

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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THE 1984 AND 1985 VINTAGES OF CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON



The beautiful view of the vines at Mount Eden Vineyards, perched up atop a ridge in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The 1984 and 1985 vintages for cabernet sauvignon-based wines in California were the start of a superb four year stretch of highly-acclaimed years that culminated with the 1987s and captured the imaginations of wine lovers across the globe and probably paved the way for today's commercial success of these wines every bit as much as Steven Spurrier's famous wine tasting in Paris a decade earlier in 1976. With the release of this string of four vintages of excellent wines, California had officially arrived! These were important vintages in my own personal career, as I was fully ensconced as a wine buyer for a large retailer when these wines first started to appear in the market and I have been familiar with the wines from the top estates from this period of 1984 through the 1987 vintages quite intimately and still remember how a large number of these wines tasted when they were first released in the market. As much of my writing on older vintages of California wine in the last several years has focused on the decade of the 1970s, I thought it might be interesting to start revisiting these four highly-praised vintages of cabernet sauvignon and see how the passage of time has treated them. Given that tackling all of the top cabernets from the 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987 vintages would be a daunting task (and probably fill up most of an entire issue of the newsletter!) I decided to break down this look back

at the vintages of the mid-1980s into a pair of reports, each focusing on two of the vintages. So, here is part one of what I hope in due course will be a two part series, with a look at how the cabernet sauvignon-based wines from the top vintages of 1984 and 1985 are both evolving in the bottle.

For this feature, I thought it might be interesting to reach out to a handful of the veteran winemakers in California for their recollections on the two vintages of 1984 and 1985. Consequently, I spoke or exchanged correspondence with Ric Forman, Cathy Corison, Rod Berglund, Jeffrey Patterson and Philip Togni to get some of their memories about these two vintages of cabernet sauvignon, and their comments appear below. I should also take a moment before we get into the specifics of the two growing seasons of 1984 and 1985 to set the stage a bit for this era of cabernet sauvignon production in California, as many of the wineries that are renowned today with this grape variety were not even around back in the mid-1980s and several of the finest producers at this time are no longer making wines at the same quality level today. So, it is probably worthwhile to revisit who was where and which producers were on a roll when the first two of these four top flight vintages of cabernet sauvignon were starting to hit the market. Of the most important cabernet producers from the previous decade of the 1970s, several were still at the absolute top of their game when the 1984s and 1985s were being bottled and sent out into the market. These already very well-established stars at the time would include Heitz Wine Cellars, Diamond Creek Vineyards, Mayacamas Vineyards, Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Caymus Vineyards, Chappellet Vineyards, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, Château Montelena, Robert Mondavi Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards. All of these producers had been the standard bearers of world class wines for California during the decade of the 1970s and were still making wines at the pinnacle of quality in the golden state. However, there were others, who had been among the very highest quality tier for cabernet sauvignon the decade before, but were getting to the end of their runs by the mid-1980s, with estates such as Beaulieu Vineyards figuring prominently in this category of wineries where the sun was starting to sink towards the horizon. Others, who had been key cabernet producers in the decade of the 1970s had already slipped a notch or two in quality, such as Sterling Vineyards. And yet others, such as Kalin Cellars and Joseph Swan Vineyards were highly-acclaimed for their work with other grape varieties, but were completely under the radar when it came to their excellent examples of cabernet sauvignon in the 1980s.

The mid-1980s was also an era in California with many of the top estates in the realm of cabernet sauvignon today were just starting to rise up into the first division when the 1984s hit the market. Among these would be Dominus Estate, as Christian Moueix released his first vintage made from grapes from his part of the old Napanook Vineyard in 1984 (though he had produced a 1983 as well, but judged that the more plush style of the 1984 vintage would make more sense as an inaugural release of Dominus), Francis Ford Coppola was producing his Rubicon bottling (from another section of the old Napanook Vineyard), which had debuted in the 1978 vintage, but was really only starting to be widely recognized as one of the top wines in Napa by the mid-1980s. Silver Oak Vineyards was at the absolute top of its game when it released its lineup of 1984s and 1985s, for though the winery had debuted as far back as 1974, it was not until they had a good decade under their belts that the estate was widely recognized as one of the very top sources for cabernet sauvignon in California. Randy Dunn was still making the wines for Caymus Vineyards in 1984, but he had already started his own winery of Dunn

Vineyards back in the 1979 vintage and was far more widely known for his own wines by 1984 than he was as he was as the winemaker at Caymus. Ric Forman had left Sterling Vineyards after fermenting the 1978 vintage there, had been the winemaker for a few vintages at Newton Vineyards and had started his own winery of Forman Vineyards commencing with the 1983 vintage, so he was one of the old hands at a new address when the 1984s and 1985s were released. Cathy Corison would not start her own winery until the 1987 vintage, but was still making wines at Chappellet in 1984 and 1985. Philip Togni had also just opened the doors of his own winery the preceding year of 1983, so the 1984 was only his second vintage making wine from his own vineyard on Spring Mountain.

So, the mid-1980s was a period of change and rebirth in California wine country, with some of the early pioneering winemakers having moved on to start their own projects, after having made great wines for other wineries, some of the great old estates from the previous two decades of trailblazing in the realm of world class California fine wine already having lost the spark or starting to stumble and descend into quality decline, and a number of relatively new winemakers were just starting to polish up their stars (such as Helen Turley, who was then at the B. R. Cohn winery) and would bring in new techniques and profoundly change the stylistic direction of much of the cabernet sauvignon produced in the golden state in the coming decade. As I mentioned above, several of the old school estates who had been among the finest producers of the previous decade were on the cusp of change (not necessarily for the better) in the mid-1980s, as commercial interests started to seemingly trump stylistic decision-making in many of the cellars in Napa and Sonoma. Corporate ownership had already tarnished several of the earliest stars of Napa Valley, with Sterling Vineyards having sunk from the very pinnacle of Napa wineries into a parody of itself under Coca-Cola's ownership period. André Tchelistcheff was still ostensibly overseeing the winemaking at Beaulieu Vineyards (owned by Heublein corporation since the late 1970s), but the winery would fail to make a compelling cabernet in the 1984 vintage (perhaps the only top flight vintage where they "swung and missed" up until that time) and would only have one last hurrah with the superb 1985 Georges de Latour Private Reserve bottling before the winery qualitatively crashed and burned with indifferent cabernets in the 1986 and 1987 vintages and one into the future. Joseph Phelps Vineyards would continue on with their classic, stunning style of cabernets right up through the 1990 vintage, but then would abruptly change course by adopting a sweet, over the top, modern style debuting in the 1991 vintage and tarnishing what had been a pristine legacy up until that time. Caymus Vineyards would change their philosophy profoundly after the 1986 vintage, rolling in a lot of purchased grape production into their regular bottling of cabernet sauvignon, while "kicking upstairs" a much more sizable chunk of the production from their own estate vineyards into a greatly expanded "Special Selection" program, and turning into a caricature of their former selves in the process (while making money hand over fist from folks who could not tell the difference).

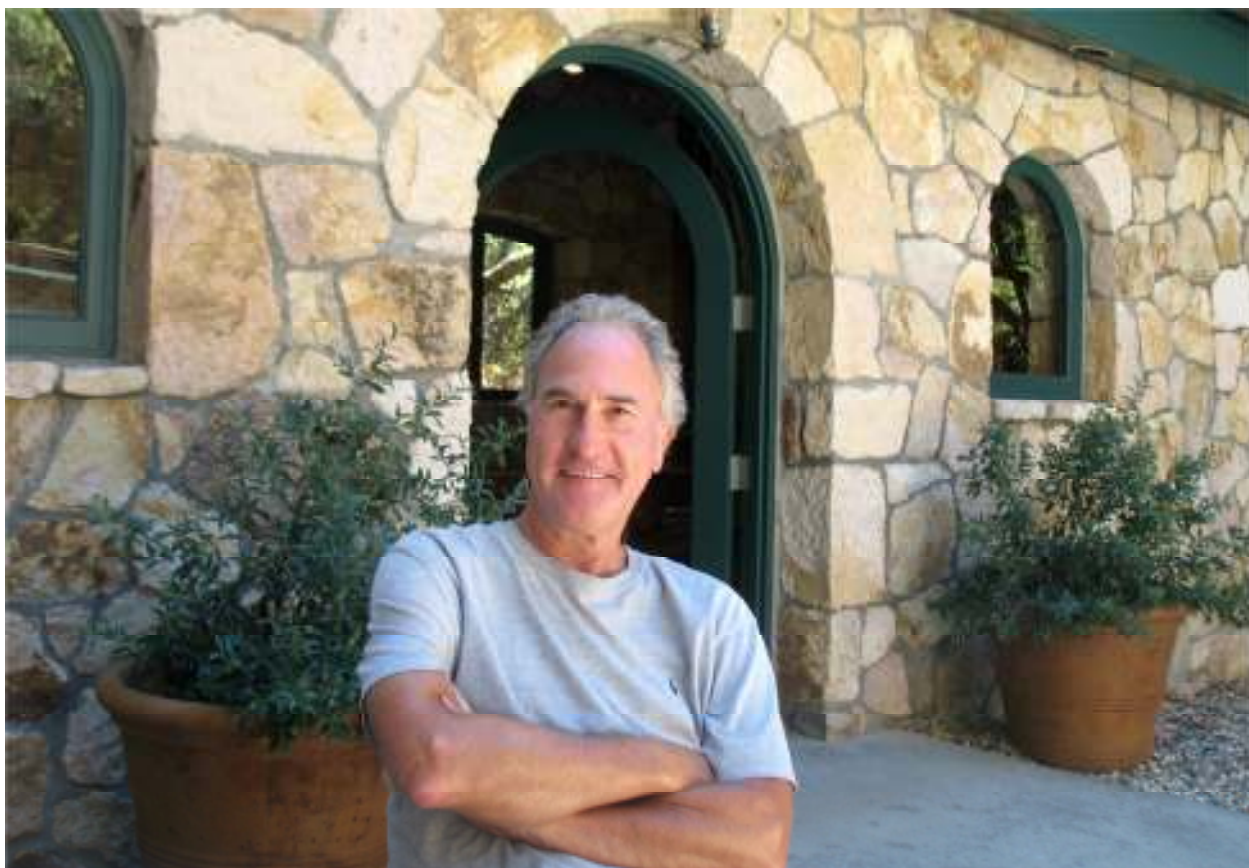
So, there were a lot of changes afoot or just over the horizon as the four high quality cabernet sauvignon vintages of 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987 were fermenting in the cellars or just hitting the market. At the time of their release, these four vintages seemed to indicate that California wine had fully "made it" into the exclusive club of the world's greatest wine-producing regions, and yet, in reality, its classical style of wines was actually nearing an end and would probably only really continue through the 1991 vintage a few years down the road and the number of top estates who continued to produce wines in the style of the 1970s and 1980s would

soon shrink considerably. The decade of the 1990s would be one of profound change for a great many of these estates who had made their reputations on cabernet sauvignon, and a great many of the endless string of new arrivals in Napa Valley would focus primarily on cabernet and the style of the wines here would change dramatically as new philosophies regarding ripeness of fruit, cellar techniques and the use of new oak greatly shifted the stylistic paradigm of California cabernet in the coming decades. And lest we forget, at the core of many of the new winemaking techniques championed in the 1990s focused on making cabernet sauvignon drinkable at a far earlier age than the great wines of the 1970s and 1980s would have been, as manipulating tannin levels and textures, as well as leaving residual sweetness in the wines, made them far easier to drink early on, so that clients could come back to wineries at a far brisker pace to restock. When one looks back on this four year run of high quality vintages between 1984 and 1987, it is hard now not to come to the conclusion that this was truly the last gasp of the formative era of world class winemaking in California, and while a staunch coterie of producers from that era would continue to soldier on and make wines in the classical style that had made Napa, Sonoma and the Santa Cruz Mountains famous in the decade of the 1970s, there was a lot of collateral damage and a lot of once “blue chip” estates that were more than happy to change direction, follow the burgeoning fashion for over the top, sweet, high alcohol and new oaky cabernets and seek to cash in on the new stylistic paradigm that arrived in the decade of the 1990s. Seen in retrospect, this four year run of cabernet vintages takes on an even more important historical role than we in the wine trade back then would have ever imagined when these fine wines first started to arrive in the market.

While both the 1984 and 1985 vintages produced outstanding examples of cabernet sauvignon, the two vintages were hardly similar in their growing seasons. The 1984 vintage in California was a relatively hot year, accompanied by a very large cropload that offered producers both excellent ripeness and plenty of production. It followed on the very difficult 1983 vintage in California, which had hardly ignited the imaginations of wine enthusiasts, so the release of the 1984s was highly anticipated and very much welcomed when the wines started to hit the market. The winter months at the end of 1983 had been very, very rainy, which proved providential for the '84 vintage later on down the road, as water reserves were replenished prior to the start of the growing season. The spring itself of 1984 was dry and warm, so budbreak was early and very generous, with lots of bunches in the offing. Back in this era, cabernet sauvignon was the undisputed king of red wines from California in the marketplace and the 1984 cabernets were greeted as the finest vintage to emerge from the west coast since the legendary 1978s. The harvest began early, as a heat spike at the start of August pushed up sugar levels briskly and picking was done as quickly as possible, as it remained very warm throughout the entire harvest period. The picking of white grape varieties started on August 8th in 1984 (at that time the earliest start to a harvest on record since the end of prohibition), and with the temperatures remaining high, picking teams worked tirelessly to bring in the fruit as quickly as possible. The later-ripening cabernet sauvignon was picked at the outset of September in '84 and the vines were already completely cleared of their bunches by the middle of the month. But, as Cathy Corison recalls, “the actual ripening season was measured and resulted in terrific complexity and good balance” for the cabernets from 1984, with “the overall impression on the jammy side, but not at the expense of other fruit flavors.”

The 1985 vintage for cabernet sauvignon was quite a bit different from its predecessor, as the growing season was dramatically cooler and the resulting wines did not possess the same early flash of the 1984s, possessing firmer structures, “cooler” fruit profiles and the seeming need to be cellared quite a few years longer than the 1984s to offer up the same generosity. The budbreak was also very early in 1985, but the spring remained quite cool, and even the sunny summer months were also defined by cooler night-time temperatures, so that long, leisurely sugar accumulation was the norm in 1985. This contrasted quite dramatically with the preceding year, where the heat of August had sent sugar levels soaring and precipitated the onset of a frenzied five weeks of picking. In 1985, the month of August was quite cool, but the arrival of warmer temperatures at the end of the month and in early September pushed the vintage across the finish line in a fine manner, with this Indian Summer providing excellent sugar levels eventually reached through gentle, incremental ripening and long hang time that added an early element of potential complexity to the wines. There was some rain the second week of September in '85, with the cabernet sauvignon still being brought in, but it did not cause any deleterious effects on the quality of the grapes. One of the beauties of the 1985 vintage was that tannins ripened up nicely at relatively lower sugar levels than would be customary in warmer conditions, leading to quite supple and beautifully integrated tannic structures in the top examples of cabernet sauvignon, which from the outset promised to be very long-lived.

Ric Forman was already a veteran winemaker by the time the 1984 and 1985 vintages rolled around, as he had been the young winemaker behind the meteoric success of Sterling Vineyards from its first vintage of 1969 up through the initial fermentation of the 1978 vintage there, and the Sterling wines made during his tenure were numbered among the very finest to be crafted in California during the preceding decade. He had left Sterling after fermenting the 1978s, leaving the winery's team there to oversee their *elevage* and bottling and had embarked on a new project with Sterling's original founder, Peter Newton, which would eventually become Newton Vineyards. That partnership had not been as cordial as the one at Sterling and had not ended amicably. However, Ric had just gotten rolling with his own winery in this era (after those few tempestuous years trying to coexist still with Peter Newton at Newton Vineyards), as his first vintage of cabernet sauvignon from Forman Vineyards had been the 1983. His 1983 cabernet had been fermented and aged for its first year in cask over at the Charles Shaw Winery, as his own cellars were still under construction at the time. The 1984 vintage was the first to be fermented and raised in the new Forman Vineyards cellars at the foot of Howell Mountain, and Ric remembers liking the wine very well from the outset. He laments that he did not start keeping careful vintage notes on the harvest until the following year of 1985 (one imagines he was a bit busy at the time overseeing the construction of a new winery, not to mention finalizing his business separation from Peter Newton!), as he would have liked to look back and compare the data on the two vintages. But, regarding the 1985 vintage (for which he still has his original notes) he recalls “that we started picking the merlot on August 30th in 1985, with Brix just under twenty-four, and the first of the cabernet was brought in on the afternoon of September 8th, after pretty heavy rains in the morning, with Brix of 22.8.” He laughs and says “no one today would even buy a cabernet still made in that style of the 1985, but I always liked the wine, which had good structure and a *Bordelais* type of personality from the outset.” His 1984 is still aging nicely to his palate as well, as he notes that “I drank a bottle of the 1984 a year or two ago and I still like the wine very much, as it is nicely ripe and still has quite a bit of spunk.”



Ric Forman, sitting on the veranda at his winery in the foothills of Howell Mountain.

For Philip Togni, this era was also one of significant change, as he and his wife Birgitta had only just started producing wine as well from their own vineyards planted up on Spring Mountain. The two of them had put in their first vines in 1981, so they had cabernet sauvignon and sauvignon blanc planted and were able to begin producing wine in the 1983 vintage. As Philip recalls, “both the 1983 and 1984 vintages were made at a nearby winery here, as we still did not have a winery building finished on the property and it was not until the 1985 vintage that we were able to make the wine entirely here in the nearly-completed cellars and put ‘Estate Bottled’ on the label, which we were quite proud of at that time.” These first few vintages of Philip’s cabernet sauvignon were produced entirely from that variety, as the merlot, cabernet franc and petit verdot that are now supporting members of the blend here each year were not planted until 1985 and not part of the cabernet sauvignon bottling until the 1987 vintage. Philip recalls that during that era in the mid-1980s, “it seemed like we were always alternating a small crop with a big crop, every other year, with our first vintage of 1983 having been quite short, and then the 1984 being quite large for that era, and then 1985 again being a relatively small crop.” He remembers that “1984 was a hot growing season, for those times, but nothing like what we are experiencing these days, as global warming is a very real thing and certainly affecting what we are trying to do out in the vineyards.” He recalls that “the berries were quite a bit larger in 1984 than either 1983 or 1985, so the wine was not quite as structured and I did not think it had quite the same potential for long aging as either of those vintages.” He laughs, recalling that “Peter Sichel had bought a case of our first vintage of 1983 for his own cellar and called me up, complaining that the wine would never be ready to drink in his lifetime- maybe we should have

sold him the 1984!” But, he notes that he and his family have not tasted either their 1984 or 1985 cabernets in a long, long time, as “we don’t drink our own wines very often- perhaps not often enough- but a bottle of that 1983 was drinking very nicely when we opened one a couple of months ago!”

Cathy Corison was still in charge of winemaking at Chappellet Vineyards at the time of the 1984 and 1985 vintages, as she would not produce her first vintage of cabernet sauvignon from her own Corison Winery until 1987. Cathy was following in the footsteps of Philip Togni, who had been the first winemaker at Chappellet when the winery released their inaugural wines from the 1968 vintage; Philip would remain with Donn Chappellet through the 1973 vintage. As Cathy recall of the mid-1980s at Chappellet, “we had an amazing four-year string of great vintages at Chappellet beginning with the 1984” and running up through the 1987 vintage, (as she was still making wines at Chappellet in this vintage, while getting her own winery up and running). She continues, “in my mind 1984 was the first really ripe vintage that sparked the run-up to the big style that eventually became dominant in the Napa Valley”, but at Chappellet, “we *did* pick early” in that vintage to keep down potential alcohol. So, her 1984 Chappellet, like most of the successful cabernets from that vintage, was most assuredly not a bruiser in terms of octane and was still very much a classically-proportioned wine that recalled the style of the best cabernet vintages from the decade of the 1970s. As she notes, “my stylistic inclinations were already pretty well-established and I know I picked at sugars that resulted in an alcohol well south of fourteen percent” in the 1984 vintage. However, Cathy had a preference for her 1985 over her 1984 cabernet sauvignon at Chappellet, as the style of the growing season dovetailed perfectly with her approach to winemaking. As she recalls, “the 1985 was probably my favorite of all the wines I made at Chappellet,” as it was “a classic long, cool ripening season which yielded a fruit-driven wine that leaned in the bright red/blue fruit direction and with terrific, snappy acidity.”

Rod Berglund of Joseph Swan Vineyards was also in a transition period during the 1984 and 1985 vintages. Rod had been the winemaker at La Crema from 1979 up through the harvest of 1984, but major complications at the winery after the picking in 1984 led to his parting ways with La Crema and taking his 1984 cabernet sauvignon with him! Rod had bought fruit from the Steiner Vineyard for a few years leading up through the vintage of 1984 and he recalls that “I made my last Steiner Cabernet at La Crema in Petaluma” before things went south at the winery and “I finished (the *elevage* of) the wine at Swan.” His 1984 Steiner Vineyard cabernet sauvignon was very warmly received when it was released a few years later, with Dan Berger, then the very well-respected wine columnist for The Los Angeles Times, writing that it was “one of the finest California Cabernets I have tasted- period.” Rod recalls that he was helping Joseph Swan out a bit in the vineyards at this time (he would take over as full-time winemaker at the winery in 1988) and dating his future bride, Lynn Swan, so was quite aware of what was going on in the Russian River Valley at this era as well. He notes that “Joe Swan had a pretty easy time of it in both years” with his cabernet sauvignon vineyard, though “I don’t recall the harvest dates (for the two vintages), but it must have been earlier in ’84.” At the time, cabernet sauvignon ripened quite late in this corner of the Russian River Valley, so that picking in “late October and even early November was pretty normal here” for this grape variety at Joseph Swan Vineyards. Rod goes on about the two Swan cabernet vintages: “the ’85 was and still is one of my favorite cabernets of this vineyard,” as “it had a bit of mint- as opposed to eucalyptus, which I have only

seen a couple of times.” In contrast, “the ’84 was less exotic, but perfectly balanced and the more traditional cabernet, with more of the red current than black current notes that you get from warmer areas.”

It was also a time of profound change at Mount Eden Vineyards in Saratoga up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, as the infighting among the various partners here that had started all the way back when Martin Ray was still the managing partner of the estate in the early 1970s had finally subsided and Jeffrey and Ellie Patterson had taken over management for the partnership here in 1983. So, one could say that this was finally the start of the modern age at Mount Eden when the twin titan vintages of 1984 and 1985 rolled around. Jeffrey remembers that the growing season of “1984 was an exceptionally easy year, with the winter stopping after the first of January,” and we had an “early budbreak, early harvest and very uniform ripeness.” Back in this era, all of the cabernet sauvignon at Mount Eden was still coming from the old vines that had been planted by Martin Ray between 1955 and 1962, which were starting to become quite feeble and were on Jeffrey’s “to do list” for replanting once he and Ellie took over as the managing partners at Mount Eden. He notes that in 1984 “we were able to harvest at classic levels, mid-twenty-three Brix for sugar levels, 3.2 pH and 7 grams of acid.” The cabernet sauvignon was picked between September 13th and the 27th at Mount Eden in ’84, with the wine raised entirely in new Bordeaux barrels, bottled without filtration and ending up at 12.8 percent octane. To give some idea of just how low the production was from these old vines here in this era, the estate only produced six hundred and eighteen cases of bottles and twenty-seven cases of magnums of the 1984 cabernet!

Continuing, Jeffrey recalls the 1985 vintage was also special for both he and Ellie for another reason beyond the quality of the cabernet sauvignon, as “it was the year our first child was born.” I hope that there are still a few magnums of the 1985 in the family cellars! Jeffrey notes that “1985 was a very normal year, weather-wise and a beautiful autumn, with ideal, even cool conditions” and we “harvested the cabernet sauvignon between September 24th and October 2nd.” He notes that “ripeness was more varied” than had been the case the year before, “but, still with sugars at mid-twenty-three Brix and high acids- 7.5 and above- and with pH higher than had been the case with the 1984 at around 3.4.” Despite the cooler growing season in 1985, the long hang-time allowed this vintage of cabernet sauvignon to come in even a shade higher in alcohol than the ’84, tipping the scales at an even thirteen percent. Like the 1984, it was raised entirely in new oak, bottled unfiltered and the vintage produced only a touch less than was the case the year before, as there were five hundred and ninety-nine cases of bottles and twenty-one cases of magnums of the 1985 Mount Eden cabernet. So, one can see that the very old cabernet sauvignon vines here were a bit sheltered from the swings in crop loads that defined the 1984 and 1985 vintages elsewhere, as every year produced a small crop!

When I first envisioned this project to compare and contrast the two cabernet vintages of 1984 and 1985, I was looking forward to the tastings that would be part of the research process for the feature. Though I had sold both vintages during my merchant days, I had not cellared as many of the wines initially as I probably should have (being a wine buyer of a relatively limited budget and the insatiable cellaring needs of someone just discovering wine for the first time and wanting to build a cellar that included examples of all the worthy wines I was tasting and selling!), so I had to pick and choose more than I would have liked back when the wines were

first in the market. However, I started planning this article a couple of years ago and have been buying well-stored bottles at auction since then, for wines that I did not still have in my own cellar and was able to get a pretty good range of examples from the two vintages. Pooling my own resources with a few friends who are also fond of these two vintages of California cabernet sauvignon produced far more wines from the two vintages than I initially thought would be possible to taste, so this report is deeper and broader than I ever hoped to imagine when I first conceived of the project as we were able to organize three very good tastings of the two vintages. We were not able to taste all of the important wines from these two years, as these were very deep waters for cabernet sauvignon in this era, but the notes that follow are a very representative sampling of the top wines from both vintages, as well as many of the less well-known producers from this era that were also making good cabernets. For each of our tastings, I tried to arrange to have wines from both the 1984 and 1985 vintages included, with our alternating back and forth between vintages for each flight, or even pairing up similarly-styled 1984s and 1985s, as the goal from the outset was to compare the two vintages.



While starting to write this article, I hopped around on the internet to see what had been written elsewhere about the cabernets from the 1984 and 1985 vintages, as these were both more than thirty-five years ago and I wished to re-familiarize myself with the growing seasons of the two years. What struck me was just how little has been written in relatively recent times about the two vintages, which played such a seminal role in establishing California wine as we know it today. And, much of the little that I read was rather ill-informed and clearly written by folks who really did not know all that much about the two vintages or the wines that they produced (and

had clearly not tasted many of the wines recently, if at all). For example, Decanter wrote of the 1984 vintage that the cabernets offered “generous highly concentrated flavors, and high tannin levels” that were “even by California standards,” were “wines (that) were huge, powerful and ultra-ripe.” They concluded that with the 1984s, “only a few (wineries) managed to produce balanced wines, and all but a few managed to last a decade.” All of this is sheer bunk. As I mentioned above, I tasted a great many of the top 1984 cabernets when they were first released and have revisited a many of these wines in the last couple of months, and they were most assuredly not “huge, powerful and ultra-ripe” out of the blocks. In their youth, the 1984s were plush, very deep at the core, ripely-tannic and classically-proportioned, as this was still several years before the “modern style” of cabernet would take hold at so many addresses. The wines were built for long cellaring, as this was how all serious cabernets from California were fashioned in this era, but would certainly never be seen as bruisers in the style of so many of today’s cabernets. To write that many of the wines did not survive beyond a decade in bottle is complete nonsense. As many of the notes below will attest, alcohol levels were generally between 12.8 and 13.5 percent octane for the 1984 cabernets. And the wines were impeccably balanced from the moment that they hit the market, with connoisseurs of this era properly praising them as the finest cabernet vintage since the 1978s. Yes, the wines were relatively ripe by the standards of the day, but so had been the 1978s and 1974s, which were seen as the finest cabernet vintages of the previous decade.

In fact, the only thing that put a slight damper on the reception of the excellent 1984 vintage of California cabernet sauvignon by the market was that there was already considerable buzz that the 1985 vintage was going to prove to be even better for long-term cellaring! In time, the two vintages would sit side by side on many wine merchants’ shelves and there were often early tastings comparing the two vintages, which I was always happy to host or attend. The 1985s were superbly balanced from the outset, due to the long hang-time afforded to the bunches and the relatively cool, sunny summer and excellent *fin de saison* conditions of September. The wines were clearly destined to age long, gracefully and be superb wines in due course, but they were quite a bit tighter and less generous out of the blocks than the corresponding 1984 had been upon release. Part of the reason for the 1985 cabernets’ initial reticence *vis à vis* the 1984s was that the vintage had possessed higher acidity, due to the cooler lead-in to harvest, as Jeffrey Patterson’s comments above attest. But, keep in mind that acidity levels had routinely been adjusted in California cellars since at least the previous decade of the 1970s (and probably further back than that), with proper acidulation to get the pH just right in a given wine part of the mantra of UC-Davis winemaking training and practiced at the vast majority of wineries in this era. So, no one felt that the 1984 cabernets were deficient in acidity when they were released, as most had seen at least a bit of tweaking of their acidities prior to bottling. And there was certainly no perception among seasoned tasters in the latter half of the 1980s that the 1984 vintage was the bigger, more powerful and routinely higher octane vintage in comparison to the 1985; rather, the 1985s were just inherently a bit more structured out of the blocks and the less desirable vintage for drinking early on, if one did not have a cache of 1970s-era cabernets already in the cellar and a hankering for a top flight glass of California cabernet happened to strike during dinner. In fact, this is where an awful lot of the 1984 cabernets that I bought for my own cellar disappeared- at dinner parties in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, as I did not have that needed foundation of previous vintages upon which to draw upon at the time.

Turning to today, both vintages have aged very well indeed (Decanter's incorrect comments that most 1984s did not last a decade in bottle notwithstanding) and are actually pretty much at the same point of their evolutions, which might be a bit unexpected, given the very profound differences in the two growing seasons. Having gone back and forth between top examples from both vintages at the tastings on which this article is based, it is hard to conclude that one vintage was intrinsically superior to the other in general terms, as some wines are better in 1985 and others are clearly better in 1984. Where a winery might have performed to the best of their abilities in both vintages, such as at Mayacamas, Heitz, Joseph Phelps or Joseph Swan, one can sometimes see a slight superiority for the wines from the 1985 vintage, as they possess more refined tannins, slightly more complexity and a bit more precision than their equally successful counterparts from the 1984 vintage, but these differences are not dramatic and the relative quality of the two vintages is really very close. The two vintages are also very much at the same stage of evolution at the present time (again, ignoring Decanter's silliness about the demise of the 1984s), with both vintages finding their very best examples of cabernet sauvignon just about hitting their apogees of peak drinkability, but all still retaining some tannins and possessing the potential to go on drinking with great style for several more decades to come.

As I noted above, some wineries realized for more success in one vintage than another, with Ridge Vineyards producing one of the legendary vintages of Monte Bello with their 1984, but a rather less successful wine from this famed vineyard in 1985. At Beaulieu Vineyards, which had been one of the most consistently excellent producers of cabernet sauvignon in the Napa Valley from at least the 1968 vintage up through 1982 (and probably far further back than 1968!), the 1984 Georges de Latour Private Reserve was utterly indifferent in quality from the outset, whereas the 1985 proved to be back on form and an excellent example of this superb vintage. At the time, the mediocrity of the 1984 BV Reserve cabernet sauvignon had been a shock in the market, as this cuvée had been so consistently excellent for so long that it was simply assumed that if it was a good vintage in the Napa Valley, BV would have produced a top flight Reserve cabernet. But, it turned out that the 1984 was actually a harbinger of things to come at this winery, as the excellent 1985 turned out to be their last gasp. I had bought a case of BV's 1985 Georges de Latour for my own cellar when it was first released (as it was all of \$17.99 a bottle back then), but I drank my last bottle from the case a couple of decades ago and did not have a chance to revisit it for this article. But, a friend did have a bottle of the 1984 for us to taste, which confirmed what had been evident from the start, that the winery had not been successful in this vintage.

There are some important wines missing from the notes that follow from the 1984 and 1985 vintages of cabernet sauvignon, as not all of the top wines could be tracked down at auction or had been put in our cellars over the years. I did not have a chance to revisit either the 1984 or 1985 Robert Mondavi Reserve cabernets, both of which had still been made in the classic style from this estate and had been very successful when they were first released. To my mind, this winery continued to produce their classical style of cabernet up through the 1986 vintage, but started to shift over to a modern style with the release of the 1987 Reserve cabernet, which was quite a bit riper and loaded up with toasty new oak (emulating the Opus One style of the day) and did not augur well for the future stylistic direction of cabernet sauvignon at this iconic estate. I did not have a chance to taste the 1984 or 1985 Opus One bottlings for this article- both of which had been very good wines when first released. There are also no notes on Caymus

Vineyards Special Selection below from either vintage, though both wines were excellent when I tasted them early on in their evolutions and were still done in the classic style of Caymus in this era and among the most promising wines of either vintage when first released. The profound shift in quality and priorities at Caymus would not take hold until the 1987 vintage, so there was one last hurrah here with the wines from '84, '85 and '86. There is also only a single note on the 1984 Bonny's Vineyard bottling from Silver Oak, despite this winery being among the most highly sought-after estates for cabernet sauvignon in this era and producing three cabernets at this time: Alexander Valley, Napa Valley and Bonny's Vineyard. I did not have a chance to taste any of the 1984s or 1985s from either Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, Diamond Creek Vineyards or Château Montelena for this article, and they should have been included in a properly exhaustive report on the two vintages. And of course, I do not have notes on the 1984s or 1985s from either Cathy Corison at Chappellet at this time, or Philip Togni's wines from these two vintages. But, all things considered, there is still a broad look at both vintages in the notes that follow.

One of the key questions I had hoped to answer with this report and the tastings that accompanied it was how the 1984 and 1985 vintages of cabernet sauvignon in California stacked up with the very best wines from the previous decade of the 1970s on the west coast. Having now tasted a goodly number of '84s and '85s, it seems pretty clear to me that only the very top wines from these two vintages can compete favorably with the similarly-placed top cabernets from vintages such as 1970, 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1978 in California. Wines like 1984 Ridge Monte Bello, both '84 and '85 Martha's Vineyard from Heitz Wine Cellars, both vintages of cabernet at Mayacamas, Joseph Swan, Joseph Phelps, Mount Eden, Kalin Cellars, Silver Oak and probably Caymus (though I only managed to cross paths with one of their wine from these two vintages) are every bit as superb as the very best wines produced from the decade of the 1970s in California. So, at least at the very head of the class, 1984 and 1985 are every bit as good as advertised when they were first released: the finest vintages of cabernet sauvignon at that time following the brilliant vintage of 1978. However, when one dips a bit below the very top tier of 1984s and 1985s, I am not really sure that the wines can quite keep pace with similarly placed cabernets from the top vintages of the 1970s, and one of the key reasons that the wines from '84 and '85 do not quite measure up to their predecessors at this level has to do with how the acidity in the wines has come to present itself with long-term cellaring.

As I mentioned above, almost all California winemakers were taught during their university studies that the pH of their finished wines had to be "just so" and adjustments to acidity levels had been routine in most top wineries going back at least to the decade of the 1960s. As Cathy Corison recalls, "we had been taught that a wine must have a pH of 3.3 or lower to be sound and stable" and "fresh out of UC-Davis, I too acidulated too much." Philip Togni, having trained at Montpellier in France, was apparently one of the few winemakers from his pioneering generation in California who did not routinely adjust his acidities, and it was actually the cabernets he made during his time at Chappellet that changed Cathy's thinking about routine acidulation, as she recalls that "after I had been at Chappellet for a while I realized how beautifully old Chappellet Cabernets were aging, in spite of pH's that often pushed 4.0 and occasionally exceeded that." And today, she does not acidulate her cabernets, noting that "it is now been nearly forty years since I've acidulated a red wine." As she comments, "in my experience, when grapes are picked at proper ripeness, the acidity/pH falls into place with the other components of the wine, without acidulation" and this is "one of the reasons I pick earlier

than many to achieve balance without manipulation.” As I worked through these tastings of 1984 and 1985 cabernets, I seemed to be hitting on more wines where the acid adjustments in the cellars were sticking out more prominently at thirty-five years of age than has been the case with similarly broad tastings of cabernet sauvignon vintages such as 1974, 1977 and 1978, all of which I have done in the last handful of years. As I noted above, this is not evident in the very best examples from 1984 and 1985, but below this top tier, some of these lesser examples were quite good wines in many respects, but several shared a rather “coarse” palate impression to their acidities, which seemed to be peeling away from the other elements in the mature wines.

One might think that, based on the quite different growing seasons of 1984 and 1985 in California wine country, it would be the warmer vintage 1984s that would show more of this “coarse acidulation” than the 1985s, which hail from a cooler vintage with higher natural acidity, but this was not the case. Both vintages had their examples where the “divorced” nature of the acidity in comparison to the other structural elements took a bit of drinking pleasure away from the wine and correspondingly kept its score down. In many cases, the separation of the added acidity from the other elements of the wine was the only flaw in what was otherwise, quite a tasty wine that was aging gracefully. But, as Cathy Corison mentions, her generation of winemakers, who were already quite experienced by the time the mid-1980s rolled around, were generally moving away from acidulation for their red wines by this time, whereas the younger generation of winemakers, many not that long out of UC-Davis and the like, were still trying to fine tune the pH of their wines by adding acidity- usually in the form of powdered tartaric acid. So, perhaps one of the reason many of the 1984s and 1985s tasted for this report seemed to be showing a coarseness to their added acidities, was that many of the less well-established wineries at this time (meaning estates that had not already earned their reputations in the previous decade of the 1970s) were still routinely acidulating their wines, as this is what their younger winemakers had been taught to do at school. But, one assumes that this would have also been the case a decade earlier, when some of these veterans of the 1980s were cutting their teeth at different wineries in the 1970s, and probably still routinely adjusting acidity in their red wines. So, this is not an entirely satisfactory explanation for why more wines from the mid-1980s were showing acid separation than had been the case with similar cabernets from the vintages of the 1970s.

Again returning to Cathy Corison’s comments on this topic, she notes that “I think the difference between the 1970’s and the 1980’s is that we all became more thoughtful and careful about acidulation as we learned that it was more complex than we had been taught to believe,” as “pH is only one of a myriad of indices to consider.” But, one can imagine that this may have mostly been true for the well-established winemakers at the time. My guess is that some of these newer wineries, who had not been around in the first half of the 1970s, were also constrained by other considerations than the already-established cabernet specialists from the previous decade, so they were more reliant on purchased fruit or newly-planted vineyards, both of which were likely to have been subject to higher yields in the vintages of the 1980s than would have been the case in the decade of the 1970s. And as present day Napa Valley cabernet has taught us, larger yields require riper grapes to allow the tannins to also ripen in the skins, so it seems likely that some of the second tier producers in our tastings of the 1984s and 1985s were working with relatively riper fruit than the top division estates, who were often making wines exclusively from their own, well-established estate vineyards. Cathy Corison alludes to this in her discussion of

the differences between the cabernets of the 1970s and 1980s, when she observes that “the grapes were different too- many were picking riper and riper as the 1980’s progressed, calling for more and more acidulation.” My gut feeling is that this issue will prove to be even more prominent in my feature on the next two top vintages of cabernet sauvignon, the 1986s and 1987s, which I plan to begin working on in the not too distant future.



Cathy Corison, standing just in front of her Kronos Vineyard in St. Helena.

While it is not precisely on topic about this perception of acidulation starting to separate from the other aspects of some of the wines from 1984 and 1985, I found Cathy Corison’s comments on this subject fascinating to consider, when I asked her about this phenomenon. Her observations are perhaps even more germane to what is going on at most cabernet sauvignon addresses today, where the style of the wines is so dramatically different from what was made back in the mid-1980s, or which continue to be made at traditionalist wineries such as Corison, Mount Eden, Ridge or Joseph Swan today. Letting Cathy take the stage, she comments that “there is another issue for me- if grapes are picked too ripe, they lose the life force/vibration they had at lower sugars due to snappy natural acidity,” and “sadly, you can’t get that back simply by adding acid” as “everything else, including the fruit flavors, has moved around.” She continues, “specifically, the bright red and blue- cherries blueberries and plum- end of the flavor spectrum are gone and you can’t get them back.” Perhaps this is one of the reasons why we see today so many cabernet sauvignon producers who are fond of cultured yeasts that can produce specific

fruit aromas and flavors in their wines, to try and help cover up what has been lost by their late harvesting practices. While this custom did not seem to be particularly prevalent in the vintages of 1984 and 1985, I fully anticipate that it will start to be more prominent when I turn my attention to the 1986, and even more so, 1987 vintages of cabernet sauvignon. And it will certainly become central once I start reporting on the cabernet sauvignon vintages from the decade of the 1990s.

However, returning back to the vintages of 1984 and 1985, I hope the notes below will attest to the exceptional quality of both of these vintages for the very best examples of cabernet sauvignon produced in California- and there are many of them in both vintages. More than thirty-five years down the line, it is quite clear that both of these years have produced a large number of truly dazzling wines, all still having been made in the “old school” style that harkened back to the previous decade of the 1970s. It would not be too many years later that this style of cabernet would be in serious retreat across most of Napa and Sonoma, as the modern school took over and so many wineries would turn to the dark side to bolster sales and add gloss to balance sheets. While the overall quality of the cabernets from both 1984 and 1985 might not have quite reached the same stunning heights of the 1970, 1974 and 1978 vintages, there is no doubt that both 1984 and 1985 produced more than their fair share of some of the most legendary cabernet sauvignon bottlings ever made in the history of California. And, as I mentioned above, the riper year of 1984 has certainly proven to be every bit as much of a long-distance runner as the more highly-acclaimed, cooler 1985 vintage, and there are several of the very best wines from both vintages that are still not quite fully mature. Both vintages have proven up to the challenges of the brisk passing of time, and now in their mid-thirties, both vintages’ best wines are now just entering their primes of peak drinkability and still have decades of life ahead of them. Just like the best cabernet sauvignon bottlings from the top vintages of the previous decade! Perhaps the issues with sloppy acidulation of some of the lesser cabernets of each vintage were a harbinger of problems to come with the cellar methodologies that became dominant in the 1990s, and it is entirely possible that an equally deep review of vintages from the top years of the ‘90s will make these issues with added acidity in some of the lesser ‘84s and ‘85s seem like minor irritants in comparison to how younger vintages of cabernet have evolved with longer-term cellaring. But, that will be a story for another time.

The 1984 Vintage

1984 Beringer “Chabot Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Back in the day, the Chabot Vineyard bottling from Beringer was highly sought after in some wine circles and considered a very good bottle of cabernet sauvignon. I do not ever recall having the opportunity to sell this cuvée, so I was curious how the 1984 might have aged. The answer was “not so well.” The nose is okay, offering up notes of desiccated black fruit, a touch of pruniness, cigar ash and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, but drying out and already has lost most of its fruit. There are some tannins still remaining on the tarry and uninteresting finish, but if this bottle was representative (and it certainly showed no signs of mishandling), then the 1984 Beringer Chabot is now over the hill. DOA.

1984 Beringer “Private Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1984 Beringer Private Reserve cabernet sauvignon has survived far better than the Chabot Vineyard bottling. It comes in at 13.3 percent octane, which was pretty ripe by the standards of the day, but hardly out of line with many others from the vintage. It offers up a deep

and vigorous bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a touch of raisin, cigar ash, dark soil tones and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is plump, full-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with good focus and grip, a bit of buried tannin remaining and a long, well-balanced finish. This is a good wine except in one aspect, which is that it really is a bit lacking in complexity. What is here is very good, but the wine is ultimately rather four-square and has never really developed any secondary layers on either the nose or palate. It has plenty of life ahead of it, but I actually enjoyed it more at ten years of age than I do today, as back then, there was some sappy joy in its fruit tones, which has faded with the passage of time and not been replaced by developmental complexity. 2021-2050. **88.**

1984 Beaulieu Vineyards “Private Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1984 vintage of the Georges de Latour bottling from BV was never a strong one, as I remember my disappointment tasting this wine on release, given that I had sold so many cases of the high quality 1982 Reserve and had high expectations for the even better quality vintage of '84 for this bottling. But, for whatever reason, the 1984 wine was rather indifferent (by the then very high standards for the BV Georges de Latour cuvée) and I had to wait for the release of the back on form 1985 BV Reserve to make fans of Beaulieu Vineyards happy again. Given how modest the wine was on release, I was very curious to taste it for this article, just to see if I had misread the wine in my early days as a wine buyer. No, it was the same wine, just now thoroughly over the hill. The dying nose offers up scents of dried black fruit, prunes, cigar ash, soil and American oak. On the palate the wine is still full-bodied, but completely hollow at the core, with a bit of remaining tannin on the backend, but no fruit left. DOA.

1984 Flora Springs “Trilogy” (Napa Valley)

The 1984 vintage was the inaugural release of the Trilogy bottling from Flora Springs, which took its name from its blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc. The wine is still alive and kicking, but it has not really blossomed with all that much style and grace, so that it comes across today as rather heavy-handed stylistically. The rather dense and black fruity nose offers up scents of cassis, cigar ash, baking spices, a touch of pruniness and a well-done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extracted, with a rather four-square personality and some slightly dry-edged tannins still sticking out on the finish. The wine still has plenty of life in it and I suppose it could be termed drinkable, but it is really a bit over-extracted and quite dull in personality, without ever having given birth to any real developmental complexity, so it is hard to imagine its future being any better than its present, which is solidly unexciting. 2021-2045. **84.**

1984 Heitz Wine Cellars “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1984 Martha’s Vineyard is a great wine and one of the best cabernets to be found in the vintage. It is quite ripe by the standards of the day, listed at its customary 13.5 percent on the label, but probably closer to fourteen percent, as Joe Heitz did not really enjoy changing details on his labels for the vagaries of a single vintage! The wine is very deep and pure on the nose, while still retaining plenty of youthful vigor in its constellation of black cherries, petroleum jelly, eucalyptus, cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of soil tones, allspice, incipient notes of chipotles and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a plush core of fruit, fine soil signature and focus, ripe, seamless tannins and a very, very long, complex, tangy and impeccably balanced finish. The 1984 Martha’s Vineyard is now starting to drink very well indeed, but I have the sense that it is still in climbing mode and will be even better a decade down the road. It will prove to be one of the longest-lived 1984 cabernets. 2021-2065+. **95.**

1984 William Hill “Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Howell Mountain)

The 1984 William Hill “Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon is really quite a good bottle of wine, but it was a touch sloppily acidulated and the acids are showing through a bit on the backend today. But, other than that, there is a lot to like here, as the wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of sweet cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a nice touch of eucalyptus, a very well done framing of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced and tangy finish. The texture of the added acidity is getting a bit coarse at age thirty-seven, which keeps the wine’s score down a couple of points, but in all other respects, this is a wine that has aged very well indeed and is quite enjoyable to drink. It is truly a pity they did not just leave the acids alone! 2021-2035+. **89.**



1984 Johnson-Turnbull Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Back in this era, the Johnson-Turnbull bottling of cabernet sauvignon was known in the wine trade as “the poor man’s Martha’s Vineyard”, as this vineyard was also surrounded by eucalyptus trees, which imparted the same “mintiness” to the cabernets here as is the case with the Heitz family’s Martha’s Vineyard bottling. Sometime in the late 1990s the trees were cut down and the Johnson-Turnbull cabernet lost its signature mintiness. Their 1984 cabernet belies the erroneous reports that this was a “super-ripe” vintage, as the wine comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a quite refined, albeit aggressively minty nose of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a nice touch of vanillin oak and an extremely generous serving of eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, velvety and fully mature today, with a good

core, modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, focused and nicely balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it has aged quite gracefully. Like several other cabernets covered in this report, the acidulation is starting to stick out just a touch on the backend here, which gives the wine just a bit of coarseness as a result. However, this is really quite a good wine, and given that I sold it back in the day for \$12 a bottle, it has proven to be a pretty good value all these years later. 2021-2040+. **89.**

1984 Kalin Cellars “Potter Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

This was the second bottle of 1984 “Potter Valley” cabernet sauvignon from Kalin that I have opened out of my cellar in the last few years. As was the case back in 2016, this wine remains a tad on the young side and could still do with a bit more bottle age to mellow out its remaining backend tannins, as this vineyard site does not produce quite the same polished tannins as was the case with the Sonoma vineyard that the Leightons sourced cabernet sauvignon fruit from back in this same era. But, the 1984 Potter Valley Reserve is hardly unapproachable today and offers up a lovely bouquet of dark berries, cassis, tobacco leaf, chipotles, a very good base of soil and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil undertow, very good focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and still modestly tannic finish. The grapes for this bottling hailed from the BJJ Vineyard in Potter Valley, where the Leightons also purchased sauvignon blanc in the 1980s. This is an excellent bottle of cabernet sauvignon, but it does not hail from quite the same level of *terroir* as the Kalin “Sonoma” bottling of cabernet. 2025-2065+. **94.**

1984 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

The 1984 vintage of Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon is absolutely superb. The wine comes in listed at 12.5 percent alcohol in this warm summer and offers up a beautifully complex and expressive nose of black cherries, red plum, Cuban cigar, a superb base of mountain soil, a hint of petroleum jelly, bonfire, gorgeous spice tones and just a whisper of bell pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a bit chewy (in the inimitable Mayacamas style), with a great core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, still some ripe backend tannins and outstanding grip and focus on the very long, very pure and stellar finish. This is another of Bob Travers’ masterpieces from this variety, and though it is not quite as seamless as the nearly perfect 1985, this is a brilliant bottle of cabernet sauvignon! With a bit of decanting, this is drinking very well indeed, though further cellaring will allow its remaining tannin to continue to soften up more completely. But, there is no rush to drink this wine, as it probably has another forty to fifty years of primetime drinking still ahead of it, as it is most assuredly structured like the great Château Latours of yesteryear. Great juice. 2021-2070. **96.**

1984 Monticello Vineyards “Corley Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I had very much liked the run of mid-‘80s Corley Reserve bottlings produced by Monticello Vineyards, so had high hopes for this 1984. The wine has stood the test of time quite well and still has plenty of life ahead of it. The bouquet is quite stylish, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, a touch of mint, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil, just a touch of French oak and a smoky topnote. However, on the palate the wine is not quite as interesting as the nose, as it is full-bodied and still vigorous, but also a bit rustic stylistically. There is good depth of fruit at the core, but the remaining tannins are a bit coarse on the backend. The finish is long and there is pretty good developmental complexity here, but it just lacks the polished veneer of one of the top examples of the vintage and is overall a tad rustic in personality. That said, it is also quite drinkable and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. A good, honest and solid cabernet, but not in the top division of the vintage. 2021-2040+. **88.**

1984 Mount Eden Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 1984 vintage of cabernet sauvignon from Mount Eden Vineyards is an excellent example of the vintage, and not surprisingly, this mountain cabernet is still a bit tannic and has not yet reached its apogee. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, stony soil tones, petroleum jelly, chipotle pepper, a touch of new oak and a gentle topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish that closes with a slightly tarry note that recalls a good Barolo. This is an excellent wine, but I would actually opt to give it a handful of more years in the cellar and let its backend tannins soften up even a bit more! 2024-2060. **95.**

1984 Niebaum Coppola “Rubicon” Red Table Wine (Napa Valley)

Given how well the 1984 Rubicon showed at our tastings of the two vintages, I am not sure if my note on the 1985 (bought at the same auction from the same cellar- please see below) is accurate, or if we had an “off” bottle of the ’85. In any case, this bottle of the 1984 Rubicon was excellent and drinking very well at age thirty-seven, offering up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of chocolate, dried eucalyptus and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered stylistically, with a fine core of ripe fruit, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is very good juice, which in this era, was crafted under the consultancy of André Tchelistcheff. 2021-2050+. **92+.**

1984 Joseph Phelps “Eisele Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1984 Eisele Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Joseph Phelps is another wine that puts down the assertion that the 1984 was one of the first “modern, high octane” vintages in California, as this wine comes in at a svelte 12.9 percent alcohol. It is a very good wine that is still a bit youthful and really deserves further bottle age to allow it to completely blossom. The bouquet is complex, deep and very promising, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, gentle tarry tones, eucalyptus, a touch of petroleum jelly, a fine base of dark soil tones and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still sports a fair bit of backend tannin, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. With more bottle age, this wine may blossom dramatically, in which case, my score will seem absurdly conservative. 2025-2055+. **92+.**

1984 Ridge Vineyards “Monte Bello” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 1984 Ridge Monte Bello bottling of cabernet sauvignon is one of the wines of the vintage in this top flight year, coming in at 12.9 percent alcohol and having included seven percent merlot in the blend in this vintage. The simply beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, a gorgeous array of spice tones, a marvelous base of soil, discreet notes of dill, cigar smoke, petroleum jelly, American oak and a topnote that hints at fruitcake tones like one might find in a mature example of Château Rayas. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with impeccable balance, still some fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and very complex finish. This is a great, great vintage of Monte Bello! 2024-2060. **97.**

1984 Silver Oak “Bonny’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1984 Bonny’s Vineyard bottling from Silver Oak is one of the lowest octane cabernets that I tasted from the vintage, as this wine comes in listed at 12.2 percent alcohol. It has aged beautifully and is now drinking with excellent complexity and breed, wafting from the glass in a blend of baked red and black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of petroleum jelly,

discreet notes of dill and a lovely base of toasty, American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively plush at the core (particularly for its low octane), with impeccable balance, fine grip and a long, complex, meltingly tannic finish. At thirty-seven years of age, the '84 Bonny's Vineyard has retained nice, tangy acids and splendid focus and is now at its apogee of peak maturity, albeit, still with plenty of life ahead of it. This is really a superb example of the vintage. 2021-2045. **95.**

1984 Joseph Swan Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

The 1984 Swan cabernet sauvignon is one of my favorite examples of the vintage. In this era, Joseph Swan was far more famous for the quality of his zinfandel and pinot noir bottlings, but his cabernet sauvignon was certainly excellent and one of the great sleepers to be found in top years such as 1984 and 1985. The wine is drinking beautifully today, offering up a deep, black fruity and fully mature nose of sweet dark berries, ripe cassis, cigar smoke, a complex base of soil tones, gentle notes of eucalyptus and a touch of tobacco leaf still in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with excellent focus and grip, a lovely core of black fruit, fine soil inflection and a long, complex finish that still carries a bit of fine-grained tannin. This is a great wine that is easing into its zenith of peak drinkability, but which still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2050. **94.**



The 1985 Vintage

1985 Ahlgren Vineyard “Bates Ranch” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Ahlgren Vineyard was founded in 1976 and closed in 2016. They were not particularly well-known during their day, but produced quite high quality wines and this 1985 cabernet sauvignon produced from fruit from Bates Ranch was quite good. The wine is quite black fruity on the nose, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, a good base of dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly resolved, with a good core, still a bit of modest backend tannins and fine balance and grip on the long finish. The only thing that keeps this wine’s score down just a touch is that it has not really gotten particularly complex with the passage of time. But, it still has plenty of life in it and is a good, solid drink and quite enjoyable. 2021-2040. **89.**

1985 Beaulieu Vineyards “Rutherford” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I remember well selling the 1985 BV “Rutherford” bottling of cabernet sauvignon, which was quite tasty for its eight or nine dollars a bottle price tag when first released. It was made for immediate consumption, so I never imagined I would cross paths with a bottle at age thirty-six! Not surprisingly, the wine was long in the tooth, but still partially alive and palatable. The bouquet offers up a very mature nose of desiccated black cherry, fig, petroleum jelly, cigar ash and a touch of brown spices in the upper register (like the skeletal remains of Rutherford Dust). On the palate the wine is still full-bodied, though chunky and four-square, with the fruit fading in the mid-palate, but still a heartbeat on the modest finish. This is better than I would have ever imagined, based on how forward it was out of the blocks, but it was never meant to run long-distances like this. 2021-2025? **81.**

1985 Buena Vista “Private Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Carneros)

The 1985 Buena Vista Reserve cabernet is long past its best and probably was never all that enjoyable at any point in its evolution. When the wine is first opened today, one gets a blast of intense weediness, but this eventually dissipates quite a bit as other elements mount on the nose. Eventually, it offers up scents of cassis, bell pepper, cigar ash, road tar and plenty of damp herb tones. On the palate the wine is fullish and getting hollow at the core, as it dries out, with some overt signs of oxidation already impinging on the finish. Like the Eagles used to say, “Already Gone”. **DOA.**

1985 Burgess Cellars “Vintage Selection” Cabernet Sauvignon (Howell Mountain)

The 1985 Burgess Cellars cabernet sauvignon is a very respectable example of the vintage. The wine comes in listed at an even thirteen percent alcohol. This particular bottle was purchased at auction and had a dry and crumbly cork, so there is a possibility that there are even better bottles of this wine still out there. But, despite its dying cork, the wine is alive and well, offering up a refined nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, chipotles, a good base of soil and a gentle framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with a good core and soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, focused and very nicely balanced finish. This is good juice and I would love to cross paths with another bottle one day, just to see if the crumbly cork affected the wine at all. 2021-2045. **89.**

1985 Caymus Vineyards “Estate Bottled” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

1985 was the penultimate vintage at Caymus before the wholesale shift in priorities at this Napa winery in 1987, when making money seemed to take over precedence from making great wines. For those who are too young to remember the changes, starting in 1984, the Wagner family had begun producing a third Caymus bottling of cabernet sauvignon, which they dubbed “Napa Cuvée” and which was produced exclusively from purchased grapes. It was not in the

same league as their Estate bottling or the Special Selection made from the family's own vineyards, but it was a pretty good bottle for the \$12 it sold for and was fairly popular in the vintages from '84 through '86, when it was produced. However, in 1987, the winery decided to nix the Napa Cuvée label and started blending it in with forty percent of their Estate bottling (and selling the blend for the same price as the Estate), while taking sixty percent of the Estate vineyards and "kicking them upstairs" to dramatically increase the quantity of Special Selection cabernet that they produced. Everything suffered in quality from 1987 onwards, though critics at the time did not seem to notice, and the caricature of cabernet at Caymus began and which still plagues us today. But, back in 1985, Caymus was still rightly considered one of the very best producers of this varietal in all of California and this recent bottle of the '85 Estate cabernet was excellent. The bouquet is blossoming very well, though still a few years away from its true peak, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of mint and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin remaining to soften up and a long, complex and classy finish. The world has not crumbled and the sun still sets in the west, but it was a better time when this Napa cabernet specialist, founded in 1972, was still making classically-inspired wines. 2021-2050. 92+.

1985 Clos du Bois "Briarcrest" Cabernet Sauvignon (Alexander Valley)

The 1985 Briarcrest bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Clos du Bois is a perplexing wine, as it goes through stages while sitting in the glass when I thought it was going to blossom and turn into something interesting, and then it collapses in on itself. Part of the wine's issue is that it appears to have been raised in heavily-charred barrels (which were the fashion at this time) that add a charcoal element to the aromatics and flavors. When they are strident (and the wine changes repeatedly in the glass), the wine is not enchanting, but when they recede, there are some good black fruity elements here. I followed this wine in the glass for twenty-five minutes and it ultimately was consumed by its strange oak component. The nose eventually settles into notes of cassis, black cherries, tarry elements, cigar ash and charcoal-like toasted oak. On the palate the wine is deep, rather dense and full-bodied, with some sour backend notes from acidulation (that is peeling away from the structural elements of the wine like lead paint in an old building), melted tannins and good focus and length. This is fairly ripe for a 1985, coming in at 13.4 percent octane. There seem to have been some good components here at the outset, but ultimately, they did not get out of the cellar unscathed. 2021-2035. 84.

1985 Clos du Bois "Marlstone Vineyard" Red Table Wine (Alexander Valley)

The 1985 Marlstone Vineyard bottling from Clos du Bois is composed of a blend of sixty-two percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-eight percent merlot, seven percent cabernet franc and three percent malbec. It is really quite ripe for the '85 vintage, as it comes in at 13.7 percent octane. The bouquet has developed quite nicely and now offers up a blend of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, a good base of dark soil tones, a touch of road tar, menthol, dried eucalyptus and a modest framing of creosote-like new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really quite refined in profile, with a good core of fruit, melting tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. My sole complaint with this wine is that it was obviously acidulated, and now at age thirty-six, the acids are no longer seamlessly integrated into the body of the wine and give it a slightly rigid backend impression as a result. But, other than this misstep, this is a quite good wine that has aged gracefully (and is far more successful than the Briarcrest in this vintage), seems cooler than its 13.7 percent alcohol and is nicely complex and tasty. One has to take a couple of points away for the acids, and I should note that the wine started to show a touch of

oxidation once it was open for an hour or so. Consequently, as this bottle seemed to be in excellent condition, I would opt for drinking it up over the next half dozen years or so. 2021-2027+? **88.**

1985 Girard Vineyards “Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

It was funny that when I decanted this wine prior to serving, it showed a lovely nose and I hoped for a very good wine. However, by the time I served it fifteen minutes later, the promise was gone. The wine shows an odd combination of a fairly heavy hand with extraction and yet a certain hollowness at the core, not to mention poorly-done acidulation on the backend of the palate. The bouquet is a four-square blend of cassis, bell pepper, cigar ash, coffee grounds and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, dense on the attack, hollow at the core and lacking in complexity, with plenty of remaining tannins and a slightly sour aspect from the peeling acidity marring the finish. It still has plenty of life in it, but not much pleasure. 2021-2040. **81.**

1985 Dominus Red Table Wine (Napa Valley)

The 1985 vintage of Dominus is a very good wine, but it is still fairly structured and not yet ready for primetime drinking. The bouquet is deep and already quite complex, delivering scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a touch of road tar, dark soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and more primary than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and still moderately chewy finish. This wine is clearly still in climbing mode and needs at least another five years in the cellar to properly blossom. It is slightly dense stylistically at the present time, but this may disappear as the wine reaches its proper plateau of maturity in a few more years. There is a distinct possibility that once this wine truly blossoms, my score may seem a tad stingy. 2026-2055+. **92+.**

1985 Dunn Vineyards “Napa” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I last drank the 1985 Napa cabernet from Randy Dunn back in early 2018 and felt it was starting to turn the corner. However, at one of our most recent tastings, it was back in its tannic suit and tie and demanding to be left alone in a cool corner of the cellar for another ten-plus years. The potential here remains exceptional, but I was hoping to see even a bit more softening of the tannins, rather than a still closed and cantankerously-structured wine! The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, sweet dark berries, stony soil tones, cigar smoke, incipient notes of petroleum jelly, pretty spice tones, a touch of road tar and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still pretty clenched in its tannic chassis, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and grip, firm, chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex and still very promising finish. Was my last bottle more forward, or is this bottle from a particularly cool cellar? I am not sure, but this most recent bottle needs still more time in the cellar before it starts to drink with generosity. Someday, it should be a terrific bottle of wine! 2030-2075. **93+.**

1985 Heitz Wine Cellars “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

David Heitz’s 1985 “Napa” bottling of cabernet sauvignon is a very good example of the vintage and a relative bargain out there in the auction world, as I see this appear from time to time. The wine offers up a fine nose of black cherries, lovely spice tones, a very good base of soil, tobacco leaf, eucalyptus and a nice touch of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, melted tannins, still good acidity and a long, well-balanced finish. This does not offer up the same complexity as the single vineyard bottlings from Heitz, but it has depth, stuffing and plenty of class. 2021-2045. **90.**

1985 Heitz Wine Cellars “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I can distinctly recall from my early days in the wine trade the release of the 1985 Martha’s Vineyard, which was eagerly anticipated after it was announced that this was the first vintage to be graced with a special label since the legendary 1974. This was at the height of the winery’s popularity and the 1985 Martha’s was an extremely difficult bottle to come by at the time of its release. Consequently, I had not seen a bottle in many years and was delighted to see it included in our vertical at the winery in June. The wine is flat out brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, saddle leather, a great base of soil tones, eucalyptus, smoke, incipient notes of petroleum jelly and a very gentle framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, great complexity, moderate tannins and a very long, perfectly balanced, tangy and palate-staining finish. This is a very intense vintage of Martha’s that is decidedly younger than the 1987 for instance, and still demands plenty of cellaring time. It will clearly prove to be a legendary vintage of Martha’s and certainly has earned its special label. 2025-2100. **96+**.

1985 Kalin Cellars “Sonoma” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

The 1985 vintage of Terry and Frances Leighton’s cabernet sauvignon from their steep-sloped vineyard source in Sonoma is one of the wines of the vintage. This was the first time I had tasted this vintage of Kalin’s cabernet and it fully supported my great expectations for the wine. As is customary with this bottling from Kalin, the wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane, was aged in eighty to one hundred percent new oak and spent fully four years in cask prior to being bottled. At age thirty-six, the wine is now entering its apogee and is drinking with great distinction, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, gentle notes of eucalyptus, a gorgeous base of iron-infused soil tones, a touch of allspice and a beautiful framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with great purity to its fruit expression, a great signature of soil, suave, melting tannins, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the very long, very refined finish. Great, great juice. 2021-2060. **96**.

1985 Kathryn Kennedy Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

I had liked the 1985 Kathryn Kennedy cabernet sauvignon from its earliest days and at age thirty-six, the wine is drinking very well indeed. I was quite surprised to see that this wine comes in at 13.7 percent octane in the cooler ’85 vintage, which was at the upper range of alcohol for this era. But, it has aged quite gracefully and today, offers up a superb nose of dark berries, cassis, a bit of road tar, briary overtones, a fine base of stony soil, a bit of dried lavender, cedary oak and a smoky topnote. There is also a touch of brett here, which I found quite understated, but which the taster sitting next to me thought ruined his enjoyment of the wine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe, moderate tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and quite impressive finish. If a dollop of brett does not bother you, then there is plenty of enjoyment to be found here! 2021-2050+. **93**.

1985 Laurel Glen Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

I remember vividly how much I admired Patrick Campbell’s wines at Laurel Glen back in this era, as I happily sold all of his cabernets during the stretch of vintages from 1984 to 1987. The 1985 has aged very gracefully and is now drinking with generosity, offering up a complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, a touch of bell pepper, a lovely base of dark soil tones, chipotles and a deft touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of black fruit, good soil undertow, modest tannins and a

long, focused and quite classy finish. This is not the most complex 1985 out there, but it hits a lot of the right notes! 2021-2050. **92.**

1985 Lyeth Red Table Wine (Alexander Valley)

If memory serves me correctly, 1982 was the first vintage ever produced of this bottling from Lyeth, which I sold enthusiastically during my earliest wine merchant days. I bought a bottle of the '82 at auction a couple of years ago for nostalgia's sake, but it had not aged well. The 1985 is a decided step up from the 1982, but this is still not a great wine and probably represents one of the first wines to take a step into the "modern school" of more manipulation than was good for it. The wine is still drinkable, but overly concocted stylistically, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, an array of spice tones and a generous serving of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, reasonably complex and still tangy, with a bit of hollowness at the core, good focus and grip and still a bit of tannin perking up the finish. The sum of the parts is okay here, but the wine lacks personality and complexity. One gets the sense that everything about this wine was hashed out in the cellars by a committee of people who knew little about wine, but knew much about consensus building. The wine is not bad *per se*, just rather soulless and uninteresting after the first half glass. 2021-2035. **86.**

1985 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

Having shared a bottle of 1985 Mayacamas cabernet with a friend three years ago, I had very high expectations for this particular bottle that closed out my three rounds of larger tastings for the preparation of this article. Back in 2018, I had noted that I was surprised how well the '85 Mayacamas was drinking at the time, as I still expected it to be fairly backwards in personality. But, it was blossoming nicely at the time. Three years on, the wine is even better than it was then and now seems to have fully emerged from its hibernation and is clearly one of Bob Travers' greatest wines in his long and very, very successful career. The bouquet soars from the glass in a deep, pure and complex constellation of black cherries, Cuban cigars, a complex base of mountain soil tones, a touch of eucalyptus, woodsmoke, gentle notes of allspice and a deft foundation of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, seamless and shows off stunning depth at the core, with great soil signature, suave tannins and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. The wine was delicious when first decanted, but over the course of the hour that it was drunk, its tannins started to firm up just a bit, so my gut instinct is that the wine is still climbing and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. This was drunk alongside of the excellent 1984 Mayacamas and it is unequivocally the finer, more complete wine of the two. One of California's most legendary cabernets! 2026-2085. **99.**

1985 Newton Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1985 Newton cabernet sauvignon was another of the real pleasant surprises in these tastings, as the wine is lovely on both the nose and palate and is drinking very well indeed at thirty-six years of age. This is very elegant in profile, offering up a mature, classy middleweight profile with plenty of aromatic refinement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, a touch of dried eucalyptus, pretty brown spice tones, a dollop of French oak and a note of hickory smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure, complex and shows off very good mid-palate depth, with melting tannins, sound acids and a long, poised and well balanced finish. This is very good. 2021-2040+. **92.**



1985 Niebaum Coppola “Rubicon” Red Table Wine (Napa Valley)

The 1985 Niebaum Coppola “Rubicon” was one of the most curious wines in any of our tastings for this article. Though the wine has aged nicely and is still quite alive and well, it most assuredly does not smell like a Bordeaux blend made from grapes grown on the Rutherford Bench, as it most closely resembles a dry Port on both the nose and palate (albeit at much lower octane). Francis Ford Coppola first started producing his Rubicon bottling in the 1978 vintage, but had hired the great André Tchelistcheff as his consulting winemaker by the time the 1982 vintage rolled around, so this wine was made under André’s tutelage. And yet, the wine smells and tastes as if it is a Port! The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of desiccated black fruit, prunes, cigar ash, spiced meats, road tar and plenty of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, Port-like in its flavor profile and chewy, with still some firm, rustic tannins, a good core and a long, complex and stylistically perplexing finish. I really do not know how to score this wine, as it is still alive and kicking, but its personality is hardly that of the great Inglenook cabernets of the forties and fifties which were ostensibly its inspiration. In the end, if one does not mind one’s Napa Valley Bordeaux-styled blend tasting and smelling like a Port, then add six points to my score. I should note that the 1984 Rubicon, bought at the same auction from the same cellar, showed quite well and did not have any of the Port personality conflict of the 1985, so there is a possibility that this was not a sound bottle of the 1985, despite its appearance being exemplary. 2021-2040. **82?**

1985 Joseph Phelps Vineyards “Backus Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The Joseph Phelps team was at the top of their game in the mid-1980s and the '85 Backus Vineyard is a beautiful bottle of cabernet sauvignon. This was drunk most recently from magnum, which is still a touch on the youthful side, but regular-sized bottles I have drunk in the recent past have been squarely into their apogees of peak drinkability. This magnum offers up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, sweet cassis, mint, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a nice touch of petroleum jelly and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, good soil signature and grip, suave, buried tannins and a long, poised and impeccably balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2060+. **94.**

1985 Joseph Phelps “Eisele Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1985 vintage of cabernet sauvignon from the Eisele Vineyard is everything one might expect from the confluence of Joseph Phelps at the absolute top of their game and a great vintage. The wine is quite ripe by the vintage's rather “cool” standards, coming in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a superb bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, eucalyptus, cigar ash, espresso, a beautiful base of soil tones, a nice touch of vanillin oak and a topnote of chipotle pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a great core of black fruit, fine soil undertow, moderate, seamless tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and tangy finish. This is certainly drinking well today, but a few more years in the cellar will be beneficial, as there is still a bit of backend tannin to soften up here and probably, yet another layer of complexity to unfold! Great juice. 2025-2065+. **95.**

1985 Joseph Phelps “Insignia” Red Table Wine (Napa Valley)

The 1985 vintage of Joseph Phelps Insignia showed brilliantly at our tasting. In this vintage, the wine was composed from a *cépages* of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-five percent merlot and fifteen percent cabernet franc. Like the '85 Eisele, this is quite ripe by the standards of the 1985 vintage, coming in listed also at 13.5 percent alcohol. The wine is now at its apogee and drinking with grace and marvelous complexity, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, cherries, cigar ash, mint, a complex base of dark soil tones, a hint of petroleum jelly, a discreet framing of vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined in profile, with a plush core of fruit, melting tannins, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, complex and dancing finish. This is truly stunning wine! 2021-2055. **95.**

1985 Ridge Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon “Monte Bello”(Santa Cruz Mountains)

This particular bottle of 1985 Monte Bello showed even a hair better than the last one that I drank. It is a very good, solid example of the vintage, but not one of the legendary vintages of Monte Bello from this era. The wine comes in at 13.1 percent alcohol in this vintage and offers up a deep and complex nose of cassis, saddle leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones, petroleum jelly and a judicious framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, still some firm backend tannins and a long, well-balanced and fairly complex finish. This wine has some brett to it, which has always been its Achilles' Heel, and though this impression is mellowing as the wine ages, some tasters will find this characteristic more off-putting than I do, so adjust your score accordingly. Like the 1984 Monte Bello, this wine includes seven percent merlot in the *cépages*. The wine is not yet at its apogee and could do with a bit more time in the cellar to further soften up its tannins. Good juice, but not a patch on the 1984 version. 2027-2065. **92.**

1985 Sequoia Grove “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Sequoia Grove was still a fledgling winery back in 1985 and this bottle was one of the very pleasant surprises of one of our tastings for this report. The wine comes in listed at twelve percent octane and seems like it was aged in American oak casks, as it offers up a refined bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a nice touch of petroleum jelly, dark soil tones and just a touch of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite vigorous, with a good core, a nice touch of soil and still a bit of ripe, backend tannin perking up the long and nicely balanced finish. This really is quite tasty and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2021-2040+. **91.**

1985 Silverado Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1985 vintage of Silverado cabernet sauvignon is a good, solid wine that has aged pretty well and is drinking with generosity at age thirty-six. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent and offers up scents of red and black cherries, chipotle pepper, a good base of Napa soil tones, tobacco leaf and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and has good depth at the core, with modest tannins and a long, fairly well-balanced finish. There is a bit of coarseness on the backend from its acidulation, but it is not too serious. However, the wine has not really developed much complexity with its extended bottle age, which also keeps its score down a tad. But, all in all, for a wine that was probably never intended to last this long, it is a good, solid bottle and still has plenty of life in it. 2021-2040. **87.**

1985 Joseph Swan Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 1985 Joseph Swan cabernet sauvignon since I was working on my historical feature on this iconic estate all the way back in 2011. It was included in a large and comprehensive lineup and I have to say that I “missed” the wine on that occasion and vastly underrated it. I was very fortunate to have a chance to taste it again for this report, in a smaller lineup of its vintage peers and the wine was absolutely stunning. The bouquet is svelte, complex and clearly emblematic of the low octane nature and long hang-time of the 1985 vintage, as it offers up a pure and very complex blend of sweet cassis, dark berries, fresh-culled mint, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of soil tones, a hint of petroleum jelly and a topnote of chipotles. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil inflection and grip, melted tannins and a very, very long, complex finish. This is not a powerful example of California cabernet sauvignon by any stretch of the imagination, but an utterly refined, suave middleweight of stunning balance and glorious complexity! Joe Swan never deigned to put his alcohol levels on his labels, but this wine is clearly under thirteen percent and perfectly ripe at the same time. Great juice with decades of life still ahead of it. 2021-2050+. **95.**

A Few Slightly Older Tasting Notes

1985 B. R. Cohn Cabernet Sauvignon “Olive Hill Vineyard”

After having a rather tired bottle of this wine and reporting on it back in 2008, I have had it a couple of times since and had much better results. I happily sold both this and the 1984 Olive Hill Vineyard bottlings when they were first released, as this was a new kid on the block in this era, and though few of us had any idea who their winemaker, Helen Turley, was at the time, these wines proved to be stepping stones for her towards her eventual career as one of California’s most popular “hired gun winemakers” before starting up her own Marcassin label. I bought a bottle of this vintage of B. R. Cohn cabernet at auction just before getting to work on this feature, but as summer temperatures spiked up early this year, I did not see the point of

shipping it from California at the present time, given that I had a note on the wine already from a few years back. The wine has stood the test of time pretty well, but has not really developed any complexity with bottle age and offers up a pretty straightforward bouquet of cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of chocolate and a nice framing of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nicely balanced and resolved, with melting tannins, good focus and grip and a long, tasty finish. If this wine had developed more complexity as it aged, it would have been one of the great steals of the vintage (I sold it for \$12 a bottle upon release). But, in hindsight, it was probably best in the first decade or two of its life and has been simply in a holding pattern ever since. Not a bad wine. 2017-2030. **87.**

1985 Forman Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1985 vintage of Ric Forman's cabernet is a good solid wine, but like the 1987, it was not quite up to my expectations of the intersection of a top vintage and Ric's formidable winemaking skills. Of course, the vineyards were still quite young in '85, so perhaps this has something to do with the showing of this wine, not to mention that the winery construction had just been finished and this was the first vintage entirely produced here. The 1985 Forman Cabernet is nicely cool at 12.8 percent and offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, a touch of eucalyptus, cigar ash, a good base of soil and gentle framing notes of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with sound balance, fleeting tannins and good complexity on the finish. The backend is not particularly precise and wanders quite a bit, and this is really the only thing keeping the score down a tad, as otherwise this is quite tasty. Good, but not great juice. 2016-2030+. **89.**

1985 Heitz Wine Cellars "Bella Oaks Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Remarkably, the 1985 Heitz Bella Oaks cabernet is still a fairly young wine and in need of a bit more cellaring to really blossom. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, as it offers up scents of black cherries, tobacco smoke, a touch of chipotle pepper, Rutherford dust, a bit of nuttiness and a nice framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, good focus and a long, chewy and slightly rigid finish. This needs at least another four or five years of cellaring to fully soften, but there is a slight possibility that the rigidity that the wine currently shows on the backend may always be part of its profile. A very good wine in need of a few more years of bottle age. The '85 Bella Oaks should prove to be one of the longer-lived wines of the vintage. 2015-240+. **90+.**

1985 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon "Reserve" (Napa Valley)

The 1985 Mondavi cabernet reserve bottling contained twelve percent cabernet franc and six percent merlot in this vintage, and was aged in one hundred percent new oak. It weighs in at 13.1 percent alcohol, making it still a very classic vintage of this wine in terms of ripeness. I tasted two bottles of this wine for this article, with the first shipped to New York by the winery for a retrospective tasting, and which showed impressive complexity, but with slightly disjointed acidity on the backend that suggests less than fully successful acidulation in this era of "sculpted wines". The second bottle, which had been in a good friend's cellar since its release was very polished and classy, and decidedly more interesting than the bottle flown in from Oakville. The bouquet is a complex and classy blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of chipotle, tobacco leaf, coffee, gentle bass notes of Rutherford dust and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and possesses nicely "cool" fruit tones, with very good mid-palate depth, modest tannins and good length and grip on the classy finish. The more "rested" bottle showed beautiful refinement and continued to blossom and add different facets of

spice tones as it developed in the glass over the several hours that we followed the wine. A delightful 1985 cabernet. 2009-2025+. **92.**

1984 B. R. Cohn Cabernet Sauvignon “Olive Hill Vineyard”

The 1984 Olive Hill cabernet sauvignon is a good solid example of the vintage, but like its 1985 counterpart, it has not really developed any complexity with extended bottle age. The wine shows a bit of the warmth of the vintage in its nose of baked black cherries and cassis, chocolate, a hint of eucalyptus, cigar smoke and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with no rough edges, a good core, melted tannins and good length and grip on the balanced and easy-drinking finish. This is a good, solid wine that still has life ahead of it, but is outclassed by many of its vintage contemporaries. At least it is holding up well and looks likely to last longer than I thought the last time I drank the wine back in 2007, when I thought it would already be getting towards the end of its plateau. 2015-2030. **88.**

1984 Dominus Red Table Wine (Napa Valley)

The 1984 vintage of Dominus was the first ever to be released by the estate, as Christian Moueix properly judged that the tighter and more structured 1983, which was the first wine actually vinified at the property, would do well with a bit more bottle age in the cellars prior to release, so the 1984 was the first vintage of Dominus to find its way to market. I have always loved this vintage of Dominus and this most recent bottle was absolutely singing, offering up a deep and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, a beautifully complex base of Rutherford soil, fresh herb tones and a judicious base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, still a fair bit of tannin left and superb complexity and grip on the very long and impressive finish. One of the finest vintages of Dominus from the first decade of the winery’s existence and still with tons and tons of life ahead of it. 2012-2050. **94.**

RECENTLY-TASTED LOIRE VALLEY WINES SUMMER 2021



While there are several early 2020s starting to creep into the pipeline from the Loire Valley, the vast, vast majority of recent releases in the market today are still from the 2019 and 2018 vintages in this beautiful section of France. As I wrote about the conditions of these two vintages in some depth last spring in Issue 87, I will only go into a brief review of the weather conditions of the two vintages here. After a brief respite in 2018 from the what are now frequent frosts in the spring in the Loire, the 2019 growing season once again started out with April frost damage. As I mentioned last year, the worst of the freeze hit vineyards on the eastern end of the Loire, in the Nantes and Anjou regions, with potential yields cut back catastrophically in many parcels in Muscadet and Anjou. It was provident that the 2018 crop had been very generous, as 2019 was once again a year characterized by short yields (as had the vintages of 2016 and 2017), for the weather in early June during the flowering was also imperfect. What followed the spring of 2019 were two months of drought in July and August, with some extreme heat spikes in late June and early July. Sadly for *vignerons*, the lack of precipitation continued all the way up to harvest in 2019, so that the vines never really had a chance to take a deep drink during the second half of the growing season and berries came in small, concentrated and relatively few in number. For some regions, particularly in the eastern end of the Loire, where sauvignon blanc is

king, the concentrated berries allowed for much better acidity levels than had been the case in the previous year, so that 2019 examples of Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé, Quincy, Menetou-Salon and the like have more of their customary spines of acidity than was the case with the rounder and slightly softer and more opulent 2018s.

One could argue that both the 2019 and 2018 vintages were finest for the red wines of the central Loire, as cabernet franc seems to have excelled in both vintages, though the wines are quite different stylistically and only a handful of 2019 red wine cuvées have yet to be released. The 2018 vintage was a very big (mercifully so after the tiny, frost-damaged crops of 2016 and 2017) and managed to ripen up nicely in the beautiful, hot and sunny weather of the second half of the growing season. The spring was early and flowering was abundant, setting the tables for a very large crop. There was a lot of rain in June and *vignerons* had to be vigilant to keep mildew at bay out in the vines. From the outset of July, days were very warm and sunny and nights often cooled down nicely, keeping relatively good acidity levels in the grapes and auguring good things for the wines of the vintage. As I mentioned last year, there are a couple of potential Achilles' heels to the 2018 vintage, with the first obviously being that the rot and mildew that cropped up immediately after the heavy rains in June had to be studiously controlled to make great wines. The other is that the potentially huge yields required patience at the end of the summer, as this large crop had to be ripen up completely to get fruit flavors and tannins to ideal levels, which sometimes also allowed potential alcohol levels to also mount. A year on from starting to taste a lot of 2018 whites, it is also clear that acidity levels fell in many regions as *vignerons* sought to get proper phenolic ripeness in their large number of bunches out on the vines in the Indian Summer weather, so many 2018 white wines come across now as a bit soft in comparison to their racier 2019 counterparts. This is particularly true on the eastern end of the Loire, where there are some very pretty and generous 2018 sauvignon blanc-based bottlings that will want drinking up fairly early on in their evolutions, while the snappier 2019s seem the better bet for tucking away in the cellar (if anyone besides me actually ages their Loire sauvignon blancs these days ☺).

Since my last big report on the Loire Valley and its beautiful wines last summer, a great many more 2018 red wines have arrived from the central Loire appellations of Chinon, Saumur-Champigny and Bourgueil. This is a very, very good vintage for these reds, though the wines are generally big, ripe and structured wines, with the top cuvées in need of some extended bottle aging before they soften up to really start drinking with generosity. But, their excellent potential is self-evident and this will be a fine, fine vintage for tucking away in the cellar. The wines have plenty of fruit, with ripe, but without overripe flavor profiles, very good soil signatures and fine, tannic structures that will carry them extremely well for longer-term aging. For producers in these appellations who customarily produce their red wines for earlier consumption, the 2018s are often a bit bigger in profile than most vintages and often do have a bit of tannin on the backend, though this is usually buried in the lovely fruit tones and the wines are indeed quite delicious out of the blocks. For the more serious estates in Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny who prefer to make their wines for the long haul, the 2018 vintage has given them excellent raw materials with which to work and I have tasted dozens of truly outstanding 2018s that will age long and gracefully and take their places eventually as one of the top recent vintages for red wines on the Loire.

Having now tasted a very nice range of top 2017 and 2018 red wine bottlings from the regions of Chinon, Saumur-Champigny and Bourgueil, not to mention a goodly number of earlier 2019 releases, it seems to me that one can pick and choose among these three vintages and really fine tune a given wine selection to one's particular palate preferences. All three vintages have produced a fine array of various bottlings that will do exceedingly well with mid-to-long-term aging in the cellar, but all three vintages will produce wines with different personalities when they are fully ready to drink. The 2017s are the most classically styled wines of the three vintages, and though they do not pack quite the same beautiful sappy depth of fruit as the 2018s or the 2019s, this is a very high quality vintage and there are several 2017s that I would rather have in my cellar over some of the riper versions from 2018 or 2019. But, this is not to say that the top 2018s are overripe in style (or at least the wines that I tasted), as they possess really extraordinary purity and freshness and are just a bit higher in octane than the vintage of 2017, for the aforementioned reason that the big and generous crop of 2018 requiring *vignerons* to let the bunches continue to hang until the tannins ripened up completely. On occasion, having to wait to pick resulted in wines coming in around fourteen percent alcohol (with a half point swing either way). Some, like the excellent 2018s from Philippe Alliet, are big, ripe and sappy examples that have a gorgeous, glossy veneer of perfectly ripe fruit over a serious structural chassis for the long haul; others, like the truly stunning 2018s from Marc Plouzeau, are listed at octane levels that are quite typical for the vintage, but the wines are relatively cool in personality soil-driven and beautifully balanced for the long haul and far more classical than one might anticipate from their labels (and all absolutely stunning), and still other 2018s, from estates such as Domaine Olga Raffault, seemingly defy the vintage's personality and come in at 12.5 percent octane and are utterly refined in aromatic and flavor profile. So, you can see how it might be possible to find brilliant bottles in whatever particular style one might favor the most from the seriously large array of great 2018 red wines from these appellations.

For the great chenin blanc appellations of the Loire Valley, 2018 and 2019 offer quite different perspectives on the many stylistic facets that these wines can present from vintage to vintage. The drought year of 2019 did not favor producing sweeter-styled cuvées, so we will see far more Sec from Vouvray and Montlouis in 2019 than was the case the previous year. This actually works out reasonably well for producers, as 2018 did afford the opportunity to produce a fairly sizable range of sweeter-styled bottlings, and with the consumption of Moelleux bottlings nowhere near as robust these days as was the case a generation ago, two vintages back to back that favored the sweeter-styled wines from these appellations would not have necessarily been a gift to producers in our current market conditions. But, as 2019 was far better suited to producing a preponderance of dry cuvées from the chenin blanc grape here, it has worked out very well, as there seems to still remain plenty of 2018 Demi-Sec and Moelleux bottlings available still in the pipeline from Vouvray and Montlouis. In the wider Touraine region, the 2018 vintage produced really pretty, plump and generous wines that are perfectly suited for the earlier drinking that is customary with these cuvées, and 2019 has followed suit (albeit with a bit more concentration from the lower yields and small berries), so there are some amazing bargains available from the Touraine in both vintages.

The very first wines from the 2020 vintage are also starting to find their way into the Loire Valley pipeline. Fortunately, after the drought conditions of 2019, the winter was wet and rainy, so that groundwater reserves could be replenished going into the growing season of 2020.

However, the winter temperatures were not particularly cold and spring was very precocious, so that the budbreak of 2020 was one of the earliest on record in the Loire Valley. March temperatures were so warm that a generation ago, they would have been welcomed as a beautiful and warm month of May! Budbreak was three weeks ahead of a typical year in 2020. But, then once again, there were threats of frost again in April, which quickly tempered enthusiasm for the very warm month of March. Fortunately, in 2020, they did not bite and the crop would eventually turn out to be quite generous (though not quite as large as had been the case in 2018). The summer months were again very dry and August saw heat spikes, which seems to be the new normal across much of France in this era of climate change. Sunburnt grapes were once again a consideration and careful sorting to remove the damaged bunches was a prudent course. Harvest was early in 2020, with many domaines starting in August or at the very outset of September. At Domaine Mathias et Emile Roblin in the Sancerre village of Maimbray, 2020 was the very first time that the family estate had ever begun picking in the month of August! Domaine Huët began picking on September 7th, which was also the earliest start to a harvest in the history of the domaine! Grapes were generally in beautiful condition (once one removed any sunburnt bunches) and acidities tended to be more in line with the 2018 vintage, rather than the more racy 2019s.

It is still very early days for the wines from the 2020 vintage in the Loire, and we will see more information about the wines and the growing season come along as the vast majority of the bottlings here start to prepare for shipping in the coming months. The only complete collection of 2020s I have yet tasted are those from Domaine Huët in Vouvray, but from their lineup, we can see a microcosm of the vintage's character. Like 2018, the roster of bottlings at Domaine Huët is more focused on the sweeter cuvées in 2020, as the vintage's characteristics certainly favored these wines over the production of Sec. As I mentioned above, this probably works out nicely, as 2019 had been a very strong year for dry bottlings in Vouvray and Montlouis. Domaine Huët only produced one bottling of Sec in 2020, a lovely example from their le Mont vineyard. At the Demi-Sec level, there is not one from the Clos du Bourg in 2020, with all of the production there having gone to Moelleux and Moelleux Première Trie bottlings, as well as, one imagines, contributing to a 2020 Cuvée Constance somewhere down the line. 2020 is truly a brilliant vintage for Domaine Huët and I cannot wait to see more wines from the vintage from their neighbors such as Domaine Pinon, Bernard Fouquet's Domaine des Aubuisières or top producers across the river in Montlouis such as François Chidaine, Jacky Blot's Domaine de la Taille aux Loups and Xavier Weisskopf's Le Rocher des Violettes.

This year also saw the sad news of the passing of François Pinon, one of the greatest veteran winegrowers in Vouvray, who passed away on January 28th. François had started out his professional life as a child psychologist in the city of Tours, after having studied this subject at the university, and it was not until 1987 that he returned to assist his father with the family domaine in Vouvray in anticipation of his father's imminent retirement. At the time, François was thirty-five years of age and ready for a new challenge. He would take over direction of the estate in 1987 and make this vintage working with his father, but his first vintage flying solo at the helm was the very next year of 1988. He would hit the ground running in his second career as a *vigneron* and would go on to become one of the finest and most beloved producers in the appellation of Vouvray. This was no small feat, for the Pinon family vineyards are in the *Vallée de Cousse*, which was not then recognized as prime vineyard real estate in Vouvray (though

much through the efforts of François during his long career, the quality of the *terroir* is now far more widely recognized). His son Julien in turn, would also return from a previous career (working as an urban planner in the city of Lille) to join François at the domaine a couple of years ago, with the plan being to spend several vintages working side by side before Julien would take over the helm of the estate. Unfortunately, with François's sudden passing in January, the apprenticeship working together was much shorter than either father or son had planned. This issue is dedicated to the memory of François Pinon and his fine legacy as one of Vouvray's greats over the last thirty-plus vintages.



François and Julien Pinon in their vineyards.

Sparkling Wines

Les Petits Vélos Non-Dosé NV- Domaine de Bellivière

This is the second iteration of sparkling wine produced at Domaine de Bellivière. This is made from a solera of wines from the vintages of 2015 through 2017 (all chenin blanc) that were blended together in 2019 and given a touch of 2018 sweet wine to start the secondary fermentation. It was then given a year aging *sur latte*, disgorged in late 2020 and released this spring. The wine offers up a bright and complex nose of baked apple, quince, chalky soil tones, a bit of chenin “dustiness” and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full, with a good core and mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This has impressive backend lift and grip. 2021-2035. **91.**

Crémant de Loire “Cuvée des Roys de Naples” Brut NV- Maison Foucher

The Crémant de Loire “Cuvée des Roys de Naples” non-vintage Brut from Maison Foucher is composed from a blend of fifty percent chenin blanc and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. The vineyards for this wine lie primarily in Montlouis. The *vins clairs* do not go through malo and the wine is given fully two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The current release offers up a bright and youthful nose of quince, lemon, chalky soil tones, a touch of bread dough and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is young, full and snappy, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, bouncy finish. This is still quite primary and hence, not overly complex, but it is nicely balanced and quite refreshing to drink now; more complexity should emerge with a bit of bottle age. 2021-2030. **87.**

2018 Les Valseuses Pétillant Naturel- Domaine de l'Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The 2018 Les Valseuses Pétillant Naturel from Xavier Courant is composed entirely from chenin blanc. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of quince, fresh apricot, a nice touch of soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely plump at the core, with frothy *mousse*, good acids and grip and a long, well-balanced finish that closes with just a wisp of sweetness that plays off beautifully with the wine's good acidity. This is very tasty. 2021-2030. **89.**

2017 Vouvray Non-Dosé- Domaine François et Julien Pinon

The 2017 Vouvray Brut Non-Dosé from the Pinon family is produced from organically-farmed, forty-five year-old chenin blanc vines, with the bunches harvested later for the Brut Nature bottling to help buffer the wine's acids. The *vins clairs* are fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for about three months in cask and tank prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The 2017 version is excellent, offering up a deep bouquet of quince, tangerine, beautiful soil tones, a touch of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, well-balanced finish that closes with just a whisper of chenin's typical interplay of sweet and bitter fruit tones. This is very, very good. 2021-2040. **92.**

2017 Vouvray Brut- Domaine François et Julien Pinon

Though the Pinon family makes both a Brut and a Non-Dosé bottling of Vouvray Pétillant, and the wines hail from the same forty-five year-old vineyards, they are not from the same base wine. The Brut bottling, which is going to receive a *dosage*, is produced from earlier picked grapes, while the Non-Dosé cuvée's grapes are picked a bit later. Their 2017 Vouvray Brut was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and delivers a superb nose of quince, chalky soil tones, lanolin, a bit of bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite dry in profile, with a lovely core and soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice that will age very well indeed and will be even better three to five years down the road. 2021-2040. **92.**

2017 Montlouis Pétillant Naturel- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

Xavier Weisskopf's Montlouis Pétillant Naturel is made from chenin blanc vines all in excess of forty years of age. One third of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented in older cask and the other two-thirds in stainless steel tank and the wine is non-*dosé*. The wine delivers a beautiful bouquet of apple, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, a hint of beeswax and a delicate floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core and

excellent soil signature. The finish is long, bouncy and shows off a lovely girdle of acidity. This is really good juice! 2021-2030+. **90.**

2015 Vouvray Pétillant Brut- Domaine Huët

The 2015 Vouvray Pétillant Brut from Domaine Huët is a lovely bottle of sparkling wine. The complex nose jumps from the glass in a blend of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and floral hints of honeysuckle and lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with frothy *mousse*, lovely mid-palate depth, zesty acids and a long, well balanced and very classy finish. This has been my favorite bottling of sparkling wine from the Loire for many decades and the 2015 vintage is clearly, yet again, a reference point for how good sparkling wine made from chenin blanc can be in the Vouvray region. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **92.**



Muscadet

2020 Muscadet “Côtes de Grandlieu” Sur Lie- Domaine du Haut Bourg

The 2020 Muscadet “Côtes de Grandlieu” from Domaine du Haut Bourg is a pretty bottle. The nose offers up scents of green apple, bread fruit, wet stone minerality and a nice touch of leesiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bright, with a good core, nice mineral undertow and sneaky length and grip on the youthful finish. This

is not particularly complex Muscadet, but it hits all the right notes in its more limited range. 2021-2030. **88+**.

2020 Muscadet “Classic”- Domaine de l’Ecu

The Muscadet “Classic” bottling from Domaine de l’Ecu is the estate’s young vine cuvée. The 2020 version delivers superb aromatic complexity in its blend of breadfruit, a hint of pear, beautiful leesy elements that show sweetly nutty in tone, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and a long, wide open and classy finish. This is a beautiful entry level Muscadet. 2021-2035. **91**.

2020 Muscadet “la Pépie”- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2020 Muscadet “la Pépie” from Domaine de la Pépière is the first vintage where Marc Ollivier is officially retired and has left the estate in the hands of the next generation of proprietors, Rémi Branger and Gwénaëlle Croix. Of course, this transition has been long in the making, as Rémi started working with Marc in 2006 and became a partner in 2011 and Gwen started here in 2011 and became a partner in 2014, so things have long been in place in anticipation for this day. The la Pépie bottling is made from all of the estate’s production that does not go into one of its cru bottlings, augmented by a bit of judiciously purchased fruit from neighbors who farm “seriously”. The 2020 version is a fine bottle, offering up a bright and wide open bouquet of breadfruit, wet stone minerality, a nice touch of ocean breeze salinity and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, sound acids and a long, gently leesy and nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2035. **90**.

2019 Muscadet “les Fils des Gras Moutons”- Domaine Claude et Sébastien Branger

The les Fils des Gras Moutons is the workhorse bottling from the Branger family, made from plots near the vineyard of les Gras Moutons, but not from the vineyard itself. The 2019 version is bright and beautiful, offering up a complex nose that is gently influenced from its six months of contact with its fine lees, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of green apple, lemon, wet stone minerality, a touch of sweet nutty tones from the lees, citrus blossoms and a touch of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and complex, with a full-bodied format, a lovely core, fine mineral drive and a long, beautifully balanced finish. I love the backend energy in the 2019 Muscadets that I have tasted thus far! 2021-2030. **92**.

2019 Muscadet “Terre de Pierre”- Domaine Pierre Luneau-Papin

The Terre de Pierre bottling from Domaine Luneau-Papin hails from the *lieu à dit* of Butte de la Roche, which is planted on decomposed volcanic rock called Serpentine, which is extremely rare. It is the only parcel in Muscadet planted on this geologic formation. The vines here were planted in 1974 and the 2019 vintage of Terre de Pierre is gorgeous, offering up a precise and vibrant bouquet of lemon, breadfruit, a complex base of stony minerality, dried flowers and a touch of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, really fine acids and a long, complex and stunning finish. This is an outstanding Muscadet! 2021-2035+. **94**.

2018 Muscadet “les Gras Moutons”- Domaine Claude et Sébastien Branger

The 2018 Muscadet “les Gras Moutons” from Claude and Sébastien Branger is a fine example of this excellent *terroir*. The bouquet is bright, complex and shows a lovely touch of

leesy influence from its extended time *sur lie*, offering up scents of apple, wet stone minerality, lemongrass, a touch of sweet nuttiness from the lees contact and a salty topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, good, sound acids and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This has good acidity for the relative near-term, but hailing from a riper vintage, it will probably be at its best over the coming five years or so. That said, it is so beautifully balanced, that I would not be surprised to see it still cruising along without issue a decade down the road! First class Muscadet. 2021-2026+. **93.**

2018 Muscadet “Clos des Allées”- Domaine Pierre Luneau-Papin

The 2018 Clos des Allées bottling from Pierre-Marie Luneau is outstanding. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex and wide open blend of green apple, beautiful leesy tones, a touch of raw almond, lemongrass, a complex base of soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking splendidly today, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, fine acids and a long, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. Though this does not have the same cut as one will find in the frost-reduced 2019 vintage, it has plenty of acidity to carry it nicely for at least the next decade. Fine juice. 2021-2031. **93.**



Savennières and Nearby Vin de France

2019 Savennières “Roche aux Moines”- Domaine aux Moines (Tessa Laroche)

Tessa Laroche does the *elevage* of her Roche aux Moines bottling of Savennières in a combination of tank and older casks, with roughly two-thirds of the cuvée raised in stainless steel. Her 2019 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and vibrant bouquet of apple, quince, a hint of tangerine, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil signature and cut, zesty acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is an excellent bottle of Savennières. 2021-2045. **92.**

2018 Vin de France “les Bonnes Blanches”- Domaine Mosse

The 2018 Vin de France “les Bonnes Blanches” from Agnès and René Mosse and their two sons is excellent, as it hails from their oldest parcel of chenin blanc vines. The two brothers, Sylvestre and Joseph, have taken over most of the responsibilities for the domaine and did not bother to apply for the appellation for this wine in 2018. The wine is lovely, offering up a ripe and complex nose of quince, orange, chalky soil tones, lanolin, citrus peel and just a whisper of natural wine wildness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, zesty acids and a long, very well-balanced and quite dry finish. This wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane in the warm summer of 2018 and is a fine example of the vintage. 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Vin de France “le Rouchefer”- Domaine Mosse

The le Rouchefer bottling from the Mosse family is composed entirely of chenin blanc, hailing from a 1.66 hectare parcel planted on clay and gravel. The wine is aged for one year in older casks prior to bottling. The 2018 le Rouchefer delivers a youthful nose of quince, tangerine, lanolin, a fine base of soil tones, citrus peel and just a touch of natural wine wildness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut and a long, bouncy and well-balanced finish. This is really a good bottle, but I would love it even more if the natural wine wildness could be tamed completely. But, this has depth, complexity and length to burn! 2021-2035. **93.**

2018 Savennières “Arena”- Domaine Mosse

This plot of vines is tiny, at less than a half hectare, and the Mosse brothers decided to submit this wine for the Savennières AOC in the 2018 vintage. The wine is also 13.5 percent alcohol in this vintage and delivers a fine, ripe bouquet of nectarine, quince, lanolin, orange peel, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core, lovely soil undertow, bright acids and a long, well-balanced and slightly wild finish. This has impressive depth and complexity, but it shows a bit more of the “natural wine” personality than the les Bonnes Blanches, so the latter may well be more to the tastes of those who are not already adherents to the natural wine movement. But, both wines are very well-made in their respective styles. 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Savennières “Clos de Frémine”- Domaine Thibaud Boudignon

Thibaud Boudignon is *Bordelais* by birth, but cut his teeth working in Gevrey-Chambertin with Philippe Charlopin. He came to Savennières to oversee winemaking at Château Soucherie and started his own small project on the side in 2009. He farms his vines organically and raises his Savennières in *demi-muids*, with ten percent new. His parcel in Clos de Frémine was only planted in 2015, so 2018 is only the second vintage from these young vines (if he was able to produce one in the frost-damaged year of 2017). The wine is beautifully low octane for

2018, coming in at 12.5 percent and offering up a precise and classy nose of quince, lemon, chalky soil tones, lanolin, beeswax and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, a superb girdle of acidity and a long, beautifully balanced and quite promising finish. With so many examples of Savennières getting a bit top heavy with ripeness in this age of global warming, the lithe and snappy personality of this bottling is a breath of fresh air! Fine juice. 2021-2045. **93+**.

2018 Savennières “Clos de la Hutte”- Domaine Thibaud Boudignon

Monsieur Boudignon’s parcel in the Clos de la Hutte *lieu à dit* were planted in 2011, so these vines are a touch older than those in the Clos de Frémine. They too are farmed organically, the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in *demi-muids*, with fifteen percent of the larger casks new for this bottling in 2018. This is even a touch lower in octane than the above, coming in at an even twelve percent alcohol and delivering a beautiful aromatic constellation of quince, breadfruit, a lovely base of stony minerality, lanolin, citrus peel, a hint of oak and a topnote of paraffin. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and intensely flavored, with great cut and grip, laser-like focus and a long, complex and energetic finish. This is outstanding young Savennières- tightly-wound out of the blocks, but with immense potential. It is still a puppy today, but certainly quite drinkable, though the real fireworks will require a few years’ worth of bottle age to unfold. 2021-2045. **95**.

2018 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel

The Clos du Papillon from Domaine du Closel is probably the cuvée from Savennières that I have the most experience with, as I started selling this wine back in my wine merchant days in the 1980s. The 2018 version is a good, ripe wine, but it is pretty heady in this hot summer, coming in at fully 14.8 percent alcohol. Despite its octane, the wine is really pretty fresh aromatically, offering up scents of pineapple, sweet quince, peach pit, a nice dollop of soil tones, lanolin, honeysuckle and a bit of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just a bit hot on the backend, with a good core of fruit, impressive soil signature for its ripeness, lovely focus, sound framing acids and really pretty good balance, other than that bit of backend alcohol. This has turned out quite well for its octane, but 14.8 percent is really pushing the envelope a bit beyond my tastes in Savennières, even if the wine carries it fairly well. 2021-2040. **88**.

2018 Savennières “la Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel

The la Jalousie bottling from Domaine du Closel is their younger vine cuvée, as these vines average around twenty years of age and are always the first to be harvested each year. This benefited them in the hot summer of 2018, as this wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane. Typically, this wine does not go through malolactic fermentation, but it did so in the warm conditions of 2018. Consequently, the wine shows a bit of almost toastiness on the nose, which also offers up scents of apple, quince, chalk dusty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and solid at the core, with fine soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Due to its going through malo, the 2018 la Jalousie has rather a unique personality this year, but it has fine depth, length and complexity and is quite enjoyable in its style. 2021-2045. **91**.

2017 Savennières “Vendanges”- Domaine du Closel

Due to the catastrophic crop loss due to the frosts in April of 2017, Domaine du Closel was only able to scrape together enough fruit from their three customary single vineyard bottlings to produce three casks (four hundred liter *demi-muids*) from the few bunches that

survived the freeze in the spring and actually grew to maturity to make this blended example of Savennières. It is too bad that there is so little of this wine, as it has turned out quite well, offering up a deep and complex nose of quince, apple, orange peel, lanolin, a good base of soil tones and a topnote that hints at honeycomb. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced finish. Good juice from a year the domaine would love to forget- hence the moniker in the fine print for this bottling: 2017- Le Grand Gel (translation: The Big Freeze). 2021-2045. **92.**

2016 Savennières “les Caillardières”- Domaine du Closel

The Savennières “les Caillardières” from Domaine du Closel is a single vineyard bottling from the estate, from a parcel of thirty-five year-old vines that sit at the top of a windy hill, planted on sandy topsoils over schist. The wine is aged in older, four hundred liter casks and typically has a slight kiss of botrytis to it. The 2016 les Caillardières delivers a fine young nose of sweet quince, a hint of fresh apricot, a lovely base of soil, lanolin and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad in the shoulders, with a good core, fine focus and grip, good soil signature and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This has a touch of residual sugar in it, but is essentially still a dry wine. Good juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

2016 Savennières “Fidès”- Domaine Eric Morgat

The 2016 Savennières “Fidès” from Eric Morgat is a very lovely wine from a very difficult vintage. The bouquet is very refined, wafting from the glass in a beautiful blend of lemon, quince, beeswax, a whisper of lanolin, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, zesty acids and fine balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of Savennières that is already drinking with great style. A masterpiece of a 2016 Savennières! 2021-2040. **93.**

Anjou Blanc

2020 Anjou Blanc- Domaine Pascal Biotteau

The 2020 Anjou Blanc from Pascal Biotteau is a lovely young example of chenin blanc. The bouquet is bright and nicely high-toned in personality out of the blocks, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, a touch of bee pollen and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent transparency and cut, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent Anjou Blanc! 2021-2035. **92**

2020 Le Berceau des Fées- Domaine aux Moines (Tessa Laroche)

The 2020 Le Berceau des Fées from Tessa Laroche is composed entirely from chenin blanc and is the declassified production from the younger vines on the estate of Domaine aux Moines in Savennières. The vines are all cultivated under organic viticulture, fermented with indigenous yeasts in tank and aged in stainless steel prior to bottling. The 2020 is a lovely wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of quince, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of lanolin. On the palate the wine is vibrant, focused and full-bodied, with a good core, fine soil signature and cut, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a fine, fine value. 2021-2030. **89.**

2017 Anjou Blanc “Chauvigné”- Domaine Richou

The Richou brothers, Didier and Damien, have produced a really lovely, dry Chenin Blanc bottling in 2017 with their Chauvigné. The bouquet is starting to develop some secondary layers of complexity in its blend of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, lanolin, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, excellent soil inflection, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and very well-balanced finish. This is fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

Anjou Rouge and Friends

2019 Anjou Rouge- Domaine Pascal Biotteau

Pascal Biotteau’s vines fall right at the split between *terroirs*, as half lie on slate and the other half on a mix of clay and limestone. The blend of the two gives this Anjou Rouge a seriously complex base of soil tones. The wine is a blend of eighty percent cabernet franc and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon, which are fermented with indigenous yeasts and the wine is eventually bottled unfiltered. The 2019 version is outstanding aromatically, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a refined blend of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of tree bark, a beautiful base of soil, cigar smoke and just a hint of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, lovely balance and grip and a long, promising finish. This is quite closed and structured out of the blocks, but all it needs is cellaring time to soften up and start to drink with generosity. It will be a very good bottle in due course, but patience will be required. 2029-2050+. **90.**

2019 Anjou Rouge “l’Avant-Garde”- Château La Tomaze

The 2019 Anjou Rouge “l’Avant-Garde” from Château La Tomaze is a lovely bottle of cabernet franc. The bouquet is deep, sappy and nascently complex, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, youthful and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a classic drought vintage red, with its sugars, acids and tannins concentrated from the small berries, so the wine will need a bit of bottle age to soften up and start to drink with generosity. But, once the wine is ready, it will be excellent and this is a terrific value for the cellar! 2026-2045. **91.**

2018 Cabernet Franc- Domaine Mosse

The 2018 Cabernet Franc from Domaine Mosse is just a *Vin de France*, as the appellation was again not sought for this bottling. Nevertheless, the wine has turned out beautifully in 2018, coming in quite ripe at fourteen percent octane and offering up a deep and vibrant nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of soil tones, a bit of balsam bough and a hint of new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a whisper of CO₂ on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The gas dissipates nicely with a bit of decanting time and the wine starts to blossom, but it is still a fairly youthful wine and would benefit from a few years in the cellar to let its backend tannins soften up a bit more. Good juice. 2024-2035. **89.**

2017 Raisins Migrateurs Grenache- Les Arches de Bellivière (Vin de France)

The 2017 Raisins Migrateurs Grenache from Les Arches de Bellivière is a big, broad and ripe wine, coming in at fifteen percent octane and offering up a vibrant nose of raspberries, fruitcake, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue* and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is

full-bodied, chewy and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, firm tannins and a long, complex and slightly heady finish. This is a good example of grenache in our era of global warming, as the wine has complexity and soil tones, but it is a bit hot for my palate. Those more accustomed to wines at this octane level should add four points to me score! 2024-2040. **87.**

Pineau d'Aunis

2019 Rue de Pineau d'Aunis- Lecointre (Château la Tomaze)

The 2019 Rue de Pineau d'Aunis from Lecointre is an old vine bottling of this lovely variety, hailing from vines planted in 1960 (which happens to be my birth year, so it pains me to note that these are now old vines ☺). The vines are harvested by hand and the wine sees a touch of carbonic maceration prior to fermentation. The 2019 version offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of bitter cherry, dark berries, bonfire, a touch of tree bark, fresh herb tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and tangy, with fine complexity and intensity of flavor, just a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex finish. This is excellent juice! 2021-2030+. **91.**



Chinon, Saumur (and Friends) Blanc and Rosé

2020 Chinon Rosé- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2020 Rosé from the Baudry family is quite a pale salmon color. It offers up lovely aromatic complexity in its blend of melon, nectarine, cherry skin, chalky soil tones, orange peel

and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with good core and soil signature, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the long and well balanced finish. This is lovely and is quite vinous in personality and will excel at the table. First class Chinon Rosé. 2021-2026. **91.**

2020 Chinon Rosé- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2020 Chinon Rosé from Domaine Raffault is made entirely from cabernet franc via the *saignée* method. The wine delivers a lovely and quite refined bouquet of melon, white cherries, orange peel, sandy soil tones and a gentle floral topnote that suggests both lavender and roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely vinous in style, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, zesty framing acids and a long, complex finish. This has good acids for the relative near-term, but is a touch softer on the backend than the Baudry Rosé and will probably want drinking up a tad sooner as a result, though this is so nicely balanced that it may well last longer than I anticipate. 2021-2024. **89.**

2020 Saumur “Argile” Blanc- Château du Hureau

The Saumur “Argile” Blanc from Château du Hureau hails from thirty year-old chenin blanc vines, which are grown organically in soils with plenty of clay over their base rock of *tuffeau*. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in old oak casks for nine months prior to bottling. The 2020 version is excellent, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, quince, a lovely base of soil, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is young, bright and full, with a superb core of fruit, good soil signature, zesty acids and a long, primary and promising finish that closes with impressive lift and plenty of grip. This is fresh off of the boat and could do with at least a little time to blossom, but I have the sense that it will start to drink with generosity by autumn and provide plenty of pleasure over the next ten to fifteen years. 2021-2035. **91+.**

2019 Chinon “Silice” Blanc- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2019 Chinon “Silice” Blanc from Château de la Bonnelière is a lovely Chenin Blanc, offering up a vibrant aromatic constellation of quince, lemon, a touch of lanolin, chalky soil tones, citrus zest and an exotic touch of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of ripe fruit, very good acidity for the vintage, impressive balance and grip and a long, bouncy and complex finish. This is outstanding Chinon Blanc! 2021-2035. **92+.**

2019 Saumur Blanc “Terres Blanches”- Domaine de l’Enchantoir

The 2019 Saumur Blanc “Terres Blanches” from the Brunet family’s Domaine de l’Enchantoir is produced from chenin blanc vines at least forty years of age, grown on a bed of deep limestone. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in stainless steel tank. It delivers a fine young nose of quince, crab apple, a beautiful base of chalky soil, citrus peel and just a hint of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is quite approachable out of the blocks, but more complexity will clearly emerge if it is given just a few years in the cellar to blossom. A fine value! 2023-2045. **90+.**

2019 Saumur Blanc- Lena Filliatreau

The Filliatreau’s chenin blanc vines hail from a two hectare parcel planted in the town of Brézé. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raised in tank. The 2019 version is quite pretty on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up notes of

quince, crab apple, chalky minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of lanolin. On the palate the wine is vibrant, focused and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, impressive mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and a long, balanced and complex finish that closes with excellent lift and bounce. This is outstanding Saumur Blanc! 2021-2030+. **92.**

2019 Existe en Blanc Vin de France- Domaine de l'Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

This is a very good bottle of chenin blanc grown in Bourgueil by Xavier Courant, but the AOC of Bourgueil is not allowed for chenin, hence the Vin de France label. The 2019 Existe en Blanc offers up a bright and complex bouquet of quince, orange peel, chalky soil tones, lanolin, dried flowers and a bit of natural wine mousiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core and soil signature, sound acids and a long, complex finish. This is a good bottle. 2021-2030. **89.**

2018 Chinon “Champ-Chenin” Blanc- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2018 Chinon Blanc “Champ-Chenin” from Domaine Raffault is really an outstanding bottle of young, bone dry Chenin Blanc. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and possess a *nervosité* on the palate that is really delightful. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of green apple, quince, a lovely base of chalky soil, beeswax, spring flowers and a dollop of upper register lanolin. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. Great juice. 2021-2045. **94.**



Chinon Rouge

2020 Chinon “les Granges”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The les Granges bottling from Mathieu Baudry is his young vine cuvée, made to be drunk young and crafted from twenty-five year-old vines that grow in alluvial deposits of gravel and sandy soils right on the flats near the banks of the Vienne River. The 2020 version is quite stylish, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, cassis, tree bark, cigar smoke and a lovely base of gravelly soil. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Though this is certainly approachable out of the blocks, a couple of years in the cellar will certainly pay dividends with more complexity and melted tannins. It is so nicely balanced in 2020 that I could easily see it keeping twenty-five years in bottle, despite it being made to drink young! 2021-2045. **91+**.

2019 Chinon- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The 2019 regular bottling of Chinon from Philippe Alliet and his son Pierre is made from parcels the family has on sandy and gravel soils closer to the Vienne River in Cravant-lès-Coteaux. The vines are more than forty-five years of age, the Alliets ferment it with indigenous yeasts and raise it in cement vats. The 2019 version is excellent, offering up a deep and classic bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of soil, just a hint of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and plush at the core, with good soil signature, buried, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is made to be drunk young and it is already quite a lovely drink, but it also has the balance to age nicely and it would not be a crime to tuck it away in the cellar and forget about it for a decade, as it will be even better with bottle age! Fine, fine juice for the entry level bottling from this top level domaine. 2021-2050. **91+**.

2019 Chinon “les Lisons”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The Chinon “les Lisons” from Marc Plouzeau is produced from fifty year old vines planted on clay, chalk and flint soils. The 2019 les Lisons is an excellent young wine, offering up a deep, black fruity and complex bouquet of cassis, sweet blackberries, cigar ash, a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile out of the blocks, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is certainly approachable out of the blocks (albeit a bit chewy), but it is still a young wine and will most assuredly repay handsomely some additional bottle age. I would give it five years cellaring and really start to enjoy the ride from that point forwards. 2026-2055. **92+**.

2019 Chinon- Château de Coulaine (Jean de Bonnaventure)

The regular bottling of Chinon from Château de Coulaine is composed from cabernet franc vines that are all at least thirty years of age, planted on sandy and chalky soils. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and raised in a combination of seventy-five percent cement vats and twenty-five percent in stainless steel tank. The 2019 version is fairly ripe, coming in at 14.3 percent octane and delivering a deep and black fruity bouquet of cassis, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, coffee bean and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with good soil signature and grip, ripe, moderately chewy tannins, good focus and balance and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This is a good bottle in the making- just give it five years in the cellar to soften up a bit on the backend. 2026-2050. **89**.

2019 Chinon “les Terrasses”- Domaine Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

Béatrice and Pascal Lambert farm their eighteen hectares of vineyards biodynamically in the commune of Cravant-lès-Coteaux. The Lambert family began with a switch to organic farming methods in 1995 and were certified by Ecocert in 2005, but they have now moved on to biodynamics. Their Chinon “les Terrasses” bottling hails from some of their younger vines, ranging from ten to twenty-five years of age, planted in clay and sandy soils down by the Vienne River. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and aged in cement tanks. Their 2019 les Terrasses is a fine bottle, offering up a pure and classic nose of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a nice base of soil, a hint of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced finish. The desiccated berries of 2019 have really given this wine lovely stuffing and bouncy acids, which add lift on the backend. Fine juice and an excellent value! 2021-2045. **92.**

2019 Chinon- Le Verre en Vignon

The 2019 Chinon from Le Verre en Vignon is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a deep and wide open bouquet of dark berries, tree bark, cigar ash, a good base of soil tones, a touch of juniper berry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe, with a good core of fruit, fine soil inflection and grip, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is clearly a wine emblematic of the drought and tiny berries of the partially desiccated fruit found so frequently in this vintage, so the wine’s depth of fruit, acids, tannins and octane level are all a bit revved up from the small berries. Consequently, this wine comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but is really quite well balanced and should age nicely, but will demand at least a few years in the cellar to soften up the tannins before it is ready to drink. 2025-2050. **90.**

2018 Chinon “Coteau de Noire”- Domaine Philippe Alliet

Philippe and Pierre Alliet’s single vineyard Coteau de Noire bottling of Chinon is from a steep hillside vineyard with clay and limestone soils. The family’s vines are twenty years of age in Coteau de Noire, so they are just coming into their prime. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in twenty-five percent new oak each year. The 2018 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and delivers a very refined bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, menthol, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and just a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of pure fruit, ripe, very well-integrated tannins and great length and grip on the complex, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. This is outstanding Chinon! 2028-2065+. **94.**

2018 Chinon “l’Huisserie”- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The single vineyard l’Huisserie bottling from Domaine Alliet is not one of their oldest vine cuvées, as these vines are only a bit more than twenty years of age. The soils here are a thin layer of flint and clay over limestone, with the wine aged in one, two and three year-old *demi-muids*. The 2018 l’Huisserie is a beautiful bottle of Chinon, offering up a ripe and refined nose of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of menthol and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and sappy at the core, with fine-grained tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and is probably a tad riper than this, but beautifully balanced and should drink very nicely with only a few years in the cellar. 2026-2055+. **92.**

2018 Chinon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The old vine cuvée from the Alliet family is made from their oldest vines in several parcels, with the soils for this bottling either sand or gravel and the very youngest vines included in the blend being seventy years of age! The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in cement vats for two years prior to bottling. The older vines came in at a lower octane in 2018, so the wine only tips the scales at thirteen percent in this vintage and offers up a beautiful, black fruity bouquet of cassis, dark berries, tree bark, cigar smoke and a marvelous base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off some lovely old vine creaminess at the core, with superb soil signature, ripe tannins and excellent balance and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is another absolutely superb young Chinon. 2028-2065. **93+**.

2018 Chinon “le Clos Guillot”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2018 Clos Guillot from the Baudry family is a beautifully deep, pure and sappy wine, coming in at 14.3 percent octane in this warm summer and offering up bottomless depth in its bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of soil tones, hints of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core of black fruit, superb soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a very long, superb balanced finish. This is a classic example of the 2018 vintage in Chinon, with plenty of ripeness, but absolutely no signs of *sur maturité* and great precision and soil signature. It is a young wine and will need bottle age to properly blossom, but it will be stellar once it is ready to drink. 2028-2065. **94**.

2018 Chinon “les Cornuelles”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2018 les Cornuelles from Marc Plouzeau is outstanding, as these fifty-five year-old vines planted on *tufa* have really excelled in this growing season. The nascently complex nose wafts from the glass in a deep and very refined blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, smoke and a hint of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and meaty, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, focused and very, very promising finish. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane, which is not out of line by the standards of the 2018 vintage and this is an absolute classic in the making! The vineyard of Cornuelles always produces long-lived wines and the 2018 from Marc Plouzeau will be no exception. However, once this wine is ready to drink, it will be superb. 2028-2065+. **94+**.

2018 Chinon “Vindoux l’Intégrale” 1929 Lieu-dits- Ch. de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

As the name suggests, these vines were planted all the way back in 1929. I should note that on the label, the designation printed is “Parcelle YB38”, which denotes the plot of 1929 vines. This wine is just a touch riper than the les Cornuelles, coming in at 14.5 percent octane in 2018, but this seems to be absolutely perfect for these venerable vines, as the wine offers up a stunning nose of sweet dark berries, Cuban cigars, a hint of fresh nutmeg, a gorgeous base of dark soil tones, coffee bean and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a youthful personality, impeccable balance, a superb core of old vine fruit and a long, tannic and focused finish. Great juice in the making that reminds me a bit of some of the best 1989 Chinons when they were first released. 2028-2065+. **94+**.

2018 Chinon “Bonnaventure”- Château de Coulaine (Jean de Bonnaventure)

The Bonnaventure bottling of Chinon from Château de Coulaine hails from forty-plus year-old vines that are grown up on the hills, away from the river, on a base of yellow limestone and sandstone. Like all of the family’s wines, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and this

bottling is aged for one year in six thousand liter *foudre*. The 2018 Bonnaventure offers up a deep and complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, a hint of tree bark, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and loaded with sappy black fruit at the core, with fine mineral undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and youthfully complex finish. This is already starting to get nicely velvety on the attack and is approachable, but there are layers of complexity to unfold here if the wine is given some time in the cellar to properly blossom. I have very much liked this bottling in the past and the 2018 is another excellent bottle of Chinon in the making. 2024-2055. 91+.



2018 Chinon- Domaine Olga Raffault

This straight Chinon from Domaine Raffault made its debut in the 2017 vintage, in response to the very short, frost-damaged crop, the estate started producing this bottling, which is made from a combination of estate-grown and purchased fruit. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts (like all of the Raffault wines) and aged entirely in tank prior to bottling. The 2018 version comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and delivers a lovely and wide open bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and already delicious finish. This cuvée is designed to drink well early and the 2018 achieves its goal superbly well, but this also

has the depth and structural chassis to also age very well indeed. A fine new addition to the Raffault lineup and a great, great wine for restaurant wine lists! **92.**

2018 Chinon “les Barnabés”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2018 Chinon “les Barnabés” from Domaine Olga Raffault is also raised entirely in stainless steel tank prior to bottling, and this single vineyard bottling is also made for earlier consumption, as befits its riverside vineyard planted on gravel and alluvial sands. The 2018 les Barnabés is also nicely cool at 12.5 percent alcohol and provides a more black fruity aromatic profile than the above, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of dark berries, cassis, tree bark, cigar ash, gravelly soil, smoke, a touch of spiced meats and a lovely topnote of juniper berries. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, suave, fine-grained tannins and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. While there is a bit of buried tannin here, this wine is already drinking with generosity and is very tasty, though it will easily last in the cellar thirty years or more! This is fine, fine juice. 2021-2050+. **93.**

2018 Chinon “les Peuilles”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The les Peuilles vineyard is a plateau down fairly close to the Vienne River, with the vines planted on clay and flint soils. This cuvée is aged in oak for its first year, in the family’s combination of old oak and chestnut *foudres*, prior to racking back into stainless steel tank for another year of *elevage*. The 2018 les Peuilles is a gorgeous young Chinon, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, tree bark, a hint of chicory and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very pure, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is a superb young wine, which is certainly accessible out of the blocks, due to its impeccable balance, but is really made for the cellar and deserves to be tucked away until its tenth birthday, when the fireworks will really begin! 2028-2065. **94.**

2017 Chinon- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The 2017 straight Chinon bottling from Philippe Alliet is starting to really drink nicely, but it still has a good chassis of suave tannin below the surface and has decades of positive evolution still ahead of it. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke and a fine topnote of juniper berry. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, still a bit of tannin perking up the backend and a long, well-balanced and quite classy finish. This is a fine bottle that is just beginning to come into its plateau of maturity, but has many years still to go and will be even better with more time in the cellar. 2021-2050. **91+.**

2017 Chinon “les Picasses”- Château de Coulaine (Jean de Bonnaventure)

The 2017 is the first vintage of les Picasses that I have tasted from the Bonnaventure family. They have a parcel in this fine vineyard of vines that are forty-five years of age or older, and they raise this wine for a year in four hundred liter *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2017 is superb, offering up a deep, pure and very elegant aromatic constellation of dark berries, black cherries, violets, cigar wrapper, limestone soil tones, chicory and a topnote of distant bonfire. On the palate the wine is precise, refined and full-bodied, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and soil-driven finish. This is a classic young Chinon and needs some bottle age to blossom, as it does not possess the same plushness to its fruit component of young wines from hotter years like 2018 or 2019. But,

all of the constituent components are in place here for a stellar bottle once it has blossomed with a bit of cellaring! 2027-2060. **93+**.

2017 Chinon “le Clos des Roches St. Paul”- Domaine de la Croix (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2017 Chinon “le Clos des Roches St. Paul” from Marc Plouzeau is flat out stunning on both the nose and palate! The bouquet is deep, pure and very refined, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, a complex base of gravelly soil tones and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and displays outstanding mid-palate depth, with ripe, buried tannins, excellent soil signature, nascent complexity and a very long, perfectly balanced finish. This is properly youthful out of the blocks, as befits one of the greatest *terroirs* in all of Chinon in a top flight vintage, but this is going to be an absolutely stunning wine when it is ready to drink! 2027-2065. **95+**.

2017 Chinon “les Perruches”- Domaine Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

The les Perruches bottling of Chinon from the Lamberts hails from very stony, flinty soils over limestone, with the vines ranging up to twenty-five years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, raised in cement vats and bottled unfinned and unfiltered. The 2017 les Perruches is beautifully refined aromatically, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, chalky minerality, a touch of juniper berry and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and blossoming superbly well, offering up the first vestiges of velvetiness on the attack, a lovely core of fruit, outstanding mineral drive and lift, suave tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully complex finish. This is great juice! 2021-2055. **94**.

2016 Chinon “les Puys”- Domaine Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

The les Puys bottling from Béatrice and Pascal Lambert is a cuvée that is aged in oak, as this wine is raised for two years in *demi-muids* prior to bottling, with forty percent of the casks new in the 2016 vintage. The soils here are primarily limestone and the vines range up to twenty-five years of age. The wine offers up a deep and gently new oaky nose of cassis, black plums, Cuban cigar, a nice base of chalky soil, coffee bean and a deft framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, tangy acids, well-measured tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. The new wood here is done quite judiciously, but the wine still needs some cellaring time to let the oak more completely integrate into the other elements of the wine. It is a very good bottle in the making, but I am not sure I do not prefer the unadulterated style of the 2017 les Perruches over this very good 2016 les Puys, as the oak seems to have blocked that velvety attack from develop here which is so prevalent today in the 2017 les Perruches! Good juice. 2024-2055. **92+**.

2015 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

Domaine Raffault’s 2015 Chinon “les Picasses” is an outstanding young wine. The clay and limestone soils of this hillside vineyard, set well back from the confluence of the Vienne and Loire Rivers that define this section of the appellation, provide a beautiful signature of *terroir* to the wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and already quite complex at six years of age, offering up a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, Cuban cigars, a superb base of soil tones, tree bark, juniper berries, bonfire and coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent transparency, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding balance on the long, structured and extremely promising finish. Though the les Picasses bottling sees a longer maceration period than any of the other Chinons from the

domaine, which used to translate to a rather chewy personality early, these most recent vintages seem far more suave structurally out of the blocks than was the case a decade or two ago and this wine will drink extremely well not too far down the road, and as always, keep for many decades. Fine, fine juice. 2025-2065. **94.**



Bourgueil

2019 Bourgueil “le Haut de la Butte”- Domaine de la Butte (Jacky Blot)

The le Haut de la Butte bottling of Bourgueil from Jacky Blot is made from vines in excess of thirty-five years of age, grown on clay and silex over limestone. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and aged in a combination of cement tanks and used casks. The 2019 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar wrapper, bitter chocolate, a touch of menthol and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and ripely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, very good focus and balance and a long, youthful and promising finish. This needs some bottle age to soften up its backend tannins, but it will be a fine example once it is ready to drink. 2029-2060+. **92.**

2019 Bourgueil “Perrières”- Domaine de la Butte (Jacky Blot)

Jacky Blot’s parcel of vines in the fine vineyard of Perrières are thirty years of age. The wine is raised in barrel, with twenty percent new oak each year and the 2019 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a superb, black fruity nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar

ash, a touch of tree bark, a great base of soil, coffee bean and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is going to be stunning when it is ready to drink and should prove to have a very long life in bottle, once it blossoms. 2029-2070. **94.**

2019 Bourgueil “Chatrois”- Domaine Bertrand Galbrun

Bertrand Galbrun only founded his domaine in 2005; he farms his three and a half hectares of vines biodynamically. He foot trods his bunches and ferments with native yeasts, continuing his classical approach to his *métier*. His 2019 Bourgueil “Chatrois” is a fine wine in the making, coming in at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a bright and complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a touch of sarsaparilla and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely accessible out of the blocks, with a good core, fine soil signature, suave, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is clearly crafted to make for a good drinking wine out of the blocks, and even in the 2019 vintage, it succeeds in offering plenty of pleasure right off the boat! But, it has the balance and structure to also age nicely. Good juice. 2021-2040+. **91+**.

2018 Bourgueil “Notre Histoire”- Domaine de l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

Xavier Courant’s 2018 Bourgueil “Notre Histoire” is a very fine bottle in the making. It is produced from thirty-five year-old vines and bottled unfined and unfiltered. The 2018 version is nicely ripe, coming in at 14.1 percent octane and offering up a deep and black fruity nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, a marvelous base of soil, a bit of tree bark and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, quite firm tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is fairly chewy out of the blocks and deserves some bottle age to soften up on the backend, but it is going to be excellent Bourgueil once it blossoms properly. It is fairly powerful in style, but impeccably balanced at the same time. 2028-2055. **92+**.

2015 Bourgueil “les Galichets”- Domaine de la Chevalerie

The 2015 Bourgueil “les Galichets” from siblings Stéphanie and Emmanuel Caslot at Domaine de la Chevalerie is made from some of their oldest vines, as part of this parcel was planted in 1934. The family has had to replant sections of the original old vines in the ‘70s, ‘80s and most recently, a bit more in the 1990s, so that the average age of the vines for this bottling is now around forty years of age, but there is still plenty of the 1934 vines fruit in the blend. It is aged in older casks and the 2015, which is the current release, offers up a superb, precise bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of tree bark, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones, a hint of juniper berry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. I love the “cool fruit” profile of this wine, which even in the hot summer of 2015 comes in at a svelte thirteen percent octane. This is simply an outstanding young Bourgueil! 2026-2055. **93+**.

2014 Bourgueil “les Chevalerie”- Domaine de la Chevalerie

The 2014 Chevalerie bottling from the Caslot family is outstanding. These vines average fifty-five years of age, planted on clay topsoils over the mother rock of limestone. Like all of the

Caslot wines, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in older four and five hundred liter *demi-muids* prior to bottling, unfinned and unfiltered. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, a superb base of soil tones, tobacco leaf and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, a very elegant profile on the attack, a lovely core of fruit, suave, buried tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. As this is from the classic vintage of 2014, it is still a few years away from hitting its primetime, but with a touch of air, it is already starting to drink beautifully. A very, very fine example of Bourgueil. 2021-2060. **93.**

2014 Bourgueil “les Alouettes”- Domaine de la Chanteleuserie

The 2014 Bourgueil “les Alouettes” from Domaine de la Chanteleuserie continues to age very gracefully and is every bit as delightful to drink today as it was back in 2016. The wine offers up a refined and black fruity nose of dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of sweet bell pepper, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely resolved today, with a good core, melting tannins, good acids and grip and a long, complex finish. Good juice. 2020-2035+. **91.**

Saumur and Saumur-Champigny

2020 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignolle”- Domaine Filliatreau

The 2020 la Grande Vignolle bottling from Domaine Filliatreau is beautifully expressive and suavely red fruity on the nose this year, offering up a fine constellation of cherries, pomegranate, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of *tuffeau* soil tones, hints of both menthol and tree bark and a gently floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine core and soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nicely balanced and nascently complex finish. As I tasted this right off of the boat, it is understandably still quite young, but it has impressive depth, length and complexity and will be a superb bottle of Saumur-Champigny with just a bit of bottle age. As it is sealed with a synthetic cork, it may come forward fairly briskly, once it settles in from its voyage. In a pinch, I would have no trouble drinking it now, but it is still pretty youthful! 2022-2035+. **92+.**

2019 Saumur-Champigny- Domaine Filliatreau

Domaine Filliatreau is now all certified organic for its viticulture and its Château Fouquet is about to be certified biodynamic. This bottling is made from forty year-old vines and is aged in tank prior to bottling. The 2019 version is excellent, offering up a superb bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of soil, espresso and a hint of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and juicy at the core, with good soil undertow, well-integrated tannins and a long, nicely balanced and focused finish. This is complex and just starting to blossom properly, but it has the structure to also age for many more years, though like the la Grande Vignolle bottling, this too is sealed with a synthetic cork. 2021-2040. **92.**

2019 Saumur-Champigny “Laurigine”- Domaine des Varinelles

The 2019 Saumur-Champigny “Laurigine” from Domaine des Varinelles is an excellent bottle that is already starting to drink with generosity, but has the structure and balance to also age very gracefully. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, currant leaf, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and gently chewy on the backend, with a fine core of fruit,

lovely soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

2018 Saumur Puy-Notre-Dame “le Pied à l’Étrier”- Domaine de l’Enchantoir

The Brunet family farms their vines organically in this very chalky section of Saumur, with the vines over forty years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in cement vats prior to bottling, with the 2018 coming in listed at 14.2 percent octane in this warm summer. The wine is deep and ripe on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, cassis, coffee grounds, bonfire, hung game and a good touch of soil tones. On the palate the wine is broad-shouldered, full-bodied and quite powerfully-built for Saumur, with a rock solid core of fruit, good limestone undertow, firm, chewy tannins and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. This is a big boy that needs some bottle age to soften up its backend tannins, but should prove to be a good drink in a riper style, once it has had a chance to blossom. 2028-2050. **88+.**

2018 Saumur “Château Fouquet”- Domaine Filliatreau

Paul Filliatreau bought this vineyard back in 1990, which at the time needed partial replanting. Paul took *selection massale* cuttings from Charles Joguet’s Clos du Chêne Vert vineyard to replant the fallow section of the vineyard, so this has fine genetic pedigree. The Château Fouquet bottling from Domaine Filliatreau was the first cuvée he converted to organic viticulture back in 1998, and this 6.5 hectare vineyard in the town of Brézé has now been farmed biodynamically for several years and is on the verge of certification. The 2018 Château Fouquet is nicely ripe in the style of the vintage, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a beautifully pure and sappy nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, just a whisper of menthol, a touch of juniper berry and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely plush at the core, with superb focus and balance, seamless, buried tannins, impressive complexity and a long, suave and very classy finish. This is outstanding, and happily, sealed with a natural cork. 2021-2045+. **93+.**

2018 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château du Hureau

The 2018 vintage of Tuffe from Philippe and Agathe Vatan is a fine, fine bottle of Saumur-Champigny. The wine comes in nicely ripe at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, a touch of meatiness, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, tobacco leaf and a lovely topnote of juniper berry. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and excellent balance and grip on the long, very classy finish. This is so well balanced out of the blocks that it is certainly approachable in its youth, but will be even better if given five or six years in the cellar to fully blossom. Fine juice. 2021-2050. **93.**

2018 Saumur-Champigny “les Terraces”- Domaine Clotilde Legrand

Clotilde Legrand took over the reins of the family estate here in 2014, becoming the first female winemaker at the property in its history, which just happens to date back to the 1600s! Her 2018 Saumur-Champigny “les Terraces” is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a ripe and pure nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with the broad shoulders of the vintage, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish. This comes in at fourteen percent and has a bit of the muscle of the vintage, but is also an inherently elegant wine and is a very good bottle of Saumur-Champigny. It is quite enjoyable today with the right food, but will certainly soften up a bit more with some bottle age. Good juice. 2021-2045+. **91.**



Vouvray

2020 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët

In the 2020 vintage, the only Sec bottling produced by Domaine Huët is the Le Mont Sec and it is an absolute beauty. The bouquet is young, tight and relatively inexpressive when first opened, but with some aeration, it blossoms to offer scents of lemon, quince, a touch of pink grapefruit, beeswax, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and seamless in balance, with a rock solid core of fruit, beautiful mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a very long, pure and promising finish. I love the balance of this wine, which augurs very well for its evolution with bottle age. As I am tasting it very early on in its post-bottling evolution (the wine will not be in the market for at least a couple of months), it is possible that it will behave in typical fashion and be a bit more open when it first ships in from France, so that it offers up a year or two when it is wide open and drinks beautifully in its first blush of youth. After this, the domaine’s Sec bottlings usually shut down for a half dozen years or so and the return in full bloom. 2021-2070. **94+**.

2020 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s 2020 Demi-Sec from the Le Haut Lieu vineyard is a beautiful young wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of apple, quince, lanolin, chalk dusty soil tones, a touch of honeycomb, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and racy, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, lovely bounce and complexity and a long, zesty and superb balanced finish. This is a gorgeous wine in

the making! Like all of the Domaine Huët wines when young, it should offer up a year or two of accessibility, before hunkering down for an eight to ten year period of hibernation, after which it will open up again and last sixty or seventy years! Fine juice. 2021-2085. **93+**.

2020 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2020 Le Mont Demi-Sec shares the same stunningly perfect balance as the Sec version from this outstanding vineyard. The bouquet is also youthful, but offers up a beautifully precise aromatic constellation of pear, sweet quince, bee pollen, a lovely base of chalky soil, hints of the honeycomb to come with bottle age, lanolin and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core and soil undertow, snappy acids and great length and backend lift on the very long, superbly balanced finish. A gorgeous wine in the making, again with the purity of only the finest vintages at Domaine Huët. 2021-2085. **95**.

2020 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2020 Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët is the most powerfully-built of the three Demi-Sec bottlings in this very elegant vintage, with great mid-palate depth and backend bounce. The bouquet delivers a very refined blend of quince, pear, a hint of fresh pineapple, limestone minerality, citrus peel, honeycomb and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a bit more sweetness and mid-palate stuffing than the other two Demi-Secs this year. The wine is beautifully balanced, zesty and rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip on the long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This still closes with that classic young chenin blanc note of citrus peel. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2085. **95**.

2020 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s 2020 Moelleux bottling from the Le Haut Lieu vineyard is an absolutely stunning wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and very, very precise (recalling the 1989 version when it was young!), soaring from the glass in a complex blend of sweet quince, fresh pineapple, a bit of tangerine, a gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, honeycomb, bee pollen, citrus peel and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a stunning core of fruit, great mineral drive, a superb girdle of acidity and a very long, refined and utterly complete finish. I love the backend lift here! This is a great Moelleux in the making. As is customary with this bottling, it will most likely offer up a couple of years of stunning drinking in its youth and then close down for a period of hibernation, after which it will drink well for a couple generations beyond my life expectancy! 2021-2100. **96**.

2020 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

The 2020 Le Mont Moelleux is a slightly bigger and sweeter wine than the Le Haut Lieu version, with more of a primary personality out of the blocks, but stunning depth and length. The bouquet is quite youthful, but eventually can be coaxed into offering up scents of sweet quince, apple, a lovely base of chalky soil, honeycomb, incipient notes of barley sugar, orange zest and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost plush on the attack, with bottomless depth at the core, great acids and mineral drive, impeccable balance and a long, focused and still very youthful finish. Whereas the 2020 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux is going to drink stunningly well for a couple of years, before it closes down, the Le Mont Moelleux is such a puppy out of the blocks that it is going to be best to just tuck it away for a decade in the cellar and then see if the fireworks have started yet! 2030-2100. **95**.

2020 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

The 2020 Le Haut Lieu Première Trie from Domaine Huët is a beautiful young wine in the making, offering up a very refined bouquet of pear, sweet quince, honeycomb, a hint of guava, chalky soil tones, white lilies and orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very elegant in profile, with a superb core, lovely soil undertow, zesty acids and a very, very long, impeccably balanced and beautifully complex finish. This is stunning. 2021-2100. **96.**

2020 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s 2020 Le Mont Première Trie is also young and stunning on both the nose and palate, with a bit more tropical personality than the Le Haut Lieu version, but the same sense of dancing refinement coupled to bottomless depth. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, sweet quince, lemon zest, honeycomb, a beautiful base of limestone, citrus peel and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already showing some creaminess on the attack from the botrytis, with a great core, a lovely tug of underlying minerality, bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the long, nascently complex finish. This wine has tremendous backend lift and should be an absolute cellar treasure once it is truly ready to drink. It is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but still fairly monolithic, with most of its inherent complexity hidden, so I would not touch a bottle of this wine for the next decade, just to allow it to properly blossom and start to show its true complexity! 2030-2100+. **97.**

2020 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

The 2020 Clos du Bourg Première Trie seems to have the most botrytis of these three bottlings, which gives it a slightly deeper-pitched nose of apple, peach, candied quince, a hint of raspberry, a stunning base of soil, bee pollen, incipient notes of barley sugar, a touch of lanolin, citrus peel and a topnote of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, young and full-bodied, with a bottomless core, snappy acids, laser-like focus, lovely mineral drive and bounce, great balance and a long, youthfully complex and gorgeous finish. This is richer than either the Le Haut Lieu or Le Mont Première Trie bottlings, so it will also want some time in the cellar to let those layers of complexity rise up through the stunning puppy fat fruit and start to define the wine. In due course, this will be pure magic! 2032-2100+. **96+.**

2019 Vouvray “le Petit Clos” Sec- Domaine des Aubuisières (Bernard Fouquet)

The 2019 le Petit Clos Sec from Bernard Fouquet is a beautifully expressive and complex wine on the nose right out of the blocks. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of sweet quince, apple, white lilies, powdered stone soil tones, a hint of lanolin and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite a bit more reserved than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, lovely, snappy acids and superb length and grip on the nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent Vouvray Sec, but if one is inclined to drink it early on, then decant it for twenty to thirty minutes before serving, just to let the structural chassis relax a bit. It will age gloriously. 2021-2050. **93.**

2019 Vouvray Sec- Domaine François et Julien Pinon

The 2019 Vouvray Sec from François and Julien Pinon is a lovely young wine, offering up impressive precision and soil signature on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of apple, quince, beeswax, chalky soil tones, lanolin and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core of fruit, bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. First class juice. 2021-2050. **93.**

2019 Venise “Cuvée Parcillaire Monopole”- La Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

This is from a single hectare vineyard in Vouvray, but as it is fermented and raised at Jacky Blot's winery across the river in Montlouis, it is not entitled to the AOC of Vouvray and must be labeled as Vin de France. The vineyard is planted with vines in excess of fifty years of age on a base of chalky and flint, is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in casks, with twenty percent new each year. The 2019 Venise is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and gently oaky nose of quince, lanolin, a lovely base of soil, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit and soil signature, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced, dry and very classy finish. This is quite drinkable now, though it shows its new oak a bit more today than will be the case a decade down the road, and I have the feeling I am going to like it even better when the new oak has been further buried into the complex personality of the wine. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2060. **93.**

2018 Vouvray “les Déronnières”- Domaine François et Julien Pinon

The les Déronnières vineyard used to be included in the Silex Noir cuvée, but beginning with the 2015 vintage, it began to be bottled on its own, as it is a *lieu à dit* that is planted on limestone soils, whereas the other vineyards that go into the Silex Noir are on flint and clay. The vines here are fifty years of age, farmed organically (as are all the Pinon vineyards) and raised in old oak casks. The 2018 les Déronnières offers up a refined bouquet of apple, quince, just a whisper of leesy tones, a beautiful base of chalky soil, orange peel and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite dry, with a lovely core of fruit, superb mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, complex, racy and very well-balanced finish. The limestone here really gives this wine cut and grip on the backend! This is quite a bit drier than the Silex Noir or les Trois Argiles cuvées in this vintage. 2021-2055+. **93.**

2018 Vouvray “les Trois Argiles”- Domaine François et Julien Pinon

The Pinons' 2018 les Trois Argiles, produced from predominantly clay soils over a base rock of *tuffeau*, As is the case with the Silex Noir cuvée from the family, this wine usually is allowed to find its own sweetness level during vinification, with the range generally between Sec and Demi-Sec, but in the warm summer of 2018, it seems just a touch sweeter than customary Demi-Sec levels. The wine is lovely nonetheless, offering up a ripe and complex nose of sweet quince, apple, a fine base of soil tones, lanolin, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core and soil signature, very good acidity and a long, moderately sweet and beautifully balanced finish. Like the 2018 Silex Noir below, this is like a light Moelleux in sweetness level in this vintage, but absolutely lovely. 2021-2055+. **92.**

2018 Vouvray “Silex Noir”- Domaine François et Julien Pinon

The 2018 Silex Noir bottling from the Pinon family is a beautiful example of the vintage, with a bit more residual sweetness in 2018 than is often the case for this wine, which is allowed to finish its fermentation wherever it feels balanced, so that it can range from a fairly dry Demi-Sec style in some vintages to a lighter Moelleux, which is where it landed in 2018. The bouquet is bright, complex and very refined, offering up scents of fresh pineapple, quince, a lovely blend of chalky and flinty soil tones, a hint of honeycomb, citrus peel and white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe acids and a long, balanced and beautifully complex finish. I love the backend lift here. 2021-2055+. **93+.**

Montlouis and Friends

2020 Chenin Blanc- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The 2020 Chenin Blanc from Xavier Weisskopf is produced from de-classified Montlouis grapes, from parcels that do not fit into one of the other bottlings produced here, though the vines are not young, as all are sixty years of age or older. The vines are planted on silex and limestone soils and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tank and bottled under screwcap. The 2020 is a very pretty wine, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of quince, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin, honeycomb and a gentle topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, vibrant acids and a fairly long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is good juice, but just a touch short on the backend, which makes me wonder if its screwcap is shaving the finish a touch. 2021-2030. **89.**

2019 Montlouis “Clos du Breuil”- Domaine François Chidaine

The 2019 Montlouis “Clos du Breuil” from François Chidaine is a superb young wine. This is done in its customary sweetness level of Sec, though it does not appear on the front label. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, sweet quince, a hint of passion fruit, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin, orange zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, bright, bouncy acids and excellent backend lift on the very long, well-balanced finish. This is already drinking beautifully, though it may close down for a short hibernation a few years down the road. 2021-2045+. **93+.**

2019 Montlouis “Touche Mitaine”- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The 2019 Montlouis “Touche Mitaine” from Le Rocher des Violettes is a single vineyard wine from this *lieu à dit*, planted with vines in excess of thirty-five years of age. Touche Mitaine has very thin topsoils of clay and flint before one hits the mother rock of limestone. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in oak, with seventy-five percent of the cuvée raised in used Burgundy casks that range from five to ten years of age and the other quarter raised in older *foudre*. The 2019 Touche Mitaine is a beautiful example of this fine vintage, offering up an elegant and very precise nose of apple, quince, a complex base of chalky soil tones, bee pollen, white lilies and just a touch of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, focused and full, with an excellent core and soil undertow, bright, zesty acids and superb balance on the long, complex and utterly refined finish. This is excellent Montlouis, done in a quite dry style which befits the strengths of the vintage of 2019. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2055. **92+.**

2019 Montlouis “Clos du Hochet”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The Clos du Hochet is planted with vines that are at least forty years of age, farmed organically and planted on very, very chalky soil tones. It is handled in the cellar like all of the Blot bottlings, with fermentation done in cask with indigenous yeasts and twenty percent new casks used for the *elevage*. The 2019 Clos du Hochet is a beautifully precise wine aromatically, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of sweet quince, nectarine, a gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, bee pollen, a hint of honeycomb, white lilies and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, good mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, discreetly new oak and nicely balanced finish. Out of the blocks, this a bit more deeply-pitched in personality and shows its new wood a touch more than the Remus bottling of Montlouis, but in a very pleasing manner that is already very tasty. 2021-2055+. **92.**



2019 Montlouis “les Hauts de Husseau”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The les Hauts de Husseau vineyard is the highest in the appellation of Montlouis, sitting on the top of a hill with soils of flint and clay over mother rock of pure limestone. These are old vines, being at least seventy years of age and the wine is handled in the cellars as the other Montlouis bottlings from Monsieur Blot. The 2019 les Hauts de Husseau is beautifully refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a lovely mix of sweet quince, pear, lanolin, beeswax, a gorgeous base of limestone, honeysuckle and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and seamless, with a great core, outstanding mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and beautiful balance on the long, focused, dry and zesty finish. This is stunning young Montlouis, and even though it is approachable about of the blocks, this is the one 2019 Montlouis bottling from Jacky Blot (of the three that I sampled) that I would do my best to keep my hands off of for at least a handful of years. It is not that it is very tasty now, but this is more tightly-knit and so very clearly has much more to reveal if given more bottle age! 2026-2060. 94+.

2019 Montlouis Remus”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The Remus bottling from Jacky Blot is composed of fruit from several different vineyard plots, all farmed organically and planted to vines that range from fifty to more than eighty years of age. The wine is barrel-fermented with native yeasts and aged in *barriques*, with twenty percent new oak used for each vintage. The 2019 Remus is a lovely wine in the making, showing its touch of new oak less than the Venise bottling from Vouvray as it offers up a complex aromatic constellation of quince, a touch of tangerine, beeswax, chalky soil tones, a dollop of

lanolin and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with quite a dry personality, a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive and a long, crisp and classy finish. This is excellent juice. 2021-2060. **93.**

Touraine Blanc and Vin de France

2020 Vin Blanc- Le Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The Vin Blanc bottling from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is composed entirely of sauvignon blanc and was seemingly bottled with just a touch of CO2 in solution, just to keep it fresh on the palate, as it has a gentle touch of *spritzig*. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of lemon, pineapple, wet grass, a nice base of chalky soil tones and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and fairly complex, with a good core, lovely acids and grip, quite good length and just a touch of effervescence on the finish. Good juice. 2021-2024. **88.**

2020 Sauvignon “Petit Le Mont”- Foucher-Lebrun

The 2020 Sauvignon “Petit Le Mont” from Foucher-Lebrun is a good, solid example of the vintage. It offers up a bright bouquet of gooseberry, lime peel, damp grass, chalky soil tones and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and succulent at the core, with good focus and acidity and a long, bouncy finish. This is not overly complex, but it has plenty of personality and is a good value. 2021-2024. **88.**

2020 Sauvignon- Clos de la Grange

The 2020 Clos de la Grange Sauvignon Blanc is nicely ripe and expressive out of the blocks on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of pineapple, tangerine, chalky soil tones, damp grass and lime peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent at the core, with good soil signature, sound acids and a long, ripe and bouncy finish. This has a lot of personality for a Touraine sauvignon blanc. 2021-2025. **89.**

2020 Sauvignon “Moulin des Vrillères”- Domaine Kevin et Christian Lauverjat

The 2020 Sauvignon “Moulin des Vrillères” from the Lauverjat family is a lovely example, offering up a vibrant bouquet of lime, green apple, chalky soil tones, a discreet touch of fresh-cut grass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and bouncy, with solid depth at the core, good acids and grip and a fairly long, juicy finish. This is not as complex as a good Sancerre or Menetou-Salon, but it is a very respectable sauvignon blanc with plenty of personality. 2021-2025. **89.**

2020 Sauvignon- Domaine de la Rochette (Famille Leclair)

The sauvignon blanc from Domaine de la Rochette hails from vines overlooking the Cher River, planted on soils of clay, flint and gravel. The 2020 Sauvignon is a lovely follow-up to their strong 2019, offering up a vibrant nose of gooseberry, lemon, fresh-cut grass, a lovely base of flinty soil tones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core of ripe fruit, lovely acids and a long, balanced and succulent finish. This is very good Touraine Sauvignon Blanc! 2021-2024. **89.**

2019 Terres de l’Aumonier Sauvignon- Domaine Sophie et Thierry Chardon

The Terres de l’Aumonier bottling of Sauvignon from Sophie and Thierry Chardon is produced from organically-farmed vineyards, as the young couple, who started their domaine in 1996, switched to organic farming in 2003. Their 2019 sauvignon blanc is lovely and really drinking well at the present time, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of

fresh lime, gooseberry, citrus zest, a fine base of chalky soil tones, just a touch of grassiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core, zesty acids and a long, bouncy and quite classy finish. This has a load of personality for a Touraine Sauvignon Blanc. 2021-2024. **89.**

2019 Phyllade Vin de France- Domaine l'Epicourchois (Luc Percher)

The 2019 Phyllade from Luc Percher is composed entirely from chenin blanc, planted on schist soils. The 2019 version is a fine young wine, offering up a deep and complex nose of quince, apple, lanolin, citrus peel, lemongrass and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a fine spine of acidity, excellent core and soil signature and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is still fairly closed on the palate and deserves some additional bottle age to really blossom, but in a pinch, it does open up quite nicely with a half hour in decanter! There is more than a little Savennières personality here! Fine value. 2021-2040. **90.**

2019 Orbois- Hervé Villemade

This bottling from Hervé Villemade is made from purchased Menu Pineau grapes. Two-thirds of the cuvée is fermented and aged in cement eggs and the other third in older barrel. The 2019 version offers up just a bit of natural wine mousiness on both the nose and palate (Hervé does not use added SO₂ in his wines, as he is allergic to sulfur), to go along with impressive aromatic complexity in its mélange of tart orange, a hint of pineapple, limestone minerality, citrus peel and a touch of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, fine soil undertow, vibrant acids and a long, complex finish. Add a couple of points to my score if a touch of mousiness does not put you off, as the other components here are admirable. 2021-2030+. **89.**

2017 Sauvignon- Domaine Méchinière (Valérie Forgues)

The 2017 Sauvignon Blanc from Valérie Forgues' Domaine Méchinière is produced from twenty year-old vines, which she farms organically and harvests by hand. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks. The bouquet remains bright and zesty, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, pineapple, a touch of cut grass, citrus peel and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite concentrated at the core from the 2017 vintage's short yields, with good acidity and a long, complex finish. Valérie Forgues learned her winemaking philosophy working closely with her neighbors, Catherine Roussel and Didier Barrouillet when that couple owned Clos Roche Blanche, and the pedigree shows. Good juice that is drinking very well today and still has some life ahead of it. 2021-2024. **89.**

2017 Sauvignon "LBL" Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Noëlla Morantin

The Sauvignon "LBL" Vieilles Vignes bottling from Noëlla Morantin are from two old parcels, planted in 1943 and 1965, that Noëlla once worked with as winemaker for a now defunct domaine in Touraine, and finally had the opportunity to purchase a couple of years ago. It is aged for fully eighteen months in four hundred liter *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2017 version is excellent, offering up a deep and vibrant bouquet of tangerine, sweet grapefruit, citrus peel, gentle grassiness and a beautiful base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and quite ripe, with a lovely core of old vine fruit, fine secondary layers of complexity, still zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and impressive finish. Though these vines are in Touraine, the wine is sold as Vin de France. Fine juice. 2021-2028. **91.**

Touraine Rouge and Vin de France

2020 Vin Rouge- Le Clos de Tue-Boeuf

The 2020 Vin Rouge from Le Clos de Tue-Boeuf is composed entirely from gamay, made from organically-farmed vineyards that the Puzelat family buys from in both Touraine, and in 2020, also from Beaujolais. The wine offers up a deep and sappy nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of saddle leather, just a hint of thyme and lovely spice tones redolent of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full and juicy, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, little tannin and a long, bouncy finish. This is an entry level red with a lot of personality for the price tag! 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Le Brin de Chèvre Vin de France- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The Le Brin de Chèvre bottling from the Puzelat brothers is composed entirely from the Menu Pineau variety, with fully seventy percent of the cuvée produced from two very old vine parcels, planted in 1937 and 1950. The other thirty percent is from rows of vines that have been replanted in the last twenty years, always from cutting taken from the original old vines. The wine is fermented like all of the Puzelat bottlings, with indigenous yeasts, with no added SO2 at the start and then aged in a combination of old *demi-muids* and Burgundy barrels for a year, prior to bottling, again with little or no SO2. The 2019 delivers a nose of tangerine, lime zest, a hint of pineapple, chalky soil tones, a bit of grassiness and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full and a touch spritzy with CO2, with a good core, fine focus and grip, slightly volatile acidity and a long, complex finish. One has to be fairly tolerant of volatile acidity to embrace this wine, but if so, then there is plenty to like here, as the wine has depth, complex and length. I am quite tolerant of VA in general, but this is right at my limit. Add or subtract a few points from the score (either way), depending on your own tolerance to volatile acidity. 2021-2026+? **88.**

2019 Pineau de la Loire Vin de France- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

This wine from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is made entirely from chenin blanc grown in vineyards in Touraine, but as this grape is no longer entitled to AOC status in Touraine, it is bottled as a Vin de France. The wine is fermented and aged in large *foudres* and bottled without fining or filtration and with very little SO2 added. The wine shows a bit of natural wine instability on both the nose and palate, but also impressive depth, length and complexity, with the vintage's concentrating character from small bunches quite in evidence. The bouquet is a mix of quince, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and just a hint of mousiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a bit of residual sweetness on the backend, with a good core, snappy acids and a long, focused and slightly volatile finish. This wine is a bit like a reckless bike racer that somehow manages to get around the corners without toppling, but comes damn close on each curve! Some tasters may find it a bit too far over the edge for their tastes, but there is no denying that there is a load of personality here for the intrepid. I do not know how long it will be able to continue as it is, but I can very much enjoy it for the time being, despite its slight volatility and mousiness. 2021-2026+? **89.**

2019 Côt- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The 2019 Côt from Le Rocher des Violettes is a deep and ripe wine, coming in at just over fourteen percent octane and offering up a sappy, black fruity nose of cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, bonfire, dark soil tones, roasted venison and a hint of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely packed at the core, with good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, primary and lighter on its feet finish than the nose

suggests. This is a fine bottle of malbec in the making, but it will need a bit of bottle age to unfurl. 2026-2045. **88.**

2017 Gamay- Domaine de la Méchinière (Valérie Forgues)

The 2017 Gamay from Valérie Forgues is a lovely wine. Her vineyards lie only five minutes' drive away from Clos Roche Blanche and Valérie farms her vines organically, after much consultation with Didier Barrouillet, who was previously the proprietor at Clos Roche Blanche. But, 2017 is only the second vintage since Madame Forgues took the plunge to stop machine-harvesting and move to picking solely by hand, and the wines have apparently benefited from the switch. Her 2017 Gamay comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully expressive bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, chicory and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. Good juice that should add even more complexity as it has a chance to blossom with a bit of bottle age. 2021-2030. **89.**

Jasnières

2019 Jasnières “Prémices”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The Jasnières “Prémices” from Eric and Clément Nicolas is made from a barrel selection of their Jasnières in the cellar, with the casks that are more forward in personality earmarked for this bottling. Like all of the bottlings from Domaine de Bellivière these days, the Nicolas family allows the style of the vintage to dictate the level of sweetness of the cuvée. Their 2019 Prémices is outstanding, done in a light moelleux style in this vintage and offering up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, sweet quince, a hint of tangerine, chalky soil tones, honeycomb and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, lovely soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. This is a gorgeous wine. 2021-2050. **93.**

2017 Jasnières “Calligramme”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The Jasnières “Calligramme” from Domaine de Bellivière is their old vine cuvée, produced from a handful of parcels where the vines range from fifty to seventy-five years of age. Like all of the Nicolas family's vineyards, the vines are farmed biodynamically, the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cask and aged in barrels during its *elevage*, with a small portion of the cuvée spending its first year in new oak. The 2017 Calligramme is already getting a golden sheen to its color and offers up a deep and complex nose of fresh apricot, sweet quince, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, lavender, honeycomb, white lilies and a touch of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and concentrated, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, zesty acids and impeccable focus and balance on the long, complex and classy finish. This is quite dry in style in 2017, but loaded with complexity and mineral drive and a lovely wine. I have to assume the frost damage of 2017 caused this wine to be made from miniscule yields, as it is quite concentrated in style. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2045. **93.**

2017 Jasnières “le Clos des Molières” Sec- Domaine de la Roche Bleue (Sébastien Cornille)

The 2017 Jasnières “le Clos des Molières Sec” from Sébastien Cornille is a single vineyard bottling, which is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in neutral casks for one year, followed by six months of finishing in stainless steel tank. The 2017 version is a good young wine, offering up a tightly-knit nose of lemon, lime, flinty soil tones, citrus peel, a touch

of lanolin and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy and fullish, with lovely soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, lean and nascently complex finish. This is a bit tight for primetime drinking now and really could do with a year or two to let its acidity relax a bit more. 2023-2035. **88+**.

2015 Jasnières “Cuvée du Silex”- Domaine Pascal Janvier

The 2015 Jasnières “Cuvée du Silex” from Pascal Janvier is a lovely wine that is drinking very well today. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pretty blend of apple, sweet grapefruit, flinty minerality, a touch of orange peel, just a bit of chenin dustiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a good core of fruit, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, zesty finish. Fine juice. 2021-2035. **92+**.



Coteaux-du-Loir

Pollux Gamay “L2”- Eric et Clément Nicolas

This is a wine made from purchased grapes from organically-farmed plots in the Coteaux-du-Loir, which the Nicolas family only produces in vintages favorable to the gamay grape. I assume the L2 refers to the 2020 vintage for this bottling. It is quite ripe for this northerly region, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a deep and pure bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, a lovely base of soil, bonfire, a hint of cedar and a floral topnote redolent of both violets and peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy at

the core, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, a bit of backend tannin and a long, primary and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a puppy and hence, a bit monolithic today, though packed with fruit. If given some bottle age, I have little doubt that much more complexity will emerge, but it is not really a bad drink at all right out of the blocks! 2021-2035. **90+**.

2019 L'Effraie- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The Nicolas family's L'Effraie bottling is for their "younger" chenin vines, which are fifty years of age or younger! The vines are farmed biodynamically, the wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in casks, one quarter of which are new. The 2019 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a beautifully pure and detailed bouquet of sweet quince, tangerine, a touch of fresh pineapple, citrus zest, a beautiful base of flinty soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish that closes with a lovely touch of citrus peel. Fine juice. 2021-2040+.

92.

2019 Rouge-Gorge- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The 2019 Rouge-Gorge bottling from Domaine de Bellivière is composed entirely from Pineau d'Aunis, but notably dark in hue in this vintage. There are several different, small parcels of this variety planted among the various Nicolas family vineyards, which are all farmed biodynamically and range in age from twenty-five to forty-five years of age. The wine is given an extended period of maceration, which accounts for its relatively dark color for this variety and aged in older casks for a year to a year and a half, prior to bottling without fining or filtering. The 2019 Rouge-Gorge is quite ripe in this vintage, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a deep and youthful nose of dark berries, balsam bough, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and some resinous tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and young, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, firm, chewy tannins, tangy acids and a long, primary and still quite closed finish. I am not really sure what to make of this wine, which seems to have been made from very small berries, so that acids, tannins and fruit depth are all turned up in volume, but where the constituent components have not yet synthesized. This could turn out beautifully with six to ten years in the cellar, or the components might never harmonize. I really have no idea! My gut instinct is that it will be worth taking a chance on and laying a few bottles down for the long haul. 2027-2050+? **????**

2018 Vieilles Vignes Éparses- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The 2018 Vieilles Vignes Éparses from Domaine de Bellivière is an old vine selection of the very oldest chenin blanc vines that the Nicolas family owns in the Coteaux-du-Loir, with the vine age ranging from seventy to more than eighty-five years of age! Like all of the domaine's vineyards, these vines are farmed biodynamically, harvested by hand and the wine is barrel-fermented and about a quarter of the cuvée spends one year in new oak. The 2018 Éparses is ripe and finished at Demi-Sec levels this year (which is pretty sweet for this bottling, which will often seem quite dry, but again, it is the vintage's characteristics that decide how much sweetness will be in the wine). The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely mix of sweet quince, a hint of orange, passion fruit, honeycomb, a lovely base of flinty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and has almost a sense of creaminess in the core from the very old vines, with lovely framing acids and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and seamlessly-balanced finish. This is superb juice. 2021-2045. **94.**

Cheverny Blanc

2019 Cheverny “Frileuse” Blanc- Domaine Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The 2019 Cheverny “Frileuse” from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is quite ripe in this vintage and offering up a lovely touch of tropical fruit in its bouquet of pineapple, tangerine, musky floral tones, a nice dollop of soil and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit and soil undertow, sound acids and a long, ripe and fairly powerful finish. This is a good bottle, which is more a product of its vintage than a classic Cheverny Blanc from Clos de Tue-Boeuf, but the wine has plenty of personality. 2021-2026. **88.**

2019 Cheverny Blanc- Domaine le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

The 2019 Cheverny Blanc from François Cazin is a beautiful young wine, with ripe fruit, but very classical lines of detail on both the nose and palate. The bouquet hops from the glass in a lovely mélange of pink grapefruit, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin, lime peel and a fine array of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, zesty and quite ripe, with a lovely core, good soil signature and grip, bouncy acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2030. **91.**

2018 Cheverny Blanc- Domaine l’Epicourchois (Luc Percher)

The 2018 Cheverny Blanc from Domaine l’Epicourchois is composed from a *cépages* of Menu Pineau and Sauvignon Blanc, with the vines in excess of fifty years of age. The 2018 version offers up a deep and complex aromatic constellation of wizened apple, breadfruit, lovely soil tones, nutskin, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a lovely core, sound framing acids and a long, wide open and nicely balanced finish. The warm summer of 2018 has not left this wine with a ton of acidity, so drinking it over the next few years is probably warranted, but it is so well balanced that it may well age longer than its moderate acids would suggest. Good juice. 2021-2025+? **89.**

2018 Cheverny “La Bodice” Blanc- Domaine Hervé Villemade

The 2018 Cheverny “La Bodice” from Domaine Hervé Villemade is comprised from a *cépages* of eighty percent sauvignon blanc and twenty percent chardonnay, with this vineyard forty years of age. The wine is aged in used casks for a year on its fine lees, prior to bottling (with little or no SO₂), and the 2018 version comes in fairly ripe at 14.3 percent octane. It offers up a deep and nicely ripe nose of pineapple, quince, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of damp grass, orange peel and a touch of natural wine wildness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, excellent focus and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a very good wine that is drinking exuberantly today. Given its low or zero sulfur regimen, as well as its quite ripe character, I would not expect it to make particularly old bones, but for drinking over the next year or two, it is a lovely glass. 2021-2024+? **91.**

Cour-Cheverny

2019 Cour-Cheverny- Domaine Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

François Cazin makes a beautiful example of Cour-Cheverny, made from old vines, with some of the parcel dating all the way back to 1928. The 2019 version is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of fresh apricot, lime peel, a hint of quince, a complex base of soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with an

excellent core of ripe fruit, lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2021-2030+. **93.**

2018 Cour-Cheverny- Domaine l'Epicourchois (Luc Percher)

Luc Percher's 2018 Cour-Cheverny, which is produced from Romarantin vines more than a century old, is excellent. The nose jumps from the glass in a ripe, vibrant and exotically complex blend of pear, menthol, bergamot, lavender, raw almond, a hint of orange peel and a gorgeous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil undertow, sound framing acids and a long, well balanced and surprisingly open and accessible finish right out of the blocks. Monsieur Percher's wines are renowned for being quite reticent when young, but this is most emphatically not the case with his excellent 2018 Cour-Cheverny. 2021-2035+. **93.**

2018 Cour-Cheverny "Romo"- Domaine des Huards (Michel Gendrier)

Michel Gendrier and his son Alex have farmed all of their vineyards via biodynamic principles, having been certified in 1998, though Michel started farming organically as far back as the 1970s. Their Romo bottling of Cour-Cheverny is from vines that average thirty-five years of age, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel. The 2018 Romo offers up a superb bouquet of lime, quince, stony soil tones, a touch of beeswax and menthol and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully defined by its underlying minerality, with a lovely core, bright acids and a long, focused and complex finish. This is excellent Cour-Cheverny. 2021-2035+. **92+.**

2018 Cour-Cheverny "Renaissance" Moelleux- Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

The 2018 Cour-Cheverny "Renaissance" Moelleux from Le Petit Chambord is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, but it is quite a ripe example of the vintage, as the botrytis here concentrated everything a bit, so it comes in at 14.5 percent octane. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of tangerine, passion fruit, honeycomb, candied quince, chalky soil tones and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine acids and grip, lovely balance and a long, ripe and vibrant finish. This is a lovely wine. 2021-2045+. **94.**

2017 Cour-Cheverny "François 1er" Vieilles Vignes- Dom. des Huards (Michel Gendrier)

The old vine cuvée of Cour-Cheverny from the Gendrier family takes its name from King François the First, who is credited in legend with bringing the Romarantin grape to the Loire Valley from Burgundy in 1519, so there would be some good wine in the region where he was building a summer house, which turned out to be Chambord. This bottling is made from vines that average seventy-five years of age. The 2017 version delivers a beautifully complex and expressive bouquet of fresh lime, a touch of pineapple, lovely minerality, citrus blossoms, a hint of menthol and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a good core, zesty acids and a long, vibrant finish. This does not have the mid-palate amplitude of the 2018 Romo bottling (but they hail from two decidedly different vintages), but it is complex and very long on the backend. Another superb bottle, which already has me looking forward to tasting the old vine cuvée in the 2018 vintage! 2021-2030. **92.**

Cheverny Rouge et Rosé

2020 Cheverny Rosé- Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

This is the first time I can recall ever tasting a Cheverny Rosé. The example of François Cazin is comprised from seventy-five percent Côt and twenty-five percent Pinot Noir, with the latter done in a *saignée* fashion to give the bottling its lovely salmon color. The 2020 version offers up a lovely, youthful nose of rhubarb, cherry skin, a nice base of soil, dried rose petals, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and quite surprisingly powerful in personality, with a fine core, snappy acids and a long, complex and vinous personality. This is listed at 13.5 percent octane, but seems likely to be a bit closer to fourteen to my palate. It is a good wine, but it most emphatically needs food to show at its best. 2021-2026. **89.**

2020 Cheverny Rouge- Domaine Hervé Villemade

The 2020 Cheverny Rouge from Hervé Villemade is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent gamay. The wine is lovely in this vintage, offering up a bright and red fruity bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, bonfire, a fine base of soil tones that seem destined to turn autumnal quite briskly, a dollop of fresh herbs and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced finish. This is a very stylish middleweight red. 2021-2030. **89.**

2019 Cheverny Rouge- Domaine Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

The 2019 Cheverny Rouge from François Cazin is a fine example of the vintage, coming in fairly ripe for this bottling at 13.8 percent alcohol and offering up a bright and nascently complex bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent in personality, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced finish. This is a fine bottle that will be even better with a few years in the cellar to let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. 2021-2035. **90.**

2019 Cheverny Rouge “les Ardilles”- Domaine Hervé Villemade

Hervé Villemade’s Cheverny Rouge “les Ardilles” is composed primarily of pinot noir, with a small percentage of gamay included in the *cépages*. This is made from Monsieur Villemade’s oldest vines for *vins rouges*, planted on a parcel of clay topsoils over a base of limestone. The wine is fermented in cement vats and raised in a combination of amphorae and older casks and bottled with a minimum of SO₂. The 2019 les Ardilles delivers a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, a bit of meatiness and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, superb transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. After the deep, black fruity nose, the lightness of step this wine has on the palate comes as a bit of a surprise, but the wine is loaded with personality and is excellent in quality. It is certainly approachable today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age to let those backend tannins soften up a bit more. 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Cheverny Rouge- Domaine l’Epicourchois (Luc Percher)

The 2018 Cheverny Rouge from Luc Percher is a blend of gamay and pinot noir, with the vines averaging forty-five years of age, which make them younger vines for Monsieur Percher! The wine comes in nicely ripe and black fruity in this vintage, offering up a deep and complex

nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a sappy core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is nicely ripe at 14.1 percent octane, but also very pure and soil-driven, with the generous fruit of the vintage beautifully placed on top of the soil. This will need a few years' worth of bottle age to soften up on the backend, but it will be a gorgeous drink when it is ready to drink. Fine juice and a marvelous value! 2024-2045. **92+**.

Valençay

2019 Valençay- Domaine Jourdain (Sophie Siadou)

Sophie Siadou's Valençay is the first example of this small appellation that I have ever tasted. Valençay is located due south of Cheverny and extends to seventy-four hectares of vines for the entire appellation. Madame Siadou's 2019 is composed from a *cépages* of thirty-five percent each of Gamay and Côt, as well as thirty percent Pinot Noir. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in older casks for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2019 Valençay is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a bright, youthful nose of bitter cherry, pomegranate, a complex base of soil tones, hints of bonfire and a dollop of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, complex and well balanced finish. I like the spine of structure that the malbec adds here, which makes it a touch chewy out of the blocks, but augurs very well for its evolution in the cellar. Paired with the right food to buffer the tannins a touch, this is quite drinkable today but it will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. A very stylish middleweight. 2021-2040. **91**.

Coteaux du Giennois

2019 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Domaine Clément et Florian Berthier

The 2019 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from the Berthier brothers is a good bottle of sauvignon blanc, offering up a complex nose of green apple, lime peel, damp grass, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and grassy, with a very good core, snappy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is another quite concentrated 2019, which augurs well for an extended life in bottle. 2021-2030. **88**.

2019 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Domaine Villargeau

The 2019 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from Domaine Villargeau is a fine bottle of sauvignon blanc, with a really strong signature of limestone to go along with its bright fruit tones of green apple, lime, white flowers and just a dollop of cut grass. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and bouncy, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, good framing acids and a long, complex and grassy finish. There is quite a bit more cut grass tones here on the palate than on the nose, but the wine is balanced and complex and quite attractive in its style. 2021-2025. **88**.



Quincy et Menetou-Salon

2020 Menetou-Salon- Domaine Karine Lauverjat

Karine Lauverjat's 2020 Menetou-Salon is a lovely wine in the making. It is a tad on the young side, having just landed here in the New York, but it has lovely bones. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine combination of lemon, gooseberry, spring flowers, chalky soil tones, citrus zest and a nice topnote of fresh-culled grass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit today, with a lovely core and soil undertow, bouncy acids and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is tasty already, but will be even better with six months out from its trans-Atlantic voyage. Good juice. 2021-2027. **91.**

2019 Menetou-Salon- Domaine Clément et Florian Berthier (Sainte-Gemme)

The 2019 Menetou-Salon from Clément and Florian Berthier is a lovely example of its appellation and vintage, as it offers up a vibrant bouquet of lime, lemon, green apple, chalky minerality, fresh-cut grass and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is very good Menetou. 2021-2030. **92.**

2019 Menetou-Salon "Morogues"- Domaine Pellé

Paul-Henry Pelle's Morogues bottling hails from seven different vineyard parcels he has around the village, which he ferments with native yeasts and raises in a combination of seventy percent tank and thirty percent used *demi-muids* and *foudres*. The 2019 Morogues bottling is a

superb example of Menetou-Salon, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of gooseberry, tart orange, a complex base of chalky minerality, fresh-cut grass and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, complex and full-bodied, with a nice touch of roundness on the attack from the portion raised in older oak, a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and bounce, a superb spine of acidity and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This is fine, fine juice! 2021-2030+. **93.**

2019 Menetou-Salon “le Carroir”- Domaine Pellé

The single vineyard le Carroir from Paul-Henry Pellé hails from a 1.25 hectare parcel of vines that were planted in 1976 in this southeast-facing vineyard, so that this wine basks in morning sun. The soils in le Carroir are quite different from the rest of Morogues, as these sit on an outcropping of *silex*, rather than the customary Kimmeridgian limestone found throughout the rest of the village’s vineyards. This bottling is raised in the inverse proportions to the Morogues, with seventy percent of the *elevage* undertaken in *demi-muids* and *foudres* and the final thirty percent in stainless steel. The 2019 le Carroir is quite youthful in profile, offering up a nascently complex bouquet of grapefruit, lemon, flinty minerality, a bit of fresh-cut grass, gentle smokiness and a faint touch of oak influence. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with zesty acids, excellent focus and grip, impeccable balance and a long, promising and gently oaky finish. This too is an outstanding bottle in the making, but unlike the 2019 Morogues cuvée, I would be inclined to give the le Carroir a couple of years in the cellar to allow it to fully blossom from behind its excellent structural chassis. This is going to age like a top Sancerre from Chavignol! 2023-2040. **93+.**

2019 Menetou-Salon “Vignes de Ratier”- Domaine Pellé

The Vignes de Ratier vineyard is a very stony one in Morogues, with a southwesterly exposition and only a couple of millimeters of topsoil before one hits the mother rock of limestone. The wine is raised in seventy percent oak and thirty percent stainless steel and the 2019 offers up a fine aromatic constellation of lime, tangerine, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, gentle grassiness, spring flowers and a nice touch of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and exquisitely mineral-driven in personality, with a great core of fruit, bright, snappy acids, laser-like focus and a very long, complex and superbly balanced finish. Though there is a nice touch of oak influence to this wine, it is absolutely devoured by the stunning minerality that is the foundation of this excellent bottle of sauvignon blanc! 2022-2040. **93+.**

2019 Quincy “Cuvée Très Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mardon

The Mardon family’s old vine cuvée of Quincy is made from sauvignon blanc vines that range from fifty to more than eighty years of age. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and raised in stainless steel tank. The 2019 version offers up a deep and vibrant bouquet of gooseberry, lime, a beautiful base of soil tones, a nice touch of fresh-mown grass and a floral topnote redolent of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and superb focus and grip on the long, concentrated and complex finish. The low yields of 2019 can really be sensed here, as this wine has depth and personality to burn! 2021-2030+. **92.**

Pouilly-Fumé

2019 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Fille

The 2019 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes” from the Dagueneau family is a lovely example of the vintage, offering ripe, pure fruit, good mineral undertow and lovely length on the palate. The bouquet delivers scents of sweet grapefruit, fresh lime, newly-mown grass, flinty minerality and

a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, sound acids and fine balance on the long, succulent and zesty finish. This does not have quite the cut one would expect in a racier vintage and hence, will probably age fairly briskly, but it will deliver tons of pleasure over the coming half dozen years. 2021-2027. **91+**.

Sancerre

2020 Sancerre “Le Mont”- Foucher-Lebrun (Alligny)

The 2020 Sancerre “Le Mont” from Foucher-Lebrun offers up a deep and complex nose of grapefruit, green apple, fresh-cut grass, a good base of flinty minerality, citrus peel and a hint of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows off fine depth at the core, with good focus and grip, sound framing acids and a long, ripe and nicely balanced finish. This is a touch soft for a 2020 and will want drinking up in its relative youth, but it will provide plenty of pleasure over the next few years. 2021-2024. **90.**

2020 Sancerre “Perle Blanche”- Domaine Kévin et Christian Lauverjat (Sury-en-Vaux)

The Lauverjat family’s 2020 Sancerre “Perle Blanche” is a very, very lovely example of both the vintage and its appellation. The bright and utterly refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, lime blossoms, chalky soil tones, gentle notes of fresh-cut grass and a hint of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, vibrant acids and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is delicious! 2021-2028. **92.**

2020 Sancerre- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

Pierre Martin took over as the winemaker for his father, Yves Martin at the family domaine back in 2005. However, he also purchased four hectares of vines in Chavignol on his own, starting his own label as well, so he is now the winemaker for two distinct labels in this village. Pierre Martin’s 2020 Sancerre is excellent. All of the fruit for this bottling hails from his own vines, with the wine fermented with native yeasts and raised in stainless steel tank. The wine is still quite youthful on both the nose and palate, but a bit of swirling reveals a classic nose of gooseberry, lime, Chavignol botanicals, a complex base of limestone minerality, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and racy, with fine mineral drive and grip, a lovely core, zesty acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This will keep nicely, though it is already very tasty in its youthful guise. 2021-2030. **92.**

2020 Sancerre- Domaine Yves Martin (Chavignol)

The regular bottling of Sancerre from Domaine Yves Martin is fermented with natural yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks. This is from completely different vineyard sources than the above wine, though both made by Yves’ son Pierre. The 2020 version from the family domaine is a classic example in the making, offering up a deep, nicely grassy and citric bouquet of lime, orange, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a complex base of limestone minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and cut, bright acids and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. First class Sancerre. 2021-2030. **92+.**

2020 Sancerre- Domaine du Carrou (Dominique Roger) Bué

The 2020 Sancerre from Dominique Roger hails entirely from his parcels in the village of Bué, with the parcels planted on the full range of *terres blanches*, *caillottes* and *silex* that can be found in this commune. His vines are all at least twenty-five years of age for this bottling, which he ferments and raises in stainless steel. The 2020 version is a lovely example, offering up a pure

and quite complex bouquet of lime, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a complex base of minerality, citrus zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, a great spine of acidity and a long, superbly balanced and zesty finish. This is outstanding Sancerre! 2021-2030. **93.**

2020 Sancerre- Domaine Noël et Jean-Luc Rimbault (Sury-en-Vaux)

The Rimbault family's Sancerre hails from soils that include quite a bit of *silex* in their composition, along with the typical blends of limestone, so this has a bit of Pouilly-Fumé shadings to it on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, green apple, fresh-cut grass, flinty minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bright, with an excellent core of fruit, a lovely girdle of acidity, excellent balance and grip and a long, soil-driven and fairly grassy finish. Good juice. 2021-2026. **91.**

2019 Sancerre- Domaine Clément et Florian Berthier (Sainte-Gemme)

The Berthier brothers' 2019 Sancerre is a very refined and elegant example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of gooseberry, fresh lime, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of grassiness and a fine topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with superb balance and backend mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Like so many 2019 Sancerres, the low yields and small berries have really given this wine depth and cut! 2021-2034. **92.**

2019 Sancerre "les Terres Blanches"- Domaine Chevreau (Crezancy)

The 2019 les Terres Blanches from Nicolas Chevreau is an excellent bottle of Sancerre, with a great spine of limestone minerality shooting through the wine. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, lime, a hint of raw almond, a great base of chalky minerality, just a whisper of grassiness and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and juicy at the core, with lovely mineral drive, sound framing acids and lovely balance on the long, complex and absolutely delicious finish. As is typical with the 2019s, this will not make old bones, but it is loaded with personality and will burn brightly over the coming handful of years. 2021-2025. **92.**

2019 Sancerre "les Grands Monts"- Domaine Isabelle Garrault (Verdigny)

Isabelle Garrault is a new producer to me, but I loved both her red and white bottlings of Sancerre that I tasted for this report. Her 2019 Sancerre Blanc is made from vines in excess of fifty years of age, which she ferments with indigenous yeasts and raises in stainless steel tanks. The wine offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of gooseberry, lemon, a lovely base of chalky minerality, white flowers and a dollop of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full, with a lovely core of pure fruit, excellent soil undertow and bounce, zesty acids and a long, seamlessly balanced and complex finish. This is lovely Sancerre. 2021-2030. **92.**

2019 Sancerre "les Monts Damnés"- Domaine Anthony et David Girard (Chavignol)

The 2019 les Monts Damnés from Anthony and David Girard is produced from seventy year-old vines on this great *terroir*, on which they farm three hectares. Their 2019 is really lovely, offering up a deep and youthful nose of gooseberry, pink grapefruit, limestone minerality, Monts Damnés lovely botanical signature scents, white flowers, citrus peel and a touch of damp grass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive and grip, lovely acids and a long, focused, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a properly structured young bottle of Monts Damnés and really deserves a few

years in the cellar to blossom completely, but it is already very tasty and I have to imagine plenty of these bottles will be savored in their first blush of youth! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035. **93.**

2019 Sancerre- Domaine Karine Lauverjat (Sury en Vaux)

The 2019 Sancerre from Karine Lauverjat is a very refined example on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, gooseberry, very gentle botanical tones, a fine base of chalky minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full, with a lovely core of pure fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. The short crop of 2019 has really given this wine intensity of flavor, without sacrificing any of the bounce and freshness of top flight Sancerre! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2030. **92+.**

2019 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés”- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

Pierre Martin’s own parcel of vines in the les Monts Damnés are thirty-five years of age. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and raised in stainless steel, in much the same manner as the wine he produces from the family domaine’s parcel in the same great *terroir*. As both this and the wine below hail from the same vineyard, but different parcels of vines, I wish I had tasted the two side by side, as it would have been fascinating! In any case, Pierre’s own 2019 version of les Monts Damnés is a beautiful and minerally example of this great vineyard, with the nose wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, green apple, a very complex base of limestone minerality, lovely botanicals, a hint of smokiness, citrus peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full and defined by its beautiful mineral undertow, with a great core of fruit, zesty acids, laser-like focus and a very long, very pure and complex finish. Stunning juice. 2021-2035. **93+.**

2019 Sancerre “la Côte des Monts Damnés”- Domaine Yves Martin (Chavignol)

The 2019 la Côte des Monts Damnés from Domaine Yves Martin is handled the same in the cellars as the domaine’s regular Chavignol bottling, with native yeasts and fermentation and *elevage* conducted in stainless steel tanks. The bouquet of the 2019 is lovely, offering up a complex and vibrant nose of lime, green apple, complex Chavignol botanicals, a fine base of chalky minerality, damp grass and plenty of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of ripe fruit, excellent acids and focus, impeccable balance and a long, racy and mineral-infused finish. The concentrated berries of 2019 can really be sensed here, as the fruit is deep, the minerality razor sharp and everything is tightly held together by excellent acidity. Fine juice. 2021-2030+. **93.**

2019 Sancerre- Domaine Merlin-Cherrier (Bué)

Thierry Merlin’s 2019 Sancerre is a lovely bottle, exuding the early generosity both of the 2019 vintage and the *terroir* of Bué. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of gooseberry, fresh lime, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones from the *caillottes*, citrus blossoms and just a whisper of grassiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely svelte for the vintage, with a good core, excellent mineral undertow, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. 2021-2026. **92.**

2019 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The 2019 old vine bottling of Sancerre from Pierre Morin is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a bright and classic nose of lime, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a fine base of limestone minerality, a hint of white pepper and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, a serious jolt of electric acidity and a very long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is so typical of the top 2019 Sancerres, with all the elements in the wine concentrated from the very

low yields and slightly desiccated bunches, but with everything still in harmonious balance. Fine juice that should age very well indeed. 2021-2030+. **92.**



2019 Sancerre- Domaine Henry Natter (Montigny)

The Natter family ferments their Sancerre with indigenous yeasts in large, old oak *foudres* and age the wine in the same vessels prior to bottling, so this is one of the rare “oak-aged” examples one can find in the region, albeit the oak being both large and quite neutral. Their 2019 Sancerre is lovely, offering up a pure and classy nose of green apple, gooseberry, lovely *terres blanches* minerality, fresh-cut grass, white flowers and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a deep core, fine soil inflection, zesty acids and a long, ripe and very nicely balanced finish. A lovely Sancerre that will clearly age gracefully. 2021-2031. **92.**

2019 Sancerre “Cuvée les Côûtes”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The 2019 Sancerre “Cuvée les Côûtes” from the Reverdy family is a beautiful example of the vintage, offering up early generosity, beautiful purity of fruit and mineral signature and a zesty, succulent personality. The nose delivers a lovely constellation of pear, gooseberry, raw almond, spring flowers, chalky soil tones and a gentle topnote of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil inflection, zesty acids and a long, wide open and complex finish. A lovely example for drinking over the next several years. 2021-2026. **92.**

2019 Sancerre “Origine”- Domaine Mathias et Emile Roblin (Maimbray)

The Roblin brothers’ 2019 Origine bottling is really a beautiful and absolutely classic example of *terres blanches* Sancerre. The bouquet is vibrant and very precise, jumping from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, gooseberry, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, fresh-cut grass, citrus zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent juice. 2021-2030. **93.**

2019 Sancerre “les Comtesses”- Domaine Paul Thomas (Chavignol)

The 2019 Sancerre “les Comtesses” from Domaine Paul Thomas is barrel-fermented and aged in older oak casks from Raphaël Thomas, Paul’s son and the current proprietor of the family estate. The wine offers up an outstanding young nose, jumping from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, green apple, lime peel, complex, chalky minerality, newly-mown grass, just a faint whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is outstanding Sancerre. 2021-2030. **93.**

2018 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Yves Martin (Chavignol)

Pierre Martin’s 2018 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu” is an excellent example of this great *terroir*. This is the only cuvée in the Martin cellars that is aged in older cask, rather than stainless steel tank. The bouquet offers up a deep and complex blend of lime, green apple, complex, limestone minerality, a lovely array of Chavignol botanicals, a touch of damp grass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, sound framing acids and a long, very well-balanced and classy finish. As this is 2018, it is a tad riper and deeper-pitched than other recent vintages of this bottling, but still fresh, zesty and very complex and it is drinking with lovely generosity in its youth. Fine juice. 2021-2030. **92.**

2018 Sancerre- Domaine Merlin-Cherrier (Bué)

The 2018 vintage of Domaine Merlin-Cherrier’s Sancerre is really drinking beautifully today. The bouquet is bright and nicely citric in its personality, offering up notes of lime, tangerine, fresh tarragon, damp grass, chalky soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a succulent core of fruit, good acids and focus and a long, complex and wide open finish. Lovely juice, with a slightly deeper-pitched personality than the equally impressive 2019 version. 2021-2024. **91.**

2018 Sancerre “le Chêne Marchand”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

Pierre Morin’s 2018 le Chêne Marchand is very refined example of Sancerre in this ripe and generous vintage. The nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of gooseberry, lime, a beautiful base of chalk, a touch of raw almond, fresh-culled mint and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied, focused and complex, with good framing acids, excellent mineral undertow, lovely balance and grip and a long, ripe and soil-driven finish. Like many examples of 2018 Sancerre, this wine has fairly gentle acids, but it is so beautifully balanced that it seems likely to age quite gracefully despite it being a bit on the softer side. For drinking today, it has plenty of bounce and cut and is delicious! 2021-2030. **92.**

2018 Sancerre “les Ammonites”- Domaine Mathias et Emile Roblin (Maimbray)

The 2018 Sancerre “les Ammonites” from Mathias and Emile Roblin is excellent. This cuvée is now raised entirely in six hundred liter *demi-muids*, which has been the case since the 2016 vintage. The 2018 Ammonites is beautifully complex and refined on the nose, wafting from

the glass in a mix of gooseberry, green apple, lime, a superb base of limestone minerality, raw almond, a touch of cut grass and a gentle foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovey core, excellent soil signature and grip, very good acids for the vintage and a long, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a fine, fine example of the vintage. 2021-2030. **92+**.

2016 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmund et Anne Vatan (Chavignol)

The 2016 Sancerre “Clos la Néore” from Edmund and Anne Vatan has turned out beautifully. Readers may recall that the 2016 vintage was an extremely difficult one across the Loire Valley, but Sancerre at least benefited from far less severe frost damage than was the case elsewhere along the river, so yields were generally only down around ten percent from frost damage here. Hydric stress was a problem later in the summer, but lovely weather in September helped what bunches which were out on the vine ripen nicely and the 2016 Vatan Clos la Néore has come in at a very old school thirteen percent octane in this vintage. The wine is still quite youthful, but offers up a lovely nose of lime, gooseberry, raw almond, a complex base of limestone minerality, early notes of Chartreuse-like botanicals, lime peel and just a wisp of white pepper. On the palate the wine is bright, racy and full-bodied, with a tightly-knit personality, a lovely core, a very complex base of soil, excellent focus and balance and a long, refined and very promising finish. This reminds me a bit of vintages like 2007 and 2008 out of the blocks. 2026-2055+. **95**.

2002 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmund et Anne Vatan (Chavignol)

It had been several years since I last opened a bottle of the 2002 Clos la Néore from Edmund Vatan, so I figured it would behoove me to check in and see how the bottle was evolving. I reported on this wine with some regularity for the first decade of the newsletter, as I had purchased this wine back before the wine world really knew how great were the wines from Monsieur Vatan, so I was able to actually purchase three cases of this wine for my cellar. I last tasted it in 2016, so five years have passed since the last bottle I drank and after the wine seemingly being suspended in time for most of its first dozen years in bottle, it has now begun to really show more mature aspects on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep and still quite vibrant, offering up scents of orange peel, deep-pitched lime notes, menthol, a complex base of limestone minerality, damp grass and the Vatan kaleidoscope of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty zesty, but with the fruit shadings far darker than was the case five years ago. It still has excellent depth at the core, zesty acids and impeccable focus and balance, with a long, complex and vibrant finish. It remains a great bottle of wine, but it has now fully entered its stage of more tertiary aromatics and flavors, without losing one bit of its structural integrity and is likely to continue drinking beautifully for many more years to come. 2021-2040+. **95**.

Sancerre Rouge and Rosé

2020 Sancerre “les Grands Monts” Rosé- Domaine Isabelle Garrault (Verdigny)

The 2020 Sancerre “les Grands Monts” Rosé from Domaine Isabelle Garrault is fairly pale in hue and shows the same elegance on the nose of her Sancerre blanc. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of tangerine, melon, chalky soil tones, peonies and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with a fine core, lovely mineral

drive and grip, snappy acids and a long, precise and complex finish. This is very good Sancerre Rosé. 2021-2027. **91.**

2020 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

Pierre Martin's 2020 Sancerre Rosé is a lovely, pale salmon color and offers up a very pretty nose of rhubarb, watermelon, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and just a hint of candied fruit. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, good soil signature and a long, focused and energetic finish. This has a nice touch of real vinosity on the backend that makes it excellent with food. 2021-2025. **89.**



2019 Sancerre “Origine” Rosé- Domaine Mathias et Emile Roblin (Maimbray)

Mathias and Emile Roblin have made a lovely Sancerre Rosé in the 2019 vintage. This wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and offers up a bright and very classy nose of melon, strawberries, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a juicy core of fruit, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. The lovely acidity of the 2019 vintage is really on display here! Fine juice. 2021-2025. **90.**

2019 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Paul Thomas (Chavignol)

The 2019 Sancerre Rouge from Raphaël Thomas is a fine young bottle of pinot noir in the making. The wine is quite black fruity in personality out of the blocks, despite coming in at fourteen percent octane, and offers up a bouquet of dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, a fine

base of chalky soil tones, fresh thyme and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a good core, lovely mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, promising finish. This needs four or five years in the cellar to let the tannins soften up a bit on the backend, but it will be a fine drink once it has blossomed. 2026-2045. **90+**.

2018 Sancerre “les Grands Monts” Rouge- Domaine Isabelle Garrault (Verdigny)

Isabelle Garrault’s pinot noir vines all lie in the village of Verdigny, on a combination of soil types that include *caillottes*, clay and *terres blanches*. She raises one quarter of this cuvée in older barrels and the rest in stainless steel tank and ferments with natural yeasts. Her 2018 rouge is nicely red fruity and spicy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, raspberries, gentle spice tones, a hint of mint, bitter chocolate, a lovely signature of soil and a floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is very elegant in profile for Sancerre rouge and a lovely bottle in the making. 2026-2050. **91**.

2018 Sancerre “la Garenne” Rouge- Domaine Girard (Chadoux)

This is the first vintage of Sancerre rouge that I can recall tasting from Domaine Girard, whose white wines I have been enjoying for more than twenty-five years. The wine comes in quite ripe in the warm summer of 2018, with the label listing it as fully fifteen percent octane, but it does not taste this high to my palate, as there is only a touch of heat on the backend. The bouquet is ripe and quite pure, offering up scents of black cherries, bonfire, coffee bean, chalky soil tones, chicory and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. If this is really fifteen percent, it is the best balanced fifteen percent alcohol wine I have ever tasted! 2025-2045. **88+**.

2018 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

Pierre Martin’s Sancerre rouge is produced from vines in excess of fifty years of age, grown on a combination of *caillottes* and silex soils. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of forty percent used casks and sixty percent tank. The 2018 version is a fine example in the making, offering up a bright and youthful nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a fine base of chalky soil and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core, fine soil signature, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This will need some cellaring time to soften up on the backend, but will be lovely glass of pinot noir once it is ready to drink. 2028-2050+. **90**.

2018 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Merlin-Cherrier (Bué)

Thierry Merlin’s 2018 Sancerre Rouge comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is a refined and quite classic example of the vintage. These vines were planted in the 1970s and 1980s, in more clay soils found at the base of the Chêne Marchand vineyard in Bué, so they are now in their prime today. The 2018 version offers up a deep and black fruity bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a lovely touch of spice tones, raw cocoa, chalky soil elements (that seem likely to turn autumnal fairly briskly), a dollop of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe, well-measured tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is going to be lovely juice. 2026-2050. **91**.

2018 Sancerre “Origine” Rouge- Domaine Mathias et Emile Roblin (Maimbray)

The Roblin brothers’ 2018 Sancerre Rouge is fermented with indigenous yeasts, includes about a third of whole clusters and is raised primarily in *foudre*, with any surplus production that does not fit in the vat finding its way into *demi-muid* for its *elevage*. The 2018 version comes in nicely svelte for the hot summer of 2018, tipping the scales at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a quite refined young bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, chalky soil tones, a touch of stems and a delicate foundation of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite youthful in profile, with a good core, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe tannins and a long, chalky and promising finish. This needs five to seven years in the cellar to start to blossom, but should prove to be a fine bottle in due course. 2026-2055. **90+**.

RECENTLY-TASTED WINES FROM THE JURA AND SAVOIE



I know that I have been remiss in not writing about the wines from the Jura and Savoie sooner, as both regions are now among the most popular to be found in the marketplace and prices for the most popular producers here often rival those of many of the most famous domaines in Burgundy. I have good friends in Europe who are absolutely passionate about the top estates from these regions and began plying me with some of their top bottles several years ago, in an attempt to get me to start visiting and writing about the wines. Alas, the light just did not go on for me with these wines, with the exception of a few very memorable bottles of chardonnay from Emmanuel Houillon at Domaine Pierre Overnoy. But, in recent times, a few importers have been sending me samples from their producers in the two regions, noting that I might enjoy tasting them, and finally, enough bottles had amassed un-tasted in my cellar that I decided to dip my toe in the water again here and see if I could finally start to understand these wines better. Once I had opened a few of these bottles, I started to see what all of the excitement has been about (and realized all of the superb wines I have been missing!), and I reached out to a few more importers to further flesh out this inaugural article on the Jura and Savoie. I am sure that there are many more producers beyond those I have tasted for this feature who merit attention and in good time, I hope to have a much better feel for these two regions. But, at least

here is a start in the right direction and I will not make the same mistake twice and will now be covering these beautiful wines on a regular basis!

For the report that follows, I did not taste any (other than an isolated bottle or two) from the region's most famous estates, figuring that I was quite unlikely to be given samples from Domaine Pierre Overnoy, Jean-François Ganévat, Jacques Tissot or Domaine du Pelican the first time I wrote about the regions, given that I had not previously paid a lot of attention to these wines. But, beyond the expectations of negative responses to queries for samples from the priciest wines of the Jura and Savoie (and the most expensive bottlings from the Jura are certainly rather high priced today), I also did not want to fall into the trap of seeing the two regions through the prism of only the most renowned wines of the region. Having spent enough time in the cellars at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti with private clients of the estate, tasting wines with folks who know nothing of Burgundy beyond the constellation of DRC's wines (granted, if one were only to choose to drink wines from a single producer in Burgundy, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is not the worst choice out there!), I did not wish to be the same "head in the clouds" type of taster when it came to the Jura and Savoie, as both of these regions are effectively new to me. So, I thought a more productive approach to finally tackling the Jura and Savoie was simply to write to a few importers whose producers from other regions have impressed me consistently in the past, figuring that if their palates were that good with wines from the Loire Valley, Mâconnais, Champagne, Burgundy, Alsace or the Rhône, I was not going to be let down by the *vignerons* with whom they chose to work with in Savoie or the Jura. This "ground up" approach to a new region has worked for me in the past (I drank an awful lot of Jackie Truchot's wines- when virtually no one wanted them- long before I ever saw the other side of a DRC cork in those early years discovering Burgundy), and I hope it will prove a fertile approach to tackling the wines of Savoie and the Jura.

I should note that one of the reasons that I was so slow in starting to understand the wines from the Jura in the past is that I am not a particularly partisan fan of the region's *Vin Jaune* wines, which were my primary introductions to the Jura many, many years ago. Even the rare Château-Chalon bottles that I have tasted did not move me all that much, so I always felt I would leave this region to other commentators who more fully appreciated the wines. I suppose that this is not surprising, given that my admiration for Sherry, which is also produced in an oxidative manner by allowing a film of yeast to grow on the non-topped-up casks of wine over many years of barrel aging, is another wine where my appreciation is entirely intellectual and it seldom graces a glass in my hand when I am drinking wine, rather than tasting it. My earliest exposure to the Jura also included their sparkling wines, Crémant du Jura, which are good, solid, inexpensive sparklers that still constitutes nearly a quarter of the production in the region. But, having now tasted a reasonable range of Chardonnay, non-oxidative bottlings of Savagnin (these cuvées are called *Ouillé* here in the Jura, to denote that the casks have indeed been topped up to avoid oxidation), Pinot Noir, Trousseau and Ploussard, I now understand that my early introduction to the wines from this region was hardly comprehensive. To be fair, I started selling a few wines from the Jura as far back as the late 1980s, but certainly, I was not working with the region's top producers back in that era! If someone had served me a bottle from Lucien Aviet, Pierre Overnoy or Jacques Puffeney back in those early days, I like to think I might have understood far better in inherent beauty of these wines. In any case, my eyes have been fully opened with the preparation

for this report and I am already looking forward to my next round of tastings with the wines from the Jura and look forward to covering them regularly from here on out!

While the title of this article includes Savoie, I only tasted a small handful of wines from the region, and though the wines from the two domaines I tasted from this region were excellent, the vast majority of the notes that follow are from producers in the Jura. I hope the next time around to be able to cast my net a bit wider in the Savoie, for based on the fine wines from Mathieu Apffel and Denis and Didier Berthollier that I sampled for this report, clearly this is another region that I need to delve far more deeply into in the coming months and years. Within the Jura, as I mentioned above, still nearly twenty-five percent of the region's production is devoted to Crémant du Jura, the region's sparkling wine, which is nearly always produced from chardonnay. Back in the late '80s when I was first starting to sell Crémant du Jura, the wine was seen as an inexpensive alternative to Champagne, and this still seems to be the case. Perhaps there are better examples than those that I tried for this report, but in general terms, it seems to me that despite growers in the region continuing to devote a quarter of their vineyard production to sparkling wines in the Jura, the real treasures crafted here are the still wines, which are another level or two up in terms of complexity, breed and potential for longevity.

The most widely-planted grape variety today in the Jura is Chardonnay, which accounts for fully forty-three percent of the acreage under vine. Given that almost all Crémant du Jura is produced from chardonnay, I suppose this comes as no surprise. The next most prolific grape variety here is Savagnin, which is used for both *Vin Jaune* and Château-Chalon bottlings, but which also makes an extremely good dry white wine, crafted in the non-oxidative or *Ouillé* style, which I like even better than the oxidative bottlings crafted from this grape. Savagnin comprises twenty-two percent of vineyard plantings in the Jura. So, one can see that the region is white wine territory, with nearly two-thirds of the area under vine devoted to either Chardonnay or Savagnin, but the red wines here are every bit as exceptional in quality as the white wines of the Jura, as the chalk and clay soils settled here in the Alpine valleys really take well to the three red grapes that are planted in the region. Thirteen percent of vineyard land in the Jura is devoted to Pinot Noir (which along with Chardonnay, arrived here from Burgundy all the way back in the tenth century!), fourteen percent is planted to the distinctive, thin-skinned variety of Ploussard (as the grape is spelled in the Jura, it is more often spelled as Poulsard outside of the region) and eight percent of the vineyard land here is planted to Trousseau.

Of the five dominant grape varieties here, the Jura's renditions of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are often quite Burgundian in stylistic sensibilities (not surprising, given that the two regions are only an hour's drive from each other), with the Chardonnays often resembling the wines of Meursault to my palate, with an overt nuttiness on both the nose and palate that I find immensely attractive. Given the altitude of the vineyards in the Jura, not to mention the Alpine influence of the nearby mountains, both of these varieties produce quite age-worthy examples, with most of the Chardonnays I tasted possessing lovely girdles of acidity and clearly showing potential for at least ten to fifteen years of positive evolution in the bottle (and maybe more), and Pinot Noir bottlings properly structured out of the blocks and most needing at least eight to ten years of cellaring to start to blossom and drink with generosity. I would suspect that most top examples of Pinot Noir from the Jura have at least twenty-five to thirty years of peak drinkability once they have softened up and properly blossomed, but as I am a newbie to these wines, I may

well be underestimating how long that they can last in the cellar. There is also an ancient strain of Chardonnay grown in the Jura called Melon à Queue Rouge, whose mutation from Chardonnay goes back generations and is treated as a separate grape variety today by *vignerons* in the Jura, so I have listed it separately in the notes that follow.

The Savagnin grape is another whose wines I find excellent, when it is done in the *Ouillé* style, which dovetails nicely with what I prize in dry white wine, with its high natural acidity giving the wines a very appealing lift and cut on the backend and the potential for longevity in the bottle. I have not yet had a chance to drink any bottles of Savagnin *Ouillé* with extended cellaring, but I hope to have that opportunity one day, as this strikes me as a varietal that has fine potential for evolving and gaining in complexity with mid-to-long-term aging. It is a wine that is produced in relatively small quantities in the *Ouillé* style, as of course, both *Vin Jaune* and Château-Chalon are produced from the Savagnin grape, and those two wines are more prized in the region than non-oxidative examples of Savagnin. Among the red wines of the Jura, the pinot noirs that I tasted were excellent, with impressive depth, transparency and purity of fruit, coupled to fine structural chassis brought about by the combination of fine clay and limestone soils and cooler microclimates from the Alpine influence of the Jura Mountains. Trousseau produces more black fruity and sturdy wines than Pinot Noir here, or at least this was the case with the examples that I tasted for this report, with fine structure and excellent potential for long-term cellaring. Though I have not had the pleasure to drink fully mature bottles of Jura Trousseau, my gut feeling is that with long-term cellaring, this is probably the finest red wine varietal planted in the region, though I have little doubt that both Pinot Noir and Ploussard have their partisans in this respect. Ploussard produces the most delicate of the red wines of the Jura, with a beautiful array of aromatics, excellent soil signatures and a lightness of step that is most beguiling. I only tasted a single Ploussard for this report, which I expect is a reflection of both the *vignobles* of the region only planted to fourteen percent of this variety and its popularity among Jura collectors out there.

Among the producers whose wines I especially liked in preparing this article, Bruno Bienaimé was one who really stood out for me. Monsieur Bienaimé is not a long-time *vigneron* in the Jura, as he is a native of the Champagne region and spent a full decade working as Vincent Laval's right hand man in his cellars in Cumières learning the fine nuances of making Champagne, prior to starting his own project in the Jura. Bruno decamped for the village of Arlay in the Jura (roughly ten kilometers due west of Château-Chalon) in November of 2016, where he now farms 3.2 hectares of vines, planted to Chardonnay, Savagnin, Trousseau and Pinot Noir. Consequently, the 2017 vintage was the first for Monsieur Bienaimé in the Jura; he only produced a scant thousand bottles of wine in this inaugural vintage. Once he arrived in the Jura, leaving behind his decade of work in Cumières with Monsieur Laval, Bruno immediately began converting over his small parcels of vines in Arlay and nearby towns to organic farming methods, as one might expect after working with the Laval family, who were amongst the very first family domaines in Champagne to change their own farming methods over to organic viticulture all the way back in the 1970s. Bruno Bienaimé plows his vines by horse, uses a gentle basket press for the crushing of his bunches and indigenous yeasts for the fermentation of all of his wines, which are done in barrel. They are aged in a variety of older casks, never chapitalized and bottled without filtration after fully two years of barrel aging. Bruno is also quite circumspect with his use of SO₂, with one gram added at the press and another gram added just

before bottling. From what I tasted of Bruno's wines, he is excelling with all four varietals that he is currently bottling, and though one of the newcomers to the region, he is also one of its stars.

Another producer whose wines were most impressive was Jean-Luc Mouillard. Monsieur Mouillard is also not a particularly long-established as a Jura winegrower, as he only started his domaine in his native village of Nevy-sur-Seille in 1991, located right at the base of Château Chalon, after completion of his oenology degree at the university. However, unlike Brune Bienaimé, he is originally from the region, but his family were primarily dairy farmers, with only a few parcels of vines on the side, whose grapes they sold to the local cooperative. In 1997, he moved his domaine from the village of Nevy-sur-Seille to a sixteenth century house in the village of Mantry, just north of Arlay, attracted primarily by the old, arched stone cellars of his new address. He started out by renting several parcels of vines, but has steadily grown to now exploit ten hectares of vineyards, planted primarily to Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Trousseau and Ploussard in the Côtes du Jura appellation, though he does also produced a small bit of Château Chalon. He farms by the precept of *lutte raisonnée*, eschewing the use of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. Jean-Luc ferments with indigenous yeasts, with alcoholic fermentations generally taking place in tank, followed by malolactic fermentation and aging in older Burgundy barrels for all of the wines, though the Trousseau in lighter vintages will often spend its entire *elevage* in tank, rather than seeing time in barrel. In really short crops, Jean-Luc will blend his Trousseau and Pinot Noir production to make a single red wine cuvée, which he calls Rubis.



Loreline Laborde's domaine, Les Granges Paquenesses, is another relative newcomer in the firmament of the Jura, as she only opened this small estate in 2010, after having studied oenology in Burgundy and trained in Bordeaux and the Rhône. I was very much impressed with her wines. She decamped from the city of Montpellier to settle in the small village of Tourmont, located near Poligny, to start farming two hectares of vines. She has added small parcels when available over the last few years and has grown her vineyard largess to three and a half hectares, which she farms biodynamically and her farming has just been officially certified as organic (on the road to official certification for biodynamics). Loreline works her vines with the assistance of her horse, with most of her parcels around thirty years of age, though she did acquire one plot of Trousseau vines that are now over sixty years-old. The domaine's range includes Crémant de Jura, Chardonnay, Savagnin, Trousseau and Ploussard. Madame Laborde ferments her wines with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel tank, ages them in older, neutral barrels and bottles unfinned and unfiltered. The samples I tasted from Les Granges Paquenesses were all excellent in quality, and on top of that, the wines are priced very reasonably, which is now fairly rare in the world of high quality Jura wines. Loreline Laborde is not yet well-known, but with the superb quality of her wines, that is not bound to last, and I highly recommend discovering them now, while they are still such stunning values!

Probably the most well-known and established producer whose wines I was able to taste for this article on the Jura is Lucien Aviet, who has been an institution in the Jura since he first opened up his domaine more than sixty years ago. Today, he has ceded the day to day responsibility to his son, Vincent, but is still a formidable presence in the cellars of the family domaine, known as Le Caveau de Bacchus, in the village of Montigny. Since starting his domaine all the way back in 1960, Lucien Aviet has been a passionate proponent for the excellence of the red wines from the Jura, and most of his family's six hectares of vineyard land are devoted to Trousseau and Ploussard, though the Aviets also produced a bit of Melon à Que Rouge (which is an ancient clone of chardonnay) as their lone non-oxidative white wine bottling. But, the most widely-planted grape varieties of Chardonnay (not counting their small parcel of Melon à Que Rouge) and Pinot Noir are nowhere to be found in their stellar lineup of wines. Part of the reason for this is that Montigny is best known for its stellar red wine *terroir* and Lucien Aviet has been famous for his Trousseau now for decades. Though Lucien is "officially retired" today, he and his son Vincent continue to make Trousseau the foundation of their lineup of wines, producing fully five different bottlings from this variety, each from different *terroirs*. All of the Caveau de Bacchus wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts in old Alsatian oak *foudres* and aged in the same vessels prior to bottling. The Savagnin that is grown in the domaine's vineyards is earmarked for the production of *Vin Jaune* or a bottling called Réserve du Caveau, which is aged a minimum of six years in cask without topping up under its *flor* or *sous voile*, as this method is called in the Jura. The Réserve du Caveau is simply a selection of casks that are not deemed quite concentrated enough at six years of age to qualify for further aging and bottling as *Vin Jaune* by the Aviets. As I am more partial to non-oxidative Savagnin than I am to *Vin Jaune*, I am sorry that the domaine does not produce a bottling, as I am sure it would be stunning. But, it is the red wines here that the domaine is famous for and rightly so, as these are truly stunning examples of Trousseau. The small amount of Ploussard that Aviet family produces is allegedly mostly reserved for the table of Lucien, with the window for private clients to purchase this wine limited to a single week per year! I did not taste all of the Aviets' cuvées for this report, but all of the ones that I did have a chance to try were simply stunning.

Julien Mareschal's Domaine de la Borde was another standout performer in my tastings. Julien is originally from a farming background, but his family were not winegrowers. He studied agronomy and oenology at the University of Dijon and then turned to the Jura to start his domaine, after *stages* in Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Jura, knitting together a small domaine in 2003 in Arbois Pupillin. Today, his vineyard patrimony now encompasses five hectares of vines, with the oldest parcels now more than seventy-five years of age. Julien grows Chardonnay, Savagnin, Pinot Noir, Trousseau and Ploussard, all of which he farms either organically or already in conversion to biodynamics. Julien started out his farming in the Jura using the *lutte raisonnée* system, but switched half of his vines over to organic farming in 2009 and everything over to biodynamics beginning in 2012. Unlike many of his colleagues, where their predominant grape variety planted in Chardonnay, nearly half of Julien's vineyards are planted to Savagnin. Julien ferments all of his wines with native yeasts and ages most of them in used *demi-muids* or larger *tonneaux* (his Trousseau "Sous la Roche" bottling is the only one to my knowledge raised in used Burgundy casks). All of his wines that I tasted were very well-made and they too, represent relatively fine value in the context of Jura pricing.

All of the tasting notes below are organized by varietal, with the handful of very good Savoie wines that I tasted for the article interspersed with the Jura wines. The notes for the Crémant de Jura and sparkling wine from Savoie that I tasted are listed first, and I should mention that perhaps my scores on these wines are not quite as generous as the wines might deserve. I tried to be as objective as possible in my evaluations with the wines, but as I have also covered a goodly number of new releases from Champagne in this issue of the newsletter, the Crémant de Jura bottlings may not have had the opportunity to show to best advantage. I always tasted them on days I was not sampling Champagne, hoping to be just to the bottles, but as I tasted an awfully good set of new Champagne arrivals in the last couple of months, it is certainly possible that my scores are a tad stingy for the Crémant de Jura bottlings.

Crémant de Jura and Crémant de Savoie

2016 Domaine Mathieu Apffel "Bulles de Rouzan" Crémant de Savoie Brut NV

The Mathieu Apffel "Bulles de Rouzan" Crémant de Savoie is made from the Jacquère grape. Mathieu did not make the base wine for this bottling, which was made by another *vigneron* and inherited by Mathieu. He decided to make a sparkling wine out of it, rather than waste the juice, and offer it up at an attractive price. The wine has turned out quite well, offering up a bright bouquet of lime, menthol, stony minerality and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, snappy and focused, with a good core and mineral undertow, brisk acids and a long, complex finish. The bubbles here are a bit coarse, but other than this, the wine is quite good. It puts to shame an awful lot of Prosecco out there! 2021-2035. **88.**

Domaine Désiré-Petit Crémant de Jura Brut NV

The Désiré-Petit Crémant de Jura non-vintage Brut is composed entirely from chardonnay. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of pear, fresh-baked bread, a good base of fairly chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and snappy, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid example. 2021-2030+. **88.**

Domaine Désiré-Petit Crémant de Jura Rosé Brut NV

The Crémant de Jura Rosé Brut from Désiré-Petit is made from a *cépages* of pinot noir. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a lovely nose of strawberries, rhubarb, chalky

minerality, rye bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and youthful, with snappy acids, a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and gently vinous finish. This is my favorite of the three sparklers from Désiré-Petit, as it has a bit more complexity and its vinous personality works nicely at the table. 2021-2030. **88+**.

Domaine Désiré-Petit Crémant de Jura Blanc de Blancs Brut NV

The non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut from Domaine Désiré-Petit is also comprised entirely from chardonnay. The wine offers up a bright nose of lemon, apple, warm bread and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and youthful, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. I am not sure of the *dosage* numbers for the Blanc de Blancs and the regular non-vintage Brut, but this seems to have been finished with a bit lower *dosage*. Good juice. 2021-2030+. **88**.

Chardonnay

2018 Chardonnay- Domaine Bruno Bienaimé (Côtes de Jura)

This is the first vintage release of chardonnay from Bruno Bienaimé, and I should mention that he did not consider putting the vintage on the label or the corks, so one only knows that it is the 2018 if it shows no vintage markings! The wine is beautiful on the nose, starting out a bit tightly-knit, but gathering itself with just a touch of aeration to reveal scents of pear, lemon zest, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, fruit blossoms and a deft touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still fairly youthful structurally, with a rock solid core, excellent transparency and grip, impeccable balance and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is certainly tasty today, but it has that good spine of acidity to carry it far into the future and I have to believe that we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg here in terms of complexity today, so I would be inclined to cellar my bottles for at least three or four years and let the secondary layers emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035. **92+**.

2018 Chardonnay “Côte de Caillot”- Domaine de la Borde (Arbois Pupillin)

Julien Mareschal’s chardonnay “Côte de Caillot” bottling is produced from a parcel of forty year-old vines planted on soils of limestone and gravel. The wine is fermented with native yeasts and raised in six hundred liter *demi-muids* that range from three to six years of age. The 2018 Côte de Caillot is a lovely young wine, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of apple, fresh almond, chalky minerality, beeswax, gentle spice tones redolent of nutmeg and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, excellent focus and balance and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is already quite tasty, but it is still a young wine and could do with a bit more bottle age to blossom and start to drink with complete candor. Fine juice. 2021-2033. **92**.

2018 Bas de La Chaux- Domaine Jean-Luc Mouillard (Côtes de Jura)

This wine no longer bears the varietal name on the label, but just the name of the single vineyard that it now hails from, La Chaux, despite the fact that the wine is composed entirely of chardonnay. The 2015 Chardonnay reviewed below included fruit from two other parcels along with the production from La Chaux, but Jean-Luc is now bottling his chardonnay solely from the La Chaux vineyard and just using that name on the label. The wine delivers a lovely, youthful aromatic constellation of apple, almond, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, discreet white flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, very classy finish. This is excellent chardonnay! 2021-2030. **92+**.

2018 Chardonnay “La Mamette”- Les Granges Paquenesses (Côtes de Jura)

Loreline Laborde is a young winegrower and a native of Montpellier; she did her university studies and training in the Rhône, before starting to piece together her 3.5 hectares of vines here in the Jura starting in 2010. She farms biodynamically, works the soils by horse and works vines that range from thirty to over sixty years of age. Her La Mamette chardonnay hails from a plot of thirty year-old vines planted in Pupillin, planted on clay and limestone soils and is fermented with indigenous yeasts. The 2018 version is a superb wine in the making, offering up a pure and youthful bouquet of pear, hazelnuts, a very strong foundation of chalky minerality, lavender, bergamot and just a hint of the butteriness to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, again, with striking mineral drive, bright acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, classy and nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and will grow exponentially with a bit of time in the cellar. 2021-2040. **93.**

2015 Chardonnay- Domaine Jean-Luc Mouillard (Côtes de Jura)

The 2015 Chardonnay from Jean-Luc Mouillard is a beautiful wine that is just entering its secondary period of developmental complexity. Jean-Luc ferments his chardonnay in stainless steel and racks the wine to older casks for malolactic. The 2015 is drinking splendidly today, offering up scents of apple, pear, hazelnut, beeswax, a beautiful base of limestone, dried flowers and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, still good acidity and a long, complex and nicely mature finish. This wine has been tucked away in my cellar for a couple of years waiting to be opened, and I am sorry it took me so long to finally do so, but delighted to be able to taste the wine once it has entered its plateau of peak maturity! Very tasty juice. 2021-2030. **91.**

2013 Chardonnay “Cuvée Marguerite”- Domaine Jean-François Ganevat (magnum)

The Cuvée Marguerite from Jean-François Ganevat takes its name from his grandmother and is crafted from a very old parcel of chardonnay vines, planted in 1902. The 2013 is drinking very nicely now out of magnum, offering up a ripe and gently tropical bouquet of pineapple, orange peel, salty soil tones and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, fine balance and bounce and a long, slightly four-square finish. This is a good solid bottle of chardonnay that has aged gracefully and still has plenty of life ahead of it in magnum, but I was hoping it would have developed just a bit more complexity with bottle age. It is a good solid drink, but not quite up to my expectations. 2019-2030. **89.**

Savagnin**2018 Savagnin Ouillé- Domaine Bruno Bienaimé (Côtes de Jura)**

The 2018 Savagnin from Bruno Bienaimé is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of fresh pineapple, tangerine, a hint of menthol, a lovely base of soil tones, orange peel, gentle notes of beeswax and a dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, bright acids and a long, bouncy and beautifully balanced finish. Lovely juice that is still tightly-knit, but already drinking well, despite it being really built for the long haul and destined to be even better four to five years down the road. 2021-2040. **93.**

2018 Savagnin Ouillé “La Pierre”- Les Granges Paquenesses (Côtes de Jura)

Loreline Laborde’s “La Pierre” bottling of Savagnin is produced from a plot of thirty year-old vines planted in the vineyard of Saint Pierre, just outside the limits of Pupillin. The soils are clay, chalk and sand and she ferments the wine with native yeasts in stainless steel and raises this bottling in older oak casks. Her 2018 Savagnin is a lovely wine, offering up a refined young bouquet of pear, hazelnut, bergamot, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, lovely focus and a long, beautifully balanced and still quite youthful finish. I love the backend lift here! This is quite tasty to drink today, but very clearly has further layers of complexity to deliver if given some more time in the cellar. Fine juice. 2021-2035+. **93.**

2018 Savagnin Ouillé “les Fées Papillon”- Les Granges Paquenesses (Côtes de Jura)

The les Fées Papillon bottling of Savagnin from Loreline Laborde is a new cuvée which she only began producing in the 2018 vintage. It is crafted from a new parcel of Savagnin vines which she bought in the vineyard of Trouillots, which she combined with a portion of her production in Saint Pierre to create this new bottling. The wine is bright and more expressive out of the blocks than the La Pierre cuvée, offering up scents of nectarine, a hint of fresh pineapple, salty soil tones, fresh almond, a hint of bergamot and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really energetic on the backend, with fine mineral undertow, a lovely core and a long, complex and really beautifully-balanced finish. This does not have quite the same mid-palate stuffing as the La Pierre, but is also more generous right out of the blocks. Another lovely bottle of Savagnin. 2021-2035+. **92.**



2017 Savagnin Ouillé “Naturé Foudre à Canon”- Domaine de la Borde (Arbois Pupillin)

Julien Mareschal’s “Naturé Foudre à Canon” bottling of Savagnin is produced from thirty year-old vines planted on blue marl and schist soils. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in fifteen hundred liter *foudres* prior to bottling with very little added SO₂. His 2017 version is a beautiful wine that is now hitting its plateau of peak drinkability, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of slightly candied lemon, fresh pineapple, a lovely base of stony soil tones, citrus blossoms, gentle notes of beeswax and a hint of bergamot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, a lovely spine of acidity and a long, beautifully balanced finish that closes with a touch of beeswax. This is excellent! 2021-2030. **94.**

2017 Savagnin Ouillé “l’Essen ‘Ciel”- Domaine Désiré Petit (Arbois Pupillin)

The 2017 Savagnin Ouillé from Domaine Désiré Petit is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and complex aromatic constellation of lemon, tangerine, chalky soil tones, a touch of beeswax, jasmine, gentle notes of butter and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is drinking splendidly today, but still has room to grow with further bottle age. First class Savagnin. 2021-2035. **93.**

Jacquère, Melon à Queue Rouge, Chignin and Blended Whites

2018 Vin Blanc Sec “Avant La Tempête”- Domaine Mathieu Apffel (Savoie)

Mathieu Apffel’s Avant La Tempête bottling is made entirely from the Jacquère grape, but these vines were so badly damaged by hail in the following year of 2019 that he may not be able to produce this cuvée again in the future, hence the name of the wine. These vines are (were?) planted on a combination of clay, limestone, schist and granite, and the wine was fermented in stainless steel and then raised in older barrels prior to bottling, without added sulfur. The wine comes in a touch riper than the Terroir de Saint-Alban, topping out at twelve percent alcohol and offering up a lovely nose of lemon, fresh pineapple, white lilies, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, zesty acidity and a long, beautifully balanced and vibrant finish. A lovely wine. 2021-2030. **92.**

2018 Vin Blanc Sec “Terroir de Saint-Alban”- Domaine Mathieu Apffel (Savoie)

The Terroir de Saint-Alban bottling from Mathieu Apffel is composed of a blend of fifty percent Jacquère (planted in the early 1950s) and fifty percent Altesse (planted in the early 1990s), with both vineyards farmed organically and planted on limestone. One-third of the cuvée is raised in cask and two-thirds in stainless steel, and the wine is bottled unfinned, unfiltered and without any added SO₂. The 2018 version comes in at 11.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and complex nose of lemon, tart pear, dried flowers, chalky minerality and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-bodied and mineral-driven, with good intensity of flavor, bouncy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and fairly complex finish. There is just a whisper of natural wine “wildness” on the nose and palate, but it just adds to the complexity of the wine. 2021-2025. **90.**

2018 Chignin-Bergeron “La Coulée de Prosperine”- Denis et Didier Berthollier (Savoie)

The La Coulée de Prosperine bottling from Denis and Didier Berthollier is comprised entirely from the Jacquère grape, made from fifty year-old vines planted on a southeast facing slope of decomposing clay and limestone scree. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tank and the 2018 offers up a refined bouquet of apple, raw almond, chalky minerality,

lemon peel and a gently savory topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is excellent juice! 2021-2030+. **93.**

2017 Melon à Queue Rouge “Cuvée des Docteurs” Réserve- Caveau de Bacchus (Arbois)

Caveau de Bacchus is the domaine of the father and son team of Lucien and Vincent Aviet. *Père* Lucien started his six hectare domaine in 1960. The Aviets’ 2017 Melon à Queue Rouge is very fine aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of yellow fruit, beeswax, raw almond, chalky minerality, gentle floral tones of lilac, iris and lavender and just a hint of savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with a fine core and lovely mineral drive, bright acids, excellent focus and a long, complex and very refined finish. This is a gorgeous wine. 2021-2035+. **94.**

Ploussard and Mondeuse

2018 Mondeuse- Domaine Denis et Didier Berthollier (Savoie)

The Berthollier brothers 2018 Mondeuse is a fine young wine, with a deep, dark color, a black fruity personality and impressively light on its feet, tipping the scales at only 11.5 percent octane. The still quite primary bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, stony soil tones, coffee grounds and a touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and peppery, with a good core, fine mineral undertow, firm tannins and a long, young and nicely balanced finish. This will demand some aging in the cellar before it starts to drink with generosity. 2027-2050. **89+.**

2018 Ploussard “la Bidode”- Domaine Désiré Petit (Arbois Pupillin)

The 2018 Ploussard “la Bidode” from Domaine Désiré Petit is a lovely wine: pure, complex and light on its feet. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red berries, orange peel, gentle smokiness, brown spices, a touch of tea leaves, fresh herb tones and a blossoming base of forest floor. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and transparent, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids, a nice touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is certainly approachable today, but I would be inclined to give it a few years in the cellar and let its moderate tannins soften up a bit more. Good juice. 2023-2045. **90+.**

Pinot Noir

2019 Pinot Noir “Sous la Roche”- Domaine de la Borde (Arbois Pupillin)

The 2019 Pinot Noir from Julien Mareschal is a gorgeous young wine, coming in at a cool twelve percent octane and offering beautiful precision and perfume. This is a single vineyard bottling from the five hundred meter *Sous la Roche lieu à dit*. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a superb blend of red and black cherries, an exotic hint of eucalyptus, stony soil tones, a touch of gamebird, gentle smokiness and a floral topnote redolent of both peonies and rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with fine soil inflection, bouncy acids, modest tannins and a long, focused and superbly balanced finish. Though this is quite approachable, give it at least a few years in the cellar and let those secondary layers of complexity emerge! 2024-2055. **92+.**

2018 Pinot Noir- Domaine Bruno Bienaimé (Côtes de Jura)

The 2018 Pinot Noir from Bruno Bienaimé is again his first effort with this grape variety, and managed to find its way into the market without any vintage information on the front or back labels. The wine is beautifully low octane at 12.2 percent, but completely ripe and pure, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, a touch of meatiness, chalky soil tones, violets and a topnote of fresh marjoram. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full-bodied, with great soil signature and grip, a good core, ripe tannins and a long, focused and beautifully balanced young finish. This lovely pinot deserves some bottle age to soften up more completely on the backend and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge, but it is already quite enjoyable for those who do not mind a touch of youthful tannin in their pinot noir. For my palate, I will tuck it away for five or six years and let time work its magic. 2026-2060. **93+.**

2018 Pinot Noir- Lulu Vigneron (Côtes de Jura)

Lulu Vigneron is the new name for Ludwig Bindernagel's domaine, as when the estate's vineyards were finally converted to full organics, he felt it was time to change the name from Les Chais de Vieux Bourg (which had been the original name of the property when he bought it in 2000) to mark the occasion. His pinot noir is made from a very rare strain known locally as Savignin Noir and the vines are on their own *franc de pied* roots. The 2018 version is a lovely wine, coming in at a svelte 12.6 percent octane and offering up a deep and gently sappy bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, coffee bean, a touch of rose petal and a topnote of gentle herb tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, superb soil signature and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very refined finish. This is outstanding pinot noir! It needs some time in the cellar to allow its tannins to soften up properly, but it has all of the constituent components in place to be a superb drink once it is ready to go! 2028-2055. **93.**

2015 Pinot Noir- Domaine Jean-Luc Mouillard (Côtes de Jura)

The 2015 pinot noir from Jean-Luc Mouillard is a lovely middleweight, with loads of complexity on the nose and impressive intensity of flavor on the palate. The wine is aged in older casks for its *elevage* and the 2015 version comes in at thirteen percent in this ripe vintage. The bouquet delivers a beautifully refined constellation of cherry, raspberry, bonfire, chalky soil tones, a bit of gamebird, fresh thyme, roses and an exotic topnote of mint that reminds me of some of the Ramonet wines of yesteryear. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very transparent and defined by its underlying minerality, with a good, solid core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. At six years of age this is still a fairly youthful wine, but is certainly drinkable with a bit of aeration. That said, it is still in climbing mode and will be even better a few more years down the road and will age for at least a couple more decades. Fine juice. 2021-2050. **92.**



Trousseau

2019 Trousseau “Sous la Roche”- Domaine de la Borde (Arbois Pupillin)

Julien Mareschal’s Trousseau hails from the high elevation Sous la Roche vineyard in Pupillin, which sits at five hundred meters above sea level. His 2019 Sous la Roche is a young and beautifully transparent wine, delivering a lovely bouquet of cherries, blood orange, a touch of quince, bonfire, stony soil tones, citrus peel and a lovely topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with great mineral drive and bounce, a good core, a lovely girdle of acidity and a long, suavely-tannic and well-balanced finish. This beautifully balanced and light on its feet right out of the blocks, so even though it is quite youthful, I thoroughly enjoyed drinking it now, though it will certainly be an even more complex with some extended cellaring. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2055. **93.**

2018 Trousseau- Domaine Bruno Bienaimé (Côtes de Jura)

Bruno Bienaimé’s 2018 Trousseau comes in at a svelte 12.6 percent octane and delivers beautiful complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is beautifully pure, complex and red fruity, wafting from the glass in a blend of bitter cherry, wild strawberries, woodsmoke, a hint of tree bark, chalky soil tones, peonies, dried rose petals and a gentle topnote of sweet botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and very transparent, with a good core, lovely focus, complexity and grip, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and bouncy finish. I love this wine’s girdle of acidity out of the blocks, which will carry it far into the future and already

makes it a lovely companion at the table, though the wine is still a puppy and deserves further bottle age! A lovely, low fat and very complex example of Trousseau. 2021-2050. **93.**

2018 Trousseau “les Grandes Gardes”- Domaine Désiré Petit (Arbois Pupillin)

The Petit family’s les Grandes Gardes bottling of Trousseau is made from young vines, as these are only ten years of age. The 2018 version is beautifully ripe and expressive on both the nose and palate, coming in at a full fourteen percent octane and offering up a lovely nose of bitter cherry, dark berries, pomegranate, a hint of tree bark, stony soil tones, gentle botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, well-measured tannins and a long, vibrant and very classy finish that closes with a touch of pepperiness. This is excellent Trousseau. 2026-2055. **92.**

2016 Trousseau “les Bruyères” Cuvée des Géologues Réserve- Caveau de Bacchus (Arbois)

They have fashioned a stellar example in the 2016 vintage from the vineyard of les Bruyères, though this wine is still young and a touch reductive when first opened, so if one is inclined to drink it now, give it some time to stretch its legs in a decanter before serving. Once it blossoms, it delivers a beautiful nose of cherries, pomegranate, cola, pepper, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of stony soil tones, a touch of orange zest and a lovely array of discreet botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully transparent in profile, with a lovely core of bitter cherry fruit, fine focus and balance, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and very well balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine, but is built for the long haul and will be a far more complex wine five to ten years down the road. 2026-2055. **94.**

2016 Trousseau Ruzard “Cuvée des Géologues” Réserve- Caveau de Bacchus (Arbois)

The Aviet family’s Ruzard bottling of Trousseau from the high altitude Ruzard vineyard is a beautiful bottle. The bouquet is more open and less reductive when first opened than the equally impressive les Bruyères, delivering a superb bouquet of dark berries, bitter cherry, a hint of tree bark, a gorgeous mineral foundation, cola, botanicals, peonies and just a touch of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still tightly-knit, with a good core, excellent soil inflection and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced young finish. I love the backend closing notes of botanicals and bitter cherry, all wrapped around a heart of stone. This will need some bottle age to really drink with generosity, but it is going to be a stellar wine in due course. 2027-2055+. **95.**

2015 Trousseau- Domaine Jean-Luc Mouillard (Côtes de Jura)

Jean-Luc Mouillard raises his Trousseau in either older barrels or stainless steel tanks, depending on the style of the vintage, with the lighter years raised in tank. His 2015 was allotted barrel space for its *elevage* and is starting to drink beautifully at six years of age. It offers up a lovely and quite complex nose of strawberries, sweet dark berries, fresh herb tones, a touch of bonfire, a stunningly complex base of limestone minerality, a bit of autumnal leafiness and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and transparent in personality, with a fine core, superb mineral drive and grip, still some modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. I love the way this wine ends with just a touch of bitterness on the backend, like a Montepulciano from Emidio Pepe. This lovely example of Trousseau is very tasty today, but still has decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2045+. **92.**

RECENTLY-TASTED MÂCONNAIS AND CÔTE CHALONNAISE SUMMER 2021



I continue to be impressed by the evolution and march towards higher quality for so many wines from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, and for this summer's report, I have tasted mostly wines from the 2019 and later-arriving cuvées from the 2018 vintage (with a few of the first 2020s sprinkled in). While there remains an ocean of machine-harvested, generic wine produced in the Mâconnais, the roster of serious producers here seems to grow larger with each passing vintage and there is little doubt that a beautiful renaissance is underway in both regions. Last spring, I covered mostly wines from 2017 and 2018, but this summer finds many of the 2019s already having shipped into the market and now available. The 2019 vintage was a challenging one in the two regions, particularly in the Mâconnais, which was once again hit by spring frosts, though the damage was not as extensive here as has been the case in the recent past. The month of April of 2019 was unseasonably cool, and the following month of May was quite rainy (and also cool), which proved providential, as it allowed ground reserves to be topped up leading into the blistering heat of the coming summer months. The flowering period was not ideal in 2019, so yields were cut back by indifferent weather during *floraison* and *millerandage* in the bunches was a problem for growers. As had been the case the previous year, the midsummer was very hot in 2019, so that drought and hydric stress were constantly a concern

during the months of July and August in 2019, and sunburnt bunches were also a potential problem that had to be addressed. With yields already having been cut back previously by some frost damage in the Mâconnais and poor flowering both here and in the Côte Chalonnaise, 2019 has produced a small crop of quite concentrated wines. But, acidities are generally more than respectable for such a hot vintage, with desiccated berries having concentrated acids a bit, as well as the sugars.

As I mentioned last summer in my last feature on these two regions, the 2018 vintage in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise was a bit more difficult out of the blocks than was the case further north in the Côte d'Or that year, as spring precipitation varied quite dramatically from village to village and the variations of water reserves later on in the backend heat of the summer would spread harvesting dates out dramatically, as many plots of vines suffered from hydric stress in the areas where spring rains had not been all that generous and saw their maturation blocked for some weeks in the midsummer of 2018. The winter leading into the growing season of 2018 had been wet and warm in both the Côte Chalonnaise and Mâconnais (as it was further north in the Côte d'Or), with plenty of rain, but not really very cold temperatures. The flowering period in 2018 was early in the spring and conducted under very good weather, promising a large crop and this indeed proved to be the case. For those who were blessed with more rain over the months of May and June to further build up water reserves in the soil, ripening would not be a problem in the heat and drought of July and August, but as spring rains were scattered, not all vineyards fared alike. In the drought and very high temperatures of the backend of July and first fortnight of August of 2018, many vineyards shut down and ended up lagging behind vines in villages that had been blessed with superior water reserves; these laggards in ripening had to be picked a bit later as a result. So, some vines were ready for harvest at the end of August of 2018, while others had not ripened up their fruit completely until two to three weeks later, which caused some logistical challenges for *vignerons* at harvest time. My impression is that the differences in physiological ripeness from plot to plot at the end of August was more of an issue in the Mâconnais than it was in the Côte Chalonnaise in 2018.

As the 2018 growing season was a hot one and the wines are generally pretty big, ripe nicely concentrated at the core, fresh and wide open in personality in both the Côte Chalonnaise and the Mâconnais. The 2019s are somewhat similar in personality, but with the acids serving to frame the wines even better for nearer-term consumption, they have more lift and cut. However, I suspect that 2019 this will also not be a particularly long-lived vintage in either region- at least compared to a vintage more classically structured such as 2017. For wines from the Mâconnais, I know that the vast, vast majority are drunk up within a year or two of release, so even the top cuvées of Pouilly-Fuissé and Pouilly-Vinzelles seldom see their third or fourth birthdays, except in the cellars of folks like me who like to drink their wines with a bit of developmental complexity added from extended bottle age. So, the more forward and at times, sumptuous style of these two vintages are perfectly suited for the realities of the market and both vintages are certain to be very popular. Comparing the two vintages from my recent tastings, the 2019s seem to have just a bit more cut and grip than the corresponding 2018 did a year ago, but this may also be a function of the earlier-released 2019s now entering the pipeline are the cuvées that are destined for early drinking in any case, and trying to compare them from memory to the same bottlings from a year ago may not be a fail-safe approach to contrast the style of the two vintages.

At the higher levels of Pouilly-Fuissé, Pouilly-Vinzelles, as well as Rully and Mercurey Blanc, it seems likely (again, not all that many of the top bottlings from 2019 have found their way into the pipeline) that 2019 will prove to be a bit longer-lived than the corresponding bottling from 2018, due to the small berries of 2019 having concentrated acids a bit better than was the case in 2018, though both vintages have really lovely, ripe, plush and generous fruit components in their wines, so neither year is going to be quite as racy and svelte as their counterparts from the 2017 vintage. Of my favorite estates producing Pouilly-Fuissé, only Jacques Saumaize in the village of Vergisson has released some of his top bottlings from the 2019 vintage, and these are certainly a bit higher in acidity and sense of extract than had been the case with his lovely 2018s a year ago. I am looking forward to tasting 2019s from producers such as Domaine Guerrin et Fils, Daniel Barraud, Catherine and Pascal Rollet, Château des Quarts, Domaine Saumaize-Michelin and Domaine Ferret to really get a feel for just how successful the 2019 vintage is in this appellation. Those wines will be released in the coming months and I hope to cover them in a Part Two on the Mâconnais in the near future. Similarly, most of the very best examples of Rully and Mercurey Blanc in the market right now remain originating in the 2018 vintage, so it is still pretty early to be seeing the 2019s from these two regions- particularly for the premier cru bottlings. Certainly the very high quality of the 2019 Rully bottlings from Domaine de la Folie augur very well for future releases from other top estates in these two appellations.

The following wines are listed geographically from north to south. Given how the wines from both regions seem to be getting better with each passing year, as more vignerons in the south eschew machine harvesting and farm better, these are now some of the most exciting values to be found in the world of white Burgundy and I need to devote more time to their coverage. And given that premoix still makes it an utter crapshoot to age a grand cru from the Côte de Beaune the ten to twelve years its terroir properly deserves, wines from the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise- which inherently drink at their peaks sooner- are more and more important in the grand scheme of things. I have listed the handful of red wines from the Côte Chalonnaise that I also tasted for this report at the end, after the geographical listings of the white wines.

Aligoté

2019 Bourgogne Aligoté- Domaine de la Folie

The Bourgogne Aligoté bottling from Domaine de la Folie is an old vine cuvée, with half the parcel having been planted in 1973 and the other half in 1947! The vines grow on a hillside that sits adjacent to Bouzeron (the other side of the hill is in that village) and the wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2019 version delivers an expressive nose of lemon, quince, a touch of crab apple, chalky minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit (particularly for Aligoté!), zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. The warmer vintage conditions of 2019 have really given this bottling some impressive mid-palate amplitude, without diminishing the inherent transparency and cut of top flight Aligoté. Lovely juice. 2021-2030. **89.**

Bourgogne Blanc

2018 Bourgogne Blanc- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2018 Bourgogne Blanc from Louis Jadot is a ripe and nicely vibrant example of the vintage, offering up a vibrant nose of pear, apple, *crème patissière*, a touch of fresh almond, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bouncy, with a very good core of fruit, lovely acids (from a partially-blocked malo, I would suspect) and fine length and grip on the ripe finish. This is not overly complex, but has depth and length and no shortage of personality in the riper style of 2018. 2021-2024. **88.**

2018 Bourgogne Blanc- Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

Sylvaine et Alain Normand's Bourgogne Blanc bottling hails from fruit grown in Solutré, Chaintré and La Roche Vineuse. The wine is aged fully a year on its fine lees in tank prior to bottling, so that the 2018 version is the current release. Their 2018 Bourgogne Blanc offers up a ripe and pretty bouquet of peach, apple, a nice base of chalky soil tones, a hint of spice and a gentle topnote of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is deep, succulent and full, with a lovely core, fine soil undertow, good, framing acids and a long, complex and nicely round and generous finish. This is flat out delicious to drink now, though I suspect it will also keep nicely, for despite fairly modest acids, it possess impeccable balance. 2021-2025. **89.**



Rully Blanc

2019 Rully Blanc- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Drouhin family's bottling of Rully Blanc is barrel-fermented and aged in twenty percent new oak each year. The 2019 version is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a classic bouquet of apple, pear, wet stone minerality, dried flowers and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, really very good acids for the vintage and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Fine juice. 2021-2030. **91.**

2019 Rully Blanc- Domaine Jean-Charles Fagot

I like the modern label Monsieur Fagot utilizes for this bottling, as it simply says Rully from Jean-Charles. The family domaine is located in the small village of Corpeau, near Chassagne-Montrachet and Jean-Charles' lineup is primarily based in the Côte de Beaune. His 2019 Rully is a fine bottle, delivering a complex bouquet of apple, pear, a good foundation of wet stone minerality, a touch of beeswax and a lovely floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, zesty acids and fine focus and balance on the long and complex finish. This is a very good example. 2021-2026. **90+.**

2019 Rully "Clos la Folie" 1er Cru Monopole- Domaine de la Folie

The Clos la Folie bottling from Clémence Noël-Bouton and her husband Baptiste is a very vibrant and extroverted example of the vintage, showing the ripeness of 2019 firmly ensconced in the lovely minerality of Rully. This bottling is raised entirely in stainless steel and offers up a bright bouquet of pineapple, tangerine, a fine base of minerality, fruit blossoms and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a juicy core of fruit, good mineral undertow, solid framing acids and a long, succulent finish. This is already wearing its heart on its sleeve and will not make old bones, but it will provide plenty of pleasure over the next handful of years. 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Rully "Clos du Chaigne" 1er Cru Monopole- Domaine de la Folie

The Clos du Chaigne lies on the same slope as the domaine's Clos St. Jacques, but a bit higher up, so the wine tends to be a bit more minerally in personality as a result. These vines were planted in 1971 and the wine is raised in a combination of about sixty percent tank and forty percent casks, with a small percentage of the barrels being new each year. The 2019 Clos du Chaigne delivers a complex nose of fresh pineapple, pear, chalky minerality, white lilies, just a whisper of buttery oak and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive and backend bounce and a long, complex finish. This has a touch more cut than the equally impressive Clos St. Jacques this year. 2021-2033. **91+.**

2019 Rully "Clos St. Jacques" 1er Cru V.V. Monopole- Domaine de la Folie

Domaine de la Folie sits at the northern extreme of the appellation of Rully, only three miles from Puligny-Montrachet. Here, the limestone of the Côte de Beaune is still dominant in the vineyards, which is not true further to the south in the appellation. These vines were planted in 1952 in this Monopole for the domaine. The 2019 is a lovely example of the vintage, with the generosity of a warmer year evident in its wide open and vibrant bouquet of fresh pineapple, tart orange, wet stone minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with fine focus and grip, sound framing acids and a long, well-balanced and bouncy finish. This is a lovely wine, but will probably be fairly short-lived vintage by the standards of this cuvée. 2021-2028. **91.**

Mâcon-Villages

2020 Mâcon-Villages- Maison Louis Jadot

Maison Jadot's 2020 Mâcon-Villages is a pretty and quite floral example of the vintage. It is fermented and aged entirely in stainless steel and offers up a bright bouquet of pear, nectarine, chalky soil tones, a touch of almond and a potpourri of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, young and full, with a good core of fruit, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and still fairly primary finish. This is a good example that could do with a few months more bottle age to blossom, as it is still pretty young and tight. But, I like the wine quite well and it should be very tasty once it uncoils a bit more. Good value! 2021-2027. **89.**

2019 Mâcon-Villages "la Crochette"- Domaine Jacques Charlet

The 2019 Mâcon-Villages "la Crochette" from Domaine Charlet is produced by the Barbet family, of Domaine des Billards fame in Saint-Amour. The wine is an excellent bottle of Mâcon, offering up a bright and bouncy bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of fresh almond, soil tones redolent of Mâconnais toastiness and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely ripe at the core, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent and wide open finish. This is lovely. 2021-2026. **90.**

2019 Mâcon-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2019 Mâcon-Villages from Maison Joseph Drouhin is a very stylish example of the vintage. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, nectarine, a nice base of chalky soil, fruit blossoms and a touch of Mâconnais "toastiness" in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and zesty, with a good core of fruit, sound framing acids and a long, complex and quite generous finish. The ripeness of 2019 has given this bottling a bit more mid-palate stuffing than in most years, which is quite agreeable. 2021-2024. **89.**

2019 Mâcon "Les Morizottes"- Domaine Marie-Pierre Manciat

The 2019 Mâcon "Les Morizottes" from Marie-Pierre Manciat is a very good example of the vintage, offering up nicely ripe fruit, good soil detail and zesty acids that keep the wine bouncy and fresh on the palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of apple, nectarine, chalky soil tones, citrus zest and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, succulent and full-bodied, with a good core, fine mineral drive, good acids and a long, complex and tasty finish. This is good juice. 2021-2026. **89+.**

2019 Mâcon-Bussières "les Montbrisons"- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

Like all of the wines from the Saumaize family, their Bussières "les Montbrisons" is hand-harvested and barrel-fermented. The 2019 bottling is a beautiful bottle of Mâcon, offering up a ripe and complex nose of apple, pear, a complex base of chalky soil tones, a hint of almond and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite zesty for a 2019, with a fine core of ripe fruit, lovely soil undertow and grip and a long, complex finish. This is really lovely. 2021-2028. **91.**

2019 Mâcon-Lugny "les Crays"- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Maison Drouhin's 2019 Mâcon-Lugny "les Crays" is a fine bottle. The wine has more soil signature and zestier acidity than the straight Mâcon-Villages this year, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, chalky minerality, apple blossoms and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely ripe in

personality, with a good core and soil undertow, a nice spine of acidity and fine focus and balance on the long and complex finish. This is very good. 2021-2027. **91.**

2019 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse “Vieilles Vignes”- Château de la Greffière

Château de la Greffière’s 2019 old vine bottling of La Roche Vineuse is a very stylish example of this vintage, offering up a wide open and vibrant bouquet of peach, apple, chalky soil tones, fruit blossoms and just a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, crisp and full-bodied, with a plump core, good framing acids and grip and a long, complex finish. Like so many 2019s, this wine is forward and succulent right out of the blocks and is drinking very well indeed. 2021-2026. **89.**

2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse- Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

The 2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse from Sylvaine and Alain Normand is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in stainless steel tank, on its fine lees. The 2018 version is a lovely wine, offering up a ripe and generous nose of peach, apple, lovely Mâconnais toastiness, chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full, with a lovely, succulent core of fruit, good acids and soil undertow and a long, well-balanced and wide open, complex finish. This will not make old bones, but it will deliver plenty of pleasure over the next few years. 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Viré-Clessé- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme

The 2019 Viré-Clessé from Pascal Bonhomme is a very stylish and complete bottle of Mâcon. This cuvée is produced from thirty-five year-old vines and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks, which gives it lovely cut in the riper 2019 vintage. The nose jumps from the glass in a fine blend of apple, fresh almond, chalky minerality, a touch of Mâconnais toastiness and a lovely array of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and generous at the core, with good acids, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This does not have quite the cut of most vintages of this bottling, but it has the same mineral drive and elegant profile. Lovely juice. 2021-2027. **90.**

2019 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme

Pascal Bonhomme’s old vine bottling of Viré-Clessé is produced from sixty to sixty-five year-old vines and is raised in older Burgundy barrels, rather than stainless steel tanks, so it is quite a bit different in personality than the regular bottling. In the richer year of 2019, this is a marriage made in heaven, as the wine is really shining out of the blocks, offering up a deep and vibrant bouquet of pear, apple, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, almond, gently musky floral tones and a dollop of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, a very good girdle of acidity, impressive focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and classy finish. This is really very fine in 2019! 2021-2030. **92.**



Saint-Véran

2019 Saint-Véran- Maison Joseph Drouhin (screwcap)

The 2019 vintage of Saint-Véran from Maison Joseph Drouhin is an impressively mineral interpretation of this ripe vintage, offering up a refined and very classy nose of apple, pear, chalky minerality, spring flowers and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, fine soil inflection, very good framing acids and a long, complex finish. This is very good this year. 2021-2026. **91.**

2019 Saint-Véran “En Crêches”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

This is the Saumaize family’s regular bottling of Saint-Véran from the En Crêches vineyard (they also make an old vine selection here), with the vines ranging from ten to thirty years of age. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in twenty percent new oak. The 2019 En Crêches offers up a beautiful nose of pear, white peach, a touch of almond, a complex base of soil tones, orange blossoms and just a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, ripe and full-bodied, with a juicy core of fruit, good soil inflection, sound framing acids and a long, wide open and complex finish. This has the more gentle acidity of the vintage and will be best over the next half dozen years or so, but it is so well-balanced that I would not be surprised to see it also age longer. 2021-2027+. **91.**

2019 Saint-Véran “Poncétys”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

As I mentioned last year, the Poncétys bottling of Saint-Véran from Domaine Saumaize is from some of their oldest vines, as this parcel was planted in 1944 and 1945! The wine sees twenty percent new oak, is barrel-fermented and has turned out splendidly in the 2019 vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, pear, a hint of fresh pineapple, a beautiful base of chalky soil, hazelnuts and a discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthful, with a rock solid core of old vine fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. Old vines seem to navigate the vagaries of hot years better than younger vines and this certainly seems to be the case here, as this wine has really very good acidity for 2019 and should prove to be a quite long-lived example of the vintage. It is certainly very tasty today, but more complexity will emerge with a year or two in the cellar, as it remains a tad on the primary side. 2021-2035. **93.**

2018 Saint-Véran “le Clos Vessats”- Domaine Guerrin

The 2018 Saint-Véran “le Clos Vessats” from Domaine Guerrin is one of the few “younger vine” cuvées in their fine lineup, as these vines are still only fifteen years of age. Like all of the Guerrin wines, the Clos Vessats is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in primarily in older barrels. The 2018 is starting to really drink splendidly today, with the very elegant bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, hazelnuts, very elegant limestone soil tones, apple blossoms and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, very nice acidity, impeccable balance and a long, refined and dancing finish. This is simply lovely Saint-Véran! 2021-2030. **92.**



Pouilly-Fuissé and Pouilly-Vinzelles

2020 Pouilly-Fuissé- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2020 Pouilly-Fuissé from Louis Jadot is a good, solid example of its appellation and vintage, and given the quantity of bottles produced from the *maison*, this is quite the accomplishment. The bouquet offers up a very pleasing mélange of apple, peach, toasty soil tones, dried flowers and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine acids and grip and a long, bouncy finish. This is not overly complex, but has depth and conviction on the backend. Good juice. 2021-2030. **89.**

2019 Pouilly-Fuissé- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2019 Pouilly-Fuissé from Joseph Drouhin is beautifully floral in personality this year, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, fresh almond, chalky minerality, spring flowers, vanillin oak and a nice touch of lemon zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely transparency and grip, zesty acids and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is a fine, ripe example of the vintage. 2021-2027. **92.**

2019 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Courtelongs”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The *lieu à dit* of Les Courtelongs lies on the eastern flank of the *Roche de Solutré*, with a very stony base of limestone topsoil, so this is at the foot of the other towering hillside (along with the *Roche de Vergisson*) that dominates the landscape of the appellation of Pouilly-Fuissé. The 2019 Courtelongs from Domaine Saumaize is beautifully complex aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, fresh apricot, a hint of passion fruit, acacia blossoms, a very refined base of chalky minerality and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, vibrant and full-bodied, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, excellent soil undertow, excellent acids and a long, complex and superbly balanced finish. I love the backend energy of this wine in 2019! 2021-2040. **93+.**

2019 Pouilly-Fuissé “la Maréchaude”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

As I have mentioned in past years, the la Maréchaude vineyard lies mid-slope below the *Roche de Vergisson*, and so its soils have a fair bit of clay interspersed with the limestone and produce a richer wine than some of these other *lieux à dit* bottlings. The oldest vines in the three plots of vines the Saumaize family has here are more than eighty years of age. The 2019 Maréchaude is beautifully refined on the complex nose, offering up notes of pear, nectarine, almond, a lovely base of soil, gently musky floral tones and a deft touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long, complex and focused finish. A beautiful wine. 2021-2035. **93.**

2019 Pouilly-Fuissé “Sur la Roche”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The 2019 Pouilly-Fuissé “Sur la Roche” from Jacques Saumaize is a beautiful bottle of wine in the making. The nose delivers a vibrant aromatic constellation of apple, passion fruit, almond, chalky soil tones, orange zest, fruit blossoms and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy and mineral-driven, with a full-bodied, format, a rock solid core of fruit, superb acids and a long, focused and complex finish. This is like crossing Pouilly-Fuissé and a bolt of electricity! I would give it a couple of years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge, but it is already and awfully tasty glass of wine! 2021-2035. **93.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé from Domaine Ferret is a lovely wine, offering up bright, ripe fruit, zesty acids and lovely soil undertow. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, fresh almond, a good base of soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, a fine spine of acidity, very good balance and a long, nascently complex and bouncy finish. This is ripe in the style of the 2018 vintage, but also nicely light on its feet at the same time. Good juice. 2021-2027. **89+**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Ménétrières” Cuvée Hors Classé- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2018 Ménétrières bottling from Domaine Ferret is a beautiful wine, wafting from the glass in a very expressive and complex blend of pear, apple, almond, bee pollen, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, very good, bouncy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. One can sense the ripeness of the 2018 vintage just a touch on the backend, but this is a very impressively light on its feet example of 2018 and a flat out delicious bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé. 2018-2028. **92**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Tournant de Pouilly” Cuvée Hors Classé- Domaine J. A. Ferret

Domaine Ferret’s 2018 Tournant de Pouilly is an excellent bottle and a step up from the straight Pouilly-Fuissé from the domaine this year. The bouquet is bright, complex and shows a nice touch of buttery oak to go along with its lovely fruit and soil tones, wafting from the glass is a blend of pear, white peach, chalky soil tones, a dollop of hazelnut, buttery oak and a pungent topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil undertow and grip, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is wide open in the style of 2018, but has very good acids to also carry it nicely in the cellar. 2021-2030. **91+**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos des Prouges” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2018 Clos des Prouges from Domaine Ferret is an excellent example of the vintage, with lovely cut and soil signature for this plump and ripe vintage in the Mâcon. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of pear, nectarine, chalky soil tones, hazelnuts, honeysuckle and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and backend bounce, impressive complexity and a long, vibrant finish. This is very good and quite svelte for a 2018. 2021-2035. **92**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Perrières” Tête de Cru - Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2018 les Perrières from Domaine Ferret is showing its new oak component just a bit more than the Clos des Prouges at the present time, but it has lovely fruit tones and soil undertow underneath the wood. The bouquet offers up a gently reductive and new oaky nose of apple, fresh apricot, chalky minerality, a touch of iodine, hazelnuts and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and very well balanced finish. This is the first Domaine Ferret wine that I can recall tasting that has that gentle reductive quality of a Domaine Roulot wine, and in a vintage like 2018, I think this augurs very well indeed for its long term cellaring potential. It is certainly drinkable today, but more complexity is hidden here at the present time and a couple of years’ worth of bottle age will reveal it. This is very strong. 2023-2040. **93+**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Crays”- Domaine Guerrin

Les Crays is one of the very finest vineyards in all of Pouilly-Fuissé, situated right at the base of the *Roche de Vergisson*. The Guerrin family has forty-five year-old vines in this superb *terroir* and they age the wine all in cask, with twenty percent of the oak renewed each year. Their 2018 les Crays offers up a pure, complex and very refined bouquet of pear, fresh apricot, almond, chalky soil tones, honeysuckle and just a dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of ripe fruit, excellent transparency and cut, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and quite refined finish. This is quite svelte for a 2018! 2021-2032. **93.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

The Normands’ regular bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé hail from thirty to forty year-old vines that lie on the flanks of the *Roche de Solutr  *. This cuv  e is raised in stainless steel tank. Their 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé delivers a lovely bouquet of apple, nectarine, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a nice touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with really fine acidity for the vintage, a rock solid core, impressive mineral drive and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. This is an outstanding example Pouilly-Fuissé, in the riper style of the 2018 vintage, but with excellent mineral undertow and cut and lift on the backend! 2021-2030. **93.**

2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Vieux Murs” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Jacques Charlet

The 2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Vieux Murs” Vieilles Vignes from Domaine Charlet is an outstanding example of this top flight M  connais vintage. The bouquet shows a sophisticated touch of oak in its aromatic constellation of pear, apple, honeysuckle, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, fresh almond and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, impressive balance and a long, zesty and very classy finish. This is first class Pouilly-Fuissé! 2021-2030. **93.**

C  te Chalonnaise Rouge

2018 Bourgogne Rouge- Domaine Michel Juillot

Laurent Juillot’s 2018 Bourgogne Rouge is a really lovely example of both the vintage and its appellation. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones and a touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core, lovely soil inflection and focus, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and quite promising finish. Like so many top examples of Bourgogne rouge, this wine needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it is very well made and will be a fine example in due time. 2024-2045. **88.**

2019 Rully “Clos de Bellecroix” Rouge- Domaine de la Folie

The Clos de Bellecroix Rouge from Domaine de la Folie hails from a vineyard that runs right up to the town of Chagny. The pinot noir vines here were planted in 1962 and the bunches are destemmed prior to fermentation and the wine is raised entirely in tank. The 2019 version is bright and stylish on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a dollop of fresh thyme, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, succulent and impressively broad-shouldered, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, modest tannins and a long, fairly complex and quite satisfying finish. Good honest pinot and a fine value! 2021-2035. **88.**



2019 Rully “Cuvée Marey du Clos de Bellecroix” Rouge- Domaine de la Folie

Domaine de la Folie’s bottling of Cuvée Marey hails from a particularly well-situated parcel of vines in Clos de Bellecroix, facing to the southeast. The wine is raised in a combination of stainless steel tank and cask. The 2019 version is really lovely, with the bouquet delivering a complex nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of spiced meats, a fine base of soil and just a hint of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, good soil undertow, excellent balance and a long, complex and modestly tannic finish. This is really quite serious and should age quite nicely, if one can keep their hands off of it in its youth! I would try to give it at least a couple of years in the cellar to blossom a bit more. Another excellent value. 2023-2040+. **90+**.

2018 Givry “A Vigne Rouge”- Domaine des Moirots (Christophe Denizot)

The 2018 Givry “A Vigne Rouge” from Christophe Denizot is a very lovely example of the vintage, offering up ripe, black fruit, a nice framing of new oak and plenty of personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bonfire, dark chocolate, a good base of soil and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, black fruity and full-bodied, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex and new oak finish. Monsieur Denizot raises this bottling in sixty percent new oak, but it is very nicely balanced and carries its oak very well,

though there is still a bit of backend wood tannin that needs integration. Fine juice and a very good value! 2026-2045+. **90.**

2018 Mercurey “le Meix Juillot” Rouge- Domaine Michel Juillot

Domaine Juillot’s le Meix Juillot bottling of Mercurey rouge is lovely in 2018. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, bonfire, dark soil tones, a touch of bitter chocolate and a lovely topnote that mixes notes of spice and savory elements. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, youthful and focused, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral tug, ripe, buried tannins and a long, primary and quite promising finish. This is most emphatically not one of those 2018 red Burgs that is juicy out of the blocks, as this wine demands some cellaring time before it will start to blossom. When it is ready, it will be excellent. 2026-2055. **90+.**

2018 Mercurey “les Vignes de Maillonge” Rouge- Domaine Michel Juillot

The les Vignes de Maillonge Rouge bottling from Laurent and Michel Juillot is produced from good old vines, as this parcel was planted in 1958 and 1982, so even the young vines here are now nearly forty years of age and well into their prime. The grapes are destemmed and the wine is raised in fifteen percent new oak, with the 2018 version offering up a beautiful nose of red and black cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, cinnamon-like spice tones and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, suave, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. By any measure, this is really, really good red Burgundy! 2021-2050+. **91.**

2018 Mercurey “les Champs Martins” Premier Cru Rouge- Domaine Michel Juillot

The 2018 red wine from les Champs Martins is one of the top cuvées from the Juillot family in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and very classy, delivering scents of black cherries, plums, *pigeon*, woodsmoke, a beautifully complex base of soil, with chalk and gravel both evident, fresh thyme and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent soil inflection and grip, suave, buried tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. First class juice in the making! 2028-2060. **92+.**

2018 Mercurey “Clos des Barraults” Premier Cru Rouge- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Domaine Juillot 2018 Clos des Barraults *rouge* is another outstanding wine in the making, with the vintage’s character giving the wine a quite black fruity personality this year. The wine offers up a refined aromatic constellation of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, roasted venison, a complex base of soil, fire pit, fresh thyme and a nice touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with excellent depth in the mid-palate, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and promising finish. All this lovely wine needs is bottle age. 2028-2060. **92+.**

2018 Mercurey “Clos Tonnerre” Premier Cru Rouge- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Clos Tonnerre *rouge* from the Juillot family is produced from vines that now average sixty years of age, with the wine also raised in fifteen percent new oak. The 2018 Clos Tonnerre offers up a beautiful, youthful nose of red and black cherries, plums, a lovely base of limestone, gamebird, bonfire, mustard seed, peonies, gentle spice tones and a dollop of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very precise and transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, impeccable balance and focus, fine-grained tannins and a long, refined and very promising finish. This is certainly approachable out of the blocks, due to the generosity of the 2018 vintage,

but it is still quite primary and so much more complexity with arrive if the wine is given at least a few years in the cellar to really blossom. 2025-2055+. **92+**.

2018 Mercurey Rouge- Domaine Gaëlle et Jérôme Meunier

Gaëlle et Jérôme Meunier's *villages* level bottling of Mercurey rouge hails from two parcels of vines, both with average ages in excess of sixty years of age! The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and given an *elevage* of eleven months in barrel, with only ten percent new oak used for this cuvée. The 2018 is nicely svelte in this warm summer, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a bright, red fruity and transparent nose of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is an excellent example in the making, but it deserves a handful of years in the cellar to soften up and properly blossom. 2026-2045+. **90**.

2018 Mercurey "Premier Cru" Rouge- Domaine Gaëlle et Jérôme Meunier

The Meuniers' Premier Cru bottling of Mercurey hails from two vineyards, Sazenay, where they have forty-five year-old vines, and Clos l'Evêque, where the vines are sixty-five years of age. This too is fermented with native yeasts and it is raised in thirty percent new oak. The 2018 Premier Cru is quite a bit more black fruity in personality than the couple's Mercurey *villages*, offering up a bright and complex nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, espresso, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a deft touch of cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent focus and backend bounce and a long, suavely tannic and complex finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle of red Burgundy with sufficient age. 2028-2055+. **92**.

VERY WORTHY WINES FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE



I have had a wide range of samples arrive this spring that do not fit into any of the planned articles that I had on tap for this issue of the newsletter or the following one, so I thought it would make sense to just go ahead and taste them for this issue and put together a feature on these wines while they are still in the market. For example, as I have written both about new releases of American wines and the same for Spain for the last two issues running, it did not really make sense to put together articles on both of those regions for a third straight newsletter. However, when the 2019s from Rhys Vineyards showed up at my door, new chardonnays and pinot noirs from OO Wines in Oregon, as well as a full range of new Rioja bottlings from Cuné and their sister winery of Contino, I was not about to tuck these bottles away in the cellar for another two months before tasting them! Consequently, I have put together this article that is not based on any geographic region, but rather includes all of the newly arrived samples that were simply too good to put away for a couple more months until I could amass a sufficient number of bottles to write a regional feature for each category. As I will be writing about Alsace, Italy, Beaujolais, Germany and the Rhône Valley in the next issue of the newsletter, I have retained those samples for the next issue, but everything else that has been waiting in the wings to be tasted and written up is featured in the following tasting notes.

I have also included here notes on wines that I have tasted out of my own cellar and those of friends over the last two months, for wine tasting get-togethers are starting to pop up with quite some frequency now that a fairly sizable percentage of the New York population is now vaccinated against Covid and it is once again safe to congregate together (at least among fellow vaccinated wine lovers). As you will see from some of the notes below, there is quite some pent-up energy behind some of these tastings and we all seem a bit more inclined to dig deeper in the cellar to find something worthy of sharing with friends we have been sundered from for more than a year! I can only imagine that the frequency of such tastings will accelerate in the coming months, as more of the world has the opportunity to open up and I can think of nothing nicer to commemorate the retreat of Covid across the world than to need to write several more of these general articles on great wines over the course of the remainder of this year. There is no need to get ahead of ourselves, but it seems possible that we may actually be able to toast the defeat of Covid by the end of this year, and though its toll has been gruesome beyond imagination, brighter days may be just around the corner, so do keep a few special bottles close at hand for the holiday season of 2021!

Of the wines that are featured in the pages that follow, the Rhys Vineyards wines certainly merit particular comment, as they have often had an article of their own in the past in the newsletter. The 2019 vintage at Rhys Vineyards is every bit as refined and loaded with potential as we have come to expect from Kevin Harvey, Jeff Brinkman and all the other talented members of the team at Rhys. There is a new addition to the lineup this year, as the first vintage of syrah from the Bearwallow Vineyard has been released from the 2019 vintage. Rhys has considered growing syrah in this vineyard from the moment that they purchased it in 2008, but they did not want to embark upon this variety in Bearwallow until they had given their first plantings of pinot noir in the vineyard time to mature and ramp up production, before they could turn their thoughts to syrah. Once the younger vines of pinot were hitting their stride, the team was able to replant a section of pinot noir previously planted by the former owner of Bearwallow over to syrah, and then wait for these vines to come on line for the first Rhys Bearwallow Syrah in the 2019 vintage. As readers know, I have long been a big fan of the Rhys examples of syrah and lamented when Kevin Harvey and his team decided that the syrah in their Skyline Vineyard was not performing up to expectations and discontinued this cuvée, leaving them for several vintages with only the single syrah bottling from the Horseshoe Vineyard. So, I am very happy to see a second syrah again in the lineup from the winery.

This article also covers several of the new releases from Chris Hermann at OO Wines in Oregon. These wines are from the 2018 vintage and are every bit as fine as his releases from 2017 that I covered in the newsletter a few issues back. As readers may recall, Chris is working with famed Burgundy consultant, Pierre Millman, on the wines at OO and the two have collaborated in the 2018 vintage also on an example of Corton-Charlemagne, which Chris very generously included in my range of early 2018 vintage releases from OO Wines. There are only two casks of the Corton-Charlemagne, so with only fifty cases produced, I felt very fortunate to be able to taste a bottle! While the growing fame of the wines from OO has focused primarily on their chardonnays from the Willamette Valley, I tasted two of their more limited release bottlings of pinot noir from the 2018 vintage as well, and it is quite clear to me that this is not an estate that is solely successful with their white wine program! I really like the transparency and stylistic

preferences of Chris and Pierre with the OO Wines of both colors and there are some excellent 2018s in the offing.

Regarding the Burgundy notes that are included in the report below, I have not written up all of the “in the bottle” red Burgundies that I have tasted since the last time I wrote about the region, as I generally do a report focused on those wines in the autumn and will include most of my recent notes in that report. So, in this article, it is primarily notes on recent samples that I have received in the last few months (and which have been languishing in my cellar waiting to be tasted), augmented by a few other notes of younger red Burgundies that I have tasted in the very recent past that are also youthful and possibly still available out in the market. But, the lion’s share of red Burgundy notes will appear in an article on the region in one of the next two issues, as I do have a pretty good supply of notes (having been convinced at the start of Covid that the world was ending and I better get going hitting the red Burgundy section of my cellar with more vigor!). Similarly, with the red Bordeaux notes that are included here, most of them are from samples that were kindly sent to me over the last six months or so and were waiting in line to be tasted. Some are from smaller properties whose wines were new to me and whose quality I was very much impressed with. I have augmented those notes with a few older bottles shared recently, as one simply cannot write about red Bordeaux and focus simply on youthful wines, as the beauty and strength of this region has always been on the ability of these wines to improve dramatically with extended bottle age.

I should also mention that this article also includes notes on a couple of the more recent vintages produced at Château Figeac in Saint Émilion. As readers are well aware, Figeac had for most of my adult life been one of my absolute favorite producers on either side of the Gironde and I had always rated it as one of the greatest wines produced in all of Bordeaux. The Quixotic attempt by the owners to have the estate officially ranked at the very pinnacle of Saint Émilion properties, alongside of Châteaux Cheval Blanc and Ausone (effectively as a First Growth in the commune), which dates back now more than fifteen years, eventually led to the sad decision to bring in Michel Rolland as consultant here in an attempt to get the next ten year classification in Saint Émilion to rank Figeac in the very top tier of estates. The decision to bring in Michel Rolland was taken at the end of 2012 or the start of 2013, so that Monsieur Rolland was in the cellars in the spring of 2013 to work on the blending of the 2012 Figeac, but had not been on board when the wine had been fermented. Long-time director of the property, Eric d’Aramon (who is the son-in-law of the late Thierry Manoncourt) had been ousted from his position at the Figeac prior to the *En Primeur* campaign for the 2012 vintage, which took place in the early spring of 2013, with a wholesale shake-up of the management of the property also accompanied by the bringing in of Monsieur Rolland to consult on the winemaking. Out of cask, the 2012 Figeac was still quite a classical example from the estate, as the wines had finished fermentation ahead of the Figeac-Rolland marriage. As I stopped attending the Bordeaux *En Primeur* spring tastings after sampling the 2012 vintage, I had not yet had the opportunity to taste any of the wines here made completely under the auspices of Monsieur Rolland’s consultancy. However, a generous subscriber, Alexandre Pagliano, was curious about my take on the new Rolland wines at Figeac and kindly sent me bottles of both the 2014 and 2016 vintages from the estate, so that I would have a chance to see firsthand what Monsieur Rolland has wrought in the cellars of this once great estate. The notes on the two wines appear below.

While most of the notes on Spanish wines that follow are from very well-known and highly-regarded producers such as Cuné, Contino and Raúl Pérez, there is one new (to me) winery from Cataluña whose wines I was startled with just how good they were, as I had never even heard of this producer previously (and I do tend to cover a fair bit of ground in Spain over the course of a year)! This is a winery called Sauvella, perched in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains in the D.O. of Costers de Segre in Cataluña. The winery's founder and chief winemaker is Jeroen Nagtegaal, who has created a beautiful parcel of vineyards which are farmed organically, include a myriad of cover crops and are mowed by roaming flocks of sheep in this beautiful corner of mountainous Spain. The vineyards include several typical grape varieties grown in Cataluña, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Garnacha, Tempranillo and Syrah, as well as Spanish grapes such as Macabeu and Sumoll (which is far more often found as part of field blends in Galicia these days than in Cataluña). There are also a few other experimental varieties planted to see how they will adapt to the relatively high altitude and stony vineyards at Sauvella. Everything at Sauvella is harvested by hand, the red wines undergo a short pre-fermentation maceration or "cold soak", prior to fermentation with indigenous yeasts and are aged in a combination of French and American oak cooperage. They are generally raised for a year to eighteen months in cask prior to bottling, and then given additional bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. Consequently, the first sample I tasted from Sauvella was from the 2009 vintage, which I found in my cellar, having been overlooked at the time it was originally sent to me late last year. It was so good that I wrote to the importer and had a chance to taste a couple more "current releases" from Sauvella, which were another 2009 and a 2015! The wines are very, very interesting and quite well-made and worth a special note of introduction here, as they are likely to be overlooked in the notes that follow, just like that bottle of 2009 was overlooked in a corner of my cellar for six months!

The following notes are arranged alphabetically by region, with Bordeaux and Burgundy listed first. Then follows California and Oregon wines (grouped together), followed by Spanish wines. Within each section, I have listed white wines first, followed by red wines, with no differentiation made for varietal or sub-region in the American and Spanish sections of the article, so that, for example, one will find 2018 pinot noirs and syrahs listed together. Wineries are listed alphabetically and sorted chronologically by vintage. As I mentioned at the outset, though this article is not a typical, geographically-focused feature on a specific region, but a hodge-podge of wines from many different regions, it is loaded with notes on simply stunning wines (not counting those Figeacs in that category!) that were too good to leave waiting in the cellar to be tasted.

Bordeaux Blanc

1985 Château Laville Haut-Brion (Pessac-Léognan)

I last wrote a note on the 1985 Château Laville Haut-Brion all the way back in 2013, in my historical feature on the properties of La Mission Haut-Brion and Laville Haut-Brion. At that time, the bottle I tasted was rather indifferent and I had hypothesized that the wine could indeed have been better to what I tasted, but it was the only time I had crossed paths with a bottle of the 1985. Happily, I was able to share a perfect bottle just a few weeks ago and can report that the note from 2013 is not accurate, as it was based on an imperfect example. The wine actually is drinking brilliantly at age thirty-six and is at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability today. The bouquet is wide open, vibrant and precise, offering up scents of fresh fig, toasted coconut, a

gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, a touch of beeswax, gentle notes of petrol and a very refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, zesty and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, perfect balance and focus and a long, bouncy and very refined, seamless finish. The girdle of acidity here is still plenty bouncy and the wine has many decades still ahead of it, but it is hard to imagine it improving from this magical zenith of maturity at which it currently resides! 2021-2050+. **96.**

Bordeaux Rouge

2016 l'Hêtre (Castillon Côte de Bordeaux)

The 2016 l'Hêtre from Jacques Thienpont is composed from a *cépages* of ninety-five percent merlot and five percent cabernet franc. This is the first vintage produced here at this recently-purchased property in Castillon, which was raised in one-third new oak for fifteen months prior to bottling. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of black plums, dark berries, violets, a touch of dark chocolate, gentle spice tones and a refined framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, nascent complexity, suave tannins and a long, poised and quite promising finish. Good juice in the making and a welcome new addition to the firmament of Bordeaux. It is probably too early to give this the moniker of the “poor man’s Le Pin”, but it may well earn it one day. 2026-2045+. **90.**



2011 Château Rocher Cap de Merle

Château Rocher Cap de Merle is a tiny, one hectare estate in the village of Les Artigues-de-Lussac, which lies about seven kilometers northeast of Lalande de Pomerol and ten kilometers due north of St. Émilion. The *cépages* of the 2011 Château Rocher Cap de Merle is eighty percent merlot and ten percent each of cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon, with the wine tipping the scales at a very civilized thirteen percent alcohol. The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark plums, cigar smoke, coffee, a nice base of soil and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with fine focus and balance, a lovely core, ripe, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the gently chewy and complex finish. This is really a fine bottle of Petit Château Bordeaux, but production is only about six hundred cases a year, so one needs to keep a sharp eye out for the wine! 2018-2030+. **88+**.

Pomerol

2016 Château de Valois (Pomerol)

The Château de Valois is owned by the Leydet family, who also owns the St. Émilion Grand Cru, Château Leydet-Valentin, with Frédéric Leydet having taken over direction of Château de Valois from his father, Bernard in the 1996 vintage. Their Pomerol estate comprises just under eight hectares of vines, with the vineyards planted to eighty-three percent merlot and seventeen percent cabernet franc. The wine is raised in one-third new wood, as the family practices a three year barrel rotation for their Pomerol estate. The 2016 version offers up a deep and pure nose of plums, black cherries, cigar ash, a good base of soil, dark chocolate and a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle once it is ready to drink! 2026-2050. **91**.

2015 Château de Valois (Pomerol)

The 2015 vintage of Château de Valois is composed of a blend of seventy-four percent merlot and twenty-six percent cabernet franc. The wine offers up a beautiful nose of plums, black cherries, chocolate, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a discreet framing of new oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely balance and grip and a long, modestly tannic finish. This does not have quite the same mid-palate amplitude as the more famous wines of Pomerol, but it exudes the commune's aromatic and flavor profiles and is really lovely bottle of wine and a terrific value! 2021-2050. **91**.

2010 Château de Valois (Pomerol)

The 2010 Château de Valois comes in at fourteen percent alcohol, which is cool for this drought vintage, and offers up a lovely nose of plums, black cherries, tobacco smoke, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil and a discreet framing of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, suave, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, pure and still quite primary finish. This is a classic example of Pomerol that offers up far more interest than some of the more manipulated, bigger names in the commune, such as l'Église-Clinet, and is really a terrific value (in the context of today's Pomerol pricing). As I am so little enamored of the 2010 vintage in Bordeaux, I can only imagine what this wine tastes from in a truly top flight year like 2008 or 2009! Great juice. 2020-2050. **92**.

1971 Château Petit-Village (Pomerol)

I had never thought of Petit-Village as one of the properties in Pomerol that made particularly long-lived wines, but when a lone bottle of the 1971 popped up at auction, I felt I should really buy it and see how the wines aged, as I had never drunk one from the '60s or '70s. This is a very good year in Pomerol and the '71 Petit-Village does not disappoint at all, offering up a deep, vibrant and complex bouquet of plums, saddle leather, smoked meats, cigar ash, dark soil tones, just a touch of Pomerol's savory herb elements and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a touch of inkiness in the black fruity core, good soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, very well-balanced and quite vibrant finish. This was made in a more powerful and slightly more rustic style than the wines at Petit-Village today, but this may have helped it to age so well. It is not the most complex or elegant example of Pomerol one will come across from the 1971 vintage, but it still has life in it and is drinking at its apogee today. Good juice. 2021-2035. **89.**

1971 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol)

It had been a few years since I last drank a bottle of the 1971 Château Trotanoy, and the wine has not lost a step since my last glass. The wine remains placed right smack dab in the middle of its plateau of maturity and offers up a deep, complex and beautifully refined nose of black plums, dark berries, gravelly soil tones, plenty of smokiness, a note of black tea and just a hint of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very pure, with a lovely core of black fruit, fine soil inflection and grip, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and absolutely *à point* finish. The fact that Bordeaux vintages like 1962, 1966 and 1971 have been so relatively overlooked in much of the wine journalism of the last forty years underscores just how poorly this region was covered back in the day, despite the general impression that Bordeaux was thorough back in the day! The '71 Trotanoy has been drinking seamlessly for decades, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2021-2050. **95.**

St. Émilion

2018 Château Franc Grâce-Dieu (Grand Cru) Saint Émilion

The 2018 Château Franc Grâce-Dieu is composed from a blend of seventy percent merlot and thirty percent cabernet franc. The wine offers up a ripe bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a good base of limestone soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with moderate tannins and a bit of heat perking up on the finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and may have landed a bit north of this mark, given the torrid summer conditions of 2018. It is a good, solid bottle and I would love to taste it in a more temperate vintage. 2021-2035. **87.**

2018 Château Leydet-Valentin (Grand Cru) Saint Émilion

Château Leydet-Valentin lies in the Graves section of Saint Émilion, not far from Château Corbin, with the estate's vineyards farmed organically. The *cépages* here is eighty-one percent merlot and nineteen percent cabernet franc, with the wine bottled unfined and unfiltered. The 2018 vintage here is quite successful, offering up a deep and classic bouquet of cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of menthol, a fine base of dark soil tones and a touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and fairly chewy, with a fine core of sappy fruit, lovely balance and grip and a long, ripely tannic and quite promising finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but it will need some time in the cellar to absorb its oak fully, soften up and start to drink with generosity. A fine value. 2028-2050. **89+.**

2016 Château Leydet-Valentin (Grand Cru) Saint Émilion

The 2016 Château Leydet-Valentin benefits from a couple of additional years of bottle age in comparison to the 2018 version, not to mention hailing from a truly top flight vintage! The wine is really starting to blossom beautifully at age five, offering up a deep, complex and gently exotic nose of plums, black cherries, eucalyptus, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, violets and a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, elegant and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, very good soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, svelte and complex finish. This is really a fine bottle, but it remains youthful and deserves further time in the cellar to soften up those suave tannins and develop some secondary complexity. Most impressive! 2026-2055. **91.**

2016 Château Figeac (Premier Grand Cru Classé) Saint Émilion

I was in the cellars at Figeac when the Michel Rolland era first unfurled, as he was responsible for the blending of the 2012 vintage here (though the wine had been fermented prior to his being hired at the estate). But, after that round of *En Primeur* tastings in the spring of 2013, I have not been back to Saint Émilion since, so I had no idea how the Rolland imprint had been placed on the wines at Figeac in subsequent vintages. The 2016 is a well-made, sadly modern, charmless wine that shows absolutely no Figeac personality to it whatsoever and could have hailed from any of the anonymous Right Bank estates where Michel Rolland hoists his flag over the smoking ruins these days. The bouquet offers up a blend of black cherries, plums, balsamic tones, chocolate and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with good balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, monolithic and new oaky finish. This is a very well-made wine (and one of Michel Rolland's more elegant caricatures) that is soulless and completely devoid of any classical Figeac signature elements, such as breed, soil tone or complexity! If you told me it was made in a warehouse in New Jersey under grow-lights, I would not have been surprised. Totally depressing in its truly profound sense of anonymity. 2026-2055. **83.**

2014 Château Figeac (Premier Grand Cru Classé) Saint Émilion

The 2014 Château Figeac is a better wine than the 2016, as it hails from a superior vintage. This is really most impressive in that it is still recognizable as Figeac on several levels, as it retains some of the nice tobacco leaf elements of the classic wines here, as well as almost a hint of soil tone. The bouquet is quite black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a dollop of dark soil tones, cigar ash and a fairly well done framing of gently spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and seamlessly structured, with a good core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. The only thing that is really missing here from a traditional example of Figeac is the early complexity that this wine always used to show. Its absence here in the 2014 gives me pause, as if it develops more complexity with bottle age, it will be the very first wine Michel Rolland ever had a hand in the making of where bottle age produced greater complexity. But, even if it stays as it is now and simply softens up a bit more, it will be a pretty solid effort. Now, excuse me, while I go down in the cellar and pull a bottle of the 1970 or 1971 Figeac and remind myself what all the fuss was about once upon a time at this estate! 2030-2080. **88.**



St. Émilion's beautiful Château Figeac- once home to equally beautiful wines.

2010 Château Leydet-Valentin (Grand Cru) Saint Émilion

The 2010 Château Leydet-Valentin is one of the lower alcohol 2012 St. Émilions one is likely to find, as the label purports the wine coming in at an even fourteen percent alcohol, which is decidedly low test for this hefty vintage. However, there is some backend heat here, so I suspect that the real alcohol level is a bit north of the label's claim. That said, if one does not mind a bit of headiness, there is a lot to like here with this St. Émilion Grand Cru, as the nose is an excellent blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, a bit of tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, gentle new oak and a bit of chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, a bit of the vintage's tannin and hard acids, but good length and grip on the slightly heady finish. This seems to be a very well-made wine in a very difficult vintage in St. Émilion, and I would love to see it in a more classic year like 2008 or 2009, as the winemaking sensibilities here seem to be spot on to my palate. But, this is 2010. 2014-2025+?

87.

Bourgogne Blanc

2019 Bourgogne Haute Côtes de Nuits Blanc- Domaine Olivier Gard

Olivier Gard ferments and raised half of this cuvée in stainless steel and the other half is barrel-fermented and aged in cask, with fifteen percent new oak for this portion of the blend. The 2019 version is ripe, but bright and bouncy as well, offering up scents of fresh pineapple, pear,

chalky soil tones, a touch of almond pastry cream, orange blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent, with a good core, good soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, quite ripe and vibrant finish. This is not overly complex, but it really has quite good stuffing for its appellation and will deliver plenty of pleasure over the next few years. 2021-2027. **87.**

2019 Chablis “les Preuses”- Domaine Dampfrères

The 2019 Chablis “les Preuses” from Domaine Dampfrères is a lovely bottle. The wine is fairly forward in personality, offering up fine array of the ripe fruit of the vintage in its aromatic constellation of pear, raw almond, a beautiful base of chalky minerality, a touch of oyster shell and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core and mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and tasty finish. This is already drinking beautifully, but it has another layer of complexity to unfold with some extended cellaring. Fine juice. 2021-2045+. **92+.**

2019 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Michel Voarick

The 2019 Corton-Charlemagne from Domaine Michel Voarick is a good, young wine in the making. The bouquet is ripe, as the wine comes in just north of fourteen percent, but also youthful, offering up scents of apple, pear, a hint of pineapple, a good base of soil and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, tight and full-bodied, with a good core, fine balance and grip and a long, zesty, slightly warm and still very primary finish. This needs bottle age to blossom, but should end up a quite good example in due course. 2025-2045. **91.**

2018 Bourgogne Haute Côtes de Beaune Blanc- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

The 2018 Haute Côtes de Beaune Blanc from Sébastien Magnien is a very pretty wine, offering up a bouquet of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core and a long, surprisingly snappy finish. This is actually still on the young side and could do with another year in the cellar to let its lovely acidity relax just a bit more on the backend. A good example. 2022-2030. **87+.**

2018 Pernand-Vergelesses Blanc- Domaine Michel Voarick

The 2018 Pernand-Vergelesses Blanc from Domaine Michel Voarick is a very pleasant example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, a touch of hazelnut, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, well-balanced and slightly four-square finish. There is a touch of old-fashioned, sturdy rusticity to the personality of this wine, but it has depth and good length and grip. 2021-2030. **88.**

2018 Corton-Charlemagne- OO Wines

The 2018 Corton-Charlemagne from Chris Hermann and Pierre Millman at OO Wines is an excellent example of the vintage, with the wine deep, powerful and broad-shouldered in the style of 2018. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of pear, passion fruit, a superb base of chalky minerality, fresh almond, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a ripe, long, very nicely balanced finish. There were two casks produced of this wine in 2018 and it is lovely. 2021-2045. **94.**

2018 Saint-Romain “Sous le Château”- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

Sébastien Magnien’s 2018 Saint-Romain “Sous le Château” is a lovely example of both the vintage and this fine commune. The nose wafts from the glass in a stylish blend of pear,

apple, a touch of beeswax, a fine base of limestone soil tones, white lilies and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tightly-knit and deep at the core, with good soil signature, very good acids for the vintage and a long, nascently complex finish. Today, this wine is a bit hidden behind its structure, but shows good raw materials and should be a tasty bottle with a bit more bottle age. 2022-2030. **88.**

2011 Chablis “les Clos”- Maison William Fèvre

The 2011 les Clos from Maison William Fèvre is drinking splendidly as it celebrates its tenth birthday, with no signs of any early oxidative qualities and the precise and classy evolution one used to experience routinely with grand cru white Burgundy. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pink grapefruit, flinty, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, excellent acids and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035+. **95.**

Bourgogne Rouge

2019 Bourgogne Pinot Noir- Domaine Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun is one of Beaujolais’ finest wine producers, so I feel that his pinot noir is often overlooked because of the consistent brilliance of his Beaujolais bottlings. His 2019 Bourgogne Pinot Noir is an excellent wine in the making, offering up a young and vibrant bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, beetroot, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and youthful, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, moderate tannins, still some youthful stem tones and a long, tangy finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be excellent when it is ready to drink. 2025-2045. **90+.**

2019 Bourgogne Rouge- Domaine Michel Voarick

The 2019 Bourgogne Rouge from Domaine Michel Voarick is a very pretty and red fruity example of the vintage, offering up a bright and youthful bouquet of cherries, strawberries, fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, bouncy and youthful finish. Like so many good example of Bourgogne rouge, this needs a bit of bottle age to blossom, but it will be a very good drink in due course. 2025-2040. **88.**

2018 Bourgogne Pinot Noir- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

The 2018 Bourgogne *rouge* from Sébastien Magnien is a pretty example of the vintage, offering up a bright bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a touch of cedar and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, well-balanced and nicely structured, with a good core and a long, youthful and gently chewy finish. This needs a few years to blossom, but will be a good, solid example once it opens up. 2023-2035. **87.**

2018 Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune “Clos de la Perrière”- Dom. Sébastien Magnien

The 2018 Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune “Clos de la Perrière” from Sébastien Magnien is really quite a stylish example of the vintage, delivering a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, black tea, smoked duck, a lovely base of soil and a nice, gentle array of spices and fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with good soil signature, modest tannins and a long, focused and

complex finish. This is very good and is drinking better out of the blocks than the straight Bourgogne *rouge*. 2021-2035. **88+**.

2019 Pernand-Vergelesses- Domaine Michel Voarick

The Voarick family's 2019 Pernand-Vergelesses *rouge* is a good young bottle in the making. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and still very youthful, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, a complex base of iron-infused soil, herb tones, bonfire and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, transparent and tangy, with a lovely core of red fruit, excellent mineral drive, ripe tannins, good focus and grip and a long, promising finish. This is structured out of the blocks and will demand some cellaring time before it starts to drink with generosity, but I like its constituent components and it will be a very good *villages* once it is ready to drink. 2029-2060. **89+**.

2019 Corton "Bressandes"- Domaine Michel Voarick

The 2019 Corton "Bressandes" from Domaine Michel Voarick is an excellent young wine. It is ripe, tangy and nicely mineral in its foundation, offering up a bright and red fruity nose of cherries, red plums, a hint of blood orange, mustard seed, venison, coffee, excellent soil signature and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, balanced and very promising finish. This is a proper young Corton and needs a decade in the cellar before even thinking of broaching a bottle, but in due time, it will be excellent. 2030-2075+. **93+**.

2019 Corton "Renardes"- Domaine Michel Voarick

True to the nature of the two *terroirs*, the 2019 Renardes from the Voarick family is a bit more structured out of the blocks than their Bressandes. The wine offers up excellent aromatic depth, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of black cherries, dark berries, gamebird, French roast, a touch of youthful stem tones, a fine base of dark soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite pure, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, suave, tangy and very promising finish. This will need a year or two longer in the cellar to blossom than the 2019 Bressandes, but it is the slightly more refined wine of these two very strong Cortons from Domaine Voarick and when it is ready to drink, it should be outstanding. 2032-2075+. **94**.

2018 Aloxe-Corton- Domaine Michel Voarick

Jean-Marc Voarick's 2018 Aloxe *villages* is a fine bottle in the making. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fairly red fruity and youthful blend of cherries, plums, gamebird, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil tones, coriander seed, a touch of cedar and a nice topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and fine balance and grip on the long and quite promising finish. Young Aloxe AC can sometimes be a touch rustic in personality, but this is most emphatically not the case with this lovely example from Jean-Marc! The wine needs some bottle age, but it is going to be lovely when it is ready to drink and will be a superb value! 2028-2055. **91**.

2018 Beaune "les Aigrots"- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

Sébastien Magnien's 2018 les Aigrots is a good young wine in the making, but it is fairly structured out of the blocks and will demand some cellaring before it starts to stir. The bouquet is bright and nicely red fruity, delivering notes of cherry, strawberries, gamebird, a good base of soil, a touch of nutskin and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and fairly tannic, with a good core of fruit, a tightly-knit personality and a long, well-

balanced, but still quite primary finish. I would have liked to have tasted this out of barrel, as it is quite shut down now that it has been in the bottle for a couple of years, but it seems to have good constituent components and should prove to be a good example of its vineyard once it starts to blossom. 2028-2055. **89+**.

2018 Pommard “les Petits Noizons”- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

The 2018 Pommard “les Petits Noizons” from Sébastien Magnien is a good, solid *villages* bottling in the making. Today, the wine is pretty tightly-knit, but offers up scents of cherries, quince, pomegranate, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a good base of soil and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, chewy and nicely structured, with a good core of fruit, firm tannins and a long, focused and quite youthful finish. This will demand some cellaring before it starts to stir, but should turn out quite nicely once the tannins have softened up, as there is a good core of fruit waiting in the wings. 2030-2055. **88**.

2018 Pommard “les Perrières”- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

Sébastien Magnien’s 2018 Pommard “les Perrières” is a bit deeper and more refined out of the blocks than his les Noizons bottling. The bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, plums, gamebird, dark soil tones, raw cocoa and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with good soil inflection, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and fine balance on the long and nascently complex finish. The oak tannins here have not fully integrated on the backend yet, so cellaring is required here, but the constituent components are very strong and this will be a lovely bottle of Pommard when it is ready to drink. 2030-2065. **90**.

2018 Volnay “les Echards”- Domaine Sébastien Magnien

The 2018 Volnay “les Echards” from Sébastien Magnien is a fine bottle in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely soil signature, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, poised and quite promising finish. This is still a young wine and needs some bottle age to blossom, but should prove to be a very good example of Volnay *villages* once it is ready to drink. 2028-2060. **90+**.

2017 Aloxe-Corton “les Fournières”- Jean-Marc Voarick

I assume that the 2017 Aloxe-Corton “les Fournières” from Jean-Marc Voarick is made from a *mettayage* agreement or the like, as it is not labeled with the family domaine name. No matter the source of the grapes, Jean-Marc has fashioned a fine bottle from them, as the bouquet delivers a complex blend of cherries, a touch of blood orange, bonfire, roasted *pigeon*, mustard seed, a fine base of dark soil tones and a dollop of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral undertow and grip, ripe tannins and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is fine juice in the making- all it needs is some hibernation time in the cellar to let its tannins soften up properly. 2029-2060. **91**.

2017 Pernand-Vergelesses “Île de Vergelesses”- Domaine Rollin

Domaine Rollin’s 2017 Île de Vergelesses is a beautiful wine in the making, but it is still several years away from really starting to blossom. The young and very promising nose offers up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, vinesmoke, gamebird, a superb base of stony soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with excellent soil signature and grip, a lovely core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, promising and nascently complex finish. Just add bottle age! 2032-2060. **92+**.

2017 Pommard “Grands Epenots”- Jean-Marc Voarick

Jean-Marc Voarick’s 2017 Grands Epenots is really a superb bottle in the making, offering up all of the depth and complexity one can find in this excellent premier cru. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined and complex blend of black cherries, plums, smoked meats, a touch of black tea, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and energetic finish. This will be a very elegant example of Grands Epenots when it is fully mature. 2030-2080. **93+**.



The beautiful small village of Aloxé-Corton in the late autumn sunshine.

2016 Nuits St. Georges “Clos de Thorey” Monopole- Domaine de la Vougeraie

The Clos de Thorey from Domaine de la Vougeraie is beautifully-situated on the Vosne side of the town of Nuits St. Georges, tucked in between Chaignots and Bousselottes on the slope. The vines here have been farmed organically since 2012. The 2016 Clos de Thorey is an excellent example of the vintage, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of plums, black cherries, a touch of nutskin, spit-roasted venison, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a generous serving of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite closed today, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, chewy finish. I very much like the underlying wine here, but I am not wild about its oak treatment, as there is a raw aspect to the wood tannins here that may not integrate into the wine seamlessly with bottle age. The ultimate

quality of this wine down the road will depend on the oak integration, but assuming it does not present any problems, this will be a tasty bottle in due course. But, given that the wine is already five years of age and still not integrated its wood tannins completely, I am going to hedge my bets and score the wine in a range and hope for a good outcome. 2030-2065. **86-92.**

2016 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Grands Liards”- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils

The 2016 Grands Liards from Domaine Bize is a fine bottle in the making, but it is still several years away from really softening up and starting to blossom. The complex nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, bonfire, mustard seed, a fine base of stony soil tones and a topnote of coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely mineral in profile, with a very good core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced, youthful finish. 2027-2050+. **90+.**

2016 Savigny-lès-Beaune- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Drouhin family’s 2016 Savigny-lès-Beaune AC is an excellent village wine in the making. The bouquet is stylish and starting to blossom very nicely, delivering scents of strawberries, cherries, vinesmoke, a lovely array of Savigny spice tones, a fine base of soil and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a good core of gently sappy red fruit, fine soil inflection, modest tannins and a long, very well-balanced finish. Good juice that is almost ready to drink. 2024-2055. **90.**

Oregon and California White and Rosé Wines

2020 Rosé of Pinot Noir- Kendric Vineyards (Petaluma Gap- Marin County)

The 2020 Rosé of Pinot Noir from Kendric Vineyards is a lovely salmon color and offers up a bright and nicely vinous bouquet of cherries, strawberries, a touch of rhubarb, lovely spice tones, a good base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with good core and soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, focused and succulent finish. This is really quite lovely Rosé. 2021-2024. **90.**

2020 Viognier- Kendric Vineyards (Petaluma Gap- Marin County)

The 2020 Viognier from Stewart Johnson at Kendric Vineyards is really lovely this year. Stewart had made a barrel of viognier this year that he was thinking of using for the base wine for a sparkling bottling, but decided against it as it seemed to lack a bit of personality from having been picked earlier. However, after having abandoned plans for a stab at sparkling viognier, the wine started to pick up character in cask and ended up being blended back into the other four barrels of viognier! The result is a lovely wine, offering up scents of peach, a touch of casaba melon, lovely spice tones, salty soil elements and a classic floral blend in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and bouncy, with a fine core, good soil signature, zesty acids and a long, nicely racy finish. The one cask of earlier-picked juice here seems to have really given this wine cut and lift on the backend! 2021-2027. **91.**

2019 Chardonnay “Anderson Valley”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

The 2019 Alesia Anderson Valley bottling of chardonnay from Rhys Vineyards is beautifully floral out of the blocks this year, offering up a bright and very refined bouquet of apple, pear, fresh almond, acacia blossom, a hint of *crème patissière*, a lovely base of soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, zesty and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, complex and balanced finish. This is a touch riper than the Santa Cruz Mountains bottling of Alesia this year, tipping the scales at an even thirteen percent alcohol and it is already wearing its heart on its sleeve,

though it has the structure to also age beautifully. This may well be my favorite vintage yet of the Alesia Anderson Valley chardonnay! 2021-2035+. **92.**

2019 Chardonnay “Santa Cruz Mountains”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

Now that the Alesia bottlings from Rhys Vineyards are all made from the younger vine production on their estate vineyards, these wines have moved up a level in overall quality. The 2019 Santa Cruz Mountains chardonnay comes in at a svelte 12.4 percent octane in this vintage and offers up a lovely young nose of pear, green apple, lemon, salty soil tones, dried flowers, citrus peel and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit out of the blocks, with a good core, superb mineral drive and focus, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This could do with a year or two in the cellar to blossom properly and will be an excellent bottle in due course. 2023-2040. **92.**

2019 Chardonnay “Alpine Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Alpine Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Rhys is their lowest alcohol wine in the vintage, coming in at 12.1 percent alcohol. On the nose, the wine is simply loaded with personality, offering up a beautiful aromatic constellation of pear, passion fruit, fresh almond, apple blossoms, a touch of honeysuckle, lovely minerality and a dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is zesty, medium-full, focused and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip and a long, nascently complex and bouncy finish. This is a lovely middleweight in the making. 2023-2035+. **92+.**

2019 Chardonnay “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The 2019 Rhys Vineyards’ Bearwallow chardonnay is beautifully expressive aromatically right out of the blocks, jumping from the glass in a blend of apple, nectarine, salty soil tones, acacia blossoms, fresh almond and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced finish. The wine is a little more reserved on the palate than the nose, so I would give it a year or two in the cellar to let both facets completely blossom. I love the backend mineral drive here. 2023-2035+. **93.**

2019 Chardonnay “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Horseshoe Vineyard chardonnay from Rhys is one of the low octane whites from the winery in this vintage, as it comes in at a cool 12.3 percent. However, the wine is very expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of apple, pear, fruit blossoms, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with lovely intensity of flavor and transparency, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This will need a few years to open up, but should prove to be a long-lived and lovely middleweight once it is ready to drink. 2024-2035+. **93.**

2019 Chardonnay “Mount Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Mount Pajaro Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Rhys Vineyards comes in this year at a svelte 12.7 percent alcohol and offers up a nascently complex bouquet of pear, green apple, white flowers, raw almond, a lovely base of minerality and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tightly-knit, with a good core, fine mineral drive and bounce, lovely focus and a long, balanced and zesty finish. This is still quite primary and needs some bottle age to start to blossom and reveal its secondary layering of complexity. It will be a very suave, complex and very classy middleweight in due course. 2023-2040. **92+.**

2019 Chenin Blanc- Beau Rivage (Clarksburg)

With each passing vintage of Beau Rivage chenin blanc from William Kelley, I start wondering how long it will be until he strikes an agreement with a *vigneron* in Vouvray or Montlouis and takes his Kalin Cellars-inspired style of chenin and applies it to something in the Touraine! The 2019 Beau Rivage chenin is another excellent wine in the making, but it is young right now and quite reductive when first opened, so it needs some extended aeration before it starts to reveal its charms. With some decanting time it blossoms to deliver scents of tart pineapple, quince, dried flowers, citrus peel, salty soil tones and a gentle resiny topnote that suggests fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and bouncy finish. This wine comes in at 12.4 percent octane in the cooler 2019 vintage and is another, very ageworthy example of chenin blanc from that budding chenin hotbed of Clarksburg! 2021-2040. **93.**

2019 Chenin Blanc “Mount Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 vintage of Mount Pajaro Chenin Blanc from Jeff Brinkman and the rest of the team at Rhys is quite low octane this year, tipping the scales at 12.25 percent alcohol. The wine is beautifully defined by its soil elements on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of quince, tart pear, salty minerality, white lilies, lemon peel, hints of the beeswax to come and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, excellent girdle of acidity, impeccable balance and a long, nascently complex and zesty finish. I love the structural tension of this wine on the backend, which augurs extremely well for its evolution in bottle. This is quite drinkable out of the blocks, but I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for a few years and really let it blossom. 2024-2045. **93+.**

2018 Chardonnay “EGW”- OO Wines (Willamette Valley)

The 2018 EGW bottling of chardonnay from Chris Hermann at OO Wines is another absolutely stellar wine in the making, which has been the case with virtually every bottling I have tasted from the winery. The wine is a touch more forward out of the blocks than the 2017 version, as it is a bit riper at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of iodine, a complex base of soil tones, fruit blossoms and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a superb girdle of acidity, great focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. Like the 2017, this is still a touch reductive on the palate and should be decanted for thirty minutes if one is inclined to drink it now. It will age long and gracefully and is a very classy bottle. For my palate, it deserves three to five years in the cellar before broaching, to really let it build up a head of steam! 2021-2040+. **94.**

2018 Chardonnay “Kathryn Hermann Cuvée”- OO Wines (Chehelam Mountains)

The 2018 Kathryn Hermann Cuvée of chardonnay from OO Wines is quite Meursault-like in personality in its early guise, delivering an aromatic constellation of pear, passion fruit, iodine, geranium-like floral tones, a beautiful base of chalky soil, incipient notes of the buttered nuttiness to come and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off gorgeous mid-palate depth, with great precision and balance, zesty acids and a long, complex and very, very classy finish. Of the three 2018 chardonnays I tasted for this report from Chris Hermann, this is the coolest of the trio, coming in at a very refined 13.3 percent octane. This is a stunning bottle of young chardonnay. Do not give into temptation and drink it too early in its evolution, as it has stunning potential! 2021-2045. **95+.**

2018 Chardonnay “Richard Hermann Cuvée”- OO Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2018 Richard Hermann Cuvée bottling from OO Wines is a big, bold and very promising wine in the making, as it shows its vintage character in an octane level of 14.1 percent and a very promising personality out of the blocks. This is structured like a young Bâtard-Montrachet, offering up a slightly reductive bouquet of pear, apple, hazelnuts, iodine, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of sweet butter, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, bright acids and a long, very promising finish. Like a good Bâtard, this is broader-shouldered out of the blocks than the Kathryn Hermann Cuvée, with a touch of puppy fat, but it may well tighten up with bottle age as the puppy fat recedes and it could well catch the former with extended bottle age. It will provide plenty of pleasure early on, but there may well be another level of complexity lurking here just below the surface. If this proves to be the case, my score will prove a bit conservative! 2021-2045. **94.**

2008 Mount Eden Vineyards Chardonnay “Reserve” (Santa Cruz Mountains)

I really like the 2008 Mount Eden Reserve Chardonnay bottling, which is hitting its apogee right now at age thirteen, but still has a lovely spine of acidity and plenty of life ahead of it. The only aspect of this wine that kept my score down just a bit was that it is a touch hot on the backend, despite being listed at fourteen percent, and I had to deduct a couple of points for this from the score, despite all the other aspects of the wine being absolutely lovely. So, for those who do not mind slightly higher octane wines than I do, add a couple more points. The bouquet today is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pineapple, a lovely base of soil tones, citrus peel and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a superb core, fine mineral drive and cut, lovely focus and a long, gently warm finish. This still has many years of fine drinking ahead of it, but is now wide open and securely in the heart of its plateau of peak maturity. 2021-2040. **92.**

Oregon and California Red and Rosé Wines

2020 Rosé of Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard”- Bravium Wines (Anderson Valley)

The 2020 Rosé of Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard” bottling from Bravium was barrel fermented with indigenous yeasts and given three months of *elevage* in used casks. It is a beautiful, delicate peach color and offers up a lovely nose of casaba melon, strawberries, gentle spice tones, salty soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, very impressive soil signature for a Rosé and a long, bouncy finish. This is very lovely Rosé. 2021-2024. **90.**

2019 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

The 2019 Anderson Valley bottling of pinot noir from Alesia is gorgeous and one of the best wines I have yet tasted sold under the Alesia label from Rhys Vineyards. The bouquet is pure, youthful and beautifully precise, offering up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, a hint of beetroot, gamebird, woodsmoke, a superb base of soil tones, fresh herbs, espresso and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, tangy and displays outstanding mid-palate depth, with a nice sense of imminent sappiness, lovely soil undertow, ripe, suave tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. A very serious bottle of pinot in the making! 2028-2060. **93+.**

2019 Pinot Noir “Santa Cruz Mountains”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

Similarly, the 2019 Santa Cruz Mountains pinot noir from Alesia has set the bar higher for subsequent vintages of this label than has ever been set before. The wine comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up a cool, soil-driven and very classy bouquet of sweet dark berries, cassis, raw cocoa, a beautiful array of spice tones (that hint at fresh nutmeg, cardamom and allspice), a marvelous base of stony soil, woodsmoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a very elegant profile, a lovely core of black fruit, excellent transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is great juice! 2028-2060. 93+.



2019 Pinot Noir “Sarmiento Vineyard”- Morrows Wines (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The winemaker at Morrows is Derek Rohlffs, who makes lovely wines at his own Bravium winery. The 2019 Sarmiento Vineyard bottling of pinot from Morrows comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and was raised entirely in older oak barrels, of French and Hungarian origins. The wine delivers a refined, perfumed nose of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, peonies, roses and a whisper of oak influence from the older casks. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with a fine core, impressive transparency and grip, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. Structurally, this is already quite approachable, but it is still quite primary in personality and I would opt for tucking

it away in the cellar for at least a handful of years and allow its complexity to fully emerge. A lovely wine. 2025-2050+. **91+**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Alpine Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Alpine Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from the Rhys team is an excellent bottle in the making. The wine offers up a precise and nascently complex bouquet of red and black cherries, a hint of beetroot, sweet stem tones, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a gorgeous base of soil, dark chocolate and a discreet foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and plush with ripe fruit at the core, with still plenty of whole cluster influence, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a touch riper than the Swan Terrace bottling this year (not surprisingly, as the Swan Terrace faces due east), but at 13.3 percent octane, it is perfectly ripe and beautifully expressive of its underlying *terroir*. All this beautiful wine needs is time in the cellar to blossom. 2031-2075. **94**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Alpine Vineyard” Hillside- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Hillside bottling from Alpine Vineyard is a beautiful young pinot noir. The bouquet still shows a nice touch of its youthful stems from the whole clusters, but these are covered up by a refined blend of sweet dark berries, black plums, pomegranate, coffee bean, gamebird, a complex base of dark soil tones, a suave framing of new oak and the aforementioned sweet stem tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, great transparency and bounce, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and absolutely perfectly balanced finish. All this great bottle of pinot noir needs is time in the cellar to fully blossom! 2032-2075. **96**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The 2019 Bearwallow Vineyard pinot noir from Jeff Brinkman and the cellar team at Rhys is a marvelous wine in the making. The bouquet shows plenty of red fruit in its gorgeous combination of pomegranate, red and black cherries, a very complex base of soil tones, just a hint of beetroot, raw cocoa, a very discreet foundation of new oak and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with superb transparency and grip, a lovely core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This has great backend lift and is going to be a stunning bottle when it is fully ready to drink. 2031-2070. **94+**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Family Farm Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Family Farm pinot noir is another one of the riper cuvées in the Rhys lineup this year, coming in at 13.8 percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine delivers a beautiful aromatic constellation of pomegranate, black cherries, complex soil tones, a touch of coffee bean, gentle smokiness, just a whisper of sweet herb tones, black tea and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, focused and full, with an excellent core of black fruit, fine soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, beautifully balanced, tangy and complex finish. This is a very lovely wine in the making, which will be approachable earlier than the Home Vineyard bottling, but really will need at least as much time in the cellar to really start to blossom. Fine juice here! 2026-2055+. **93**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Home Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Home Vineyard pinot noir from Rhys is one of the ripest in the lineup in this vintage, coming in tipping the scales at 13.9 percent octane. That duly noted, the wine is beautifully pure, precise and well-measured on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, incipient notes of cola, bonfire, a touch of espresso, dark soil tones, sweet stems and a discreet foundation of new

oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but it will want five to seven years in the cellar to start to display any of its secondary layers of complexity and for the backend tannins to soften up. 2026-2055+. **92+**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Kevin Harvey’s 2019 Horseshoe Vineyard pinot is another great wine in the making. The wine is deep, pure and youthful on the nose, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of red and black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, sweet stem tones, raw cocoa, a complex base of dark soil tones, gamebird, gentle notes of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, sappy at the core and light on its feet, with impressive transparency and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. All this stellar bottle of pinot noir needs is some time alone in the cellar to blossom fully. Great juice! 2032-2070+. **95**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Vineyard” Hillside- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Rhys Vineyard’s 2019 Hillside bottling of pinot noir from the Horseshoe Vineyard is outstanding. The bouquet delivers a very promising aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, incipient notes of cola, a great base of soil, campfire, a bit of dark chocolate, gamebird, gentle notes from the whole clusters and a very stylish foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is full, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with stunning soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, superb focus and grip and a very long, poised and energetic finish. This is still a young wine, but it has backend lift that augurs extremely well for its future beauty and will be worth every minute of waiting for it to blossom in the cellar. 2034-2075. **96**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Vineyard” Ungrafted Vines- Rhys Vydys (Santa Cruz Mtns)

It is fascinating to taste the Horseshoe “Ungrafted Vines” bottling alongside of the Hillside cuvée from this vineyard, as the ungrafted version is a touch lighter in color (though still a lovely, dark ruby). The bouquet is deep, complex and seems more expressive out of the blocks than the Hillside, offering up a complex blend of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a beautiful base of soil tones, fresh thyme, sweet stem tones and a lovely dollop of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a sappy core of black fruit, excellent focus and grip, plenty of youthful stem tones on the backend, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a wine that trades even more profoundly on its underlying soil signature than the Horseshoe Hillside, and though it is not quite as deep at the core, it seems likely to be every bit its equal when the two are ready to drink, despite this wine being a touch less intense in personality. Great juice. 2032-2075. **95+**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Mount Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 vintage of Mount Pajaro Vineyard pinot noir from Rhys is a very fine example of the vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and delivering a young, vibrant and promising bouquet of dark berries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, a dollop of youthful stem tones, coffee bean, woodsmoke, a touch of graphite and a suave framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent in profile, with well-integrated tannins, fine balance and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is the new kid on the block amidst the other Rhys pinot noir bottlings, but it is quickly playing catch up and is certainly at home amongst these other great cuvées. 2027-2065. **92**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Porcupine Hill”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The densely-planted Porcupine Hill section of the Bearwallow Vineyard has produced a stellar wine in 2019. The bouquet is quite a bit more black fruity out of the blocks than the regular Bearwallow, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, beautifully complex soil tones, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme, discreet floral notes redolent of peonies and a gentle framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, young and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral undertow, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and extremely promising finish. This is going to take even a few more years to blossom than the regular Bearwallow, but it will be stellar juice when it is ready to drink. 2034-2070+. **94+**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Skyline Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

As is so often the case, the 2019 Skyline pinot noir is a touch more black fruity than its siblings from the Alpine Vineyard. The bouquet is deep, pure and very promising, offering up scents of dark berries, black cherries, raw cocoa, stony minerality, a touch of graphite, a hint of chicory, some youthful stem tones, new oak and scents of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with a good core of black fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex finish. This does not have quite the mid-palate stuffing of some of these other Rhys pinots in 2019, but I absolutely love its precision, balance and lightness of step and have a gut feeling that this may well be one of those wines that puts on a bit of weight with extended bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2031-2075. **94**.

2019 Pinot Noir “Swan Terrace”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2019 Swan Terrace bottling from Rhys, which hails from a parcel of vines in Alpine Vineyard with an easterly exposition and loads of morning sun, is simply gorgeous in this vintage. The wine is perfectly ripe at 12.8 percent and already very expressive aromatically, offering up a beautiful constellation of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, a complex base of soil tones, bitter chocolate, sweet stem tones, gamebird, a touch of cedary oak and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and extremely elegant in profile, with a plump core of fruit, outstanding mineral undertow, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is going to be simply stunning pinot when it is ready to drink, but it will need a nice sojourn in the cellar to soften up and start hitting on all cylinders. Great juice in the making! 2031-2075. **95**.

2019 Syrah “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The 2019 vintage is the inaugural release of a Syrah bottling from the Bearwallow Vineyard in Anderson Valley. When I asked Jeff Brinkman about the wine, he observed that the syrah here “is something that we talked about putting in almost from day one- we bought the property in 2008- but it didn't materialize until we had enough production from the new plantings (of pinot noir) which we put in, so that we could tear out one of the weaker original Pinot blocks” and replant that section to syrah. The parcel was planted with a *selection massale* taken from the syrah vines at Horseshoe Vineyard. The wine included fifty percent whole clusters this year and was raised entirely in older casks and thousand liter *foudre*. The 2019 Bearwallow Syrah is a bit riper than its 2018 counterpart from Horseshoe, as this wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of black raspberries, black cherries, pepper, a hint of dark chocolate, roasted meats and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and peppery in personality, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is impeccably balanced and

will age superbly well, but will demand some cellaring time before it starts to drink with generosity. A great new addition to the firmament at Rhys! 2031-2065. **92+**.

2018 Pinot Noir “VGR”- OO Wines (Willamette Valley)

The 2018 VGR pinot noir from the team of Chris Hermann and Pierre Millman is yet another example to bolster my suspicion that when all is said and done, despite all of the very deserved accolades that OO has received already for its beautiful chardonnays, their pinot noirs may well become their most highly-acclaimed wines in the fullness of time. The 2018 VGR pinot is very much a creature of its sunny vintage, coming in at 14.1 percent octane and offering up a deep, ripe and very lovely young nose of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh thyme, rose petals and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and classy, with a lovely core of perfectly ripe fruit, suave, buried tannins, excellent balance and grip and a long, nascently complex and soil-driven finish. I love the structure here, which allows the beautifully ripe fruit to take center stage, but which is sustained by mineral drive and great balance. This needs some bottle age to blossom properly, but all of the constituent components are in place for a great bottle down the road! 2028-2065. **93+**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Hyland Vineyard”- OO Wines (McMinnville)

The 2018 Hyland Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from OO Wines is a bit riper than the VGR cuvée, coming in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a ripe, classy bouquet of dark berries, black plums, chocolate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of meatiness and a nice serving of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, a good base of soil, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly youthful finish. With its slightly higher octane, the new oak shows here quite a bit more (perhaps it was also raised in a slightly higher percentage than the VGR?), but is nicely supported by its lovely fruit component and fine soil elements and should integrate nicely with further bottle age. This is a lovely wine in the making, but right now, I have a slight preference for the more harmonious style shown by the VGR 2018 pinot out of the blocks. That may change as both wines have a chance to settle in with some cellaring time. 2028-2065. **93**.

2018 Syrah “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2018 Syrah from the Horseshoe Vineyard is another absolutely stellar bottle in the making from Rhys Vineyards. The wine tips the scales at an even thirteen percent alcohol and delivers a beautifully precise and complex nose of black raspberries, blackberries, pepper, black olive, smoked meats, stony soil tones, black tea, just a whisper of new oak and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and peppery, with an excellent core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, firm and well-integrated tannins and a long, youthful and chewy finish. This is a long distance runner that will not be happy to be disturbed from its hibernation in the cellar for at least the next dozen years or so, but it is going to be a great bottle when it is ready to drink. 2033-2065+. **94**.

2013 Pinot Noir “Alpine Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

After being inspired by the range of 2019s from Rhys, I dipped into another half bottle of slightly older pinot in the hope that they might be stirring with some bottle age. But, the 2013 Alpine Vineyard bottling of pinot is still fairly closed down, even with extended aeration, and really demands more cellaring before pulling corks! The youthful nose delivers a beautifully precise bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, violets, bitter chocolate, a lovely base of minerality, sweet stem tones, a touch of cedar and a topnote of black tea. On the palate the wine

is deep, pure and very transparent in personality, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. Even in half bottle, this wine is at least five or six years away from truly blossoming, and I am sure in full bottle it still needs at least seven years! Taking one for the team... 2026-2075. **95.**

1984 Zinfandel “Northern Sonoma”- Joseph Swan Vineyards (Russian River Valley)

This particular bottle of Joseph Swan 1984 Northern Sonoma Zinfandel was inserted as a ringer into one of the tastings of 1984 and 1985 cabernet sauvignons that form the basis for the article on those two vintages that appears earlier in this issue of the newsletter. This wine was so good that it has spurred one of my wine tasting groups to embark upon another few rounds of mature zinfandels in the coming months, so I will have another feature on these old school examples of zinfandel sometime in the coming year. In any case, Joe Swan’s 1984 Northern Sonoma bottling is outstanding and at its peak today, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of black raspberries, brambly fruit tones, spiced meats, cigar ash, a lovely base of soil tones and a nice array of zinfandel spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil inflection, tangy acids, modest remaining tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2040. **92.**

Spanish White Wines

2019 Riesling “Selten”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The Selten bottling of Riesling from Raúl Pérez hails from a parcel of vines planted in 2001, on clay soils down at the foot of a slope where the vineyard is prone to botrytis. The wine is fermented in older barrels and typically carries between fifteen and twenty grams per liter of residual sugar. The 2019 version comes in at nine percent octane and delivers a very pretty bouquet of apple, pineapple, salty soil tones, a touch of petrol and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and succulent, with a good core, just a touch of backend sweetness and good focus and grip. This is not as light on its feet as many German Rieslings, due to its clay soil, but it is still a very tasty bottle. 2021-2030. **89.**

2019 Palomino “Valdecañada”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The 2019 Palomino from Raúl Pérez is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and complex nose of lemon, bread fruit, salted almonds, stony soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a fine girdle of acidity, an excellent core of fruit, lovely balance and focus and a long, zesty finish. Fine juice. 2021-2030+. **92.**

2019 Ulteira Blanco “la Claudina”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

This wine is composed entirely of Godello, but a *flor* is allowed to form during its *elevage*, giving it a unique character. The 2019 la Claudina Blanco offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, tangerine, sea salts, a lovely base of soil tones, just a hint of Sherry-like nuttiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and a touch more nutty than the nose suggests, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2040. **93.**

2019 Regueirón Godello- Virgen Del Galir (Valdeorras)

Cuné’s Virgen Del Galir project is quickly becoming one of the brightest stars in all of Galicia. As readers may recall, it was launched in 2002, but the team from Cuné took their time familiarizing themselves with the vineyards and the region and they have only begun releasing wines in the last few years. As I mentioned in my note on the 2018, the Virgen Del Galir Godello hails from the terraced Regueirón vineyard, which is planted on slate and loam soils and

fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of older casks and cement vats. The 2019 is just finding its way into the pipeline and will be released shortly. It is a superb follow-up to the 2018, delivering a deep and nascently complex aromatic constellation of pear, tart orange, a fine base of salty, stony soil tones, citrus peel, a hint of raw almond a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, well-balanced and very promising finish. Like many top examples of Godello, this will certainly be a delicious drink when it is first released, but it has the structure and depth to age beautifully and the real fireworks are likely to begin two or three more years down the road! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035. **94.**

2018 Rioja Blanco “Monopole Clásico”- Cuné

The 2018 “Monopole Clásico” Rioja Blanco from Cuné is really lovely this year. As readers may recall, this is made in the style of the bottling from 1979 back in time, when the *bodegas* would blend about fifteen percent of Manzanilla Sherry into the wine, which is otherwise comprised entirely of Viura. After the 1979 vintage, this practice was discontinued for Monopole, until it was happily resurrected again in very small quantities in the 2014 vintage. So, “Monopole Clásico” is the new name for this traditional bottling, which is now celebrating its fifth vintage since it was reborn. The 2018 offers up a pure and complex bouquet of lime, green olives, a lovely touch of nuttiness, salty soil tones, citrus zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, bright, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and classy finish. Even with the addition of fifteen percent Manzanilla to the cuvée, this wine still only comes in at 13.5 percent octane. It is a unique and very beautiful wine. 2021-2050. **93.**

Spanish Red Wines

2019 Ultreia Tinto “Valtuille”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The Valtuille bottling from Raúl Pérez is one of his oldest vine cuvées, as these vines were planted at the end of the nineteenth century! It is a classic field blend based primarily on Mencía, but with Trousseau, Garnacha Tintorera, Godello and Doña Blanca also co-planted in small percentages. The 2019 Valtuille is a stunning young wine, offering up a superb bouquet of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, graphite, cigar smoke, lovely spice tones and just a touch of upper register botanicals from both the whole clusters and the Trousseau and Garnacha Tintorera in the blend. On the palate the wine is pure, refined, full-bodied and extremely promising, with an excellent core of fruit, great mineral drive and focus, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a truly great bottle of Bierzo in the making! 2029-2065+. **94+.**

2019 A Villeira- Virgen Del Galir (Valdeorras)

As I mentioned last year, the A Villeira single vineyard bottling from Virgen Del Galir is composed primarily of Mencía, with the terraced vineyards planted on granitic soils. These are fairly old vines, having been planted in 1958 and include the customary field blend of trace amounts of Garnacha Tintorera, Brancellao, Merenzao and Sousón with the Mencía. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, undergoes its malolactic fermentation in used five hundred liter *demi-muids* and then was raised in the same larger casks for one year prior to bottling. The 2019 A Villeira is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2018, offering up a scents of pomegranate, blackberry, tree bark, stony minerality, woodsmoke, a hint of cola and a gentle topnote of lovely botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a superb core of

fruit, ripe tannins and a long, complex and youthful finish. This is outstanding wine, but it deserves at least three to five years in the cellar to start to blossom. 2025-2055+. **94.**

2019 Rioja “Anza”- Diego Magaña (Rioja Alavesa)

Diego Magaña only started to produce a bit of Rioja to augment his fine lineup of Bierzo wines when he found a few old vine parcels in 2016. His 4.5 hectares of vines are spread across several different vineyards in the Rioja Alavesa region, with the vines ranging from thirty to fully ninety years of age. He ferments his Rioja in open top oak vats and ages them in a collection of used two hundred and twenty-five hundred liter barrels, as well as a single old, four thousand liter *tina*. His 2019 regular Rioja is a lovely young wine, offering up scents of raspberries, lovely spice tones, a fine base of chalky soil tones, a bit of smoked meats, a bit of orange peel, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, tangy and ripely tannic, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and grip and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a young wine and needs time in the cellar to soften up, but it will be a lovely bottle in due course. 2029-2065. **92.**

2019 Rioja “Anza” Especial- Diego Magaña (Rioja Alavesa)

The Anza Especial is composed primarily of Tempranillo, but with a bit of Graciano, Garnacha, Viura and Malvasía also blended in, as they are co-planted with the Tempranillo in the oldest parcels of vines. This is the same as for the regular Anza cuvée, except that the Especial includes more of the white grapes in the blend, so that the Viura and Malvasía are just over ten percent of the blend in 2019. The cuvée comes from Diego’s oldest vines, with these bush vines all planted on pure limestone and between seventy-five and ninety years of age, with the wine raised in used five hundred liter *demi-muids* for one year prior to bottling. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very precise constellation of black raspberries, clove, spiced meats, a beautiful base of limestone minerality, cigar wrapper, Rioja spices and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of old vine fruit, excellent mineral undertow and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and extremely promising finish. This too needs cellaring, but is going to be excellent when it is ready to drink! 2030-2065+. **93+.**

2018 Rioja “Garnacha”- Viñedos del Contino (Rioja Alavesa)

Contino’s straight Garnacha bottling of Rioja is one of their rarest cuvées, as it has only been produced since the 2008 vintage and always in limited quantities. The wine is raised in “one wine” barrels for eighteen months before bottling and the lovely 2018 vintage comes in at an even fourteen percent octane. The wine wafts from the glass in a spicy and elegant blend of raspberries, cherries, *garrigue*, smoked meats, cloves, a beautiful base of salty soil tones and a gentle topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is vibrant, focused and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, suave tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. This strikes me as an extremely elegant vintage of Garnacha in the making for Contino, and it seems likely to one day be considered one of the all-time great vintages for this varietal at the estate. Give the wine some time in the cellar, as it is still fairly primary and will grow exponentially in complexity if given proper bottle age. 2028-2065. **94.**

2018 Merenzao “Los Carismáticos”- Virgen Del Galir (Valdeorras)

The Los Carismáticos vineyard from which this bottling of pure Merenzao from Virgen Del Galir hails, is planted on sandy and decomposed granite soils, built on terraces that were constructed in the nineteenth century, though the current vines are fifty years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older, five hundred liter casks. The 2018 is a

beautiful expression of this fairly rare grape, coming in quite light in color and delivering a fine bouquet of bitter cherry, a touch of blood orange, a refined array of sweet botanicals, a fine base of soil and a touch of tea leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, tangy, full-bodied and beautifully transparent down to its soils, with a fine core of red fruit, modest tannins and excellent focus and balance on the long, complex and dancing finish. I love the backend lift of this wine. This is a beautiful example of Merenzao that is certainly approachable today, but which will age superbly well and will be an even better drink with some bottle age. Great juice. 2024-2055. 93+.



2017 Rioja “Graciano”- Viñedos del Contino (Rioja Alavesa)

The 2017 Graciano bottling of Rioja from Contino is simply gorgeous and will be a truly great wine when it is fully ready to drink. The bouquet is deep, pure and sappy, showing a nice touch of new oak in its complex constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, violets and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very precise, with lovely sappiness at the core, impeccably refined balance, fine-grained tannins and a very long, nascently complex and beautiful finish. Great juice! 2027-2060+. 94+.

2017 Rioja “Reserva”- Viñedos del Contino (Rioja Alavesa)

The 2017 vintage is the first one for the new winemaker at Contino, Jorge Navascués, and it is quite clear that the estate will not miss a beat under his tenure! He was very fortunate

that the frosts that ravaged other parts of Rioja missed the Contino vineyards almost entirely. The 2017 Contino Reserve is a blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and the remaining five percent split between Garnacha and Mazuelo. The wine offers up a beautifully deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, Rioja spice tones, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke and a beautifully understated foundation of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with ripe, buried tannins, lovely soil signature and grip, excellent balance and a long, complex and utterly seamless finish. This is so beautifully balanced on release that it is already very easy to drink, but this wine is still a puppy and it will be infinitely more enjoyable if tucked away in the cellar for several more years, just to allow that velvety palate impression that it is already hinting at to rise up to the fore. Gorgeous wine. 2025-2065. **94.**

2017 Rioja “Viña del Olivo”- Viñedos del Contino (Rioja Alavesa)

The single parcel bottling of Viña del Olivo from Contino is outstanding in 2017. It is not composed of its customary *cépages* of ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Graciano, as in this vintage, five percent of the Tempranillo was replaced by Mazuelo. I had a chance to taste this wine prior to its release and am very happy to see it finally arriving on the market, as it is a superb vintage of Viña del Olivo. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, red plums, black raspberries, Cuban cigars, gorgeous spice tones (that shade towards fresh nutmeg, rather than clove), a complex base of soil tones and a very suave foundation of French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex and youthful finish. This is really a stunning, stunning wine in the making! 2027-2075. **95.**

2017 Rioja “Imperial” Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The 2017 Rioja Imperial “Reserva” from Cuné is composed from its customary *cépages* of eighty-five percent Tempranillo and the balance a mix of Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo. It was given two years of aging in older oak barrels, followed by an additional two years of bottle aging in the cellars prior to release. The nose wafts from the glass in an utterly refined constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, Cuban cigars, a very complex base of soil, a touch of toasted coconut, gentle Rioja spice tones and a suave foundation of oak scents from its mix of older French and American barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and structured, with a gorgeous core of fruit, fine soil inflection, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. With the frosts of 2017 in the Rioja Alta region, this wine is deeper and more structured out of the blocks than most vintages of Imperial Reserva, so it will need some hibernation in the cellar to really blossom, but it is going to be a sensational vintage for this wine! 2030-2075. **93.**

2016 Rioja “Imperial” Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The 2016 Imperial Reserva is really a special vintage for this consistently fine bottling from Cuné. The bouquet is very pure and utterly classical in profile, offering up a complex constellation of cherries, plums, Rioja spice tones, a touch of toasted coconut from the American oak in the blend of cooperage, a superb base of soil tones, cigar wrapper and a nice touch of cedar from the French casks also used in the *elevage* of the wine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and pure, with a superb core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. This is more classically balanced than the atypically structured 2017 Imperial Reserva, so it will not demand the same time in the cellar

before it starts to drink well, but it too is a wine that is built for the long haul and really deserves at least a half dozen years' worth of bottle age before drinking, as there is so much more here yet to unfold! Its superb balance may well work against it, as the odds that it will be drunk early on, before it really has a chance to show its secondary layers of complexity are pretty strong! 2027-2075. **94.**

2015 Rioja "Gran Reserva"- Viñedos del Contino (Rioja Alavesa)

I love the classic *cépages* of the 2015 Contino Gran Reserva, as this wine is composed of a blend of seventy percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Graciano, twelve percent Garnacha and three percent Viura. This is the first Gran Reserva released here since the 2012 vintage and it comes in at fourteen percent octane in 2015. The wine delivers a refined young nose of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar wrapper, a superb base of soil tones, cloves, a refined framing of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with excellent depth at the core, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is an excellent young wine that still needs some bottle age to soften up more completely and start to drink with generosity, but it is going to be an superb wine in the fullness of time. 2033-2080+. **94+.**

2015 Rioja "Imperial" Gran Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alta)

The 2015 Imperial Gran Reserva is crafted from a constellation of eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuelo this year. Like the Contino Gran Reserva, this wine tips the scales at fourteen percent alcohol in 2015 and offers up a pure, nascently complex and sappy nose of black raspberries, black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil tones, toasted coconut, a touch of cedar, fresh nutmeg and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, refined, deep and full, with a great core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is going to be an absolutely superb vintage of Imperial Gran Reserva, but it is even younger than the Viña Real Gran Reserva out of the blocks and will need a bit more cellaring to soften up. In due course, it is going to be a stunning wine! 2031-2080+. **95.**

2015 Rioja "Viña Real" Gran Reserva- Cuné (Rioja Alavesa)

Cuné's 2015 Rioja "Viña Real" Gran Reserva is a touch lower octane than the Contino Gran Reserva in this vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane. It is produced from a blend of ninety-five percent Tempranillo and five percent Graciano this year. The wine is aged in a combination of French and American oak casks of varying age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and very classy blend of black cherries, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, lovely spice tones, gentle smokiness and a lovely array of oak-derived scents that include toasted coconut and nuttiness. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with the first vestiges of velvetiness starting to poke through on the attack, a superb core of black fruit, fine soil signature and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. This will be excellent, but give it just a half dozen more years of so in the cellar to let those backend tannins fade a bit more. 2027-2080+. **94.**

2015 Rubis- Sauvella (Costers del Segre)

Sauvella is a relatively new winery that has sought to reclaim the winegrowing traditions in the these steep, rugged sites in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains in the Costers del Segre region of Catalunya. Their vineyards are all farmed organically, rising up to five hundred meters into the mountains, and everything is hand-harvested. Their 2015 Rubis bottling is nicely low octane, coming in at 12.5 percent and offering up a fine young nose of black cherries, dark

berries, woodsmoke, a touch of chocolate, stony soil tones, spiced meats and just a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a fine core of black fruit, moderate, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish that closes with a nice note of bitter cherry that recalls a wine from Emidio Pepe. Good juice. 2021-2040. **90.**

2009 Luscinia Canta- Sauvella (Costers del Segre)

The 2009 Luscinia Canta from Sauvella is made from a field blend that includes cabernet sauvignon, tempranillo, syrah, summoil, merlot and at least a couple of other varieties that no one is quite sure what they might be. The 2009 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and is nicely light in color and offers up a beautiful bouquet of cherries, cigar wrapper, a nice touch of eucalyptus, stony soil tones, cedar and a fine array of spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very soil-driven for these two varietals in Catalunya, with a good core of red fruit, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This could still do with some further cellaring to allow those backend tannins to fall away a bit more, but with grilled meats to soften up the impression of the tannins, it is already easy to drink. Fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

2009 Luscinia Eximia- Sauvella (Costers del Segre)

The 2009 Luscinia Eximia bottling from Sauvella is composed of approximately two-thirds syrah and the other third a field blend that includes some of the indigenous Spanish grapes and a few of the experimental varieties as well. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane, which is pretty ripe for Sauvella, but offers up a superb nose of cassis, dark berries, pepper, grilled meats, coffee bean, a fine base of stony soil tones, cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chewy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. Even though this is from the 2009 vintage, the Luscinia Eximia is still a young wine and needs some further bottle age to blossom. But, once the tannins soften up completely, it will be a fine drink! But, for current consumption, I would reach for bottles of the 2009 Luscinia Canta bottling and let this one sleep a bit longer. 2027-2050. **92.**

RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINES SUMMER 2021



The sheer volume of outstanding wines currently being produced in the Champagne region clearly dictates that my previous approach of writing about Champagne twice a year in relatively large reports is inadequate, as it is not well-suited to release schedules and I will end up missing a lot of new releases that come out at other times of the year. So I am rethinking coverage of this region and will now try to say “yes” to samples proffered at all times of the year and regularly include smaller articles of new wines in the market, as is the case with this report, rather than trying to do those larger features I wrote in the recent past. This seems like the most logical approach as the world starts to open up again from the Covid pandemic, as one of the current byproducts of the last year and a half is that shipping from France to the US is slower and more unpredictable now than was the case pre-pandemic, so that many importers of French wines are no longer able to plot the shipping and arrival of containers with relative accuracy to their scheduling, but rather are in a position to just try and get their containers on a ship whenever the slot opens up. I am sure that in addition to all of the headaches caused by Covid in this regard, the period of the Trump administration’s tariff war on European wines also added to the backlog of wines in cellars and at freight forwarding companies throughout the EU, hoping for the abolition of those tariffs and the possibility of shipping containers without the added layer

of taxation. So ports are extremely busy at the present time and wines are arriving here in the US in a piecemeal fashion and at relatively atypical times of the year.

The following notes include a fine array of new releases from some of the very best producers in the entire region of Champagne. In particular, I should mention that these notes include the first taste I have had of the 2012 vintage of Dom Pérignon, which is probably the most-anticipated release of a new vintage of this *Tête de Cuvée* since the 1996 vintage. There have been some truly brilliant vintages crafted here in relatively recent times, as both the 2002 and 2008 vintages of Dom Pérignon have followed in the footsteps of the 1996 and taken their proper place, right at the historical summit of great years for this wine. But, based on the early showing of the 2012, it does not seem to be a stretch of the imagination to place that wine even higher in the pantheon of vintages here and this is clearly one of the very greatest vintages of Dom Pérignon to have been crafted in the last half century! The *maison* mentions the 1990 vintage as another that may have been created in a similar vein, but I sold plenty of 1990 Dom Pérignon back in my merchant days and vividly recall how that wine tasted when it was first released. It was a lovely vintage of DP, but the 2012 unequivocally towers above that wine. I am not sure if the 2012 Dom Pérignon has arrived in the market yet, or is imminent, but I wanted to take a moment to extol its boundless virtues here in the introduction, so that those well-heeled enough to wish to cellar this wine have an early warning of just how brilliant the wine will be to drink and cellar over the coming fifty or sixty years. I should note though that the 2012 is quite a structured wine out of the blocks, and for those thinking about drinking a vintage of Dom Pérignon in the near future, the wide open and very lovely 2010 DP is the vastly preferable option. But, for cellaring, the 2012 vintage is a stunning candidate!

So, even as I put the finishing touches on this smaller feature on the region, I am already awaiting the arrival of new releases from Maison Louis Roederer and Maison Philipponnat for the next issue of the newsletter, so one can see that I at least am benefitting from this new strategy of writing even more frequently about Champagne! Not surprisingly, the year and a half (and still counting) of the pandemic was hardly a bull market for Champagne, as sales slumped alongside of the dearth of safe gatherings and the relative tenor of most people's moods during the darkest days of Covid. In theory, one would expect this situation to remedy itself with gusto once the pandemic is truly in the rearview mirror and the pace of Champagne shipments around the globe is certainly rebounding now and should get even more robust as the virus is truly beaten back and the world can get on to the prospect of celebrating a return to normalcy. France remains the most important market for Champagne and I am uncertain how the domestic market is faring right now for bubbly, caught between the gentle uptick of cases once again brought on by the Delta variant and the urge on the part of the population to once again get on with sharing their *joie de vivre* with their fellow citizens and with the host of people the world over who wish to again visit *La Belle France* and toast its inherent beauty and ongoing wisdom with a glass of bubbly.

Here in the United States, which remains a pretty modest market for Champagne, one hopes that the slump in sales induced by the pandemic will get some distributors and importers to rethink a bit how they market Champagne in America. This is particularly true of the representatives of many of the *Grandes Marques*, who other than those who represent the market dominant brands of Moët et Chandon and Veuve Clicquot, seem content to simply be "order

takers” selling the *Grandes Marques* in their portfolio during wedding and graduation season in the early summer, and then during the lead up to the Christmas and New Year’s holidays, and pretty much writing off any other times during the course of the year. There are a few exceptions here in the US, as one can see by the wide placements of houses such as Louis Roederer, and Bollinger around the country, but they are the exception that proves the rule here in the US. Many of these less-adept representatives do not even bother to try and go out and sell their *Grandes Marques*, or make extremely tepid efforts to do so, and often simply rely on a cadre of rather inept or disinterested public relations firms for any promotional efforts at all in the market here in the states during the rest of the year. Which might be an okay system if the public relations firms showed any wine savvy at all, but this has rarely been my experience. So, while so many of the *Grandes Marques* today are pushing their quality levels to new heights, many of whose wines simply tower over what was produced a generation ago at these same estates, their Herculean efforts are often kept secret by their trade representatives that know or care little about Champagne and really do not do any real “selling” of these wines. I always have the sense that many of the movers and shakers at the *Grandes Marques*, sitting in their offices in Reims, Épernay, Mareuil-sur-Aÿ and Aÿ have no idea how poorly-served they are in the US market by those they pay to allegedly represent their wines!

For Grower Champagne producers, they tend to fare a bit better here in the US market (or at least in the larger urban areas that show an affinity for fine wine), as they are often placed with smaller wine importers and specialty distributors who understand how to try and build up customer loyalty for their portfolio and do not overlook the Champagne producers in their books. This is probably one of the reasons that I am able to cover so much more thoroughly so many of the very best small estates in the Champagne region, whereas I have not tasted a bottle of Perrier-Jouët, Laurent-Perrier or Billecart-Salmon in ages and ages, and have not even seen a full representation of current releases from houses such as Pol Roger, Bollinger, Charles Heidsieck or Piper-Heidsieck in several years. And, if one looks at the sales figures for any of these *Grandes Marques*, one can see that they are hardly making the folks at Veuve Clicquot look over their shoulders. In the notes that follow, one will see that I did manage to get a couple of entry level cuvées from Charles Heidsieck and Piper-Heidsieck for this report, though it was far from an enjoyable task and it will hardly inspire me to put so much effort into a similar effort a year down the road. The Pol Roger notes that are included as well below all hail from wines pulled out of my own cellar, or wines which I encountered at private tastings, as I have not seen any samples from their importer since they too hired a slick new public relations company to handle their portfolio a few years ago. But, hopefully, the dearth of sales here in the states during the pandemic market slump may serve as a catalyst for these distributors and importers to rethink how they attempt to market Champagne here in America and maybe, just maybe, some good will come from the pandemic in this regard.

Please do not misconstrue the above comments as complaining, as I taste an awful lot of outstanding Champagne for each and every issue of the newsletter and am most emphatically not in need of a greater volume of samples arriving on my stoop. It is more a lament for all of the great wines being produced in the region that are often not finding their way to wine collectors, merchants and sommeliers, through the lack of marketing effort and insight exercised on the part of the middle tier of distribution who are more often than not, doing an extreme disservice to their Champagne producers. And this is nothing new, as I can look back thirty-five years to my

wine merchant days, or twenty-five years ago to my sommelier days, and cannot recall more than a small handful of times where Champagne was marketed with the same vigor as still wines from distributors and importers. How often did the wholesale representative call me up to make an appointment to taste the new releases of non-vintage or vintage-dated wines from their Champagne house in the portfolio? Almost never! But, the new vintages of cabernet sauvignon, Chianti or Beaujolais often were part of a routine scheduling of buyers with wholesale trade representatives, and it often puzzled me why Champagne and other sparkling wines were not treated in a similar fashion. Perhaps if they were, we might see American consumption of sparkling wines increase dramatically, as there is little doubt that this category is woefully soft in our national market. Back in the old days, Terry Theise was really the only importer of Champagne who took a serious approach to his marketing, and annual tastings of the new releases and vintages were always part of his yearly calendar. I often wonder how much more successful other importers might be with their own roster of Champagne producers if they organized a similar tasting of the new releases shortly after they arrived here in the US, so that their clients would have firsthand knowledge of how the new bottlings were tasting?

Marketing of Champagne in America seems to be something that has only been mastered by a few of the important houses, as it is routine for many top buyers and journalists to taste the new releases from Champagne Krug, Dom Pérignon and Maison Louis Roederer, to name a few of the very best-represented wines of the region. Often, though not always, these tastings are undertaken by the *Grandes Marques* themselves or their dedicated staff here in the US, as they seem to have learned that farming this responsibility out to others is not always efficacious. Certainly, there are houses such as Louis Roederer and Taittinger where their importers act promptly to promote new releases in the American market, but most of the other small handful of successfully-promoted brands seem to be doing it themselves. With several other *Grandes Marques*, I will often contact their representatives about getting new samples of their wines for a coming article, only to be told that “the cuvées we have in the market currently are the same ones you tasted two and a half years ago.” Really? And the representatives never ask themselves, “if we have not been able to sell through a single release in two years, perhaps it is time to consider a new methodology to trying to sell these wines?” The stultifying inertia demonstrated by many representatives in this regard is truly mind-boggling. As I said above, there are some exceptions to this low level standard of representation, but it is probably quite accurate for a large percentage of the *Grandes Marques*.

To be fair to the middlemen and women in the Champagne pipeline, the long-repeated mantra that non-vintage bottlings are essentially the same from year to year with the *Grandes Marques* certainly feeds into this lack of urgency on the part of their representatives to go out and sell the wines here in the states. The non-vintage bottlings will find their customary, miniscule place of representation in the market from their historical places in the firmament in Champagne, the vintages that are highly-touted will also receive some orders, and the rest of the time, the wines will just languish in warehouses waiting to be ordered at Christmas. Kudos to smaller *maisons* such as Champagne Jacquesson, who eschews this simpleton motto about non-vintage bottlings and makes a conscious effort to underline just how unique each and every release of non-vintage Champagne is from the year before or the next year, and no longer makes any effort to bury vintage to vintage personality through aggressive blending down to the least common denominator. But, there needs to be a renaissance in how Champagne is marketed here

in the United States (and perhaps in other markets as well?) that mirrors the renaissance that has been going on for quite some time in the cellars in Champagne, but is not translating into more wine lovers drinking bubbly on a routine basis.

As long as we are on the subject of Champagne markets, it does merit mention of the new, asinine law in Russia that now reserves the term of “Champagne” exclusively for sparkling wines produced within Mother Russia, and requires wines from all other countries, including Champagne itself, to include the term “Sparkling Wine” on their labels. As I complete this new issue of the newsletter, it appears that the term Sparkling Wine may be allowed to grace the back labels of real French Champagne, rather than be required on the front labels, but the entire episode is disappointing in the extreme. One supposes that next, as Stalin once had ordered hundreds and hundreds of truckloads of soil from the Cognac region to be transported back to Russia to improve the prospects of Russian brandy, that the term Cognac will soon follow suit within the Russian market. I was sorry to see that the corporate umbrella of several of the most important *Grandes Marques* seemed likely to acquiesce to the new regulations in Russia, as for decades, this has been the sword that the entire Champagne world was prepared to fall on if it would protect the historical name of their region and keep it from being usurped by sparkling wine producers in other countries hoping to cash in on the hard-earned *cachet* of real French Champagne. It is understandable, in the wake of the pandemic’s global slump in Champagne sales, to not wish to hurt sales in any market at this time, but one hopes that in the near future there will be a reversal of this law, or the end of the willingness of Champagne producers to abide by its terms (even if it means temporarily shunning the Russian market). As it will be a sad day for Champagne if the official delimitation of the region eventually extends from the Aube to the Kamchatka peninsula.



Crémant de Bourgogne

2018 Bruno Dangin “Préstige de Narcès” Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime

I often wonder how different Bruno Dangin’s life might be if the boundaries for the Aube region of Champagne had been just a touch more expansive and included his vineyards, which fall a kilometer or two outside the region. There is little doubt that his wines are as good as many Champagnes in the Aube, though given his price per bottle, he cannot afford to age them as long as he would like *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. So, it makes sense to tuck a few of these bottles away for two or three more years in the cellar, as they are really Champagne in all but name and aging pattern! His 2018 Préstige de Narcès is a beautiful bottle of pinot noir-based bubbly, offering up a vibrant nose of white peach, apple, chalky minerality, bread dough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive, quite elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and racy finish. This wine was disgorged in March of 2021. Fine juice. 2021-2030+. **90.**

2017 Bruno Dangin “Préstige de Constance” Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime

Monsieur Dangin’s Préstige de Constance bottling is his no added SO2 cuvée, and though I like it quite well, it never seems to have quite the same bounce and vibrancy as his Préstige de Narcès. The 2017 Préstige de Constance is also composed entirely from pinot noir and offers up a toasty nose of apple, a touch of nutskin, chalky soil and wheat toast. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and shows off pretty good depth at the core, with very elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not quite as refined on the palate as the 2018 Préstige de Narcès bottling, but we are dealing with two dramatically different vintages as well, as 2017 was afflicted by both frost and hail, while 2018 was quite trouble free from the perspective of *vignerons*. But, I have the sense that some of this wine’s more mature profile is related to the lack of SO2, as well as the vagaries of the 2017 vintage. We shall see if this is the case a year from now, when the 2018 Préstige de Constance is ready for release. But, this is still a good drink and a very good value. The wine was disgorged in February of 2019 and given some additional bottle aging in the cellars. 2021-2026. **88.**

Bruno Dangin “Cuvée Rosée” Brut NV “Lot 17”

This is all from the 2017 vintage, though it is not listed as a vintage-dated wine on the label. It is crafted solely from pinot noir and was disgorged in October of 2020. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a complex and vibrant bouquet of strawberries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, a touch of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and frothy in personality, with fine depth at the core, pinpoint bubbles, zesty acids, lovely balance and a long, focused and impressively complex finish. Fine juice and again, a great bargain. 2021-2028. **90.**

Sparkling Wine

Rhys Vineyards “Perpetual Reserve” Extra Brut NV (Santa Cruz Mountains)

This is going to be the first release of Rhys Vineyards’ Perpetual Reserve Extra Brut, which I received an early preview of this June. The wine is composed of eighty-seven percent 2018 vintage, nine percent 2017 vintage and four percent 2016 vintage, with the wine eventually designed to incorporate more older wines from the solera as it picks up age with the incorporation of more vintages in the future. The *cépages* is seventy-seven percent chardonnay and twenty-three percent pinot noir and the *vins clairs* were given nine months of barrel aging before bottling up for its secondary fermentation. After two years aging *sur latte* it was disgorged

in June of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of 3.3 grams per liter. The wine is outstanding on both the nose and palate, offering up a very refined bouquet of apple, lemon, complex minerality, a hint of bread dough, spring flowers, lemongrass and a touch of *fleur de sel* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core and mineral undertow, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, crisp and beautifully balanced finish. This will be quite drinkable out of the blocks, but like all Rhys wines, it is built to age and will be even more interesting with five to ten years' worth of bottle age on it. Most impressive! 2021-2045. **93.**

Non-Vintage Non-Dosé

Francis Boulard et Fille “les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Faverolles)

As is customary with the les Murgiers bottling from Delphine Boulard these days, this wine is from the single harvest of 2017. The *cépages* here is entirely pinot meunier once again, after a brief blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier for the wine last year, due to a fire in the cellars in 2016. The grapes are grown organically, barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and the *vins clairs* go through full malo. The 2017 les Murgiers offers up a very pretty and refined nose of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a lovely base of soil, just a whisper of buttery oak and a fine array of meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, very refined *mousse* and quite good length and grip on the well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is quite lovely. 2021-2040+. **92.**

Champagne Marguet “Shaman 17” Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

This is the same bottling of Shaman 17 that I reviewed in the last issue from Benoît Marguet, just a later disgorgement, as this bottle was disgorged in February of 2021 and the last in November of 2020. The wine is every bit as lovely as the previous bottle, but seems to be already blossoming and starting to drink with generosity, whereas my last bottle was still rather tight and I was missing its former modest level of *dosage*. But, this wine is now singing on both the nose and palate, offering up a really fine bouquet of apple, white peach, a beautiful base of Ambonnay minerality, brioche, gentle floral tones and a discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core, excellent soil undertow, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, beautifully balanced finish. This bottling only spent three months longer on its fine lees than the last one that I tasted, so I suspect that the difference in my impression of the wine's approachability is not based upon the different dates of disgorgement, but simply misreading how quickly the first bottle would blossom from behind its acids with a bit of aging. In any event, the wine is excellent and will certainly age well, but I was clearly incorrect that it needed a couple of years in the cellar before drinking, as it is already quite accessible! Live and learn. 2021-2045. **92+.**

Demi-Sec

Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Sublime” Demi-Sec NV (Reims)

The current release of Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Sublime” non-vintage Demi-Sec is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent chardonnay. The blend includes twenty percent reserve wines and was finished with a *dosage* of thirty-three grams per liter. The wine offers up a bright nose of peach, *patissière*, chalk soil tones and a lovely array of meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, a lovely girdle of acidity and a long, moderately sweet and very nicely balanced finish. This is designed for

serving with dessert or sipping late at night in a Parisian jazz club, and it will fulfill either role admirably. Good juice. 2021-2035. **90.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut

Champagne Corbon Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

I reported incorrectly about the origins of Agnès Corbon's newest release of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs in the last report on Champagne, back in Issue 92. It turns out that this iteration of her Blanc de Blancs NV is actually de-classified 2011 vintage Blanc de Blancs, as Agnès decided to sell this as a non-vintage bottling. So, my intuition in my note on the wine that the *vins clairs* had not gone through malolactic fermentation were correct, as none of the vintage bottlings at Champagne Corbon go through malo. The bouquet is bright and beautifully expressive, offering up scents of pear, lemon, fresh almond, brioche, limestone minerality and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, snappy and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a puppy and could use some bottle age to blossom from behind its girdle of acidity. It will be excellent once it relaxes a bit structurally! 2023-2045+. **92.**

Fallet-Prévostat Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

The previous versions of Fallet-Prévostat non-vintage Blanc de Blancs had far more bottle age than this release, which was imported into the New York market in the last year or so. It is every bit as fine in quality as the more mature wines I have drunk with great pleasure in the last couple of years, just ten to twenty years younger in its evolution. The bouquet is bright, complex and very classy, jumping from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, hazelnut, brioche and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow, refined *mousse*, excellent grip and a long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is old enough to be starting to drink very well indeed, but based on older examples, it is clearly still in climbing mode and will be even better a decade down the road! 2021-2050. **93.**

Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges)

Cécile Grongnet is making absolutely superb wines these days and her entry level Blanc de Blancs is one of the best values out there in the world of non-vintage Brut Champagne. This new arrival is from the base year of 2018, with the *vins clairs* not going through malo and the finishing *dosage* being its customary eight grams per liter. The wine is still youthful, but also open and complex on the nose, offering up scents of pear, hazelnut, a lovely base of limestone minerality, a nice touch of citrus zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, very nicely balanced finish. Fine juice. 2021-2040. **92.**

Lancelot-Courtois "la Croisée de Terroirs" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant)

Jean-Paul Lancelot farms four hectares of vines, all in the grand cru villages of Cramant, Oger, Avize and Chouilly. He reserves the production from two *lieux à dits* to make his Brut Tradition Vieilles Vignes bottling below, and blends the remainder into this bottling. All of his vines are old by Champagne standards, as the youngest are now forty years of age. The la Croisée des Terroirs bottling is lovely, offering up a complex nose of pear, apple, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, brioche and a nice floral topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, quite refined *mousse* and a long, focused and well-balanced finish. A fine bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. 2021-2045. **91.**

Lancelot-Courtois “Brut Tradition V.V.” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant)

The Brut Tradition bottling from Jean-Paul Lancelot hails from a plot of vines in the *lieu à dit* of Les Monts Aigous in Chouilly, which was planted in 1957, and another in the *lieu à dit* of Les Monts Chenevaux in Oger that were planted all the way back in 1953. The current release is excellent, delivering a fine bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, a lovely foundation of chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, almond and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, nascently complex and full, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, vibrant and very, very promising finish. This is already quite tasty, but clearly will deliver more with a bit more bottle age and still has a long life ahead of it! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **92+**.



Looking down on the village center of Cumières, the “sun basket” of Champagne.

Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

Robert Barbichon “Blanc de Noirs” Extra Brut NV (Celles-sur-Ource)

The new release of non-vintage Blanc de Noirs bottling from Robert Barbichon is a lovely wine, though I have little doubt that it is not a year that Monsieur Barbichon looks back fondly upon. Due to both frost and hail damage in the Aube, he lost more than half of his normal production and this was quite a short crop. The wine is composed entirely from pinot noir, with ninety percent of the blend from the base year of 2017 and ten percent reserve wines from the previous year. The bouquet is very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of nectarine, apple, nutskin, a fine base of chalky soil and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine

is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2021-2035. **91+**.

Bérêche et Fils “Brut Réserve” NV (Ludes) Base Year 2018

The Bérêche et Fils “Brut Réserve” from the base year of 2018 was disgorged in December of 2020 and given its customary finishing *dosage* of seven grams per liter. It is a blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and includes about one-third reserve wines in its composition, as is customary for this bottling *chez* Bérêche. The wine is quite a bit more youthful on the nose than the 2017 base year version, but eventually the bouquet can be coaxed into showing a lovely blend of nectarine, a hint of fresh apricot, a fine base of chalky soil tones, brioche, hazelnut and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine mineral drive and bounce, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is quite approachable today, but is really still a puppy and it will reward a bit of cellaring with an added layer of complexity. A lovely non-vintage in the making. 2023-2045. **91+**.

Bérêche et Fils “Brut Réserve” NV (Ludes) Base Year 2017

The 2017 base year bottling of Brut Réserve from Raphaël and Vincent Bérêche was disgorged in February of 2020, after two years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. It is its customary blend of one-third each (more or less) of pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay, and like all of the Bérêche wines, it is aged under cork, rather than crown cap during its time on its fine lees. The 2017 version (which includes thirty percent reserve wines) offers up a beautiful bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent soil undertow, zesty acids, refined, pinpoint bubbles and a long, focused and very classy finish. This is drinking very nicely today, but like all of the wines from the Bérêche brothers, it is built to age and will improve with some bottle aging. 2021-2040+. **92.**

Grongnet “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV (Étoges)

The newest arrival of Cécile Grongnet’s “Carpe Diem” non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2015 (I just reported on the 2012 base year version of this back in April). As is customary, the *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented, do not go through malo and are aged in cask until blending. The *cépages* of this year’s version is fifty-three percent chardonnay, twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and the remaining seven percent composed of a mix of arbanne, petit meslier and pinot blanc. The wine is aged under cork on its fine lees for three and a half years prior to disgorgement and receives a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The excellent bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a lovely base of soil, hazelnut, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, refined *mousse* and a long, suave and vibrant finish. The aging under cork gives the wine a roundness out of the blocks that allows it to really drink with breed right from the start. 2021-2050. **93+**.

Charles Heidsieck “Brut Réserve” NV (Reims)

The new release of Charles Heidsieck non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2010 and was disgorged in 2018, giving this wine plenty of time to develop with time aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is deep, refined and complex, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of apple, nectarine, *patissière*, a touch of hazelnut, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature, very elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish.

With seven years of aging on its fine lees, this wine is remarkably complex and truly ready to drink upon release, which is all too rare in the world of non-vintage Brut. As is always the case, this is one of the finer non-vintage Bruts on the market today. 2021-2040. **92.**

Lanson “Black Label” Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Lanson Black Label non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2015, with thirty-five percent of the cuvée comprised of reserve wines. The *cépages* this year is fifty percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier and the wine was aged fully four years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in January of 2020. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is drinking beautifully, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, white peach, a complex base of soil, fresh-baked bread, just a hint of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, very refined *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced and zesty finish. This is a lovely wine. 2021-2040. **91+.**

Lanson “Green Label” Brut NV (Reims)

Lanson’s “Green Label” non-vintage Brut bottling is their first foray into the world of organic and biodynamically-farmed grapes, as this wine is made entirely from vineyards certified by Ecocert. It hails from four hectares of vines in the communes of Verneuil and Vandières, with this release hailing from the base year of 2015 and having been given four years aging *sur latte*. The *cépages* is fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent chardonnay, with the wine having been disgorged in March of 2020 and given a *dosage* of six grams per liter. It offers up a quite refined bouquet of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones, dried flowers and hints of the smokiness to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and bounce, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and complex young finish. This is fine, fine juice. 2021-2045. **93.**

Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Brut” NV (Reims)

The current release of Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Brut” non-vintage is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent chardonnay. Twenty-five percent of the blend this year is made up of reserve wines. It is aged twenty-four months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a discreetly floral topnote from the pinot meunier in the blend. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This is quite good Brut NV, though I would not have minded it at seven or eight grams per liter for the *dosage*, as that might have added just a touch more backend precision to the wine. But perhaps that would have limited its wider market appeal. Good juice. 2021-2035. **89.**

Ponson “Petite Montagne” Extra Brut NV (Coulommès-la-Montagne)

The newly-arrived Petite Montagne bottling from Maxime Ponson hails from the base year of 2015 and is made from its customary blend of forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir. The wine was disgorged in October of 2019 and given some additional bottle aging in the cellars prior to release. The nose is pure and quite refined in profile, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on

the crisp and complex finish. I have the sense that with every passing vintage, Maxime's wines are getting more refined. 2021-2040. 92.



Non-Vintage Rosé Brut and Extra Brut

Francis Boulard et Fille Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut (Faverolles)

The new release of Delphine Boulard's Rosé de Saignée is from the 2013 vintage (though it is not vintage-designated on the label, which is why I have listed it here with the non-vintage bottlings). It was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter and disgorged in September of 2020. The wine is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the delicate salmon color hailing from a twelve hour maceration on the skins at the outset of fermentation, rather than an addition of still red wine. The 2013 Rosé de Saignée delivers a beautifully refined aromatic constellation of strawberries, blood orange, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones, wheat toast and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow, elegant *mousse*, and a long, complex and bone dry finish. With its extended aging *sur latte*, the acids are nicely buffered here at the low *dosage*. Fine juice. 2021-2040. 92.

Lanson "Le Rosé" Brut NV (Reims)

The newest release of Lanson's "Le Rosé" non-vintage Brut is another very strong effort. The wine is from the base year of 2015 and was given fully four years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in May of 2020, which is almost an unheard of amount of time on the fine lees for

a non-vintage Rosé bottling from a *Grande Marque*. The wine's *cépages* this year is fifty-three percent pinot noir, thirty-two percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It is a lovely salmon color and offers up a bright and classy nose of cherry, blood orange, chalky soil tones, rose petals, rye bread and a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely snappy, with a lovely core of fruit and soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and complex finish. Like all of the Lanson wines, this is non-malo and the four years of aging *sur latte* have allowed the acids to mellow beautifully, giving the wine a fine combination of generosity on the attack and backbone from its girdle of acidity. First class non-vintage Rosé. 2021-2040. **91.**

Champagne Marguet “Shaman 17” Rosé Extra Brut NV (Ambonnay)

The Marguet “Shaman 17” Rosé Extra Brut is another in a long line of outstanding Rosé bottlings from Benoît Marguet. This year's version is composed of a *cépages* of fifty-nine percent chardonnay and forty-one percent pinot noir and was disgorged in November of 2020, without finishing *dosage*, despite it being labeled as an Extra Brut. The wine is pure and sophisticated on the nose, offering up scents of blood orange, cherry, wheat toast, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, crisp and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent complexity and bounce, elegant *mousse*, impeccable focus and a long, poised and zesty finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035. **92+.**

Piper-Heidsieck “Rosé Sauvage” Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Piper-Heidsieck “Rosé Sauvage” non-vintage Brut is composed from a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent chardonnay. The wine is aged two years *sur latte* and includes a fairly sizable percentage of still pinot noir in the blend, which accounts for its lovely, ruby hue. The wine offers up a beautiful nose of cherries, rhubarb, a touch of cinnamon stick, rye bread, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and moderately complex, with a fine core of fruit, slightly coarse *mousse*, good acids and a fairly long, well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid wine, but not quite up to the last iteration of this bottling I tasted a few years ago. 2021-2035. **89.**

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2011 Francis Boulard et Fille “les Rachais” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Faverolles)

The 2011 vintage of les Rachais from Delphine Boulard is produced from the family's oldest vines, which were planted in 1867. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in cask for one full year prior to bottling for secondary fermentation. The 2011 les Rachais offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, pear, hazelnut, brioche, a fine base of chalky soil tones, a hint of buttery oak and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, balanced and zesty finish. The acids here are quite nicely buffered for a non-*dosé* wine and it is drinking very nicely today, though it has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2021-2045. **92.**

2010 Corbon “les Bacchantes” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Avize)

Agnès Corbon's 2010 vintage of les Bacchantes Blanc de Blancs is an outstanding wine. The wine was disgorged in March of 2021, after ten years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthful blend of pear, passion fruit, brioche, a fine base of chalky soil and a lovely floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with beautiful focus and balance,

a lovely core, excellent mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. This is outstanding juice! 2021-2050. **94.**

2004 Pol Roger “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2004 Pol Roger vintage Blanc de Blancs was quite tight when it was first released, but it is starting to blossom very nicely now at age seventeen. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a bright and stylish blend of apple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, brioche, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is really just starting to drink with generosity and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2021-2045. **93.**

1996 Pol Roger “Blanc de Chardonnay” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

It had been several years since I last drank a bottle of the 1996 Pol Roger Blanc de Chardonnay and the wine is aging as gracefully as one could ever hope for. The bouquet is deep, bright and beautifully complex, offering up a maturing constellation of pear, fresh apricot, chalky soil tones, brioche, a lovely dollop of orange zest and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, a beautiful spine of acidity, excellent focus and balance, refined *mousse* and a long, poised and very classy finish. First class bubbly in its prime. 2021-2050. **94.**



Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2016 Champagne Marguet “Verzenay” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)

This is a new bottling from Benoît Marguet that is produced entirely from pinot noir, made from purchased fruit from organically-farmed vineyards in this grand cru village. The wine was disgorged in March of 2021 and is still young, but its excellent potential is already self-evident. The bouquet offers up a fine aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, citrus zest, a complex base of soil tones, warm biscuits and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and full, with an excellent core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and impeccable balance on the long, nascently complex and beautifully precise finish. This will need at least three years in the cellar to start to open up, but it has a fine, fine future ahead of it. 2024-2060. 94.

2016 Champagne Marguet “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)

In contrast to the 2016 Verzenay cuvée, the 2016 Ambonnay bottling from Benoît Marguet is composed entirely from his own, estate-grown fruit. Its *cépages* is fifty-seven percent pinot noir and forty-three percent chardonnay and the wine was also disgorged in March of 2021. The wine is also on the youthful side and will want a few years in the cellar to start to blossom, but offers up a lovely young nose of apple, nectarine, a fine base of chalky soil tones, brioche, gentle smokiness and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, bright and full-bodied, with excellent mid-palate depth, lovely mineral drive, zesty acids, suave *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This has outstanding backend lift and grip and will be a stunning wine when it has been given a chance to blossom properly. 2024-2060. 94+.

2015 Georges Laval “les Hauts Chèvres” Brut Nature Millésime (Cumières)

It had been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2015 les Haut Chèvres from Vincent Laval, and I was amazed how quickly it has blossomed on the nose with only one additional year of bottle age! When I last drank this wine in the spring of 2020, its potential was self-evident, but it was tight and structured and seemingly a decade away from blossoming. But, one year on, it is opening up brilliantly, and while still young, it is already awfully easy to drink! The stunning bouquet soars from the glass today in a blend of apple, pear, passion fruit, a complex base of chalky minerality, just a whisper of buttery oak and a beautiful blend of musky floral tones in the upper register redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with bright, beautifully integrated acids, laser-like focus, very refined *mousse* and a long, complex and stunningly balanced finish. The old pinot meunier vines here have given this wine a very exotic touch in the ripe year of 2015. A brilliant wine that seems destined to drink a bit earlier than I initially thought, but will age just as long and gracefully! 2026-2065+. 96.

2014 Grongnet “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Étoges)

The newly arrived 2014 Grongnet “Special Club” Brut Millésime is composed from a *cépages* of forty-five percent chardonnay and fifty-five percent pinot noir. The *vins clairs* did not go through malolactic fermentation and the wine was disgorged in November of 2020, after four and a half years aging *sur latte*. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and deliver and superb aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, a hint of *patissière*, almond and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied,

complex and rock solid at the core, with fine soil undertow, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is superb. 2021-2050. **93+**.

2012 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2012 Dom Pérignon is a brilliant wine in the making and seems likely to ultimately be judged one of the greatest vintages here in the last quarter century. According to *Chef de Cave* Vincent Chaperon, the wine is close to its ideal *cépages* of fifty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir in 2012. The wine is quite a powerful vintage of Dom Pérignon, but with all of the customary elegance and structural chassis of the greatest vintages here and it remains a young wine, brimming with energy and superb depth. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of lime, green apple, menthol, stony minerality, discreet botanical tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core, superb mineral drive and grip, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. I love how the perfect ripeness of the 2012 vintage is seamlessly interwoven here with a superb girdle of acidity, great minerality and excellent purity, which will end up producing a legendary vintage of this wine. It is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but I would opt to tuck bottles away for at least eight to ten more years before starting to drink the 2012, as there is so much left here to still unfold. 2029-2075+. **98.**

2010 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2010 vintage of Dom Pérignon is a beautiful wine, and rather uncharacteristically for this long-distance runner of a *Tête de Cuvée*, the wine is quite flattering to drink out of the blocks, as its customary steely structure is more giving than usual at such a young age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of apple, lime, menthol, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness, a delightful touch of DP's signature botanicals and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, bright, bouncy acids and a very long, very complex and surprisingly wide open finish. This is the rare vintage of Dom Pérignon that drinks well out of the blocks, and of all the recent vintage releases of this wine, the 2010 is unequivocally the one I would choose for drinking over the next decade! That said, it is also very well-balanced and may well surprise us with how well it ages! 2021-2050. **95.**

2008 Lanson "Gold Label" Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2008 Lanson "Gold Label" Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of roughly fifty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. It was disgorged in February of 2016, after seven years aging on its fine lees. Today, the wine is really starting to drink with generosity, soaring from the glass in a refined blend of peach, apple, wheat toast, hazelnut, a beautiful base of soil tones and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, fine soil undertow, very elegant *mousse*, a lovely spine of acidity and a long, complex and very classy finish. At twelve years of age, this wine is wide open and hitting on all cylinders, but still has decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2060. **93+**.

2006 Philipponnat "le Léon" Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

Philipponnat's "le Léon" bottling is a single vineyard cuvée from a parcel of pinot noir vines in the village of Aÿ. I have had the chance to drink the 2006 "le Léon" on a small handful

of occasions since first tasting the wine at the cellars in Mareuil back in the spring of 2014, and I have always loved this wine. This most recent bottle is drinking splendidly, offering up a wide open and refined bouquet of apple, white peach, warm bread, walnuts, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, impeccable balance and grip, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and quite refined finish. This is a superb example of the ripe, but underrated 2006 vintage. The wine is fully at its peak today, but still has decades of fine drinking ahead of it. 2021-2040. **94.**

2003 Dom Pérignon “P2” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

I last tasted the 2003 Dom Pérignon with Richard Geoffroy in the spring of 2018 in Hautvillers, but that bottle was the original disgorgement, rather than the soon to be released P2 version, which has spent longer resting on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. I had been unaware before tasting the P2 version that the 2003 crop of chardonnay in the Côte des Blancs has been reduced by seventy percent by spring frost damage, so that this vintage of Dom Pérignon included the highest percentage of pinot noir in the blend, at sixty-two percent, of any vintage ever produced of this cuvée. The cellar team also took the unprecedented decision in 2003 to “brown” the juice ahead of fermentation to allow some phenolics to precipitate out before the fermentation got rolling, in a manner that was first championed by Jean-Marc Roulot in Meursault. In any event, the 2003 Dom Pérignon is drinking beautifully in its new P2 guise, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of dried apricot and apple, lovely botanical overtones, still a classic foundation of DP minerality, dried flowers, menthol and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered in personality, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a long, powerful and complex finish that closes with customary mineral notes. This is an outstanding wine that is drinking very well and is really one of the recent vintages of Dom Pérignon that performs best at the table. 2021-2045+. **94.**

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

2007 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne Rosé Brut Millésime Magnum (Reims)

The 2007 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne Rosé is drinking beautifully out of magnum at fourteen years of age. The bouquet is pure, elegant and precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of tangerine, bitter cherry, chalky minerality, rose petals, gentle smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow and grip, pinpoint bubbles, bright, zesty acids and impeccable balance on the long, complex and utterly refined finish. Out of magnum, the 2007 is just entering its plateau of peak drinkability, which I suspect it already has been for a couple of years out of regular-sized format. Just a lovely vintage of Comtes de Champagne Rosé! 2021-2040. **95.**

Coteaux Champenois

2019 Coteaux Champenois Rouge- Champagne Robert Barbichon

Robert Barbichon’s 2019 Coteaux Champenoise *rouge* is composed entirely from pinot noir and comes in at a svelte 11.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine is quite pale ruby in color and delivers a fine nose of strawberries, orange peel, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, fresh thyme and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and bright, with lovely intensity of flavor and marvelous transparency, bouncy acids and fine length and grip on

the gently tannic and very nicely balanced finish. This is a suave middleweight that is loaded with personality. 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Ambonnay Chardonnay- Champagne Marguet

Benoît Marguet's 2018 chardonnay from his estate-grown fruit in Ambonnay is from a blend of two different *lieux à dits*, Le Parc and Saint Remy. The wine is barrel-fermented and offers up a deep and refined bouquet of peach, apple, hazelnut, a lovely, complex base of soil, musky floral tones and a suave framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a fine core, impressive mineral drive and a long, zesty and quite classy finish. This could easily hold its own in a flight of Meursault! 2021-2035+. **92.**

2018 Bouzy Rouge- Champagne Marguet

The 2018 Bouzy rouge from Benoît Marguet is also excellent, though it is a properly structured young pinot noir and will need at least a handful of years in the cellar to soften up its tannins a bit. The wine comes in at twelve percent octane in this warm summer of 2018 and delivers a fine, deep and black fruity aromatic constellation of dark berries, black cherries, gamebird, complex soil tones, bitter chocolate and a touch of new oak. With air, the wine shows an exotic hint of peppermint in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and bright, with a good core, lovely soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, refined and very promising finish. Give this a few years to blossom. 2024-2040+. **92.**