

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

March-April 2021

Number Ninety-Two

- ❖ *The Produttori del Barbaresco's Stunning Lineup of 2016 Single Vineyard Riservas.* (pages 1-13)
- ❖ *The 2019 Vintage From Domaine Clos de la Chapelle and Domaine Joseph Voillot, Featuring Plenty of Stunning Volnay and Pommard Premier Crus.* (pages 14-23)
- ❖ *A Beautiful Lineup of Spring Releases From Some of America's Greatest, Old School and Neo-Classical Producers.* (pages 24-53)
- ❖ *Part Two Of the Annual Report On New Releases from Spain and Portugal, With a Heavy Focus On the Beautiful Wines of Galicia.* (pages 54-93)
- ❖ *More New Arrivals From the 2019 Vintage in Beaujolais.* (pages 94-105)
- ❖ *Another Full Round of Great 2019ers From Germany (As Even Late Containers Eventually Find Shore).* (pages 106-129)
- ❖ *New Spring Releases From Some Of the Top Producers In Champagne.* (pages 130-144)

Coming Attractions

- ❖ *The Annual Loire Valley Report- The First 2019s and Loads of Other Vintages.*
- ❖ *An In-Depth Report On the 1984 and 1985 Vintages of California Cabernet Sauvignon- Can They Match the Brilliance of the Decade of the 1970s?*
- ❖ *Summer Is the Right Time To Check In On the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise.*
- ❖ *New Releases and Recently-Tasted Older Wines From Italy.*
- ❖ *The Jura and Haut Savoie, Aging Non-Vintage Champagne, Chile, Argentina and Mexico, The Hill of Corton, Chassagne-Montrachet Rouge, 1998 Pomerols, Gevrey's Underrated Premier Cru of Petite Chapelle, Mature Loire Valley Reds, Champagne Bruno Paillard, 1999 Red Burgundy, Domaine Camus-Bruchon, Schloss Lieser, The Chermette Family, Special Club Champagne, Chambertin and Clos de Bèze, Château l'Evangile, and New Releases From the Languedoc and An Historical Profile of Domaine Tempier.*

View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at www.viewfromthecellar.com. Inquiries may also be emailed to john@viewfromthecellar.com. Copyright 2021 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either View From the Cellar or John Gilman are fully credited. **Please do not share.**

THE SIMPLY STUNNING 2016 CRU RISERVAS FROM THE PRODUTTORI DEL BARBARESCO



The Produttori del Barbaresco has been producing stellar wines since its inception in 1958, and is clearly one of the most impressive success stories for a winegrowers' cooperative in the history of wine. Since its very first vintage, it has been remarkable for the high quality of its wines, which rival the very best estates in Piemonte, and in its steadfast championing of the *terroir* of the top crus in Barbaresco. Back in the summer of 2009 I wrote a full historical feature on this amazing cooperative and their stellar lineup, so I was delighted this spring to have the opportunity to taste all of their Cru bottlings from the superb 2016 vintage. As these wines were not yet in the market when I wrote my large feature on new Italian releases last summer, where a significant number of 2016 Barbareschi and Baroli were reviewed, I am very grateful to be able to cover these superb new arrivals in the article below. Long-time readers already know of my long-held reverence for the Produttori del Barbaresco, as I wrote nearly thirty pages on the history of this superb cooperative and their beautiful interpretations of the finest *terroirs* to be found in the township of Barbaresco. For newer subscribers who may not have seen the historical feature on the Produttori, it can be found in its entirety in Issue 22 (which is easily accessed through the database) or you can email me directly and I will be more than pleased to share a copy of the article with you.

However, I thought it might be interesting to include here the background information on each of the Crus from the Produttori, regarding soil type, altitude, exposition and the cooperative's relative share of the production from each vineyard which I put together for that historical piece back in 2009, so I have included this background information prior to the tasting note on each of the 2016s. I have listed the Crus in the order that I generally rank them to my own personal tastes, starting with the more "forward" Crus and moving up the hierarchy to the finest and most long-lived bottlings. This is not to imply that any of the Produttori's Crus are particularly shorter-lived than another, but the style of each wine will often lend itself to certain Crus starting to drink with generosity a bit sooner than others, so I try to taste them in that order when I have the good fortune (such as this) where I can taste all nine of the bottlings together at the same time. Like many Barbaresco lovers, my two personal favorites from the Produttori are the Rabajà and Asili bottlings, but I have never turned down any of the other Crus for my own cellar or when offered a glass, as every single wine here is made to the same exacting standards as any of the others and there is simply not a "weak link" in the lineup. I should also observe that, though there is no tasting note for the 2016 Barbaresco *Normale* from the Produttori in this article, this bottling is always excellent on its own merits and should not be overlooked in the pursuit of the various Crus Riserva bottlings.

As I mentioned last summer back in Issue 88, I have found the 2016 vintage in Piemonte to be one of the greatest, classically-styled vintages to come along in the region since the twin towers of 1999 and 2001. The growing season of 2016 was long and sunny, but not as hot as either 2015 or 2017, which meant that producers here could harvest their Nebbiolo in the middle of the month or the third week of October, rather than the start of the month, or the end of September, which has too often been the norm in recent years, as the planet wrestles with the ill effects of climate change. The weather in September and October was absolutely ideal to finish up the growing season of 2016, with warm, sunny days and cooler nights, with the excellent diurnal temperature swings producing wines of precision, exceptional mid-palate depth, elegance and plenty of personality. It was the great *fin de saison* of 2016 that has given the top wines from this vintage their superb and classical personalities and their very suave, elegant tannic undercarriages. The wines possess plenty of structure and most assuredly will not prove to be early drinkers (despite my having just read recently an advertisement from one NY retailer about the great desirability of the 2016s from Barolo and Barbaresco because they were drinking in such a forward manner!), but the structural components of so many of the top 2016s are very refined this year, making for one of the greatest vintages in recent memory. The 2016 Crus from the Produttori del Barbaresco are clearly among the finest wines produced in the region and for those with cellar space and adequate patience, they should not be missed!

One of the things that struck me while tasting through this stellar lineup of 2016s was that the wines in general were labeled with a slightly higher alcohol level than I am accustomed to for the wines from the Produttori. Every single one of the Crus came in listed at fifteen percent alcohol in the 2016 vintage, which caught my eye. At first, I thought that this might have been a bit of preemption in case the Trump administration had decided to expand its trade war with the European Union to include Italian wines (which had originally been exempted at the expense of Italian cheeses, which were hit with the increase in tariffs) in a future round of taxation. As the EU allows wine producers up to a half point of latitude in labeling of alcohol levels (in either direction), it was conceivable that the wines were actually around their customary 14.5 percent

octane, but had been labeled a tad higher, just in case of more trade war escalation. But, after tasting through the wines, I was able to dissuade myself of this possible scenario, as the wines did seem to be around fifteen percent in 2016. I wrote to Aldo Vacca, the long-time Director of the Produttori del Barbaresco to ask about the alcohol levels of the 2016s, but did not hear back from him prior to sending out this issue of the newsletter, so I do not know the reason for the slightly higher (to me) alcohol levels of the 2016s. In this context, I should note that after writing my historical feature on the cooperative back in 2009, I did not have the opportunity to regularly taste new releases from the Produttori, so the fifteen percent octane could be simply routine now for these wines in our era of global warming and I was just behind the times in knowing this.

In any event, it did not really matter, as the wines were certainly not showing any signs of backend heat at the slightly higher octane levels of the 2016s, and it may well be that this has been the reality of the Produttori's wines for several vintages now. It is one of the great beauties of the Nebbiolo grape that it can carry a bit more alcohol than some other varieties and not show it, for even back in the pre-global warming days, Barolo and Barbaresco would routinely come in at fourteen percent alcohol, when most of the world was struggling to get sugar levels up past twelve percent. And great, classic vintages from Piemonte have routinely been labeled at 14.5 percent since the at least the late 1990s, so perhaps I have just been out of the loop for too many recent vintages from the Produttori and the 2016s being listed at fifteen percent was not out of the ordinary in the last decade's worth of releases from the cooperative. The entire range of 2016s here was everything one would expect from a great, classically-styled vintage and a producer at the top of its game, so the wines exude beautifully pure, precise fruit tones, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, outstanding expressions of their underlying *terroirs* and firm, superbly well-integrated tannic chassis that will carry the wines far, far into the future. As I intimated above, the well-meaning merchant here in NY offering up 2016s from Piemonte is not correct in calling this a vintage of "early-drinking" wines, but one can forgive them, as the wines are so beautifully balanced from the great Indian Summer of 2016 in the region that they can behave as if they will drink on the early side, given that their tannins are so suavely buried into the other constituent components of the wines. 2016 is a great vintage for the Produttori del Barbaresco and there is not a single Cru here that I would not want to have buried in my own cellar, if I was not painfully aware of where I currently stand in actuarial charts! The traditionally more forward 2016 Crus here may well start to show some generosity around age fifteen or so, but will still be even better to drink at age twenty or twenty-five. The more structured Crus will want a good two decades out from the vintage before they should start to be opened with expectations of accessibility and secondary developmental complexity. But, the wines are brilliant across the board, and will be very much worth the wait!

Barbaresco "Ovello"

Ovello is the most northerly of all the cru vineyards in the village of Barbaresco. It is a fairly large vineyard of 6.58 hectares, and the Produttori controls a significant percentage of the total under vine in Ovello, making this one of the most widely-seen single cru bottlings from the cooperative. The vineyard lies at an altitude of between 220 and 290 meters above sea level, with the vast majority of its vines facing west or southwest. There is a small east-facing section of the vineyard that drops down on the other side of the ridge towards the neighboring village of Neive, but this section is not considered to produce nebbiolo of quite the same quality as the other side of the ridge and production from this area generally will find its way into the Produttori's

blended Barbaresco bottling (even in top vintages), rather than into the single vineyard Riserva. The soils of Ovello have a bit more clay in the composition than many of the other crus in Barbaresco, which may account for the nice plump fruit that this vineyard often shows relatively early on in its evolution. Ovello's closest cru neighbor is the vineyard of Casotto-Loreto, which lies alongside of it to the south on the same ridge and shares the same exposure and altitude. In top vintages the Produttori will produce about fifteen hundred cases of their cru Ovello.

Ovello is one of the oldest crus in the lineup from the Produttori, having first been produced in the 1970 vintage, which was the second vintage in which the cooperative made single cru bottlings (after the inaugural releases in the 1967 vintage). It is generally one of the most forward of the nine crus made by the Produttori, and is a classic Barbaresco of ripe red and black cherry fruit at maturity, coupled with autumnal notes, scents of road tar, curry-like spice tones and often a distinctly floral topnote. Like all of the cru bottlings from the Produttori, the Ovello is an extremely ageworthy wine that will usually drink better at age twenty than it will be at age ten, despite its often quite precocious and plump fruit component that makes the wine accessible quite a bit ahead of when it reaches its peak. Because it is one of the largest production crus in the Produttori lineup, usually only matched in quantity of bottles produced by the Pora bottling, it is often overlooked a bit by Barbaresco lovers trying to search out the more limited release bottlings from vineyards such as Asili or Montefico, but Ovello is a superb wine that is every bit as worthy of inclusion in the well-stocked Piemonte cellar as any of the other crus in the Produttori lineup.

2016 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2016 vintage of Ovello is outstanding from the Produttori. The bouquet is deep, pure and shows a lovely touch of early sappiness in its constellation of red and black cherries, licorice, gamebird, violets, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely, pungent topnote of fresh oregano (like your fingers smell when you harvest some from your garden right before dinner). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise and transparent in personality, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is an outstanding wine in the making that will need a minimum of another ten to twelve years in the cellar to really start drinking with generosity, but which will be exceptional when it is ready to drink! 2031-2080. **93.**

Barbaresco “Pajè”

The cru of Pajè is one of the more recent additions to the Produttori's lineup, as its inaugural vintage was in 1982. Pajè is one of the smallest vineyards in the village, at only 2.43 hectares, but it produces a very lovely middleweight version of Barbaresco, which many commentators often associate with Rabajà in terms of aromatic and flavor profiles, albeit at a less powerful and full-bodied level. The vineyard sits on a ridge that links Muncagota and Secondine, both of which lie just to the north of the main ridge that houses Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà. The vineyard of Pajè forms a beautiful amphitheater of vines facing south by southwest, lying at an altitude between 260 and 220 meters above sea level. Pajè is one of the coolest microclimates amongst the crus in the township of Barbaresco, and for this reason it is generally a bit higher in acidity than many of its neighboring crus. Consequently, the wines typically start out quite structured from the Pajè vineyard, and it takes several years for the inherent elegance of this cru to emerge from behind its slightly austere adolescent phase. But the wine ages very

well indeed, and at full maturity Pajè is a lovely middleweight Barbaresco of impressive aromatic and flavor complexity. The Produttori typically produces about 8,000 bottles of Pajè per year in a top vintage, making this the second most limited of the cru bottlings, with only the Montefico producing a smaller number of bottles in a typical vintage.

2016 Barbaresco “Pajè” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2016 Barbaresco “Pajè” Riserva from the Produttori del Barbaresco is very red fruity in personality this year (this Cru can often be pretty black fruity in its youth), offering up a lovely and very precise bouquet of (mostly) red and black cherries, anise, lovely spice tones (that will turn to curry with age), bonfire, *pigeon*, a lovely base of soil tones that will turn autumnal fairly briskly, cumin, lavender and fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with a fine structural chassis, ripe, chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, very nicely balanced and extremely promising finish. This is already supremely elegant on the nose (though still quite primary), but will need extended bottle age for the tannins here to soften up and the wine to drink with generosity. 2035-2080. **93.**

Barbaresco “Pora”

The Pora vineyard is slightly larger than Ovello, measuring in at 7.3 hectares in size. It produces a longer-lived and more structured wine out of the blocks than Ovello, and takes several more years of cellaring to blossom than its more precocious compatriot. The Pora vineyard has had a high reputation in Barbaresco for centuries, and at one time was owned in its entirety by the “Father of Barbaresco”, Professor Domizio Cavazza, who was also the founder of the Produttori’s predecessor, the original Cantine Sociali di Barbaresco in 1894. It is a beautifully-situated vineyard, lying just to the west of the ridge that houses the three finest crus in all of Barbaresco, Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà, and touches Asili on its eastern border. The vineyard of Pora sits at an altitude of three hundred meters above sea level, and offers perfect exposure for nebbiolo in the upper reaches of the slope. The bottom of the hillside is generally planted these days with white grape varieties. The vines planted on the western end of the vineyard alongside the vineyard of Faset face due west, but the slope quickly swings around to face due south in the heart of the vineyard and turns a bit towards the southeast by the time it reaches its border with Asili.

Pora has some of the richer soils amongst all the crus in the village of Barbaresco (a trait it shares with Asili according to Aldo Vacca), and from these generous soils emerges one of the longest-lived and most complex single vineyard bottlings in the village. Not surprisingly, Pora was one of the first crus selected by the Produttori to be bottled on its own in 1967, and that inaugural wine has stood the test of time beautifully and was still drinking splendidly at our tasting in San Francisco in June of 2009. For most of its evolution, the Pora bottling will generally be a bit more black fruity than the Ovello (which tends to slide over towards a red fruity personality as it reaches its apogee), and Pora starts out life quite a bit more bound up in its structural elements than several of the other crus in the Produttori lineup. It is a deep and classic example of Barbaresco, with a great base of complex soil tones, beautiful fruit elements, tarry notes and with sufficient bottle age, notes of truffles and porcini are often present as well. As the Produttori’s website notes, it is not always the most elegant example of Barbaresco, but it is always deep, intensely flavored and long-lived. It is a great bottle in top vintages, and with

comparable production figures to the Ovello, it is one of the easier to find crus from the Produttori del Barbaresco.

2016 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The Produttori’s 2016 Pora is again more red fruity out of the blocks than I am accustomed to in most young vintages of this bottling, which probably shows the beneficial aspect of the perfect Indian Summer ripening period in October of 2016. Like the Pajè in 2016, the Pora is already uncharacteristically very expressive aromatically, though it still carries its customary structural chassis for long aging. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a beautiful blend of red plums, cherries, spit-roasted venison, curry-like spice tones, forest floor, woodsmoke and a lovely mélange of both savory and floral aspects in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, chewy and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, striking soil inflection, ripe, firm and chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and classic finish. There is a beautiful synthesis here of the inherent elegance of the 2016 vintage and the sturdy style of the Pora vineyard that will make for a stellar bottle in the years to come! 2035-2085+. **93.**

Barbaresco “Rio Sordo”

Rio Sordo is a beautifully situated vineyard that lies by itself on a solitary ridge south of the hillside that houses Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà. It is a moderately sized vineyard of 4.56 hectares, with a beautiful southwesterly exposition. The ridge sits at 270 meters above sea level, and it has long had a reputation as one of the finer terroirs in the village of Barbaresco, with Angelo Gaja’s famed Sori Tildin vineyard being Rio Sordo’s immediate neighbor to the west. Bruno Giacosa produced a Rio Sordo cru bottling in the 1985 vintage. The Produttori first began bottling a Rio Sordo in the 1978 vintage, and have made one in each subsequent top vintage, with average production around 10,000 bottles per year of this cru. The vineyard is at its very best at the top of the central portion of the cru, where the combination of perfect exposure and fine soils produce beautiful nebbiolo. As is the case with Pora and Asili, Rio Sordo is another of the vineyards in Barbaresco with quite rich soils in which the nebbiolo grape thrives.

Of all the crus bottled by the Produttori del Barbaresco, the Rio Sordo bottling is probably the most rustic (in a good sense) in terms of its aromatics and flavor profile. In many ways it occupies a position in the pantheon of Barbaresco crus that is not a whole lot dissimilar from the position of the wines of Nuits St. Georges in the Burgundy firmament. There is more of a gamebird aspect to mature Rio Sordo, often coupled to autumnal notes, smoke, porcini and plenty of red fruit and fresh herb tones. Of all of the crus, this is the one that really cries out to be served with roasted meats, preferably on a cold, damp autumn or winter evening. It is consistently a very fine bottle of Barbaresco when fashioned by the Produttori, but it invariably does not show to best advantage in large vertical or horizontal tastings with other cru bottlings, as it does not generally deliver the same refined perfume of Ovello or Asili for instance, or the same inner core and drive of wines such as Montefico or Rabajà. But the Produttori’s Rio Sordo is certainly a complete and very captivating bottle of Barbaresco, with its “noble rusticity” very, very enjoyable when set in the proper context, and I find this one of the most underrated crus in their fine lineup.

2016 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2016 Rio Sordo Riserva from the Produttori is outstanding. The inherent purity of the 2016 vintage really dovetails beautifully with the smoky, meaty personality of this *terroir*, with the classy bouquet offering up scents of cherries, anise, a hint of orange peel, red curry, smoked meats, beautiful Piemontese herb tones, woodsmoke and a very complex base of soil that will go autumnal in personality in the not too distant future. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and structured, with a great core of fruit, plenty of well-integrated, chewy tannins and a long, focused and impeccably balanced finish. Not surprisingly, this is a young wine and needs plenty of cellaring to allow all of its impressive complexity to blossom and its tannins to soften up. When it is ready to drink, it will be superb. 2035-2090. **93.**

Barbaresco “Muncagota”

Muncagota is the Piemontese dialect spelling of Moccagatta, which was how this vineyard was spelled on the labels here for many years. Muncagota (then labeled as Moccagatta) was one of the five inaugural crus bottled by the Produttori in 1967, and it has been one of the workhorse bottlings from the cooperative ever since. Muncagota is a fairly sheltered vineyard lying just to the north of Rabajà, with the hilltop at the same altitude as that vineyard and nearby Martinenga at 300 meters above sea level. The exposure here is southeasterly, which means more morning sun than the warmer afternoon sun, and consequently the vineyard is a touch cooler and the wines from Muncagota tend to be a bit more delicately-styled than some of the other top crus in Barbaresco. As Aldo Vacca likes to say of Muncagota, “it shares the same finesse as Rabajà, but it is lighter in body.” However, Muncagota lies in a fairly warm and narrow valley, which offsets at least a bit its not having direct southerly exposure or more afternoon sun, and while it is a relatively more delicately-styled example of Barbaresco, it is by no means a weak-kneed cru. The vineyard is moderate in size, with the lion’s share (ten hectares) owned by the winery that takes its name from the vineyard, Azienda Agricola Moccagatta, but the Produttori controls 2.4 hectares of vines in this lovely cru and produces on average of fifteen thousand bottles in a typical high quality vintage. In my experience, Muncagota can be one of the most “Burgundian” of the crus in Barbaresco when fully mature, with autumnal notes, plenty of red fruit and a smoky character on both the nose and palate.

2016 Barbaresco “Muncagota” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2016 Muncagota is an absolute classic in the making! The bouquet is bright, spicy and very pure and precise, offering up scents of cherries, gorgeous spice tones, a hint of orange peel, gamebird, heather, red curry, loads of fresh oregano, bonfire and a stunningly complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a great core of fruit, stunning mineral undertow and grip, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length on the complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a young wine that will need plenty of time in the cellar to unfurl, but once it is ready to drink, it will be a supremely elegant example of Barbaresco! For lovers of Bonnes-Mares, this could well be the finest cru in Barbaresco for matching some of those beautiful signature aromatic and flavors, albeit with the very different structural elements of nebbiolo. 2033-2085. **94.**



Barbaresco “Montestefano”

The Montestefano vineyard lies at the top of a ridge (with the cru of Cole just to its west on the same hilltop) along the border between the villages of Barbaresco and Neive. In many ways, the more powerful style of the wines from Montestefano are more akin to the very best Barbaresco crus in the neighboring village of Neive than they are to the generally more elegant crus to be found in Barbaresco proper, and Montestefano is often referred to as “the Barolo of Barbaresco” for its firm, tannic structure and impressively powerful personality. Along the Neive border, its most immediate neighbor to the north is the Montefico vineyard, which lies on a ridge with similar exposures, but which produces quite differently-styled wines. Historically this is a very important vineyard, as Montestefano was one of the very first crus to be bottled on its own, with the first commercial release to bear the name of Montestefano on the label being the 1961 vintage produced by Beppe Colla at Prunotto. This was also one of the first crus to be bottled on its own by the Produttori, as it joined the Pora, Moccagatta, Martinenga and Rabajà vineyards in the lineup of Riserva Speciale single vineyard bottlings produced in the 1967 vintage.

Montestefano has a beautiful southerly exposition, as it swings around from its western extremity lying alongside Cole almost all the way to the border with Neive, where the hillside turns towards the east to face the neighboring village. One would think that Cole, lying on the same ridge would be equally as well-regarded, but the hillside at the demarcation between the two vineyards switches to a southeasterly exposition here, giving Cole a bit less depth and dimension, though it does share Montestefano’s firm structure and potential for longevity. Montestefano is another of the vineyards of Barbaresco to possess a fairly high percentage of clay in its soils, which accounts for much of the power for which this cru is rightly renowned.

Both the Montestefano and Cole vineyards sit at an elevation of about 270 meters above sea level at the top of their shared ridge. The Produttori has been producing a Montestefano cru bottling since the 1967 vintage, and it averages about fifteen thousand bottles of production from this vineyard in a top vintage. In my experience the Montestefano bottling from the Produttori is one of the more opulently fruity wines at its apogee, with a beautiful core of red and black fruit, often coupled to notes of leather, shoe polish, smoke, a lovely base of soil and very often a distinctive topnote of orange zest. It is one of the slower crus to unfold in the Produttori lineup and generally demands at least a fifteen years to begin to blossom in a classic vintage, and can easily last forty to fifty years in bottle.

2016 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2016 Montestefano is so quintessentially expressive of this vineyard this year that I would not hesitate to use this wine for the next fifty years if I were going to try and demonstrate to wine students what the *terroir* of Montestefano tastes like! Some years, the vintage's characteristics seem to define a wine as much as its underlying *terroir*, but this is not the case with the great year of 2016 in Piemonte! The bouquet here is precise, deep and beautifully black fruity, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of cigar wrapper, licorice, dark soil tones, a hint of road tar, incipient notes of curry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with broad shoulders, excellent structural chassis and focus, firm tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is impeccably balanced and is going to be a great vintage of Montestefano in due time, but it is going to need plenty of bottle age to soften up its considerable tannins. 2037-2090.

93.

Barbaresco “Montefico”

To my mind, the Montefico takes third place in my own personal hierarchy of the very best crus at the Produttori, for after the Asili and the Rabajà, this has consistently been the most complete and complex of the single vineyard bottlings that I have tasted from this fine winery. As I noted above, most commentators on Piemonte wines would rank Montestefano just a bit ahead of Montefico (though Montefico's reputation is also excellent), but based on the breadth of the tastings on which my historical feature on the Produttori back in 2009 was based, I have to give the slight nod to Montefico over the Montestefano for its superb elegance and complexity. While Montefico also lies along the Neive border, just a few hundred meters to the north of Montestefano, Montefico is the quintessentially elegant Barbaresco cru, with more perfume and a tad more breed than its more powerful neighbor to the south. Across the border in Neive from Montefico lies the superb cru of Gallina. As noted above, at one time this beautiful vineyard was owned in its entirety by Domizio Cavazza, founder of the oenological school at Alba and widely regarded as the “Father of Barbaresco”.

Like Montestefano, the vast majority of Montefico's vines enjoy a direct, southerly exposition. But the exposure is a bit more southeasterly on the western end of the vineyard, and the hillside starts to swing around towards a southwesterly exposition as the vineyard nears the border with Neive. The ridge that houses Montefico is a bit less tall than Montestefano's hill, with its peak elevation at 250 meters above sea level. The Produttori has only made a Montefico cru since 1982, when two cousins from the Rocca family decided to join up with the cooperative and brought along their fine holdings in this vineyard. This makes the Produttori's Montefico

one of the most limited of their cru bottlings, as annual production in a high quality vintage is only five hundred (twelve bottle) cases of this lovely wine. Like Montestefano, Montefico tends to deliver a wine of beautiful fruit tones, which start out quite black fruity in the wine's youth, but which can pick up some red fruity overtones in certain vintages as the wine ages. It often delivers the finest soil transparency of any of the crus in the Produttori's lineup (outside of Asili), and this is often synthesized with beautiful notes of truffles, porcini, tobacco and autumnal notes. It is a beautifully poised and refined Barbaresco cru, and one of the great Piemonte vineyards. Montefico can often be so superbly balanced when it is young that it gives off the impression of early drinkability, but to my mind it needs every bit as much time as Montestefano to really blossom, and is a very long-lived cru as well.

2016 Barbaresco “Montefico” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

As one might imagine, the combination of the inherent elegance of the 2016 vintage and the great refinement of the Montefico vineyard is absolutely magical. The very pure and detailed bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, anise, red curry, fresh-picked oregano, a gorgeous base of soil tones, coffee bean, a hint of road tar, gamebird and a topnote of distant bonfire on the evening breeze. On the palate the wine is precise, complex and full-bodied, with seamless balance, a great core, superb mineral undertow and grip, laser-like focus and a long, complex and ripely tannic finish. This is a simply brilliant bottle of Barbaresco in the making! 2035-2090. **95.**

Barbaresco “Rabajà”:

Rabajà was one of the earliest single cru bottlings from the Produttori, as it replaced the Martinenga (one of the original five crus produced in 1967) in the 1970 vintage, and since that day it has set the pace as one of the greatest bottlings of Barbaresco made anywhere in the DOCG. I really have a very hard time picking a favorite between Rabajà and Asili, as both are hauntingly complex and utterly refined wines at their apogees. Rabajà sits at the highest elevation in the township of Barbaresco, with the top section of the ridge a full 310 meters above sea level. It shares a small border on its western edge with Asili, and a rather long boundary with Martinenga along its southerly stretches. Muncagota lies over the ridge to the north of Rabajà, and its western boundary carries all the way to the border with Neive. Most of the exposition in the vineyard faces southwest, except for a central section which turns due south- this is the very finest section of the vineyard. The Produttori has pretty sizeable holdings in Rabajà, making this happily one of the largest production wines amongst the crus in their lineup, with annual quantities usually running around fourteen thousand bottles in a good year. The Produttori's vines are beautifully situated in the vineyard; however, one should note that Rabajà is a much larger vineyard than Asili, and not all of its locations are prime, with some of the lower sections decidedly inferior to the top central core of the vineyard.

The cru of Rabajà lies just to the east of Asili on that same central ridge, and it too is widely recognized as one of the greatest terroirs to be found anywhere in the Barbaresco region. Although the vineyard of Rabajà shares a similarly high percentage of limestone in its soil and subsoil with its neighbor of Asili, the style of the wines emerging from these two vineyards is markedly different. In fact, in many ways, Rabajà and Martinenga share much more in common with each other than either one does with Asili. The wines of Rabajà start out life more robust than the discreet and rather tightly-wound wines of Asili, with broad shoulders, ripe, pure fruit (more black fruity than the red fruit of Asili when young) and plenty of tannin for long-term

cellaring. However, despite its more powerful personality in its youth, Rabajà is a quintessentially elegant and refined example of Barbaresco when mature, with great depth, complexity, perfume and breed. The vineyard always retains its more black fruity personality throughout its long life, with the dark berry and black cherry fruit deepening and sweetening as the wines evolve with sufficient bottle age. Rabajà typically produces one of the longest-lived of the crus of Barbaresco, and along with neighboring Martinenga is the finest candidate in this village for long-term cellaring.

2016 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 2016 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva from the Produttori del Barbaresco is everything one would expect from the synthesis of one of the world’s greatest red wine *terroirs* and a great vintage. The bouquet is youthful, but already very complex, wafting from the glass in a precise blend of red and black cherries, sweet dark berries, fresh herb tones (mostly bay leaf and sage), roasted meats, a very complex base of soil, woodsmoke, licorice and a spicy topnote that seems likely to shade towards curry with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and impeccably balanced, with a rock solid core, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and stunning length and grip on the nascently complex, extremely promising finish. This will be brilliant wine once it is ready to drink, but it is a long-distance runner and will need many, many years in the cellar before it starts to properly blossom. 2035-2095. 95+.



Barbaresco “Asili”

The fifteen hectare vineyard of Asili lies in the village of Barbaresco, in the northwestern section of vines that make up the appellation. It lies in a band of vineyards that are the very heart of the best terroirs in the village of Barbaresco, abutting Martinenga to the north and with Rabajà adjacent just to its east. The vineyard lies with a beautiful southerly exposition, with the vines running up the slope to an elevation of 280 meters above sea level. The soil composition of Asili is made up of a mix of clay marl and the strong vein of limestone running through it, giving the wines of Asili their raciness, perfume and lift. And indeed, top examples from Asili are clearly among the most elegant and refined examples of Nebbiolo to be found anywhere in Piemonte, and it is not surprising that Neive native son, Bruno Giacosa, long sought a top parcel in this superb cru. Asili is widely regarded as one of the greatest terroirs in the entire region of Barbaresco, with the mature wines of this vineyard offering up all of the haunting elegance that personifies Barbaresco, along with the intensity of flavor and structural integrity that only the greatest red wines of the world can deliver.

Drawing upon the great expertise of Aldo Vacca, we find that the Asili vineyard is divided into two subdivisions topographically, though not recognized as such in the delimitation of the cru. The top section of the hill, which is informally known as Bricco Asili, lies adjacent to Rabajà and shares with that cru an exposure due southwest. Here both the Produttori and Ceretto have their vines. The lower section of the Asili hill is once again bowl shaped, and consequently has a variety of exposures that range from due south to southwest. The soils in all of Asili are strongly limestone-infused, with a base of calcium and sand. Signore Vacca notes that the Bricco Asili section has more calcium in the soil, a trait it shares with neighboring Rabajà, while lower down in the bowl section of Asili the soils tend to be sandier and have more in common with Martinenga. The bowl section is also a slightly warmer microclimate than the top of the hill in Asili, as it does not have the same cooling breezes during the growing season. However, Aldo Vacca was quick to point out that the lower section is also very prized terroir, slightly different from the Bricco Asili, but by no means inferior.

The Produttori has produced a single cru bottling of Asili since the 1970 vintage, and, to my palate, this is one of the two crown jewels in their portfolio. The annual production of Asili at Produttori is one of the smaller of their nine crus, as the average is only nine thousand bottles per year. Asili probably produces the most complex and elegant of all the crus in the DOCG of Barbaresco, as the combination of the perfect exposure and the high percentage of limestone in the soils here produce a hauntingly complex and often ethereal glass of Barbaresco. It is never as deeply colored in its youth as the wines from its neighbors, Pora, Martinenga or Rabajà, but is often every bit as structured in its more medium-full format, and takes much more than a decade to really blossom in a top quality vintage. At its apogee it is to my mind the most complex of all the crus in Barbaresco, with plenty of red fruit and citrus peel at the core, with layers of autumnal scents, licorice, fresh herbs, smoke and porcini feathered in over a profoundly complex base of soil. If Musigny were to find a counterpart in Barbaresco, Asili would undoubtedly be its kindred spirit.

2016 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva - Produttori del Barbaresco

The Produttori's 2016 Asili Riserva is a simply stunning young wine. The aromatic constellation is dreamlike in its purity and nascent complexity, wafting from the glass in a mix of

red and black cherries, smoked duck, a touch of sweet nutskin, red curry, very complex limestone soil tones, a hint of tariness, orange zest, bonfire and a lovely mix of fresh herbs and spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, great soil signature and grip, firm, chewy and buried tannins, tangy acids and great balance on the long, detailed and energetic finish. This is a very young wine as well, but it is so impeccably balanced that some might be tempted to open it around age ten or so. Try not to do so, as there is so much here to unfold with full bottle age that opening this wine too early will be sheer folly! 2035-2095. **96.**

**THE SUPERB 2019 VINTAGE
FROM DOMAINES CLOS DE LA CHAPELLE AND JOSEPH VOILLLOT**



For the last couple of years, I have been fortunate to review the new vintages from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle from bottle in the spring, as the proprietor, Mark O’Connell has graciously sent me the wines ahead of their upcoming release. This proved particularly fortuitous last spring, when the pandemic was just getting rolling into the global catastrophe that we have all tried to soldier through over the last year. I never imagined, when I had to cancel my spring trip to Burgundy, Germany and Champagne in March of 2020 that a full year would pass before I could even contemplate again travelling, and as I write these notes, the opening up to visit and taste in the cellars with winegrowers is still on the horizon, rather than a solid reality. But, there is light at the end of the tunnel and we should be back to some semblance of normalcy in the world of travel in the coming months! This year, in addition to being blessed with the full range of 2019s from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle, Domaine Joseph Voillot in Volnay also offered to send me samples of their 2019s for review, so I am fortunate in this article to be able to feature wines from the 2019 vintage from both of these fine estates. The two domaines’ lineups actually work beautifully together for an article, as they have parcels in some of the same premier crus in both Pommard and Volnay, so the pairing of the two makes sense for an article.

The cellars for Domaine Clos de la Chapelle are now based in the small village of Bligny-lès-Beaune, where they have now been for a couple of years. Previously they had been located next door to Maison Champy right in the center of Beaune. Though they are now in Bligny, this is really a Volnay domaine to my mind, as the heart and soul of their holdings remain their excellent parcels in this village, including their namesake *monopole* Premier cru of the Clos de la Chapelle. Mark O'Connell, proprietor and head winemaker here, has grown the estate's vineyard patrimony beautifully since he first purchased the former Domaine Boillot holdings in 2010. The first plots of vines included the entirety of the tiny jewel of a vineyard of the Clos de la Chapelle, as well as pieces of the Volnay premier cru of la Caille Sous la Chapelle and very old vines in the fine Pommard premier cru vineyard of Chanlins. Since the first vintage of 2010, the domaine had added beautifully to its vineyard patrimony, becoming one of the top domaines in the Côte de Beaune and now having significantly expanded its lineup to include a Beaune Blanc bottling from the premier cru vineyard of les Reversées, Volnay "Taillepieds" produced from sixty-five year-old vines (and beautifully situated between the parcels of Domaine de Montille and Domaine d'Angerville), Pommard "Grands Epenots" and two grand cru bottlings from the hill of Corton. These are a parcel of forty-seven year-old vines in the superb *lieu à dit* of Bressandes and thirty *ares* of forty-five to fifty year-old vines in Corton-Charlemagne over on the Pernand side of the hill. Subsequent additions have included another white wine bottling for the domaine, crafted from a small parcel in the excellent Pernand-Vergelesses premier cru of Sous Frétille, as well as a pair of Beaune premier crus from les Teurons (sixty year-old vines) and Champs Pimont (fifty year-old vines). It is now quite the lineup!

Domaine Joseph Voillot has a longer history than Domaine Clos de la Chapelle, though the estate is probably even a bit further under the radar to many Burgundy lovers. The domaine sits prominently on the street running up to the center of Volnay from the *Route Nationale* and just kitty-corner from the ancient, thirteenth century church in town. The patriarch of the domaine, Joseph Voillot retired in 1995 and passed away in 2014, but the estate has been in able hands since his retirement, as Jean-Pierre Charlot, his son-in-law, had worked alongside of Monsieur Voillot from the early 1980s and has run the estate with great success since he took over full-time direction of the domaine in 1996. These days, he has now been joined by his nephew, Etienne Chaix, so the next generation at this family domaine is already being laid out in proper order, with Etienne now taking full responsibilities for the wines beginning in the 2019 vintage reported on below. Domaine Joseph Voillot has excellent holdings in Volnay, Pommard, Meursault and Beaune, with old vine parcels in the premier crus of Fremiets, Caillerets and Champans in the first village, Clos Micault, Pézerolles, Epenots and Rugiens *Bas* in Pommard and aux Coucheries in Beaune. The domaine also has a bit more than a hectare of vines at the villages level in both Pommard and Volnay and make very good *Vieilles Vignes* bottlings from both communes. Even their Bourgogne Rouge is planted with old vines, as this parcel is over fifty years of age! In Meursault, the family produces two fine bottlings, of les Chevalières (fifteen *ares*) and Les Cras, from an even slightly smaller parcel of just under fourteen *ares*.

The pairing of the wines from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle and Domaine Joseph Voillot makes sense on a number of fronts, for not only do they share fine, old vine parcels in several of the very finest premier crus in both Volnay and Pommard, but they also are two of the estates in the Côte de Beaune that like to keep the percentage of new oak that they use for their wines to a

quite modest twenty percent. Both estates make very classical interpretations of their respective *terroirs*, with plenty of depth and structure for long-term cellaring. Mark O’Connell likes to use a percentage of whole clusters for his wines these days, and also gives the reds a short “cold soak” in the Henri Mayer style, whereas Jean-Pierre Charlot has chosen to de-stem his wines since he took over direction of the estate from his father-in-law in 1996. The *elevage* of the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle wines are generally on the shorter side of the ledger (similar to the wines from Maison Joseph Drouhin) and are usually about to be bottled when I am in Burgundy in November, so it had become customary for me to let the wines recover from their *mise* and taste them on my spring trips to the region. Jean-Pierre Charlot and Etienne Chaix give their wines just a touch longer in cask than Monsieur O’Connell, with the whites and Bourgogne rouge usually bottled after ten months or a year in barrel and the remainder of the red wines after fourteen to sixteen months in wood. Both estates also offer up some of the very finest values still to be found in the Côte d’Or, which is another laudable trait that they share!

The growing season of 2019 in the Côte d’Or got off to an early start (if one can still say this with a straight face in this age of climate change), with warmer weather at the end of March getting the sap flowing in the vines and budbreak was early this year. However, April turned cold, with a small bout of frost striking on the night of April 5th and unseasonably cool weather remaining through the end of the first fortnight of the month. The frost damage of 2019 was nowhere near as severe as had been the case in 2016. However, it was also rainy during the flowering period in June, which further cut back potential yields after the moderate frost damage that had been experienced in certain vineyards that first week of April. In general, flowering was more sporadic in the premier and grand cru vineyards, with their superior expositions, whereas cooler microclimates in some *villages* level parcels were a touch behind in maturation and flowered under clearer skies (or at least less sustained precipitation). But, after the big crop of 2018, the potential yields in 2019 were not looking all that promising coming into the middle of summer. There were two heat spikes in Burgundy in 2019, with the first in July weathered quite well by the vines, as there were still adequate groundwater reserves and vines generally did not suffer from hydric stress. However, it did not rain at all between the first heatwave in July and the second one that arrived in the middle of August, so many of the vines shut down during this second bout of torrid temperatures and some bunches shriveled up and further cut back potential yields. It remained dry through to harvest, with producers getting rolling in mid-September in the Côte de Beaune.

The following notes are listed geographically from north to south. I would have dearly liked to have done my two customary trips to the region to visit the cellars in Burgundy to taste the 2019 vintage, but the vagaries of Covid prevented those trips. Consequently, I am extremely grateful to Mark O’Connell, Jean-Pierre Charlot and Etienne Chaix for generously sending me their ranges of 2019s for this article. Reports I have heard out of Burgundy is that 2019 is a high, high quality vintage and I would have loved to have been able to taste far more deeply of this vintage than I have been able to in our pandemic-limited world. But, such is our moment in history, and my having missed a few trips to the cellars of Burgundy over the last fifteen months is hardly the most tragic thing that has unfolded across the globe during these very, very difficult times. May we all soon bask in the light at the end of the tunnel.

Vins Blancs

2019 Pernand-Vergelesses “Sous Frétille”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2019 Sous Frétille from Clos de la Chapelle shares the same early seductive charm as the Beaune “Reversées”, but I have the sense that the superior mineral foundation here will also take the wine further into the future if cellared for an extended period of time. The bouquet is pure and complex, offering up scents of lemon, pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, a touch of lemon zest, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a lovey girdle of acidity, fine focus and backend bounce and a long, complex finish. This too is certainly going to be very easy to drink in its youth, but I have the sense that there are more layers here to unfold with a bit of bottle age and I would try to keep my hands off of bottles for at least a couple of years and let it blossom more completely. 2023-2035. **92.**

2019 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2019 Corton-Charlemagne from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is as beautifully cool customer for this vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a pure and classic bouquet of apple, pear, spring flowers, a hint of iodine, a complex base of chalky soil tones, incipient notes of the *crème patissière* that will come with bottle age and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, zesty acids, impeccable balance and a long, pure and gently reductive finish. Believe me, I had no trouble drinking this sample bottle, but in reality this wine is still three to five years away from truly blossoming and deserves at least that much time in the cellar. It should prove to be beautifully long-lived. 2024-2055+. **94+.**

2019 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2019 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc from Clos de la Chapelle is a beautifully expressive wine right out of the blocks. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, passion fruit, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, honeysuckle and a stylish framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and juicy at the core, with good soil undertow, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This has the structure to age nicely over the next decade or so, but it is so easy to drink right from release that I have to imagine the vast majority of bottles of this wine will not see their fifth birthday! 2021-2030+. **90.**

2019 Meursault “les Cras”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

The 2019 vintage of les Cras from Etienne Chaix is a beautiful bottle of Meursault, with the richer soils of this cru (it lies close to Santenots) giving the wine just gorgeous fruit tones on both the nose and palate. These vines were planted in 1963 and 1980, so even the younger section is now into its prime. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a gently reductive mix of apple, pear, passion fruit, hazelnut, musky floral tones, a fine base of soil and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, good acids and grip, lovely balance and a long, wide open and bouncy finish. This is already drinking quite nicely, though it will have no trouble aging gracefully. 2021-2032. **90.**

2019 Meursault “les Chevalières”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

The Domaine Voillot’s fifteen *ares* of vines in Chevalières were planted in 1979, so these celebrated their fortieth birthday in 2019. The wine is excellent this year, offering up a bright and classy nose of apple, passion fruit, a hint of pineapple, almond, chalky minerality, iodine, apple blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely

core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, soil-driven and complex finish. This shares the same early charm as the les Cras, but it has more mineral undertow and is more complex as a result. Great value! 2021-2035. **92.**



Vins Rouges

2019 Bourgogne Rouge “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

The old vine Bourgogne Rouge from Domaine Voillot is produced from three parcels of vines (in two *lieux à dits*) that were planted respectively in 1953, 1966 and 1972. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane this year and offers up a lovely, red fruity nose of cherries, strawberries, a hint of quince, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones and a fine base of soil elements. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a pretty core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins, bouncy acids and a long, still fairly youthful finish. Like most top flight Bourgogne Rouge bottlings, this needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be excellent in due course. 2024-2035+. **89.**

2019 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2019 Corton “Bressandes” from the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is a simply stunning wine in the making. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and so beautifully delineated, offering up scents of cherries, red plums, red currants, spiced meats, raw cocoa, a hint of orange zest, a complex base of stony soil tones, gorgeous spice tones and deft framing of

cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and very, very promising finish. This is going to be stunning Corton with sufficient bottle age, but despite its beautiful fruit component, it is built for the long haul and will need plenty of time in the cellar before it blossoms properly! 2034-2100. **95+**.

2019 Beaune “Champs Pimont”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

2019 vintage of Champs Pimont from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is an absolute charmer on both the nose and palate. The wine is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up a pure and sappy bouquet of red plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh-culled thyme, peonies and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a sappy core, fine soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Though this is very accessible on the nose, the plush fruit covers up a lovely structural chassis, so I would do my best to not touch a bottle for at least the next eight to ten years and let it really open out. 2029-2075. **92**.

2019 Beaune “aux Coucherias”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

The domaine only has a bit more than twenty-three *ares* of vines here in aux Coucherias, so this is one of their most limited red wine bottlings. The vines here were planted in 1964 and 1981, so even the younger section is approaching old age. The 2019 aux Coucherias from Etienne Chaix is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of sweet dark berries, black cherries, coffee bean, a dollop of fresh herbs, dark soil tones, gamebird, a lovely touch of violet and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a fine core of black fruit, fine-grained tannins, good soil inflection and a long, poised and very promising finish. This will need a half dozen years to get generous on the palate and is going to be a lovely drink for many decades, once it blossoms. 2027-2065. **91+**.

2019 Beaune “Teurons”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

These sixty-three year-old vines in Teurons have turned out a beautiful wine in the 2019 vintage. I really like the contrast in style between the domaine’s Champs Pimont and Teurons, as the former has the deeper soils and produces the more broad shouldered example of Beaune, whereas the high limestone content of Teurons always produces a slightly lighter, more dancing version of the commune. The 2019 Teurons shows a lovely streak of red fruit in its aromatic constellation of wild strawberries, cherries, *pigeon*, cocoa powder, chalky soil elements, roses, fresh thyme and a refined touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a lovely core of red fruit, suave, buried tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2030-2075+. **92+**.

2019 Pommard “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

As I have mentioned in the past, the average age of vines in the Pommard V.V. bottling are a touch older than those for the Volnay from Domaine Voillot, with these vines closing in on an average of sixty years of age now. The bouquet of the 2019 is excellent, offering up a youthful blend of cherries, quince, pomegranate, *pigeon*, bonfire, a fine base of soil, nutskin, a whisper of oak and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, structured and tangy, with a lovely core of red fruit, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated and chewy

tannins and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is a proper young Pommard and will need cellaring time to let its structural chassis to soften up, but it is going to be an excellent wine in due course. 2032-2070. **91.**

2019 Pommard “Chanlins” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

I have felt for many years that Chanlins is one of the most under-estimated *terroirs* in the village of Pommard, which itself is one of the least well-understood communes in all of Burgundy in the twenty-first century. Domaine Clos de la Chapelle has a parcel of very old vines here in Chanlins, now over ninety years of age, and they have produced a marvelous wine in 2019. The aromatic constellation is pure, red fruity and precise, offering up notes of cherries, pomegranate, quince, gamebird, a touch of youthful stem tones, fresh thyme, a gorgeously complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, sappy and complex finish. This is stunning wine in the making and one of the most refined young examples of Pommard I have ever tasted! 2031-2085. **94.**

2019 Pommard “Clos Micault”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

Domaine Voillot’s fourteen *ares* of vines in the Clos Micault were planted in 1958. This is a beautifully elegant young Pommard, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, grilled venison, a beautiful base of soil, raw cocoa, a touch of mustard seed, fresh nutmeg and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a great core of fruit, lovely soil undertow and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and focused finish. For Burgundy fans searching around for a supremely elegant example of Pommard, this vintage of Clos Micault from Etienne Chaix will be right up your alley! 2030-2080. **93.**

2019 Pommard “Grands Epenots”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2019 Grands Epenots bottling from Clos de la Chapelle is another outstanding wine in the making, exuding the same purity, transparency and seamless structural chassis as is found in the Chanlins. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, plums, bitter chocolate, dark soil tones, gamebird, a touch of youthful stem tones, bonfire, fresh thyme and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off stunning mid-palate depth, with plenty of black fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is dynamite Pommard in the making as well, but it is more structured out of the blocks than the Chanlins and will demand a few years longer in the cellar before it starts to give up the goods. 2033-2085. **94.**

2019 Pommard “les Epenots”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

These vines are almost my age, as they were planted in 1961 (which I always say is my birth year when visiting in Bordeaux cellars ☺- I was actually born at the end of November of 1960, so just missed that great vintage) and they have produced an absolutely gorgeous wine in 2019. The nose wafts from the glass in a very refined, sophisticated blend of red plums, red and black cherries, cocoa powder, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a hint of nutskin and a suave framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a superb core, great soil undertow, ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and a very long, very refined and promising finish. Great juice in the making! 2032-2085. **94.**

2019 Pommard “les Pézerolles”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

To my palate, Pézerolles is another of the most underrated premier crus in all of the Côte d’Or, as this is a very special *terroir*. Jean-Pierre Charlot and Etienne Chaix have vines here that are fifty-six years of age, so they are right in their prime. The bouquet of the 2019 is excellent,

offering up a youthful blend of cherries, quince, a touch of orange peel, a fine base of soil, gamebird, nutskin, cocoa powder, fresh thyme and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, red fruity in personality and full-bodied, with great soil signature, firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and extremely promising finish. This is a properly-structured young Pommard, but it will be a very refined wine once it is ready to drink. 2032-2085. **92+**.

2019 Pommard “les Rugiens”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

Domaine Voillot’s holdings in Rugiens *bas* are not huge, totally just over a quarter hectare, but they too were planted in 1961. This bottling has turned out stunningly well in 2019, offering up a deep, beautifully complex and very, very precise bouquet of red and black cherries, black plums, raw cocoa, a stunning base of soil, a touch of mustard seed, spit-roasted *pigeon*, woodsmoke, black tea, gentle spice tones and a nice framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, buried tannins, tangy acids and great backend mineral drive on the long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is grand cru quality without a doubt! 2033-2085. **94+**.



2019 Volnay “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

The average age of vines that go into this lovely V.V. bottling are now in excess of fifty years of age (with the oldest plots having gone into the ground in 1946 and 1947), hailing from a blend of six different *villages* level parcels that total up to 1.375 hectares. The 2019 comes in at

an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a beautifully expressive bouquet of black plums, red and black cherries, bitter chocolate, gamebird, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a plush core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and very promising finish. This is a first class *villages*! 2029-2065. **91.**

2019 Volnay “en Carelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

Domaine Clos de la Chapelle has fine old vines in the vineyard of en Carelle, with the vines now sixty to sixty-five years of age. The 2019 en Carelle is nicely light in color and offers up a marvelous bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a touch of venison, gentle smokiness, lovely spice tones and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a sappy core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, impeccable balance and a long, focused and complex finish. This is gorgeous Volnay in the making! 2029-2080. **93.**

2019 Volnay “les Champans”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

I have loved the domaine’s bottling of Champans for many years, as I would often look to order this at the Cellier Volnaysien restaurant next door to the cellars when I was dining there. Like most of the family’s premier cru holdings, these are old vines, with the sections having been planted in 1985, 1971 and 1934! Etienne Chaix has made a great Champans in the 2019 vintage, delivering a superbly complex bouquet of red and black cherries, spit-roasted *pigeon*, raw cocoa, a gorgeously complex base of soil, lovely spice tones, a hint of black tea, woodsmoke, gentle notes of hazelnut and a dollop of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, balanced and very classy finish. This is a stellar Champans in the making! 2032-2085+. **94.**

2019 Volnay “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The Clos de la Chapelle *monopole* has become one of my absolute favorite bottlings in the village of Volnay in a relatively short time, as 2019 is only the tenth vintage fashioned here since Mark O’Connell purchased this vineyard and started piecing together one of the Côte de Beaune’s finest estates. The 2019 Clos de la Chapelle comes in at 13.5 percent octane (as is the case with all of the domaine’s red wines in this vintage) and delivers a stunningly precise and deep bouquet of red plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, *pigeon*, a touch of nutskin, youthful notes of sweet stem tones, a gorgeous base of soil, incipient notes of fresh nutmeg and a judicious foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, stellar soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and stunning finish. This is a great bottle of Volnay in the making, but though it is certainly approachable out of the blocks, please tuck it away in the cellar for a decade or so and let the fireworks really mount! 2029-2085. **94+.**

2019 Volnay “les Fremiets”- Domaine Joseph Voillot

Etienne Chaix gets to work with plenty of old vines in the family’s parcel in Fremiets, as these vines were planted respectively in 1978, 1950 and 1932! Like all of the premier crus here, this wine sees about twenty percent new oak each year. The 2019 Fremiets is simply outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a very pure and perfumed mix of red and black cherries, a hint of pomegranate, plums, smoked meats, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, violets, lavender, fresh thyme and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, buried tannins

and outstanding length and grip on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is superb juice-the pure unadulterated beauty of classic Volnay! 2030-2085+. **93+**.

2019 Volnay “Taillepieds”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The Domaine Clos de la Chapelle’s Taillepieds parcel is beautifully placed, lying between the vines of the Marquis d’Angerville and the de Montille family in the heart of the vineyard. It does not hurt that the vines are now closing in on seventy years of age! The 2019 Taillepieds is beautifully black fruity and pure on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, duck, dark soil tones, a touch of hazelnut, woodsmoke, hints of the nutmeg to come with bottle age and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant in personality, with a great core of black fruit, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is an utterly refined young bottle of Taillepieds, and though it will demand cellaring to soften up properly, it should prove to be a very long-lived and stunning wine in due course. 2032-2085. **95**.

RECENTLY-TASTED AMERICAN WINES SPRING 2021 RELEASES AND FRIENDS



This new article on spring releases from some of my favorite old school and Neo-Classical producers in the United States is chock full of outstanding wines. A great many are from the 2019 vintage, which seems likely to be considered one of the greatest vintages in recent memory on the west coast of the US. Given all of the problems that the extensive fire season of 2020 has caused throughout these regions, it seems only fitting that the struggles of 2020 were preceded by a truly great vintage, to take some of the sting out of the historical difficulties of the following year. I know that some producers (particularly in Oregon wine country, where the prevailing patterns of the jet stream during the most serious period of the fires kept the smoke hovering over the vineyards, may well choose to release their 2019s over an extended period of time, just to help manage their cash flow if they have decided to eschew releasing 2020s, or if the evolution of their wines from the 2020 vintage is still in question and they have not yet made a decision on what direction to take for individual wines. So, I would anticipate that a great many 2019s may be released a bit later than customary, given the uncertainties that surround some wines from the following year. I wrote a bit about the 2019 vintage back in December, and as more 2019s have crossed my path in the last four months, I thought I would just include again a short sketch of the vintage in Oregon and California.

A great many of the new releases that are featured below are wines from the 2019 vintage in Oregon. It is generally a classically “cooler” vintage, such as used to be the norm in Oregon wine country prior to global warming, and the superb potential inherent in this year is very evident as one tastes through the wines. It was a rather wet year by recent standards in the Willamette Valley in 2019 (again, more like the old days here), with flowering a couple of weeks behind the last several vintages, but conducted under cooler temperatures and clear and sunny skies. There was heavy rains from the end of June well into July, which forced growers to be vigilant against mildew pressures. But, there were no real heat spikes during the 2019 growing season, so sugar accumulations were slow and steady up until harvest in the back half of September and early October and the wines seem to have ripened up nicely, though lower in octane in general than the comparable wine from the preceding year of 2018. The wines exhibit really lovely purity to their fruit components, excellent soil signatures and quite precise structural chassis that augur extremely well for beautiful evolutions in bottle. As I mentioned last December, I was very much looking forward to sampling more 2019s this spring and the vintage most assuredly did not disappoint! There remain plenty of my favorite producers in Oregon wine country whose 2019s I have not yet tried, as I did not make a concerted effort to reach out to all of my favorite domaines, once the pile of samples for this article reached a certain size and my getting through all of the bottles in time seemed to be getting doubtful. So, I will plan another round of American wines in a couple of issues and try to cover more of this outstanding vintage.

The 2019 vintage is also proving to be outstanding in northern California wine country, as the wines I have tasted for this report have only further enhanced the reputation of the 2019s in my eyes. The growing season of 2019 was a bit different than in Oregon, as there was some *fin de saison* high temperatures that pushed sugars up briskly coming into harvest time, but the crop was relatively bountiful out on the vine, so a little push over the finish line from warmer weather was not necessarily a bad thing. Sonoma County winegrowers had the complication of the very destructive Kincade Fire in October of 2019, but this generally did not affect the harvest, as most of the grapes had been already brought into wineries before the fire started on October 23rd. In this regard, cabernet sauvignon producers in Sonoma had been relatively lucky in 2019, compared to two years earlier, when much of the 2017 crop of that variety was largely unpicked and still out on the vine when that year’s wildfires ripped through the region, dramatically cutting back on much of the 2017 cabernet sauvignon crop. Concerns of smoke taint in the 2017 cabernet sauvignon crop have plagued the wines ever since, so producers were relieved that they did not have to relive that same scenario with the Kincade Fire in October of 2019. This is particularly true, given the even greater damage of the wildfires of 2020.

Back in December, I had only tasted a handful of earlier releases from the 2019 vintage in California, with some white wines and the stellar lineup of 2019 pinot noir cuvées from Jamie Kutch in Sonoma being the lion’s share of representatives I tasted from 2019 for that report. I have had a chance to taste quite a bit more broadly in this report and it seems quite clear that the 2019 vintage will be every bit as exciting for red wines from California as it will be in Oregon wine country, and there will be a great many more bottlings being released in the coming months that will merit attention. From what I had the opportunity to tasted this spring, it is clear that Sean Castorani and Joanna Wells of Model Farm have crafted their finest set of wines yet in the 2019 vintage (and readers know I have been a very big fan of their wines for several years now!), with their 2019 Syrah bottlings likely to make stunning cellar treasures a decade down the road,

and their new single vineyard Chardonnay bottling from this vintage their finest effort to date with this variety (at least to my palate). The first releases of the 2019 vintage from Paul and Jackie Gordon at Halcón Vineyards are also reported on below, and they are everything one might hope for from the confluence of a great, great vintage and one of the very finest producers of Rhône-inspired wines in California (not to mention that their 2019 Pinot Noir from the Oppenlander Vineyard is also excellent).

I should also take time to single out the 2019s from Seth Long in the Willamette Valley for individual mention in this introduction. As readers already know, Seth's winery, Morgen Long Wines, specializes in chardonnay from some of the very best vineyard sites in Oregon. He aspires to make very long-lived chardonnays from these vineyard sources, producing both a variety of blended wines either based on soil similarities across vineyards (such as his Marine bottling of chardonnay) or from geographically proximate vineyards such as his Eola-Amity Hills bottling. In addition, he makes a small handful of single vineyard wines from Seven Springs Vineyard, X-Omni Vineyard and Eyrie Vineyard, which are truly destined to be legendary bottlings from the 2019 vintage. I first started tasting Seth's wines in the 2017 vintage and have been very, very impressed since the first bottle I opened, but his 2019s are clearly his best wines to date and will be worth a special search of the marketplace to find and tuck away in the cellar. A few that I tasted will drink nicely early on, but most are built for the cellar and should be just starting to hit their strides three to five years down the road, and show every probability to be twenty to twenty-five year wines. I should also take the time to mention his unique "Pink Label" bottling of chardonnay, which in the past has included five percent of pinot noir blended into it. The 2019 version was done a bit differently, as the chardonnay, after having spent a year aging in barrel, was racked onto lees of both pinot noir and gamay at the end of 2020 for a couple of months of contact, so as to give the wine its unique personality and gentle touch of pink color. So, the five percent of "red" included in the blend this year was not actually red wine, but lees contact. The practice works beautifully for this wine and delivers a great wine for the table, and I am looking forward to the day I can drink one of these vintages of Seth Long's "Pink Label" chardonnay with some proper bottle age, accompanying some grilled salmon, as the combination strikes me as it will be beautiful together!

Beyond these usual suspects whose 2019s are now readying for release or are just in the market, this article also covers a few new wineries (to me) whose wines showed very well in the preparation of this report. One is Reeve Wines in Anderson Valley. The winery very generously sent me a wide array of different bottlings of chardonnay, pinot noir, grenache and even a dry riesling from Mendocino. The wines all showed high quality across the board, with several of the single vineyard bottlings truly exceptional, including a couple from the Kiser Vineyard in Mendocino, which I used to know well when Wells Guthrie was manning the helm at Copain Vineyards back in the day. I do not know how the pricing is on the wines, but they were certainly very, very well-made. Another new producer to me was Robin Pollard, who farms her ten acre vineyard in Yakima Valley and produces a cabernet sauvignon and a Bordeaux-inspired red wine blend under her Pollard Per Se label. Robin works in conjunction with Chris Camarda of Andrew Will Wines (who handles her winemaking duties, if I understood Robin correctly) and her 2016s and 2017s that I tasted for this report were exceptional, with a low octane, old school style that merits particular attention for old school cabernet sauvignon fans (such as myself) who long for the style of wines from the 1970s.

In addition to these noteworthy producers mentioned above, this feature includes plenty of truly exceptional new releases, including the first full-blown efforts from the Italian wine varietal label of Aeris, owned by Kevin Harvey of Rhys Vineyards fame. The new 2018 vintage releases from Aeris are really the first wines to be “complete” in the vision that Kevin has for this label and they are truly stellar in quality; I look forward to the day these vineyards get a bit older and really start to hit their primes, as the potential looks enormous for Aeris! The new vintage of William Kelley’s Beau Rivage project is also truly outstanding, as he is taking chenin blanc to a quality level in California that I do not believe anyone thought was possible, and the 2018 is a stunning young wine. As William also kindly sends a bottle of the previous vintage to review as well each year, I was able to see how the 2017 was evolving with bottle age and there is little doubt that the Beau Rivage cheniens are destined to be one of California’s longest-lived white wines as they become better known and people start to tuck them away in the cellar and let time work its magic on them! Many thanks to Terry and Frances Leighton for having taken up the challenge of producing their own dry chenin blanc all those years ago and inspiring William to start producing his own versions in the last few vintages!



This article has more new releases from some of the producers who I have only just had the pleasure to discover in recent times, but whose wines have impressed me very much indeed. My heartfelt thanks for wineries such as Bee Hunter Wines and Pamplin Family Winery for again sending me a stellar range of new bottlings for tasting. There are also plenty of old school

producers included in the notes below, from estates that have not lost a step since their founding and remain at the top of their games. These include Edmunds St. John (though I was hoping I might get a sniff of a syrah or two from Steve's distributor, rather than just his very good gamay!), Alex Smith at Porter Creek (though sadly, no pinots this time around), Mount Eden Vineyards, the Togni family, Doug Nalle, Sky Vineyards and Morgan Winery in the Santa Lucia Highlands, whose 2019 chardonnays were very, very strong and already have me looking forward to tasting their pinot noirs and especially, their syrah bottlings from the 2019 vintage! The following notes are sorted by type of wine, and within each sub-section, chronologically by vintage and alphabetically by producer. On a rare occasion (such as with Seth Long's 2019 chardonnays), I have listed the notes in the order that I tasted them, rather than alphabetically by vineyard or cuvée designation, just so readers can see how I approached this range of wines.

Off the Beaten Path White Varietals

2019 Porcelina Pinot Gris "Heringer Vineyard"- The End of Nowhere (Yolo County)

Chris Walsh ferments his pinot gris with indigenous yeasts and ages it in older barrels for seven months prior to bottling. The 2019 version comes in at 12.6 percent octane and delivers a pretty nose of nectarine, a touch of orange zest, wheat chaff, a good foundation of soil tones and a discreet and gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, vibrant acids and lovely balance on the long finish. This really has personality! 2021-2026. **91.**

2019 Albariño- Morgan Winery (Arroyo Seco) screwcap

The 2019 Albariño from Morgan Winery is a very pretty example of this underrated varietal, offering up a vibrant bouquet of green apple, lime, fruit blossoms, a lovely base of minerality and a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and full-bodied, with a lovely core, good transparency and cut and a long, complex finish. This wine is a touch pinched on the backend from its screwcap when first opened, but blossoms nicely with air (for the time being), so decant it before serving. The wine is aged in barrel for six months, with eleven percent of the oak new, with a touch of Hungarian oak used in addition to French wood. It is one of the finest examples of Albariño I have ever tasted grown outside of Galicia and really does deserve a natural cork, so one does not have to decant such a young wine to undo the closure. 2021-2025. **91.**

2018 Bianco "Centennial Mountain Vineyard"- Aeris (California)

The 2018 Bianco "Centennial Mountain Vineyard" from Kevin Harvey's new Aeris project is composed entirely of Carricante. The 2018 comes in at an even twelve percent octane and offers up a superb aromatic constellation of pear, lemon blossoms, lavender, a dollop of bergamot, stony soil tones, a deft touch of vanillin oak and hints in the upper register of green olive notes that may arrive more fully with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a great girdle of acidity, fine mineral drive and grip and a long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is flat out great juice, which is delicious today, but clearly will continue to blossom and grow with bottle age. I do not have a sense of how ageworthy Carricante will be from California, but all of the constituent components seem in place for this wine to easily last fifteen to twenty years in the cellar. Time will tell. 2021-2040+? **94.**

2018 Chenin Blanc- Beau Rivage (Clarksburg)

It had been a little over a year since I last revisited the 2018 vintage of Beau Rivage Chenin Blanc and the wine is blossoming beautifully. As readers may recall, this is one of William Kelley's lowest octane vintages of this excellent wine, coming in at a svelte 11.9 percent. The bouquet is opening up to reveal a complex constellation of fresh pineapple, quince, beeswax, a lovely base of white soil tones, a hint of citrus peel, dogwood, hints of lavender and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish, complex and intensely flavored, with a good core, superb soil signature, excellent focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and energetic finish. This is gorgeous, dry chenin blanc! 2021-2035+. **92+**.

2017 Sémillon- Bee Hunter (Yorkville Highlands) screwcap

The 2017 Sémillon from Bee Hunter hails from organically-farmed vineyards. The bottling is entirely Sémillon, barrel-fermented and aged in older French casks for ten months prior to bottling. The wine shows off a lovely bouquet, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh fig, tart tangerine, paraffin, a lovely base of soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a gentle foundation of oak, good soil signature and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. This is first class and very ageworthy Sémillon and it is sheer madness to have bottled it under screwcap. There are no overt signs of reduction on the nose or in the flavor profile, but the backend is a bit artificially tensile from its closure, so that rather than finishing with roundness and lift, it is a bit shredded texturally. This is ameliorated a bit with decanting today, but I have the sense that this aspect is going to clamp down more and more on the finish as time goes by. So, despite it having the spine of acidity to age for many more years, I suspect it will be at its most pleasurable if drunk in the next year or two, just to dodge the potential reduction issues down the road. I would dearly love to see this wine bottled under natural cork in the future, as this is the best Sémillon I have tasted from California, other than those made at Kalin Cellars. 2021-2025+? **91+?**

2017 Chenin Blanc- Beau Rivage (Clarksburg)

This is now the third year in a row that I have been able to revisit the 2017 Beau Rivage Chenin Blanc made by William Kelley and the wine gets better every time I have the opportunity to come back to it. The bouquet has developed beautifully secondary layering of complexity in its blend of sweet quince, pear, beeswax, lemon blossoms, white soil tones, just a whisper of honeycomb, lanolin and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very precise, with a lovely core, excellent soil undertow and grip, zesty acids and a long, wide open and beautifully balanced finish. To my palate, this wine has now reached its apogee and is drinking with generosity and great style. As my score keeps going up for this wine with each passing year, clearly I am underestimating the new releases! 2021-2030+. **93.**

Chardonnay

Chardonnay "Willamette Valley" Memorie II- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

This is the second release of the "Memorie" bottling of chardonnay from Seth Long. The wine is produced from a solera that Seth started with in the 2015 vintage (with just a whisper of 2014 juice added at the outset), so it is a multi-vintage blend that will get more complex with each passing year. The fruit comes from seven different vineyards and the blend is now composed of six different vintages, so it is progressing geometrically at this point. The breakdown of vintages in the blend this year runs thus: twenty-one percent 2019, twenty-two

percent 2018, twenty-three percent 2017, ten percent 2016, twenty-three percent 2015 and a whisper of 2014 juice. The wine offers up a beautiful nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, lemon, hazelnut, a complex base of soil elements, honeysuckle, citrus zest and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. I love the backend lift here! Unlike several of the youthful 2019s from Seth this year, the *Memorie II* is drinking just splendidly right from the outset and will require no patience before it is savored. However, it has an excellent spine of acidity and will have no difficulties also aging gracefully in bottle! Stunning juice. 2021-2040+. **94.**



2019 Chardonnay “HMR Vineyard”- Adelaida Vineyards (Paso Robles)

The 2019 Chardonnay “HMR Vineyard” bottling from Adelaida is fairly ripe, coming in at 14.3 percent alcohol, but also quite fresh on the nose. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh pineapple, pear, acacia blossoms, a good foundation of soil tones and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is plush and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and grip and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. The wine hides its alcohol quite nicely on the nose, but it is a bit hot on the backend. If it were a bit lower in octane I would like it quite well, as there are stylistic semblances here that recall the great old Chalone chardonnays of yore. But, at least to my palate, the alcohol gets in the way and keeps the score down. 2021-2024. **87.**

2019 Chardonnay “P. M. Staiger Vineyard”- Model Farm (Santa Cruz Mountains)

This is the first vintage from Sean Castorani and Joanna Wells produced from fruit from the organically-farmed P. M. Staiger Vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains. These chardonnay vines were planted in 1973 on their own rootstocks, on a steep, southwest-facing slope that sits on a combination of sandstone and shale, one thousand feet above the San Lorenzo Valley. The cuttings were from old Wente clones back in 1973, and today the vineyard gets plenty of morning and late day fog to moderate its temperatures during the growing season. The wine is barrel-fermented in older casks with indigenous yeasts, aged in these barrels for a year and then racked to stainless steel tanks for six months of finishing *elevage*. The 2019 version comes in at 12.7 percent octane and delivers a beautifully refined bouquet of pear, lemon, elder flowers, a complex base of minerality, citrus zest and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core and soil signature, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, pure and complex finish. This is more accessible out of the blocks than previous chardonnays that Joanna and Sean have released from the Wood Valley Vineyard, which could prove to make holding onto this beautiful wine in the cellar quite difficult! Like all of the Model Farm wines, it is built to age and will be infinitely more enjoyable to drink if given some bottle age, but good luck exercising the self-control needed! 2021-2040. **94+**.

2019 Chardonnay “Metallico”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands) screwcap

I fully understand the marketing niceties of this wine, with its silver label and stainless steel *elevage* that leads to it being bottled under a screwcap, as it ties so nicely in with the other aspects of the wine. But, even the beautiful synthesis of marketing angles here does not make up for the wine being compromised a bit by using the screwcap, as my bottle is already a touch reductive on the nose and getting a bit “scalped” on the finish from the closure. However, with a bit of aeration, these issues can be swept under the rug for the moment and the wine offers up a very pretty bouquet of apple, pear, salty soil tones, gentle notes of beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, zesty and delicious finish. I like this wine very much, but would suggest it will be best drunk in the next year or two, just to avoid potential pitfalls with the reductive nature of its closure. Under cork, this wine would easily last a decade or more in bottle! 2021-2024? **90**.

2019 Chardonnay “McIntyre Vineyard”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2019 McIntyre Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Morgan is a beautiful wine in the making. The wine is aged ten months in French barrels, with thirty percent new in this vintage. The wine is still beautifully youthful on the nose, offering up scents of pear, casaba melon, lemon, spring flowers, a touch of beeswax, lovely soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature, zesty acids and a long, still quite primary finish. This is the ripest of the Morgan chardonnays that I tasted for this report, tipping the scales at fourteen percent octane in this vintage, but it is still quite “cool” in profile and a lovely wine in the making. I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for a year or three and really letting it blossom completely, but I will understand if folks wish to drink it in the blush of youth, as it is already very tasty. 2021-2030+. **91+**.

2019 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley”- Morgen Long Wine

The 2019 regular bottling of Willamette Valley chardonnay from Seth Long is once again composed from a blend of fruit from six different vineyards, all of them dry-farmed, with forty

percent of the blend this year from Seven Springs Vineyard, twenty-five percent from X-Omni Vineyard and nineteen percent from Durant Vineyard. This year the wine ended up being raised in twenty percent new oak. The wine is beautifully expressive on the nose, offering up scents of pear, almond, a complex base of salty soil tones, apple blossoms, a hint of iodine and a suave foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, zesty acids and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a touch more refined in personality than the very good 2018 version and is a lovely bottle of chardonnay. It is still a fairly young wine, but decanting it opens it up nicely and it is hardly a crime to be drinking it now! 2021-2045. **93.**

2019 Chardonnay “Dundee Hills”- Morgen Long Wine

The Dundee Hills bottling from Seth Long is made from a blend of ninety percent Durant Vineyard fruit (twenty-one year-old vines) and ten percent Eyrie Vineyard fruit (fifty year-old vines). The wine was given one year in cask and then racked to stainless steel tanks for another winter of *elevage*, with the wine settling in at 12.8 percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex blend of apple, a hint of tangerine, hazelnuts, a beautifully vibrant base of soil tones, a hint of iodine, honeysuckle and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very precise, with a lovely core, stellar mineral undertow, zesty acids and marvelous backend structural tension on the long and nascently complex finish. While it can be very easily (all too easily!) drunk now, this wine has more layers of complexity to unfurl if given some time in the cellar, so I would try to keep away from it for three to five years and really let the fireworks come to the fore! Supremely elegant juice. 2024-2050. **94.**

2019 Chardonnay “Eola-Amity Hills”- Morgen Long Wine

The 2019 Eola-Amity Hills bottling is from younger vines, with the *cépages* a fifty-fifty blend from the X-Omni and Seven Springs Vineyards. The wine ended up at thirteen percent octane and was raised in fifteen percent new oak. It offers up a very lovely aromatic constellation of apple, pear, flinty minerality, a youthful touch of iodine, discreet notes of hazelnut, lemon zest, a whisper of vanillin oak and a floral topnote reminiscent of Meursault geranium. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, bright acids, lovely focus and a long, youthfully complex finish. The younger vines here can be sensed just a touch in the mid-palate today, but I have the sense that this is the kind of wine that will put on weight with bottle age. The aromatic and flavor complexity are just lovely already. 2021-2045. **92.**

2019 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley” Marine- Morgen Long Wine

The 2019 Marine bottling of chardonnay from Seth Long is composed from a slightly different blend of vineyard sources compared to the 2018, as this year it is only produced from two of the three vineyards that contributed fruit last year. The composition this year is sixty percent grapes from the Loubéjac Vineyard and forty percent from the Yamhill Vineyard. Fermentation for both lots started in stainless steel and was finished in barrel. As is customary with Seth’s chardonnays, the wines spent one year in cask and then were assembled in tank for six more months of finishing *elevage*. The wine ended up seeing fifteen percent new oak and comes in at 13.2 percent alcohol in 2019. The nose jumps from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, almond blossoms, a touch of lime peel, a lovely base of soil, hazelnut and a faint touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is elegant, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine depth at the core, superb transparency and bounce, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. The wine is still a touch youthfully shut down on the backend, but it

is delicious already if given a bit of aeration; it will be even better with some bottle age. 2021-2045. **92+**.

2019 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley” Pink Label- Morgen Long Wine

The Pink Label bottling of chardonnay from Seth Long takes its name from the unusual inclusion of a small percentage of red grapes in the *cépages* of this wine. In 2019, this wine is ninety-five percent chardonnay (vineyard sources: fifty percent X-Omni, thirty-five percent Durant, ten percent Loubéjac), which was racked onto five percent of lees of pinot noir and gamay from the Seven Springs Vineyard at the end of 2020 for two months of contact, which gives the wine its gentle pink color. The wine comes in at 12.8 percent alcohol this year and offers up a beautiful nose of apple, gentle notes of blood orange, a hint of rhubarb, salty soil tones, dried roses, citrus peel, a touch of oak and citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil undertow, bright acids and a long, complex and promising finish. This wine will age beautifully, and though it is already quite tasty out of the blocks, it deserves just a bit of cellaring to let its secondary layers of complexity unfold. It is a superb wine! 2022-2045. **92+**.

2019 Chardonnay “Seven Springs Vineyard”- Morgen Long (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2019 Seven Springs Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Seth Long is another superb effort from him in this top flight vintage. This is the youngest and most reductive of Seth’s 2019s and demands decanting time, if one is inclined to drink it early on. However, with thirty minutes in decanter, it does start to budge a bit and eventually delivers a nose of pear, apple, iodine, a very pretty base of soil, hints of almond, white flowers and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with an excellent core and mineral drive, vibrant acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, primary and promising finish. Today, the wine is most impressive on the backend, where it has enormous lift and energy. Once this wine blossoms, it is going to be stellar, but it will need some cellaring to open up properly. 2026-2050. **95**.

2019 Chardonnay “The Eyrie Vineyard”- Morgen Long Wine (Dundee Hills)

This is Seth Long’s oldest vine bottling, as this block of ungrafted chardonnay vines was planted by David Lett in 1968. The grapes were picked on September 28th this year, with the wine coming in at an even thirteen percent. As is customary, it started fermentation in stainless, was racked to a once-filled French cask to finish fermentation and age on its fine lees for one year. This was followed by six months of finishing *elevage* in tank prior to bottling. The bouquet is pure and youthful, with a gently reductive personality eventually revealing scents of lemon, pear, a complex base of salty soil tones, citrus zest, fresh almond, a dollop of iodine, fruit blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with great depth at the core, superb soil inflection, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and extremely promising finish. This is still a puppy and needs bottle age to allow its secondary layers to emerge, but it will be flat out brilliant once it is truly ready to drink! 2026-2055. **96**.

2019 Chardonnay “X-Omni Vineyard”- Morgen Long Wine (Eola-Amity Hills)

The X-Omni Vineyard is densely planted with fifteen different clones of chardonnay. The grapes for this bottling were picked on October 1st and 7th in 2019, with the wine starting out fermentation in stainless steel and being racked into cask to finish. The wine ended up being raised in forty-five percent new oak this year and tips the scales at 12.85 percent octane. The bouquet is precise and simply beautiful already, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, white peach, almond, a complex base of soil tones, lemon blossoms, just a whisper of iodine and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, intensely flavored

and very complex, with a beautiful girdle of acidity, superb focus and grip and a long, zesty and very, very classy finish. This is young and a bit reductive out of the blocks, so I would definitely tuck it away in the cellar and let it blossom. This is a great new addition to Seth Long's lineup of single vineyard bottlings! 2024-2050. **95+**.



2018 Chardonnay “Highland”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

Morgan’s Highland bottling of chardonnay is sourced from the Double L, Tondre, Leavens and McIntyre Vineyards. The wine was aged in one-third new oak and comes in at 13.8 percent octane in the 2018 vintage. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of lemon, pear, a complex base of soil tones, just a whisper of fresh pineapple, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a lovely core, good soil undertow and grip, bright acids and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. This is a really good bottle of chardonnay in the making, which is delicious right now, but has another layer of complexity to unfold if given some time in the cellar. Fine juice! 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Chardonnay “Double L Vineyard”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2018 vintage of Morgan’s Double L Vineyard cuvée of chardonnay is a superb bottle in the making. The wine was barrel-fermented and aged in thirty percent new oak for ten months prior to bottling this year. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of pear, lemon, paraffin, citrus blossoms, a touch of lavender, acacia blossoms, complex soil tones and a dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and complex, with a full-bodied format, a

fine girdle of acidity, excellent focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This will age very well and I would not open a bottle until it has had at least a couple more years' worth of bottle age, just to let more layers of complexity emerge. 2023-2035+. **93.**

2018 Chardonnay "H. Klopp Vineyard"- Reeve Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 Chardonnay "H. Klopp Vineyard" bottling from Reeve Wines comes in at a cool 12.3 percent octane in this vintage. The wine offers up a beautiful young nose of pear, apple, a fine base of soil tones, just a whisper of iodine, acacia blossoms and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, an excellent girdle of acidity, fine balance and grip and a long, complex finish. This is really lovely, low fat chardonnay! 2021-2030+. **92.**

2018 Chardonnay "Heintz Vineyard"- Reeve Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The Reeve Wines bottling of chardonnay from the well-known Heintz Vineyard has turned out splendidly in 2018, tipping the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and delivering a fine, youthful aromatic constellation of pear, fresh pineapple, lovely spice tones, good soil tones, a touch of orange peel and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with zesty acids, fine focus and a long, still quite primary finish. This is quite a bit more tightly-knit out of the blocks than the chardonnay from H. Klopp Vineyard and will demand a bit of cellaring time prior to drinking with generosity. In due course, it will be lovely, but the H. Klopp is the more accessible of these two very good bottlings. 2023-2030+. **91+.**

2017 Chardonnay "Mariah Vineyards"- Bee Hunter Wines (Mendocino Ridge) magnum

Bee Hunter's 2017 Chardonnay from Mariah Vineyards is drinking beautifully out of magnum, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, tangerine, salty soil tones, citrus peel, a hint of honeycomb and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and fairly complex, with good acids and grip, lovely balance and a long, zesty finish. This is not the most complex example of chardonnay out there, but it hits all the right notes and still has plenty of bounce and life ahead of it. Good juice. 2021-2027. **90.**

2017 Chardonnay "Estate Bottled"- Mount Eden Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Chardonnay from Mount Eden Vineyards is a stunning beauty that is just starting to really hit its stride at age four! The bouquet is pure and precise, offering up some secondary layering in its constellation of pear, golden delicious apple, a touch of candied lemon, chalky soil tones, a hint of almond, honeysuckle and a very discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and a very long, balanced and utterly classy finish. This is a touch more primary still on the palate than the bouquet at the present time, so decant it and let the palate play catch up, if you are intent on drinking it now. It will age still for many, many years! 2021-2040. **94.**

Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc

2019 Sauvignon Blanc "Cuvée Lucia"- Andrew Will Cellars (Yakima Valley)

The 2019 Sauvignon Blanc "Cuvée Lucia" from Will and Chris Camarda at Andrew Will Cellars is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent sauvignon blanc and twenty-five percent sémillon, both planted in their Two Blondes Vineyard. The wine comes in at fourteen percent and is a bit tight when first opened, so give it a bit of aeration prior to serving. Once it blossoms, it offers up a fine and complex nose of lemon, fresh fig, a hint of tangerine, beeswax, a lovely

dollop of fresh-cut grass, citrus peel and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, lovely balance and grip and a long, classy finish. This is the first vintage of sauvignon blanc I have tasted from the Camardas and it is excellent! 2021-2030. **92.**

2019 Riesling “Vonarburg Vineyard”- Reeve Wines (Anderson Valley)

The 2019 Riesling “Vonarburg Vineyard” bottling from Reeve Wines is done in a dry style and comes in at twelve percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine delivers a lovely nose of apple, white cherry, just a hint of petrol, citrus peel, white flowers and a lovely base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and well-balanced, with a good core and acidity, fine focus and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is a very tasty bottle of dry Riesling. 2021-2026. **89.**

Off the Beaten Path Red Varietals

2019 Bone-Jolly Gamay Noir- Edmunds St. John (El Dorado County) screwcap

The 2019 Bone-Jolly Gamay Noir from Steve Edmunds is a touch reductive when first opened, but blossoms nicely with a bit of aeration to offer up scents of cherries, strawberries, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with still a wisp of CO₂, a good core and fine intensity of flavor and bounce on the long and complex finish. As I have said before, I would love to see this wine bottled under a natural cork, just to obviate the need to decant it right out of the blocks before drinking. But, once the wine unlocks with some air, it is very tasty. 2021-2025. **90.**

2019 “Stroke of Luck” Primitivo- The End of Nowhere (Amador County)

Chris Walsh purchases his Primitivo from Shake Ridge Ranch, which he ferments entirely whole cluster and raises in older French wood casks. The 2019 version comes in at a very svelte 12.4 percent octane and delivers a fine bouquet of brambly red berries, peppercorn, clove-like spice tones, just a hint of eucalyptus, bonfire and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and pure, with fine complexity and grip, modest tannins and a long, vibrant finish. I should note that there is just touch of volatile acidity here, so decant the wine and let it blow off. This has the backend bounce of Beaujolais, coupled to the aromatics and flavors of zinfandels from the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. It is a totally unique and captivating middleweight. 2021-2035. **90.**

2019 Pinot Gris “Space Boy” Heringer Vineyard- The End of Nowhere (Yolo County)

The Space Boy Pinot Gris from Chris Walsh is really more of a Rosé than a red, but as it is a pinot gris fermented on its skins, I have listed it here as a red wine. The wine only tips the scales at 11.6 percent alcohol, is a very pale red in color and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of cherry skins, rhubarb, a touch of orange peel, sumac, salty soil tones and a touch of clove in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and modestly complex, with tangy acids, a wisp of tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. I find the nose here more interesting than the palate, as the wine is a bit fours-square on the backend. Is it possible the wine is just young? I have tasted a few Oregon pinot gris bottlings that flirt with some skin contact, but never one that went all the way to try and make a light red wine from the grape. I am not sure if this wine just needs a bit more ripeness to allow the palate to catch up with the very interesting bouquet, or if it simply needs a bit of bottle age to do so! A very unique wine, and if the palate can catch the nose with a bit of age, then it deserves the score at the upper end of the range. 2021-2030? **86-89?**

2018 Barbera “Centennial Mountain Vineyard”- Aeris (California)

The 2018 vintage of Barbera from Aeris is a ripe customer, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol in this year. Despite its octane, the wine is beautifully pure and precise on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of nuttiness, a lovely base of soil, gentle balsamic tones, a touch of oak and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and transparent in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, tangy acids, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This is an excellent wine and really balanced impeccably for its octane; it will age long and gracefully, though I expect it many bottles will be drunk up in its blush of youth. 2021-2040+. **92.**

2018 Bricco Rosso “Centennial Mountain Vineyard”- Aeris (California)

The 2018 Bricco Rosso bottling from Aeris is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent Nebbiolo, fifteen percent each of Nerello Mascalese, Carignan and Primitivo and five percent of Barbera. The wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet dark berries, a hint of chocolate, a gentle touch of fresh herb tones, a hint of curry, a classy framing of cedar and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely ripe, with great mineral undertow (particularly for fairly young vines!), a lovely core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This too is a touch riper than I would like ideally, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but it carries its alcohol very well and will have no difficulty aging beautifully. I can well imagine drinking this wine ten or fifteen years down the road and wonder why I even bothered to comment about the ripeness when it was young! 2028-2055+. **93.**

2016 Charbono- Calder Wine Company (Napa Valley)

Rory Williams (Vineyard Manager at Frog’s Leap Winery and founder of Calder Wine Company) planted this parcel of Charbono in the Rossi Vineyard in Rutherford, with the 2016 being the second vintage he has produced from this plot of organically and dry-farmed, bush-trained vines. The wine is raised in older casks prior to bottling and the 2016 comes in at a very economical 11.8 percent alcohol. Despite its low octane, the wine has plenty of personality, offering up a deep and black fruity bouquet of sweet dark berries, cassis, coffee bean, a touch of currant leaf, beautiful spice tones, incipient notes of eucalyptus and a fine base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with lovely delineation, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, very well-balanced finish. The low alcohol level does not provide for a lot of plumpness in the mid-palate, but the wine has plenty of intensity of flavor and is most emphatically not a light wine in any respect! At five years of age it is starting to drink very nicely, but will age long and gracefully as well. 2021-2045+. **91+.**



Zinfandel, Carignane and Field Blends

2019 Zinfandel- Nalle Vineyards (Dry Creek Valley)

Doug and Andrew Nalle's 2019 Zinfandel includes seven percent Petite Sirah and three percent Carignane in the blend this year. The wine was raised in twenty-five percent new oak and comes in at a very civilized 13.8 percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of brambles, black raspberry, roasted game, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil tones, bonfire, youthful fresh herb tones and blossoming spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, tangy acids, buried tannins and fine balance and grip on the long and very promising finish. Like all of the Nalle Zinfandels, the 2019 is built for the cellar and will need some bottle age before it blossoms properly and starts to drink with generosity. However, once it is really ready to drink, it will be delicious. 2027-2055. **92.**

2018 Ancient Field Blend "Old Hill Vineyard"- Bucklin (Sonoma County)

The Ancient Field Blend from Bucklin is composed of a *cépages* of roughly sixty percent zinfandel, fifteen percent of grenache, ten percent alicanté bouschet, five percent syrah and ten percent of "other" red grapes. The moniker of Ancient Field Blend is quite accurate, as these vines were planted in the late 1880s! The varieties are co-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in forty percent new oak. The 2018 version comes in at 15.3 percent octane and offers up a deep, briary and complex bouquet of black raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, cigar ash, currant

leaf, a wide array of spice tones and hung game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely plush at the core, with well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and a moderately warm finish. There is a fair bit of tannin buried deep here, but overall, the wine is really pretty approachable already and it is hardly a crime to be drinking it early on. This handles its alcohol pretty well and is quite tasty. I only wish it were a half point lower in alcohol, as then I could reach for a second glass with dinner! But, for those more tolerant of higher octane wines, add four points to my score, as there is still a lot to like here. 2021-2040+? **88.**

2018 Carignane “Old Vine”- Porter Creek Vineyards (Mendocino County)

Alex Davis makes truly special Carignane, from this parcel of vines planted all the way back in 1939! He de-stems the fruit, barrel ferments with indigenous yeasts and ages half the cuvée in thirty-eight hundred liter *foudre* and half in older casks. The 2018 comes in at a svelte 12.3 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, smoked meats, lavender, pepper, a touch of rosemary, dark soil tones and a lovely dollop of upper register spices. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complex, with fine focus and grip, chewy tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and low fat finish of grace and promise. At its lower octane, this wine does not have any puppy fat fruit to cover up its youthful tannins, so it will need to be tucked away in the cellar until the tannins start to soften up a bit. In due course, it will be an excellent middleweight. 2026-2055. **91+.**

2014 Zinfandel “Fashauer Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Anderson Valley)

The 2014 Zinfandel “Fashauer Vineyard” bottling from Bee Hunter is extremely well-made in its style, which unfortunately is far higher in octane than my palate is comfortable with. I now understand (thanks to Joseph Swan Vineyards’ owner, Rod Berglund’s tutorial on the zinfandel grape) why it is sometimes necessary to let the sugars soar with this variety, so as to try and tame recalcitrant acidity levels, but it does not make such high octane zins any more palatable to me to know that sometimes nature forces this hand on the winegrower. In any case, despite its alcohol quite lofty, the wine offers up a lovely bouquet of brambly red and black raspberries, black tea, beautiful spice tones, a dollop of soil and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and hot, with a good core, ripe, moderate tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and slightly stewy finish. Intellectual comprehension does not always translate into fondness. 2021-2035+? **84.**

2014 Zinfandel- Sky Vineyards (Mount Veeder)

As I have written in the past, I adore Lore Olds’ beautiful zinfandel bottlings from his Sky Vineyards, located up above Mayacamas on the top of Mount Veeder. The vineyards are farmed organically, the winery is powered by a single solar panel and the wine is raised in barrels that range from one to ten years of age. The 2014 Zinfandel is the current release from this iconic producer, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane and offering up a beautifully refined and complex nose of black raspberries, dried eucalyptus, spit-roasted venison, pepper, lavender, stony soil tones, bonfire and the first vestiges of autumnal shadings. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, still some chewy tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced finish. This is properly old school mountain zinfandel and is still fairly youthful, but all constituent components are in place for an outstanding bottle of wine once the tannins have softened up further. 2029-2060+. **92+.**

Syrah and Grenache

2019 Esquisto- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2019 Esquisto bottling from Halcón Vineyards is composed of a blend of eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah this year. It comes in at 14.2 percent alcohol and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, smoked meats, *garrigue*, a nice touch of sweet stem tones from whole clusters, pepper, stony soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and youthful, with great depth at the core, fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and peppery finish. This is a fine young wine in the making, but it is chewy and plenty structured out of the blocks and will need plenty of bottle age to soften up and blossom. 2029-2065. **92+**.

2019 Mourvèdre- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

2017 was the first vintage that Paul and Jackie Gordon bottled a bit of Mourvèdre on its own, as the yields were generous enough that they could not use all of it in their Esquisto (Châteauneuf-styled) bottling in that vintage. I had really enjoyed the 2017 version and was very happy to unpack my box of samples from Paul and see that they had produced the bottling again in both 2019 and 2018. The 2019 Mourvèdre included fifty percent whole clusters and comes in at 13.7 percent octane. The wine delivers a fine nose of red currants, dark berries, *garrigue*, roasted game, stony soil tones, bonfire and a fine array of upper register sweet botanicals that very much recall young Tempier Bandol from the vintages of the late '80s and early '90s. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core and mineral drive, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and gently funky finish that is the hallmark of young mourvèdre. This is a superb wine in the making. 2032-2065. **93**.

2019 Syrah “Alturas”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2019 Alturas bottling of Syrah from Halcón Vineyards again includes a small percentage of viognier in the blend, as was the case with the 2018 vintage of this wine. This vintage is just a whisper riper than the 2018, coming in at 13.7 percent octane and offering up a deep and classic bouquet of cassis, pepper, smoked meats, stony soil tones, a touch of chocolate, black tea, woodsmoke and a topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is an outstanding bottle of syrah in the making, but it is plenty structured and will need at least a decade in the cellar to soften up before it starts hitting on all cylinders. When it is ready to drink, it will be superb. 2031-2075. **93**.

2019 Syrah “Elevación”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The Elevación bottling of syrah from Paul and Jackie Gordon hails from a parcel planted with the “Chave Clone” of this variety and it always seems to have just a touch more complexity than the Alturas as a result. The 2019 is a stunning young wine in the making, arriving listed at 13.4 percent alcohol and delivering a great young nose of black raspberries, cassis, smoked meats, pepper, early spice tones from the whole clusters, a gorgeous base of stony soil tones, dark chocolate, a hint of new leather and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, precise, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a superb core of fruit, plenty of chewy tannin and a very long, precisely focused and nascently complex finish. This is a very young bottle of syrah, but also a brilliant one in the making. Just be patient, as it is going to need well more than a decade to start to soften up! 2034-2075+. **95**.

2019 Syrah “La Cruz Vineyard”- Model Farm (Petaluma Gap)

The 2019 La Cruz Vineyard bottling of syrah from Model Farm comes in at 13.3 percent octane, included fifty percent whole clusters this year and, as is customary with Sean and Joanna’s wines, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised in older French oak casks. The wine is bottled unfinned and unfiltered and offers up a superb bouquet of red and black raspberries, sweet cassis, grilled meats, pepper, stony soil, beautiful spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. This is outstanding syrah in the making! 2032-2075+. **94.**

2019 Syrah “Petaluma Gap”- Model Farm (Petaluma Gap)

The Petaluma Gap bottling from Model Farm is from the family’s “estate” vineyard, on which they started their project with a long-term lease back in 2013. Sean and Joanna farm this cool, two acre parcel of syrah organically. The 2019 version is absolutely stunning, coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol, having been one hundred percent whole cluster and raised entirely in four used French casks. The bouquet shows plenty of youthful spiciness from the stems, soaring from the glass in a very complex blend of cassis, black raspberries, black olive, gorgeous spice tones, smoked meats, dark soil tones, lavender, pepper and a touch of black tea in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with a beautiful core of fruit, stunning mineral drive, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and superbly balanced finish. While this wine is loaded with complexity and personality, it is stunningly light on its feet and so transparent down to its underlying soil tones. This is the finest wine I have yet tasted from Sean Castorani and Joanna Wells (and I have been a fan since the very first sample bottle that the couple sent me)! 2033-2075+. **96.**

2018 Grenache- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

This is the first “stand alone” grenache bottled by Halcón Vineyards, with the wine having been fermented with forty percent whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and it was raised in a single, five hundred liter puncheon of used French oak. It comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and delivers a superb young nose of raspberries, cherries, sweet stem tones, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue* and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, peppery and precise, with great transparency and grip, a stellar core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced young finish. Like all of Paul and Jackie Gordon’s wines, their new bottling of grenache is built for the long haul and will be a cellar treasure in due course! 2028-2065. **94.**

2018 Mourvèdre- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

The 2018 vintage of Mourvèdre from the Gordon family at Halcón is cut more in the style of the inaugural vintage of 2017, rather than the riper 2019 version. The wine comes in at 12.8 percent octane, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and was fifty percent whole clusters in this vintage. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of dark berries, smoked meats, pepper, a lovely touch of stem tones that will turn to spices with bottle age, a fine base of soil, a touch of black tea and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, svelte and tangy finish. This is simply outstanding Mourvèdre! 2028-2065. **94.**

2018 Syrah “Alturas”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

I was able to taste a bottle of the 2018 Alturas Syrah from the Gordon family at Halcón Vineyards a little over a year ago and was delighted to have a chance to revisit it for this report.

Readers may recall that this vintage of Alturas includes four percent viognier in the blend. The wine was raised entirely in older barrels this year and included fifty percent whole clusters. It remains plenty young, but also promising on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of dark berries, pepper, grilled meats, a complex base of soil, plenty of upper register smokiness and a floral topnote redolent of lavender from the bit of viognier in the *cépages*. On the palate the wine is nascently complex, full-bodied and precise, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. Just add time in the bottle and *voilà!* 2028-2065. **93+**.

2018 Syrah “Elevación”- Halcón Vineyards (Yorkville Highlands)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2018 “Elevación” Syrah from Halcón Vineyards since the start of last year and the wine is even better today than it was then, despite it still being in need of plenty of bottle age before it is really ready to drink! The bouquet is pure, refined and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, plenty of meatiness, a hint of black olive, pepper, bonfire, a complex base of soil and a whisper of upper register stems from the one hundred percent whole clusters in this vintage. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, great soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannin and a long, perfectly balanced and very, very promising finish. Great juice in the making. 2030-2070. **94.**



2018 Grenache “Petrichor Vineyard”- Reeve Wines (Fountaingrove District)

The grenache and syrah planted at Petrichor Vineyard are densely-planted and farmed organically. The vines are planted on the volcanic soils of the western flank of the Mayacamas Mountains, looking down on the Russian River Valley. The 2018 version from Reeve Wines comes in at 14.6 percent octane and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, roasted meats, lovely spice tones and a fine base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This is very good grenache. 2028-2055+. **92.**

2015 Grenache “Eagle Point Ranch”- Bee Hunter (Mendocino)

The 2015 Grenache from Bee Hunter is a pretty heady example of the varietal, tipping the scales at 14.8 percent octane in this vintage. However, the bouquet is impressively fresh and vibrant for its ripeness level, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, a lovely base of soil tones, woodsmoke, cedar and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a sweet core of fruit, firm tannins, good complexity and a fair bit of heat poking out on the long finish. I love the nose on this wine, but even at its stated 14.8 percent alcohol level it seems to have a fair bit of residual sugar, not to mention backend heat. I would love to taste this bottling in a less ripe vintage, but the 2015 is not my cup of tea. 2021-2035+? **84** (add six points if you like higher octane Grenache and do not mind some residual sweetness in the wine, as there really are some good raw materials here).

Pinot Noir

2019 Pinot Noir “HMR Vineyard”- Adelaida Vineyards (Paso Robles)

The Hoffman Mountain Ranch Vineyard (HMR) was planted in 1964 by Stanley Hoffman, with André Tchelistcheff having come on to consult for the Hoffmans in 1973. In 1994, the Van Steenwyk family, proprietors of Adelaida, bought the original 1964 planted vineyards from the Hoffman family. Today, these are the oldest pinot noir vines in the Central Coast. The 2019 HMR pinot noir comes in at 13.6 percent octane and offers up a bright and red fruity bouquet of strawberries, cherries, a dollop of fresh herb tones, incipient notes of cola, a good base of soil and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthful, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, bouncy and promising finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still quite primary in personality and deserves some bottle age to unlock some of its secondary layers of complexity. 2026-2055. **90+.**

2019 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Bravium Wines

The 2019 vintage of the Anderson Valley bottling of pinot noir from Bravium is an absolute charmer. The bouquet is pure and red fruity, wafting from the glass in a mix of red berries, cherries, a touch of beetroot, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, rose petal, cedar and a lovely topnote of Mendocino sweet herb tones. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is approachable today, though it is still young and will be even better with at least a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2021-2055. **92.**

2019 Pinot Noir “Oppenlander Vineyard”- Halcón Vineyards (Mendocino County)

The 2019 Oppenlander Vineyard Pinot Noir from Halcón Vineyards comes in this year at 13.4 percent octane and shows a world of promise. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, some sweet stem tones, woodsmoke, fresh Mendocino herbs, dark soil tones and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil transparency, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and a long, primary and vibrant finish. This is a puppy and will demand some bottle age before it really starts to drink with generosity, but it will be excellent juice in due course. 2030-2070. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Bee Hunter Wines

Bee Hunter’s 2018 Anderson Valley pinot noir comes in at a nicely ripe, but quite balanced 13.8 percent octane in this vintage and offers up a deep, very classy bouquet of plums, black cherries, smoked duck, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, raw cocoa and a well done framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely plump at the core, with good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. I only became aware of the wines from Bee Hunter last year, but I have been so impressed with what I have tasted from the winery so far! This is excellent. 2024-2055. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Twelve Clones”- Morgan Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2018 Twelve Clones Pinot Noir from Morgan is composed of fruit from several different vineyards. It was raised in thirty-five percent new oak this year and tips the scales at 14.3 percent octane. It delivers a pretty bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, stony soil tones, pretty spice tones, incipient notes of cola, a touch of fresh herbs and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, gently warm finish. I like this wine quite well and only wish it was just a touch lower in octane, so that there would be no heat on the backend. But, that is a very minor complaint. 2021-2045+. **90.**

2018 Pinot Noir “L’Ensemble”- Domaine Nicolas-Jay (Willamette Valley)

L’Ensemble is a new bottling from Jean-Nicolas Méo and Jay Boberg Domaine Nicolas-Jay. It is a barrel selection of the very finest handful of casks, blended together to make a “grand cru” level bottling from the estate. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and was raised in one-third new oak in the 2018 vintage. The wine offers up a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, blackberry, a hint of pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, a lovely base of dark soil, gentle spice tones and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is precise, elegant, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil undertow and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is a gorgeous wine in the making! 2030-2065. **94+.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Rhoda”- Reeve Wines (Anderson Valley)

The Rhoda bottling of pinot noir from Reeve Wines is a blend of fruit from three different vineyards in Anderson Valley. The 2018 version comes in listed at a svelte 13.2 percent octane and offers up a lovely nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh dill, a fine base of soil and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core and soil signature, moderate, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is fine juice and quite approachable out of the blocks, though it has the balance to age quite gracefully. 2021-2050. **90.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Mirama” - Reeve Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 Pinot Noir “Mirama” from Reeve Wines was fermented with fifteen percent whole clusters and was raised in twenty percent new oak for twenty months prior to bottling. Like the Rhoda bottling, this is made from a blend of fruit from three different vineyards on the Sonoma Coast. The bouquet is bright and more black fruity in personality than the Rhoda bottling, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, cola, a lovely dollop of fresh herbs, dark soil tones, a touch of brown spices and a refined framing of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with good soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. Like the Rhoda cuvée, this wine is certainly accessible out of the blocks, but here, I sense that there is another layer of complexity lurking just below the surface and it makes sense to tuck it away in the cellar for three or four years and let the wine really blossom. 2024-2055. **91+**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Kiser Vineyard” Lower Block- Reeve Wines (Mendocino County)

Reeve’s 2018 Kiser Vineyard Lower Block bottling of pinot noir is nicely low octane this year, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and delivering a very pretty and precise bouquet of cherries, strawberries, spice tones, a beautiful base of stony soil, a dollop of fresh herbs, woodsmoke, black tea and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tightly-knit, with good intensity of flavor, bright acids, moderate tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom from behind its good acids and start to drink with generosity. It will be a stylish middleweight in due course, but never a particularly deep bottle of pinot. 2026-2050. **90**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Kiser Vineyard” Upper Block- Reeve Wines (Mendocino County)

It is interesting to see the contrast in ripeness between the Lower Block and the Upper Block bottlings from Kiser Vineyard in 2018, as this wine comes in at 13.7 percent octane (rather than the 12.5 percent for the Lower Block). The bouquet is deep, sappy and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of plum, incipient notes of cola, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a suave foundation of new oak and a touch of nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with tangy acids, ripe tannins and excellent balance and grip on the long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. I love the backend energy here! This wine will need plenty of bottle age to blossom, but it will be stunning when it is ready to drink. 2028-2060. **93+**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Kiser Vineyard” Suitcase Block- Reeve Wines (Mendocino County)

The 2018 Suitcase Block from Kiser Vineyard is again, very low octane in this vintage, coming in at 12.4 percent alcohol. The bouquet is bright and quite a bit more black fruity than the Lower Block version, offering up notes of sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird, gentle spice tones, incipient notes of cola and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, vibrant and tangy, with a good core of black fruit and mineral drive, a snappy girdle of acidity, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and very promising finish. Despite sharing a similar alcohol level with the Lower Block Kiser, this wine has far more stuffing at the core (albeit buttoned up behind its acids) and should ultimately be the more impressive bottle when it is fully mature. 2028-2055. **93**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Rice-Spivak Vineyard”- Reeve Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 Pinot Noir “Rice-Spivak Vineyard” bottling from Reeve Wines is fine juice in the making. The soils here are volcanic, which is quite rare on the Sonoma Coast. The pure and nascently complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, black tea, fresh bay, a lovely base of soil, a touch of citrus peel and a discreet foundation of new

oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent soil signature, a fine core of black fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2025-2065+. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Thorn Ridge Vineyard”- Reeve Wines (Sonoma Coast)

The 2018 Thorn Ridge Vineyard bottling of pinot from Reeve Wines comes in at 13.4 percent alcohol and offers up a beautiful, black fruity bouquet of black plums, dark berries, incipient notes of cola, woodsmoke, sage, raw cocoa, a fine base of dark soil, gentle spice tones and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, suave tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. Structurally, this beautiful wine is approachable, but it is still unmistakably a puppy and I would try to keep my hands off of it for six or seven more years and really let it start hitting on all cylinders. It is going to be outstanding. 2027-2060. **94.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Wendling Vineyard” North Slope- Reeve Wines (Mendocino County)

The 2018 Pinot Noir from the Wendling Vineyard from Reeve comes in this year listed at 13.9 percent octane and is nicely light on its feet for its octane. The bouquet offers up a nascently complex blend of cherries, red plums, incipient notes of cola, a beautiful array of gentle spice tones, dark soil and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with good soil signature, ripe tannins, tangy acids and just a whisper of backend heat on the long and classy finish. This is nicely ripe and will become velvety with only a few years’ worth of bottle age. Good juice. 2024-2055. **91.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Estate Bottled”- Mount Eden Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 vintage of pinot noir from Mount Eden Vineyards is an excellent young wine in the making. It is fairly ripe, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but deep, nicely structured and pure and will only need some extended cellaring time to blossom. The still quite primary bouquet offers up scents of plums, black cherries, fresh bay leaf, dark soil tones, coffee bean, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of dried eucalyptus and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, soil-driven and full-bodied, with a rock solid core, excellent backend mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is a classic vintage of Mount Eden pinot noir in the making, but give it some time in the cellar to really start to stir. 2029-2060+. **93+.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Domaine Nicolas-Jay

It has been about a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2017 Nicolas-Jay pinot noir, and the wine is slowly starting to blossom, but remains several years away from its peak of drinkability. It is a beautiful wine, tipping the scales at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a refined bouquet of black cherries, a hint of Morey-like beetroot, *pigeon*, a fine undertow of soil tones, raw cocoa, a gentle foundation of new wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, refined and elegant, with lovely structure and balance, a fine core and a long, suavely tannic and nascently complex finish. I was very impressed with this wine last summer and it is aging quite gracefully. 2027-2055+. **93.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Angel Camp Vineyard ”- Bee Hunter Wines (Anderson Valley)

The 2016 Angel Camp Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Bee Hunter is fairly ripe, coming in listed at 14.2 percent octane, but offers impressive purity to its fruit component and fine soil signature as well. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, chocolate, fresh nutmeg, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied and already nicely velvety on the attack, with a good core and soil signature, seamless tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish (with perhaps just a whisper of backend heat with aeration). This is starting to develop its first signs of secondary complexity, as the soil tones are starting to share towards the autumnal end of the spectrum and I am sure more spice tones will emerge with further bottle age. A very pretty bottle that is blossoming beautifully at the moment. 2021-2045+. **91+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “HMR Vineyard”- Adelaida Vineyards (Paso Robles)

The 2014 vintage of HMR Vineyard pinot noir from Adelaida is riper than the 2019, coming in listed at 14.3 percent octane and offering up a more black fruity personality than the '19 on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, black tea, a bit of roasted meats, bay leaf, coffee grounds, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and gently warm finish. Though this is a touch higher in octane than I find ideal, it is aging beautifully and is really quite a tasty, complex bottle of pinot noir today, with still room to grow with further bottle age. If the 2019 version ages this gracefully, at its slightly lower alcohol level, it should prove to be even better than the 2014! 2021-2045. **91**.

Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux Blends

2019 Involuntary Commitment Red- Andrew Will Winery (Columbia Valley)

The Involuntary Commitment bottling from Andrew Will Winery is produced from some of their estate grown fruit that does not fit into the varying blends of their flagship bottlings. It is made from a blend of cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot and the 2019 version comes in at an even fourteen percent octane. The bouquet is deep and black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This bottling is made for early drinking, but to my palate, it has the structure to also age nicely and will be an even better drink five to ten years down the road. At \$20 a bottle, it is an excellent value! 2021-2040. **90**.

2017 Cabernet Franc “Two Blondes Vineyard”- Andrew Will Winery (Yakima Valley)

The 2017 Cabernet Franc from Will and Chris Camarda is composed entirely from that variety, all from fruit grown on the family's Two Blondes Vineyard. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and was raised in twenty percent new oak casks for nineteen months prior to bottling. It offers up a superb and very precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a beautiful touch of fresh herbs and a very discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of black fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This wine is so seamlessly balanced that it will be approachable only a few years down the road, but I would be inclined to let it celebrate its tenth birthday before really starting to pull corks on bottles with the expectation of full maturity, as there are more layers of complexity still to unwrap here. First class juice! 2027-2055. **93**.

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Champoux Vineyard”- Andrew Will (Horse Heaven Hills)

The Camardas' cabernet sauvignon vines are now twenty-five years of age at Champoux Vineyard and really hitting their stride. Like the 2017 Cabernet Franc from Two Blondes, this

pure cabernet sauvignon bottling was aged in twenty percent new oak casks for nineteen months prior to bottling, with minimum SO₂. The wine is riper than the cab franc, coming in at 14.5 percent octane this year and delivering a ripe and beautifully expressive bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a lovely touch of spice (some no doubt from the Taransaud casks), a fine base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, complex and sports excellent mid-palate depth, with fine balance and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and quite refined finish. The full point higher octane here in comparison to the cabernet franc allows the casks to show a bit more influence in the wine, despite being raised in the same barrels for the same duration. Some folks will prefer this, others may like the more understated cabernet franc in this vintage. They are both beautifully made wines. 2028-2055. **92.**

2017 JRG Red Wine- Pamplin Family Winery (Columbia Valley)

The 2017 JRG bottling from Pamplin is composed this year from a blend of eighty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, nine percent merlot and three percent petit verdot. The wine comes in at 14.2 percent this year and delivers a superb young nose of dark berries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of dark soil tones, hints of violets and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and well-balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is an excellent wine in the making that exalts in its old school stylistic sensibilities! 2027-2055+. **93.**

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon- Pamplin Family Winery (Columbia Valley)

The 2017 Pamplin Family Winery cabernet sauvignon is one hundred percent pure varietal and weighs in at the same octane level as the JRG this year, at 14.2 percent. The bouquet is pure and classy, offering up a nascently complex blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, dried eucalyptus, a discreet framing of new oak and incipient notes of cigar smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and beautifully refined in profile, with a very good core, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and lovely focus and balance on the long, youthfully complex finish. This is a proper young cabernet and will need plenty of bottle age to start to drink with generosity, but it will superb when it is ready to drink. Stylistically, it reminds me quite strongly of young Château Montelena cabernets from the decade of the 1980s. 2031-2065. **94.**

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Walla Walla AVA”- Pamplin Family Winery

The Walla Walla bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Pamplin Family is a special, limited release cuvée produced at the winery, as there are only thirty-six cases of this beauty that will find their way into distribution. The wine is entirely cabernet sauvignon, with eighty-five percent of the fruit hailing from the Seven Hills Vineyard and the other fifteen percent from Summit View Vineyard. The wine comes in at the same svelte 14.2 percent alcohol, but offers up a more black fruity bouquet than the regular 2017 cabernet, wafting from the glass in a deep and very promising blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a beautiful base of soil tones, cigar wrapper and a refined foundation of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine soil undertow, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, seamless tannins and a very long, nascently complex and impressively light on its feet finish. This is a stellar bottle in the making, but it is quite structured and built for the long haul, so if you are fortunate enough to find a few bottles, do not even think of opening one for at least the next decade! 2033-2075. **94+.**

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Pollard Vineyard”- Pollard Per Se (Yakima Valley)

Robin Pollard planted her ten acre vineyard in upper Yakima Valley in 2010, and has made her 2017s and 2016s with the assistance of Will and Chris Camarda of Andrew Will

Winery. The 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Pollard Vineyard” bottling from Pollard Per Se was raised in twenty percent new oak and comes in at a svelte and decidedly 12.6 percent octane. The bouquet is pure, precise and very classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, a touch of currant leaf, a fine base of dark soil tones, just a hint of Barolo-like road tar and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a marvelously lower octane bottle of cabernet sauvignon that is built to age splendidly. Most impressive! 2027-2055. **93.**

2017 Red Wine “Pollard Vineyard”- Pollard Per Se (Yakima Valley)

The 2017 Red Wine blend from Pollard Per Se is composed from a *cépages* of forty-four percent cabernet franc, thirty-seven percent merlot and nineteen percent cabernet sauvignon. This wine is also aged in twenty percent new casks and is a touch higher in alcohol than the straight cabernet sauvignon from this vintage, but still quite judicious at 13.7 percent. The nose delivers a refined, classy blend of dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, coffee bean, a hint of sweet herb tones, a lovely array of spices and a nice touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and detailed finish. Just a lovely, lovely wine. 2025-2055. **93.**



2016 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Winery (Horse Heaven Hills)

The *cépages* of the 2016 vintage of Champoux from the Camarda family is fifty percent merlot, thirty percent cabernet sauvignon and twenty percent cabernet franc. The wine is quite

ripe this year, coming in at 15.1 percent alcohol and was raised in twenty-five percent new oak. As Will Camarda noted, the warm summer of 2016 tended to push up octane levels a bit, particularly if a fair bit of merlot was used in the cuvée. It delivers a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a very restrained foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is focused and full-bodied, with a nice sense of early plushness already showing on the attack, a deep core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex finish that closes with just a bit of backend heat. I am truly impressed with how well this wine carries its alcohol, as the slightly hot finish is hardly obtrusive and this wine is beautifully crafted. 2026-2055+. **92.**

2016 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will Winery (Red Mountain)

The 2016 vintage of Ciel du Cheval from Andrew Will Winery is also ripe this year, coming in listed at a full fifteen percent. The bottling is a blend this year of fifty-seven percent merlot and forty-three percent cabernet franc, with the *elevage* done in twenty-five percent new oak for eight months. The wine offers up a beautifully pure and refined bouquet of black plums, cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil tones, just a hint of tobacco leaf, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and warm, with a good core of fruit, nice textural sophistication on the attack, ripe, slightly coarse tannins and a long, complex finish. It's funny, the 2016 Champoux bottling is listed a touch higher in alcohol than the Ciel du Cheval, but it seems to hide its alcohol better on the backend at this stage of its evolution. This is still a well-made wine, but the alcohol seems slightly more problematic to my palate than in the Champoux and I do not have a real sense of how this wine will evolve with bottle age. And, of course, I am sure that there are plenty of cabernet drinkers out there these days that would not even notice the touch of backend heat in this wine! 2026-2055. **89-91+?**

2016 Sorella (Champoux Vineyard)- Andrew Will Winery (Horse Heaven Hills)

The 2016 vintage of Sorella is composed from a blend of eighty percent cabernet sauvignon, eight percent each of merlot and cabernet franc and four percent of petit verdot. This wine sees just a touch more new wood during its *elevage*, with thirty percent of the casks new this year, but the wine only stayed in barrel for nine months for the 2016 vintage. It is the ripest wine in the lineup of 2016s, coming in listed at 15.2 percent alcohol. Despite its octane level, the wine is quite pure on the nose, offering up a distinctly black fruity blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, coffee grounds, dark soil tones, smoke and a judicious framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just a wee bit hot, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, gently warm and nascently complex finish. As is the case with the 2016 Ciel du Cheval, I really do not have any experience with how a cabernet-based wine at this octane is going to evolve over the long haul in the cellar. It is certainly crafted in its customarily elegant style, but at 15.2 percent, I want to hedge my bets a bit with a range of scores. However, given how the 2015s are settling in from Andrew Will after a bit of cellaring, the odds are pretty good all of these wines will end up meriting the scores at the upper end of the ranges! 2027-2055. **89-92?**

2016 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will Winery (Yakima Valley)

The 2016 vintage of Two Blondes Vineyard from Andrew Will Winery is a bit more merlot-dominant this year that is customary, with the *cépages* having ended up sixty percent merlot, sixteen percent each cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc and eight percent malbec. The wine was raised in twenty-five percent new oak and given an *elevage* of eighteen months for the 2016, which comes in at a svelte fourteen percent octane. It offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, coffee bean and cedary oak. On the

palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, impeccably balanced and classy finish. This is more in my comfort zone for octane and is unequivocally a superb bottle in the making. 2026-2055. **94.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon- Domaine Eden (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2016 Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon is a superb and quite classically-styled wine, coming in at fourteen percent octane. This hails from vines planted on the ridge next door to Mount Eden Vineyards, which were originally planted in 1983 (from cuttings taken from Mount Eden) and purchased by Ellie and Jeffrey Patterson in 2007. The *cépages* for the 2016 is seventy-five percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent merlot, five percent cabernet franc, four percent petit verdot and one percent of malbec. The wine is aged in a fifty-fifty split of American and French oak casks, with ten percent of each oak renewed each vintage. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, incipient notes of chipotle pepper, dark soil tones, a touch of dried eucalyptus and a refined framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, beautifully balanced young finish. This wine is already starting to show the first touch of velvetiness on the palate, but is still a young wine and deserves further bottle age before starting to drink it in earnest. 2026-2055. **92+.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon- Pamplin Family Winery (Columbia Valley)

The 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon from Pamplin Family is again made entirely from this grape variety and was probably raised in about a third new oak. The wine is a whisper riper than its 2017 sibling, coming in at 14.3 percent octane and delivering a superb aromatic constellation of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a bit of coffee bean, dark soil, incipient notes of dried eucalyptus, currant leaf and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more broad shouldered than the 2017 version, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and still quite primary finish. This is every bit as old school in personality as the 2017, but it is also from a more brooding vintage and will demand more bottle age before it starts to soften up and drink with generosity. It should prove to be extremely long-lived and at its peak, every bit as enjoyable as the lovely 2017 version. 2035-2075. **92+.**

2016 Red Wine “Pollard Vineyard”- Pollard Per Se (Yakima Valley)

Pollard’s 2016 Red Wine has a slightly different blend than the 2017 version, as the *cépages* this year is forty-four percent merlot, thirty-two percent cabernet franc and twenty-two percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine is raised in its customary twenty percent of new oak (all Taransaud casks- used quite judiciously I might add) and comes in at an even fourteen percent octane in 2016. The bouquet is already starting to show some lovely secondary development in its blend of black raspberries, cassis, sweet herb tones, tobacco leaf, dark soil, cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already nicely velvety on the attack, with a good core, suave tannins and a long, well-balanced, complex and delicious finish. There is a touch of *confiture* to the fruit tones here that I find extremely attractive. The wine is already drinking beautifully at five years of age and does not seem likely to be as long-lived as the 2017 version, but has the benefit of not really needing any further bottle age before drinking. 2021-2045. **92.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “Tanbark Hill Vineyard”- Philip Togni (Spring Mountain)

Lisa and Philip Togni continue to make two of California’s greatest cabernet sauvignons from their vineyard on Spring Mountain. Though the Tanbark Hill bottling is their second label,

it is important to remember that both this and the cabernet bottled under the Philip Togni label are made from barrel selections in the cellar, so both wines are treated identically up until the decision is taken on which casks will go into which bottling. The Tanbark Hill cuvée is based on a three acre block of cabernet planted on slightly richer soils than the rest of the family vineyard, and to this are added casks that do not fit into the mosaic of the estate bottling. The wine is aged in forty percent new oak and the 2016 delivers a superb bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a hint of mint, a beautiful base of dark soil tones, gentle notes of bitter chocolate and a very suave framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a plump core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, poised and very classy finish. The section of the vineyard with deeper soils gives this bottling an early plushness that is not replicated in the estate bottling, so that the Tanbark Hill is accessible quite a bit earlier. However, this cuvée is still a true, Togni family wine and will also age long and gracefully. 2026-2055+. 93.



2015 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Winery (Horse Heaven Hills)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2015 Champoux Vineyard bottling from Chris and Will Camarda in nearly three years, so I was delighted to find a bottle included in my most recent round of samples from their New York distributor. This vintage the wine is composed of a blend of fifty-one percent merlot, thirty-two percent cabernet franc, twelve percent cabernet sauvignon and five percent petit verdot. It has blossomed beautifully over the last thirty-three months and

its merlot component is starting to throw a little Pomerol-like sheen around, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a classy blend of plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a hint of fresh herb tones, dark chocolate, cigar smoke and a refined foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and grip, fine-grained, firm tannins and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. As I mentioned back in the summer of 2018 in my last note on the wine, this came in at 14.5 percent octane in the hot summer of 2015, so it shows a whisper of backend heat, but it is very subtle and the wine is starting to really round into form today. It remains a young wine, but I clearly under-estimated it three years ago and the wine is aging beautifully! It is also a bit more structured than I initially thought, so give it a few more years in the cellar to soften up properly. 2026-2065+. **94.**

1986 Kalin Cellars “Sonoma County” Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

As Terry Leighton once told me, this steep vineyard was so beautifully located that it could effortlessly reach full physiological ripeness at low octane, as this superb 1986 bears witness to at its lovely 12.5 percent alcohol. I do not have a lot of bottles of the '86 in my cellar, so I would not have opened this one if not for a cork that started to leak and forced my hand. Not that I am complaining, as the wine is now thinking about approaching its apogee, soaring from the glass in a beautifully complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, beautiful spice tones, a hint of dried eucalyptus, a complex base of soil and a deft framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, precise, full-bodied and still shows some backend tannin, with impeccable focus and grip, excellent balance and a long, complex and extremely classy and energetic finish. The cooler personality here allows a sense of structural tension that makes the wine dance across the palate. Brilliant juice that is really, just starting to hit its stride, but still has decades of life ahead of it. One of California's legendary cabernet bottlings! 2021-2060. **96.**

RECENTLY- TASTED SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE WINES PART TWO SPRING 2021



As I mentioned in the last issue in Part One on the wines of the Iberian Peninsula, the first half of coverage from Spain and Portugal tends to include an awful lot of new releases from Rioja, while Part Two has generally been deeper in notes on new releases from Galicia and the Canary Islands. True to form from the past few years, this is indeed the case with this report, which covers a lot of my favorite wineries in Ribeira Sacra, Ribeiro, Bierzo and Tenerife (though not without a fair bit of Rioja as well that did not find its way into the first article on the wines from Spain). One exception to this expected largesse from Galicia was that I could not get the new Bierzo arrivals from Raúl Pérez into this article, as the container with the wines, which was expected to dock in New York in early March, did not arrive until the end of April and the bottles are set to be delivered to my office in the next few days (actually the truck has just pulled up as I type these words). I will let them settle in for a few weeks and put a piece together on them for the next issue. In Part One, I did not spend a lot of time talking about the vintage characteristics of the most recent years that are now in the marketplace, so I will make up for that in this follow-up feature on the Iberian Peninsula.

Many of the wines now in the market from Spain and Portugal are from the 2019 vintage, with just the first few early-bottled 2020 whites starting to make an appearance. The 2019 vintage on the Iberian Peninsula follows on the heels of what was generally a very generous

cropload across almost all of Spain and Portugal in 2018, as vines had plenty of pent up energy from the difficult and short crops of 2016 and 2017 and responded with copious quantities of grapes in 2018. In contrast, 2019 was once again a year characterized by low yields, due to imperfect weather during the flowering, coupled with drought conditions during much of the summer and isolated bouts of frost and hail in certain regions. Other than in Galicia, where the drought was not anywhere near as severe, the 2019 vintage was very much defined by the hydric stress brought on by lack of precipitation, with some late-arriving rainfall in September and early October jump-starting the maturation process in the bunches again, after the vines had been shut down for periods in August and the first half of September. In hindsight, it was fortunate that the flowering had been less than ideal, with fewer berries on each bunch in most areas, so the small, immature grapes were able to get over the finish line of ripening once the precipitation alleviated the drought conditions and got maturation going again, but the rains also brought on very brisk mounting of sugars in the grapes, as well as rot out in the vineyards, so it was a scramble to get everything picked without later-harvested parcels soaring in potential alcohol. In general, the 2019 vintage will be one characterized by small berries, high skin to juice ratios, concentrated tannins, sugars and acidities from the partially dehydrated berries which will produce structured, tannic and powerful wines.

Mid-summer temperatures in 2019 were once again quite high throughout much of Spain and Portugal, with August torrid in many regions, but again, Galicia was the exception to this rule. In Galicia, the drought in the area was not intertwined with blazing heat, so that the vines suffered less and yields eventually ended up higher in 2019 than was the case in the previous, cool year of 2018 in this beautiful northwestern corner of Spain. Fifteen years ago, the dark, powerful and high alcohol must of 2019 would have been cause for near universal celebration and predictions of a “great vintage” would have been broadcast far and wide, but as winemaking tastes have started to shift back from the excesses of the late “Parker era” in Spain in search of more traditionally balanced wines, the style of 2019 is being evaluated in cellars with some caveats. In regions that have had to confront routinely higher alcohol levels in this era of global warming, such as Toro or the lower elevation sectors of Ribera del Duero, there is potential with the small, concentrated berries to end up with wines that are going to be quite high in octane and quite dense, so that managing extraction levels and the use of new oak is going to be of paramount importance in these regions in 2019. Dehydrated berries also tend to concentrate acidities, which will help give the 2019s lift and vibrancy, but it remains to be seen how estates who traditionally use a high percentage of new oak for their wines will be able to handle the raw materials of the vintage without leeching too many wood tannins into wines that are already going to be plenty tannic from thick skins and modest quantities of juice in the small berries.

The *fin de saison* rains across Spain in 2019 were heavy at times, so there is also the potential for dilution in vineyards planted on richer soils that would retain water longer once the precipitation stopped. In vineyards with lots of clay in the soil, the challenge was to wait for the plants to process the water through their systems and regain better balance in the berries, which can take a week or two after the rain stops. However, due to the hydric stress and stalled maturation in some parcels, the rains really got the maturation processed revved up again in the previously dormant plants, pushing up sugar accumulation briskly, while phenolic maturity of the skins and seeds was lagging a bit in comparison. Couple this with the pressures of rot and botrytis out in the vines in the immediate aftermath of the rains and one can imagine that some

vineyards were extremely complicated to manage at the end of the 2019 growing season. Where soils drained faster after the rains, it was easier to negotiate potential pitfalls and bring in grapes in more ideal conditions, but 2019 was no doubt a very complicated harvest for many estates across the Iberian Peninsula. But, where there was a harmonic convergence of well-drained soils, attention to potential rot risks after the rains, and the ability to collect grapes at the optimal moment, there will no doubt be some absolutely beautiful wines to emerge from the 2019 vintage.

Contrast this with the bountiful 2018 vintage, which is very different on the Iberian Peninsula than it was in the more northerly wine-producing sectors of Europe. 2018 in Spain and Portugal is a very good vintage, but not one defined by heat, as was the case in more northerly wine-producing regions of Europe. In Spain or Portugal, 2018 started out very cool and rainy, so that by midsummer, the vines were behind schedule and the bunches were ripening slowly. With all of the early season rains, fighting off mildew was paramount to protecting the crop, but for those who were successful, it was a joy to see such a large cropload after the meager quantities of bunches in both 2016 and 2017. July and August helped the vineyards start to play catch up in 2018, as it was sunny during both months, though not particularly hot, which was a blessing compared to what the vineyards further north in France and Germany were undergoing during that torrid period of their own growing seasons. As I mentioned last year, in regions of Spain where high summer temperatures often bring on brisk ripening and relatively high alcohols, such as the lower altitude sections of Ribera del Duero or in Toro, the more moderate temperatures of July and August have given the vines a chance to accumulate sugars in a more leisurely fashion under bright sunshine, without baking heat, and it may well prove to be an exceptional vintage in these regions as a result. The contemporary wisdom in Spain and Portugal is still to equate warmer summers with “greater” vintages, but in this age of global warming, it strikes me that traditionally hotter regions such as Toro and Ribera del Duero are really going to see their finest vintages these days in years such as 2018 where the second half of the summer is a bit less hot than what now is “typical”.

Both the 2019s and the 2018s from Rioja are receiving early praise for the potential of each vintage in the region, but we are still several years away from seeing releases of top bottlings from the more classically-inclined producers in the region. As is the case in most other regions in Spain, the 2019 vintage in Rioja will end up producing the more powerful and structured wines of the two vintages, as the drought conditions in 2019 will have concentrated sugars, tannins and acids and many producers in the region are predicting that this will be the greater of the two years. I have only seen an isolated example or two from the 2019 vintage in Rioja, and this of course from the more modern-styled producers who do not age their wines for an extended period of time in the cellars prior to release, so it is still way too early for my having tasted sufficient examples of Rioja from either the 2019 or 2018 vintages to have any sense of which vintage will be superior to my palate. I am always leery of drought vintages such as 2019, given my experience with the overly-hyped vintage of 2010 in Bordeaux, which has some potential similarities to the 2019 vintage in Rioja and elsewhere in Spain. But, the traditionalists in Rioja have more experience with handling hot summers than the *Bordelais*, not to mention cellar techniques that might adapt better to such conditions than the modern producers on the Gironde, so the vintage may well turn out to merit much of the very early enthusiasm that is already rumored to be on display in the cellars in Rioja.

One of the key elements to keep in mind when anticipating the style and ultimate quality of the 2019s in Rioja and from other regions of Spain and Portugal is that the use of new or older oak could well be determinative in the final evaluation of the vintage. Higher alcohol wines soak up tannins from new oak barrels far faster than is the case with lower octane juice, and with reports of high alcohol in several regions here in 2019, one has to assume that producers who use little or no new oak are going to have an advantage over those who tend to use a lot of new wood. The flip side is that powerful, tannic juice from small berries is also going to want to have a fair bit of oxygen exchange during its period of *elevage* in the cellar prior to bottling, so it may be a vintage that lends itself to less new wood and more rackings, so as to manage the combination of skin tannins and oak tannins. The great traditionalist estates of Rioja such as López de Heredia, Bodegas Riojanas, Cuné, La Rioja Alta, Pedro P. Peciña and Bodegas Akutain, use almost exclusively older barrels for their top bottlings and one can easily imagine that this is going to be a serious advantage in 2019. Contrast this with top estates in Ribera del Duero (or Bordeaux in 2010 for that matter), where skipping the use of new oak is unfathomable at many addresses, and one can easily imagine far more potential pitfalls as oak tannins are added from new casks to wines that already possessed plenty of tannin from the small skin to juice ratios in the berries this year.

As I mentioned above, Galicia is the contrarian region in Spain in the two vintages of 2018 and 2019. In Galicia, the bountiful crop found elsewhere in Spain in 2018 was not replicated to the same extent in these beautiful terraced vineyards. The flowering of 2018 was quite difficult in Ribeira Sacra for example, cutting back on potential yields right from the outset. The spring rains of 2018 caused similar mildew pressures here as in the rest of Spain, and where yields are lower in Galicia, it is often the result of mildew also taking a portion of the crop during the aftermath of the rainy weather in May. There was also some isolated hail damage in Galicia in 2018, but generally the combination of cooler temperatures and plenty of sunshine in the second half of the summer and throughout September allowed for the grapes to eventually ripen up nicely. Many of the winegrowers in the region call 2018 an “Atlantic vintage”, meaning that it stayed cooler than what might be expected in a warmer “Mediterranean vintage”, so it was slow, methodical ripening of the 2018 crop that ended up defining the vintage across these sub-regions. With picking generally getting started in mid-September and carrying on into early October, winegrowers were able to take advantage of sunny days and cool nights, which is the ideal combination to retain good acidity levels in the resulting wines. Growers in Rías Baixas were very happy with their 2018s, which were aromatically complete and bright, juicy wines that capture both the beautiful green fruit tones and the stony soil elements found in the best examples of Albariño. For Galicia in general, the 2018 vintage has produced beautifully balanced wines that are generally quite forward in personality and will provide plenty of charm and early drinking, but with the red wines from the best producers also showing plenty of depth and structure for longer-term cellaring.

2019 in Galicia was again out of step with much of the rest of Spain, as yields ended up being higher than in the previous year in Ribeira Sacra, as flowering was more even and mildew pressures in the late spring did not cause as much damage as had been the case in 2018. In Albariño country in Rías Baixas, flowering in 2019 was more sporadic, so yields were down from the previous year, but it too benefited from a more benevolent growing season that was characteristic of 2019 in Galicia than in the rest of Spain. The heatwave that was a defining

element of the midsummer in most of Spain was not replicated here, for the most part, so the lack of rainfall in July and August was not felt as keenly, due to the plants not being stressed dramatically by attendant torrid temperatures. The one exception to this rule was in the Sil River Valley, which did see high temperatures at the end of August. The rains that got maturation rolling again throughout Spain in the back half of September were quite beneficial in Galicia, as they plumped up the small berries and brought acids, sugars and tannins back into really lovely balance ahead of picking in the month of October. Many of the 2019 Albariños and other white wines from Galicia that are already in the market show just how beautifully balanced the grapes were in this year, as the resulting wines have better cut and mineral drive than their counterparts from 2018, while still retaining beautiful depth and purity to their fruit tones. One can intuit that this will also be the case with the red wines from Galicia in 2019, and I am already anticipating a very, very strong crop of red wines from Valdeorras, Ribeiro, Bierzo and Ribeira Sacra hitting the market in the coming year or two. The handful of 2019 reds I have tasted thus far from Ribeira Sacra bear out this optimism, and it seems likely that the 2019 vintage for red wines here will be outstanding.

As I mentioned last year, 2017 was a far more challenging year for winegrowers on the Iberian Peninsula than 2018, with frost, hail, drought and very high temperatures at times making for a volatile mix and multi-faceted challenges for *bodegas*. Northern Spain was hit very hard by spring frosts in 2017, with extensive damage from Bierzo all the way to Ribera del Duero and Rioja cutting back yields heavily in the wake of the freezing temperatures. Crop losses due to frost damage in Ribera del Duero range from forty percent in the lower altitude vineyards to as much as seventy-five or eighty percent in upper elevations such as Gumiel de Mercado. After the frost damage, there was drought and blazing temperatures, so though the remaining grapes managed to ripen up in the end of summer heat, acidities are low, alcohol levels are high and the wines can be concentrated beyond their normal parameters. In places like Toro, alcohol levels were high in 2017, often without fully ripe phenolic maturity to go with the high sugars. Further west from Bierzo, frost damage was equally bad in Valdeorras and Ribeiro, but Rías Baixas was able to escape freezing temperatures in the spring and this may well be the most “classical” region for wine in Spain in 2017. Ribeira Sacra was not generally as badly frosted as some of these other D.O.s, but drought and heat were antagonists here in 2017 and the generally most gifted sections, such as Amandi, will have produced the most concentrated and powerful wines in the region in 2017, from the combination of heat and drought. Cooler sub-regions here such as Bibei and the Miño River Valley may have fared a bit better.

When one looks back to the 2016 vintage, which was generally unheralded, many of the wines are turning out beautifully. It was a year of high yields in places unaffected by hail damage (sadly, Ribeira Sacra was pummeled by hail in midsummer and lost more than half the crop), which affected concentration to a certain degree, but, as I frequently note, in our age of global warming, perhaps the best years for the cellar are going to end up being those that are less concentrated. Flowering was late across Spain in 2016, but it was prolific, and the crop promised to be generous. Though winter and spring had been wet leading into the growing season of 2016, drought conditions descended on many growing regions starting in June and July and then it was very hot during the second half of August. Several producers in Rioja had gone out in the vineyards and had done a green harvest in July, fearing that they would not be able to ripen up all of the bunches out on the vines in the drought conditions, and this proved prescient. All of the

heat and drought eventually ended in September, as heavy rains arrived mid-month and unblocked vines suffering from hydric stress and plumped up berries that may have been suffering from dehydration (with the exception of Cataluña, where the rain was modest or non-existent in September and the drought continued all the way through to picking). After the rains cleared through, the *fin de saison* of 2016 was very good and many winegrowers were able to wait until late September and on through the entire month of October to harvest and were able to bring in a fairly large cropload with good maturity. The resulting wines that I have tasted from 2016 thus far have been quite good, with perfectly satisfactory concentration, but not the power we see so often in warmer D.O.s in this age of global warming, which may augur very well for their long-term cellaring potential.

The following tasting notes are organized similarly to how I have done so in most recent reports on the wines from the Iberian Peninsula. I have listed all of the Spanish sparkling wines first, followed by a section of Rosados from all across Spain and Portugal. After this, I have tried to list the wines regionally in a geographic pattern, starting in the upper northwestern corner of Spain in Galicia and then worked due east across the very top of Spain. Once reaching the eastern edge of wine regions, I have dipped down to the south for the next tier of wine-producing regions and again, worked my way west to east across the country once again. I have completed the sections of Spanish wines with those from the Canary Islands, and then grouped together all of the wines which I have tasted from Portugal for this report. I had hoped to have more notes on wines from Portugal here in Part Two of the coverage on the Iberian Peninsula, but as I did not hear back from a couple of importers of Portuguese wines when I enquired about samples, I do not have quite as many notes as I had anticipated. Given that the global pandemic has been so disruptive of economic activity in most corners of the world, when I do not hear back from suppliers about the availability of samples, I generally do not follow up with second requests, as I have no idea what each company and importer have had to face during Covid and want to try to be as empathetic as possible, just in case they have really struggled during the never-ending pandemic. Within each regional subsection, the wines are listed first chronologically by vintage, followed alphabetically by producer.

Spanish Sparkling Wines

Perdigón Rosado Pet Nat - Alfredo Maestro y Victor Bellmunt

The Perdigón Pet Nat from Alfredo Maestro and Victor Bellmunt is composed from a blend of ninety-five percent pinot noir and five percent garnacha Tintorera. Though *Señor* Maestro is based in Ribera del Duero, these vineyards are further south, about sixty miles north of Valencia. The grapes are pressed and bottled before fermentation is complete, to give the wine its sparkle. The current release is a very pale salmon color and offers up a nose of white peach, a hint of rhubarb, a touch of warm bread, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy and full-bodied, with good mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, bone-dry and vibrant finish. 2021-2030. **88.**

2019 Camí dels Xops “Métode Ancestral” Pet Nat- Anima Mundi

The 2019 Camí dels Xops Pet Nat from Anima Mundi is made from a blend of Xarel-lo and Macabeu. The wine is barrel-fermented in old Burgundy casks with indigenous yeasts and then bottled before the first fermentation is finished to produce the *mousse*. It is aged under cork, rather than crown cap. The wine delivers a lovely nose of tart pear, raw almond, chalky, salty

minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core and mineral drive, pleasant bubbles and good length and grip on the complex finish. I do not know the history and philosophy of this estate, but it seems to me that having such stunning raw materials (the vineyards are in the Sant Sadurní d'Anoia neighborhood, the Côte d'Or for Spanish sparkling wines), why not go all the way and make a proper Cava from these grapes, rather than the coarser Pet Nat version? This is excellent Pet Nat, but it could be more! 2021-2028. **89.**

2019 Taro Vinícola Méthode Ancestral” Pet Nat- Pablo Matallana (Lanzarote)

Pablo Matallana's Pet Nat is composed of a blend of Malvasia and Diego, grown in trenches (to protect them from the trade winds) in central Lanzarote. The grapes are harvested at the start of August, fermented with native yeasts in stainless steel and bottled just before fermentation finishes up to give the wine its sparkle. The wine offers up a complex nose of tart pear, lemongrass, a touch of bread dough, salty minerality and straw. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely mineral in profile, with a good core, frothy bubbles, lovely acids and a long, focused finish. Good juice. 2021-2030. **88.**



2018 Júlía Bernet “Cuvee Ú” Brut Nature (Corpinnat)

The 2018 Júlía Bernet “Cuvee Ú” Brut Nature is composed entirely from Xarel-lo, from certified organic vineyards grown on chalky soils at four hundred meters above sea level. The grapes are hand-harvested, fermented in stainless steel and the *vins clairs* are given six months of

elevage in tank prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. It was aged two years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in December of 2020. The wine offers up a bright and complex bouquet of lemon, tart pear, menthol, chalky minerality, a touch of sea salt and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, complex, soil-driven and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, classy finish. This is very, very good. 2021-2035+. **92.**

2018 Espurmoso Malvasía Volcánica Brut Nature- Bermejós (Lanzarote)

The 2018 Espurmoso Malvasía Volcánica Brut Nature from Bermejós is aged eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. It offers up a bright and youthful nose of tart pear, bread dough, wheat chaff, lemon peel and volcanic soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy, full-bodied and complex, with a good core and mineral undertow, frothy *mousse* and a long, impressively complex finish. This is very tasty. 2021-2035. **89.**

2017 A. T. Roca Reserva Brut Nature (Clàssic Penedès)

The 2017 A. T. Roca Reserva Brut Nature is produced from a *cépages* of fifty percent Macabeu, thirty percent Xarel-lo and twenty percent Parellada. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and the wine was disgorged in March of 2020, after aging on its fine lees for twenty-six months. The bouquet is pure and precise, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of lemon, tart pear, sea salts, chalky minerality, just a hint of warm bread and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a superb core, lovely mineral drive and bounce, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is excellent! 2021-2040. **92+.**

2017 A. T. Roca Rosat Reserva Brut Nature (Clàssic Penedès)

The 2017 A. T. Roca Rosat Reserva is composed from a fifty-fifty blend of Macabeu and Garnaxta, with the latter seeing nine to twelve hours of skin contact to give the wine its lovely salmon hue. It spent a bit over two years aging *sur latte* and was disgorged in March of 2020. The wine offers up a refined and nicely mineral bouquet of wild strawberries, a touch of rhubarb, salty minerality, orange peel, a touch of rye toast and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. First class juice! 2021-2040. **92.**

2016 A. T. Roca “Pedregar” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Clàssic Penedès)

The Pedregar bottling from Augustí Roca are single vineyard cuvées, from an organically-farmed, three hectare, northwesterly-facing parcel of vines that includes about ten to fifteen percent Macabeu co-planted with the Garnaxta. The grapes are co-fermented in older barrels and the wine is aged *sur latte* for three-plus years prior to disgorgement. The 2016 Pedregar is a very pale salmon color and offers up a beautiful bouquet of pear, orange peel, chalky, salty minerality, white flowers, a touch of warm bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive, a fine girdle of acidity, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is outstanding! 2021-2045. **94.**

2015 A. T. Roca “Esparter” Brut Nature (Clàssic Penedès)

The Esparter vineyard is the highest elevation (and hence coolest) owned by the Roca family. It was planted in 1968 and is comprised entirely of Macabeu, planted on very chalky soils, farmed organically and facing again, to the northwest. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented

and the wine is aged under cork, rather than crown cap. The 2015 Esparter was disgorged in May of 2019 and delivers a vibrant and complex aromatic constellation of lemon, tart pear, menthol, complex limestone minerality, fresh-baked bread and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full, with lovely mid-palate depth, excellent mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This wine reminds me of the family's old Kripta bottlings produced under the Augustí Torelló Mata label, which was produced before the family decided to split the domaine and go their separate ways in 2013. Spanish sparkling wine simply does not get any better than this! 2021-2045. **94.**

2014 Júlia Bernet “Cuvee R-130” Brut Nature (Corpinnat)

The R-130 bottling from Xavier Bernet is his oldest vine, Xarel-lo bottling, from a parcel of vines grown at four hundred meter elevation in chalky soils in the foothills of the d'Ordal Mountains. The wine was disgorged in October of 2019 after four and a half years aging on its fine lees. The wine offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of lemon, tart pear, raw almond, ocean breeze, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a faint whiff of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and snappy, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is drinking very well indeed, but has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2021-2040. **93.**

Rosado

2015 Rioja Rosado “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2015 Rioja Rosado “Gran Reserva” from Bodegas Akutain is composed entirely from tempranillo, with the wine aged in old American oak casks for a minimum of two and a half years prior to bottling. The wine is a beautiful, deep salmon color and offers up a superb bouquet of raspberries, strawberries, dried rose petals, salty soil tones, orange peel and a touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is a stunning Rioja Rosado, which is still youthful and needs thirty minutes in decanter to really open up and will clearly continue to age beautifully in the bottle. 2021-2040. **93.**

Rias Baixas Blanco y Tinto

2020 Albariño “Essencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

The Essencia Diviña bottling of Albariño from Gran Vinum is made from fifty year-old vines, grown on granitic and sandy loam soils. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and given three months of aging on its fine lees. The 2020 offers up a fine nose of fresh-squeezed lime, pear, spring flowers, salty soil tones and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and full-bodied, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and a long, succulent and complex finish. This bottling is made for immediate gratification and the 2020 version is delicious right out of the blocks. Lovely Albariño! 2021-2027. **90+.**

2020 Albariño “Selección Especial”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Rías Baixas)

The 2020 Albariño “Selección Especial” from Gran Vinum is an excellent bottle. The bouquet delivers a classic combination of green apple, lemon, salty minerality, gentle leesiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of ripe fruit, lovely mineral drive and backend lift, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This has just been released and Gran Vinum makes

some of the most age-worthy Albariño, so this will be even better with a bit of cellaring. But, it is already a very good drink! 2021-2035. **92.**

2019 Albariño “Tempus Vivendi”- Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores (Rías Baixas)

The Tempus Vivendi bottling from Alberto Nanclares and Silvia Prieto hails from vineyards along the coastline, about ten miles south of the regional wine capital of Cambados. About a third of the cuvée is raised in an ancient chestnut *foudre*, with the rest in stainless steel. The 2019 version was bottled in May of 2020, after about six months on its fine lees. The bouquet is bright and expressive, hopping from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, bread fruit, salty soil tones, a hint of beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and zesty, with fine mineral undertow and grip and a long, beautifully balanced finish. 2021-2028. **91.**

2019 Albariño “Alberto Nanclares”- Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores (Val do Salnés)

The Alberto Nanclares bottling from Nanclares y Prieto is produced from pergola-trained vines, ranging from thirty to sixty years of age, all planted on granitic soils interspersed with sand. The wine is fermented and raised for a bit more than a year, half in an old French oak *tina* and the other half in stainless steel, with fine lees in both vessels. The 2019 bottling is gorgeous on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a vibrant and complex blend of lemon, green apple, discreet notes of beeswax, ocean breeze, granitic minerality, gentle leesy tones and a delicate topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and a very long, complex and saline finish. This is superb Albariño! 2021-2035. **93.**

2019 Albariño “O Bocoí Vello”- Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores (Rías Baixas)

The O Bocoí Vello bottling of Albariño from Nanclares Y Prieto is made from a blend of three different vineyards, with the wine aged in a combination of ancient, Galician oak *foudre*, and French oak *demi-muids* that date back to 2008. The 2019 offers up a deep and complex nose of lime, fresh pineapple, sea salts, granitic minerality, a hint of paraffin, citrus blossoms and a bit of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a wide open personality, a lovely core, good mineral undertow and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is a more forward wine than the Soverribas and is already drinking very well indeed, though it has the balance to age very well indeed. 2021-2035. **92.**

2019 Albariño “Soverribas”- Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores (Meaño)

The Soverribas bottling from Alberto Nanclares and Silvia Prieto is a single vineyard wine, from a parcel of thirty-plus year-old, pergola-trained vines in the vineyard of Paraje Manzaniña. The wine is raised on its fine lees entirely in 2200 liter, ten year-old French oak *tina* for one year and then given additional bottle aging in the cellars prior to release. The 2019 Soverribas is a beautiful wine, with the more floral aspect of Meaño Albariño quite evident on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, bread fruit, beautifully complex minerality, citrus blossoms, white flowers, a hint of leesy tones and incipient notes of beeswax. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is more reserved out of the blocks than the 2019 Alberto Nanclares bottling and I would be inclined to give this another year or two in the cellar and let it really blossom. It is going to be superb. 2023-2040. **93+.**

2019 Albariño “A Graña”- Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores (Val do Salnés)

The Albariño “A Graña” bottling from Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores is a single vineyard cuvée produced from an old vine parcel planted on sand and granite soils. The wine is fermented in an eight hundred liter chestnut cask and a two hundred liter stainless steel tank. The wine spends eleven months on its fine lees, with weekly *battonage* for the first three months, prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2019 A Graña delivers crystalline precision in its bouquet of lemon, green apple, breadfruit, wet stone minerality, menthol, dried flowers and a hint of Chablis-like straw tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive and cut, laser-like focus and a long, still quite youthful finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Albariño in the making, but it really deserves a couple of years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge. 2023-2035. **94.**

2019 Albariño “Serea”- Adega Pedralonga (Rías Baixas)

The Albariño “Serea” from Adega Pedralonga is made from some of the younger vines on the estate, ranging from ten to fifteen years of age, planted close to the coast. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel, with three months on its fine lees. The 2019 version delivers up a bright and saline nose of green apple, lime zest, *fleur de sel*, granitic minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, lovely mineral undertow and grip and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is fine Albariño! 2021-2027. **90.**



Great old, Pergola-trained Albariño vines in the vineyards of the Do Ferreira estate.

2019 Albariño- Adega Pedralonga (Pontevedra)

This bottling of Albariño from the vines Francisco Alfonso originally planted to start his estate in 1982, which grow on very stony granitic soils a few miles in from the Atlantic Ocean. Today, his son Miguel has taken over the full-time management of the estate and makes the wines, which he allows to go through full malolactic fermentation and ages for eighteen months on its fine lees in stainless steel tank. The 2019 delivers a superb bouquet of lime, pear, wet stone minerality, a lovely touch of lees, citrus peel, a hint of paraffin and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. Despite going through full malo, this wine has a superb spine of acidity and will age long and gracefully. Somewhere down in my cellar I have a bottle of this from at least a decade ago—clearly I have to go dig it out and check in on its evolution in the near future! Great juice. 2021-2040. **93.**

2018 Albariño- Adega do Vimbio (Rías Baixas)

The Albariño bottling from Martin Crusat's Adega do Vimbio is given a nice extended aging period on its fine lees. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks, with the lees gently stirred for the first three months of the *elevage*. The 2018 version is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, citrus peel, a hint of fresh almond, gentle leesy tones and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, lovely salinity in its soil foundation and a long, complex finish. Good juice. 2021-2025. **90.**

2018 Vimbio- Adega do Vimbio (Rías Baixas)

The Vimbio Blanco bottling from Martin Crusat's Adega do Vimbio includes Loureiro and Caiño Branco, as these varieties are co-planted with the Albariño in this vineyard. The 2018 is developing very nicely, offering up a quite mature bouquet of fresh apricot, hazelnuts, orange peel, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and fully mature, with a good core of fruit, still sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. Martin bottles his wines with a minimum of SO₂ and this wine tastes like it has matured at a fairly brisk pace as a result of this practice. It is drinking very nicely today, but will want drinking up in the next year or so. 2021-2022. **89.**

A Senda Vermella “17/18”- Nanclares y Prieto Viticultores (Rías Baixas)

The A Senda Vermella “17/18” from Alberto Nanclares and Silvia Prieto is a red wine from Rías Baixas that is composed of a blend of Caiño and Mencía, with all the parcels of vines farmed organically. The wine is a blend of two vintages, as eighty percent of the cuvée hails from the 2018 vintage, while the other twenty percent is from the previous vintage, which had been resting for a year in an old cask prior to the two vintages being blended together for an additional nine months of barrel aging. Both vintages were one hundred percent whole clusters. The wine offers up a complex bouquet of red berries, pomegranate, black pepper, tree bark, autumnal soil tones, subtle botanicals and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and complex, with fine intensity of flavor and transparency, very modest tannins and lovely focus on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is a fascinating middleweight, which grows in both complexity and intensity of flavor as it gets some air in decanter. I do not really have a sense that it will age too many years in bottle, but I could be

wrong on that score. Stylistically, think of it as a Pinot d'Aunis from Rías Baixas! 2021-2025+? **89.**

Ribeiro Blanco

2018 Viña de Martín “Os Pasás” Branco- Luis Rodríguez-Vazquez

Luis Rodríguez's Os Pasás Branco is composed primarily of Treixadura, with small percentages of Lado, Albariño and Torrentés co-planted in the vineyards. The vines are planted on steep granite hillsides and, though these vines only range from fifteen to thirty years of age, there is plenty of minerality in the resulting wine. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The 2018 Os Pasás comes in at 12.5 percent octane and delivers a beautiful young bouquet of tart pear, beeswax, a hint of green olive, stony soil tones, white flowers and a touch of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is delicious to drink today, but still has plenty of potential for longer-term aging and will be even better a few years down the road. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035. **92+.**

2016 Chánselus Castes Brancas- Bernardo Estévez

The Chánselus Castes Brancas bottling from Bernardo Estévez is his main production white wine cuvée, produced from a field blend that is mostly Lado and Treixadura, but certainly with other varieties co-planted. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of older, French five hundred liter barrels and chestnut *foudres* that date back to Bernardo's grandfather's time. The 2016 is a ripe wine, coming in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a beautiful nose of nectarine, delicious apple, hazelnut, a beautiful base of white soil tones, acacia blossoms, beeswax and a whisper of vanillin oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. This is dynamite wine, with marvelous complexity and the palate authority of a grand cru white Burgundy! 2021-2030+. **94.**

Ribeiro Tinto

2018 Planeta Tinto- Bernardo Estévez

The 2018 Planeta Tinto from Bernardo Estévez is comprised of field blends from several different parcels, ranging in age from twelve years of age to more than a century old! The range of varieties planted in these vineyards is the whole laundry list of red grapes in Galicia, including (but not limited to!) four distinct strains of Caíño, Ferrol, Brancellao, Sousón and Espadeiro. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in open top fermenters and aged for approximately ten months in older *demi-muids*. The 2018 version comes in at twelve percent octane and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of sappy dark berries, tree bark, cigar smoke, graphite, dark soil tones and a lovely touch of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and quite wide open finish. Though this is a young wine, Bernardo bottles his wines with a minimum of SO₂ and I have the sense that the 2018 Planeta is going to come forward fairly quickly and drink well with only a bit of bottle age. It will drink very nicely early on, but I worry a bit about its potential longevity. 2021-2035+? **90+.**

2018 Eidos Ermos- Luis Rodríguez-Vazquez

The Eidos Ermos bottling from Luis Rodríguez-Vazquez is his early-drinking cuvée, produced from younger vine Brancellao, Caiño, Sousón and Ferrol, planted on granitic soils. The grapes are destemmed, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of older Burgundy casks and stainless steel tanks. The 2018 Eidos Ermos is a beautifully expressive wine on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, tree bark, a fine base of granite, woodsmoke, coffee grounds and just a hint of upper register, sweet botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely mineral drive and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is outstanding juice. My bottle had just a whisper of volatile acidity on the nose when I first opened it, but this disappeared once the wine was open for a couple of minutes, so do give this lovely wine just a bit of air before serving. 2021-2040. **92.**



2017 A Torna Dos Pasás- Luis Rodríguez-Vazquez

The 2017 vintage of A Torna Dos Pasás from Luis Rodríguez is composed of its customary blend of forty percent each of Brancellao and Caiño and twenty percent of Ferrol, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older, three hundred liter French barrels prior to bottling. The 2017 is a cool vintage for this wine, as it comes in at 12.5 percent octane and delivers a beautiful and very precise bouquet of sweet dark berries, bitter cherry, pomegranate, tree bark, graphite, lovely botanicals, stony soil tones and a topnote of chicory. On

the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a beautiful core of black fruit, great mineral drive and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and very complex finish. This is so impeccably balanced out of the blocks that it is eminently drinkable already, but it has the structure to age long and gracefully and will be even better with further bottle age. When I drink the wines from Luis Rodríguez I feel the way I imagine Robert Parker felt forty-plus years ago drinking his first wines from Gérard Chave! I cannot overstate how everyone should be tucking these world class wines away in their cellars, before they become even better known and the prices soar up, as this wine is an absolute steal! 2021-2055. **94.**

2016 Chánselus Castes Tintas- Bernardo Estévez

The Chánselus Castes Tintas from Bernardo Estévez is again composed of a field blend of a potpourri of grape varieties from the region, including Caíño, Trincadeira, Carabuñeira, Mencía, Ferrol, Brancellao, Sousón and others! As is the case with his Planeta, the age of vines in these parcels ranges widely, from seventeen to ninety-five years of age. The grapes are destemmed, trodden by foot and fermented with indigenous yeasts, prior to aging in used, three hundred and six hundred liter oak casks for eleven months. The 2016 Chánselus Castes Tintas offers up a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, cassis, black tea, chicory, dark soil tones, coffee grounds, bonfire and a gentle topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, just wisp of volatile acidity and a long, moderately tannic and quite complex finish. The VA here is very tame and the overall structural chassis of this wine seems excellent for long-term cellaring, but it is going to be hard to keep one's hands off of it right now, as it is really starting to drink beautifully at five years of age! 2021-2045+. **92.**

2015 A Torna Dos Pasás “Escolma”- Luis Rodríguez-Vazquez

As readers may recall, Luis Rodríguez's Escolma Tinto is only produced in top vintages, from his oldest vines (which are a field blend of unknown age and composition, but does include the usual suspects of Brancellao, Caíño, Ferrol and probably also Garnacha Tintorera and Mencía). His 2015 Escolma comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a pure and beautifully complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, coffee bean, pomegranate, a hint of tree bark, lovely botanicals, pepper, dark soil tones, a touch of spices meats and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and peppery, with a lovely core, quite an elegant profile, fine soil undertow, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is still a very young wine at six years of age and needs more cellaring before it catches up on the palate with the stellar expressiveness already found on the nose. It is going to be stunning wine! 2027-2055. **95.**

Ribera Sacra Blanco

2019 Blanco- Adegas Guímaro (Amandi)

Pedro Rodríguez's Blanco is composed entirely of Godello, grown on a variety of different parcels planted on granite, slate and a few more sandy soils. It is fermented and raised in stainless steel and the 2019 version comes in at 12.5 percent octane and delivers a superb and very precise bouquet of pear, raw almond, lemongrass, a complex base of stony soil tones, citrus peel and a lovely topnote that marries both gentle spices and slightly savory elements. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, sound acids and a long, still fairly primary finish. The acids are not particularly high in this 2019, so it should come

forward pretty briskly, but today, it remains a tad adolescent and I would be inclined to at least give it another six to twelve months of bottle age and let it blossom. Pedro Rodríguez is rightly recognized as one of the finest producers of red wines in Ribeira Sacra, but his white wine bottling is also very serious and should not be overlooked! 2022-2030. **90+**.

2018 Portela Do Vento Blanco- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Amandi-Bibei)

The Portela Do Vento Blanco from Laura Lorenzo hails from several different parcels of vines, some in Amandi and others in her native Quiroga-Bibei section of Ribeira Sacra. The wine is fermented in old chestnut vats and clay amphora, with each portion of the cuvée seeing its *elevage* take place in the same vessels that it is fermented in, with the different components only assembled shortly before bottling. The 2018 Portela Do Vento Blanco weighs in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a pure and complex bouquet of pear, a hint of nectarine, beeswax, raw almond, a lovely base of soil tones, lemongrass, white flowers and just a whisper of natural wine wildness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, gently wild finish. This has more of those natural wine characteristics to it on the palate than I can ever recall in previous vintages of this wine, which may well be the result of a moderate use of SO₂ at bottling. Some will love this characteristic, while others will be a bit less excited by this personality trait. Put me in the latter camp- at least until we see how the 2018 evolves with a bit of bottle age. If this characteristic dissipates with bottle age, then my score will seem ludicrously low! 2021-2026. **89**.



Ribera Sacra Tinto

2019 Lousas “Viñas de Aldea”- Envínate (Amandi)

The 2019 Viñas de Aldea from Envínate is a stunning young bottle of (primarily) Mencía in the making. This is Envínate’s blended bottling, made from various old-vine parcels planted on slate, with some of the parcels including five to ten percent of other local varieties co-planted in among the Mencía. The grapes are foot-trodden, fermented with indigenous yeasts, includes roughly half whole clusters and is raised in older casks for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2019 Viñas de Aldea offers up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, espresso, a beautiful base of slate, graphite and a touch of sweet herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and tangy, with a superb core and mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a long, youthfully complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is more structured out of the blocks than the last couple of vintages have been at a similar stage of evolution, indicating the great aging potential of the 2019 vintage in Ribeira Sacra. It is certainly drinkable out of the blocks, but in this vintage, I would strongly suggest giving this beautiful wine three to five years in the cellar and really allow it to blossom properly, as it really is a bit more tannic out of the blocks than is customary. Great juice in the making. 2026-2060+. **93.**

2019 Lousas “Cuvée Viticole”- Envínate (Amandi)

The Lousas “Cuvée Viticole” bottling from Envínate is essentially the same blend as the Viñas de Aldea, other than this wine is raised in cement tanks, rather than older oak barrels during its *elevage*. The 2019 Cuvée Viticole delivers a bright, complex and youthful aromatic blend of pomegranate, cassis, graphite, black tea, a hint of the smoked meats to come with further bottle age, slate minerality, cigar smoke, gentle botanicals and a touch of stone dustiness from the cement. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, ripe, seamless tannins, superb balance and a long, vibrant and classy finish. As was the case with a comparison of these first two bottlings of Lousas from the 2018 vintage, I again find the 2019 Cuvée Viticole a bit more forward out of the blocks than the Viñas de Aldea and this is the first of the 2019s from Envínate that I would start drinking this year. It is a beautiful wine. 2021-2055+. **92+.**

2019 Lousas “Camiño Novo”- Envínate (Amandi)

Envínate’s 2019 Lousas “Camiño Novo” is produced from a seventy year-old vineyard that is planted to ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Garnacha Tintorera. The vineyard forms a small amphitheater facing southeast and sits at an elevation of four hundred and thirty meters above sea level. It is one of the cooler microclimates in the warmer Amandi sub-region of Ribeira Sacra. The 2019 Camiño Novo comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivers a beautiful young bouquet of pomegranate, dark berries, slate, a hint of licorice, graphite, a superb array of Ribeira Sacra botanicals and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very much defined by its underlying slate minerality, with great precision and grip, a superb core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. This is truly a stunning wine in the making, but though it is seamlessly balanced, it is still young and will need some bottle age to properly start to blossom. 2029-2075. **95.**

2019 Lousas “Rosende”- Envínate (Amandi)

The 2019 Parcela Rosende is a superb wine in the making. As I have mentioned in the past, this single vineyard wine is the “odd man out” in the Lousas lineup, as this vines are planted on pure granite, rather than the customary slate of the other Envínate bottlings from Amandi. The bouquet is pure, precise and flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a complex

blend of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, stony minerality, graphite, beautiful, almost sweet botanical notes, a touch of pepper, a touch of spices meats and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant in profile, with a lovely core of black fruit, superb mineral undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is so seamlessly balanced that it is almost possible to drink this now, though it has the structure to age very long and gracefully and will be even more complex with some bottle age (and the tannins do mount a bit on the backend with air). Great, great juice this year! 2026-2065. **95.**

2019 Lousas “Seoane”- Envínate (Amandi)

The Parcela Seoane from Envínate is located in the Doade region of Amandi, with these eighty-plus year-old vines planted on a base of pure slate and facing to the southwest. The wine is entirely whole clusters in 2019 and is raised in used, five hundred liter *demi-muids* for eleven months prior to bottling. It delivers an absolutely stunning young bouquet of pomegranate, black cherries, smoked meats, graphite, a great base of slate minerality, espresso, Galician botanicals and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a beautiful core of black fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This needs bottle age to hit on all cylinders, but it will be a legend in due course. The Seoane bottling from Envínate is now clearly one of Spain’s greatest red wines, though my saying this will probably only make it even harder to find bottles in the marketplace! 2030-2075+. **96+.**

2019 Misturado de Abeleda- A Chingao Vineyards y Envínate (Amandi)

I had not seen a bottle of the Misturado de Abeleda since the 2016 vintage and was delighted to find the 2019 placed among my samples from Envínate this year. As readers may recall, this bottling is a classic Ribeira Sacra field blend, with the vines more than a century old and of unknown variety, except that about thirty percent of the parcel is planted with white grapes. Everything is co-fermented and aged in older three and four hundred liter barrels prior to bottling. The 2019 Misturado de Abeleda is a beautiful wine, with a more black fruity nose than the Lousas bottlings this year, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, Gallego botanicals, tree bark, pepper, smoked meats, slate soils and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and light on its feet, with a peppery personality, lovely intensity of flavor and soil transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very long, complex and superbly balanced finish. I have the sense that the white grapes included in the field blend make their presence known more keenly on the palate today (though this could change with extended bottle age), with the wine not showing a bit lighter and without the same mid-palate stuffing as the Lousas range, but this wine is absolutely stunning and is going to age into something of pure beauty with sufficient bottle age. It is certainly drinkable out of the blocks, but the real magic lies hidden still and will need some cellaring to rise up to the surface. This is one of those brilliant middleweights (like les Amoureuses in Chambolle-Musigny) where one does not long for more weight on the palate, but just revels in the ethereal nature of the inherent beauty of this wine! 2026-2055. **93.**

2019 Miñato da Raña “Tinto Rústico”- Nanclares y Prieto (Laderas do Miño)

The 2019 Miñato da Raña “Tinto Rústico” from Alberto Nanclares and Silvia Prieto is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Mencía, thirty percent Garnacha Tintorera and ten percent of the white grapes of Godello and Palomino, which are co-planted with the red varieties. These vines are over one hundred years of age and planted primarily on terraced granitic soils. The grapes are foot-trodden, one hundred percent whole clusters and fermented with indigenous

yeasts in open top vats, prior to racking to used *demi-muids* for eleven months of *elevage*. The 2019 Miñato da Raña is beautifully precise and expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, pepper, graphite, a touch of tree bark, stony soil tones, a touch of cola, discreet spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, gently chewy tannins, a very elegant profile and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This has the backend structure that the 2019 vintage reds are renowned for and will need some extended cellaring to soften up on the palate, but it is a truly stunning wine and will be a cellar treasure with some bottle age! 2029-2060+. **94+**.

2018 Casas De Enriba- Daterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Portomourisco- Ourense)

The Casas De Enriba from Laura Lorenzo is composed of younger vine Mencía planted in two parcels on primarily granitic soils at an elevation of five hundred and fifty meters above sea level. The vineyards are planted in Portomourisco, which lies about eight miles to the southeast of Quiroga. The 2018 includes some whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cask and then aged for ten months in five hundred liter, used French barrels prior to bottling. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane in this cooler Ribeira Sacra vintage and offers up a beautifully precise bouquet of pomegranate, cherries, tree bark, very stony minerality, graphite, a touch of lavender and a gentle topnote of Mencía sweet botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, elegant and very transparent, with a full-bodied personality, a good core of red fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is not overly concentrated, due to the younger vines, but it has outstanding intensity of flavor and impeccable balance and is a beautiful wine in its dancing red fruity complexity. 2021-2045. **92+**.

2018 Portela Do Vento- Daterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibei & Amandi)

The Portela Do Vento Tinto is composed of a blend of Mencía and Garnacha Tintorera, selected from several different vineyard parcels in both Quiroga and Amandi. The grapes are mostly destemmed and fermented in stainless steel tanks, prior to racking to five hundred liter, used *demi-muids* for ten months of *elevage*. The 2018 Portela Do Vento comes in at a svelte twelve percent alcohol and delivers a beautiful, black fruity bouquet of cassis, dark berries, tree bark, coffee bean, slate, cigar smoke and just a touch of upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent slate undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex, palate-staining and focused finish. This is pure, light on its feet and excellent! 2023-2045+. **93**.

2018 Mencía “Camiño Real”- Adegas Guímaro (Amandi)

The 2018 Camiño Real from Pedro Rodríguez at Guímaro is a beautiful bottle of wine in the making, showing all the inherent complexity of Mencía vines in their primes (forty to sixty years of age), co-planted with small percentages of the region’s other fine red varieties. The varieties are fermented together, included one hundred percent whole clusters in 2018 and undergo their *elevage* in a fifty-fifty split of old *foudres* and a combination of used Burgundy casks and *demi-muids*. The nose is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, a touch of pepper, tree bark, spiced meats, a superb base of slate, gentle botanicals and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is quite easy to drink right out of the blocks, but it has the balance and structure to also age beautifully. 2021-2045+. **92+**.

2018 Mencía “A Ponte”- Adegas Guímaro (Amandi)

The A Ponte single vineyard bottling from Pedro Rodríguez is relatively new in the Guímaro lineup, as it made its debut in the 2015 vintage. The parcel lies up above Finca Meixemán and was planted to the classic Ribeira Sacra field blend of Mencía, Brancellao, Caiño, Merenzao and Sousón. The soils are a combination of granite, slate and sand and the grapes are co-fermented with one hundred percent whole clusters and aged for fourteen months in older Burgundy barrels. The wine is bottled unfined and unfiltered. The 2018 A Ponte offers up a superb, young aromatic constellation of dark berries, graphite, botanicals, pepper, tree bark, slate minerality, fresh thyme and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is elegant, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a good core of fruit (particularly for young vines), excellent focus and balance and a long, complex and suavely tannic finish. Because this is from young vines (albeit cropped low), the wine does not have the same depth of the other single vineyard bottlings from Pedro, but it has excellent intensity of flavor and stellar complexity and is no “after thought” in the superb 2018 lineup from Guímaro! 2024-2050. **92+**.

2018 Mencía “Finca Meixemán”- Adegas Guímaro (Amandi)

The Finca Meixemán from Adegas Guímaro is a beautifully pure and balanced example in the 2018 vintage, coming in at thirteen percent octane (as do all the other reds from Pedro Rodríguez this year) and delivering a superb bouquet of dark berries, pomegranate, graphite, espresso, a complex base of slate minerality, a touch of meatiness, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. These are seventy-plus year-old Mencía vines, which are foot-trodden and given a long period on the skins, so this is a wine that is built for the cellar. When it is ready to drink, it is going to be stunning! 2026-2060. **94**.

2018 Mencía “Finca Capeliños”- Adegas Guímaro (Amandi)

The Finca Capeliños bottling from Pedro Rodríguez is given the same cellar regimen as the Finca Meixemán, with foot-trodding, some whole clusters, open top fermentation, extended maceration and then a bit more than a year of *elevage* in older Burgundy casks prior to bottling. The 2018 Finca Capeliños is a simply superb wine in the making, offering up a nascently complex and very deep bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, coffee grounds, a touch of smoked meats, discreet botanicals, pepper, stony slate soil tones and plenty of cigar smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a great core and mineral undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it feigns approachability out of the blocks, but it would be infanticide to open this great bottle before it has had eight to ten years of bottle age! 2026-2060. **95**.

2018 Mencía “Finca Pombeiras”- Adegas Guímaro (Amandi)

The 2018 Finca Pombeiras from Adegas Guímaro is another superb wine in the making. The vines here are all Mencía and more than seventy years of age. This is the only 2018 in the lineup that includes one hundred whole clusters. The wine delivers a youthfully complex, superb aromatic constellation of dark berries, graphite, pomegranate, complex slate minerality, coffee bean, tree bark, roasted meats and a lovely array of upper register botanicals from the whole clusters. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a very svelte profile, a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding transparency and grip, ripe tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and extremely promising finish. This is going to be great wine, but it is the

most structured out of the blocks of the single vineyard bottlings from Pedro this year and it will want a full decade to really unfurl. 2028-2065. **95.**



Bierzo Tinto

2019 “1984”- La Senda (Diego Losada)

Diego Losada is making some of my favorite wines in Bierzo, despite his having only started up his own winery of La Senda in the 2013 vintage. His 1984 bottling is pure Mencía, made from three different parcels of old vines, with the range running from seventy to fully ninety years of age. These are high altitude vineyards, planted primarily on clay soils, but with some decomposed slate in the mix. The wine includes a percentage of whole clusters and is aged in older casks for eight months prior to bottling. The 2019 version comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and delivers a fine, youthful nose of cassis, pomegranate, tree bark, pepper, dark soil tones, coffee grounds and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with fine intensity of flavor, good soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish. This is still tightly-knit on the nose and really benefits from twenty minutes or so in decanter prior to drinking, if one is tempted to open a bottle in its youth. It should start to really blossom three to five years down the road. 2024-2045. **92.**

Rioja Blanco

2019 Rioja Blanco- Sierra de Toloño (Rioja Alavesa)

The Rioja Blanco from Sandra Bravo is composed entirely from Viura, from biodynamically farmed vineyards. Ninety percent of the cuvée is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks, with the other ten percent barrel-fermented and raised in older French barrels. The 2019 delivers a fine aromatic constellation of apple, lime, a hint of musk melon, white soil tones, spring flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, young, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, impressive soil signature, zesty acids and a long, very promising finish. I know that this is approachable today, but it is infanticide to be opening it right now, as this wine seems likely to grow exponentially with a bit of bottle age! Try and tuck away a few bottles and let time work its magic. 2024-2040. **92+**.

Rioja Tinto

2019 Rioja- Sierra de Toloño (Rioja Alavesa)

Sandra Bravo's Sierra de Toloño winery in Rioja was only started in 2012, after Sandra returned to Rioja Alavesa from years of working throughout the wine world, with her last stop six years in Priorat (after stints in France, New Zealand and California). Her Rioja is composed entirely from tempranillo, grown in high altitude vineyards in the mountains of Rioja Alavesa. She completely de-stems her grapes, ferments in stainless steel and ages the wine for one year in used French barrels. The 2019 comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and youthful nose of black cherries, dark berries, cigar ash, a good base of soil tones, discreet Rioja spices and a bit of smoky French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow and grip, firm, chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This will need quite a bit of bottle age before it is ready to drink, but all of the constituent components are in place for a fine bottle once time in the cellar has worked its magic. 2029-2060+. **92**.

2018 Rioja- Bodegas Akutain

I last tasted a bottle of the 2018 straight Rioja bottling from Bodegas Akutain a year ago, when it was still pretty tightly-knit and youthful, so I was very happy to see another sample arrive with this year's releases from the bodegas. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane. It is composed primarily of Tempranillo, with just a bit of Garnacha, and sees no oak during its *elevage*. The wine has opened up nicely since I last tasted it, offering up scents of cherries, raspberries, Rioja spice tones, a good base of soil, cigar smoke and a nice touch of fresh dill in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still has a bit of backend tannin, with good focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, complex finish. This remains a pretty high-toned vintage for this bottling from Akutain, with a discreet green streak that hints at imperfect ripening in this challenging vintage, but it is complex and has depth and for those who do not mind this style of Rioja, there is a lot here to like. 2021-2035. **88**.

2018 Raposo- Sierra de Toloño (Rioja Alavesa)

The Raposo from Sierra de Toloño is also composed entirely from tempranillo, like the flagship Rioja bottling here, but the wine is aged entirely large oak vats prior to bottling. The 2018 version delivers a bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of Rioja spice tones, black tea, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good mineral drive, firm, chewy tannins and a long, primary and nicely

balanced finish. This is young and will need some bottle age to blossom, but it will be quite tasty in due course. 2026-2055. **89+**.

2016 Rioja “Crianza”- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2016 Crianza from Bodegas Akutain is composed of ninety-three percent tempranillo, five percent garnacha and two percent viura. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, aged entirely older American oak casks for twenty-one months and then given an additional year of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined and classical mix of red and black raspberries, Cuban cigar wrapper, smoked meats, a beautiful base of soil tones, Rioja spices redolent of clove and nutmeg and a nice hint of fresh dill from the American oak casks. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and just starting to get a bit velvety on the attack, with a fine core, very good soil undertow, a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is approachable today, but still a bit tannic and it will be an even better drink with three or four more years in the cellar! 2021-2050. **90+**.



2014 Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2014 Rioja “Reserva” from Bodegas Akutain is composed primarily of tempranillo, with a small percentage of garnacha included in the blend. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged nearly three years in old, American oak casks, prior to bottling. The bouquet is bright, complex and utterly classical in personality, wafting from the glass in a mix of

raspberries, red plums, a lovely array of Rioja spice tones, cigar wrapper, a complex base of soil tones and a lovely framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and starting to get beautifully velvety on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish of impeccable balance and fine grip. This is a beautiful bottle of Rioja that is just starting to really drink well, but has decades of life still ahead of it! 2021-2060. **93.**

Navarra

2019 Graciano- Viña Zorzal

The 2019 Graciano from the Sanz brothers' Viña Zorzal is aged in French oak casks, with twenty-five percent of the cuvée undergoing malolactic fermentation in barrels. This vintage comes in at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a beautifully precise and complex nose of red and black cherries, smoked meats, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and just a touch of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and focused finish. It is already quite tasty, but I would suspect that more complexity will emerge with a bit of bottle age. This is very good juice and an excellent value! 2021-2035. **89.**

Rueda

2019 Lirondo- Manuel Cantalapiedra

The Lirondo bottling from Manuel Cantalapiedra is composed entirely of Verdejo, produced from vines that are just over thirty years of age and grown in his Las Escucillas vineyard. The wine is given twelve hours of skin contact, fermented with indigenous yeasts, aged on its fine lees for eight months in stainless steel tank and bottled with a minimum of added SO₂. The 2019 Lirondo offers up a deep, precise and vibrant bouquet of fresh pineapple, musk melon, salty soil tones, orange blossoms and just a whisper of green olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a good core, just a hint of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. There is a hint of natural wine "wildness" lurking here on both the nose and palate, which would incline me to drink this wine in its relative youth, despite its excellent girdle of acidity. But, it will deliver plenty of pleasure over the next handful of years and may well end up aging longer than I anticipate! 2021-2025+. **92.**

2018 Mondo- Manuel Cantalapiedra

The single vineyard bottling of Mondo hails from an old vine parcel of Verdejo that Manuel Cantalapiedra's father Isaac, planted with his own father when he was just a young winegrower. The wine is given a month of skin contact in open top vats, prior to racking to used French oak *demi-muids* to finish up fermentation. It is aged eleven months on its fine lees prior to bottling without fining, filtration or added SO₂ at the *mise*. The 2018 offers up a lovely, slightly wild bouquet of orange, lemon peel, salty soil tones, a touch of browned butter and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, a whisper of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced and intensely flavored finish. I like this wine quite well, but the extended skin contact seems to have taken some of the mineral undertow away from this wine, which is so vivid in several of the other bottlings from the Cantalapiedras that I tasted for this report. 2021-2030. **90.**

2016 Alto Las Cuestas- Manuel Cantalapiedra

The Alto Las Cuestas from Manuel Cantalapiedra is made from an old vine parcel of ungrafted Garnacha vines. The wine is aged in older *demi-muids* and the 2016 version tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a deep and very serious bouquet of black raspberries, smoked meats, a touch of pepper, rosemary, lavender, black tea, a beautiful base of soil tones and a topnote of allspice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with great focus and mineral drive, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is truly a stunning bottle of Garnacha, with a quite black fruity personality that is absolutely defined by its exotic spice elements. Great juice! 2025-2050+. **94.**

Castilla y León

2019 El Rey del Glam- Alfredo Maestro

Alfredo Maestro's El Rey del Glam bottling is composed entirely from Garnacha, though he sources these grapes from two different vineyards. One of them is a very old-vine parcel, planted in the Sierra de Gredos Mountains outside of Madrid, while the other parcel is one of the forgotten plantings of this variety in Ribera del Duero (and now so out of fashion in this land of Tempranillo that no one wants the grapes). So the age of the vines here ranges from thirty years for the younger vines in the Ribera del Duero parcel to one hundred years of age for the oldest section of the Sierra de Gredos parcel. Alfredo ferments these with indigenous yeasts via carbonic maceration in stainless steel tanks. The 2019 comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a vibrant and complex nose of black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, a touch of fruitcake and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with a fine core, a bit of chewy backend tannin and just a wisp of heat on the long, complex and very tasty finish. A completely unique interpretation of Garnacha and a very good wine. 2021-2035. **89.**

2018 Cantayano- Isaac Cantalapiedra

The Cantayano bottling from the Cantalapiedra family is composed entirely from Verdejo, with ninety percent of the cuvée raised in stainless steel and the other ten percent fermented and raised in used Burgundy casks. The wine is given eight months of aging on its fine lees in both vessels prior to blending and bottling. The 2018 version delivers a bright and extroverted bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, salty minerality, grassy notes, citrus peel and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, very well balanced finish. This excellent Verdejo! 2021-2030. **92.**

2018 Arenisca- Manuel Cantalapiedra

Though Manuel Cantalapiedra is based in neighboring Rueda, he has just started producing his Arenisca bottling from a plot of vines in Toro (though it carries the Castilla y León designation on the label). The wine is composed almost entirely from tempranillo, with the vines having been planted at three intervals, so that their ages are twenty, fifty and one hundred and fifty years of age! The oldest vines have some trace amounts of white grapes co-planted with them. Ninety percent of the cuvée is destemmed and fermented in stainless steel, with the other ten percent whole clusters and fermented in open top oak vats. The wine is racked into used French *barricas* for malolactic fermentation and *elevage*, with the wine aged eleven months prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2018 is ripe and very refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of new leather, cigar wrapper, a

lovely base of soil tones, elegant spice tones and a whisper of oak from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, ripe and impressively light on its feet for Toro, with a lovely core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. As this Toro, the wine still comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but it carries its alcohol beautifully and is destined to be a stunning wine when the tannins soften up a bit more on the backend! 2028-2065. **93+**.

2017 Majuelo del Chiviritero- Isaac Cantalapiedra

The single vineyard Majuelo del Chiviritero bottling of Verdejo from the Cantalapiedra family is produced from vines planted in 1981, in the village of La Seca, located southwest of the city of Valladolid. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in used Burgundy barrels on its fine lees for eight months, prior to bottling. The beautifully complex bouquet of the 2017 Majuelo del Chiviritero delivers a fine aromatic constellation of pear, fresh lime, jasmine, bergamot, fine soil tones, fresh almond and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with lovely focus and bounce, fine soil undertow and a long, bright and perfectly balanced finish. This is one of the most serious examples of Verdejo I have ever had the pleasure to taste! As is the case with the wine below, the use of oak here is discreet and perfectly measured to support the other elements of the wine seamlessly. 2021-2030+. **94.**

2017 Majuelo La Otea “Pie Franco”- Isaac Cantalapiedra

The Majuelo La Otea “Pie Franco” from Isaac and Manuel Cantalapiedra is a single vineyard bottling, with the Verdejo planted on its original roots and the wine barrel-fermented and aged in used French casks. The 2017 is a beautiful bottle of Verdejo, offering up a gently oak-influenced nose of peach, apple, almond, a fine base of soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and cut, vibrant acids and a long, complex and suavely oaky finish. I really like the marriage of the cask influence and the Verdejo here. 2021-2035. **94.**

Ribera del Duero and Sardon de Duero

2019 Malvasia- García Georgieva

This bottling of Malvasia from Goyo García Viadero and Diana Semova Georgieva is made from vines that are over one hundred years of age. The vineyard sits at an elevation of eight hundred meters, with the grapes pressed with an ancient basket press. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel, given twenty-five days of skin contact and is raised in the same tank on its fine lees until the following spring, when it is bottled without fining or filtration. The 2019 version is beautifully deep and expressive on the nose, offering up scents of tangerine, fresh apricot, a hint of guava, limestone soil tones and a floral topnote redolent of both orange blossoms and white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core, fine soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is a gorgeous wine! 2021-2026. **93.**

2019 Joven de Viñas Viejas- Goyo García Viadero (Ribera del Duero)

The Joven de Viñas Viejas from Goyo García is his only wine that is not raised in cask, as he ferments and raises this wine in stainless steel tanks to allow for early accessibility. As the name suggests, though the wine is made for youthful drinking, it is not made from young vines, as it hails from a single, high altitude parcel of tempranillo and is given three months of skin maceration prior to racking, further aging and then bottling unfining and unfiltered. The 2019 Joven de Viñas Viejas delivers a beautiful pure and nascently complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil, a hint of violet and a gently

spicy topnote redolent of nutmeg and clove. On the palate the wine is very pure, precise and full-bodied, with a lovely core, laser-like focus, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. Though this is ostensibly made for early drinking, the drought conditions of 2019 have given it a good structural chassis and I would be inclined to give it some bottle age before really starting to drink it with abandon. It is a beautiful wine in the making. 2026-2050. **92.**

2018 Selección Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

Bodegas Arrocal sources the grapes for this bottling from forty year-old tempranillo vines the Los Astrales vineyard, which sits at an altitude of eight hundred and fifty-five meters above sea level, just southwest of the town of Gumiel del Mercado (home to Goyo Garcia's winery). This is among the coolest sectors of Ribera del Duero. The 2018 Selección bottling from Arrocal was aged entirely in French oak casks for eighteen months, with half the casks new and the other half "one wine barrels". It comes in at 14.5 percent in this vintage and offers up a ripe and elegant bouquet of red plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, beautiful spice tones, cocoa powder, a good base of almost salty soil tones and a quite refined framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a very good core, ripe, fine-grained tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat here, but it is quite unobtrusive and should not affect the wine's ability to age long and gracefully. This is a young wine and will demand some bottle age to come into its own, but it is going to be excellent when it is ready to drink. 2028-2055. **92.**

2018 Beâtum- Diana Semova Georgieva y Goyo García Viadero (Cantabria)

The 2018 Beâtum is made of a unique blend of eighty percent Mencía and twenty percent Palomino, from vineyards Goyo inherited from his mother's family back in 2007. This bottling used to be called Cabero Tinto. These are very old vines (the Palomino vines are over one hundred years of age), grown on fractured slate soils in the foothills of the Picos de Europa Mountains, with the vines farmed organically, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in eight to ten year-old casks. The 2018 Beâtum is a stunning young wine, delivering a deep and complex bouquet of pomegranate, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, pepper, slate minerality, brown spices and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully spicy, with a lovely core, stunning mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. The Palomino in the wine gives it bounce, vibrancy and truly striking transparency! This is quite unique in personality and utterly stunning, but it will need some bottle age to let some of those backend tannins soften up properly. 2028-2055+. **94.**

2017 Tinto "Selección Especial"- Abadia Retuerta (Sardon de Duero)

Back in my sommelier days in the mid-1990s, I poured the very first vintages of Abadia Retuerta's wines by the glass. They were stunning values back in that era and our clients loved having a wine at this level by the glass. I saw a mention to the winery on the internet at the end of March and searched out the estate to see if I could taste their current releases, which are a bit more ambitious than they were at the outset, but still represent good value. This bottling now includes a bit of syrah and cabernet sauvignon to augment the tempranillo in the *cépages*. The 2017 Selección Especial comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a deep, precise and ripe bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a well done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, fine focus and grip, well-integrated tannins and a long, youthful and fairly well-

balanced finish. This is still quite primary and will be more complex with bottle age, but it hits all the right notes today and is a quite tasty bottle. Given all the challenges with frost and drought in 2017, this has turned out very well. Good juice, but done in a more modern style than the wines I loved from those early vintages. 2021-2040+. **90.**



Goyo García and Diana Semova Georgieva in their tasting room at the winery in Gumiel del Mercado.

2016 Máximo Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The Máximo bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is also a single vineyard bottling from old vines, as this wine hails from the vineyard of El Portillo and the Tempranillo here is eighty-five years of age! The vines are farmed organically, the vineyard sits at eight hundred and sixty meters above sea level and the soils are clay and limestone. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, undergoes malo in barrel and is raised for twenty-six months in Radoux French oak cask prior to bottling. The 2016 Máximo is a touch riper than the 2016 Ángel bottling, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of plums, dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, chocolate, a nice touch of Tempranillo spice tones, smoke and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off lovely old vine creaminess in the mid-palate, with excellent focus and grip, budding complexity and a very long, suavely tannic and impeccably balanced finish. I like the oak signature of this wine, which is both nutty and spicy at the same time, without being overbearing to the stunning fruit here. This is a gorgeous wine, but like the Ángel Tinto, I have a gut feeling that there is still another level up in quality this wine could go if it were given the Pétrus treatment of only fifty

percent new oak and malo in tank, to allow even more soil signature to shine through. That said, this is still brilliant wine! 2030-2080. **95.**

2016 Tinto “Pago Negralada”- Abadia Retuerta (Sardon de Duero)

The Pago Negralada from Abadia Retuerta is a single vineyard wine composed entirely from tempranillo. The 2016 Pago Negralada comes in again at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a deep and black fruity bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a bit of road tar, dark soil tones, balsamic overtones and plenty of spicy French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely velvety on the attack, with a good core, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, moderately warm finish. As 2016 was generally a cooler vintage, with fairly high yields, but good weather for the *fin de saison*, I find this wine a bit perplexing stylistically, as I do not see why it needed to be a bit hot on the backend. The oak tannins that perk up as the wine has some extended air are also a bit worrying, as this wine may have a bit more wood than it is going to be able to carry over the finish line. It is an okay bottle, but fairly pricey and I was hoping for quite a bit more, given the winery’s fine track record and the price tag. 2026-2045? **88.**

2015 Tinto “Reserva”- Isaac Fernández (Ribera del Duero)

The 2015 Tinto “Reserva” from Isaac Fernández hails from a parcel of sixty year-old tempranillo vines, farmed organically and planted on primarily limestone soils at an elevation of nine hundred meters above sea level, outside of the city of Burgos. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in ninety percent French casks and ten percent American oak, with all of the French barrels being new oak. The *elevage* lasted twenty-one months prior to bottling and the 2015 comes in at 14.5 percent octane. The wine delivers an excellent aromatic constellation of black plums, black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a bit of dark chocolate, fresh nutmeg, a superb base of soil tones and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a beautiful mid-palate depth, lovely focus and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, very promising finish. Like so many of the best bottlings in Ribera del Duero (and I would rank this wine among them), the wine has more new oak to it than I would ideally like to see, as less new wood might very well produce an even more complex wine. There is sufficient depth of fruit to eventually absorb all of the oak tannins here, but it has not yet happened and further bottle age will be needed for this to happen. Eventually, this is going to be a lovely wine, but again, in my opinion, these stunning raw materials could shine more brightly with a lighter hand with the new oak! 2028-2050+. **90-92+** (depending on how well the oak tannins recede with bottle age).

2014 Tinto “Reserva”- Isaac Fernández (Ribera del Duero)

The 2014 Tinto “Reserva” from Isaac Fernández hails from the same parcel of organically-farmed, sixty year-old vines and was treated the same in the cellar as the 2015, other than the fact that it was raised entirely in French oak casks in this vintage. The 2014 also tips the scales at 14.5 percent octane, but is quite a bit more developed on the nose than the 2015 version, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of dark berries, chocolate, cigar ash, a gentle note of tempranillo spice, dark soil tones and nicely integrated new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, well-integrated tannins and a long, blossoming and very nicely balanced finish. Though there is still a bit of backend oak tannin here, they are less obtrusive today in comparison to the 2015, and with a steak, I would have no difficulty drinking the 2014 Reserva tonight. It really is a very well-made wine (though again, less new oak would make it even more impressive!). 2021-2045+. **93.**

Penedès

2018 Blau Cru- Cellar Pardas

Cellar Pardas' co-proprietors, Jordi Arnan and Ramon Perera, farm all of their vineyards organically. Their farm is in the Alt Penedès, close to the grail village of sparkling wines in the region, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia. Their Blau Cru bottling is made entirely from Malvasía de Sitges, a particularly high acid version of Malvasía. The vines were planted in 1999 on alluvial soils and the wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2018 version offers up a bright and gently reductive nose of lemon, tart pear, grapefruit, salty soil tones, trampled white flowers and a touch of raw almond. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and snappy, with a fine core and mineral undertow and almost a wisp of backend tannin on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. Good juice that seems likely to age quite gracefully. 2021-2030. **90.**

2017 Xarel-lo- Anima Mundi

Anima Mundi is based in the village of Sant Sadurní D'Anoia in the heart of Cava country. Their Xarel-lo hails from a single vineyard named *Viña del Boat Vel*, which was planted in 1978. The wine is fermented and aged in a combination of old Burgundy *demi-muids* and six hundred liter clay amphora, with a couple days of skin contact followed by a gentle *elevage* of eight months prior to bottling. The 2017 Xarel-lo offers up a deep and complex nose of fresh lime, a bit of tart pineapple, lavender, wild fennel, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine soil undertow, zesty acids and impeccable balance on the long and bouncy finish. This is first class juice! 2021-2030. **92.**

2017 Pur Xarel-lo- Cellar Pardas

The Pur Xarel-lo from Cellar Pardas is made from older vines than their Blau Cru, as these vines are fully forty years of age and planted on limestone soils. Half of the cuvée is raised in cement eggs and the other half in French oak casks. The 2017 Pur Xarel-lo comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of Granny Smith apple, lemon peel, a hint of green olive, chalky minerality, wild fennel, spring flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, excellent soil signature and grip and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is excellent Xarel-lo. 2021-2027. **91.**

2016 Xarel-lo “Avi Ton”- Eudald Massana Noya

I have had some excellent Cava from Eudald Massana Noya, so I was very curious to taste this bottling of barrel-fermented Xarel-lo from an old vine parcel planted in 1945. The wine comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of pear, limepeel, salty soil tones, just a hint of green olive, lemongrass and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, still good acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is lovely. 2021-2026. **91.**

Mallorca

2019 Ancestral Malvasia Pet Nat- Avior (Cati Ribot)

Cati Ribot's sparkling Malvasia, Ancestral, is a lovely wine. The fresh and vibrant bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, a nice touch of hazelnut, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with frothy *mousse*, good focus and grip and a long, juicy finish. Cati is Mallorca's preeminent natural winemaker, but all of her wines show impressive purity and none of the natural wine

“mousiness” that can be found among some producers in the category. This is lovely Pet Nat. 2021-2028. **90.**

2019 Son Llebre Blanco- Avior (Cati Ribot)

The 2019 Avior Son Llebre Blanco from Cati Ribot is composed from a *cépages* of eighty percent Giró Ros and twenty percent Malvasia. Son Llebre is the name of the vineyard where both this wine and the red wine below originate. The Avior is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The 2019 version delivers a lovely nose of lemon, tart pineapple, a hint of beeswax, salty soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and zesty, with a good core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Good juice. 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Son Llebre Negre- Avior (Cati Ribot)

The 2019 Son Llebre Negre from Cati Ribot is made from a blend of the sixty percent Escursac and forty percent Callet Negrello grape varieties. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in tank and then given four months of *elevage* in five hundred liter, four year-old French *demi-muids*. It comes in listed at twelve percent alcohol and offers up a bright bouquet of dark berries, a touch of tree bark, woodsmoke, gentle botanicals and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bouncy and vibrant, with very little tannin and sneaky length and grip on the complex finish. This is easy-drinking right out of the blocks, but seems to have the balance to also age quite nicely, though I have never had an example of an aged red wine from Mallorca! 2021-2030? **88.**

Sierra de Gredos

2018 Valautín Albillo Real- Ca’ di Mat

The 2018 Valautín Albillo Real from Ca’ di Mat hails from three different parcels of Albillo, all planted on granite. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in older French barrels and raised in the same for eight months prior to bottling. The wine is bright and complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, raw almond, stony soil tones, spring flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with fine focus and grip, a good core and mineral undertow and a long, tasty finish. The acids here are not overly pronounced, so I would suspect this wine will be at its best in the next few years. Good juice. 2021-2024. **89.**

2018 Valautín Garnacha- Ca’ di Mat

The friends, Curro Bareño’s and Jesus Oliveros, are the masterminds behind Ca’ di Mat. Their Garnacha Valautín is made from a blend of several different parcels of old vines, farmed organically. The grapes are foot-trodden and fermented with one hundred percent whole clusters with indigenous yeasts, after which half the cuvée is raised in cement vats and the other half in older casks. The 2018 Valautín comes in at fifteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and quite pure nose of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, stony minerality and a gentle topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely defined by its soil, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This carries its alcohol very well indeed for fifteen percent, but I would love to see it a bit lower in octane. 2024-2045. **88+.**

2018 Fuentes de Los Huertos- Ca’ di Mat

The Fuentes de Los Huertos bottling from Curro Bareño’s and Jesus Oliveros’ Gredo project of Ca’ di Mat is composed from a single vineyard of Garnacha, planted at eight hundred

meters above sea level on granitic and quartz soils. The grapes are foot-trodden and fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats. The 2018 Fuentes de Los Huertos is beautifully light in color and offers up a very pretty bouquet of wild strawberries, a hint of fruitcake, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and superbly transparent in personality, with a good core, ripe, well-measured tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and soil-driven finish. This comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but it seems very light on its feet and is an excellent bottle. I would opt to give it at least a few years in the cellar to let the backend tannins soften up a bit, but I imagine it would already be a tasty drink today with red meats that would mask a bit of its youthful tannins. 2025-2045+. **90.**

Campo de Borja

2020 Garnacha Blanca- Legado del Moncayo

Legado del Moncayo's 2020 Garnacha Blanca is bright and bouncy out of the blocks, offering up an expressive bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of honeysuckle, a fine base of chalky soil tones and just a hint of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and juicy at the core, with moderate acids, but good backend vibrancy and a long finish. This will be best in its youth, as it is not overly structured, but there is plenty of enjoyment to be had over the near-term. 2021-2023. **88.**

2020 Garnacha- Legado del Moncayo

The 2020 Garnacha from Legado del Moncayo is another fine vintage for this consistent producer in the mountain's foothills of Moncayo. The wine offers up a ripe and vibrant nose of red and black cherries, grilled game, *garrigue*, limestone minerality, a touch of Châteauneuf-like fruit cake and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with good soil undertow, modest tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Fine juice that is very tasty out of the blocks, but will also age quite well. 2021-2035. **90+.**

Almansa

2019 Albahra- Envínate

I have been a fan of the Albahra bottling from Envínate since I first tasted it and still have a fair number of bottles of the 2015 vintage of this wine evolving in my cellar. The 2019 is composed of its now customary *cépages* of seventy percent Garnacha Tintorera and thirty percent Moravia Agria, with the former including some whole clusters, foot-trodden and fermented and raised in cement vats. The Moravia-Agria is completely destemmed and fermented and aged in older Burgundy casks, with the two components blended after about eight months of *elevage* on their own. The 2019 comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a refined nose of sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, autumn leaves, pepper, a bit of roasted game and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite transparent in personality, with a good core, fine focus, good acids and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish. This is really lovely, with the potential to age nicely, but already quite easy to drink. Fine juice. 2021-2035. **91.**

2019 Albahra "Chingao"- Envínate

The Chingao bottling of Albahra is composed entirely from Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet) and does not include any Moravia in the blend. The 2019 Chingao Albahra is deeper, more primary and riper than the regular cuvée, offering up a sappy bouquet of blackberries, black cherries, pepper, hung game, a touch of tree bark, *garrigue* and a fine base of soil tones

that are just starting to hint at the fallen leaf character so typical of Alicante Bouschet. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and meaty in personality, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. I would guess this is around 13.5 percent octane (the label shows a range from 11-14 percent) and the wine is bigger-boned and chewier and will demand some bottle age before it starts to drink with generosity. It will be superb when it is ready to go, but a bit of patience will be required. 2026-2045. **92+**.

Calatayud

2019 Garnacha- Acentor

The 2019 vintage of Garnacha from Acentor is excellent on both the nose and palate, as these old, bush vines have really excelled. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of crushed raspberries, dark berries, smoked meats, hickory smoke, a fine base of stony soil tones, pepper and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a superb core of fruit, impressive soil signature and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is excellent. 2023-2050. **92**.

Utiel-Requena

2019 Bobal- Vera de Estenas (Félix Martínez Roda)

The 2019 Bobal from Félix Martínez Roda is made from old vines, with most around fifty years of age, but some fully a century old, grown in clay and limestone soils. The wine is fermented in cement vats and then raised in a combination of cement and old oak casks. The bouquet of the 2019 is bright, ripe and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, lovely spice tones, roasted meats, a good foundation of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, ripe and well-balanced finish. This wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but is not hot on the backend and is fresh and tasty. Excellent Bobal! 2021-2035+. **90**.

Canary Islands Blanco y Rosado

2020 Diego Blanco- Bermejos (Lanzarote)

The 2020 Diego Blanco from Bermejos is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, with the wine given three months on its fine lees during its *elevage*. The wine offers up a bright and almost Albariño-like nose of lime, green apple, salty minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is vibrant, complex and fullish, with lovely focus and cut, superb mineral drive and a long, complex and zesty finish. The wine closes with just a touch of citrus peel bitterness that is so emblematic to me of the Canary Islands and adds a refreshing note at the table. This is a beautiful bottle! 2021-2028. **92**.

2020 Listán Negro Rosado- Bermejos (Lanzarote)

Ignacio Valdera's 2020 Listán Negro Rosado comes in surprisingly ripe at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a lovely bouquet of fresh apricot, a touch of casaba melon, salty soil tones and a floral topnote that comes across as a mix of orange blossoms and delicate roses. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely vinous in personality, with an excellent core, zesty acids and a long, succulent and classy finish. This is not the most complex Rosado, but it is absolutely loaded with personality! 2021-2028. **89**.



2019 Táganan Blanco- Envínate (Tenerife)

The 2019 Táganan Blanco from Envínate is made from a blend of many of the indigenous white grape varieties on the island, all hailing from old, untrained vines that grow along the ground and by the cliffs that overlook the Atlantic Ocean in this part of Tenerife. The 2019 vintage has turned out beautifully for this wine, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of tart orange, pink grapefruit, salty minerality, lemongrass, raw almond and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and minerally, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent acids and grip, fine focus and a long, beautifully balanced and energetic finish. First class juice. 2021-2035. **92+**.

2019 Palo Blanco- Envínate (Tenerife)

The Palo Blanco bottling from Envínate is a relatively new cuvée for them, hailing from Listán Blanco vines that are more than a century old, growing on black volcanic soils in the braided fashion of *Cordon Trenzado*. The wines are pressed whole cluster, fermented in cement vats, do not go through malo and then age in twenty-five hundred liter *foudres* prior to bottling. The 2019 Palo Blanco delivers an excellent aromatic constellation of lemon peel, breadfruit, a bit of briny ocean breeze, volcanic minerality, lemongrass and a whisper of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and zesty, with superb focus and grip, a lovely core of fruit, outstanding mineral drive and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is stunning juice! 2021-2040+. **94**.

2019 Los Loros Blanco- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Tenerife)

The Los Loros Blanco bottling from Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez is made from Listán Blanco vines that are not particularly old by his standards. He ferments and ages the wine in stainless steel tanks with its fine lees prior to bottling after six months of *elevage*. The 2019 Los Loros offers up a bright and vibrant nose of gently-candied lemon, pear, volcanic soil tones, fruit blossoms, lemongrass and a wisp of upper register botanicals that suggest lavender and wild fennel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice! 2021-2027. **92.**

2019 Los Loros “Siete Lomas” Blanco- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Tenerife)

The Siete Lomas bottling from Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez is made from a blend of eighty percent Marmajuelo and twenty percent Gual, two indigenous grapes to the Canary Islands that one seldom sees anymore. The two grapes are fermented together and aged in older Burgundy casks, with a couple of months of gentle lees stirring. The 2019 Siete Lomas is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of tart pineapple, lime peel, salty minerality, dried flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, excellent mineral drive and grip, sound acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish that closes with a note of citrus peel. Fine juice. 2021-2027. **93.**

2019 Blanco - Tajinaste (Tenerife)

Agustín García Farraís at Tajinaste produces his Blanco bottling from a blend of ninety percent Listán Blanco and ten percent Albillo Criollo. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and twenty percent of the blend sees two or three months of barrel aging in older French casks. The 2019 Blanco provides a fine young nose of casaba melon, lime, wild fennel, sea salts, a lovely base of soil and just a hint of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, impressive backend mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent. 2021-2030. **92.**

2019 Taro Blanco- Taro Vinícola (Lanzarote)

Pablo Matallana’s Taro Blanco is composed from Malvasia, with the vines not particularly old by his standards. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for nine months on its fine lees prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2019 version offers up a vibrant and complex nose of lemon, tart pear, salty minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is zesty, fullish and complex, with a lovely core and mineral undertow, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and bouncy finish that closes with a note of lemon peel. This is fine juice. 2021-2028. **92.**

2019 Taro “Frías”- Taro Vinícola (Lanzarote)

Pablo Matallana’s Taro “Frías” bottling is made entirely from very old vine Listán Blanco, which are grown in the island’s traditional holes in the ground called *hoyos* and which serve to protect them from the hot dry winds blowing in from Africa. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, with extended skin contact for the first thirteen days, and then aged on its fine lees for nine months prior to bottling. The skin contact gives the wine a lovely orange hue and the wine offers up a bouquet of tangerine, citrus peel, salty minerality, dried flowers and a hint of browned butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and even shows a hint of backend tannin, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip and a long, complex finish. This is quite off the beaten path stylistically, but nicely made. 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Elaboraciones Ancestrales Blanco- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

The Elaboraciones Ancestrales Blanco from Viñátigo is composed entirely from the Gual grape, which proprietor Juan Jesus handles as if it were a red wine, with the wine undergoing three weeks of skin contact maceration prior to being racked into cement eggs for fermentation and aging. The 2019 version is not particularly dark in color (really a pale gold), despite the three weeks on the skins, and offers up a deep and complex nose of pear, paraffin, salty soil tones and a complex, floral notes that reminds me of a combination of white lilies and gentle honeysuckle tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and almost a touch tannic on the backend, with excellent acidity and grip, fine balance and a long, complex finish. Good juice. 2021-2030. **92.**

2019 Listán Blanco- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

The 2019 Listán Blanco from Viñátigo is produced from pergola-trained vines, at least one hundred years of age and planted on their own rootstocks. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of sweet grapefruit, lemon peel, sea salts, wild fennel, dried flowers, paraffin and a lovely base of volcanic soil. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and cut, fine focus and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish that closes with a nice touch of waxiness. This is a good drink already, but still fairly primary and it will be an even better drink three to five years down the road. 2021-2035. **92.**

2019 Gual- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

I do not taste very many examples of Gual (which is known as Bual on the island of Madeira), but Viñátigo's 2019 version makes me wish more would cross my path, as it is a lovely wine. This too is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of lime, green apple, salty minerality, fruit blossoms, beeswax and a bit of candied citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, youthful complexity and a long, well-balanced finish. I like how this wine closes with a touch of citrus peel bitterness that reminds me of how many of the best red wines from the Canary Islands also end with that touch of backend bitterness. I would love to be sitting out on a veranda in Tenerife, looking at the ocean and sipping this wine, while deciding what to order for dinner! 2021-2030. **92.**

2019 Vijariego Blanco- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

The 2019 Vijariego Blanco from Viñátigo is a bright and complex wine, offering up a deep bouquet of tart pear, lemon, volcanic soil tones, a touch of beeswax, wild fennel, a hint of lavender and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, an excellent girdle of acidity, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and energetic finish. I cannot ever recall tasting an example of pure Vijariego Blanco previously, but if all examples are as good as the 2019 from Viñátigo, then this is a varietal I will have to start searching out with more frequency! This is truly an excellent bottle! 2021-2035. **92+.**

Canary Islands Tinto

2019 Benje Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)

The 2019 Benje Tinto from Envínate is composed from its customary blend of Listán Prieto and Tintilla, sourced from several parcels all growing at one thousand meters of elevation. Each parcel is picked and fermented separately, before blending for malo and aging in older Burgundy barrels. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of bitter cherry, green

peppercorns, a very complex base of volcanic minerality, chicory, a wisp of tree bark, a fine array of botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine soil signature and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and promising finish. This is quite approachable today, but still fairly primary in personality and some bottle age will reveal more complexity. 2021-2050. **92.**

2019 Migan Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)

The 2019 Migan Tinto from Envínate is composed from two different parcels of Listán Negro, with both vineyards grown in the traditional *Cordon Trenzado* of braiding the vines as they grow along the ground. The grapes are foot-trodden, with each parcel vinified separately prior to blending for malo in a combination of two hundred and twenty-five and six hundred liter, older French casks for eleven months of *elevage*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful blend of sweet dark berries, bitter cherry, tree bark, gentle meaty tones, espresso, a gorgeous base of soil and a gentle topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and transparent in personality, with a fine core, ripe tannins, bright acids and a long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is going to be outstanding, but it needs some bottle age to soften up those backend tannins a bit more and allow its layers of complexity to properly blossom. 2027-2055+. **93+.**



2019 Táganán “Parcela Margalagua”- Envínate (Tenerife)

The Táganán “Parcela Margalagua” from Envínate is composed from a field blend of ancient vines (more than a century old) which are planted on their own, pre-phyllloxera roots and grow untrained along the ground in Tenerife. The wine is fermented and raised in old *demi-muids* for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2019 Margalagua comes in at a svelte twelve percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of sour cherries, cranberries, lovely botanicals, volcanic soils, a hint of tree bark and a topnote of balsam bough. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very transparent, with a good core, superb mineral drive and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is superb juice! 2021-2045+. **93+**.

2019 Los Loros Listán Negro- Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez (Tenerife)

Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez’s Listán Negro bottling also contains trace amounts of Listán Blanco and Tintilla that are co-planted in these old vines. The grapes are foot-trodden, one hundred percent whole clusters and fermented with indigenous yeasts, with *elevage* done in old Burgundy casks prior to bottling. The 2019 Los Loros Tinto offers up a beautiful bouquet of red and black cherries, cola, sweet stem tones, dark volcanic soils, smoked meats, a hint of lavender and a nice array of gentle botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and so strikingly transparent, with a good core, tangy acids, moderate tannins and impeccable balance on the long and youthful finish. This is already very expressive on the nose, but still fairly tightly-knit on the palate and deserves some time in the cellar to blossom more fully. It is going to stellar juice! 2026-2055. **93+**.

2019 Taro Tinto- Taro Vinícola (Lanzarote)

Pablo Matallana’s Taro Tinto is primarily composed of Listán Negro, with trace amounts of Listán Blanco co-planted in the *hoyos* where these grapes are grown in Lanzarote. The wine is given a three day period on its skins prior to fermentation with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel tanks and is aged for eleven months prior to bottling. The 2019 comes in at a cool eleven percent octane and offers up a very refined, high-toned nose of bitter cherry, pepper, tree bark, volcanic soil tones, bonfire and a topnote of sweet botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and intensely flavored, with lovely transparency and complexity, modest tannins and a long, vibrant finish. This is a beautiful middleweight that tastes like it has another layer of complexity to unfurl with some bottle age. 2021-2040. **91**.

2019 Ikewen- Bien de Altura (Carmelo Peña Santana) Gran Canaria

The 2019 Ikewen from Carmelo Peña Santana is made from old vines, planted on their *pied franc* roots in an old field blend. Carmelo uses forty percent whole clusters for this bottling, destemming the other bunches by hand, macerates for forty days and ages the wine for eight months in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The 2019 Ikewen comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and delivers a beautiful, peppery bouquet of dark berries, cherrystone, pepper, woodsmoke, a superb base of minerality, cola, balsam bough and sweet Canary Islands botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, tangy acids and a wisp of backend tannin on the long and complex finish. This is lovely! 2021-2045. **92**.

2019 Tinto Tradicional - Tajinaste (Tenerife)

The Tinto Tradicional from Agustín García Farraís’ Tajinaste is made entirely from Listán Negro, with the wine fermented in stainless steel and one-third of the cuvée raised in older American oak casks for a few months prior to bottling. The 2019 is thirteen percent alcohol and delivers a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a lovely touch of botanicals,

volcanic soil tones, chicory and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core and soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Good juice. 2021-2040. **90+**.

2019 Listán Negro- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

Juan Jesus at Viñátigo ferments his Listán Negro in stainless steel tanks and ages it for three months in French oak barrels, all of which have seen plenty of use. The vines are very old and pre-phylloxera, growing in volcanic soils between an altitude of five hundred and one thousand meters above sea level. The 2019 comes in nicely ripe at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of dark berries, bitter cherry, tree bark, lovely Canary Islands botanicals, dark soil tones and a topnote of smoked meats. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of black fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is dynamite Listán Negro! It is approachable out of the blocks, but will be even better with a few years in the cellar to allow its suave tannins to fall away a bit more. 2021-2045+. **93**.

2018 El Cántaro Tinto- Patricia Perdomo (La Palma)

Patricia Perdomo farms only a single hectare of vines, which she does organically. Her El Cántaro Tinto is a field blend composed primarily of Listán Prieto and Negramoll. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely nose of dark berries, chicory, pepper, beautifully complex botanicals, a hint of clove, espresso, volcanic soils and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and smoky in the mouth, with lovely intensity of flavor and transparency, tangy acids, moderate tannins and a long, suave and nascently complex finish. The backend lift and grip here are most impressive. This is drinking quite well out of the blocks, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age to let the tannins soften up a bit more. It should age long and gracefully. 2021-2045+. **92+**.

Tinto do Portugal

2019 Cima Corgo- Trans Douro Express (Mateus Nicola de Almeida)

Mateus Nicola de Almeida hails from the family that long owned (and still manages) the Ramos Pinto port lodge. His grandfather was also the winemaker of Barca Velha, the Douro's most famous dry wine producer until the younger generation started today's current trend here. Mateus produces three red wines under his Trans Douro Express label, each one taking its name from the sub-region of the Douro where the grapes are grown. The Cima Corgo region is the coolest, so the 2019 version, made from a blend of Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Sousão and Tinta Amarela, comes in at 12.5 percent octane. The vineyards are planted on schist soils and the wine is fermented and aged in concrete vats. The 2019 Cima Corgo offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, saddle leather, charred wood, pipe tobacco and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core and soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is quite light on its feet (in relative terms) for a wine with substantial amounts of Touriga Nacional in the blend. Good juice that needs some bottle age to soften up a bit more. 2025-2045+. **90+**.

2019 Baixo Corgo- Trans Douro Express (Mateus Nicola de Almeida)

The Baixo Corgo from Mateus Nicola de Almeida is from the western end of the Douro and is composed of a blend of Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Roriz and Tinta Barroca. The wine is also fermented and aged in cement, with the 2019 vintage coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep and already beautifully expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix

of black cherries, cassis, gentle spice tones, a bit of chocolate, pipe tobacco, lavender, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and almost sappy on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. This is equally structured to the Cima Corgo, but the more plush aspect to the fruit component here makes it a bit more agreeable for drinking in its youth, though it too has the potential to age very well indeed and really deserves some further bottle age. it is very impressive! 2023-2045+. **92.**

2017 Curral Teles- Trans Douro Express (Mateus Nicola de Almeida)

The Curral Teles bottlings from Trans Douro Express are made with foot-trodden grapes, again fermented and aged in cement vats. The *cépages* includes Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca and several of the other indigenous grapes to the region. This is the ripest of the current releases from Mateus, coming in at 14.5 percent octane (though it does not show this on the nose) and offers up a complex bouquet of desiccated red berries, lovely spice elements, bitter cherry, sweet botanicals, stony soil elements, pipe tobacco and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and quite elegant in profile for its octane level, with a good core of fruit, lovely transparency and grip, moderate, suave tannins and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish that shows just a wisp of backend heat. I like the cooler balance of the Baixo Corgo bottling, but this is the more complex wine, despite it showing just a bit of alcohol on the finish. Good juice. 2021-2045+. **92.**

RECENTLY-TASTED BEAUJOLAIS SPRING 2021



When I last wrote about the wines of Beaujolais, it was October of last year and the market was just starting to see the first releases from the fine 2019 vintage. Most of the wines then available were still from the very good, ripe vintage of 2018. As readers may recall of the 2018s, it is a vintage that matches the ripeness and depth of the 2015 vintage in the region, but with seemingly far better freshness to the fruit and less of the overt roasted notes of *sur maturité* that define many of the wines from the 2015 vintage. Part of the reason that the 2018s have ended up a bit fresher in personality, even where they have the broad shoulders and more muscular personalities of a torrid growing season, is that the double serving of extensive hail damage in certain parts of Beaujolais in both 2016 and again in 2017 had left the vines with a lot of unused, pent up energy from the hail-shortened crops of the previous two years. Consequently, the crop size was quite large in 2018, which helped slow the ripening of the bunches (as the energy in the plants had to be divided among an awful lot of bunches) in the blazing heat of August of 2018. There also were good groundwater reserves to be drawn upon in 2018, due to a particularly wet winter and early spring leading into the growing season. So despite a very big crop and blazing heat in August, *vignerons* generally were extremely happy with the quality of the grapes that they were able to bring in starting in early September of 2018 (and probably also

equally happy with the size of the crop, at least in the areas around Fleurie where they had been pummeled by hail in the preceding two years).

There are still several later releases 2018s currently in the market, including the excellent range of Moulin-à-Vent bottlings from Château des Jacques, and many of these are among the top wines of the vintage. As I have mentioned before, 2018 is not a homogenous vintage in terms of style, as some parcels had to be picked later than others and these wines can be a bit high in alcohol (at least for my palate) and trade more on power than charm. But, there are an awful lot of really strong wines from Beaujolais to be found in 2018 and it is in general, a high quality vintage and some of these late-released wines are very much worthy of adding to the cellar, particularly if folks are looking for true long-distance runners to drink a decade or two down the road. Having been fortunate to drink a few venerable 1947s from Beaujolais, which is touted as one of the great vintages in the region and is marked by a powerful style, I suspect that the best from 2018 may well share certain characteristics with the young 1947s a couple of generations ago, and may well possess the same potential for very long-term aging. My personal tastes still favor vintages like 2011 for long-term cellaring, as the 2011 vintage has pretty extraordinary depth and structural density, but more classically fresh and red fruity aromatics and flavors. The 2018s tend to be a bit more black fruity and meaty in personality than the comparable 2011, but they do possess at least the same potential for extremely long lives in bottle

Which brings us to the 2019 vintage in Beaujolais. As I wrote a backdrop on the 2019s in the October issue that still seems quite accurate, I will repeat it here (as I probably cannot write it any better) and keep readers from having to refer back to the newsletter from last October. The 2019 growing season was not an especially easy one for *vignerons* in the region, as an early bud-break was threatened (and in some places seriously damaged) by bouts of early April frost in certain sectors of the region. This cut back potential yields from the bountiful crop of 2018 in areas affected by these cold spring temperatures. The frost hit on the evening of April 5th and where it affected vineyards, the resulting loss of crop was dramatic. Fortunately the frost damage was not uniform across all of Beaujolais, so many were spared from such serious damage from the freezing temperatures. Once the spring frost damage was past, the early summer unfolded into one of very good weather, with plenty of sunshine and high temperatures, but without any precipitation of any kind once June arrived, so that drought conditions prevailed throughout much of the summer. The growing season was certainly shaped to some extent by the robust summer heat, but hydric stress was an equally serious factor in the equation until it was alleviated by heavy rain storms that swept through most of the Beaujolais region in mid-August. For most of the vineyards across the region, this was just what was needed to relieve the drought conditions, plump up the desiccated berries and get the vines rolling again to ripen up their bunches properly leading into the harvest. Most importantly, the mid-August rains were able to bring the bunches back into the balance, which prior to the rain had been very concentrated with sugars and tannin, but with a real paucity of juice to balance these other elements in the grapes.

However, this series of August storms was far from consistent from north to south in Beaujolais, and unfortunately, these rains arrived accompanied by heavy hail across a wide band in the southern half of the region, where Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages level vineyards are located, and the hail damage in these areas was extensive. The band of hail hit on August 18th and cut across the southern end of the region centered on the east-west line that runs from just

north of the town of Chazay-d'Azergues in the east (about fifteen kilometers due south of the regional center of Villefranche) to the sector known as Pierres Dorées in the west, which is very close to where the Chermette family's Domaine du Vissoux is located. For vineyards hit by the August hail, the crop was decimated and potential yields were reduced by as much as seventy-five percent. This was the opposite of the hail damage in both 2016 and 2017, which had been centered on the Cru of Fleurie in the northern half of the region and affected primarily the Cru Beaujolais vineyards in Fleurie and neighboring villages, whereas the southern half of Beaujolais had not had to deal with hail in either vintage. But, in August of 2019, it was sadly the south's turn to be pummeled by hail. I have not yet tasted many examples of 2019 Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages from the southern half of the region, as most of the straight Beaujolais bottlings which have arrived on my desk thus far are from growers in the north who happen to have vines outside of the delimitations of their Crus, so that I have not yet had a chance to assess how the hail damage of August has shaped the style of the surviving wines from the south.

Where these August storms did not come accompanied by hail, the rains were most welcome, as they alleviated the stress the vines had been under from the drought conditions and the sometimes extreme heat of midsummer of 2019, as temperatures topped one hundred degrees Fahrenheit on several occasions during July and early August. The rains were able to lower potential alcohol levels dramatically, as the stressed bunches were able to plump up nicely by soaking up the precipitation and the berries regained a far more ideal juice to skin ratio as the vines happily absorbed the beneficial water. But, even where there was no hail, the August rains were not consistent. While the southern end of the region was pummeled with hail on August 18th, the far northern Crus of Beaujolais: Juliénas, Chénas and Saint-Amour, suffered inversely from not getting anywhere near as much precipitation from these rainstorms as most of the rest of the Beaujolais region, so the wines here in these three Crus are far more shaped by the drought conditions and baking heat of the summer than anywhere else in Beaujolais in 2019. Though I have not tasted all that many examples from these three Crus yet, the few I have tried bear witness to reports that these communes have wines with firmer tannins and higher alcohol levels than what is found throughout most of the rest of the Cru region. So the lack of consistency of precipitation with these August rainstorms would contribute to heterogeneity of both style and quality in the wines of 2019. This lack of consistency of style would be further complicated when harvest time rolled around, as the baking heat of July and the first half of August returned for the picking, so that everything was often ripe and demanding attention at the very same time, forcing *vignerons* to make tough decisions about which vineyards to harvest first and which would have to wait until the frenzied picking teams could get around to clearing the bunches in the parcels that could not go first. Consequently, there are also a few examples of 2019 Beaujolais that show overt signs of *sur maturité* from having to wait for the teams to find time to harvest their crops.

Though there was certainly a litany of challenges posed by Mother Nature during the growing season of 2019, the end result is that there is also a real bounty of truly excellent wines which have been crafted in this vintage. The August rains not only brought back better balance to the grapes, lowering sugar levels and adding far more juice to the berries, but they also brought down acidity levels to a more moderate range. The drought conditions and heat had concentrated both sugars and acids as the grapes shriveled up a bit during the heatwave, but, where the precipitation was copious, the berries settled into a very good state of ripeness and balance prior

to picking, albeit with slightly lower acidity than we have seen in most recent top flight vintages of Beaujolais. The results are wines of plush textures, sappy fruit tones and plenty of early generosity- at least where there were no issues with hail damage in the south or more pronounced hydric stress in the far northern Crus. As alluded to above, with everything coming ripe at the same time, not all parcels could be harvested at the ideal moment, so there is some variation introduced to quality and style also based on when the pickers could get to a given parcel. But, all things considered, the 2019 vintage in Beaujolais is truly excellent and there are a very large number of bottlings that are going to rank right up there with the finest from the best vintages of recent memory. The best of 2019 share a succulent generosity and sappy core of fruit that is utterly charming right out of the blocks, with lovely underlying *terroir*, suave structural elements and impeccable balances that should carry them nicely in the cellar- if anyone can be persuaded to keep their hands off of the wines and let them age! It has been a long time since I can recall a vintage like 2019 in Beaujolais, where the wines are so overtly seductive out of the blocks that it is going to be very, very hard not to drink them up in the blush of youth (and readers know that I am among the minority of Beaujolais lovers who steadfastly refuses to drink my wines too early on in their evolutions in the bottle). But, the beautiful early charm of the best 2019s is likely to put my patience to the test!

One of the things that I should have mentioned in a previous article on the region revolves around one of my absolute favorite producers in the region, Jean-Étienne and Pierre-Marie Chermette of Domaine du Vissoux. Nothing has changed here in terms of quality, which has been exemplary from the very first wine I ever tasted from Pierre-Marie Chermette, all the way back in the 1988 vintage. But, Jean-Étienne has changed the labeling on the wines very slightly, so that now they are labeled under his father's name, Pierre-Marie Chermette, with Domaine du Vissoux no longer mentioned anywhere on the labels. This is the only change here as Jean-Étienne assumes full direction of the family estate from his father, as this remains unequivocally one of the finest domaines in all of Beaujolais, but as a subscriber wrote to me to ask if the wines labeled under Pierre-Marie's name were the same as the ones formerly labeled as Domaine du Vissoux, I realized I had been remiss in not mentioning this labeling change sooner. The following notes are listed in their customary fashion for this report, with Beaujolais Blanc first, followed by sections for Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages, followed by the various Crus, listed geographically from north to south.

Beaujolais Blanc

2019 Beaujolais Blanc- Daniel Bouland

The 2019 Beaujolais Blanc from Daniel Bouland is a bright and bouncy example of the vintage. The bouquet offers up scents of green apple, pear, almond, chalky soil tones, apple blossoms and a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows off a good core of ripe fruit, with good soil undertow, sound framing acids and a long, complex finish. This will drink best in the next half dozen years, over which time it will deliver plenty of enjoyment. 2021-2027. **89.**

2018 Beaujolais Blanc “les Vignes de la Roche”- Château de Lavernette

The 2018 Beaujolais Blanc from Xavier and Kerrie de Boissieu's Château de Lavernette is a very lovely wine, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of Mâconnais “toastiness”, fruit blossoms and a whisper of fresh pineapple in the

upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and cut, zesty acids and a long, focused and complex finish. This is not your customary Beaujolais Blanc, as the Château de Lavernette lies at the extreme north of the appellation, in the village of Leynes, within a stone's throw of the most southerly village of the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation, Chaintre! The 2018 is a ripe vintage here, so this wine will probably not age as long as some other recent vintages, but it will provide plenty of pleasure for the next handful of years. Fine juice. 2021-2025. **90.**

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2020 Beaujolais “Nouveau”- Domaine de Cornillac (Jean Loron)

It has been a few years since I last tasted an example of Beaujolais “Nouveau”, as my last visit with this sector of the Beaujolais market did not go as well as I had hoped and I did not bother to write up any of the handful of wines that I tasted, as they were less successful than I had imagined. However, the 2020 Nouveau from Domaine de Cornillac may inspire me to once again investigate this category next November, as this is really quite a lovely wine and continues to drink beautifully now into the following spring. The bouquet is deep, black fruity and sappy, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bonfire, gamebird and a bit of dark soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a bit of backend tannin, with a fine core, good focus and grip and a long, bouncy and fairly complex finish. This is quite serious for Nouveau and still a very tasty bottle! 2021-2022. **88.**

2019 Beaujolais “Griottes”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

Jean-Étienne Chermette's 2019 Beaujolais “Griottes” is a beautiful, red fruity example of the vintage, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, bonfire, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of gamebird and a dollop of savory fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core, a touch of tannin and lovely length and grip on the vibrant and complex finish. This is a younger vine cuvées, made from vines that are thirty years of age or younger and the only red wine made by the Chermette family that is raised in stainless steel tanks, as it is intended for early drinkability. It is quite lovely in 2019. 2021-2026. **89.**

2019 Beaujolais “Origine” Vieilles Vignes- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The Chermette family's Origine old vine bottling is simply outstanding in 2019. The Origine cuvée was first created in the 1986 vintage at the request of a Michelin-starred chef, who wanted a true Beaujolais to offer on his wine list, as opposed to the “banana bubblegum-scented” wines then so popular in the region (and created by using specific commercial yeasts). This bottling is made from vines that range from thirty-five to one hundred years of age, fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and aged for six months in large *foudres* prior to bottling in the spring following the harvest. The 2019 Origine is deep, pure and complex, offering up a fine nose of red and black cherries, gamebird, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and a touch of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of firm tannin and a long, nascently complex finish. I am guessing that the slightly more chewy aspect of the 2019 Origine is a result of the hail of August, as this wine is a bit more structured out of the blocks than is the case in most vintages, but the wine is pure and only will need a bit of bottle age before it blossoms. 2024-2040+. **91.**

2019 Beaujolais- Domaine de Cornillac (Jean Loron)

The 2019 Beaujolais from the Loron family's Domaine de Cornillac is an excellent example of the vintage, plush with beautifully ripe fruit and nicely underpinned by a fine base of soil. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a hint of cranberry, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a touch of raw cocoa and a very good array of soil elements. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with nicely broad shoulders for this appellation, fine focus and grip and a long, ripe and complex finish. This comes in at fourteen percent in 2019 and really has some stuffing for a straight Beaujolais! Good juice. 2021-2030. **89.**

2019 Beaujolais- Domaine de La Grosse Pierre

Pauline Passot's Domaine de La Grosse Pierre is based in Chiroubles, and her Beaujolais level parcels are in the area around Chiroubles and were not affected by the August hail of this summer. The wine offers up beautiful aromatic complexity in its blazingly red fruity nose of strawberries, cherries, cranberries, lavender, granitic minerality, a touch of Chambolle-like mustard seed, fresh thyme and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and tangy, with a nice juicy core of fruit, good soil signature, modest tannins and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is very tasty. 2021-2028. **89.**

2019 Beaujolais-Villages- Château de Lavernette

As readers may recall, Château de Lavernette is located in the northern reaches of Beaujolais, so their vines did not benefit from the mid-August rains that alleviated much of the drought conditions further south, and consequently, their 2019 Beaujolais-Villages is atypically powerful in the this vintage. The is deep and meaty on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, quince, roasted meats, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, fresh thyme and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced, sturdy finish. This has the muscle one might associate normally with Morgon, due to the drought conditions that prevailed in the north in 2019, but the wine is very well-balanced and will be excellent, once it has had a bit of bottle age to soften up those uncharacteristic backend tannins. It will be very long-lived for Beaujolais-Villages! 2025-2045. **91.**

2019 Beaujolais "l'Ancien" Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Terre Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2019 Beaujolais "l'Ancien" from Jean-Paul Brun is an excellent wine in the making, offering up a beautifully red fruity and transparent bouquet of cherries, cranberries, sweet stem tones, a superb base of soil, just a touch of thyme and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, focused and complex finish. As is customary with top vintages of Monsieur Brun's "l'Ancien", the 2019 is eminently drinkable out of the blocks, but really built to age, and will be even better three to five years down the road. This is a superb vintage for this iconic bottling. 2021-2035+. **92.**



Saint-Amour

2019 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards

I last tasted a bottle of the 2019 Saint-Amour from Domaine des Billards in October of last year, but was happy to have a chance to revisit it and see how six months more bottle age had affected it. As readers may recall, Saint-Amour was one of the crus that did not benefit from the August rains of 2019, so this wine is stylistically reflective of the drought conditions that prevailed before more fortunate communes received their timely dose of precipitation. So, this is a big and powerful vintage for this bottling, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The nose is deep, precise and complex, delivering scents of red and black cherries, spit-roasted *pigeon*, pomegranate, dark soil tones, violets, peonies, a whisper of thyme, raw cocoa and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a gorgeous core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex, chewy and intensely-flavored finish. The past six months of bottle age have really let this wine snap into place and it is a seamless, powerful beauty. It will demand some cellaring to let its tannins soften up, but it is a stellar wine in the making and I clearly underestimated it a touch when I last opened up a bottle! 2030-75. **93+**.

Moulin-à-Vent

2018 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

The 2018 Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques is a superb example of the vintage, offering up a ripe and complex nose, without every straying over the line to show any signs of

sur maturité. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, *pigeon*, a touch of cedary oak and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent in personality, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is very good juice that is approachable today, but is a pretty structured example of Moulin-à-Vent and is really built for cellaring. It will be an even better drink ten years down the road than it is today! 2024-2050. **92.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos du Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

The 2018 vintage of Clos du Grand Carquelin from Château des Jacques is a stunning young wine in the making. This wine comes in listed at a svelte (for 2018) 13.5 percent alcohol and displays beautiful precision and purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic combination of dark berries, cassis, espresso, a complex base of dark soil tones, *pigeon*, woodsmoke, a touch of cedar and just a delicate topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent soil signature and mid-palate depth, with ripe, beautifully integrated tannins, fine focus and balance and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. This will be a long distance runner! 2026-2075. **94.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Rocheegrès”- Château des Jacques

Château des Jacques’ 2018 Clos de Rocheegrès is also an outstanding bottle of Moulin-à-Vent in the making. The wine is a bit more forward in personality out of the blocks than the Clos du Grand Carquelin, offering up an excellent bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, French Roast, a lovely base of stony soil, spit-roasted gamebird, lovely spice tones, woodsmoke and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of black fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, very well balanced finish. This is certainly quite accessible out of the blocks, but I might be inclined to give it at least a few more years’ worth of bottle age, to let some secondary layers emerge. 2024-2075. **93+.**

2018 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos des Thorins”- Château des Jacques

The 2018 Clos des Thorins from Château des Jacques is a beautiful wine in the making. The nose delivers an aromatic constellation of cassis, espresso, bonfire, a complex base of dark soil tones, a touch of chicory, brown spices and a whisper of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and deep at the core, with superb mineral drive and bounce, ripe, buried tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Though this wine too will age splendidly, it seems to me to be the most forward of the four Château des Jacques’ Moulin-à-Vent bottlings that I tasted for this article, and I would not hesitate to drink this wine right away (though still holding some bottles in the cellar for a decade or two down the road)! 2021-2065+. **94.**

Fleurie

2019 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2019 Château de Fleurie is a beautifully refined and perfumed bottle of Fleurie. The bouquet is bright and quite floral in personality, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a hint of cranberry, gamebird, a complex base of soil, peonies, a hint of mustard seed and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and detailed, with a sappy core of fruit, a good structural chassis, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and energetic finish. This will age beautifully, but is going to be hard not to drink in its early, “first blush of youth” phase (despite its touch of tannin)! Serious Fleurie. 2021-2045. **93.**

2019 Fleurie “le Vivier”- Domaine de Grand Garant (Claude Grosjean)

Claude Grosjean’s 2019 le Vivier is a very fine bottle in the making, with the depth and structural chassis of a Fleurie that is built to age long and gracefully. The black fruity nose delivers scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of espresso, fresh herb tones, gamebirds, dark soil elements and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and moderately tannic, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but it is still quite primary in personality and really deserves a year or two in the cellar to unlock its secondary layers of complexity. 2023-2040. **90+**.

2019 Fleurie “Bel Air”- Domaine de La Grosse Pierre

Pauline Passot’s forty-five *ares* of vines in the fine *lieu à dit* of Bel Air in Fleurie are fifty years of age. Her 2019 Bel Air is a beautifully transparent and expressive example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, cherries, blood orange, hickory smoke, fresh thyme, a complex base of soil tones and incipient notes of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of red fruit, good mineral undertow, just a touch of tannin and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. First class Fleurie! 2021-2045. **93**.

2018 Fleurie “le Vivier”- Domaine Grand Garant (Claude Grosjean)

The 2018 Fleurie “le Vivier” from Claude Grosjean is a very good example of the vintage, with depth of fruit, excellent granitic mineral drive and some firm tannins that will ask for a few years in the cellar to soften up. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, gamebird, stony soil tones, bonfire, sweet stem tones and a topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy finish. This will be a very good bottle once it has had a chance to blossom. 2024-2045. **90**.

Chiroubles

2019 Chiroubles- Domaine de La Grosse Pierre

The 2019 Chiroubles from Domaine de La Grosse Pierre is Pauline’s “young vine” cuvée in the commune, as they are forty-five years of age. The wine offers up a beautifully pure and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, woodsmoke, a lovely base of granite, cloves, red curry and fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a beautiful core of red fruit, excellent mineral undertow, moderate tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Chiroubles. It is still a bit marked by its youthful stems and could do with a bit more bottle age to let those tones turn to spices, but it is also awfully easy to drink already! 2021-2050. **92+**.

2019 Chiroubles “Claudius”- Domaine de La Grosse Pierre

The Claudius bottling from Pauline Passot is her oldest vine bottling, with these vines all closing in on one hundred years of age. The 2019 Claudius is gorgeous on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, a touch of plum, smoked duck, a complex base of stony soil tones, fresh thyme, violets, black tea and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, ripe, buried tannins, superb mineral drive and grip and a long, complex and extremely promising finish. This is built for the cellar and needs a bit more bottle age to blossom properly. It will be stunning juice when it is ready to drink. 2026-2065. **94**.

2019 Chiroubles “Grillé-Midi”- Domaine de La Grosse Pierre

Like many Beaujolais lovers, prior to be introduced to Pauline’s Chiroubles “Grillé-Midi” bottling, I thought this fine *lieu à dit* was only in the commune of Fleurie. I am very happily disabused of this incorrect notion! These vines are forty to sixty years of age, so not as old as the Claudius parcel, but this is a special *terroir* and it clearly shows in this stunning 2019 Chiroubles. The nose is pure, precise and nicely red fruity, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, blood orange, gamebird, woodsmoke, a complex base of granitic minerality and a lovely spice potpourri of cardamom, thyme and cumin seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a superb core, outstanding mineral drive and bounce, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. Stunning juice! 2027-2065+. **95.**



Morgon

2019 Morgon “Bellevue”- Daniel Bouland

Daniel Bouland has only been producing his Bellevue bottling since 2014, when he purchased this parcel of old vines. He raises the wine in two thousand liter old *foudres*. The 2019 Bellevue is a beautiful wine in the making, offering a pure and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, smoked meats, bonfire, fresh thyme and a gorgeous base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and very transparent in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully

balanced finish. After the more broad-shouldered 2018 version, this is absolutely classical in its measurements and a gorgeous wine in the making. 2025-2055+. **93+**.

2019 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel Bouland

Monsieur Bouland’s seventy year-old vines in the *lieu à dit* of Corcelette have really excelled in this lovely vintage. The nose jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a bit of sweet dark berry, gamebird, woodsmoke, a fine base of granitic minerality, red curry, fresh thyme, a hint of clove and a touch of sweet stem tones that will turn deliciously spicy with bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and bounce and a long, ripely tannic and tangy finish. This will need time in the cellar to unwind, but it will be stunning juice once it is ready to drink! 2026-2065. **94**.

2019 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2019 Morgon “Côte du Py” from the Desvignes family is an outstanding young example of the vintage and this excellent vineyard. The bouquet is pure, precise and still fairly primary, offering up scents of plums, black cherries, pomegranate, duck, stony soil tones, a touch of raw cocoa, lovely spice tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and structured, with a full-bodied format, a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This has the structure of a long-distance runner Morgon in a great vintage and will demand some bottle age to really blossom, but it is going to be an outstanding bottle once it is ready to drink! 2025-2055+. **93**.

2018 Morgon- Château des Jacques

The 2018 Morgon from Château des Jacques is a pretty ripe example of the vintage, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane. However, it remains quite fresh on the nose, offering up scents of red and black cherries, roasted venison, bonfire, a good base of dark soil tones, a dollop of fresh thyme, lavender and a bit of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch roasted in personality, with a good core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. All of the bottlings from Château des Jacques are built for the long haul, but this could be one time where I might opt to drink this wine fairly early on in its evolution. Right now, the aromatics are quite fresh and captivating, but, I wonder if elements of *sur maturité* might creep in with extended cellaring? In any event, the wine has depth, plenty of stuffing and good backend mineral drive and it could surprise me and cruise along beautifully for thirty or forty years! 2021-2050+? **91**.

Côte de Brouilly

2017 Côte de Brouilly “100% Cotton”- Pierre Cotton

Pierre Cotton’s bottling of Côte de Brouilly that he calls “100% Cotton” is from a one hectare parcel of sixty-five year-old vines that were the first he recovered once he returned to the region from the Loire Valley in 2014. The wine is fermented in cement vats and aged in old *foudres* prior to bottling. The 2017 offers up a superb bouquet of sappy red and black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, fresh herb tones, a beautiful foundation of minerality, cardamom and a hint of clove. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, seamlessly integrated tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is stellar Côte de Brouilly that is certainly approachable today, but is still a tad youthful and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. In the true nature of the appellation, it is built for the long haul! 2021-2055+. **93+**.

2017 Côte de Brouilly “les Grillés”- Pierre Cotton

Monsieur Cotton owns a hectare and a half in the *lieu à dit* of les Grillés, with these vines having been planted in the 1950s. The wine is also fermented in cement vats and raised in a combination of older *foudres* and casks prior to bottling without added SO₂. The 2017 les Grillés delivers a fine aromatic constellation that is quite a bit more black fruity than the “100% Cotton” bottling, with scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, chicory, granitic minerality, fresh thyme, brown spices and the first vestige of autumn leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a bit more structured than the “100% Cotton” cuvée, so give this a few years in the cellar before opening bottles, just to let those tannins soften up a bit more and the wine to properly blossom. 2024-2055+. **93+**.

2016 Côte de Brouilly “100% Cotton”- Pierre Cotton

The 2016 vintage of “100% Cotton” from Pierre Cotton is a first class example of Côte de Brouilly. The bouquet is more spicy in personality than the 2017 version, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, cherries, cranberries, cloves, allspice, thyme, marjoram, stony minerality, incipient notes of *sous bois*, gamebird and black tea. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit marked by its youthful stem tones, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, complex and fairly chewy finish. In contrast to the 2017, the tannins here are still a touch dry-edged and need to be waited out. 2024-2050+. **91**.

2016 Côte de Brouilly “les Grillés”- Pierre Cotton

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly “les Grillés” from Pierre Cotton is an excellent example of the vintage and I like the balance here a bit more than in the above wine. The bouquet is a fine, black fruity mix of dark berries, cassis, grilled *pigeon*, stony soil tones, a bit of coffee grounds, woodsmoke, a hint of cedar and a topnote of fresh thyme and sweet stem tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil undertow, ripe, moderate and well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and a long, classy finish. This is just starting to hit its apogee and still has plenty of fine, fine drinking ahead of it! 2021-2055. **93**.

ROUND TWO FROM THE BEAUTIFUL 2019 VINTAGE IN GERMANY



Last summer I covered the early arrivals from the 2019 vintage in Germany, as well as an in-depth look at the conditions of the growing season that produced this stunning vintage. For many winegrowers across Germany, the quality of the 2019 vintage mirrors that of the great 2001 vintage, with good must weights, excellent acidity levels, very clean botrytis and also a myriad of non-botrytized wines of stunning purity and mineral undertow. However, as a great many wines were not yet authorized for showing (for example, all Grosses Gewächs bottlings cannot be officially shown until the first of September the year following the harvest) or the importer here in the US was still working with a given estate's 2018ers, so last summer's report was not as complete as would normally be the case if I had spent ten days tasting across German wine country in the spring of 2020. I was very happy to have been able to report on so many 2019ers last July, as well as augmenting that report with tasting notes on a great many 2018ers which I had not had the opportunity to taste on my last trip to the cellars in the region. I was able to augment that article with an article that focused on the stunning 2019ers from Katharina Prüm of Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm and the later-released wines from Klaus-Peter Keller in December, and now can happily add yet one more layer to the coverage of this superb vintage.

I will not go into detail on the growing season of 2019 across German wine country in this article, as I covered that fairly thoroughly in Issue 88. Here is just a brief synopsis of the vagaries and advantages of the spring and summer of 2019 and what was necessary for winegrowers to seize an opportunity to make brilliant wines in this vintage. The summer of 2019 was once again defined to some degree by drought, as had been the case the previous year of 2018, though fortunately for growers, the dry conditions of 2019 were not also accompanied by stifling heat for much of the summer, as had been the case the year earlier. But, hydric stress was a very important part of the growing season of 2019 and older vines were at great advantage in this vintage, as their more developed root systems could seek out subterranean water sources in the dry weather far better than younger vines. The spring had been precocious, so that the vines were out of the shoots early once again in 2019, but April's warm weather turned cold in May, with even some frost damage felt in the pre-dawn hours of May 5th in the Saar and Ruwer valleys. Elsewhere across Germany, it was a sleepless night for *vignerons*, but the dip in temperatures did not produce damage to the vines. But, the month of May stayed cool and the early start was soon given back during this unseasonably cold month. June and July were warm and sunny, but not excessively hot (as had been the case in 2018) and some well-timed rain early in July helped alleviate at least some of the hydric stress on younger vines.

There was a three to four day heat spike in August of 2019, with temperatures soaring over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit during the days and causing a lot of problems with sunburned grapes. Meticulous sorting to remove any sunburned berries and bunches would be critical to achieving maximum success later in the season. After the quick heatwave of early August, the rest of the growing season unfolded splendidly, with September sunny and seasonable during the day, but with cool evening temperatures. This allowed sugar to mount nicely during the days, while cool nights helped retain excellent acidity levels in the finished wines. Picking began the third week of September under ideal conditions, with plenty of perfectly ripe berries in some parcels, other bunches glazed by the cleanest of botrytis and plenty of golden berries, allowing for perfect raw materials whether a winegrower favored making dry wines, delicate Kabinetten, classic Spätlesen or glossy, shimmering Auslesen and higher Prädikat wines. There were isolated showers towards the end of September, which made harvesters stop and start in the vineyards a bit, but temperatures were cool and there was no alarming spread of rot or mildew from the rains. The first fortnight of October was dry, sunny and provided beautiful Indian Summer conditions to finish up the harvest, before the second half of October turned heavily rainy and stumbled on towards winter. Several winegrowers mentioned that the best botrytis in the vintage was to be found before the end of September showers, though others loved the quality of the noble rot that arrived in the sunny days of early October.

In any event, the vast majority of the 2019ers I have tasted for the first two sections of this report have been stunning wines, underlining that despite some challenges, the growing season of 2019 provided plenty of opportunity to winegrowers to fashion some truly stunning wines if they were precise about selecting out sunburnt bunches prior to the start of harvest and worked carefully during the showers of the second half of September. I am sure that there was more pressure on estates who had been hit by frost in the spring and had already had their crop significantly shortened as a result, but for those who had been lucky enough to avoid any serious frost damage, selecting well during the picking has translated into wines of excellent depth of fruit, extract, mineral drive and snappy acids. Klaus-Peter Keller commented last summer that

the young 2019ers reminded him of the 2001 vintage, and after having now tasted a goodly selection of the vintage, I agree with him quite strongly in this comparison. I am fortunate to have bought quite a lot of 2001ers back in the day and they still represent the single largest chunk of my German wine corner of the cellar, so I am very much looking forward to following how these outstanding 2019ers evolve with bottle age and comparing them to the 2001s still in my cellar. The 2001 vintage evolved at a fairly slow pace and the wines are now really only starting to hit their apogees at twenty years of age, so I would anticipate that the 2019s will also need plenty of time to fully blossom and reach their plateaus of peak maturity. For Prädikat wines such as Kabinett and Spätlese, the 2019ers will probably always drink well, as this is the beauty of these levels of wines in that they offer great drinking enjoyment when still in their puppy fat of youth stage or anywhere along the way to full maturity. But, given how stunning the 2001 Kabinetten and Spätlesen are drinking today, I would certainly advocate giving their counterparts from the 2019 vintage their deserved hibernation time in the cellar as well.

For the beautiful dry wines produced in the 2019 vintage, and this is indeed a vintage that has produced absolutely stunning Trocken and Grosses Gewächs bottlings, I would advise planning on not touching any of the upper level bottlings for at least a decade and expecting them, even ten years out from the vintage, to still be on the youthful side. Dry wines were not yet at the same high average level of quality back in 2001 that they are today (though there were plenty of very good Trocken wines back then), so we are clearly looking at one of the greatest and probably, longest-lived vintages thus far for the best dry wines of Germany. My gut instinct is that even in 2029 or 2030, most of the GGs and other top dry Riesling bottlings from 2019 will still be quite youthful and only just starting to blossom at that point in their evolutions, so try to exercise some patience and let these superb wines reach their true apogees with extended periods of hibernation in the cellar. It took a lot of hard, hard work on the parts of winegrowers to navigate the challenges of frost, drought, August's heat spike and then rain around harvest time thrown at them by Mother Nature in 2019, but for those who were up to the challenge, they have managed to produce a very large number of simply stunning wines that will rightfully take their place among the most legendary wines of the last twenty years. Given that German wine country has been on quite a hot streak over these last two decades, this is saying an awful lot about the ultimate quality of the very best 2019ers!

Mosel

Weingut Fritz Haag (Brauneberg)

I was very saddened to hear the news of the passing of Wilhelm Haag, long-time proprietor of Weingut Fritz Haag, on December 16, 2020 at the age of eighty-three. Wilhelm Haag was the father of Olivier Haag (current proprietor of the family domaine in Brauneberg) and Thomas Haag, proprietor of Weingut Schloss Lieser. Wilhelm Haag had a long and very illustrious career at the head of the family estate, having taken over for this father in the 1957 vintage, when he was just twenty years of age. At the time, Weingut Fritz Haag was a small, but important estate in the village of Brauneberg; under Wilhelm Haag's direction, the estate grew significantly in size and also prestige, becoming one of the most revered producers in the middle Mosel. The era of the late 1950s and 1960s was one where many winegrowers in the region doubted the future of producing high quality Riesling from the steep slate slopes along the Mosel River, as these could not be farmed mechanically (which was growing exponentially in popularity at that time), and with wine prices low, it was hardly a very remunerative occupation.

But, Wilhelm Haag saw a much brighter future for the Mosel's inimitable expressions of Riesling and was a loud and frequent champion of continuing to focus on the best vineyards and making the highest quality wines possible. He purchased many top parcels of vines in Brauneberg, when his neighbors grew disenchanted with working the steep slopes for little profit, so that over time Weingut Fritz Haag become one of the larger, as well as one of the most important high quality producers on the Mosel. In addition to running his family estate and making the wines here, Wilhelm Haag was also the Director of the Grosser Ring of top Mosel estates within the VDP for fully two decades, running the organization from 1984 until 2004. Wilhelm Haag handed over the reins of Weingut Fritz Haag to his younger son Oliver Haag after the 2004 vintage, but, after his retirement, could be seen always around either the winery here in Brauneberg or at his other son, Thomas Haag's winery of Schloss Lieser across the river. He was one of the great personalities and most talented winegrowers of his generation and his insistence that the Mosel's future lay firmly planted in the steep slate slopes and the Riesling grape have proven to be absolutely true, and much of today's Mosel renaissance can be laid at the doorstep of Wilhelm Haag and a few other top winegrowers of his generation and their collective vision of how the future should look in this bucolic corner of the wine world.



2019 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling AP #19- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2019 Juffer Riesling comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol this year, but the fine print on the back label indicates that this is a Feinherb in the excellent vintage of 2019, so it must carry a

bit over ten grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is simply gorgeous on the nose, offering up scents of pear, apple, hints of the yellow plum to come, beautiful botanicals, salty slate minerality, orange zest, lavender and a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and youthful, with a lovely core, ripe, buried acids, great focus and grip and a very long, minerally and nascently complex finish. Given how expressive the bouquet is, the more closed down palate comes as a bit of a surprise and shows the wine will demand a bit of bottle age to really start to drink with generosity. But, the constituent components here are superb (as this seems to essentially be a GG that did not ferment down to the required level of dryness) and with a bit of bottle age, this wine will drink stunningly well! 2025-2060. **92+**.

2019 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP #24- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2019 Juffer Riesling GG had no difficulties getting under the ten gram per liter threshold, as this wine comes in at thirteen percent octane this year and carries only 2.7 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is beautifully refined aromatically, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, fresh lime, a hint of mint, very, very salty soil tones, incipient notes of beeswax, cress, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a very elegant and seamless profile, a rock solid core, gorgeous transparency and grip, ripe, zesty acids and stunning length on the complex, perfectly balanced finish. This is a young and beautiful wine that deserves a full decade of bottle age to blossom properly, but it is so impeccably balanced that I can imagine people drinking it before its time! 2029-2080. **95**.

2019 Fritz Haag Riesling AP #1- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap)

The 2019 Estate Riesling comes in at eleven percent octane and carries 17 grams per liter of residual sugar, making this a Feinherb (though there is no mention of it on the label). The nose is bright and very expressive, jumping from the glass in a mix of lime, pink grapefruit, a beautiful base of slate, moss, white flowers and a whisper of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a beautiful girdle of acidity, a fine core, impeccable balance and a long, zesty finish. This is beautiful entry level off-dry Riesling from one of the best estates in the middle Mosel. 2012-2040. **90+**.

2019 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap)

The 2019 Juffer Kabinett from Oliver Haag comes in at a svelte 8.5 percent octane, carrying forty-six grams per liter of residual sugar to balance 8.7 grams per liter of acidity. The wine offers up a beautiful aromatic constellation of lime, fresh pineapple, a complex base of slate, discreet Juffer botanicals and a lovely floral topnote redolent of both citrus blossoms and lavender. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and filigreed, with a lovely core and soil salinity, a zesty girdle of acidity and excellent focus and cut on the long and beautifully balanced finish. A lovely Kabinett. 2021-2055. **92**.

2019 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2019 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #5 comes in sporting seventy-five grams per liter of residual sugar and acids of 8.1 grams per liter. Stylistically, it straddles the line between a light Auslese and a Spätlese, but is lovely on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of pear, fresh lime, tangerine, violets, a gorgeous base of slate minerality, a dollop of honeycomb, hints of mossiness and a topnote of tropical fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and succulent, with excellent focus and balance, a lovely tension of acidity and minerality and a long, complex and absolutely delicious finish. This is one of those slightly broader-shouldered Spätlesen that one tucks away in the cellar for a decade and finds it has blossomed into a stunning wine! But, good luck keeping the hands off of it for ten years! 2021-2060. **93**.

2019 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Auslese AP #20- Weingut Fritz Haag

The numbers for the 2019 Juffer Riesling AP #20 from the Haag family are 7.5 percent alcohol, 8.3 grams per liter of acidity and one hundred and five grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is beautifully glazed on the nose, offering up scents of lime, white cherry, honeycomb, fresh mint, lilacs, iris blossoms, slate and a whisper of Juffer mossiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, elegant and complex, with a great core, snappy acids and a long, seamlessly balanced and dream-like finish. This is a very young wine, and though it is very easy to drink it right now, it really deserves ten to fifteen years in the cellar to allow all of its secondary complexity to start to emerge. 2032-2080+. **94.**

2019 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #6- Weingut Fritz Haag

The AP# 6 Auslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard from Oliver Haag is more precise and complex on both the nose and palate than the lovely Juffer Auslese, despite having very similar numbers this year, with 7.5 percent alcohol, eight grams per liter of acidity and one hundred and eight grams per liter of residual sugar. The stunning nose is so beautifully glazed in very clean botrytis, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of lime, pear, fresh pineapple, lovely mossiness, honeycomb, violets, slate minerality and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, vibrant and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core and filigree, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and dancing finish. This is stunning young Auslese! 2032-2085+. **97.**

Weingut Dr. Loosen (Bernkastel)

The range of 2019 Prädikat wines that I tasted from Weingut Dr. Loosen are very, very good indeed. The harvest began here on September 16th of 2019, with the rains of late September slowing down things for a spell and requiring careful selection in the vineyards. The beautiful Indian Summer conditions of the first half of October allowed for the formation of botrytis for the making of both Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese by the estate in this vintage. As readers may recall, the Loosen family owns the very oldest vines in the Ürziger Würzgarten vineyard (up to one hundred and twenty years of age, with a great many centenarians planted in their parcels), but chooses to use the oldest vines here and their other oldest vine parcels for their Grosses Gewächs and Auslese bottlings from their vineyards, so my notes on the 2019 Kabinett and Spätlese below are from the “young vines” here, which are only sixty years of age! As I mentioned last summer, the estate owns 12.5 hectares of very old vines in some of the greatest vineyards of the Middle Mosel, including the Himmelreich and Domprobst in Graach, the Würzgarten in Ürzig, Sonnenuhr in Wehlen, the Treppchen and the Prälat vineyards in Erden. Ernie Loosen’s father and grandfather had been gentlemen farmers here in Bernkastel, with the estate essentially a nice hobby for them, so they never really got around to replanting vines or updating winemaking facilities during their epochs at the head of the family estate, so Weingut Dr. Loosen has an embarrassment of riches of very, very old, ungrafted vines in these great terroirs. As Ernie Loosen likes to give his dry Rieslings a properly relaxed élevage in the cellars, the range of 2019ers that I was able to taste for this report were a broad selection of the estate’s Kabinetten and Spätlesen from this vintage. As one would expect, they were all excellent in quality, though I do have to question taking superb Kabinetten from these old vines and great vineyards and bottling them universally under screwcaps, as these very young wines were already showing nascent signs of reduction and had to be decanted to blossom properly. I know that a great many purchasers of the Dr. Loosen 2019 Kabinetten are likely to drink them within a short time of purchasing (so that the closure choice will hardly make a difference to them), but

these wines have the balance and structure to age forty years or more and it seems a shame to me to saddle them with a closure whose ability to navigate several decades in the cellar without compromising the evolution of the wine in bottle is hardly self-evident, particularly when the wines are already showing early reductive tendencies. Be that as it may, the seven 2019ers I tasted from Ernie Loosen were all lovely examples of the vintage, and I am sure this is only the tip of the iceberg of successful 2019ers still resting comfortably in the cellars in Bernkastel!



The tasting room at Weingut Dr. Loosen in Bernkastel, during a busy day of Mythos Mosel back in 2019.

2019 Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Kabinett AP# 12- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

Ernie Loosen's 2019 Kabinett from the Bernkasteler Lay vineyard is a pretty wine on both the nose and palate, but takes a little coaxing to get it to blossom when it is first opened. With some time in decanter, it offers up scents of apple, a hint of white cherry, salty slate minerality, bee pollen and a delicate topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and nicely filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, zesty acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. The wine comes in at 8.5 percent alcohol, with 8.4 grams of acidity and 47.6 grams of residual sugar. A lovely Kabinett from sixty year-old vines that seriously deserves a natural cork! 2021-2045+. **91+**.

2019 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett AP# 29- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

The Weingut Loosen 2019 Treppchen Kabinett is a touch higher in octane than the Lay, coming in at 9.5 percent alcohol, but with fairly similar numbers for acidity and sugar at 8.2 grams and 43.8 grams per liter respectively. The parcel selected for Kabinett here also average sixty years of age (only middle-aged by the insanely old vine standards of the Loosen family, but

certainly not young vines!). The wine has a fair bit of CO2 when first opened and it too benefits from some time in decanter, but eventually delivers a beautiful bouquet of pear, white cherry, a whisper of strawberry, a complex base of slate, violets, bee pollen and elder flower. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and complex, with lovely interplay of slate, fruit and acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. This is already a touch reductive on the nose, so be sure to decant it for fifteen to twenty minutes prior to serving, just to let it open up properly (which it most assuredly does). 2021-2050. **92.**

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett AP# 4- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

The 2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett AP# 4 from Dr. Loosen is simply gorgeous on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of strawberries, lime blossoms, pear, beautiful spice tones, a superb base of minerality, bee pollen and a topnote of dusty rose. On the palate the wine is zesty, medium-full, complex and filigreed, with superb mineral drive, pristine fruit tones, snappy acids and a long, perfectly balanced and focused finish. The touch of CO2 at the start needs to be swirled away to really let the palate shine, but this is a simply beautiful bottle of Kabinett. Nine percent alcohol, 8.1 grams of acidity and 41.7 grams per liter of residual sugar, for those keeping score at home. 2021-2050. **94.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP# 3- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

The 2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett from Ernie Loosen comes in at 8.5 percent octane, with nine grams per liter of acidity and 43.1 grams of residual sugar this year. The wine is quite a bit more primary on the nose than these other Kabinetten, offering up a youthful blend of pear, apple, salty slate, vanilla, lilacs and fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, racy and focused, with good intensity of flavor, a lovely girdle of acidity, fine balance and a long, nascently complex finish. This just needs a bit of bottle age to blossom, but will be just lovely in due course. 2026-2050+. **93.**

2019 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese AP# 33- Weingut Dr. Loosen

The 2019 Erdener Treppchen Spätlese AP# 33 from Weingut Dr. Loosen is a beautiful wine in the making, with great lift from its 9.1 grams per liter of acidity. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of pear, white cherry, bee pollen, red slate, lime zest, elder flowers, iris blossoms and lilacs. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and filigreed, with excellent focus and balance, impressive youthful complexity and a long, dancing and electric finish. This wine comes in at 8.5 percent octane this year and was balanced off at 61.7 grams per liter of residual sugar. It is still a young wine and really deserves at least six or seven years in the cellar to step out completely from behind its lovely wall of acidity. 2027-2065. **93.**

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese AP# 34- Weingut Dr. Loosen

Ernie Loosen's 2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Spätlese AP# 34 is a beautiful synthesis of this inimitable *terroir* and a great vintage. The bouquet soars from the glass in a mix of strawberries, green apple, white cherry, a hint of honeycomb, a beautiful base of salty minerality, spices, lilacs and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and delicately styled, with a lovely core, an excellent spine of acidity and impeccable focus and grip on the long, complex and dancing finish. Technical specs on this wine are eight percent alcohol, 8.9 grams of acid and 64.6 grams of sugar. This is more filigreed out of the blocks than the Treppchen Spätlese and is going to be hard not to drink in the first blush of youth, though it will last every bit as long as the Treppchen! 2021-2060. **93+.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP# 31- Weingut Dr. Loosen

The 2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP# 31 from Weingut Dr. Loosen is a touch lower in acidity than these two other Spätlesen, coming in with 7.6 grams per liter, to go along

with 65.9 grams per liter of residual sugar and eight percent alcohol. The wine is quite a bit more expressive on both the nose and palate than the Kabinett from this vineyard, offering up a classic and utterly captivating bouquet of pear, apple, white cherry, vanilla bean, honeycomb, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and filigreed, with a succulent core, beautiful slate undertow and grip, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and wide open finish. This is so full of early charm that I have a very hard time imagining any bottles surviving past their tenth birthdays, though the wine is impeccably balanced and has the capacity to age for decades. But, good luck keeping your hands off of this charmer! 2021-2060. **93+**.



Saar

Weingut Goltz-Zilliken (Saarburg)

The Zilliken family's vineyards were among those that suffered from spring frosts in 2019, with their holdings in the lower sections of the Rausch vineyard in Saarburg the most seriously affected. The heat spike in early August caused its share of sunburned bunches in the vines here, but the Zillikens' harvest team has been together for many years and rigorous sorting prior to picking is a pretty regular feature, so none of the damaged bunches made it out of the vineyards. Due to both the tight selection and the crop losses from the spring frosts, yields were fairly low, and consequently, not all of the customary bottlings from the estate were produced in 2019. The short crop necessitated that there will be no Ayler Kupp or Bockstein Grosses

Gewächs bottlings in 2019, as well as the estate's beautiful Diabas cuvée. As Dorothee Zilliken notes "the grapes were simply not dried up and shriveled enough for making high-end noble sweet wines", so there are also not any Prädikat wines above Auslese this year from the Zillikens. There will be both an auction Spätlese and Auslese from 2019, but obviously, I did not have the opportunity to taste samples of those wines, which were available solely in Trier in September of 2020. As Dorothee notes, the 2019ers are "open for business and superbly animating", with a structural chassis that reminds her of the 1990 vintage here at Weingut Geltz-Zilliken. As the notes below will attest, I was very impressed with the entire lineup from the Zilliken family in 2019, but special mention should go to the Rausch Grosses Gewächs this year, which may well be the very finest dry wine I have yet tasted from this beautiful vineyard. The 2019 Rausch Kabinett is also an absolute masterpiece! I am very sorry not to have notes on the two 2019 Auction bottlings from the Zilliken family, as those are usually amongst my very favorite wines of each vintage, and given how good the "regular" Rausch Spätlese and Auslese are this year, I can only imagine what the next step up with the auction versions must taste like!

2019 Rausch Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP# 11- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken

The 2019 Grosses Gewächs from the Rausch vineyard is a beautiful example of the vintage. The wine comes in at twelve percent alcohol, with 8.5 grams per liter of residual sugar and acidity of 7.6 grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, precise and absolutely defined today by its underlying slate minerality, as it offers up scents of lime, sweet grapefruit, a very salty base of slate (from the high levels of dry extract), citrus peel, dried flowers and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a great core, electric acidity, laser-like focus and a very long, nascently complex and mineral-infused finish. This is a long distance runner that will need some time alone in the cellar to properly blossom. 2029-2065. **96.**

2019 Butterfly Riesling AP# 10- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken (screwcap)

The 2019 Butterfly bottling from Dorothee and Hanno Zilliken is another beautifully balanced, off dry Riesling that is so versatile at the table. The wine comes in at eleven percent alcohol this year, carrying 18.7 grams per liter of residual sugar and just under seven grams of acidity. The wine again shows a lovely vein of salinity from the low yields of 2019, offering up a complex nose of pear, a touch of white cherry, a lovely base of slate, violets and a touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and medium-full, with lovely focus and balance, good mineral undertow and a long, succulent and filigreed finish. Lovely entry level juice. 2021-2028. **89.**

2019 Estate Riesling AP# 8- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken (screwcap)

The Zilliken family's 2019 Estate Riesling this year enjoys a lovely veneer of ripeness, as this nine percent octane wine carries 41.5 grams per liter of residual sugar to balance out its 7.3 grams of Saar acidity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very stylish blend of apple, a touch of pineapple, white cherry, wild yeasts, spring flowers, citrus peel and a refined base of slate. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and bouncy, with Spätlese level sweetness, a lovely vest of acidity and impressive salty minerality driving the long finish. This is a very serious example of Estate Riesling and a great value! 2021-2045. **90.**

2019 Saarburg Riesling Kabinett AP# 7 - Weingut Geltz-Zilliken

The 2019 Saarburg Riesling Kabinett AP# 7 from Weingut Geltz-Zilliken is a beautifully filigreed example of the vintage, with more precision and early complexity on the nose than in the very good Estate Riesling bottling this year. The wine is 8.5 percent alcohol, carries 7.3 grams of acidity and is countered by 50.7 grams of residual sugar. The nose delivers a

constellation of fresh pineapple, pear, very salty slate minerality, apple blossoms, bee pollen, wild yeasts and a touch of lilac in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and properly delicate in profile, with lovely intensity of flavor, zesty acids and a long, complex and elegant finish. Lovely Kabinett. 2021-2055. **92.**

2019 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett AP# 5 - Weingut Geltz-Zilliken

The Rausch 2019 Kabinett from Dorothee Zilliken shares quite similar numbers to the Saarburg Kabinett, with 8.5 percent alcohol, 7.4 grams of acidity and 59.8 grams per liter of residual sugar. However, the precision of the Rausch really shine through here on the nose, which soars from the glass in a blaze of lemon, pink grapefruit, a touch of cress, salty minerality, white flowers, incipient smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and medium-bodied, with great mineral drive and cut, a lovely core, laser-like focus and a very, very long, complex, filigreed and dancing finish. This is an utterly brilliant young Kabinett! 2021-2065. **96.**

2019 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese AP# 4 - Weingut Geltz-Zilliken

The Zilliken family's 2019 Spätlese from the Rausch vineyard is another truly beautiful young wine. The bouquet offers up an irresistible blend of fresh pineapple, pear, bee pollen, a beautiful base of slate, tropical fruit blossoms, a dollop of honeycomb and a salty topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, medium-full and loaded with the energy of golden berries, with snappy acids, a lovely glaze of sweetness, impeccable focus and balance and a very, very long, complex and vibrant finish. This carries a fair bit of residual sugar at 86.4 grams per liter, coupled with acidity of 6.9 grams per liter, so the overall impression right now is a touch generous and I would be inclined to give this three to five years in the cellar before drinking it, just to let some of the puppy fat recede and the underlying structure to come to the fore. It is a lovely wine. 2024-2065. **93.**

2019 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese AP# 3 - Weingut Geltz-Zilliken

The 2019 Rausch Auslese AP #3 from Dorothee Zilliken is utterly refined on both the nose and palate this year. The wine is eight percent alcohol, snaps in with 6.6 grams per liter of acidity and sports 97.8 grams per liter of residual sugar. The nose delivers a gently glazed aromatic constellation of pineapple, a hint of mango, white cherry, wild yeasts, very salty minerality, orange blossoms, a touch of honeycomb and a discreet topnote of Rausch smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and resplendent in clean botrytis, with a great core, electric acids, great focus and grip and a very long, complex and dancing finish. This is a brilliant young Auslese! 2032-2100. **95+.**

Ruwer

Maximin Grünhaus (Mertesdorf)

The Maximin Grünhaus estate was one of the producers hit hardest by the spring frosts, with yields ultimately ending up at least fifty percent down from the freeze, with crop loads barely topping twenty hectoliters per hectare in the 2019 vintage. Due to the very short crop, the lineup here is quite truncated in comparison to a typical year, with no Alte Reben or Feinherb bottlings, no Superior from the Herrenberg and not even a Spätlese this year from this lovely vineyard. With such a short crop in 2019, I only tasted a small sampling of the wines produced here this year (quite understandably, I might add) and found them quite captivating. Both the 2019 Herrenberg Kabinett and the Abtsberg Spätlese seemed a touch richer in style this year than is customary, which I attributed to the very short crop levels and simply not having enough juice to split cuvées into more Prädikat levels, so that there would be sufficient quantity of a

given bottling to make it commercially viable. Despite a touch more generosity than usual, both wines were delicious. Like many other top estates in Germany, I look forward to the day when screwcaps might not be used here anymore, as I do not like how they impact the palate texture of the wines they seal, nor how the impinge upon the finishes. When the wines are still this young, this can be undone by some decanting prior to tasting, but honestly, what is the point of using a closure that requires decanting of the wines this young to offset early signs of reduction? Agglomerated corks seem like a much better option to me, as they are equally cost-effective to screwcaps, without the same potential for early reduction. So, I would love to see these beautiful wines closed under anything but screwcaps someday. But, I am not holding my breath...



The beautiful Maximin Grünhaus estate with the rhododendron in full bloom.

2019 Pinot Blanc AP# 1- Maximin Grünhäus (screwcap)

The 2019 Pinot Blanc from Maximin Grünhäus comes in this year at 12.5 percent alcohol and carries a modest 7.8 grams of residual sugar. The wine is beautifully ripe and expressive on the nose, offering up scents of nectarine, tart orange, a pretty base of slate, dried flowers, gentle smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This wine is already a touch pinched on the backend from the screwcap, but decanting it for fifteen minutes allows it to open up nicely. It is a very stylish example of Pinot Blanc, that to my palate, really is serious enough to deserve a natural cork for its closure! 2021-2040. **90.**

2019 Riesling Monopol AP# 15- Maximin Grünhäus (screwcap)

The 2019 vintage of Monopol from Maximin Grünhaus comes in this year with twelve percent alcohol, 7.3 grams per liter of residual sugar and 7.3 grams of acidity. It is produced from younger vines in both the Herrenberg and Abtsberg, so its pedigree is well established. The bouquet is pure and already complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, sweet grapefruit, lovely Herrenberg-induced botanicals (cress and mint), a fine base of slate, a touch of orange peel, a nice dollop of wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, youthful and quite dry finish. This bottling is usually at Feinherb levels of sweetness, but in 2019, this is really a Trocken and quite dry in profile. Like the Pinot Blanc, this is a tad tensile on the backend from its closure and is best induced into its finest drinking with a short sojourn in decanter prior to serving. Good juice. 2021-2045. **91+**.

2019 Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett AP# 6- Maximin Grünhäus

The 2019 Kabinett AP# 6 from the Herrenberg vineyard comes in sporting technical numbers of 7.5 percent alcohol, 8.1 grams per liter of acidity and residual sugar of 75.4 grams per liter. The bouquet is lovely, delivering a refined combination of lime, tart pear, tangerine, a hint of honeycomb, fruit blossoms, wild yeasts, a whisper of mossiness and a very refined base of red slate. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids, laser-like focus and a long, beautifully balanced and moderately sweet finish. This seems a bit more like Spätlese in weight and personality to my palate, but it is a flat out delicious wine and though it might not be quite as delicate as old school Kabinett partisans might prefer, it is beautifully made. 2021-2060. **93**.

2019 Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP# 5- Maximin Grünhäus

The 2019 Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP# 5 from Maximin Grünhäus also comes in at a svelte 7.5 percent alcohol. It is a bit lower in acidity than the Herrenberg Kabinett, carrying 7.5 grams per liter and is balanced by 87.5 grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet is precise and youthfully complex, offering up scents of pear, yellow plum, very salty, slate minerality, wild yeasts, discreet mossiness, a touch of honeycomb, citrus peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with a superb core of fruit, good mineral undertow, a fine vein of acidity and lovely focus and balance on the long and generous finish. This is another very classy wine that seems caught a bit between Spätlese and Auslese in style this year, so it is a touch richer than is customary for a Spätlese from the Abtsberg, but a very lovely wine all the same. It seems quite accessible out of the blocks, but should have no difficulty aging long and gracefully. 2021-2060. **92**.

Rheingau**Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn (Oestrich)**

This historic family estate in Oestrich is currently run by the husband and wife team of Peter Bernhard and Viktoria Kühn, with ample assistance from Peter Bernhard's sister, Sandra Kühn. The Kühn family have run this Rheingau estate now for ten generations, dating back more than two hundred and thirty years. Since 2004, Peter Bernhard has farmed his vineyards biodynamically and the estate is now Demeter certified. Fermentations take place in both large oak fuders and in stainless steel- always with indigenous yeasts, and the Kühn family has moved to giving their wines longer elevation in recent years to allow them to be released into the market when they are starting to recover from their bottling, so that now single vineyard wines are fully three years out from their vintage before they are released into the market. As I do not get to the

Rheingau too often on my annual trips to Germany, I had never previously tasted any of the wines from the estate and I was very happily surprised to open the first sample and discover just how good these wines are! The current releases are from the 2018 and 2017 vintages, and as one will see from the tasting notes below, the quality here is consistently excellent. The dry Riesling bottlings were exceptional and I also very much enjoyed the 2018 Kabinett and Spätlese from the Lenchen vineyard in Oestrich. These two Prädikat wines were a touch higher in octane than I expected (but 2018 was plenty warm during the growing season), but also light on their feet, filigreed and beautifully balanced and I quickly became accustomed to their style. As I said, I do not get to the Rheingau too often these days, so perhaps ten percent Kabinett and nine percent alcohol Spätlese may simply be standard these days here- particularly in our age of climate change. In any case, both wines were beautifully made and I had no difficulties whatsoever finishing the bottles with dinner after having written my notes on them!



2018 Jacobus Riesling Trocken AP# 20- Weingut Peter Jakob Kühn (screwcap)

The Jacobus bottling from Peter Bernhard Kühn is his Estate Riesling Trocken, made from production from several different vineyard parcels, all grown on slate. His 2018 Jacobus comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely bouquet of tart orange, pink grapefruit, a beautiful base of slate, woodland flowers and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, good soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the finish. There is just a whisper of “pinching”

from the screwcap on the backend here now, so decant this wine for maximum enjoyment. It is a very good Estate Trocken. 2021-2040+? **90.**

2018 Quarzit Oestricher Riesling Trocken AP #22- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The Quarzit bottling from Peter Bernhard Kühn comes from a few parcels in the village of Oestrich, with the soils here a combination of gravel, loess-loam and quartzite. There are some young vines included in this cuvée, but the oldest vines in the blend are closing in on sixty years of age, so this is no young vine bottling. The 2018 Quarzit comes in at an even twelve percent octane and delivers a beautiful bouquet of apple, breadfruit, a complex base of soil tones, very delicate floral tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, plenty of minerality, excellent acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is fine, fine juice. 2021-2055. **92.**

2018 Rheinschiefer Hallgarten Riesling Trocken AP# 2- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The grapes used in the Rheinschiefer cuvée from Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn all come from the Hallgarten vineyard and are planted on pure slate. The wine is fermented in the customary combination of stainless steel and old oak *fuders* and the 2018 is again a very svelte twelve percent alcohol. It delivers a beautiful aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of pear, bee pollen, straw, white flowers, a lovely base of slate and an ephemeral and totally captivating topnote of “woody” notes that are as much botanical as floral. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and racy, with a full-bodied and seamlessly balanced format, a fine core, excellent mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is still a young wine and needs some time in the cellar to unwind, but it will be superb once it is truly ready to drink. 2025-2055+. **93+.**

2018 Oestricher Klosterberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The 2018 Oestricher Klosterberg Trocken from Peter Bernhard Kühn is a touch riper in personality than the lovely Rheinschiefer bottling, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a very expressive bouquet of nectarine, sweet breadfruit, a hint of fresh pineapple, lilacs, slate soil tones, almond blossoms, a touch of citrus peel and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fairly broad shoulders, good focus and grip and a long, complex and relatively powerful finish. This is a very well-made wine, but it is a touch muscular today for my tastes and I would be inclined to give it some time in the cellar to mellow out a bit more, despite the fact that it is certainly quite open at age three and is already drinking with generosity. I just have a sense that there is more here below the surface of puppy fat and more complexity with emerge with a bit of cellaring. Good juice. 2023-2050. **91.**

2018 Hallgarten Riesling Trocken- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The 2018 Hallgarten Riesling Trocken from the Kühn family also comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol this year, but the wine is a bit more reserved in personality and already shows more precision than the Klosterberg version. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, tangerine, elderflowers, a fine base of slate, wheat chaff, wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows an inner structural tension currently missing in the more generous Klosterberg, with a superb core and mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making, but it deserves some time in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders. 2026-2065. **94.**

2018 Hallgarten Hendelberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The Kühn family’s parcel of vines in the Hendelberg section of the Hallgarten average forty-six years of age. This wine comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol as well in the 2018 vintage and

delivers a superb young nose of lemon, white peach, breadfruit, bee pollen, spring flowers, a lovely base of slate, just a whisper of sweet nuttiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and classy, with a fine girdle of acidity, a lovely core, good mineral drive and bounce and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is excellent juice in the making and will be a very, very elegant example of Rheingauer Trocken when it reaches its apogee. 2026-2065. **94.**

2018 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett AP# 10- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The 2018 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett from Weingut Kühn is fairly high in octane for this Prädikat, coming in at ten percent alcohol (but this is the dilemma of global warming- does one ferment the wine a touch drier or leave more residual sugar in the wine and end up with a sweeter-styled Kabinett). It offers up a lovely nose of apple, sweet breadfruit, lilacs, iris blossoms, a lovely base of soil, bee pollen and a hint of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and filigreed, with a lovely tug between the fruit, minerality and acidity. The finish is long, beautifully balanced and really works as a Kabinett, despite the slightly higher alcohol that one would normally expect from this Prädikat level. 2021-2050. **93+.**

2018 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Spätlese AP# 11- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

The 2018 Lenchen Spätlese from Peter Bernhard Kühn is outstanding wine. It is again, a touch higher in octane than one might expect, coming in at nine percent, but in the warm vintage of 2018 in the Rheingau, this is probably about average. The wine is beautifully refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, tangerine, a hint of lychee nut, salty soil tones, violets, bee pollen and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good acids and bounce, lovely balance and a long, vibrant finish. This is a bit weightier than a classic Spätlese, but I love that it still retains the lightness of step of a classic Spätlese, even at a slightly larger scale. The wine is flat out delicious! 2021-2055. **93.**

2017 Doosberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP# 8- Weingut Peter Jacob Kühn

Peter Bernhard Kühn's parcel of vines in the Doosberg vineyard are now forty-five years of age. The soils include some quartzite here, to go along with the classical clay-loess-loam combination of many vineyards here in the Rheingau. The 2017 Doosberg comes in at 12.5 percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of apple, sweet grapefruit, orange peel, dried flowers, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, lemongrass and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, snappy acids and a long, impeccably balanced and very promising finish. This is a proper GG and still needs bottle age to fully blossom, but its future is going to be outstanding! 2027-2060. **94.**

Weingut Robert Weil (Kiedrich)

Weingut Robert Weill was founded in 1875, so this is one of the “new kids on the block” by Rheingau standards! The estate’s founder, Robert Weil, was a university professor by training and was still teaching German at the Sorbonne in Paris when he purchased his first parcel of vines in Kiedrich in 1867. With the prospects of war between France and Prussia on the horizon in 1870, he returned to his native land and was able to establish Weingut Robert Weil a few years after the Franco-Prussian War ended, after purchasing the cellars and vineyards of another Kiedrich winery in 1873 and opening his eponymous estate in 1875. Today, the family

winery is run by his great grandson, Wilhelm Weil, who now farms fully one hundred hectares of vines in this sector of the Rheingau, planted exclusively to Riesling. During the drought summer of 2019 the winery's vineyards in Kiedrich, based in fractured stone intermixed with loess and loam, managed to provide enough subterranean water to keep the vines progressing nicely, avoiding the hydric stress that was sometimes felt elsewhere in Germany. Having avoided any frost damage early on, Weingut Weil was able to harvest a crop in beautiful condition in 2019 and only a few percentage points lower in quantity than in a "normal" year.

2019 Kiedricher Riesling Trocken AP# 32- Weingut Robert Weil (screwcap)

The Kiedricher Trocken is made from younger vines in the estate's three top vineyards in the village. It comes in this year at 12.5 percent alcohol, sports 7.5 grams of acidity and is balanced with 6.2 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine delivers a fine young nose of grapefruit, tart orange, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of soil tones and a Chablis-like topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a good core, lovely acidity and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a lovely *villages* level bottling. 2021-2045. **90+**.

2019 Kiedricher Turmberg Riesling Trocken AP# 47- Weingut Robert Weil

The Turmberg vineyard is a *monopole* for the estate. It has relatively thin topsoils over its slate substrata, making for a racy rendition of Rheingauer Riesling. The 2019 Turmberg Trocken is thirteen percent octane, with 4.9 grams per liter of sugar and 7.5 grams of acid. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, tart orange, lemongrass, a beautiful base of slate, raw almond, elder flowers and a whisper of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a beautiful core of fruit, outstanding mineral undertow and cut, excellent focus and a long, complex and very, very classy finish. For a thirteen percent Riesling, this has marvelous lightness of step on the palate and beautiful, flowing minerality. This is a beautiful Trocken that is quite accessible out of the blocks, but really still a puppy, and more complexity will certainly emerge with further bottle age! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2060. **94**.

2019 Riesling Tradition AP# 16- Weingut Robert Weil (screwcap)

Weingut Weil's Riesling Tradition bottling hails from estate vineyards in Kiedrich and Eltville. The wine is done in a Feinherb style, with the 2019 Tradition coming in at 10.5 percent alcohol, carrying 27.6 grams per liter of residual sugar and 8.2 grams per liter of acidity. The nose delivers a lovely blend of peach, apple, spring flowers, a good base of soil and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, juicy and complex, with a lovely girdle of acidity, fine focus and a long, very tasty finish. The closure here is impinging on the wine just a touch already, so give it fifteen minutes or so in decanter to let it blossom properly. It is a lovely wine. 2021-2041+. **90**.

2019 Riesling Kabinett AP# 19- Weingut Robert Weil (screwcap)

The Estate Riesling Kabinett also hails from the Weil family's vineyards in Kiedrich and Eltville, but in this bottling, some parcels from their top vineyards are also included. The 2019 Kabinett is racy, coming in with 9.4 grams per liter of acidity, balanced with 38.6 grams of sugar and ended up at ten percent alcohol. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of apple, white cherry, bee pollen, spring flowers, lemon peel and a hint of straw. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and fairly powerful in style for Kabinett, with a lovely core, impressive mineral undertow, snappy acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a fascinating version of Kabinett, as its ten percent alcohol makes it a bigger wine than most

traditional Kabinetten, but with its high acidity and lovely interplay of soil and fruit, the balance works beautifully. Not a classic example, but a delicious wine in its slightly more powerful guise. 2021-2055. **91+**.

2019 Riesling Spätlese AP# 20- Weingut Robert Weil (screwcap)

The 2019 Estate Spätlese from Wilhelm Weil comes in at 9.5 percent octane, with 9.2 grams of acidity balanced by 51.2 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is showing a bit of reduction on the nose from the screwcap and really demands some decanting time before it opens up, but eventually offers up scents of fresh pineapple, nectarine, salty minerality, citrus blossoms and lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and nicely filigreed, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, excellent acids and fine focus on the long, lifted and complex finish. This is quite a classically-proportioned Spätlese and has a great spine of acidity to carry it long in the cellar (if the screwcap does not get in the way). Good juice. 2021-2060. **92.**

2019 Kiedricher Gräfenberg Riesling Spätlese AP# 25- Weingut Robert Weil

The 2019 Gräfenberg Spätlese from Weingut Weil is a lovely wine, but really done in a clean, non-botrytized Auslese style, as it carries fully 74.7 grams of residual sugar to balance off its snappy acidity level of 9.9 grams per liter. The alcohol is nine percent in this extroverted 2019ers, which offers up a very expressive bouquet of pineapple, mango, tangerine, honeycomb, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of tropical fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and electric, with a beautiful core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, blazing acidity and a long, laser-like and complex finish. The balance here works very well, but it reminds me of some of the 2005ers I tasted when they were young, with sugars and acids both whipped up into a high-wire act on the palate. This is an excellent wine, but think of it as a top flight Auslese, rather than a Spätlese. With its racy acidity, it should prove to be almost timeless and I would love to drink a bottle when it hits the ripe old age of fifty, as I am sure it will still be stunning! 2029-2100. **93.**

2019 Kiedricher Gräfenberg Riesling Auslese AP# 26 - Weingut Robert Weil

I did not have the technical sheet for the 2019 Gräfenberg Auslese from Weingut Weil, but it is a botrytized beauty with plenty of depth and complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of mango, sweet peach, pineapple, a nice touch of salty soil tones, honeycomb, orange blossoms and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a dreamy core of fruit, superb acidity and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is not particularly different in profile from the Gräfenberg Spätlese, but it is a far more subtle, seamlessly balanced wine. 2027-2100. **95.**

Rheinpfalz

Weingut Villa Wolf (Dr. Loosen)

Ernie Loosen purchased the J. L. Wolf estate in Wachenheim in 1996 and relaunched the winery under the Weingut Villa Wolf name. This property is designated to produce entry level bottlings from the Pfalz and the range of 2018ers that I tasted last year were very well-made and offered up excellent values, so I was very much looking forward to seeing how this estate had done in the even better vintage of 2019. The estate has been farmed organically since 2012 and has just begun the process for certification in the coming years. Yields were down forty percent here in 2019 from the previous year, with loose-clustered bunches and smaller berries making for a higher skin to juice ratio and great extract in the wines, but less quantity. The 2019ers that I tasted from the estate are a good follow-up to the 2018ers here. They are made to be good value wines and drink well early, which they most assuredly will do. As they are lower priced

wines, many are sealed under screwcaps, which is not to their benefit to my palate, but such is the world we live in now. The late-released 2013 Forster Pechstein Riesling Trocken is in another league altogether, as this is a far more ambitious wine that is most impressive and a classic example of Pfalz Riesling Trocken entering its prime of peak drinkability.



2019 Pinot Blanc AP# 11- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The 2019 Villa Wolf Pinot Blanc comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol in this vintage, carrying 8.8 grams per liter of residual sugar to balance its seven grams per liter of acidity. The wine offers up a pretty nose of nectarine, apple, fruit blossoms, a hint of straw and a nice dollop of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and loaded with personality, with good acids, fine focus and a long, succulent finish. The backend shows just a touch of pinching from the screwcap when first opened, but with some aeration, it blossoms beautifully. This is high quality pinot blanc and a good value. 2021-2030. **89.**

2019 Pinot Gris AP# 12- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

Weingut Villa Wolf's 2019 Pinot Gris also comes in at 12.5 percent octane this year. The wine is fermented in a combination of older *fuder*, cement tanks and stainless steel, and the 2019 version has 6.4 grams per liter of acidity and 7.9 grams of residual sugar this year. It is nicely floral on the nose, offering up notes of white peach, apple, gently musky spring flowers and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely concentrated at the core, with zesty acids, fine focus and a long, tasty finish. This too is just a touch clamped down

on the backend when first opened, but comes out of its shell with fifteen minutes in decanter. Good juice. 2021-2028. **88.**

2019 Gewürztraminer AP# 7- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The Gewürztraminer from Weingut Villa Wolf is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks and does not go through malolactic fermentation. The 2019 version's stats are twelve percent alcohol, eighteen grams per liter of residual sugar and 5.9 grams per liter of acidity. The bouquet is precise and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, rosewater, lychee nut, a nice foundation of minerality and a topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and carries Spätlese level sweetness, with sound framing acids and a long, juicy and inviting finish. This is very easy-drinking right out of the blocks and quite a crowd pleaser, though a touch soft, so drinking on the early side seems like it will be rewarded. 2021-2026+. **88.**

2019 Riesling Dry AP# 3- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The 2019 Villa Wolf Dry Riesling comes in at eleven percent alcohol, sports 8.6 grams per liter of residual sugar to balance its 7.5 grams per liter of acidity. The wine is a touch more reductive on the nose due to its screwcap than the wines above, so decanting is *de rigueur* to help this wine open up. With coaxing, it blossoms to offer up scents of apple, white peach, salty soil tones, elder flowers and a touch of lavender. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and succulent on the attack, with a good core, fairly gentle acids and a long, complex and tasty finish. This is not the most structured Riesling, but it has depth and personality. 2021-2035. **89.**

2019 Riesling AP# 16- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The 2019 Estate Riesling bottling from Villa Wolf comes in at eleven percent octane, and carries 23.8 grams per liter of residual sugar to buffer its 6.9 grams per liter of acidity. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel. It delivers a bouquet of tart orange, white cherry, elder flowers, a bit of salty soil tones and a hint of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is fullish, succulent and easy drinking, with a nice touch of sweetness, good mineral undertow, sound acids and a long, bouncy finish. This is made for early enjoyment and it certainly delivers. It is not particularly complex on the nose right now, but delivers the goods on the palate and is quite delicious! 2021-2035. **89+.**

2018 Pinot Noir AP# 34- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

Villa Wolf's 2018 pinot noir comes in at 13.5 percent octane in this nicely ripe vintage. The grapes are completely de-stemmed for this bottling, with the wine fermented in stainless steel and then half of the cuvée aged in French oak barrels (thirty percent new) and half doing its *elevage* solely in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 offers up a youthful and slightly reductive nose that needs some decanting time to blossom, but eventually offers up scents of black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a good base of soil, a dollop of herb tones and just a hint of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a good core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the finish. I do not love the backend texture here from the screwcap, as the wine is already quite pinched. The raw materials here are very good, but this wine is crying out desperately to be bottled under a natural cork, so as not to lose that magical texture of pinot noir! 2023-2040. **86** (with 90 point potential under a proper cork).

2013 Forster Pechstein Riesling Trocken "Library Release" AP# 10-14- Weingut Villa Wolf

Villa Wolf's 2013 Forster Pechstein Riesling Trocken comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and complex bouquet of sweet grapefruit, tart orange, plenty of smokiness, lemongrass, a complex base of soil tones, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of rosemary. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, fine focus and grip, sound acids and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is a very good bottle and it is a real treat to see it just hitting the market now, as it enters its plateau of peak maturity. 2021-2040. **93.**

2013 Wachenheimer Belz Riesling Trocken AP# 9-14- Weingut Villa Wolf

The 2013 Wachenheimer Belz Riesling Trocken from Villa Wolf is a touch riper than the Pechstein in this vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane. It delivers a fine bouquet of tangerine, rosemary, sweet grapefruit, a hint of petrol, a fine base of soil tones, lemongrass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the poised and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2021-2035+. **92.**



Rheinhessen

Weingut Wittmann (Westhofen)

As I mentioned in my notes on the 2018ers here last summer, Weingut Wittmann (the other star estate in the Hügelland) started farming their vineyards organically in 1990 and moved onto biodynamics in all of their parcels beginning in 2004. Philipp Wittmann has been in charge of the family estate for many years now (taking over from his father Günter, who was the family member who made the move to organic farming here all the way back in 1990), which now comprises twenty-five hectares of vineyard holdings. These include superb holdings in some

of the most famous grand crus in the Hügelland, including 5.43 hectares in the fabled Morstein vineyard (with fully three hectares in the filet section of the vineyard from which they produce their Grosse Gewächs bottling here), 2.27 hectares in the Kirchspiel, two hectares in the Brunnenhäuschen (the official name for the Abtserde vineyard for those Klaus-Peter Keller fans out there) and two hectares in the Aulerde vineyard. In addition to the beautiful panoply of vineyard holdings in the Hügelland, the Wittmann family has also purchased some parcels in the Roter Hang section of Nierstein in 2014, from which they produce a beautiful bottling of Niersteiner Trocken (which I particularly liked in the 2018 vintage, but did not taste any 2019ers from these vines). The wines are fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts in neutral oak vats and raised in older fuders. I have been very slow to start to taste the Wittmann family's wines with regularity, but though I am late to the party, I fully recognize just how beautiful these wines are and will try to make up for lost time by visiting them with regularity once the ways of the world lie open once again. This entire range of 2019ers is outstanding, but they are a far more structured collection than the 2018ers were a year ago and all will need at least a few years of bottle age before they start to emerge behind their lovely acidities. The more seriously structured and outstanding 2019 Grosses Gewächs bottlings are serious long-distance runners and will need at least a decade to start to blossom. But, once they are ready to drink, they will be among the greatest dry Rieslings produced in all of Germany in this great vintage!

2019 Estate Riesling Trocken AP# 6- Weingut Wittmann (screwcap)

The Estate Riesling Trocken hails all from vineyards in the town of Westhofen. The wine spent ten months *elevage* in older *fuders* prior to bottling and comes in at twelve percent octane this year, with 5.4 grams per liter of residual sugar and extremely zesty acidity of 8.4 grams per liter. The wine offers up a beautiful notes of tart orange, apple, wild yeasts, limestone soil tones, a touch of citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, bouncy acids and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This wine is quite expressive on the nose, but a touch pinched on the backend, so decant it fifteen minutes before serving, just to let it open up properly. 2021-2040. **89.**

2019 Westhofener Riesling Trocken AP# 14- Weingut Wittmann

The 2019 Westhofener Riesling Trocken AP# 14 from Weingut Wittmann is made entirely from younger vine fruit (but, still at least fifteen- plus years of age) from the two grand cru vineyards of the Brunnenhäuschen and Morstein in Westhofen. The wine is a touch riper than the Estate Trocken, with its technical numbers this year thirteen percent alcohol, eight grams of acidity and 3.8 grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a superbly chalky-infused blend of pear, sweet grapefruit, wild yeasts, beautiful chalkiness, a hint of raw almond and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright, zesty acids, impeccable balance and a long, nascently complex finish. This is an excellent bottle, but it really deserves some bottle age to start to unwind and drink with generosity. 2025-2050+. **91+.**

2019 Aulerde Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP# 16- Weingut Wittmann

The Aulerde vineyard sits at the foot of the Kirchspiel hillside, with much of the soil here a mix of loess and clay, with only a small sector having limestone like the other grand crus in Westhofen. The Wittmann family only has Riesling planted in this chalky subsection of the Aulerde. This is the warmest microclimate in the Wittmann vineyard patrimony. The 2019 Aulerde GG from Philipp Wittmann comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol, with 3.5 grams per liter of

sugar and 7.9 grams per liter of acid. It offers up a ripe and very attractive nose of tangerine, apple, lemongrass, wild yeasts, plenty of smokiness, a good foundation of chalky soil and a topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is youthful, full-bodied and zesty, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip, good soil undertow, a suave girdle of acidity and a long, complex finish. This does not have quite the same mineral drive as the other 2019 Grosses Gewächs from the estate, but I really like its balance and depth and it will be an excellent bottle once it is ready to drink. 2026-2060. **93.**

2019 Brunnenhäuschen Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP# 18- Weingut Wittmann

The Brunnenhäuschen vineyard lies due east of Morstein, but sits at a bit higher elevation and so is more exposed to cooling westerly winds and is always a bit later fully ripening than its neighbor. The Wittmann family owns two hectares of vines here, with 1.2 hectares lying in the “filet” subsection of Abtserde. The estate’s GG bottling hails entirely from these vines in the Abtserde! The 2019 Brunnenhäuschen Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Wittmann comes in also at 12.5 percent octane, with 8.6 grams per liter of acidity and four grams per liter of residual sugar this year. The wine wafts from the glass in a superb aromatic constellation of tart orange, apple, a lovely base of limestone, citrus peel, wild yeasts, a touch of straw and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very mineral in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, a razor-sharp blade of limestone, snappy acids and great focus and cut on the long, well-balanced and promisingly complex young finish. This is more backwards out of the blocks than either the Aulerde or Kirchspiel and will need at least a decade’s worth of bottle age to blossom, but it has enormous potential. 2031-2075+. **94+.**

2019 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP# 17- Weingut Wittmann

The Wittmann family’s holdings in Kirchspiel are primarily planted on the upper third of the hillside here, where the finest *terroir* is located. Their 2019 GG from these vines comes in at 12.5 percent octane, carries a snappy 8.9 grams of acidity and is balanced with 4.4 grams per liter of residual sugar. The nose is far, far more influenced by its limestone foundation than is the case with the Aulerde, offering up a vibrant and very soil-driven bouquet of apple, lemon, tart orange, a beautifully complex base of limestone minerality, a dollop of wild yeasts, citrus zest and a floral topnote redolent of apple blossoms and lily of the valley. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, mineral and racy, with a lovely core of fruit, a superb base of limestone, excellent focus and cut and a long, nascently complex and snappy finish. The nearly nine grams per liter of acidity give the 2019 Kirchspiel from Philipp Wittmann a serious structural chassis that will carry it far, far into the future, but which will require a bit of patience before broaching bottles. When this wine is truly ready to drink, it will be stunning! 2029-2075. **94+.**

2019 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP# 19- Weingut Wittmann

The 2019 Morstein GG from Philipp Wittmann hails from the family’s choicest three hectare plot of vines from their lovely five and a half hectare parcel in this great grand cru vineyard. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane this year, with its acidity level at 7.4 grams per liter and residual sugars at 3.7 grams. The nose jumps from the glass in a marvelously sophisticated blend of apple, tangerine, a touch of pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, refined chalky minerality, citrus peel, lemongrass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, stellar mineral drive on the backend, snappy acids and a long, laser-like and youthful finish. Morstein is one of my favorite *terroirs* from anywhere in the world of wine and the 2019 version from Philipp Wittmann is going to be a brilliant example. All this great wine needs is time in the cellar to blossom! 2030-2075+. **95.**

RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINES SPRING 2021



Fabrice Gass of Champagne Alexandre Filaine, in the entrance to his cellars in Damery.

The spring of 2021 found a goodly number of new releases from Champagne arriving on my stoop. As I had done a larger feature on the region only a couple of issues ago, I thought that for this report I would limit the number of wines to those who had just been shipped in, rather than expanding it by reaching out to some of the other excellent Champagne importers whose portfolios I have only tasted a portion of in the last few issues. Part of the reason for this was that I had already accrued enough samples for other articles in this issue that I knew I was going to be well over one hundred and fifty pages for this issue, which even during a pandemic, not everyone has the time or inclination to read completely! So I contented myself with the wines that arrived here without a lot of solicitation and I will do a broader report on the bottlings in the market in a couple of issues, when the rest of the newsletter is not already quite so long! But, though this is only fifteen pages or so in length, this does not mean that there are not some important new bottlings now gracing the market, or destined to be released in the very near future, so I found plenty of enjoyment in tasting through these wines. While I am trying to keep this particular report fairly short (and we all know brevity is not one of my relative strengths), I do want to take a moment to once again highlight the wines from a new producer who is now releasing only his

second vintage of Champagne bottlings this spring: Emilien Feneuil. As he began commercially releasing wines last spring with his 2015s, which were excellent, and is now following those up with incrementally even better wines from the 2016 vintage, I did want to repeat a bit of his background information for folks who may not have taken note of his wines last spring.

Emilien Feneuil is a young Champagne grower in the village of Sermiers in the Montagne de Reims. The village of Sermiers lies on the southern face of the Montagne de Reims, in the area known as the *Petite Montagne*, with Chamery and Écueil being two of its better-known neighboring villages. The *Petite Montagne* is considered one of the two finest areas for growing pinot meunier in the Champagne region, as there is a complex soil mosaic here of sandy soils, clay, limestone and marl. Emilien farms 2.37 hectares of vines, spread amongst the villages of Sermiers, Écueil and Chamery, planted to forty-three percent pinot meunier, twenty-eight percent chardonnay, twenty-two percent pinot noir and seven percent petit meslier. He took over from his parents about ten years ago, but it was not until the 2015 vintage that he started producing his own wines, as for his first five years, he was content to focus on farming and selling off all of his grapes in the market to larger producers. One of the better-known loyal clients for Emilien's grapes was Aurélien Laherte in Chavot. Emilien Feneuil has been farming his vines organically since he took over the family property and everything is now certified organic. He has the reputation in the region as a great farmer, doing most of the work in the vineyards himself and encouraging groundcover and even sapling trees to grow amongst his vines. His *vins clairs* are fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of older barrels and *tonneaux* and see no *dosage* and minimal sulfur usage at disgorgement.

Like many of today's younger *vignerons* in Champagne, Emilien believes in barrel-fermentation and a bit of extended *elevage* for his *vins clairs* prior to bottling the wines for their secondary fermentations. He uses both two hundred twenty-eight and four hundred liter barrels for this, with his *vins clairs* aging until the following September after harvest prior to being bottled up for their secondary fermentations. He purchased used casks for his first vintage of 2015, with the barrels ranging from five to six years of age when he bought them. All of his wines are vintage-dated. He tries to use a minimum of sulfur during the *elevage* and bottling and all of his wines are non-*dosé*. I go into the style of his various 2016 Champagne bottlings in their proper section below, but I should also mention that I had a chance to taste two of his still wine, Coteaux Champenois bottlings for this article, and they were excellent. The 2016 Coteaux Champenois cuvées were even a touch superior to the very strong 2015s I tasted a year ago and these are clearly also among his best wines at the present time and merit some serious attention. Emilien Feneuil is clearly one of the up and coming young stars in Champagne and if you did not have a chance to try any of his 2015s last year, do try and find a bottle or two of his 2016s, as they are really very, very good and an exciting new addition to the panoply of small growers aspiring to make world class Champagne from their relatively small holdings!

Beyond Emilien's lovely 2016s, there are tons of great wines to report on below. These include the new releases of Cristal and Cristal Rosé from *Maison Louis Roederer*, which both hail from the 2013 vintage. Given the legendary status already of the 2012 Cristal bottlings, collectors may be inclined to overlook the 2013s a bit, but I urge folks not to do so, as these 2013s are truly stunning wines and are very close in quality to the beautiful 2012s. Though Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, Cellar Master at Louis Roederer, feels that the 2013s are a great classic

vintage that will need plenty of cellaring to blossom properly, the regular bottling of 2013 Cristal was showing a bit of uncharacteristic early generosity out of the blocks and I found it already immensely enjoyable to drink (and far more accessible than the 2012 version had been a year ago). I also had the marvelous good fortune this spring to have an opportunity to preview the coming 2008 vintage-dated bottling from Champagne Krug, which is destined for release in the third quarter of 2021. It is an absolute legend in the making, with great depth and structure and it is likely to be a very, very long-lived and iconic vintage from the House of Krug. Alongside of the 2008 Vintage Brut, I also was able to taste Krug's "Grande Cuvée" 169^{ème} Édition, which is from the base year of 2013. I am not sure of when it will be officially released, but it is a stunning rendition of this flagship bottling and will be very much worth keeping an eye out for in the market. Like the 2013 Cristal, I thought that the Grande Cuvée 169^{ème} Édition was a touch more forward than the previous release based on 2012, and though it is built to age for many decades, it was awfully easy to drink now and will not take as long as its predecessor to reach its apogee.

There are plenty of additional stars in the firmament of Champagne covered in the notes below, including current and new releases from talented winegrowers such as Benoît Marguet, Jean-Marc Sélèque, Benoît and Mélanie Tarlant, Agnès Corbon, Bertrand Lilbert, Laurence Ployez, Cécile Grongnet and a host of others. I should mention that I had my second round of wines from Gilles Lancelot in Cramant this spring, with his Champagne Lancelot-Pienne bottlings showing beautifully and very much worthy of inclusion in any listing of great grower Champagne alongside of these other already very well-respected producers. I have the sense that Gilles' wines are only going to continue to improve as he gains further experience. And, of course, any report on Champagne from me would not be complete without mentioning that *dosage* levels seem to continue to fall to near-negligible levels with each passing vintage for many of these wines, and I continue to find some of these beautifully made wines simply too austere out of the blocks to drink with great pleasure in their collective youth. While low or non-*dosé* specialists like Benoît and Mélanie Tarlant continue to give their wines that receive no *dosage* very extended cellaring regimens aging *sur latte* prior to release (in some cases fully ten years in the cellar!), most smaller producers cannot do so and their beautifully-made wines are emerging into the market still without their acids buffered sufficiently to make them really approachable upon release. I know that there is a significant segment of the Champagne market that prefers these very low or no *dosage* bottlings and will enjoy them in their shrill and snappy youth, but these enthusiasts remain a small percentage of the overall Champagne market and I worry that producers are unnecessarily limiting their potential client base by continuing to push *dosage* levels lower and lower. These wines will certainly be excellent with a bit of bottle age to let the acids soften up a bit (in the absence of a bit more generosity in buffering with *dosage*), but I do question the market wisdom of releasing solely a non-*dosé* version of Shaman 17 from Benoît Marguet, which is effectively his non-vintage workhorse bottling, when so few potential clients for this wine (other than myself) might be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and really let it blossom. And Benoît is hardly alone in this trend.

I know my views on *dosage* are certainly not "hip" in today's market, but four or five grams of *dosage* is hardly going to produce a "sweet" wine, and can often make the young wine accessible to a larger segment of the Champagne market- particularly for non-vintage bottlings. *Dosage* was never the enemy in Champagne, just poorly-balanced wines. Certainly, there were

efforts to cover up inferior juice with excessive *dosage* a couple of decades ago (particularly in the wake of the deregulation of the grape-purchasing market in Champagne in the 1990s), but that period is now generally past and we have to be careful not to let the pendulum swing too far in the other direction. Champagne's current renaissance is predicated not only on the expansion of talented new producers and long-established *Grandes Marques* now at the absolute top of their games, but also on a market that is willing and able to purchase these wines once they are released and keep the most quality conscientious producers' cash flows healthy and robust, so that decision-making can continue to be made primarily on the basis of potential quality. But, if market shares start to shrink (and the most recent numbers I have seen from the Champagne Bureau are food for thought for smaller producers), then cellar and vineyard decisions may also have to start to take into account turnover of stocks and other financial considerations that have often been at odds with the absolute quality of the wines of Champagne. My concern is that the continued trend to steer clear of *dosage* or keep it at very, very low levels, will alienate some potential consumers who are most assuredly going to be needed in the present and immediate future to keep the renaissance going strong in Champagne.



Coteaux Champenois

2016 Emilien Feneuil Coteaux Champenois “Les Basses Croix & Les Gillis” Sermiers Blanc

As I noted last year, Emilien Feneuil handles his Coteaux Champenois Blanc exactly the same in the cellar as the *vins clairs* that go into his Blanc de Blancs Champagne bottling from

these two vineyards, with the wines barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts in five and six year-old casks and then aged in the same barrels for one year prior to bottling with a minimum of SO₂. The 2016 is a lovely follow-up to the inaugural release from the 2015 vintage, offering up a refined aromatic constellation of lemon zest, delicious apple, a wisp of almond, a complex base of soil, orange blossoms and a delicate touch of oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine transparency and bounce, lovely balance and a long, complex and very elegant finish. Out of the blocks, the 2015 version seemed to walk just a bit on natural wine's "wild side", but this vintage does not share that characteristic and is one of the finest Coteaux Champenois chardonnays I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2021-2045. **94.**

2016 Emilien Feneuil Coteaux Champenois "Les Goulats" Chamery Rouge

The 2016 Les Goulats rouge again tips the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and is really a superb bottle of pinot noir in the making. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of dark berries, bitter cherry, a touch of pomegranate, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of meatiness, a complex base of soil tones, gentle herb tones and a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This wine needs at least a half dozen years in the cellar to blossom properly, but it is going to be terrific. Like Emilien's 2016 Coteaux Champenois Blanc, this pinot noir is a wine of very serious ambition! 2026-2045. **92.**

Sparkling Wines

2017 Bruno Danguin "Prestige de Narcès" Crémant de Bourgogne Extra Brut

The 2017 Bruno Danguin "Prestige de Narcès" was disgorged in November of 2019 and is a blanc de noirs bottling composed entirely from pinot noir. The bouquet is pure, precise and already beautifully complex, offering up scents of apple, white peach, flinty minerality, fresh-baked bread, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent mineral undertow, a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, zesty and complex finish. As I have mentioned previously, Monsieur Danguin's vineyards lie only a few kilometers outside of the Champagne limits of the Aube region and for all intents and purposes, this is lovely Aube Champagne at half the price! 2021-2040. **91.**

2017 Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt "Majorat" Riesling Sekt Brut AP# 03-19

The 2017 Majorat Riesling Sekt from von Kesselstatt is a very pretty wine, with all of the brightness and complexity of Riesling done in a dry, sparkling style that works beautifully at the table. The wine offers up a very expressive nose of apple, white peach, a touch of bread dough, salty minerality and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, brisk and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex finish that closes with a note of citrus peel. This is a lovely wine that will be even better to drink if given a few years in the cellar to blossom out from behind its racy girdle of acidity. Good Sekt! 2023-2035. **88.**

Non-Dosé Champagne Non-Vintage

Champagne Marguet "Shaman 17" Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet's "Shaman 17" non-vintage Brut Nature is composed from a *cépages* of sixty-nine percent pinot noir and thirty-one percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and given extended aging in cask until July of 2018 prior to bottling up for secondary

fermentation. The wine was disgorged in November of 2020. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of white peach, apple, a touch of hazelnut, *patissière*, a beautiful base of soil and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, very well-balanced and bone-dry finish. This is a beautifully made Brut Nature, but at this point in its evolution, it is still a little snappy and will be most enjoyed by purists in the non-*dosé* camp. For me, it needs still a couple of years in the cellar to soften up its spine of acidity just a bit more. It is once again a superbly made wine, but I miss the days when this bottling sported four grams per liter of *dosage* and I could drink it right out of the blocks! 2024-2045. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence Nature” Brut Nature NV (Pierry)

The new release of Solessence Nature from Jean-Marc Sélèque is from the base year of 2015, with the fifty percent of reserve wines utilized all hailing from this cuvée’s solera or perpetual reserve. The wine has been given a longer time on its lees than the last iteration of this bottling, having been disgorged in October of 2020. Its *cépages* is fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, raw almond, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, *patissière* and a lovely floral topnote from its pinot meunier component. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral undertow, refined *mousse* and a long, bone-dry, but beautifully balanced finish. The acids are nicely softened up here from the extended aging *sur latte*, so the wine is quite approachable out of the blocks, though it is clearly built to age. 2021-2045+. **93.**

Champagne Tarlant “BAM” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Base Year 2010

I love Benoît and Mélanie Tarlant’s BAM bottling, which takes its name from its *cépages* of Pinot Blanc, Arbanne and Petit Meslier. This wine is from the base year of 2010, with plenty of reserve wines included in the blend from this cuvée’s solera. It was disgorged in March of 2018 after nearly seven years aging *sur latte*. The wine offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of white peach, hazelnut, brioche, a complex base of chalky soil tones, a hint of buttery oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a superb core, very refined *mousse*, lovely focus and a long, complex finish. As I have said before, with extended aging on the fine lees *de rigueur* for all of the Tarlant bottlings, the acids have mellowed nicely prior to the wine’s release and the lack of *dosage* is hardly an issue here like it can be with so many other examples of Brut Nature, which are simply too young and snappy when hitting the market to provide drinking pleasure beyond the circle of non-*dosé* purists. The 2010 BAM on the other hand, is drinking gorgeously today! 2021-2045. **93.**

Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Base Year 2013 Half Bottle

This sample of the Tarlant “Zero” from the base year of 2013 was tasted from a half bottle, so it was “only” aged five years on its fine lees prior to its disgorgement in December of 2019. Its *cépages* is one-third each of pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of lemon, pear, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, lime blossoms and a hint of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with good depth and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, zesty and complex finish. This does not have the same mid-palate depth as the 2012 version (witness the difference in the two vintages), but it is a lovely wine in its own right. 2021-2040. **91.**

Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Base Year 2012

The base year 2012 bottling of Zero Brut Nature from the Tarlant family is again composed of its traditional blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier.

It was aged six years *sur latte* and disgorged in July of 2019. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of apple, pear, brioche, chalky minerality and a nice touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced finish. Benoît and Mélanie Tarlant are two of the few winegrowers in Champagne that actually take the time to age their non-*dosé* bottlings sufficiently prior to release that they are drinking well when they hit the market. This is a beautiful wine. 2021-2045+. **92.**



Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut
Champagne Corbon Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

Agnès Corbon's newest release of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2016 and was disgorged in February of 2019. The first release of this relatively new bottling was made from the base year of 2012, where Agnès allowed the *vins clairs* to go through malolactic fermentation; I have the impression this was not allowed for the 2016 base year version, as this wine has a snappy spine of acidity. 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.**

Lilbert-Fils “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant)

The new release of Bertrand Lilbert’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2017, with fifty percent of the cuvée (as is his custom for this bottling) composed of reserve wines. It was disgorged in July of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine delivers a very expressive nose of pear, delicious apple, a touch of hazelnut, chalky soil tones, brioche and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a superb core, impressive mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very classy finish. First class Blanc de Blancs! 2021-2040. **92.**

Lancelot Pienne “Instant Présent” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cramant)

Gilles Lancelot’s new release of his non-vintage Blanc de Blancs “Instant Présent” is from the base year of 2016, with twenty percent of the blend made from reserve wines from a solera his father first started in 1998. The vineyards that go into this bottling, from both the Côte des Blancs and the Coteaux Sud d’Épernay, average forty years of age. The *vins clairs* go through malo and the wine is aged two and a half years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine delivers a refined bouquet of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in personality, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, zesty acids and a long, balanced and complex finish. This is beautifully light on its feet and is the perfect aperitif Blanc de Blancs. 2021-2045. **91+.**

Lancelot Pienne “Table Ronde” Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant)

Gilles Lancelot’s “Table Ronde” cuvée of Blanc de Blancs hails exclusively from the family’s parcels in the grand cru villages of Cramant, Avize and Chouilly, with the vines a minimum of fifty years of age. The current release is also from the base year of 2016, with twenty percent of the cuvée composed of reserve wines from the family solera. The wine was disgorged in July of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex nose of delicious apple, pear, brioche, a lovely base of limestone, hints of the pastry cream to come and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent balance and grip, superb backend mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is more primary in personality than the Instant Présent bottling, with more mid-palate depth and mineral drive, but it also is a younger wine and will need a bit of bottle age to really start hitting on all cylinders. 2023-2050. **92.**

Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut**Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery)**

Fabrice Gass of Champagne Alexandre Filaine only commercialized this bottling as Cuvée Confidence for a handful of years, as he now calls this cuvée “DMY” (short for Damery, his home base village). This is Fabrice’s top bottling of non-vintage Champagne, which is produced from his same blend as his “Cuvée Speciale”, but which is aged under cork, rather than crown cap and given fully five years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The *cépages* is forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. It offers up a beautiful and maturing bouquet of pear, a touch of tangerine, warm brioche, almond, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, just a whisper of buttery oak and discreet floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with an excellent core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. As this wine does not undergo

malolactic (like all of Fabrice's wines), it is still fresh as can be and retains decades of life ahead of it. Fabrice believes this bottle was either from the base year of 2008, 2009 or 2010, and my best guess would be that this is the 2010 base year, with one-third of the blend being composed of reserve wine from 2009. No matter which year it came from, it has aged into a stunningly beautiful bottle of bubbly. 2021-2050. **94+**.

Champagne Grongnet "Carpe Diem" Extra Brut NV (Étoges)

The new release of Carpe Diem from Cécile Grongnet is composed from a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and fifteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. It was aged under cork for five and a half years prior to disgorgement in June of 2018, with a finishing *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine is from the base year of 2012 and offers up a beautiful bouquet of nectarine, apple, hazelnuts, brioche, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. With it having been aged under cork, rather than crown cap, the wine has already developed a lovely patina of a mature wine on both the nose and palate, but still has a fine girdle of acidity for continued cellaring. First class juice. 2021-2045+. **92+**.

Champagne Krug "Grande Cuvée" 169^{ème} Édition Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Krug Grande Cuvée, the 169^{ème} Édition, is from the base year of 2013, but includes fully forty percent of reserve wines all the way back to the harvest of 2000. The *cépages* for this new iteration of Grande Cuvée is forty-three percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-two percent pinot meunier. The wine is beautifully expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, a touch of passion fruit, chalky soil tones, brioche, incipient notes of caraway seed, just a whisper of buttery oak and lovely floral tones in the upper register from the pinot meunier component in the *cépages*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a great core, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a very long, very pure and perfectly balanced finish. This is really a stunning new version of Grande Cuvée. It is approachable already, but I would be inclined to give it just a few more years in the cellar and let its girdle of acidity relax a bit more, so that the wine can deepen and broaden in its palate impression. Fine, fine juice. 2024-2075. **95**.

Champagne Krug "Grande Cuvée" 164^{ème} Édition Brut NV (Reims)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 164^{ème} Édition of Krug Grande Cuvée since the spring of 2017, so I was delighted to see it included at our Krug tasting in April. This is from the base year of 2008 and includes reserve wines all the way back to 1990 in this bottling, with the reserves ultimately comprising just over a quarter of the blend. The final *cépages* is forty-eight percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and seventeen percent pinot meunier, with the wine having spent seven-plus years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in the summer of 2016. The beautiful bouquet is quintessential Grande Cuvée, delivering a constellation of apple, pear, passion fruit, brioche, a complex base of soil tones, fresh almond and a floral topnote redolent of acacia and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and now wide open in personality, with superb mid-palate depth, lovely soil signature and grip, pinpoint bubbles, zesty acids and a long, seamlessly balanced and beautifully complex finish. Stylistically, the 164^{ème} Édition of Grande Cuvée is one of my absolute favorites in recent years and it is now drinking with great generosity and breed. 2021-2055. **96**.

Champagne Krug “Grande Cuvée” 159^{ème} Édition Brut NV (Reims)

The Krug Grande Cuvée, the 159^{ème} Édition is from the sunny base year of 2003, which was a year of both heavy frost damage in the spring and blazing heat in midsummer. Crop loads were effectively half of a normal year in 2003, so that this Grande Cuvée included fully thirty-seven percent reserve wines in the blend. This particular bottle of the 159^{ème} Édition was given an extended period of aging *sur latte*, so it was not disgorged until January of 2017. The wine is composed of fifty-one percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and nineteen percent pinot meunier and offers up a superb bouquet of fresh apricot, passion fruit, a hint of fresh pineapple, *patissière*, a beautiful base of soil, delicate floral tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, light on its feet and vibrant finish. This is such an outstanding result for the extremes of the growing season of 2003 (no doubt, the fine stocks of reserve wines added here were a major support) and really a lovely and quite classical expression of Grande Cuvée. The only characteristic that shows it hails from a tough base year is it is just a touch shorter on the finish than either the 169^{ème} or 164^{ème} Éditions. 2021-2045+. **93.**

Lancelot Pienne “Accord Majeur” Brut NV (Cramant)

Although Gilles Lancelot is based in Cramant in the heart of the Côte des Blancs, his family has vineyard parcels also in the Coteaux Sud d’Épernay and in the opening of the Marne Valley, so there is plenty of red grapes available for certain bottlings. Consequently, Gilles’ “Accord Majeur” non-vintage Brut cuvée is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot meunier, twenty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. The new release is from the base year of 2014 and was aged *sur latte* for more than five years prior to its disgorgement in July of 2020. It was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine is deep, complex and quite refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, warm biscuits, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. This is outstanding non-vintage Brut! 2021-2045. **92.**

Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Quality” Brut NV (Ludes)

The current release of Laurence Ployez’s lovely non-vintage Brut was disgorged in November of 2020, probably making this from the base year of 2016, as this bottling is always aged for a minimum of three years *sur latte*. The wine is its customary blend of forty percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier, along with twenty percent of pinot noir. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of apple, pear, brioche, chalky soil tones, gentle floral tones and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced and classy finish. This is drinking very well indeed right now, but like all of Laurence’s wines, it will also age beautifully. 2021-2045. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

The new release of Solessence from Jean-Marc Sélèque is from the base year of 2018 and was disgorged in October of 2020. Like the Solessence Brut Nature, it is composed from a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir. The grapes come from all of Jean-Marc’s holdings across the seven villages he has vines: Épernay, Pierry, Moussy, Mardeuil, Dizy, Boursault and Vertus, with the vines averaging forty years of age. It was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine offers up a beautiful aromatic constellation of pear, apple, brioche, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, discreet smokiness and

lovely floral tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, young and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, zesty and very, very promising finish. To my palate, this is still a touch young for primetime drinking, but with a couple of years in the cellar, it is going to be excellent. 2024-2050. **92.**



Non-Vintage Rosé

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes)

The new release of Ployez-Jacquemart's non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2017 and was disgorged in February of 2020. The *cépages* this year is its customary fifty percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and thirteen percent pinot meunier. As is also tradition here, Laurence Ployez utilizes ten percent of the pinot noir as still red wine to give the bubbly its lovely color. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of wild strawberries, chalky soil tones, rye bread, a touch of orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced and quite complex finish. This is lovely juice for current drinking, but it has the structure to also age very gracefully. Fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque "Solessence Rosé" Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

Though Jean-Marc Sélèque's "Solessence Rosé" is labeled as a non-vintage wine, he has started producing it solely from a single year, so the current release is from the 2018 vintage. It is composed of a blend of forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir, with the pinot meunier including some maceration on the skins and the pinot

noir including some still red wine. This bottling was disgorged in October of 2020 and given a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine is a lovely, deep salmon color and offers up a lovely bouquet of wild strawberries, blood orange, chalky minerality, rye bread, dried flowers, discreet spice tones and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent balance and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, vibrant and minerally finish. This is first class, gently vinous Extra Brut Rosé, but to my palate, it could still do with another year or two in the cellar to really blossom. 2023-2045. **92.**

Champagne Tarlant “Rosé Zero” Brut Nature (Oeuilly)

The Rosé Zero from Benoît and Mélanie Tarlant is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty-four percent pinot noir and six percent pinot meunier. It is from the base year of 2013, with plenty of reserve wines in the cuvée. It was aged five years *sur latte* and disgorged at the end of January of 2019. It is a lovely salmon color and offers up a superb bouquet of nectarine, rhubarb, tangerine, rye bread, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, very well-balanced finish. As I have said previously, the Tarlant family understands that non-*dosé* wines demand extended time in the cellar to tame the acids before they are released, so this wine is now drinking beautifully. Fine, fine juice! 2021-2045. **93+.**

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2016 Emilien Feneuil “Les Basses Croix & Les Gillis” Blanc de Blanc Non-Dosé

The 2016 Blanc de Blancs Emilien Feneuil is sourced from the *lieux à dits* of Les Basses Croix in the village of Sermiers and Les Gillis in Écueil. The 2016 vintage is the second of Emilien’s young career, and it is an excellent follow-up to the lovely 2015, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, pear, a fine foundation of gently chalky soil, toasted almond, spring flowers and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core and soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, zesty and very well-balanced finish. As I noted last year, though this wine is non-*dosé*, the acids are fairly tame and the wine is already drinking very well indeed. Another impressive effort from Monsieur Feneuil! 2021-2040. **93+.**

2012 Francis Boulard et Fille “Petraea” Brut Nature (Faverolles)

The Petraea bottling was started by Francis Boulard back in the decade of the 1990s and is based on a perpetual reserve solera that he started at that time. So, previously, this has always been a non-vintage bottling, drawing upon some of the solera blended with a percentage of the current base year. However, as the parcel of old vine pinot noir from which this wine hails (sixty to eighty years of age) was finally certified organic in 2012, the Boulard family decided to start a new solera for the wine into the future, only including organically-certified production, so the first certified bottling of Petraea ends up being solely from the fine 2012 vintage! The wine is aged in a dedicated, twenty-five hectoliter *foudre* and was aged for more than six years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in October of 2019. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, a touch of hazelnut, a lovely base of soil, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, good soil undertow and cut, pinpoint bubbles and a long, well-balanced and classy finish.

The long aging on its fine lees has softened up the acids nicely and the wine is just starting to drink with generosity. 2021-2045. **92.**

2006 Krug “Clos du Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Millésime (Reims)

In the summer of 2006, the Clos du Mesnil vineyard was picked between September 14th and 16th. The 2006 vintage of Clos du Mesnil was aged *sur latte* twelve years and was disgorged in the summer of 2019. The wine offers up a beautifully ripe and pure bouquet of pear, fresh apricot, hazelnut, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread, delicate floral tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and still fairly youthful, with a rock solid core, lovely soil signature, zesty acids, utterly refined *mousse* and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. The 2006 Clos du Mesnil is certainly approachable today, but there are more layers of complexity to unfold here and it will be an even better drink a decade down the road. This is stunning juice. 2021-2075. **97.**

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2016 Emilien Feneuil “Les Puits” Blanc de Noir Non-Dosé Millésime (Sermiers)

The 2016 “Les Puits” Blanc de Noir from Emilien Feneuil is a one hundred percent pinot noir cuvée, from thirty-five year-old vines in the village of Chamery. As I mentioned last year, this vineyard has a northeasterly exposition and about a meter of clay, chalk and sandy topsoil over the substrata of limestone. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented in older oak and aged for one year prior to bottling for secondary fermentation. The 2016 Les Puits is a beautiful wine aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a touch of buttery oak, a complex base of soil, dried flowers and just a whisper of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and has a lovely core of fruit, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. I love the synthesis here of the pinot noir, the complex base of soil and the discreet touch of oak, which work in complete harmony. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2045. **93+.**

2016 Emilien Feneuil “Cuvée Totum” Non-Dosé Millésime (Sermiers)

The 2016 Cuvée Totum from Emilien Feneuil has a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent pinot noir, eight percent chardonnay and two percent petit meslier added for good measure. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and aged in cask a full year prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation, introducing a lovely, understated framing of buttery oak to the finished wine. The nose of the 2016 delivers a fine combination of white peach, apple, gentle notes of hazelnut, a lovely base of soil, those delicate pinot meunier floral tones, *patissière* and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and racy, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil undertow, snappy acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. It is interesting, but the blended bottling is a bit more youthfully snippy with its acids and needs a bit of bottle age to soften up structurally, whereas I did not find this in either the Blanc de Blancs or Blanc de Noirs 2016s! But, with a little bottle age, this will be lovely juice. 2023-2045. **93.**

2014 Grongnet Special Club Brut Millésime (Étoges)

The 2014 vintage of Special Club from Cécile Grongnet was disgorged in November of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It offers up a beautiful, youthful bouquet of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of hazelnut and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still

youthfully zesty, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, snappy and complex finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making, but to my palate, it really deserves at least a few more years in the cellar, just to let its girdle of acidity relax a bit more and secondary layers of complexity to emerge. It is first class juice. 2024-2055. **93.**

2013 Louis Roederer “Cristal” Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2013 vintage of Cristal from Maison Louis Roederer is the only one in the last two decades to be made from fruit that was harvested in October, as global warming has pushed most picking dates in the Champagne region forward into September. Spring was cool and flowering in 2013 did not occur until the month of July- almost unheard of in recent times! The *cépages* this year is sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with one-third of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented for this vintage. As always, none of the *vins clairs* went through malolactic fermentation and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine delivers a beautiful young bouquet of apple, a hint of pear, yellow plum, a complex base of chalky minerality, brioche and a lovely array of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with impeccable balance, a superb core, laser-like focus, very elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. This has the structure to age long and gracefully and may well close down a bit over the next couple of years, but for the moment, it so seamlessly balanced that I find it very easy to drink out of the blocks (which is not customary for my palate with Cristal, which I usually want to bury in the cellar for a decade!). This is a very beautiful vintage of Cristal and a very, very worthy follow-up to the stellar 2012 version! 2021-2075. **97.**

2008 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2008 Krug Vintage is scheduled for release in the fourth quarter of this year and it is going to be a stunning year for this iconic bottling, so start making plans early. Cellar Master Julie Cavil notes that 2008 was a classical year, with slow and very even ripening adding up to what will be one of the great long distance runners of recent memory in the pantheon of vintage-dated Krugs. The bouquet is deep, pure and precise, offering up a youthful blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, a gorgeous base of minerality, caraway seed, dried flowers, a touch of bread dough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, exceptional mineral undertow, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. This still needs five to ten years in the cellar to really start drinking with generosity, but it is clear that this is destined to be one of the legendary vintages of Krug of the last quarter century. 2028-2100. **98+.**

2006 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2006 Krug Brut Millésime is a superb young wine. The warmer growing season of 2006 has given this vintage of Krug a bit more early generosity than either the 2004 or 2008 vintages at a similar stage, but still with fine potential for very long evolution in the cellar. The *cépages* ended up being forty-eight percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and seventeen percent pinot meunier. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and expressive bouquet of white peach, fresh apricot, *patissière*, hazelnut, fresh-baked wheat bread, a beautiful base of soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, ultra-refined *mousse*, impeccable

balance and a long, complex and focused finish. Stylistically, this reminds me quite a bit of the 1989 Krug when it was first released. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2075. **95.**



Vintage-Dated Rosé

2016 Emilien Feneuil “Les Goulats” Rosé de Macération Non-Dosé Millésime (Sermiers)

The 2016 Les Goulats Rosé de Macération from Emilien Feneuil is a beautiful wine and an excellent follow-up to his exceptional rendition (and first vintage) of this wine in 2015. As I noted last year, Monsieur Feneuil gives the pinot noir for this bottling thirty hours of skin contact prior to the onset of fermentation, which gives the wine its cherry red color and beautifully vinous personality. All the grapes for this bottling hail from the *lieu à dit* of Les Goulats in the village of Chamery, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and given nearly a year in cask prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The 2016 les Goulats Rosé delivers a complex and vibrant aromatic constellation of cherries, blood orange, rye bread, clove-like spices, a lovely base of soil, a hint of the orange peel to come and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with superb core and soil signature, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, vinous and complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle of bubbly, but it is most emphatically designed for pairing at the table, rather than casual aperitif sipping. 2021-2040. **92+.**

2013 Louis Roederer “Cristal” Rosé Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2013 Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé is composed of a blend this year of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay, with all of the pinot hailing from the village of Aÿ and the chardonnay from Avize and Mesnil-sur-Oger. Twenty percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented for this vintage of Cristal Rosé and the wine received a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is pure and very precise, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of white peach, strawberry, rye bread, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, delicate floral tones and a gently spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a lovely spine of acidity, great focus and grip, supremely elegant *mousse* and a very long, racy and seamlessly balanced finish. This seems a touch more reserved out of the blocks than the regular 2013 Cristal and will demand a bit more bottle age before it starts to drink with generosity, but once it blossoms, it will be brilliant and extremely long-lived. 2026-2065+. **97.**

2009 Les Rachais Extra Brut Rosé Millésime- Francis Boulard et Fille (Faverolles)

The vintage-dated Les Rachais Extra Brut Rosé from Delphine Boulard is only produced in warm vintages, such as 2009, which is the current release. The wine is produced entirely from pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* all barrel-fermented and aged in older Burgundy casks. The wine was disgorged in March of 2019 after fully nine years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine is a pretty, deeper salmon color and offers up a lovely, quite vinous bouquet of blood orange, rhubarb, lovely soil tones, rye bread, dried rose petals, gentle spice tones and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, a serious girdle of acidity and a long, complex and nicely vinous finish. Even as this enters its twelfth year, the wine is still pretty youthful in personality and will continue to grow with further bottle age. I really like its combination of a vinous personality, while still remaining light on its feet. The bouquet here is already stunning, but the two grams per liter *dosage* has not really buffered the girdle of acidity all that much, so today, this is most enjoyable for fanciers of the lower *dosage* camp. For those who like the acids buffered a bit more, give it three to five more years in the cellar to let the acidity soften up further. Good juice. 2021-2045. **92.**