

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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*July-August 2021*

*Number Ninety-Four*

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## RECENTLY-TASTED ITALIAN WINES SUMMER 2021



The current crop of fine Italian wines that I tasted for this report are primarily from the 2019 and 2018 vintages in this beautiful wine-growing country. A very few bottles from 2020 have already arrived on my stoop, but as the bulk of releases from this vintage has still not even found its way into the far side of the pipeline in Italy, I will hold off on reporting on the vintage conditions from that year until the next iteration of my article on Italian wines, when I expect to have far more examples from 2020 in the coverage. In the meantime, there are such a bountiful crop of beautiful wines now available from the vintages of 2018 and 2019 that it is a superb time to be tucking some of these bottles away in the cellar to blossom properly with bottle age, as though 2020 looks likely to be another strong year across much of Italy, the summer of 2021 has been generally cool, wet and challenging across all of western Europe and at the time of this writing (notwithstanding a town in Sicily posting the highest temperature ever recorded in Europe in August of 2021), unless the growing season is saved by a merciful Indian Summer, is not likely to be able to keep pace qualitatively with the three preceding vintages. So, while there is still plenty of top quality wines getting ready to ship in the coming year from 2020 and later releases from the two previous years, keep in mind that there is a possibility that the hot streak of

quality vintages may well come to a close when the 2021s start to emerge, barring a near-miraculous *fin de saison*.

The 2019 vintage in Italy was a good year, but not without some challenges during the growing season, many of which mirrored similar problems encountered by winegrowers in France as well. Early spring in Italy was warm and precocious, with temperatures high enough by March to get the sap rising and the vines starting to come out of their winter dormancy. However, the early start would be given back in the coming months, as unseasonably cool and rainy weather descended on vineyards across the region. In particular, the month of May was quite difficult, as temperatures dropped precipitously after the promising start to spring and it rained heavily for nearly the entire month. Come June, this had put the vines behind by ten to fifteen days in their typical maturation schedules, as the flowering was quite late in 2019 from the atypically cool and wet month of May, and *millerandage* was a problem. As a result of the indifferent weather leading into flowering, yields are down in 2019 anywhere from fifteen to forty percent from 2018, which had seen record-setting quantities in many of Italy's finest grape-growing regions. However, Tuscany was a bit of an outlier in 2019, as the yields here are actually a bit larger in 2019 than was the case in the previous year, as the flowering was less disrupted than throughout the rest of Italy.

As the rainy month of May of 2019 led into hot, summer weather in the months of June, July and August, the robust subterranean water reserves brought about by all the rain in spring were very much welcomed once the summer heat arrived. There were some isolated showers perking up in August, which helped to replenish groundwater supplies that had been relied upon during the previous two months of heat, so that maturation was able to continue apace after the very cold late spring weather had pushed everything back behind schedule. Happily, due to combination of all the precipitation of May and then the occasional rains in August, drought conditions, which had plagued the previous two growing seasons of 2017 and 2018, did not come into play in 2019. But, along with the August showers, there were also some isolated bouts of hail, mostly in the Veneto region, which put a damper on the hopes of winegrowers affected by the hail, as yields were cut back dramatically by the resulting damage. However, September weather was beautiful across all of Italy, with sunny days that were warm, but not too hot, nicely cool evenings and perfect weather to finish up ripening and still retain good acidity in the grapes from the diurnal temperature swings. So, despite the rainy month of May that had put the whole growing season running late, the beautiful autumn weather in the end allowed bunches to ripen up beautifully in 2019 and winegrowers were once again able to enjoy a very strong vintage.

Turning to the 2018 vintage in Italy, this was a year which was certainly influenced by the frost damage and drought conditions of the previous year of 2017, as the vines had plenty of pent up energy to use and yields were generally quite large and generous in most of Italy's varied wine-growing regions. Some estates even practiced green harvesting to rein in the potential size of the crop in 2018, which was in notable contrast to the meager yields of the previous year. Spring of 2018 was also wet, which was certainly welcomed by growers who had been forced contend with severe drought conditions in 2017, as once again, the seemingly always important groundwater reserves were able to be nicely replenished going into the growing season of 2018. After warm temperatures in the month of April, flowering generally was on schedule to take place towards the end of May, but it was sometimes disrupted by showers, which caused some

blossoms to drop and, as a result, not every vineyard was able to enjoy bountiful yields in 2018. However, the rainy early summer weather varied from region to region, so difficulties during flowering were not widespread. For example, the months of May and June were fairly rainy in Piemonte, but this was not the case everywhere in Italy, and in contrast, Tuscany saw most of its summer precipitation in July and August with rounds of thunderstorms. The summer months of 2018 across all of Italy were generally warm, but not too hot, other than a heat spike at the start of August which brought blazing temperatures (but for a relatively short period of time), but there were again bouts of hail scattered around Italy's various regions in late July and August, which affected yields dramatically in the areas hit. For example, in Campania, Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino vineyards were affected by hail in late July, with some vineyards losing as much as fifty percent of their potential crop (but nearby Taurasi vineyards were untouched). Hail also affected Barbaresco in 2018, but generally spared townships in the Barolo area. The storms, where there was no hail, also presented challenges of potential mildew issues (which had been a relative constant of 2018 since the rainy weather in May), so that growers had to be vigilant after the thunderstorms had passed and keep their vines in good condition rolling into harvest. The weather at harvest was excellent across all of Italy, with sunny skies and cooler evening temperatures allowing acidity to keep at good levels, and most growers reported bringing in beautiful bunches, with nicely plump, concentrated berries and fine juice to skin ratios.

So, these were the general vintage conditions of the two years primarily reported on in this feature, 2018 and 2019. In addition to the current releases covered in this article, I am also fortunate to be able to report on a vertical tasting of the rare Super Tuscan bottling of Il Caberlot from the Podere Il Carnasciale winery. Podere Il Carnasciale is owned by the Rogosky family, who first cleared and planted their small, one-third of a hectare vineyard in southern Tuscany in 1986. What is most remarkable about the wine that they produce from their hilltop, tiny gem of a vineyard is that the original parcel was planted with a very rare genetic cross of Cabernet Franc and Merlot, which was discovered by agronomist Remigio Bordini in an abandoned vineyard outside of Verona fifty years ago and was nurtured and propagated in his nursery for many years, prior to his sanctioning it to be planted at Il Carnasciale in the mid-1980s. To date, this is the only commercial planting of the Caberlot grape anywhere in the world! Wolf and Bettina Rogosky planted their vineyard in 1986 and produced their first vintage of Il Caberlot from the "third leaf" in 1988, and the wine has been eagerly sought after since that very first vintage. It is an extremely elegant and refined example of a Super Tuscan, with its unique blend of personalities from the Cabernet Franc and Merlot grapes providing a certain sense of Bordeaux familiarity to the wines, but with the *terroir* of southern Chianti also very strongly in evidence and placing this wine stylistically squarely in the natural realm of Tuscany's greatest wines. Wolf and Bettina placed a bottle of Sassicaia under the first vine that went into the ground at Il Carnasciale back in 1986, and this has been a good luck charm for their vineyard that clearly now produces a wine at the very same quality level. I have placed the vertical report on the Podere Il Carnasciale's Il Caberlot in the Tuscan section of this report (which is organized generally by geographic terms from north to south for the red wines), so please look below for further information on this rare and beautiful Super Tuscan.

Beyond the vertical report on Il Caberlot, readers will find that this year's report on Italian wines is greatly expanded from last year's edition, as have been able to add to the roster of wineries covered in this article rather dramatically. Happily, this has allowed me to revisit the

wines from a great many estates whose wines I have sold in the past, back in my formative days in the wide trade, first as a retail wine merchant and later as a sommelier, but which I had not been able to follow with any regularity in the pages of View From the Cellar over these last fifteen years. Beyond familiar names such as Castello di Rampolla and Castello di Ama in the Chianti region, Lisini and Uccelliera in Brunello or Vie di Romans or Livio Felluga in Friuli, I was also able to taste some truly stunning wines from estates that were completely new to me (though I probably should have already known about them!) such as the beautiful Piemontese wines from the Pecchenino brothers, or the superb, Old School Baroli from the Anselma family or the rising Barolo stars of the Giovanni Rosso and Trediberri wineries, or the superb Barbareschi from Pietro Rocca's fine La Ca'Növa estate. Add in all the usual suspects such as Burlotto, Bartolo Mascarello, Vallana, Ar.Pe.Pe., Giacomo Conterno, Cavallotto, Cantina Rizzi, Luigi Tecce, Colle Gaio and a host of other producers and one will see that I have been up to my neck in some of the most stunning young Italian wines that I have ever had the pleasure to taste! In fact, at the start of August my cellar was so overflowing with samples of Italian wines that I did not even bother to follow-up with importers such as Empson USA, who had not gotten back to me from my original email, as I knew I would never have enough time to get through even more samples (despite my profound regret for not getting caught up on the new releases from Marcarini!) and still get this issue of the newsletter out close to its anticipated release date. So, despite this feature being more than fifty pages in length, there is still a lot of ground I left uncovered this time around!

The following tasting notes are generally sorted geographically for the red wines, from north to south. Prior to this, I have simply listed all of the white wines together alphabetically in their own section, and have done the same for the small handful of rosé bottling that I have tasted for this article. In both the white wine and rosé sections, I have included which region the wine hails from in parentheses after the name of the wine. As I received far more red wine samples than I did white or rosé wines for this article, this approach seemed to be a logical organization of the tasting notes for this report, rather than letting the notes on the white wines get a bit buried in the much larger number of red wines I tasted from each geographic region. Within the red wine groupings, I have listed just a couple of wines by varietal, rather than geographically, as it struck me as more interesting to compare and contrast wines made from the Barbera or Dolcetto grapes in their own section, rather than lumping them in with other wines from Piemonte (as one is more likely to overlook notes on wines from these two varietals when they are listed alongside those from Barbaresco and Barolo). Within all of the various groupings of similar wines, individual notes are listed first by vintage from youngest to oldest, and alphabetically within these subsets of vintages.

### ***Vino Bianco***

#### **2020 Gavi- Tenuta Olim Bauda (Asti)**

The 2020 Gavi from Tenuta Olim Bauda is fermented and raised in stainless steel and offers up a bright bouquet of pear, spring flowers, a hint of green olive and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, focused and complex, with fine mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and youthful finish. Lovely Gavi. 2021-2028. **89.**

#### **2020 Moscato d'Asti- Tenuta Olim Bauda (Asti) screwcap**

The 2020 Moscato d'Asti from Olim Bauda is a beautifully fresh and vibrant wine on the nose, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, passion fruit, acacia blossoms and pretty soil



tones. On the palate the wine is fresh, bright and full, with lovely delineation and bounce, frothy *mousse* and a long, succulent finish. I love good Moscato d'Asti, which at five percent octane, is so easily drinkable and delicious. This is a good example, despite the use of the screwcap! 2021-2023. **89.**

**2020 Carricante- Calabretta (Etna Rosso)**

The Carricante from Massimiliano Calabretta utilizes some very old vines, as one-third of this cuvée hails from vines that range from sixty to one hundred years of age, planted in stony volcanic soils. The other two-thirds were planted in 2004, planted on the same soils, so these vines are also starting to come into their own. The grapes are hand-harvested and the wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tank. The 2020 Carricante comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of lemon, lime, fresh rosemary, balsam boughs, a beautiful base of stony soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, outstanding mineral drive and bounce and a very, very long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stellar wine. 2021-2040. **94.**



**2020 Frascati Superiore- Cantine Colli di Catone (Antonio Pulcini)**

The 2020 Frascati Superiore from Colli di Catone is a lovely wine, with a bright, complex and floral bouquet of lemon, pear, white lilies, lilacs and a good base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and zesty, with lovely detail and backend bounce

on the long finish. This is the first Frascati bottling I have tasted from Antonio Pulcini and it is a very elegant wine. 2021-2025. **89.**

**2019 Luminae Bianco- Cantina Bianchi (Colline Novaresi)**

The 2019 Luminae Bianco from Cantina Bianchi is composed entirely from the grape variety of Erbaluce. It delivers a bright and complex bouquet of green apple, green olive, fresh tarragon, stony minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and zesty, with a lovely core, impressive mineral undertow, good acids and a long, focused and very nicely balanced finish. This is the first wine I can recall tasting made from Erbaluce and it is quite lovely. 2021-2024. **90.**

**2019 Petite Arvine- Lo Triolet (Vallée d'Aoste)**

Marco Martin only started his Lo Triolet winery in 1993, but he has fairly quickly become the iconic producer in the Vallée d'Aoste. His Petite Arvine bottling is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks and offers up a very bright and complex nose of green apple, lime peel, green olive, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, zesty acids, fine focus and bounce and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is outstanding juice! 2021-2035. **92.**

**2019 Pinot Gris- Lo Triolet (Vallée d'Aoste)**

The Lo Triolet vineyards of Pinot Gris are planted at fully nine hundred meters above sea level, nestled into the lower slopes of the Alps in this extreme northwestern corner of Italy. Despite the altitude of this parcel, the wine is plenty ripe in 2019, coming in at a full fourteen percent octane and delivering a fine aromatic constellation of peach, fresh apricot, gently musky floral tones, orange zest, stony soil tones and a discreet topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bright, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and cut, bouncy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is beautifully light on its feet for Pinot Gris, but has plenty of depth and stuffing at the same time. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2035. **93.**

**2019 Core Bianco- Montevetrano (Campania)**

The Core Bianco bottling from Montevetrano is a fifty-fifty blend of Greco and Fiano, raised in stainless steel tank. The 2019 offers up a beautifully complex and expressive bouquet of comice pear, casaba melon, honeysuckle, a hint of beeswax, beautiful, salty soil tones, lemon peel and a topnote that hints at green olive. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core and soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is first class juice! 2021-2028. **93.**

**2019 Kerner- Pacher Hof (Alto Adige)**

The Kerner bottling from Pacher Hof has a small percentage of the cuvée raised in cask, as ten percent of the blend is aged in French oak barrels, with the remainder in stainless steel. The 2019 version is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent and offers up a bright and zesty bouquet of gooseberry, lime, a fine base of soil, citrus peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with an excellent core of fruit, a fine girdle of acidity, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex finish. This really shares a lot of personality with a top flight Sancerre, albeit with more gravelly soil tones than the chalk of Sancerre. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2030. **92.**

**2019 Nascetta- Reverdito (Langhe)**

Michele Reverdito's bottling of Nascetta (a grape I had never tasted previously) is from fairly young vines, as he only planted this vineyard six years ago, and which he raises in clay

amphora. The wine comes in nicely ripe in 2019, tipping the scales at fourteen percent octane and offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, white peach, dried flowers, white soils and a nice touch of amphora earthiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and bright, with a fine core, good soil undertow and acidity, fine balance and an impressively long, complex finish that closes with a note of citrus pith. This is a uniquely styled and quite lovely wine. 2021-2028+. **90.**

**2019 Pinot Grigio- Tenuta il Canovino (Verona)**

The Pinot Grigio from Antonio Rambelli's Tenuta il Canovino comes in one of the most unique bottles I have ever seen, as this squat, broad-shouldered and clear bottle will stand out in any crowd! The 2019 version is quite tasty, offering up a bright bouquet of lemon, green apple, dried flowers, a bit of straw and a good base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and complex, with zesty acids, good focus and a long well-balanced finish. This is very tasty juice. 2021-2025. **89.**

**2019 Chardonnay "Filebasse"- Viberti (Langhe)**

The 2019 Chardonnay "Filebasse" from Viberti is grown from vines planted in the valley between the ridges in the Barolo AOC. The wine is fermented and aged solely in stainless steel tanks and the 2019 comes in at an even thirteen percent octane. It delivers a youthful bouquet of apple, lemon, a hint of nutskin, dried flowers and a bit of sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is far more expressive today than the reticent nose, with its full-bodied and zesty format, good core of fruit and long, youthful finish. This has good stuffing, but is a bit unfocused. 2021-2028. **86.**

**2019 Chardonnay- Vie di Romans (Friuli Isonzo)**

The 2019 Chardonnay from Vie di Romans is fermented in stainless steel and raised in French *barriques* for nine months prior to bottling. It offers up a pretty and new oaky nose of apple, pear, fresh almond, a lovely base of soil, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite new oaky in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow, good acids and a long, promising finish. This is certainly quite drinkable today, but I would be inclined to give it a year or two in the cellar to allow the new oak to be more fully subsumed in the other elements of the wine. Like all of the Vie di Romans' wines, this is very well-made, but it might be a candidate for aging in "one wine" barrels, just to obviate the need for allowing the new oak to integrate with bottle age. A tasty chardonnay. 2021-2030. **90+.**

**2018 Friulano- Livio Felluga (Friuli Colli Orientali) screwcap**

The 2018 Friulano from Livio Felluga is a fine bottle, with impressive depth on the palate and lovely complexity on the nose. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of tart pear, green olive, wild fennel, a good base of soil, just a touch of white flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and drinking beautifully today, with good acids and focus, a superb core, sound framing acids and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. I often comment about wines sealed under screwcap that are showing some sort of deleterious effect from the closure, so I should mention here that this wine is drinking beautifully and shows absolutely no reduction issues from its screwcap. Fine juice. 2021-2024. **91.**

**2018 Cuvée Flors di Uis- Vie di Romans (Friuli Isonzo)**

The Flors di Uis bottling from Vie di Romans is composed from a *cépages* of forty-five percent Malvasia, forty percent Rhein Riesling and fifteen percent Friulano. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel. The 2018 version is beautifully expressive on the nose, showing plenty of Malvasia personality in its constellation of musk melon, peach, a hint of



papaya, honeysuckle, very pretty soil tones and a touch of gentle spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with sound framing acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, bouncy and vibrant finish. This wine is absolutely loaded with personality, but it seems likely to be fairly short-lived in this vintage by the standards of this fine winery. 2021-2024. **91.**

**2018 Sauvignon Blanc “Piere”- Vie di Romans (Friuli Isonzo)**

Vie di Romans has always been one of my reference point producers in Friuli and I sold their wines all the way back in the early 1990s. Their 2018 Sauvignon Blanc is ripe and lovely, offering up a complex aromatic constellation of lemon, gooseberry, plenty of lovely grassiness, a fine base of stony soil tones and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a fine core of ripe fruit, plenty of this warm vintage’s backend amplitude, lovely acids and a long, complex and slightly heady finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane and is very much a creature of its vintage and a pretty ripe example of its variety, so it will not be for everyone stylistically, but it is also quite complex and very tasty. 2021-2025. **90.**

**2017 Gavi di Gavi- Bruno Broglia (Piemonte)**

The 2017 Gavi di Gavi from Bruno Broglia is produced from his oldest vines, as these vineyards were planted in 1953 and 1955. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel for twelve months and then given an additional four months of bottle aging in the cellars prior to release into the market. The 2017 is drinking beautifully, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of casaba melon, lemon, pear, salty soil tones and a lovely floral topnote redolent of white lilies and honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is cropped at thirty to forty hectoliters per hectare, due to the old vines, and the added depth and length are very much apparent from these lower yields. This is outstanding. 2021-2027. **92.**

**2017 Illivio- Livio Felluga (Friuli Colli Orientali)**

The Illivio bottling from Livio Felluga was first crafted by Livio’s children, on the occasion of his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is composed of a blend of Pinot Bianco, Chardonnay and Picolit, with the wine barrel-fermented and aged in small casks prior to bottling. The 2017 version is drinking at its apogee today, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, pear, raw almond, salty soil tones, fruit blossoms and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, still good acids and a long, balanced and gently new oaky finish. This is a touch more oaky on the palate than on the nose, but the wood is done very elegantly. This is fine juice. 2021-2025. **93.**

**2017 Terre Alte- Livio Felluga (Friuli Colli Orientali)**

Livio Felluga’s Terre Alte bottling is a single vineyard wine from the Terre Alta vineyard in the township of Rosazzo. The wine is made from a blend of Friulano, Pinot Bianco and Sauvignon Blanc, with the Friulano portion of the blend barrel-fermented and aged in *barriques*. The 2017 Terre Alte delivers a deep and complex aromatic constellation of tart pear, green olive, lime peel, fresh-cut grass, a fine base of soil tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, lovely, vibrant acids and impressive balance on the very long and gently new oaky finish. I really enjoy the blend of the grassy notes from the Sauvignon Blanc and the green olive notes from the Friulano, all gently wrapped in vanillin oak! 2021-2035+. **93.**

**2016 Sylvaner “Alte Reben”- Pacher Hof (Alto Adige)**

The old vine bottling of Sylvaner from Pacher Hof hails from a parcel of forty year-old vines. The wine is barrel-fermented in acacia wood casks and then given its *elevage* in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 version is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a lovely nose of green apple, tart pear, white flowers, stony minerality and a topnote of raw almond. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is really good Sylvaner! 2021-2030+. **92.**

**2016 Fiano “Oi Nì”- Tenuta Scuotto (Campania IGP)**

This wine from Tenuta Scuotto is composed entirely from the Fiano di Avellino grape, with the vines ten years of age and fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older, twenty-five hundred liter *botti* for one year prior to bottling. The wine does not undergo malo. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, fresh apricot, honeysuckle, a lovely base of soil tones, beeswax and just a hint of vanillin oak from the large vats. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and loaded with personality, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, good acids and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a big wine, as it comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but the volcanic soils and the blocked malo here give the wine plenty of acidity and it is still nicely cool in the mouth. Good juice. 2021-2026. **90.**

**2014 Fiorduva- Marisa Cuomo (Costa d’Amalfi)**

The 2014 Fiorduva from Marisa Cuomo is a beautiful wine that is drinking at its peak today, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The *cépages* is thirty percent each of Fenile and Ginestra, coupled with forty percent Ripoli. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of pear, tangerine, green olive, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, classy finish. This is a truly lovely wine at its apogee, but still with plenty of life in it. 2020-2025+. **93.**

**2007 Malvasia del Lazio “Colle Gaio”- Cantine Colli di Catone (Antonio Pulcini)**

The 2007 vintage of Colle Gaio from Antonio Pulcini’s Cantine Colli di Catone is a beautifully deep and aromatically complex wine, offering up a marvelous young nose of lemon, tart pear, wild fennel, a touch of rosemary, menthol, fresh almond and a beautiful base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied, racy and complex, with bottomless depth at the core, a superb girdle of acidity, laser-like focus and a very long, perfectly balanced and extremely promising finish. At fourteen years of age, this wine is drinking splendidly, but it is clearly still in climbing mode and more complexity will emerge with further cellaring. This is an absolutely stunning vintage for this iconic white wine! 2021-2045. **95.**



### ***Vino Rosato***

#### **2020 Rosato- Calabretta (Etna Rosso)**

The 2020 Rosato from Calabretta is all produced from Nerello Mascalese vines, with Massimiliano using his younger vines for the rosé. The vines were planted in 2005 and 2006 and half are on their original rootstock. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and is a fairly deep color for Rosato. It offers up a very pretty nose of blood orange, rhubarb, a touch of watermelon, dried roses, gentle spice tones and a fine base of volcanic soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite vinous in personality, with impressive soil signature for a Rosato, a fine core, good acids, focus and grip on the long, quite complex finish. This is most emphatically a Rosato built for food and is a lovely wine. 2021-2026. **89.**

#### **2020 Rosato “Purple Rose”- Castello di Ama (Toscana)**

Castello di Ama makes their “Purple Rose” Rosato entirely from Sangiovese, with the wine given twelve hours of skin contact, and then the juice for the Rosé is bled from the vats in a *saignée* method. Thirty percent of this juice is barrel-fermented in older *barriques* and the remainder in stainless steel. The 2020 Purple Rose is a deep salmon color and offers up a lovely nose of cherries, rhubarb, orange peel and a quite serious base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and juicy, with a good core, lovely focus and balance and an impressively long, wide open finish. Good juice, but with fairly moderate acidity, so plan to drink over the next few years. 2021-2023. **89.**

### **2019 Rosato “Purple Rose”- Castello di Ama (Toscana)**

The 2019 Rosato “Purple Rose” from Castello di Ama is also still a fairly deep salmon hue, but it is starting to show just a hint of orange to its color today. The wine is aging quite nicely, and does not have quite the same youthful exuberance on the nose as the just released 2020, but has a touch of developmental complexity to compensate. It offers up scents of desiccated cherries, orange peel, a hint of sweet tomato, pretty soil tones, a touch of oregano and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, zesty and more structured than the 2020 version, with a fine girdle of acidity, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I like the slightly superior cut and grip here. 2021-2025. **90.**

### **2018 Rosato “La Cyclope”- Luigi Tecce (Irpinia)**

The 2018 Rosato “La Cyclope” from Luigi Tecce is composed entirely from Aglianico, from the same two parcels of vines in Paternapoli where Luigi produces his Poliphemo bottling. The soils are clay and limestone, interspersed with sand and residual volcanic elements, with the vines more than eighty-five years of age. 2018 was the first vintage that Luigi ever produced this Rosato di Aglianico, with the wine fairly dark for a Rosé from some extended skin contact. The wine goes through a full malolactic fermentation and offers up a deep and youthfully complex nose of desiccated cherries, rhubarb, blood orange, cinnamon stick, roses, peonies, a touch of sumac and a beautiful base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with good framing acids, impeccable balance, a fine core and a very long, complex and still youthful finish. This is a fascinating wine, which needs fifteen to twenty minutes of air to start to blossom on the nose and seems destined to age long and gracefully, though it is not all that high in acidity. When it comes to food pairing, think of this as a red wine without a lot of color and no tannin, which would be great in the heat of the summer with grilled pork, lamb or chicken. I have never tasted a Rosato like this, but it is beautifully crafted and I would love to see how long it is going to last in the cellar and what it will drink like a decade down the road! 2021-2035+. **93.**

### ***Vino Rossi- Trentino- Alto Adige***

#### **2015 Südtiroler Blauburgunder- Weingut Gottardi**

This wine is composed entirely from Pinot Noir (Blauburgunder in the local dialect), with the vineyards planted on limestone and sandstone soils. The first vines here were planted in 1992 and the most recent parcel went in the ground in 2008, so they are still relatively young, but starting to come into their own. The wine is given one year aging in Burgundy casks and then is racked into large *fuders* for a six month stay prior to bottling. The 2015 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and youthful nose of black cherries, lovely soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs, woodsmoke and a discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, well-measured tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced young finish. This is still fairly youthful and needs some time in the cellar for the tannins to soften, but it is very well-made and will be an excellent drink in due course. 2026-2055. **90.**

#### **2015 San Leonardo Vigneti delle Dolomiti - Tenuta San Leonardo**

This wine is an old vine blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and carmenère, with the first vintage having been created in this mountainous corner of the Alto Adige by Carlo Gonzaga in 1982. However, these grape varieties have a long history at this Trentino estate, as they were first planted here at the dawn of the twentieth century. The wine is aged for fully two years in French

*barriques*, with the one third of the casks renewed each year. The vineyards are farmed organically, the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and the 2015 comes in at a svelte thirteen percent octane, with the *cépages* in this vintage being sixty percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent carmenère and ten percent merlot. The 2015 San Leonardo offers up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of dark berries, smoked meats, tobacco leaf, coffee grounds, a superb base of gravelly soil tones, a touch of sweet botanicals and a discreet framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and elegant in profile, with fine focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex finish that closes with a note of bitterness that reminds me of Emidio Pepe's wines. This young wine takes a bit of time in the glass to blossom and is clearly built for long-term cellaring. I love its shape and aesthetic sensibilities and have to imagine that it is a gorgeous middleweight when it is fully mature, but this is the first vintage I have had the pleasure to taste. A new world to me that I intend to follow and see what San Leonardo tastes like when it is fully mature! 2031-2075. **93+**.

#### **2014 Villa Gresti Vigneti delle Dolomiti- Tenuta San Leonardo**

The Villa Gresti bottling from Tenuta San Leonardo is composed of ninety percent merlot and ten percent carmenère, with the vines not as venerable as those used for the San Leonardo bottling, as these vines range from ten to twenty years of age. As the vines are a bit younger, this wine is aged for only twelve to fourteen months in *barriques*, after fermentation with native yeasts in cement tanks. The 2014 vintage of Villa Gresti is lovely, coming in at thirteen percent alcohol and offering up an expressive and black fruity bouquet of dark berries, cigar ash, fresh herb tones, dark soil, coffee bean, a touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and refined, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and promising finish. This too is built for the cellar, but it is a bit more forward in personality than the San Leonardo bottling and will start to drink very nicely with five to seven more years in the cellar. Good juice. 2027-2050. **92**.

#### ***Dolcetto***

##### **2020 Dogliani Superiore "Bricco Mollea"- Trediberri (La Morra)**

Trediberri's bottling of Dogliani was first crafted in the 2019 vintage, after the winery was able to secure a parcel of very old Dolcetto vines in the township, which date back to the early years after the second world war. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of cement and stainless steel tanks. The 2020 Bricco Mollea comes in at a svelte thirteen percent octane and offers up a beautiful deep and expressive aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, bonfire, roasted game, dark soil tones and a topnote of dried violets. On the palate the wine is tangy, fullish and succulent at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and grip, very gentle tannins and a long, nascently complex and very tasty finish. This has just enough backend tannin to ask for a couple of years in the cellar, but it will be hard not to drink it in the first blush of youth. Good juice. 2021-2030. **89+**.

##### **2019 Dolcetto d'Alba- Anselma Giacomo (Serralunga d'Alba)**

The Anselma Giacomo estate is now run by Franco and Maria Anselma, who are the third generation to man the helm of this winery in Serralunga. This was the first time I had ever tasted any of their wines and I was very impressed with their old school sensibilities and fine parcels in Serralunga, including Vigna Rionda! Their 2019 Dolcetto is a fine young wine, offering up a classic nose of black cherries, a bit of gamebird, dark soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote

of violet. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of sappy black fruit, good soil signature, a bit of buried tannin and a long, well-balanced and bouncy finish. This is very good Dolcetto, which has a bit of structure and will be an even better drink a year or two down the road, but which is eminently approachable today. 2023-2033. **90.**



**2019 Dolcetto d'Alba- La Ca'Növa (Barbaresco)**

The 2019 Dolcetto d'Alba from the Rocca family's La Ca'Növa estate is a classic example of this underrated varietal. The bouquet is deep and bright, jumping from the glass in a youthful mix of red and black cherries, a bit of cranberry, woodsmoke, a hint of peanut and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and still youthfully tight, with a fine core, good soil undertow, vibrant acids and a long, promising finish. This needs six months to a year to unwind structurally, but has lovely bones. 2022-2030+. **88+.**

**2019 Dolcetto d'Alba- Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)**

The 2019 Dolcetto d'Alba from Maria-Teresa Mascarello is a lovely and quite serious example of this varietal. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a hint of curry, roasted meats, fresh herb tones, dark soil elements and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is bright, juicy and full, with a good core and soil inflection, modest tannins and a long, wide open and complex finish. This is a fine bottle of Dolcetto. 2021-2028. **90.**



### **2019 Dolcetto d'Alba- Giuseppe Nada (Treiso)**

Enrico Nada succeeded his father, Giuseppe, as cellar master here in 2008, though his parents still live in their house right at the summit of the family vineyards and do most of the vine-tending themselves, as no winegrower in Piemonte really retires! The family's Dolcetto hails from the cru of Marcarini and the 2019 version is classic and utterly beautiful, with the nose soaring from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of nutskin, rose petals, a hint of tariness and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, a bit of tannin and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is terrific Dolcetto, without the sappy core of fruit of many examples, but far more mineral definition and complexity as a result. 2021-2030. **90.**

### **2019 Dolcetto d'Alba- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

The 2019 Dolcetto d'Alba from Cantina Rizzi is a very lovely wine that truly reflects Dolcetto's often quoted, but seldom realized sobriquet of "Italy's Beaujolais", as this wine is bright, transparent and light on its feet. The nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a fine base of soil tones, bonfire, just a touch of fresh oregano and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with lovely intensity of flavor in the mid-palate, just a bit of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is lovely Dolcetto that will actually age very well, but is also delicious out of the blocks. 2021-2030. **89.**

### **2016 Dogliani Superiore "Bricco Botti"- Pecchenino**

The Bricco Botti bottling from Pecchenino is composed entirely of Dolcetto, which is raised in large *botti* for two years prior to bottling. The 2016 version is the current release and offers up a superb nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of hazelnut, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of road tar, a good base of soil, peonies and perhaps just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, well-balanced and promising finish that actually still needs some bottle age to fully blossom! Maybe there are other bottlings of Dogliani out there like this, but to me, this is a completely new style of wine and reminds me of my first encounters with Bricco dell'Uccellone back in the 1980s, when I had no idea Barbera could aspire to be that serious! This is a superb wine that is certainly quite approachable today, but will be even better with a bit more bottle age to let its tannins soften up a bit more on the backend. Fine, fine juice. 2026-2045+. **92.**

### ***Barbera***

#### **2020 Barbera d'Alba- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

Enrico Dellapiana's 2020 Barbera is a fine young bottle, delivering a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, a touch of peanut, gamebird, fresh oregano, a complex base of soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil undertow, buried, moderate tannins and lovely focus and balance on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is another of the top flight examples of Barbera that will age for a decade or more in the cellar and provide excellent drinking every step of the way. A great value! 2021-2031+. **91+.**

#### **2020 Barbera d'Alba- Trediberri (La Morra)**

The 2020 Barbera d'Alba from Trediberri hails from several parcels of vines planted down at the foot of the well-known Rocche dell'Annunziata vineyard in La Morra. The wine is

fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in a combination of cement and stainless steel vats. The wine is ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a beautiful, classic bouquet of red and black cherries, peanuts, bonfire, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This is excellent Barbera! 2021-2030+. **91+**.

**2020 Barbera d'Alba "La Gemella"- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)**

As I mentioned last summer, the Viberti family's Barbera d'Alba is done in a hybrid style, with the initial fermentation getting started in a roto-fermenter before being racked to French *barriques* for malolactic and eight months of *elevage* in barrel. The wine is then racked to stainless steel tanks for another three to four months prior to bottling. The 2020 La Gemella is fairly ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a very expressive bouquet of red and black cherries, peanuts, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of fresh herbs, a good base of soil and a fair bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and has a lovely sappy core of fruit, with modest tannins, tangy acids and lovely complexity on the gently new oak finish. The new oak here works very nicely with the underlying wine and is already integrating very well indeed, but I would give the wine a year or two in the cellar to allow it to be absorbed completely. This is really very good juice. 2022-2035. **90**.

**2019 Barbera d'Alba- Anselma Giacomo (Serralunga d'Alba)**

The 2019 Barbera d'Alba from Franco and Maria Anselma, who are the current generation of the family to run Anselma Giacomo, hails all from family-owned parcels in the township of Serralunga. The wine is still quite youthful and needs some air before it starts to blossom, but once it opens up, it delivers scents of red and black cherries, smoked meats, a fine base of soil, bonfire, fresh oregano and a touch of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a good core, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, focused, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a very fine, old school example of Barbera. 2021-2035. **90**.

**2019 Barbera d'Asti "La Villa"- Tenuta Olim Bauda (Asti)**

The La Villa bottling of Barbera from the Bauda family is made from two parcels of vines, with one planted in 1979 and the other in 2020, so these days, all of the vines are starting to get into their primes. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel and the 2019 offers up a lovely bouquet of black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of peanut, dark soil tones, fresh oregano and topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a classic example of Barbera that will age very nicely indeed, but is already quite approachable if given a bit of air. Good juice. 2021-2035. **90+**.

**2019 Barbera d'Alba- Commendatore G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)**

The 2019 Barbera d'Alba from the Commendatore G. B. Burlotto winery is a lovely wine that is a touch riper in style than the 2016 reported on below. The wine comes in at an even fourteen percent octane and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, nutskin, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, a nice touch of fresh oregano and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, bit of backend tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is certainly tasty today, but given how beautifully the 2016 Barbera is drinking today, I would be remiss in not recommending cellaring it for at least a couple of years! 2023-2035. **90+**.

### **2019 Barbera- Vallana e Figlio**

The 2019 Barbera from Vallana e Figlio is fermented and aged in cement tanks. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivers a classic aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, peanut, complex soil tones, a bit of licorice, roasted gamebird, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and nicely soil-driven finish. This is a beautiful bottle of old school Barbera. 2021-2035+. **91.**

### **2018 Barbera d'Alba- La Ca'Növa (Barbaresco)**

The Barbera d'Alba bottling from Pietro Rocca and his two sons, Marco and Ivan, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in three thousand liter Austrian oak *Botti*. The 2018 version is a ripe wine, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of Piemontese herb tones and a touch of peanut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with very good focus and grip, buried tannins and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This shows virtually no signs of backend heat and is a fine, broad-shouldered example of Barbera. It could do with a couple of years in the cellar to allow its tannins to recede a bit more. Good juice. 2023-2035+. **89.**

### **2018 Barbera d'Alba "Vigna Cuculo"- Cavallotto**

The 2018 Barbera d'Alba "Vigna Cuculo" from Cavallotto is given a fifteen day maceration and then fully two years aging in oak prior to bottling. The wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of roasted meats, dark soil tones, a hint of road tar, a bit of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, good soil signature, modest tannins, tangy acids and a long, well balanced and very classy finish. This is outstanding Barbera that could use a few years in the cellar. 2024-2045. **91.**

### **2018 Barbera d'Alba "Vigna Francia"- Giacomo Conterno (Monforte d'Alba)**

Roberto Conterno's 2018 Barbera is a big, ripe wine, coming in listed at a full fifteen percent octane and delivering a complex and slightly jammy nose of red and black cherries, a bit of tomato, bonfire, roasted game, nutskin, herb tones, a touch of rose petal and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a bit of firm tannin, tangy acids, good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a very good bottle, with very little signs of backend heat, but its ripeness takes away just a bit of the brightness on the nose that one associates with so many examples of Barbera. That said, this is still a very good wine- just slightly atypical stylistically for this varietal. 2021-2035. **91.**

### **2018 Barbera d'Alba- Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)**

Maria-Teresa Mascarello's 2018 vintage of Barbera hails from plots of vines in two of the Crus of Barolo (where she also has Nebbiolo planted)- Rué and San Lorenzo. The wine delivers a beautifully deep and precise bouquet of black cherries, a touch of orange peel, gamebird, a touch of peanut, fresh oregano and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and built for the cellar, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and a long, focused, complex and beautifully balanced young finish. This still needs a few years to blossom properly and will be particularly long-lived by the standards of Barbera. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2040. **92.**



### **2018 Barbera d'Alba- Pio Cesare (Alba)**

The Barbera d'Alba from Pio Cesare is rather unique in its *elevage* for this varietal, as thirty percent of the cuvée is aged in small, French *barriques*, and the other seventy percent in *botti* that are also made from French oak and are now eight years of age. The 2018 version is quite lovely, offering just a whisper of oak influence in its bright and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, nutskin, woodsmoke, a hint of licorice, a fine base of soil, fresh oregano and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with quite a bit of structure for Barbera, a lovely core of fruit, buried tannins and a long, tang and complex finish. The touch of oak here works very well and produces a Barbera that will certainly reward cellaring, so I would be inclined to tuck this away for at least a couple of years and allow it to really blossom. It is a very refined example of Barbera. 2023-2033+. **90.**

### **2018 Barbera d'Alba Superiore "Fides" Vigna Mosconi- Pio Cesare (Alba)**

The Fides bottling from Pio Cesare is a single vineyard bottling of Barbera from the Vigna Mosconi vineyard in Monforte d'Alba. The wine is aged in the same combination of French oak *botti* and *barriques* as the regular bottling of Barbera, though the wood may be a touch newer than for the *normale*. The 2018 Fides offers up a pure, black fruity and gently new oaky bouquet black cherries, cigar smoke, peanuts, gentle herb tones, a lovely base of soil, roses and a very attractive framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long,

well-balanced and very classy finish. This reminds me quite a bit of Elio Altare's Vigna Larigi bottling from the late '80s, with a more refined use of new oak. Fine juice. 2026-2045. **92.**

**2018 Barbera d'Alba- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

Enrico Dellapiana at Cantina Rizzi is making just superb wines these days and this was one of the finest Barberas I tasted for this report. His Barbera is aged in a combination of old *botti*, cement vats and stainless steel tanks. The 2018 is a beautiful example of this underrated varietal, with the nose jumping from the glass in a sappy blend of red and black cherries, nutskin, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, roses, a touch of fresh oregano and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil undertow and grip, a bit of ripe tannin and a long, complex and very classy finish. This comes in at 14.5 percent octane- in the style of this ripe vintage, but is impeccably balanced and will age effortlessly (if one can keep their hands off of the bottles in the cellar). If you have not yet discovered just how good Enrico's wines are these days, then this is a beautiful introductory bottle to give you some idea of the classically-styled fireworks going on with the Barbaresco Crus here! 2021-2030. **91.**

**2017 Barbera d'Alba "Dü Gir"- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)**

The Dü Gir bottling of Barbera from Montaribaldi is their old vine cuvée, with all of these vines at least sixty years of age. It is aged all in new oak for two years prior to bottling. The 2017 Dü Gir is listed at quite a ripe octane, at 15.5 percent alcohol, but offers up impressive freshness and precision in its bouquet of black cherries, roasted meats, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh oregano and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, buried tannins and a long, surprisingly well-balanced finish that shows a bit of backend heat. This carries its alcohol very well, but I would love to taste it in a vintage where it came in a point lower in octane, as the old vine depth here is quite impressive. 2021-2030. **89.**

**2016 Barbera d'Asti Superiore "Le Rocchette"- Tenuta Olim Bauda (Asti)**

The Barbera d'Asti Superiore "Le Rocchette" from the Bauda family is one of their old vine bottlings, as these vines were planted in 1950! The wine is aged in twenty-five hundred liter *Botti*, but made from French *Allier* oak (in the style of Bruno Giacosa) and the 2016 offers up a superb bouquet of ripe black cherries, gamebird, anise, dark soil tones, a touch of *balsamico* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and structured like a young Barolo, with a sappy core of black fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and slightly warm finish. This is quite ripe in 2016, coming in listed at 15.5 percent octane, but it carries its alcohol remarkably well and only shows a bit of backend heat. The wine will definitely demand some cellaring time before it starts to soften up. This is the first vintage of Le Rocchette I have tasted from the Baudas, so I am not sure if the 15.5 percent alcohol is unique to this vintage, or something that happens with some frequency with these old vines. It is a very impressive Barbera, but, needless to say, I would have been even more impressed with it coming in at a lower octane. But, there is no denying this has serious raw materials. 2026-2045. **90+.**

**2016 Barbera d'Alba- Commendatore G. B. Burlotto**

I am trying my best to age this beautiful vintage of Barbera from the Burlotto estate, but I am not having all that much success! This most recent bottle was wide open and drinking with great style, offering up scents of black cherries, road tar, a lovely touch of nuttiness, a superb base of soil tones and a topnote of fresh-picked oregano. On the palate the wine is pure, full-

bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, tangy acids, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. My goal was to see how this wine would drink at ten or fifteen years of age, but I am starting to doubt there will be many bottles left from the case by the time its tenth birthday rolls around! 2021-2035. **91**.

### ***Nebbiolo d'Alba***

#### **2020 Langhe Nebbiolo- Trediberri (La Morra)**

Trediberri's winemaker, Nicola Oberto, sources his Nebbiolo for this bottling from younger vines in the villages of Roero and La Morra. He ferments the wine with indigenous yeasts and ages it in cement and stainless steel vats. The 2020 offers up a beautifully pure, youthful blend of cherries, gamebird, rose petals, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke and a dollop of fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core of red fruit, impressive soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is beautifully old school in personality, and yet coupled with impressive elegance and structural sophistication. It is a great value and will be starting to drink with generosity three to five years down the road. 2024-2045. **91+**.

#### **2019 Langhe Nebbiolo- Giuseppe Nada (Treiso)**

Enrico Nada's Langhe Nebbiolo bottling hails from younger vines in the families two crus in Barbaresco, as well as some parcels in the cru of Marcarini that are always earmarked for this bottling. The 2018 Langhe Nebbiolo is ripe in the style of the vintage, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but also quite transparent in personality. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, blood orange, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh oregano and a floral topnote redolent of roses. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This does not show its 14.5 percent alcohol at all! I would give this wine three or four years in the cellar to let its tannins soften up a bit more on the backend. 2025-2045. **89+**.

#### **2019 Langhe Nebbiolo- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

The 2019 Langhe Nebbiolo from the Dellapiana family is a lovely young wine, with all of the transparency and red fruity elegance that one finds in the family's Barbaresco bottlings as well. The wine comes in at an even fourteen percent octane in 2019 and delivers a refined bouquet of cherries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh oregano, a beautiful base of soil and a hint of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins, vibrant acids and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is an excellent wine that needs a few years in the cellar to soften up its backend tannins and start to drink with generosity, but it is going to be lovely. 2026-2045+. **90**.

#### **2019 Langhe Nebbiolo- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)**

The 2019 Langhe Nebbiolo from the Viberti family is a fine bottle in the making. The bouquet is bright and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, blood orange, gamebird, fresh oregano, a good base of soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tangy, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced young finish. This could do with a few years' worth of bottle age before drinking. 2024-2040+. **88+**.



### **2018 Langhe Nebbiolo- Cavallotto (Castiglione Falletto)**

The Cavallotto family treats their Langhe Nebbiolo in very much the same manner as their Baroli, with the wine given an extended maceration period of anywhere from eighteen to thirty-eight days and then aging in large, Slavonian oak *Botti* for fifteen to eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2018 version is an excellent wine in the making, delivering a deep and complex nose of sappy red and black cherries, oregano, gamebird, lovely soil tones (that will turn autumnal quite promptly), a touch of camphor, woodsmoke and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with broad shoulders, fine focus and grip, excellent complexity, superb soil undertow, chewy tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. This is really a “baby Barolo” in the best sense of the term and a great, great value! Unlike many Langhe Nebbiolo bottlings, the 2018 Cavallotto will demand plenty of bottle age before it starts to drink, but will also age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2028-2055. **91+**.

### **2016 Langhe Nebbiolo- Anselma Giacomo (Serralunga d’Alba)**

The 2016 Langhe Nebbiolo from the Anselma family is really a lovely example, with a very transparent and red fruity personality on both the nose and palate. The wine is fermented in cement vats and acacia wood tanks and then aged for twelve to sixteen months in traditional Slavonian oak *Botti*. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of red cherries, gamebird, a hint of camphor, rose petals, a fine base of soil tones, red curry and just a hint of fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, soil-driven and structured a bit like a Serralunga Barolo, with a good, solid core, ripe, chewy tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and surprisingly youthful finish. This closes with a proper Barolo note of road tar and is a complex, nicely structured wine that is going to age beautifully, but will insist on some hibernation time in the cellar before it starts to drink with any sense of generosity. But, it will definitely reward patience and is an excellent value! 2028-2045+. **91**.

### **2015 Langhe Nebbiolo- Ester Canale Rosso (Serralunga d’Alba)**

This is young vine juice from Ester Canale Rosso and her son Davide, which is not bottled under the family estate name of Giovanni Rosso, as this is from a parcel of Vigna Rionda that was inherited by Ester when her grandfather passed away in 2010. It was replanted in 2012 and this is the first release from those vines, from the “third leaf” that often produces wine at a quality level of much older vines (witness the 1985 vintage of La Turque from Guigal). The wine is fermented in cement vats, given a traditional maceration on the skins of close to a month, and aged in twenty-five hundred liter, French oak *botti* for one year prior to bottling. It offers up a pure and beautifully complex bouquet of cherries, anise, woodsmoke, gamebird, anise, a very refined base of soil tones, roses, a touch of cedar and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a superb core of red fruit, great soil undertow and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish of excellent breed and complexity. This does not quite have the same mid-palate depth and structural chassis as a Barolo bottling from Vigna Rionda, but it has the complexity, depth and stunning soil signature of this great vineyard and will come forward a bit sooner than a proper Barolo would from this *terroir*, and probably deliver the same level of complexity at its apogee. This is a great wine by any measure, but priced according to its pedigree, as young vine Vigna Rionda. 2028-2065. **94**.



### ***Alto Piemonte and Vallée d'Aoste***

#### **2019 Gamay- Lo Triolet**

I had never tasted an example of Gamay from the Vallée d'Aoste before, but Marco Martin's example has to be about as fine as this variety will do in this Alpine setting. The wine is nicely ripe in this vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a vibrant bouquet of red berries, cherries, bonfire, a hint of cranberry, stony soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, good mineral drive, modest tannins and a long, focused and very nicely balanced finish. This is lovely Gamay that speaks clearly of its Italian heritage in its soil signature. 2021-2040. **92.**

#### **2019 Pinot Noir- Lo Triolet**

The 2019 Pinot Noir from Marco Martin's Lo Triolet winery is made from a parcel of fifteen year-old vines that are planted at seven hundred meters above sea level of altitude. Marco ages sixty percent of the cuvée in stainless steel tank and forty percent in *barriques*. The 2019 is a fairly pale in color when first poured, but visibly darkens with exposure to oxygen! The only other pinot noirs I have seen do this routinely were those from Jacky Truchot in Morey St. Denis. The wine delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its constellation of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a hint of currant leaf, lovely, stony soil tones, sweet botanicals and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully light on its feet and transparent, with tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and beautifully balanced

finish. This is approachable now, but still a young wine and will be even better with five to seven years' worth of bottle age. It is really a lovely bottle of pinot noir! 2021-2045+. **92+**.

### **Campi Raudii Vino di Tavola “L-2018”- Vallana e Figlio**

The Campo Raudii bottling is officially a non-vintage wine, but this is Lot 2018, so obviously, it is from the excellent Alto Piemonte vintage of 2018. The wine is made almost entirely from Nebbiolo, with this grape comprising ninety percent of the blend and the other ten percent split between Uva Rara and Vespolina, with the wine fermented and aged in cement vats. The 2018 Campo Raudii delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its bouquet of cherries, a touch of blood orange, bonfire, a fine base of autumnal soil, a bit of smoked meats and a fine mix of both fresh herbs and spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, excellent soil signature, just a bit of tannin and plenty of acidity adding bounce on the long and well-balanced finish. This is the entry level bottling from Vallana and it is amazingly good for its level! 2021-2035. **89.**

### **2018 Rosso di Valtellina- Ar.Pe.Pe.**

Ar.Pe.Pe.'s Rosso di Valtellina is their entry level bottling, but this wine is still made from fifty-plus year-old Nebbiolo vines. The 2018 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane, but is beautifully transparent and light on its feet in style, offering up a vibrant bouquet of cherries, orange peel, smoked meats, lovely, stony soil tones, a touch of fresh oregano, just a hint of road tar, rose petals and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and defined by its underlying minerality, with lovely intensity of flavor, impressive focus and grip, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a wine that is loaded with complexity and personality, without a whole lot of weight! Fine juice. 2021-2040+. **90.**

### **2018 Spanna “Colline Novaresi”- Vallana e Figlio**

The 2018 Spanna “Colline Novaresi” from Vallana is fermented in cement vats and given six months' worth of *elevage* in old oak *Botti* prior to bottling. This bottling is primarily Nebbiolo, but with trace amounts of Vespolina also included. The 2018 comes in at a cool thirteen percent octane and offers up a simply beautiful nose of cherries, lovely spice tones, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke, just a whisper of anise, fresh oregano and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a very elegant profile, a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant, complex and very well-balanced finish. The wine is quite tasty already, but will be even better once it has had a few years in the cellar to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more. This is a lovely, serious wine and an insanely good value! 2021-2050. **92.**

### **2018 Spanna “Cuvée Bernardo Vallana”- Vallana e Figlio**

The “Cuvée Bernardo Vallana” from the Vallana family is only made in top vintages such as 2018. It is a cellar selection of the best lots of Spanna produced in a great year, when the family opines that the *normale* bottling will not suffer from a few lots being set aside for the Cuvée Bernardo. This wine is always composed entirely from Nebbiolo and is aged longer in *Botti* than the regular bottling. The 2018 Cuvée Bernardo is already marvelously complex aromatically, delivering a very refined, old school bouquet of cherries, gamebird, a beautifully complex base of soil (which will become autumnal fairly briskly), brown spices, woodsmoke, roses, violets and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and more elegant on the attack than the *normale*, but with plenty of structure perking up from the mid-palate back to the chewy, ageworthy finish. The wine has a beautiful core of red fruit, outstanding soil undertow, firm tannins and a very long, complex and youthful finish that closes with a note of

oregano. This is a superb wine in the making, but unlike the regular bottling of Spanna in 2018, the Cuvée Bernardo Vallana will demand at least a decade in the cellar before it starts to soften up and drink with generosity. In due time, this will be stunning and it will be very, very long-lived. 2030-2075+. **93+**.

### **2017 Caste della Sesia Rosso- La Palazzina**

The La Palazzina winery was founded by Leonardo Montà in 1986. He now works in the vineyards and cellars with his son, Paolo. Their Caste della Sesia bottling includes their oldest vines, which are sixty years of age, with the wine being composed from a *cépages* of Nebbiolo, Croatina, Uva Rara and Vespolina. All of the vines are planted on volcanic soils. The 2017 comes in at a cool thirteen percent octane and offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, new leather, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones Piemontese herb tones and a topnote of licorice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine that is very Alto Piemonte in personality, with the blend of grapes giving incipient autumnal shadings to the wine that are very attractive. Give it a bit of bottle age to really let it blossom completely. 2027-2055. **92**.

### **2017 Gattinara- Nervi-Conterno**

The 2017 Gattinara from Nervi-Conterno includes all of the fruit from the top four Crus in the estate's vineyard lineup, as Roberto Conterno decided to forego bottling his two single vineyard cuvées of Molsino and Valferana in this vintage. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged for fully three years in *botti* prior to bottling. The wine is quite ripe for Gattinara, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a deep, complex nose of cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, fresh oregano, a fine base of soil, a touch of road tar, loads of spice tones and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, beautifully transparent and firmly structured, with tangy acids, chewy tannins and a long, complex and quite promising young finish. This is plenty tannic out of the blocks and will demand extended cellaring time, but it has lovely constituent components and will be an excellent wine once it has started to soften up a bit. 2033-2075. **92**.

### **2017 Spanna "Cuvée Bernardo Vallana"- Vallana e Figlio**

The 2017 Cuvée Bernardo Vallana is also a fine, fine bottle in the making, but it does not have quite the same extraordinary core of fruit as the 2018 version. However, this is still a first class bottle of Nebbiolo, offering up a deep and complex aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, gamebird, anise, gamebird, a beautiful base of soil tones, fresh oregano, a touch of orange peel and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, young and full-bodied, with a good core, superb soil signature and grip, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, poised and very promising finish. This needs a fair bit of cellaring to loosen up, but it is going to be a fine bottle once it has had its requisite period of hibernation. 2027-2065. **92**.

### **2016 Il Pettirosso- Ar.Pe.Pe.**

The 2016 Il Pettirosso from Ar.Pe.Pe. is a beautiful bottle of Valtellina, composed entirely from Nebbiolo grapes, with the vines well over fifty years of age. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane in this vintage and delivers a very stylish aromatic constellation of cherries, a touch of blood orange, bonfire, gamebird, anise, a complex base of soil tones and very refined notes of road tar, roses and fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and transparent down to its soil, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids, fine focus, moderate

tannins and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is absolutely loaded with personality and yet is beautifully light on its feet. 2021-2040+. **91+**.

**2016 Boca- Vallana e Figlio**

The Boca bottling from Vallana is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent Nebbiolo, twenty percent Vespolina and fifteen percent Uva Rara. The varietals are fermented separately in cement vats and then blended and aged two years in *Botti* prior to bottling. The 2016 Boca delivers a fine, complex aromatic package of cherries, roasted meats, a hint of licorice, complex, stony soil elements, lovely herb tones, woodsmoke and a topnote of brown spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, well-balanced and very classy young finish. This still deserves a few more years in the cellar to blossom up completely, but in a pinch (or if curiosity gets the upper hand) it does drink very well already with half an hour in decanter! Fine, fine juice. 2025-2055+. **93**.

**2015 Grumello “Bocca De Piro”- Ar.Pe.Pe.**

The 2015 Grumello “Bocca De Piro” from Ar.Pe.Pe. is composed entirely from old vine Nebbiolo, with the vines planted between fifty to one hundred years ago! The bottling is given a long maceration of one hundred and ten days and aged in *Botti* for eighteen months prior to bottling, followed by two more years of bottle aging in the cellars before release. The 2015 Bocca De Piro possesses a beautiful bouquet which wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, licorice, a hint of road tar, a beautiful array of fresh herb tones, a bit of smoked duck, complex soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and very well balanced finish. 2021-2050. **93**.

**2015 Sassella “Stella Retica”- Ar.Pe.Pe.**

The Sassella “Stella Retica” bottling from Ar.Pe.Pe. is also made entirely from Nebbiolo, with the vines again ranging from fifty to one hundred years of age. The wine is allowed to macerate for fully four months prior to racking off into *Botti* for a year and a half of cask aging. The 2015 Stella Retica is a truly stunning young wine, offering up a beautifully transparent and complex bouquet of cherries, licorice, gamebird, a complex base of minerality, a beautiful array of fresh herb tones, peonies and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant and absolutely defined by its underlying minerality, with a lovely core, great intensity of flavor, suave tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and tangy finish. This is such a stunning example of great complexity and intensity, without any undue weight- a Nebbiolo for les Amoureuses lovers! 2021-2050. **94**.

**2015 Bramaterra “Balmi Bioti”- La Palazzina**

The Bramaterra “Balmi Bioti” bottling from La Palazzina is another classical Alto Piemonte blend, with a *cépages* of Nebbiolo, Croatina, Vespolina and Uva Rara. The 2015 is a nicely cool and classic wine, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and delivers a complex aromatic constellation of cherries, a touch of pomegranate, anise, lovely minerality, a hint of road tar, a dollop of fresh oregano and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, tangy and beautifully transparent down to its soil, with a good core, bouncy acids, moderately chewy tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is going to be an outstanding middleweight with a bit more bottle age. 2026-2050+. **91**.



### **2010 Gattinara- Vallana e Figlio**

The Vallana family's 2010 vintage of Gattinara is really drinking beautifully at eleven years of age and is another absolutely stunning value in the world of great nebbiolo-based wines. The wine offers up a beautiful aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, gamebird, a complex base of autumnal soil, orange peel, fennel seed, bonfire, gentle spice tones, oregano and a pungent topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with superb soil signature, lovely focus and complexity, modest tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice now into its plateau, but still with many years of life ahead of it. 2021-2050. **92.**



### ***Barbareschi***

#### **2018 Barbaresco “Rizzi”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

The 2018 Barbaresco “Rizzi” from the Dellapiana family is absolutely beautiful young wine, with superb purity and transparency down to its underlying *terroir*. Most of the vines in this twelve hectare vineyard were planted in 1967, though some younger vines were planted here also in 2013 (and most likely still find their way into the Nebbiolo Langhe bottling). The lovely bouquet of the 2018 wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, rose petals, gamebird, curry, complex soil tones, anise and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is still a young wine, but it has all of the pieces in place to be a



superb drink once it starts to blossom. This is a ripe vintage for this wine, coming in listed at a fifteen percent, but this was the same octane level of the 2016 Crus from the Produttori del Barbaresco, and like those wines, the 2018 Rizzi Cru bottling does not show any signs of heat or a lack of precision from its ripeness level. 2035-2085. **93+**.

#### **2017 Barbaresco “Meruzzano”- Orlando Abrigo (Treiso)**

The 2017 Barbaresco “Meruzzano” from Orlando Abrigo is made from vines that range from fifteen to twenty-five years of age. The wine is given a maceration of twenty to twenty-five days and then aged in five hundred liter *tonneaux* for fifteen months prior to bottling. It comes in pretty ripe in this vintage, listed at fifteen percent octane and offering up a nicely pure and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, fennel seed, a fine base of soil tones, a bit of red curry, orange peel, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine transparency down to the soil, firm, chewy tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. My tech sheet does not state how much new oak this wine sees, but clearly it sees at least some, as it has not yet integrated its oak tannins completely. It will in due course, as there is plenty of depth here, but this is a very good bottle of Barbaresco that would be even more interesting to my palate without any new wood- maybe just keep using the same *tonneaux* for a decade and see how the wine evolves without the overt influence from the oak? But, there are good raw materials here and the future looks bright for this estate. 2032-2065+. **91.**

#### **2017 Barbaresco “Montestefano”- La Ca’Növa (Barbaresco)**

Pietro Rocca’s Montestefano bottling is produced from a parcel of thirty-five year-old vines in this excellent cru. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, given twenty-five to thirty days of maceration and then raised in neutral, three thousand liter *Botti*, made from Austrian oak. The 2017 Montestefano is beautifully precise on the nose, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, a superb base of soil, a touch of fresh oregano, road tar, roses and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, firm and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, firm and chewy tannins and a long, tangy and complex young finish. This is an absolutely classic, superb young Barbaresco! 2032-2075+. **93+**.

#### **2017 Barbaresco “Casot”- Giuseppe Nada (Treiso)**

The Casot cru bottling of Barbaresco from the Nada family is an outstanding young wine. This bottling is aged for one year in older *tonneaux* and five hundred liter casks for its first year of *elevage* and its second year in large Slavonian oak *botti*. The 2017 Casot offers up a deep, nascently complex and very pure bouquet of cherries, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of red curry, roses, a touch of fresh oregano and a lovely panoply of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a superb bottle in the making, but it is a properly structured, old school example of Barbaresco and it is built for the cellar. 2032-2075. **93.**

#### **2017 Barbaresco “Nervo”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

The Barbaresco “Nervo” from Cantina Rizzi is produced from their 3.8 hectare parcel in this Cru in Treiso, which sit up at the top of the ridge. The oldest vines here were planted in 1974, with further plots planted in 1997 and 2005. The 2017 Nervo is a lovely, classic example, coming in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage and offering up a complex bouquet of cherries, red curry, spit-roasted gamebird, a refined base of soil tones, bonfire, rose petals and a topnote of

fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is bright, complex, tangy and full-bodied, with lovely soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins, excellent acids and focus and a long, beautifully balanced and very classic finish. This is going to be a gorgeous bottle of Barbaresco when it is ready to drink. 2035-2080. **93.**

**2017 Barbaresco “Pajoré”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

The 2017 vintage of Pajoré from the Dellapiana family is another absolutely excellent Barbaresco in the making. Like the 2017 Nervo, this wine tips the scales at 14.5 percent and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, gamebird, a touch of orange peel, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, road tar, fennel seed, pretty spice tones, a touch of fresh oregano and a topnote of rose. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is outstanding juice. 2035-2085+. **94.**

**2016 Barbaresco “MonTERSINO”- Orlando Abrigo (Treiso)**

The MonTERSINO Cru bottling from Orlando Abrigo is made from older vines than his Meruzzano, as these vines were planted in 1970. The wine is given a similar maceration period and then aged in Slavonian oak *barriques*, with twenty percent of the barrels new each vintage. The 2016 MonTERSINO comes in also at fifteen percent octane and offers up a fine, deep and sappy bouquet of black cherries, fresh oregano, roasted meats, complex soil tones, anise, curry, bonfire and just a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, firm tannins and a long, complex finish that shows just a bit of backend heat. This is a good bottle of Barbaresco in the making, but it is on the riper side. 2033-2065+. **91.**

**2016 Barbaresco “Palazzina”- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)**

It has been a year since I last opened a bottle of the cru of Palazzina from Montaribaldi. As I mentioned last year, this cru is located in the village of Neive and Luciano Taliano ferments the wine traditionally and then ages it in *barriques* for twenty months. The wine is evolving beautifully and now offers up a complex and quite refined bouquet of cherries, a hint of orange peel, lovely spice tones, gamebird, a fine base of soil and plenty of cedary oak from its sojourn in *barrique*. On the palate the wine is svelte, full-bodied, and well-balanced, with excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and fairly new oaky finish. The wine is absorbing its quotient of new oak pretty well and should be a lovely bottle when it is fully ready to drink. As I mentioned last year, I like the “hybrid” style of this wine quite well, but I think using only older *barriques* for the aging of the wine would allow the oak to integrate faster and the wine to develop even greater complexity at its peak. But, that said, this is very good in its style. 2030-2065. **91.**

**2016 Barbaresco “Sori Montaribaldi”- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)**

As I noted last year, when I first tasted the 2016, the cru of Montaribaldi lies in the southern end of the township of Barbaresco, right on the Treiso border. Its closest cru neighbor is Roncaglie. The vineyard has excellent exposition, bending around from southeast to due south to southwest. Luciano Taliano’s version is given two years of aging in *barriques*, with some new casks in the mix, after a quite traditional fermentation. One year on from the last time I tasted this cru, the wine is evolving very nicely and now offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, spit-roasted *pigeon*, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke, a lovely blend of spices, fennel seed and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins, fine balance and grip and a long, complex and youthful finish of

considerable promise. This is more black fruity in personality than the Palazzina bottling, with more mid-palate stuffing to better buffer its *barriques*. A year ago, the wood tannins here were still floating on the surface a bit; one year on, they are buried and perfectly integrated. This is a fine bottle of Barbaresco in the making, but my observation about the Palazzina is also germane here: using one and two wine *barriques*, instead of new oak, could take this up a level in complexity! But, this is good juice without question! 2030-2065+. **92+**.

#### **2015 Barbaresco “Rizzi Vigna Boito” Riserva- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)**

As I mentioned last year in my note on the 2013 Vigna Boito, this is the bottling from the two hectare filet section of the Rizzi Cru, with this parcel sitting up at the top of the ridge and facing south and southwest. The *elevation* of the Vigna Boito is a full two years in older *Botti*, as opposed to one year in *Botti* and eight months in cement vats, which all the other Crus here age in at Cantina Rizzi. The 2015 Vigna Boito Riserva is an outstanding example of the vintage, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a deep, soil-driven and sappy nose of red and black cherries, gorgeous spice tones, a bit of smoked meat, bonfire, dark soil tones, licorice, a hint of road tar, cedar and a topnote of red curry. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, ripe and sappy at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. I do not have any information on how old the *Botti* are that this bottling is raised in, but I get the sense that they are not all that old, as the wine shows a bit of oak influence on both the nose and palate, despite the large size of the vessels that the Vigna Boito is aged in. This is a young wine that needs plenty of bottle age, but it should be outstanding once it is ready to drink. 2035-2085. **94**.

#### **Baroli**

##### **2017 Barolo “Acclivi”- Commendatore G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)**

The 2017 Burlotto Barolo “Acclivi” is a beautiful young wine, coming in at 14.5 percent and offering up a gorgeously refined and transparent bouquet of red and black cherries, rose hips, gamebird, camphor, a complex base of soil tones, a bit of road tar, bonfire and just a wisp of fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, refined and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip, outstanding backend mineral drive, firm, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is going to be outstanding once it is ready to drink, but it is a proper young Barolo and will need plenty of bottle age. 2037-2085. **93**.

##### **2017 Barolo “Monvigliero”- Commendatore G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)**

Monvigliero is becoming one of my absolute favorite *terroirs* in all of Barolo, as in the hands of the Alessandria family, one cannot ask for an example that shows more fidelity to this beautiful vineyard. Their 2017 Monvigliero delivers an absolutely stunning aromatic constellation of sappy cherry fruit, gamebird, woodsmoke, a very complex, chalky soil impression, gentle notes of camphor, a touch of fresh oregano and mustard seed and a beautifully strident floral topnote redolent of both roses and peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, sappy, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive and bounce, laser-like focus, stellar complexity and a very long, ripely tannic and impeccably balanced finish. This is one of the finest young vintages of Burlotto Monvigliero that I have ever tasted! 2035-2085+. **95**.



### 2017 Barolo- Trediberri (La Morra)

The Trediberri bottling of Barolo hails primarily from the vineyard of Berri in the northeast of La Morra, as well as smaller percentages from both the Crus of Capalot and Rocche dell'Annunziata in the township. The wine is given a three week maceration and the aged in *Botti* for just under two years, before it is assembled back in cement vats (where its fermentation had taken place) for three to four months of finishing. The 2017 Barolo comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a fine young nose of red and black cherries, camphor, bonfire, a complex base of soil, fresh herb tones, fennel seed and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, structured and full, with fine balance, a good core, lovely soil signature, tangy acids and a long, chewy and complex finish. I really like the size and shape of this wine, which reflects a bit the blocked maturation from the drought in a touch less mid-palate stuffing and muscle, but has not sacrificed any complexity or potential for longevity. It reminds me of some of the top 1988 Baroli when they were first released in terms of size and structure. Good juice. 2035-2085. 92+.

### 2016 Barolo “Noi”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

As I mentioned last summer, the Barolo “Noi” bottling from Virna Borgogno is a blended cuvée, with her vineyard sources for this bottling hailing from parcels in the communes of Monforte d’Alba, La Morra, Verduno and Novello. This cuvée is raised classically in large Slavonian oak *botti*, with the 2016 Noi offering up a pure and precise young bouquet of cherries,

camphor, a touch of road tar, a lovely base of soil, fresh oregano, red curry and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is tight, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, svelte and nascently complex finish that closes with excellent grip. This is a fine bottle of quite traditionally-styled Barolo that needs plenty of time in the cellar to blossom, but will be a very good drink once it is ready to go. 2031-2075+. **91.**

**2016 Barolo “Sarmassa”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)**

The single Cru bottling of Sarmassa from Virna Borgogno is produced from a parcel of vines that were planted in 1973, with this cuvée raised in a combination of older Slavonian oak *botti* and new French oak *demi-muids*. So, this is more of a hybrid bottling from Virna, with some new oak influence. The 2016 Sarmassa is quite a bit more black fruity in profile than the Noi, offering up scents of dark berries, black cherries, fennel seed, a fine base of soil, gamebird, camphor, licorice, a touch of cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very promising finish. Not surprisingly, this is a significant step up in terms of soil signature, as it hails from a single cru, rather than being a blend, and I really like its potential, despite it showing its percentage of new French oak a bit on the backend right now. In good time, this should submerge and the wine should be an outstanding bottle! 2035-2085. **92+**.

**2016 Barolo “Cannubi”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)**

As I noted last year, Virna Borgogno’s Cannubi hails from the Cannubi Boschis vineyard, which is best known for the bottling produced here by Luciano Sandrone. Like the Sarmassa cuvée, the wine is raised half in Slavonian oak *botti* and half in new five hundred liter French casks. The 2016 Virna Borgogno Cannubi is an utterly complete young Barolo, offering up notes of red and black cherries, roasted gamebird, anise, a lovely base of gently autumnal soil tones, woodsmoke, red curry and a fair bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, fine balance and grip, ripe tannins and a long, fairly new oaky finish that will be plenty complex in due course, but needs time to bury its fifty percent of French new oak tannins first. This is a very good bottle in the making, but I really do not see what the new French wood here brings to the equation. If Virna would use the *demi-muids* that are already in the cellar, rather than swapping them out for new oak, then this wine would move up even another notch in quality, in my humble opinion! 2035-2085. **93.**

**2016 Barolo “Bricco San Pietro”- Manzone (Monforte d’Alba)**

Azienda Agricola Manzone Fratelli in Monforte d’Alba is run today by the brothers Elio and Giuseppe Manzone, both born in the 1940s, as well as Elio’s two sons, Marco and Alberto. Their Barolo “Bricco San Pietro” is made in a very traditional style, with a nice, long maceration and then patient aging in ancient, Slavonian oak *Botti* prior to bottling. The 2016 Bricco San Pietro is an excellent wine, with a refined bouquet that wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, gamebird, a touch of orange peel, a lovely base of soil tones, fennel seed, fresh oregano and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a fine core of red fruit, excellent focus and grip, firm, buried tannins and just a bit of backend heat on the long and nascently complex finish. This comes in listed at fifteen percent octane and shows it a tad on the finish, but at the same time (and this is the beauty of nebbiolo), the wine remains pure, transparent down to the soil and quite precise. I do not think the octane will impede this wine’s ability to age gracefully and in due course, it should be a very complex example of Barolo, albeit, still with a bit higher octane than some wines from this top flight

vintage. I love the fruit and soil complexity here and only wish it was a bit lower in alcohol. 2033-2065+. **89+**.

**2016 Barolo “Bussia”- Pecchenino (Dogliani)**

The Bussia bottling from the brothers, Orlando and Attilio Pecchenino, is made from relatively young vines, as these are now fifteen years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged fully three years in Slavonian oak *botti* prior to bottling. The bouquet is beautifully pure, youthful and promising, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, black licorice, incipient notes of camphor, red curry and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, pure and rock solid at the core, with superb soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is even more classically styled than the San Giuseppe bottling from the brothers, and is consequently, even a hair better! This is a great young Barolo by any measure! 2036-2100. **94**.

**2016 Barolo “San Giuseppe”- Pecchenino (Dogliani)**

The San Giuseppe bottling of Barolo from the Pecchenino brothers is made primarily from two different vineyards in Monforte, Le Coste (parcel planted in 1995) and Ravera (planted 1980), as well as a bit of younger vine fruit from Bussia. The wine is aged for two years in French oak, twenty-five hundred liter *botti*, followed by an additional year in cement vats prior to bottling. The 2016 San Giuseppe comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a fine, young bouquet of red and black cherries, anise, gamebird, a fine base of soil tones, just a hint of road tar, roses and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a fine, old school, blended Barolo (despite the use of French wood for the *botti*) that needs plenty of time in the cellar to blossom, but it is going to be excellent in due course. 2036-2085. **93**.

**2016 Barolo- Reverdito (Verduno)**

Michele Reverdito’s winery is situated in the township of La Morra and he farms just under seven and a half hectares of vines in Barolo, with holdings both in La Morra and Serralunga d’Alba. He farms organically, ferments solely with indigenous yeasts and ages his wine in four thousand liter *Botti*. His 2016 Barolo *normale* is a fine, old school example, offering up a fine nose of cherries, anise, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, gamebird and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent in style, with a good core, fine focus and grip, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, young and tangy finish. There is a touch of noble rusticity here that I like very much. Good juice. 2031-2065+. **90**.

**2016 Barolo “Del Commune di Serralunga d’Alba”- Giovanni Rosso (Serralunga d’Alba)**

The Barolo “Del Commune di Serralunga d’Alba” from Davide Rosso hails from several different vineyards in Serralunga, with the wine fermented in cement vats and given a thirty-five day maceration prior to racking into five thousand liter, French oak *foudres* for three years of aging. The 2016 Commune di Serralunga Barolo is an excellent young wine, offering up a deep and classical bouquet of red cherries, gamebird, anise, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke, fresh oregano, just a touch of cedar and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of red fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and impeccable balance on the long, very promising finish. This is an excellent bottle of Barolo in the making. 2031-2085. **92**.



### **2016 Barolo “Ceretta”- Giovanni Rosso (Serralunga d’Alba)**

Ceretta lies in the northern half of Serralunga d’Alba, with the Rosso family owning 3.5 hectares of vines in this lovely amphitheater of a vineyard. They have owned vines here since 1920. There was some partial replanting in both 1984 and 2000 in the Rosso parcels, but there remains also plenty of old vines here, and with more clay in the soil than in Serra, it produces a more broad-shouldered example of Barolo. Like the Rosso family’s Serra bottling, this is fermented in cement vats and raised in a combination of twenty-five and fifty hectoliter *foudres*, with the period of *elevage* ranging from eighteen to thirty-six months, depending on the style of the vintage. The 2016 Ceretta delivers a deep and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, camphor, gamebird, a fine base of soil, bonfire, red curry and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and a long, seamlessly balanced and extremely promising finish. This is outstanding wine in the making. 2035-2085+. **93+**.

### **2016 Barolo “Serra”- Giovanni Rosso (Serralunga d’Alba)**

The Serra cru in Serralunga d’Alba lies in the southern half of the township, on the ridge just below Vigna Rionda, with a south by southwesterly exposition and plenty of limestone in its white soils. Though the Rosso family has owned their one hectare parcel here since 1946, Giovanni Rosso started replanting the vines here in 1984, with subsequent sections done in 1996 and 2003. The wine is not given quite as long a maceration time as the Commune di Serralunga bottling, with macerations lasting between twenty-five and thirty days, with fermentation taking place in cement vats and the wine is raised in large French oak *foudres* of twenty-five hundred and five thousand liter capacity. In top vintages, the wine will remain in *foudre* for three years. The 2016 Serra is a refined young wine, with a very elegant and transparent personality that offers up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of orange peel, a complex base of soil (that will turn autumnal promptly), licorice, lovely spice tones, roses, camphor, celery seed and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe, firm tannins and a long, well-balanced and properly chewy finish. Fine, fine juice in the making! 2033-2085. **92+**.

### **2015 Barolo- Anselma Giacomo (Serralunga d’Alba)**

The Barolo *normale* from Anselma Giacomo is produced entirely from fruit grown in the Cru of Collaretto in Serralunga, with labels for this wine in Europe including the cru name on the front. The wine is fermented in a combination of cement vats and acacia wood tanks and given eighteen to twenty-two days of maceration, depending on the style of the vintage. It is aged in older Slavonian oak *Botti* for fully three years prior to bottling. The 2015 version is a superb young wine, fashioned in a very traditional style and offering up a youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, smoked meats, a superb base of soil, fresh oregano, road tar, rose petals and a beautiful topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and plenty structured, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, firm and very well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, complex and very, very promising finish. This is a superb, old school Barolo that is going to be a great, great drink when it is ready to go, but will demand as much patience as any old vintage did from Giovanni Conterno or Bartolo Mascarello back in the day. Fine value, in the context of what traditionalists in Barolo are fetching these days! 2035-2085. **93**.



### **2015 Barolo “Bricco Boschis- Vigna San Giuseppe” Riserva- Cavallotto (Cast. Falletto)**

The Barolo Riserva bottlings from the Cavallotto family are given approximately thirty days of maceration and aged for fully four years in Slavonian oak *Botti* prior to bottling, and then an additional year of bottle aging in the cellar before they are deemed ready for release! The 2015 Bricco Boschis Riserva comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a superb nose of red and black cherries, spit-roasted venison, anise, woodsmoke, a touch of road tar, camphor, complex soil tones and a pungent topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied, focused and classic in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins, tangy acids and great balance and grip on the long, complex and very promising finish. This is a great wine in the making, but it is going to need plenty of time in the cellar! 2035-2085+. **94+**.

### **2015 Barolo “Vignolo” Riserva- Cavallotto (Castiglione Falletto)**

The Cavallotto family’s parcel in the Cru of Vignolo has some of their oldest vines, as this parcel was planted in 1948 and 1966. The 2015 Riserva from Vignolo was given twenty-six days of maceration and the same four years in *Botti* and one year in bottle prior to release. It too comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up an excellent aromatic constellation of sappy black cherries, cigar smoke, gamebird, camphor, gently chalky soil tones, fresh oregano and an exotic floral tone of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost bottomless at the core, with lovely sappiness, excellent mineral drive, ripe, buried and plenty chewy tannins, good acids and grip and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish

that augurs nothing but pure magic once this wine is fully ready to drink! The old vines here give this wine a sense of sappiness that is truly lovely, coupled with a structural refinement that the Bricco Boschis cannot quite keep pace with in the 2015 vintage. Great, great juice. 2035-2085+. 96.

#### **2015 Barolo “Badarina”- Reverdito (Verduno)**

The Cru of Badarina in Serralunga sits at four hundred and twenty meters above sea level, and up until recently, this was mostly planted to Dolcetto, as growers in region felt that its altitude made it hard to ripen up Nebbiolo here properly. However, with the arrival of global warming, more and more of Badarina was committed to Nebbiolo. The vineyard lies on its own ridge near the border with Rodino, with its closest neighbor to the north being Falletto and due west, Francia, so this is a good neighborhood. 2015 Barolo “Badarina” from Michele Reverdito offers up a refined aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, gamebird, anise, fresh oregano, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with a lovely signature of soil, a good core of fruit, tangy acids, buried tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This seems likely to come forward reasonably quickly for a traditionally-styled Barolo and should start to drink very well indeed in a dozen years or so. This is a very good example from the Old School. 2035-2065+. 92+.

#### **2015 Barolo “Bricco Cogni”- Reverdito (Verduno)**

The Cru of Bricco Cogni is located in the township of La Morra. It is one of the most northerly of all the vineyards in La Morro, sticking out into the neighboring town of Verduno and sitting at an elevation of two hundred and seventy-five meters above sea level, with a westerly exposition. These vines were planted by Michele’s father, Silvano, in 1967, so they were just about fifty years of age in the 2015 vintage. Michele Reverdito’s 2015 Bricco Cogni delivers a deep and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, camphor, roasted venison, incipient notes of forest floor, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh oregano and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and chewy, with a very good core of fruit, a fine signature of soil, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This is not as elegant in profile as the Badarina in 2015, but it has fine stuffing and will be a very good wine once it is ready to drink. It takes a while to stretch its wings when first opened, so if you are inclined to drink a bottle in its youth to size up its potential, do decant it for at least an hour prior to tasting, as it really needs at least that long to get rolling in the glass! 2035-2065+. 91.

#### **2011 Barolo “Vignarionda” Riserva- Anselma Giacomo (Serralunga d’Alba)**

The Vignarionda Riserva from the Anselma family is treated the same as their *normale* bottling, with fermentation in a combination of cement tanks and acacia vats and given the same maceration of eighteen to twenty-two days. However, the wine is given fully five years of aging in the family’s old Slavonian oak *Botti*, which range from thirty to forty-two hectoliters in size. Their 2011 Vignarionda Riserva offers up a stunning young bouquet of black cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, black licorice, fresh oregano, bonfire, camphor and a nice touch of road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and absolutely defined by its underlying soil elements, with a superb core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, plenty of acidity and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is ripe, coming in listed at fifteen percent, but does not show any signs of backend heat at all, but it does

have a serious chassis of tannin that will need to be resolved before it starts to drink with any semblance of generosity. 2036-2085. **94.**

**2001 Barolo “Falletto” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa (Neive)**

The 2001 Falletto Riserva from Bruno Giacosa remains a young wine, but it is starting to stir at age twenty and it will not be too much longer before it emerges to really begin drinking with the generosity of maturity. The bouquet is already superb, wafting from the glass in a mix of sappy cherries, white truffles, a touch of road tar, a gorgeous base of soil tones, celery seed and a pungent topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and potentially very sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, still plenty of ripe, seamless tannins and a very, very long, complex and utterly refined finish. This wine will probably start to taste really good with some extended decanting time in about five or six years, but try to hold off opening up bottles until at least 2030 and really let the magic unfold in all its glory. 2026-2100. **97.**



**1961 Barolo- Fontanafredda (Barolo)**

The 1961 Barolo from Fontanafredda has been fully mature for decades, but it continues to cruised along very nicely and is still a lovely drink at sixty years of age. The wine is now a quite translucent, pale cherry red and the bouquet offers up a lovely, tertiary blend of desiccated cherries, a touch of road tar, spit-roasted gamebird, fresh oregano, rose hips and a beautiful base

of stony, autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and transparent, with a good core, still a bit of tannin, solid acids and a long, complex and autumnal finish that shows just a whisper of decay on the backend. This was probably never a great wine, but it is still a good wine at age sixty and eminently drinkable. 2021-2035+. **87.**

### ***Bolgheri***

#### **2019 Orio- Podere Il Castellaccio**

The 2019 Orio from Podere Il Castellaccio is made from the same blend as the very good 2017 I tasted last summer, which is sixty percent cabernet franc, thirty percent merlot and ten percent syrah. It comes in at touch riper than the 2017 at 14.5 percent octane this year and offers up a ripe and very pretty nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of meatiness and a fine base of soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This is very much a creature of the warm summer of 2019, but is quite tasty. 2021-2031. **89.**

#### **2018 Valente- Podere Il Castellaccio (Toscano IGT)**

The 2018 Valente bottling from Podere Il Castellaccio is composed from a blend of seventy percent Sangiovese, seventeen percent Pugnitello and thirteen percent Foglia Tonda, with the vines at least fifty years of age and farmed organically. The wine is given one year aging in cask and then a further year of aging in bottle prior to release, with the 2018 version coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep and refined, offering up scents of plums, cherries, a lovely base of soil, a touch of Tuscan herb tones, cedar and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids and a long, balanced and still quite youthful finish. This is still quite primary in personality and deserves some bottle age to allow its layers of complexity to unfold a bit, but it has fine balance and depth and with some time in the cellar, it should prove to be a fine bottle. 2026-2045+. **91.**

### ***Chianti***

#### **2019 Chianti Classico “Ama”- Castello di Ama**

The Chianti Classico “Ama” bottling from Castello di Ama hails from their vineyards in the township of Gaiole, with the *cépages* of this bottling ninety-six percent Sangiovese and four percent Merlot. The bottling is raised in “one wine” *barriques*. The 2019 version is an excellent bottle of Chianti, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, orange peel, cigar smoke, a complex base of soil tones, just a hint of fresh oregano and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, tangy and svelte in personality, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex finish. This vintage is very classical in profile, with a lovely girdle of acidity to keep the wine light on its feet and it will reward a year or three in the cellar (though it is already very tasty in its youthful guise if given a bit of decanting to blossom). 2021-2040. **89+.**

#### **2018 Chianti Classico “Ama”- Castello di Ama**

The 2018 vintage of Ama Chianti Classico comes in listed at the same 13.5 percent octane as the lovely and youthful 2019 version, but it is a bit more black fruity in personality and seems to be a bit riper than its younger sibling. The bouquet is lovely, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, sweet herb tones, a fine base of soil and



a deft touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of plushness at the core, with still a fine framing of acidity, moderate tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a bit riper than the classic 2019 version, but also more structured, and whereas the 2019 is quite tasty with a bit of decanting, the 2018 is a bigger wine and really deserves at least a couple of years in the cellar before broaching, just to let its slightly bigger backend tannins soften up properly. Good juice. 2024-2040. **90.**



### **2018 Chianti Classico “Montebuoni” Riserva- Castello di Ama**

2018 is the inaugural vintage for this single vineyard bottling of Chianti Riserva, which Castello di Ama purchased and replanted in 1997. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent sangiovese and five percent merlot, with both varietals vinified separately with indigenous yeasts and blended right after the completion of malo. The wine is raised in *barriques* and comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. It offers up a deep, refined and nascently complex nose of red and black cherries, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, bonfire, a touch of fresh oregano and a nice topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is lovely Chianti that I would opt for tucking away for a couple of years in the cellar, but which is eminently drinkable now with a bit of aeration. 2023-2045. **92.**



### **2018 Chianti Classico- Castello di Uzzano**

The 2018 Chianti Classico bottling from Castello di Uzzano is composed from a *cépages* of ninety percent Sangiovese and five percent each of Canaiolo and Colorino, with all of the vineyards located in the township of Greve. The wine is aged for one year in stainless steel tank and then racked to *Botti* for finishing prior to its bottling. The 2018 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a beautiful, black fruity nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh oregano, cedar and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, youthfully complex and very nicely balanced finish. This has the depth and concentration of the vintage and really deserves a few years in the cellar to soften up its tannins, though with decanting, it is certainly approachable now. Good juice. 2024-2045. **90**.

### **2018 Chianti Classico “480”- Terra di Seta**

Terra di Seta’s 2018 Chianti Classico bottling is a creature of its vintage, as this is quite ripe for a Chianti, coming in at a full fifteen percent in this warm summer. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent sangiovese and five percent cabernet sauvignon and is raised in French *barriques* for a year prior to bottling. The wine offers up a bouquet of ripe cherries, red plums, pretty spice tones, Tuscan herbs, a good base of soil and plenty of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, juicy and full-bodied, with a good core and soil signature, firm tannins and a long, gently warm finish. I like the raw materials here quite well, but in a hot vintage like 2018, one has to be careful of the use of *barrique*, as the oak tannins leach into the wine faster at higher octane levels. The wine clearly needs some more bottle age to absorb its wood tannins, but it should have the stuffing to eventually do so and then it should drink quite nicely, as it carries its fifteen percent alcohol quite well and is not particularly hot on the backend. But, at this early stage, I am not really sure how well the wood will be absorbed over time into the wine, so I am going to score it in a range and hope for the best, so it can place at the upper number. 2024-2040. **85-89?**

### **2017 Chianti Classico “San Lorenzo” Gran Selezione- Castello di Ama**

The San Lorenzo bottling from Castello di Ama is not a single vineyard wine, but rather a vineyard selection of some of the finest parcels from the vineyards of Montebuoni, Bellavista, Casuccia and San Lorenzo, from which it takes its name, with the oldest vines that go into this cuvée having been planted in 1974. The *cépages* of the 2017 is eighty percent sangiovese, thirteen percent merlot and seven percent malvasia nera, with the wine aged in *barriques*, of which twenty-two percent were new. With the frost damage in April of 2017 limiting yields, the San Lorenzo is a beautifully deep, suavely-structured wine this year, offering up a complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a complex base of soil, Tuscan herbs, a touch of nutskin, cigar wrapper, just a dollop of cedary oak and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and elegant in profile, with a fine core of black fruit, impressive soil signature and grip, firm, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This wine is built for the cellar and needs some extended bottle age to soften up its backend tannins, but is destined to have a long and graceful life in bottle. 2031-2065. **92+**.

### **2016 Chianti Classico “San Lorenzo” Gran Selezione- Castello di Ama**

The 2016 vintage of San Lorenzo from Castello di Ama is composed from the same blend as the 2017: eighty percent sangiovese, thirteen percent merlot and seven percent malvasia

nera, but with the better yields of the vintage, it was raised in a bit less new wood at eighteen percent. The wine comes in at the same 13.5 percent as the 2017 version, but is not as structured in its relative youth and offers up an aromatic constellation that is already starting to show some signs of secondary development in its complex mix of red and black cherries, gamebird, cigar smoke, a refined base of dark soil tones, a hint of road tar, anise, fresh oregano and a deft touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil undertow, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, poised and very classy finish of impeccable balance. This is a top flight example of Chianti! It is certainly drinkable today, but it is still in climbing mode and I would let it hibernate in the cellar for at least a few more years, as there are still tannins here to resolve on the backend. 2026-2065. **93.**

### **2008 Chianti Classico Riserva- Castello di Ama**

The 2008 Riserva from Castello di Ama is a lovely example from a quite old school vintage, as this wine hails from a year with a cool spring, hot summer and long, temperate autumn that saw the grapes brought in from October 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> in 2008. The wine is eighty percent sangiovese and the other twenty percent a mix of cabernet franc, merlot and malvasia nero and the wine was raised in twenty percent new oak for a year prior to bottling. Today, the wine is drinking splendidly well, offering up a deep, black fruity bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of nutskin, a gorgeous base of dark soil, sweet Tuscan herb tones, violets and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a velvety attack, a beautiful core of fruit, lovely soil signature, still a bit of melting tannin and a long, seamlessly balanced and very classy finish. I love the cool vintage, sophisticated character of this wine! This is still out there in the market at \$40 a bottle in the US and is a fine, fine value. 2021-2040. **93.**

### ***Il Carnasciale's Il Caberlot IGT***

Podere Il Carnasciale's Caberlot bottling has only been produced since its debut in the 1988 vintage. This Super Tuscan is composed entirely from the Caberlot grape variety, which is a rare, natural crossing of cabernet franc and merlot and which possesses the aromatic and flavor characteristics of both grapes, and hence its name of Caberlot. It is only planted in one place, in the tiny Il Carnasciale vineyard located in the mountainous southern Chianti region of Valdarno di Sopra, about thirty kilometers north of Siena. The Caberlot clone was originally discovered in an abandoned vineyard near Verona in the late 1960s and then nurtured by agronomist Remigio Bordini in his nursery since its discovery; Remigio has only allowed it to be planted in one place- Il Carnasciale. Il Carnasciale was cleared and planted by Wolf and Bettina Rogosky in 1986, who continued as the proprietors of this tiny gem of a winery up until Wolf's passing a few years ago. But, Il Carnasciale has continued on, now run by Bettina and her son, Moritz. Their hilltop, windswept vineyard was densely planted at ten thousand vines per hectare from the outset and the wine was first produced with the vineyard's "third leaf" in 1988. The grapes are completely destemmed and initial fermentation takes place in stainless steel vats. The wine is transferred to cask for malolactic fermentation, with sixty percent of the lightly-toasted barrels new each year, and spends eighteen months in barrel aging. Bottling for Il Caberlot is done by hand, only in magnums, and then the wine is allowed another sixteen months of additional bottle aging in the cellars before it is prepared for sale. The winery does bottle a very small number of 750 milliliter bottles for tastings and for journalistic samples, so all of the following wines were tasted from regular-sized formats for this feature, unless otherwise noted. I have given the projected window

for peak drinkability of each vintage of Il Caberlot below- from the wines that I have tasted from regular-sized sample bottles- that reflect the wines as I tasted them in the smaller bottles. But, for those who have been lucky enough to have a few of the magnums in their cellar, I would suspect that adding at least three to five years to the proposed “start to drink” date would be merited for the larger formats that are found in commercial channels. As Moritz Rogosky at Il Carnasciale had not sent any “sample” bottles of the more recent releases, he very generously agreed to send me magnums of the vintages from 2015 to 2018, so that my vertical report could be brought more up to date with the wines that have been released in the last couple of years. However, as the wines had not arrived in magnum from those vintages by the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, I will report upon them in the next issue of the newsletter. Il Caberlot is one of Italy’s greatest wines and is very much worth a special search to add to the cellar for those who love Super Tuscans. The wines are very rare and hence, not inexpensive, but given where some other wine prices around the world have gone to in recent times, the Il Caberlot price tag does not seem out of line with the going rate for the world’s greatest wines in this day and age. And, unlike some of its contemporaries, at least the wine on the other side of the cork is always stunning in quality.



#### **2014 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

The 2014 vintage of Il Caberlot comes in at 13.5 percent octane and is an absolute classic year for this beautiful Super Tuscan bottling. The wine is starting to really develop beautifully on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of road tar, cedary oak and a topnote of gentle botanicals.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beginning to get very suave on the attack, with a fine core of black fruit, lovely soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This wine is still in climbing mode and deserves several more years in the cellar before drinking in earnest, but once it reaches its plateau of maturity, it is going to be a stunning of exceptional elegance. 2029-2075. **94+**.

#### **2013 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

Il Caberlot 2013 is another beautiful wine in the making, with this vintage just a touch more generous in its youthful spirit than the 2014, though it also tips the scales at 13.5 percent alcohol, it has seemingly taking on more of the merlot side of its unique genetic blending of grape personalities. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, merlot-like fresh herb tones, dark soil elements, peonies, a touch of allspice and a refined framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and already a bit more velvety than the more structured 2014 version, with incipient plushness on the attack, lovely mid-palate depth, suave, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish of impeccable balance and grip. Though the tannins are a bit more buried in the fruit texture of this wine, it too is still on the young side and many years away from peaking. This is quite Pomerol-like in many of its features, but wed to a soil signature that just screams out Tuscany. Great juice. 2027-2075. **95**.

#### **2012 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

The 2012 vintage of Il Caberlot is a tad riper than either the 2013 or 2014, as this wine comes in at an even fourteen percent octane in this year, but every bit as inherently elegant as the wines from the slightly less ripe years. The wine is really starting to blossom beautifully aromatically, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, a touch of road tar, woodsmoke, that signature base of complex soil tones, beautiful fresh herb tones, a touch of cigar ash and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, elegant and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, plenty of soil undertow and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish of breed and complexity. This is every bit as precise as the slightly lower octane vintages, but the touch more ripeness gives this a bit more youthful generosity and though it is really still a young wine, I would have no regrets to drinking a bottle of the 2012 at this beautiful point in its evolution! In magnum, it is probably still would want a few more years' worth of bottle aging, but this is a vintage that I would keep an eye on for drinking in the not too distant future. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2075. **95**.

#### **2011 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

Podere Il Carnasciale's 2011 vintage of Il Caberlot is beginning to hit its peak in regular-sized format, offering up a pure, complex and utterly refined bouquet of cassis, blackberry, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gentle, merlot-like herb tones, exotic hints of both dried eucalyptus and lavender and a suave framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with a superb core of black fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins that are starting to recede nicely and a long, focused and seamlessly balanced finish of admirable complexity. This is simply gorgeous wine! 2021-2070. **96**.

#### **2010 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

The 2010 vintage of Il Caberlot comes in listed at the same 13.5 percent octane as most of these vintages, but this is a deeper-pitched and more black fruity version of this iconic Super Tuscan bottling. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up notes of sweet dark berries, road tar, cigar ash, a beautiful array of Tuscan herbs, a complex base of soil tones, a bit of espresso, dried eucalyptus and the wine's customary framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-

bodied and quite velvety in texture, with a plush core of fruit, lovely soil signature, melting tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish of impeccable balance. Like the 2013 vintage, this seems to be channeling its “merlot side” a bit more in its personality makeup. There is still a good structure here underneath and the wine has decades and decades still ahead of it, but it is hardly a crime to be drinking it now at ten years of age! A beautiful bottle. 2021-2065. **94.**

#### **2009 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

The 2009 Il Caberlot is another fairly black fruity vintage for this wine, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of cassis, dark berries, Tuscan herb tones, cigar ash, a dark base of soil tones, road tar, a hint of menthol and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure, complex and nicely plush at the core, with excellent soil undertow, moderate, well-measured tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a slightly broader-shouldered vintage for this cuvée, which is the style of the vintage, but it is still very refined and an absolutely delicious wine. 2021-2065. **93.**

#### **2008 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

The 2008 vintage of Il Caberlot comes in listed at the same 13.5 percent octane as the 2009 version, but it comes across as slightly cooler in aromatic and flavor profile, despite being of the same ripeness. The bouquet is pure and very refined on the '08, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of soil, Tuscan herb tones, espresso, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely delineation and complexity, a superb core of black fruit, lovely soil undertow, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, very elegant finish. This is a gorgeous vintage of Il Caberlot. 2021-2065. **95.**



### **2007 Il Caberlot- Podere Il Carnasciale**

Il Carnasciale's 2007 vintage of Il Caberlot is really starting to drink splendidly at fourteen years of age. This wine is starting to show some of its cabernet franc origins in its very refined aromatic constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of menthol, cigar wrapper, that signature foundation of complex soil tones, gentle Tuscan herb tones, a touch of lead pencil and cedary tones from the oak casks. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamless, with lovely depth of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, fine-grained tannins, bouncy acids and laser-like focus on the very long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. No wonder Il Caberlot is ranked as one of the unofficial First Growths of Super Tuscans! This wine is just starting to drink well, but is still really in climbing mode and will be even better five to ten years down the road, when its tannins have fully melted away. Utterly brilliant. 2021-2065. **96.**

### ***Rosso Toscano and IGT***

#### **2019 A Quo- Montepoloso**

Fabio Chiarello's Montepoloso estate is located in Maremma, near the Bolgheri coastline. He produces several different IGT bottlings from his windswept six hectare estate. His A Quo bottling is his entry level wine, made from a blend of thirty percent each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Montepulciano, twenty percent Sangiovese and ten percent each of Alicante and Marselan. Like all of Fabio's wines, the grapes here are harvested by hand and fermented with indigenous yeasts. This wine is given a relatively short *elevage* of four months in "one wine" casks prior to bottling. The 2019 A Quo offers up a refined bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, a dollop of fresh oregano and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with fine focus and grip, a good core, lovely soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane and shows just a bit of backend alcohol, but it is not particularly obtrusive. It has a bit of backend tannin to soften up, so tuck it away for at least a few years. Good juice in the riper style of its year. 2025-2040+. **89.**

#### **2018 San Biagio- Lisini**

The San Biagio bottling from Lisini is composed entirely from Sangiovese, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 San Biagio is bright and nicely red fruity in personality, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, red plum, a touch of orange peel, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil and a nice dollop of Tuscan herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and well-balanced finish. This is a young wine, but if decanted for twenty to thirty minutes, it is already very easy to drink. 2021-2035. **91. 447**

#### **2018 Eneo- Montepoloso**

The Eneo bottling from Fabio Chiarello is a blend of forty-five percent Sangiovese, thirty-five percent Montepulciano and fifteen percent Alicante and five percent Marselan. The wine is aged entirely in *barriques*, but they are two, three and four years of age and no new oak is used. The 2018 Eneo is a ripe and very classy on the nose, offering up youthfully complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of coffee grounds, woodsmoke, Tuscan herb tones, dark soil and a hint of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus, firm, chewy tannins and a long, promising and slightly warm finish. I like this quite well, but it is a very much a creature of its vintage and comes in at a full



fifteen percent alcohol, so it may be a bit too heady for some palates, though it is remarkably refined in profile for its octane and carries its alcohol quite well. This seems to have the balance to age quite gracefully, but I do not have a lot of fifteen percent octane wines in my own cellar, so I do not have a real sense of what it will ultimately drink like when it is fully mature. But, I have faith in the wine, despite my lack of personal experience with aging this type of wine. 2028-2065. **92.**

#### **2017 Haiku- Castello di Ama**

Haiku is a new IGT bottling from Castello di Ama is that is made from a *cépages* of fifty percent Sangiovese and twenty-five percent each of Cabernet Franc and Merlot, with all of the parcels planted on clay and limestone soils. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in *barriques*, with twenty-four percent new oak used for the 2017 version. The wine delivers a beautifully refined bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a refined base of soil, a nice touch of Tuscan herb tones, cedary oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is tightly-knit out of the blocks and will require extended cellaring to blossom, but it is going to be an outstanding wine once it is ready to drink. A fine, fine new star in the firmament of Super Tuscans! 2030-2080. **94.**

#### **2017 Sammarco- Castello di Rampolla**

Sammarco has been one of my favorite Super Tuscans for as long as I can remember, which is not surprising, as this was first produced in the 1980 vintage, making it a longer-running bottling than Ornellaia! The wine is made from a blend of ninety percent Cabernet Sauvignon and five percent each of Sangiovese and Merlot, with all of the vineyards farmed biodynamically. The wine is fermented in cement vats and aged in a combination of three thousand liter *botti* and five hundred liter *tonneaux* for fully two years prior to bottling. The 2017 Sammarco comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a superb young bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of fresh oregano, cumin, a superb base of soil tones, just a whisper of road tar and a framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine chassis of chewy tannin, a rock solid core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip and a long, youthfully complex and very promising finish. With the frost in the spring of 2017, this wine is quite structured and will need plenty of time in the cellar to blossom, but it will be simply outstanding once it is ready to drink. 2035-2075+. **94.**

#### **2017 Rapace- Uccelliera**

The Rapace bottling from Andrea Cortonesi's Uccelliera winery is composed from a blend of seventy percent Tempranillo, twenty percent Merlot and ten percent Cabernet Sauvignon. This Super Tuscan bottling is given eighteen months aging in *barrique* and an additional six months of bottle aging prior to release. The 2017 Rapace is ripe and refined, offering up a complex bouquet of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, cigar smoke, fresh oregano, a lovely base of dark soil tones, cedar and a touch of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, good focus and grip and a long, complex and very classy finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but seems cooler to my palate and is a very classy Super Tuscan, not to mention a fine, fine value! 2030-2075. **93.**

### **2012 d'Alceo- Castello di Rampolla**

While Sammarco has been around since the 1980 vintage, Castello di Rampolla's other Super Tuscan cuvée, d'Alceo, did not make its debut until the 1996 vintage. This wine is made from a *cépages* of eighty-five percent Cabernet Sauvignon and fifteen percent Petit Verdot, with the wine again fermented in cement vats, but aged in a combination of *barriques* and *tonneaux* for fourteen to sixteen months, prior to bottling. It is also given an additional two years of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The 2012 d'Alceo comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and is now fully mature, offering up a complex and quite refined bouquet of dark berries, cigar ash, cinnamon stick, a lovely base of soil tones, woodsmoke, beautiful, gentle spice tones of lavender, oregano and rosemary and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and resolving beautifully, with a fine core of black fruit, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a bit more new oaky in personality than Sammarco, due to its having been raised in smaller barrels, but the oak is beautifully done and fully integrated in the wine. Classy and elegant juice that is now drinking very well indeed, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2021-2050. **94.**



### **Maremma**

#### **2015 Poggio Bestiale- Fattoria di Magliano**

Fattoria di Magliano's Poggio Bestiale bottling comes in at fourteen percent octane in the 2015 vintage. This single vineyard wine is composed from a blend of forty percent Cabernet

Sauvignon, twenty-five percent Cabernet Franc, twenty percent Merlot and five percent Petit Verdot. The 2015 version offers up a deep and ripe nose of black cherries, a touch of chocolate, woodsmoke, gamebird, a good base of dark soil tones and a cedary topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows fine mid-palate depth, with good soil undertow, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but will be a good bottle in due course. 2025-2045. **90.**

### ***Rosso di Montalcino***

#### **2018 Rosso di Montalcino “Vigneto Gauggiole”- Castiglion del Bosco**

The single vineyard bottling of Vigneto Gauggiole of Rosso di Montalcino from Castiglion del Bosco is a lovely bottle. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks and spends its first six months of *elevage* in the same tanks, prior to racking to cement vats for its next year and a half of aging prior to bottling. The 2018 Vigneto Gauggiole comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine, vibrant bouquet of cherries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of fresh oregano and a gently spicy topnote of cumin and sandalwood. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with lovely transparency down to the soil, a good core of red fruit, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is a first class Rosso that could do with a few years in the cellar to soften up properly on the backend. Serious juice. 2026-2045. **91.**

#### **2018 Rosso di Montalcino- Lisini**

Lisini family’s Rosso di Montalcino is raised in traditional large oak *Botti* for a full year prior to bottling and then given an additional four months of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. Their 2018 Rosso is a beautiful wine, with lovely depth on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of red plums, cherries, cigar wrapper, a gorgeous base of soil tones, just a touch of Tuscan herb tones, gentle notes of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, firm, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This wine comes in at fourteen percent in this vintage and is really built more like Brunello than Rosso, with excellent mid-palate depth and structure and the need to be cellared for at least a few years. It is an outstanding value! 2025-2050+. **92.**

#### **2018 Rosso di Montalcino- Salvioni**

The Rosso di Montalcino from Salvioni is aged in large, Slavonian oak *Botti* for one year prior to bottling. The 2018 version is ripe in the style of the vintage, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent octane, but also beautifully red fruity and impressively transparent in personality. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very stylish mix of cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, a hint of fresh oregano, a fine base of soil, cardamom and other spice tones and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, well-balanced and youthful finish. This is cool in the mouth and does not show its ripeness at all, but it will need a few years in the cellar to let its backend tannins soften up a bit. This is an excellent Rosso. 2025-2045. **90+.**

#### **2018 Rosso di Montalcino- Uccelliera**

Uccelliera has been a mainstay in Brunello for many decades now, so it is hard to think of this estate as the new kid on the block, but it was only founded in 1991, when owner Andrea Cortonesi purchased the property from its next door neighbor, Ciacchi Piccolomini, where Andrea had been the long-time winemaker. His 2018 Rosso di Montalcino is a lovely example, delivering a fine aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a superb base of

soil tones, raw cocoa, roses and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, good acids and lovely balance and grip on the wide open and complex finish. This wine comes in at fourteen percent octane this year and has nice, broad shoulders, to go along with fine purity of fruit. A fine, fine Rosso. 2021-2035+. **91.**

### ***Brunello di Montalcino***

#### **2016 Brunello di Montalcino- Camigliano**

Camigliano's Brunello di Montalcino is raised in six hundred liter, French oak *demi-muids* and Slavonian oak *foudres* for two years prior to bottling. The wine is quite youthful when first opened and really needs some aeration to blossom, but once it opens up, it offers up a superb bouquet of cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, nutskin, a fine base of soil tones, orange peel, rose petals, a nice touch of spice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, youthful and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, a good base of soil, ripe, well-integrated tannins, lovely acidity and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is an old school Brunello in the best sense of the term and needs plenty of cellaring to blossom, but it has excellent potential and will be a superb bottle in the fullness of time. It comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol, but is transparent and precise on the palate. Fine juice. 2031-2065. **93.**

#### **2016 Brunello di Montalcino- Castiglion del Bosco**

The 2016 Brunello di Montalcino from Castiglion del Bosco is a fine, fine example. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in French *barriques*, with twenty percent of the oak new each year and the remainder one and two wine casks. The 2016 Brunello comes in at fourteen percent octane in this vintage, and offers up a complex and quite refined bouquet of red and black cherries, plums, cigar wrapper, a touch of Tuscan herb tones, nutskin, gentle spices, a fine base of soil and a very well done framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent down to the soil, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. The wine is still youthful and has not yet quite absorbed its oak tannins on the backend (though there is plenty of stuffing to do so with a bit more bottle age), but all the pieces are on place for a long and rewarding life in bottle. 2030-2065+. **94.**

#### **2016 Brunello di Montalcino- Lisini**

The 2016 Brunello di Montalcino from the Lisini family is beautifully old school, as the wine is raised in older *Botti* for fully three and a half years prior to bottling, and then given at least another six months bottle aging before release! The wine delivers a ripe and pure aromatic constellation of red plums, red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a complex base of soil, a touch of tobacco leaf, lovely spice tones and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, tangy acids and lovely soil signature defining the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This comes in at 14.5 percent octane in 2016, but is seamlessly balanced and quite cool in the mouth. Gorgeous juice in the making. 2031-2080. **94+.**

#### **2015 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva”- Lisini**

The 2015 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva” from the fine estate of Lisini is aged in a combination of Slavonian oak *Botti* and smaller French oak *barriques* for at least three years, and often longer, prior to bottling. The wine is absolutely stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a refined and utterly classical blend of red and black

cherries, cigar wrapper, a complex base of soil tones, nutskin, a hint of orange peel, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones and a bit of cedary oak from the *barrique*-aged portion of the cuvée. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, soil-driven and sappy at the core, with impeccable balance and grip, suave, fine-grained tannins and great focus on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is a truly great young Brunello, but it could do with some further bottle age before it is really ready to drink, as it has a bit of oak tannin from the *barriques* that it still wants to absorb completely. 2030-2075+. **94.**

#### **2015 Brunello di Montalcino “Ugolaia”- Lisini**

The Ugolaia bottling is a single vineyard wine from Lisini, that is made from a selection of the oldest vines in this vineyard and only singled out for bottling on its own in top flight vintages. The 2015 is not yet released, but is imminent in the market. The wine ages for a full four years in *Botti* before bottling and given extended bottle aging in the cellars after that. The 2015 Ugolaia is an outstanding Brunello in the making, offering up a deep and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, nutskin, Cuban cigar wrapper, complex soil tones, a wisp of brown spices, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with an attack that is already starting to show a bit of velvetiness, a superb core of fruit, marvelous soil undertow, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very, very classy finish. Just a stunning young wine! 2031-2080. **94+.**

#### **1988 Brunello di Montalcino- Tenuta Caparzo**

The 1988 Brunello di Montalcino from Tenuta Caparzo is still drinking nicely at thirty-three years of age, though it has clearly been fully mature for more than a decade. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol (those were the days!) and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of baked black cherries and dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a complex base of autumnal soil tones, nutskin, bonfire, sweet Tuscan herb tones and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tertiary and complex, with a very good core of fruit, solid soil signature, still a hint of backend tannin and a long, plush and nicely mature finish. This is a good, solid example, but not a great Brunello. It is fully into its plateau of peak maturity and probably does not have all that many years ahead of it, but for the moment, it is still quite enjoyable. 2021-2035. **88.**

### ***Veneto***

#### **2018 Jùsto Rosso- Cesari**

The 2018 Jùsto Rosso from Cesari is made from a blend of the merlot and corvina grapes. The wine comes in at a nicely ripe octane of 13.5 percent and delivers a black fruity nose of cassis, a touch of raisin, pretty spice tones and a good base of dark soil elements. On the palate the wine is tangy, full-bodied and ripe, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins and a long, wide open finish. The acidity here is quite high, but buried in the body of the wine right now. The wine is not particularly expressive on the nose, but has more personality on the palate. Not bad. 2021-2034. **87.**

#### **2018 Valpolicella Superiore “Mara” Ripasso- Cesari**

The 2018 “Mara” bottling of Valpolicella Ripasso from Cesari comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage and offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, a touch of fruitcake, lovely Valpolicella spice tones, a fine base of soil, gentle botanicals and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and impressively length and grip on the well-balanced

finish. I like the added depth this wine has gained from its Ripasso period (the aging of the young wine on the lees from Amarone for several weeks prior to racking into casks), which really gives it good backend length and lift. Good juice. 2021-2035. **90.**

**2016 Valpolicella Superiore “Quarto Vecchio” Ripasso- Tenuta Il Canovino**

The 2016 Valpolicella Ripasso bottling from Antonio Rambelli is really starting to drink nicely at five years of age, though it still has some tannin and will be even better down the road. The bright bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, lovely spice tones, a bit of gamebird, sultana raisins, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and has less than seven grams per liter of residual sugar, so it is essentially a dry wine. Good juice. 2021-2040+. **90.**

**2016 Amarone della Valpolicella Classico- Cesari**

Cesari’s 2016 Amarone is pretty svelte in style compared to many of its compatriots in this age of global warming, as the wine comes in at only fifteen percent octane, which is one of the lower alcohol levels I have seen for Amarone in recent times. The nose wafts from the glass in a deep and complex blend of red and black cherries, a bit of sultana raisin, lovely spice tones, a hint of cigar wrapper, fine soil elements, an attractive touch of fresh oregano and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish that shows only a whisper of backend heat (and is downright cool in the mouth by today’s Amarone standards). This is a very good bottle of Amarone. 2026-2055+. **93.**

***Campania, Taurasi and Irpinia Aglianico***

**2018 Core- Montevetrano di Silvia**

The Core bottling from Montevetrano di Silvia is composed entirely from Aglianico, with most of its grown on the estate in San Cipriano, but also includes some purchased fruit from serious growers who the proprietor works with as far as Benevento. This cuvée is raised in French *barriques* for ten months prior to bottling, with a sizable percentage new, and the 2018 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane. It offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of pepper, bonfire, hung game and a generous serving of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced and promising finish. This is approachable today, but still fairly primary and could do with some time in the cellar to fully absorb its oak tannins; more complexity will clearly emerge if the wine is given at least a few years’ worth of bottle age. Good juice in the making, but if this bottling was raised exclusively in the used barrels from the flagship wine at the estate, it would be even better! 2026-2050. **89.**

**2018 Irpinia Campi Taurasini “Satyricon”- Luigi Tecce**

The 2018 Irpinia Campi Taurasini “Satyricon” from Luigi Tecce is his young vine wine, made from a 1.5 hectare parcel of twenty-five year-old Aglianico vines in the township of Castelfranci. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks and then is given a year of *elevage* in fifty hectoliter *botti*, then racked back into tank for another ten months prior to bottling. The 2018 Satyricon comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a deep, youthful and complex nose of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, a bit of saddle leather, a fine base of volcanic soil tones, a bit of youthful stem tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is youthful, full-



bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with a fine chassis of ripe tannin, excellent balance and grip and a long, primary and gently weedy finish. This is a puppy that needs some time alone in the cellar to uncoil. In due course, it will be superb juice. 2028-2065. **92+**.



*The beautiful, rolling hillside vineyards of Campania.*

### **2013 Taurasi- Tenuta Scuotto**

I tasted the 2013 Taurasi from Eduardo Scuotto a year ago and liked quite well, though found it quite a powerful expression of its DOCG. A year further on, it is settling in beautifully and is clearly a fine, fine bottle in the making. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite refined for a young Taurasi, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, grilled venison, a fine base of dark soil tones, coffee bean, cigar smoke and a nice framing of cedary French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit and soil signature, firm tannins and a long, very well-balanced finish. A year ago, the wine showed just a touch of heat on the backend, but this is no longer the case. The French casks are not yet fully-integrated into the wine, but will clearly do so in the coming years. This is first class Taurasi and I clearly underrated it a touch last year. 2030-2075. **92+**.

### **1974 Taurasi- Mastroberardino**

The 1974 Taurasi from Mastroberardino is drinking stunningly well today, but still has at least another forty or fifty years of potential longevity in it! The superb nose jumps from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, road tar, roasted venison, bonfire, a touch of

curry-like spice tones and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still gently chewy (at age forty-six!), with an excellent core of fruit, excellent complexity and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and classically powerful finish. Back in this era, taming the ripeness of Taurasi was not complicated by global warming and this wine is a quintessential example of a mature bottle at the peak of its powers, but with decades and decades of roadway still ahead of it. 2020-2060+. **94.**

### ***Sardegna Bianco and Rosso***

#### **2020 Vermentino di Sardegna- Antonella Corda**

Antonella Corda has farmed her fifteen hectares of vines organically since she started her own winery back in 2010, and next year they will be officially certified organic. Her 2020 Vermentino di Sardegna is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tank. It offers up a beautifully complex and refined bouquet of tart pear, green olive, salty soil tones, raw almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. This is outstanding Vermentino! 2021-2028. **92.**

#### **2019 Cannonau di Sardegna- Antonella Corda**

Antonella Corda's 2019 Cannonau is a tad riper than the 2018, as this wine comes in at a full fifteen percent octane in this warm vintage. The wine is still beautifully light and transparent in color and offers up a complex nose of bitter cherry, a lovely base of soil tones, bonfire, orange peel, a touch of white pepper and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with good fruit on the attack, a fine core and then plenty of wallop on the backend, as the octane flexes its muscles. The wine is long, complex and focused, and if one is not deterred by fifteen percent, then there is plenty to enjoy here, as it remarkably fresh for its ripeness level. But, there is some backend heat, which keeps my score down. Add four points if the octane is not an issue for you. 2021-2030. **87.**

### ***Etna Rosso***

#### **2011 Nerello Mascalese- Calabretta**

The 2011 Nerello Mascalese from Massimiliano Calabretta is a big boy, coming in at a full fifteen percent octane and showing a bit of *sur maturité* on the complex bouquet of baked black cherries, sultana raisins, bonfire, spit-roasted meats, a fine base of soil, orange peel, cedar, balsam bough and a lovely array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, chewy tannins, good acids and a long, focused and slightly warm finish. This is an excellent wine, but it has more of an old school Amarone profile than the far more classical 2010 version. In fact, I would serve this like an Amarone, with a good cheese course at the end of the meal, as the 2011 seems just a touch too high in octane to my palate to work with the main course. These great old vines have produced another deep and complex wine, but it seems destined to be a bit more limited around the table than the outstanding and slightly lower octane 2010 bottling. But, there is still serious quality here. Add four points to my score if higher octane juice does not phase you, as the complexity here is certainly admirable. 2021-2050. **88.**

## RECENTLY-TASTED GERMAN WINES SUMMER 2021



I will be writing about the 2020 vintage in Germany in a coming issue, as several generous proprietors have assembled samples of the vintage and placed them on containers headed to New York. However, given the slow pace of container travel out of Europe right now, it will be one of the next two issues that includes the article on the 2020 vintage. In the meantime, I have put together my occasional report on Recently-Tasted German wines out of bottle, which I try to do every year or so to cover what I have been tasting and drinking from the fine constellation of Germany's wines. As I went back through my tasting books, I discovered that I did not do this report last year during the height of Covid and I had a mountain of notes on wines out of bottle, many of which date back to my trip to Germany in May of 2018, so this report covers my "in the bottle" notes on German wines from that date up to the present time. I have to say I am almost embarrassed how many wines I have drunk from Klaus-Peter Keller over that period! Normally, this report will be focused primarily on more mature or maturing wines, but while I was starting work on this piece, the superb estate of Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt sent me samples of their 2019ers, which I had requested a while ago, but which had also been caught up in the difficult calculus of container shipping post-pandemic and had just arrived into the port of New York this summer. Given how superb the von Kesselstatt wines are year in and year out,

coupled to the outstanding quality of the 2019 vintage, I was more than happy to make them the centerpiece of this article!

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt is one of the finest and most important estates on the Mosel, as the property owns fully forty-six hectares of vines, well-placed among many of the crown jewel *terroirs* to be found in the middle Mosel, the Ruwer and the Saar. As I have mentioned previously, the von Kesselstatt holdings in the middle Mosel include fine parcels in the blue chip vineyards of the Goldtröpfchen in Piesport, the Juffer-Sonnenuhr in Brauneberg, the Sonnenuhr in Wehlen and the Domprobst and their Monopole Josephshöfer in the village of Graach. Many estates would count themselves extremely fortunate to have just this stellar lineup of grand crus in the middle Mosel, but in the Saar Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt also has parcels in the Scharzhofberg and Gottesfus in Wiltingen and the Bockstein in Ockfen, and in the Ruwer, the Nies'chen and Kehrnagel in Kasel. And these are just their very grand cru vineyard sites! It is an enviable lineup of truly stunning vineyard holdings! Of course, even these great parcels would not be meaningful if the von Kesselstatt was not making superb wines, but the estate is most assuredly making the most of their vineyard patrimony and producing stellar wines from them today. This is an estate with a very deep and rich history, as it can trace its origins back fully six hundred and fifty years. Originally part of the rich legacy of Medieval knights in this part of Germany, the modern day estate really dates back to the post-Napoleon era on the Mosel, as the von Kesselstatt family eventually purchased the former vineyards holdings of the four monasteries of Saint Maximin between the years of 1854 and 1889 and assembled those vineyard holdings into what would become their modern day estate. The property was eventually purchased by Günther Reh in 1978 and his daughter, Annegret Reh-Gartner would take the direction of Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt in 1983 and lead the estate with great *élan* until her untimely passing in the autumn of 2016.

The cellars for many, many years at Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt were located right in the center of downtown Trier, which was no doubt a great benefit way back in the day of horse-drawn wagons and the limited means of transportation back in the early days, but which became more and more problematic in the days of automobiles, trucks and tractors, which had to be crossed by loads of freshly-harvested grapes trying to fight their way across Trier's daily traffic jams to get from the vineyards into the winery in the center of town. Finally, in 1999 the Reh family stopped trying to swim upstream and make the wines in Trier, and they purchased the Schloss Marienlay estate in Morscheid in the Ruwer and moved their winery and cellars there. The beautifully restored castle is a far less logistically challenging location for a winery than downtown Trier, with easy access for grapes coming in at harvest time and plenty of space in the cellars in which the winemaking team can work without compromise. Annegret Reh-Gartner was a very passionate proprietor at von Kesselstatt and she left behind a beautiful legacy of commitment to quality wines of *terroir* during her long career manning the helm of this important estate. She was one of the first of her generation to speak out eloquently for the exclusive use of indigenous yeasts for the fermentation of the estate's wines, arguing that *terroir* can only be compromised to some extent by the use of commercial yeasts. During her time running Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt, the domaine's wines were always defined by their classical filigrees and lightness of step, coupled to very transparent representations of their underlying soil signatures and showed a beautiful ability to age long and gracefully. Since her passing in 2016,

the estate has continued to honor her legacy and make wines in the same uncompromising manner and their 2019ers are truly stunning examples of this great vintage!

While I do not get to raid my cellar with anywhere near the frequency that I did back in the days before I started writing *View From the Cellar*, as the constant flow of samples that need to be tasted keeps me from digging into my cellar on a nightly basis, I do tend to drink a fair bit of German wines when I have the opportunity to start pulling out bottles from my collection. Part of the reason for this is that I do not drink as much white Burgundy as I did once upon a time, so German wines will often emerge from my cellar to match a dish that might have been served with white Burgundy twenty years ago. But, these days, I also find that I am often drawn to the significantly lower alcohol levels found in many of the German wines in my cellar, which are quite tilted towards the traditional Prädikat wines in terms of sheer numbers, as I started buying those wines for my cellar back in my very first days in the wine trade. Not that a lot of the 1983ers, 1985ers and other fine vintages of the '80s are still surviving in my cellar from those early years, as I had a rather voracious appetite for young German wines in those formative cellar-building days, and so, despite my having bought an awful lot of cases of German wines back in the decade of the 1980s, not too many bottles were still extant in my cellar by the time the new millennium rolled around. But, I have any regrets about drinking those wines in their relative youths (well, not too many anyway...), as they were stunningly beautiful wines at that stage of their evolutions and I learned an awful lot drinking those wines back in my early days collecting wine. That said, I do still have some serious depth from the vintages of the late '90s and early '00s, and as many of those Prädikat wines are now starting to reach a stage where they are drying out a bit in personality (though their residual sugar levels do not change, but they do certainly start to taste drier than they did in their youth as the wines evolve into tertiary layers of maturity), they are really well-placed to step in for the gaping hole left in my white Burgundy corner of the cellar by the onset of premo. So, you will find a fair number of notes from that era in the article that follows.

The following notes are arranged by vintage, from youngest back to oldest. The article starts with a nice range of the new releases of (primarily) 2019ers from Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt, followed by my "in the bottle" tasting notes from a variety of other German wine producers. Within each vintage section, I have listed the wines stylistically from dry to sweet, with Trocken entry level wines first, followed by Grosses Gewächs or other Grand Cru Trocken wines, followed by Prädikat wines in ascending order of must weight from Kabinett to Spätlese to Auslese and above. Within each category of wine, I have simply listed the wines alphabetically by estate, so, for example, a 2009 Trocken bottling from Weingut Keller would appear ahead of one from Weingut Willis Schaefer in a vintage's range of tasting notes.

### ***New Releases From Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt***

#### **2020 Sommerpalais Riesling Feinherb QbA - Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt (screwcap)**

The Sommerpalais Riesling from Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt is their entry level wine and made for easy, early quaffing without reflection. Despite its very unpretentious aspirations, the wine is really quite tasty, as the 2020 offers up a bright and fairly complex nose of pear, apple, lilacs, iris blossoms, a touch of citrus zest and a very pretty base of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and shows just a touch of sweetness, with lovely intensity of flavor and mineral undertow, good acids and a long, lovely finish. This is a blended wine, so is not as

complex or site-specific as most Mosel Rieslings, but one can clearly see that all of the fruit used in the blend hails from serious *terroirs*. Dare I say it deserves a natural cork? 2021-2027. **87+**.

**2019 Nies'chen Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs AP #46- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2019 Nies'chen Grosses Gewächs bottling from von Kesselstatt is a beautiful young wine, coming in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offering up a vibrant bouquet of green apple, sweet grapefruit, a beautiful base of salty slate, citrus peel and a dollop of dried violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a superb core of fruit, great mineral drive and cut, ripe, snappy acids and laser-like focus on the long, perfectly balanced finish. This has the inherent elegance of the Ruwer in spades! It is certainly approachable today, but it is still a puppy and I would try to give it at least six or seven more years in the cellar to really let it start to hit on all cylinders, as it is going to be magnificent. 2027-2065. **94.**

**2019 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs AP #43- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt 2019 GG from the Goldtröpfchen is just a touch riper than the Nies'chen, coming in at an even thirteen percent in this vintage. The wine is already beautifully generous on the nose, offering up a combination of peach, passion fruit, a nice touch of wild yeasts, a beautiful base of soil, lavender and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil undertow, very good acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is a beautiful wine. 2025-2065. **93.**

**2019 Josephshöfer Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs AP #24- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2019 Josephshöfer Riesling Grosses Gewächs from the von Kesselstatt estate is simply stunning. The wine is not quite as big as the Goldtröpfchen version, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and showing a beautiful saltiness to its mineral component from high extract. The bouquet is precise and very refined, jumping from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, pear, salty, slate minerality, orange peel, a touch of wild yeasts and a lovely combination of violets and lavender in its floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, superb minerality, impeccable focus and balance and a long, complex and zesty finish. I love the potential elegance of this wine, which needs a few years to blossom properly (as it is still quite primary), but will be pure magic when it is really ready to drink! 2027-2065+. **94.**

**2019 Graacher Josephshöfer Riesling Kabinett Feinherb AP #9- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2019 Kabinett Feinherb bottling from the Josephshöfer vineyard is a beautiful wine, done in a quite dry style and with slightly broader shoulders that are reminiscent a bit of the style of a GG. The wine comes in at 11.5 percent octane in 2019, so obviously not quite as dry and powerful as a Grosses Gewächs bottling might be, but with similar stylistic sensibilities that I find extremely exciting. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of fresh lime, apple, kiwi, a lovely base of slate, lilacs and a hint of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, crisp and complex, with a great girdle of acidity, a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and a long, dry and beautifully balanced finish. This is touch fuller in style than the traditional Kabinett, but think of it as a simply stunning GG style of wine done in a medium-bodied format. It will age for decades and decades, but will not demand any bottle age before drinking! Great juice. 2021-2065. **94.**





### **2019 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett AP #25- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2019 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett from Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt is excellent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, a touch of wild yeasts, a lovely base of soil tones, bee pollen and a touch of honeysuckle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, vibrant and medium-full, with lovely focus and grip, fine intensity of flavor, zesty acids and a long, complex and nicely filigreed finish. This has the relatively broad shoulders of the Goldtröpfchen, nicely coupled with classic Kabinetten sensibilities. 2021-2065. **93.**

### **2019 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett Feinherb AP #8- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt's 2019 Scharzhofberger Kabinett Feinherb is a beautiful rendition of this magical *terroir*, with classical filigree and lightness of step of this Prädikat level and a fairly dry personality. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of lime, pear, salty slate minerality, bee pollen, a hint of petrol and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is zesty, medium-full and absolutely defined by its mineral undertow, with a fine core, an excellent girdle of acidity, just a whisper of sweetness and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. Whereas the 2019 Josephshöfer Kabinett Feinherb is already loaded with charm, the Scharzhofberger version is a bit tighter out of the blocks and deserves at least a modicum of bottle age before broaching. It will prove to be an excellent wine once it starts to stir. 2026-2065. **93.**

### **2019 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese AP #26- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt's 2019 Spätlese from the Goldtröpfchen is a beautiful example of the vintage. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of nectarine, passion

fruit, a lovely and quite complex base of soil, orange blossoms, a dollop of wild yeasts and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core, a beautiful interplay of sweetness, acidity and minerality, excellent balance and grip and a long, succulent and absolutely delicious finish. This is gorgeous. 2021-2065. **94.**

**2019 Graacher Josephshöfer Riesling Spätlese AP #19- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2019 Josephshöfer Spätlese from von Kesselstatt is a delicious example of the vintage. The wine comes in at 7.5 percent octane and offers up a very expressive bouquet of pear, tangerine, a hint of passion fruit, a beautiful base of slate, bee pollen and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and zesty, with a lovely core and soil signature, fine acids and grip and a long, sun-kissed finish that tastes like biting into a perfectly ripe peach right off of the tree. There is a touch of puppy fat to the fruit component of this wine right now, which makes it a touch sweeter than many Spätlesen out of the blocks, but this will submerge with bottle age and for those who would prefer a slightly more tensile example of Spätlese, simply tuck it away in the cellar for eight to ten years. It is a flat out delicious wine. 2021-2065+. **92.**

**2019 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese AP #18- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt's 2019 Spätlese from the Scharzhofberger vineyard is done in a slightly drier style than the Josephshöfer version, coming in a full point higher in octane at 8.5 percent alcohol. The wine delivers a beautifully pure and precise aromatic constellation of apple, fresh lime, a hint of pineapple, menthol, a gorgeous base of slate, citrus peel and a lovely topnote of mint and lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, poised and complex, with a lovely kernel of fruit, superb mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and a long, superbly balanced and filigreed finish. This is an understated beauty! 2021-2065+. **94.**

**2019 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese "Fuder 10" AP #41- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2019 Auslese #10 from the Scharzhofberg vineyard is one of the von Kesselstatt estate's finest wines in this extraordinary vintage. The bouquet is pure, precise and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a crystal clean blend of pear, fresh apricot, hints of the *mirabelle* to come with bottle age, gorgeous slate soil tones, a gentle touch of honeycomb and a floral topnote of white lilies, iris blossoms and violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, refined and very creamy at the core, with beautiful mineral undertow, zesty acids, laser-like focus and a long, complex and simply dancing finish. This is a gorgeous Auslese that has bottomless depth and yet, is absolutely light on its feet. It is flat out delicious today, but of course, is really built for the cellar and far more complexity will emerge if it is tucked away in the cellar for a decade or two! 2021-2085. **95.**

**2018 Majorat Riesling Brut- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2018 Majorat Riesling Brut from von Kesselstatt is a lovely bottle of Sekt, offering up a vibrant and complex bouquet of apple, white peach, slate minerality, spring flowers and a lovely topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and frothy, with snappy acids, fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, complex and bone dry finish. This is very well-made German sparkling wine and it is already very tasty, but will have no difficulties aging as well, and I would think it will be really lovely to drink five years down the road! 2021-2030+. **89.**

### ***Recently-Tasted German Wines***

#### **2017 Leiwener “Alte Reben” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Grans-Fassian**

The Leiwener “Alte Reben” Trocken bottling from Weingut Grans-Fassian is produced from fifty year-old vines and is fermented with native yeasts. The 2017 version comes in at 12.5 percent octane, has eight grams per liter of residual sugar and about seven grams per liter of acidity. The wine offers up a lovely nose of blood orange, grapefruit, a fine base of slate, lemongrass, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine, ripe acidity and a long, complex and quite classy finish. I like this very much. 2019-2040+. **91.**

#### **2017 Trittenheimer Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Grans-Fassian**

This is a pretty wine that seems more like a Spätlese to my palate, rather than showing that classic Kabinetten filigree and lightness of step, but estates often have Kabinett clientele that they want to make happy, even if the vintage does not cooperate with good raw materials for this Prädikat level. The bouquet of the 2017 Trittenheimer Kabinett is bright and bouncy, offering up scents of tangerine, apple, slate, bee pollen and a touch of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fairly rich on the attack for Kabinett and has a nice undertow of slate minerality, but with slightly soft acids and a bit more girth than one would ideally like for this Prädikat level. It is a fairly tasty wine. 2018-2030. **87.**

#### **2017 Wintricher “Ohligsberg” Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart (served from jero.)**

Julian Haart’s 2017 Ohligsberg Kabinett is still a young wine, particularly out of jeroboam, but its ultimate quality is already very easy to read. The youthful nose jumps from the glass in a mix of petrol, sweet grapefruit, peach, a beautiful base of slate minerality, wild yeasts and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and medium-bodied, with superb focus and filigree, a blade of backend minerality and a very long, snappy and complex finish. This classically light on its feet as Kabinett should be and is quintessential Kabinett in the making. 2029-2075. **95.**

#### **2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)**

This is a very lovely bottle of Kabinett that so clearly deserved to be bottled under a natural cork, so that it could evolve to its complete potential without anything being sacrificed to its closure. The bouquet is very pretty, delivering a lovely combination of pear, a touch of tangerine, a fine base of slate, vanilla bean and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is precise, medium-bodied and nicely filigreed, with fine complexity of flavor and bounce, lovely acids and a long, nascently complex and quite classically proportioned finish. This wine is not showing any signs of reduction right now, but I would have loved to have had some bottles in my cellar under natural cork to drink at age twenty-five or thirty! 2018-2040+? **91+.**

#### **2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut von Hövel**

Max von Kunow took over direction of the well-known von Hövel estate from his father in 2010, after having done *stages* at several other wineries in Germany and Burgundy, as well as consulting for winegrowers in Luxembourg. He has converted the family’s vineyard holdings to organic farming, which includes an impressive 2.8 hectares of vines in the Scharzhofberg. His 2017 Scharzhofberger Kabinett is quite good, offering up a bright and complex nose of green apple, lime peel, a fine base of slate minerality, a hint of wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and nicely filigreed, with lovely complex, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and bouncy finish. Good juice and quite classically proportioned. 2018-2040. **91.**

**2016 Riesling Trocken AP #12- Weingut Dr. Crusius**

This is just a basic, entry level Riesling Trocken from Dr. Crusius, but the wine is excellent. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, fresh pineapple, sea salts, a hint of menthol, slate, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and wide open in personality, with a good core, fine mineral drive, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. This is a fine value. 2021-2045. **91.**

**2016 Apotheke Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Grans-Fassian**

The 2016 Apotheke Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Grans-Fassian is quite a ripe wine in personality, but I did not get the technical details of its alcohol, residual sugar or acidity. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raised in the same vessels prior to bottling. The 2016 Apotheke GG offers up a nascently complex nose of tart orange, pink grapefruit, a fine base of slate minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly broad-shouldered in profile, with a rock solid core, bright, buried acids and a long, fairly powerful, but well-balanced finish. This is a young wine that needs still some time in the cellar to blossom properly, but will be a good drink in due course. 2026-2050. **90.**

**2016 Maximin Herrenberg “Alte Reben” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Carl Loewen**

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from the superb estate of Weingut Carl Loewen, which I sampled on the eve of Mythos Mosel in May of 2018. These ungrafted old vines were planted all the way back in 1896, on red slate soils, and the wine is fermented with native yeasts and raised in old *fuders*. The 2016 is excellent, offering up scents of grapefruit, tart orange, a beautiful base of slate, wild yeasts, citrus peel and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with lovely slate undertow, bright acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. Fine, fine juice, that needed a few more years' worth of bottle age before it was really drinking generously- at least when I tasted it back in the spring of 2018. At that time, I felt 2022 might be a good time to check in on it, which is now just around the corner! 2022-2050. **93.**

**2016 Würzgarten Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben”- Weingut Dr. Loosen**

Weingut Dr. Loosen's 2016 old vine bottling of Grosses Gewächs from the Würzgarten, made from one hundred year-old, ungrafted vines, is an outstanding wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, complex and very precise, offering up scents of apple, a complex base of minerality, lime zest, a beautiful array of spice tones, dried flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, fine mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. Fine, fine juice that still needs some time in the cellar to blossom properly. 2026-2065. **93.**

**2016 Brunnenhäuschen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Wittmann**

As I mentioned in my note on the 2019 Brunnenhäuschen GG, the Wittmann family owns two hectares of vines in this vineyard and 1.2 of these are located in the subsection of the Abtserde, which is where all of the fruit for the Grosses Gewächs bottling originates. The 2016 Brunnenhäuschen Grosses Gewächs is an excellent young wine, offering up scents of white cherry, grapefruit, a lovely base of chalky minerality, a nice touch of wild yeasts, citrus peel and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, excellent mineral undertow and cut, racy acids and a long, youthfully complex and very classy finish. Fine juice. 2026-2050+. **94.**

### **2016 Serriger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #14- Weingut Würtzberg**

This was another of the lovely wines I was introduced to at Zeltinger Hof on a recent trip to the middle Mosel, and if you are a fan of great Riesling, this is one restaurant wine list that you should avail yourself of in the near future, before this treasure trove of great wines is picked clean! The bouquet of this very elegant Spätlese wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, white cherries, passion fruit, bee pollen, a fine base of slate and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and medium-full, with a fine spine of acidity, lovely mineral drive and bounce, a fine core and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Fine juice. 2019-2060. **92.**



### **2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Trocken Weiss Kapsel \*\*- Markus Molitor**

I do not have the opportunity to taste the wines from Markus Molitor with regularity, so I was very happy that two vintages of his “Weiss Kapsel” bottling from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr were included in one of the Mythos Mosel events I attended. The 2015 Weiss Kapsel \*\* is a deep, fairly powerful example of the vintage, offering up scents of grapefruit, orange peel, rosemary, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a fine base of slate. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with broad shoulders, good focus and grip, snappy acids and a long, well-balanced and muscular finish. This is still a young wine and more elegance may well arrive with extended bottle age, but right now, it is a bit of a bruiser in terms of personality. 2025-2050. **89.**



### **2015 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

Klaus-Peter Keller's 2015 Kirchspiel is still a young wine and at least six or seven years away from really blossoming properly, but its ultimate shape is beginning to come into focus and it is only a matter of time before this wine starts to drink very well indeed. The bouquet is very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of clementine, pink grapefruit, a complex base of limestone minerality, citrus peel, still a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and seamlessly balanced, with a fine core, lovely transparency and grip, a superb girdle of acidity and a long, poised and very promising finish. This is not all that far away, but give it a handful of more years down in the cellar to allow it to start hitting on all cylinders. 2027-2085. **94+**.

### **2014 Wintricher Ohligsberg Riesling QbA AP #14- Weingut Günther Steinmetz**

The 2014 Wintricher Ohligsberg Riesling QbA from Günther Steinmetz is really quite a nice wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of white peach, grapefruit, petrol, a nice touch of wild yeasts, spring flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite dry in style, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, quite elegant finish. Good juice. 2020-2035. **91**.

### **2014 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett AP #6- Weingut Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2014 Doctor Kabinett from Weingut Dr. Thanisch is an excellent young wine. The bouquet offers up a bright and complex nose of lime, green apple, a lovely touch of mossiness, a superb base of soil tones and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and a long, balanced and complex finish. Six year-old Doctor Kabinett is still a young wine, with more complexity sure to emerge with further bottle age, but this is already quite tasty. 2020-2050. **93+**.

### **2014 Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Spätlese- Karthäuserhof**

The 2014 Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Spätlese is a lovely example of the vintage that is drinking very well indeed. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of white cherries, pear, slate, bee pollen, white flowers and a whisper of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, filigreed and complex, with lovely focus and mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, quite filigreed finish. Fine juice. 2020-2040. **92**.

### **2014 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Auslese- Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2014 Doctor Auslese from the Thanisch family is a stunning young wine that was still a few years away from properly blossoming when I last drank it at the Mythos Mosel events in May of 2018. The bouquet is starting to stir, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, yellow plum, a touch of laurel, honeycomb, discreet floral tones and a beautiful base of salty Doctor soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and seamlessly balanced, with bright, zesty acids, great depth at the core, a lovely spine of acidity and a very long, nascently complex and utterly refined finish. All this needs is a bit more time to fully come into its own. 2025-2075+. **95**.

### **2013 Riesling “von der Fels” Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2013 vintage of von der Fels is drinking beautifully and fully underscores just how superb a value this bottling is from Klaus-Peter Keller. The beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, orange peel, petrol, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, long and zesty, with a lovely core, fine chalky soil tones, very good balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Fine juice. 2021-2035+. **92**.



**2012 Würzgarten Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben” Reserve- Weingut Dr. Loosen**

The Reserve bottlings of GG from Ernie Loosen are aged fully two years on their fine lees in cask prior to bottling. I have really liked the most recent examples I have tasted from his reserve program, and I have to imagine that this 2012 Reserve from the Würzgarten was one of the earlier renditions. The wine is very refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of tart orange, apple, a lovely touch of leesy complexity, a fine base of minerality, lemon peel and a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a rock solid core, fine soil detail, snappy acids and just a touch of backend heat poking out on the long, complex and dry finish. I wish I had taken the time to check the listed octane level on this bottle, but it was served at a large, sit down tasting at Mythos Mosel and I did not get a chance to look at the label. Good juice, but the score is kept down just a touch of because of the bit of heat on the finish. 2018-2040+. **89.**

**2011 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

When I was writing my feature in Klaus-Peter Keller’s G-Max a few years back, I did not yet have note out of bottle on the 2011 vintage of that fine wine. However, my lone bottle was still sitting in a friend’s cellar in Germany, as I had not yet shipped the wine home to New York, so I proposed to him that we open it at dinner one night while I was visiting, so that I could have a more complete article on G-Max. With his characteristic generosity, he insisted that he open one of his bottles of the 2011 Morstein to go along with the G-Max. Needless to say, we were all very happy around the dinner table that night! The 2011 Morstein is a brilliant wine by any measure and did not have any difficulty being served right alongside of the G-Max, as it offers up a stunning young nose of tart orange, grapefruit, apple, a very complex base of limestone minerality, citrus peel, lemongrass and an exotic topnote of rosemary. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and laser-like, with a rock solid core of fruit, stunning mineral undertow and grip, snappy acids and a very, very long, seamless and electric finish. Brilliant juice. 2018-2060. **96+.**

**2011 Lieser Niederberg Helden Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Schloss Lieser**

The 2011 Long Gold Kap Auslese from the Niederberg Helden from Schloss Lieser is a brilliant wine. The bouquet is pure, complex and wide open today, wafting from the glass in a mix of pineapple, pear, a beautiful base of slate, honey and just a whisper of the vineyard’s botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and racy, with great precision and purity, a lovely core, superb acids and grip and a long, classy and electric finish. This is a great bottle of Auslese. 2019-2060. **95.**

**2010 Rüdesheimer Berg Schlossberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Georg Breuer**

The Berg Schlossberg is the Breuer family’s top vineyard site in Rüdesheim. The soils here are weathered slate over loam and loess. The estate’s 2010 Trocken bottling from this vineyard comes in at an even twelve percent alcohol and offers up a blossoming bouquet of lemon, apple, salty soil tones, lemongrass and a dollop of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, snappy young acids and lovely balance on the long and promising finish. This still needs at least a few years in the cellar to blossom completely from behind its fine girdle of acidity. It will be a lovey wine in due course. 2024-2050+. **92.**

### **2010 Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2010 Abtserde from Klaus-Peter Keller is starting to really drink beautifully and is a few years ahead of the G-Max in terms of evolution. The wine offers up a precise and beautiful aromatic constellation of blood orange, pink grapefruit, a complex base of chalky minerality, candied orange peel, a hint of petrol and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off superb mid-palate depth, with superb underlying minerality and cut, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and dancing finish. This is stunning wine. 2021-2065. **96+**.

### **2010 G-Max Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller (served from magnum)**

The 2010 G-Max out of magnum is still a fairly young wine, but it is starting to get close to its plateau and is only a few more years away from hitting its primetime window of drinkability. The blossoming bouquet offers up a beautiful blend of tangerine, a touch of guava, pink grapefruit, a very complex base of limestone minerality, dried flowers, blood orange, lemongrass and a lovely topnote that is starting to get smoky. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with stunning mid-palate depth and backend mineral drive, snappy acids and a complex, perfectly balanced and totally electric finish. Sheer brilliance. 2025-2075+. **100**.

### **2010 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese AP #10- Weingut Egon Müller**

Egon Müller's 2010 Auslese from the Scharzhofberg vineyard is drinking splendidly well at ten years of age, but is clearly still in climbing mode and will be even better another decade down the road. But, today, there is an awful lot of pleasure already to be found here, as the bouquet delivers a very refined combination of white cherries, yellow plums, a hint of mint, a gorgeously complex base of salty minerality, bee pollen, orange blossoms and a topnote of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and electric, with a great spine of acidity, laser-like focus, a stunning core and a very, very long, impeccably balanced and complex finish. This is one of those vintages of Scharzhofberger Auslese that simply dances across the palate and is likely to last forever! 2020-2100. **97**.

### **2009 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2009 vintage is quite a ripe year, but this just gives the Keller Kirchspiel a bit more mid-palate amplitude, rather than robbing the wine of any of its inherent elegance. The bouquet remains youthful, but is showing signs of starting to awake, as it offers up scents of lemon, pear, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, spring flowers, incipient notes of saltiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is very fresh and light on its feet for the vintage, but with a very pleasingly plump core of fruit. I would not be averse to opening bottles of the 2009 Kirchspiel in a few more years, as it is getting close to primetime. 2024-2075. **94**.

### **2009 Saarbuerger Rausch Riesling Feinherb AP #13- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2009 Feinherb bottling from the Rausch vineyard is drinking beautifully at age eleven, but still has plenty of years ahead of it. The bouquet is deep, bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, a hint of pineapple, lovely, mint-like botanicals, slate, lime peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with a lovely core, good mineral drive and grip, sound framing acids and a long, wide open and complex finish. This is a typical 2009 and a touch low in acidity by customary Saar standards, but the wine is now fully mature, impeccably balanced and will have no trouble aging at least another decade or more. 2020-2030+. **91**.



*Dorothee Zilliken in the estate's lovely tasting room in Saarburg.*

### **2008 Rauenthaler Nonnenberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Georg Breuer**

The 2008 Nonnenberg Riesling Trocken from Weingut Breuer is an outstanding wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, rosemary, a touch of petrol, citrus peel and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core and soil signature, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very, very classy finish. This is first rate juice. 2018-2040+. **93.**

### **2007 Kalkofen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Bürklin-Wolf**

The five hectare vineyard of Kalkofen in Deidesheim is planted on limestone soils. The 2007 Grosses Gewächs from Bürklin-Wolf comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is drinking quite nicely at eleven years of age, offering up scents of peach, pear, candied lemon peel, a touch of butter, a good base of chalky soil tones and a whisper of oak influence. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ready to drink, with a good core of ripe fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is now into its apogee and will be at its best over the next decade. 2018-2030+. **91.**

### **2007 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

I have always liked the svelte personality of the 2007 vintage *chez* Keller and the '07 Kirchspiel is really starting to drink well today. The wine still has at least a couple of decades of primetime drinking ahead of it, but for those who are fortunate enough to have more than a couple of bottles of this wine in the cellar, there is no reason not to start enjoying them now. The wine offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of sweet grapefruit, blood orange, a beautiful base of limestone minerality, gentle notes of petrol, lemongrass and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, zesty acids, a wide open personality and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. Now that the wine has emerged completely from behind its lovely structural chassis, the fruit has gotten succulent in its generosity and almost gives the perception of more sweetness than it really has in terms of residual sugar. Just a gorgeous wine now entering its peak of maturity. 2021-2045. **94.**

### **2007 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #17- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2007 Himmelreich Auslese AP #17 from Doctor Prüm is a stunningly beautiful wine that is just starting to enter its apogee of peak maturity and drink with clarity and grace. The bouquet soars from the glass in a complex constellation of fresh apricot, apple, salty minerality, honeycomb, just a touch of lavender and a topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very complex, with lovely filigree and intensity of flavor, zesty acids and a very, very long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. This is gorgeous! 2021-2060+. **96.**

### **2006 Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller (served from jeroboam)**

This is the very first vintage of Abtserde that Klaus-Peter Keller ever crafted and it is drinking splendidly well today, even out of larger format bottles. The bouquet is deep, refined and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, tart orange, wild flowers, still a touch of wild yeasts, a gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, *fleur de sel* and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile (particularly for the 2006 vintage), with a lovely core and soil signature, laser-like focus and a long, complex and impeccably-balanced finish. This still has decades of life ahead of it, but it is wide open today and is drinking with great style and grace. 2020-2060+. **96.**

### **2006 G-Max Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller**

This is the first vintage of G-Max that I have opened from my own cellar (not that I have all that many bottles down there) and it is really starting to drink beautifully at fifteen years of age. The nose is pure, precise and beautifully complex, revealing scents of apple, tangerine, a hint of the yellow plum to come, salty limestone minerality, petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with nice broad shoulders, a rock solid core, superb mineral drive and a long, ripe and very classy finish. The 2006 vintage was a fairly powerful one and this can be felt here in the G-Max a bit, but the inherent refinement of this bottling still has the upper hand in defining this beautiful wine. 2021-2040. **96.**

### **2006 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch (magnum)**

As readers will recall, the 2006 vintage in the middle Mosel was quite unique in comparison to the other wine-growing regions in Germany, as the middle Mosel was absolutely inundated with botrytis in this vintage, so almost everything produced here has at least a bit of glaze to it, and this Badstube Kabinett is no exception. Given the growing season's character, this is really more of a light, gently botrytized Auslese, but this was the closest thing to Kabinett to be found in the Thanisch cellars in this vintage, so customers looking for Kabinett were treated to light Auslese at Kabinett pricing! The bouquet offers up a classic botrytis blend of

*mirabelle*, pineapple, orange blossoms, honey, a nice touch of slate and a topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent finish. This is very tasty, albeit a far cry from a traditionally-styled Kabinett. 2019-2045+. **91.**

**2006 Norheimer Dellchen Riesling Spätlese AP #10 (Auction)- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2006 Dellchen Auction Spätlese from Helmut Dönnhoff gets more and more interesting each time I try it and after a period of a gently blowsy adolescence, this wine looks well on its way to turning into something very special down the road. I had not opened a bottle of this from my cellar since I wrote my piece on aged Spätlesen back in 2017, so I was quite curious to see how the intervening four years had treated it. The wine is now drinking beautifully, offering up scents of apricot, yellow plum, lovely slate minerality, a touch of honeycomb, orange blossoms and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with excellent acids and grip, fine focus and a long, well balanced finish that closes with a note of orange peel. This is from the Türmchen section of the Dellchen vineyard, which is the file sector, and it is aging beautifully. 2021-2060. **94+.**

**2006 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #4 (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

I had last opened a bottle of this wine back in 2017 also, for the feature on aging Spätlesen, and it too is getting more interesting as it gets more bottle age. As readers may recall, the onslaught of botrytis in the middle Mosel in 2006 was brisk and thorough, so almost everything had some botrytis in it, and this wine is certainly no exception. This wine seems to be firming up nicely with further bottle age and is a bit less blowsy in personality than it was back in 2017, offering up a beautiful, gently glazed nose of peach, *mirabelle*, papaya, salty minerality, lavender, orange peel and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, still very good soil undertow, fine filigree and a long, succulent and vibrant finish. As I have noted before, this is more like a light Auslese in this vintage, but it is a beautiful wine. 2021-2060. **93.**

**2005 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Auslese AP #12- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

I can still recall sitting in Hanno Zilliken's tasting room back in September of 2006 and tasting the dazzling lineup of wines the family crafted in this vintage. The upper Prädikat fireworks were so brilliant that day that I could not recall if we had even tasted this bottling until I consulted my notes from the visit, only to find that all of the pyrotechnics had been limited to Saarburger Rausch bottlings on that day. So, this was my first look at the 2005 Auslese from Bockstein and it is a lovely wine. The color is fairly dark for the wine's age, offering a deep copper hue and a beautiful, glazed bouquet of orange, apricot, honey, salty soil tones, heather and incipient notes of tea leaves. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full, with a beautiful honeyed core of fruit, lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, complex and flat out delicious finish. Just a very refined bottle. 2021-2050+. **93.**

**2004 Estate Riesling AP #30- Weingut Dönnhoff**

This is the Feinherb bottling of Estate Riesling from Helmut Dönnhoff, as it comes in at nine percent alcohol and had a bit of residual sweetness when it was first bottled, though at seventeen years of age, most tasters would say that this is now a dry wine. The bouquet today is very lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, *mirabelle*, salty minerality, lavender and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fairly complex and nicely filigreed, with a good core, fine balance and backend bounce and a long, vibrant finish. This is a

really fine bottle that still has decades of life ahead of it, but is now into its apogee. It is not quite as complex as any of the single vineyard wines would be from the Dönnhoff family, but it has an essence of the same magic. 2021-2040+. **91.**

**2004 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2004 Hermannshöhle Spätlese from Weingut Dönnhoff is truly beautiful wine that is into its apogee of peak drinkability and hitting on all cylinders today. The stunning nose delivers a complex blend of fresh apricot, tangerine, a refined base of slate, lemongrass, citrus zest and the first touch of saltiness starting to emerge from the soil tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and zesty, with a superb core, precise focus and grip, lovely mineral drive and a long, complex and lifted finish of outstanding energy. This is gorgeous wine. 2021-2045+. **95.**

**2004 Rudesheimer Bischofsberg Riesling Spätlese GK AP #12- Weingut August Kessler**

I had never tasted a wine from Weingut August Kessler before this bottle, and I was quite impressed with both its quality and stylistic sensibilities. Though the wine is labeled as a Goldkapsel Spätlese, the wine was not overtly botrytized or particularly sweet by today's standards, and I found it drinking very well indeed. The refined nose wafts from the glass in a mix of yellow plum, lavender, a lovely base of soil tones, peach-stone, gentle saltiness and a topnote that hints at the first touch of leather that will emerge with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and nicely light on its feet, with good acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, lithe finish. This is fine juice. 2021-2045+. **92.**





**2004 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #6- Weingut Fritz Haag**

This is the first time I can recall tasting the 2004 Auslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard from Oliver Haag, and the wine is absolutely brilliant! The bouquet is pure, refined and seems like it has little or no botrytis influence in its aromatic constellation of apple, pear, a beautiful base of salty slate, a touch of passion fruit, orange zest and that lovely signature topnote of this vineyard of delicate, mossy botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and filigreed, with a lovely core of fruit, gorgeous soil complexity, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the very long, complex and dancing finish. This is really on the drier side for an Auslese from our current era, but oh, so refined and vibrant! Great, great juice that is only going to keep getting better with further bottle age. 2021-2075. **96+**.

**2004 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #1- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

This beautiful wine was drunk out of half bottle. The bouquet is a deep, pure and vibrant blend of baked apples and peaches, honey, salty soil tones, a hint of the new leather to come with further bottle age and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and quite delicate in profile, with stunning filigree for such a beautifully glazed wine. The mid-palate depth is exceptional, the wine possesses perfect balance and focus and a very, very long, complex and dancing finish. Just a stunning wine from Hanno Zilliken (but, I have said that before ☺). 2018-2040+. **95**.

**2002 Würzgarten Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben”- Weingut Dr. Loosen**

This has to be one of the earliest GGs from Ernie Loosen, and tasting it today, one has the sense that its inspiration was found in the top Austrian bottlings from this era, as the wine has a bit of botrytis in it in the 2002 vintage. Happily, this practice has fallen out of fashion and today, the estate studiously avoids any influence of botrytis in its dry bottlings. The 2002 Würzgarten GG offers up a ripe nose of pineapple, apple, a good base of minerality, citrus peel and the vineyard's classic spice elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit muscle-bound stylistically, with good acids and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and slightly tropical finish. This is a good, solid wine, but not a patch on what the estate is doing today with the same vines and GG style. 2018-2035+. **88**.

**2002 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Trocken Weiss Kapsel \*\*- Markus Molitor**

The 2002 Weiss Kapsel \*\* Auslese Trocken from Markus Molitor has blossomed nicely and is now drinking with generosity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of blood orange, pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, citrus peel, slate and a topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely resolved, with a wide open personality, good mid-palate depth, sound acids and a long, complex, but slightly bitter finish. As is the case with the 2002 Würzgarten GG from Ernie Loosen above, I have to assume this was very early on in the evolution of this bottling from Markus Molitor, so I could well imagine more recent vintages aging even more gracefully than has the 2002 version. This is a good, solid wine, but not exceptional in quality. 2018-2035. **88**.

**2002 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese AP #5- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2002 Rausch Auslese from Hanno Zilliken was served at a tasting alongside of his 2005 Bockstein Auslese, and it was striking to see how much lighter in color this 2002 was, despite it being three years older! This is a brilliant wine in the making, offering up a deep, pure and very elegant bouquet of lemon, fresh pineapple, tangerine, a gentle array of Rausch botanicals, lovely slate soil tones that are just starting to turn the corner into saltiness, lilacs, iris blossoms and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and filigreed, with a

lovely core, fine focus and grip, vibrant acids and a very long, dancing and complex finish. I love the structural tension of this wine, as the fruit, minerality and acidity pull and tug at each other in a beautiful manner. 2021-2065+. **96.**

**2001 Brauneberger Mandelgraben Riesling Spätlese AP #7- Weingut Licht-Bergweiler**

I had never previously tasted a wine from Weingut Licht-Bergweiler, so I was very pleasantly surprised with how good this Spätlese was drinking. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of yellow plum, pineapple, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a nice touch of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and still beautifully zesty, with a good core and a long, bouncy finish. This is not the most complex 2001er I have had in the last few years, but it hits a lot of sweet notes in its more limited range. Good juice. 2021-2040. **90.**

**2001 Gimmeldinger Schlössel Rieslaner Auslese AP #17- Weingut Müller-Catoir**

The 2001 vintage was the last for Hanz-Günther Schwarz at Weingut Müller-Catoir and the 2001 Gimmeldinger Schlössel Rieslaner Auslese that he fashioned is absolutely brilliant. The wine delivers a beautiful and very expressive bouquet of peach, a touch of fresh apricot, lavender, a beautiful base of soil tones, hints of petrol and incipient notes of the sweet corn tones to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a fine core, lovely, ripe acids and a long, complex and focused finish. This is now drinking beautifully, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2020-2050. **95+.**

**2001 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #5- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

I drank this beautiful wine with a small group of people who had gotten together a couple of days earlier and drank the 2001 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from Manfred Prüm, so all they could keep saying about the Zeltinger version was “it’s not quite up to the quality level of the Wehlener!” Happily (at least for my appreciation of this wine), I had not been among the crowd a couple of days earlier, so I was able to savor this bottle in all of its glory. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of apricot, peach-stone, *mirabelle*, heather, a dollop of honeycomb, a beautiful base of slate (just starting to turn salty) and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and beautifully delineated, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, superb acidity and lightness of step and a long, complex finish that is just starting to turn drier in profile, so that the residual sweetness in this wine today is more like a young Spätlese. This is a beautiful wine. 2021-2065. **95.**

**2001 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese\* AP #19- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The One Star Auslese from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr vineyard has to be one of Johannes Selbach’s finest examples of the vintage. At twenty years of age it is drinking at its apogee, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of pineapple, fresh apricot, salty soil tones, honeycomb, a hint of orange peel and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, delicate of step and complex, with a fine core and grip, zesty acids and impeccable balance on the long, focused and vibrant finish. This is gorgeous wine. 2021-2050. **94.**

**2001 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese\*\*- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

This is a very pretty, filigreed and still quite youthful example of Auslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard. The bouquet is more reticent than the palate today, but with some insistent swirling, offers up a bright blend of pear, fresh pineapple, violets, honeycomb, salty slate minerality and incipient notes of the yellow plum to come with just a bit more bottle age. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with a lovely, dreamy core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, expressive and beautifully balanced finish. This tastes stunning

today, but I would love to keep some bottles still tucked away in the cellar and let the bouquet fully catch up with the generosity already found on the palate, as the wine still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2060. 92+.

**2001 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Fritz Haag**

I had extremely high expectations for this particular wine, but it ended up falling into the “very good”, but not “great” camp. The bouquet is deep and pretty, but not all that complex, as it offers up scents of honey, apricot, nectarine, a nice touch of salty soil tones and a topnote of tea leaves. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite seamless in its balance, with a fine core, fairly gentle acids and a long, succulent and very tasty finish of moderate complexity. This has lovely depth, but in the great, classic vintage of 2001, I would have loved to have seen just a bit more cut and complexity in the wine. That said, it is certainly delicious in its more limited range of flavors and aromatics. 2021-2045. 90.

**2001 Monsheimer Silberberg Rieslaner GK Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Keller**

Weingut Keller remains dedicated to keeping the magic of Rieslaner alive, much in homage to the magical work Hanz-Günther Schwartz did with the varietal during his long and illustrious career at Weingut Müller-Catoir, and this 2001 is a stunning testament to just how good this grape can be in the right hands. This was Klaus-Peter Keller’s first vintage officially in charge at the family estate and he did not do too bad of a job with this wine! The color is now deep copper and the celestial bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of apricot, orange, honey, heather, barley sugar and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, utterly refined and drinking at its zenith, with bottomless depth at the core, superb acidity and grip, seamless balance and a very, very long, complex and electric finish. Stunning wine. 2021-2060. 98.



**1999 Niederfeller Fächern Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joseph Haupt**

This is a producer that I know absolutely nothing about, but a glass was shared with me while dining on my own at the Zeltinger Hof restaurant. The wine turned out to be quite good, albeit not the most complex example of mature Spätlese I have come across, but still with plenty of bounce and personality. The nose offers up scents of white cherries, pear, bee pollen, slate, spring flowers and just a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and vibrant, with lovely focus and length, plenty of resolution and a succulent finish. Not bad at all and drinking at its peak today. 2010-2040. **89.**

**1996 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Trocken Weiss Kapsel \*\*\*- Markus Molitor**

The 1996 version of the Weiss Kapsel bottling, made from eight to one hundred year-old vines in the Sonnenuhr, was graced with three stars on its label, but it is quite similar to the 2002 version and is a tad ham-fisted in style. The bouquet offers up a ripe blend of pineapple, blood orange, candied lemon peel and a solid foundation of soil tones that are just starting to get a bit salty. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and a bit hot on the backend, with a good core, sound acids and a long, chunky finish. It is not just that this wine is a bit too powerful for its own good, but it shows virtually no developmental complexity with more than twenty years' worth of bottle age, which I find hard to comprehend. It is a good, solid wine, but should not these old vines produce something far superior? 2018-2030+. **87.**

**1996 Forster Pechstein Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken- Weingut J. L. Wolf**

This was the first wine I have ever tasted from Weingut Wolf and I was very impressed with its quality. The bouquet now is fully mature and offers up a bright and complex constellation of peach, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness, lemon peel and fruit stone. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and complex, with lovely focus and grip, elegant balance, zesty acids and a long, wide open and vibrant finish. This has the proper lightness of step for a Kabinett Halbtrocken and a fine filigree. Good juice. 2018-2035+. **93.**

**1995 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #11- Wgt. Reinhold Haart**

Theo Haart's 1995 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Gold Kap is a gorgeous example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and now fully into its apogee, delivering a panoply of fresh apricot, tangerine, honey, a hint of the new leather notes to come, a lovely base of salty soil tones and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and complex, with a creamy core, fine soil undertow, zesty acids and impressive focus and cut on the long, complex and beautifully light on its feet finish. This is really a lovely wine at the peak of its powers. 2019-2040+. **94.**

**1994 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #13- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 1994 Domprobst Auslese AP #13 from Willi Schaefer is a beautiful wine that is starting to really drink at its apogee, but clearly still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apricot, gooseberry, a complex base of slate, clover honey, orange peel and a gentle floral topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a beautiful core, great balance and grip, zesty acids and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. Welcome to the wonders of mature Domprobst! 2019-2060. **95+.**

### **1994 Mussbacher Eselshaut Rieslaner Trockenbeerenauslese AP #19- Müller-Catoir**

This bottling of TBA was really my introduction to the beauty of the wines of Weingut Müller-Catoir, as I sold cases and cases of the brilliant 1986 version back in my retail wine merchant days. I had a half bottle of that 1986 a few years back and it continues to drink well, and it is probably still a shade ahead of this very good 1994 version. The 1994 TBA offers up a deep and honeyed nose of orange, apricot, tea leaves, salty soil tones, orange peel and clover honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a great core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is not quite as racy as the 1986 was at the same point in its evolution, but it is still a very tasty and highly satisfying dessert wine. 2020-2035. **93.**

### **1993 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese AP #7- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken (Auction Wine)**

When I first started attending the September VDP auctions in Trier back fifteen years ago or so, the Zilliken family's auction Spätlese was one of the hidden gems in the auction and was often the finest value to be had. Today, the wine no longer flies under the radar, but its quality has never diminished and year in and year out, it is always one of my favorite wines in Trier. The 1993 Auction Spätlese from the Rausch is a brilliant wine that is now at its peak, delivering a stunning aromatic constellation of pear, apple, plenty of smokiness, a lovely array of Rausch botanicals, sea salts and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nearly dry in profile, with a lovely core, superb filigree and mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, perfectly balanced and oh, so complex finish. Just a glorious Spätlese in full flight at age twenty-five! 2018-2040. **96.**

### **1988 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese- Zeltinger Hof**

This was a private label for the restaurant that was purchased from one of the local growers with holdings in the Himmelreich, and based on how well this wine was drinking when I shared a glass, the winegrower was clearly quite talented! The bouquet is deep, bright and beautifully complex, offering up scents of tangerine, fresh apricot, salty soil tones, a nice touch of heather, gentle smokiness and a topnote of clover honey. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed and *à point*, with a lovely girdle of acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is fine juice, and still available at the restaurant if one asks Markus, the proprietor if he can find a bottle for you down in the cellar! 2019-2050. **92.**

### **1988 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese AP #26- Weingut Edmund Werland**

This is another estate that I have never tasted before, and I do not believe that the domaine is still in existence today. But, when one is dining at the Zeltinger Hof, the chances of coming across fine old Riesling are always very high! The wine is at its apogee today, delivering a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, apple, a touch of almond, dried flowers and a lovely base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and at its peak, with good mid-palate depth, bright, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. A very tasty old Spätlese. 2019-2030. **89.**

### **1986 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Von Schubert**

If anyone were interested in disputing Hanno Zilliken's observation that global warming did not really get rolling until the 1988 vintage in Germany, I would happily submit this bottle of 1986 Herrenberg Spätlese as evidence that Hanno is absolute right! This is a stunningly beautiful bottle of Spätlese, but it is bone dry and by today's standards, could easily be interpreted as a

Trocken wine, no matter what the original level of residual sugar might have been in the wine! But, it is truly a stunning wine, offering up a vibrant and very complex bouquet of lemon, tart *mirabelle*, salty minerality, laurel, bee pollen and a wide array of gentle botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and taughtly structured, with a lovely core, gorgeous filigree and bounce, zesty acids and a very, very long, complex and stellar finish. This wine still has decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2050. **94.**

**1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Halbtrocken AP #15- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

This is a bottling one is never likely to see again, as the age of Auslese Halbtrocken now belongs fully to the past! The wine has aged beautifully and is now drinking at its peak, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of pear, yellow plum, plenty of Rausch smokiness, very salty soil tones, citrus peel and an exotic topnote of sweet almond. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and now completely dry in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and cut, zesty acids, beautiful mineral undertow and a long, complex and utterly refined finish. Think of this as the pre-cursor to Hanno's Diabas bottling today. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **94.**

**1983 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #20- Weingut Fritz Haag**

Wilhelm Haag's 1983 Auslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr is a gorgeous wine that is now at its apogee of peak maturity. The bouquet is deep, complex and still quite vibrant, offering up a fully mature panoply of yellow plum, pineapple, honeycomb, a beautiful base of salty soil tones, a touch of the vineyard's signature mossiness and a topnote of peach stone. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex, medium-full and beautifully refined today, with its residual sweetness level now resolved to more of a Spätlese level, with a great core, stunning focus and balance and a long, vibrant and absolutely *à point* finish. This is stellar and still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2055. **95.**

**1983 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Auslese AP #12- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

Hanno Zilliken has always placed the 1983 vintage in the Saar at the very pinnacle of vintages from this era, prior to global warming, when it was difficult to get such beautifully ripe grapes except once or twice a decade. While I have been fortunate to drink several of Hanno's 1983ers from the Rausch vineyard, this was the first time I had ever tasted his 1983 Bockstein Auslese, which was kindly shared with me over lunch by Nadine and Julian Haart when I was visiting them in Piesport. The wine is flat out superb, offering up a bright and beautifully complex nose of pineapple, a touch of fresh apricot, salty soil tones, just a touch of honey, citrus oils and an exotic topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very pure and precise, with lovely intensity of flavor and filigree, bright acids and a long, focused and dancing finish. Just a beautiful wine at its apogee. 2019-2045+. **94.**

**1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese AP #18- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

As excited as I was to taste the rare 1983 Bockstein Auslese, I do have to admit that the Rausch is a step up! This bottle was tasted at the estate with the Zilliken family in May of 2018 and was at the peak of its powers, offering up a pure, complex and utterly refined nose of baked yellow plums, pineapple, salty minerality, a touch of sweet corn, pungent floral notes of violets and plenty of upper register Rausch smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very precise, with a lovely core and mineral bounce, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, dancing finish. This is absolutely stunning. 2018-2050. **97.**

**1983 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Egon Müller**

This beautiful bottle of Goldkapsel Auslese from the Scharzhofberg was drunk at the estate, as Egon Müller kindly brought it up from the cellar to finish up our tasting of his 2017ers.



As the wine did not have any label on it, I am not sure of the AP number for the wine, and knowing Egon, there are probably a few different versions of 1983 Gold Kap still down in the cellar for future drinking. In any case, this bottle was stellar, delivering a classic and beautifully glazed and complex nose of yellow plums, apricot, honey, a touch of browned butter, slate soil tones, iris blossoms and an exotic topnote of saffron. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied complex and at its apogee, with a creamy core of fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and a very, very long, superbly balanced and vibrant finish. Gorgeous juice. 2018-2045. **95.**



*Christophe and Willi Schaefer in the family estate's tasting room in Graach.*

### **1975 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #12- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

When I was learning about German Riesling in my formative days in the wine trade in the early 1980s, the vintage from the 1970s that most still quite widely available was the 1976 vintage, which seemingly caught the imaginations of wine buyers a bit older than me more than had the classic 1975 vintage. While I have been fortunate to drink some truly exceptional 1976ers over the years, I really wish the 1975s had received as warm of a reception in the American wine trade, as I do prefer this vintage by quite some margin over the 1976ers. Willi Schaefer's 1975 Domprobst Auslese is utterly brilliant and now at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability. The stunning bouquet soars from the glass in a mix of *mirabelle*, tangerine, a beautiful base of very salty soil tones, a touch of new leather, honey, orange zest and a delicate topnote of sweet corn. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, fullish and gloriously complex, with hauntingly perfect balance, great focus and grip and a very, very long, zesty and dazzling complex finish. Pure magic! 2018-2050. **98.**

**1971 Rüdesheimer Berg Rosenberg Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Deinhard**

The 1971 Rüdesheimer Berg Rosenberg Beerenauslese from Weingut Deinhard is a stellar example of this outstanding vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully tertiary today, offering up scents of apricot, tangerine, lavender, peach stone, honey and tea leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, still quite crisp and beautifully complex, with lovely balance and length, very good focus for its age and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is really drinking beautifully still and has plenty of life ahead of it. 2019-2040. **94.**

**1969 Rauenthaler Gehrns Riesling Auslese- Weingut Schloss Eltz**

Back in my early wine merchant days in the 1980s, I often drank the wines from Schloss Eltz, which were available from their importer in a range of older vintages. But, even back then, we did not see wines from the decade of the 1960s, so I was delighted when friend brought this bottle to a tasting in Germany. The wine is drinking gorgeously today, with still plenty of life in it as it offers up a complex and tertiary bouquet of dried apricot, a lovely base of salty soil tones, tea leaves, just a hint of honey and a topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely crisp and vibrant, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex and delightful finish. This is a fine bottle. 2019-2040+. **92.**

## RECENTLY-TASTED ALSACE WINES SUMMER 2021



While it has been a year since I last did a report on the wines of Alsace, the two vintages that figure predominantly in this article are once again the 2018 and 2019 vintages, as was the case last year. Of course, there are some older wines to be found in the notes that follow as well, as Maison Trimbach in Ribeauvillé continues to release their long-lived and utterly classical grand cru Riesling bottlings after giving them some bottle age in their cellars, so that there are plenty of 2017s in their current lineup, as well as the 2016 vintage of Clos Ste. Hune. However, mostly what is written up below hails from the 2019 and 2018 vintages in Alsace, so I include again the vintage summations from last year's report. Both were very hot summers in the region, and to a certain degree, both years will be defined by these torrid mid-summer weather conditions of each growing season. However, as was the case in other parts of France, there are important difference in the two summer seasons. In 2019, spring was cool and rather late in Alsace, with some early April frosts causing a bit of damage (and, as was the case throughout so many other parts of France). The weather picked up nicely as May arrived, with seasonal temperatures and little rain, so that fruit began to mature very nicely. June and July of 2019 were hot and dry, but fears brought on by hydric stress were relieved by timely rains in August that kept maturity mounting nicely out in the vines. As can be seen further on in this issue, this was mirrored in the northern Rhône in 2019, but not in the south, where the drought was never

relieved by any precipitation. The timing of much-needed rain in Alsace in August would prove to be of pivotal importance in shaping both the style and the ultimate quality of the Alsace vintage of 2019. September temperatures stayed warm in the region and the harvest was conducted under absolutely lovely conditions. Picking began in September and progressed in a leisurely fashion throughout the month, with growers in the cooler sections of the Bas Rhin finishing up in the first week or so of October. Yields in 2019 are down notably from the very generous crop size of 2018.

The Alsace growing season was quite different at the outset in 2018, as the first several months of this year were about as wet as Alsace has ever seen. Lots of rain in January was followed by a particularly cold and snowy February, and as the temperatures start to hedge towards springtime levels, the rains kept up and it was a very damp, dismal and grey start to 2018 in Alsace. May was also one of the wettest month on record in the region. Flowering occurred in early June, with still some rainy days interspersed with sunshine, but the crop set was good and as the rains finally departed, the temperatures started to rev up and allow the fruit to ripen very well. With all the spring rain, mildew was a threat and growers had to be vigilant out in the vines. July weather was seasonably hot and a serious heat spike arrived with the outset of August of 2018, with temperatures soaring to over forty degrees Celsius. Fortunately, all that rain in the first half of the year allowed water reserves to be more than a match for the heat of August and ripening did not slow from hydric stress in 2018. The frost damage in the region in 2017 had allowed for plenty of pent up energy in the vines, so the crop of 2018 in Alsace was quite generous, and if the heat of the backend of summer had not arrived, it could have been problematic for growers to try and ripen up such a large crop. But, with all the hot sunny days, the bunches ripened up just fine and picking began at the start of September. Daytime temperatures remained high throughout the harvest, with evenings cooling down a bit, but 2018 is not a vintage where acidity is particularly tensile and the wines all seem to have an early generosity to them- even the generally more reserved Rieslings. Happily, the harvest period was one of relaxed celebration for *vignerons*, as the bunches had ripened up very nicely and each grape variety was on its own schedule, so there would not be instances of having pressure to pick everything all at once, as full maturity was nicely spread out across microclimates and grape varieties.

### ***Crémant d'Alsace***

#### **2017 Breit “Blanc de Blancs” Crémant d’Alsace Extra Brut- Domaine Mélanie Pfister**

Mélanie Pfister’s 2017 Breit Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is made from a fifty-fifty blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc, with the wine aged on its fine lees for twenty-eight months prior to disgorgement. It offers up a very refined bouquet of apple, white peach, gently musky floral tones, a lovely base of soil and a nice touch of brioche in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core and excellent soil signature, slightly coarse *mousse*, brisk acids and a long, very nicely balanced and quite dry finish. This is one of the finest examples of Crémant d’Alsace I have ever tasted! 2021-2035. **90.**

### ***Blended Varietal Bottlings***

#### **Cerisier en Fleur- Domaine Amélie & Charles Sparr (screwcap)**

The Cerisier en Fleur is a blended bottling from Amélie and Charles Sparr that is not only multi-varietal, but also multi-vintage, with this current release a blend of wines from 2018, 2019

and the 2020 vintages. It is made from a *cépages* of Riesling, Pinot Blanc and Muscat, with the wine bone-dry and coming in at 12.5 percent octane. It offers up a bright and floral bouquet of nectarine, apple, lavender, musky fruit blossoms and a nice touch of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is a complex bottle that is drinking very nicely, but the combination of both three vintages and three grapes does not make for the most delineated wine on either the nose or palate, but there is a lot of very pleasing elements here. 2021-2028. **88.**

**Liberté No. 33 Orange- Domaine Amélie & Charles Sparr**

This is a fascinating wine from Amélie and Charles Sparr. The wine is made from a blend of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer and allowed to macerate on its skins for one month in conical casks crafted specifically for this purpose. The grapes were foot-trodden by Amélie and her sister to get the gentle extraction going. The wine is a beautiful orange-rose color and offers up a bright and vibrant bouquet quite influenced by the Gewurztraminer in the blend, with scents peach, lychee, rosewater, a bit of spiced meats and a nice base of soil wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and a bit four-square in personality, but with good depth at the core, just a whisper of backend tannin, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the slightly bitter finish (from the Gewurztraminer skins?). This is not quite as focused on the palate as on the nose, but it does have plenty of personality (not to mention a touch of sediment). It is a unique and interesting wine. 2021-2030+? **87.**

**2018 Rendez-Vous en Blanc- Domaine Mélanie Pfister**

The 2018 Rendez-Vous en Blanc from Mélanie Pfister is a lovely, entry level, dry blended wine from this extremely talented *vigneronne*. The *cépages* this year is thirty-six percent Pinot Blanc, twenty-eight percent each of Pinot Gris and Riesling and eight percent Gewurztraminer. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivers a lovely bouquet of nectarine, pear, a touch of orange, a lovely base of soil, a hint of menthol and plenty of floral shadings. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with fine balance and grip, zesty acids and a long, classy finish. The blend of different grape varieties gives this wine a lovely, seamless personality, but at the same time, makes it quite difficult to pick out specific nuances on either the nose or palate from any of the grapes involved. So, I do not know what I think of the blend, as there is a lot going on here and it is almost bewildering to one accustomed to breaking down a wine into its individual facets! But, that said, it is delicious. 2021-2030. **91.**

**2018 Paar “Deux Cépages”- Domaine Mélanie Pfister**

Mélanie Pfister’s Paar bottling is a more straightforward affair than her Rendez-Vous en Blanc cuvée, as this is a straight fifty-fifty blend of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois. The 2018 Paar tips the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, peach, bee pollen, spring flowers, a lovely foundation of soil tones and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bouncy, focused and full, with a lovely framing of acidity, a fine core of fruit, very good soil undertow and a long, complex and succulent finish. This is a lovely wine, just exuding charm on both the nose and palate. 2021-2028. **90.**

***Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois***

**2019 Pinot Blanc “Vieilles Vignes” Auxerrois- Domaine Schoffit**

The 2019 Pinot Blanc “Vieilles Vignes” from Bernard Schoffit is made from a blend of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois, with the average age of the vines fully fifty years-old. The

2019 version is a lovely wine, offering up a complex and very expressive aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, gently musky floral tones redolent of acacia blossoms and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core, a wisp of sweetness, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the succulent and beautifully balanced finish. This is flat out delicious wine. 2021-2030+. **91.**

**2019 Pinot Blanc- Domaine Weinbach**

The 2019 Pinot Blanc from Domaine Weinbach is a blend of seventy percent Pinot Auxerrois and thirty percent Pinot Blanc *vrais*. The wine comes in listed at thirteen percent octane and offers up a complex nose of peach, apple, fruit blossoms and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the bouncy finish. This is probably just a bit north of thirteen percent octane and should be best over the next several years, as there is not a ton of acidity here and I would opt for consuming it while it still has its lovely vivacity of youth. 2021-2026. **89.**

**2018 Pinot Blanc “Pensée”- Domaine Amélie & Charles Sparr**

The 2018 Pinot Blanc “Pensée” from Amélie and Charles Sparr hails from vineyards grown on gravelly soils and is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 version comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a pretty bouquet of peach, apple, white lilies, a nice foundation of soil tones and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, fine balance and grip, lovely length and a closing note of citrus pith on the finish. The focus here is just a touch muddled, which keeps its score down a couple of points. But, this is a good solid example of Pinot Blanc, with the touch of backend bitterness working quite nicely at the table. 2021-2027. **88.**

**2018 Pinot Blanc “Am Zelle”- Domaine Marc Tempé**

Marc Tempé’s domaine is based in the village of Zellenberg and his bottling of Pinot Blanc hails from several parcels of fairly old vines that he has scattered around the village. The vines average forty-five years of age and Marc ages them in old oak *foudres*, which is quite rare for bottlings of Pinot Blanc. His lovely 2018 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and delivers a beautifully expressive nose of peach, apple, spring flowers, fairly stone soil tones and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely balance and bounce, zesty acids and a long, focused and vibrant finish. This is first class Pinot Blanc! 2021-2030+. **90.**

***Sylvaner, Chasselas and Orange Wines***

**2019 Chasselas “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Schoffit**

As I mentioned last year, Domaine Schoffit’s old vine bottling Chasselas hails from a parcel of vines planted in Colmar which are fully eighty years of age. The 2019 Chasselas Vieilles Vignes is a lovely bottle, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and offering fine depth and purity on both the nose and palate. The classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of nectarine, apple, white lilies, a beautiful base of minerality and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, fine soil inflection, bouncy acids and a long, well-balanced finish that shows just a bit of residual sweetness. A lovely wine. 2021-2040. **91.**



## ***Pinot Gris***

### **2019 Pinot Gris Tradition “Lieu à Dit Harth”- Domaine Schoffit**

The 2019 Pinot Gris from the *lieu à dit* of Harth from the Schoffit family is one of the first two wines to be certified organic by Ecocert, though the domaine has been farming organically now for many years and is transition to biodynamics. But, they only started the official certification process a couple of years ago and this wine, along with the 2019 Riesling bottling from the Harth vineyard, are the first two to receive the certification. The wine is fairly ripe in 2019, coming in at 14.3 percent octane and offering up a complex bouquet of white peach, apple, wheat chaff, dried flowers, a fine base of soil tones and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a plush core of fruit, good soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This carries its alcohol beautifully and does not seem warm in the mouth at all. Fine juice. 2021-2040. **91+**.

### **2019 Pinot Gris “Cuvée Ste. Catherine”- Domaine Weinbach**

The grapes used for the Cuvée Ste. Catherine bottling of Pinot Gris from Domaine Weinbach hail from the lower sections of the Grand Crus of Schlossberg and the Clos des Capucins- both planted to old vines, as well as a few younger vine parcels from the Grand Cru of Marckrain, with all of the vineyards farmed biodynamically. The wine is fermented and aged in old oak casks and the 2019 Cuvée Ste. Catherine comes in at 14.5 percent octane. It offers up a deep and youthful nose of peach, a hint of papaya, orange zest, a lovely base of soil tones, lemongrass and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, sound framing acids, a touch of residual sweetness and a long, complex finish that shows just a wisp of backend heat. Good juice, but it seems likely to drink best in its relative youth. 2021-2027+? **91**.

### **2018 Pinot Gris “Am Zelle”- Domaine Marc Tempé**

This bottling hails from vineyards growing in the village of Zellenberg. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in large, old oak *foudres* for fully two years prior to bottling. The 2018 is ripe in the style of the vintage, coming in at a full fifteen percent octane and offering up a lovely nose of apricot, peach, musky floral tones, a nice base of soil and just a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good acids, just a bit of backend sweetness and a long, surprisingly well-balanced finish that shows only a touch of heat. This is a very well-made wine, but I would love to taste it in a vintage that is not quite so ripe in style, as fifteen percent is a bit high for my palate. But, there is no denying that there are a lot of good things going on here on both the nose and palate. 2021-2030+. **89**.

### **2015 Pinot Gris “Réserve Personnelle”- Maison Trimbach**

The 2015 Pinot Gris “Réserve Personnelle” from Maison Trimbach is only made in top vintages and is produced from a vineyard selection of the best parcels, including from their holdings in the grand cru vineyard of Osterberg. The 2015 version comes in at an even fourteen percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of peach, a touch of fresh pineapple, tangerine, beautiful minerality, rosemary and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with just a wisp of sweetness to the fruit component on the attack, a superb core, lovely mineral undertow and a long, complex, zesty and quite dry finish. This is simply superb Pinot Gris! 2021-2040. **93**.

## **Gewurztraminer**

### **2019 Gewurztraminer “Furstentum” Grand Cru Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Albert Mann**

The 2019 Furstentum old vine bottling Gewurztraminer from the Barthelmé brothers is a beautiful pure and classic example of this varietal. The marvelously expressive aromatic constellation hops from the glass in a mix of apple, lychee nut, rosewater, a hint of spiced meats, beautiful underlying limestone minerality and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good acids and grip, lovely balance and a long, zesty and quite dry finish. This comes in at fourteen percent octane in the 2019 vintage and carries just a touch of residual sweetness, but is for all intents and purposes, still a dry wine. And it is simply lovely! 2021-2050. **94.**

### **2018 Gewurztraminer “Steingrubler” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann**

The 2018 Steingrubler Grand Cru bottling of Gewurztraminer from the Barthelmés is a touch lower in alcohol than the 2019 Furstentum, coming in at thirteen percent octane, but carries just a bit more residual sugar, as the brothers found the wine balanced best with this combination of alcohol and sweetness. Whereas the vines in Furstentum are on hard, pure limestone, the Gewurztraminer vines here in the Furstentum are on a combination of marl, limestone and sandstone soils. This gives the wine a bit more fruit-driven personality, with the 2018 offering up a fine nose of peach, passion fruit, lovely spice tones, orange blossoms, spices meats and a deep and complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bottomless at the core, with sound framing acids, good focus and bounce and a long, gently sweet and quite complex finish that closes with a note of citrus peel on the backend. This is a lovely bottle, but as its acids are a bit lower than in some vintages, I would expect it to not be all that long-lived, though its balance is so exquisite that it may well last far longer than I anticipate. Good juice. 2021-2035+? **92.**

## ***Riesling***

### **2019 Riesling “Berg”- Domaine Mélanie Pfister**

The 2019 Riesling “Berg” from Mélanie Pfister is an absolutely beautiful young wine. This is quintessential Alsace Riesling from limestone soils, which define the wine beautifully on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of apple, a hint of grapefruit, petrol, a very complex base of chalky minerality, lime peel and a gentle floral topnote redolent of tropical flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a lovely core of fruit, superb mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a cool, old school 12.5 percent octane in 2019 and built for the long haul. It is certainly approachable today, but really deserves at least a handful of years in the cellar to allow it to start to show its secondary layers of complexity. Great juice. 2021-2050. **93+.**



### **2019 Riesling Tradition “Lieu à Dit Harth”- Domaine Schoffit**

The 2019 Lieu à Dit Harth bottling of Riesling from Bernard Schoffit has also been certified organic this year. It hails from fifty year-old vines in the Harth vineyard in Colmar and is slightly riper than the 2018 version, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol this year. The wine is beautifully expressive on the nose, jumping from the glass in a mix of apple, tangerine, a hint of petrol, complex minerality and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and cut, bright acids and a long, complex and superbly balanced finish. This hints at a touch of sweetness on the attack, but it is misdirection, as the wine finishes quite dry. Lovely juice. 2021-2050. **92.**

### **2019 Riesling “Sommerberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Schoffit**

Bernard Schoffit’s vines in the beautiful grand cru of the Sommerberg are forty years of age on average now. He ferments and ages them in stainless steel, to better emphasize the mineral drive from this granite-based vineyard. The 2019 Sommerberg comes in listed at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a precise and youthful bouquet of apple, tart orange, beautifully complex minerality, a hint of petrol, lime blossoms and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, rock solid at the core and defined by its mineral drive, with a superb girdle of acidity, excellent focus and grip and lovely balance on the long, nascently complex and bone dry finish. This is a thoroughbred in the making, but it is still a very young wine and needs some bottle age before it will start to blossom and show all of its multi-faceted complexity. 2025-2055. **94.**

### **2019 Riesling “Rangen” Clos Saint-Théobald Grand Cru- Domaine Schoffit**

I will never forget my first visit to Alsace in the second half of the 1980s and seeing the beautiful, steep, south-facing slope of the Rangen de Thann vineyard. At that time, I was convinced that Rangen and Clos Ste. Hune were the two greatest vineyards in Alsace, but these beautiful volcanic soils are also one of the warmest plots in the entire region, and as global warming has shaken the planet to its core, Rangen has had to grapple with climactic challenges that never existed in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, which were the vintages that informed my love for this *terroir*. The impact of climate change is evident in the beautiful 2019 Rangen from the Schoffit family, as this wine comes in 14.3 percent octane in this vintage. However, despite its ripeness level, the wine remains beautifully precise on the nose, offering up scents of fresh lime, pink grapefruit, crystalline minerality, Rangen’s classic, slightly resinous note of fresh rosemary, citrus blossoms and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a beautiful core of fruit, with excellent mineral drive and cut, vibrant acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This carries its alcohol beautifully and will age long and gracefully, and I have to say that I am happier to see this a bit out of my comfort zone for octane, rather than trying to manage a lot of residual sugar by stopping the fermentation earlier. Fine juice. 2025-2055. **93.**

### **2018 Riesling “Am Zelle”- Domaine Marc Tempé**

The 2018 Riesling “Am Zelle” from Marc Tempé, like all of his wines, is beautiful. He farms his vineyards biodynamically, ferments with indigenous yeasts in either cask or *foudre* and ages everything a minimum of twenty-four months in his cold cellars prior to bottling, making these quite old school wines of impressive precision and mineral signature. His Am Zelle Riesling bottling hails from several different parcels in his home village of Zellenberg, with the vines closing in on fifty years of age on average. It is fermented and aged in *foudre* and the 2018 delivers a refined aromatic constellation of apple, pink grapefruit, petrol, stony minerality, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, fine focus, snappy acids and a long, complex and superbly balanced finish. This is outstanding juice. 2021-2045+. **93+.**

### **2017 Riesling “Sentiment”- Domaine Amélie & Charles Sparr**

The Riesling “Sentiment” is a blended bottling from the Sparrs’ Riesling vineyards in the villages of Riquewihr, Turckheim and Sigolsheim. Like all of the Sparr wines, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel. The 2017 Sentiment offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of apple, tart orange, a hint of petrol, a lovely base of soil, dried flowers and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with good soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is still a young wine and will be even better with a bit more time in the cellar. It is quite dry in personality and a fine bottle of Riesling. 2021-2035+. **91.**

### **2017 Riesling “Brand” Grand Cru “Legende”- Domaine Amélie & Charles Sparr**

Amélie and Charles Sparr’s Brand bottling of Riesling showcases the granitic soils of this great *terroir* on both the nose and palate. The bouquet of the 2017 Brand is deep, pure and precise, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of apple, pear, spring flowers, a touch of raw almond, menthol, citrus peel and a gorgeous base of granitic minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, classy and full, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb mineral drive and cut, snappy acids

and laser-like focus on the long, youthful and vibrant finish. This is an outstanding example of Brand Riesling, which is already quite delicious, but is clearly still in climbing mode and will be an even better drink four or five years down the road. First class juice. 2021-2045. **93**.

#### **2017 Riesling “Réserve”- Maison Trimbach**

The 2017 Riesling “Réserve” from Maison Trimbach is a terrific young wine and has to be one of the finest values out there in the market for bone dry, classical Alsace Riesling. The bouquet is bright and nascently complex, jumping from the glass in a mix of lemon, apple, a fine base of salty minerality, white lilies, gentle notes of petrol and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, a superb girdle of acidity and a long, perfectly balanced and flat out delicious finish. This wine tips the scales at thirteen percent octane in 2017 and is an absolute steal! The 2017 Riesling Réserve is the finest vintage I have tasted of this cuvée in decades. 2021-2040. **92+**.

#### **2017 Riesling “Selection de Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Trimbach**

The 2017 “Selection de Vieilles Vignes” from Maison Trimbach is another exceptional bottle of dry Riesling, from one of the grand masters of this varietal in the world of wine. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a stunning aromatic constellation of tart orange, apple, a hint of fresh pineapple, petrol, gorgeous minerality, balsam bough and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthful, with excellent depth behind its girdle of acidity, fine focus and cut, snappy acids and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. The nose here is wide open and expressive, but the palate is a few years behind in its development and still demands a bit of cellaring. This is going to be excellent in due course, but a few more years of patience are required. 2025-2055. **93+**.

#### **2017 Riesling “Schlossberg” Grand Cru- Maison Trimbach**

I have been cellaring Riesling from the Schlossberg since the first vintage that Domaine Albert Mann was imported into the US by Peter Weygandt, which must have been around the 1988 vintage, so I have always had a very strong attachment to this beautiful, granitic *terroir*. Maison Trimbach bought a small parcel of 1.6 hectares in the Schlossberg in 2012 and produced their first bottling from here in the 2014 vintage. The 2017 Schlossberg is a thoroughbred, coming in at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a beautiful young nose of apple, pink grapefruit, spring flowers, wet stone minerality, citrus peel and a touch of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, lovely mineral drive and grip, snappy acids and a long, well-balanced and classic finish. This is just starting to blossom on the palate and is a very tasty drink already, with about half an hour in decanter, but it should be even better with three to five more years in the cellar. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2045+. **93+**.

#### **2016 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach**

Here in the United States, Clos Ste. Hune used to be something of an “insider’s wine” and I used to be able to sell a fairly significant number of cases of this wine back in my wine merchant days. Given the fact that only about seven thousand bottles are made in most vintages, it was pretty remarkable that I could get ten to fifteen cases of this wine in most vintages (twelve bottle cases back in those days), and sometimes I could also offer several back vintages as well! It is a lot harder to source this wine these days, as the world now fully understands just how special it is, but at least the superb quality has not changed at all from those good old days! The

2016 Clos Ste. Hune comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a pure, classic bouquet of green fruit, apple, petrol, a kaleidoscopic base of limestone minerality, citrus peel, just a whisper of fresh-culled mint and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is precise, deep and full, with a rock solid core of fruit, stunning mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and great length and grip on the beautifully balanced and very complex finish. This is a simply stunning vintage of Clos Ste. Hune! 2025-2065. **97.**

#### **2014 Riesling “Geisberg” Grand Cru- Maison Trimbach**

The 2014 Geisberg from the Trimbach family is the current release of this bottling, at seven years of age! The grand cru of Geisberg is one of the two that contribute to the *maison*’s famed Cuvée Frédéric Émile bottling (which also draws upon fruit from the neighboring grand cru of Osterberg), and the Trimbachs have been bottling a portion of this on its own since the 2009 vintage, after having bought an additional parcel in the vineyard in 2008. The 2014 Geisberg is a truly beautiful wine, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, grapefruit, petrol, stony minerality, dried flowers and a distinct topnote of salinity. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great focus and cut, stunning complexity and a very long, racy and wide open finish of a wine that is now entering its plateau of peak maturity. This is a brilliant bottle of dry Riesling! 2021-2045+. **95.**

#### **2011 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)**

The Trimbach family’s 2011 vintage of Cuvée Frédéric Émile is just starting to blossom in magnum, and I have to expect that it is now in its plateau of peak drinkability in regular sized formats. The bouquet of the 2011 magnum is beautiful, offering up a precise and vibrant constellation of apple, pink grapefruit, a beautiful base of stony minerality, a lovely touch of petrol, white flowers, beeswax and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and has a rock solid core of ripe fruit, with superb mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, complex and bone dry finish. This vintage comes in at fourteen percent octane, so this is a fairly powerful example of Cuvée Frédéric Émile, but it is elegant, pure and low fat at the same time. Fine juice. 2021-2065. **94.**

#### **1995 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach**

This bottle of the 1995 Cuvée Frédéric Émile had a soft and crumbly cork, so perhaps it was a bit more advanced than a pristine bottle would be even more youthful. I have another four or five still in my long-term storage, so I will pull another bottle and check on the wine’s evolution with a good cork in the near future. In the meantime, even with this crumbly cork, this wine is drinking beautifully, offering up a deep and mature bouquet of apple, fresh apricot, petrol, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a lovely touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a good core, lovely focus and balance and a long, tertiary and still bouncy finish. My guess is that this wine is showing a bit less fruit than a bottle with a sturdy cork might show today, but we will find out about that the next time I pull some bottles from storage. So, I would expect pristine examples to rate three to four points higher, as this is one of my favorite vintages of Cuvée Frédéric Émile in the decade of the 1990s. That said, I had no trouble drinking this particular bottle, crumbly cork and all. 2021-2040+? **92.**

#### **1990 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)**

The Trimbach family’s 1990 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” is drinking splendidly out of magnum today. The bouquet is pure and absolutely *à point* at the present time, offering up a



pure and vibrant blend of apple, tangerine, petrol, a gorgeous base of salty soil tones, citrus peel, beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp, complex and impeccably balanced, with a marvelous core, great mineral drive and grip, bright, zesty acids and a very, very long, refined and dancing finish. One of my favorite vintages of Cuvée Fred since the stunning 1979. 2021-2040+. **95.**

### ***Pinot Noir***

#### **2019 Pinot Noir “Rouge Toujours”- Domaine Mélanie Pfister**

Mélanie Pfister has decided to bottle her pinot noir as *Vin de France* beginning in this vintage, simply to give her the flexibility to do things such as bottle it in a Burgundy-shaped bottle, rather than the taller Alsace bottle that would be required if it were an AOC pinot noir from Alsace. The vines for this bottling were planted in 1980, so they are now fully into their prime, and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in stainless steel tank. The 2019 version is a svelte 12.5 percent octane and is a tad reductive when first opened, but with a bit of aeration delivers a youthful bouquet of cherries, red berries, stony soil tones, bonfire, a bit of gamebird and a floral topnote redolent of lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with lovely soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced young finish. This really shows some fine backend lift, and given some bottle age, it is going to be lovely. 2027-2050. **89+.**

#### **2018 Pinot Noir “Jardin d’Eden”- Domaine Amélie & Charles Sparr**

The Sparr family’s parcel of pinot noir was planted in 2006, on a plot with an excellent base of limestone in the village of Sigolsheim. The 2018 includes sixty percent whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in cask. It comes in at thirteen percent alcohol and delivers a quite refined bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, a dollop of fresh herb tones, peonies and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a lovely sense of transparency and bounce, moderate tannins, good acids, fine intensity of flavor and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a lovely middleweight. 2026-2050. **90.**

#### **2016 Pinot Noir “Réserve Personelle”- Maison Trimbach**

The 2016 Pinot Noir “Réserve Personelle” from Maison Trimbach is nicely ripe in this vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent octane. It offers up a deep and pure bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh thyme, a good base of soil, roses and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthful, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a young wine and will demand some cellaring to blossom and start to drink with generosity, but it is also, unequivocally, the finest pinot noir I have yet tasted from the Trimbach family! 2028-2055+. **91+.**

## RECENTLY-TASTED RHÔNE WINES LATE SUMMER 2021



*October sunshine gracing down on the beautiful estate of Château de Beaucastel.*

This summer's annual report on the beautiful wines of the Rhône Valley is heavily-weighted towards the new releases from both the 2019 and 2018 vintages from the region. When I last wrote about the Rhône Valley in the autumn of last year, the very first wines from the 2019 vintage were just starting to enter the pipeline, and the majority of the higher appellation red wines from the region were still either from the 2018 or 2017 vintages. A year further on, the very first of the higher appellation wines from 2019 are now arriving, along with the later-released 2018s, and the very first of the 2020 white wines are starting to also appear in the market as well. All of these are high quality vintages, though each is a bit different in personality. Given that it has been nearly a year since my last report on the Rhône Valley, I have included vintage summations for the years of 2018, 2019 and a first look at the vintage of 2020 below, so that readers will not be required to hop back to Issue 89 to re-familiarize themselves with the vintage conditions of the two years of 2018 and 2019.

I have now been writing about the fine 2018 vintage here for a couple of years, and I continue to like the wines from this year very well. It was another hot growing season in the Rhône, as was the case all over France, but I tend to like the balance better in the 2018s that was

the case than the previous “hot summer vintage” of 2015 in the Rhône Valley. Part of the reason for this probably has to do with the heat of 2018 not being accompanied by drought conditions, as happily, the winter of 2017-2018 had been quite wet and subterranean water reserves were able to be topped up nicely going into the growing season. As 2017 had been an extreme drought year, this was quite fortuitous. In the wake of the previous year’s drought, the plants had plenty of pent up energy in reserve and the cropload of 2018 was very generous, as flowering was abundant and the early spring weather was excellent to set the tables for a large fruit set. Much of the month of June was rainy in 2018, so that mildew was a constant threat to the vines and *vignerons* had to be vigilant and spraying had to be carried out with quite a bit of frequency during the first three weeks of the month to protect the plants. By the end of June the sun returned and the growing season was very pleasant the rest of the way on to harvest, but with plenty of heat in the month of August. As I mentioned last year, the possible Achilles’ Heel of the 2018s (for those who adequately handled the mildew pressures of early June) was that the blazing heat of August sent sugars soaring and *vignerons* scrambling to get rolling with picking at the very beginning of September- making 2018 one of the earliest harvest starts on record in the Rhône Valley. For those unprepared to get started picking at the very outset of September (and remember, the French generally take their August vacations very, very seriously!), overripeness in the wines could often be the result of a late start bringing in the bunches, and these tardy estates often missed the opportunity to make great wines in 2018. For *vignerons* with vines spread out over several different appellations, the best vineyard sites would often be picked first in the immediate aftermath of the heat spike in late August, so it is possible to see more *sur maturité* in Crozes-Hermitage or Saint-Joseph examples from producers in the north who also may have parcels in pricier neighborhoods such as Côte-Rôtie, Condrieu, Hermitage or Cornas (which they would have harvested first). The same can be said in the south, where Gigondas or Châteauneuf du Pape parcels might have been picked ahead of Côtes-du-Rhône vineyards if everything happened to ripen up at the same time, which was often the case.

As I mentioned last fall, having now tasted a fairly wide range of 2018s from the Rhône Valley, it seems to me that this was certainly a vintage that favored red wines over whites, as some of the white wines I have tasted from 2018 suffer from both exotic notes of borderline overripeness and a notable dearth of acidity, which can sometimes result in flabby and slightly shapeless wines on the palate. This is not true of all the white wines from this vintage, but there are certainly some over the top and quite soft white wines from this year. The best white wines of 2018 have managed to avoid the plunge into overt *sur maturité* in their aromatic and flavor profiles, and have delivered plush, buxom wines of lovely complexity and undeniable early appeal, but generally without a sufficient acid structures to carry them more than a handful of years in the bottle and they will be at their best in their collective youth. This is most emphatically not the case for the top red wines of 2018, which are ripe, often impressively pure, nicely structured and built to develop splendidly in the cellar. The obvious comparison for the 2018 red wines in the Rhône Valley would be the 2015s, which were also the product of a hot summer. From what I have tasted of these two vintages, I have a pretty decided preference for the style of the 2018s, which seem to have been able to maintain a more pronounced veneer of freshness and vibrancy than the 2015s (in general terms), so that they are ripe, powerful, but also a bit more classically-inclined in personality than the correspondingly successful examples from 2015.

The wines from the 2019 vintage here are also now very well-represented in the market and it is another strong vintage in the region. The 2019 vintage is yet another one defined by its summer heat, but unlike 2018, drought conditions returned and hydric stress was again a factor, as had been the case with the 2017 vintage. The Rhône Valley did not get out of the spring blocks particularly early in 2019, despite beautiful and warm weather at the start of March that had things looking precocious by the middle of the month. But the weather turned overcast and cool and April was flat out cold, and this turn in the weather gave back the early start realized by the vines at the outset of March. The cold April nights in 2019 that led to extensive frost damage in some parts of France were not replicated in the Rhône Valley, though it was a near miss in some sectors and *vignerons* had several sleepless nights in early April when the temperature plunged down close to freezing. By mid-April, the threat of possible frost damage was past, but the very cool and grey weather of the first half of the month had retarded the vines' development and at this point the vineyards were now fully ten days behind schedule of a "normal year". Flowering was late as a result in 2019, and it took place under rather indifferent conditions, so that it was a slow and uneven pace of fruit set throughout the first three weeks of June and this would lead both to a susceptibility to *coulure* and very uneven ripening in the vines as the season rolled on.

However, as has been the case so often as the planet continues to heat up, 2019 saw a period of blazing mid-summer heat would make up for some of the sluggish start to the growing season. However, as bunch maturity was not even, due to the complications brought on by both the heterogeneous nature of the ripening in the vineyards and the nearly relentless drought conditions of the summer that caused some vines to shut down through hydric stress, some plants benefited from the heat and others still continued to lag in maturity. The southern Rhône was the most severely affected by the drought of 2019, so hydric stress was more of a factor here than in the north. Happily, the winter of 2018-2019 had again been fairly wet, so there had been some build-up of water reserves leading into the growing season, so that the vines were able to draw upon sufficient subterranean water reserves from the storms of the winter of 2018 to at least keep the maturation process crawling forward during the heat and drought, albeit at a very snail-like pace. June, July and August were all exceedingly hot in both the northern and southern ends of the Rhône Valley in 2019, but the drought conditions were most emphatically not the same in the two halves of the region. In the south, the heat and drought continued from start to finish, with no rains to ameliorate these effects. In the northern half of the Rhône, there was a short, but quite violent hailstorm centered on Crozes-Hermitage, which struck on June 15<sup>th</sup> and decimated vineyards in its path. It was brutal for those who were hit with the hail, as fifty percent of the crop was wiped out in a matter of minutes, but the storm was localized in the southern end of Crozes and all the other northern appellations were missed by the hail, though they did get some much needed and beneficial rain from this storm front. In the northern half of the Rhône Valley, the very dry conditions of the summer of 2019 were further ameliorated by more rain in August, which arrived mid-month (much as was the case in most of Beaujolais at the same time), which further eased the drought and added much needed juice to the then very concentrated berries and brought far better skin to juice balance to the grapes leading into harvest. So, it is really a tale of two very differently-styled vintages in the northern and southern halves of the Rhône Valley in 2019, as the south was far more affected by unrelenting drought conditions, while the north (other than the hailed upon sectors in Crozes-Hermitage) was able to get some needed precipitation that brought relief to the vines and very much shaped the style of the wines this

year, adding a degree of charm and elegance that would have been unlikely if the drought conditions had not been somewhat relieved by those timely showers.

Though it was hot the entire summer of 2019 in the Rhône Valley, the harvest was not to be particularly early, due to slow pace of photosynthesis during the heatwave and drought, not to mention the late and uneven flowering back in May and early June. Different grape varieties handled the difficulties at flowering with varied success, which added yet another layer of complicated calculus to the eventual harvest, as different varieties ripened on very different trajectories during the growing season. As I mentioned last fall, a perfect example of this was at Château Mont-Redon in Châteauneuf du Pape, where Director Pierre Fabre observed that “we started to harvest a few plots of whites at the end of August to keep freshness, but we waited until September 10th and 17th for the majority of Syrah.” The Grenache at Mont-Redon was brought in even later, “harvested between September 20<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, and lastly came the Mourvèdre, which was not brought in until October 10<sup>th</sup> - a record (late) date for Mont-Redon.” Shattered bunches in the vines from the difficult flowering period had already led to potentially small yields, and this was exacerbated by the constant drought conditions in the southern half of the valley in 2019. Adding in the heat that prevailed in the Rhône throughout much of the growing season of 2019 produced low yields, small, thick-skinned and very concentrated berries in the southern half of the region, with high levels of tannins, concentrated acidities from partially desiccated bunches and plenty of color and extract in the resulting wines. So, the 2019s from appellations such as Gigondas, Châteauneuf du Pape, Vacqueyras, Lirac and the like, are powerful wines that do not lack for freshness, due to their concentrated acidities, though they can sometimes be pretty high in octane from the same concentrating effects of the small berries. In the north, yields were more generous than in the south in 2019 (excepting of course the hail-damaged vineyards in Crozes-Hermitage), due to those beneficial August rains which brought things far more into classical balance in the bunches out on the vines. Harvesting was primarily done during the month of September in the north, with only the very latest ripening parcels left to be gathered on the first of October. So, it is a far more charming group of 2019s from the northern Rhône than is the case in the south, with plenty of depth and concentration in evidence, but the more typical balance of skin to juice in the berries (plumped up by those August rains) has led to quite beautifully classically-styled wines in most of the appellations of the northern half of the valley.

The 2020 vintage in the Rhône Valley shares many attributes with the previous three years, as it was once again a very warm spring and the sap in the vines started rising early and things looked to be off to an early start. The winter of 2019-2020 had been quite mild, but it was dry, so the water reserves that were so important in highly successful warm years like 2018 were not topped up by wet winter weather going into the growing season of 2020. Early spring was warm and the vines were again out of the blocks early in this vintage, with the budbreak fully ten days earlier than had been the case in 2019. Happily, April did not produce any threat of frost this year, which was a welcome change after the “near miss” of threatened frost in the Rhône’s cold temperatures in April of 2019. Most of May was fairly rainy, with frequent showers, which helped the vines immeasurably and vine growth accelerated during this month. The flowering was early in 2020, commencing the last week of May and the month of June saw some additional precipitation over the course of the month, which proved to be crucial, once the blazing heat and drought of midsummer again returned to the vineyards of the Rhône Valley in July.

Temperatures were very high in both July and August of 2020, but not quite as high as in 2019, and often accompanied by cool evenings and good diurnal temperature swings that can help maintain acidity levels and eventually, freshness and brightness in the finished wines.

The drought conditions of midsummer 2020 were relieved by occasional rain showers in the second half of July and the month of August, which helped to offset hydric stress and improve skin to juice ratios in the berries. However, the precipitation was often followed by quite hot and humid conditions in the immediate aftermath, so mildew was a threat after the showers and spraying had to be done vigilantly to protect the vines. But, unlike the previous summer, when the welcome rains only fell in the northern half of the valley, in 2020, precipitation fell up and down the Rhône and the concentrated, desiccated bunches prevalent in the southern Rhône in 2019 were not replicated again in the summer of 2020. Harvest was early up and down the valley in 2020, with white grapes primarily harvested in the last two weeks of August and most red varieties collected immediately thereafter (even some red grape parcels on the hill of Hermitage were ready to be picked on August 25<sup>th</sup>!), so that all harvesting was principally finished in 2020 by the middle of September. The only laggards out on the vines into the last week of September was the late-ripening mourvèdre in Châteauneuf du Pape, but this is not exceptional for this variety. As there was one last beneficial bout of precipitation between August 28<sup>th</sup> and September 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2020, the vines were in very good condition going into the picking of red grapes, as the rains again helped to address any imbalances in any desiccated bunches that had endured the high temperatures of the previous couple of weeks. Yields were once again quite generous (and far better in the southern half of the region than had been the case in 2019), but grapes were perfectly ripe and *vignerons* were very happy with the fruit that they brought in during harvest.

As I mentioned above, it is still very early days for the shipping of wines from the 2020 vintage in the Rhône Valley and I am looking forward to diving into them in earnest in the next feature on the region. At this early date, reports are that it is a more classically-styled vintage than either 2018 or 2019 in both halves of the valley, and *vignerons* are very much excited about the potential of the wines from this vintage. But, other than an occasional *Vin de France* or Collines Rhodaniennes bottling from 2020, almost everything I have tasted from this vintage are Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc cuvées, so I do not really have any sense of what the 2020 reds will look like in terms of size and shape at this point in time. The 2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc bottlings I have tried have been quite tasty and probably augur well for both the reds from this vintage and the higher appellation white wines as well, but it is still too early in their evolutions to have seen many in the pipeline as of yet. But, in the meantime, there remains a lot of truly excellent wines from both the 2018 and 2019 vintage for consideration. Both vintages presented certain challenges to producers and not everyone was equally successful in both vintages (and as I mentioned above, the 2018 vintage seems to have favored red wines), but there are a large number of very, very strong wines that have been produced in both vintages and plenty of very good cellar options now currently available in the market.

Having now tasted pretty deeply in the 2019 vintage, it probably merits circling back to the vintage for a moment to discuss how the unrelenting drought conditions of the vintage in the southern half of the region has shaped those wines. As I noted above, the beneficial rains that fell in the northern parts of the Rhône Valley did not have their counterparts in the south, so the



2019s from the southern appellations were made from berries with very high skin to juice ratios from often desiccated bunches and this has shaped the style of the wines from the vintage quite considerably. Stylistically, the 2019 southern Rhône wines are quite similar to many of the 2010s from the Bordeaux region, with sugars, acidities and tannins all leveraged upwards from the relative lack of juice in the berries. So, everything is amplified in the resulting wines, including alcohol level, with most wines coming in listed routinely at 14.5 or fifteen percent octane in this vintage. Given that it is legal for *vignerons* to round up or down the stated alcohol on a label by half a percent in the EU, when one reads 14.5 percent alcohol on the label of a wine from the southern Rhône in 2019, it is probably safe to assume that the actual alcohol is closer to fifteen percent. But, interestingly, in most examples that I have tasted (and as you will see below, I have now tackled a pretty good number of 2019s from the south), the higher octanes are not accompanied by overt notes of *sur maturité* and are often surprisingly fresh and bright in their expressions of fruit tones, despite the higher alcohols. This is because the acids are also quite elevated in many of the 2019s from the south, so that the wines finish with plenty of lift and bounce from high acids, not to mention plenty of chewy tannins. Again, structurally, there are a lot of similarities to the 2010s from the Left Bank in Bordeaux.

Because of this relatively high acidity in so many of the 2019s from the southern half of the Rhône Valley, I tend to like these wines decidedly more than I did other very high octane vintages of the not too distant past here, such as 1998, 2000 or 2003. For, the very strong notes of overripe fruit tones and jammy, flabby structures are nowhere near as prevalent in the 2019s that I have tasted than was the case with any of these previous high octane vintages. Part of the reason for this may be generational, as the over the top styles of the 1998s, 2000s and 2003s no longer have their journalistic champion in Robert Parker around to push these wines through the pipeline and into people's cellars, so those heady wines of blazing *sur maturité* no longer find quite the same depth and breadth of audience that they did when Robert Parker was still in his prime and greater numbers of collectors accepted out of hand his read on vintages of this sort. So, some winegrowers have been reining in their style of wines for quite a while already and are better able to navigate the challenges of a vintage like 2019 and still retain some freshness in their wines. The constant barrage of challenges posed by climate change has also honed the skills of *vignerons* in trying to survive the heat of our planet's summers these days, which also helps to some degree in surmounting the difficulties posed by the drought and extreme heat that defined the growing season of 2019 in the south. So, despite sometimes pretty heady alcohol levels, there is a lot to enjoy in some of the examples from the southern Rhône in 2019. This is not to say that there were not some wines which I tasted that were still simply too high in alcohol for my comfort zone, and occasionally in the notes that follow, I have scored wines in a range because of their octane level, recognizing that my tolerance for higher alcohol levels is not mirrored with every wine drinker today. In cases where I have scored a wine in a range, the upper number is where it should place based on its complexity and relative quality for those who can tolerate the heat more than I can; the lower score is for those who cannot look past the overt presence of quite high alcohol in these wines.

I am not trying to sit on the fence by scoring a few of the 2019s from the southern half of the Rhône Valley within a range, but wanted to be fair both to the wines in question and to readers who may be interested in wines of this particular style. I am fully cognizant of the challenges that Mother Nature threw at *vignerons* in the south in this vintage, and have empathy

for their situations as the baking heat just went on and on throughout the months of July and August, without a cloud in the sky to relieve the hydric stress that the vines were suffering from during the latter half of the growing season. Given these massive challenges, the fine quality of so many of the 2019s from the south in many cases is truly remarkable, and though they can sometimes be quite a bit headier in style than I would ideally like, they are really very successful wines when viewed within the context of the vintage. So, I am sure that there are some wine drinkers who will taste these wines and not be deterred in the slightest by fifteen percent alcohol levels and find the wines immensely pleasurable, as they are still fresh, vibrant, soil-driven and complex. But, given the fact that I have routinely graded wines lower for higher alcohol levels (and probably still stand pretty much alone in wine journalistic circles for disliking the style and quality of the 2010 clarets for many of the same personality traits found in the 2019s in the southern Rhône), I wanted to at least address some of these characteristics of the vintage in the introduction of this feature, rather than hope that subscribers could read between the lines to understand where I finally landed on scoring some of these wines.

I should also mention that high alcohol levels found in some 2019s are certainly not limited to the southern half of the Rhône Valley in this vintage, as I have also tasted some pretty high octane examples from the north as well. But, as most of the top northern wines from 2019 have not yet shipped, the sheer volume of fifteen-plus percent alcohol wines from the north that I have tried is nowhere near as large as is the case from the southern half of the valley. There may well be a great many more waiting in the wings for shipping and to be reported on in my next article on the region. But, the fact that the vineyards in the northern half of the region were able to benefit from bouts of precipitation during the heat of summer and saw the drought relieved to some degree by these rains has given the riper northern wines of 2019 a completely different textural characteristic than the chewy, powerful wines of the south. There is a gentler, sappier aspect to these higher octane northern Rhône wines in 2019, even if they too are often higher in alcohol than I would prefer. It remains to be seen, as more of the top northern wines ship in coming months, if these higher octane northern wines are outliers, or if heady alcohol will end up defining to some degree wines from the north as much as from the south. But, for the moment, the more extreme structural natures of the wines from the south in 2019 are not mirrored in even the higher octane examples for the north in this vintage.

*The following notes are generally organized geographically, from south to north. The exception is that I have listed any Vin de France and Collines Rhodaniennes bottlings at the outset, regardless of whether the wines originate in the northern or southern sectors of the Rhône Valley. But, after this exception, everything is listed more or less in geographical sections, with each category then divided by vintage subsets and then listed alphabetically within each vintage grouping. I received a couple of Bandol samples along with my requested Rhône Valley samples for this article and I have listed those tasting notes at the end of the article, despite Bandol being the furthest south of all these different appellations and if I were a purist with my geographical sections, these notes would appear first in the article.*



## **Rosé**

### **La Vieille Ferme Sparkling Rosé NV**

This is a sparkling wine made by the Perrin family under their La Vieille Ferme label. It is composed from a *cépages* of forty percent each of grenache and cinsault, augmented by twenty percent of pinot noir. The wine is sealed under a crown cap and is a pale salmon color. It delivers a nose of white cherries, casaba melon, white soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy and full-bodied, with a good core, fairly coarse bubbles, but sneaky length and grip on the finish. This has a pretty good underlying still wine, but the bubbles are like soda. 2021-2028. **83.**

### **2020 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nymphaea” Rosé- Domaine les Aphillanthes**

The “Nymphaea” Rosé from Domaine les Aphillanthes is made from a blend of fifty percent grenache, forty percent cinsault, seven percent mourvèdre and three percent counoise (with thirty percent of the blend done by *saignée*), so this is most emphatically not your grandmother’s simple Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé.. The 2020 version comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and is a fairly pale salmon color. The wine’s aromatic constellation is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherries, cantaloupe, dried flowers, a hint of orange zest and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with good mid-palate depth, really quite nice acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. First class Rosé. 2021-2026. **89.**

### **2020 Bandol Rosé- Domaine la Bastide Blanche**

The 2020 Bandol Rosé from Domaine la Bastide Blanche is composed from a *cépages* of mourvèdre, grenache and cinsault. The wine is nicely ripe at fourteen percent and comes in with a beautiful, deep salmon color and offers up a beautifully expressive and complex nose of desiccated cherries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, rose petals, a touch of orange peel and an exotic topnote of sumac. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent, with a lovely core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. I love the style of this wine, which is a bit more vinous in personality than the Domaine Tempier Rosé, but equally light on its feet and complex. Lovely juice. 2021-2030. **92.**

### **2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé- Domaine Charvin**

Laurent Charvin's Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé is made from a blend of grenache and cinsault, with the vines hailing from sandy and clay soils with plenty of *galets roulés*. The 2020 bottling tips the scales at fourteen percent alcohol and is a lovely pale salmon color. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pretty blend of nectarine, delicate orange tones, white soils, dried flowers and a lovely array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, juicy and full, with a lovely core, excellent acids and grip and a long, ripe and complex finish. Good juice. 2021-2025. **89.**

### **2020 Tavel Rosé- Olivier Lafont**

The 2020 Tavel Rosé from Olivier Lafont is made from a *cépages* of sixty percent grenache, twenty percent cinsault and ten percent each of syrah and mourvèdre. It comes in at fourteen percent octane, is fairly deep in color and offers up a slightly candied nose of cherries, pomegranate, fruit skin and a good base of chalky, stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch soft, with good mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip and a long, slightly low acid finish. This has good components for near-term drinking, but will want not make old bones with these gentle acids. 2021-2023. **88.**

### **2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé "Réserve"- Famille Perrin (screwcap)**

The 2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé "Réserve" from the Famille Perrin is produced from a blend of grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvèdre. The wine is bright and fresh in the style of the vintage, offering up scents of strawberries, melon, a nice base of almost salty soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and succulent at the core, with good acids and grip, fine focus and a bit of a clamped down finish from the closure on the long backend. This wine does open up (for now) with some decanting, which is strongly recommended, but the reductive characteristics already in evidence on the finish are unfortunate, as this wine has not been in bottle all that long. But, once the screwcap is outwitted, the wine is quite tasty. 2021-2023. **87.**

### **2020 Tavel Rosé "Cuvée des Lys"- Château de Manissy**

Young Florian André has taken over at Château de Manissy a few years back and has converted all of the viticulture here to biodynamics, though thus far, they have only been officially certified organic. His Cuvée des Lys bottling of Rosé is comprised of a blend of sixty percent clairette, thirty percent grenache and ten percent syrah. This is not produced from young vines, as the average age here is forty-five years of age and the wine is raised in a combination of cement vats and stainless steel tank. The 2020 offers up a lovely and quite complex bouquet of desiccated cherries, watermelon, pomegranate, a lovely base of soil tones, gentle spice tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral lift and a long, zesty and superbly balanced finish. This is one of the finest examples of Tavel Rosé I have ever tasted! 2021-2026. **92.**

### **2019 Tavel Rosé- Domaine Moulin-la-Viguerie**

The Tavel Rosé from Domaine Moulin-la-Viguerie is made from a fairly complex *cépages*, as this wine is crafted primarily from grenache, cinsault and syrah, but also augmented by small percentages of clairette, bourboulenc and mourvèdre. The 2019 is fairly deep in color and delivers a beautifully refined and complex bouquet of dried cherries, rhubarb, blood orange, grenadine, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Excellent juice. 2021-2028. **91.**

### ***Collines Rhodaniennes and Vin de France***

#### **2020 Syrah Collines Rhodaniennes- Domaine Martin Clerc (Tupin-Semons)**

The village of Tupin-Semons lies at the northern extreme of the Côte-Rôtie appellation, with these syrah vines lying just outside of the official AOC (though still in the town). The vines are eighteen years of age, so just about reaching that “*belle age*” and Martin ferments them with indigenous yeasts. The 2020 version comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a refined aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and peppery, with lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and nicely balanced finish. This is a fine, lighter-bodied northern Rhône syrah with the weight of pinot, but classic aromatics and flavors. Good juice. 2021-2030+. **89.**

#### **2019 La Belle Étoile Rouge- Florian André**

Florian André is the winemaker at Château de Mannisy in Tavel. This is his *Vin de France* bottling of red, made from a blend of syrah and grenache, both planted on chalky soils and with the wine vinified and aged in stainless steel tanks. The 2019 version delivers a sophisticated bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue* and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This has impressive depth and breed for a simple *Vin de France* and is an outstanding value! I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for a few years and letting its tannins soften up a bit before drinking. 2024-2040. **89.**

#### **2019 Syrah “Kamaka”- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott (Collines Rhodaniennes)**

Graeme and Julie Bott first met when they were both working at Domaine Ogier in Ampuis. Julie is a native of the northern Rhône and Graeme is originally from New Zealand. They bought their first parcel in Condrieu in 2015 and started producing their own wines in the 2016 vintage. They have gradually grown and have just moved into cellars in Ampuis. Their Kamaka bottling is sourced from fruit from the village of Seyssuel, which lies directly across the river from Ampuis. The soils are not granitic here, so the wine is less structured and more accessible right out of the blocks. The 2019 Kamaka offers up a fine, complex nose of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, black olive, fine soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely balance and grip, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, classy finish. This is really excellent juice! 2021-2045. **92.**

#### **2019 Le Petite Viognier- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)**

The 2019 Le Petite Viognier from Stéphane Montez hails from vines planted in the Collines Rhodaniennes AOC, which range from five to twenty years of age. The wine is barrel

fermented in older casks and *demi-muids*, with the 2019 version coming in at a full fifteen percent octane. It offers up a ripe bouquet of pineapple, mango, musk melon, coriander seed, honeysuckle and orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and concentrated at the core, with surprisingly good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish that really does not show any real signs of heat, despite being listed at fifteen percent. This is a fairly big wine, but it carries its ripeness very well indeed and for drinking over the next few years, it will do quite well. 2021-2024. **88.**

**2019 La Chevalière- Domaine Patrick Jasmin (Collines Rhodaniennes)**

The La Chevalière bottling from the Jasmin family is not old vines, as they were only planted in 1995, but they deliver a lot of Côte-Rôtie-like personality at a fine price. The 2019 is another strong bottle of syrah, coming in at a svelte 13.5 percent octane and delivering lovely scents of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, bonfire, grilled meats, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and intensely flavored, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and quite complex finish. Patrick Jasmin is making stellar wines these days and this is a very classy middleweight in the making and one of the great bargains to be found in the northern Rhône. Give it a few years to soften up the backend tannins. 2024-2045+. **90+.**

**2018 Syrah “First Flight”- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott (Vin de France)**

Graeme and Julie Bott’s “First Flight” Syrah bottling hails from fruit grown in both Condrieu and Ampuis, with the vines ten years of age, the grapes destemmed prior to fermentation with indigenous yeasts and aging is for ten months in *barriques*. The 2018 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a bright bouquet of black raspberries, pepper, black olive, roasted meats, a good base of soil and a touch of oak influence. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, focused and complex, with a lovely core, good mineral undertow, modest tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is very good Syrah for a Vin de France bottling! 2021-2035. **89.**

**2018 Viognier “First Flight”- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott (Vin de France)**

The First Flight Blanc bottling from Graeme and Julie Bott is composed from younger vine Viognier vines, located both in Condrieu and in Ampuis (as is the case with the First Flight Rouge). The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in casks for ten months prior to bottling. The 2018 comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a very pretty nose of pear, melon, white lilies, a touch of spice tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full and complex, with a good core, lovely soil undertow, sound acids and a long, well-balanced finish. It is so refreshing to taste a 2018 Viognier that is not over the top from the vintage’s conditions. Good juice and a fine value. 2021-2026. **89.**

**2018 Le Grand Saint Paul- Christelle et Jérôme Greico (Vin de France)**

Christelle and Jérôme Greico now run Domaine de Biscarelle in Châteauneuf du Pape, having taken over from Christelle’s father, Gérard Bouyer in 2009. This wine is entitled to the Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages AOC, but the couple prefers to name it after the vineyard from which it hails in Orange. It is composed from a *cépages* of forty percent each of grenache and mourvèdre and twenty percent syrah. The wine is fermented and aged in cement vats. The 2018 comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a complex nose of black raspberries, fruitcake. *garrigue*, smoked meats and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins



and a long, well-balanced finish. This has plenty of old school Châteauneuf personality to it and is a good value. 2021-2030+. **89.**

**2018 Syrah “Les Hauts du Monteillet”- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)**

The 2018 Syrah “Les Hauts du Monteillet” from Stéphane Montez is composed from three different parcels of syrah, with one in his home village of Condrieu, planted on granite, another planted on sandy soils in the valley and a third, facing the river on a terraced plot that is loaded with the *galets roulés* potato-sized stones one finds more often south in Châteauneuf du Pape. The combination of soil types gives the wine impressive complexity, as the 2018 offers up scents of cassis, black olive, smoked meats, a lovely base of stony soil tones, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully endowed at the core, with fine focus and grip, superb backend mineral drive and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. This has excellent mid-palate stuffing and structure in 2018 and is a simply great value! 2026-2045+. **90.**

**2017 Viognier “Sensation du Nord”- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond**

The Bonnefond brothers’ Viognier bottling from the Collines Rhodaniennes were planted ten years ago, on schist soils. The wine is aged in older, four hundred liter barrels. Their 2017 comes in at a svelte thirteen percent octane and a fine, complex nose of pear, hazelnut, a good base of soil, white lilies and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a very good core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is good juice. 2021-2027. **89.**

***Côtes-du-Rhône and Ventoux Blanc***

**2020 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Grange Daniel” Blanc- Domaine Alary**

The la Grange Daniel Blanc bottling from the Alary family is made from pure roussanne. The 2020 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully precise bouquet of pear, lemon, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This is a delicious wine, but it is a tad on the soft side, and though there is good acid for near-term drinking, I would plan to drink the wine over the next three or four years. 2021-2024. **89.**

**2020 Côtes-du-Rhône “Clementia” Blanc- Domaine les Aphillanthes**

As I mentioned last year, the “Clementia” bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc from Domaine les Aphillanthes is produced from a unique *cépages* of forty-five percent each of viognier and roussanne and ten percent clairette, with the wine fermented and aged in stainless steel. The 2020 version comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivers a lovely nose of tart pear, bread fruit, salty soil tones, coriander seed and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with good mid-palate depth, zesty acids, fine focus and balance and a long, vibrant finish. This is a very good example of Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc. 2021-2026. **89.**

**2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc “les Promesses”- Domaine Font du Vent**

The 2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc “les Promesses” from Domaine Font du Vent is composed from a blend of forty percent Viognier and twenty percent each of Clairette, Grenache Blanc and Roussanne. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks and comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet is bright and quite attractive, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, musk melon, sandy soil tones, fresh almond and a topnote of white

flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, sound acids and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This is ripe and broad shouldered, but a very good Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc with impressive acidity to keep it light on its feet. 2021-2026. **89.**

**2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc- Château du Trignon**

Château du Trignon's 2020 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc is made from pure Roussanne. It offers up a bright and complex nose of tart pear, breadfruit, salty soil tones, raw almond and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, a bit of dustiness on the backend (that seems to indicate fermentation in cement), zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This has depth, complexity and backend bounce, but one has to not mind that bit of cement dustiness on the finish. But, in all other aspects, it is a lovely wine. 2021-2027. **88.**



**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc “Nature”- Famille Perrin**

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc “Nature” bottling from the Famille Perrin is made all from vineyards that are certified by Ecocert, lying in the area around the town of Vinsobres in the northern part of the AOC. The *cépages* is grenache blanc, marsanne, roussanne and viognier, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2019 Nature Blanc offers up a very pretty nose of peach, casaba melon, white soil tones, gently musky floral tones and a touch of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a

good core of fruit, sound framing acids and a long, ripe and tasty finish. This is a pretty big wine, coming in listed at fourteen percent, but the 2019 vintage in the south produced quite powerful wines due to the ceaseless drought of summer. This is a touch chunky in style, but is a good, solid result from a challenging year. 2021-2025. **86.**

**2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Blanc “Inopia”- Rotem & Mounir Saouma**

The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Blanc “Inopia” from Rotem and Mounir Saouma is composed primarily of grenache blanc, with small percentages of marsanne, roussanne, bourboulenc, clairette and viognier included in the *cépages*. Part of the cuvée is barrel-fermented in five hundred liter casks and the rest in cement eggs. The wine deliver a pretty bouquet of pear, apple, hazelnut, vanillin oak and some cement tones from the eggs. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, sound framing acids and a long, ripe and very nicely balanced finish. This is quite tasty and very fresh for a 2018 white wine, but it will be best drunk up over the next couple of years, as it does not have a lot of acidity in reserve. Good juice. 2021-2023. **89.**

**2017 Ventoux Blanc “Au Pied du Mont”- Oliver & Lafont**

The 2017 Ventoux Blanc “Au Pied du Mont” from Oliver & Lafont is made entirely out of clairette, grown on sandy and clay soils with a scattering of limestone. The wine is nicely ripe at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a really quite polished nose of lemon, tart pear, sandy soil tones, a bit of raw almond and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, zesty acids and good length and grip on the slightly four-square finish. This has impressive depth for its level, but it does not have the delineation and focus of a higher pedigree appellation. Good, solid juice. 2021-2026. **86.**

***Côtes-du-Rhône and Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Rouge (and One Côtes de Roussillon)***

**2020 Côtes-du-Rhône “Cuvée Bastien”- Domaine de Châteaumar**

The 2020 Côtes-du-Rhône “Cuvée Bastien” from Domaine de Châteaumar is composed entirely from grenache, from a parcel of forty-five year-old vines. The wine is fermented and aged in cement tanks and offers up a fine nose of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, *garrigue*, pepper, a good base of soil and a topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with fine focus and balance and a long, suavely tannic finish. This comes in at 14.5 percent octane and that accounts for its bit of mid-palate opulence, but it is quite cool on the backend. Good juice. 2021-2030. **89.**

**2020 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Valréas” Sans Sulfites- Domaine Grande Bellane**

This is exactly the same wins as the regular bottling of 2020 Valréas (not yet released), but made without any added SO<sub>2</sub>. The nose is deep and complex, but is a touch more black fruity in personality than the 2019 Valréas, offering up scents of black raspberries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, coffee bean, pepper and a topnote of rosemary and lavender. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, very good soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, wide open and expressive finish. This wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane, but is fairly cool on the backend and quite tasty. Good juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude”- Domaine Alary**

The Côtes-du-Rhône “la Gerbaude” from Domaine Alary is a blend of grenache, syrah and carignan, from vines that are around twenty years of age today. The 2019 comes in listed at

an even fourteen percent octane and offers up a deep bouquet of black raspberries, hung game, lovely soil tones, pepper, coffee grounds, a good dollop of soil, pepper, gentle notes of *garrigue* and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with buried, fine-grained tannins, very good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is quite suave texturally for a 2019, and though primary out of the blocks, is already quite tasty. But, it also has the depth and balance to age quite nicely, and I have the sense that more delineation will develop here with a few years in the cellar. 2021-2035. **89.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Le Cros” Syrah- Domaine les Aphillanthes**

Daniel Boulle’s Côtes-du-Rhône “Le Cros” bottling is composed entirely from syrah. The 2019 Le Cros comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a refined and complex bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, grilled meats, pepper, lavender, woodsmoke and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost velvety on the attack, with a fine core of black fruit, good mineral drive, snappy acids and a long, chewily tannic and complex finish. The concentrating effect of the drought is most keenly felt here in the ratcheting up of the wine’s acids, which give it serious bounce on the backend! Good juice that could do with a couple of years’ worth of bottle age. 2023-2030+. **89.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Galets” Plan de Dieu- Domaine les Aphillanthes**

Domaine les Aphillanthes’ Côtes-du-Rhône “les Galets” Plan de Dieu from is produced from forty-six year-old vines, with the *cépages* sixty percent grenache and twenty percent each of syrah and mourvèdre, with all the vines farmed biodynamically. The wine is fermented and aged in cement vats. The 2019 les Galets comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine, ripe aromatic constellation of raspberries, roasted meats, a fine base of soil and a lovely, complex topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Like so many 2019s from the south, this has more structure than in most vintages, but I really love the balance here and this wine is going to be outstanding once it softens up and drink well for many years. I would give it a year or two in the cellar to let it drop a bit of tannin, and then drink it with great enjoyment over the next fifteen years or more. It is quite cool on the backend for its octane. Fine juice. 2023-2040. **91.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Pierrügues”- Domaine de la Berthète**

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Pierrügues” from Domaine de la Berthète is made from a *cépages* of fifty percent grenache, twenty-five percent syrah, twenty percent carignan and five percent cinsault, with the vines averaging a bit over thirty-five years of age. The 2019 vintage brings this wine in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe bouquet of black raspberries, fruitcake, *garrigue*, bonfire, pepper and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, a bit of chewy tannin, tangy acids and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This is a quite typical example of the 2019 vintage in the south, with the desiccated fruit from the drought ratcheting up sugars, tannins and acidity. Consequently, the wine will really be happier with a few years in the cellar to tame these elements a bit. 2023-2045. **88.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “le Poutet”- Domaine Charvin**

Domaine Charvin’s old vine bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône “le Poutet” is made from a *cépages* of eighty percent grenache, seven percent each of syrah and mourvèdre and six percent of carignan, with the oldest vines in the blend ninety years of age and the average age now fifty years of age! As I noted last year, the soils are sandy, with a vein of clay and plenty of *galets roulés* (very Châteauneuf-like) and the vineyard is farmed organically. The 2019 le Poutet is

plenty ripe (again in the style of 2019 in the south), coming in at a full fifteen percent alcohol and delivering really quite lovely aromatic complexity in its blend of raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, *garrigue*, roasted venison and a fine, stony base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with tangy acids, good focus and grip, a rock solid core and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. I am very impressed by the balance of this wine, which shows little signs of backend heat and is really quite precise aromatically and on the palate for its octane, but then, this is a Domaine Charvin wine after all! 2021-2030. **89.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Visan “Terre Pourpre”- Domaine la Florane**

The 2019 Visan “Terre Pourpre” from Domaine la Florane is a lovely and quite refined example of the vintage. The vineyards for this bottling are all farmed biodynamically. The bouquet jumps from the glass in stylish blend of raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, *garrigue*, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely array of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced for a 2019, with a suave attack, a good core, fine soil signature and a long, tangy and moderately tannic finish. This wine is listed at 14.5 percent octane and is nicely ripe, but in the context of the vintage, it is really very elegantly proportioned for this drought year and an excellent result! It is drinkable now (if one does not mind a bit of tannin) and will clearly age well in the cellar. Fine juice. 2021-2040. **91.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Promesses”- Domaine Font du Vent**

The Domaine Font du Vent’s 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Promesses” is composed of a blend of seventy percent grenache and thirty percent syrah, with the wine raised in cement vats prior to bottling. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage and delivers a lovely, complex bouquet of black raspberries, a bit of fruitcake, bonfire, a lovely base of soil, pepper and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and soil-driven, with a fine core, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, well-balanced, gently warm and complex finish. This is first class Côtes-du-Rhône. 2021-2030+. **90.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Valréas”- Domaine Grande Bellane**

The “Valréas” bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages from Domaine Grande Bellane is made equal parts of grenache and syrah, with these vineyards sitting at four hundred meters above sea level, making them amongst the highest elevation vines in the southern half of the Rhône. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and the 2019 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a bright bouquet of red and black raspberries, a hint of fruitcake, pepper, *garrigue*, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is ripe and rock solid in the style of 2019, with good acids and just a whisper of backend heat. Fine juice that will age well, but is also quite tasty already. 2021-2035. **90.**

**2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Trois Soeurs”- Domaine les Grands Bois**

Marc Besnardeau’s Côtes-du-Rhône “les Trois Soeurs” bottling is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and five percent of carignan, with the vineyards ranging from thirty to sixty years of age. The 2019 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this drought vintage, but like so many 2019s, it is quite vibrant on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, *garrigue* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and sappy at the core, with good mineral drive and grip, plenty of pepperiness, a bit of firm tannin and a long, complex finish. There is a bit of *sur maturité* to the personality of this wine, but it is not strident and the wine is really quite tasty. 2021-2030. **88.**

### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Calades”- Domaine la Monardière**

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “les Calades” from Vacqueyras-based Domaine la Monardière is an excellent example. It comes in listed at just a bit over fourteen percent octane and is composed of a blend of counoise, cinsault and grenache. It is raised in cement tanks prior to bottling and the 2019 offers up a lovely nose of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. I would love to see this a bit lower in alcohol, but in this day and age, we have to live with our climate, and this is very well done in the context of our troubled times. 2021-2030. **89.**

### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature”- Famille Perrin**

The Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” bottling from the Famille Perrin is produced from vineyards that are farmed organically and certified as such by Ecocert. However, given that the family’s flagship estate of Château Beaucastel has been farmed organically for more than forty years, one would expect that almost all of the Perrin’s vineyards are farmed in this manner. In any event, this wine is composed of a blend of grenache and syrah, from vineyards just north of Orange, and the wine is raised in a combination of stainless steel and older oak barrels prior to bottling. The 2019 Nature is nicely ripe at 14.5 percent, but also precise and pure in its aromatic constellation of raspberries, bonfire, grilled meats, pepper, a beautiful base of soil tones and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very serious finish. The textural integrity that this wine exudes on the finish is in notable contrast to the clamped down 2018 Réserve bottling, locked in combat with its screwcap closure, and tasting the two side by side would convince even the staunchest proponent of screwcaps that they adversely affect the wine. The Côtes-du-Rhône “Nature” from the Famille Perrin is a superb wine and a great, great bargain, as it is as good as a lot of the bottlings of Châteauneuf du Pape from the decade of the 1980s that I happily put away in my cellar and drank with great pleasure. But, like those wines, it really needs a bit of time in the cellar for the tannins to soften up a bit. 2024-2040+. **90.**

### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône- Domaine de Saje (Jérôme Mathieu)**

Jérôme Mathieu only began working on his own in the 2016 vintage, as previously he had worked alongside of his brother at the family’s Domaine Mathieu in Châteauneuf du Pape. However, with his nephew coming of age to start working at the family domaine, Jérôme and his brother agreed to split up the family vineyards and Domaine de Saje was born from Jérôme’s half of the vineyard patrimony. He has two hectares of vines in the Côtes-du-Rhône AOC, just outside of the borders of Châteauneuf, with the field blend roughly planted to two-thirds grenache and one-third syrah. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in cement vats, with the 2019 version coming in at fourteen percent octane. It offers up a superb bouquet of black raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, pepper, smoked meats, a good base of soil and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, peppery and complex, with fine focus and balance, a lovely core and good soil undertow on the long, moderately tannic and quite serious finish. Not surprisingly, this has plenty of Châteauneuf du Pape character. This is outstanding and a stunning value! 2025-2045+. **91.**

### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Bouveau”- Domaine Saint-Damien**

Domaine Saint-Damien in Gigondas is run by the Joel Saurel and his son Romain. As I mentioned last year, their “la Bouveau” bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône is made from a unique *cépages* of eighty percent syrah, fifteen percent cinsault and five percent viognier, with the old



vines of cinsault having been planted in 1954. The 2019 la Bouveau delivers a fine, black fruity bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, black olive, a superb base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. With the concentrating effect of the drought in the south in 2019, this wine has a beautiful chassis for aging and will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age, but is also quite approachable out of the blocks. This is an excellent Côtes-du-Rhône! 2021-2035+. **91.**



### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Plan de Dieu” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Saint-Damien**

The old vine bottling of Plan de Dieu from Joel and Romain Saurel is composed of a blend of eighty percent grenache (vines planted in 1949) and twenty percent mourvèdre (vines planted in 1978). The grapes are co-fermented in cement vats and aged in the same for eight months prior to bottling. The 2019 Plan de Dieu is ripe in the style of the vintage in the south, but at 14.5 percent octane, is not out of line at all. These old vines have delivered a really lovely, precise aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, a touch of hung game, pepper, hickory smoke, a fine base of soil tones and a nice array of upper register spiciness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and pepper, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This has turned out very well indeed! 2021-2030+. **90.**

### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône- Château du Trignon**

The 2019 Côtes-du-Rhône from Château du Trignon is composed from its customary *cépages* of grenache, syrah and mourvèdre and comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet is bright and expressive, delivering scents of raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, pepper, pretty spice tones, a nice base of chalky soil tones and a bit of upper register bonfire tones. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and full, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, focused and complex finish, that closes with just a hint of heat. This is quite successful for the vintage. 2021-2030+. **89+**.

### **2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Réserve”- Famille Perrin (screwcap)**

The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône “Réserve” from the Famille Perrin hails from fruit sourced in the villages of Vinsobres and Orange, with the *cépages* being sixty percent grenache and twenty percent each of syrah and mourvèdre. The wine is raised in a combination of stainless steel tank and older barrels. The 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a lovely bouquet of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue* and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, a bit of chewy tannin and just a touch of backend heat on the impressively complex finish. This is a very good Côtes-du-Rhône, but the closure is already reductively clamping down a bit on the finish, so decant it thirty minutes prior to serving. This is a wine that cries out for the equally cost-effective alternative of an agglomerated cork. 2021-2030. **88**.

### **2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Inopia”- Rotem & Mounir Saouma**

The 2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Inopia” bottling from Rotem and Mounir Saouma (of Lucien Lemoine Burgundy fame) is made primarily from grenache, with small percentages of syrah, mourvèdre, counoise and cinsault included in the *cépages*. The wine undergoes a short pre-fermentation maceration prior to fermentation in cement eggs and large, younger oak *foudres*. The 2018 Inopia comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and delivers a complex and rather uniquely new oaky bouquet of red and black cherries, smoked meats, a nice base of soil, a touch of bonfire and plenty of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and slightly warm on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, buried, suave tannins and a long, well-balanced and focused finish. This is a fascinating wine, as it does not show a whole lot of Côtes-du-Rhône personality, but is quite tasty! It is quite approachable out of the blocks, but shows every sign of being capable of aging well and I might be tempted to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and see how it blossoms. 2021-2035. **89**.

### **2017 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Devèze”- Domaine de Dionysos**

The 2017 Côtes-du-Rhône “la Devèze” from Domaine de Dionysos is constructed from a *cépages* of sixty percent grenache, twenty percent syrah, fifteen percent mourvèdre and five percent cinsault, with all of the vines at least forty-five years of age. Even though 2017 was also a drought vintage, the difference in structure between this wine and the more revved up 2019s is striking, with this wine having a soothing palate impression that is most enjoyable. The bouquet is lovely, jumping from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, *garrigue*, spit-roasted gamebird, a lovely base of soil and a hint of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, good soil undertow and grip, still a bit of ripe tannin and a long, vibrant and very nicely balanced finish. This is a first rate bottle that is drinking with generosity, but still has plenty of potential for further aging. Fine juice. 2021-2035+. **90**.

### **2017 Côtes-du-Rhône “Vigne de Fer”- Olivier & Lafont**

The Vigne de Fer bottling from Olivier & Lafont is comprised of a blend of carignan, grenache and syrah, grown on sandy soils with plenty of *galets roulés*. The 2017 version is plenty ripe, tipping the scales at fifteen percent alcohol and offers up a deep and moderately overripe nose of fruitcake, hung game, coffee grounds, bonfire and damp soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, solid at the core and a bit hot on the finish, with rather dulled flavors of *sur maturité*, moderate tannins and a long, four square and slightly muddled finish. To my palate, this wine is too overripe for its own good, though it is not too hot on the backend. 2021-2030. **83.**

### **2017 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Schistes”- Olivier & Lafont**

The 2017 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Schistes” from Olivier & Lafont is made from a blend of eighty percent carignan and twenty percent grenache, with the wine grown on schist soil, as the name infers. This is a bit lower in octane than the above, coming in listed at 14.5 percent and offering up scents of dark berries, spit-roasted venison, woodsmoke, pepper, a good base of soil and hints of the autumnal tones to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, meaty and complex, with a good core, chewy tannins, just a touch of *sur maturité* and a long, gently warm finish. I like this better than the above, but it too could have been picked sooner. 2021-2035. **85.**

### **2017 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Plan de Dieu”- Château du Trignon**

The Plan de Dieu bottling of Côtes-du-Rhône-Village from Château du Trignon is made from a blend of grenache and syrah, with the vineyards just over thirty-five years of age. The 2017 version tips the scales at fourteen percent octane and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of black raspberries, roasted meats, pepper, a good base of dark soil tones, *garrigue* and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with good soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, good acids and grip and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This closes with a bit of heat on the finish that suggests the alcohol is a bit closer to 14.5 percent, but it carries it quite well and should start to drink nicely with another year or two of bottle age. 2023-2035. **89.**

### **2016 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Plan de Dieu”- Château du Trignon**

The 2016 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Plan de Dieu” from Château du Trignon is also pretty ripe in personality, coming in at the same 14.5 percent octane, but it seems just a touch more precise on both the nose and palate than the tasty 2017 version. The nose wafts from the glass in a slightly more red fruity blend of red and black raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, hung game, *garrigue* and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, peppery and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, stony soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a very good example. 2021-2035. **91.**

### ***Rasteau***

### **2019 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages “Rasteau 1921”- Domaine les Aphillanthes**

This ancient vineyard in Rasteau is set to celebrate its centennial with the 2021 vintage, but the vines did not do too badly at ninety-eight years of age! The wine is ripe in the style of the 2019 vintage in the south, but also deep, complex and impressively precise in its aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberries, bonfire, hung game, pepper, a bit of chicory and an impressive base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and focused, with a rock solid core of ripe fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip, firm tannins and a long, tangy and slightly warm finish. This wine comes in listed at fifteen percent octane, but is far cooler in

the mouth than that would suggest, with only a faint touch of backend heat and really very good balance. This needs a few years in the cellar to soften up properly, but it is a fine result from a challenging year in the south. 2024-2040. **91+**.

### ***Lirac***

#### **2019 Lirac “Charles I”- Domaine Stéphane Usseglio**

Stéphane Usseglio’s Lirac bottling has plenty of old vines in its *cépages* of grenache, syrah and mourvèdre, as the syrah vines are nearly fifty years of age and the grenache is eighty! The wine is aged in a combination of cement vats and *foudre*, with the latter made by the excellent Austrian *tonnelier* of Stockinger. The 2019 version comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and is quite elegant on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, pepper, hung game, *garrigue*, a fine base of stony soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and structured in the style of the 2019 vintage in the south, with an excellent core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, firm tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. Remember that the drought conditions of ’19 brought slightly desiccated bunches, concentrating all the elements of the wine, and this is clearly on display here with this excellent Lirac, which will demand some time in the cellar to blossom as a result. But, once it is ready to drink, this is going to be outstanding. 2029-2055. **91+**.

#### **2017 Lirac- Olivier & Lafont**

Olivier & Lafont have certainly bottled some very ripe wines in the 2017 vintage, as their Lirac comes in listed at a full fifteen percent octane. The *cépages* here is seventy percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and ten percent syrah. The wine shows some overripe aromatics in its mix of desiccated dark berries, hung game, fruitcake, smoke and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and lacking in vibrancy, with a plush core of fruit, little structural integrity, some chewy tannins and a bit of backend heat on the fairly long finish. This is dulled from being picked too late. 2021-2030. **84**.

### ***Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc***

#### **2020 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Domaine Chante Cigale**

The 2020 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc from Chante Cigale is composed of a blend of twenty percent each of Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Roussanne and Picpoul. The wine is fermented in new oak casks, but racked out of them six weeks later to finish its *elevage* in stainless steel tanks. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage and offers up a bright nose of pear, persimmon, chalky soil tones, white lilies and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, quite nice acidity and a long, classy finish that closes with just a whisper of backend heat. This is very well made in this era of global warming, and though there is a bit of heat on the finish, it is a nicely balanced wine for this day and age. 2021-2025. **89**.

#### **2020 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Le Vieux Donjon**

Le Vieux Donjon has only one hectare of vines dedicated to producing Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc, with the wine made from a mix of clairette and roussanne. The 2020 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and delivers a lovely bouquet of lemon, tart pear, coriander seed, white soil tones, citrus zest and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and a

long, beautifully balanced finish. This is really very, very good white Châteauneuf du Pape! 2021-2035. **92.**



### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Domaine Charvin**

Laurent Charvin's Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc is composed from a blend of Clairette and Bourboulenc. The white soils for these vineyards still include plenty of *galets roulés*. The 2019 version comes in at a svelte 13.5 percent alcohol (notably low for the vintage) and offers up a complex nose of pear, crab apple, raw almond, a fine base of soil, white flowers and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This wine is quite defined by its crab apple component on the palate (from the Bourboulenc?) and may not be to everyone's taste, but the wine is beautifully made and will age long and gracefully. My score assumes that one will like this crab apple trait. 2021-2035. **90.**

### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc "Cuvée Tradition"- Domaine Font du Vent**

Font du Vent used to be named Domaine Font de Michelle (named for their most important *lieu à dit* in their vineyard holdings), but the Gonnet brothers decided to change the name a couple of years ago, when they purchased additional vineyard land in Châteauneuf du Pape, including in the famed La Crau vineyard. All of their vines have been farmed organically since their father's generation at the helm of the estate, so the brothers decided to get their certification, so they have now been organically certified by Ecocert since 2013. Their Blanc bottling is composed of a blend of thirty percent each of Grenache Blanc, Clairette and Roussanne, coupled with ten percent Bourboulenc. The wine is fermented in old oak vats and aged in stainless steel, without undergoing malolactic fermentation. The 2019 offers up a fine



nose of pear, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a lovely core, good soil signature, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane and has just a whisper of backend heat, but in the context of today's profound climate change, this is really a quite cool example of its appellation! Fine juice. 2021-2028. **90.**

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc “les Sinards”- Famille Perrin**

The Famille Perrin's Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc bottling hails from the les Sinards *lieu à dit* and is barrel-fermented and aged in *demi-muids*. The 2019 version was produced from a *cépages* of clairette, grenache blanc, and roussanne and comes in listed at fourteen percent octane in this drought vintage. The wine is quite lovely on the nose, offering a gentle touch of vanillin oak to augment scents of fresh pear, lemon, white soil tones, a touch of coriander seed, honeysuckle and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, very good acids and grip, excellent focus and a long, complex and fairly warm finish that suggests the alcohol is a bit north of its stated fourteen percent. This is a very good result for 2019, as the wine is nicely balanced (beyond the backend heat), but it is a big, powerful example of Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc. 2021-2030. **88.**

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Domaine du Vieux Lazaret**

The Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc from Domaine du Vieux Lazaret is produced from a *cépages* of forty-five percent grenache blanc, thirty percent clairette, twenty percent bouboulenc and five percent roussanne, with the last varietal barrel-fermented on its own before being blended into the cuvée. The 2019 version tips the scales at an even fourteen percent octane and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of lemon, tart pear, wild fennel, white soil tones, a touch of raw almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is zesty, ripe and full, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, the zesty acids of this drought vintage and good length and grip on the moderately complex finish. I like the backend bounce here, but the wine is a bit chunky in personality today and lacks a bit of delineation; perhaps this will arrive with more bottle age? A good, solid example that may blossom into something better. 2021-2030. **87+?**

**2018 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Château de Nalys (E. Guigal)**

The family firm of Guigal purchased the Château de Nalys in Châteauneuf du Pape in 2017. Their 2018 Blanc is composed from a *cépages* of roussanne, grenache blanc and clairette, with the wines vinified in a combination oak *foudres* and casks, with just under twenty percent of the cuvée fermented in the smaller *barriques*. The 2018 is nicely ripe in the style of the vintage, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and complex bouquet of pineapple, pear, a touch of kiwi, white soil tones, citrus peel and a bit of tropical fruit tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and vibrant, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, sound framing acids and a long, complex finish. This is not as overripe, as some 2018 whites can be, but has a nice tropical fruit cast from the growing season. Good juice for relatively near-term drinking. 2021-2025+. **90.**

***Châteauneuf du Pape Rouge***

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape- Bosquet des Papes**

The 2019 Châteauneuf du Pape from Bosquet des Papes is another typical wine of this vintage in the south, as it comes in at a hefty 15.5 percent alcohol, due to the concentrating effect of the dehydrated bunches during the never ending drought of 2019. Despite the high octane, the wine offers up a deep, complex and quite interesting bouquet of black raspberries, fruitcake,



hung game, pepper, a fine base of soil tones, balsam bough, Christmas spices and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a sappy core of fruit, fine focus and grip, firm, chewy tannins buried in the body of the wine and a long, complex and surprisingly well-balanced finish. There is some backend heat here (how could there not be at 15.5 percent?), but it is not overly strident. This is very much a creature of its vintage, but it is well done in this superb powerful style, with the heightened acids of the vintage adding bounce and vibrancy on the backend. Again, given one's tolerance for high octane wines, the score for this wine will vary. For those more lenient than me, the upper score in the range is appropriate. 2032-2065+. **87-92.**

#### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape "Chante le Merle" Vieilles Vignes- Bosquet des Papes**

The Châteauneuf du Pape "Chante le Merle" Vieilles Vignes from Bosquet des Papes comes from the estate's oldest vines, with the vines ranging from seventy to fully one hundred years of age. The *cépages* is eighty percent grenache and ten percent each of mourvèdre and syrah, with the grape varieties co-fermented and then aged in *demi-muids*, *foudres* and tank. The 2019 is a big boy, tipping the scales at 15.5 percent octane and offering up a surprisingly well-delineated nose of dark berries, fruitcake, pepper, hung game, chocolate, stony soil tones and a topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is big, full and ripe, with a plush core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, tangy acids and good length and grip on the surprisingly well-balanced finish. There is certainly a fair bit of backend heat here, but it is really quite modest for the wine's stated octane level. This is a very typical 2019 Châteauneuf du Pape, with sugars, tannins and acids all concentrated by the desiccated bunches in the drought. There is some *sur maturité* in evidence on the backend of the finish, but it is minimal, but this is the kind of wine that is made for other palates than mine. It is certainly well-made in difficult circumstances, and for those who like wines from the 1998 and 2000 vintages in this region, the upper score in the range will be applicable. 2032-2075. **87-92.**

#### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Chante Cigale**

Chante Cigale's regular bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent grenache, twenty percent syrah, ten percent mourvèdre and five percent cinsault. Seventy percent of the cuvée is raised in cement and stainless steel tanks, the other thirty percent in Burgundy casks. The 2019 is deep, ripe and classy, offering up a complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, bonfire, a superb base of soil tones, lovely spice tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely plush on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex and moderately hot finish. This is listed at fifteen percent octane and is a bit heady in personality. It is very well made and one's appreciation of the wine will only be predicated on one's tolerance of alcohol on the backend. For my palate, despite the very obvious quality of the winemaking here, it is a bit too hot for my comfort zone. For those who are more intrepid, add five points to the score, as there is little doubt as to the complexity and depth here. 2027-2055? **87.**

#### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape "Pi"- Domaine Chante Cigale**

Domaine Chante Cigale's bottling called "Pi" hails from the famous *lieu à dit* of Pignan (of Château Rayas fame) and is composed entirely of grenache. Pignan is completely sandy, without any of the stones found in most other parcels in the appellation. The 2019 Pi is fairly dark for a one hundred percent grenache cuvée and quite ripe in this vintage, tipping the scales at 15.5 percent octane. It offers up a deep and sappy nose of black raspberries, *garrigue*, smoked meats, bonfire, pepper and a superb base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe, full and really quite pure for its octane, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, firm,

chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This carries its alcohol extremely well, and though there is a bit of backend heat, it is quite moderate and the wine seems likely to age beautifully, even at 15.5 percent alcohol. Oddly, it actually seems cooler on the palate than the 2019 regular bottling from Chante Cigale. The 2019 Pi needs time in the cellar to soften up its tannins, but it should be an excellent wine in due course. 2030-2075. **92.**

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape “Secret de Nos Vignes”- Domaine de Châteaumar**

The Domaine de Châteaumar has been owned by the Souret family now for three generations. Their Châteauneuf du Pape is composed of a blend of seventy percent grenache and thirty percent mourvèdre and the 2019 version tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol. It offers up a deep and classy nose of black raspberries, dark berries, hung game, pepper, bonfire, a fine base of soil tones, a bit of cedar and a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, good mineral drive and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. There is a bit of backend heat here, but it is moderate, and the wine should age quite nicely. Good juice. 2032-2075. **91+.**

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape “Selection”- Famille Chaussy**

The 2019 Châteauneuf du Pape “Selection” from Christine and Daniel Chaussy is beautifully complex and nicely black fruity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, roasted meats, balsam bough, sultana raisin, *garrigue*, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of fruitcake and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with broad shoulders, firm, chewy tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and soil-driven finish that closes with just a bit of backend heat. This comes in listed at fifteen percent, but handles the heat deftly and is really quite well-balanced. There are certainly notes of *sur maturité* here, so this wine will not be to everyone’s tastes, but it is very well done in its style. This is nicely crafted in a challenging year in the south. 2032-2065. **89.**

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape- Clos des Brusquières**

Clos des Brusquières is owned by Claude Courtil, who trained with Henri Bonneau, who happens to also be his godfather. The eight hectare estate is planted to seventy year-old vines and only a single bottling is produced, with the *cépages* being eighty percent grenache, ten percent syrah and five percent each of cinsault and mourvèdre. The wine is made traditionally, with fermentation with indigenous yeasts and the *elevage* done in the a combination of cement vats and older *demi-muids*. The 2019 version is a big boy, tipping the scales at a full 15.8 percent alcohol, but offers up pretty impressive purity for its ripeness level, delivering scents of fruitcake, desiccated black raspberries, pepper, hung game, *garrigue*, a good base of soil tones and a topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fine core, good soil signature and grip, buried tannins, plenty of complexity and a long, slightly overripe, tangy and warm finish. This is not all that extraordinary for the vintage, as the shrunken berries from the drought concentrated sugars, acids and tannins in the resulting wines. It is a bit too ripe for my tastes, but I do admire its complexity and classical styling, despite the extraordinary nature of the vintage. I will score the wine in a range, as I am really not the right person to be handicapping wines at 15.8 percent octane! For those who do not mind this much alcohol in the wine, the score at the top of the range is accurate for this wine, as there is a lot to like here, if one can get by the ripeness of the vintage. 2029-2055. **85-92.**

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape- Clos des Papes**

The 2019 Châteauneuf du Pape from Clos des Papes is really very well done for the trying drought conditions of this vintage, as it comes in at 14.5 percent octane this year. It is composed of its customary blend of sixty-five percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre, ten

percent syrah and five percent of several of the other grapes of the appellation. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged in old *foudres*. The 2019 offers up a deep and ripe nose of black raspberries, fruitcake, roasted game, pepper, *garrigue*, a complex base of stony soil tones and a topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and really very well-balanced finish. This is such a masterpiece for this difficult vintage! 2029-2075. **93.**

#### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Tradition”- Domaine Font du Vent**

The Gonnet brothers’ 2019 Cuvée Tradition Châteauneuf du Pape is produced from old vines, with the range running from fifty to ninety years of age and the average age here more than seventy years-old. The *cépages* is seventy percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre. The bottling can include some whole clusters, depending on the vintage, and in 2019 I am guessing that some stems were included. The wine is raised in a combination of cement vats, stainless steel tank and oak *foudres*. The 2019 comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers fine, classic aromatics of black raspberries, fruitcake, bonfire, hung game, pepper, a fine base of soil and a nice topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and well-balanced, with a fine core, excellent stony soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, chewy and complex finish. This is very good Châteauneuf du Pape in the making. 2032-2065+. **92.**

#### **2019 Châteauneuf du Pape- Le Vieux Donjon**

As I mentioned last year, Le Vieux Donjon is rich in old vines, as more than six of their seventeen hectares of vineyards are planted to vines in excess of one hundred years of age! As there is no reserve wine here, all of the old vines go into their single bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape *rouge*, with the vast majority of the blend being composed of this very old vine grenache. The *elevage* is done primarily in old *foudres*, with only twenty percent of the blend seeing their aging in cement vats. The 2019 vintage at Vieux Donjon is ripe in the style of the vintage, coming in at fifteen percent octane and offers up a complex aromatic constellation of sweet blackberries, black raspberries, hickory smoke, spit-roasted venison, balsam bough, rosemary, lavender, stony soil tones and just a hint of Christmas spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely sense of (relative) elegance from the very old vines, a plush core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, fine mineral drive and a long, very complex and impressively balanced finish. There is a bit of heat here on the finish, but it is quite minimal and this may well be the first fifteen percent octane wine that I would happily drink, as these very old vines have done a nice job of mitigating the most strident aspects of this drought vintage. 2032-2075. **92.**

#### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “le Grand Pin”- Chapelle St. Theodoric**

The Chapelle St. Theodoric wines have very quickly become some of my very favorites in the appellation. The *vigneron* for this small project is Baptiste Grangeon, farms solely old vine grenache in two distinct parcels, le Grand Pin and la Guigasse, for the two bottlings produced from the Chapelle. As I mentioned in my notes on the 2016s, the parcels of vines are at the highest elevation in the appellation, flanking the vines of Château Rayas and Pignan. Importer Peter Weygandt co-directs this project, which is his brain child. The 2018 le Grand Pin parcel (which lies next to the vines of Pignan) is planted on pure sand and is a superb wine in the making, coming in listed at fifteen percent alcohol and delivering a gorgeous young nose of raspberries, fruitcake, *garrigue*, smoked meats, pepper, a gorgeous base of soil tones and a lovely dollop of stem tones in the upper register that recalls the 1985 Rayas in its youth (when I

very foolishly drank my bottles). On the palate the wine is deep, tangy and full-bodied, with excellent mid-palate stuffing and soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced young finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making that shows not a hint of heat or *sur maturité* in its profile, and which will be, in the fullness of time, utterly stunning Châteauneuf du Pape! 2032-2085. **95.**



### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “la Guigasse”- Chapelle St. Theodoric**

As I mentioned a couple of years ago, the La Guigasse bottling from Chapelle St. Theodoric is made from pure grenache, with the vines ranging from fifty to one hundred years of age. Like both wines made here, it is vinified and raised in the style of Jacques Reynaud during his days at Château Rayas (whole cluster fermentations and *elevage* in a variety of old oak *demi-muids*). The 2018 la Guigasse is a ripe wine, coming in at fifteen percent octane, but also a deep, bright and quite precise wine on both the nose and palate. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of raspberries, bonfire, spit-roasted venison, complex soil tones, lovely spice elements, pepper and a lovely touch of youthful stem tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with beautiful mid-palate depth, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip on the youthful, but already very poised and classy finish. This is great juice in the making! 2032-2085. **95.**

### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Tradition”- Château Fortia**

The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Tradition” from Château Fortia is composed from a blend of forty percent each of grenache and mourvèdre, augmented with twenty percent of syrah. The wine is ripe, coming in at fifteen percent and offering up a deep and complex nose of fruitcake, hung game, pepper, *garrigue*, stony soil tones, raspberries, hickory smoke and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a bit of heat poking out on the long finish. This carries its octane pretty well and I have to believe it will age quite gracefully, given this estate’s fine track record in the cellar. But, be advised that it is a big boy. 2033-2075. **91+**.

### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée du Baron”- Château Fortia**

The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée du Baron” from Château Fortia has a slightly different *cépages* from the Tradition, as the blend here is fifty percent grenache, thirty-five percent syrah and fifteen percent mourvèdre. The wine is aged entirely in older *foudres* prior to bottling. The wine is also quite ripe in 2018, again being listed at fifteen percent octane, but seems more delicately styled on the nose, offering up scents of crushed raspberries, beautiful spice tones, smoked meats, a fine base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of orange peel and just a hint of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced (despite some backend heat), with a lovely core of red fruit, fine soil undertow, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, complex and focused finish. This again handles its fifteen percent octane quite well, and though there is a bit of heat, it is hardly obtrusive. Good juice. 2033-2075. **92+**.

### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Jérôme Gradassi**

Jérôme Gradassi started out his career as a chef, eventually earning a Michelin star for his restaurant in Avignon. In 2003, he sold the restaurant and took over his family’s five hectare estate in Châteauneuf du Pape. He farms his eighty year-old vines organically and ferments his wine in cement, and then ages it in older Burgundy barrels (four to ten years of age) for one year prior to bottling. His 2018 is made from a *cépages* of eighty percent grenache and twenty percent mourvèdre and comes in at 14.5 percent octane. It offers up a beautifully expressive, complex nose of red and black raspberries, pepper, grilled meats, *garrigue*, a superb base of stony soil tones, just a hint of fruitcake and a topnote of hickory smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, firm and chewy tannins and excellent balance and grip on the long, poised, classic finish. This is beautifully structured and quite cool in the mouth, with great potential for long-term cellaring. This is the first wine I have tasted from Monsieur Gradassi and it is a beautiful example of Châteauneuf du Pape! 2033-2080. **93**.

### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine de Saje (Jérôme Mathieu)**

The Châteauneuf du Pape from Jérôme Mathieu is composed of roughly eighty percent grenache, all co-planted in field blends on head-pruned vines, combined with fully all twelve other permitted grape varieties for the appellation. All the varieties are harvested together and co-fermented with indigenous yeasts and then raised in ancient *foudres* for fourteen to sixteen months prior to bottling. The 2018 comes in at fifteen percent octane, in the style of this warm summer, but is most assuredly not overripe in personality, offering up a deep and complex nose of fruitcake, raspberries, grilled venison, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil (that will turn autumnal in due course), pepper and a lovely array of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very classical in style and proportion, with a superb core, fine soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This carries its

alcohol beautifully and shows little signs of backend heat and certainly, no jamminess. This is excellent, old school Châteauneuf du Pape in the best sense of the term. 2030-2070. **93+**.

**2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Omnia”- Rotem & Mounir Saouma**

The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Omnia” bottling from Rotem and Mounir Saouma is composed from a blend of eighty percent grenache and ten percent each of syrah and mourvèdre. The wine undergoes a seven day “cold soak” prior to the onset of fermentation, using one hundred percent whole clusters and is aged for two years in barrel prior to bottling, with no racking during its *elevage*. Mounir Saouma now owns fully 8.5 hectares of vines in the appellation, spread out over all five communes, so that this wine is now made entirely from estate grown fruit. The 2018 Omnia comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and gently new oaky bouquet of raspberries, cherries, spiced meats, a nice touch of *garrigue*, pepper, salty soil tones and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, buried tannins, fine focus and grip, impressive early complexity and a long, well-balanced and chewy finish. This is an excellent young example of Châteauneuf du Pape, but it is plenty new oaky in personality and classicists may not be enamored of its style, despite its obvious pedigree. If the oak becomes more subsumed in the other elements of the wine with the passage of time, my score will seem a bit stingy. 2028-2065. **92+**.

**2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Impériale”- Domaine Raymond Usseglio et Fils**

The Cuvée Impériale bottling from Stéphane and Raymond Usseglio is from the family’s oldest vines, which are now more than one hundred and fifteen years of age, as they were planted in 1901 and 1902! The *cépages* is a field blend of primarily grenache, and the wine is fermented and aged in cement. The 2018 is pure, young and stunning in its potential, with its deep bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, roasted meats, *garrigue*, spice tones reminiscent of sandalwood and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless at the core, with great focus and grip, firm, buried tannins, very good balance and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is a big boy, tipping the scales at fifteen percent octane, but it is remarkably cool in the mouth for its alcohol level and shows only a touch of backend heat. It will age superbly well and probably drink well for half a century once it blossoms. 2033-2085. **95**.

**2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine du Vieux Lazaret**

The Domaine du Vieux Lazaret is owned by the Quiot family, which also owns the Château du Trignon. The wine here is composed of a blend of two-thirds grenache, twenty-two percent syrah, five percent mourvèdre and the remainder a blend of the various other permitted grapes in small quantity. The wine is fermented in cement and aged in a combination of cement and *foudres*. The 2018 Vieux Lazaret is a big, ripe young wine, coming in at fifteen percent octane and offering up a rather black fruity bouquet of black raspberries, bonfire, hung game, damp soil tones, fruitcake, pepper, *garrigue* and a bit of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with firm, chewy tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and impressively balanced finish. This really does carry its alcohol quite well, and though it hints at *sur maturité* on the nose and backend. Not bad. 2030-2060. **87**.

**2017 Châteauneuf du Pape- Olivier & Lafont**

The 2017 Châteauneuf du Pape from Olivier & Lafont is composed from a blend of sixty percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and ten percent each of syrah and cinsault, with the grenache vines being fully seventy years of age. The wine is raised in a combination of cement



vats and *foudres*, and the 2017 vintage comes in listed at fifteen percent alcohol. It offers up a good, solid bouquet of desiccated raspberries, fruitcake, chocolate, hung game, pepper, woodsmoke and damp soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit overripe, so that the wine is a bit dull, though it has good mid-palate stuffing, well-integrated tannins and good length on the finish. But it lacks brightness and closes with notes of *sur maturité*. Not my cup of tea. 2027-2055. **85.**

**2017 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château de Nalys (E. Guigal)**

The family firm of Guigal purchased the Château de Nalys in Châteauneuf du Pape in 2017. The fruit for this bottling hails primarily from the château's holdings in La Crau, with the *cépages* predominantly grenache, augmented by syrah, mourvèdre, vaccarèse and counoise. One third of the cuvée is aged in oak, with the debut vintage under the Guigal family's tenure coming from the drought vintage of 2017 and tipping the scales at 15.5 percent octane. However, the wine is impressively pure and complex on the nose, with no signs of jamminess in its beautifully precise bouquet of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, bonfire, a complex base of stony, dark soil tones and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, well-balanced and gently warm finish. This carries its alcohol astonishingly well and served blind, I would peg this wine for a full point lower in octane. This is the first bottling here under the Guigal family's stewardship and it is excellent; I cannot wait to taste the 2018, when the growing season is not quite so extreme! 2030-2075. **92+.**

**2016 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine de la Biscarelle (Christelle et Jérôme Grieco)**

I have only tasted a couple of vintages of Domaine de la Biscarelle's bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape, but I have been very impressed by the old school and balanced style I have tasted in the past and the 2016 version is another quite successful example. The wine this year comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and is a bit more plush in style than previous vintages I have tried, but offers up fine complexity in its aromatic constellation of black raspberries, pepper, grilled meats, fruitcake, a touch of chocolate, rosemary, stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, sound acids and good length and grip on the long, well-balanced and youthfully complex finish. The last vintage of Biscarelle I tasted was the 2014, which was a bit less ripe and therefore, more precise and soil-driven in personality, but this 2016 is a good, solid bottle. Give it some time in the cellar to soften up its tannic framework. 2031-2065. **90.**

**2016 Châteauneuf du Pape "Ombres et Lumières" - Olivier & Lafont**

Ombres et Lumières is the reserve bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape from Olivier & Lafont, made entirely from grenache planted on sandy soils *à la* Château Rayas. The 2016 version is another big, ripe wine from the partners, coming in listed at fifteen percent alcohol and offering up an overripe bouquet of black raspberry jam, fruitcake, charred wood, coffee grounds, pepper and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely textured on the attack, with a solid core, chewy tannins and a long, complex and reasonably well-balanced finish that closes with overt notes of *sur maturité* and a glaring lack of freshness. At lower octane, this would be a really good wine, but at this level, it is uninteresting to my palate. 2028-2055. **84.**

**2016 Châteauneuf du Pape "Cuvée Exceptionnelle"- Domaine du Vieux Lazaret**

Domaine du Vieux Lazaret produces roughly thirty vats each vintage of their Châteauneuf du Pape from their ninety-three hectares of vines in the appellation. Their Cuvée

Exceptionnelle is a vat selection of what they deem the very finest single lot in the entire vintage, which they bottle on its own. In 2016, this vat happened to be comprised entirely from grenache and syrah. The wine is deep and ripe on the nose (this too is a full fifteen percent alcohol), offering up a black fruity blend of desiccated dark berries, fruitcake, coffee grounds, hung game, chocolate, a hint of *garrigue* and plenty of bonfire smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and very ripe, with notes of *sur maturité*, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, fairly low acids, buried tannins and a long, complex and slightly plodding finish. This is a well-done version of the style of wine that plagued the appellation at the end of Robert Parker's era as a taste arbiter in Châteauneuf du Pape, and is not my cup of tea. Add five points to my score if you like this style of wine. 2030-2055+. **86.**

### **2015 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Duclaux**

Domaine Duclaux's twelve hectares of vines are old, and distinguished by being a "field blend" planting mode from the old days, rather than sequestered into different parcels of each grape variety. The average age of the vines here is more than fifty years, with some of the mourvèdre vines nearly a century old! Their 2015 bottling is deep and complex on the nose, but also shows plenty of *sur maturité* in its constellation of fruitcake, desiccated raspberries, hung game, coffee grounds, chocolate, pepper, cedar and smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, overripe and jammy, with a good core and soil signature, firm tannins and a long, fairly plodding finish. This is not particularly hot on the palate, despite coming in at fifteen percent, but perhaps the field blend requires that some grape varieties end up very overripe while waiting for the late-ripening mourvèdre to be ready to pick? If you like wines of *sur maturité*, add five points to my score. 2027-2050. **84.**

### **2015 Châteauneuf du Pape "Cuvée Exceptionnelle"- Domaine du Vieux Lazaret**

The 2015 Cuvée Exceptionnelle from Domaine du Vieux Lazaret includes some mourvèdre in its *cépages* in this vintage, to augment the grenache and syrah that make up most of the blend. It comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely nose of red and black raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, forest floor-like soil tones, *garrigue*, bonfire and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow and grip, firm, well-integrated tannins, sound acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is very good Châteauneuf du Pape in the making, which still needs a few more years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend. The precision and soil signature one finds here at the lower octane level is telling, and is worlds above the 2016 version for that reason. 2026-2055. **91.**

### **2013 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Duclaux**

The 2013 Châteauneuf du Pape from Domaine Duclaux is a full point lower in alcohol than the 2015, coming in at what is a pretty old school fourteen percent octane. The wine is far more successful (to my palate) as a result, offering up a deep, complex and nicely delineated bouquet of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, stony soil tones, hickory smoke and a touch of celery seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, suave tannins and a long, complex and quite tasty finish. This is good juice! 2025-2055. **90.**



#### **2004 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Célestins”- Domaine Henri Bonneau**

The 2014 vintage of Cuvée Célestins from Henri Bonneau is a breathtakingly beautiful wine in terms of its depth, refinement and complexity, but it is a big boy and carries plenty of alcohol, some of which comes across as heat on the backend. The bouquet is pure and bottomless, offering up notes of baked raspberries, fruitcake, hung game, pepper, a fine pantheon of spice tones, bonfire and a simply beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a sappy core of fruit, moderate, buried tannins, great focus and grip and a very, very long, slightly hot finish. Other than the alcohol on the backend, this is as brilliant as the vintages of this bottling from the late 1980s and early 1990s, but there is no denying that it is carrying more alcohol these days than was the case back then, so one has to work around the heat on the finish. I have deducted a couple of points from the score of the wine, simply because of the backend heat. 2021-2045+. **94.**

#### ***Vacqueyras***

#### **2019 Vacqueyras- Domaine du Terme**

The 2019 Vacqueyras from Domaine du Terme is comprised of a *cépages* of eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah. The vines are forty-five years of age. The 2019 version comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine, complex bouquet of black raspberries, fruitcake, a fine base of soil tones, bonfire, hung game, pepper and a nice touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite

elegant, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This carries its alcohol very well, with only a touch of backend heat and is a fine example of Vacqueyras. 2021-2040. **90.**

#### **2017 Vacqueyras- Olivier & Lafont**

The 2017 Vacqueyras from Olivier and Lafont is a big, ripe wine, tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent octane and delivering plenty of depth in its bouquet of black raspberries, fruitcake, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, a good base of gently autumnal soil tones, bonfire and a lovely topnote of exotic spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively balanced, with a plush core of fruit, good focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and quite classy finish that closes with just a whisper of backend heat. All in all, this wine carries its octane superbly well! The wine is made from a blend of sixty percent grenache and twenty percent each of syrah and mourvèdre, with the grenache vines fully fifty years of age. It is aged in cement vats. Good juice. 2023-2045+. **91.**

#### **2015 Vacqueyras- Château du Trignon**

Château du Trignon's Vacqueyras bottling is composed from a blend of grenache and syrah, grown on sandy, sedimentary soils. The wine offers up a fine and black fruity aromatic constellation of dark berries, roasted meats, dark soil tones, pepper, charred wood, *garrigue* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, still a bit of tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, classy finish. This is first class Vacqueyras, that comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but is very nicely balanced and shows no backend heat whatsoever. Good juice. 2021-2035+. **91.**

#### **Gigondas**

##### **2018 Gigondas- E. Guigal**

The Gigondas bottling from the Guigal family is all made from purchased juice, in the tradition that dates all the way back to founder Etienne Guigal's day. The 2018 is a broad-shouldered example of the vintage, coming in at fifteen percent alcohol and offering up deep and complex nose of desiccated raspberries, hung game, pepper, *garrigue*, a good base of soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and plush at the core, with plenty of pepperiness on the backend, chewy tannins and good focus and grip on the long and moderately warm finish. Good juice in the riper idiom of so many examples of Gigondas these days. 2027-2055. **90.**

##### **2018 Gigondas- Domaine du Terme**

Anne-Marie Gaudin has been in charge of the winemaking at Domaine du Terme since she took over from her father, Rolland, in 1987. Her Gigondas is made from vines closing in on fifty years of age, with the *cépages* being eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah. She ferments the wine with indigenous yeasts and raises it in vats, prior to bottling without filtration. Her 2018 Gigondas is a ripe wine, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but also impressively precise and transparent on the nose, offering up scents of raspberries, smoked meats, a superb base of stony soil tones, pepper, *garrigue*, lavender and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively defined by its minerality, with a lovely, sappy core of red fruit, ripe, chewy tannins, impressive focus and grip and a long, complex and moderately warm finish. I would guess that this wine is actually just a bit north of 14.5 percent, as it does show a bit of backend alcohol, but at the same time, it is reasonably well-balanced and

seems likely to age quite well. This is a very, very impressive bottle of Gigondas; I only wish it were a point lower in alcohol, as it would then take me back to those great old '83s and '85s from folks like Raspail-Ay and les Pallières that I put in my cellar by the case and drank with immense pleasure. But, this is the nature of the 2018 vintage in the south, so a bit of alcohol poking through on the backend may be the new reality for even the finest examples of Gigondas in this blistering age of decline. 2028-2055. **92.**

### **2017 Gigondas- Olivier & Lafont**

Olivier and Lafont's 2017 Gigondas is composed from a blend of seventy percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre, with the wine aged in cement vats. The wine comes in at a full fifteen percent in this vintage, but offers up impressive precision and purity on the nose, with scents of black raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, grilled meats, *garrigue*, sandalwood and soil tones wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and a bit hot on the backend, with plenty of body and stuffing, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex finish. I like the constituent components of this wine quite well, but the backend heat is a just a bit beyond my comfort range, and that keeps the score down a few points as a result. If higher octane wines do not bother your palate, add three points to my score. 2027-2055+. **87.**

### **2017 Gigondas "Jocunditae"- Olivier & Lafont**

The 2017 Gigondas "Jocunditae" from Olivier & Lafont has a different *cépages* from the regular bottling, as this wine is composed from ninety percent grenache and ten percent syrah. It too comes in at fifteen percent alcohol and offers up a complex nose of black raspberries, fruitcake, pepper, bonfire, smoked meats, *garrigue* and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, broad shouldered, full and rock solid at the core, with chewy tannins, good length and grip, modest focus, a bit of backend heat and a rather jammy, borderline overripe finish. This is okay, but no better, despite a pretty good nose for its octane. 2027-2045. **85.**

### **2015 Gigondas- Château du Trignon**

The 2015 Gigondas from Château du Trignon is a big boy, coming in listed at fifteen percent alcohol. The *cépages* here is grenache, syrah, mourvèdre and cinsault. One third of the cuvée is raised in barrels (twenty-five percent renewed each year) and the other two-thirds are raised in cement vats. The barrel-raised portion of the blend spends one year in cask before being racked back into the total blend to finish up the *élevage* in cement. The 2015 offers up a deep and impressively precise nose of black raspberries, fruitcake, hung game, pepper, *garrigue*, a good base of soil tones and just a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty well balanced for its octane, with a good core and soil signature, chewy tannins and a long, complex finish that shows only a touch of backend heat. Good juice. 2027-2055. **89.**

### **Cairanne Blanc**

#### **2020 Cairanne "la Font d'Estevenas" Blanc- Domaine Alary**

The 2020 la Font d'Estevenas Blanc from Domaine Alary is composed from a blend of roussanne and clairette, with the former planted in stone terraces and the latter in soils of blue clay. As I mentioned last year, the vineyards are thirty years of age and harvest is done first thing in the morning to preserve freshness. The 2020 version comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of pear, tart melon, salty soil tones, white flowers and a bit of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and juicy, with lovely

acids and grip, fine focus and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is lovely wine, but I would not hesitate to give it six months or a year in the cellar and really let it stretch its wings! 2021-2030. **88+**.

### ***Cairanne Rouge***

#### **2019 Cairanne “l’Estévenas”- Domaine Alary**

Domaine Alary’s l’Estévenas cuvée is crafted from a *cépages* of sixty-five percent grenache and thirty-five percent syrah, with the syrah vines being *petite serine* taken from cuttings that originated in Côte-Rôtie and having been planted in 1960. The two varieties are fermented separately with indigenous yeasts and blended after six months of *elevage*, with the wine raised for up to eighteen months in a combination of cement vats and old *demi-muids*. The 2019 l’Estévenas is a fine follow-up to the simply stunning 2018 version, offering up a deep and complex nose that is very much influenced by its syrah component, delivering scents of cassis, black raspberry, black olive, pepper, a stunning foundation of soil, a touch of *garrigue* and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and classy, with a very elegant profile for the concentration of the vintage, with a beautiful core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and very refined finish. This will really need a few years of cellaring to blossom, but it has extraordinary potential and once again, is a stunning bargain from the vintage! 2025-2045+. **93**.

#### **2018 Cairanne “Maximilien”- Domaine les Grands Bois**

The 2018 Cairanne “Maximilien” from Domaine les Grands Bois is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent grenache, thirty-five percent mourvèdre and fifteen percent syrah. The wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of dark berries, black raspberries, pepper, a bit of fruitcake, bonfire, hung game, lavender and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and full, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow, firm, chewy tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. This has plenty of mid-palate stuffing and length, but it is a bit chunky today and not the most delineated example of Cairanne out there, though more precision may well emerge with some bottle age. It certainly has the structure to age nicely and it would not surprise me if it really comes into its own three to five years down the road. This has good bones, and if it develops more detail down the road, my score will seem a tad conservative. 2024-2040+. **88+**.

#### **2017 Cairanne “la Cigarette”- Domaine de Dionysos**

The 2017 Cairanne “la Cigarette” from Domaine de Dionysos is a lovely bottle, with the vines hailing from parcels planted on red clay littered with *galets roulés*. The *cépages* here is fifty-five percent grenache, thirty-five percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre and the 2017 version comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of raspberries, smoked meats, woodsmoke, a superb base of stony soil tones, pepper, gentle notes of *garrigue* (more lavender than rosemary), a touch of cedar and a lovely array of Indian spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, bouncy and vibrant finish of impressive breed and complexity. This is first class Cairanne that is still in climbing mode and will be even better with a few more years bottle age, but is already very tasty indeed! 2023-2045. **92**.



### ***Saint-Péray***

#### **2019 Saint-Péray “les Maisons de Victor”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

Julien Pilon now produces eighty percent white wines, with much of his production based on purchased fruit, but since his start in 2010 (without any vineyard land at all), he has grown to now own five hectares. His 2019 Saint-Péray “les Maisons de Victor” is produced from a blend of eighty percent Marsanne and twenty percent Roussanne and comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The nose wafts from the glass in a pretty blend of peach, hazelnut, musky floral tones of honeysuckle and acacia blossoms and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent, with a fine, plump core of fruit, good soil underneath, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is an excellent bottle of Saint-Péray. 2021-2028. **90.**

### ***Cornas***

#### **2019 Cornas “Domaine de Saint Pierre”- Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné**

The 2019 Cornas “Domaine de Saint Pierre” from Caroline Frey at Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné is produced from vines planted between 1985 and 1990, near the Chapelle de Saint Pierre perched at the top of the steep hillside vineyards of the appellation. The 2019 version is an excellent young wine- deep, ripe and very precise on both the nose and palate. The wine comes in at a full fifteen percent octane, but handles its alcohol beautifully and shows no signs of heat on the palate and lovely purity on the nose. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very promising blend of black raspberries, pepper, hung game, black olive, stony minerality, bonfire and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, firm and well-integrated tannins and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is first class Cornas! 2034-2085. **93+.**

### ***Saint-Joseph Blanc***

#### **2018 Saint-Joseph Blanc- E. Guigal**

I do not think anyone has really commented on just how important the Guigal family’s purchase of great old Saint-Joseph vineyards purchased from the Grippat family in 2000 and the Domaine de Vallouit in 2001. With these purchases, the Guigal family became one of the finest vineyard holders in the appellation, with all of their old, steep, terraced vineyards right in the heart of the appellation on the granite hillsides of Mauves and Tournon (right alongside those of the Gonon and Grippa families). Their Saint-Joseph Blanc is from these old vines, ranging up to fifty years of age and planted on limestone and decomposing granite, with the *cépages* of the 2019 being ninety-five percent marsanne and five percent roussanne. The wine is raised half in stainless steel and half in cask, with the barrels split fifty-fifty between new casks and “one wine” barrels. The 2019 offers up a refined, youthful nose of pear, lemon peel, coriander seed, a fine base of minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and bounce, sound acids and a long, complex and classy finish. This wine comes in at fourteen percent octane and is quite approachable today, but will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. Good juice. 2021-2030. **91.**



*The stunningly beautiful, terraced vineyards of the best sector of the Saint-Joseph appellation.*

### **2019 Saint-Joseph Blanc “Dimanche à Lima”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

The 2019 Saint-Joseph Blanc from Julien Pilon is made from a fifty-fifty blend of Marsanne and Roussanne, with the wine raised in barrels for nine months, with ten percent of the casks new each year. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a beautiful nose of pear, white peach, hazelnuts, a fine base of granitic soil (though ten percent of the grapes here grow on chalky soils in the far south of the appellation), honeysuckle and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is truly outstanding Saint-Joseph Blanc! 2021-2028. **92+**.

### **2018 Saint-Joseph Blanc- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)**

Stéphane Montez’s old vine bottling of Saint-Joseph Blanc bottling is composed of a blend of two-thirds roussanne and one-third marsanne, with the vineyards planted on granitic soils. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in older casks. The 2018 vintage delivers a beautifully precise and zesty bouquet of lime, pear, a hint of papaya, stony soil tones, orange blossoms and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet for a 2018 white, with a lovely core, good acids and grip and a long, complex and gently exotic finish. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane and has just a

touch of tropical shadings from the style of the vintage, but this is a lovely white wine from 2018 and a most impressive result in this year that was so challenging for white wines! 2021-2028. **91.**

### ***Saint-Joseph Rouge***

#### **2019 Saint-Joseph- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott**

The Saint-Joseph from Graeme and Julie Bott hails from twenty year-old vineyards in the northern part of the appellation in the villages of Chavanay and Saint-Pierre de Boeuf. The bunches are completely destemmed, the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and the *elevage* is done in Burgundy barrels. The 2019 offers up a superb young bouquet of cassis, dark berries, pepper, hung game, black olive, dark soil tones, a bit of nutty oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a very good mid-palate core, lovely soil signature and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, classy finish. This does not have the same granitic mineral drive as examples from the heart of the old appellation around Tournon and Mauves, but in all other respects, this is a first class example of Saint-Joseph. 2025-2055. **92.**

#### **2019 Saint-Joseph “Rue des Poissonniers Paris XVIIIe”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

The “Rue des Poissonniers Paris XVIIIe” cuvée of Saint-Joseph from Julien Pilon is from his parcels of vines in the northern part of the appellation. The grapes are harvested by hand, destemmed and raised in Burgundy casks for one year, with ten percent new oak renewed each vintage. The 2019 version is excellent, offering up a deep and promising nose of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, a fine base of soil and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, impressive mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, balanced and classy finish. This is fine Saint-Joseph! 2025-2050+. **92.**

#### **2018 Saint-Joseph- E. Guigal**

The 2018 regular bottling of Saint-Joseph from the Guigal family is all from their own steep, terraced vineyards, which they purchased primarily from Jean-Louis Grippat in 1999, situated in the towns of Tournon and Mauves in the heart and soul of the appellation. Their 2018 comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and beautifully pure bouquet of cassis, dark berries, smoked meats, pepper, a fine base of granitic soil tones, a touch of new oak and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, firm, buried tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish that shows just a whisper of backend heat. This is a broad-shouldered wine in the style of the vintage, but an excellent young Saint-Joseph. 2028-2055+. **92.**

#### **2018 Saint-Joseph “Lieu à Dit”- E. Guigal**

As I mentioned last year in my note on the 2017 vintage of this fine cuvée, these vines in Tournon were purchased by the Guigal family from the former Domaine Grippat in 2000. They hail from the Saint-Joseph vineyard itself that eventually gave its name to the entire appellation, with most of them having been planted in 1956. The Guigals age this wine in half new oak and half “one wine” barrels for fully two years prior to bottling, and the 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane. The bouquet of the wine wafts from the glass in a new oaky and very complex blend of cassis, black raspberries, black olives, a lovely base of stony soil tones, pepper, grilled meats, bonfire and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with excellent mineral undertow, ripe, firm tannins, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, complex and new oaky finish. Stylistically, this reminds me

strongly of the La Mouline vintages I cut my teeth on from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. It is probably a bit more marked by its new oak than I would allow if I were in charge of the winemaking for this bottling (as I would want to highlight its underlying *terroir* carried forth by those vines planted in 1956!), but even with that in mind, this is still a truly stunning young wine! 2028-2065+. **94.**

**2018 Saint-Joseph “Cuvée du Papy”- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)**

The old vine bottling of “Cuvée du Papy” from Stéphane Montez is excellent in 2018. The vines used for this cuvée are Monsieur Montez’s oldest vines, ranging from forty to more than seventy years of age, and they are planted in the steepest section of the appellation, across the river from the hill of Hermitage. The wine comes in at a fairly ripe 14.5 percent in this warm vintage and delivers outstanding aromatic precision in its bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, bonfire, spit-roasted meats, pepper, black olive, stony minerality and gentle spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant on the attack, with a fine core of black fruit, excellent soil transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins and impressive backend lift on the complex, ripely tannic and tangy finish. This is an outstanding example of Saint-Joseph that will age long and gracefully. 2028-2055+. **93.**

***Crozes-Hermitage Blanc***

**2019 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc “On the Rhône Again”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

Julien Pilon’s Crozes-Hermitage Blanc is made entirely from Marsanne, sourced from two vineyard parcels in the village of Mercurol in the heart of the appellation. Julien raises the wine in cask for ten months, with fifteen percent of the oak new for this cuvée. The wine offers up a refined and complex nose of pear, orange peel, almond, white flowers and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a good core and soil signature, a lovely girdle of acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, wide open and complex finish that closes with lovely lift. Good juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

**2018 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott**

The 2018 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc from the Bott family is composed from a blend of eighty percent roussanne and twenty percent marsanne, with the vines planted in the Les Chassis sector of Crozes in the southern end of the appellation. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in *barriques* for ten months prior to bottling. It delivers a ripe, but pretty nose of nectarine, pear, coriander seed, a good base of soil, fruit blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and wide open in personality, with a good core and soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, ripe finish. This has just a touch of the heaviness of the white wines of 2018 evident on the backend, but it is quite minimal and this is really a quite good example of a 2018 white wine. 2021-2028. **89.**

***Crozes-Hermitage Rouge***

**2019 Crozes-Hermitage “Domaine de Thalabert”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné**

The 2019 vintage of the Domaine de Thalabert from Paul Jaboulet is a superb young wine that very much recalls the 1990 version when it was young, with perhaps even more depth and potential plushness. The hail on June 15<sup>th</sup> of 2019 was centered on the southern half of the Crozes appellation, which is unfortunately where the Domaine de Thalabert was situated, so I have to imagine this wine was made from yields that were cut back by half from the hail in early summer. But, the wine has really turned out beautifully, coming in ripe and complex at fifteen

percent octane and delivering a deep bouquet of black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, black tea, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of bitter chocolate, black olive and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied, firm and beautifully balanced, with a sappy core of black fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and refined finish. This is a big and ripe vintage of the Thalabert, but impeccably balanced at the same time. Fine, fine juice. 2029-2055. **92.**

#### **2018 Crozes-Hermitage “le Rouvre”- Domaine Yann Chave**

Yann Chave’s Crozes-Hermitage “le Rouvre” hails from his oldest vines in his fairly stony vineyard parcels in the plain of Chassis, with the vines fifty to seventy years of age. The wine is raised in one wine and two wine *demi-muid*. The 2018 comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and delivers an excellent aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, woodsmoke, a lovely array of spice tones and a touch of cedary oak from the used *demi-muids*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a plush core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, vibrant and very promising finish. This is an excellent example of Crozes that needs a few years in the cellar to soften up, but is going to be excellent. 2028-2055. **91+.**

#### **2018 Crozes-Hermitage- E. Guigal**

The Guigals make their Crozes-Hermitage from their own vineyards, which they first began purchasing in 1999 and which are clustered in the northern half of the appellation around the towns of Mercurol, Gervans and Crozes. These are hillside vineyards, rather than on the plains found further south, with the vines now averaging thirty-five years of age. The wine is aged for a year in barrels produced from the Guigal cooperage in Ampuis and the 2018 version tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol in this warm summer. It offers up a fine, complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, pepper, grilled meats, stony soil tones, just a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully detailed, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a serious example of Crozes and a fine value! 2021-2045. **91+.**

#### ***Hermitage Blanc***

#### **2019 Hermitage Blanc “Prisme”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

The Hermitage Blanc from Julien Pilon is sourced from two *lieux à dits* on the hill of Hermitage: les Rocoules and la Maison Blanche, with the wine a fifty-fifty blend from the two parcels. The wine is raised entirely in new, five hundred liter barrels and comes in at fourteen percent octane in 2019. It offers up a fine young bouquet of pear, white peach, nutskin, chalky soil tones, dried flowers, orange peel and a quite discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent acids and grip, very good focus and a long, beautifully balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a properly young bottle of Hermitage Blanc and really deserves some time in the cellar to blossom completely. A fine, fine example. 2024-2050. **93.**



### **2018 Hermitage Blanc- E. Guigal**

The Guigal family's bottling of Hermitage Blanc is almost entirely composed of marsanne, with ninety-five percent of the blend being this grape variety and the other five percent being roussanne, with the vines ranging from thirty to fully ninety years of age! The wine is raised for two years entirely in oak barrels, with the casks all "one wine barrels". The 2018 version is a lovely young wine, coming in at fourteen percent alcohol and offering up a youthful bouquet of nectarine, pear, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of raw almond, white lilies and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rally has excellent structure for a 2018 white wine, with a rock solid core, excellent soil undertow and grip, very good acids for the vintage and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is excellent juice. 2021-2040+. **93.**

### ***Hermitage Rouge***

#### **2019 Hermitage "La Maison Bleue"- Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné**

The 2019 Hermitage "La Maison Bleue" from Caroline Frey at Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné is a beautiful young wine. This is plenty ripe in this vintage, coming in at 15.5 percent octane, but not lacking in either precision or freshness. The fruit for the La Maison Bleue hail primarily from the *lieux à dits* of les Murets, les Signaux and Diognières, all of which lie on the eastern side of the hill of Hermitage. The wine is raised in entirely the same manner as La Chapelle, with the bunches destemmed and then *elevage* done in a combination of *barriques* and



*demi-muids* for eighteen months, with no more than fifteen percent of the oak new in any vintage. The bouquet of the 2019 La Maison Bleue offers up a deep, complex and black fruity bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, smoked meats, a very complex base of soil tones, bonfire, an exotic touch of black tea, a discreet framing of cedary oak and a topnote of lovely spice elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with firm, buried tannins, excellent focus and grip, impeccable balance and a long, youthful and very, very promising finish. This reminds me very much of the excellent examples 1990 La Chapelle out of the blocks, but with a more buried structural chassis. 2035-2080. **93.**

#### **2019 Hermitage “La Chapelle”- Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné**

The flagship bottling of Hermitage “La Chapelle” from Caroline Frey is treated the same as the La Maison Bleue in the cellars, but the fruit for this bottling hails from different *lieux à dits* on the hill: mostly from Le Méal and Les Bessards, with smaller portions of the blend from parcels in Les Rocoules and Les Greffeix. Like the La Maison Bleue bottling in 2019, the La Chapelle was raised in fifteen percent new oak (both *barriques* and *demi-muids*) for eighteen months and comes in listed at 15.5 percent octane in this vintage, despite Madame Frey and her team at Jaboulet being one of the earliest harvesters on the hill of Hermitage each year. The wine is clearly a legend in the making, showing no signs of *sur maturité* in its complex and sappy nose of sweet dark berries and cassis, pepper, roasted venison, woodsmoke, stony soil tones, violets and just a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with bottomless depth at the core, ripe, firm tannins, excellent balance and focus and a long, nascently complex and utterly seamless finish. This is certainly a big wine, but it is so impeccably balanced that one does not have the sense of either power or muscle, but rather simply incredible depth and intensity of flavor. It is most assuredly not hot on the palate! It is still so youthful that I do not have a clear sense of when it will really start to blossom, but clearly it is not going to start to hit on all cylinders until it has had a full couple of decades’ worth of bottle age. 2040-2100. **95.**

#### **2018 Hermitage “Domaine des Tourettes”- Delas Frères**

The Delas Frères’ bottling of Hermitage hails from the three *lieux à dits* of les Bessards, l’Hermite and le Sabot. The wine is fermented in cement vats and aged in *barriques*. The 2018 Domaine des Tourettes is a ripe wine, coming in listed at fifteen percent octane and offering up a deep and still youthful nose of cassis, spit-roasted venison, pepper, stony soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite classy in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, buried tannins, fine balance and grip and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. There is perhaps just a whisper of *sur maturité* in evidence here on both the nose and palate, which reminds me a bit of how the 1983 Jaboulet La Chapelle showed aromatically out of the blocks. This is a very good wine in the making. 2032-2080. **92+.**

#### **Condrieu**

##### **2020 Condrieu- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott**

The Condrieu from Graeme and Julie Bott is one of the lowest octane examples I have tasted from this appellation in a few vintages, coming in listed at an even thirteen percent alcohol. It is produced from a parcel of twenty-five year-old vines, is barrel-fermented and aged in small casks for ten months. The wine is very pretty on the nose, offering up a youthful blend of pear, lemon, coriander seed, a lovely base of minerality, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core of pure fruit,

excellent mineral drive, outstanding acidity for modern day Condrieu and a long, complex and quite refined finish. This is a lovely bottle of Condrieu that will be even more complex with a bit of bottle age. 2021-2035. **92+**.

#### **2019 Condrieu “Îône”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

The 2019 Condrieu “Îône” from Julien Pilon is a lovely example, coming in at a well-measured fourteen percent octane and offering up an expressive nose of nectarine, passion fruit, papaya, honeysuckle, a lovely base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, good acids and grip and a long, ripe and well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle of Condrieu, with the ripeness inherent in the vintage handled quite deftly, with only a whisper of backend heat in evidence. Julien Pilon is clearly making some of the most beautiful white wines in all of the northern Rhône these days! 2021-2030. **92.**

#### **2018 Condrieu- Domaine Martin Clerc**

Martin Clerc’s Condrieu is made from twenty year-old vines, so they are just coming into their period of peak performance. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, goes through full malo and is raised half in older casks and half in stainless steel, with the 2018 version coming in listed at 13.5 percent octane. The deeply-pitched nose delivers a ripe and complex blend of pear, tangerine, tropical flowers, a touch of hazelnut, a good base of soil and just a touch of rosemary and a bit of oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with sound framing acids, good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is one of the successful 2018 whites, but it will not make old bones and will be best drunk up over the next few years. 2021-2024. **88.**

#### **2018 Condrieu “la Galopine”- Delas Frères**

The la Galopine bottling of Condrieu from Delas includes up to twenty percent of the cuvée that is barrel-fermented in new casks. The 2018 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and delivers a very pretty, ripe nose of pear, passion fruit, citrus fruit blossoms, a touch of almond, a lovely base of soil and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and quite precise for the vintage, with a full-bodied format that offers up fine depth at the core, very good framing acids, fine focus and balance and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is a very good 2018 Condrieu. 2021-2028. **90.**

#### **2018 Condrieu “Clos Boucher”- Delas Frères**

The single vineyard Condrieu bottling of Clos Boucher from Delas hails from a south-facing vineyard that lies adjacent to Château Grillet. The wine is entirely barrel-fermented and only produced by Delas in vintages they deem exceptional. The 2018 Clos Boucher tips the scales also at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely, youthful bouquet of pear, passion fruit, a touch of tangerine, beautiful minerality, almond, acacia blossoms and a quite refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and grip, fairly gentle acids (in the style of the vintage) and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is so well-balanced that it may end up keeping longer in bottle than I anticipate, but it has the fairly moderate acidity of 2018 and will probably drink at its finest in its relative youth. 2021-2030. **92.**

#### **2018 Condrieu “la Doriane”- E. Guigal**

The Guigal family first began producing its reserve bottling of Condrieu, la Doriane, in the 1994 vintage. The wine is aged entirely in new oak casks for a full year prior to bottling and

the 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane. The wine has impressive freshness and precision for the vintage, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, passion fruit, casaba melon, acacia blossoms, beautiful soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full, with a plush core of fruit, good acids and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and gently new oak finish. The depth of fruit of the 2018 vintage has already swallowed up a lot of the oak influence here on the palate, so that the wine is already drinking very well indeed out of the blocks. It is a big, ripe wine in the style of 2018 whites, but also has impressive backend lift and structural bounce. Good juice and a very fine result in a year that was not all that favorable to white wines. 2021-2035. 92.



### ***Côte-Rôtie***

#### **2019 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Graeme & Julie Bott**

Julie and Graeme Bott have bought two small parcels in the *Côte de Blonde* section of Côte-Rôtie (Semons and Lancement), as well as a few rows in the *Côte de Brune* vineyard of Fongeat, from which they produced this limited release bottling. They retain twenty-five percent whole clusters for this wine, which is again fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for the first year in *barriques*, with fifteen percent of the casks new. The wine is then racked into older barrels for another six or seven months to finish up its *elevage*. The 2019 version comes in at a svelte thirteen percent octane and delivers a deep and classic aromatic constellation of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, stony soil tones, a touch of hazelnut, bonfire and a deft touch

of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, soil-driven and full, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, seamlessly balanced and very complex finish. This is totally superb young Côte-Rôtie! 2033-2085. **94.**

**2019 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet**

The 2019 la Viallière from the Champet family is a deep, concentrated and tangy young wine that shows enormous potential for the long haul. The bouquet is still quite primary, but offers up a deep blend of cassis, pepper, a nice touch of youthful stems, roasted venison, a fine base of soil tones, hints of the black olive to come and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and rock solid at the core, with excellent mineral undertow, firm, well-integrated tannins and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. One can really taste the small berries of the vintage in this wine, which will need fifteen years to properly blossom, but should last for decades and prove to be a great wine once it has come out from behind its shell. Structurally, it reminds me a bit of the young 1983s in Côte-Rôtie, but with more mid-palate stuffing. 2034-2085. **93+.**

**2018 Côte-Rôtie “Colline de Couzou”- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond**

The Bonnefond brothers in Ampuis raise their Côte-Rôtie bottlings now in four hundred liter casks, with their Colline de Couzou bottling seeing ten percent new oak and all the rest of the barrels being older. Their 2018 version comes in at 14.5 percent in this vintage and delivers a lovely, classic aromatic constellation of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, woodsmoke, hazelnuts, a lovely base of soil and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, elegant and plush at the core, with fine soil signature and grip, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish that closes with a lovely note of hazelnut. This is a fine, fine example! 2028-2075. **92.**

**2018 Côte-Rôtie “les Rochins”- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond**

The Bonnefond brothers have changed the spelling of this *lieu à dit* to “les Rochins” on their labels, though it is better known as “les Rochains” and appears that way on most maps. It lies just above La Landonne. This is all old vines, as one hectare of the family’s parcel was planted in 1955 and the youngest here are still more than forty years of age! Like all of the brothers’ examples of Côte-Rôtie, the bunches are destemmed and raised in four hundred liter barrels, with this cuvée seeing twenty-five percent new oak each year and the remainder raised in one wine barrels. The 2018 Rochins is deeper on the nose than the Colline de Couzou bottling, offering up a superb aromatic blend of red and black raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, bonfire, a stony base of soil tones, a nice base of cedary oak and a topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with an excellent core of ripe fruit, firm, buried tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and superb finish. This is an outstanding bottle of young Côte-Rôtie, with this vineyard’s close proximity to La Landonne very much in evidence! 2032-2085. **94.**

**2018 Côte-Rôtie “les Fils à Jo”- Domaine Champet**

Maxime and Romain Champet first started producing their “les Fils à Jo” bottling of Côte-Rôtie in the 2015 vintage, and the 2018 and 2017 versions are the first that I have tasted to this new addition the family lineup. It is made from a parcel of fifty-plus year-old syrah vines in a stony section of la Viallière and is aged in older Burgundy casks, rather than the used *demi-muids* and *foudres* primarily used for the regular bottling of la Viallière. The 2018 vintage of les Fils à Jo is a stunning young wine, offering up a deep, pure and very precise bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, dark chocolate, stony soil tones, smoked meats, incipient notes of both

black olive and hazelnut and just a whisper of oak from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very mineral in personality, with a superb core of black fruit, excellent focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and very complex finish. This is a brilliant wine in the making! 2032-2085+. **95.**

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “Seigneur de Maugiron”- Delas Frères**

The “Seigneur de Maugiron” from Delas Frères is their regular bottling of Côte-Rôtie, for they have also produced a single vineyard La Landonne bottling since the 1997. The Seigneur de Maugiron is sourced from parcels in both the *Côte de Brune* and the *Côte de Blonde*, with seventy percent of the grapes hailing from the former sector and thirty percent from the latter. Delas augments their own holdings in Côte-Rôtie with purchased fruit to make this bottling, so that forty percent comes from estate-owned parcels and sixty percent is bought in. The grapes are completely destemmed for this bottling, with the wine undergoing its primary fermentation in cement vats and its malo in barrels. Fifteen percent of the *barriques* are new each year for this bottling, with the remainder of the casks “one wine” barrels. The 2018 Seigneur de Maugiron comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a nascently complex nose of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, hazelnuts, pepper, a good base of soil, woodsmoke and just a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and really impressive backend lift on the long and complex finish. This is still a touch shy on the nose and on the attack on the palate, but from the mid-palate back, it is really an energetic wine of serious potential. Good juice. 2029-2075. **92.**

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “Brune et Blonde de Guigal”- E. Guigal**

It seems to me that the 2018 vintage is the first to bear this slightly different label of “Brune et Blonde de Guigal” for this cuvée, which had previously been labeled as “Brune et Blonde” dating back at least to the first vintage I purchased of this wine, which was the 1978. As I have mentioned before, I used to buy this wine by the case in every good vintage and it has always been an excellent example. The 2018 is no exception, offering a deep and complex aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, a complex base of soil tones, lovely spice elements, woodsmoke and a topnote of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite light on its feet for a 2018, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent stony undertow, impressive focus and grip and a long, complex and ripely tannic finish. This is young and needs some bottle age, but it will be an excellent wine in due course. 2030-2075. **92+.**

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “la Giroflarie”- Domaine Patrick Jasmin**

The 2018 Côte-Rôtie “la Giroflarie” from Patrick Jasmin is a beautiful young wine. As I mentioned last year, the Jasmin family’s parcels in the appellation all lie in the *Côte de Blonde* sector, in the *lieux à dits* of Les Moutonnes and La Côte Baudin. Four percent of viognier is co-planted here with the syrah and the two grapes are fermented together in the traditional style. The bunches are destemmed and the wine sees a tiny percentage of new oak during its *elevage*, which is primarily done in puncheons and *demi-muids*. The 2018 comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, stony soil tones, *garrigue*, a hint of black olive, discreet notes of cedar and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with lovely focus and balance, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is not as powerful as some examples, but that has been the Jasmin family’s calling card for the two generations that I have been drinking these

wines with great pleasure, and they always age superbly well and end up being some of the finest examples of Côte-Rôtie in their respective vintages. The 2018 will be no exception! 2033-2085. 94.

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “Fortis”- Domaine du Montillet (Stéphane Montez)**

The Fortis bottling of Côte-Rôtie from Stéphane Montez is composed entirely from syrah, with the wine raised in *demi-muids*, of which twenty percent are new each vintage. The wine’s fruit comes from his parcels in the *lieux à dits* of Montmain and les Bercherries as well as Le Combard, which he helped jointly clear and plant with the Barge and Gangloff families. All of these vineyards lie in the *Côte de Blonde* sector in the southern end of the appellation. The 2018 Fortis tips the scales at 14.5 percent and delivers a superb bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, woodsmoke, roasted meats, pepper, lovely soil tones and a framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core of black fruit, superb soil undertow, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, superbly balanced and very classy young finish. This is excellent Côte-Rôtie, with the ripeness of the vintage beautifully synthesized with the inherent elegance of the *Côte de Blonde*! The new oak here is very nicely done, but there is little doubt that this bottling, all raised in used *demi-muids*, could be even better! 2030-2080. 92+.



#### **2017 Côte-Rôtie “les Fils à Jo”- Domaine Champet**

The 2017 vintage of “les Fils à Jo” bottling of Côte-Rôtie from the Champet brothers is more refined aromatically than the still quite primary 2018 version. The bouquet is pure and



beautifully expressive already, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, toasted hazelnuts, pepper, bonfire, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, black olive, a hint of licorice, spiced meats and a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with superb focus and grip, a lovely core, excellent mineral undertow, firm, buried tannins and a long, complex and very, very promising finish. Where the 2018 version trades on its power and timeless structural chassis, the 2017 is an utterly classical, elegant example of Côte-Rôtie (though still with all of the sturdy character of la Viallière!) that is already showing the first vestiges of the velvety palate texture to come and stunning perfume and flavor complexity, despite remaining still a very young wine. Brilliant juice in the making! 2031-2085. **95+.**

**2017 Côte-Rôtie “Château d’Ampuis”- E. Guigal**

The 2017 Côte-Rôtie “Château d’Ampuis” from the Guigals is a beautiful, new oaky example of this marvelous appellation. The wine is made from vines that are all in excess of fifty years of age, with the bottling’s *cépages* being ninety-three percent syrah and seven percent viognier. The wine is aged entirely in new oak casks for thirty-eight months prior to bottling, so that the 2017 is the new release. The wine comes in at an even fourteen percent octane and delivers a lovely, new oaky nose of raspberries, spiced meats, a beautifully complex base of soil, woodsmoke, a touch of hazelnut, violets and a very well done framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very, very promising finish. This is a great bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making, but, to my palate, it needs some time in the cellar to fully bury its framing of new oak, so that the other elements can take center stage. But, the balance here is lovely and in the fullness of time, as the oak recedes a bit more, this is going to be stellar juice. 2030-2085. **95.**

**2004 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Patrick Jasmin (served from magnum)**

As is customary with the very classically-styled wines from the Jasmin family, the 2004 Côte-Rôtie remains still a fairly youthful wine, particularly in magnum, but its ultimate quality is already very easy to appreciate. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a bright, beautifully transparent and promising bouquet of raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, a nice touch of stems from the whole clusters, a fine base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely array of spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, still some moderate backend tannins in magnum and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish of impressive complexity. This does not have a ton of mid-palate density, but it has plenty of intensity of flavor and is only a couple of years away from primetime drinking, in magnum, and is probably delicious in regular-sized format right now. Fine juice. 2024-2065+. **93+.**

**1999 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jamet (served from magnum)**

The 1999 Jamet Côte-Rôtie is starting to drink brilliantly, even out of magnum, and this is a quintessential bottle of Côte-Rôtie from a great producer in a top flight vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, hazelnuts, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, pepper, black tea and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully plush at the core, with great focus and balance, lovely soil signature and grip, suave, modest tannins and a very, very long, pure and simply gorgeous finish. This is such a great wine! 2021-2065+. **97.**

### ***And a Few Bandol***

#### **2016 Bandol “Cuvée Estagnol”- Domaine la Bastide Blanche**

Domaine Bastide Blanche’s single vineyard Estagnol cuvée is crafted from fifty year-old vines, with the *cépages* of this bottling being ninety-two percent mourvèdre and eight percent grenache. The vineyard is planted on a mix of limestone and clay, and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in older *foudres*. The 2016 version of Estagnol is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up a ripe and precise bouquet of cassis, blackberries, cigar ash, gentle notes of pepper, chalky soil tones, a bit of tree bark, gentle notes of cedar, a bit of bonfire and a lovely array of sweet botanicals in the upper register that hint at rosemary, balsam bough and tarragon. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a gorgeous core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, firm and buried tannins and a long, suave and very refined young finish. This is still a young wine, but it is more approachable out of the blocks than the 2015 version was a year ago, and with extended aeration, it is really already pretty tasty in its youthful and moderately chewy guise. But, the wine has many more layers to unfold and further cellaring will be richly rewarded. I would tuck it away for another decade and really let it start to hit on all cylinders! 2031-2085. **94.**

#### **2016 Bandol “Cuvée Fontanéou”- Domaine la Bastide Blanche**

The Cuvée Fontanéou from Domaine la Bastide Blanche is made from even older vines, as this parcel is planted to vines in excess of sixty years of age today. The vineyard is planted to the same percentages of mourvèdre (ninety-two percent) and grenache (eight percent) as the Estagnol, but this vineyard has a northerly exposition and soils of limestone and red clay. The 2016 Cuvée Fontanéou is another stunning young Bandol, delivering a refined aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar wrapper, a complex base of soil tones, gentle notes of *garrigue*, woodsmoke, tree bark and a topnote of coffee bean. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great mineral drive, ripe, fine-grained and gently chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is stunning Bandol in the making, but it is a bit more structured out of the blocks than the Estagnol in this vintage and will not be tempting to drink too early. But a decade down the road, watch out, as it is going to be stellar! 2031-2085. **94+.**

## RECENTLY-TASTED BEAUJOLAIS END OF SUMMER 2021



The continued delays in shipping containers of wines out of Europe has put the customary arrival times for different categories of wines all out of whack over the course of this year, so I am trying to adjust my regular coverage schedule for regional articles to accommodate for some of these later-arriving containers. At this point, it seems to me that most importers and distributors in the New York market are just happy to get their pallets onto containers and have almost given up on their traditional scheduling to time with particular seasons in the market, so things have been arriving piecemeal and everyone is just happy to have gotten the wines onto a ship and over to the US. Consequently, I received a nice range of new Beaujolais arrivals that have just landed here in the last several weeks, and so, even though I just did a piece on the region's wines back two issues ago, I saw no reason not to do another, short follow-up article and get these wines reviewed while they remain available in the market. The majority of the new arrivals are from the lovely 2019 vintage or-later released cuvées from the previous year; consequently, I have included vintage synopses of both growing seasons below to remind readers of the differences between the two vintages.

The 2019 vintage in Beaujolais has produced a bevy of truly lovely wines and this is a top quality year for the region, though the most successful wines are certainly not uniform in style, as drought conditions certainly varied among the different sub-regions of Beaujolais in the summer of 2019 and produced differently structured wines as a result. The growing season was out of the blocks early in this year, but this has now often become a cause for concern for *vignerons* across Europe, as this early growth puts the vines at risk for spring frosts that will damage any precocious growth and can negatively impact yields for the vintage. Beaujolais 2019 had frost damage on April 5<sup>th</sup>, with some parcels hit quite hard by the freeze and others fortunate to sneak by without significant damage, but costing my producers some sleepless nights. After the frost damage was past, the growing season revved up with plenty of sunshine, often hot temperatures, and no precipitation whatsoever, so drought conditions became the primary cause for concern amongst *vignerons* throughout the entire region. Much of Beaujolais received some much needed precipitation in the middle of August, which was able to replenish water supplies and get vines ripening again that had shut down due to hydric stress. The rains were very heavy when they came, which was far from ideal, but at least there was water in the soils again and the struggling vines were very much relieved. Most importantly for the sectors that received this abundant rainfall in mid-August, the skin to juice ratios in the bunches were able to come back into balance, as before the rains, the berries were very small, had thick skins and very little juice in them.

However, as I mentioned in the last piece on Beaujolais back in April, these August rain storms were not consistent from north to south in Beaujolais, causing far less relief to the hydric stress in the most northerly communes of the Cru Beaujolais section of the appellation, with far less precipitation leading to wines that are more structured and concentrated from the drought than is typical of the 2019 vintage in general. The heavy storms of mid-August also brought more problems to the southern end of the appellation, as they were accompanied by hail, which did quite a bit of damage to some villages in the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages sectors to the south, particularly to the area of Pierres Dorées. For vineyards hit by the August hail, the crop was decimated and potential yields were reduced by as much as seventy-five percent. 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. The summer of 2019, as had been the case the year before, was also subject to some baking temperature spikes during July and August as well, with global warming flexing its muscles with temperatures in excess of one hundred degrees Fahrenheit on several days during the peak of summer. So, where the rains fell without hail, they were most useful in plumping up berries again that were dehydrated and the vintage was able to slide back into normal potential alcohol ranges again as the berries gained juice through the absorption of the rainfall.

But, as I noted previously, even where there was no hail, the August rains were not evenly divided across the entire region and so not every *vigneron* benefited from the precipitation. While the southern end of the region was pummeled with hail on August 18<sup>th</sup>, the far northern Crus of Beaujolais: Juliéna, 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. The lack of consistency of precipitation with these August rainstorms, not to mention the swath of hail in the

south, contributed to quite a bit of 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 vigneron 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!

As readers may recall of the preceding vintage of 2018, it is a year that delivers the ripeness and depth of the 2015 vintage in the region, but with superior freshness and bounce to the fruit tones in the wines and less of the overtly roasted notes of *sur maturité* that define a great many of the wines from the 2015 vintage. This is obviously not true of all of the 2015 Beaujolais, as there are some deftly light on their feet wines, but overall, it is a vintage that is very much defined by its torrid growing season and attendant depth, muscle and roasted fruit tones. However, based upon my tastings of the vintage, the 2018s have generally ended up quite a bit fresher in style than the corresponding 2015, even where they have similarly broad shoulders and more muscular personalities of a torrid growing season. Part of this can probably be attributed to 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, which was drawn upon in the growing season of 2018.

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 a generous number of bunches on each vine), which somewhat mitigated the blazing heat of August of 2018. There also were good groundwater reserves to be relied upon by the vines 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* reported being quite delighted with the quality and quantity of the bunches when harvest 2018 started to kick into high gear. These beautiful grapes have turned into lovely wines in due course, with plenty of ripe, fleshy fruit tones, impressive depth and good freshness that augurs well for their evolution in bottle.

As is the case with the subsequent vintage of 2019, the Beaujolais of 2018 are not a homogenous set of wines in terms of style, as everything ripened up briskly at the end of the growing season and some parcels had to be picked later than others, as there were only so many hands to go around to bring in fruit in the warm days of early September. The plots of vines that were cleared a bit later have often resulted in wines which are generally a touch higher in alcohol than is typical of Beaujolais, and these 2018s can often be quite muscular in personality and quite structured out of the blocks. The wines of the vintage done in this style, which are often found in the already more broad-shouldered Crus such as Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent, really demand some cellaring time, but seem destined to be excellent and very long-lived wines. Many veteran winegrowers in the region, searching through past vintages for ones similar to the 2018s, have often cited the very ripe, powerful vintage of 1947 as a possible precursor to the longest-lived of the 2018s, and having been fortunate enough to have drunk a few of those oldies, I can certainly see that the comparisons between the two vintages may have some credence. As is my custom with reports on Beaujolais, the notes that follow also include a smattering of wines from earlier vintages, as I am in the habit of aging my Cru Beaujolais for far longer than most wine drinkers and have plenty in my cellar to dip into when opportunity allows from at least the 2005 vintage forwards. However, given the very generous pile of samples I have been working through for this most recent issues of the newsletter, I have not been able to dip into the cellar with any regularity over the last couple of months, so most of the tasting notes that follow are for wines from the 2019 and 2018 vintages.

*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***

#### **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 fine bottle of chardonnay and has opened up beautifully since I last tasted it in the early spring. The nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, a touch of pineapple, a superb base of limestone soil tones, a hint of toastiness and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and quite classy finish. As I have mentioned in the past, this is quite a unique example of Beaujolais Blanc, as the vineyards here are in the very north of the appellation and very, very close to the southern limit of the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation! Fine juice. 2021-2026. **90.**



### ***Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages***

#### **2019 Beaujolais- Domaine de Cornillac (Jean Loron)**

The 2019 Domaine de Cornillac Beaujolais continues to blossom nicely since the last time I tasted it. The wine is nicely plump in personality, offering up the ripe fruit of the vintage nicely coupled with fine soil signature. The nicely black fruity bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, black cherries, a nice red fruity edge of cranberry, fresh thyme, a fine base of soil, a touch of raw cocoa and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is a lovely example of the 2019 vintage, offering up impressive depth and stuffing for its level. 2021-2030. **89.**

#### **2019 Beaujolais-Villages- Château de Lavernette**

Château de Lavernette's 2019 Beaujolais-Villages is quite typical of the wines produced at the northern end of the region in this vintage, where drought conditions created more concentrated wines than is customary in most years. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pomegranate, cherries, lovely meaty tones, a fine base of soil, fresh thyme, bonfire and a fine array of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full, focused and bouncy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, fairly substantial tannins for its level and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. As I noted the last time I tasted the wine, this is a broad-shouldered example of its appellation, with the structure and stuffing of a good Morgon and it will need a bit of bottle age to start to soften and drink with generosity. But, it will be a lovely wine when it is ready to drink. 2025-2045. **91.**



### **2018 Beaujolais-Villages- Marine Descombe (Mary Taylor Selections)**

Marine Descombe's 2018 Beaujolais-Villages is nicely svelte for the vintage, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane. The wine is made from parcels in the commune of Brouilly, with the vines averaging fifty-five years of age, but with some having been planted all the way back during World War I. Forty percent of the bunches are destemmed and the wine is fermented Burgundy style, followed by *elevage* in cement vats for six months. The 2018 offers up a beautifully pure and complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, cassis, a bit of smoked meats, a lovely base of granitic soil tones, cumin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, a fair bit of ripe tannin and a long, structured and complex finish. This is quite serious Beaujolais-Villages and could really do with another year or two in the cellar to soften up the backend tannin completely. I know that other than a couple of Beaujolais bottlings from people like Jean-Paul Brun and the Chermette family, most folks are not inclined to age their Beaujolais-Villages, but Marine Descombe's version is outstanding and very much worthy of tucking away in the cellar for a few years and let it really start to hit on all cylinders! It is very impressively complex and a fine, fine bottle in the making. 2022-2040+. **91+**.

### ***Saint-Amour***

#### **2013 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards**

The 2013 Saint-Amour from Domaine des Billards is drinking very nicely today. The wine has developed lovely aromatic complexity, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, still bright acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, classy finish. It has been about a year and a half since I last opened a bottle of this wine and time does not seem to have touched it all over the span! 2021-2040. **92**.

### ***Moulin-à-Vent***

#### **2019 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette**

The Chermette family's 2019 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches” is raised half in *foudres* and half in one to five year-old Burgundy barrels. This is probably my absolute favorite bottling of Moulin-à-Vent these days (along with those from Château des Jacques) and the 2019 is another stellar young wine. The utterly refined bouquet offers up a complex aromatic constellation of blackberries, black cherries, pomegranate, spit-roasted gamebird, a complex base of dark soil, fresh herb tones, a touch of chicory and a smoky topnote of bonfires on the breeze. On the palate the wine is deep, full and suave on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This superb wine is easily going to last forty years! 2024-2065. **94+**.

#### **2017 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet**

The 2017 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes” bottling from Xavier and Nicolas Barbet is a superb wine in the making. It is deep, pure, nascently complex and beautifully structured for the long haul. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of sweet cassis, blackberries, gamebird, espresso, dark soil tones, a bit of sweet stem tones, a dollop of fresh thyme and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a superb core of pure black fruit, excellent soil signature and impeccable focus on the long, well-balanced

and gently chewy finish. This is a long-distance runner in the making and a classic Moulin-à-Vent that will want a bit of bottle age to start to drink with generosity. In due course, it will be outstanding. 2025-2065. **93+**.

### ***Fleurie***

#### **2019 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette**

The les Garants bottling from Pierre-Marie and Jean-Etienne Chermette is given ten percent new oak for its cask aging each year, whereas the Poncié bottling is always aged in older wood. The 2019 les Grants is a beautiful young wine, offering up a bright and nascently complex bouquet of cherries, cranberries, gamebird, fresh thyme, a lovely base of soil tones, some youthful stem tones and just a touch of gentle oakiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with tangy acids, excellent structure and grip and a long, moderately tannic and complex finish. This is a serious glass of Fleurie in the making and built for the long haul, so tuck a box away in the cellar and give it at least a couple of years of aging before opening that first bottle! 2023-2045+. **93**.

#### **2019 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette**

The 2019 Fleurie “Poncié” from Domaine Chermette is another outstanding young example of this fine vintage, offering up a vibrant and quite red fruity nose of cherries, strawberries, cranberries, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil and a floral topnote of roses and peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil undertow, suave, buried tannins, bouncy acids and a long, complex and soil-driven finish. This is every bit as youthful as the les Garants out of the blocks, but having been raised in solely older casks, it seems to be more complete out of the blocks. So, if I were to choose one of these two excellent Fleuries to drink right away, it would certainly be the Poncié. But, I would prefer to give this wine some bottle age as well, as there are more layers of complexity to unfold here with the passage of time! 2021-2045+. **93**.

#### **2019 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie**

The 2019 Château de Fleurie has continued to unfold with style and grace since the last time I tasted it. As I noted in the late winter, the wine is marvelously floral and elegant in this vintage, offering up scents of red and black cherries, gamebird, a fine base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and an array of floral tones in the upper register that recall peonies and violets. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, precise and nicely sappy at the core, with a fine foundation of suave tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This bottling has a fine track record for cellaring and the 2019 will be no exception, but this is already quite delicious to drink, so it will not be easy to leave it alone in the cellar! 2021-2045. **93**.

### ***Régnié***

#### **2019 Régnié “Sans Soufre”- Château de la Pierre (Famille Barbet)**

The Régnié “Sans Soufre” from Château de la Pierre hails from a beautiful parcel of sixty to seventy year-old vines, planted on sandy soils streaked with purple granite. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in a traditional, semi-carbonic method and the wine is aged in cement vats prior to bottling, with no SO2 additions. The 2019 version is nicely ripe, but not overly so at 13.5 percent octane, and offers up a deep, black fruity and sappy nose of black cherries, blackberries, bonfire, a bit of dark chocolate, *pigeon* and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely delineated, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, a fair bit of ripe tannin, good acids and a long, complex and very well

balanced finish. This is young, but certainly very drinkable already, but letting the tannins soften up for a year or two will certainly pay dividends. Fine juice. 2021-2030+. **92.**

### ***Chiroubles***

#### **2019 Chiroubles “aux Craz”- Domaine de la Grosse Pierre**

The 2019 Chiroubles “aux Craz” bottling from Pauline Passot’s Domaine de la Grosse Pierre hails from the steep *lieu à dit* of the same name, which faces southeast and is very stony in its soil foundation. The morning sun gives it a nice, ethereal feel on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a mix of raspberries, cranberries, gamebird, stony soil tones, peonies, a touch of cumin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a lovely core of sappy fruit, superb stony soil signature, bright acids and just a wisp of tannin perking up the long and very classy finish. This wine has oodles of backend lift. 2021-2045+. **94.**

### ***Brouilly***

#### **2019 Brouilly “Bonnèze”- Pierre Cotton**

The 2019 Brouilly “Bonnèze” from Pierre Cotton is one of the last two years that this wine will be produced, and also one of the first two years. Previously, Pierre had blended the production from Bonnèze and les Mines together to make a single bottling of Brouilly, but as he has lost the lease on the Bonnèze vines beginning in 2021, he decided to bottle the two *lieux à dits* separately in these last two vintages for the rented parcel, with the vineyards noted on the back labels. Like all of Pierre’s wines, the Bonnèze is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats and aged in old oak *foudres*, with not added SO<sub>2</sub>. The 2019 Bonnèze shows a bit of natural wine volatility when it is first opened, so I decanted the wine, which allowed it to settle in nicely and eventually offer up scents of red and black cherries, spit-roasted *pigeon*, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a topnote of brown spices. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and velvety on the attack, with a good core, lovely transparency and grip, just a whisper of backend tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. Do decant this wine when serving, as the difference between popping and pouring and decanting fifteen minutes is quite dramatic! 2021-2029+? **90.**

#### **2019 Brouilly “les Mines”- Pierre Cotton**

The 2019 les Mines from Pierre Cotton is a fine young bottle, with still a touch of CO<sub>2</sub> perking up the backend. The nose is deep, young and complex, offering up scents of cherries, quince, a dollop of pomegranate, a nice touch of sweet stem tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, lovely soil signature and grip, modest tannins and a long, tangy and nicely balanced finish. This is a lovely example of Brouilly that opens up beautifully with a bit of aeration and is more stable out of the blocks than the Bonnèze bottling. I do not know how long it will last in the bottle without any SO<sub>2</sub>, but it seems likely to drink well for at least six to eight years, and perhaps even longer. Good juice. 2021-2029+? **91.**

#### **2018 Brouilly “100% Cotton”- Pierre Cotton**

In the 2018 vintage, Pierre Cotton was still blending his two different vineyards in Brouilly to make a single cuvée, so this wine is bottled under the “100% Cotton” label. The wine has just a faint tickle on the backend from the CO<sub>2</sub> still in solution here, but it seems far more stable than the 2019s do today. The bouquet is deep, nicely ripe and black fruity, offering up a

complex blend of black cherries, pomegranate, smoked meats, a beautiful base of soil, woodsmoke and a gentle topnote of spice tones mostly redolent of cumin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite pure, with a good core of fruit, impressive soil signature, tangy acids and a long, gently tannic and very complex finish. This is most impressive Brouilly, and though there is just a hint of volatility still here, it is dramatically calm in comparison to the two 2019 Brouillys from Pierre, and makes me wonder if the 2019s will also settle in with a bit of bottle age. In any event, this is excellent! 2021-2030. **92.**



### ***Côte de Brouilly***

#### **2019 Côte de Brouilly “100% Cotton”- Pierre Cotton**

As I noted last year in my note on the 2017 version, Monsieur Cotton’s bottling of Côte de Brouilly that he calls “100% Cotton” is from a one hectare parcel of sixty-five year-old vines. The 2019 “100% Cotton” bottling delivers a deep, stylish and quite lovely aromatic constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, a hint of duck, a lovely foundation of soil tones, woodsmoke and a hint of cumin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, lovely focus and grip, suave, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This does not seem likely to be a long-distance runner of a Côte de Brouilly, but rather one to delight over the next dozen years or so. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2033+. **93.**

#### **2019 Côte de Brouilly “la Chapelle”- Pierre Cotton**

2019 is the first vintage of la Chapelle from Pierre Cotton, as he has only recently purchased this one hectare *lieu à dit* that sits at the very summit of the Mount de Brouilly. For those who have driven up to the top, to the little chapel at the top of the mount, one understands where the vineyard gets its name. These vines were planted in the 1950s. The 2019 la Chapelle is

a beautifully refined wine aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, just a hint of blood orange, gamebird, bonfire, a complex base of soil tones and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a wide open personality, superb soil undertow, buried tannins and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is lovely juice. 2021-2033+. **93.**

**2019 Côte de Brouilly “les Grillés”- Pierre Cotton**

Pierre Cotton’s les Grillés is a fine example of Côte de Brouilly, with vines closing in on their seventieth birthdays. The 2019 les Grillés is a beautiful wine, with a more black fruity current running through it than the other two 2019 Côte de Brouilly bottlings, offering up a complex and classy bouquet of plums, red and black cherries, gamebird, a touch of red curry, a gorgeous base of soil tones, nutskin, gentle spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, deep and tangy, with ripe tannins, fine focus and grip, an excellent core of fruit and a long, complex and youthful finish. Whereas the other two bottlings of Côte de Brouilly are quite drinkable out of the blocks, the les Grillés will definitely benefit from at least a few years in the cellar. 2024-2035+. **93+.**

**2018 Côte de Brouilly “100% Cotton”- Pierre Cotton**

The 2018 rendition of the “100% Cotton” bottling of Côte de Brouilly from Pierre Cotton is a simply gorgeous young wine. This comes in a bit riper than the 2018 Brouilly, tipping the scales at 14.1 percent alcohol and offers up a very pure and deep bouquet of black cherries, plums, gamebird, a touch of hickory smoke, a gorgeous base of soil tones, red curry, a hint of thyme and other discreet spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely succulent at the core, with impressive purity and soil signature, buried, modest tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Côte de Brouilly. 2021-2035+. **93+.**

**2018 Côte de Brouilly “les Grillés”- Pierre Cotton**

The 2018 Côte de Brouilly “les Grillés” from Pierre Cotton is simply stellar young wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, plums, a touch of dark chocolate, spit-roasted *pigeon*, woodsmoke, violets, cumin and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core of fruit, fine soil undertow, modest, buried tannins and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is just lovely! 2021-2040. **94.**



**TWO BEAUTIFUL LIVES  
IN MEMORY OF JIM CLENDENEN AND BECKY WASSERMAN**



The summer of 2021 saw the departure from this world of two of the world's most beautiful people, as Jim Clendenen and Becky Wasserman passed away. Each leaves behind a legacy worthy of their great passion for life. Jim passed away in May of this year and Becky in August. Both Jim Clendenen and Becky Wasserman were people I met through the world of wine, though I never thought of them as "wine people" *per se*, as their generosity and noble spirits were far too vast to not transcend far beyond their chosen *métiers* and enlighten a much larger world that somehow seems to always be in need of more good sources of light. I did not know either Jim or Becky as well as I would have liked, as our paths never crossed with any great frequency, but did have occasion as the years went by to spend a bit of time with each of them and one certainly did not need a lot of time with either to get to know them, for their inviting and egalitarian spirits swept everyone up in their paths and made one feel like a good friend of long standing only thirty seconds into a conversation. In a world that seems to in danger of losing its ethical compass and civilized veneer in recent times, these were two intrinsically good people and you knew that from the moment you said hello to either of them and the world is a much poorer place for their passing.

I used to see Jim once in a while in New York prior to my starting the wine writing stage of my career, as he was a great lover of the wines of Burgundy and our paths would cross now and then at New York's favorite Burgundy watering hole in this era, Montrachet Restaurant. I had already sold Jim's wines since his very earliest vintages at Au Bon Climat, his Santa Barbara-based winery. Montrachet was like a second home to many of us Burgundy lovers in New York back then, with the food sometimes brilliant and sometimes just comfortingly good (depending on who might be the chef at the time), but the wines were always dazzling. I got the

feeling that Jim would always find time for a dinner at Montrachet whenever he was in town, as in the far more insular world of Burgundy lovers back at that moment in history, there were not all that many places where one could drink and share great bottles of Burgundy. But, there was always great Burgundy being drunk at Montrachet, and more often than not, shared from table to table, and it was in this spirit of sharing where Jim was so obviously most at home. Jim began his winegrowing career in 1978, after narrowly escaping a career in law after earning his undergraduate degree from the University of California Santa Barbara in 1976, with every intention of going on to law school. But, fortunately for us, he had spent a year abroad in 1974 and been introduced to wine and decided upon graduation (and after month in Champagne in Burgundy to celebrate his freshly-minted diploma) that law school could wait while he attempted to fashion a career in the world of wine. He went on to become the assistant winemaker at Zaca Mesa Winery for three years, from 1978 to 1980, as well as working harvests around the globe, and founded his own winery, Au Bon Climat in 1982, alongside of friend Adam Tolmach (who would leave Au Bon Climat in 1990). Through his determined efforts, boundless energy, gifted winemaking skills and willingness to work his tail off, Jim made Au Bon Climat into one of the very finest producers of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay (not mention Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris) in the United States.



*Jim Clendenen, during his forty years at Au Bon Climat (the middle photo was the Jim I used to see at Montrachet).*

I never mentioned this to Jim on the few occasions where we had a chance to chat, but I can still vividly recall a photograph of him and another winemaker standing around a grill at some large wine event in the mid-1980s, glasses of pinot noir in hand, which appeared in a wine publication at the time. I was living in southern California in this era, having just graduated from college, and I remember commenting to my friend over a glass of wine as we thumbed through the pages of the magazine, that “those two guys really looked like they were having a good time—maybe a career in the wine business would not be such a bad thing!” I had not seen Jim in many years, and I am sure he would not have recognized me from any of the other people he might have crossed paths with during his peripatetic “winemaker tour” days, but a friend who runs one of the few public relations agencies worth anything in the world of wine asked me a couple of years ago if I would be interested in writing one of my historical features on Au Bon Climat. I told her that I loved Jim’s wines and had sold them in my retail wine days back in the 1980s and

1990s, but had not had a chance to taste them for several years, so yes, absolutely, I would love to do an article on Jim and Au Bon Climat. It did not come to pass at the time (Covid having reared its ugly head in the interim and getting in the way of that project), but her query had reminded me of the beauty of Au Bon Climat's wines and I wrote to the winery last spring to see about getting samples, so that I could catch up on the more recent vintages at ABC and start to include them regularly in my coverage of America's finest old school wine producers. Jim and his team at Au Bon Climat sent a very generous range of wines last spring and I was so happy to see that not only had the original magic not been dulled by the passage of time, but that Jim's skills had been honed to fine degree over the years and these wines were even better than the ones I remembered and cherished from back in those early days! It was during May of this year, when I was getting ready to write the winery about the possibility of samples again, that the sad news reached me of Jim's untimely passing. But, as I write this remembrance, a newly-arrived case of Au Bon Climat wines is waiting in my cellar to be tasted for the next issue of the newsletter.

I had last seen Becky Wasserman far more recently than Jim Clendenen, as I was at her home a couple of years ago to interview her husband Russell Hone about his days working with Richard Olney, when I was writing about Richard's very important and seldom commented upon career in the world of wine and food. Becky and Russell are two of the nicest people you could ever hope to meet and I was very much looking forward to seeing them again. Becky was sick with the flu on that November Sunday afternoon, but graciously got out of her sickbed to say hello before Russell and I settled in to share a couple of glasses of 1963 Taylor-Fladgate to chase away the winter chill and reminisce about Richard Olney. I remember vividly Becky telling me that "I think that it is great that you are writing this article, for Richard was a wonderful man- truly a great man whose contributions should be far better known than they are today." This was Becky in a nutshell: able to easily spot like-minded, kind and talented people whose passion for their *métiers* led to excellence in their professional lives, and who merited admiration, even if the world at large was largely unaware or indifferent to their accomplishments. As I was leaving hers and Russell's home that afternoon, Becky said to me "that it is really too bad we do not see you more often here in Bouilland, as we have lots of visitors from the US, but we have never had a chance to have you over for dinner." I left promising to make it happen on one of my next trips to Burgundy, but never managed to do so before Covid interrupted everyone's plans.

My first recollections of Becky Wasserman came long before I had a chance to meet her in person, and harken back to my days specializing in the wines of Burgundy during my wine merchant days. I remember hearing a story about Becky at the time, and the problems she had with one of her clients in the Washington D.C. market, who had managed to take in a huge order of her Burgundies and never paid her for the wines. At the time, the word on the street was that the merchant had a coke habit of galactic proportions and all of his and his store's money was going straight up his nose, and his coke dealer had received all of the money that Becky should have been paid for the Domaine Lafarge, Mugnier, Bize and Bachelet wines that she had delivered on credit to this merchant. Sadly, these types of stories were not all that out of the ordinary at the time, as cocaine had made its way out of the corner offices of Wall Street and the backstages of Rolling Stones concerts to permeate nearly every fabric of American life in this era, screwing tons and tons of people along the way. But, what was truly remarkable about this



particular story were the reports that Becky had taken out a second mortgage on her home in Bouilland with which to pay off all of her producers for the wines that had been stolen by the merchant, and in doing so had earned her the undying respect of each and every *vigneron* in the Côte d'Or. But, this was always the kind of person that Becky Wasserman was during her life—doing the right thing, no matter the circumstances, and this is a character trait that not enough of us possess.



*Paul Wasserman with Becky and Russell in Bouilland (courtesy of David Motion).*

Becky Wasserman first moved to Burgundy in 1968, with her first husband. They purchased a farmhouse in the small village of Bouilland, just west of Savigny-lès-Beaune, and Becky had lived in this house ever since. When her first marriage ended in 1976, she began her own business brokering for the *tonnelier* François Frères, selling its barrels to wine producers throughout the globe. Around the same time, a friend of hers started an importing company and he asked Becky to help choose Burgundy growers with which he could work representing their wines in the United States. By 1979, she had taken over this business herself and her company, Le Serbet was born. Over the years, it became one of the finest sources for blue chip Burgundy estates, with producers such as Michel Lafarge, Jean-Claude Bessin, Denis Bachelet, Alain Burguet, Patrick Bize, Dominique Lafon and Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier numbered among the

many other Burgundian *vignerons* whom she represented in the United States. Becky met her second husband, Russell Hone, while Russell was working with Richard Olney in the latter half of the 1970s and they have been fixtures in Burgundy ever since, with their large table in Bouilland always populated with visitors sharing Russell's excellent cuisine and a beautiful array of fine old wines from their deep cellar. There always seemed to be a pot of stock gently bubbling away on the stove in front of Russell whenever I visited, a menu and guest list being attended to for the coming evening's casual festivities and a real atmosphere of *joie de vivre* that hung in the air here. For many American Burgundy lovers, Becky's and Russell's table was the true center of the Burgundy universe. And the admiration for the two certainly extended far beyond Americans, as I never met a Burgundian that knew the couple and did not have lovely things to say about them.



While I was never one of the dinner guests at Becky and Russell's table during my frequent stays in Burgundy (finding that after a long day of tasting in the cellars, what I really wanted was a quick beer to repair my palate before dinner and then plenty of water with my meal and an early hour to bed to try and recharge the batteries for the next day's round of tastings), I so frequently ran into folks in Beaune or in the cellars up and down the Côte d'Or who had just been out to Bouilland the night before or were going to dinner the day after tomorrow that I felt that I vicariously shared in the warmth of spirit of so many of those dinners at their home as if I

too had been seated around the table. So, I will not miss those dinners in the wake of Becky's passing. What I will miss most about her was her noble spirit that one found reflected in everyone with whom she knew or worked with over the course of her long life in Burgundy. You always knew that when you spoke with someone in the offices in Le Serbet or walked into a *vigneron's* cellar for the first time, if Becky was working with he or she, then this was truly a good person and the tasting visit was going to be a very enjoyable time (and, of course, the wines were going to be very, very good). Of all the articles that I have written on Burgundy over the first sixteen years of this newsletter, the one that Becky commented on the most vociferously was the two Part Series I wrote on the wines of the commune of Beaune, which she observed was "a very important piece that someone should have written a very long time ago, as these wines are so under-appreciated." For this was the kind of person Becky was during her entire life, always concerned and championing the underdog region or *vigneron* (such as those crafting those lovely wines from Beaune)- often overlooked, but still working those long hours meticulously to excel at their craft, even if the vast majority of the world took little notice. Because, they all knew that at least Becky noticed! The Burgundians have a wonderful phrase to describe people who do the right thing and choose the right path in life, even if it is the more difficult. They call these people "serious" and mean this as the highest form of compliment. And this is the phrase that immediately comes to mind when I think of both Jim Clendenen and Becky Wasserman and the beautiful lives that they both lived and shared with so many of us. They were serious.