

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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Number Ninety-Five

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RECENTLY-TASTED AMERICAN WINES AUTUMN 2021



After all of the struggles with fires during harvest last year in Oregon, and previously in California, it is nice to be able to put this report together while hearing news that the harvest in both regions has gone beautifully this year and wine producers are looking forward to a very strong vintage in 2021. It is not that the summer of 2021 was without major challenges in the western US, as there have been massive fires once again in California this year and blistering heat in the first half of the summer in Oregon and Washington. But, happily, it now seems that the bunches were able to soldier through the continued vagaries of climate change and the grapes ultimately arrived in the cellars looking splendid this year. And as I write this introduction, the harvest is over in both northern California and Oregon and the two regions have just finished being pelted by heavy rains for the first time in ages, so that the long-running drought conditions are finally being somewhat alleviated and groundwater reserves are being topped up leading into next year. Hopefully all the rain this autumn will also help with potential fires next year, as the western US has been a series of conflagrations for several years now and global warming has been wreaking havoc with wildfires in that part of the country for too long. Let it rain.

While this article is not as broad as some recent autumn features on American wines, it has plenty of depth, as I have been able to get out to a few older American wine tastings in the

last several months and there are plenty of notes on mature wines to round out the selection of new releases. One of the tastings that I was fortunate enough to enjoy was a small selection of 1978s that included three of the four single vineyard cabernet sauvignon bottlings from Al Brounstein at Diamond Creek Vineyards (we did not have a bottle of the Lake 1978 in our lineup), and I enjoyed this tasting immensely, as I also had the opportunity to taste the new releases of Diamond Creek from the 2018 vintage for this article. It is not often that I get a chance to report on the same bottlings of cabernet sauvignon from the same winery- forty years apart- in the same article, so this was indeed a treat. I have great respect for the wines that Diamond Creek turned out back in the day, as they were always extremely long-lived, structured, complex and serious wines that were meant to age alongside of other great California wines from this era, such as Mayacamas, Ridge “Monte Bello”, Heitz “Martha’s Vineyard” and the like, who probably found their original inspiration in the style of the great Château Latour wines from the twentieth century. So, having the opportunity to juxtapose the 2018s with the 1978s within a week of each other was a great opportunity to reflect upon the style of the wines in each era, which actually share more similarities than differences even over such an extended period of time. Sadly, this cannot be said for many other producers from the old days in California, for example, think how drastically different tasting the 1978s and the 2018s from Joseph Phelps or Caymus Vineyards might be and how poorly the current wines would show in comparison to the glories of the past at each winery. The 2018s from Diamond Creek are still deeply structured wines meant for long-term cellaring, and each single vineyard wine remains very true to its underlying *terroir*. I would have to say that today, the winemaking is even a bit more polished at Diamond Creek than it was all the way back in 1978, and so I would anticipate that the 2018s will last every bit as long in bottle as the 1978s have done and maybe even reach slightly higher apogees. However, I would not expect that they will be anywhere near as impenetrable in their relative youth as the 1978s were back when I tasted them for the first time in 1988 at a ten year retrospective tasting of the ’78 vintage. Back then, celebrating their tenth birthdays, the 1978 Diamond Creeks were still tough, dense and had a streak of almost medicinal overtones that recalled wines such as very young Cornas from that same era, and though they were immensely impressive to taste, they were not particularly pleasurable to drink at ten years of age! I cannot imagine that the more suave, but equally deep and structured 2018s will be anywhere near as cantankerous at age ten, but we shall see!

The Diamond Creek 2018s and 1978s were not the only “bookend wines” that I had the pleasure to taste for this feature, as I also had the opportunity to taste the new releases from the 2018 vintage from Cathy Corison and her superb winery in St. Helena. I did not dip quite as far back in Cathy’s winemaking catalogue as 1978 for her “bookend wine”, but I did come close, as I had a chance to drink her first vintage at Chappellet Vineyards, the 1980, at one of our older California tastings in October. Cathy had arrived as the winemaker at Chappellet at the start of 1981, but it turned out that when I asked her about the 1980, that she considers this her “first vintage” at Chappellet, as the very young wine was still fermenting away in tank when she took over the winemaking responsibilities here and she is the one who oversaw its *élevage* and bottling. The 1980 Chappellet turned out to be a beautiful bottle of cabernet sauvignon that was still at its absolute zenith of maturity and has decades of life ahead of it, exuding the elegance, complexity and soil signature that have been the hallmarks of Cathy Corison’s winemaking style over the course of her entire career. It certainly shows that Donn Chappellet knew what he was doing when he hired Cathy as his winemaker at the outset of 1981!

Issue 95's report on American wines also features a range of new pinot noir, syrah and chardonnay bottlings from Wells Guthrie, formerly of Copain Vineyards, who has started a new project in Mendocino County called Dupuis Wines. As readers may recall, Wells made a lot of fans during his time at Copain, particularly when he decided to change stylistic directions and start making very classically-inspired, lower octane wines from his choice vineyard sources in Mendocino and Sonoma Counties. Wells had trained in France for a period of time, working with Christophe Roumier, Jeremy Seysses and Jean-Louis Chave, among others, during his time there, so he felt a bit of remorse in crafting those big, plush, "over the top" styled wines during his early years at Copain that were in vogue at the time. Of course, back then, those types of wines earned huge scores from Robert Parker, who was still the world's most influential wine critic, so wines in that style certainly benefited the cash flow at Copain. However, Wells mentioned to me several years ago, on my first visit to Copain, that his dramatic change in stylistic direction was brought about by his imagining Christophe, Jeremy or Jean-Louis coming for a visit out to Healdsburg and tasting some of those big, syrupy, high octane-styled wines, and the embarrassment he would feel serving them those wines with his name on them! Wells eventually decided that it was high time to make wines in a more traditional style that he would be proud to serve to such well-respected winegrowers from across the Atlantic. Thus came about a dramatic sea change of style at Copain in 2006 and the second chapter of Wells' Copain story began. Eventually, financial turmoil disrupted the winery and would eventually lead Wells choosing to sell Copain to Jackson Family Wines (of Kendall-Jackson fame) in 2016, with the terms of the sale stipulating that he remain in charge of Copain for another two years. When 2018 rolled around, Wells decamped and started Dupuis.

The new Dupuis winery is very much in the old world style, with Wells and his wife Kate having purchased a sixteen hectare estate in the hills above Booneville in Anderson Valley, converting an old barn on the property to house the winery. The family home is now in the upper part of the barn, right above the winery, in the true Burgundian tradition of living right above the cellars. There are redwood forests and an olive grove as neighbors for Dupuis and it sounds like an absolutely idyllic setting for a new chapter in Wells Guthrie's winegrowing career. I look forward to visiting one day soon. Three hectares of the property were cleared and planted to pinot noir at the outset of the project, with a small crop first bottled from these vines in the 2019 vintage. But, for now, the majority of the Dupuis wines are coming from purchased fruit in Anderson Valley, with Wells offering a chardonnay from the Ferrington Vineyard, a syrah from Baker Ranch and several single vineyard designated pinot noir bottlings, as well as a blended wine dedicated to Ned Benedict, Wells' good friend who passed away a couple of years ago at a young age in a tragic car accident in Spain. The first vintage here at Dupuis is 2018. Fans of the "Chapter Two" wines at Copain are going to love what Wells is crafting today under the Dupuis label!

I should also take a moment to mention the stunning lineup of 2018s that I tasted for this report from David Jeffrey at Calluna Estate on Chalk Hill in Sonoma County. Readers are certainly familiar by now with how much I like David's wines, which harken back to the style of cabernet sauvignon that was prevalent back in the 1970s and 1980s and somehow got lost in more recent times of higher-octane, more boysenberry syrup styles of cabernet. His 2018s at Calluna may well represent the finest set of wines that he has yet crafted at his relatively young winery and they are highly, highly recommended for any lovers of old school, ageworthy

cabernet bottlings on which California made its reputation back in the decade of the 1970s. And, David Jeffrey also fashions the very finest bottling of merlot in all of California these days and his 2018 version really has to be tasted to be believed. It is so superb that the character of Miles in the movie *Sideways* would have picked on another varietal if he knew just how good merlot could be from Chalk Hill when David Jeffrey is fashioning it! So, if you have not yet had the opportunity to try a bottle of Calluna, try to get a hold of a few of these stellar 2018s and tuck them away in the cellar, as they will age beautifully and will be stunning wines for many decades, once they have blossomed with some proper bottle age.

Despite all of this early discussion about cabernet sauvignon in these introductory remarks, this article once again focuses far more on other varietal bottlings and blends in the pages that follow. The simple reason for this is that cabernet sauvignon, as so many fashion it today in California (and particularly in Napa Valley) is the less interesting grape to my palate, as the vast majority of these cabernet producers are still wedded to that big, dumb, over the top style of high octane jam juice and I have zero interest in tasting and reporting on those styles of wines. Sure, there are still a fine couple of handfuls of producers continuing to make cabernets in the style that made California wine famous in the first place, with producers such as Philip Togni, Diamond Creek, Cathy Corison, Ridge, Mount Eden and Calluna all crafting truly stunning and long-lived wines out of this variety, but in statistical terms, they are just a drop in a bucket compared to all of the modern cabernets crafted up and down the wine-producing coast of California. I often reflect upon the irony that cabernet sauvignon, the grape that truly made California famous, is such a laggard these days compared to other varieties, as the music is really playing in red wine country when one stretches out beyond cabernet to taste today's truly illustrious bottlings of pinot noir, syrah, other Rhône varietals and even gamay, when one gets up into Oregon wine country.

And the stunning lineup of pinot noirs that I tasted for this report from estates such as Au Bon Climat, Belle Pente, Brick House, Domaine Drouhin, Roserock, Crowley, Résonance, Poe and Mount Eden are all world class wines that will prove to be cellar treasures ten or twenty years down the road, long after most of those over the top Napa cabernets have collapsed in on themselves like the Astrodome during its demolition. And, please keep in mind that this recent lineup of pinot noir magic is hardly a significant percentage of all the world class wine being made by classically-inclined producers these days from this grape variety, but just one slice of a large and ever-expanding pie of pinot noir excellence. I have a nice cache of old pinot noir in my cellar these days from yesteryear on the west coast, and as much as I cherish my bottles from the decade of the 1970s from producers such as Joseph Swan, Mount Eden and Kalin Cellars, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that pinot noir quality in California and Oregon has never been higher than it is today- despite just how beautiful those old pinots are from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Pinot noir is in the midst of a renaissance in the western US at the present time, and it is only that small coterie of traditionally-minded cabernet producers listed above (and my apologies if I have failed to mention others in the old school camp of cabernet) that can keep pace with all the exciting pinot noir bottlings emerging each year from the US.

In the universe of American red wines, the grape variety that I find the most exciting beyond pinot noir these days is syrah, which has never had so many fine winegrowers as it does today crafting great bottles from this variety in the history of US winemaking. This is a varietal

that seems to have also once been blasted by the over the top stylistic paradigm of the late Parker years, in much the same way as cabernet sauvignon, but to have righted the ship far quicker and today one tastes so many truly stunning bottlings of syrah from California, Oregon and Washington that it is hard not to come to the conclusion that syrah has also supplanted cabernet sauvignon atop the red wine variety hierarchy. Much of syrah's current run of brilliance has to be laid at the doorstep of Steve Edmunds, who has been crafting outstanding, northern Rhône-inspired syrah bottlings for decade after decade and has shown a younger generation of winegrowers just how brilliant this variety can do on the west coast of the US. Thirty years down the road, in much the same manner that we can marvel at just how beautiful cabernet sauvignon was back in the decade of the 1970s, I am sure the next generation of wine lovers is going to bask in the glories of fully mature syrah bottlings from the likes of Rhys Vineyards, Model Farms, Halcón Vineyards, Joseph Swan Vineyards, Morgan Vineyards, Day Wines, Porter Creek Vineyards and Mike Hinds at Franchere Wines. For their syrahs today are clearly the legends of tomorrow. I should mention that Paul and Jackie Gordon of Halcón Vineyards, who make some of the most brilliant American syrah I have ever tasted, have sold their vineyards to Pax Mahle and will be returning to Europe to live, so that is one source of great US syrah that will be disappearing. I strongly urge readers who love great syrah to keep an eye out in the market for any remaining bottles from Halcón Vineyards, as these were truly some of the greatest syrahs ever made in the US! I do know that the winery still has a bit of the 2019 vintage remaining in their stocks, so contact them if you would like to add some of these beautiful wines to your cellar. You can thank me later!

And, of course, there is an entire universe of red wines beyond the big three of cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir and syrah. There is a lot of good grenache-based wines being produced, gamay in Oregon is every bit as exciting as pinot noir to my palate, there are still some stellar, old school, lower octane zinfandels still being made (particularly at Sky, Joseph Swan, and Nalle) and what Adam Sabelli-Frisch is doing with the Mission grape is truly stunning! With white wines on the west coast, chardonnay still appears to be king, but there are an awful lot of these that are truly stunning wines that one must not overlook their excellence just because this grape variety has been at the summit of white wine in America since Stony Hill first put it in the ground in the late 1940s! Though there are not many notes on Riesling in this feature, as I did not get a chance to reach out to some of my favorite estates featuring this grape variety in either the Finger Lakes region here in New York or in Oregon and Washington, the varietal is alive and well and I will look forward to reporting on more bottlings in my next report on American wines. Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon still remain the private kingdom of Terry and Frances Leighton at Kalin Cellars, at least to my palate, as no one has yet mastered these two varieties with anywhere near the same success as the Leightons, but do find the time to check out the new 2020 vintage release from David Jeffrey at Calluna, as it clearly shows that he is not only a red winemaker!

The following notes are set up in sections by varietal, more or less. Within each section, wines are listed chronologically by vintage and alphabetically by producer. I should mention that there is a lovely photo in the Chardonnay section that includes a bottle of 1993 Kalin Cellars "Cuvée LD", but no note on the wine appears in the article. The reason for this was that the bottle in the photo ended up having a bad cork and was not representative, but I liked the photo well enough that I had to keep it in the feature. I still have a handful of bottles of the '93 LD in

my off-site cellar and intended to pull another bottle for this article, but did not have the opportunity to do so. Consequently, all we have is the photo of that lovely wine in this feature.

Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling

2020 Sauvignon Blanc & Sémillon- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The white wine bottling from David Jeffrey at Calluna Vineyards is composed of seventy-five percent sauvignon blanc and twenty-five percent sémillon. The 2020 comes in at a svelte 12.9 percent octane and delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of lemon, green apple, a touch of fresh fig, white soil tones, citrus peel and a nice touch of fresh-cut grass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely acids and grip and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is really a lovely wine! 2021-2026. **93.**

2019 Riesling “Obie” Curtis Vineyard- Sabelli-Frisch (El Dorado)

The 2019 Riesling from Adam Sabelli-Frisch is barrel-fermented to a dry style, with the wine coming in at 13.1 percent octane and offering up a beautifully complex and refined bouquet of apple, a hint of yellow plum, lavender, elder flowers, a hint of beeswax, fresh almond and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and very nicely balanced, with the gentle oak treatment rounding out the palate, but still with good acid lift on the long and complex finish. This is not a wine that finds its stylistic inspiration in Alsace or Germany, but charts its own very unique and interesting course. A lovely wine. 2021-2035. **93.**

2018 Riesling- Trestle Thirty-One (Finger Lakes)

The 2018 Riesling from Nova Cadamatre at Trestle Thirty-One includes thirty percent botrytized bunches in its blend, but is still fermented in a dry style and tips the scales at fourteen percent alcohol. Stylistically, it reminds me of some of those flashy Austrian Rieslings from the early 1990s, as the botrytis nicely elevates the aromatics and the wine is still fairly dry on the backend. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of pineapple, tangerine, apple, a touch of menthol, a good base of soil and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, sound framing acids and just a touch of citrus pith perking up the long finish. I do not think that this will make old bones, as wines done in this style have historically not aged all that gracefully, but it does have plenty of personality at the moment. 2021-2025. **88.**

Off the Beaten Path White and Orange Wines

2020 For Heaven’s Sake, Don’t Move Here- Franchere Wine Company (Willamette Valley)

This is not really an orange wine, as it is composed from a blend of fifty-seven percent Pinot Gris and forty-three percent Grüner Veltliner, with the two varieties co-fermented and allowed nine days of skin contact, giving the wine its striking deep salmon orange color. It was raised in a combination of stainless steel and neutral oak for seven months. It offers up a bright and complex bouquet that is more red wine than white, delivering scents of peach, rhubarb, a good base of soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of sumac. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with good framing acids, just a wisp of backend tannin and a long, youthful finish. This is a unique of a wine as I have ever tasted, as the aromas and flavors are beyond the pale of my experience, but yet, I like it! It seems like it would age pretty well

over the mid-term, for though the acids are not that pronounced, it does have good structure. 2021-2030? **89.**

2020 Grenache Blanc- Skinner Vineyards (El Dorado County)

The 2020 Grenache Blanc from Skinner Vineyards is raised in a combination of stainless steel, concrete and French oak casks. It comes in at 12.8 percent octane in this vintage and delivers a very pretty bouquet of pear, casaba melon, spring flowers, a fine base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, solid acids and bounce and a long, nicely balanced finish. This is an example of grenache blanc that is impressively light on its feet! Good juice. 2021-2026. **89.**

2019 Hildegard- Au Bon Climat (Santa Maria Valley)

The Hildegard bottling from Au Bon Climat is a celebration of the original white grape plantings on the hill of Corton insisted upon by Empress Hildegard, the wife of Charlemagne, which did not include any chardonnay in those ancient times. Consequently, the *cépages* of the 2019 Hildegard is fifty-five percent pinot gris, forty percent pinot blanc and five percent aligoté. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of passion fruit, casaba melon, a touch of blood orange, musky floral tones, a lovely base of soil, fresh almond and just the right amount of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core and soil signature, zesty acids, impeccable balance and a long, vibrant and gently new oaky finish. 2021-2030+. **93.**

2019 Petit Manseng “Saurel Vineyard”- Sabelli-Frisch (El Dorado)

Adam Sabelli-Frisch’s Petit Manseng is given a short skin contact, but as the berries for this variety are naturally small, it gives the wine a lovely orange color from its modest time of macerating with the skins. The 2019 Petit Manseng comes in at 13.9 percent alcohol in this vintage and delivers a lovely bouquet of fresh apricot, orange peel, a hint of sumac and a gentle topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a whisper hot on the backend, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and good length and grip on the slightly four-square finish. I love this wine’s aromatics, but the palate does not quite keep pace at the present time, though perhaps more detail will emerge with a bit of bottle age? An intriguing wine. 2021-2035. **88+?**

Chardonnay

2019 Chardonnay “Los Alamos Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Barbara County)

The 2019 Chardonnay “Los Alamos Vineyard” from Au Bon Climat is a lovely wine. It comes in at a svelte 13.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of fresh pineapple, almond, a lovely base of salty soil tones, pretty spice tones and a deft framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This is a lovely wine and an outstanding value, as this retails for \$25 here in the states! 2021-2033+. **92.**

2019 Chardonnay- Brick House Wine Company (Ribbon Ridge)

The entry level bottling of chardonnay from Doug Tunnel at Brick House is no afterthought in the lineup, as the wine is barrel-fermented, aged in a variety of aged casks and *demi-muids* for one year and then given an additional six months finishing *elevage* in stainless steel tank. The svelte 2019 version comes in at twelve percent octane and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of pear, golden delicious apple, fresh almond, a good base of soil, fruit blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and

zesty, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and quite classy finish. This is an excellent wine and a great value! 2021-2030. **91**.



2019 Chardonnay “Four Winds”- Crowley Wines (Willamette Valley)

Tyson Crowley’s Four Winds bottling of chardonnay is produced from twenty-six year-old Wente clones, planted on their own *franc de pied* rootstocks. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged all in used casks. The 2019 version comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane in this old school vintage in the Willamette Valley and offers up a refined bouquet of apple, pear, almond, a pretty base of soil tones and a touch of buttery oak from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and light on its feet, with a full-bodied format, a good core and soil signature, a lovely spine of acidity and a long, balanced and complex finish. I really like the refined style of this wine. 2021-2035+. **91+**.

2019 Chardonnay “Ferrington Vineyard”- Dupuis Wines (Anderson Valley)

Wells Guthrie’s 2019 Ferrington Vineyard bottling of chardonnay is a pretty young wine, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a nascently complex nose of pear, apple, gentle baking spices, a lovely base of soil tones, a gentle touch of honeysuckle and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine girdle of acidity, lovely soil undertow, vibrant acids and a long, fairly primary and very promising finish. This is certainly easy to drink already, but in reality, it is still

a young wine and more complexity will come to the fore if it is given at least a modicum of time in the cellar! 2021-2035+. **92+**.

2019 Chardonnay “Hyland Vineyard”- Résonance Wines (McMinnville)

The 2019 Chardonnay “Hyland Vineyard” bottling from Résonance Wines is a lovely wine. It comes in at 13.5 percent octane and seems to show that a bit of the malolactic fermentation was blocked, as it has that lovely essence of pear aromatic note that one finds in many of Louis Jadot’s white Burgundies as well. The nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, a touch of pastry cream, raw almond, a touch of vanillin oak and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and a long, nicely balanced and stylish finish. Good juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

2019 Chardonnay- Trestle Thirty-One (Finger Lakes)

Trestle Thirty-One is the winery of Nova Cadamatre, who also finds time to fill the position of Director of Winemaking at Robert Mondavi Winery in Napa Valley! Nova calls the Finger Lakes home and her 2019 chardonnay is a pretty wine. It is partially barrel-fermented and raised in a fifty-fifty combination of stainless steel and oak, with half new and half used French barrels for the wood side of the equation. The wine comes in at a nicely ripe thirteen percent in this vintage and offers up a stylish bouquet of apple, almond, a touch of soil tones, pretty floral scents and a fair bit of buttery, toasty oak. In fact, the oak shadings remind me strongly of the earlier vintages of Mondavi Reserve Chardonnay. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and fairly new oaky in personality, with a solid core, nice acids and a long, well-balanced finish. To my palate, this could do with a bit less new oak or a less lees stirring, as the combination of the two seems to have robbed the wine of some other nuances that might have added to the complexity here. It is a well-made wine that is a bit innocuous in style and I would love it if Nova could find a way to get more Finger Lakes personality into the bottling. 2021-2027. **88.**

2018 Chardonnay “Bien Nacido Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Barbara County)

The 2018 Bien Nacido chardonnay from Au Bon Climat is an excellent young wine. It offers up a complex bouquet of fresh pineapple, apple, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, almond, dried flowers, citrus zest, vanillin oak and just a hint of the butterscotch tones that will come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core and soil signature, bright, zesty acids and lovely balance on the long and very promising finish. This is, of course, already very tasty, but it is still a puppy and really deserves at least four or five years’ worth of bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A beautiful wine in the making. 2025-2045+. **94.**

2018 Chardonnay “Nuits-Blanches au Bouge”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Maria Valley)

The Nuits-Blanches au Bouge bottling of chardonnay from Au Bon Climat is the winery’s bigger, flashier-styled wine, made initially to attract the Parker crowd, but eventually tamed down a bit to allow for a bit more finesse than the first few vintages were capable of delivering. The fruit for this bottling hails from both Bien Nacido and Le Bon Climat vineyards. The 2018 version comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and delivers fine aromatic complexity in its blend of pear, tangerine, a touch of fresh pineapple, acacia blossoms, a good base of soil and buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. The wine is probably a bit north of its stated 13.5 percent alcohol, but stays well-balanced and

only shows a whisper of backend heat. Good juice done in a more buxom style than the other chardonnays in the ABC lineup. 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Chardonnay “Runway Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Maria Valley)

Au Bon Climat only started producing a single vineyard bottling of chardonnay from the Runway Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley in 2016, so this is their third effort from this parcel of vines. The wine is barrel-fermented and the 2018 version delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, a touch of tangerine, a lovely base of soil tones, spring flowers and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, very good acidity and cut and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is the type of chardonnay that will get nicely creamy on the attack with a bit more bottle age, but will always have excellent backend lift. Fine juice. 2021-2030+. **92+.**

2018 Chardonnay “Sanford and Benedict Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Ynez Valley)

Au Bon Climat’s 2018 Chardonnay from the Sanford and Benedict Vineyard is a beautifully complex young wine, offering up lovely precision on both the nose and palate. The wine comes in at a svelte 13.5 percent octane in this vintage. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, fresh pineapple, a touch of lemon zest, salty minerality, a touch of beeswax, gentle savory elements that hint at wild fennel, citrus blossoms and a suave framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with an excellent core, seamless balance, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. This is outstanding chardonnay! 2021-2035+. **94+.**

2018 Chardonnay “Cascadia”- Brick House Wine Company (Ribbon Ridge)

The Cascadia bottling from Brick House is their Reserve bottling of chardonnay, made from a barrel selection of the finest casks in the cellar in any given vintage. The 2018 Cascadia tips the scales at a very refined twelve percent alcohol and offers up a very expressive bouquet of pear, hazelnut, complex soil tones, a hint of passion fruit, white lilies, a dollop of fresh nutmeg and a very stylish framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, youthful and full, with a superb core, excellent mineral drive and cut, impressive focus and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is still a puppy and really deserves at least two or three years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge. Fine juice. 2024-2040. **93.**

2018 Chardonnay “Affinités”- Nicolas-Jay (Willamette Valley)

The 2018 Chardonnay “Affinités” bottling from Nicolas-Jay is made from a blend of fruit from both Yamhill-Carlton and Eola-Amity Hills AVAs, with the wine raised entirely in used casks. The 2018 Affinités is a lovely wine, offering up noteworthy purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex mix of apple, pear, almond, a touch of fresh nutmeg, fruit blossoms, a good base of soil and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is a lovely bottle in the making, which is certainly approachable today, but will clearly be even better with a few years in the cellar to stretch its wings and reveal its secondary layers of complexity. Fine juice. 2023-2035. **92.**

2018 Chardonnay “Bishop Creek”- Nicolas-Jay (Yamhill-Carlton)

Domaine Nicolas-Jay’s Bishop Creek bottling of chardonnay is from their estate vineyard, which was planted in the second half of the 1990s, so in Burgundian terms, it is just “coming of age” these days. Jean-Nicolas Méo and Jay Boberg have crafted a lovely bottle here in 2018, with the wine coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up scents of pear, almond, white lilies, a lovely base of soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright

and youthful, with a full-bodied format, a lovely core and soil drive and a very long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. This is a touch oakier than the Affinités bottling, as it sees twenty percent new oak, but this is done in a very discreet manner. It is beautifully balanced and will be a lovely wine in due course, but it needs some cellaring time for its complexity to unfurl. 2024-2035+. **92+**.

2018 Chardonnay “Santa Rita Hills”- Pence Ranch (Santa Barbara County)

The Pence Ranch 2018 Chardonnay is raised in thirty percent new oak. It comes in at 13.3 percent alcohol in this vintage and delivers a very pretty bouquet of apple, a touch of pineapple, a good base of soil, almond, musky floral tones and a nice dollop of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, good balance and backend bounce and a long, classy finish. This is very well made. 2021-2026. **91+**.

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

The 2017 Mount Eden chardonnay is a fine bottle in the making, with the estate’s customary structural integrity that promises even a better drink three to ten years down the road. The bouquet is a tad reductive when first opened and needs a little prompting when first opened, but eventually wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, iodine, honeysuckle, a lovely base of soil, incipient notes of beeswax and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, youthful and well-balanced, with a lovely core, vibrant acids and lovely soil signature defining the long and nascently complex finish. If one is inclined to drink this now, decant it for half an hour first, just to let its youthful dollop of reduction work through. I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for three or four more years and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. 2024-2045. **92+**.

Rosé

2020 California Rosé of Petite Sirah- Mountain Tides Wine Company (California)

Scott Kirkpatrick and Allison Watkins at Mountain Tides Wine Company specialize in petite sirah and their Rosé from this varietal is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older oak barrels. Their 2020 version is nicely deep salmon in color, tips the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a pretty bouquet of watermelon, blood orange, rose petals and soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and vinous in personality, with a good core, sound framing acids and good length on the juicy finish. This is not overly complex, but it is tasty. 2021-2024. **87**.

2019 Flame Tokay “Lanterna” Chandler Vineyard- Sabelli-Frisch (Makelumne River)

The 2019 Flame Tokay “Lanterna” Rosé from Adam Sabelli-Frisch is another beautifully-colored wine, with the color falling halfway between tangerine and salmon. As I mentioned in my note last year, this wine is made from extremely old vines in the Chandler Vineyard having been planted in 1899! The wine is given three weeks of skin contact and then raised in a mix of older oak casks and clay amphora for a bit more than a year prior to *assemblage* and bottling. The 2019 Lanterna comes in at an even twelve percent octane and offers up a complex nose of apricot, cherry skin, orange peel, a dollop of sumac, brown spices, a lovely base of soil tones, a hint of lavender and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, bright acids and fine focus and lift on the long, very well-balanced finish. I like the backend grip here from the three weeks of

skin contact. This is an excellent wine and a step up, to my palate, from the 2018, as I find this wine far more structurally sound, without the slightly wild “natural wine” aspects of the 2018 version. Fine juice from vines that celebrated their one hundred and twentieth birthday in 2019! 2021-2030. **92.**

Off the Beaten Path Red Wines

2020 Cascadia- Franchere Wine Company (Willamette Valley)

The 2020 Cascadia red wine blend from Mike Hinds at Franchere is composed this year from eighty-three percent Pinot Noir, ten percent Grüner Veltliner and seven percent Syrah. The grapes are all foot-trodden, co-fermented and included twenty percent whole clusters in this vintage. The Cascadia is raised in older casks for nine months prior to bottling and the 2020 version comes in at 13.2 percent octane. The wine offers up a bright and nascently complex nose of cherries, red berries, a touch of grilled meats, some youthful stem tones, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, a touch of cedar and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core and transparency, moderate tannins, snappy acids (from the Grüner?) and a long, promising finish. This needs a bit of bottle age to soften up before it starts to drink with generosity, but it should prove to be a tasty middleweight once it blossoms. 2024-2040+. **88.**

2019 “Hernan” Mission “Somers Vineyard”- Sabelli-Frisch (Mokelumne River)

Adam Sabelli-Frisch has made a name for himself with his beautiful renditions of the Mission grape, which was so prolific in early California winemaking, but has largely fallen by the historical wayside with the passage of time. His Hernan bottling is treated a bit differently than his other Mission cuvée, as he lets the grapes hang longer for this bottling and then gives it four months of skin contact in clay amphora prior to racking it to cask for completion of its *elevage*. It is still a svelte wine, tipping the scales at 12.9 percent octane and delivering a nose of fig, sultana raisin, a nice touch of botanicals, tree bark, a complex base of autumnal soil tones and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and full-bodied, with a fine core, ripe tannin and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a fairly powerful example of Mission, but still tangy and light on its feet. Good juice that could do with a few years in the cellar to blossom. 2025-2050. **92.**

2019 “La Malinche” Mission “Somers Vineyard”- Sabelli-Frisch (Mokelumne River)

The La Malinche bottling of Mission from Adam Sabelli-Frisch is more typical of this grape, as it is notably lighter in color than the Hernan bottling and also a touch lower in octane, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. Though the wine is fairly pale for a red wine, it is loaded with personality, as the bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, strawberries, orange zest, beautiful, clove-like spice tones, rose petals, a hint of sumac and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor and complexity, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. Adam’s Mission bottlings are like no other red wines I have ever tasted from California, but I love them! 2021-2040+. **93.**

2019 Native Red- Skinner Vineyards (El Dorado)

The 2019 Native Red bottling from Skinner Vineyards is composed from a blend of Trousseau, Carignane and Petite Bouschet. The wine is raised in used barrels and comes in at an even thirteen percent octane in this vintage. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant and complex mix of dark berries, chicory, pomegranate, a touch of tree bark, black tea, woodsmoke

and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe tannins and beautiful balance on the long, youthfully complex and energetic finish. I love the backend lift here, as well as the synthesis of sappy fruit and great mineral drive. This is a superb wine and my only complaint with it is that the folks at Skinner have decided to bottle it in clear glass. This allows one to marvel at its beautiful, ruby red color, but given that the wine is built to easily age twenty-five years or more, perhaps a tinted glass more inclined to protect this beautiful wine from ultraviolet radiation would have been more appropriate? But, in any case, this is a unique and totally stellar bottle of red wine! 2026-2050+. **93.**

2018 “Luciades” Tinta Caõ “Tamayo Vineyard”- Sabelli-Frisch (Contra Costa County)

The 2018 Tinta Caõ from Adam Sabelli-Frisch is a big boy, coming in at 14.6 percent octane in this vintage, and as Adam notes, taking an “extra year and a half in barrel to calm down” its tannic chassis. Today, the wine is settling in nicely and offers up a lovely nose of desiccated dark berries, bonfire, roasted meats, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones and a nice touch of savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core of fruit, good soil undertow, firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex and nobly rustic finish. Adam notes that this is a fine bottle for a hearty dinner on a winter’s night, maybe by the fireplace, and I can only concur. Good juice that is still a bit chewy, but certainly approachable today, and likely to soften up quite a bit more with further bottle age. 2026-2050. **91+.**

Gamay

2019 Gamay Noir “Due East”- Brick House Wine Company (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2019 Due East bottling of Gamay from Doug Tunnell is a young and very intensely flavored wine which is loaded with personality and still very light on its feet. The wine offers up a red fruity and peppery nose of strawberries, blood orange, pepper, bonfire, beautiful soil tones, a touch of cardamom and some savory herb tones that recall Canary Islands’ reds. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with lovely transparency and grip, just a touch of tannin, excellent acids and fine focus on the long, complex and well-balanced finish that closes with a peppery note. In the classic vintage of 2019, this bottling comes in at an even twelve percent octane and the bunches were completely destemmed. This is lovely wine. 2021-2035+. **92.**

2018 Gamay Noir- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Willamette Valley)

I love the Gamay Noir bottlings from Belle Pente and Brick House and it was fascinating to get to taste the 2018 versions of each winery’s releases in preparation of this report. The 2018 Belle Pente is pretty ripe for this varietal from Brian O’Donnell, coming in at a 14.4 percent octane in this hot summer. The wine is deep and sappy on the nose, jumping from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of road tar, bonfire, dark soil, gentle balsamic overtones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, ripe and sappy, with lovely acids and focus, a plush core, firm tannins and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This is quite a powerful example of young gamay and I would guess that this parcel of vines suffered a bit from drought, as it has a concentrated aspect to the sugars, acids and tannins that suggest desiccated bunches. It will need some cellaring to soften up and

blossom, but it has some fine constituent components and should be very tasty in due course. 2028-2045+. **89+**.

2018 Gamay Noir “Due East”- Brick House Wine Company (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2018 Brick House Due East bottling of Gamay is quite a bit riper than the 2019 version, which is not surprising given the very different growing seasons. The wine comes in at 13.2 percent alcohol in 2018 and was also completely destemmed. It offers up a deeper and more black fruity bouquet than the 2019, delivering scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, still plenty of bouncy acidity, modest tannins and a long, youthfully complex and very nicely balanced finish that also closes with a nice touch of pepper. This is a slightly bigger and more structured wine than the 2019 and I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for a handful of years and let its tannins soften and its secondary layers of complexity emerge. I cannot say that I like one vintage over the other, as they are both excellent, but just quite differently styled wines, as they are both creatures of their respective growing seasons. 2024-2040. **92**.

2017 Gamay Noir- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Willamette Valley)

The 2017 Gamay Noir from Brian O'Donnell at Belle Pente is really starting to drink nicely as it closes in on its fifth birthday. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows lovely secondary development in its blend of red and black cherries, sweet dark berries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird, bitter chocolate and a just a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of black fruit, excellent soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, very well-balanced finish. This tastes quite a bit like a maturing bottle of Château Thivin, with different soil signature. It is very tasty wine today, but it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. Like a top flight Cru Beaujolais, it has tons of life still ahead of it! 2021-2045+. **93**.

Syrah and Rhône Style Friends

2019 Cotillion- Frenchtown Farms (Lodi)

The Cotillion bottling from Frenchtown Farms hails from fruit sourced from the old Renaissance vineyards in North Yuba, with the wine made from a *cépages* of fifty percent each of syrah and grenache. The bunches are destemmed by hand and then foot-trodden, before *elevage* in all old oak casks for one year prior to bottling. The 2019 Cotillion tips the scales at a very civilized 13.1 percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of black raspberries, smoked meats, lavender, a touch of pepper, a superb base of soil tones, a hint of new leather, bonfire and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This wine needs time in the cellar to soften up, but it is going to be a very good drink when it is ready to go. 2031-2060. **92+**.

2019 Petite Sirah- Mountain Tides Wine Company (California)

The 2019 Petite Sirah from Scott Kirkpatrick and Allison Watkins at Mountain Tides comes in at 13.4 percent octane. The wine offers up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, bonfire, roasted venison, chicory, dark soil tones and a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a good core and soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, well-balanced and promising finish. This will

need a handful of years in the cellar to soften up, but it will be a fine bottle in due course. 2027-2055. **91.**

2019 Mourvèdre- Skinner Vineyards (El Dorado)

The 2019 Mourvèdre from Skinner Vineyards comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and is raised entirely in used French oak casks during its *elevage*. The wine is impressively transparent in profile and offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of pomegranate, dark berries, pepper, smoked meats, a fine base of soil, cigar smoke and incipient notes of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and peppery, with a good core, fine mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and fine balance on the long, focused and youthfully complex finish. This is a very fine example of mourvèdre. 2029-2055+. **92.**

2018 Syrah “Baker Ranch”- Dupuis Wines (Anderson Valley)

Well Guthrie’s Baker Ranch bottling of Syrah in 2018 included one hundred percent whole clusters, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in older oak casks. The wine comes in at a svelte thirteen percent octane this year and offers up a stunning young nose of black raspberries, cassis, smoked meats, pepper, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of raw cocoa and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with great transparency and grip, a lovely core of black fruit, excellent complexity and a long, ripely tannic and perfectly balanced finish. I love the backend lift on this wine! This is a stunning young syrah in the making. 2028-2065. **94+.**

2018 Syrah “Havlin Vineyard”- Franchere Wine Company (Willamette Valley)

I have always liked Mike Hinds syrah bottling from the cool Havlin Vineyard, as it has plenty of northern Rhône-like personality traits and excellent depth and structural integrity. The 2018 version comes in at a svelte 13.1 percent octane (due to the cool prevailing wines in the van Duzer Corridor), included one hundred percent whole clusters and delivers a superb young nose of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, black olive, a complex base of iron-infused soil tones, a nice touch of sweet stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still quite primary, with a good core of fruit, an even better undertow of soil, ripe, firm tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is an outstanding wine in the making that stylistically, harkens back to the Côte-Rôtie bottlings I used to taste from Albert Dervieux-Thaize and the like back in the late 1970s. It will be an absolutely superb wine when it is ready to drink! 2030-2065+. **93.**

Merlot and Zinfandel

2018 Merlot “aux Reynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

David Jeffrey at Calluna makes one of my absolute favorite examples of California merlot and I only wish more winemakers would follow his lead with this varietal. His 2018 Merlot includes twelve percent cabernet franc in the blend this year. It delivers a very refined aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, plum, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of soil, a touch of La Conseillante-like herb tones, cigar smoke and a deft touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil undertow and grip, ripe, suave tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and very sophisticated finish. In terms of aesthetic sensibilities, this is so like the 1985 La Conseillante, albeit with completely different *terroir*. But, it has that same elegant grace and inner intensity, wrapped up in a totally refined package. Beautiful juice. 2028-2065+. **94.**



1979 Merlot- Newton Vineyards (Napa Valley)

The 1979 Newton Merlot from Ric Forman is a beautiful middleweight that is still in its plateau of peak maturity, even at forty-two years of age. This lovely wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a refined, complex bouquet of dark berries, cigar ash, eucalyptus, lavender, a nice base of soil tones, a touch of petroleum jelly, woodsmoke and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, refined and fully resolved, with a still quite respectable core, melted tannins, good acids and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. 1979 was not a top flight vintage in Napa, but this wine has aged more gracefully than many a 1979 cabernet sauvignon I have tasted in recent times and remains a lovely drink. 2021-2040. **89.**

1977 Zinfandel “Mendocino”- Joseph Swan Vineyards

The 1977 Mendocino bottling of zinfandel from Joseph Swan is an outstanding example of this lovely vintage. At age forty-four, the wine is drinking at its peak and still plenty vibrant both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a complex blend of raspberry, lovely spice tones, fresh dill, a beautiful base of soil tones, smoked meats and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impressive balance and grip, melted tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. Back in this era, Joe Swan did not deign to put alcohol levels on his wines, but I would guess that this came in around or just under thirteen percent, based on how the wine is showing today and the style of

the cooler growing season of 1977. It is a truly beautiful bottle of zinfandel that still has tons of life ahead of it. 2021-2055. **93.**

1974 Zinfandel “Late Harvest”- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)

Bob Travers made a handful of Late Harvest Zinfandels during his earlier days at Mayacamas and the 1974 is certainly a very lively wine. The wine comes in at fully sixteen percent alcohol in this ripe vintage and is stylistically unique and somewhat acquired taste. The bouquet is deep and offers up scents of raisins, dark berries, plenty of zinfandel spice tones, a pretty good base of soil and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and fairly warm on the backend, with a good core, a rather chunky personality and a long finish that still shows plenty of vitality. This is not a particularly complex wine and is certainly defined by its Late Harvest style (kind of like four-square Amarone made from zinfandel), but it remains alive and kicking. Stylistically, it is not my cup of tea, but it is at least interesting to try. 2021-2035+. **84.**

Zinfandel- Gemello Vineyards

This non-vintage bottling of Gemello Zinfandel is actually a blend of two years, 1972 and 1975! The back label describes how “Lot 72-A” was blended with the newly minted 1975 to produce this multi-vintage bottling, with the Lot 72-A wine probably having been resting in old redwood *foudres* prior to its being blended with the 1975 juice. The wine has held up quite well for such an old zin, but was probably never more than a “pretty good” bottle even in its prime, so its relative lack of complexity today is not so much a sign of it getting long in the tooth, but rather, never having had all that much complexity at the outset. Nevertheless, the wine is still quite vigorous, offering up a jammy nose of dried berries, fire pit, a touch of raisin, zinfandel spice tones, cigar ash and a bit of redwood seasoning from its sojourn in old *foudre*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, jammy and just a bit warm on the backend, with a four square personality, melted tannin and a long, vibrant finish. This wine still has plenty of life in it, which is pretty amazing, given that it was probably all of \$1.50 a bottle when it was released and was never intended to be a wine to last this long! It is not particularly complex, but it is a good, solid drink. 2021-2040. **85.**

Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux Blends

2018 Cuvée CVC- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2018 vintage of CVC is composed from a *cépages* of forty-one percent merlot, twenty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent cabernet franc, nine percent petit verdot and six percent malbec. The wine comes in at 14.1 percent octane this year and offers up a beautifully refined nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, gentle notes of menthol, a bit of cigar ash and a very discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and very refined finish. This has been one of California’s finest values in the world of Bordeaux blends for many years, but the 2018 may well be one of most complete vintages yet for this lovely cuvée. 2030-2070. **94.**

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2018 vintage of The Colonel’s Vineyard from Calluna is an excellent bottle of young cabernet sauvignon. It is always the most new oaky of David Jeffrey’s wines, as he barrel-ferments this wine in all new casks, prior to racking off half of the cuvée for *elevage* in older

barrels. The 2018 version is outstanding on both the nose and palate, coming in at 13.7 percent alcohol and offering up a superb bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones and a lovely framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very elegant in personality, with a lovey core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and impeccable balance on the long, youthfully complex and very elegant finish. This will need plenty of time in the cellar to fully blossom, but it is going to be stunning wine when it is ready to drink. 2033-2075. **94+**.

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon “Calluna Estate”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The flagship bottling of Calluna Estate cabernet sauvignon is an absolute stunner in this vintage. The wine includes six percent cabernet franc, three percent merlot and one percent each of petit verdot and malbec in the *cépages* this year and comes in at 13.8 percent octane. The *cépages* this year makes the 2018 Calluna Estate the most dominated by cabernet sauvignon in the history of this bottling. The wine offers up a truly stunning bouquet of sweet black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, a beautifully complex base of soil, a hint of allspice (think of Chalk Hill trying to conjure up Rutherford Dust), a touch of cigar smoke and a beautifully refined framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, fine-grained, seamless tannins and superb length on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is not a blockbuster in style, as it is about the weight of a top vintage of Lafite-Rothschild, but it has great intensity of flavor and stunning length on the backend. If you are a fan of Cathy Corison’s beautiful cabernets and are not already buying the wines from Calluna Vineyards, you are making a serious mistake! 2035-2085. **96**.

2018 Helios Cabernet Franc “Sunbasket Vineyard”- Corison Winery (Napa Valley)

Cathy Corison makes such beautiful cabernet franc from her Sunbasket Vineyard. The 2018 Helios comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers beautiful aromatic precision and complexity in its blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, violets, a touch of tobacco leaf, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a more transparent personality than the cabernet sauvignon from this vineyard, a lovely core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, poised and nascently complex finish. This is outstanding wine in the making! 2028-2065. **93+**.

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon “Sunbasket Vineyard”- Corison Winery (Napa Valley)

The 2018 Sunbasket Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Cathy Corison comes in listed at 13.7 percent octane in this vintage and delivers beautiful aromatic and flavor purity in its seamless package. The youthfully complex bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil tones, violets, pretty spice tones and a suave framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and very elegant, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil undertow, ripe, fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance on the long, complex and focused finish. This is a stellar wine in the making, but give it at least a decade in the cellar to unwind and start to show all of its layers of complexity. Fine, fine juice. 2031-2085+. **94**.

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon- Corison Winery (Napa Valley)

The 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon from Cathy Corison is another absolutely classic wine and yet another legend in the making. The wine is just a whisper higher in octane than the Sunbasket cabernet, tipping the scales at 13.8 percent alcohol and offering up all of the precision, purity and structural sophistication that one has come to routinely expect of young vintages of Corison cabernet sauvignon. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a polished blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, Rutherford Dust, cigar smoke and a deft framing of

spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a beautifully refined attack, a rock solid core of fruit, exemplary soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and great focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stunning young wine! 2033-2100. **96.**



2018 Cabernet Sauvignon “Gravelly Meadow”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa)

The 2018 Gravelly Meadow bottling of cabernet sauvignon is a fine, fine young wine. The wine comes in at the 14.5 percent alcohol that seems to be the comfort zone of ripeness of these wines in the twenty-first century, but the wine does not offer up any signs of *sur maturité* on either the nose or the palate. The bouquet is young, primary and very deep, delivering scents of cassis, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, cigar ash, currant leaf, a touch of dried eucalyptus and a very well-done, discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and structured, with a fine chassis of ripe tannin, a superb core of black fruit, fine mineral undertow and a long, primary, palate-staining and very promising finish. The stonier soils here normally give the Gravelly Meadow bottling more early detail than the soils of the clay and iron-rich Red Rock Terrace bottling, but in the 2018 vintage, I have the sense that the Gravelly Meadow is actually the more backward of these two bottlings. 2038-2100. **95.**

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon “Red Rock Terrace”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa)

The 2018 Red Rock Terrace from Diamond Creek is a superb young wine in the making. It comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage and offers up a young and promising bouquet of sweet cassis, dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, plenty of smokiness, just a hint of

spices and a lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a great core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and extremely refined finish. I love the Diamond Creek wines today, which are still true to Al Brounstein's original stylistic vision of great, long-lived Mountain cabernets, but are a bit more polished structurally out of the blocks than was the case back when the 1970s and 1980s versions were young! 2035-2100. **95.**

2018 Cabernet Sauvignon "Volcanic Hill"- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa)

The 2018 vintage of Volcanic Hill cabernet sauvignon is yet another stellar wine in the making from Diamond Creek. This too comes in listed at a ripe 14.5 percent octane, but seems the most detailed of these three bottlings out of the blocks. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful young blend of cassis, tobacco leaf, a touch of eucalyptus, a beautiful base of dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a nice framing of new oak that hints at both cedar and nutty oak overtones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable balance and grip, superb delineation and a long, firm, ripely tannic and perfectly focused finish. It is still ridiculously early in their evolutions to be choosing a favorite from these three stellar 2018s from Diamond Creek, but if intuition is worth a damn anymore, I will bet that thirty or forty years down the road, the Volcanic Hill will prove to be the finest (by a nose) of these three stellar 2018s. 2033-2100. **96.**

2018 Claret- White Rock Vineyards (Napa Valley)

The 2018 Claret bottling from White Rock Vineyards is composed from a *cépages* of fifty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-seven percent merlot, four percent cabernet franc and two percent petit verdot. The vintage comes in at 14.4 percent octane and was given twenty-two months aging in cask prior to bottling. The bouquet offers up a suave and pure blend of red and black cherries, a hint of violets, graphite, a lovely base of stony soil tones, cigar smoke and a svelte foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly well-balanced for its octane, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex finish that shows just a bit of backend heat. I really like this wine's aesthetic sensibilities, but the alcohol poking out on the finish keeps its score down just a tad for my palate. For those more accustomed to this octane, please add three points to my score, as it is really a very well-made wine. 2031-2065. **89.**

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon- White Rock Vineyards (Napa Valley)

White Rock Vineyards' 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon is a touch riper than their 2018 Claret, tipping the scales at 14.7 percent alcohol. The wine is produced entirely from estate grown fruit up on the eastern hillsides of Napa Valley, at an elevation of three hundred feet. These vines have always been farmed organically since they were planted in the late 1970s and the wine this year was raised in thirty-five percent new oak. It offers up a deep and ripe nose of blackberries, black cherries, cigar ash, a nice touch of soil, gentle smokiness and a nicely restrained foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and pretty suave in style, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This carries its alcohol pretty well, but it is up out of my comfort zone and I wonder how the wood tannins on the backend are going to end up integrating over the coming years. There is plenty of stuffing to eventually absorb them, but they show pretty prominently as the wine gets some air and underscore the vagaries of new oak and higher octane wines. This is well made and probably well intentioned, but it is really hard today to taste it and think it is really going to be

special ten or fifteen years down the road, as the octane is too much of a variable in that equation. 2033-2065? **84-89?**

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon- Volker Eisele Family Estate (Chiles Valley)

The cabernet sauvignon from the Volker Eisele Family Estate is produced from vines that range from twenty-five to thirty-five years of age, with the vast majority of this organically-farmed vineyard also dry farmed. The wine is raised in fifty percent new oak and the 2015 vintage comes in listed at 14.3 percent octane. The nose is deep, ripe and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, blackberries, cigar smoke, mint, a hint of *garrigue*, a good base of soil tones and a deft framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with good focus and grip, ripe, firm tannins and fine length and grip on the gently warm, but essentially well-balanced finish. This is probably a bit north of its stated octane level, but still a good bottle of cabernet sauvignon in the making and it should drink nicely once the tannins have mellowed a bit. 2028-2055. **90+.**

1980 Cabernet Sauvignon- Chappellet Vineyards (Pritchard Hill)

Cathy Corison arrived at Chappellet for her *stage* as winemaker here in early 1981 and inherited this wine while it was still fermenting away in the vats. Tony Soter had been Chappellet's consulting winemaker at harvest time in 1980, but had departed before the wine was even ready to be racked off into barrel, so Cathy thinks of the 1980 cabernet the first wine she made during her tenure here at Chappellet. The wine was raised in about twenty percent new oak and came in at a svelte 12.4 percent octane in this vintage. It is drinking beautifully at age forty-one, offering up a deep and very refined bouquet of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, a lovely base of iron-infused dark soil tones, just a whisper of bell pepper and dried eucalyptus and a very discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and very well-balanced finish. I really like the "cool fruit" personality of the 1980 Chappellet cabernet sauvignon, which is drinking at its apogee today, but still has decades of life ahead of it! 2021-2050. **92.**

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Lot 2"- Conn Creek Vineyards (Napa Valley)

The Lot 2 bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Conn Creek is drinking beautifully at age forty-three. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of sweet cassis, a touch of fruitcake, cigar ash, a nice note of spiced meats, Rutherford Dust, discreet cedary oak and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully resolved, with a lovely core, a nice base of soil tones, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Even at age forty-three, there is still a nice dollop of backend tannin that adds grip to the finish. This is a lovely bottle that still has plenty of life in it. 2021-2040. **92.**

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Gravelly Meadow"- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa)

I can still recall the first time I tasted any of the 1978 Diamond Creek cabernets, which was on the occasion of their tenth birthday at a broader tasting of the vintage. They were still very young and chewy wines at that point of their evolutions and many years away from starting to soften up. Today, the '78 Gravelly Meadow is drinking splendidly well, but still has some backend tannin to lend grip and has the potential for another forty or fifty years of life in bottle! The gorgeous bouquet offers up a precise and very pure blend of sweet cassis, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, a touch of dried eucalyptus, tobacco leaf, new leather and just a hint of

violets in the upper register as the wine evolves in the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a great core of black fruit, superb soil undertow, moderate, still gently chewy tannins, great balance and grip and impressive backend lift and energy on the very long, complex and utterly superb finish. This is a great, great bottle of mountain cabernet that still may improve with further bottle age! 2021-2065. **96.**

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon “Red Rock Terrace”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa)

The 1978 Red Rock Terrace is drinking beautifully at forty-three years of age. This was probably the first of the ‘78s from Diamond Creek to start to blossom and it is fully into its apogee of peak maturity today, but does not possess quite the same backend lift as the Gravelly Meadow and Volcanic Hill at this stage of its evolution. But, that said, the wine is still outstanding and only suffered by comparison to its two stable-mates. The bouquet is deep, *à point* and complex, wafting from the glass in a black fruity blend of cassis, dark berries, a touch of bell pepper, a fine base of soil tones, black tea, cigar smoke and just a touch of the medicinal tones that this wine showed in its youth (back when I first tasted it in 1988). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, modest, melting tannins and a long, very well balanced finish. I like this wine very much, but it did place third among the three ’78 Diamond Creeks at this extraordinary tasting. 2021-2055. **94.**

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon “Volcanic Hill”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa)

Of the three single vineyard bottlings of 1978 cabernet sauvignon from Diamond Creek that I tasted for this article (none of us had a bottle of the Lake Vineyard in their cellar), the Volcanic Hill is the only one that shows some red fruity shadings to go along with the great core of black fruit in the wine. At age forty-three, this wine is just reaching its apogee of peak drinkability and still has decades of life ahead of it, but now offers up a wide open and beautifully complex bouquet of baked red and black cherries, cassis, a hint of red currant, cigar wrapper, a complex base of stony soil tones, gentle notes of chipotle, cigar ash and a smoky topnote that is more redolent of bonfire than tobacco smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shares the same precision to its mineral drive as the ’78 Gravelly Meadow, with a rock solid core of fruit, impeccable balance and grip, superb complexity and a long, suavely tannic finish. All three of these ‘78s still have a bit of tannin on the backend that will continue to carry them for many, many years to come, and all demand at least a half hour in decanter to properly blossom, even at age forty-three, before they start to drink with proper generosity. It is clearly one of the greatest years ever at this iconic Spring Mountain cabernet estate! 2021-2065. **97.**

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon- Jordan Vineyards (Sonoma County)

The 1978 vintage of cabernet sauvignon from Jordan Vineyards is one of my favorite from the estate. Its Sonoma County origins are very apparent in its more “weedy” aromatic profile, but this is simply its personality trait and is most assuredly not a demerit in my book! I had not drunk a bottle of the ’78 Jordan in more than four years and was happy to see it showing beautifully and continuing to cruise along as if time is not going to touch it for decades to come. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite refined, offering up notes of cherries, chipotle peppers, weedy Sonoma overtones, a lovely base of soil, tobacco leaf and a dollop of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and still shows off marvelous mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, impeccably balanced and vibrant finish. This remains at the peak of its powers and it is clear that my last note, underrated the wine just a tad! Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050+. **93.**



1978 Cabernet Sauvignon “Monte Bello”- Ridge Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

I last drank a bottle of the beautiful 1978 vintage of Monte Bello back at the start of 2017 and suspected that it should just be hitting its absolute zenith around now. Sadly, this particular bottle was not completely pristine, so it was maybe ninety percent of a perfect bottle and we did not have the opportunity to enjoy a perfect example of what is one of my favorite vintages for Monte Bello of all time. Our bottle looked perfect, with good color, a fine fill level and a sound cork, but the wine was just a touch dulled in its aromatic and flavor spectrums and must have seen some less than perfect storage somewhere along the line. However, even at ninety percent efficiency, this is still a fairly tasty bottle of wine, offering up scents of cassis, new leather, cigar ash, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, chipotle peppers and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fully resolved, with a good core and soil signature, melted tannins and lovely backend lift and grip on the long finish. Perfect bottles of the 1978 Monte Bello are 95 or 96 points in quality, but this one could not quite reach those peaks. Still, it was tasty. However, I learned an interesting historical fact about the '78 Monte Bello in the wake of our tasting, when discussion of the wine led to the revelation that Paul Draper had needed to bottle this wine twice back in the day, as after it was first bottled, the wine had not quite completed its malolactic fermentation and started to bubble away a tad in bottle. So, Paul had to uncork every bottle and rack the wine back into tanks to finally get that pesky malo to finish up, before bottling it up a second time. I had never heard this before. 2021-2045. **90.**

1975 Cabernet Sauvignon- Chappellet Vineyards (Pritchard Hill)

Chappellet Vineyards had the good fortune to hire Philip Togni for its first several vintage and he was the winemaker here from the inaugural vintage of 1968 through the 1973s. The 1975 vintage here still carried his stylistic moniker to a certain degree, as this is a deep and black fruity wine that was based on a *cépages* of eighty-three percent cabernet sauvignon and seventeen percent merlot. Joe Cafaro was the winemaker at Chappellet in this era, having succeeded Philip Togni two years previously. The wine is still drinking beautifully, offering up a black fruity nose of cassis, black cherries, a touch of sweet bell pepper, a fine base of dark soil tones, a nice streak of iron, cigar smoke, a touch of oak and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced and quite complete finish. This is not quite as powerfully-built as the 1973 Chappellet, which was crafted by Philip Togni during his tenure here, but it is a fine example of this outstanding cabernet vintage and a wine that still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2021-2045. **92.**

1974 Cabernet Sauvignon- Spring Mountain Vineyards (Napa Valley)

The 1974 Spring Mountain cabernet sauvignon is a good, solid bottle from a ripe year that is now starting to gently peer over the far side of its plateau. The wine is not in any immediate jeopardy of declining, but it is a bit low in acidity now and kind of flat on the palate as a result. It comes in listed at thirteen percent octane and offers up a reasonably complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet bell pepper, chocolate, a hint of mint, cigar ash and a dollop of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and gently chocolaty in profile, with a solid core, melted tannins and a long, velvety finish that trails off and does not show a whole lot of lift or backend grip. This is tasty and still has life in it, but it is moving onto a point in its evolution where it is in the “good, but not great” camp. 2021-2040. **87.**

1973 Cabernet Sauvignon- Spring Mountain Vineyards (Napa Valley)

The 1973 vintage of Spring Mountain cabernet sauvignon comes in listed at the same octane level of thirteen percent as the 1974, but this wine has more bounce and vibrancy to it than the '74. The bouquet is quite similar in both wines, with the '73 offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, a touch of sweet bell pepper, a good base of soil, a touch of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with good brightness to its fruit tones, melted tannins and a long, fairly complex and nicely precise finish. This is a good bottle that continues to drink very well today and has plenty of life still in it. 2021-2045. **89.**

1968 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa”- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa Valley)

The 1968 Heitz Napa bottling of cabernet sauvignon is drinking beautifully at age fifty-three, and though no doubt it has been at its apogee for decades already, it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon! The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mature and vibrant blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, a lovely array of spice tones, a good base of soil, mint and a classic touch of old cabernet petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature, still a whisper of backend tannin and a long, tangy and very classy finish. Joe Heitz's penchant for not letting his cabernets go through malolactic fermentation gives all of his wines a

lovely spine of acidity that keeps them fresh and bouncy well past their fiftieth birthdays, and this is very much in evidence with this lovely 1968 Napa bottling. 2021-2040. **92.**

1968/1969 Cabernet Sauvignon “Lot H”- Spring Mountain Vineyards (Napa Valley)

This Lot H bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Spring Mountain is a completely different wine from the 1973 and 1974 reported on above, as rather than hailing from the winery’s own vineyards, this was actually composed from purchased barrels of cabernet sauvignon made and initially cellared by Joe Heitz at Heitz Wine Cellars! This shows how hand to mouth the early days in Napa Valley were for those pioneering wineries, and was so far removed from what is “normal” today up and down Highway 29. The 1969 half of the blend was the Heitz Wine Cellars’ Napa cabernet bottling from that vintage and the 1968 was Martha’s Vineyard that was still in cask. So, this wine is a step up in pedigree from those other Spring Mountain wines, but to the more experienced winemaking hand Joe Heitz and older vineyards as well! The wine is still drinking beautifully today, offering up a superb nose of red and black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, a lovely mintiness from the Martha’s Vineyard portion of the fruit, dark soil tones and a touch of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still at its apogee, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil undertow and grip, melted tannins, tangy acids and a long, refined and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice and one of the great, under the radar bottlings of cabernet sauvignon from this era. 2021-2040+. **93.**



Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier

2019 Pinot Noir “Select”- Brick House Wines (Ribbon Ridge)

The Select bottling of pinot noir from Brick House is their entry level wine. It included twelve percent whole clusters in 2019, was fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts and given sixteen months *elevage* in cask prior to bottling. It comes in at 13.3 percent octane in this classic Oregon vintage and offers up a refined young nose of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, a bit of smoked meats, gentle spice tones, roses and just a whisper of fresh herbs in the upper register from the small amount of whole clusters. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and quite svelte in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil undertow, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and lovely balance and grip on the long, focused and complex finish. This is crafted for early approachability and I would not hesitate to drink a bottle if I came across one on a wine list, but for drinking at home, I would definitely tuck it away in the cellar for at least a handful of years, as there are more layers of complexity here still to unfold! Fine juice and a superb value. 2026-2055. **92.**

2019 Pinot Noir “les Dijonnais”- Brick House Wines (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2019 vintage of les Dijonnais from Dough Tunnell at Brick House is a stunning young pinot noir. The wine offers up a beautifully red fruity and spicy bouquet of cherries, strawberries, red plums, fresh nutmeg, a hint of clove, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil tones and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a tightly-knit personality, a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, fine-grained, seamless tannins and a long, nascently complex and energetic finish. This needs some bottle age to properly blossom, but even in its reticent youth, one can easily see just how stunning this wine is going to be when it starts to hit on all cylinders! 2028-2065+. **94.**

2019 Pinot Noir- Cloudline Cellars (Willamette Valley)

The Cloudline label was created in 2002 when Dreyfus-Ashby, Joseph Drouhin’s importer, partnered with Véronique Drouhin-Boss as consultant to craft an early-drinking example of pinot noir. These days, fully twenty-five percent of the fruit for this bottling hails from the Drouhin family’s new property, Roserock, in the cool Van Duzer Corridor. The 2019 Cloudline pinot noir comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a refined nose of red plum, cherry, a touch of raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil tones, peonies and a deft touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is quite tasty out of the blocks, but clearly, more complexity will emerge with a bit of bottle age. Good juice. 2021-2045. **90.**

2019 Pinot Noir “La Colina”- Crowley Wines (Dundee Hills)

The 2019 La Colina bottling of pinot noir from Tyson Crowley comes in at an even thirteen percent octane, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in used oak barrels. The wine offers up a lovely, nascently complex nose of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a lovely base of soil, incipient notes of cola, woodsmoke and just a touch of oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a good core and soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. There is plenty of complexity waiting to emerge here, but a bit of bottle age will be required to allow the wine to fully blossom. Good juice. 2026-2055. **92.**

2019 Pinot Noir “Four Winds”- Crowley Wines (Willamette Valley)

The 2019 Four Wines pinot noir from Crowley Wines sees just a touch of new oak during its *elevage*, but is raised primarily in used casks. These vines are a touch older than those at La

Colina (twenty-seven years of age versus eighteen years old) and the wine seems to have just a bit more mid-palate sappiness as a result. The 2019 Four Winds tips the scales at thirteen percent alcohol in this cool vintage and delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of black plums, sweet dark berries, gamebird, a fine base of dark soil tones, raw cocoa, a dollop of fresh thyme, gentle smokiness and a deft foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, focused and full, with a good core, fine soil undertow, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and a long, youthful and promising finish. This will need a few more years in the cellar than Tyson's 2019 La Colima bottling to start to drink with generosity, but it has fine promise. 2029-2065. **92+**.

2019 Pinot Noir "Eola-Amity Hills"- Franchere Wine Company

The 2019 Eola-Amity Hills bottling of pinot noir from Mike Hinds at Franchere hails from the dry-farmed Zenith Vineyard and included twenty percent whole clusters in this vintage. These vines are not particularly venerable, having been planted in 2006 and 2012 and Mike ages the wine entirely in old oak casks. The 2019 version comes in at 13.9 percent octane and offers up a deep and nicely spicy nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, clove-like spices, pretty balsamic tones and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, moderate tannins, good acids and a long, promising finish. Stylistically, this reminds me of some of the Oregon pinots I sold back in the day from the 1985 and 1986 vintages, which were from cooler growing seasons like 2019. This is young and a bit four-square out of the blocks, but has good depth and balance and should blossom very nicely with a bit of bottle age. Think of it as an old-fashioned example of pinot in the best sense. 2027-2050+. **88+**.

2019 Pinot Noir- Pence Ranch (Santa Rita Hills)

Pence Ranch is a new project from Blair Pence, who planted his property in the upper reaches of the Santa Rita Hills in 2004. Blair brought in the fine winemaker, Sashi Moorman (of Domaine de la Côte and Evening Land, amongst others) to oversee the vinification of the Pence wines. Their 2019 Pinot Noir was fermented with indigenous yeasts, includes some whole clusters and was raised in thirty percent new oak. It comes in at 13.4 percent alcohol and offers up a refined nose of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, a fine base of soil tones, fresh herbs, hints of the cola to come and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is still a young wine and needs some bottle age, but it is going to be very fine indeed. 2028-2060. **91+**.

2019 Pinot Noir "Willamette Valley"- Résonance Wines (Willamette Valley)

The Willamette Valley bottling from the Louis Jadot-owned Résonance Wines includes fruit from their two estate vineyards, Découverte and Résonance Vineyards, as well as purchased fruit from beyond the confines of the Yamhill-Carlton AVA. The wine is raised in twenty percent new oak and comes in at an even 13.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. It delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, black plums, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, a lovely touch of fresh thyme, a fine base of dark soil tones and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of black fruit, good soil undertow and grip, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, focused and very nicely balanced finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but it is really a young wine and I would opt for giving it five to seven years in the cellar to really let it develop properly. Fine juice. 2026-2055+. **91+**.

2018 Pinot Noir “Estate Bottled”- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)

The 3028 Estate bottling of pinot noir from Darrin Low is a touch lower in octane than the very good 2017 version, as this wine comes in at 13.2 percent this year, as opposed to 13.6 percent a year ago. Like all of the Domaine Anderson pinots, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts, and this particular cuvée sees only a tiny percentage of new oak each year. The wine delivers a lovely young bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, sweet beetroot, a nice base of soil tones, gentle notes of fresh herbs and gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, suave, moderate tannins and lovely focus and balance on the long and still fairly tightly-knit finish. This is quite primary in personality, but certainly approachable already if given some decanting time, but I would be inclined to let it hibernate in the cellar for four or five years and let its secondary layers of complexity start to emerge. 2026-2050. **90.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Dach Vineyard” - Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)

As I mentioned last year, the Dach Vineyard is perched on the hills right above the Domaine Anderson winery. The vineyard farmed biodynamically and organically, with the biodynamic section now certified by Demeter. The 2018 Dach Vineyard bottling is raised mostly in older oak casks (less than ten percent new in any given vintage) and is really lovely in this vintage, offering up a perfumed and precise nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of bitter chocolate, violets, discreet Mendocino herb tones and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with a nice sense of sappiness at the core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is going to be a fine bottle once it blossoms. 2028-2065. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Pinoli Vineyard”- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)

Though the Pinoli Vineyard is usually one of the lower octane wines in the Domaine Anderson lineup, due to the maritime influence here, the 2018 has come in at a very surprisingly high alcohol level of 15.6 percent in this vintage. I have to assume that this was the result of drought conditions and some desiccated berries concentrating the sugars in the bunches. Surprisingly, the wine is really pretty fresh on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of hung game, dark soil tones, nice herb tones and a bit more cedary oak influence than these other single vineyard bottlings. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and really quite light on its feet for its octane level, with a nice nod of soil tones, ripe, suave tannins, still good acids and a long, gently warm and fairly complex finish. It is rather remarkable how well this wine has turned out, given its alcohol level. It is still up out of my comfort zone, but I am impressed with how well this has turned out from what were clearly extenuating circumstances! 2021-2035. **88.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Walraven Vineyard”- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)

The 2018 Walraven Vineyard bottling of pinot noir is one Domaine Anderson’s cooler wines in this vintage, coming in at a svelte 13.2 percent octane. The wine delivers a refined aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, just a hint of beetroot, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a hint of Chambolle-like mustard seed and a very discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of red fruit, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. I really like the backend lift here. This is going to be excellent once it blossoms completely. 2028-2065. **93.**



2018 Pinot Noir “Bien Nacido Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Barbara County)

The 2018 Bien Nacido Vineyard bottling from ABC is a beautiful young of pinot noir. The aromatic constellation wafts from the glass in a red fruity blend of cherries, beetroot, a touch of strawberry, gentle herb tones, a lovely foundation of soil, hints of cinnamon and clove, orange peel and a nicely understated framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is focused, complex, tangy and full-bodied, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine soil signature, excellent acids and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a gorgeous bottle of pinot noir! It can certainly be enjoyed in the first blush of youth, but the real fireworks are ten to fifteen years down the road and I would be patient and let time in the cellar work its magic! 2030-2075. **94.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Isabelle”- Au Bon Climat (California)

The 2018 vintage of Cuvée Isabelle comes in at a refined octane level of 13.5 percent and offers up its customary superb complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine’s aromatic constellation consists of scents of sweet dark berries, black plums, bonfire, gamebird, raw cocoa, a fine base of dark soil, lovely spice tones, a hint of anise and a nice framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and new oaky in style, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, seamless and nascently complex finish. This is going to be superb with sufficient bottle age, but it needs a good decade or so in the cellar before it will really start to stir. 2031-2080. **95.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Runway Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Maria Valley)

The 2018 Runway Vineyard bottling of Pinot Noir from Au Bon Climat is a beautiful bottle in the making. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, a lovely array of spice tones, a fine base of soil, sweet stem tones and a deft touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent soil undertow, tangy acids, suave tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2028-2065. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Sanford and Benedict Vineyard”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Ynez Valley)

Back in the old days when I was still a wine merchant, my favorite two bottlings of pinot noir from Jim Clendenen were always the Sanford and Benedict Vineyard and the Cuvée Isabelle. These days, there are more cuvées vying for top billing at Au Bon Climat, but the 2018 Sanford and Benedict pinot noir is every bit as fine as those bottlings of yesteryear. The wine shows a lovely mix of red and black fruit on the nose, offering up scents of cherries, plums, a touch of pomegranate, a complex base of soil tones, gamebird, brown spices, a touch of rosemary, woodsmoke, peonies and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins, bright acids and fine focus and balance on the long and nascently complex finish. Though this is listed at the same 13.5 percent octane as the Bien Nacido bottling, this is a bit more powerfully structured wine out of the blocks and I would not touch a bottle until it is at least a dozen years of age. In due course, it will be stellar. 2030-2075+. **94+.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Belle Pente Vineyard”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Yamhill-Carlton)

The 2018 Belle Pente Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Brian O'Donnell is a beautiful wine in the making. This vineyard was densely-planted in 1994 and is starting to “come of age” these days, with the 2018 bottling here coming in at 14.2 percent alcohol in this ripe vintage and delivering a superb bouquet of red plums, pomegranate, cherries, gamebird, a beautiful foundation of soil tones, fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke, a deft framing of nutty oak and a topnote of cocoa powder. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with the start of a velvety attack, a lovely core of pure fruit, fine soil signature and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very elegant finish. These are younger vines than the Murto Vineyard bottling, so they do not have quite the same mid-palate volume, but they make up for this with beautiful transparency and inner mouth perfume. Fine, fine juice. 2028-2065+. **93+.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Murto Vineyard”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The Murto Vineyard was planted back in 1978, so these vines are in their prime at forty years of age in this vintage. The bottling this year comes in at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a strikingly beautiful and sappy nose of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, violets, a beautiful base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with lovely focus and grip, a suave chassis of ripe tannin, tangy acids and great balance on the long, complex and very sophisticated finish. Great juice in the making, but this wine will need some hibernation in the cellar to soften up those fine-grained tannins and really start to hit on all cylinders. 2028-2065+. **94.**

2018 Pinot Noir “les Dijonnais”- Brick House Wines (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2018 vintage of les Dijonnais bottling from Brick House is another simply beautiful young wine from Doug Tunnell. The cuvée included thirty percent whole clusters in this vintage, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in one-third new oak casks. The wine comes in at a very svelte (particularly for the warm summer of 2018) 13.3 percent octane and offers up a beautifully refined, red fruity and spicy aromatic constellation of strawberries, cherries, red

plums, fresh nutmeg, cloves, smoked meats, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of sweet stem tones and a discreet framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and full-bodied, with lovely transparency and complexity, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is certainly tasty right out of the blocks, but there are so many more layers of complexity here that will come to the fore with bottle age that I would try not to touch a bottle until it is fully ten years of age. Great juice! 2028-2065+. **94.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Halliday Hill”- Brick House Wines (Ribbon Ridge)

The small Halliday Hill vineyard is owned by Jim and Karen Halliday, but Doug Tunnell and his team at Brick House have been farming it biodynamically and purchasing the fruit since 2007. However, 2018 is the first time this bottling has stood on its own in the Brick House lineup, with two hundred and thirty-five cases produced in its inaugural vintage as a single vineyard cuvée. The wine included fifty percent whole clusters in 2018 and was raised in one-third new oak during its sixteen months in the cellars. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of strawberries, cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, a lovely base of soil tones, clove-like spices, just a dollop of mustard seed and a deft foundation of cedar. On the palate the wine is vibrant, youthful and full-bodied, with excellent focus and grip, a lovely core of red fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is going to be a beautiful bottle, with striking transparency, once it is ready to drink. First class juice. 2028-2065. **93**

2018 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Domaine Carneros (Carneros)

Though I have been drinking and selling Domaine Carneros’ sparkling wines since their very earliest vintages, this was the first red pinot noir vintage I have ever tasted from the estate. All of the fruit hails from the domaine’s vineyards in Carneros, with the bunches destemmed and given a short cold soak prior to the onset of fermentation. The 2018 comes in listed at 14.2 percent alcohol in this vintage and offers up a deep and ripe bouquet of black cherries, chocolate, fresh herb tones, a good base of soil and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This is a good, solid bottle in the making, but it will need some bottle age to allow its complexity to more fully emerge, as it is still quite primary in personality at the present time. 2026-2055. **89.**

2018 Pinot Noir “La Colina”- Crowley Wines (Dundee Hills)

The 2018 vintage of La Colina pinot noir from Crowley Wines is a lovely example of the vintage, coming in fairly moderate in octane for this warm summer, as it tips the scales at thirteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is blossoming beautifully at three years of age, offering up a black fruity blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil, a nice array of fresh herb tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, primary and nicely balanced finish. This does not possess the same gentle youthful structure of the 2019 version and the 2019 La Colina will need some hibernation in the cellar before it starts to blossom. 2030-2060. **91.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Four Winds”- Crowley Wines (Willamette Valley)

Tyson Crowley’s 2018 Four Wines pinot noir is a lovely bottle in the making. This wine shows lovely sappiness on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of black plums, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, a superb base of soil, woodsmoke, delicate spice tones and a nicely restrained framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure

and full-bodied, with plenty of mid-palate sappiness, fine soil inflection, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This really has good flesh on the bones, and though it is a young wine that deserves some cellaring time to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge and its tannins to soften up properly, it is not all that bad of a drink out of the blocks (though the tannins do mount a bit as the wine sits open)! Fine juice. 2028-2065+. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2018 Pinot Noir from Domaine Drouhin is a beautiful young wine. The bouquet is pure and refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of plum, cocoa powder, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of nutskin, violets and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent soil undertow, tangy acids, ripe, fine-grained tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, pure and beautifully balanced finish. This bottling from Véronique Drouhin-Boss is always approachable out of the blocks, but it ages so well that it seems crazy not to tuck it away in the cellar for at least six to eight years and let time work its magic! The 2018 vintage was a warm summer and this wine comes in at 14.1 percent octane, but carries its ripeness beautifully. 2027-2060. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Abel Vineyard”- Dupuis Wines (Anderson Valley)

Dupuis Wines is the new winery for Wells Guthrie, of Copain fame. Wells farms organically, ferments with native yeasts and uses no new oak in the cellars- my kind of guy! His 2018 Abel Vineyard bottling of pinot noir comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up a beautiful, red fruity nose of strawberries, cherries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil, gamebird and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent balance and grip and a long, complex and suavely tannic finish. This is a classic Anderson Valley pinot noir with the heart of a Chambolle! It is certainly easy to drink already, but it is still really a puppy and should be tucked away in the cellar for at least six to ten years to really let it start hitting on all cylinders! Fine, fine juice. 2027-2065. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Le Benedict”- Dupuis Wines (Anderson Valley)

Wells Guthrie named this cuvée for well-known New York wine professional Ned Benedict, who was tragically killed in a car accident in Spain a few years back. Ned and Wells were good friends and this is Wells way of paying tribute to Ned. The fruit for this bottling comes from several different vineyard sources, including Abel and Wendling Vineyards. The wine tips the scales at 13.5 percent in 2018 and offers up a beautifully pure, complex nose of red and black cherries, beetroot, gamebird, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a dollop of mustard seed and a lovely topnote of brown spices. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and beautifully balanced, with fine depth at the core, lovely soil undertow, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. This is lovely. 2028-2065. **93+.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Wendling Vineyard”- Dupuis Wines (Anderson Valley)

The 2018 Wendling Vineyard pinot noir from Wells Guthrie is another outstanding wine. This is a far more black fruity wine than the Abel Vineyard, offering up a pure and already beautifully complex constellation of black cherries, black plums, pomegranate, fresh herbs, dark soil tones, black tea, gamebird, raw cocoa, a lovely touch of allspice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely transparency and bounce, fine-grained tannins and a perfectly balanced, suave and vibrant finish. This is dynamite wine in the making. 2030-2065. **94.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Havlin Vineyard”- Franchere Wine Company (Willamette Valley)

The Havlin Vineyard is a cool site, located in the opening of the Van Duzer Corridor, so despite this wine hailing from a warmer vintage than the 2019 Eola-Amity Hills bottling, it actually comes in at a lower octane of 13.2 percent. The wine included sixteen percent whole clusters this year, was raised for a year in older Burgundy casks, and was bottled unfined and unfiltered. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a black fruity blend of dark berries, black cherries, balsam bough, black tea, a fine base of soil, incipient notes of cola and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, firm tannins and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This is going to be a fine bottle in due course, but give it some bottle age. 2028-2055+. **91.**

2018 Pinot Meunier “Van der Kamp Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Sonoma Mountain)

Samantha Sheehan’s 2018 Pinot Meunier from the Van der Kamp Vineyard is an outstanding bottle of wine, coming in at a svelte thirteen percent octane and delivering a beautifully refined aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of pomegranate, coffee bean, fresh herb tones, a hint of chicory, bonfire and a beautiful base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and lovely balance on the long, complex and very promising finish. This is more defined by its underlying soil than the pinot noir, as it does not have the same sense of inherent sappiness of the latter, but this allows the smoky and soil elements to play more of a starring role in this superb wine. 2028-2060. **92+.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Van der Kamp Vineyard”- Poe Wines (Sonoma Mountain)

The pinot noir vines in Van der Kamp Vineyard were planted in 1953 (not sure if this is also true for the pinot meunier there), which makes these some of the oldest pinot noir vines in all of California. The 2018 version from Sam Sheehan is raised in thirty percent new oak and tips the scales at civilized thirteen percent alcohol. It delivers a beautiful, black fruity nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, gamebird, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a nice touch of youthful stems and just a wisp of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, youthful and full-bodied, with a lovely core of black fruit, fine soil undertow, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of pinot noir in the making, but it will demand a bit of cellaring to start to hit on all cylinders. 2028-2065. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)

I have been a big fan of the Drouhin family’s new Roserock project since they bought the vineyards a handful of years ago. These are sited over close to the cooler Van Duzer Corridor and produce excellent pinot noir and chardonnay. The Roserock 2018 pinot is a beautiful bottle of wine, taking advantage of those cooling night breezes in this warm summer to craft a pinot that comes in at a svelte 14.1 percent octane. The nose is deep, black fruity and gently sappy, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, black plums, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a hint of grilled meats, a fine base of dark soil tones and a very discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is outstanding young pinot noir! 2030-2075. **93.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Découverte Vineyard”- Résonance Wines (Dundee Hills)

Résonance Wines is still run by long-time Jadot Cellar Master Jacques Lardière, and his fine aesthetic sensibilities continue to define these lovely Oregon wines. The single vineyard bottling from the Découverte Vineyard in the Dundee Hills comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol in the 2018 vintage and was raised in fifty percent new oak this year for a period of fifteen months

prior to bottling. The wine delivers a refined bouquet of sappy black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, a touch of gamebird, a beautiful base of dark soil tones and a nice framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied, deep and nicely structured, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and very promising finish. This is still a tightly-knit and very youthful wine and it will need plenty of bottle age to blossom, but all of the constituent components are here for a fine bottle down the road; patience required. 2031-2065+. **92.**

2018 Pinot Noir “Résonance Vineyard”- Résonance Wines (Yamhill-Carlton)

The 2018 Résonance Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Jacques Lardière and his team at Résonance Wines is from older vines than their Découverte Vineyard, as this dry-farmed vineyard was planted in 1981 on *franc de pied* rootstock. The wine is quite black fruity in personality in the 2018 vintage, delivering scents of black plums, dark berries, bitter chocolate, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of balsam bough, woodsmoke and a deft foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and definition, ripe, buried tannins and a very long, nascently complex and marvelously balanced finish. This too is a young wine, but the older vines here give the wine a bit more “meat on the bones” out of the blocks, so this can be drunk with more pleasure than the Découverte Vineyard bottling at a young age. That said, this too is built for the long haul and it will really be criminal to open it before at least its tenth birthday! Fine juice. 2028-2065+. **93+.**



2017 Pinot Noir “La Bauge Au-dessus”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Maria Valley)

The La Bauge Au-dessus bottling of Pinot Noir hails from fruit sourced in the Bien Nacido and Clendenen Family vineyards. The 2017 comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a refined, black fruity nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a hint of fresh nutmeg, gentle herb tones that hint at fresh dill and a suave framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is still a puppy and needs a good decade in the cellar before it will really start to stir, but its fine potential is self-evident. 2031-2065. **92+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Knox Alexander”- Au Bon Climat (Santa Maria Valley)

The Knox Alexander pinot noir from Au Bon Climat, named for Jim Clendenen’s youngest son, is outstanding in the 2017 vintage. The wine is made from a vineyard selection of the best performing parcels in any given vintage from the domaine’s estate vineyards, with the goal to find a blend of fifty percent Dijon clones and fifty percent of the best of the other clonal variations in the ABC vines. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane in 2017 and delivers a beautifully refined bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of dark berry, raw cocoa, a bit of smoked duck, black tea, a fine base of soil, discreet savory elements from the whole clusters, woodsmoke and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and fairly structured out of the blocks, with a fine core of black fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and fine balance and grip on the long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a young wine, but it has all of the constituent components for future greatness- all it needs is time in the cellar to unfold. 2031-2080. **95**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Belle Pente Vineyard”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Yamhill-Carlton)

I have become a huge admirer of Brian O’Donnell’s wines in the last several years and am very happy to have several vintages tucked away now in my own cellar. His 2017 Belle Pente Vineyard bottling of pinot noir is a lovely wine in the making, coming in at a svelte 13.8 percent octane in this year and delivering a complex and very refined aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, fresh nutmeg, a complex base of soil, *pigeon*, violets and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, complex and transparent, with a lovely core of red fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a young wine, but one of unmistakable beauty. 2028-2065. **93**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Murto Vineyard”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The 2017 Murto Vineyard bottling from Brian O’Donnell is a beautiful wine in the making, with a more black fruity personality than the wines made from Belle Pente Vineyard fruit. The classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, black cherries, gamebird, a touch of black tea, a refined base of soil, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and youthful, with a lovely core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent balance and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a very transparent and classically-proportioned bottle of pinot noir in the making; it will be flat out delicious when it is ready to drink! 2030-2075+. **93+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Estate Reserve”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars (Yamhill-Carlton)

The Estate Reserve bottling of pinot noir is a barrel selection from the top lots from the Belle Pente Vineyard and the 2017 is outstanding. The wine comes in at 14.3 percent and included twelve percent whole clusters this year. It offers up a deep and youthfully complex nose

of cherries, red plums, just a hint of beetroot, raw cocoa, a superb base of soil tones, gamebird and a fine touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and sappy at the core, with fine soil undertow, ripe, firm tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and needs plenty of bottle age, but in due course, it is going to repay patience tenfold! 2030-2075+. **94.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène” from Domaine Drouhin is a beautiful young wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a superb base of soil, a touch of black tea and a very refined framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and youthful, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and a long, ripe and beautifully balanced finish. The Cuvée Laurène is always built for extended cellaring and the 2017 vintage is no exception; once it is ready to drink, this is going to be a stunning bottle of wine! 2033-2075+. **95.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Zépherine”- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)

The Zépherine bottling of pinot noir from the Drouhin family’s Roserock is a true reserve wine in the old sense, as it is a barrel selection made of the best vats in any given vintage. The wine comes in at 14.1 percent alcohol in this vintage, but is cool and black fruity on the nose, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, black cherries, bitter chocolate, a lovely base of soil, bonfire, peonies, violets, a whisper of fresh thyme and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and nicely black fruity in personality, with tons of soil undertow, tangy acids, fine-grained, seamless tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Simply stunning juice. 2031-2075. **95.**

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

The 2017 Mount Eden pinot noir is a superb wine in the making. The complex and youthful nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, beetroot, smoked meats, a fine base of soil, some youthful stem tones and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and structured, with a good core of black fruit, fine soil signature, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and promising finish. I love the mid-palate depth here and the backend lift and grip. This bottling comes in at fourteen percent octane in 2017 and shows outstanding promise, but it will need some extended cellaring before it properly starts to stir. 2029-2075. **93.**

2015 Pinot Noir- Caballus (Véronique Drouhin & Isabelle Dutartre) Willamette Valley

This is a relatively new, small collaboration between Véronique Drouhin and Isabelle Dutartre, (only five casks of wine produced), with 2013 being the first vintage of Caballus. Isabelle Dutartre was the former assistant to long-time Joseph Drouhin Cellar Master, Laurence Jobard for a decade, before moving out to Oregon to be the winemaker at Deponte Winery. She and Véronique have been friends since their university days. Fruit for this bottling hails from both the Dundee Hills and Eola-Amity Hills AVAs, hence the Willamette Valley moniker on the label. In this vintage the bunches were entirely destemmed and the wine was raised in twenty percent new oak. The 2015 Caballus pinot comes in at 14.2 percent octane and delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, cocoa powder, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, tangy acids, ripe, buried tannins and a long, very well-balanced and promising finish. At six years of age, this is

certainly quite approachable today, but it still has plenty of growth ahead of it and I would tuck it away in the cellar until it is at least twelve to fifteen years of age, so that one can enjoy all of the secondary layers of complexity that will come with bottle age. 2027-2065. **95.**

ROUND TWO FROM THE BUCOLIC LOIRE VALLEY AUTUMN OF 2021



Even though I just wrote about the Loire Valley two issues ago, there have been enough very good new arrivals coming into the port of New York this autumn that it made sense to do another follow-up on the region to cover these new arrivals, rather than hold back the notes for a couple more issues and only post them once the wines may have already sold through the market. So, this is not an in-depth report on the Loire, but simply a quick follow-up to cover some lovely wines that are now available and arrived after my last big feature on the region. As readers may have noticed from the “Coming Attractions” section of the front page of each issue, I have been working on separate articles for Mature Loire Valley Red Wines and Aged Muscadet, both of which are scheduled to appear sometime early next year, so notes on wines tasted recently from these two categories do not appear in this article, as they are being added to the roster of notes for those coming features. But, even with those exceptions, there are some really superb wines covered in the short report that follows here, including the new releases from the Sourdais family’s excellent Domaine de Pallus in Chinon, Claude Branger’s Muscadets and Bernard Fouquet’s Domaine des Aubisières in Vouvray. So, despite the very brief nature of this report, there are certainly some wines covered below that merit tracking down in the market and adding to the cellar for future drinking pleasure!

Muscadet

2019 Muscadet “Navineaux Amphibolite”- Domaine Gadais Père et Fils

The Navineaux Amphibolite bottling from Christophe and Pierre-Henri Gadais is a lovely bottle of Muscadet, offering up a bright and complex nose of lemon, green apple, wet stone minerality, dried flowers and a lovely touch of gentle nuttiness from its time on the lees. On the palate the wine is deep, focused and full-bodied, with lovely balance and grip, a fine core, impressive mineral undertow and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is first class Muscadet. 2021-2035. **92.**

2018 Muscadet “Péninsula” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Gadais Père et Fils

The Gadais family’s bottling of Péninsula hails from their parcel of old vines the *lieu à dit* of les Ménardière, which were planted in 1929! The wine offers up excellent, old vine depth in its aromatic constellation of lemon, breadfruit, beautiful leesy tones of raw almond, a complex base of soil, a touch of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil signature, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is excellent. 2021-2040. **93+.**

2016 Muscadet Monnières-Saint-Fiacre- Domaine Claude Branger

Monnières-Saint-Fiacre is one of the new Crus in Muscadet, having been officially promoted in 2018. The well-known vineyard of Les Gras Moutons lies within Monnières-Saint-Fiacre. It lies just north of Clisson, with the Brangers having four parcels within the delimitation of the Cru, from which they make this bottling from their older vines here. The wine is aged for thirty-three months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2016 offers up a beautifully refined and complex nose of lemon, a hint of fresh pineapple, *fleur de sel*, beautiful minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of candied lemon peel. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent acids and focus, lovely detail and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is excellent Muscadet! 2021-2040. **94.**

2016 Muscadet “Plantation 1947” Monnières-Saint-Fiacre- Domaine Gadais Père et Fils

The Plantation 1947 bottling from the Gadais family is from very old vines, as the name suggests, planted at the highest point in the Les Gras Mouton vineyard. I last tasted this wine a little over a year ago and I clearly underrated it at the time. The nose jumps from the glass in a deep blend of breadfruit, fresh lime, wet stone minerality, lovely leesy tones, dried flowers and a saline topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and stony in personality, with a lovely core, fine focus and cut and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish that closes with a hint of iodine. Pass the oysters please! Great juice. 2021-2040. **94.**

Saumur-Champigny

2019 Saumur Rouge “Siébrit”- Domaine Armand David

The 2019 Saumur Rouge “Siébrit” from Domaine Armand David is an excellent bottle of cabernet franc. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark, just a touch of nutty oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, good balance and grip, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable with half an hour in decanter, but the wine really deserves to be tucked away in the cellar for four or five years to let it blossom properly, as there will be a lot to like when this wine is really ready to drink. 2025-2050. **91.**

Bourgueil

2018 Bourgueil “Diptyque”- Domaine de la Chevalerie

The Diptyque bottling from the Caslot family’s Domaine de la Chevalerie is their early-drinking bottling, made with four to six months of aging in cement vats (or an occasional older cask) and made to be enjoyed from release. The 2018 version comes in ripe in the style of the vintage, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent octane and delivering a fine, black fruity bouquet of sweet cassis, black cherries, a bit of tree bark, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a topnote of espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins, good soil signature and a long, ripe and well-balanced finish. This is a bit chewier than most vintages of Diptyque and will age very nicely, but is certainly drinkable already with a bit of aeration. However, I would be inclined to give it at least a couple of years in the cellar to let the wine blossom more completely. 2023-2045. **90.**

Saumur and Chinon Blanc

2019 Saumur Blanc “l’Enchanteur”- Domaine Armand David

The 2019 Saumur Blanc “l’Enchanteur” from Domaine Armand David is a lovely bottle of chenin blanc, with the wine aged in older oak casks for fourteen months prior to bottling. The bouquet is bright and youthfully complex, offering up scents of quince, fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones, beeswax, white lilies and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and well-balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and bounce and a long, complex and classy finish. Fine juice. 2021-2030. **91.**

2005 Chinon “la Croix Boissée” Blanc- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2005 la Croix Boissée Blanc from Bernard Baudry is a very pretty wine that is still in its plateau of maturity at age sixteen and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The wine is beautifully expressive today on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, a touch of pineapple, iodine, white soil tones with an overt vein of salinity and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow, fine balance and a long, quite classy finish. The only thing that keeps the score down a touch on this wine is it is not all that complex at age sixteen, but perhaps more complexity will emerge in the coming years, as this wine still has miles to go before it sleeps. 2021-2040. **91.**

Chinon Rouge

2017 Chinon “les Pensées de Pallus”- Domaine de Pallus

The 2017 Chinon “les Pensées de Pallus” from the Sourdais family is an outstanding wine. This cuvée from Bertrand Sourdais does not see any new oak during its twelve months of *elevage*, as it is aged entirely in used Burgundy barrels. It hails from the lower slopes in the village, where there is more sand mixed in with the clay and limestone. The wine offers up a superb young nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a bit of tobacco leaf and just a hint of nutty oak from the used casks. On the palate the wine is deep, svelte and full, with a good core, fine focus and grip, lovely soil undertow and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. This is always the first cuvée to start to drink in the Pallus lineup and the 2017 is already quite tasty out of the blocks, though it is still four to five years away from really blossoming completely. Fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

2017 Chinon “la Croix Boissée”- Domaine de Pallus

The Sourdais family only has a small parcel in the fine vineyard of la Croix Boissée, with the vines planted in 1974 from *selection massale* cuttings. They make ten barrels of this wine each year, so it is not an easy find in the market, but the 2017 version will be worth a special search. The grapes are destemmed and fermented with indigenous yeasts prior to aging in Burgundy barrels for a year and a half. The 2017 la Croix Boissée offers up a deep and black fruity nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke, juniper berry, a superb base of chalky soil tones (from the underlying *tuffeau*) and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with a good core, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and still fairly tightly-knit finish. The 2017 la Croix Boissée is not a powerful example of Chinon in the style of the 2018 or 2019 vintages, but rather a classic wine of depth, breed and excellent soil signature that will age seamlessly. It is so well balanced that it is approachable today, but I would not touch a bottle until it is at least ten years old, as there are more layers to unfold here. Ten barrels were produced in the 2017 vintage. 2027-2065. **94.**

2017 Chinon “le Clos de Pallus”- Domaine de Pallus

The Clos de Pallus bottling is brand new from Bertrand Sourdais in the 2017 vintage. This is produced from a parcel of sixty-five year-old vines located in the terraced *lieu à dit* of Pallus in Cravant-les-Côteaux, with sandy soils over pure *tuffeau*. The wine spends twelve months aging in Burgundy casks and six more months in tank prior to bottling. The bouquet is beautifully refined, offering up a complex blend of red and black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, juniper berry, just a touch of menthol, a superb base of soil tones, hints of tree bark and cigar ash and a very refined framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, very well-balanced and extremely promising finish. Like these other 2017s from Bertrand Sourdais, this is not a powerful style of Chinon and is very classical in profile, but loaded with potential for aging. 2028-2065. **94.**

2017 Chinon “la Rougerie”- Domaine de Pallus

Bertrand Sourdais has another very small parcel in the *lieu à dit* of la Rougerie in the village of Cravant-les-Côteaux, which is planted on clay soils, so only six casks of this wine are produced each year. Most of these vines were planted in 1952, though one section was replanted in high density in 2007. It is handled in the cellar exactly the same as the la Croix Boissée, except that Bertrand includes five percent whole clusters for this bottling. The wine offers up a pure and nascently complex aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, tobacco leaf, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of tree bark, juniper berry, menthol and a lovely foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and superb balance on the long, refined and very classy finish. This has fine structure for long-term aging, but should start to drink very well indeed by its tenth birthday. 2027-2065. **94.**

Vouvray

2019 Vouvray “le Marigny” Sec- Bernard Fouquet (Domaine des Aubisières)

Bernard Fouquet’s 2019 le Marigny bottling is an outstanding example of young Vouvray Sec. The bouquet is precise and expressive, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, orange peel, a hint of honeycomb and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of ripe fruit,

snappy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2055+. **93.**

2019 Vouvray “Cuvée de Silex”- Bernard Fouquet (Domaine des Aubisières)

The 2019 Cuvée de Silex from Monsieur Fouquet is done in a Demi-Sec style this vintage, and still sealed with a screwcap. The wine offers up a bright and complex nose of apple, quince, honeycomb, spring flowers, a bit of bee pollen, flinty soil tones and a touch of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, very nicely balanced finish. Tasting this wine after the le Marigny Sec, which is sealed under cork, it is easy to see how the screwcap slightly impacts the depth of this wine on both the nose and palate, as the difference is a lot like listening to an analog recording and comparing it to one of those early digitally-recorded CDs when the medium was being changed by the music industry. Everything is still here, but it is as if the high and lows have been chopped off just a bit from the technology of the screwcap. This is still a good bottle, but taste it next to the le Marigny and you will get a wonderful tutorial in how screwcaps affect wine. For drinking over the near term, the effect will be negligible, but I cannot imagine how this wine is going to taste under the screw twenty or thirty years from now. 2021-2055+? **92.**



2019 Vouvray “les Girardières”- Bernard Fouquet (Domaine des Aubisières)

The les Girardières vineyard is also planted on flinty soils, with these vines more than sixty years of age and finished at a Demi-Sec level, but just a touch sweeter than the Cuvée de Silex this year. The bouquet is young and still fairly primary, but with some prodding offers up scents of pear, sweet quince, honeycomb, white lilies and a lovely base of flinty soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and bouncy, with superb mid-palate depth and soil signature, zesty acids and a long, youthful and very promising finish. Of these two Demi-Sec bottlings (neither of which is indicated as such on the labels), the Cuvée de Silex is far more open out of the blocks and this is the one that I would select for early drinking. However, the les Girardières seems to have even a bit more mid-palate depth and length on the backend, so over the long haul, this is probably going to win the race. Fine, fine juice. 2029-2065+. **93.**

1959 Vouvray “le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 1959 Vouvray “le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët is drinking brilliantly at age sixty-two and still has decades of life ahead of it! At this point in its evolution, it is essentially a dry wine, as the residual sweetness it began its life with (a year before I was born!) has now morphed in directions that no longer seem “sweet” on the palate. The color is now like a copper penny and the bouquet is simply stunning, soaring from the glass in a mix of fallen apples, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, orange peel, heather, lilacs, lemon peel and a topnote of clover honey. On the palate the wine is vibrant, pure and full-bodied, with laser-like focus, outstanding mid-palate depth, zesty acids and great grip and cut on the very, very long, very complex and impeccably balanced finish. This wine, if stored in a nice cool cellar, will clearly cruise right past its one hundredth birthday still drinking at its peak of maturity! 2021-2075+. **97.**

Touraine Blanc

2020 Sauvignon Blanc “les Grenettes”- Domaine Beauséjour

The 2020 Sauvignon Blanc “les Grenettes” from Domaine Beauséjour is a pretty example of the vintage, offering up a bright and expressive bouquet of gooseberry, lime, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, quite nice complexity and a long, wide open and bouncy finish. This is a good bottle of Touraine sauvignon blanc. 2021-2024. **88.**

Touraine Blanc

2020 Gamay Noir “Cuvée Vincent”- Domaine Beauséjour

The 2020 Cuvée Vincent from Domaine Beauséjour is composed from a blend of eighty-five percent gamay and fifteen percent malbec, with the vines twenty-five years of age and grown on sandy-clay soils that include a vein of *silex*. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tank and comes in at thirteen percent octane in this vintage. It offers up a lovely nose of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, flinty soil tones, bitter chocolate and just a hint of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, peppery and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and grip, moderate tannins, tangy acids and impressive focus and complexity on the long finish. The addition of the malbec here gives the wine a lovely, black fruity personality and adds some lovely stuffing. This is a fine bottle and an outstanding value! 2021-2035. **90.**

Cheverny Rouge

2017 Cheverny Rouge “le Pressoir”- Domaine Huards (Michel Gendrier)

Michel and Alex Gendrier farm their entire estate biodynamically, with father Michel having eschewed chemical treatments as far back as the 1970s and starting to farm organically in the early 1980s. Biodynamics logically followed over time. Their le Pressoir bottling of Cheverny Rouge is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent gamay, with the grapes fermented on their own prior to blending and *elevage* in stainless steel. The vines are at least fifty years of age and grow in the chalkiest section of their red grape vineyards. The 2017 le Pressoir tips the scales at a svelte twelve percent octane and delivers a lovely bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of roasted gamebird, woodsmoke, a fine base of chalky soil tones (that will go nicely autumnal with bottle age), a hint of pepper and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with fine transparency and bounce, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a wine that will age as much on its lovely acidity as it will on its tannins, but it has the balance to last quite nicely in bottle. A very tasty middleweight. 2021-2040. **90.**

Coteaux du Loir

2020 Coteaux du Loir- Domaine de Cézin

The 2020 Coteaux du Loir from brother and sister, Amadine and Xavier Fresneau at Domaine de Cézin, is a fine bottle of dry chenin blanc. The bouquet is bright and youthfully complex, offering up scents of quince, green apple, chalky soil tones, lanolin and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, bouncy acids and fine balance and grip on the long and quite classy finish. This is first rate chenin blanc and an excellent value! 2021-2030. **89.**

Jasnières

2020 Jasnières- Domaine de Cézin

Domaine de Cézin’s 2020 Jasnières is excellent on both the nose and palate. The wine is a bit more reserved in personality than the Coteaux du Loir cuvée, but more precise and complex at the same time and it displays excellent potential. The nose jumps from the glass in a mix of lime, tangerine, sweet quince, chalky minerality, fruit blossoms, white lilies and a hint of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a superb core of ripe fruit, lovely focus and grip, impressive nascent complexity and a long, well-balanced and classic finish. This is quite ripe in 2020, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but has plenty of cut and grip to go along with its beautifully generous fruit tones. The wine is approachable out of the blocks, but still youthful, and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for four or five years and really let it blossom completely. Fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

2015 Jasnières “Clos des Fleuries”- Domaine de Cézin

The Jasnières “Clos des Fleuries” from Domaine de Cézin is their Moelleux bottling and only produced in vintages favorable to achieving extraordinary ripeness in the vineyards. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is starting to turn a lovely green-gold color at six years of age, while offering up a refined bouquet of sweet quince, apricot, pineapple, orange peel, chalky soil tones, barley sugar, heather and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely sweet on the attack, with a plump core of fruit, good framing acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a lovely wine

that is starting to drink very well indeed, but still has plenty of room to grow with further bottle age. 2021-2045. **92.**

Sancerre

2019 Sancerre “les Terres Blanches”- Domaine Gueneau (Sancerre)

The 2019 Sancerre “les Terres Blanches” from Elisa Gueneau is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of lime, gooseberry, chalky minerality, damp grass, a touch of white pepper and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite grassy in style, with a good core, solid soil signature and grip, sound acids and a long, fairly complex finish. This is just a touch four-square in personality, but has good depth and backend length to it. 2021-2025. **89.**

2019 Sancerre “les Angeslots” V. V.- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The old vine bottling of les Angeslots from the Reverdy family is made from vines in excess of seventy years of age, planted on Kimmeridgian limestone soils just west of Maimbray in the direction of Chavignol. The wine is fermented and aged in older oak *cuvés*. The 2019 version is simply beautiful, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of lime, green apple, a touch of tangerine, kaleidoscopic limestone minerality, orange blossoms, a touch of fresh-cut grass and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very refined in personality, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, complex and absolutely seamless finish that shows enormous energy and lift on the minerally finish. This is brilliant young Sancerre that clearly will be a better drink with four or five years’ worth of cellaring! 2021-2040. **94.**

RECENTLY-TASTED RED BURGUNDY IN THE BOTTLE REPORT AUTUMN 2021



I have not been drinking quite as much red Burgundy over the last year and a half as I would normally do, as Covid put a damper on many of the tasting activities that would customarily fill up my calendar. And, even during the early, apocalyptic-feeling days of the spring and summer of 2020, I did not open a lot of red Burgundy out of my own cellar, as even if we were at the end of days, it still seemed wretched of me to be drinking great bottles of Burgundy without a table full of fellow tasters with whom to share the bottles. For, to my mind, Burgundy is a wine inherently made for sharing, not for sucking down solo in the darkness of a bunker, so this section of my cellar did not get all that much attention during the first year of the pandemic (though I do have to confess to wiping out a sizable chunk of old bottles from other regions during those first few panicked months of the pandemic). However, skies have brightened throughout much of the world as 2021 winds towards a close, and though Covid still seems to be resisting its final departure from the stage and life has not yet really returned completely to “normal”, we are at least getting out from under the weight of feeling that the world is coming to an end and it is once again safe to share great bottles of wine with (immunized) friends. So, I have been unearthing a few Burgs to bring around to tastings with friends in the last six months and hope that the politicizing of the virus and its cures will one day

finally stop and we can truly return to a semblance of “normal life” again, at which time I am sure that the various tasting groups I drink a lot of my best wines with these days will greatly accelerate how often we meet and our red Burgundy sections of our respective cellars will start to deplete with more rapidity!

As I still have several planned red Burgundy projects under way that were disrupted by the pandemic: features on the red wines from the hill of Corton, the lovely premier cru or Petite Chapelle in Gevrey-Chambertin, red wines from Chassagne-Montrachet and the 1999 red Burgundy vintage, I have not included any notes intended for those reports in the article that follows. All of those projects would have been completed by now if Covid had not disrupted our lives for a year and a half, but as I hope to be back in Burgundy with regularity in the near future, I will keep those features in the pipeline and expect to finish them up in the coming few issues. I will be back in the Côte d’Or in a couple of weeks for my first visit to the region in two years, but as my long pandemic-induced absence has forced me to miss the 2019 vintage and to be playing catch up on the 2020 vintage, I will confine this coming trip to focusing principally on the 2020 vintage and try to organize my Corton, Chassagne *rouge* and 1999 tastings for the next couple of trips. But, in the meantime, I do still have a pretty sizable cache of notes on red Burgundies in the bottle, so I have included them in this feature. These notes were simply collected over the course of my regular range of tastings, both in Burgundy and back here in New York, based solely on happenstance of what I have drunk since my last iteration of the “in the bottle” report on red Burgundy. Most of the notes on younger wines were accrued while still visiting Burgundy just prior to the pandemic, as I tend to drink a lot more young red Burgundy while over there. Back here in New York, I do not drink many young reds from the region, as my cellar is here and there are more than enough bottles that are truly ready to drink that it makes little sense to open up bottles before their true period of maturity arrives. And, of course, with the new realities of Burgundy pricing, I am no longer buying the same wines in the same quantities as I did prior to the 2005 vintage came along and completely changed the landscape of the Burgundy market. Consequently, I am a little more hesitant to pop young grand crus out of my cellar these days than was the case ten or fifteen years ago, as I am not laying them down in the cellar in anywhere near the same volume as yesteryear.

In any case, the following notes are organized chronologically. Within each vintage grouping, I have listed the notes from north to south, with premier crus listed first within each communal sub-section, followed by grand crus. The premier crus are not listed alphabetically in their respective vintage sections, but rather in what is generally considered an ascending order of quality or reputation, so that for example, in Chambolle-Musigny, the les Amoureuses bottlings are listed just ahead of the grand crus from the village, even though they would appear first if the premier crus were listed alphabetically.

2017 Gevrey-Chambertin “Bel Air”- Domaine Taupenot-Merme

I like Romain Taupenot’s 2017 Gevrey “Bel Air” quite well, but it seems just a touch *fluide* at the core at the present time, when compared to some of his other premier crus in this vintage. But, the wine is certainly quite refined on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, *pigeon*, fresh herb tones and a nice touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and soil-driven in personality, with good, but not great depth at the core, good intensity of flavor, fine-grained tannins and a

long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. This is the type of fairly young red Burgundy that will often put on a bit of weight with bottle age. If it does so, my score will be a tad conservative, as the complexity and soil signature here are both excellent. 2027-2065. **91+**.

2017 Charmes-Chambertin- Christophe Roumier

I have always liked Christophe Roumier's Charmes-Chambertin bottling, but the last half dozen years have seen the elegance quotient of this wine mount. The 2017, of course, hailing from a very elegant vintage, is one of the most svelte in recent memory, as it offers up a lovely bouquet of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, *pigeon*, mustard seed, a lovely base of dark soil tones and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, suave, buried tannins and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This will be an outstanding wine when it is ready to drink, but it needs at least another decade in the cellar first. 2030-2080. **94+**.

2017 Charmes-Chambertin- Christophe Taupenot-Merme

The 2017 Taupenot-Merme Charmes-Chambertin is a fine bottle in the making. The bouquet is deep and already beautifully perfumed and expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of sappy cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a discreet foundation of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a superb core of red fruit, lovely transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. First class juice. 2032-2075+. **94+**.

2017 Mazoyrès-Chambertin- Christophe Taupenot-Merme

The 2017 Mazoyrès-Chambertin from Romain Taupenot is also an outstanding wine in the making. The bouquet is deep and far more black fruity than the Charmes, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, cassis, lovely savory notes, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, mustard seed and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and seamlessly balanced finish. Another excellent wine. 2032-2075. **94+**.

2017 Morey St. Denis "Clos de la Bussière"- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2017 Clos de la Bussière from Christophe Roumier is another bottling that has really benefited from the refined elegance of this vintage, as it offers up uncharacteristically early polish in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, *pigeon*, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still properly reserved in personality, with a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency and a long, ripely tannic and very well balanced finish. This will be an excellent vintage of Clos de la Bussière in the fullness of time, but it is still close to a decade away from starting to blossom. 2030-2070+. **92**.

2017 Morey St. Denis "la Riotte"- Domaine Taupenot-Merme

The 2017 Taupenot-Merme la Riotte is an outstanding wine, with truly excellent transparency for this cru. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful mix of red and black cherries, espresso, black minerality, vinesmoke, gamebird, a touch of oak and a lovely topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with outstanding soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long, refined finish. This is an excellent wine in the making. 2027-2065. **92+**.

2017 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac

In many vintages, I have a slight preference stylistically for the Clos St. Denis from the Seysses family over their Clos de la Roche, though the wines are often absolute equals in terms

of quality. However, in 2017, I have to give a very, very slight nod to the Clos de la Roche, as it seems to have really excelled in this vintage. This is not to say that the 2017 Clos St. Denis is not a stunning wine, as it most assuredly is, offering up a pure and complex nose of sappy red plums, beetroot, smoked duck, a complex base of chalky soil tones, lovely spice tones, a refined base of new oak and a topnote of cocoa powder. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and supremely elegant, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil undertow, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. A great wine in the making. 2030-2080. **96.**

2017 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

I love the 2017 vintage for red Burgundy and Domaine Dujac's Clos de la Roche has to be one of the finest wines of the vintage. The bouquet is still youthful and quite red fruity this year, but already shows lovely complexity in its blend of cherries, blood orange, beetroot, raw cocoa, a gorgeous base of soil tones, *pigeon* and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very svelte in profile, with a sappy core of fruit, great balance and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, soil-driven and dazzling finish. This is going to be a stunning wine once it is fully ready to drink! 2032-2080+. **96.**

2017 Chambolle-Musigny “la Combe d’Orveau”- Domaine Taupenot-Merme

The 2017 la Combe d’Orveau from Romain Taupenot is a lovely young wine in the making. The bouquet is still fairly adolescent, but offers up lovely purity in its blend of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, coffee, gamebird, a fine base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core, fine-grained tannins, lovely acids and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. All this lovely wine needs is more bottle age. It should be approachable around its tenth birthday, and then probably close down again for a bit around age fifteen, with its best drinking coming from age twenty onwards. 2027-2065. **92+.**

2017 Chambolle-Musigny “les Fuées”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

The 2017 les Fuées from Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier is a lovely bottle in the making. It is still young, but the suave personality of the 2017 vintage also makes this quite easy to drink today, as it offers up a bright and complex nose of red and black cherries, beetroot, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke, a touch of mustard seed and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil undertow, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very well balanced finish. Though this is quite accessible in its youthful guise, I would try to leave my hands off of it for another seven or eight years and really let it come into its own. Lovely juice. 2028-2060. **93.**

2017 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2017 les Cras from Domaine Roumier is an outstanding bottle in the making. The nose wafts from the glass in a very classy blend of red and black cherries, violets, raw cocoa, gamebird, chalky minerality, vanillin oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and very soil-driven in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. This should start to open nicely in another seven or eight years, but its real apogee is still probably twenty years down the road. 2028-2065+. **93+.**

2017 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

The 2017 les Amoureuses from Domaine Mugnier is a beautiful wine in the making. This is more primary in personality today than the les Fuées, but its inherent beauty is already very easy to behold. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful, red fruity blend of cherries,

strawberries, a touch of sweet beetroot, mustard seed, cocoa powder, a gorgeous base of soil tones, vanillin oak and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is refined, full-bodied and intensely sappy at the core, with stunning transparency and grip, suave, seamless tannins and a very long, tangy and impeccably balanced finish. A great, great wine in the making. 2032-2080. **96+**.

2017 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

The 2017 Bonnes-Mares from Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier is another outstanding wine in the making. The inherent elegance of the vintage gives this wine a very refined aspect in its youth, with the bouquet delivering scents of black cherries, plums, gamebird, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a deft framing of new wood and an absolutely gorgeous base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and young, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine transparency, great focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and very promising finish. Fine, fine juice. 2032-2080. **94+**.

2017 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

Having been lucky enough to drink a fair number of fully mature examples of Bonnes-Mares from the Roumier family over the course of my career, I have great reverence for the long-term potential of this great *terroir*. The 2017 version of this iconic wine is going to be great in due course, as it offers up enormous potential in its aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, venison, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a great core and mineral drive, impeccable balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, youthful and very, very promising finish. This is a proper long-distance runner, even in the 2017 vintage, but when it is ready to drink, it is going to be a stunning wine. 2035-2100. **96+**.

2017 Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts”- Domaine Dujac

The 2017 Dujac Malconsorts is a superb wine, offering up glorious complexity, intensity of flavor and soil signature in a medium-full format that will be the epitome of elegance when it is fully mature. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of raspberries, red plums, smoked duck, a complex base of soil tones, roses, cocoa powder and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and vibrant, with a sappy core of red fruit, beautiful transparency, seamless tannins, tangy acids and a very long, complex and dancing finish. There is a weightlessness to the palate impression here that is utterly charming. 2027-2065+. **94+**.

2017 Nuits St. Georges “Clos de la Maréchale”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

I love the synthesis of the *terroir* of the Clos de la Maréchale with very suave vintages like 2017, as the combination works so beautifully. This is a superb young wine in the making, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of cherries, quince, a touch of nutskin, a lovely base of soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and still fairly primary finish. This needs time, but is going to be outstanding. 2030-2075+. **93**.

2017 Nuits St. Georges “les Pruliers”- Domaine Taupenot-Merme

The Taupenot family’s parcel of vines in les Pruliers have certainly excelled in this vintage, and coupled with 2017’s inherent elegance, the wine is destined for fine drinking with sufficient bottle age. The wine offers up an aromatic constellation of dark berries, venison, espresso, woodsmoke, a fine base of dark soil tones and a deft touch of new oak. On the palate

the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, well-integrated, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. This is going to be an excellent example of les Pruliers with sufficient bottle age! 2030-2070. **93.**

2017 Corton “Rognet”- Domaine Taupenot-Merme

Romain Taupenot’s 2017 version of Corton “Rognet” is a stellar wine in the making. It is nicely red fruity in personality in this vintage, offering up scents of cherries, blood orange, spit-roasted venison, a fine base of soil, coffee, cedar and plenty of Corton spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off excellent soil undertow, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine balance and bounce, suave, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and nicely focused finish. First class Corton! 2032-2075+. **94.**



The Rossignol brothers, David and Nicolas, of Domaine Rossignol-Trapet.

2016 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The Rossignol brothers’ 2016 Chapelle-Chambertin is a beautiful wine in the making, but it remains still very young and a decade away from primetime drinking. The bouquet is already starting to show the first vestiges of perfumed aromatics in its combination of red plums, cherries, cocoa powder, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of mustard seed, a suave base of vanillin oak and a lovely, floral topnote redolent of both violets and lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off a lovely core of red fruit, with fine-grained tannins, superb soil signature and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2030-2080. **95.**

2016 Chambertin- Domaine Trapet

I had loved this wine out of barrel and it is aging beautifully in bottle. The wine is still an absolute puppy at five years of age, but one of my curious friends had just bought some for his cellar and wanted to get a read on the wine's evolution, so who was I to refuse a glass? The wine remains nicely black fruity in personality in this vintage, offering up a deep and youthful bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, grilled meats, raw cocoa, a gorgeous base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice touch of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with a fine signature of soil, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish that is presently closed for business and in need of more hibernation in the cellar. 2032-2080. **96+**.

2016 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2016 vintage Bonnes-Mares from Domaine Roumier is a brilliant wine in the making, but it is still at least a dozen years too soon to be opening up bottles! The bouquet is young, pure and shows off outstanding potential in its blend of red and black cherries, sweet dark berries, *pigeon*, dark chocolate, a classically complex blend of soil tones that shows off both the *terres rouges* and *terres blanches* signatures of this vineyard, woodsmoke and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays stunning mid-palate depth, with the sappiness to come very much in evidence. The tannins are ripe, seamlessly integrated and substantial, and the finish is long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced. All that needs to be added here is the passage of time! 2035-2100. **96+**.

2013 Chambolle-Musigny “les Combottes”- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2013 vintage of Combottes from Christophe Roumier is evolving beautifully and is not all that far away now from really reaching its plateau of primetime drinkability. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a red fruity blend of cherries, blood orange, gamebird, chalky soil tones, a touch of new oak and a beautiful floral topnote redolent of both peonies and rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with a fine core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, bouncy and complex finish. Give this just a few more years in the cellar to let it fully blossom. 2025-2055+. **92**.

2012 Gevrey-Chambertin “les Champeaux”- Domaine Duroché (375 ml.)

The 2012 Champeaux from Domaine Duroché is a very pretty example of the vintage, which is so strong in the Côte de Nuits, and out of half bottle it is starting to drink very nicely. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, grilled meats, dark soil tones, just a whisper of mustard seed, cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, modest tannins (in half bottle) and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. As was the case when I first tasted this wine in its youth, it is still just a touch dominated by its spicy new oak component, which becomes a bit dominant in the nose as the wine opens up with air, and also shows a bit on the finish, where a touch of wood tannin has never been absorbed. But, these are very minor blemishes on an otherwise quite good example of this underrated premier cru. 2021-2055. **89**.

2012 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Armand Rousseau

The style of the Charmes-Chambertin at Domaine Rousseau has changed dramatically in the last decade, as the wine routinely has more depth and broader shoulders than was the case throughout much of Charles Rousseau's long career. The 2012 Charmes is a superb wine in the

making, offering up a young and promising bouquet of strawberries, cherries, venison, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke, mustard seed and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with lovely transparency and grip, suave, seamless tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. An excellent example of Charmes. 2027-2065. **93.**

2012 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Armand Rousseau

The Clos de la Roche *chez* Rousseau has also put on some muscle in the last decade or so and the 2012 version is another excellent wine in the making. The bouquet is pure and youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of plums, cherries, a touch of beetroot, *pigeon*, coffee, dark soil tones, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely concentrated at the core, with fine soil undertow, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. Fine juice in the making. 2027-2065+. **93+.**

2012 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2012 vintage of les Cras from Christophe Roumier is a fine bottle, but it is still youthful and fairly bound up in its structural elements and begging for a bit more time in the cellar. The bouquet is tightly-knit at first, but with aeration, opens up to delivers scents of plums, cherries, fresh herb tones, vinesmoke, raw cocoa, chalky soil and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and long, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely bounce and intensity of flavor, excellent soil undertow and a long, moderately tannic and very promising finish. This remains fairly primary in personality and more bottle age is certainly going to pay dividends. 2025-2065. **93.**

2009 Clos Vougeot “Musigni”- Domaine Gros Frères et Soeurs

The 2009 Clos Vougeot “Musigni” from Domaine Gros Frères et Soeurs is a good, solid wine, but very much marked by its generous serving of smoky new oak. The bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, a good base of soil, roasted venison and a lot of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely suave on the attack, with a plump core of ripe fruit, good focus and grip, buried tannins and a long, new oaky finish. This wine is nicely balanced on the palate, without any oak tannins showing, but its personality is really dominated by all of the wood, which, at least to my palate, is a shame, as there are really good elements under the slathering of smoky new oak. 2019-2040+. **88.**

2009 Volnay “les Angles”- Domaine Louis Boillot

The 2009 vintage of les Angles from Louis Boillot is starting to drink very nicely. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a ripe and classy mix of sweet dark berries, gamebird, dark chocolate, a touch of currant leaf, a touch of vanillin oak and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a plush core of fruit, still a touch of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the long, nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2045+. **92.**

2007 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Domaine Fourrier

Jean-Marie Fourrier’s 2007 Clos St. Jacques is a lovely example of this vintage, with a more middleweight personality wrapped up in plenty of aromatic and flavor complexity. The bouquet is a lovely combination of both black and red fruity tones, offering up scents of black cherries, beetroot, blood orange, a fine base of soil, rose petals, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and velvety, with fine intensity of flavor,

impeccable balance and grip, tangy acids, modest, buried tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2045. **94.**

2006 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

Aromatically, the 2006 Bressandes from Chandon de Briailles is really starting to get nicely expressive at age fifteen, but the wine remains still a bit bound up by its structural elements on the palate and in need of another few years in the cellar. The bouquet today is truly beautiful, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, fruitcake, orange peel, gamebird, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of coriander seed and a topnote of distant bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still young, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, tangy acids and still a fair bit of backend Corton tannins in need of further cellaring to resolve properly. The wine is long and very well balanced and all it needs is more time to blossom on the palate. 2031-2085. **94.**

2005 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques”- Domaine Fourier

The 2005 vintage of Clos St. Jacques from Jean-Marie Fourier remains a young wine, but its ultimate greatness is already very easy to appreciate, as this is a wine of spectacular depth and purity. The still youthful nose jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, gamebird, a complex base of chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core of fruit, great balance, brisk acids and a long, ripely tannic and nascently complex finish. All this great wine needs is more time in the cellar to complete its period of hibernation! 2032-2080. **96.**

1996 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

It is funny that I opened two 1996 grand crus in the last few months, with the Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche showing splendidly and the Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat Clos Vougeot completely shut down and in deep hibernation! The latter was so closed that I did not even bother to take a note, other than to leave my hands off of the rest of the case in my cellar for at least another three or four years! But, the Dujac Clos de la Roche is another matter entirely, as this wine is drinking beautifully today. The wine delivers an utterly refined bouquet of cherries, strawberries, summer truffles, cinnamon, woodsmoke, gamebird, *sous bois* and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and silky on the attack, with a lovely core, beautiful transparency and grip, melting tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is superbly balanced and drinking with great style today. 2021-2045. **95.**

1996 Beaune “Clos des Mouches”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 1996 Clos des Mouches is drinking nicely and is fairly typical of the wines from this vintage when they are in one of their “open” phases, as it offers up lovely, tertiary aromatics and flavors, fairly moderate tannins and still a good spine of tangy acidity. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, dried red berries, *pigeon*, forest floor and a nice touch of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a solid core, good soil signature and a long, complex and meltingly tannic finish. This seems to be getting just a touch lean in the mid-palate (at least at this moment of its evolution), which may warrant drinking up over the relative near-term. A good, solid vintage of Clos des Mouches, but not one of the best from this decade. 2020-2035+. **90.**

1995 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg

I keep waiting for the 1995 vintage of red Burgundy to start drinking with serious generosity, and though there have been occasional flashes where the vintage in general looks likely to turn the corner and finally soften up profoundly, the next bottle will still be a bit firm and tannic. Perhaps this is just how the vintage will always behave? In any case, after having loved a bottle of this eight or ten years ago, this most recent bottle was again a bit chewy in personality, thought to be fair, it did soften up considerably with some extended time in decanter. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of red and black cherries, venison, coffee, a complex base of soil tones that are not yet autumnal in personality, a nice framing of smoky oak and a topnote of black tea. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and grip, very good focus and still a bit of backend tannin perking up the long finish. The last bottle of this I drank was paired up with prime rib for a Christmas dinner, so perhaps it was just as chewy as this recent bottle, but I noticed it less, because of the food pairing? In any case, this is a very good wine that still carries a bit of tannin at twenty-six years of age and should continue to drink quite well for decades to come, but may always have just a touch of a tannic edge to its profile. 2021-2050+. **93.**

1990 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat

The 1990 Clos Vougeot from Alain Hudelot is a fine example of the vintage. It is funny, as I shared this wine with a fairly large group of tasters in the early summer of this year and several thought it was not showing well because of its roasted personality, but that is just the style of this vintage. When it was first decanted it showed a funky, fairly overripe aromatic profile, but this freshened up decisively with a bit of air to eventually offer up notes of baked plums, black cherries, venison, *sous bois*, bonfire, chocolate, cedary oak and a dollop of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a plush core of gently roasted fruit, good soil signature, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the finish. This is a quintessential example of the 1990 vintage, with a fairly roasted fruit personality that also displays excellent depth, complexity and fine balance. Good juice, but very much a creature of its vintage. 2021-2050. **92.**

1986 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

The 1986 vintage in Burgundy was a good, solid year, but with a fair bit of early structure that had to be waited out. Today, they can deliver some really lovely bottles, as is the case with the '86 Clos des Chênes from Michel Lafarge. The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully expressive, offering up scents of plums, red and black cherries, duck, violets, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil that is just starting to turn autumnal and incipient notes of black truffle and porcini. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with lovely focus and grip, superb soil signature and a long, well-balanced and complex finish that still shows a trace of backend tannin. Fine, fine juice with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2021-2055. **93.**



1985 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Lavières”- Domaine Tollot-Beaut

I loved Domaine Tollot-Beaut’s style of wines in the decades of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, but by the turn of the new century, they had gone off in a much more new oaky direction that left me cold, so I do not taste them with any regularity these days. But, back in 1985, they were one of the Côte de Beaune’s top estates and their les Lavières from this vintage is a truly outstanding wine. It delivers a deep, complex and *à point* bouquet of raspberries and dark berries, lovely spice tones, *sous bois*, spit-roasted gamebird, a touch of iron, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, mature and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good, bouncy acids, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, focused and very complex finish. This is a superb bottle of Savigny at its apogee. 2021-2045+. **93.**

1985 Beaune “Cuvée Nicolas-Rolin”- Hospices de Beaune (Maison Louis Jadot)

André Porcheret’s first stop at the Hospices de Beaune, from 1976 through 1987, is one of my favorite eras for the wines of the Hospices. His 1985 Cuvée Nicolas-Rolin, with this bottle having been raised by Louis Jadot, is drinking stunningly well today. The utterly refined bouquet delivers a superb constellation of sweet blackberries, black cherries, a touch of fresh sage, a lovely base of soil, roasted *pigeon*, a nice touch of new oak and a floral topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully tertiary in its development, with a sweet core of fruit, melted tannins and a long, focused and very elegant finish. This is a great bottle of Beaune that is still at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability. 2021-2035+. **93.**

1979 Pommard- Maison Pierre Bourée

The 1979 vintage of red Burgundy is quite underrated and a great many of the top example from the vintage continue to drink very well today. The '79 Pommard from Maison Pierre Bourée is one of those wines, as it is fully mature now, but still right in the middle of its plateau of peak drinkability. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of plums, pomegranate, smoked duck, woodsmoke, black tea, a complex base of soil tones, dark chocolate and a lovely topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly resolved today, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, melted tannins and a long, complex and superbly balanced finish. This is a very good Pommard at its apogee. 2021-2040+. **92.**

1970 Vosne-Romanée- Maison Louis Latour

This bottle was just a bit over the hill and I only include the note in this report to emphasize just how good the Louis Latour wines were back in this era. The 1970 vintage was not a great year in Burgundy, so a *villages* level bottling is not likely to still be at the top of its game in any case, nor are most grand crus from this year either! But, despite this wine starting to get a little wobbly, it was still not all that bad of a drink and was still probably very tasty only a decade ago. The bouquet just hints at incipient oxidation, but also offers up lovely notes of desiccated cherries, fresh herb tones, a touch of saddle leather, autumnal soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is plagued by a bit of volatile acidity today, but is still fullish, complex and nicely defined by its *sous bois* elements. It is still pretty long on the backend and retains a good, solid core of sweet red fruit. It is clearly into its slide down the far side of its plateau, but probably had a good long run where it defied expectations and is still not all that bad of a drink today. 2021-2030. **84.**

1969 Pernand-Vergelesses “Île de Vergelesses”- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The 1969 Île de Vergelesses from Chandon de Briailles is a lovely bottle that continues to drink with great style and complexity, but has clearly been fully mature for thirty years and is starting to inch its way towards the far side of the plateau. Consequently, though this wine delivered plenty of pleasure for the first thirty minutes that it was open, it did start to fade pretty briskly from that point forward and is clearly getting towards its period of decline. But, over those good thirty minutes, the wine was just lovely, offering up a complex and wide open bouquet of desiccated cherries, spiced meats, iron, *sous bois*, heather, orange peel, a touch of brown sugar, porcini and a gentle topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and has a lovely core of sweet fruit, with excellent soil undertow and grip, melted tannins and a long, very nicely balanced and fully mature finish. This has the velvety texture of a long mature bottle of Burgundy, but with time in hand, so it should be drunk up in regular-sized formats in the near future. A lovely wine while it lasts. 2021-2031. **91.**

1959 Bonnes-Mares- Alexis Lichine

I drank this wine a few years ago, but had overlooked printing the note in my last article on mature red Burgundies, so thought I would include it here, just to get it into the database. Back in this era, Alexis Lichine used to bottle quite a few red Burgundies under his own label, usually with no information about where he had bought the wine. But, he had a great palate and fine connections, so the wines that I have had the pleasure to drink have always been good, as was the case with this excellent example of 1959 Bonnes-Mares. The bouquet was just a touch

volatile when first opened, but settled down beautifully and eventually offers up a superb blend of baked plums, cherries, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, spiced meats, heather and a topnote of gently savory elements that are extremely attractive. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and now very elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, melted tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully complex finish. I do love Bonnes-Mares at its apogee! 2017-2035. **93.**

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Doyard- *Cuvée Révolution Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV; “Cuvée Vendémiare” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV;*

Emilien Feneuil- *2016 “Cuvée Totum” Non-Dosé Brut Millésime;*

Alexandre Filaine- *“Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Base Year 2018); “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Base Year 2016); “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Magnum); “DMY” Brut NV (Base Year 2014); 2015 “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime;*

Champagne Geoffroy- *“Expression” Brut NV; 2013 “Empreinte” Brut Millésime;*

Pierre Gimonet et Fils- *Blanc de Blancs “Cuis Premier Cru” Brut NV; 2016 “Cuvée Gastronomes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2014 “Fleurion” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2014 “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;*

Grongnet- *“Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV; “Carpe Diem” Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV;*

Marc Hébrart- *2017 “Special Club” Brut Millésime; 2013 “Rive Gauche-Rive Droit” Brut Millésime;*

Jacquesson- *“Cuvée 744” Extra Brut NV; “Cuvée 739 Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV;*

Benoît Lahaye- *2012 “Violaine” Brut Nature Millésime;*

Lancelot-Pienne- *“Instant Présent” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2014 “Marie Lancelot” Grand Cru Extra Brut Millésime;*

J. Lassalle- *2007 “Special Club” Brut Millésime;*

Paul Launois- *“Composition #3” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Monochrome #1” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV;*

Georges Laval- *“Cumières” Brut Nature NV; 2015 “les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature Millésime; 2016 “Cumières” Brut Nature Millésime (Magnum); 2016 “les Hautes Chèvres” Brut Nature Millésime; 2013 “les Longues Violes” Brut Nature Millésime;*

Valentin Leflaive- *“CV/17/50” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV;*

Lilbert-Fils- *2015 “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime;*

Sadi Malot- *“les Deux Cépages” Brut NV; 2017 “les Suzaines” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime;*

Champagne Marguet- “Yuman 18” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV; “Shaman 18” Extra Brut Rosé; 2011 “Sapience” Brut Nature Millésime;

Mouzon-Leroux- “l’Ascendant” Extra Brut NV; “l’Atavique” Extra Brut NV; “L’Incandescent” Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV;

Bruno Paillard- “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV; “Rosé Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV;

Pehu-Simonet- “Face Nord” Extra Brut NV; “Face Nord” Extra Brut Rosé NV; 2013 “Fins Lieux #7 Villers-Marmery les Chouettes” Extra Brut Millésime; 2014 “Fins Lieux #1 Verzenay les Perthois” Blancs de Noirs Extra Brut; 2013 “Fins Lieux #2 Verzenay les Crayères” Blancs de Noirs Extra Brut; 2012 “Fins Lieux #3 les Poules de Mailly” Blc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime;

Pierre-Péters- “Cuvée Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Rosé For Albane” Brut NV;

Philipponnat- 2000 “Grand Blanc L. V.” Extra Brut Millésime; 2014 “1522” Grand Cru Extra Brut Millésime 2012 “1522” Grand Cru Extra Brut Rosé Millésime;

Piper-Heidsieck- 2002 “Rare” Brut Millésime;

Pol Roger- 1996 “Extra Cuvée de Réserve” Brut Millésime

Ponson- 2017 “les Plaines” Blanc de Meunier Extra Brut Millésime;

André Robert- 2013 “Terre du Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime;

Louis Roederer- “Collection 242” Brut NV; “Brut Premier” NV; 2014 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2014 Brut Millésime; 2015 Rosé Brut Millésime;

Jean-Marc Sélèque- “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2017); “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Base Year 2017); “Solessence” Extra Brut NV; 2016 “Soliste” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime; 2015 “Partition” Extra Brut Millésime;

Taittinger- Nocturne Sec NV; Nocturne Sec Rosé NV; “Prestige Rosé” Brut NV;

Vilmart & Cie- “Grand Cellier” Brut NV; 2016 “Grand Cellier d’Or” Brut Millésime; 2013 “Coeur de Cuvée” Brut Millésime; 2012 “Rosé Emotion” Brut Millésime;

Champagne Vix-Bara- Blanc de Blancs Brut NV;

RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINES- AUTUMN OF 2021



The September-October issues of the newsletter always seems to include one of the biggest features on the Champagne region each year, and this is again the case in 2021. As I have mentioned in the past, I try to now write about Champagne and Sparkling Wines several times each year, as I drink these wines all the time and would love to encourage more people to do so also, rather than save up most of their annual Champagne consumption for the months of November and December around the end of year holidays. Not that I am discouraging anyone from celebrating the holiday season with bubbly, but these wines are so good today, and in the midst of a renaissance unprecedented in the history of the region of Champagne, that it seems to me that they should be reached for with far more regularity during the other ten months of the year! And given just how many estates are currently at the top of their game in the Champagne region, not to mention the very promising newcomers that seem to emerge every few months, there has never been a better time to expand your Champagne drinking habits! And the current sparkling wine renaissance certainly extends beyond the friendly confines of the Champagne region proper, as there is a similar march upwards in quality to be found in sparkling wine bastions such as Cataluña in Spain, not to mention all along the west coast of the United States. I need to find time to do a much more comprehensive report on American sparkling wines early

next year, as I only had the opportunity to taste new releases from three of California's finest sparkling wine producers for this report- Domaine Carneros, Samantha Sheehan of Poe Wines and Roederer Estate, but it was an excellent reminder of just how good sparkling wines are here in the states these days and that I need to get more of these on my tasting bench next year.

One of the many Champagne highlights tasted in preparing this report this year was the light finally going on for me about just how beautiful the wines are from Laurent Champs at Vilmart et Cie in the village of Rilly-la-Montagne. I have not drunk all that many Vilmart wines over the years, but I have certainly tasted enough of them previously that I should have already been fully aware of just how special these wines are, but for some reason, it was not until I opened my first sample of Laurent's current releases that it finally struck me just how much I love the style and quality of his wines. I know that I am very late to come to this realization, but I wanted to at least highlight the Vilmart wines in these introductory remarks, just to emphasize how good they are these days. Laurent Champs took over the reins of his family's *maison* of Vilmart et Cie in 1995, becoming the fifth generation to man the helm here, so he has now been in charge of this fine, eleven hectare estate on the Montagne de Reims for more than a quarter century. Laurent farms his vines organically, with the variety breakdown of his parcels being sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir. Rilly-la-Montagne is rated a premier cru village, but it is beautifully situated up on top of the Montagne de Reims, neighboring other top villages such as Chigny-lès-Roses, Ludes and Mailly. The relatively higher percentage of chardonnay is a bit extraordinary for this section of the Montagne de Reims, as usually pinot noir and pinot meunier are planted as the more prolific grapes at most producers located up on this section of the *Montagne*. Vilmart's vines average about thirty-five years of age, with the oldest vines just over sixty years-old and reserved usually for Laurent's top bottling, the vintage-dated "Coeur de Cuvée".

Laurent Champs barrel-ferments all of his *vins clairs*, with some fermented in older Burgundy casks and others in larger, traditional *foudres*. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malolactic fermentation at Vilmart, and like a growing number of top producers in Champagne these days, the *elevage* in cask and *foudres* for the *vins clairs* now stretches out to fully ten months prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The non-vintage bottlings are given a minimum of thirty months aging *sur latte*, with vintage-dated cuvées spending anywhere from five to eight years on their fine lees prior to disgorgement. All of the current releases I tasted from Vilmart Cie were superb and built to age long and gracefully and I need to get rolling putting some of these wines into my own cellar, so that I can familiarize myself better with how they drink at peak maturity. My kind of research! Beyond the Vilmart epiphany, this report is absolutely loaded with stunning new releases from some of the very finest producers in all of Champagne- and this is without many of the *Grandes Marques* (or to be more accurate, their representatives here in the states) sending samples for inclusion in this article. I did manage to taste a fine range of new releases from both Louis Roederer and Taittinger for this article (though no new *Têtes de Cuvées* from either house), but Pol Roger's and Gosset's importers declined or did not respond to requests for inclusion in this feature. But, a few of the very best smaller *Grandes Marques* stepped up nicely, with both Bruno Paillard, Jacquesson and Philipponnat sending a fine array of new releases, so this article is certainly not entirely focused on Grower Champagne.

But the real depth of this issue's feature on Champagne and Sparkling Wines is found in the dazzling array of top notch Grower Champagnes that I tasted for this article, as it is a veritable *who's who* of the very finest small domaines in the region of Champagne. The following notes below include tons of wines from extremely gifted *vignerons* such as Vincent Laval, Jérôme Prévost (out of my own cellar), Benoît Marguet, Jérôme Dehours, Benoît Lahaye, Rodolphe Péters, Agnès Corbon, Jean-Marc Sélèque, Fabrice Gass, Champagne Doyard, Cécile Grongnet and Sebastian Mouzon, among the more well-known producers featured in the pages that follow. All of these producers I have been fully aware of for many years now and rank them right up there with the best of the *Grandes Marques* at the very summit of quality in Champagne these days, but there was also another slice of *vignerons* who I had the pleasure to sample for this report that are not quite the same "household names" as those listed above and who also are making outstanding wines. Among these relatively new (to me) producers are Gilles Lancelot of Lancelot-Pienne in Cramant, Julien Launois of Champagne Paul Launois in Mesnil-sur-Oger, Herbert Beaufort in Bouzy, Valentin Leflaive in Oger, Christian Bourmault in Avize and Franck Malot and his daughter Cindy of Champagne Sadi Malot in Verzy. Some of these excellent producers are relatively young and just getting rolling, such as Gilles Lancelot and Julien Launois, while others have been quietly making excellent wines for many years, though this was one of the first times I have had the opportunity to taste their wines. All of the great wines featured below simply further underscore that the Champagne region has never, ever in its history produced anywhere near the quantity of stunning wines as it is today, and with viticultural practices continuing to become better and healthier in this region and more of the next generation arriving every year, the future here could not be brighter (provided we do not put the torch to the planet by continuing to ignore the profound threats of climate change).

I could have clearly covered a lot more ground for this report, as there are loads of top estates whose wines did not make it into this article and which still runs to well over forty pages in length! As I continue to emphasize, the sheer volume of great wines coming out of the Champagne region these days is so vast that it really requires nearly continuous reporting on new releases to try and keep abreast of all of the superb new wines hitting the market each year. So, I suppose I should be happy that not everyone is willing to send me samples of Champagne these days, as each issue of the newsletter would probably end up including one hundred pages of coverage on the region if I got samples of everything I would like to cover, but I do miss being able to stay abreast of some of the top *Grandes Marques* and best-known Grower-Récoltants that are now too famous and/or expensive to want to send me samples of their wines. And to be fair, for some of these, they certainly do not need more positive coverage for their wines, as we all already know how brilliant the Selosse wines are each year, or the best bottlings from Bollinger, Pol Roger and the like that have worked hard for decades to make their consistently excellent wines the long running "gold standard" for the region and have excellent market placements the world over. However, I do wonder a bit about some of the other *Grandes Marques* such as Charles Heidsieck, whose wines are consistently superb, but which I seldom see well-placed in the US market or in other countries where I travel. It would seem to me that they could use all of the positive exposure that they could generate, but I seldom receive positive responses from their representatives when I enquire about samples and never see any of their top vintage-dated wines anymore. But, I suppose they and their representatives know more about how to get quality placements in the market than I do.

Before launching into the very deep treasure trove of tasting notes below, I do want to touch on just a couple of issues with producers who are featured in the pages that follow, as both merit being singled out in these introductory remarks. One is the important new release of Maison Louis Roederer's greatly improved, non-vintage Brut cuvée, which is now called "Collection 242". The *maison* started a solera or perpetual cuvée dedicated to this new bottling back with wines from the superb 2012 vintage, and have been adding to it each year going forward, creating yet another element to their already deep library of reserve wines that figure into the blend of their non-vintage Brut bottling. So, the new Collection 242 includes a substantial mix of classic reserve wines from the Roederer cellars (dating all the way back to 2006 for this current release), which is from the base year of 2017. In addition, fully one-third of the blend in Collection 242 hails from the solera started in 2012, adding yet more complexity and depth to this stellar non-vintage bottling! I had always like the Louis Roederer Brut Premier non-vintage bottling, which the Collection 242 is replacing, but the new cuvée is a significant step up in quality and is one of the most exciting new wines to emerge from any of the *Grandes Marques* in recent memory. Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and his talented cellar team at Maison Roederer have crafted a simply stunning new non-vintage Brut bottling and it has set the bar very high for the rest of the *Grandes Marques* to try and follow!

The other topic I wanted to briefly touch upon revolves around the superb wines made by Fabrice Gass at Champagne Alexandre Filaine in Damery. Readers already know my deep and profound respect for Monsieur Gass's wines, not to mention his organic farming practices and his unrelenting pursuit of quality at any cost. I wrote rather extensively about Fabrice a few years back after a visit to his cellars in Damery, but for those who might like a quick refresher on his career, Fabrice long worked in the cellars at Champagne Bollinger in Aÿ, and this was his "day job" for most of his adult life. His uncle, Alexandre Filaine (for whom the domaine still takes its name) asked Fabrice to take over farming his small parcels of vines in Damery, as Monsieur Filaine did not have anyone else in the family to hand off his vines to when he was getting too old and stiff in the joints to continue farming them. So, Fabrice took over while he was still working at Bollinger, farming the vines organically on nights and weekends and making the wines in his small cellars in very old oak casks, most of which he sourced from Bollinger. Fabrice is an extremely talented winemaker, and though it took him several years to actually commercialize any of his new production (not being anywhere near as enamored of doing the requisite paperwork to start selling his wines as he was taking care of the vines and making his own bubbly), but eventually he has become one of the most respected small *vignerons* in all of Champagne. His *vins clairs* are entirely barrel-fermented, do not go through malolactic fermentation and are aged under either crown cap (for his Cuvée Spéciale bottling) or under cork during their time *sur latte*.

For many years, there were just two bottlings of non-vintage wine produced here, the aforementioned Cuvée Spéciale and one previously labeled as Cuvée Confidence (the bottling aged under natural cork *sur latte*) and now called "DMY". However, a few years ago, Fabrice decided to start producing a small quantity of vintage-dated wine called "Sensuum Vertigo", which quickly became one of the most highly sought-after vintage wines in the world of Grower Champagne. However, the Sensuum Vertigo is only made in very small quantities- never more than one or two barrels of wine- so there is very, very little to go around for a thirsty world. I get to taste it each year that it is produced and am very content to have that opportunity, but knowing

how limited the wine is, I never fret that I do not have any bottles in my cellar of the Sensuum Vertigo. One of the reasons for this is that, as dazzling as the vintages of Sensuum Vertigo that I have tasted have been, I have never had a preference for it over Fabrice's non-vintage cuvée of DMY- the one that is aged under natural corks *sur latte* for four or five years prior to disgorgement and release. I have just always found the multi-vintage DMY bottling to be the more complete and complex wine, though I do not mean to disparage the Sensuum Vertigo at all by stating this preference. Perhaps the vintages of Sensuum Vertigo just need extended cellaring time to fully blossom and eventually pass the excellent quality of Fabrice's DMY cuvée. But, in any case, the reason I bring this up is that I was treated to some classic allocation horror stories by Fabrice's importers during our tasting for this article, where I heard tales of wine buyers at restaurants and important merchants declining allocations of both the Alexandre Filaine "Cuvée Spéciale" and the DMY bottling, but demanding a quantity of the Sensuum Vertigo! Pure madness. So, I wanted to take a moment, just in case any of those crazy wine buyers out there in the New York market happen to see this article to implore them to take any bottles they can get from Champagne Alexandre Filaine and stop fixating on the "unicorn wine" of Sensuum Vertigo, as it is most assuredly not self-evident that it is even Fabrice's best wine! And as William Kelley just wrote to me to say, after I posted on Twitter about my slight preference for the DMY bottling here, Fabrice Gass himself also happens to prefer his DMY!

In the notes that follow, readers will see that I was indeed quite lucky with the preparation for this report, as I had a chance to taste several bottles of Fabrice Gass's wines. Most of these were his Cuvée Spéciale, which is the wine I try to buy each year for my own cellar, as it ages simply stunningly. It may not be the best Filaine bottling, but it is most assuredly a great wine when it is ready to drink! But, as Fabrice does not (yet?) include any information on the back labels on base year or date of disgorgement for his wines, there is a bit of speculation as to how old exactly a couple of the wines I tasted from him happened to be. These releases in question had been in the market in London back in 2018 and 2019, but which my friend who had purchased them, could not ship until after the pandemic and Trump's tariffs had eased off here in New York. So, their base year listed in the notes is to my best guess, based on how long Fabrice is now aging this wine *sur latte* prior to release and assuming that the London merchant would get the same release as we see here in New York at any given time. I also have a note on this wine out of magnum, which is yet another permutation from Fabrice Gass! For, Fabrice vastly prefers to drink his own wines out of magnum, so he produces almost all of these for himself and his close friends, and they are not handled quite the same way as the regular-sized bottles of Cuvée Spéciale. The magnums of Cuvée Spéciale are aged under natural cork during their time *sur latte*, and there is no real record keeping of how long those magnums stay on their fine lees, so I really have no idea what the base wine was of the magnum I had a chance to drink and report on for this article. I only know that it was gorgeous wine! So, if you ever spot a rare magnum of the Alexandre Filaine Cuvée Spéciale, do not hesitate to snap it up, as you can count on it being absolutely stunning wine and essentially, the same as his DMY bottling, as it too is aged on a natural cork during its time *sur latte*. And, for lord's sake, do not spend all of your efforts trying to locate a bottle or two of his vintage-dated Sensuum Vertigo at the expense of not buying his other two cuvées!

Sparkling Wines

Domaine Carneros “Cuvée de la Pompadour” Brut Rosé NV (Carneros)

The Domaine Carneros “Cuvée de la Pompadour” Brut Rosé is quite a pale salmon color and is composed from a *cépages* of seventy-two percent pinot noir and twenty-eight percent chardonnay, with most of the color coming from a period of skin contact for the pinot noir juice (though in certain vintages a touch of still red wine is also added). About seven percent of the *vins clairs* go through malo for this bottling, which was given eighteen months aging *sur latte*. The nose wafts from the glass in a pretty and youthful blend of casaba melon, apple, lovely soil tones, a touch of raw almond and a discreet topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied and tasty, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, well-buffered acids and a long, moderately complex finish. A good, solid example. 2021-2035. **89.**

Daheuille Crémant de Loire Brut Rosé NV

The Daheuille Crémant de Loire Brut Rosé is composed entirely of pinot noir. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a pretty bouquet of apple, a touch of cantaloupe, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and frothy, with a good core and a long, bouncy finish. This is not overly complex, but it is tasty. 2021-2026. **86.**

Müller-Catoir Haardt Riesling Sekt Brut NV AP #41

The Müller-Catoir Haardt Riesling Sekt Brut sees its secondary fermentation take place in bottle and the wine is aged a minimum of a year and a half *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The new release offers up a lovely nose of apple, nectarine, warm bread, just a hint of honeycomb, dried flowers and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, snappy and full, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and fine focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is a well-made bottle of Sekt that strikes me that it will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2023-2035. **88.**

Roederer Estate Brut NV (Anderson Valley)

The current release of Roederer Estate non-vintage Brut is composed from its customary blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir, with only a small percentage of the *vins clairs* going through malolactic fermentation. The wine is aged for two years-plus *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of twelve grams per liter. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil tones, a hint of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and quite classy finish. The addition of reserve wines in the blend here give it more complexity than probably any other non-vintage Brut produced in California. This is very good juice. 2021-2035+. **91.**

Roederer Estate Brut Rosé NV (Anderson Valley)

The Roederer Estate non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised from a blend of fifty-six percent pinot noir and forty-four percent chardonnay, with a small percentage of the pinot noir being still red wine to give the lovely salmon color to this cuvée. The includes a percentage of reserve wines aged in large oak *foudres*, in the style of the *grand maison* in Reims, and is aged *sur latte* for a minimum of two years prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of eleven grams per liter. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of strawberry, tart orange, bread dough, a fine base of soil and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full, with lovely focus and balance, refined *mousse*, a very good core and a long, soil-driven and complex finish. This is lovely wine. 2021-2035. **90.**

Ultraviolet Brut Rosé NV (California)

Samantha Sheehan's Ultraviolet non-vintage Brut Rosé is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and complex nose of crushed strawberries, a touch of pomegranate, rye bread, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and snappy, with a good core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and well-balanced young finish. I do not know what the base year is for this bottling, but the wine is still young and will be even better if tucked away in the cellars for a couple of years to let its girdle of acidity relax a bit more. It is an outstanding value! 2023-2035+. **90.**

2017 Domaine Carneros Vintage Brut (Carneros)

The 2017 Domaine Carneros is composed from a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay. The wine is aged for at least three years *sur latte*, was disgorged in April of 2021 and balanced off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter.. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of green apple, lemon, bread dough, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, zesty acids, very refined *mousse* and a long, complex and youthful finish. The knowhow of the Taittinger team is very much in evidence here. Fine juice. 2021-2035. **90.**

2017 Domaine Carneros "Ultra Brut" Vintage (Carneros)

The 2017 Domaine Carneros "Ultra Brut" is produced entirely from organically-grown, estate fruit, with a *cépages* of fifty-seven percent chardonnay and forty-three percent pinot noir. The 2017 was disgorged in August of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine delivers a refined and quite delicate bouquet of lemon, tart apple, spring flowers, bread dough, a fine base of soil tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, lovely soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, vibrant and well-balanced finish. This is very good. 2021-2030+. **91+.**

2016 Poe Wines Sparkling Pinot Meunier "Van der Kamp Vineyard" Brut Vintage

The 2016 vintage of sparkling pinot meunier from Samantha Sheehan at Poe Wines is really a beautiful bottle of Rosé, as it hails from those very old vines planted back in 1953. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a very refined, elegant nose of white peach, wild strawberries, a hint of melon, a complex base of soil tones, bread dough, meunier floral tones and a delicate touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and refined in profile, with a good core, lovely soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and youthful finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is already approachable today, but (I assume) that the *vins clairs* do not go through malolactic and the wine could do with some bottle age to relax a bit more structurally. It is good now and is going to be superb with bottle age! 2021-2045. **91+.**



2015 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Brut Vintage (Anderson Valley)

I know that there are a lot of extremely good sparkling wines now made in the United States, but to my palate, the Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” bottling is the finest. The 2015 vintage of this excellent wine is composed of a *cépages* of fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter in this vintage. The wine delivers a superb and very refined bouquet of tart pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil, discreet smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, young, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, bright acids, extremely elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is so seamlessly balanced that it is already drinking very well at six years of age, but it has the potential to blossom and improve with bottle age and I would love to drink it a decade down the road! The 2015 is clearly a very, very special vintage for the l’Ermitage bottling at Roederer Estate! 2021-2045. **93+**.

2013 Domaine Carneros “le Rêve” Vintage Brut (Carneros)

The 2013 Domaine Carneros “le Rêve” Vintage Brut is crafted entirely from estate grown chardonnay. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The bouquet is pure and precise, offering up lovely depth in its aromatic constellation of apple, peach, warm bread, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth and soil

signature, refined *mousse*, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. Great juice. 2021-2045+. **93.**

2013 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Brut Rosé Vintage (Anderson Valley)

The 2013 Roederer Estate “l’Ermitage” Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of fifty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir in this vintage, with a small percentage of the pinot being still red wine to give the lovely salmon color to the bottling. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and offers up a lovely bouquet of strawberries, dried cherries, a touch of melon, rose petals, a fine base of soil, orange peel and a discreet topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still zesty, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, snappy acids and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is not quite as seamless on the palate as the 2015 l’Ermitage, and I would opt for still giving this a few years in the cellar to allow the fine spine of acidity here to relax a bit more. 2023-2040. **91+.**

2009 Bertha “S.XXI” Vintage Brut Nature (Cataluña)

The 2009 Bertha “S.XXI” Vintage Brut Nature is an excellent bottle of Cava. The wine was disgorged in June of 2021 after more than eleven years aging *sur latte*. It offers up a bright and complex bouquet of lemon, tangerine, walnut, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is a perfect example of why I find the top Spanish sparkling wines the very best to be found outside of Champagne in all of the European Union. Great value! 2021-2040+. **92.**

Sec Champagne

Taittinger Nocturne Sec NV (Reims)

Taittinger’s Nocturne bottlings remain my favorite sweeter-styled Champagnes in the market, as I really like the balance they achieve with the interplay of acidity, minerality and a touch of residual sweetness. The *cépages* here is forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier, with a finishing *dosage* of 17.5 grams per liter, which is not all that heavily sweet. The wine offers up a refined and complex bouquet of nectarine, apple, brioche, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and a long, well-balanced finish that really only shows a wisp of backend sweetness. I am not sure if this is a touch drier on the backend than last year’s version, or if the wine is just young today, but it does seem a tad less sweet on the backend than I remember from a year ago. In any case, it is a very well-made bottle. 2021-2040. **91.**

Taittinger Nocturne Sec Rosé NV (Reims)

The new release of Taittinger Nocturne non-vintage Sec Rosé is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier. The wine includes anywhere from twelve to fifteen percent still red wine to provide its lovely salmon color. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of 17.5 grams per liter this year, which strikes me as a touch lower than has been the past in previous iterations. The nose is bright and complex, offering up scents of cherries, blood orange, chalky soil elements, rye bread and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, fine soil undertow, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and well-balanced finish that

closes with just a touch of residual sweetness. A lovely bottle of Sec Champagne. 2021-2040. **90+**.

Non-Vintage Non-Dosé Champagne

La Closerie “les Beguines” Extra Brut NV- Jérôme Prévost (Gueux)

This bottle of La Closerie “les Beguines” from Jérôme Prévost is from the base year of 2012. The wine is drinking beautifully today, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of white peach, brioche, a hint of lavender, a superb base of soil tones, just a hint of vanillin oak and a potpourri of gentle meunier floral scents in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with crisp acids, a beautiful core of fruit, impeccable balance, outstanding *mousse* and a long, soil-driven and complex finish. Just a beautiful bottle of wine that is just hitting its stride and still has decades of life ahead of it. 2021-2050. **94.**

Dehours et Fils Brut Nature NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

The new release of Dehours et Fils Brut Nature in the market hails from the base year of 2015, but with fully thirty percent of the cuvée coming from the solera that was started for this bottling in 1998. Like all of Jérôme Dehours’ wines, the *vins clairs* were treated to an extended *elevage* in the cellars here prior to being bottled up for their secondary fermentation in July of 2016. The wine was given a bit more than three years on its fine lees prior to its disgorgement in September of 2019. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of apple, warm bread, hazelnut, plenty of smokiness, a touch of dried flowers and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, excellent soil undertow, brisk acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is starting to really drink nicely today, as it is more than two years out from its disgorgement today and the acids are starting to relax nicely. It will continue to age long and gracefully. 2021-2040. **92.**

Doyard Cuvée Révolution Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Vertus)

The new release of Champagne Doyard’s Révolution Brut Nature is from the fine base year of 2013, with fifty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from 2012 and 2011, as is the estate’s custom for this bottling. Fifty percent of the *vins clairs* are raised in older Burgundy casks and the other half in stainless steel, with only fifteen percent of the *vins clairs* going through malolactic. This year the wine was aged six years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. It delivers a refined aromatic constellation of golden delicious apples, pear, almond, *crème patissière*, a beautiful base of limestone minerality, brioche and a gentle topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, excellent balance and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, perfectly balanced and classy finish. The very extended period of aging over six years on its fine lees has allowed the acids here to relax nicely, so the lack of *dosage* is not an impediment to immediate enjoyment. Like all of the Doyard family’s wines, this is excellent! 2021-2045+. **92+.**

Champagne Marguet “Yuman 18” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

I tasted the Yuman 18 a few months back, when it’s container had just landed on the east coast and the wine was literally a day or two “off of the boat”. At that time, it was clearly shaken from travel, so I have been looking forward to tasting it again once it had a chance to settle in from trans-Atlantic travel. The wine is made from purchased fruit, grown organically, and is a new bottling from Benoît Marguet designed to augment his Shaman bottlings, which now sell out very briskly. The wine is treated the same in the cellars as all the other Marguet bottlings, with barrel-fermentation and extended aging of the *vins clairs* in cask, prior to bottling and is given just under two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a lovely

bouquet, delivering scents of apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, a nice savory element (wild fennel?), white flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. Fine juice. 2021-2040. **92.**

Mouzon-Leroux “l’Ascendant” Extra Brut NV (Verzy)

I absolutely love Sébastien Mouzon’s wines, but his *dosage* has been creeping lower and lower with each round of new releases and I really would love to see the levels raised a bit for some of his bottlings (or in certain years), as to my palate, their lack of any *dosage* precludes their being thoroughly enjoyed without bottle age. This is the same release I reported on a year ago, which is comprised of fifty percent from the base year of 2014 and fifty percent from a solera that includes 2013 and 2010 juice. The wine, if anything, seems even younger and less drinkable today than it was a year ago, though its ultimate potential remains excellent. The nose offers up a lovely blend of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, raw almond, steely minerality, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, youthful and slightly angular finish. This wine seems to have closed down over the last twelve months, rather than starting to blossom, and it will demand some further bottle age to really start reaching its potential. Unless one think that I am just being overly critical with this non-*dosé* bottling, I served it alongside of two other non-*dosé* wines of similar age, albeit from riper vintages of 2012 and 2015, and the adolescent austerity of the 2014 Base Year l’Ascendant really stood out in contrast to the other two wines. I came away with the hypothesis that in leaner, racier years such as 2014, and especially in the easterly-facing and steely *terroir* of Verzy, a judicious touch of *dosage* can go a long way to rounding out the sharp edges of youth. This wine is going to be excellent in due course, but to my palate, it demands further bottle age to start to show some charm on the palate. 2025-2050. **92.**

Blanc de Blancs Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Épernay)

The current release of Besserat de Bellefon’s “Cuvée des Moines” non-vintage Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in December of 2018, making this wine from the base year of 2014. All of the fruit for this bottling hails from grand cru villages in the Côte des Blancs. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is really starting to drink well today, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, plenty of smokiness, a touch of hazelnut and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced, zesty and wide open finish. The *maison* makes this wine at a lower pressure, so the bubbles are quite delicate. This is showing the first signs of secondary development and will be prized by those who like to age their Champagne. 2021-2035. **90.**

Herbert Beaufort “Cuvée du Mélomane” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Bouzy)

This is the base year 2018 bottling of Cuvée du Mélomane from Henri Beaufort and his two sons, Hugues and Ludovic, is a lovely young wine. The *vins clairs* for this wine are fermented both in casks and stainless steel tanks, and like all of the Beaufort bottlings, they do not go through malolactic fermentation. The 2018 base year version delivers a fine bouquet, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, brioche, spring flowers and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthfully zesty, with a fine core, good soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently

complex and nicely balanced finish. This is a fine young bottle, but it really deserves a few years in the cellar to properly blossom and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. Fine juice. 2023-2045. **91+**.



Herbert Beaufort “Cuvée du Mélomane” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Bouzy)

The Beaufort family’s Cuvée du Mélomane from the base year of 2016 is far more open than the 2018 version and is drinking splendidly already. This bottling was disgorged in July of 2020 and now offers up a bright and complex bouquet of delicious apple, pear, brioche, apple blossoms, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a discreet topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, zesty acids, pinpoint bubbles and a long, beautifully balanced and vibrant finish. This is just starting to blossom and has plenty of life ahead of it, but for those with more than a few bottles in the cellar, it is hardly a crime to be starting to drink this wine today! 2021-2045. **92.**

Christian Bourmault “Grand Eloge” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

Christian Bourmault’s Grand Eloge bottling hails from fruit in Cuis and Avize, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, going through full malo and aged for ten months prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The current release is from the base year of 2016 and was disgorged in February of 2019. The wine is really starting to blossom aromatically today, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of pear, hazelnut, brioche, a complex base of chalky soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a hint of buttery oak. On the palate

the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. The palate is still a bit on the youthful side and a few years in the cellar will allow the acids to relax more fully and the mouthfeel to catch up with the lovely aromatics, but all of the constituent components are in place for a superb glass of Blanc de Blancs once those acids back off a bit more. But, in a pinch, I would be perfectly happy to drink this wine today. 2023-2040. **92.**

Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Avize)

The new release of Le Brun Servenay’s “Mélodie en C” is from the base year of 2016 and was disgorged in September of 2020, after three-plus years aging *sur latte*. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. All of the fruit for this bottling hails from the three grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger, and the *vins clairs* do not go through malolactic fermentation. A third of the blend is made up of reserve wines. The wine offers up a lovely nose of apple, pear, a hint of passion fruit, brioche, chalky soil tones, almond paste and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, snappy and nicely balanced finish. Good juice. 2021-2035+. **90+.**

Gaston Chiquet “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Brut NV (Dizy)

The current bottling of Nicolas Chiquet’s “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” in the market is from the base year of 2015 and was disgorged in October of 2020, after four and a half years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and beautifully refined blend of pear, apple, raw almond, chalky soil tones, brioche, incipient smokiness and a beautiful topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, fine soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. This is still a young wine, and though it is certainly approachable today, a few years’ worth of bottle age will allow the wine to really unwind structurally and drink with generosity. Good juice. 2023-2035+. **91.**

Champagne Corbon Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

Agnès Corbon decided not to bottle a 2011 vintage wine, which is rather unprecedented for the family, as she and her father had been crafting at least some vintage-dated wines each year going back to the 1970s. But, the 2011 ended up being declassified as a non-vintage Blanc de Blancs and it is a great value! The wine is bright, young and complex, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, golden delicious apple, brioche, a touch of almond, a beautiful base of limestone and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and has excellent mid-palate depth, with zesty acids, excellent focus and cut, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **92+.**

Doyard “Cuvée Vendémiare” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus)

The present day release of Champagne Doyard’s “Cuvée Vendémiare” that is in the market is from the base year of 2015, though this only comprised fifty percent of the blend. As is the family’s custom for this bottling, the balance of the *cuvée* is comprised of thirty percent from 2014 and twenty percent from the vintage of 2013. As I noted last year, eighty-five percent of the *vins clairs* do not go through malo for this bottling and forty percent of the wines are raised in older Burgundy barrels prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. It was aged *sur latte* for fully five years, disgorged in March of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The bouquet is youthful and stylish, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, fresh almond chalky minerality, *crème patissière*, incipient notes of smokiness and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core,

excellent mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. This cuvée has a great track record for aging, so I would not touch a bottle of this until it has had five or six years' worth of hibernation. It is not that it is not already quite tasty, but there is so much more to unfold here that drinking bottles young will be a relative waste. 2026-2050. **92+**.

Pierre Gimonnet et Fils Blanc de Blancs “Cuis Premier Cru” Brut NV (Cuis)

The new bottling of Gimonnet Blanc de Blancs “Cuis Premier Cru” non-vintage Brut in the market is from the 2017 vintage, with reserve wines included in the blend dating a back to 2010. It was disgorged in February 2021 after three years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine delivers a bright and stylish bouquet of pear, apple, almond, chalky minerality, a hint of brioche and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still fairly tensile, with a fine core, lovely mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a very good bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs that I would be inclined to give a couple of years in the cellar to allow its girdle of acidity to relax a bit more. Good juice. 2021-2040. **90+**.

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

The new release of Instant Présent from Gilles Lancelot is from the base year of 2017. As is customary with this bottling, twenty percent of the blend is taken from the perpetual cuvée that his father established in 1998. The fruit is pretty much a fifty-fifty split between Côte des Blancs vineyards and those from the *Coteaux Sud d’Épernay*, which tend to provide a bit more plush mid-palate amplitude to augment the mineral drive from the Côte des Blancs. The wine was disgorged in December of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The nose wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of pear, a touch of nectarine, chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of almond and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, bouncy acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex finish. This is already tasty, but a year or three in the cellar will allow the wine to really blossom and shine! Lovely non-vintage Blanc de Blancs! 2021-2040+. **91**.

Paul Launois “Composition #3” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

Julien Launois’ “Composition #3” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Extra Brut is composed entirely of grand cru fruit, with forty-eight percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines. The wine is from the base year of 2017, was disgorged in May of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet is quite fine, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, fresh almond, brioche, a fine base of chalky soil tones, spring flowers and incipient notes of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, very good balance and a long, complex finish. This is a very good bottle that is just a touch four-square on the palate, which keeps its score down a couple of points, but it has depth and mineral drive and may be even better with some bottle age. 2021-2040. **89**.

Paul Launois “Monochrome #1” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

This bottle of Julien Launois’ Monochrome #1 is from the base year of 2017, as he ages this bottling two years *sur latte* and it was disgorged in May of 2020, with a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. It includes seventeen percent reserve wines in the blend. The Monochrome #1 offers up a beautifully precise bouquet of apple, pear, warm bread, almond, chalky minerality, a hint of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and very good focus, length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. I like the focus of this bottling better than the Composition #3, which

may well be a reflection of less reserve wines in the blend, as Julian's first vintage was only in 2015 and one assumes that his winemaking hand is getting steadier with every passing vintage. In any case, this is a very good bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. 2021-2040. **91.**

Valentin Leflaive "CV/17/50" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Oger)

Valentin Leflaive is the son of Olivier Leflaive, of Puligny-Montrachet fame. Yes, that Leflaive family! The new release of Valentin Leflaive Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2017 and includes fifty-two percent fruit from the grand cru villages of Vertus and twenty-one percent from Cramant. The other twenty-seven percent hail from the premier cru village of Bergères les Vertus. The blend includes nineteen percent reserves wines, with the *vins clairs* aged in older Burgundy casks. It was disgorged in August of 2021 after three years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine is excellent, offering up a bright and precise bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, chalky minerality, brioche, a touch of almond and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This wine is drinking quite well out of the blocks, but clearly has the depth and structure to benefit from aging and will be an even better drink three to five years down the road. Most impressive. I cannot wait to discover more of this *maison's* lineup, which is far more extensive than the single cuvée their importer sent me to taste. 2021-2040. **92.**

Bruno Paillard "Grand Cru" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Reims)

The Bruno Paillard non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling hails entirely from the *maison's* parcels of vines in the villages of Oger and Mesnil-sur-Oger. The wine is aged for fully four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, which occurred for this bottle in August of 2019, which would make this wine from the base year of 2014, if my math is correct. The bouquet is pure, precise and complex, offering up a refined blend of golden delicious apple, pear, brioche, chalky minerality, just a touch of macadamia nut, gentle smokiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core and soil undertow, refined *mousse* and beautiful focus on the long, complex and lifted finish. A supremely elegant bottle of Blanc de Blancs. 2021-2040+. **93.**

Pierre-Péters "Cuvée Réserve" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

Rodolphe Péters current bottling of Cuvée Réserve is from the base year of 2018, with reserve wines in the blend dating all the way back to 1988! Three quarters of the *vins clairs* go through malolactic and the wine was disgorged in December of 2020. All of the fruit for this bottling hails from the estate's parcels in Mesnil-sur-Oger, Cramant, Avize and Oger. The wine delivers a refined bouquet of pear, delicious apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of limestone minerality and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is young, bright and full, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, pinpoint bubbles and a long, beautifully balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a young wine and really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to allow its acids to relax a bit more and the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. It should prove to be a long-lived bottle of non-vintage and will be hitting on all cylinders if given three to five years' worth of bottle age- though it is certainly quite tasty in its youth. 2024-2050. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque "Quintette" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

This is the brand new release of Quintette from Jean-Marc Sélèque, from the base year of 2017. The wine takes its name from the five communes where Jean-Marc has chardonnay to contribute to this bottling: Vertus, Épernay, Pierry, Dizy and Mardeuil. It again includes twenty percent reserve wines from the perpetual cuvée and half of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented.

The wine was disgorged in December of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of pear, golden delicious apple, fresh almond, brioche, a lovely base of soil tones, just a hint of oak and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full, with a lovely core and mineral undertow, refined *mousse*, zesty acids, impeccable balance and a long, vibrant and complex finish. To my palate, this seems more accessible out of the blocks than the 2016 Base Year version did when it was first released. A lovely wine. 2021-2040. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

I last had a chance to drink a bottle of the 2016 base year version of Jean-Marc Sélèque’s Quintette Blanc de Blancs in the autumn of last year, so I was very happy to have a chance to see how it has opened up over the ensuing twelve months. Up through the 2013 bottling, this was a vintage-dated cuvée, but Jean-Marc began incorporation of twenty percent reserve wines for this wine beginning with the 2014 base year version. This bottle from the base year of 2016, with the reserve wines from his solera he started for this cuvée a few years back. Half of Quintette’s *vins clairs* are raised in stainless steel and go through full malo, while the other half are barrel-fermented and do not go through malolactic fermentation. Bottling for secondary fermentation took place in July of 2017 and the wine was disgorged in October of 2019 with a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a beautifully refined blend of pear, fresh almond, warm bread, a complex base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is excellent. 2021-2045+. **92.**

Champagne Vix-Bara Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Épernay)

The offices for Champagne Vix-Bara may be in Épernay, but this is a new wine from Cécile Grongnet in the village of Étoges, and all of the parcels used for this bottling hail also from Étoges. It is a new bottling made from vineyards that were first started towards organic conversion in 2015. The Vix-Bara label is one used by Cécile’s family a couple of generations back and is being renewed for this new organically-certified bottling. This first release is from the base year of 2016, which was farmed organically, but the certification did not occur until 2019, so this is still not officially an “organic bottling”. A percentage of the *vins clairs* have been barrel-fermented and aged in cask for the Vix-Bara cuvée, with the wine having been finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is young and quite refined in profile, offering up scents of lime, pear, chalky soil tones, *crème patissière*, dried flowers and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, refined *mousse* and a long, poised and very elegant finish. This is a classic Grongnet bottling in its finesse and strong *Côte des Blancs* soil signature. It will be tasty out of the blocks, but even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age. A fine new addition. 2021-2040. **92.**



Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

Robert Barbichon “Réserve 4 Cépages” Extra Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine) Magnum

Thomas Barbichon’s new shipment to the US of his “Réserve 4 Cépages” is solely in magnum, which hail from the base year of 2016. This was a year with a lot of spring frost damage in the Barbichon vineyards, so the blend of this bottling is a bit different than customary as a result, with the varietal blend being fifty-nine percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent pinot blanc and eight percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier. Thirty-eight percent of the cuvée is also composed of reserve wines from the 2015 vintage and the bottling was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. I really like this iteration, as the higher percentage of pinot blanc in the blend gives the wine a lovely veneer of aromatic exoticism in its nose of peach, apple, gentle spice tones, brioche, a fine base of Kimmeridgian limestone minerality and very musky floral tones in the upper register from the aforementioned pinot blanc. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely balance, a fine core and mineral undertow, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and very classy finish. This is outstanding! 2021-2055. **92+**.

Herbert Beaufort “Les Facettes” Premier Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

The current release of Herbert Beaufort “Les Facettes” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2014 and was disgorged in November of 2018, after more than three and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine is composed of a *cépages* of pinot noir and chardonnay from old vines, with the vines ranging from forty-five to fully ninety years of age! The *vins clairs* are fermented and raised in stainless steel and do not go through malolactic fermentation. The nose is lovely today, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, gentle

smokiness, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, good soil undertow, refined *mousse* and a long, complex finish. This is a lovely non-vintage Brut! 2021-2040. **91.**

Herbert Beaufort “Carte d’Or” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

The new release of the Herbert Beaufort “Carte d’Or” is from the base year of 2018 and was disgorged in February of 2021, after two years of aging *sur latte*. The wine is made from a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* aged in both older barrel and stainless steel tank. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of apple, a touch of nectarine, fresh-baked bread, a good base of soil tones and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, zesty acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is a fine bottle of depth and complexity, and my only (very slight) complaint is that the *mousse* is not all that refined in texture. But, that is a very, very small demerit with a very good bottle. 2021-2045. **91+.**

Henri Billiot Fils “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay)

Laetitia Billiot new release of her Brut Réserve is from the base year of 2017, with reserve wines blended in from the previous two vintages. It is crafted from a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay and was disgorged in November of 2020. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful mix of apple, white peach, bread dough, a fine base of soil tones, white flowers and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely girdle of acidity, a good core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and wide open finish. This is a fine bottle of Brut NV. 2021-2035+. **91.**

Gaston Chiquet “Tradition” Brut NV (Dizy)

Nicolas Chiquet certainly gives his non-vintage Brut “Tradition” plenty of aging prior to release, as this current bottling is from the base year of 2015 and was disgorged in July of 2021. It is composed of a *cépages* of forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir. Twenty percent of the blend is from the previous year of 2014. The wine offers up a fine nose of apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones, a hint of hazelnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very good juice. 2021-2040. **91.**

Champagne Corbon “Brut d’Autrefois” NV (Avize)

The new release of Champagne Corbon “Brut d’Autrefois” is from the base year of 2014, with its customary fifty percent of the cuvée composed from the solera dedicated to this bottling and started all the way back in the early 1980s. The wine was disgorged in November of 2020, after five and half years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. This will be the finest iteration I have tasted to date of the Brut Autrefois, as it offers up a beautifully refined and deep bouquet of pear, fresh apricot, chalky soil tones, almond, brioche and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and superbly balanced, with a great core of fruit and soil signature, very elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the complex and very zesty finish. I love the combination of plenty of secondary layers of complexity from the solera’s contribution to the wine’s personality, coupled to the chassis of a young wine from Avize done in the racy, no malo Corbon family style. This is a great wine! 2021-2045+. **94+.**

Dehours et Fils Grande Réserve Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

The current release of the Dehours et Fils Grande Réserve non-vintage Brut is still from the base year of 2017, but this appears to be a different cuvée from what I reported on a year ago, as this bottling has fully half of the blend from Jérôme Dehours' perpetual cuvée of reserve wines started back in 1998. The previous release of base year 2017 was one-third from the solera. The *cépages* is sixty-seven percent pinot meunier, twenty-five percent chardonnay and eight percent pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* aged primarily in stainless steel (five percent old oak casks), going through full malo and are given nine months of extended aging prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in September of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 3.9 grams per liter. The bouquet today offers up a fine nose of apple, white peach, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of nutskin, plenty of smokiness and a gentle floral topnote for the two-thirds meunier in the *cépages*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with elegant *mousse*, lovely balance and grip and a long, vibrant and quite classy finish. This is a first class example of non-vintage Brut. 2021-2040. **92.**

Dehours et Fils “Les Vignes de la Vallée” Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

I love Jérôme Dehours' wines, and one of my worst moments in France right before Covid was contacting a brutal case of the flu while on the road in Champagne for ten days and having to cancel the last week of my time there, as I was scheduled to visit him in his cellars in Mareuil-le-Port on that trip. I hope to get there next spring! In any case, his wines are outstanding and he has recently shipped in his non-vintage bottling of “Les Vignes de la Vallée” from the excellent base year of 2012, with one third of the blend from his solera of reserve wines. The *cépages* is sixty-seven percent pinot meunier, twenty-five chardonnay and eight percent pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* having spent nine months aging prior to blending for secondary fermentation in June of 2013. It was disgorged in February of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of 5.6 grams per liter. The wine is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a complex blend of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, hazelnut, gentle smokiness, a beautiful base of soil tones and a gentle topnote of meunier's inimitable floral tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, focused and vibrant finish. This is stellar non-vintage Brut! 2021-2045+. **93.**

Delamotte Brut NV (Avize)

The current release of Delamotte's non-vintage Brut offers up a complex bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, a hint of fresh nutmeg, almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, wide open in personality and vibrant, with a good core and soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a fairly long, zesty and quite tasty finish. This is just a touch short on the backend, but that is its only demerit, as the wine has lovely style and grace. Good juice. 2021-2035. **89.**

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2018

The new release of Cuvée Spéciale from Fabrice Gass is from the base year of 2018. I had reported a few years back, after visiting the domaine, that Monsieur Gass aged this bottling three years *sur latte*, and his DMY cuvée for five years, prior to disgorging, but that schedule has been shortened in recent times, due to the Alexandre Filaine wines now becoming so popular among Champagne *cognoscenti*. So this bottling now spends two years *sur latte* and the DMY four years, before they are disgorged and bottled up with their customary *dosage* of six grams per liter. The new version of Cuvée Spéciale is absolutely stunning on both the nose and palate, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of apple, passion fruit, hazelnut, a gorgeously

complex base of soil, a nice touch of buttery oak, dried flowers and a dollop of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, seamless and shows off superb mid-palate depth, with a gentle foundation of oak, refined *mousse* and perfect focus and balance on the long, complex and vibrant finish. This will be a great iteration of the Cuvée Spéciale! 2026-2055. **94.**

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2016

A friend of mine found these languishing on a London merchant’s list back in the autumn of 2019, but could not ship them over to the states until after Covid relented, so we only got a chance to drink them together this October. It is from the base year of 2016 and is composed of Fabrice’s standard blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier, with the *vins clairs* all aged in old casks and not undergoing malolactic fermentation. The wine is drinking beautifully today, showing a nice hint of oak influence in its complex bouquet of apple, white peach, hazelnut, a lovely base of soil, gentle smokiness and just a hint of discreet oakiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, snappy and seamlessly balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very classy finish. Great juice. 2021-2055. **94.**

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Served from Magnum

The Alexandre Filaine Cuvée Spéciale bottled in magnum is not quite the same as the regular-sized bottles, as all of the magnums are aged under cork, rather than crown cap during their time *sur latte*. Fabrice Gass makes these mostly for himself and his friends and very few trickle out into the market, so there is no real set timeline for how long they spend aging *sur latte* and I really have no idea which base year this magnum came from. But, it is certainly a stellar wine, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of pear, passion fruit, hazelnuts, brioche, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a gentle touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core and soil undertow, bright acids, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. Given that these magnums just arrived in the US, this is probably the 2015 base year version of Cuvée Spéciale, though with the wine aged under cork, it is more like a hybrid of the Cuvée Spéciale and the DMY. Anyway, if you ever have a chance to buy a magnum of the Cuvée Spéciale, do not pass it by! 2025-2065. **95.**

Alexandre Filaine “DMY” Brut NV (Damery) Base Year 2014

As readers may recall, the DMY bottling is aged under cork, rather than crown cap, during its period *sur latte*, with the *elevage* being four years for this bottling, rather than two for the Cuvée Spéciale. The *cépages* is again forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier, with no malo for the *vins clairs* and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. This release is from the base year of 2014 and the wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of white peach, macadamia nut, a complex base of soil tones, orange zest, white flowers, just a dollop of buttery oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil undertow, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. One of my friends drinking this with me thought that the oak influence was a touch more than he would ideally like, but this was not my impression at all (nor the majority around the table), as I really like the synergy found here between the stunning fruit and mineral drive and the gently oaky elements in the wine. A beautiful bottle. 2021-2055. **95.**



Champagne Geoffroy “Expression” Brut NV (Cumières)

The new release of Champagne Geoffroy’s “Expression” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2016, with this bottle having been disgorged in December of 2020. All of the fruit for this bottling hails from the family’s vines in Cumières and Hautvillers. The *cépages* is thirty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, augmented by thirty percent chardonnay, but of course, half of this cuvée is composed from the solera started by Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy’s father all the way back in 1970. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of white peach, almond, brioche, chalky soil tones and a lovely array of delicate meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core and soil signature, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is young, but tasty right now. It will be an even better drink if tucked away in the cellar for a few years to let those acids soften up a bit more on the backend. 2021-2035+. **90+**.

Grongnet “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV (Étoges)

The new release of Cécile Grongnet’s beautiful Carpe Diem bottling is from the base year of 2015. Readers may recall that this cuvée is aged under cork in the cellars, rather than under crown cap, and is composed of a *cépages* of sixty percent chardonnay and twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine was disgorged in September of 2020, after four and a half years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine shows beautiful complexity from its aging under cork, as the micro-oxygenation allowed creates a beautiful patina of mature complexity not found in wines aged under crown cap. The bouquet

wafts from the glass in a superb blend of apple, hazelnuts, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive and cut, impressive focus, very refined *mousse* and a long, complex and exquisitely balanced finish. This is excellent juice that drinks with the breed of a mature wine right from release! 2021-2045+. **93.**

Jacquesson “Cuvée 744” Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

The new release of Jacquesson “Cuvée 744” Extra Brut from the Chiquet family is from the base year of 2016 and was disgorged in January of 2021. It was finished with a micro *dosage* of .75 grams per liter. It is hard to believe that the non-vintage Cuvée series is now closing in on its twentieth year, as the first iteration, numbered 728, was first released in 2003! The Chiquet brothers have moved away from giving exact *cépages* numbers for this bottling in more recent times, preferring to rather give a breakdown of which villages their fruit has come from in any given release. The general numbers are around fifty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier, but each year, this is adjusted depending on which grape variety have excelled in a given vintage. So the breakdown of the 744 is fifty-five percent from the communes of Aÿ, Dizy and Hautvillers and forty-five percent from Oiry and Avize, with a small percentage of reserve wines added to complete the blend. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a sophisticated blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil tones, caraway seed, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and bounce, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Though this is very low *dosage* this year, the style of the 2016 base, coupled with the nice foundation of reserve wines, gives it a relatively early drinkability that has not always been evident in past iterations of the Seven Series, some of which have demanded quite a bit of cellaring before they relax their acids. Though the 744 will age long and gracefully- and still has a serious spine of acidity, it seems likely to blossom a bit sooner than a few other recent iterations in this fine series and should start to drink well with only a modicum of bottle age. 2023-2050+. **93.**

Jacquesson “Cuvée 739 Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

The Jacquesson “Cuvée 739 Dégorgement Tardif” is from the base year of 2011 and spent fully eight years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in June of 2020. It was also finished with a tiny *dosage* of .75 grams per liter. The wine now offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, sweet nutskin, plenty of smokiness, a complex base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil undertow, refined *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced and wide open finish. The extra time spent in the Jacquesson cellars in Dizy aging on the fine lees has allowed this wine to really relax structurally, so that the wine is drinking with generosity and beautiful complexity. 2021-2045. **93.**

Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Cumières)

The new release that is just arriving of Vincent Laval’s non-vintage Cumières bottling is from the base year of 2018 and it looks likely to be one of the top vintages produced in recent times for this excellent cuvée. The wine is composed of its customary *cépages* of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. The bouquet is deep and already quite expressive (echoing how the 2015 base year showed upon release), taking advantage of the riper nature of the 2018 vintage to offer up scents of fresh apricot, passion fruit, chalky soil tones, *patissière*, hazelnuts and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and

grip, very refined *mousse*, bright, buried acids and a very long, very, very complex finish. This is absolutely stunning this year! 2021-2050+. **94+**.

Sadi Malot “les Deux Cépages” Brut NV (Verzy)

Franck Malot and his daughter Cindy farm all of their ten hectares of vines organically these days. Though the estate is based in Verzy, where they have two hectares of pinot noir, their larger holdings are their eight hectares of chardonnay vines in Villers-Marmery. Their “les Deux Cépages” bottling is a blend, as the name implies, of both chardonnay and pinot noir and the new release was disgorged in March of 2020. It offers up a refined bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, fresh almond, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and young, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, still fairly primary finish. This is a fine bottle with a fairly low *dosage* (I would guess around four grams) and it could do with a bit more bottle age to loosen up structurally, but it will be lovely once it blossoms. 2023-2037. **91**.

Mouzon-Leroux “l’Atavique” Extra Brut NV (Verzy)

The new release of Mouzon-Leroux “l’Atavique” non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2017, but as is Sébastien Mouzon’s custom for this bottling, fifty percent of the blend is from reserve wines from the preceding two years. The *cépages* is sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and the wine was disgorged in October of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine delivers superb aromatic precision in its nose of apple, nectarine, almond, lovely minerality, a hint of brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. Though this wine is certainly tasty out of the blocks, I really like to age Sébastien’s l’Atavique bottling for three or four years before I start to drink it, as once the acids relax, the wine really starts to purr. 2024-2045. **92**.

Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Reims)

The current release of Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2016 and was disgorged in June of 2020. Like all of Alice Paillard’s wines, it shows supreme elegance on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, warm bread, a complex base of chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a hint of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, poised and impeccably balanced finish. This is the epitome of refinement- as Champagne should be! 2021-2055. **93**.

Pehu-Simonet “Face Nord” Extra Brut NV (Verzenay)

The new release of the Pehu-Simonet “Face Nord” non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2017 (with thirty percent reserve wines included in the blend) and was disgorged in December of 2020. The wine is composed of a *cépages* of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* not going through malolactic fermentation for this release; the finishing *dosage* was 4.5 grams per liter. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of baked apples and peaches, a lovely base of soil, warm bread, a touch of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, snappy acids, frothy *mousse* and a long, focused and nicely balanced finish. This is quite tasty. 2021-2035. **90+**.

Louis Roederer “Collection 242” Brut NV (Reims)

The new “Collection 242” non-vintage Brut from Champagne Louis Roederer is from the base year of 2017. This is a new cuvée that is destined to replace the Brut Premier bottling in due

course. As the wine is from the base year of 2017, which was most favorable for the chardonnay grape, the ultimate *cépages* is weighted that way a bit at forty-two percent chardonnay, thirty-six percent pinot noir and twenty-two percent pinot meunier, but these numbers include the substantial amount of reserve wines included, so the 2017 juice includes a far higher percentage of chardonnay. The reserve wines included here are truly exceptional as twelve percent of the blend is comprised of wines that were aged in oak *foudres* prior to blending, ranging from the 2016 vintage back to 2009. Additionally, fully one-third of the blend is also made from reserve wines from a solera of “perpetual reserves” that was begun for this bottling in the 2012 vintage and will be included in each subsequent release of the Collection series. The Collection 242 was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, a complex base of chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh almond, dried flowers and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sports superb mid-palate depth, bright, zesty acids, utterly refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the superbly balanced and complex finish. This is truly stunning non-vintage Brut! 2021-2050. **93.**

Louis Roederer “Brut Premier” NV (Reims)

This bottling of Louis Roederer’s non-vintage “Brut Premier” was the 2019 release, which I drank a few weeks after tasting their new “Collection 242” which is slated to replace the Brut Premier in due course in the *maison’s* lineup. Tasting the two cuvées only a couple of weeks apart really underscored the step up the Collection 242 represents from the very good Brut Premier bottling. In any case, this is still a young and promising bottle, offering up a vibrant nose of apple, bread dough, chalky soil tones, orange zest, dried flowers and just a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, nicely balanced and nascently complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, bouncy finish. This is a fine bottle that will be even better with further bottle age, but is certainly drinking with generosity today. 2021-2045. **91.**

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

It has also been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2017 base year bottling of Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “Solessence”. The bottling is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir, but with half of the cuvée made up of reserve wines from the solera that is dedicated to this bottling. The base year 2017 Solessence Extra But was disgorged in February of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine is beautifully expressive on the nose today, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of pear, brioche, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a distinctive topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is still youthful, but starting to stir from behind its lovely structural elements, offering up a full-bodied and focused format, a lovely core of fruit, fine soil undertow and grip, still snappy acids, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. To my palate, about 2023 is where I would optimally want to start drinking this lovely bottle, as there is still more to unfold here, but it is certainly easy to drink right now in its more youthful guise. 2021-2045. **92+.**

Vilmart & Cie “Grand Cellier” Brut NV (Rilly la Montagne)

The current release of Vilmart & Cie “Grand Cellier” is from the base year of 2016, with reserve wines added from the previous two vintages. It was disgorged in November of 2019. As is customary for this bottling from Regis Vilmart, the *vins clairs* for this bottling spend ten months aging in used oak casks prior to blending for secondary fermentation, with the *cépages* its typical seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. The finishing *dosage* for this

bottling is eight grams per liter. The wine is still quite youthful, but shows lovely promise in its aromatic blend of apple, a touch of nectarine, freshly-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, brisk acids, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is certainly approachable today, but this will be so much more enjoyable when it has had a bit of bottle age and has had a chance to relax structurally. Fine juice. 2023-2038. **91.**



Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

Robert Barbichon Rosé de Saignée Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine)

Thomas Barbichon has now been farming his vineyards organically for more than a decade, with several in conversion to biodynamic principles. His new release of Rosé de Saignée is excellent, made entirely from pinot noir and offering up a fine nose of dark berries, sumac, black cherries, Russian rye bread, woodsmoke and a superb base of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vinous, with a lovely core, excellent limestone mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, complex finish that closes with impressive lift and grip. Fine juice. 2021-2040. **91+.**

Herbert Beaufort “Cuvée Yllen” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)

The new release of “Cuvée Yllen” non-vintage Brut Rosé from the Beaufort family is composed entirely from pinot noir. It is from the base year of 2019 and was disgorged in May of

2021. It is its customary deep salmon color (as it includes plenty of Bouzy *rouge* still wine) and offers up a deep, complex and vinous bouquet of black cherries, cinnamon stick, rhubarb, a hint of pomegranate, rye bread, chalky soil tones and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, good soil signature and a long, zesty and nicely balanced finish. This is quite wide open out of the blocks and is drinking with generosity, so I can see no reason to defer one's gratification. It is a great, red wine substitute for a warmer evening's dinner! 2021-2035. **91.**

Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

The current release of Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" Brut Rosé was disgorged in January of 2019. The wine is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent pinot meunier and twenty-five percent each chardonnay and pinot noir. Eight percent of the pinot noir is still red wine to give the bottling its beautiful salmon color. The wine is from the base year of 2015 and was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of tangerine, strawberries, chalky soil tones, a touch of rye bread, rose petals and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil undertow, snappy acids, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is very tasty. 2021-2035+. **91.**

Henri Billiot Fils Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay)

The new release of Henri Billiot Fils non-vintage Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2017 and was disgorged in March of 2021. It is composed from a *cépages* of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with ten percent of the pinot noir being still red wine. As is customary for this bottling from Laetitia Billiot, the wine includes reserve wines from both 2016 and 2015 as well. The finishing *dosage* is nine grams per liter and the *vins clairs* do not go through malo for this bottling. It is a lovely, deep salmon color and delivers a pretty bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, a fine base of soil tones, wheat bread, gentle spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and drinking well out of the blocks, with a good core of fruit, sound soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and open-knit finish. Good juice. 2021-2035. **91.**

Dehours et Fils "Oiel de Perdrix" Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port)

The current release of Dehours et Fils "Oiel de Perdrix" is from the base year of 2017, with the *cépages* here eighty-three percent pinot meunier, seventeen percent chardonnay. Five percent of the pinot meunier in the blend is *vin rouge*. The wine was disgorged in July of 2019 and is non-*dosé* this year. The color is a very pale salmon and the wine has opened beautifully since I last reported on it a bit more than a year ago. It offers up a bright and complex bouquet of tangerine, a touch of bread fruit, beautiful meunier floral tones, a complex base of soil, gentle smokiness, dried flowers and just a touch of toasted wheat bread. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and racy, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, very refined *mousse* and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. There are not a lot of non-*dosé* wines that are so beautifully balanced that they can drink this well at such a young age, but this is simply testament to how fine this wine is from the base year of 2017! 2021-2045. **93.**

Champagne Grongnet "Carpe Diam" Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV (Étoges)

I had never previously tasted an example of Cécile Grongnet's "Carpe Diam" Rosé de Saignée and I was very impressed with the wine. This is a very vinous style of Rosé Champagne, made from a *cépages* of fifty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is a deep salmon color and offers up a lovely bouquet, which wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, cinnamon, wheat toast and a plenty of upper register smokiness. On

the palate the wine is deep, complex, vinous and full, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil undertow, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully focused finish. This is very good indeed. 2021-2040. 91+.

Marguet “Shaman 18” Extra Brut Rosé (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet is an absolute master of Rosé and his Shaman 18 bottling is another stellar example. This year the wine’s *cépages* is sixty-eight percent chardonnay and thirty-two percent pinot noir and the *vins clairs* were all raised in older barrels and given ten months *elevage* prior to their bottling up for a secondary fermentation in July of 2019. As is customary these days at Champagne Marguet, the wine is non-*dosé*, and was disgorged in May of 2021. It offers up a complex and utterly refined nose of strawberries, cherries, blood orange, a lovely touch of cinnamon, chalky soil tones and a discreet touch of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely girdle of acidity, excellent balance and lift, very refined *mousse* and a long, sophisticated finish. Great juice. 2021-2050. 93.

Mouzon-Leroux “L’Incandescent” Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV (Verzy)

It has been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the Mouzon-Leroux L’Incandescent Rosé Extra Brut. As readers may recall, this release is from the base year of 2015 and is produced from pinot noir from Verzy. Sébastien Mouzon barrel-ferments twenty-five percent of the *vins clairs* and the wine takes its lovely salmon color from twenty-five hours of maceration at the start of fermentation. It was disgorged in January of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The nose is starting to open up beautifully, delivering scents of cherries, a touch of blood orange, rhubarb, a fine base of soil, warm bread, gentle smokiness and a floral topnote of roses in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mineral drive, a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and still quite dry finish. This is a Rosé Champagne that is built for the table and really is lovely throughout the entire meal. 2021-2040. 92.

Bruno Paillard “Rosé Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Reims)

The non-vintage Rosé bottling of Première Cuvée from Alice Paillard is also from the base year of 2016 and was disgorged in October of 2020. It is composed entirely of pinot noir and includes a significant percentage of reserve wines that hail from a solera that dates all the way back to 1985. It was finished with a *dosage* below six grams per liter. The wine is a beautiful, pale salmon color and delivers a very refined nose of white cherries, a touch of fresh apricot, warm bread, a complex base of chalky soil tones, white flowers, gentle spice tones and a hint of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and still youthful, with excellent focus and cut, refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and a long, complex and snappy finish. To my palate, this deserves a bit of time in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders, as there is more here that time will unlock in due course. A beautiful wine. 2024-2050. 93.

Pehu-Simonet “Face Nord” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Verzenay)

This particular bottle of Pehu-Simonet’s “Face Nord” non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2015 and was disgorged in March of 2018, so it is starting to get some nice bottle age on it. The *cépages* for this wine is seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* not going through malo and one-quarter of the blend comprised of reserve wines from the solera created for this cuvée back in 2005. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up a lovely, complex nose of desiccated cherries, rye bread, chalky minerality, dried roses and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core and soil signature,

frothy *mousse*, bouncy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long finish. This is drinking very nicely. 2021-2033. **90.**

Pierre Péters “Rosé For Albane” Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The new release of Rodolphe Péters’ “Rosé For Albane” is from the base year of 2018 and is composed of a blend of fifty-five percent chardonnay (all from Mesnil-sur-Oger) and forty-five percent pinot meunier (all from Cumières). The wine takes its lovely, deep salmon color from a *saignée* of the pinot meunier. The *vins clairs* are aged in stainless steel and the wine is given two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. It offers up a bright and nascently complex nose of cherries, rhubarb, chalky soil, lovely floral tones, a nice touch of spice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a good core of fruit, snappy acids, fine balance, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex finish. This is still a very young wine and will drink even better with a few years in the cellar. 2023-2040. **90.**

Taittinger “Prestige Rosé” Brut NV (Reims)

The current release of Taittinger’s “Prestige Rosé” non-vintage Brut is composed from a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with fifteen percent of the pinot being still red wine from the villages of Ambonnay and Bouzy. This gives the wine its beautiful, deep salmon color. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of strawberries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked rye bread and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, good mineral drive, a snappy girdle of acidity and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a tad tight out of the blocks, but the wine has a history of blossoming beautifully with just a bit of bottle age and I imagine that by next year, it will be drinking with lovely generosity. 2022-2040. **90+.**

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2017 Sadi Malot “les Suzaines” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Verzy)

The 2017 Sadi Malot “les Suzaines” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut was disgorged in January of 2021. The wine is still very young, but also quite promising, offering up a bouquet of tart pear, green apple, chalky minerality, bread dough, raw almond, dried flowers and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine mineral drive and cut, frothy *mousse* and lovely focus on the well-balanced and still quite primary finish. This is still a puppy and will need some cellaring to relax structurally, but once it blossoms, it will have a long life of fine drinking ahead of it. 2027-2050+. **92.**

2016 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Gastronome” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Cuis)

The 2016 Gimonnet “Cuvée Gastronome” Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in May of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. Seventy percent of the fruit for this bottling hails from the grand cru villages of Cramant, Chouilly and Oger, with the final thirty percent from the family’s vineyards in the premier cru of Cuis. The wine offers up a lovely young nose of delicious apple, pear, chalky soil tones, brioche, spring flowers and just a hint of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthful snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive and cut, pinpoint bubbles and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. I would opt for tucking this fine bottle age away in the cellar for three to five years and let it truly blossom, before I started drinking it, but even in its youthful guise, it is already pretty tasty! 2024-2055. **92+.**

2016 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Soliste” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s Soliste bottling is produced from a single vineyard, the *lieu à dit* of les Tartières-les Porgeons in his home village of Pierry. The chardonnay vines here were planted in 1985 and 1990 and Jean-Marc ages the *vins clairs* for this bottling in cask. The wine is aged under cork for just about four years prior to its disgorgement, which for the 2016 took place in January of 2021. It was finished this year with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined young blend of pear, apple, macadamia nut, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness, a touch of buttery oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is an outstanding wine in the making. 2026-2060+. **93+**.

2015 Georges Laval “les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature Millésime (Cumières)

Vincent Laval’s 2015 vintage of les Chênes Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in May of 2019 and is really starting to blossom on both the nose and palate, though the wine is still clearly in climbing mode and will be an even better drink a decade down the road! Though I reported on the new release of the 2016 les Chênes last spring, I had not yet crossed paths with the 2015 version and was delighted that a friend brought this to one of our recent tastings. The nose simply soars from the glass today in a constellation of pear, passion fruit, *crème patissière*, a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones, white lilies and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with laser-like focus, very refined *mousse*, impeccable balance and grip and a long, complex and simply stunning finish. This is a brilliant example of the vintage and I would try to at least reach its fifteenth birthday before opening bottles in earnest, as there are many more layers here still to unfold! 2030-2075. **96**.

2015 Lilbert-Fils “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant)

The 2015 Lilbert-Fils “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs is composed entirely from fruit the family owns within the village of Cramant. They have two *lieux à dits* that they use for this bottling: a small parcel in les Buissons that were planted in 1936 and a larger plot in the vineyard of Moyens that lies closer to the border with Cuis. The *vins clairs* are fermented and raised in stainless steel and go through full malo, with the wine having been disgorged in January of 2021 after five years aging *sur latte*. The finishing *dosage* for the 2015 is three grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, a touch of lemon, limestone minerality, bread dough, white flowers and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, young and full, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb mineral drive, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and cut and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is still a young wine and I would tuck it away in the cellar for another five years and really let it blossom completely (though it certainly quite tasty already). A beautiful young wine. 2026-2055. **93**.

2014 Christian Bourmault “les Fêtes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Avize)

The 2014 Blanc de Blancs “les Fêtes” Brut Millésime from Christian Bourmault hails from vines that are sixty years of age, with most of the fruit coming from parcels in the village of Cuis. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, undergo full malolactic and this cuvée was disgorged in October of 2020, after more than five years aging *sur latte*. The wine delivers a lovely bouquet of pear, brioche, almond, a beautiful base of chalky minerality, plenty of smokiness and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied,

focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, pinpoint bubbles, a good spine of acidity and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is certainly tasty today, but it is still a young wine and it could do with three or four more years in the cellar to allow the wine to more fully emerge from behind its girdle of acidity. Good juice. 2021-2050. **92+**.

2014 Pierre Gimonet et Fils “Fleuron” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Cuis)

The Fleuron bottling from the Gimonet family is roughly sixty percent grand cru fruit from the villages of Cramant and Chouilly, with the balance from the premier cru villages of Cuis and Vertus. The 2014 version was aged more than four and a half years *sur latte* and disgorged in October of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine offers up a refined bouquet of golden delicious apple, pear, bread dough, chalky soil tones, fresh almond and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. To my palate, this needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be very tasty when it is ready to drink. 2024-2050. **92**.



2014 Pierre Gimonet “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Cuis)

The 2014 Pierre Gimonet “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs is composed of mostly grand cru fruit, with fifty-nine percent of the fruit sources from Cramant and twenty-five percent from Chouilly. Only sixteen percent of the blend hails from premier cru vineyards in Cuis. The wine was disgorged in September of 2020, after more than five years aging *sur latte* and finished with

a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, almond, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthful, with a superb girdle of acidity, fine focus and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a lovely example of the racy 2014 vintage. It is certainly approachable today, but I would be inclined to allow it a few years in the cellar to let its acids relax a bit more and the wine to blossom more completely. It should age long and gracefully. 2025-2055. **93.**

2014 Lancelot-Pienne “Marie Lancelot” Grand Cru Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant)

The Marie Lancelot cuvée from Gilles Lancelot is composed entirely from his parcels in Cramant, with the youngest vines that go into this bottling fully fifty years of age. The wine is composed entirely of chardonnay, though it does not state that it is a Blanc de Blancs on the label. The 2014 Marie Lancelot was disgorged in December of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. It is a superb wine, offering up a deep and precise bouquet of apple, pear, almond, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, a touch of white flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and mineral-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, youthfully complex and vibrant finish. This is a lovely wine. 2021-2055+. **93.**

2014 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2014 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is composed entirely from estate-owned vineyards in the grand cru village of Avize. One quarter of the *vins clairs* for this bottling were barrel-fermented and aged in cask, with none of the still wines going through malolactic fermentation. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It offers up a lovely and very refined nose of apple, pear, almond, chalky minerality, warm bread, a hint of buttery oak and a gentle floral topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and bounce, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Some vintages of Roederer’s Blanc de Blancs can start out life pretty tightly-wound structurally, but the 2014 is drinking beautifully from the outset, though of course, more layers of complexity will emerge with further bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2055+. **94.**

2013 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux #7 Villers-Marmery les Chouettes” Extra Brut Millésime

The 2013 Fins Lieux #7 from Pehu-Simonet is composed entirely of chardonnay from the vineyard of les Chouettes in the village of Villers-Marmery. The *vins clairs* for this bottling were raised in stainless steel and the wine was given nearly seven years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in February of 2021; it was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely nose of apple, pear, brioche, gentle smokiness, a hint of hazelnut and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core of fruit and soil undertow, pinpoint bubbles, zesty acids and a long, balanced and nascently complex finish. This wine closes today with a touch of leanness still, which I suspect will be absorbed into the other components of the wine with a bit more bottle age; I would be inclined to allow this to happen by tucking the wine away for another three or four years, as it will be more elegant on the backend, once this aspect has dissipated. It has a fine future ahead of it. 2024-2045. **92.**

2013 André Robert “Terre du Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Mesnil)

The 2013 André Robert “Terre du Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs is a lovely bottle. The *vins clairs* for this bottling do not go through malolactic fermentation and are aged eight months in

older Burgundy casks (average of twelve years of age) prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was given more than six and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in February of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of 5.2 grams per liter. It offers up a fine, gently oaky nose of pear, apple, hazelnut, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and a gentle touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. Good juice. 2021-2045. **92.**

2010 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

I love Agnès Corbon’s wines, which seem to get even more refined with each passing year. Here 2010 Grande Millésime is an outstanding bottle of Blanc de Blancs, which was disgorged in April of 2021 (after fully ten years aging *sur latte*!) and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine offers up a stunningly pure bouquet of golden delicious apple, pear, hazelnut, a very complex base of chalky minerality, *crème patissière*, gentle smokiness and a beautiful floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with great focus and balance, a lovely core, excellent mineral undertow, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. First class juice in every respect! 2021-2055. **94+.**

2006 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Louis” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2006 vintage was the first ever produced of Billecart-Salmon’s vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs bottling to wear the moniker of “Cuvée Louis”, as the wine was previously known as Prestige Blanc de Blancs. It is produced entirely from grand cru villages, with five percent of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented in older casks. Only a portion goes through malo and the wine was aged for eleven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine is very elegant in profile, offering up a complex nose of apple, lemon, bread dough, chalky minerality, a touch of citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core, fine soil undertow, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a first class example of Blanc de Blancs that is drinking beautifully today, but will easily carry another couple of decades in the cellar. 2021-2045. **94.**

2005 Ayala Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2005 Ayala vintage Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in February of 2013 and this bottle had been in my cellar since July of that year. The wine is aging very gracefully and is now entering into its plateau of peak drinkability, offering up a vibrant and complex bouquet of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse*, lovely balance and a long, bouncy and quite classy finish. Like all of the Ayala wines, this bottling does not go through malolactic fermentation, so it has a fine girdle of acidity still in reserve to carry it many years into the future. However, it is drinking so nicely right now that there is really no reason to defer gratification! 2021-2040+. **92.**

2000 Philipponnat “Grand Blanc L. V.” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2000 Philipponnat “Grand Blanc L. V.” is a new release, with the wine having been disgorged in March of 2021, after fully twenty years aging on its fine lees! It was finished with a

dosage of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, apple, warm bread, hazelnut, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is a very good example of the vintage that is now drinking at its peak, but with the freshness of a late disgorgement, so that it still has a lovely spine of acidity and backend bounce. Lovely juice. 2021-2045. **93**.



Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2017 Marc Hébrart “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2017 Marc Hébrart “Special Club” Brut Millésime is composed from a blend of approximately seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. It was disgorged in December of 2020. The wine offers up a lovely nose of apple, white peach, bread dough, a touch of raw almond, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, young, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is still a puppy and needs some time in the cellar to loosen up and drink with generosity, but it has lovely constituent components and is going to be a fine bottle once it has blossomed. 2025-250. **92+**.

2017 Ponson “les Plaines” Blanc de Meunier Extra Brut Coulommès-la-Montagne)

Maxime Ponson’s 2017 “les Plaines” vintage bottling is composed entirely of pinot meunier, from his vineyards on the *Petite Montagne*. The wine was disgorged in April of 2021

and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. It delivers a beautiful aromatic constellation of white peach, *patissière*, delicate meunier floral tones, a complex base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, poised and complex finish. This is still a young wine and needs a bit of time hibernating in the cellar before it will really start to drink with generosity, but it is going to be excellent once it blossoms. 2025-2055. **93.**

2016 Herbert Beaufort “l’Âge d’Or” Extra Brut Millésime (Bouzy)

The 2016 Herbert Beaufort “l’Âge d’Or” Extra Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of primarily pinot noir, with a bit of chardonnay included. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malolactic fermentation and the wine was disgorged in May of 2021, after four-plus years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of apple, nectarine, a touch of hazelnut, *patissière*, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil undertow, refined *mousse*, bright acids and fine focus and balance on the long, classy and wide open finish. This is a lovely wine that is drinking with generosity already. 2021-2040. **92.**

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

I had the good fortune to taste this wine upon release in April of this year, but had a chance to revisit it this past November, due to a few bottles being returned to the importer for showing a bit of natural wine “mousiness” on the nose. As I had not noticed any of this quality (which I am pretty sensitive to) when I tasted the wine in the spring, I was very happy to try another bottle to see if I had missed anything. Happily, the wine was everything I remembered from April and was really showing well, particularly after it had been open for five or ten minutes, as the wine snapped into a laser-like focus that was not evident when it was first poured. And, absolutely no signs of “mousiness” in this bottle, which is composed from a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent pinot noir, eight percent chardonnay and two percent petit meslier. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, complex soil tones, *patissière*, discreet smokiness, gentle nuttiness and a lovely array of pinot meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and starting to blossom nicely, as the very snappy acids of April are starting to relax properly with a bit of bottle age. The wine is deep at the core, shows excellent soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, focused and complex finish of excellent quality. This has blossomed more quickly than I anticipated and is already starting to drink very nicely, though I expect it will be even better with more bottle age. As an aside, I have noted a touch of that natural wine “mousiness” in one of Emilien’s Coteaux Champenoise bottlings previously, but as I decanted that wine before writing it up, this aspect blew off quickly and was not an issue. So, I suppose that the same quality could appear in his sparkling wine, but it was most assuredly not in evidence in this bottle, which hailed from the same six pack as the alleged offender. 2022-2045. **93.**

2016 Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Millésime (Cumières) Magnum

This is the exact same wine as the 2016 base year of Cumières that was released as a non-vintage wine two years ago, just given two more years *sur latte* and bottled in magnum. The wine is outstanding on both the nose and palate, but even at five years of age, it is not yet starting to blossom structurally and will need more cellaring- particularly in magnum! The lovely bouquet offers up a blend of apple, white peach, brioche, hazelnut, a complex base of soil tones, dried flowers, just a hint of passion fruit and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, elegant

mousse, laser-like focus and still a piercing girdle of acidity that will carry it far into the future. This is a beautiful wine, but out of magnum, even with the longer time on the lees, it is still a puppy and needs to be purchased and buried in the cellar until it has a chance to blossom structurally. In due course, it will be excellent. 2026-2065. **93.**

2016 Georges Laval “les Hautes Chèvres” Brut Nature Millésime (Cumières)

Vincent Laval’s 2016 les Haut Chèvres is a brilliant synthesis of old vine pinot meunier, Cumières “sun-basket” generosity and striking *terroir*. The utterly refined nose soars from the glass in a stunning constellation of apple, white peach, fresh almond, *patissière*, a very complex base of chalky minerality and a potpourri of pinot meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a great core, striking soil signature, utterly refined *mousse*, snappy acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, extremely promising finish. This is pure magic in the making, but patience will be required! 2030-2080. **97+.**

2016 Vilmart & Cie “Grand Cellier d’Or” Brut Millésime (Rilly la Montagne)

The 2016 Vilmart & Cie “Grand Cellier d’Or” is composed of its traditional *cépages* of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and do not undergo malo for this bottling, which was aged three years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in July of 2020 and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely, youthful and very refined bouquet of fresh apricot, passion fruit, warm bread, a complex base of soil, a touch of hazelnut, a touch of buttery oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and youthfully complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and cut, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and very promising finish. This is still quite youthful and deserves some time in the cellar to relax a bit more structurally. It will drink long and beautifully once it is really ready to go. 2024-2055. **93+.**

2015 Alexandre Filaine “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime (Damery)

The new vintage of Sensuum Vertigo from Fabrice Gass is the 2015, which is a year that has produced so many stellar wines from *vignerons* who managed to make all the right decisions during the growing season. Clearly Fabrice was one of these! The wine is still very young and will demand most of this decade to rest comfortably in the cellar before it starts to stretch its wings, but it will be a beautiful wine once it is ready to drink. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, macadamia nut, a beautiful base of soil, dried flowers and that Filaine signature touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, sophisticated *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very, very promising finish. Great juice in the making- just give it enough time in the cellar to capture it in full flight! 2030-2075. **95.**

2015 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Partition” Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)

The 2015 “Partition” Extra Brut Millésime from Jean-Marc Sélèque is always made from the same seven vineyard parcels, with three located in the village of Pierry and the other three in Vertus, Épernay, Dizy and Mardeuil. This works out to a *cépages* of seventy-two percent chardonnay and fourteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The *vins clairs* are aged in cask and the wine *sur latte* under cork. It was disgorged in January of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of a single gram. The wine offers up a superb nose of apple, pear, almond, a very complex base of soil, a bit of oak, discreet floral tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and youthful, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, elegant *mousse*, a snappy girdle of acidity and fine focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and

very promising finish. To my palate, this is still too young to drink today and one will have to defer gratification for a while to let the acids loosen up a bit. When it is ready to drink, it is going to be exceptional. 2025-2055. 93.



2014 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux #1 Verzenay les Perthois” Blancs de Noirs Extra Brut

The 2014 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux #1” is composed entirely of Verzenay pinot noir, principally grown in the vineyard of les Perthois, with a percentage of the *vins clairs* raised in cask. This particular bottle was disgorged in January of 2021, so spent two years longer aging *sur latte* than the example I reported on last year; it was finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams. The nose delivers a fine blend of apple, white peach, bread dough, stony minerality, white flowers and a touch of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and still youthful, with a good core, fine mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and snappy finish. With its low *dosage*, this wine is still a bit young for primetime drinking (at least to my palate), but should be quite tasty when it is ready to blossom. 2024-2045. 91+.

2014 Philipponnat “1522” Grand Cru Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2014 vintage of Philipponnat’s cuvée “1522” is absolutely brilliant. The wine’s *cépages* this year is eighty-one percent pinot noir and nineteen percent chardonnay, with the majority of the fruit hailing from the Le Léon vineyard in Aÿ. The wine was disgorged in March

of 2021 after fully six years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. It delivers a truly refined bouquet of apple, white peach, a hint of orange zest, a complex base of chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with lovely focus and grip, outstanding mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is stellar juice and the finest iteration of cuvée 1522 I have yet tasted from Philipponnat! 2021-2050. **94.**

2014 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2014 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime is composed of entirely grand cru fruit, with the *cépages* this year being seventy-one percent pinot noir (all from the village of Verzy on the Montagne de Reims) and twenty-nine percent chardonnay (from the village of Chouilly in the heart of the *Côte des Blancs*). Twenty-five percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and aged in cask, and only twenty percent of the blend went through malolactic fermentation this year. The finishing *dosage* is eight grams per liter. The wine is very refined on the nose, offering up a youthful blend of apple, white peach, chalky minerality (with a touch of Verzy's steeliness also in evidence), warm bread, just a touch of hazelnut, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with bright acids, excellent mid-palate depth and mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a very long, pure and beautifully balanced finish. Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and his team at Louis Roederer are at the absolute top of their game right now and this is a stunning wine in the making. It is certainly very drinkable today, but I would be inclined to give it a handful of years in the cellar and let its acids relax a bit more and allow the wine really to blossom! 2026-2065+. **94.**

2013 Henri Billiot Fils "Grand Cru" Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)

It had been two years since I last drank a bottle of Laetitia Billiot's 2013 Brut Millésime. This bottle was disgorged in October of 2018 (three months earlier than the last bottle I reported on) and made from a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. Readers may recall that Laetitia does not put her *vins clairs* through malo. Another year of bottle age has allowed the wine to open up very nicely, offering up scents of baked apple, peach, a complex foundation of Ambonnay soil tones, gentle smokiness, a touch of nutskin and a topnote of warm bread. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and deep at the core, with fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the long and complex finish. The lack of malolactic here gives the wine an admirable spine of acidity that will carry it far into the future, though it is drinking very nicely today. Very good juice. 2021-2050. **92.**

2013 Gaston Chiquet "Special Club" Brut Millésime (Dizy)

The 2013 Gaston Chiquet "Special Club" Brut Millésime is composed from a *cépages* of sixty-two percent chardonnay and thirty-eight percent pinot noir, with the pinot hailing from vineyards in Dizy and all but ten percent of the chardonnay from the same village, augmented by ten percent from neighboring Ay. The wine was disgorged in November of 2020 after six and a half years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, hazelnut, complex soil tones, a touch of menthol, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, good soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and wide open finish. This is drinking beautifully today, but clearly has the structure to also age nicely for a couple of decades. 2021-2045. **92.**

2013 Champagne Geoffroy “Empreinte” Brut Millésime (Cumières)

It has been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2013 vintage of Empreinte from Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy. This current release was disgorged a year and a half later than last year's example, in November of 2019 (rather than July of 2018). The wine is composed from a *cépages* of thirty-six percent pinot meunier, thirty-four percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* aged principally in cask. Today, the wine offers up a lovely nose of white peach, apple, a hint of hazelnut, warm bread, a fine base of soil and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil undertow, bright acids, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is really starting to drink well, thought it has plenty of future ahead of it! 2021-2050. **92+.**

2013 Marc Hébrart “Rive Gauche-Rive Droit” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

It has been a year now since I last tasted a bottle of the 2013 “Rive Gauche-Rive Droit” Brut Millésime from Jean-Paul Hébrart. The wine is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay, with the pinot noir hailing from parcels in Aÿ and the chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs villages of Oiry, Avize and Chouilly. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented for this cuvée and aged in cask prior to secondary fermentation. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and this bottle was disgorged in July of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine today is starting to open up a bit aromatically, delivering a refined nose of apple, white peach, bread dough, chalky soil tones, white flowers and just a hint of oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still snappy, with fine focus and bounce, a lovely core, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This remains as young as it was a year ago and really needs further bottle age to start drinking with generosity, but all of the pieces are in place for an excellent bottle in due course. 2025-2055. **92+.**

2013 Georges Laval “les Longues Violes” Brut Nature Millésime (Cumières)

The les Longues Violes single vineyard bottling from Vincent Laval is his smallest production cuvée, which is too bad, as the wine is pure magic. This is all old vine pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented in ancient oak casks that would make the Ponsot family proud. The 2013 les Longues Violes is a beautiful follow-up to the legendary 2012 version, offering up a youthfully pure and precise bouquet of white peach, apple, macadamia nut, *patissière*, a gorgeous base of chalky soil, gentle smokiness and a lovely, very discreet touch of buttery old oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid in its structure, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the young, but oh, so promising finish. This will need a bit of bottle age before it starts to stir, but it is another legend in the making. 2028-2075. **98.**

2013 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux #2 Verzenay les Crayères” Blancs de Noirs Extra Brut

The Fins Lieux #2 bottling from Pehu-Simonet is composed entirely of pinot noir from the les Crayères vineyard in Verzenay. Forty percent of the *vins clairs* for this bottling are raised in cask, rather than tank, and none of the still wines undergo malolactic. The wine was disgorged in January of 2021 and finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of white peach, apple, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, just a hint of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, snappy acids and good length and grip on the brisk, well-balanced finish. There is just a touch of leesy flavors on the backend here that keep the score down a tad. The wine is starting to show some nice signs of secondary development, but with the *vins clairs*

having not undergone malo, the wine is still plenty zippy on the backend. Good juice. 2021-2045. **91.**

2013 Vilmart & Cie “Coeur de Cuvée” Brut Millésime (Rilly la Montagne)

The 2013 Vilmart “Coeur de Cuvée” is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir, with all of the vines hailing from the estate’s home village of Rilly la Montagne. The vines utilized for this cuvée are all in excess of fifty-five years of age and the *vins clairs* do not go through malolactic fermentation and are given an extended *elevage* in cask of ten months prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was given more than six years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in December of 2020 and is drinking splendidly today. The utterly refined bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of lemon, green apple, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of chalky minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, very refined *mousse* and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish of lovely breed and complexity. This is first class juice that is only going to get better with further bottle age. 2021-2050+. **94.**

2012 Benoît Lahaye “Violaine” Brut Nature Millésime (Bouzy)

This bottling from Monsieur Lahaye does not state its vintage of origin on the front label, but on the back, but as it is all from a single vintage, I have listed it as a vintage-dated bottling, despite the lack of a year on the front label. This is an outstanding wine that is composed from a blend of fifty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. It was first produced in the 2008 vintage and is Benoît’s *Sans Soufre* cuvée and sees no added SO₂ during its *elevage* or bottling. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented, go through full malo and are aged in small, older casks for ten months prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation; the 2012 was disgorged in January of 2017. The wine is starting to drink beautifully today, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, peach, *patissière*, dried flowers, bread dough, a lovely base of soil, a nice touch of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and bounce, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and quite classy finish. I have the sense that a few more years in the cellar will allow another layer of complexity to unfold here, but if one feels the need to open a bottle now, I am certainly available to help! 2025-2045+. **94.**

2012 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux #3 les Poules de Mailly” Blc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime

This particular bottle of the 2012 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux #3” (a single vineyard pinot noir from the vineyard of les Poules in the village of Mailly) was disgorged in January of 2021, so was given an additional two years on its fine lees than the bottle I tasted a year ago. This was also given just a touch more *dosage* at two grams per liter, than the previous iteration, which was finished with 1.5 grams. The nose is starting to stir nicely and shows off a lovely synthesis of 2012’s ripe and pure fruit and a lovely mineral drive from its Mailly origins. Scents of apple, *patissière*, a discreet touch of nutskin, a beautiful base of complex soil tones, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote all jump from the glass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, a lovely girdle of acidity, frothy *mousse* and a long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. I really like the backend of this wine, as the filigree of minerality, ripe fruit and just a perfect touch of *dosage* gives the wine a drinkability today that is very attractive, without undermining its potential to evolve beautifully in the cellar. Fine juice. 2021-2045. **92.**



2011 Marguet “Sapience” Brut Nature Millésime (Ambonnay)

The 2011 Marguet “Sapience” is a brilliant young wine that completely transcends the general quality of the vintage, as this was one of the more difficult growing seasons in recent Champagne history. But, no matter for the 2011 Sapience, which is utterly stunning! The *cépages* is fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the wine having been disgorged in July of 2021 after nine years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is simply beautiful, offering up an exotic blend of passion fruit, fresh apricot, *patissière*, a touch of toasted almond, a gorgeous base of soil tones, dried flowers and a very gentle framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly precise, with a great core, excellent mineral undertow and cut, refined *mousse* and a great length and grip on the poised, perfectly balanced and very complex finish. This is stunning juice. 2021-2050. **95.**

2007 J. Lassalle “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Chigny-les-Roses)

The 2007 J. Lassalle “Special Club” bottling is composed from a *cépages* of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir, with the vineyard parcels utilized for this cuvée averaging fifty years of age. The wine was released after ten years of aging in the cellars and offers up a lovely, still fairly youthful nose of white peach, a touch of passion fruit, brioche, a lovely base of soil tones, gentle nuttiness and a floral topnote redolent of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine soil undertow, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and nicely balanced finish. This is a very good bottle that is

just starting to drink, but still has room to improve with further bottle age. Fine juice. 2021-2045+. **92+**.

2002 Piper-Heidsieck “Rare” Brut Millésime (Reims)

It is funny that I have to “pull teeth” to get current releases from Piper-Heidsieck’s importer here in New York, but out in the real world of wine, I keep having people serve me the *maison*’s beautiful 2002 “Rare” Brut Millesime and thank me for alerting them to its excellent quality by writing it up in the newsletter several years ago! Such is the state of the world in 2021. In any case, this wine continues to evolve splendidly in bottle and is drinking with great style and breed at the present time, offering up a fine bouquet of apple, pear, warm bread, a fine base of chalky soil tones, caraway seed, a touch of citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with refined *mousse*, lovely focus and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **95**.

1996 Pol Roger “Extra Cuvée de Réserve” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 1996 Pol Roger “Extra Cuvée de Réserve” is composed of the traditional *cépages* for this bottling of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. This bottle was a bit more evolved than the 1996 Blanc de Blancs from Pol Roger that I reported on a few issues back, and this wine will probably be best drunk up over the next couple of decades. The wine is already starting to show a lovely golden hue and offers up a deep, mature and beautifully tertiary bouquet of nectarine, baked apple, chalky soil tones, nutskin, orange peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still has a lovely spine of 1996’s acidity, with a good core, plenty of complexity, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and nicely balanced finish. I very much love drinking Champagne at this tertiary stage of its evolution, but though the acids here should carry the wine another twenty years with ease, the wine is already quite mature in its flavor and aromatic spectrums and is likely to start taking on oxidative notes over the coming years, so when to drink it is going to become a matter of personal tastes. It is a lovely drink today, but not quite in the same league as this *maison*’s 1996 Blanc de Blancs. 2021-2040. **92**.

1982 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime (Épernay)

I have liked the style of the 1982 Dom Pérignon since it was first released and used to drink it with some regularity back in its early days in the market, as there was plenty around and it was quite generously styled out of the blocks compared to many young vintages of this cuvée. However, I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 1982 in a long, long time, so was absolutely delighted to be reacquainted with this wine at age thirty-nine! The wine has aged very gracefully and is now fully into its tertiary, mature stage of development, offering up a complex aromatic constellation of baked apples, yellow plum, brioche, a fine base of soil tones, orange peel, hazelnuts and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and, to my palate, at its absolute zenith, with a lovely core, superb focus and grip, still excellent *mousse* and a long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. A lovely vintage of Dom Pérignon. 2021-2045. **95**.



Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

2015 Louis Roederer Rosé Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2015 vintage of Louis Roederer Rosé is an outstanding wine in the making. The refined and youthful bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of strawberries, tangerine, a touch of blood orange, rye bread, chalky minerality, lovely spice tones and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, utterly refined *mousse*, bouncy acids and a long, seamlessly balanced and vibrant finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but it is still a young wine and I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for at least another five years before drinking it in earnest. 2026-2055+. **93.**

2012 Philipponnat “1522” Grand Cru Extra Brut Rosé Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2012 Philipponnat “1522” Extra Brut Rosé is composed from a blend of seventy-three percent pinot noir and twenty-seven percent chardonnay. It was disgorged in March of 2021, after eight years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, pure and still fairly youthful, offering up scents of cherries, a touch of blood orange, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, a bit of rye bread, rhubarb, discreet spice tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very well balanced, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive, elegant *mousse*, beautiful balance and a long, complex and very, very classy finish. This is a very elegant and delicious wine. 2021-2050. **93.**

2012 Vilmart & Cie “Rosé Emotion” Brut Millésime (Rilly la Montagne)

The 2012 Vilmart & Cie “Rosé Emotion” Brut is composed from a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the wine taking its beautiful salmon color from the *saignée* method with the pinot. All of the vines that go into this bottling are fully sixty years of age. The *vins clairs* are given an extended *elevage* of ten months in barrel prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation and the wine was disgorged in March of 2018 after four and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine is drinking splendidly as it closes in on its tenth birthday, offering up a deep and refined bouquet of strawberries, a touch of blood orange, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, dried rose petals, a touch of spice and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, beautifully balanced and vibrant finish. This is outstanding Rosé! 2021-2045. **94.**

MORE RECENTLY-TASTED BEAUJOLAIS AUTUMN 2021



I know that I just reported on the wines of Beaujolais in the last issue of the newsletter, but when Alain Coudert's Clos de la Roquette and the Château des Jacques release their new wines from the excellent 2020 and 2019 vintages, I am not of a mind to hold back those notes until a decent interval has passed since the last article on the region! Happily, deciding to include this short feature on Beaujolais also coincided with the release of the superb 2020 Crus from the Chermette family, as well as several other excellent wines from some of my other favorite domaines in the region, whose wines I had not yet tasted this year. So, despite this article being fairly short, there are some very serious wines covered. Posting the notes on these wines now also has the added benefit of allowing folks who might be inclined to latch onto these excellent new releases to have a chance to do so while they are still plentiful in the market, as many of these estates have produced new wines that will prove to be cellar treasures a decade down the road. I should mention that the more I taste wines from 2019 in Beaujolais, the more impressed I become with this vintage, which couples beautifully pure and generous fruit tones with excellent expressions of underlying *terroir*. The wines are often plush and texturally inviting right out of the blocks, though as I have mentioned in the past, the less than uniform pattern of drought-relieving rains in August of 2019 left some communes with wines more marked by the prior

drought conditions (the northern Crus of Saint-Amour and Juliéna in particular) than is the case where those salving rains helped restore a more ideal skin to juice ratio in the bunches leading into harvest. Readers may recall that there was also April frost damage in the most northerly sectors of Beaujolais in 2019, which cut back yields dramatically where freezing occurred, which would also add to the more structured and tannic nature of some of the wines from this end of the region.

So, 2019 is certainly not a homogenous vintage in terms of style, and not only in these most northerly reaches of the *vignobles*. The rains of mid-August were also accompanied by heavy hail in the southern end of the region, with a wide swath of damage cut across the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages appellations in this area, with the belt of storms running east to west from the town of Chazay-d’Azergues in the east (about fifteen kilometers due south of Villefranche) to the sector known as Pierres Dorées in the west. The *vignerons* affected by the August hail lost roughly three-quarters of their potential crop in this storm. Consequently, not everyone in the region will look back fondly on the growing season of 2019, but for those who were lucky enough to miss frost in April and hail in August, and also received a generous serving of precipitation to relieve the drought, the vintage has turned out brilliantly. 2019 is a not a vintage that generally produced dramatically structured wines at the most successful estates, as the rains that plumped up desiccated bunches also took the edge off of tannins and lowered acidities as well, but though the knife edge of structural chassis in the wines was softened up by the rains, there remains plenty of potential for longevity in the most successful wines of the 2019 vintage. And there are an awful lot of them!

I want to take a moment to comment particularly on the 2019s from Château des Jacques, as they seem to my palate to have shifted stylistic direction a bit with the release of this stunning lineup of young Moulin-à-Vent and Morgon bottlings. As readers may recall, Maison Louis Jadot in Beaune purchased Château des Jacques in 1996 and has been making outstanding wines here ever since. The house style at the domaine since Maison Jadot took over has been for structured, long-distance runners that fully take advantage of the potential for longevity of both of these Crus. I have never tasted any wines made at Château des Jacques under the previous regime, so I do not know if Maison Jadot changed stylistic course here when they took over, but certainly, they have been producing structured young wines since 1996 and all of the wines here generally start out life tightly-knit, moderately tannic and demanding some bottle age before they start to blossom and drink with generosity. But, their potential has always been self-evident when the wines are young and I have had the pleasure to drink some of the earliest vintages under the Maison Jadot proprietorship and the wines evolve splendidly with sufficient bottle age. One of the hallmarks of the wines from Château des Jacques since 1996 has been their oak component, as Maison Jadot has utilized their smaller Burgundy barrels for aging the wines at Château des Jacques, so the wines have often been distinguished by showing some cedary oak influence when young. There are other estates that also generally have a cuvée or two in the cellar that they also raise in smaller Burgundy barrels, but often these (or at least the most successful) are raised in older casks that impart very little oak aromatics or flavors in the finished wines, and to my palate, much of the difference between these wines and those raised in the more traditional methods of cement tanks or much larger, old oak *foudres* is in the textural differences brought about by different patterns of micro-oxygenation in the smaller casks. But, the Château des

Jacques wines have always seemed to be a bit marked by their sojourn in oak barrels, so they have been a bit of a stylistic outlier in this regard.

However, the full range of 2019s that I tasted from the estate seem to indicate that the cellar team at Château des Jacques has been rethinking how the small casks influence the aromatic and flavor profiles of the wines, as these 2019s do not show the same cedary oak influence that has been *de rigueur* with the domaine's wines for as long as I have been tasting them. This is particularly evident with the stunning lineup of 2019 Moulin-à-Vent bottlings from the estate, which seem to have gentler oak signatures than has been the case in previous vintages, and the oak seems more "nutty" in tone than "cedary", which may indicate a slight change in the toast of the casks that are used to raise these wines, or a reliance on older barrels, or a different oak origin or a shorter stay in barrel and more time in tank prior to bottling. And, it may also just be the nature of the 2019 vintage in these *lieux à dits* in Moulin-à-Vent, as the generally plush fruit tones of the vintage here may simply have absorbed the oak influence differently in this vintage and this is the sole reason for the seeming change. I wrote to the estate's importer with questions about the *elevage* of the 2019s to see if there had been any changes, and they kindly forwarded my queries to Cellar Master Cyril Chirouze to see if there might indeed be any minor changes afoot in the aging of the wines. But, I had not yet heard back from him when it was time to send out this issue of the newsletter, so I will look forward to reporting on anything that has been tweaked in the cellars here in a future feature on the region.

As I mentioned above, I never had any issue *per se* with this cedary oak component in the wines from Château des Jacques in the past, as it was always very well done and there was plenty of stuffing in the wines to seamlessly carry the oak component with bottle age. But, I do have to say that I like the 2019s from Château des Jacques even better- and this is particularly true of the Moulin-à-Vent bottlings, which seemed to show even a greater degree of early finesse out of the blocks than they had in past vintages. The team at Kobrand, the estate's importer, noted that Cyril has been expanding the variety of fermentation vessels that he uses for his wines in recent times, with wines now fermented in stainless steel, traditional cement vats or modern cement eggs, depending on the type of extraction that he is looking for in a given lot of wine. So, perhaps this is the primary change that I am noting in the 2019 Moulin-à-Vent wines. I should note that the 2019 Morgons that I tasted seemed quite similar to previous iterations of these fine wines, with more cedary oak tones in their aromatics, so perhaps it is just the Moulin-à-Vent bottlings that have seen some fine-tuning during the fermentation and *elevage*. Or maybe it is simply the style of the vintage's fruit in 2019? In any case, the vintage is extremely successful for Château des Jacques and the wines come highly, highly recommended this year!

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2020 Beaujolais "l'Aube de Javernières"- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

This is the first vintage that Claude-Emmanuelle and Louis-Benoît have produced this bottling of straight Beaujolais, which hails from a parcel of 84 *ares* just outside of the Morgon boundary and contiguous with the vineyard of Javernières. The vines range from twenty to thirty years of age, are farmed organically, hand-harvested and handled in the cellars the same as the family's Morgon bottlings, with the exception that sixty percent of the bunches are destemmed for the straight Beaujolais. The wine offers up an excellent nose of pomegranate, black cherries, sappy cranberries, vinesmoke, dark soil tones and a dollop of fresh thyme in the upper register.

On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, lovely soil signature, fine focus and grip and just a bit of backend tannin on the youthfully complex finish. Like all of the Desvignes' wines, this has impressive depth and structural integrity, and though it will not need the typical five to ten years in the cellar demanded by the various Morgon bottlings, this will be better with two to three years of bottle age! A very, very impressive debut and a fine value. 2023-2035. **91.**

2020 Beaujolais- Domaine Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier's 2020 Beaujolais is made from forty year-old vines just outside of the appellation limits of Morgon. It shows its Morgon proximity in this vintage in a lovely, sappy and fairly black fruity bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones, bonfire and a nice touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with tangy acids, a touch of backend tannin and a long, youthful finish. This is still quite primary and could do with a touch of bottle age to allow its complexity to emerge from its youthful stage, but it has lovely depth and length already. 2022-2030. **89+.**

2020 Beaujolais-Villages "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Jean-Claude Lapalu

The 2020 Beaujolais-Villages "V. V." from Jean-Claude Lapalu is a lovely wine, full of red fruit, spice and soil. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of blood orange, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil, pretty spice tones and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core and soil signature, a bit of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. Good juice. 2021-2030. **90.**

2020 Beaujolais-Villages "Wild Soul"- Julien Sunier

The 2020 Beaujolais-Villages "Wild Soul" bottling from Julien Sunier is raised in cement eggs and concrete vats and sees no added SO₂ during its *elevage* or at bottling. It needs a touch of air when first opened to pull itself together aromatically, but once it snaps to attention, it offers up a lovely blend of red and black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil tones, a pretty array of spices and a dollop of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This has excellent mid-palate stuffing for Beaujolais-Villages. 2021-2030. **91.**

Saint-Amour

2020 Saint-Amour "les Champs-Grillés"- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette

Jean-Étienne Chermette and his father only began producing this beautiful Saint-Amour in the 2017 vintage. The vines are just short of fifty years of age now and the wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised in the family's ancient *foudres*. The 2020 les Champs-Grillés is a simply beautiful example of the vintage, coming in at a svelte 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up superb purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, dark soil tones, peonies, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme and a gentle topnote of youthful sweet stem tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamless, with tangy acids, great focus and grip, a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil undertow and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. The backend lift here is very impressive! 2021-2050. **93+.**



Moulin-à-Vent

2020 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette

The les Trois Roches cuvée from Jean-Étienne and Pierre-Marie Chermette is one of my absolute favorite Cru bottlings in all of Beaujolais and the 2020 is another classic in the making. The wine is beautifully refined aromatically, offering up scents of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of pomegranate, espresso, a fine base of dark soil, gamebird, sweet stem tones, just a hint of thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, great transparency and grip, ripe tannins and impeccable balance on the long, complex and focused finish. This is tightly-knit and seamless out of the blocks and really deserves some cellaring before pulling corks, as there is greatness here just waiting to spring! 2026-2060. **94.**

2019 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

The straight 2019 Moulin-à-Vent bottling from Château des Jacques is a fine example of the vintage, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a ripe and precise bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, plenty of smokiness, dark soil tones, a hint of nutskin, a dollop of fresh thyme and a discreet framing of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, excellent soil signature, fine focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is certainly quite tasty out of the blocks, but like all of the Moulin-à-Vent cuvées from Château des Jacques, this is really built for the cellar and its best

days are going to be down the road and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least three to five years before having at it in earnest! Fine juice. 2021-2055. **92.**

2019 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos du Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

The granitic soils of Clos du Grand Carquelin always make this one of my favorite of the single vineyard bottlings from Château des Jacques. The 2019 version is a stellar wine in the making, offering up a deep and pure aromatic constellation of cassis, dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, gamebird, a lovely base of stony dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herb tones and a deft foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth, lovely mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids, nascent complexity and a very long, refined and seamless finish. This is probably the most primary of the single vineyard bottlings of Château des Jacques in 2019, so it will need bottle age to blossom, but it is going to be outstanding once it is ready to drink. 2030-2075. **94.**

2019 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Roche”- Château des Jacques

The 2019 Clos de Roche from Château des Jacques is a touch more marked by its new oak out of the blocks than several of these other single vineyard bottlings of Moulin-à-Vent, but it just means that it will need some cellaring before everything snaps into place. The bouquet offers up a deep, primary and promising blend of black cherries, cassis, coffee bean, dark soil tones, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with fine soil undertow, excellent focus and balance, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, gently new oaky and very classy finish. There is plenty of stuffing to eventually absorb every bit of oak and this wine is going to be a great bottle once it is ready to drink. 2026-2075. **93+.**

2019 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos des Thorins”- Château des Jacques

The 2019 Clos des Thorins from Château des Jacques is an excellent wine in the making, with more precision and inherent elegance on both the nose and palate than the straight Moulin-à-Vent bottling. The vines here range from thirty up to sixty years of age and the wine comes in at fourteen percent alcohol in the 2019 vintage. The bouquet is refined and beautiful, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, black cherries, coffee bean, a complex base of dark soil, woodsmoke, violets and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and structured, with a sappy core of fruit, firm, buried tannins, tangy acids and great balance on the long, complex and very energetic young finish. This is a stunning bottle of Moulin-à-Vent that is going to demand cellaring before it starts to drink with generosity, but it is going to be stunning once it is truly ready to drink. 2029-2075. **94.**

2019 Moulin-à-Vent “la Roche”- Château des Jacques

Château des Jacques’ la Roche cuvée hails from a parcel that sits on a vein of quartz, so that this is one of the most minerally bottlings of Moulin-à-Vent one will come across. The 2019 la Roche offers up a beautiful synthesis of ripe, pure black fruit and the aforementioned minerality, with the nose delivering scents of cassis, sweet dark berries, espresso, bonfire, gamebird, a touch of new oak and a beautiful base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, great mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a superb bottle of Moulin-à-Vent in the making. 2027-2075. **93.**



Fleurie

2020 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette

The *lieu à dit* of les Garants is down in the valley, near to Clos de la Roquette and also used to be part of Moulin-à-Vent, rather than Fleurie. The 2020 les Garants from Pierre-Marie and Jean-Étienne Chermette is a big boy in this vintage, coming in at a full 14.5 percent octane. The wine is deep and black fruity on the nose, offering up a sappy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, roasted *pigeon*, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, a hint of cola, gentle spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly roasted in personality, with a sappy core, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, broad-shouldered and well-balanced finish that stays tangy and precise and shows no signs of *sur maturité*. This is a nicely concentrated young bottle of Fleurie, with more in common structurally with a Morgon, but it is nicely fresh and tangy at the same time and once it has had a bit of time in the cellar to blossom, it is going to be a fine drink. 2025-2050. **92.**

2020 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette

In contrast to the valley floor les Garants, the *lieu à dit* of Poncié is located high up in the hills of Fleurie and is one of the highest elevation vineyards in the commune. Perhaps that is the reason the 2020 Fleurie “Poncié” from Domaine Chermette comes in a full point lower in octane than the les Garants, and this wine is more proportioned along the classical lines of what we have come to expect from one of Fleurie’s finest single vineyard bottlings. The bouquet is pure and expressive, offering up scents of sweet cranberries, red and black cherries, gamebird, fresh

thyme, a beautiful base of soil, sweet stem tones, bonfire and a hint of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and chiseled, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The balance here is utterly classical and simply perfect for aging. One can drink this wine right out of the blocks, but it will be so much better five years down the road! Great juice. 2021-2050. **93+**.

2020 Fleurie “Cuvée Christie”- Domaine Coudert

Alain Coudert makes his Cuvée Christie from two parcels of vines he owns that sit on Fleurie’s more typical granitic soils, rather than the clay and manganese (far more similar to the soils of next door Moulin-à-Vent) of the rest of the Clos de la Roilette vineyards. For this reason, the wine is bottled under Domaine Coudert. The 2020 Cuvée Christie is a beautiful young wine, offering up scents of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh thyme and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very sappy at the core, with lovely focus and grip, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. Fine juice. 2021-2035. **91**.

2020 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)

The 2020 Clos de la Roilette is a stunning vintage of this great cuvée. The wine is deep, pure and nascently complex on the nose, offering up scents of red and black cherries, sweet dark berries, fresh herb tones, a refined base of dark soil, gamebird, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of black fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and a long, perfectly balanced and very promising finish. As is so often the case with Clos de la Roilette, the 2020 is certainly a delicious drink in its first blush of youth, but it ages so beautifully that it will be crime to not tuck away at least a half dozen bottles in the cellar to start drinking once the wine reaches ten years of age! 2021-2050. **93+**.

2020 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)

The 2020 Cuvée Tardive from Alain Coudert comes in listed at a full point higher in octane than the regular bottling of Clos de la Roilette this year (fourteen versus thirteen percent), but shares the same precision and sappiness. The wine is quite a bit more structured out of the blocks than the regular Clos, offering up a deep and primary nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of dark chocolate, a beautiful base of Clos de la Roilette soil tones, a bit of roasted *pigeon*, woodsmoke and a hint of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, sappy and full, with a rock solid core of fruit, a nice chassis of ripe tannin and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This wine is loaded with ripe fruit, but nicely harnessed to its underlying mineral drive and buried tannin. This is a more powerful example of the vintage, as these eighty year-old vines show more of the drought character of some wines from the vintage, and therefore, will need some time to blossom. 2026-2055. **94**.

2020 Fleurie- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier’s Fleurie is made from fifty year-old vines planted on the steep, pink granite hillside vineyard of *Niagara* in the commune. The wine is fermented in cement vats and raised in older Burgundy barrels, that range from three to ten years of age. The 2020 Fleurie is really a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of red and black cherries, *pigeon*, peonies, stony soil tones, just a touch of fresh thyme and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and very nicely balanced young finish. This is a superb bottle of Fleurie that can certainly be drunk with pleasure today, but it is really still a puppy and

a couple of years in the cellar will really allow its secondary layers of complexity to unfurl. 2021-2035+. **93.**

2019 Fleurie “Griffe du Marquis”- Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)

The old vine Griffe du Marquis from Alain Coudert is also produced from the eighty year-old vines on the estate. This is the only wine raised in older Burgundy casks, rather than the customary *foudres* of the region, with the casks ranging from two to eight years of age. The 2019 Griffe comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and delivers a fine, youthful aromatic constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, a bit of grilled meats, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of spices and fresh thyme, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and just a hint of cedar from the older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is going to be outstanding once it is ready to drink, but it will demand a bit of cellaring to drink optimally. 2027-2065. **94.**

2018 Fleurie- Château des Jacques

This is the first vintage of Fleurie that I can recall tasting from Château des Jacques, but apparently they have been producing a wine from this Cru since at least 2013. Not surprisingly, the 2018 version is excellent, and really quite cool in style for this vintage, as it comes in listed at an even thirteen percent octane. The nose wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of black plums, black cherries, a lovely base of soil, gamebird, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a touch of coffee grounds and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core and soil signature, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a lovely wine, but it is true to the house style and could do with a bit of bottle age to let it blossom completely! 2024-2045. **91.**

Régnié

2020 Régnié- Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier’s 2020 Régnié hails from very granitic *lieux à dits* in the commune, with the vines averaging forty-five years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised primarily in older Burgundy barrels, with only twenty percent of the cuvée raised in tank. The wine comes in at thirteen percent octane in this vintage and delivers a beautifully black fruity aromatic constellation of dark berries, black plums, *pigeon*, bonfire, a touch of bitter chocolate, fresh herb tones and an excellent base of stony dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely delineated out of the blocks, with a fine core and soil undertow, buried tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a young wine, but it is more accessible on the palate than brother Julien’s own version of Régnié in 2020, and though this wine will be better with some bottle age, it will not be a crime to open up bottles on the early side! Fine juice. 2021-2040. **92.**

2020 Régnié- Julien Sunier

The Régnié from Julien Sunier is made from even older vines than his excellent Fleurie bottling, as these vines are more than sixty years of age and sit on the edge of the Morgon border, near Côte du Py. Twenty percent of this cuvée is aged in cement vats and the other eighty percent in older Burgundy barrels. The 2020 offers up a beautifully pure and precise bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, just a hint of cranberry, dark soil tones, gamebird, fresh thyme, woodsmoke and a topnote of peonies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and

nicely soil-driven, with a still quite primary personality, a fine core of black fruit, modest tannins and a long, tangy and still tightly-knit finish. This is structured like a young Morgon and will demand a bit of bottle age before it starts to blossom on the palate. 2025-2045. 92.



Morgon

2020 Morgon “la Voûte Saint-Vincent”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The Morgon “la Voûte Saint-Vincent” from the Desvignes family is produced from the *lieu à dit* of Douby, which is situated in the northeastern corner of the commune. These vines are forty-five years of age and planted on sandy soils of decomposed granite. The wine is fifty percent whole clusters and fermented semi-carbonically and aged in cement vats. The 2020 tips the scales at an even thirteen percent and offers up lovely precision in its youthful bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, a hint of blood orange, a lovely base of soil, gamebird, peonies and just a hint of thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of red fruit, good soil undertow, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. Structurally, this is already quite approachable, but the wine is still quite primary in personality and more complexity will emerge with a modicum of bottle age and I would give it the time to properly blossom. Good juice. 2025-2045. 92.

2020 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2020 Côte du Py bottling from Domaine Desvignes is decidedly riper than the la Voûte Saint-Vincent, as this wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage. These vines are

over seventy years of age and located up at the top of this hillside vineyard. The wine offers up a deep, sappy and quite pure bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, *pigeon*, a complex base of stony soil tones, a touch of raw cocoa, sweet stem tones, woodsmoke and a topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of black fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, firm, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced, structured and very promising finish. This is a classic example of Côte du Py that will require extended cellaring to develop some generosity, but it will be an excellent drink for many decades, once it is ready to go. 2030-2065. **93.**

2020 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

Interestingly, the 2020 Javernières is a full point lower in listed octane than the Côte du Py in this vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. These vines are forty years of age and planted in the vineyard’s deeper, clay and iron-veined soils. The bouquet is truly stunning this year, offering up complexity, purity and a subtle sense of sappiness that is bound to grow as the wine blossoms. It delivers scents of red and black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of red plum, gamebird, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil tones and delicate topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a great core of fruit, superb soil undertow, excellent complexity, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly focused finish. This is a young wine, but so beautifully balanced that it is already very tasty, though the structure starts to build a bit on the backend with extended air. Ten years down the road this wine will really be reaching its apogee of peak drinkability, but it seems likely that it will be too tempting in its youth to not see many bottles gobbled down in the coming few years. Great young Morgon! 2026-2065+. **94+.**

2020 Morgon “Château Gaillard”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2020 vintage is the debut for the Château Gaillard bottling of Morgon from the Desvignes family, as this is a *climat* located within the vineyard of Douby and used to be blended into the la Voûte Saint-Vincent bottling. But, these are eighty year-old vines in this one hectare, south-facing parcel and they have earned a single vineyard bottling in 2020. This is as ripe as the Côte du Py this year, offering up a deep and sappy bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, dark chocolate, bonfire, a good base of dark soil tones and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with great depth of fruit, very good soil signature, firm, chewy tannins and just a touch of backend heat on the long, youthfully complex and powerful finish. This is going to be a real long-distance runner, but there is a wisp of *sur maturité* that shows on the backend as this wine has a chance to blossom with aeration, and I wonder if this characteristic will become more pronounced as the wine ages? I really like the depth and stuffing here, but would have loved to have seen it come in just a touch less ripe, as it seems to me to be right on the edge stylistically. Others may like this deep, sappy and powerful Morgon even more than I do, but for my palate, I will look forward to drinking this bottling in a less powerfully ripe year. It is a very good wine, but I like the more svelte personality of the la Voûte Saint-Vincent every bit as much as this wine, though it does not possess anywhere near the same old vine depth. 2028-2055? **91.**

2020 Morgon “Corcelette”- Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2020 Morgon “Corcelette” from Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes is made from purchased fruit, which the family harvests themselves. These vines are fifty years of age and the 2020 comes in at also at 14.5 percent octane this year, but the wine is laser-like and fresh as a daisy and shows absolutely no signs of *sur maturité*. The wine is beautifully pure on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, sweet cranberries, cherries, gamebird, a

beautifully complex base of soil tones, vinesmoke, peonies and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and mineral driven, with a sappy core of red fruit, great focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The backend energy here is simply outstanding. The wine will deserve at least eight to ten years in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders, but it is going to be stellar! 2028-2065+. **94+**.

2020 Morgon “Montpelain”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The Montpelain bottling from Claude-Emmanuelle and Louis-Benoît Desvignes also hails from the larger vineyard parcel of Douby, but this *climat* of eighty year-old vines did not come in quite as ripe as the Château Gaillard sector and tips the scales in 2020 at an even fourteen percent. This is an outstanding young Morgon, offering up a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of nutskin, *pigeon*, fresh thyme, bonfire and an outstanding base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, structured and shows plenty of potential sappiness at the core, once the tannins start to back off. The wine is focused, nascently complex and very well-balanced, with chewy, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. This is another great bottle of Morgon in the making, but patience will be required. 2030-2065+. **94**.

2020 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Michel Guignier

The 2020 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Michel Guignier is produced from vines in excess of sixty years of age, located in the *lieux à dits* of la Roche Pilée, les Grands Cras and the lower section of the Côte du Py. The wine offers up a beautiful, sappy bouquet of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, *pigeon*, a fine base of granitic soil tones, fresh herbs, just a touch of sweet stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with beautiful transparency and focus, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish of lovely balance and grip. This is a first class example of Morgon that is already quite tasty, but is still a young wine and will be far more complex five to ten years down the road. 2021-2055. **93**.

2020 Morgon- Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier’s Morgon hails from two *lieux à dits*, les Grands Cras and Croix de Chèvres, with all of the vines in excess of sixty years of age. The wine is fermented in cement vats with carbonic maceration and then racked off to old Burgundy casks for *elevage*. The 2020 Morgon is a beautiful wine in the making, delivering a superb aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, coffee bean and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, sappy and soil-driven, with a beautiful core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is outstanding juice in the making! 2025-2055. **93**.

2020 Morgon- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier’s Morgon also comes from two *lieux à dits*, in this case, la Corcelette and en Oeillat, which lies on the Régnié border. Both parcels were planted in the 1960s and are closing in on their sixtieth birthdays. The wine is fermented in cement vats and aged in used Burgundy casks that originated with Julien’s friend, Christophe Roumier. The 2020 Morgon is a beautifully pure and sappy example of the vintage, with the nose jumping from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, bitter chocolate and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully pure, with more structural reserve than the nose hints at, a gorgeous core of fruit, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, suavely tannic and tangy

finish. This beautiful bottle of Morgon will demand some time in the cellar before it starts to drink with generosity, but its future is very bright indeed! 2027-2055+. **93+**.

2019 Morgon- Château des Jacques

The 2019 straight Morgon from Château des Jacques is a superb young wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and still quite primary, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil tones, gamebird, a dollop of fresh herb tones and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core of fruit, fine soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to soften up and blossom, but it will be lovely once it is truly ready to drink. 2025-2055. **92**.

2019 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château des Jacques

The 2019 Côte du Py from Château des Jacques is one of the ripest wines in the estate this year, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane, which probably indicates that it received less precipitation in mid-August than many other vineyards. However, the wine is beautifully pure and precise on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, *pigeon*, a nice touch of nutskin, a complex base of soil, a touch of mustard seed and a good foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with an outstanding core of fruit, excellent balance and grip, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, complex and extremely promising finish. Great juice. 2027-2065. **93+**.



Brouilly

2020 Brouilly “les Garanches”- Domaine Nicolas Boudeau

The 2020 Brouilly “les Garanches” from Nicolas Boudeau is made from ninety year-old vines, with about fifty percent whole clusters included in the fermentation. The 2020 version comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up a deep, ripe and old viney nose of black cherries, dark berries, bonfire, a bit of venison, granitic soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and meaty, with nice broad shoulders for Brouilly, a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, young and tangy finish. This will need a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom, but it has fine constituent components and should be a fine glass of Brouilly once it has opened up. It should prove to be quite long-lived for its appellation. 2023-2045. **90+**.

2020 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine Pierre-Marie Chermette

The Brouilly “Pierreux” from the Chermette family is crafted from thirty year-old vines (young for the Chermettes!) grown on pulverized granite soils on the flank of Mount Brouilly. The wine is raised in old oak *foudres*, hand-made by Pierre-Marie’s grandfather decades and decades ago. The 2020 Pierreux comes in at an even thirteen percent and is beautifully dark and sappy out of the blocks, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, bonfire, a nice touch of youthful stem tones, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of fresh-culled thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and full-bodied, with real stuffing for Brouilly, fine focus and grip, just a wisp of backend tannin and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is an extraordinarily high expression of Brouilly. 2021-2045. **93**.

2020 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Jean-Claude Lapalu

Jean-Claude Lapalu’s Brouilly Vieilles Vignes is made from vines in excess of fifty years of age, fermented with indigenous yeasts after a one day cold soak and raised in tank prior to bottling. The 2020 version is deep and sappy on the nose, offering up a lovely aromatic blend of black cherries, pomegranate, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a lovely array of discreet fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with good soil signature, modest tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is drinking very well out of the blocks, but has the depth to last nicely as well and will be even more complex with some aging. 2020-2030. **91+**.

A SMALL HANDFUL OF NOTES ON GREAT MADEIRA NOVEMBER 2021



This issue of the newsletter seems to have a lot of very brief pieces included in it, which is certainly not my custom with the journal. But, each short snippet has a legitimate reason to find its way into this current issue, most of the time simply amounting to a few very, very high quality samples arrived at my doorstep coincident with their availability in the market and I did not want to hang onto the notes from those wines for a longer regional feature, which might preclude the possibility of subscribers having a chance to latch onto a few bottles in the market if they might be so inclined. With this brief coverage of Madeira, those new arrivals happen to be two ancient bottlings from the fine house of Pereira d'Oliveira, who have just released for the first time ever small lots of an 1899 Terrantez and a 1904 Boal, both of which are utterly stunning. As both wines are extremely limited releases, it would have been folly for my not publishing the nose right away on the two wines, and so I dug back through my archives to see what other bottles of Madeira I had tasted in the last couple of years and not yet written up in any previous newsletter. There were not all that many notes (sadly), but all of the wines that I have drunk recently from this beautiful island paradise were truly stunning examples, so they certainly merit their tasting notes being published and finding their way into the database. If you are as fond of Madeira as I am and your circumstances allow for you to chase down some of these

ancient bottles, then do not miss these magical new releases from Pereira d'Oliveira! The photo above is from their shop in the city of Funchal on the island, and I think fully captures just how beautiful their selection of old Madeira continues to be, if you ever have a chance to visit the island and avail yourself of their amazing depth of old wines. I have not been there since the early spring of 2012, and as I was typing up these notes, while sipping a small glass of that 1904 Boal, I realized that once the pandemic is really and truly gone, I will have to find time to visit the island of Madeira again and enjoy this magical little corner of our clumsily spinning globe!

1957 Reserva Old Wine- Pereira d'Oliveira

The 1957 Reserva Old Wine from d'Oliveira was produced from the Tinta Negra Mole grape, the most widely-planted on the island. Back in 1957, the Tinta Negra grape was not recognized as a varietal that was sufficiently high enough in quality for its name to appear on the label (this was only allowed starting in 2013 by the Madeira Wine Institute), and hence the proprietary name of Reserva Old Wine for this bottling. Nevertheless, the wine is drinking beautifully today and belies its less exalted varietal status back in this era, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of browned butter, baked apples, sultana raisins, a touch of new leather and notes of brown sugar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure in profile, with lovely focus and balance, tangy acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is drinking very nicely today and has decades and decades of excellent drinking still ahead of it. 2018-2100. **93.**

1912 Boal- Shortridge Lawton & Company

Shortridge Lawton & Company was founded in Funchal in 1757 and was quite a prominent shipper on the island up into the first quarter of the twentieth century. Today, it is owned by the Madeira Wine Company. Their 1912 Boal is a good, solid bottle, but just a touch four-square in personality and not quite in the first division. The bouquet is my favorite part of the wine today, as it wafts from the glass in a still vibrant blend of brown sugar, baked peaches, orange peel, sea salts and a nice touch of spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex still, but starting to show just a touch of backend bitterness on the finish. The overall impression is of a slightly blunt old Boal, that seems to be getting just a touch long in the tooth- though I cannot believe I am writing that about a Madeira! Not a bad drink still, but perhaps its best days are behind it already. 2015-2040+? **89.**

1912 Verdelho Reserva- Pereira d'Oliveira

I purchased this particular bottle during my visit to the island back in February of 2012, but had been on my best behavior and not opened it until I started contemplating this short feature. This particular release of 1912 Verdelho had aged in cask for at least seventy-five years before it was bottled up and offered for sale by the house. I had absolutely loved this wine when I tasted it at the d'Oliveira shop in Funchal and nearly a decade on from that visit, nothing has curbed my enthusiasm for this stunning bottle of wine. This vintage hails exclusively from the d'Oliveira family's historic São Martinho vineyard high up in the hills overlooking Câmara de Lobos. The bouquet is deep and magical, wafting from the glass in a blend of molasses, sultana raisins, cherries, incipient notes of orange, cigar wrapper, a touch of celery seed and a beautiful base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with a note of *rancio* on the backend that is not yet showing on the nose, bottomless depth, bright, buried acids and stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. I have taken this note after the bottle has only been opened for about thirty-six hours and I have no doubt that it will be

even more complex and spicy in profile a couple of weeks down the road. This is a brilliant bottle of Madeira with at least a century of life still ahead of it. 2021-2100+. 98.

1906 Malvasia- Lomelino (Madeira Wine Company)

The 1906 Malvasia from Lomelino is one of the finest bottles of Madeira I have had the pleasure to taste in a long, long time. Lomelino was purchased by the Madeira Wine Company in 1934, so the label is no longer seen, but was quite prominent back in its era. The bouquet is pure and stunning in its precision, offering up scents of sultana raisins, buttered almonds, dried orange, a touch of cherry, very pretty spice tones redolent of cloves and nutmeg and even a bit of vanilla bean in the upper register. This wine is made from an old clone of Malvasia, called Malvasia Candida, which often gives the wine its hint of vanilla. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with very tangy acids, a great core, seamless balance and a very, very long, complex and haunting finish. Just a beautiful, beautiful wine. 2018-2150. 97.



1904 Boal- Pereira d'Oliveira

This 1904 Boal was never previously released by the d'Oliveira family and rested in cask in their cellars in Funchal until very recently and is just now being offered for sale. This is a gorgeous wine on both the nose and palate, delivering a superb aromatic constellation of cherries, fig, molasses, smoked meats, cigar smoke, a touch of new leather, roses, gently savory elements that recall wild fennel and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure,

full-bodied and energetic as a lightning bolt, with bottomless depth at the core, great focus and grip, seamless acidity and a very, very long, complex and exquisitely balanced finish. Like the 1899 Terrantez, this too is utterly brilliant and I marvel at the d'Oliveira family that they could keep a wine this stunning hanging around in cask for so long without being tempted to put it up for sale! But, they have certainly waited until the wine is absolutely at a perfect point in its evolution to dazzle the senses! This could very well be the greatest example of Boal I have ever tasted. 2021-2100+. **98.**

1899 Terrantez- Pereira d'Oliveira

This is another "brand new release" from d'Oliveira, as this cask or casks were never sold previously, though this is a very small lot that has found its way into the market, which makes me assume it is a single cask. The wine is aromatically breathtaking, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of brown sugar, sultana raisin, desiccated cherries, fennel seed, *rancio*, Cuban cigar wrapper, cloves, a beautiful base of volcanic soil and a gentle topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and perfectly balanced, with a great core and mineral drive, bright, buried acids, laser-like focus and a stunningly long, precise and vibrantly complex finish. This is a stunning example of old Terrantez, and if one were to force me to pick one single grape variety to drink for the rest of my Madeira-drinking days, it might well be Terrantez! 2021-2100+. **98.**

1898 Terrantez- Avery's (Cossart Gordon)

This particular example of 1898 Terrantez bottled by Avery's was sourced by Cossart Gordon and bottled in 1952. However, it is believed that it is not entirely 1898 Terrantez, as the label states, but actually an older example of Terrantez that probably dates back to around 1860, which was then blended with some 1898 Verdelho and labeled as 1898 Terrantez when it was first offered up for sale in the mid-1950s. In any case, whatever may be the murky origins of its blend, it is a beautiful wine, offering up a complex and refined nose of cherries, orange, cloves, sultana raisins, sweet almonds and a beautiful base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise, with a lovely core, great cut and grip and a very, very long finish that closes with a myriad of beautiful spice tones. A gorgeous wine. 2014-2100. **95.**

1834 Malvasia- Barbeito

The 1834 Malvasia from Barbeito is a beautiful bottle of wine in full bloom and still with decades and decades of life ahead of it. This particular bottle was tasted back in 2015, after it had only been recently-opened, and I have to believe that it stretched its wings and was even more stunning after it had been open for a few weeks or months. The wine is gorgeous on the nose, soaring from the glass in a mix of caramel, orange, salty soil tones, sweet walnuts, browned butter and a gently savory topnote that recalls tea leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and flawlessly balanced, with a great core and mineral drive, tangy acids and truly stunning length on the focused and near flawless finish. A great bottle. 2015-2100. **95+.**