



WineWise

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CHAMPAGNE

It was our privilege for 20 years to be the California distributors for Terry Theise's ground-breaking collection of grower-producers. As a result, Champagne has become central to the identity of WineWise. Much has changed in the almost-generation that has elapsed. Grower champagne is now entirely accepted and sought out by all serious restaurants and shops. The "Grandes Marques" themselves have discerned the tendency of the sophisticated market to seek out the particularities of terroir and cépage that distinguish the best grower wines and now emulate them by offering their own versions of these "special interest" champagnes. And, perhaps most strikingly of all, more and more young growers, as they take over the reins of their family firms, are striking out on their own and seeking to wring from their holdings the best and most singular wines of which they are capable. Sometimes this might entail leaving the local co-op, or ending contracts to supply grapes to big houses, leaving themselves with the means for self-expression.

With the help of some friends, we were gratified to find several growers available to us whose wines fulfilled the necessary conditions of impeccable quality, meaningful character and reasonable price for that quality. It helped that we found each one of these producers to be entirely congenial as well. What is additionally striking is how each comes to their destination in a unique way. This is the most amazing thing about champagne, really : how the myriad variables of origin, grape composition, fermentation, length of tirage, dosage and so on enable the producer to put his or her stamp on the wines. Each one of our new producers has a unique and distinctive story to tell. We think you will be impressed with these first additions to our range.

LAURENT LEQUART (Passy-Grigny)

Passy-Grigny is a village on the river Marne just a few kilometers to the west of Épernay which boasts a co-op that ranks with Mailly and Le Mesnil as among the elect few in Champagne. And our man M. Lequart just happens to be its President! Properly speaking, then, this producer is a Récoltant-Co-opérateur. That is to say, he delivers his grapes to the co-op which then delivers back to him a quantity of wine commensurate with them. It took us a while to fully grasp the complexities of this mechanism, and we admit to some scepticism about it, but all doubts were banished by the undeniable splendor of the wines, that have a torque and clarity of the highest order. This is a tiny domaine offering important champagnes.

N.V. "L'Héritière" Extra-Brut (40% Pinot Noir, 40% Meunier, 20% Chardonnay) \$328

This house has a philosophy of leaving the wines "en tirage" for an extended period and using a serious proportion of reserve wines. In this case, we are looking at a base of 60% 2012, with the balance coming from the two previous years. "L'Héritière" is Lequart's ambassadorial wine, designed to show what the assemblage of Champagne's three main grapes can achieve in Passy-Grigny (they make an entry-level Meunier that is excellent but less compelling). Fine mousse, toasty nose, perfectly judged dosage (6 gm.) and delicious flavor.

N.V. Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (100% Pinot Noir) \$360

Our reservations about the growing trend towards undosed wines were entirely banished by the swaggering authority of this wine, the only pure Pinot Noir made in Passy-Grigny. Based on 70% 2013, the balance again coming from the previous two years, it is a suave, vinous yet chiseled champagne of very high class.

2008 Brut (50% Chardonnay, 50% Meunier) 6/750 \$280

We snapped up everything we could of this imposing vintage wine with its unusual composition. Great years like 2008 benefit immeasurably from extended aging on the lees, such as this one received before its disgorgement in January 2016.

JÉRÔME COESSENS (Ville sur Arce)

This is the first producer we have worked with from the southerly Aube region since Fleury, back in the day. Jérôme is an impassioned man in his early forties who took over the family domaine at the age of 28 and decided to go in an independent direction. His particular story, unlike every other you will encounter, is that all his wines are made from one cépage, Pinot Noir, from one contiguous 3.5 hectare block of vineyards, "Largillier", and from one year. Such an approach brings with it gains and risks, but we found the results quite thrilling. These are declamatory wines, endowed with the swell of fruit and power offered by the clay soils of this warm Côtes des Bars climat. They resemble nothing else that we offer and they are gratifyingly free from any adherence to fashion or trend. Jérôme supplements his income by pressing grapes for various customers. To this end, he has invested in the best Coquard presses that money can buy. The resulting finesse of the musts is palpable.

(2013) "Largillier" Brut 6/750 \$300

This flagship wine constitutes half of the estate's production – all of 800 cases in 2013. Forthright and generous, and judiciously dosed at 8 grammes, the forceful flavor of yellow fruits topped with caramel gives way to a surprising trail of salt in the finish. A fine ambassador for Pinot Noir from the Côte des Bars.

(2013) "Largillier" Brut Nature 6/750 \$352

Jérôme only makes this undosed wine in what he terms "rich" years, which 2013 was in these parts (as opposed to the rest of Champagne). From a parcel that he names the "minéral", it was left en tirage until the end of 2016, the better to allow a graceful evolution. A lovely, scented wine that shows the way for the "Nature" style.

(2014) "Largillier" Rosé Brut 6/750 \$352

Jérôme coaxed 3000 bottles from a parcel he nicknames "Matière" in 2014 and the results are simply and singularly stunning. A saignée of delicate hue drawn from the grapes destined for his excellent Coteaux Champenois, the floral extravagance of the nose would not disgrace a Lacrymae di Morro d'Alba. While this perfumed quality also infuses the palate, what impresses overall is the contained exotic richness of the Pinot Noir fruit, braced by perhaps the most overt minerality of the entire range. This really is a rosé champagne that resembles no other we know.

(2009) "Les Sens Boisés" Brut 6/750 \$360

It takes a special hand to craft a wine of this slender and nervous quality from a ripe vintage like 2009 and an élevage in old Chablis Grand Cru barrels. It is not hyperbole to say that followers of Vilmart will find a satisfying echo of that iconic house in this wine. We were honestly surprised and exhilarated by it. Disgorged at the end of 2015.

DEHOURS ET FILS (Mareuil-le-Port)**ORGANIC**

No visit was more revelatory than this one, for all sorts of reasons. First of all is Jérôme Dehours himself, a debonair, fast-talking man of exceptional lucidity and passion. To get a sense of his uniqueness, you can read the remarkable manifesto he publishes about his enterprise which describes every aspect of his work, down to the brand and engine size of his tractors. He took over the domaine in 1999 and started a conversion to organic viticulture, which is now complete. The domaine consists of 42 parcels, all within close reach of the winery. Dehours was the first producer in Champagne to offer “vins parcelaires” emanating from their lieux dits – a now commonplace practice. Total production is typically 70-80,000 bottles a year, all of which are held back for an above-average period before release to the market. (A superlative late-released 2003 from that most unfashionable vintage was the single most stunning wine tasted on this recent tour). The wines are not filtered, all enjoy a passage through wood, and they are allowed to go through malolactic fermentation naturally in the spring. The yeasts used are indigenous, but Dehours makes their own cocktail of the best. Jérôme likes to employ the tailles, so often sold off by other producers, feeling that they impart useful and attractive qualities to the finished wines. Certainly, the prevailing cashmere elegance of his range is testimony to the fastidious care with which he works – a fact recognized by an adulatory press in France and important customers among the big houses who ask him to press their grapes for them. We count ourselves lucky indeed to have this important agency in our portfolio.

N.V. “Grande Réserve” Brut (70% Meunier, 20% Pinot Noir, 10% Chardonnay) 6/750 \$188

N.V. 12/375 \$236

Drawn from the entirety of the estate’s holdings, the idea behind this wine is to exemplify the expression of champagne in the vicinity of the domaine, with an emphasis on the prevalent Meunier grape. Based on 2013, with the balance coming from a solera of reserve wines dating back to 1998, the wine more than meets its remit. There is a tenderness to the fruit that belies the low dosage of 7 gm. and testifies to the fastidiousness of the viticulture and wine-making. We don’t use the word “perfect” lightly, but it is appropriate to a champagne like this that so effortlessly evokes the uniqueness of the genre and delivers it in such a seductive fashion.

N.V. “Terre de Meunier” Extra Brut 6/750 \$224

Jérôme is a fierce proponent of Meunier, which dominates his holdings. And who could refute his belief in the grape’s innate quality when confronted with such a masterly wine as this? A blend of 80% 2014 and 20% 2013, dosed at just 2 gm., it again demonstrates the house’s remarkable ability to coax finely-textured wines from their grapes, even at this ultra-dry level. It is reminiscent of the single-parcel Meunier wines made by Jérôme’s friend Alexandre Chartogne.

2009 “La Croix Joly” Extra Brut (Meunier) 6/750 SOLD OUT

This parcel affords the opportunity to make white, pink or still champagne – a decision that is taken every year. Perhaps the exceptionally long aging on the lees helped slim down the potential corpulence of 2009, or maybe it was just Jérôme’s innately elegant style, but this is just a focused yet sensuous vintage wine that pleases on every level. Dosage of 2 gm., like all the top wines. **SIX 6-PACKS ALLOCATED TO US!**

2009 “Maisoncelle” Extra Brut (Pinot Noir) 6/750 \$292 NET

Pinot Noir is a challenge met with equal skill. The nose is reassuringly accurate, and the wine has an appropriately bracing and masculine style, redeemed by the expected tenderness of Dehours. **TEN 6-PACKS ALLOCATED TO US!**

R. RENAUDIN (Moussy)

I have admired this house since encountering a delicious 1976 vintage on an early visit to Champagne. The holdings are all in the villages of Moussy and Pierry, just south of Épernay and just above the start of the Côte des Blancs. Their spacious buildings are testimony to the scale of their former operations. Now they are content to sell off the majority of their grapes to other houses while retaining the best for themselves, all of which are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Production is now down to a scant 50,000 bottles a year, and they show no hurry to sell anything! One of the attractions is their considerable library of old vintages for sale – including a significant quantity of 1990 in Methusalem!

(2008) Brut “Réserve” 1er Cru (70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir) \$376

When you realize that this wine is entirely from the banner year of 2008, and was disgorged in November 2015, you will know that it is not a “normal” N.V. blend. Still fresh from its extended period en tirage, the mousse is noticeably fine. The strikingly cool mineral nose is followed by a taut, crisp palate just beginning to enter its secondary “biscuit” phase. This will be a long-distance runner.

2001 “L’Espiegle” Brut Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru NEW \$488

Partly because they block the malolactic fermentation, “L’Espiegle” always shows especially vibrantly. Another wine for the long haul, that spent ten months in barrel. Rather as in Burgundy, 2001 has been overshadowed by its showier successor, 2002. But there is an argument to be made that wines like this have the extra degree of nerve that marks out the really great vintages. Disgorged in December 2017, it is showing absolutely beautifully at the moment, with years ahead of it.

1990 “Réserve Spéciale” Brut 1er Cru METHUSALEM [1/6000] NEW \$540
It is mindboggling to think how patiently Renaudin has held onto this stock of huge bottles from a landmark vintage, disgorging them to order, as they did for us. Suffice it to say that the wine turned heads when we poured it at our inaugural champagne tastings in 2017, not just because of its outsized proportions but on account of its perfect evolution and preternatural freshness.

LÉGUILLETTE-ROMELOT (Charly-sur-Marne)

The sleepy village of Charly on the very western frontier of Champagne, is home to a number of interesting producers, none more than this newly-discovered house. It was formed by the union of the two eponymous families in 1968, five years after they had joined together with other growers to form a co-operative in Charly. They remain members to this day, though the majority of their grapes are vinified in their own impressive facilities. Current proprietors Laurent and Christine took over in 2000 and have always had a brisk trade on the domestic market, particularly with private customers. WineWise is actually their first American customer, and proud to be bringing their thoughtful range of diverse wines to the California market.

The family, including the three children, are all keen amateur musicians – a fact reflected in the names of all their cuvées. The domaine covers 8.2 hectares of vines, which average 40 years of age, including a small plot around the house dedicated to three arcane varieties. The wines undergo systematic malolactic fermentation, and aging en tirage is longer than the average. We were impressed by the finesse and incisiveness across the board. It was frankly hard to leave any cuvées behind, but we have started with a judicious selection that we think shows off their strengths. This is a house that exemplifies the strides being made by ambitious growers in the new era.

N.V. “Prélude” Extra-Brut (64% Meunier, 33% Chardonnay, 3% Pinot Noir) \$320
An enchantingly direct nose and palate with 4.5 gm of dosage that shows less dry than that because of the vinosity imparted by the old vines. Based on 58% of the 2014 vintage, the reserve wines are a solera of the years 2008-13 and lend a depth of flavor that is quite palpable. Dry but far from austere.

(2012) “Opus No. 12” (45% Meunier, 28% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Blanc, 6% Pinot Noir, 6% Petit Meslier) \$352
It is impossible to dismiss comparisons with Aubry because of the important role played in this wine by the two arcane varieties. But it stands on its own feet by dint of its seething mass of flavours - white fruits, citrus, salt – and its prodigious length on the palate. It is dosed at 8 gm.. The “Opus No.” has always denoted the year from whose grapes the wine is made. Sadly, that will change in future as our importation of this wine drew the attention of a certain famed producer of Napa Valley red wine who claimed exclusive rights to use the word “Opus” in conjunction with wine. Maybe this will be a collector’s item, too!

(2008) “Notes Noires” Brut (73% Meunier, 27% Pinot Noir) 6/750 \$240
What a pleasure to find another example of this great vintage available to us. It is an unusual rendition of the Blanc de Noirs concept, but the result is vivid and chiseled. Secondary development is just beginning in a champagne that displays both power and finesse.

J.M. LABRUYÈRE (Verzenay)

We were thrilled to be approached by this rising-star in the great Grand Cru village of Verzenay (home of Lallement and Péhu-Simonet). Proprietors in Beaujolais since 1850, in recent years they acquired both Ch. Rouget in Pomerol and Jacques Prieur in Burgundy. They also have interests in Napa Valley. But current proprietor Edouard Labruyère had his sights on Champagne, too, and he wanted it to be at the top level. He was lucky enough to be offered a pocket-sized domaine (5.5 hectares in total) in this most sought-after locale in 2012. A conversion to bio-dynamic vineyard methods was quickly undertaken and no expense was spared in the cellar to bring it up to date. To make the wines, he tapped his acclaimed wine-maker from Prieur, Nadine Gublin (a native of Champagne), who instantly showed an uncanny instinct for the very different demands of making champagne. The result is wines imbued with Verzenay’s distinctive flavor, polished to a fare thee well, made in today’s prevailing dry cast. They are stylish and intense.

(2012) “Prologue” Brut Grand Cru (70% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay) \$516 NET
The estate’s flagship wine is by rights Extra Brut, as the dosage is a mere 4.8 gm.. The juice is entirely cuvée, and the wine is aged 60% in steel and 40% in used barrels passed on from Prieur. 2012 was a fortuitous year for a debut, since it provided such inherent balance for a champagne made without reserve wines. There is an aristocratic poise to the flavours and a thrilling nerve to the cut. All is in place and the result is pure class.

(2012) “Anthologie” Brut Rosé Grand Cru (72% Pinot Noir, 28% Chardonnay) \$584 NET
The addition of 8% still Pinot Noir from a small plot in nearby Bouzy and the increase of the dosage to a still-low 6.4 gm. serve to heighten the fruit qualities of this wine while leaving intact its distinctive Verzenay expression. A serious, structured rosé that perhaps serves best at the table rather than as a cheerful quaffer. For those so inclined, it should also age gracefully.

FOREST-MARIÉ (Trigny)

A chance encounter with their Blanc de Blancs at a restaurant after attending the Salon des Vins de Loire at Angers, and the discovery that my hotel proprietor was the local agent led to a protracted but ultimately successful process of negotiation whereby we became the California importers for this exceptionally good house. Situated in Trigny, a village that shares the same Massif de St. Thierry terroir as our long-time favorite, Chartogne-Taillet, this producer has quietly developed a following in France, culminating in some top ratings in the Guide Hachette. Thierry Forest (after whom the local mountain is not named) is an unassuming but serious wine-grower who makes authentic, forceful champagnes that exemplify all we have come to love about the récoltants. Particularly notable is his preference for aging his wines much longer than is the norm before release. Almost half the grapes now come from the Premier Cru village of Eceuil, home of his wife Gracianne Marié. Otherwise, they have no fewer than 86 parcels distributed in four communes, three of which are Premier Crus. The average age of their vines is 40 years, they have practised the planting of grass between rows for 35 years, and all grapes are harvested by hand.

N.V. Brut "Tradition" \$340

This is the cuvée that won the coveted Coup de Coeur from the Guide Hachette in France. Made from equal parts Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Meunier, 35% 2010 and 65% 2009/08, it is unusual for being made predominantly from reserve wines, freshened with the latest vintage. It has that insinuating nose that only champagne can offer, full of biscuity intrigue. Crisp and fresh, with a beguiling gingery overtone, this is a mighty satisfying "basic" champagne that is a poster-child for what makes our grower friends such a rewarding source for this most important of beverages.

N.V. Blanc de Blancs Brut \$360

It was a bottle of this wine that grabbed my attention in that restaurant in Saumur where I was dining with Julien and Corinne Fouet. One never expects very much of the ritual aperitif champagne in France, but this one was startling for its class, its wonderful biscuity evolution and its length on the palate. Clearly an older cuvée than the one we offer you now, it showed the potential of their Chardonnay to evolve into the sort of rococo classic beloved of champagne aficionados. This cuvee is composed of equal parts 2012 and 2013, with almost four years en tirage.

N.V. Cuvée St. Crespin 1er Cru Brut \$380

This wine came to Thierry from the Premier Cru village of Écueil, home of Gracianne Marié, his wife, whose terroir presents entirely differently. The previous cuvée was blended from 2005 and 2004, from a base of 65% Pinot Noir (the balance is Chardonnay). An imposingly spicy, gingery champagne made in a dry style (just 6 gm. of dosage), it would serve as well at the table as an aperitif. The **NEW** cuvée, however, is a blend of 2010 and 2009 (two really complementary vintages) and is made entirely from Pinot Noir fermented in used wood. It is a splendidly vinous champagne, spicy and firm, and brimming with contained power.

2006 Brut Millésimé \$432

How thrilling that Thierry's current vintage is 2006, when others are releasing their 2013 wines. An equal blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, entirely from the Écueil holdings, this is a grand, dry champagne, gingery and long, with prodigious depth of flavour.

N.V. Rosé Brut \$364

Made entirely from black grapes (80% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier) and based on 70% of the silky 2010 vintage, it sports a charming nose of wild strawberries and cunningly allies fruitiness and nervosity. Exceptional value.

LANGUEDOC

LA CAVE DE L'ABBÉ ROUS (Banyuls/Collioure)

There are no vineyards in France more startling to the eye than those that cascade down to the Mediterranean Sea just north of where the Pyrenees divide France from Spain. These logic-defying vines, grown on unnumbered terraces hewn out of the cliffs, also give rise to wines of great originality and quality. La Cave de l'Abbé Rous is essentially a co-operative of small growers in the choicest sections of Banyuls and Collioure. It makes wines at the highest quality level of the two appellations.

2015 Cornet & Cie., Banyuls Rimage (100% Grenache) 12/500 \$160

Going back to 1998, this delicious dessert wine has established itself as a brighter, less alcoholic alternative to Port. It is also an especially pretty expression of the Grenache grape. Its affinity with bitter chocolate is by now a received truth.

2005 Helyos, Banyuls 6/750 \$268 NET

This is the apotheosis of Banyuls Rimage, conjured from the most perfectly ripe Grenache grapes of the appellation and transmuted into a supreme elixir. A wine that may change you forever. Minute production.

2000 Banyuls Grand Cru Sec, Cuvée Joseph Nadal 6/750 \$180 NET

With 55 gm. Of residual sugar, this is only "sec" in comparison with the Reynal below. But, after aging for nine years in cask, the wine has achieved a spicy, gingery savor that effortlessly overcomes the sweetness and delivers a superbly fondu palate. This would be a brilliant match for hard mountain cheeses.

DOMAINE FONTANEL (Côtes du Roussillon)

This splendid domaine goes from strength to strength, making an impressive array of modern reds and traditional vins doux naturels. Pierre Fontanel is a painstaking grower who gives more thought to every stage of the grape-growing and wine-making process than most. A recent visit persuaded us to expand our range dramatically.

2015 Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes (70% Grenache, 30% Syrah) \$112

Pierre sensibly uprooted his Bordeaux varieties that used to contribute to this wine. It is now made exclusively from 3 –7 year-old vines of true southern varieties, co-fermented to maximise the expression of terroir and given a short maceration. The result is a deep-hued, grapy wine with unexpected depth of briary, juicy fruit and a distinctly more-ish appeal. Exceptional value.

2010 “L’Age de Pierre”, Muscat de Rivesaltes \$212 NET

The aristocratic Muscat à Petits Grains is famously susceptible to rot, so the fact that it thrives in the relatively arid climate of the Roussillon is not surprising. What is really impressive, however, is the “cool climate” freshness and cut that Pierre conjures from his grapes. Much livelier and lighter than the typical Muscat de Beauges de Venise, for example, this makes an admirable foil to fresh fruit-based desserts. It could also serve as an ingredient in an imaginative cocktail.

2007 Rivesaltes Ambré NEW \$208

This stunning dessert wine is the product of 60 year-old Grenache Blanc vines, blended with Grenache Gris and Muscat. The classic rancio nose is no preparation for the sumptuously concentrated palate, which shows a panoply of burnished, nutty flavours, elegantly married with oak. This is an excellent match for desserts incorporating baked fruits and nuts.

CH. DE FONTARÈCHE (Corbières)

We have had our eyes on this ancient estate for several years now, and could resist its allure no longer after tasting this impressive collection of wines from 2016. With a history dating back to the tenth century, the current domaine consists of 200 hectares that encircle a fortress constructed in the 12th century. It has been in the ownership of the Comte de Lamy’s family for nine generations, but there is nothing remotely antique about the methods they now employ. The 160 hectares planted to vine lie equally in Corbière’s appellation and the surrounding IGP’s. The multiplicity of terroirs in this expansive terrain enables them to grow no fewer than 17 different varieties, including some interlopers. We, of course, have chosen to select an introductory range derived exclusively from autochthonous varieties. You will be impressed.

2017 Ch. Fontarèche “Sélection Blanc” Vieilles Vignes (Corbières) NEW \$108

In a way, what oenologue Vincent Dubernet achieves with white wines is even more remarkable than reds, given the difficulty of the local climate. This shapely, fresh white beautifully captures the exotic perfume and round texture of Roussanne (60%) and the flowery, more piquant qualities of Grenache Blanc. The result is a triumph of cool winemaking in a hot place.

2017 Ch. Fontarèche “Tradition” Rosé (Corbières) NEW \$96

When was the last time you had a wine based on 50% of Picpoul Noir? This rarity lends a mysteriously exotic aromatic tone to the more familiar fruity qualities of Syrah and Grenache, which make up the wines balance. The 2016 vintage sold out in a flash last year. We bought more of the amazingly tasty 2017. Snap it up!

2016 Domaines de Lamy Rouge (IGP Aude) \$88

Deliciously uncomplicated and seamless red blended from Grenache (50%), Carignan (20%), Syrah (20%) and Alicante Bouschet (10%). It really cannot be beaten for the price!

2016 Domaine Fontarèche Grenache Noir (IGP Pays d’Oc) NEW \$96

This kind of straightforward but shapely wine gives the voguish Garnachas from over the border in Spain a serious run for their money.

2016 Ch. Fontarèche “Sélection Rouge” Vieilles Vignes (Corbières) \$104

For a small premium, we offer you this full-flavoured but supple wine that benefited from the favorable climatic conditions in 2016. A classic blend of Carignan (40%), Syrah (30%), Mourvèdre (20%) and Grenache (10%), it exemplifies the generous qualities that make the Languedoc, at its best, an incomparable source for interesting wines at challengingly low prices.

VIGNOBLE BELOT (St. Chinian)

It is a few vintages since we have worked with this fine producer, but we were entirely compelled by the quality and value of his current offerings. Lionel and Karine Belot run the estate started from scratch by Lionel’s father in 1985. He had the vision to see a good future in the hard-scrabble clay-and-limestone soils of the parcels he bought. The estate was expanded in 1997 with the purchase of a lovely nearby property called Le Tendon which was then replanted, mostly to international varieties. For the moment, we have chosen to bring in two different red wines made from traditional southern varieties.

2016 Mas Belot, Coteaux du Languedoc (70% Grenache, 30% Syrah) NEW \$108
An especially limpid and pure expression of Grenache underpinned with Syrah's darker tones. Spicy and easy-drinking, this offers no resistance on its descent through the gullet!

2015 Ch. Belot "les Mouleyres", St. Chinian (60% Syrah, 25% Mourvèdre, 15% Grenache) NEW \$132

This mid-range wine offers an absurd amount of class for the money. Dominated appropriately by the high-toned, floral aspects of Syrah, its fruit is sweet but structured, and the 12-month passage in used barrels has left its judicious mark, too. In short, what you have here is a wine of real breed for the price of a daily quaffer.

VERGNES ([DOM. DES MARTINOLLES](#)) (Limoux)

We renewed contact with this old estate at a sad point, shortly after the untimely death of young proprietor Jean-Marc Vergnes. His widow, Isabelle, wanted to carry on the domaine, but finally decided to take on new partners, as she has young children. We are optimistic that the quality-mindedness of this superb producer of sparkling wines will not change. Limoux is arguably the first place in France to have invented sparkling wine. Its limestone soils and markedly cooler climate make it apt for this category. The price-quality ratio is second to none.

N.V. Blanquette de Limoux (Mauzac) \$140

Mauzac is Limoux's calling card. A variety essentially unique to the region that provides the essence of what makes this appellation different. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Chenin Blanc have all made their mark in recent decades, but it is Mauzac that imparts its singular green apple tones to the aroma. This is an unpretentious but hugely satisfying sparkler, gentle, easy and suave, with perfectly judged dosage.

N.V. Crémant de Limoux Rosé (70% Chardonnay, 20% Chenin Blanc, 10% Pinot Noir) \$172

This exceptionally elegant rosé has won a passel of awards for readily understandable reasons. As easy on the eye as Catherine Deneuve, it sports a fine mousse, a beautiful nose and a tender, subtle and fine palate.

DOMAINE PAUL LOUIS EUGÈNE (Siran)

We recently paid a return visit to Paul Durand and were elated by what we tasted. Andrew Jefford describes him as a "peasant philosopher" (a sobriquet that Paul happily accepts), and also says, aptly, that "there is no more interesting person in the world of wine". Paul is a man of his region, speaking a wonderfully eloquent French in the heavy accent of the south-west. Devoted to the heritage of the Languedoc, he is nonetheless not above making wines from utterly non-traditional grapes if he feels that they have a statement to make about his terroirs.

His life in recent years has not been easy, but he has emerged from his troubles with a clarity of vision and a modest determination that translate into wines of unabashed power, endowed nonetheless with a grace and poise that are almost unheard-of in this region. Ever his own man, he was one of the very first producers in France to shun the Appellation Contrôlée system and make only "Vins de Table". He has essentially reinvented himself by planting vines in long-abandoned vineyards buried deep in the nooks and crannies of his beloved Minervois hills. Without any special efforts on his part (he is somewhat averse to the hurly-burly of commerce), his wines have developed a cult following amongst a small band of cognoscenti. It is our confident belief that Americans will be added to their numbers when they experience these unique wines for the first time.

(2006) "Canto Pébrè" (Carignan and Grenache) \$192

An inspired blend of these two workhorse grapes. Sweet, sappy wine with preternatural freshness for its age. A super successor to the long sold-out 2004 vintage that made so many friends.

(2007) "Trois Pommes" (Grenache) \$168

The first vintage of Paul's new Grenache vineyard was most auspicious. More Collioure than Gigondas (though there is no schist in the soil), its gorgeous nose is varietally true, while the firm and spicy palate delivers pleasure and intrigue in equal measure.

[CH. L'ARGENTIER](#) / FAMILLE JOURDAN (Sommières)

The Jourdan family has been established in Sommières, between Nîmes and Montpellier, since 1937. Endowed with an unusually high percentage of old vines, they make an array of blessedly old-fashioned and unaffected wines exclusively from grape varieties indigenous to the region. All wines are fermented and aged in concrete vats. They make a special point of not releasing their wines until they consider them ready to drink. Such resistance to the "latest vintage" syndrome naturally endears them to us. But, more importantly, we were utterly convinced by the purity and restraint of their various cuvées, which really offer something new and different to the range of Languedoc wines.

2016 Aramon Rosé (I.G.P. Hérault) \$140
In the pre-phylloxera era, Aramon was the variety most widely planted in the Languedoc. Today it is a relic, cultivated by a mere handful of diehards. In the hands of the Jourdans, it renders an unexpectedly fine and nervy rosé, pale in colour, fairly stony in effect but with a pleasingly fresh sour cherry flavour and an impressive vinosity in this new vintage.

SOUTH WEST

CLOS D'AUDHUY (Cahors).....NEW.....

We have never been particular fans of Malbec's expression in Cahors, but this recent discovery caused us to re-examine our prejudices. Benoit Aymard took over the small estate founded by his grandfather as recently as 2014. He did not want to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, but he was interested in putting his own stamp on the family's traditional wines. The land he inherited is already very complex geologically-speaking, and also relatively steep for the region. But he recently planted some very sparse parcels at 260 meters in elevation on limestone-rich soils dating to the Kimmeridgean era.

2016 "Les Polissons" Cahors Rouge (100% Malbec) NEW \$136

Who would have thought that Malbec could be rendered so sheerly charming and pleasurable? The trick was a light extraction, a short maceration with pigeage and remontage, and relatively early bottling. Meet the friendly face of Cahors' famous "Black Wine".

2015 "Clos d'Audhuy" Cahors Rouge (100% Malbec) NEW \$200

The estate's flagship wine is an intelligent compromise between ancient and modern. The handling of the musts is similarly gentle, but the maceration is much longer (25 days) and the wine spends 12 months in 400 liter barriques, of which half are new. The resultant wine is dark as night, but plushly textured. With air, some of that wild, brambly Cahors character comes to the fore.

NICOLAS GELIS (Côtes du Frontonnais)

Fronton is home to the Negrette grape. When well made, it offers one of those perfect amalgams of variety and place which make the notion of "terroir" a palpable sensual and intellectual pleasure, not just an abstract fancy. Nicolas Gélis is a dynamic force in the region who has assembled a collection of domaines in different districts each of which offers its individual expression of Fronton's originality.

2012 Ch. Cahuzac Rosé (80% Negrette, 20% Gamay) \$116

The pink wine from this estate has always stood out from the crowd by dint of its distinctive perfume of pears and its juicy freshness. Surprisingly drinkable at five years of age.

2014 Ch. Ferran Rouge "Classique" (60% Negrette, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Gamay) \$112

Seriously tasty red from the first property bought by Nicolas in 1994 and completely replanted at that time. The brambly tones of Negrette dominate as they should, while the Cabernet lends firmness and the Gamay acid brightness.

BORDEAUX

VIGNOBLES BAYLET (Sadirac).....NEW.....

It is not entirely accurate to describe this Bordeaux stalwart as "new" because Bruno Baylet was a staple of the WineWise portfolio in its early days. But it is many years since we worked with his admirable wines, so we are taking the liberty of treating him as a newcomer, as to most of you he will be one. We could not be happier to re-engage with his uncompromisingly honest and forceful wines. The estate has the French certificate of sustainability known as "Haute Valeur Environnementale".

2016 Ch. Landereau, Entre-Deux-Mers (40% Semillon, 35% Sauvignon Blanc, 15% Sauvignon Gris, 10% Muscadelle) NEW \$132

The unusual blend of grapes is some preparation for the sheerly singular melony gloss and power of this far-from-modest "basic" Bordeaux white. Cold fermentation and five months' aging on the lees have imparted serious texture and gloss to bolster the entirely delicious and pure flavours.

2016 Ch. Landereau, Bordeaux Clairet (30% Cabernet Franc, 30% Malbec, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot) NEW \$120

Clairet, which today denotes a more highly-coloured wine than normal rosé, is the name that gave rise to the English word "Claret". Few make it today, but it really is Bordeaux's original contribution to the world of rosé wine. (Bruno makes a lovely pale rosé as well, but we thought this one more unusual). This example is full of fruit and vigour. It truly does serve in place of both white and red, and it keeps exceptionally well.

2015 Ch. Landereau, Bordeaux Supérieur (60% Merlot 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon) NEW \$132

Perhaps it is climate change, perhaps it is the relaxation that comes with advancing years, but Bruno's reds have become less adamant in recent years, without sacrificing the admirable iron-infused sense of place that have always marked them. In this landmark vintage, the wine is predictably full and direct, with a real old-school authenticity to it.

CH. BICHON CASSIGNOLS (Graves).....ORGANIC.....

There is a strange duality in the world of Bordeaux. Its top wines command huge prices and are regarded more as status symbols than beverages, while thousands of petits châteaux struggle to survive in a world which often seems to have passed them by. We have always had a sneaking affection for the Graves, whose singular wines have made a special claim on the affections of Bordeaux connoisseurs. We were therefore delighted to be introduced to this small estate, founded by the grandfather of current proprietor Jean-François Lespinasse, whose wines offer an unforced yet pleasurable authenticity at reasonable prices. The domaine is situated at La Brède, famous home of Montesquieu just to the south of Pessac-Léognan.

2016 Ch. La Creste (Graves - 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon) NEW \$168

2014 Ch. La Creste (Graves - 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon) \$144

Raised entirely in tank to accentuate its supple fruitiness, this timeless beauty has that familiar Graves tang of iron that lends it interest and distinction. Sheerly delicious wine.

CH. CARBONNEAU (Ste. Foy)

It is many a year since we tasted a petit château Bordeaux worth its classic \$10 or \$11 retail price-tag, so our hearts leapt when we encountered this old-fashioned beauty seemingly caught in a commercial time-warp. Wilfrid Franc de Ferrière, despite his aristocratic-sounding French name, speaks an unaffected English with a disconcerting New Zealand twang to it (he's married to a Kiwi). Ste. Foy is in the extreme south-eastern part of Bordeaux.

2016 "Classique" (85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon) NEW \$104

2015 "Classique" (85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon) \$96

Seriously tasty Bordeaux at a silly price that will please the purists for its structure and the hedonists for its fruit.

2015 "Séquoia" (71% Cabernet Franc, 24% Merlot, 5% Malbec) NEW \$108

An entirely new blend in this vintage, the 2015 is predictably grand. Sumptuous fruit, skilfully raised in barrique, with an enlivening leafy tone from the high proportion of Cabernet Franc.

CH. VRAY CANON BOYÉ

2008 Canon-Fronsac (90% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cab. Sauvignon) NEW \$144

We have made something of a speciality of sourcing nicely-aged examples of classic European wines that we can offer at a bargain price. But this one takes some beating! From one of the top handful of estates in the privileged sub-appellation of Canon Fronsac comes this insanely inexpensive example of perfectly mature red Bordeaux with more than a hint of breeding to it. Plummy fruit and delicious flavor.

CH. COUTELIN-MERVILLE

2006 St. Estèphe, Cru Bourgeois (50% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 25% Cab. Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot) \$280 NET

Another treasure of aged Bordeaux. This extremely well-situated Cru Bourgeois, near Haut-Marbuzet, made a classically robust St. Estèphe in the fine Médoc vintage of 2006, with a touch of cedary class to its potent nose. In the midst of its secondary stage of development, it should soften and improve for many years yet, though it is a compelling proposition for a restaurant list right now. 20% of the barriques are renewed each year, and the estate eschews all use of pesticides.

LOIRE

GILBERT CHON (Muscadet)

We waited a very long time until importing our first Muscadet, but now believe that we have found a winner. The Chon brothers practise sustainable viticulture in a patchwork of crus that show the subtle but clear distinctions of terroir that exist in this popular but little-understood area. They make impeccably clean, vividly expressive wines at reasonable prices, and have been hailed by David Schildknecht as offering exceptional quality and value.

2016 Clos de la Chapelle (Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie) \$100

2012 Clos de la Chapelle (Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie) \$100

A single-vineyard wine of unusual authority and texture, but unmistakable origin, from schist-grown vines over 60 years old. A Muscadet for those who appreciate fruit as well as the authentic saline minerality of the genre.

2016 "Le Tristan" (Cabernet Franc, Vin de Pays du Val de Loire) NEW \$92

Little did we know that les frères Chon also make an unspeakably delicious and soft Cabernet Franc that offers all the uncomplicated charm of which this grape is capable. And what a bargain! This has understandably developed a following.

DOMAINE AUX MOINES (Savennières – Roche Aux Moines) ORGANIC

Monique and Tessa Laroche, the charming mother and daughter team who run this pocket-sized (4500 cases) estate in La Roche Aux Moines (an appellation now with all of five proprietors), evidently have little need to make a living. How else to explain the mind-boggling fact that they continue to offer many vintages back to 1992 in commercial quantities? All the more amazing in view of the exemplary quality of the wines. Now, after an adulatory review from David Schildknecht in a well-known wine journal, everybody wants them. We are delighted to be able to offer an older vintage that show off the aging potential of this great wine. The estate has been certified "Organic" since the 2010 vintage.

2015 "Le Berceau des Fées" (Vin de France) \$240 NET

This new wine comes from a recently acquired parcel of Chenin outside the appellation but still in a highly favoured locale. Deliberately made in an easier style than the Roche-Aux-Moines, it nonetheless enjoys a fruit endowment in this lavish vintage that suggests a capacity for aging, if one has the fortitude to resist the siren call of its youth. Gorgeously floral, it is a picture of prettiness.

2015 Savennières - Roches Aux Moines NEW \$332 NET

Tessa achieved something quite out of the ordinary in this powerhouse year. She contrived to fashion a wine that has all the dimension and flavour intensity of this great appellation within a relatively light (by today's standards) alcoholic frame of 13%, and with an aromatic lift that soars heavenwards on blossomy winds.

2013 Savennières - Roches Aux Moines \$280 NET

Modern Savennières is a richer, more declamatory wine than its forebears. But when endowed with this kind of fruit purity and inherent balance, it can be ranked among the world's truly important white wines. As always, it shines at table when its potent amalgam of flavours and textures play off the partnership of food.

1999 Savennières - Roches Aux Moines \$236 NET

This is not a mis-print! This "new" vintage is the latest to have crossed over to what one might describe as its tertiary stage. There is a smoky quality to the aroma that does not exactly prepare you for the delicious fusion of marmalade fruit and piquant minerality on the palate, nor the intriguing chocolate nuance in the tail. A poetic wine that offers endlessly changing stimulation. Made by Monique in the pre-organic era, it shows that the quality of terroir trumps all other considerations and that Tessa had a good teacher in her mother!

LA FAMILLE VAILLANT (Anjou).....ORGANIC.....

*This relatively large (55 hectares) domaine has unbroken family history going back to the 18th century. One of the first French producers to adopt **bio-dynamic** practices in the 1980's, it makes an impressive range of wines from several Anjou appellations. We have been especially impressed with their reds, which are made without additional sulfites, fining or filtration. **DEMETER CERTIFIED.***

2015 Cabernet Breton (100% Cabernet Franc) \$144

Named after the Bourgueil abbot who adopted the grape in the 18th century, this is a wonderfully expressive rendition of this grape that packs an improbable intensity into its light (12%) frame. Equal parts animal (think blood), vegetable (floral scent) and mineral (think pulsating saltiness in the tail), this is a brilliant miniature that, in its quiet voice, says more than many a powerhouse roaring in a stentorian voice. 2015 is faithful to that vintage's bountiful endowments.

- 2016 “L’Aubinaie”, Anjou (100% Cabernet Franc) NEW \$160**
This stalwart wine forms an interesting bridge between the perfumed varietality of the Cabernet Breton and the rugged strength of “L’Ancrerie”. An entirely honest Loire red that blossoms with air and offers great pleasure.
- 2014 “L’Ancrerie”, Anjou Villages (100% Cabernet Franc) NEW \$200**
In a series of fine Loire red vintages, 2014 stands out as something quite special, as exemplified by this late-release “Tête de Cuvée”. The magnificent, iron-drenched nose alone declaims the singular quality of the vines. And the palate’s vibrant yet structured expression of Cabernet Franc makes this a well-nigh perfect example of the grape’s masculine side, while avoiding any tendency to tannic obstruction. A not-to-be-missed highlight.

DOMAINE FOUET (Saumur)

In short measure, this domaine has become a blue-chip with a succession of irresistibly pure and generous wines which demonstrate all the fruity charm that the Loire can offer. Julien has grown in stature with each passing year, especially since the premature passing of his father in 2016. Having long used organic practices, he is also in the course of being certified by Ecocert. Also, for the last two years, Julien has been making his Crémants in-house, having previously farmed out the process to an external specialist (a very common practice in France and other countries). The result is a palpable gain in finesse. We have steadily increased our range of selections as the domaine’s exceptional quality becomes recognized and as we find more and more wines to our taste.

- 2017 Saumur Blanc, “L’Ardillon” (100% Chenin Blanc) NEW \$140**
Nature was cruel to Loire producers in 2016 (and again in 2017), dealing them a succession of blows that reduced their harvests painfully – sometimes almost entirely. The only consolation was the quality of wines like this – a gleaming, sultry dry white with a Veltliner-like green edge in the tradition of years like 2014 and 2010.

- 2017 “Buvons des Fruits” (100% Cabernet Franc) NEW \$184**
*Julien is proudest of his red wines. And this is his first essay at a “Natural” wine – naturally fermented, unfiltered, unfiltered and unsulfured. To describe it as “delicious” is to understate the indecently charming beauty of its varietal character. “Let us drink Fruits” is how the name translates – a little ponderous as a name, but entirely apt to the simple ambition of the wine. **ONLY 25 CASES ALLOCATED TO US!***

- N.V. Crémant de Loire (95% Chenin Blanc, 5% Cabernet Franc) \$180**
This ravishing sparkler radiates finesse, from the tiny mousse that it sports, through the first whiff of its unmistakably Chenin honeysuckle notes to the bracingly pure palate and its extended finish. Importantly, it has the kind of harmony that derives from extended aging on the lees. A worthy alternative to champagne.

- N.V. Crémant de Loire Rosé (100% Cabernet Franc) \$180**
With Champagne Rosé costing ever-more-ridiculous sums, it is a pleasure to discover such a compelling escape as this. Stylish, Loire-ish and dry, this coral-colored gem has all the authenticity of its white counterpart but an added fruitiness appropriate to its hue. We never seem to buy enough.

- N.V. “St. Cyr” Crémant de Loire (Cabernet Franc) \$208**
A reserve bottling from the domaine’s oldest vines, this takes all the familiar qualities of the “regular” Crémant to altogether new heights of tension and mineral intrigue.

MARC PLOUZEAUORGANIC

Pierre Plouzeau was a visionary man who, in his all-too-short life, created a négociant business like no other while running his own two domaines as well. His sons, François and Marc, are worthy successors, both firmly committed to the rigorous joys of bio-dynamic farming. Marc, who took over the family’s historic Chinon property, Ch. de la Bonnelière, also functions as a négociant, working with a small number of top-quality growers to produce a range of dependable Loire classics. He goes from strength to strength as the years pass.

- 2013 Les Devants de la Bonnelière Sauvignon (Touraine) \$132**
As always, the Chinon terroir yields a wine long on minerality that transcends the Sauvignon (whereas Delaunay’s example, for instance, exalts it). Unapologetically dry and serious wine for rock-hounds. Good with oysters.

- 2017 Dom. de la Croix Marie Chinon Rosé NEW \$136**

- 2016 Dom. de la Croix Marie Chinon Rosé \$132**
Those who followed the long-running Devants de la Bonnelière Touraine Rosé will know what a deft hand Marc has with rosé wine. This latest example is a step-up appellation-wise and offers the familiar thrill of Cabernet Franc gone pink. Poised between earth and fruit, it presents a drier, tangier and arguably more food-friendly rendition of the genre than is typical in France.

- 2016 Dom. des Hautes Troglodytes, Saumur Champigny NEW \$144**
High-toned, silky wine that walks a thrilling tightrope between pleasure and seriousness. Lighter than the well-endowed 2015, it harks back to another, more charming time. The Hautes Troglodytes never disappoints!

2015 Dom. de la Croix Marie Chinon “Vieilles Vignes” \$164
The uncanny resemblance to the long admired Ch. de la Bonnelière is not coincidental. Brilliant old-vines, big-time Chinon from a landmark vintage. Drink now or keep 20 years.

2014 Dom. de la Croix Marie Chinon “Les Lisons” \$124
The ever-restless Marc bought another estate in 2014 near Ligré. Les Lisons is a 2.5 hectare parcel grown on clay soils, a fact to which this wine’s rugged strength is testimony. The sanguine, iron-rich palate is a distinctive and contrasting expression of Chinon’s possibilities, but Marc’s sure hand eliminates any hint of coarseness. This is a really exceptional wine at a price that is frankly silly for the elevated quality. We see a sunny future for La Croix Marie.

XAVIER FRISSANT (Touraine-Amboise)

We shall be eternally grateful to Vincent Raimbault for introducing us to his friend in the village of Mosnes – one of only two vigneron making it their home!. This fellow is a star.

2016 “Les Roses du Clos”, Touraine Blanc (Fié Gris) NEW \$180
This rare cousin of Sauvignon (also known as Sauvignon Rose and Surin Gris), which is tinted like Gewurztraminer, when ripe renders in Frissant’s hands a wine of surprising substance and authority. Fermented in old 400 litre barrels, it is quite unmarked by wood flavours but offers an excellent texture. It has developed quite a following for its dramatic, almost exotic nose of roses and mastic. It is lively, dry and spicy, brimming with vigor and animation. This new vintage has exceptional cut and focus.

2014 “M de la Touche”, Côt (Touraine-Amboise) \$132

2013 “M de la Touche”, Côt (Touraine-Amboise) \$140
There is little resemblance between the popular Malbecs of Argentina or the brooding wines of Cahors and a wine such as this, made from the same grape with its Loire moniker. Once past the dark hue, you enter the unmistakable world of energetic, nervy and mineral Loire wines. The low alcohol keeps the wine bouyant and the finish is long. The 2013 is in a lovely spot right now, while the 2014 promises great things.

2011 “Cuvée Renaissance” (50% Côt, 50% Cabernet Franc) \$164
There is a vivid brilliance to the best 2011 Loire reds which this splendid wine exemplifies. Deep-colored and forcefully scented, it melds that unmistakable Loire earthiness that seems to transcend varieties with a thoroughly pleasing fleshiness.

VINCENT RAIMBAULT (Vouvray)

No explorer in search of El Dorado ever experienced the thrill we did on discovering this property . Jaded over the years by a succession of uninteresting Vouvrais, we called “Eureka” on tasting this beautiful line-up. Vincent Raimbault is a disarmingly quiet and modest man, but his wines bespeak exceptional seriousness. Their hallmark is beauty and purity of fruit, and faith in tradition. The enthusiasm with which they have been embraced by our customers shows that our excitement was well placed. Dare we mention that Schildknecht likes them, too?

N.V. Vouvray Brut \$160
Fruiter and slightly less dry than Fouet’s Crémant, this offers a fascinating perspective on sparkling Chenin grown in the Loire’s different tufa soils.

2015 Vouvray Sec “Bel Air” \$144
Inevitably, the power of the vintage asserts itself, but like all Raimbault wines this does not lose sight of its origins. The first shipment sold out fast.

2014 Vouvray Demi-Sec “Les Terrages” \$132
Chenins like this, with their subtle balance of sweetness and acidity, are really the only wines in the world that give German Riesling a run for its money. A more sheerly useful and delicious French wine is hard to imagine.

JOEL GIGOU (Jasnières)

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ONLY

Joel Gigou continues to be the iconic producer of Jasnières. This miniscule appellation is 25 miles north of Tours in the Coteaux du Loir (itself an appellation barely larger, where Gigou also has holdings). The whites are a product of that magical Loire symbiosis between Chenin Blanc and tufa. Arguably, the expression here is the most singular and extreme in all the Loire region. Gigou is a conscious archaist. One look at the ancient photograph on his labels of peasants tilling the vineyards will confirm that. But the wines will hold their own against all that modern wine-wizardry can throw forth. They have that thrilling fusion of fruit and mineral which only the greatest Rieslings, white burgundies and Savennières can offer, surmounted by an ethereal floral perfume that brings tears to the eye. Son Ludovic has been groomed to take over the estate, and he has proved to be as attuned as his father to the qualities that are Jasnières’ hallmark. When tasted amongst other wines of the appellation, they were as palpably dominant as any producer we have ever encountered in a comparative tasting. A big hit with David Schildknecht. We have now bitten the bullet and brought in our first reds and sparkling wine. The wines are organic, the yeasts are native.

2014 “Jus de Terre”, Jasnières **\$160**
This is our first wine made by Ludovic, and what a calling card it is. The signature piercing Jasnières scent is unmistakable – recognisably Loire Chenin but utterly unlike any other appellation. Sappy, dry, vibrant and long, with a huge mineral charge and tremendous length on the palate. This is a great portent for the new regime.

2000 Cuvée Clos St. Jacques, Jasnières **\$216 NET**
Always the flagship of the estate, the old vines of Clos St. Jacques give rise to greater vinosity and texture without sacrificing in any way the signature ethereal scent of Jasnières nor its searing minerality. It bears mentioning that Gigou patiently ages his wines in small old casks in his perfect cellar until he deems them ready for release. This is very much the exception to the rule in the area, but the resultant benefits are easy to appreciate. Until very recently, these barrels were exclusively made of traditional chestnut, but, starting in 2006, oak has begun to play a role in the aging as well, with a gain in finesse. This library release is stunning testament to the inherent quality and longevity of these old school wines. The golden colour indicates the wine's maturity, but the freshness of attack and spicy richness bear witness to its vigour and potential for further development. This is a classic if ever there was one.

2014 Pineau d'Aunis, Coteaux du Loir **\$152**
*It takes a specially warm year like 2014 to elevate the maverick Pineau d'Aunis to a level of vinosity that regular red wine drinkers will acknowledge. This normally pallid grape has a distinctively briary, almost foxy tone that not everyone warms to – in some ways it is like Zinfandel's spindly but clever foreign cousin. But Ludovic has made something singular from it here – slender but innerly sweet, with an insinuating earthy flavour. This really is something completely different. **LOW STOCK.***

2010 “Cuvée Gigou't”, Vin de France (Gamay) **\$152**
While we waited for the perfect Cru Beaujolais to come our way (see Perrachon on page18), we found this remarkable essay in Gamay from the north. Uncommonly well coloured, it was aged in used Bordeaux barriques for upwards of two years then aged patiently in Gigou's labyrinthine caves before release. Plummy, smoky and not insubstantial, it should make a true believer of any doubters in the possibilities of Loire Gamay.

N.V. “La Bulle Sarthoise” Rosé (Pineau d'Aunis) **SOON**
Tempting though it might be to cite the off-the-charts hipness factor of this wine (sparkling Pineau d'Aunis from one of France's most obscure appellations, made without malolactic fermentation) we prefer instead to concentrate on its ebulliently original aroma (blackberries licked with tar) and its unspittably delicious flavour, allied to alcohol of just 11.5%.

N.V. “La Bulle Sarthoise” Rouge Demi-Sec (Pineau d'Aunis) **SOON**
And if that were not enough, along come its big brother, all dressed in red and sporting a most unusual lick of sweetness to add to its spice-box full of flavours.

JOEL DELAUNAY (Touraine)

Thierry Delaunay has firmly established the estate he runs with his father in the forefront of this sprawling appellation. The village of Pouillé where he resides is home to several of the top Touraine growers and would seem to be exceptionally privileged, perhaps by dint of its relative elevation. His Sauvignon has developed a devoted following over the last few years for very good reason.

2017 “Le Grand Ballon” Rosé (Vin de Pays du Val de Loire) **NEW \$100**
Pale but definite pink wine artfully blended from Cabernet Franc, Côt and Gamay to a delightfully sprightly effect. It sports that inimitable Loire tension between fruit, acidity and earth components.

2016 Sauvignon “Le Grand Ballon” (Vin de Pays du Val de Loire) **\$96**
A splendid successor to its well-received predecessors. Unmistakable but unexaggerated Sauvignon at a bargain price. 2016 strikes a perfect balance between cool cut and warm fruit.

2017 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc **NEW \$128**
This cuvée offers real typicité year in and year out. 2016 is in the tradition of full-flavoured, precise and incisive wines that have developed such a following for this impeccable producer. The well-chronicled weather troubles of this year resulted in unusual concentration and torque.

2016 “La Voûte”, Sauvignon Blanc (Chenonceaux) **NEW \$168**
A tête de cuvée given skin-contact and extended aging on the lees, it quite overwhelmed us by its combination of precision and generosity. A style that one suspects our Antipodean friends would give their eye-teeth to emulate. Starting in 2014, the vineyard is classified in the new Chenonceaux appellation. Despite successive reduced harvests, the wine offers exceptional value.

2012 “La Brossette”, Gamay and Cabernet Franc (Touraine) **ORGANIC \$136**
Thierry Delaunay presented us this charming wine during our sales trip to the Loire last May, and we could not resist its ebullient fruit. The Gamay dominates in the blend, with the Cabernet Franc providing structure, and the overall impact is altogether less prickly than the hedgehog on the label. Lovers of their Sauvignon Blanc in its various iterations should find plenty to like in this organically farmed red.

PASCAL BELLIER (Cheverny)

Pascal Bellier makes an array of splendidly clear and authentic wines in this little-known corner of the Loire, just south of Blois. Typical of the young generation taking over in the region, he is an adherent of Terra Vitis, a group of practical but forward-thinking growers practising “La Lutte Intégrée”, an essentially organic, but undogmatic, approach to viticulture.

N.V. Rêveries” Brut Rosé (Pinot Noir)

\$156

Pascal makes a miniscule quantity of this highly perfumed and flavorful sparkler. It has been embraced by the market.

2016 Cheverny Blanc (80% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Chardonnay)

\$112

Where you might expect to be taken aback by the foreign aspect of Chardonnay in this blend, that most plastic of grapes instead serves to intensify its Sauvignon character, to make the wine grassier and imbue it with more lemon-and-lime perfume and cut. This 2016 is a real standout for its clarity and balance, not to mention its improbably low price.

2016 Cheverny Rouge (80% Pinot Noir, 20% Gamay)

\$112

The sheer prettiness of the Pinot fruit is reason alone to want this, but here is one of those wines whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is an animated, proportionate and thought-provoking wine that also happens to be awfully easy to drink. Perfection of its understated kind. The new 2016 delivers an improbable quotient of pleasure for the price, and brings a more serious grip to the table than usual.

DOMAINE DE VILLARGEAU (Coteaux du Giennois)

This tiny appellation, which hugs both sides of the Loire as it arcs north and west after Pouilly-Fumé, musters a total of 150 hectares, mostly dedicated to black grapes. Twenty of them belong to this this young domaine, founded by the brothers Fernand and Jean-François Thibault, in 1991. Joined in 2000 by one of their sons, Marc, a trained oenologist, they have quietly advanced to the fore and now are regarded as ambassadors for this little-known district.

2015 Domaine de Villargeau (Sauvignon Blanc)

\$132

We represent a serious number of different Loire Sauvignons, which is justified by the fact that each offers a subtly different expression of this popular and ever-rewarding variety. The defining influence here is the flint component of the vineyards, which lends to this light but penetrating wine an uncompromisingly dry but nonetheless salivating quality. Tucked underneath the puckerish surface is an ingratiating fruit sweetness, more evident than usual in 2015.

MAUROY-GAULIEZ (Pouilly Fumé)

This estate, which dates back to 1635, represented our first foray into the iconic appellation of Pouilly-Fumé and has proved a hit. With their three distinctive soil-types dispersed through their 15 hectares of vines, almost exclusively planted to Sauvignon Blanc, they make three single-soil wines in addition to the flagship Pouilly-Fumé. Impeccably run by the ladies of the family.

2016 Domaine de Bel Air “Cuvée Riquette”, Pouilly Fumé

\$204

“Cuvée Riquette” derives from parcels of old vines planted in “Caillottes” (clay and limestone) and represents the third different wine we have bought from this admirable woman-run estate. The climatic deprivations of 2016 were nowhere more severe than in Pouilly-sur-Loire. As a result, they decided not to make the “Pierres Blanches” that we have favoured in recent years, but to blend those grapes into the estate’s principal cuvée. We liked that wine well enough but were simply knocked out by the profundity and salty intensity of “Riquette”. For a relatively modest further premium you receive a truly elevated Loire Sauvignon experience.

JEAN-CLAUDE ROUX (Quincy)

2016 Quincy

\$168

Grain-farmer turned wine-grower Jean-Claude Roux turns out to have a deft hand with Sauvignon Blanc. With dynamic son Albin now at his side, the quality being delivered is higher than ever. With its vivid musky nose, brisk palate and exemplary balance, this is a perfect fallback from Sancerre or Pouilly Fumé in today’s market. 2016 compensated for nature’s cruelty in terms of yield (frost, hail) by delivering a sheerly beautiful rendition of Loire Sauvignon at its most piquant and delicious. It drives memories of previous excellent vintages out of mind!

ALSACE

BOECKEL (Mittelbergheim)

This ancient family firm has become a dependable source for some heart-warmingly traditional examples of Alsace wines. In recent years, they have systematically converted all their own holdings to certified organic viticulture, though they continue to buy a significant proportion of other grapes from long-term partners. The wines are full-flavored, varietally distinct and properly dry. They offer a price-quality ratio that is hard to beat. Now that the 23 hectares are fully organic, a new range of wines under the name “Midelberg”, an ancient dialectal name for their beautiful village, has been released with a striking label and bottling under screw-cap.

2016 Riesling **\$128**
Amazingly good entry-level dry Riesling. Beautifully scented, substantial, clear, juicy and delicious, at an insanely low price. Country Riesling in its Sunday best.

2012 Riesling Brandluft Vieilles Vignes **ORGANIC \$200 NET**
This lieu-dit was the first sold by Boeckel in the 19th century and holds a special place in their pantheon. Its highly complex soils on a sandy base give rise to a hauntingly-scented wine with a finesse suggestive of a Grand Cru. Quite exceptional in this vintage.

2012 Riesling Stein “Clos Eugénie” **ORGANIC NEW \$300 NET**
Boeckel own significant holdings in the Grand Cru vineyards of Zotzenberg and Wibelsberg, but it is this more modest lieu-dit which is the jewel in their crown, consistently offering the grandest and finest Riesling of the house, that is never released without several years of bottle age. In the great 2012 vintage, it offers everything you could ask for : tenderness, power, discretion, beauty, balance.

2016 Gewurztraminer “Midelberg” **ORGANIC NEW \$172**
You will perk up eagerly at the first whiff of the textbook Gewurz nose. The improved viticulture manifests itself in the uncommonly spicy palate, while the wine’s rich texture but reduced sucrosity make it a better-than-ever match for the traditional Asian fare and smoked fish.

2014 Sylvaner Vieilles Vignes **\$124**
Mittelbergheim is famous for Sylvaner. Indeed, its celebrated Zotzenberg is the only Alsatian vineyard accorded Grand Cru status for this Cinderella grape. This cuvée comes from Boeckel’s large holdings in that cru and its surroundings and displays not just the charm and freshness one expects but unexpected hints of power and gravitas, too.

2016 Pinot Noir “Midelberg” **ORGANIC NEW \$184**
Pinot Noir has become increasingly important to cellar-master, Thomas Boeckel, and it is clear that he has grand aspirations for the grape, perhaps inspired by the examples of Baden, grown a few kilometers to the east. Climate change has certainly enabled him to conjure more sheer fruit sweetness from his grapes than was the case in years past. But life would be boring if Alsace did not bring its own sinewy and incisive style to this most popular and challenging of varieties. The organic farming practices certainly help to extract a cavalcade of salty flavours in the tail. Impressive and distinctive.

BEAUJOLAIS

LAURENT PERRACHON (Juliéna)s.....

This 28 hectare domaine has holdings in six of the ten crus of Beaujolais and makes a series of impeccable, site-specific wines of uncanny precision and charm. Beaujolais is enjoying a resurgence of popularity and respect these days precisely because of the fastidious work of conscientious producers like Laurent Perrachon and his formidable wife Maxime.

2016 Beaujolais Villages “Terres de Loyse” **\$120**
That wonderful French expression “vin de plaisir” might have been invented to describe this beauty. The explosive nose screams of Gamay, while the soft cushiony fruit with its characteristic tang and modest minerality reminds you that this is a wine from somewhere – in this case the two villages of La Chapelle de Guenchay and Lancié.

2016 Juliéna)s “Les Mouilles” **NEW \$164**
From a granite-and-schist site planted to 50 year-old vines in the Perrachon’s home-village, this is an impressively mineral wine that shines in the sleek profile of 2016.

2016 Morgon “Côte de Py” **NEW \$188**

2015 Morgon “Côte de Py” **\$180**
If Grands Crus existed in Beaujolais, Côte de Py would be in the elite. Its celebrated pebbly schistous soils, so rich in iron oxide, render wines of power and authority with serious aging potential, especially in a banner year like 2015. Suitably aged for fifteen months in oak, this is a deep-coloured, brooding and deadly-serious wine that demands your attention and respect. 2016 is more classic than the super-charged 2015.

BURGUNDY

ALAIN GEOFFROY (Chablis)

We were delighted to discover this impeccable producer of [Kimmeridgean](#) Chardonnay at reasonable prices. We think that you will be, too.

2014 Bourgogne Chardonnay \$144

A lissome, snappy chardonnay with unexpected salinity in the tail. Resolutely dry, lip-smacking wine for very little.

2015 Petit Chablis \$144

The distinction between “Petit” Chablis and the “real” thing can be quite minor, as evidenced by this absolutely paradigmatic wine, whose uncompromising quality and saline tang mark it out as a serious candidate for oysters. The plumpness of 2015 is buffered by the natural nerve of the terroir.

2016 Chablis \$192

The trials of producing wine in this weather-challenged year are well known. The recompense for the difficulties presented by untimely frost and hail is wines of uncommon poise and tension with an intensity and nervousity bespeaking the challenges faced by the vintners.

2014 Chablis Beauroy 1er Cru Vieilles Vignes \$252 NET

There is real grandeur in this first-time importation of this privileged old vines plot. Intense without being big, salty and long on the palate. 2014 shows its pedigree here, and the oak élevage is discreet to an extreme.

2016 Bourgogne Pinot Noir NEW \$172

2015 Bourgogne Pinot Noir \$160

Always showing ravishingly pretty, pure stone fruit evocative of grander origins than the simple Bourgogne appellation. Exceptionally low yields of two tons an acre helped, and the decision was made not to fine given the elegance of the fruit. Successive tiny vintages have necessitated a price increase, but this still offers good value for such quality.

DOMAINE THEULOT-JUILLOT (Mercurey)

“Old fashioned” burgundy producer, in the best sense of the words. Serious, age-worthy wines which show off both the unique aromatic joys of Pinot Noir and the particular character of the six premier cru sites of Mercurey that they cultivate. These are wines of the utmost integrity, not prettified in any way, because they do not need to be. Jean-Claude Theulot, Emile Juillot’s son-in-law, has steadily raised the renown of this estate to the top echelon of Mercurey. Fittingly, the name has been changed from “Emile Juillot” to “Theulot-Juillot” in recognition of the transformation that he has wrought.

2016 Côte Châlonnaise Blanc NEW \$196

2015 Côte Châlonnaise Blanc \$176

The Theulots’ “entry level” wines are made with the same care as the premiers crus but from more modest terroirs. Nathalie Theulot’s name appears on the label of this cuvée, which comes from a vineyard she owns. It is a perfect miniature white burgundy – modestly proportioned but brimming with that archetypal sweet-salt burgundian savour, and kissed ever so gently with the most reticent oak you ever met. Brilliant.

2009 Mercurey Blanc 1er Cru, Les Saumonts \$296 NET

Jean-Claude Theulot makes rather little white wine from a handful of small plots, but he lavishes a degree of care on them that is repaid with wines like this that demonstrate exceptional purity, unfussiness and salinity, with an unerring sense of just how much oak the fruit can comfortably live with. If Montrachet is a Tchaikovsky symphony then this is a Haydn string quartet – but a great one!

2016 Côte Châlonnaise Rouge NEW \$200

2014 Côte Châlonnaise Rouge \$180

To describe this wine as “pretty” is to understate its appeal but to capture its distinction. Why should red wine not flatter the senses, after all? This one pleases the sight with its pearly lovely hue, the nose with its uncommonly incisive Pinot beauty and the taste with its refined and crystalline beauty. Your sighs of pleasure will supply the matching sounds.

2016 Mercurey 1er Cru, La Cailloute (Monopole) NEW \$336 NET

2014 Mercurey 1er Cru, La Cailloute (Monopole) \$296 NET

This monopole vineyard is a connoisseur’s special, as it makes the subtlest and arguably finest of the domaine’s wines. The 2014 is an unexpectedly swaggering wine that punches way above its weight. The 2016 is indescribably elegant and sweet-fruited, with a refined and pleasing finish.

2016	Mercurey 1er Cru, Les Combins	NEW	\$340 NET
2016	Mercurey 1er Cru, Les Combins	12/375	\$188 NET

Les Combins is perhaps not intrinsically superior in quality to, for instance, La Cailloute. But it always has a degree of velour and depth that are hard to resist. Simultaneously weighty and buoyant, with a ravishing scent of cedar and cocoa. Pure class. And 2016 is in the lineage of such classic "pleasure" years as 2009, 2001 and 1999.

SAVOIE & JURA

DOMAINE MARTIN FAUDOT (Jura).....

The Jura's catapult to fashionability has made the discovery of worthy new producers quite a challenge, especially when, in Stéphane Tissot, we already have arguably the region's best and most dynamic exponent. How happy we were, therefore, to be presented with the opportunity to add to our portfolio this century-old estate that faithfully continues the traditional ways of Jura wines. Run by Michel Faudot and Jean-Pierre Martin, it covers 12 hectares that are cultivated by essentially organic means, though they are not certified. We were especially impressed by the reds.

2015	Trousseau (Arbois)		\$212 NET
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This pallid, wan variety never ceases to surprise with its capacity to swell and persist on the palate. From an exceptional vintage in Arbois, this is a classic – vibrant, spicy, faintly earthy and without any rough edges.

ANDRÉ & MIREILLE TISSOT / STÉPHANE TISSOT (Arbois) BIO-DYNAMIC

44 year old Stéphane Tissot returned to the family domaine 18 years ago and has since converted all 32 hectares to bio-dynamic viticulture and dramatically reduced yields. Vinifying terroir by terroir, he makes Chardonnay and Pinot Noir of Burgundian quality with a distinctive mineral expression. He also honors the family traditions with brilliant versions of the semi-oxidized wines of the region. One of the world's most restlessly innovative producers, he never ceases to come up with daring new ideas relating to viticulture, wine-making and hitherto unthought-of products.

N.V.	Crémant du Jura Extra Brut (55% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir, 5% Poulsard, 5% Trousseau)		\$272 NET
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N.V.	Crémant du Jura Extra Brut	6/1500	\$288 NET
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Since the 2009 vintage, Stéphane has succeeded in finding the balance in his grapes that enables him to make this wine without dosage, his Platonic ideal of how Crémant should be. What a triumph! Beyond the wine's familiarly uncanny resemblance to champagne, it has a depth and persistence of flavor that pay tribute to the bio-dynamic regime of the domaine. The wine has never been better, and the news is out, because we have now had our allocation of this and other Tissot wines severely reduced.

N.V.	Crémant du Jura Rosé Extra Brut		\$272 NET
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A determinedly "pink" wine, in the sense that it is made predominantly from black grapes, lending it a weight and earthy flavor profile quite different from that of the more "champenois" white versions. Our allocation has been further reduced to 20 cases because of successive small, weather-impacted harvests.

N.V.	Crémant du Jura "Indigène"		\$340 NET
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Who but Stéphane would have contrived the notion of conducting a secondary fermentation with his yeast-and-sugar-rich [Vin de Paille](#)? The result is fascinatingly different – fruitier, deeper, more mysterious – and has quickly developed a cult-like following. This is the model that he intends to follow in the future. Truly delicious.

N.V.	"BBF" Crémant du Jura Blanc de Blancs Fût Extra Brut		\$304 NET
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100% Chardonnay, 75% from 2008 in the barrel for a year, and the remainder from 2009 in stainless. Again, no dosage, and great fidelity to the Champagne model of toast, yeast and fine beaded complexity. After four years on the lees, it is still young and, alas, in short supply.

2016	Chardonnay "Patchwork" (Arbois)		\$288 NET
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This is the cuvée formerly known as "Classic" and, briefly, "Empreinte". Made from younger (less than 25 years old!) vines in Tissot's famed single crus in a rigorously classical burgundian style, the only pity is that the combination of successive minute vineyards and Tissot's increasing global renown have resulted in the reduction of our allocation to thirteen (yes, 13) cases. Don't blink.

2016	Chardonnay "Les Gravières" (Arbois)	NEW	\$448
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This gravelly parcel often yields Stéphane's most forward Arbois Chardonnay. 2016 is more in the style of the elegant 2014 than the richer 2015, but, in the end, it is just a classic Tissot chardonnay with all that that implies.

2015	Chardonnay “Les Bruyères” (Arbois)		\$400
	<i>The clay-and-limestone soils of this superb site give rise to a wine that is generally released later than the other crus. We have ten cases to play with.</i>		
2016	“DD” (Arbois Rouge)		\$284 NET
2016	“DD” (Arbois Rouge)	6/1500	\$300 NET
	<i>Stéphane’s red wine yields were pitifully cut by Nature in 2013 and 2014, so he contrived this new blend of Trousseau, Poulsard and Pinot Noir. It took off, so now he makes it every year! Relatively pale, it surprises with an effusively berried nose. The palate, however, shows a more serious, earthy aspect, with a long, salty tail. This is “natural” red the way it should be made. Only 2 cases available of the Magnums!</i>		
2016	Poulsard “en Amphore” (Arbois)	6/750	\$300 NET
2016	Poulsard “en Amphore” (Arbois)	3/1500	\$300 NET
	<i>6 cases available of 750’s and 4 3-packs of magnums.</i>		
2016	Trousseau “Singulier” (Arbois) ALLOCATED		\$336 NET
	<i>Ten cases allocated of the signature autochthonous red of the Jura.</i>		
2016	Trousseau “en Amphore” (Arbois)	6/750	\$300 NET
2016	Trousseau “en Amphore” (Arbois)	3/1500	\$300 NET
	<i>6 cases available of 750’s and 4 3-packs of magnums.</i>		
2016	Pinot Noir “Sous La Tour” (Côtes du Jura)	6/750	\$232 NET
2015	Pinot Noir “Sous La Tour” (Côtes du Jura)	6/750	\$232 NET
	<i>Stéphane’s best Pinot vines are outside the Arbois appellation. Those familiar with the “En Barberon” from previous vintages will be reassured by the distinctively resonant and firm expression of the grape in this new wine, while appreciating the relative suppleness and approachability offered by the vineyard.</i>		
2014	Savagnin (Arbois)	6/750	\$216 NET
	<i>Think of this as “baby” Vin Jaune. It has all the flor-induced characteristics beloved of the true believers in a slightly less intense, one might argue more useful form</i>		
2015	Savagnin en Amphore, Sans Souffre (Arbois)	6/750	\$292 NET
	<i>Ever the restless experimenter, it was inevitable that Stéphane would at least want to know what effect amphora-raising would have on his wines. The production is miniscule – the effect is grand.</i>		
2010	Vin Jaune “En Spois” (Arbois)	6/632	\$400 NET
	<i>In typical Tissot fashion, Stéphane can’t resist experimenting, so he now has three vineyard sites, bottled separately, for Vin Jaune, all made in the classical fashion, all expressing their different terroir despite the overriding presence of the flor. One is supremely mineral, one closed and brooding, and this is perhaps the most “typical,” if anything Stéphane does can be so named. Two 6-packs of “clavelins” available.</i>		
2005	Vin Jaune “En Spois” (Arbois)	6/500	\$308 NET
	<i>1 6-pack available.</i>		
2015	“Spirale” (60% Savagnin/20% Poulsard, 20% Chardonnay)	6/375	\$320
	<i>Too sweet (300 grams residual sugar!) to be a table wine, and too low in alcohol (8%) to be a dessert wine, this extraordinarily rich and pungent nectar comes from grapes laid out to dry for five months and then pressed. The closest analogy is something between Vin Santo and TBA. This needs to be tasted to be believed.</i>		

DOMAINE LABBÉ (Savoie)

The Savoie region, hard by Lake Geneva, can barely produce enough to meet the demands of winter sports enthusiasts and summer hikers, but we’ve been lucky enough to secure one of its top estates. Abymes, and its slightly better-known neighbor Apremont, produce light, aromatic, exquisitely balanced wines from the Jacquère grape. The brothers Labbé keep yields low to extract maximum flavor from this delicate variety, while retaining freshness and sheer pleasure-giving gulpability.

2016	Abymes		\$124
	<i>Brilliant as a diamond and light as a feather. A poem of delicately delicious mountain white, with especially pronounced fruitiness in this superb vintage.</i>		
2016	Pinot Noir	NEW	\$152
	<i>This is a highly characterful Pinot which nods towards both burgundy in its delicate, leafy flavours and to Alsace in its tensile strength. One can never have too many expressions of this wonder-grape!</i>		

RHÔNE

CHRISTOPHE PICHON (Côte Rôtie)

We continue our careful exploration of the northern Rhône with the addition of this stellar producer of Côte Rôtie, Condrieu, St. Joseph and Cornas. Now in the third generation of the Pichon family, the estate covers 16 hectares split between the four appellations above and a small quantity of vin de pays. The domaine offers elegant, perfumed wines that punch way above their weight when their modest cost is considered – the WineWise paradigm! Christophe himself is a man of seriousness and commitment who is now in his second term as president of the Condrieu appellation, a job previously held by the legendary Georges Vernay.

2016 Viognier, Collines Rhodaniennes \$200

The vines lie just to the north-west of Condrieu, planted on gentle granitic slopes. 30% is aged in used barriques, the balance in cuve. The resulting wine has an unmistakable honied nose that melds with the oak as a hand fits in a glove. The glossy texture of the fruit could distract you from the wine's surprising mineral charge. At 13.5% alcohol, it passes for moderate in today's world. Exceptional class for the modest tariff.

2016 Condrieu 6/750 \$232 NET

2015 Condrieu \$364 NET

At this echelon, Condrieu demonstrates its reputation as one of the world's great white wines. As powerful and intense as a fine burgundy, it is made like one, too, being mostly vinified in barrique (30% new), with complete m.l. Just 20% is done in cuve to retain freshness. The resulting wine is voluptuous but contained, vibrant and complete with impressive length on the palate.

2016 St. Joseph Rouge \$248 NET

The elegance and suaveté that Pichon brings to this wine are ravishing. Deep-coloured, entirely "typique" Syrah nose with a seamless oak integration. This is St. Joseph at the highest height.

2013 Côte Rôtie "Promesse" (90% Syrah, 10% Viognier) \$392 NET

The startlingly beautiful and exemplary Syrah nose of this wine makes its name entirely apt, for rarely has a perfume offered so much promise that is then fully realised on the palate. This is a silkily gorgeous wine with such purity of fruit that it is hard to believe that 75% of the barrels in which it was aged were new. To achieve such high class for such a tariff is scarcely to be believed.

DOMAINE MUCYN (Crozes Hermitage)

It is ironic that we, who love Syrah almost more than any other black grape, had never before imported a producer from the northern Rhône. In truth, it is only because we had never encountered one available to us who was special enough to warrant the move. All that changed due to our discovery of Hélène and Jean-Pierre Mucyn, a young couple introduced to us by Jean-Marc Espinasse of Rouge-Bleu. Established in Crozes and St. Joseph since 2001, they have quietly charted their own course and developed a European following for their stylish, unexaggerated wines.

2015 St. Joseph Blanc "Les Carats" (100% Roussanne) \$240 NET

The stylishness of this wine is testimony to the strides that Mucyn has made with his white wines. Roussanne brings its own particular extravagances to the table, but Jean-Pierre shrugs them aside to craft this refined yet succulent Rhône white that barely hints at its oak aging. Exemplary wine that will age well.

2008 Crozes Hermitage Blanc (100% Marsanne) \$208 NET

Initially suggestive more of Burgundy than the Rhône on account of its subtly smoky notes and firm underpinning of acidity, with air this wine blossoms beautifully to display a succulent, apricotty palate. Fermented and aged in four-year-old Vosges barrels, it is a remarkably intelligent synthesis of burgundian technique and Rhône character. An original.

2015 "GamSy" Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes (60% Syrah, 40% Gamay) \$132

Renamed to better convey its constituent parts, it is hard to conceive of a more sheerly joyous and brilliant wine in this lighter vein. Masterfully combining the complementary virtues of perfumed syrah and snappy gamay, it slides down the throat with the ease of a serpent and then tempts you to commit non-stop sin.

2015 Crozes Hermitage Rouge "Les Entrecoeurs" (100% Syrah) \$180

Ripeness brings its own traps, so God bless the Mucyns for not falling into them. The 2015 was no small vintage, so we can be grateful for the freshness and crunch which leaven the Syrah's dark-toned complexion.

2012 St. Joseph Rouge (100% Syrah) \$220 NET

There is no question that the best St. Joseph wines bring an added dimension of power and concentration to the table and this is no exception – except the premium you pay is so negligible! This beauty has the hallmark tensile strength of the vintage and a flowery Syrah perfume of unmissable class.

DOMAINES BOUR (Roussas, Grignan-les -Adhémar)

Long considered the leading producer of this Rhône district, Henri Bour makes wines of head-turning aromatic quality and strikingly accurate Syrah character. He also spearheaded the appellation's change of name, in order to avoid the nuclear stigma associated with the previous appellation of Coteaux du Tricastin. After a few vintages where we thought that the estate was a little off its game, it seems to have regained its former flair and is again offering us that customary combination of purity and strength. Daughter Nathalie has taken over the commercial direction in recent years.

2013 Domaine de Grangeneuve Vieilles Vignes (50% Syrah, 50% Grenache) \$136

That familiar blend of scented Syrah and Rhône strength is here in spades. This is the sort of shapely wine that made Grangeneuve's reputation in the old days. It offers a wonderful contrast to the prevailing ruggedness of most Rhône wines on the market.

2013 Domaine de Grangeneuve "La Truffière" (90% Syrah, 10% Grenache) \$176

This remarkable vineyard, which gains its name from the truffle-bearing oaks that surround it, never fails to deliver its signature rendition of cocoa-scented Syrah. Aged in barriques of 2-6 years' use, it is unexaggeratedly ripe and stately, confident in its bearing and refined in its finish. It will please its many followers.

2014 L'Esprit de Grenache (Côtes du Rhône Villages) \$132

This uncommonly pretty rendition of the Rhône's signature grape hails from a leased parcel of old vines in Vinsobres, a few miles to the south of Domaine de Grangeneuve, the Bour's home estate. The nose reeks of strawberries and the silky texture presents no obstacle to imbibement.

DOMAINE ROUGE-BLEU (Ste. Cécile-les-Vignes)

Now firmly in the hands of French-Australian couple Caroline Jones and Thomas Bertrand (she makes the wine, he does the rest), this little domaine just east of Orange is now set fair on the course originally charted by Jean-Marc Espinasse. The newly-designed labels signal the new régime, but the founding principles of organic (mostly bio-dynamic) viticulture, honest wine-making and excellent value remain as they were. Thomas' recent visit to California reignited interest in these rewarding wines and they go from strength to strength.

2017 Dentelle Rosé (55% Carignan, 45% Grenache) \$140

2017 was the vintage when Caroline finally found that magic balance she was looking for in her rosé wine. The old, deep-rooted vines cultivated bio-dynamically enabled her to achieve proper ripeness with an improbably low alcohol level of 12%. Carignan-based rosé is a relative rarity, and this one has an irresistible snap to go with the expected berry fruit. Southern rosé does not get much more refreshing and delicious than this!

2013 Dentelle (55% Carignan, 45% Grenache) \$128

Carignan is thought of as the Languedoc variety par excellence, but it can make distinctively brambly and authentic wine in the Rhône as well, especially when blended with the local kingpin grape Grenache. The 2013 signals the new régime's refined approach.

2015 Mistral (71% Grenache, 19% Syrah, 8% Mourvèdre, 2% Roussanne) NEW \$168

In a vintage which often yielded too much of a good thing, Rouge Bleu's viticultural techniques served to temper nature's abundance. The result is an undeniably generous and spicy Rhône red which comfortably avoids all excess.

2013 Mistral (71% Grenache, 19% Syrah, 8% Mourvèdre, 2% Roussanne) \$168

This was the first vintage made entirely by Caroline and Thomas. The challenge these days, of course, is to harness the increasing warmth of the climate to the stoniness of the terroir and render a wine that is not hot. One of the "tricks" is the incorporation of stems in the fermenting wine, which lends a welcome edge to the otherwise sumptuous fruit.

DOMAINE DU BANNERET (Châteauneuf du Pape)

We resisted for a long time the temptation to import any wines from this iconic but often under-performing appellation. It is therefore with particular pleasure and some pride that we present to you the wines of a vigneron who is as rooted in his milieu as any we have ever encountered. Jean-Claude Vidal is the uncle of Jean-Marc Espinasse (see Rouge-Bleu above). An engineer by profession, he has lovingly tended his pocket-sized domaine since inheriting it thirty years ago. A fierce traditionalist, he makes a wine that will bring tears to the eyes of any nostalgists who believe that Châteauneuf's best days are behind it. Making just 500 cases a year, he proves that it is possible against all odds to harness the benefits of today's climate to the aesthetic standards of yesteryear. Now, his daughter Audrey has taken the reins and brought a wave of energy to the enterprise without in any way changing the time-honoured vineyard and cellar practices. So you can continue to expect rugged, full-throated wines made from all 13 authorised varieties, patiently aged in used barriques and built to last. These are the opposite of the smoothed-out fruit-bombs that mostly pass for Châteauneuf these days. For connoisseurs only!

2015 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc “Le Secret” 6/750 \$220 NET
Audrey has already put her stamp on the domaine by purchasing a parcel from Ch. Vaudieu, whose steep, calcareous slopes, dotted with silex and iron, have long been considered the appellation’s best spot for white wines. Composed of 40% each of Grenache Blanc and Clairette, the balance is Picardan, Bourboulenc and Roussanne. Just 15% is fermented in barrique in an effort to preserve freshness at all costs. And, at 13.5 % alcohol, this is an uncommonly fragrant, incisive and elegant Châteauneuf, which blossoms beautifully with air. Only 1200 bottles were made, of which we got 120.

2015 Châteauneuf du Pape NEW \$400 NET
*Breathtaking purity of flavor from a torrid year. As delicious an early-drinking vintage from Banneret as we can remember, yet with promise of long life. **30 cases allocated to us.***

CH. LA COURANÇONNE (Séguret, Côtes du Rhône Villages)

Séguret (like Mittelbergheim, home of Boeckel) is one of France’s officially designated “100 Most Beautiful Villages”. With its strikingly pebbly soils, it is also the source of some of the best-structured and finest wines of the Côtes du Rhône, albeit some of the least known of those enjoying the superior “Villages” status. Ch. La Courançonne is a perennial gold medal winner at the local and national wine fairs, and with good reason. They make wines that are strong, unflashy, pure and faithful to local tradition. Judging by how fast we have been selling out, California is waking up to their quality. Sadly, our friend Gérard Meffre died in 2015, but his son Ludovic, a professional pilot, has taken over the reins and we are full of hope for the future of this splendid domaine.

2007 Séguret Rouge (60% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre) \$176
*The top-rated wine in a recent comprehensive Rhône tasting held by Decanter Magazine, it shows that Séguret has terroirs the equal of any of the more renowned villages in the vicinity. **LOW.***

MAS GRAND PLAGNIOL (Costières de Nîmes)

I first met Cyril Marès when he was a teenager, and his father Roger was still in charge of the estate and presiding over the appellation. He took over in 1998, married the girl next door (Nathalie Blanc of Mas Carlot) and took the domaine to ever higher heights. The wines always show exceptional aromatic appeal, supple texture and uncannily intelligent balance between fruit and oak. We never seem to buy enough of them, mainly because they have little to sell. Wines like these offer incontrovertible proof that not much money can buy you a lot of love. In a market now brimming with Nimois wines, these remain at the top of the pile.

2017	Blanc "Tradition" (50% Roussanne, 10% Marsanne, 30% Grenache Blanc, 10% Viognier)	NEW	\$120
2016	Blanc "Tradition" (50% Roussanne, 10% Marsanne, 30% Grenache Blanc, 10% Viognier)		\$108
<i>Tired of always being accused of making a Viognier, Cyril finally decided to season his perennially scented, succulent and fresh white wine with a little. The insiders have always known, of course, that Grenache Blanc is just as aromatic and sumptuous a grape variety. Rhône white gets no better than this – certainly not at this absurdly low price. This has become over the years our most sought-after French white wine. It is given skin-contact for added texture, while the malolactic fermentation is blocked to preserve acidity.</i>			
2017	Rosé (30% Syrah, 50% Grenache, 20% Cinsault)	NEW	\$116
2016	Rosé (30% Syrah, 50% Grenache, 20% Cinsault)		\$104
<i>Cyril has always managed to keep his boisterously perfumed and fruity pink wine safely within the bounds of good taste while never cheating in the pleasure department. It ages with unexpected grace. The 2017 is perhaps the most mannerly and mineral-infused vintage in memory.</i>			
2016	Rouge "Tradition" (50% Syrah, 50% Grenache)		\$108
<i>The great ones do their best work in the lesser vintages (not that 2016 falls into that category), as proved by Cyril in years like 2008 and 2002. We challenge you to find a wine that better combines aromatic flair, suave texture and sheerly delicious spicy Rhône fruit at such a silly price.</i>			
2012	Rouge "Excellence" (100% Syrah)		\$156
<i>There is a swaggering flamboyance to this wine that is impossible to ignore. What differentiates it, as usual, from the long parade of big, ripe wines is the rigorous fidelity to Syrah of its punchy aroma and the gloss and thickness of its texture, so exemplary of the Gard in a great vintage. This wine is a great value year in and year out, but especially so in a great one.</i>			

PROVENCE

DOMAINES BUNAN (La Cadière d'Azur, Bandol).....ORGANIC

*The Bunan family, without fanfare or hyperbole, have quietly become the single largest proprietors in the increasingly well-regarded appellation of Bandol. Unlike many of their neighbours, they have not rushed headlong into a love-affair with new oak, but have judiciously employed it as a fine chef might use seasoning. The wines – across the board – show a sober respect for tradition allied to an openness to change. Their vineyards are now **certified organic** and they have begun the process of **bio-dynamic conversion**. Their red Bandols age very well, and the Kosher wine is a category-leader. Many satisfied customers have commented on the reasonableness of the prices.*

2010/12	Moulin des Costes, Bandol Blanc (Clairette, Bourboulenc, Ugni Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc)		\$216 NET
<i>Only 2% of Bandol is white, and Bunan makes 40% of it. They go from strength to strength in this difficult genre, as exemplified by this ravishingly flavoured wine, with its vivid almondy aroma and caressing texture. Provençal white wine at its best.</i>			
2016	Moulin des Costes, Bandol Rosé (30% Mourvèdre, 35% Cinsault, 35% Grenache)	KOSHER	\$232 NET
<i>What makes Bandol Rosé arguably the world's best is the unique contribution of Mourvèdre, without which it would merely be good Provençal wine. The high proportion here lends this beauty a firmness and definition that gives beautiful shape to the delicious fruit. This is pink wine for the table par excellence.</i>			
2016	Ch. La Rouvière, Bandol Rosé		\$252 NET
<i>The flagship brings just a little extra gloss and charge to the table. Bandol rosé at its grandest and suavest.</i>			
2013	Moulin des Costes, Bandol Rouge (Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah)		\$240 NET
2012	Moulin des Costes, Bandol Rouge (Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah)	12/375	\$128 NET
<i>One of the special pleasures of working with Bunan is that they are in no hurry to release new vintages, preferring instead to offer their wines to the world when they have softened somewhat. Four-year-old Bandol is far from fully mature, but it does offer a seductively rich and potent brew of dark fruits and iron-tinged, faintly animal Mourvèdre character.</i>			
2009	Ch. La Rouvière, Bandol Rouge	6/1500	\$380 NET
<i>Paradoxically, Bunan's flagship vineyard gives rise to the most forward of their reds - though it is essentially pure Mourvèdre - on account of its full-south exposure and steep slope, which result in wine of exceptional, but not excessive, ripeness. Bandol of this stature remains one of the great values in wines for aging that the world has to offer. EXTREMELY LOW STOCKS.</i>			

2010 Moulin des Costes “Charriage” 6/750 \$300 NET
This tiny parcel is located precisely at the point where an ancient rift exposes the oldest soils of the estate. It gives rise to a wine that miraculously achieves grace and repose amidst a cauldron of seethingly intense pure Mourvèdre fruit. Nor does it rely in any way on wood for effect, as only 75% is aged in large muids, the balance en cuve. This is Bandol strutting its most important stuff. It will be a keeper.

2015 Bélouvé “Vin de Pierre” (I.G.P. Mont Caume) \$132
Bunans have decided to blend the traditional Mourvèdre with 50% Syrah to excellent effect. The familiar Bandol nuances are now surmounted with the pretty lavender tones of Syrah. A well-endowed wine that promises to give pleasure for several years.

SPAIN

PRIOR DE PANTON (Ribeira Sacra).....

I passed through Ribeira Sacra a good fifteen years ago, and was captivated by the beautiful vineyards perched high above the Miño River, and the ethereal perfume of the Mencia grape in my glass. So I was thrilled to be back again in 2015. My host was Rubén Moure, who works with small plots of old vines, using cool fermentations to extract maximum fruit from both white grapes and Mencia. He inherited vineyards from his grandfather, but has only had the winery in Pantón since 2008. This is a producer with interesting collaborations in other areas and a lot of ambition. But we are impressed by their paramount concentration on quality as an orientation.

2014 “Bétula” (Ribeiro - 85% Treixadura, 15% Torrontés & Lado) \$108
Ribeiro is the region directly south of Ribera Sacra, on the border with Portugal, and Rubén makes this wine in the style of Vinho Verde. Low alcohol (11.5%), very aromatic in the nose and expansive on the palate, this has surprising persistence and has aged nicely.

2013 Finca Cuarta Godello (Ribeira Sacra) 6/750 \$116 NET
Distilling this wine down to its essence, it is Godello made in the style of white burgundy, fermented in 500 liter barrels and on the lees with batonnage for three months. Tiny production, rated the best wine of Ribera Sacra in a local competition, this will dazzle as it gains bottle age.

2015 Finca Cuarta Mencia (Ribeira Sacra) \$116
Rubén named this brand after his best vineyard in Ribera Sacra, whose 50 year old Mencia vines provide the base material here. 20% new oak and ML in the barrel contribute to surprising complexity at the price. As hot internationally as this region has become, with correspondingly inflated prices, this offers stunning value in a fruit forward, mineral-supported frame, which will only fill out with more time in the bottle.

TENOIRA GAYOSO (Bierzo).....

This small estate was created from abandoned vineyards in 1994. After six years of natural “reconversion” by means of cattle-grazing, the first vines were planted in 2000. Bierzo is, of course, one of the great D.O.’s in León, and we are delighted to introduce such a fine discovery, making excellent wines at daringly low prices!

2014 Godello (Bierzo) \$136
It requires a special talent to turn this temperamental grape into a harmonious wine, but that challenge has been well met here. All the desired attributes are on show : luxurious scent, a texture that offers substance without thickness, a hint of exoticism and a correct but not bracing acidity. All is rendered in a properly dry wine with moderate alcohol. It sounds easy, but it really isn’t, for Godello, in our experience, confounds most practitioners. But not Tenoiro Gayoso

CASAL DE ARMAN (Ribeiro)

This new discovery comes from the González family, who had been making Ribeiro wines since the 19th century, but created this winery twenty years ago. In common with the best wines of the region, their vineyards are relatively high up, keeping the acid and freshness these varieties (hand-harvested Treixadura, Godello, Loureiro, Brencellao, Caíño and Sousón) require. The installation itself is hugely impressive. A grand 18th century hacienda meticulously restored and offering spacious and luxurious accommodation and a fine restaurant. It commands the Avia River valley, with its vineyards, terraced and otherwise, on all sides. The wine-making facility is compact but well-designed, having been built into a hillside, enabling gravity-feeding for all processes. The estate is on a constant mission to expand its holdings, with the aim of eventually reaching 40 hectares (24 are planted at present). They are particularly interested in older plots, some of which feature destroyed terraces that they are laboriously rebuilding. But they also do not shrink from uprooting wooded parcels, especially if they are planted to the dreaded mimosa, which has such an inimical effect on the vineyards. A spirit of exploration prevails, with compelling experiments in orange and amphora wines.

- 2015 Eira dos Mouros Blanco (Treixadura) \$148**
Treixadura is king in Ribeiro, being especially well-suited to its weathered granitic soils. Although rarely given the chance, it is also a variety of some structure that enables serious aging. The “entry level” wine is stainless-steel fermented with some time on the lees. Remarkably expressive, vivid, and spicy, this charms as it seduces.
- 2016 Casal de Arman Blanco (90% Treixadura, 5% Godello, 5% Albariño) NEW \$192**
Whole-cluster pressed, wild- and selected-yeast fermented, there is a pervasive minerality to this wine rare in the region. All the flowers, spices, and honey the nose offers are balanced and focused by the finish of lime, ginger and gunflint.
- 2016 Eira dos Mouros Tinto (50% Sousón, 40% Caiño Longo, 10% Brancellao) NEW \$136**
There is a passing resemblance to the wines of Gaillac in these dark-toned, not-too-polished Ribeiro reds. This is entirely authentic, a vivid, juicy wine with a long finish of sour cherries. For connoisseurs of the original.
- 2015 Casal de Arman (Sousón, Caiño Longo, Brancellao) NEW \$188**
Composed of roughly equal parts of these three autochthonous grape, it is not surprising that this densely coloured, sappy red seems entirely original. There are lashings of fruit, to be sure, braced by a judicious frame of tannin. Wild, dark yet bright, it is a lovely evocation of these Atlantic-influenced vineyards.

FRAGOS DO LECER (Monterrei)

Monterrei’s distinction as a D.O. lies partly in its prevailing granitic soils, but also in its climate, which features extreme diurnal temperature ranges, that can reach 30 degrees Celsius in the dog days of summer. There are but 25 estates in the appellation, and ours is one of the best. Young scion Esteban Boo-Riveiro is the well-schooled and impassioned winemaker. Vineyard practices are essentially organic, production from the estate’s 10 hectares very limited.

- 2016 Frago do Corvo Blanco (Godello) NEW \$156**
The Godello here is actually two distinctive types, one of which is confusingly called Verdello – an older clone that produces small, tight bunches of grapes ending in a point, whose juice is tauter and more mineral than the newer clone. 2016 takes the mineral aspect of this wine to new heights.
- 2016 Frago do Corvo Tinto (Mencia) NEW \$156**
Esteban’s touch with Mencia is equally assured. The wine’s middle-weight surprises a little after the huge colour, but the fusion of earth and fruit is simply perfect. A lovely counterpoint to the more ethereal style of Ribeira Sacra and the common rusticity of Bierzo.

ADEGA FAMILIAR ELADIO PIÑEIRO.....ORGANIC

My charming interpreter had little to do when I visited Eladio Piñeiro this May, because the irrepressible Eladio can reach an audience no matter what their level of Spanish. One of the founders of large scale Albariño production in Spain with Mar de Frades in 1983, he left it all behind when his wife fell ill in 2003, selling the winery and keeping only a few prized vineyards. Now he dedicates himself to making artisanal hand-crafted Albariño (also hand-bottled and hand labeled....you get the drift) in the prime vineyard area of the Salnés Valley. Additionally, and most unusually, they make red wine in Portugal’s Alentejo, where they have a second home. His (fully recovered) wife Carmen designs the whimsical labels, he commissioned the unique and patented bottle shapes, everything is bio-dynamic except a few parcels in transition, and the wines are as original as they sound. Don’t miss them, and don’t wait - total production is about 5,000 cases.

- 2016 “Envidiacochina” Albariño (Rias Baixas) \$200**
The name means “the envy of the worm”, the pithy Spanish way of conveying that “I want to be in your shoes when good things are happening”. This is the “second” wine, which Eladio resisted making for years, but debuted with the 2011 vintage. It spends six months on the lees in stainless steel, with weekly batonnage, and is then blended with 15% Frore de Carmen from the previous vintage and held a year in the bottle before release. Super-charged Albariño with honey and tropical fruit, but showing also the lees contact with an almost balsamic sweetness and a mineral finish.
- 2013 Frore de Carme Albariño (Rias Baixas) NEW \$308 NET**
Abandon everything you think you know about Albariño when you taste this wine, which was on the lees for fourteen months with monthly batonnage, then given extended bottle age before release. Think instead of recent releases of aged Muscadet, but then add a layer of fruit and density you will never get in that region, and the cognate becomes somewhere between Muscadet and Riesling, a land of milk and honey that you want to visit again and again.

- 2007 **“La Coartada” (Alentejo - Portugal) (80% Aragonez, 15% Alicante Bouschet, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon)** **\$256 NET**
- 2006 **“La Coartada” (Alentejo - Portugal) (80% Aragonez, 15% Alicante Bouschet, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon)** **\$240 NET**

Eladio wanted to make red wine, and he knew Rias Baixas was not the place for it, so he bought an estate with vineyards near his holiday home in the Alentejo and made a red wine which is again about as far from an "industrial" wine as you can get. Four YEARS in new barrels, 3 years in stainless after that, at least six months in the bottle, no clarification, no fining etc. , designed to be drunk on release but will age effortlessly...The methods are somewhat evocative of López de Heredia in the sense that the wine is released when deemed ready to drink, while remaining capable of much longer aging. But the warmer Portuguese climate makes for a broader shouldered vein, not at all overripe but concentrated, minerally, and sublime.

MESTRES (Penedès)

We are very excited to bring you a new cava producer, though Mestres and "new" are not words which co-exist often. Indeed Mestres not only pioneered production with no dosage (in 1945) but actually registered the word “cava” in 1959, and these are recent developments for them. The current owners are the 30th generation to run the estate, as the first records of the family as vinegrowers and négociants date back to 1312. In the 1600’s they began construction of the winery in San Sadurni d’Anoia, which was finished in 1861. They bottled their first sparkling wine in 1925, and opened their first bottle to celebrate Christmas in 1928. They make López de Heredia seem like arrivistes!

All that aside, it is the quality of the wines that drew our attention. The youngest of their wines is aged 2 years in the cellar, making all of their bottlings either Reserva or Gran Reserva. In order to achieve cavas that are full and rich, development is never rushed - the wines undergo a natural stabilization process during their long aging, so that the crystals which form can then be disgorged along with the yeasts. All of their production is aged under cork during tirage, and all bottles are riddled and disgorged by hand. They have about six vintages worth of stock in their impressive cellars under the main square of San Sadurni. They also have the luxury, being so long on the scene, of owning excellent vineyard land not yet in production that they are carefully and methodically bringing on stream.

- N.V. Cava “1312” Brut Reserva** **\$164**

Although made from the same three classic grapes as Castell d’Age below, and despite also being on the dry side (6 gm. of dosage), this cava makes a friskier and fruitier impression, while retaining a refreshing tang.

- 2012 Cava “Coquet” Brut Nature Gran Reserva** **\$236 NET**

Four years on the lees have imparted to this wine a marked depth and length of flavor. Undosed, it holds its dryness effortlessly. A cava to eat with.

CASTELL D’AGE (Penedès).....BIO-DYNAMIC

This top-flight producer of dry, long-aged Cava is a superb discovery. With several geographically diverse parcels to work with, the resemblance to Champagne is suggestive. This is Cava with attitude from a woman-run estate that pioneered organic viticulture in Penedès and is now certified by Demeter. After the recent triumphant visit to California of Olivia Junyent, we are happy to have several new wines from her to sell. Like Mestres, they use no giro-pallettes. Brother Josep is the impassioned director of viticulture and a fervent believer in bio-dynamism.

- N.V. Cava “Anne Marie” Brut Nature Reserva** **\$152**

A splendid introduction to the house’s style, showing elegance and length deriving from extended lees-aging and fastidious treatment in both vineyard and cellar. On the dry side, with zero dosage, this is a Cava that punches way above its weight. Like all Castell d’Age sparkling wines, it is hand-riddled.

- 2013 Cava “Aurèlia” Brut Nature Gran Reserva** **\$200**

This is an authoritative, fine Cava which brings off the challenge of no dosage with aplomb. The addition of 10% Chardonnay to the traditional blend of Macabeo (40%), Xarel-lo (40%) and Parellada (10%) lends it a measure of suaveté, while the minimum of 30 months’ aging on the lees imparts a beautifully complex and long flavour. This is the acme of refinement in Cava, well worth its price.

- N.V. Cava “1988” Brut Nature Reserva** **\$236 NET**

*1988 was the year when Castell d’Age was founded, and this cava made from pure Xarel-lo is intended to represent a peak of the house’s potential for elegant, fine-grained sparkling wines of breed and length. **DEMETER CERTIFIED.***

- 2016 L’Essència del Xarel-lo** **\$160**

Grown in a single stony, chalk plot planted to vines over 25 years old, this wine packs an astonishing amount of sour-tinged yet succulent fruit into its 12.5% frame. We were allocated just 50 cases.

2016 Garnatxa 0% SO2 \$160
*It is not surprising that an estate with Castell d'Age's long-standing organic credentials would wish to see what they could do in the "Natural" wine sphere. What is surprising is just how sheerly normal and delicious this licorella-grown example is, bursting with vigour and fruit. **DEMETER CERTIFIED.***

BUIL & GINÉ (Priorato / Montsant / Rueda / Toro)

The Buil and Giné family returned to their winemaking roots in the rapidly evolving Priorat region in 1996 and since then have expanded into neighboring Montsant, as well as Rueda and Toro. The defining thread linking their wines seems to be pure fruit expression, richness without heaviness and excellent price-quality ratio. Young Xavier Buil, the proprietor, shows an uncanny sensibility and instinct for proportion for one so new to the craft.

2013 Nosis, Rueda Blanco (100% Verdejo) \$132

2011 Nosis, Rueda Blanco (100% Verdejo) \$136

It would be immodest of us to claim that this is the best Rueda that money can buy, but so many satisfied customers have said it that we at least allow ourselves to repeat the compliment. It is Xavi Buil's conviction that only pure Verdejo yields a wine true to the region. In the face of this wine's explosively musky nose, its suave texture enlivened by vivid acidity, and its prodigious palate coverage, there is little room for argument. A benchmark if ever there was one.

2015 Giné Giné, Priorat (Garnacha, Cariñena) NEW \$180

This unoaked old-vines cuvee remains an exceptional bargain in this pricey neighborhood. Bottled with screw-caps. Bold and full of flavor in 2015.

2010 Joan Giné Giné Roure Classic, Priorat \$296 NET
(45% Cariñena, 45% Garnacha, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon)

All of Xavi Buil's hallmark qualities are here : sweet but not over-ripe fruit, frank but unexaggerated oak, relatively moderate alcohol and licorella tang. This is as sheerly drinkable as "classic" Priorato gets.

2014 17-XI, Montsant (Garnacha, Cariñena and Tempranillo) \$148

It could be said that Montsant is to Priorato what Crozes is to Hermitage, except that it lacks nothing in the way of spectacular landscape. The main distinguishing feature actually is the soil, which is not licorella. Endowed with the kind of richness derived from old vines (maximum age 45 years) this beauty sings of stone fruits and a distinctive minerality.

2009 Buil, Toro (100% Tempranillo) \$320 NET

2008 Buil, Toro (100% Tempranillo) \$252 NET

Xavi continues to make superb Toro, with a relative lightness of touch compared to the norms of the region.

N.V. Vermut \$224 NET

*Xavi turned a lot of heads when he unveiled this new product a few years back. A dramatically flavorful and imposing Vermouth, this has proved a major hit with mixologists everywhere, who have warmed to its unusually dry and forceful flavour. The herbs are grown organically and macerated for two years in oak barrels before being blended with white Priorato wine. A *solera* system that dates back to their first, century-old vermouths, ensures uniformity of taste from bottle to bottle. Delicious neat, it will also elevate any cocktail to which it is added, whether a simple Martini or something more exotic.*

ARANLEÓN (Requena - Valencia) ORGANIC NEW!

100 miles inland from Valencia lies this impressive estate run by a husband-and-wife team since 2000, and certified organic since 2007. Its 120 hectares are divided among four fincas planted to several different varieties, both indigenous and not. The vinification is conducted in a newly-constructed facility dug six meters below the original building, so all essential functions can be conducted by gravity-feed. The wines are lusty and full of flavor and life, but are always within bounds. The labels are whimsical and attractive and the prices beyond fair. We think we have discovered a winner here.

2017 Encuentro (100% Bobal) ORGANIC NEW \$88

Before the rise of Tempranillo, Bobal and Garnacha were the dominant black grapes grown in Spain. Garnacha has staged a huge comeback in esteem in recent years, due to the efforts of such proponents as our own Frontonio. Maybe it is now the turn of Bobal, which can turn out utterly delicious wines like this one. Juicy and smooth, but with a reassuring lick of asperity, it evokes blackcurrants on the nose and offers sheer pleasure on the palate. Ridiculously cheap for the quality, especially considering the well-known additional expense of organic production.

BODEGAS FRONTONIO (Valdejalón)

We get blind solicitations from wineries literally every day, but this one caught our eye immediately, because it was penned by none other than María José López de Heredia. She said, "if there is one person in the wine world that I could recommend it is Fernando Mora, because he gives me hope for the future of the world of wine in Spain." In his own words, this is what Fernando does: "recovering old vineyards in Valdejalón area in the north east part of Spain. Producing single vineyards garnachas from old vines up to 98 years old. Something we are very proud to do." With his two partners, Mario López and Daniel Latasa, they style themselves the "Garage Winery", that being a literal description of the facility in which they craft their wines. Oh, and Fernando just became a Master of Wine, earning special distinction for his treatise on the Garnacha in Campo de Borja.

The little-known region of Valdejalón, centered around their village of Épila on the banks of the River Jalón, nestles north of Calatayud. The climate is Mediterranean, with significant diurnal temperature changes and low rainfall. The vineyards lie at altitudes between 350 and 700 meters, and benefit from loose soil structure with significant limestone content. Many of the best vineyards are also conspicuously schistous. The team's preference is for north-facing slopes, rich in stones, and planted to old vines. In their masterly hands, they give rise to Grenache wines (red AND white) of a purity and intensity we rarely see, at a price ridiculously fair, which have already been acclaimed by reviewers everywhere. One of the most remarkable aspects of this story is that Frontonio is quite literally the only producer making wines under the Valdejalón imprimatur. It is a tribute to Fernando's intuition, particularly, that he could divine the remarkable potential of this area, whose results are, to our subjective judgment, consistently superior to anything else in Aragon.

2016 "Microcósmico" Macabeo (Valdejalón) SOON

Macabeo is, of course, known as Viura in Rioja. As there, it can yield such a shapely, rich and well-structured wine with honied, expressive fruit and expansive palate.

2015 "El Casetero" Garnacha (Campo de Borja) \$96

Just to the northwest of Valdejalón, and enjoying a similar climate and topography, strongly influenced by the cold, north-eastern cierzo winds, this IGP styles itself the "Empire of Garnacha". With good reason! We were frankly stunned by the price-quality ratio of this entry-level wine. Produced from dry-farmed, head-pruned vines and fermented with indigenous yeasts, this shows the ripe, plummy and spicy side of the grape, with good freshness and length.

2015 "Microcósmico" Garnacha (Valdejalón) \$144

More than any wine, this convinced us Fernando was on to something. Vibrant, sweet fruit, oozing with white pepper and very much at ease with itself, this wine expresses purity and completeness throughout.

2014 "Telescópico" Garnacha (Valdejalón) \$192

Equally pure, but a step up in richness, sweetness, and high-toned expression of the grape, this is balanced, focused and long. It exemplifies the "cool" aspect that separates Frontonio from other practitioners of the art of producing well-balanced wines in warm climates.

R. LÓPEZ DE HEREDIA (Rioja)

This family-owned winery makes highly individual wines in a style essentially unchanged since its inception in 1877. They grow all their grapes using organic methods, ferment using only natural yeasts and do not filter their wines. They employ four full-time coopers to make their barrels. Gravonia, Tondonia, Bosconia and Cubillo are all individual vineyards which have been in the family for generations. Patience is a family watchword, as this bodega thinks nothing of waiting twenty years before releasing a wine. Their "Crianzas" are aged like others' "Reservas"; the "Reservas" as long as others' "Gran Reservas". And the ultimate accolade of "Gran Reserva" is accorded to only the very greatest vintages. Rarely are there more than three of these in a decade. These are uniquely traditional Riojas of international repute. Both red and white are capable of staggering longevity. We are immensely proud to represent them. The only rub is that the estate's uniqueness has now become universally recognised with a resultant run on stocks. Starting in 2014, our allocations of almost every wine have been essentially halved, so please prepare not to get everything you want.

2009 Viña Cubillo Crianza (75% Tempranillo, 25% Garnacha) \$224 NET

Redolent of red fruits, tomato and mint, equal parts rustic and refined, this earthy, lively red bears no resemblance to the current "international" style of Rioja, nor to the pale, oaky, "smooth" overcropped wines of the 1970's. Cubillo stands out in today's wine universe for the mannerliness and clarity of its expression and its unmistakable class. In warm years such as 2009, it doesn't exhibit any particular excess of ripeness.

2006 Viña Bosconia Reserva (80% Tempranillo, 15% Garnacha, 5% Mazuelo & Graciano) NEW \$324 NET

Bosconia tends to be rounder and earthier than Tondonia, leading to Burgundy/Bordeaux comparisons.

2005	Viña Tondonia Reserva (75% Tempranillo, 20% Garnacha, 5% Mazuelo & Graciano)		\$380 NET
2004	Viña Tondonia Reserva	6/1500	\$400 NET
2005	Viña Tondonia Reserva	12 /375	\$220 NET
2005	Viña Tondonia Reserva	6/1500 NEW	\$440 NET

Tondonia typically stays in the oak a year longer than Bosconia, so this was released later. Despite the extra wood, sweet fruit and lead pencil notes dominate this wine, whose brightness and liveliness promise decades of potential. Ancient vines and great know-how ensure that Tondonia always delivers the goods, even in the year after a great act like 2001. This is the one wine offered us by Lopez de Heredia whose supply is essentially unrestricted, so have at it! 2004 was a justly anticipated vintage in the great tradition. 2005 arrives with an elevated reputation, too, though it is important to recall that Tondonia Reserva is one of the world's most consistently reliable great wines.

VIÑA IJALBA (Rioja).....ORGANIC

At first glance this rather modern producer might seem to have little in common with its illustrious companion above, but in fact Maria José was pleased to hear we would be representing the property. Ijalba has set the standard for environmental awareness in the region, from its organic production to its extensive re-cycling and environmental certification for the winery. The vineyards were all planted in disused quarries, which perhaps explains the remarkable minerality they are endowed with, especially the bigger reds with bottle age. The estate's other distinction is the championing of the less-known varieties of Rioja such as the two Maturanas and Graciano.

2016	Maturana Blanca		\$148
2015	Maturana Blanca		\$144

This is quite literally the only Maturana Blanca in the world, grown on two hectares owned by Ijalba. And yet it is the variety with the oldest known written citation in Rioja, dating from 1622. Faintly golden, opulently peachy on the nose, and then surprisingly stony and long on the palate, this is quite a character, that effortlessly withstands its classic burgundian treatment. As singular and obscure a wine as can be imagined!

2016	Livor (100% Tempranillo)		\$96
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It is hard to imagine a wine more perfectly capturing Tempranillo's potential for cherry fruitiness and old-fashioned Rioja crispness. A silly quotient of character and quality for the price.

2014/5	Solferino (90% Tempranillo, 10% Maturana Tinta)		\$108
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Packing a little more heft and structure than the easy-going Livor, Solferino represents a selection of superior grapes that are well suited to an understated élevage in four- and five-year barriques. A subtly rendered Rioja that slyly bridges the divide between traditional and modern.

2015	Graciano (100% Graciano)		\$168
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Ijalba's mission statement is to resurrect the traditional grapes of Rioja, and this wine from their 20 hectare Graciano vineyard (the largest in the world) has been the flagship since they premiered the varietal bottling in 1995. Growers moved away from Graciano because of its inconveniently low yields, but the high acidity and intoxicating perfume of the grape are a huge part of what makes Rioja blends distinctive. The 2015 brings heft and swagger, and should age grandly. One cannot help but notice the imitators this forerunner now has.

2014	Dionisio Ruiz Ijalba (100% Maturana Tinta)		\$220 NET
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It is safe to say, despite some seemingly authoritative claims to the contrary, that this rare autochthonous Rioja variety is NOT the same grape as the Trousseau of the Jura or the Bastardo of the Douro, with which pale, some would say effete, varieties this strapping, brooding beast of a wine has nothing in common. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only mono-varietal version of this grape on the market. It miraculously combines improbably dark colour and biting peppery nose with a fruit expression that is unmistakably Riojan, suggesting that the terroir of this fabled land really does in the end conquer all. This is as singular and compelling a wine as Spain offers in its vein.

BODEGAS VALDUERO (Ribera del Duero)

Although Ribera del Duero is now well established in international markets, one forgets how comparatively new the DO is - the Valduero estate, established in 1984, was only the sixth in the appellation at the time! During the intervening 25 years, they have built up an impressive resume as a winery offering quality and value from grapes sourced from their 200 hectares of bush-trained, low yielding vineyards. The sisters Yolanda and Caroline García, daughters of founder Gregorio García Alvarez, run an impressive operation, that goes from strength to strength.

2016	Yunquera (100% Albillo)		\$160
	<i>This, the solitary white wine that they produce, is a head-turner. The Albillo is an autochthonous variety that renders a golden-hued, fullish dry white with a startlingly floral aroma not unlike Viognier. This is the eighth vintage we have imported of a unique wine that has developed a devoted following in California.</i>		
2015	Finca Azaya (Castilla y Leon) (100% Tinto Fino)		\$164
	<i>This new presentation of the wine from their Toro vineyards is an entirely compelling rendition of Tempranillo in this singular locale. The huge boysenberry fruit is beautifully contained by the 14 months spent in oak, and the overall result is a joyously rollicking wine that manages to be both serious and hedonistic.</i>		
2012	Arbucala Esencia (Toro) (100% Tinta de Toro)		\$136
	<i>Produced from vineyards owned by their winemaker, this is Toro as seen through Ribera del Duero eyes - exuberant and fruity, just over 14%, raspberry-scented and thoroughly engaging.</i>		
2014	Crianza (100% Tempranillo)		\$248 NET
2011	Crianza (100% Tempranillo)	24/375	\$240 NET
	<i>Valduero's tendency towards a finesse and style unusual in Ribe</i>		
2011	Reserva (100% Tempranillo)		\$388 NET
	<i>Valduero's vineyards are amongst the highest in the D.O., with several resultant benefits. The grapes hang longer while retaining their acidity and not developing excessive alcohol. This Reserva is aged largely in French oak, with a smattering from eastern Europe thrown in. It is lithe and persistent, with a palpable saltiness in the finish. Very much built for the long haul.</i>		

BODEGAS PEREZ PASCUAS (Ribera del Duero)

We weren't looking to add another Ribera del Duero producer to our portfolio, but when one of the few that is actually older than Valduero came knocking, we couldn't pass it up. The brothers Benjamin, Manuel and Adolfo Perez Pascuas established the winery in 1980, but their father Mauro actually planted grapes well before that. So, you have a well-established family business dedicated to top quality wines from all estate grapes featuring older vines. Don't forget one of the key quality factors in Ribera del Duero -at 2624 feet over sea level, these vines benefit from the wide range in evening and day time temperatures which preserve the acidity and hence freshness of the wines.

2014	El Pedrosal (100% Tempranillo)		\$172
	<i>Fruity and pretty, yes, but this entry level wine demands much more attention for its mix of richness and elegance than its relatively modest price would suggest. Serious wine from serious people.</i>		
2013	Viña Pedrosa Crianza (100% Tempranillo)		\$264 NET
	<i>The estate's flagship vineyard has a remarkable propensity for delivering over-performing yet understated wines year-in, year-out. Meaty and fresh, with a signature saltiness to season the flesh. Perhaps it is the memory of the extravagant banquets of Cordero grilled over vine cuttings that the family customarily offers its visitors which evokes these carnal associations, but there was never a better wine created for lamb than this.</i>		
2012	La Navilla Reserva (100% Tempranillo)		\$376
	<i>La Navilla comes from a single, eponymous, south-facing vineyard, the highest in the estate, where the vines average 35-40 years old. It is aged, uniquely, for 20 months in exclusively French oak. Fresh berries ooze from the glass, and the deep color suggests an altogether different wine from the others, but reassurance comes when the jamminess is cut by fresh, bright acidity in the finish.</i>		

PORTUGAL

We visited Portugal in February of 2009, frankly on something of a whim, and were astonished to find producers of this quality available for California. Return visits to all our people have convinced us we had a tiger by the tail. As late entrants to the field we are truly honored to represent this range of producers, from the biodynamic hipster Vasco Croft at Aphros to the solidly grounded Mário Sérgio Alves Nuno of Quinta das Bageiras. Isolated for years from the "happening" areas of Europe, the Portuguese have been free to make wine their own way, for better or worse. Things are changing, and we feel we have caught this country (and our producers) riding a wave towards international recognition for their coiled, snappy whites and mysterious, minerally reds. In no small part due to your enthusiastic embrace of these wines, we have been able to extend our reach to most of the significant wine-growing regions.

APHROS (Vinho Verde, Lima).....BIO-DYNAMIC

What more do you need to know than that Vasco Croft, an architect, educator and devotee of Rudolf Steiner, discovered the mysteries of wine in his mid-thirties through the intervention of a Brazilian Buddhist monk? From there you intuit that the path leads directly to starting a winery and farming biodynamically, right? We are proud to be the first to import his wines into the USA, but he has already blazed a trail through the English press, with luminaries like Jamie Goode and Sara Ahmed leading the praise. In person he is as vivid, energetic and unbuttoned as his wines. Endlessly restless, he is currently engaged in an ambitious project to create a cultural center/restaurant and a food forest on his recently expanded estate.

2015 Loureiro \$136

One lovely aspect of our Portuguese whites is that though they mostly play in the same field - lively, snappy, unoaked - they are as different from each other as night and day. This one starts off citrusy/grassy and fills out with honey, before ending with a hint of fennel. Need we say that it's much more than a simple palate cleanser? Indeed, it is one of those gratifying wines that prove to be fascinating mid-term developers despite its modest price tag.

2011 Daphne (Loureiro) \$192

Vasco swears by Loureiro, and who can argue with him in the face of such a compelling wine? Made only in the best years, Daphne is given 70% skin contact and 30% barrel fermentation (used oak and chestnut). Pure, vibrant and long, it sports a mere 12% of alcohol, proving that a wine does not need to be big in order to be important.

2017 Vinhão SOON

How much red Vinho Verde have you had recently? You'll want more after tasting this, though from the reviews it may be the exception that proves the rule among these wines. Crazy deep purple in the glass, sappy, wild berry fruit, huge acidity and freshness and more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Just when you thought you had tried everything, along comes this!

PASSAGEM (Douro)

These wines are a collaboration between the Bergqvist family of Quinta de la Rosa and their genius winemaker, Jorge Moreira (see below). A few years ago, they bought the Quinta das Bandeiras, an estate in the Upper Conga Valley, quite remote from their familiar locus in Pinhão. They are convinced that, once their new plantings have developed deep-enough roots, they will produce wines of equal quality but strikingly different character to the La Rosa wines.

2012 Douro White (40% Gouveio, 30% Viosinho, 30% Rabigato) \$120

Poised, sappy and stony wine in the tradition of the popular DouRosa white. Faintly resinous flavour with lip-smacking acidity and unexpected length on the palate.

2016 Douro Red NEW \$128

Made from a kitchen sink of traditional port varieties, this sumptuously-coloured red brings off the difficult feat of offering the Douro's inherent power in a gently fruity style that is nonetheless true to its roots. 2016 was a cooler year than its predecessor, yielding a more moderate wine – not such a bad thing!

2012 Reserve Red (45% Touriga Franca, 40% Touriga Nacional, 15% Tinta Cao) 6/750 \$100 NET

The warmth of the Upper Douro was tamed by the relatively restrained 2012 vintage, so while we have excellent color here, and lovely cocoa notes from the French oak, there is also an invigorating fresh snap to this lush wine. We feel it's a harbinger of great things to come from the area.

N.V. Tawny Port 6/500 \$76

This is the producer's "five year old" style, aged in smaller barrels than the ruby for faster evolution. Even so, it is ruddier in hue than the name would suggest. This is vivid, authentic tawny port.

N.V. Ruby Reserve Port 6/500 \$76

It is hard to conceive of a more sheerly joyous and delicious "basic" port than this. We could not resist it, especially in the fetching squat 500 ml. bottle that we have selected for the Passagem ports.

2012 L.B.V. Port 6/750 \$104

The genius of this style of port is that it strikes a perfect balance between the added structure of vintage wine and the supple texture gained from extended barrel-aging. Especially delicious in 2012.

N.V. Ten Year Old Tawny Port 6/500 \$120 NET

Many a port-fancier swears by aged tawny as being the finest example of the genre. This seductively classy wine bears out such a contention, with its subtle brandied raisin aroma and its integrated, not-too-sweet palate.

2011 Vintage Port 6/750 \$260 NET

From a big-time vintage, this wine does not stint in its delivery of powerful but shapely fruit. Obviously for the long haul, it nonetheless offers considerable pleasure now by dint of its sheer endowment.

QUINTA DE LA ROSA (Douro)

Port was not what drew us to Portugal, but it was hard to resist the offerings from this singular estate. Whether as one of the first wineries to make table wines in the Douro or one of the very few to use A level (top quality) grapes throughout their port range, they are always ahead of the curve here, and owner Sophia Bergqvist deserves much of the credit. Since hiring Jorge Moreira, Portugal's "Winemaker of the Year" in 2010, they have gone from strength to strength in both table and fortified wines.

2011 DouRosa White (40% Gouveio, 30% Viosinho, 30% Rabigato) \$120

2010 DouRosa White (40% Gouveio, 30% Viosinho, 30% Rabigato) \$124

Perhaps these three varieties served as the mother ship for Viognier, because the flowery, honied fruit here resembles that grape right now all the way to the slightly amaro apricot pit finish. A flowery, generous wine with surprising minerality and complexity for its price. Sceptics will be confounded by its beautiful evolution in the bottle.

2011 Estate White (35% Viosinho, 35% Rabigato and others) \$164

Tense and firm, with a subtle amalgam of flowery sweetness and salty minerality, the whole is bound by the artful use of 50% barrique-aging, that you only know about because we mention it. Brilliant wine. The 2011 reflects the compensatory bounties of the year after 2010's difficulties.

QUINTA DE SAES/QUINTA DA PELLADA (Dão)

Alvaro Castro is a true original in the world of wine and his two estates (separate properties, but the same wines are bottled under both names) are among the leaders of this appellation set on a high plateau between mountain ranges. The Pellada estate dates back to the 16th century and wine was made there until 1945, when the family reverted to selling to the local co-op. Alvaro took control in 1989 and established the winery at Saes and has been building a reputation second to none for both red and white wines of great complexity and aging potential ever since. Look for some of his top-end wines in coming months.

2012 Quinta de Saes Reserva White (80% Encruzado, 20% Cercial) \$168

While Encruzado does the heavy lifting in this imaginative blend, the Cercial adds some attractive bottom notes and textural intrigue. Not better or worse than the Encruzado below, but satisfyingly different.

2013 Quinta de Saes Encruzado Reserva White \$160

*We tasted an older example of this wine (from 2005) and found a kinship to Chablis. Even in its youth, it is minerally, but there's more fruit in these relatively ripe vintages, and over time it will blend into the minerality until they are inseparable - supple and flinty at once. Encruzado will make the reputation of Dão as a great white region, without a doubt. **LOW STOCK***

2010 Quinta da Pellada Carrocel 6/750 \$408 NET

*This is Alvaro's peak cuvée of the Dão's signature Touriga Nacional grape. A magnificently endowed yet balanced wine with the aromatic stature of a great Côte Rôtie. Vin de garde of the highest imaginable class. **VERY LOW STOCK.***

QUINTA DAS BAGEIRAS (Bairrada)

Luis Pato has put this region on the map for many wine drinkers, although he has recently hitched his star to the larger region of Beiras, which gives him more flexibility in the use of grape varieties. Baga is the region's claim to fame - a tannic, acidic and just plain old-fashioned grape which needs coaxing to express its charms. Our man Mário Sérgio Alves Nuño makes Baga the traditional way, fermented in concrete lagares and aged in large, old oak ovals. With some age, it develops a stunningly expressive nose and is a powerfully structured wine perfect with the local specialty, roast suckling pig. We are now importing his sparkling wines as well, which represent 60% of his production.

2015 Espumante Colheita Bruto Natural (Maria Gomes, Bical, Sercial) \$120

Mário Sérgio makes his bubbies in an absolutely uncompromisingly dry style that shines a spotlight on the powerful earthiness of Bairrada. Bracing, pure and appley, this demands food and offers exceptional value for such character.

2015 Espumante Colheita Rosé Bruto Natural (Baga) \$132

This first importation of the small-production Rosé is in the uncompromising tradition of the white, only that it shows off Baga's flair for yielding tense, vibrant and flavor-filled bubbly in an undosed style. Crazy value.

2004 Espumante Grande Reserva Bruto Natural 6/750 \$132 NET

Not everyone will appreciate the markedly antique quality of this wine, which was disgorged in 2012. But if you accept its positive yellow colour and its unmistakable evolution, you may be seduced by the wine's sheer vinosity and intensity. Its autolytic flavours feint towards Champagne but in the end it remains resolutely true to Bairrada and to its visionary maker.

2016	Colheita Branco (Maria Gomes, Bical, Sercial)		\$104
2015	Colheita Branco (Maria Gomes, Bical, Sercial)		\$96
<i>Anyone who had the pleasure of tasting the 1994 vintage of this wine at the Top 100 tasting in 2011 will remember how improbably fresh and refined it was. One does not normally expect a sprightly, Muscat-scented light white like this to age and develop. Well, think again. Drink it or age it, there is no better value in our portfolio. The 2016 enjoys a spiffy new label.</i>			
2013	Branco Garrafeira (Maria Gomes, Bical)	6/750	\$136 NET
<i>Availability of the estate's top white is tiny and we have until now always missed the boat in ordering it. In the lovely 2013 vintage, however, our timing was just right. Matured in old oak, the powerful nose is herbal and citric, veering to the wild side. Concentration and intensity of this order are suggestive of a wine capable of long aging. While not left in oak as long as the wines of López de Heredia, there is nonetheless something reminiscent of the Rioja masters here.</i>			
2011	Colheita Tinto (85% Baga, 15% Touriga Nacional)		\$96
<i>Actually, the red counterpart to the wine above is every bit as much a character and a bargain. A naturally liquorous wine that provides a svelte and ripe introduction to the singular joys of the great Baga variety.</i>			
2015	Reserva Tinto "Chumbado" (60% Baga, 40% Touriga Nacional)		\$144
<i>Part of Mário Sérgio's genius is to find the inner sweetheart in the brooding Baga – or maybe it just needs the right partner in Touriga Nacional to bring out its kinder, gentler side. This is a spicy, open, incense-like wine with a strong brambly undertow. It should age very nicely. 2015 was a top vintage here. "Chumbado" is a new fanciful name.</i>			
2011	Tinto Garrafeira (Baga)	6/750	\$160 NET
2010	Tinto Garrafeira (Baga)	6/750	\$128 NET
<i>This is world-class wine made from a parcel of vines over 75 year old. Old-style Nebbiolo is perhaps the best cognate, but married with some Roussillon (think Gauby) opulence, with toasted walnut and coffee notes in the bouquet and powerful structure. Not cheap, but well worth the price for a flavor from the past that could improve for 30 or 40 years. The 2011 garnered some extravagant ratings from the press.</i>			

FÍLIPA PÁTO (Beiras)

BIO-DYNAMIC

There are few rules when it comes to building a portfolio, but one gold standard is that if you start with quality, you will attract more of the same. Filipa is good friends with Alvaro Castro and Mário Sérgio (not to mention Heidi Schröck), Vasco Croft loves her wines, and you can guess the rest. This daughter of legendary Bairrada producer Luis Pato began by producing wines in the larger appellation of Beiras (and the Dão). She purchased a small winery in Bairrada, which she has now significantly expanded (by digging downwards!). Eventually, it is assumed, she will reunite with her father's estate, but, in the meantime, she has carved a big international name for herself by dint of her strikingly expressive and honest wines, so reflective of her own character. Joined now by her husband, renowned Belgian sommelier Willem Wouters, they have enthusiastically embraced the rigours of bio-dynamism. They have been steadily buying up new parcels of land, all within 10 km. of the home-base, some planted to old vines, others being replanted with massal selections. The estate is up to 15 hectares now, with a final goal of 22. As you can see, they constantly sell out.

N.V.	3B Rosé Sparkling Wine (80% Baga, 20% Bical)		\$156
<i>Let Filipa describe this for us—"Raspberries and strawberries on the nose, the palate has the freshness and body of the Baga grape and the creaminess of Bical." She says, "I believe that Baga and Bical in Bairrada are like the Chardonnay and the Pinot in Champagne. They need each other to make a balance..." we will just add that the farming is organic, only indigenous yeasts are used, and there is very little RS...</i>			
2017	FP Branco (Arinto, Bical)	NEW	\$140
<i>Filipa never fails to deliver an unlikely quotient of animation and sheer character in this, her "basic" white wine. We will sell our allocation fast, so jump on it while we have it!</i>			
2016	Nossa Calcário Branco (Bical)	NEW 6/750	\$144 NET
<i>For her trophy white, Filipa uses only her best and oldest Bical grapes from the Ois do Bairro, where stony clay overlays an extremely chalky subsoil. Fermented burgundy-stye in 500 liter barrels with batonnage every two weeks until bottling in May, this is always rated one of the top whites in Portugal. A study in contrast, with creaminess balanced by an assertive flinty character – as if Meursault were made in Sancerre.</i>			
2016	FP Baga (Bairrada)	NEW	\$140
<i>Filipa's "basic" Baga is a conscious effort to present the grape in a kinder, gentler fashion while capturing its singular aromatic and structural characteristics. She goes from strength to strength.</i>			

2015 Baga “Post Quercus” (Beiras) 6 x 500 \$80 NET
The magic that Filipa wreaks on the recalcitrant Baga has to be seen to be believed. Inspired by burgundy, she tames the beast and offers us a wine of breathtaking perfume and improbably silky texture. A wonderful juxtaposition to the more rugged style of her friend Mário Sérgio at Quinta das Bageiras. This was made in amphora, whose transpirational qualities are of huge benefit to the grapes. Just 11% alcohol!

2015 Baga “Territorio Vivo” (Bairrada) 6 x 750 \$120 NET
Filipa has been methodically buying up small parcels of old-vine Baga (particularly) throughout Bairrada. This has enabled her to make a larger palate of wines, including this one, which is intended to showcase the nature of her incomparable region. Fermented in lagares, with 30-40% whole clusters, then aged in a combination of foudre, amphora and pipas, it is a forceful yet fine ambassador, nicely contrasted to the more delicate charms of the Post Quercus.

TERRAS D’ALTER (Alentejo)

The Alentejo is the most southerly Portuguese region from which we buy wine, with the attendant risk of excessive heat. But that is not to reckon with the instincts and 30-year experience of Peter Bright, the celebrated Australian who is one of the founding partners of this young estate. One of the first of the “Flying Winemakers”, he has been settled in Portugal for many years now and arguably has more experience of the country’s varied vineyards than anyone else, allied to a top-notch technical know-how. He liked the soils of this corner and planted his flag here, with a view to making good value, modern wines from indigenous varieties. He has succeeded with a vengeance, so you can find in this range a brilliant collage of single varietal wines at very modest prices that offer you a fascinating view of some of Portugal’s most interesting varieties.

2014 Vinho Branco (Arinto, Ripeiro, Viognier) \$96
Rather like the “basic” white of Quinta das Bageiras, this offers an unexpected quotient of character for such a modest price-tag. A panoply of white fruits and flowers on the nose lead to a lively and surprisingly substantial palate.

2012 Siria \$108
Siria is the ancestral name for the grape more commonly called Ripeiro. Peter located a small plot of old vines of exceptional quality for this varietal bottling and 2012 is its first vintage. It is a plangently expressive, lithe and completely dry wine with a distinctive flavour and unusual length. In its fifth year now, it remains pale, fresh and vigorous. Ridiculous quality for the money.

2012 Alvarinho \$112
It has been gratifying to see the enthusiasm which this wine has garnered despite its improbable origin, for Alvarinho is commonly regarded as a grape of Vinho Verde and Galicia. But it does beautifully down in the Alentejo, too, as evidenced by this juicy, mouth-watering example.

2011 Arinto \$104
For a grape as widely planted as this is in Portugal, it has an astonishingly low profile, for it is a real character. Blessed with an ability to retain acidity in heat, it is perfectly suited to such a warm region as Alentejo, even if it does equally well in the Vinho Verde district. This example is a slender, intense and salty wine with personality to spare.

2013 Alicante Bouschet \$116
It is not every producer who is attracted to Alicante Bouschet, but Peter Bright never shrinks from an interesting engagement. The deep hue of this “cépage teinturier” is a given. But what took us completely by surprise was the relative finesse and purity of the fruit, as well as the innate balance of such a rollicking, high-octane wine.

2014 Alfrocheiro \$116
Peter likens this grape to Pinot Noir, though it is established that it is, in fact, the same variety as the Douro’s Bastardo and the Jura’s Trousseau. Like all these wines, it has a remarkably clear fruit impression, basically one of succulent blackberries. Indeed, it could just rest on its laurels and please on that strength alone, but it has an insistent undertow of tarry earth and then a tell-tale saltiness in the finish. If you embrace this wine, we promise to bring you the wonderful Touriga Nacional, Aragonez and Syrah. And then there is the Zero Sulfur series.....

GREECE

Our love affair with Greece continues, although we have twice suffered reverses in the field of commerce. There is an irresistible allure to this most ancient of wine cultures' combination of indigenous grape varieties, Mediterranean warmth and high-altitude vineyards. So, rather like people who have known the joy of infatuation followed by the pain of rejection, but who are nonetheless optimistic enough to walk down the aisle again, we have embarked on a new set of relationships with some of the great growers in which Greece abounds. Our matchmaker is the great Markus Stolz, a German living in Greece who is single-handedly wrestling its wine-culture into the 21st century with his hugely informative website Elloinos and his tireless efforts at education and publicity. You will be impressed by the stable of mostly very small producers that he has introduced us to. And more are on their way!

KARANIKA (Amyndeon, Macedonia).....ORGANIC

This young winery was founded by a Dutch couple, Laurens Hartman and Annette van Kampen, both refugees from the business world. Cultivating just four hectares in the extreme north west of Greece, mostly at an elevation of 650 meters on slopes by Lake Vegoritis, they make their wines in a just-built gravity-flow winery. This area of Greece enjoys the coolest climate of any wine-growing district and is best known for the aristocratic Xinomavro grape, which plays a prominent role in their programme. Such has the success of their sparkling wines been on the international stage that they are now contracting with other good local growers to supply them with more grapes to meet the demand.

(2015) Xinomavro Brut, Cuvée Spéciale 6/750 \$120 NET

Laurens Hartman had the intuitive and now proven-to-be brilliant notion that Xinomavro could make exceptional sparkling wine by the classic method of Champagne. When Stellios Boutaris of Kir-Yianni, the doyen of Xinomavro producers, asked us if we had had this wine, we felt vindicated. Full of breed on the nose, it is bracing, focused and dry. We can honestly say that a better alternative to champagne has not crossed our lips for a long time. Tom Stevenson has also praised this wine's quality and singled it out not just among Greek sparklers, but compared it favorably to champagne. We are so glad to have got in on the ground floor, as Karanika is now a hot property (witness the glass-pour at Eleven Madison Park, New York's famed 3-star restaurant).

(2015/6) Xinomavro Brut Rosé 6/750 \$124 NET

Building on the success of the Cuvée Spéciale, we have now brought in our first shipment of Laurens' rosé sparkler. The forthrightly fruity nose matches the vividness of the frankly pink colour, and the palate displays a playful side that one might not have expected of the sometimes grave Xinomavro. A lovely addition to our range of offbeat pink sparkling wines from different countries.

2015 Brut Prestige (Assyrtiko and Xinomavro) 6/750 \$132 NET

Not content with making what is universally considered to be Greece's best sparkling wine, Laurens decided to make one even better – and he has succeeded! The addition of Assyrtiko lends to the already startlingly champagne-like aroma a filip of floral scent that lifts it into an even finer domain. One suspects that these are going to age very well.

2014/5 Assyrtiko \$152

Laurens does not shrink from the challenge of making a wine from Santorini's iconic grape that mounts a serious challenge to that famed island's supremacy. It does so by embracing the aromatic and fruity possibilities of Amyndeon's terroir and not seeking to mimic the saline snap of the other one. A delicious exercise in fruit and lees.

2011 Domaine Karanika Xinomavro-Limniona \$208 NET

Laurens changes his blend every year depending on what seems best for the vintage, so we get the two key Northern grapes here in an unusually high wire assemblage. There is plenty of red fruit, but lots of room for the wine to grow.

NAOUSSA

It is our belief that Naoussa, a small (436 hectares) region in Macedonia, is one of the world's greatest and most distinctive wine areas. Like Piedmont, Burgundy and the northern Rhône, it derives its fame from a single grape, in this case the noble Xinomavro. The "sour black" makes wines that are typically of unimpressive colour, with marked acidity and tannin. With age, however, they transform swan-like into scented, stylish beauties that can hold their own with all but the greatest of the world's red wines – but at a fraction of the price. We invite you to discover the not-quite-secret wines of Naoussa.

VAENI (Naoussa, Macedonia)

This must be one of the world's great wine co-operatives, on a par with La Chablisienne, the Wachau's Freie Weingärtner and the Produttori di Barbaresco. The vast majority of Naoussa's growers have tiny holdings. Only 20 or so grow enough grapes to contemplate making a living from them. Most of the rest sell them to this exemplary organization, which offers a degree of technical and marketing expertise that is quite remarkable.

2015 Naoussa (Xinomavro) NEW \$108
This is a perfect introduction to the aromatic joys of Xinomavro and its capacity for producing refined, tense and expansive red wine. It could plausibly cost much more. Let us be glad that it does not.

2010 Grande Réserve (Xinomavro) \$144
It is not clear why the Macedonians like to use French names to describe their top wines, but old habits can die hard. Made from the best grapes available and aged for a minimum of five years in wood, there is an added weight, depth and beauty here that add up to something close to greatness. We challenge you to find a wine of this class and maturity at a price remotely close to this.

DIAMANTAKOS (Naoussa, Macedonia).....ORGANIC

This pocket-sized estate is now in its third generation, but has only sold its own label for fifteen years. Young Giorgios Diamantakos is well-trained and ambitious and offers what are arguably the most dramatic wines we offer from this region. Total production averages 1000 cases!

2016 Preknadi \$216 NET

2013 Preknadi 6/750 LOWERI \$108 NET
There is not much white wine grown in Naoussa, but the best is made from this local variety and none is better than this one. Faintly reminiscent of Viognier, this is a substantial, round and imposing white, with a succulent nose and pleasing floweriness. It effortlessly sucks up the oak in which it was made. A true original which every connoisseur should get to know. The 2016 vintage ascends to unprecedented heights of contained voluptuousness and improbable cut.

2013 Naoussa (Xinomavro) 6/750 NEW \$164 NET
It is a given that Xinomavro evokes Nebbiolo more than anything, but Giorgios' wine reminds us unavoidably of Côte Rôtie. A heady blend of peppers, olives and Syrah spice evoke the Mistral rather than zephyrs. But then those reassuring tannins in the tail remind us of where we are, while the relatively sumptuous fruit suggests a potential for generosity that not all Naoussa offers in its youth. Those of you who remember fondly the great Uranos of Thimiopoulos will find a kinship here. The new 2013 is simply brilliant.

CHRISOHOOU (Naoussa, Macedonia)

The charm of the sisters who run this domaine should not distract from the seriousness of their purpose and the sureness of their accomplishment. This is one of a handful of Naoussa estates that has been making and selling wines under its own label for more than one generation. They plant many different grapes on their small estate.

2013 Naoussa (Xinomavro) \$132
This is Xinomavro with lilting fruit and present but not punishing tannins. A wine made for grilled lamb if ever there was one, this has proved to be an exceptionally successful glass-pour at some very good restaurants. The 2013 shows the aromatic lift characteristic of this fine year, making the similarities to Nebbiolo even more pointed than usual.

KTIMA KIR-YIANNI (Naoussa, Macedonia)

We were overjoyed to reunite with Stelios Boutaris, a cornerstone of our first foray into Greek wines several years ago. His father Yiannis left the family firm in 1997 to found Kir-Yianni and enjoyed a meteoric success. Today, he has become established as one of the old guard, serving as a reference point for Northern Greek wines, especially those based on Xinomavro, universally acknowledged as Greece's noblest black grape. The Boutaris family, owners of the largest winery in Greece, planted Xinomavro here in the late 60's and only now with these wines can we see the wisdom of their experiment.

2013 Paranga (50% Xinomavro, 25% Merlot and 25% Syrah) \$140
Stelios makes his everyday red from a select group of contracted vineyards at 600 meters in the Florina district in the extreme north west of Greece. Vinified in tank in a style to enable early drinking, it is a supple but not facile wine with a delicious balance between fruit and earth.

INOMESSINIAKI (Kalamata, Messinia).....

This estate was founded only in 1998 by the Xigoros family. Cultivating a familiar blend of native and international varieties, it is unsurprisingly the former to which we were drawn. We thought that these two examples of Peloponnesan classics were excellent examples of their kind, very much in the line of the Tselepos wines we used to have.

2015 Fare Mantinia (Moschofilero) \$120
Moschofilero is a wonderful grape, with its hauntingly piercing floral scent, moderate body and fine acidity. It has more than a passing resemblance to fine Gelber Muskateller, and Mantinia is acknowledged to be the place in Greece where it shows its greatest possible expression. This is an exciting new example.

2010 Fare Nemea (Agiogitiko) \$132
Next to Xinomavro, Agiogitiko must be considered Greece's other noble black variety, and nowhere does it fare (excuse the pun) better than in Nemea. This example is rugged yet fine, with a powerful iron undertow to its black cherry fruit. Remarkably serious wine for the money.

TETRAMYTHOS (Ano Diocopto, Patras) ORGANIC

Another young winery founded in 1999 by the brothers Aristides and Stathios Panos, it offers a splendid range of impeccably made wines from both indigenous and international varieties at improbably low prices. The mindboggling vineyards rise to elevations of 1000 meters, ensuring that diurnal temperature range that is so often the lodestone of quality in Greece. Enjoying unique limestone soils and making wines only from free-run juice, Tetramythos offers a finesse and purity that are unexpected at this price level. The "Natural" series wines are made according to some biodynamic principles e.g. the whites are harvested, pressed and bottled on flower days, and the reds on fruit days.

N.V. Retsina \$96

Tetramythos have stormed Europe with this revolutionary version of Greece's most infamous vinous product. Treating it with a seriousness never before accorded it by anyone, it is made from the estate's organic Roditis grapes (rather than the Savatiano almost universally employed elsewhere), to which is added before fermentation a moderate quantity of resin drawn from pine trees growing on the property. 40% is fermented on wild yeasts in amphorae, the balance in stainless steel. Extended lees aging is the final touch before bottling. The result is an understated, elegantly dry wine that is a cinch with Mediterranean seafood dishes and will banish forever dubious memories of Greek beach holidays.

2016 Roditis \$120

2011 Roditis \$116

What a great and often under-rated grape Roditis is. Witness this beautiful wine, endowed with uncommon weight and intensity for its modest price-tag. Scented and fine, it offers a honied driness underpinned by firm acidity that confers a certain seriousness, while nonetheless offering a generous measure of pure vinous pleasure. Such is the brothers' success, that they sell out quickly each vintage. We actually missed the 2016 vintage entirely, to which they responded by offering us the higher-level "Natural" wine (46 year-old non-irrigated vines from a single plot, free-run juice, native yeasts, negligible added sulfur) for the same price. The 2011 shows the grape's unexpected capability of graceful aging.

2015 Agiogitiko \$112

It is hard to conceive of a more sheerly deliciously fruity rendition of this "noble" grape. A splendidly alternative rendition to the more ambitious efforts of Nemea, this offers value for money that borders on the insane.

2015 Mavrokalavryta "Natural" \$140

The wine was de-stemmed and crushed by foot. No sulfur was added, but a small amount of already sulfured wine was introduced into the tank, resulting in a negligible measure in the final wine. A spontaneous fermentation is followed by a two-week maceration and a seven-month repose in old oak barrels. Pleasingly earthy, but the strawberry fruit has a soft, round and lush texture.

TSELEPOS (Mantinia, Peloponnese)

Yiannis Tselepos has thirty years of experience under his belt now and can reasonably claim to be largely responsible both for the recognition of his chosen region of Mantinia as the Mother Lode of Moschofilero and for the popularity of this grape in Greece and beyond. We can hardly believe our luck in getting the King of Moschofilero into our stable, especially as we were never before able to find a producer of this wine anywhere close to his quality.

N.V. Amalia Brut (Moschofilero) \$240 NET

It might seem counter-intuitive to attempt a sparkling wine from a varietal as characterful as the fragrant Moschofilero, but by harvesting early, the aromatic elements are kept in check and a delightfully original and well-balanced Méthode Traditionelle is made. Indispensable for any Big Fat Greek Wedding.

MYLONAS (Keratea, Attica) ORGANIC

This is another very young, very small estate with several parcels of white grapes in different micro-climates. Their wines impressed by virtue of their clarity, freshness and good value. Interestingly, we appreciated the unoaked cuvées more than those raised in barrel, good though the latter were. We think that you will be impressed.

2013 Savatiano

\$124

Savatiano is the grape almost inseparably identified with Retsina. As such, it is the most prevalent white variety in Greece. In the right hands, it is also capable of rendering a super “normal” wine such as this – mid-weight, simultaneously creamy and tangy, and with an unexpected mineral depth. Mylonas really does offer exceptional quality for its modest prices.

METHYMNAEOS (Chidira, Lesbos)ORGANIC

The latest addition to our stable is our first island producer, from the home of Sappho herself. Yannis Lambrou is quite a character, with a fiercely original approach to wine and life. We especially enjoyed watching him take on not just the bureaucrats of the Greek Ministry of Agriculture but the high Paladins in Brussels itself over the ridiculous pregnancy warning symbol that Europe wants on wine labels but the U.S.A. does not. He gave them one week to come up with an answer – and they did! Unfortunately, it was not the one he wanted to hear. Still, it gave us a flavor of the man.

The estate was the first modern Lesbian estate, although the island was exalted for its wines in ancient times. Phylloxera wiped the vine out at the end of the 19th century, so when the Lambrou family revived the almost-extinct Chidiriótico grape on their ancestral property, it marked a dramatic turning point in Greece’s viticultural history. The situation is unique – the crater of an extinct volcano that used to be home to the famed petrified forest of Lesvos. The lava soil is fantastically rich in mineral content, particularly sulphur, which enables them to follow a strictly organic regime with relative ease. All this novelty aside, we would not have bought the wines if we were not struck by their exceptional quality.

2015 “Orange Wine” (Chidiriótico)

\$228 NET

Yannis makes all his wines from the black indigenous grape of Lesvos. Not especially endowed with colour, it is a good candidate for “white” wine. We are normally sceptical of the vogue for “ancient-style” wines like these, but found ourselves preferring this version to the Blanc de Noir. Pressed before fermentation, which occurs at a controlled temperature of 25 degrees Celsius, the wine has a beguilingly nutty aroma with no overt oxidative qualities. The texture is slightly oily, the fruit flavours tend in a cool, almost green direction and the finish is strikingly long and mineral. This wine is not just original but good – which surely is its first duty.

2015 Chidiriótico

\$240 NET

While there is a certain kinship here with Zafeirakis’ Limniona, in that the wine is not very dark, not at all heavy and just kissed with oak, it has a distinctive flavour of its own that we would describe as leaning in the direction of Muscat. Not quite as obviously floral as a Ribeira Sacra or Lacrima di Morra d’Alba, it evokes those parallels by dint of its perfumed beauty and tensile strength. A real original that will expand your vinous universe, without neglecting to give you pleasure!

ENDOCHORA (Crete)

Crete has many distinctions. It is the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean, and the southernmost wine producer. The average altitudes of the vineyards are uncommonly high, which contributes to the paradoxical lightness of the wines, especially the whites. Phylloxera only came there in the 1970’s – a hundred years after the rest of Europe! In its aftermath, a lot of international varieties were planted, but there is no shortage of distinctive native grapes to be found.

Our producer, Endochora, is relatively young, having been founded in 2004. Small but serious, they turned our heads with this splendid first offering.

2015 Théra (Vidiano)

\$144

This uncommonly aromatic grape has fast become a darling of hip sommeliers in Europe. It offers the same fragrant appeal as Viognier and Roussanne but with a nervous tension that one suspects the Rhône producers would kill for.

AUSTRIA

We are well-known as the longtime distributors in California of Terry Theise's incomparable collection of Austrian and German estates. While that active relationship has ended, we remain deeply attached to both countries and have taken great pleasure in sleuthing an array of producers in most of the main regions whose wines have not been previously imported to the U.S.. The first of them are found here. Austria remains the country with the highest average quality levels in the world, we believe. We are confident that you will be impressed.

MARIA HICK (Oberarnsdorf, Wachau).....NEW.....

Maria and her husband Manfred run this pocket-sized (approximately 6 hectares) estate near Spitz, in the western part of the Wachau. Her family has links to the property that go back 300 years, when it was owned by St. Peter's Stift in Salzburg. Her great-grandfather bought it from the church in 1931 after the financial crash obliged it to cash out. She has quietly been making wines of exemplary quality at moderate prices since taking over and has achieved increasing recognition in the Austrian wine press. The vineyard practices are solidly organic : composting, eschewal of herbicides and insecticides, feromonal pest-control, and leaving alternate vineyard rows unmown. Using minimal sulphur (below 5.5 gm) is another hallmark. The wines are sleek and pure, but also show flashes of Wachau grandeur without excess. The prices are truly exceptional.

2016 Gelber Muskateller "von den Terrassen", Ried Stiegelstal NEW \$180

The pesky "Muscat à petits grains" is a divisive grape. Aficionados love it with unalloyed passion, while detractors find its perfumed charms too much of a good thing. Needless to say, we are in the former camp, and could not resist the resonant floral tones and juicy palate of this forthright and delicious wine. Stiegelstal is the estate's most important vineyard. It enjoys complex soils rich in paragneiss and quartzite, mixed with amphybolites.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Smaragd "Glauberkreuz", Ried Stiegelstal NEW \$232 NET

Grüner Veltliner is planted to two-thirds of the Hick estate and is their principal calling card. The Glauberkreuz is the highest and coolest part of the Stiegelstal, producing wines of both richness and finesse. This top-level Smaragd offers a perfect conciliation of chiselled Wachau stoniness and honied opulence.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Alte Reben", Ried Stiegelstal NEW \$232 NET

The ripeness of 2015 finds lavish expression in this gorgeous wine, whose aroma is a textbook example of the powerful Wachau style. It was bottled only in February 2017 as Maria felt that it needed time to evolve. We heartily applaud such a patient and uncommercial approach, where the quality of the wine trumps the dictates of the impatient market.

2015 Riesling Smaragd Ried Stiegelstal NEW \$240 NET

Hailing from a portion of the Ried that is rich in Urgestein (primary rock), the wine sports a telling pale green colour and flamboyantly smoky nose. It combines a typically dry Wachau minerality with tender Riesling fruit.

BARBARA ÖHLZELT (Zöbing, Kamptal).....NEW.....

Barbara is an exile from the worlds of couture and advertising who took over her father's 2 hectares in 2004 when her brother, a chemist, showed no inclination to do so. She has since grown the estate to all of 6 hectares! Her tiny family home and winery enjoys the most glorious vista onto the famed Heiligenstein, where she of course has parcels. She is known in Austria as the Queen of Verjus, which accounts for a large proportion of her production. She employs no fertilisers and hoes her rows. Her preference for whole-cluster pressing results in wines with good structure and aromatic presence.

We encountered her wines at Schloss Rosenberg, a beautiful castle in the Waldviertel, where her partner, the famed chef Karl Schwillinsky, was then the chef at its excellent restaurant. The simple liter wine was of such outstanding quality that a visit was arranged and this most gratifying agency has now resulted. Barbara is as charming and gracious as her products are stylish and fine. We look forward to welcoming her to California one day. In the meantime, get to know her wines.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Zöbing NEW \$184

Grüner Veltliner accounts for 60% of Barbara's wines, and this one is second only to the Seeberg Reserve in the heirarchy of five. It is aged in 3000 liter acacia barrels, which lends some suavity to the texture. With its vivid attack and unmistakable peppery spice, it is a poster-child for well-born Kamptal Grüner Veltliner. The winsome label depicts a pair of putti hovering over the Heiligenstein. A lot of impact for a wine with just 12.5% alc..

2016 Riesling Seeberg DAC NEW \$212

This wine was an absolute standout, eclipsing even the aristocratic Heiligenstein. From 45 year-old vines planted in a sparse soil marked by mica-schist (Seeberg is an Erste Lage in the heirarchy of the Traditionsweingüter), this is a calm and composed Riesling for those who like this variety "cool", on the green rather than yellow side. It finishes long and salty.

RICHARD WALZER (Gneixendorf, Kremstal).....NEW.....

In line with the theme so far, Richard presides over a miniscule estate with his partner Petra, producing 20 – 25,000 bottles a year from vineyards within 700 meters of his winery. His soils are 80% loess and 20% conglomerate and his vineyard practices would all be classified as sustainable. He also prefers whole-cluster fermentation. The wines are generous in flavour but polished, and he does not shrink from bucking trends in matters of dryness when the grapes tell him to do so! We were late on the scene here, so he was mostly sold out, but we hope to supplement the one wine we bought in future.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Wolfsgraben NEW \$140

This wine accounts for half of Richard's production and will seem familiar to those who cut their teeth on Nigl's Freiheit. Slender and piquant, with lovely ripe acidity, it is a juicy, mouth-watering and sheerly delicious Grüner Veltliner with real Kremstal cut.

STEFAN BAUER (Königsbrunn, Wagram).....NEW.....

The jovial Stefan Bauer has run his family's estate since 2000. It is a sizable property in the fabled loess vineyards of the Wagram, at the gateway to the Krems region. He is a charter member of the "Fair and Green" group, which practises organic but eschews certification. Among his techniques is the employment of algae in place of systemic pesticides and the avoidance of all herbicides. All his sprays are organic (if one includes copper compounds under that umbrella). Stefan makes a wide array of wines, and shows mastery across the board. The prices are very fair for the quality and the packaging is snazzy.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Landwein (LITERS) NEW \$128

This is an exceptionally tasty and well-endowed wine in this most important category of Austrian wines. Leaning in what one might call a "yellow fruits" direction, it will satisfy everyone who turns to Grüner Veltliner for their daily quotient of lip-smacking, dry and incisive white wine.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Wagram NEW \$148

Carefully assembled from the fruit of no fewer than 35 parcels, this is a perfect rendition of Wagram's ineffable affinity with its emblematic grape. Uncompromisingly dry and clear, but beautifully textured and suave. This does the job!

2016 Weissburgunder Wagram NEW \$188

This was the absolute standout at Bauer, punching way above its weight. After six weeks on the lees, and with just a dollop (3.5 gm.) of residual sugar, this is a creamy, sculpted wine of palpable class, endowed with irresistible flavour and enormous length. It simply cannot be bettered at the price.

2016 Zweigelt (Wagram) NEW \$164

There are all sorts of ways to make red wines smooth and alluring, not all of them straightforward. But sometimes you come across one that comes by its virtues honestly, and this is such a one. Gushingly aromatic and bursting with insanely delicious brambly fruit, this is a wine that comes out to shake you by the hand and does not let go.

SCHREINER (Rust, Burgenland).....NEW.....ORGANIC...

Gernot and Victoria Schreiner are a magnetic couple who have pursued their own singular way in wine since taking over their 6 hectare estate in their hometown of Rust. Their adherence to organic practice far exceeds the requirements for certification, extending as it does to everything that they utilise in their vineyards and winery, including what they eat and what they pack with. It is a truly holistic and entirely sincere approach to life that one has to respect. But when one considers the quality of the wines that they make, one is awestruck by the magnitude of their achievement. These are people of the highest quality whose nature is reflected in the authenticity and limpidity of their wines. It is frankly astonishing that their wines have not been discovered before in America.

2016 Blaufränkisch LITERS NEW \$108

After more than 20 years working with Austrian wines, we can honestly say this is the first Blaufränkisch liter wine that we have come across. That would not be reason alone to buy the wine were it not so sheerly drinkable and satisfying. Light and silky, it nonetheless conveys the essential dark flavour and authentic earth-tones of Austria's great aging variety. It is a wine of improbable character for such a modest tariff.

2015 Blaufränkisch (Burgenland) NEW \$160

The estate's classic Blaufränkisch is an authentic introduction to its strongest suit. Grown in a parcel called Gemärk, whose salient components are limestone, sand and sandstone, and sporting a mere 12.4% alcohol, it was aged in large old oak casks for 14 months. The blackberry fruit and iron filings undertow are characteristic of classic Blaufränkisch from Burgenland. Simultaneously friendly and serious, this wine brings off a tigre act with great aplomb.

2015 Ruster Ausbruch "Extrem V" (Weissburgunder/Müller-Thurgau) 6/375 NEW \$240 NET

As if it wasn't enough to produce an array of Blaufränkisch-based wines of superlative quality (there are several more that we have not yet imported), the Schreinners have contrived to produce a classic Ruster Ausbruch of transcendent quality. Less oxidative than the style familiar from our beloved Heidi Schröck, this is a luscious, well-braced, fresh and composed dessert wine with all of 7% alcohol but unending reserves of flavour and character. It is not to be missed.

GERMANY

Climate change has had a profound effect on Germany. No longer do producers have to bite their fingernails wondering if their grapes will ripen properly, as they always used to. Indeed, in the warmer regions, it is entirely commonplace for wines to weigh in at the sort of alcohol levels common in historically much warmer climes. This evolution has wrought changes both positive and negative. For one, they have made the production of dry or "trocken" wines with proper balance much easier. But there is a fear that the classically sweet Rieslings of Germany, which are surely its greatest and most unique contribution to the world of wine, with their scintillating balance of sugar, low alcohol and bright acidity, might be an endangered species. We believe that our current stable of three producers from the "heartland" (Bernhard, Weegmüller and the newcomer Kettern) prove that that noble tradition is alive and kicking. And now, additionally, we have made it our mission to bring to the market's attention the singular claims of Baden as a wine-producing area.

BADEN

Baden is so scattered a wine region, stretching as it does from the Black Forest almost to Stuttgart, and from Lake Constance to the borders of Heidelberg, that it is misleading to generalise about its wines. Suffice it to say that it is Germany's third biggest producing region and specialises in dry, full-bodied wines that are eagerly consumed by the domestic market. Traditionally dominated by some excellent co-ops, in recent decades there has been an explosion of top-quality estates. We have identified and sourced a group of the very best, each of which is representative of its particular sub-region and their particular micro-climates and topographies. Broadly stated, Baden is a sort of promised land for Pinots – not just Noir, but Gris (Grauer Burgunder) and Blanc (Weisser Burgunder) as well. They all thrive here and show off beautifully the symbiosis of variety and soil-type. Remarkably, the documented history of Pinot Noir here goes back at least to the 11th century. We would argue that Baden is perhaps the world's last consistent redoubt of top-class, "cool" climate Pinots offering clarity of flavour within normally moderate alcoholic frames and at prices that make some other places seem rapacious. Of course, there are some expensive Spitzenweine that really can hold their own against almost anything, though these tend to get snapped up by the Germans. If our venture into this new Eldorado is well received by you, our customers, then we plan to import some of these top wines at a later date.

HEITLINGER / BURG RAVENSBURG (Kraichgau).....ORGANIC

We are indescribably happy to have partnered with this dynamic pair of estates, both under the same ownership but geographically separate and with different terroirs and histories. Our success with them has encouraged us to add the five new estates listed below to our portfolio.

Our pair have very different histories. Burg Ravensburg, in the village of Sulzfeld, north-west of Stuttgart and not far from the fabled university town of Heidelberg, in the extreme north of Baden, has a documented history going back to 1251, making it one of Germany's oldest estates. Heitlinger, by contrast, is a modern estate a few kilometers north in the village of Tiefenbach that was rescued from bankruptcy a few years ago by Heinz Heiler, a great wine-enthusiast and owner of a beautiful golf-course across the way. Today, it also boasts a hotel, one of the top restaurants of the region and a first-class facility where the wines of both estates are made and aged. Herr Heiler had the great wisdom to hire as his General Manager a man called Claus Burmeister, who actually grew up on the Burg Ravensburg estate and is utterly steeped in the region. Soft-spoken but intense, Claus has lifted his two estates to the absolute summit of Baden wines, enjoying a degree of success in the press and at wine competitions without compare. They own 80% of the vineyards entitled to Grosses Gewächs status in the Kraichgau and Claus displays a mastery of different idioms that is quite remarkable.

This estate can also claim to be the largest in Germany that is certified organic. They have also adopted a number of bio-dynamic practices. Their ability to offer a comprehensive range of wines on a large scale and at an elevated quality level is reminiscent of Austrian estates like Bründlmayer and Schloss Gobelsburg. The reasonableness of the prices is striking.

- 2013 Heitlinger Sekt "Blanc de Noir" (Meunier) 6/750 \$124 NET**
Welcome to the original world of Claus Burmeister. I guess he heard that this grape is grown in Champagne, so why not try his hand at it himself? He had a couple of ideas. One was to ferment 30% of the juice in oak. Another was to use the original grape juice for the secondary fermentation in bottle. A third was to add no dosage at the end. The result is a wine with a haunting scent of wild strawberries that evokes champagne without in any way imitating it. We are gratified by the market's enthusiastic embrace of this beautiful sparkling Schwarzriesling (as the Germans call this grape). The 2013 reflects the sterling quality of this vintage for Pinot varieties in Baden.
- 2016 Burg Ravensburg Riesling trocken - Sulzfeld \$160**
There is an unexpected Mosel-aspect to this wine, starting with its greenish hue, continuing to its mown hay aroma, and finishing with its salt-and-apple palate. A delicate and incisive dry Riesling, sporting a mere 11.5% alcohol.
- 2014 Heitlinger Riesling trocken "Shiny River" \$148**
Knowing that the established Burg Ravensburg 2014 Riesling would sell out before the new vintage arrived, we did not hesitate to offer Heitlinger's equally compelling rendition as an alternative. Similarly styled but differentiated by a more succulent and exotically fruit tone. These two make a remarkable one-two punch.
- 2015 Burg Ravensburg Riesling Kapellenberg, Grosses Gewächs NEW 6/750 \$160 NET**
We have been coveting the Riesling from this tiny filet vineyard since we first encountered it, but have had to wait until now to get any. Kapellenberg enjoys a combination of limestone-sandstone and volcanic soil unique among the holdings of the estate. It gives rise to a ravishingly aromatic wine, more on the "green" than the "yellow" side of Riesling, luxuriant as befits the year, but almost unbearably focused and intense.
- 2012 Burg Ravensburg Riesling Husarenkappe, Grosses Gewächs 6/750 \$140 NET**
How enlightened of this estate to hold back their top wines, even the whites, until they have entered a calm second stage. This is magnificent, grand-scaled Riesling with an insistent herbal twang to its sumptuous fruit.
- 2011 Heitlinger Riesling Schellenbrunnen 6/750 \$128 NET**
*Starting with the 2012 vintage, Schellenbrunnen, a steep 8 hectare monopole, with 40 year-old vines planted in iron-rich "Keuper" (marl) soil over coloured limestone, is officially classified as a Grosses Gewächs. The resulting wine is a poem of beauty, seethingly spicy, lavish and grand. The price is a pittance for wine of this quality. **LOW STOCK.***
- 2016 Heitlinger Auxerrois "Gentle Hills" \$156**
Hiding under the fanciful Marketing Department name and the striking, geometrical label lurks a lyrically beautiful wine, with a ravishing orange blossom nose and a tender, dry and long palate. 80% of all the Auxerrois in Germany is planted in the Kraichgau. When done like this, it seems more relaxed and searching than its cousin Pinot Blanc. The word "delicious" might have been invented to describe this beauty.
- 2015 Burg Ravensburg Pinot Noir \$168**
The distinctive soil-type of the Kraichgau is "Keuper", a red-coloured, iron-rich clay and limestone conglomerate that seems tailor-made for what might reasonably be termed a "burgundian" style. This nicely coloured and unexaggerated wine has been a success from Day One. It is predictably stylish and honest, with well-judged oak tones and a salty tail.
- 2012 Burg Ravensburg Pinot Noir Löchle, Grosses Gewächs 6/750 \$140 NET**
Löchle is the top Pinot Noir cru of Sulzfeld, offering wines of density and force. This makes an excellent claim for Burg Ravensburg's status as the district's leading light. Years of life ahead of it.
- 2015 Burg Ravensburg Blaufränkisch (Lemberger) - Sulzfeld \$176**
Lemberger, as Blaufränkisch is known in Baden, produces a higher-toned, perhaps finer wine than is typical of the better-known Burgenland examples. Claus has always had an especially deft touch with this truculent grape. The 2015 shows exceptional finesse at a very early age.
- 2012 Burg Ravensburg Lemberger "Dicker Franz" Grosses Ge. 6/750 \$160 NET**
"Fat Franz" was Baron Franz Göler of Ravensburg, a renowned 18th century gourmand. The steep monopole grand cru named after him, however, gives rise to strikingly fine and intense wine, stripped of all needless weight but brimful of power and spice. This is a picture-perfect Baden Blaufränkisch at its apogée because of the estate's enlightened policy of holding its top reds back for few years. In this, the first vintage where the vineyard was officially accorded Grosses Gewächs status, the wine recalls a Yirgacheffe coffee by dint of its gorgeous blueberry notes and roasted overtones. It speaks in a penetrating but not a loud voice.
- 2014 Heitlinger Pinot Meunier Reserve Alte Reben (Spiegelberg) \$204 NET**
Spiegelberg is a Grosse Lage whose class shows in this dramatically fine rendition of a grape that is rarely if ever allowed to shine so brightly. The vines planted in 1968 evoke burgundy both in the wine's pallid hue but more particularly in its sweet-salt flavor tension and the nobility of its structure. This is a game-changer.

SCHLOSS ORTENBERG (Offenburg - Ortenau)

The Ortenau is a distinct sub-region centered around the ancient mid-sized town of Offenburg. The predominant soil-types here are granitic, with high sandstone outcroppings and loess. This estate has a fascinating history dating back to 1300. It is one of a handful of great German estates, such as the Juliusspital in Franken and the Vereinigte Hospitien in the Mosel, that are publicly owned – in this case by the municipality of Offenburg. Run with fastidious care by the young and dynamic Matthias Wolf, the vineyards are cultivated sustainably (think feromonal intereference instead of insecticides, organic fertilisation and composting). They were innovative in German terms by eliminating cork in 2004, and they offer employment to handicapped people in their vineyards. We have selected an initial range of wines that nicely highlight the possibilities here, which are myriad! Starting with the 2016 vintage, they also have snazzy new packaging that highlights the soil types.

2013 Klingelberger (Riesling) Kabinett trocken \$160

The Ortenau makes so special style of Riesling that they even give it its own name, Klingelberger, used nowhere else in Germany. Uniquely in Baden, a significant proportion of the vineyard area is dedicated to the Queen of Grapes. When you savour the suave, honied, yet vibrant style of this wine (just 11.5% alcohol and 7.2 gm. of acidity), you will understand why. Be among the first to champion this singular expression of Riesling with its long salty tail.

2016 Klingelberger (Riesling) Alte Reben trocken 6/750 NEW \$132 NET

Riesling accounts for 25% of the estate's vineyards, which enables them to make the selections necessary to single out this top cuvée. Its greenish tinge is a reassuring entrée to the unmistakable, fine Riesling scent. What marks this wine is its finesse, not its power (it sports a mere 12% alcohol). But the minerality is ringent!

2015 Grauer Burgunder trocken Alte Reben 6/750 NEW \$132 NET

This is a triumphant rendition of a challenging variety. Absolutely fastidious viticulture enabled Matthias to pick fully ripe grapes with exceptional acidity. Fermented and aged in new 300 liter barriques, it is a flamboyantly smoky spice-bomb, luscious in texture yet brimming with vitality. An object lesson in Pinot Gris.

2015 Ein Sauvignon Blanc "Granit" trocken NEW \$192

How to resist such a clarion Sauvignion call, both musky and green? We don't exactly "need" more Sauvignion in our range, but we could not find a single valid reason to leave this behind. It is astonishingly good and authentic.

2013 Spätburgunder Kabinett trocken \$180

The exceptional quality of 2013 as a Pinot Noir vintage in Baden is exemplified by this show-stopper, that delivers way above its modest Kabinett designation (it has 13% of natural alcohol!). Everything is in just measure : the cool, green-tinged scent that is so regionally typical, plenty of velvety sweet Pinot fruit and then an insane cascade of tumbling stoniness in the finish. Remarkable.

2015 Ein Pinot Noir "Granit" trocken NEW \$200

Schloss Ortenberg cultivates both Baden and French clones of Pinot Noir, and it is the latter which give this wine its French rather than German name. Grown, as the name implies, in granitic soils, and aged in a mix of Stückfässer (large casks) and barriques, this is a fine, restrained and tensile version which will age beautifully.

BERCHER (Burkheim - Kaiserstuhl)

The Kaiserstuhl can justifiably claim to be the single best-known district of Baden. Its volcanic soils and singularly warm climate give rise to powerful, vibrant Pinots of every type. Cousins Martin and Arne Bercher are the tenth generation of the family to run this highly-reputed estate, one of several we represent that are members of the VDP (indeed, Arne is V.P. of the Baden chapter).

2016 Chardonnay SE trocken 6/750 NEW \$200 NET

2016 Chardonnay SE trocken 12/375 NEW \$224 NET

We never expected to import chardonnay from Germany, but found ourselves helpless in the face of this beauty's ineffable quality and, most importantly, its authentic differentness, for this is an unmistakably German wine in its blossomy aromas and focused, glossy and salty palate.

2016 Burkheimer Weissburgunder trocken NEW \$176

Bercher's originality is to offer an education in the influence of volcanic soils (Burkheim) versus loess (Jechtingen). In 2016, as in 2014, we narrowly preferred the fervid pungency of Burkheim as it influenced the Pinot Blanc. This is an imposing, palpably mineral wine that nonetheless has plenty of flesh on its manly bones. Wines like this lend support to the notion that Austria has a serious rival to its claim to make the world's best Pinots Blancs!

2013 Jechtinger Grauburgunder trocken \$164

The loess-rich soils of the village of Jechtingen produce a more delicate style of wine that we thought offered a charming counterpoint to some of the other Pinots Gris in the selection. The impression is tender but well-braced, with a billowing quality to the fruit and a deliciously sweet-fruited yet spicy aftertaste. It is however a real trocken wine!

2013 Burkheimer Spätburgunder \$192
This is the kind of wine that has made the Kaiserstuhl the Mother Lode of modern German Pinot Noir. Forceful but not overblown, it was aged exclusively in large, used casks, the better to preserve the singularity of its volcanic expression.

2015 Jechtinger Eichert Spätburgunder Erste Lage 6/750 NEW \$184 NET

2015 Jechtinger Eichert Spätburgunder Erste Lage 6/375 \$116 NET

2013 Jechtinger Eichert Spätburgunder Erste Lage 6/750 \$168 NET

Grown from 25-plus year-old vines in a mostly volcanic, south-facing “Premier Cru” vineyard in Jechtingen, this wine shows all the virtues of Bercher’s over-performing basic Pinot on a grander and more imposing scale. Its seriousness, however, detracts in no way from the innate sweetness of the fruit, which hauls you right into the wine’s beating heart of stone. The 2013 is easing into its prime. The 2015 is a declamatory Pinot, with lovely volcanic notes and a suave texture.

2016 Burkheimer Feuerberg Kesselberg Spätburgunder 6/375 NEW \$440 NET
Weissherbst Eiswein GROSSE LAGE

*This masterpiece enjoys perhaps the longest name we have ever found on a wine we have imported! Climate change has made the production of Eiswein rarer and rarer in recent decades, especially in so southerly a region as Baden. Arne was able to conjure this little piece of genius by leaving a small parcel of Pinot Noir grapes unpicked until early January 2017! The resultant nectar is faintly copper-hued, with a magnificent nose that unmistakably announces that this is classic Eiswein. The palate’s super-glossy texture and piquant acidity are further badges of honour. We were allocated **30 HALF-BOTTLES ONLY**.*

FREIHERR VON GLEICHENSTEIN (Oberrotweil - Kaiserstuhl)

This is a 500 year-old estate with monastic origins currently run by the young and dynamic Johannes von Gleichenstein, who impishly calls his top wine “Baron Philipp”, on the grounds that they are a noble family and Philipp is his son’s name. One suspects that he would welcome a lawsuit from the Rothschilds of Bordeaux, with all its attendant publicity! However, even without that, the wines are deserving of attention, offering fidelity to their soils and very good value. We expect to add whites to the two Pinots Noirs we have initially selected.

2017 Pinot Noir Rosé “Hofgarten” trocken NEW \$144

This exemplary wine has in short measure become one of our top sellers, on account of its fidelity to both Pinot Noir and the volcanic soils of the Kaiserstuhl, not to mention its friendly price for the quality. The 2017 is marked by pronounced and welcome acidity. It tastes better on Day 3 than Day 1, so it is an excellent by-the-glass proposition, as a large number of restaurants can testify.

2016 Grauer Burgunder “Hofgarten” trocken NEW \$164

Johannes made impressive Pinot Gris wines in 2016, starting with this exemplary “entry level” version. With 20% aged in old wooden casks, it pushes all the necessary buttons. Limpid and spicy, it has good texture and sprightly acidity – the feature so often missing in Alsatian examples.

2016 Grauer Burgunder Henkenberg trocken NEW \$268

The Henkenberg is a fabled vineyard which, were von Gleichenstein a member of the VDP, would be classified as a Grosse Lage. Their parcels lie in cooler basaltic soils. The resultant wine in 2016 is surprisingly deft (just 13% alcohol) and liling, with beautiful sandalwood scent and fine spicy flavour.

2013 Spätburgunder Hofgarten \$160

“Hofgarten” is the name that they give to their basic estate-grown wines, though this originates largely from the Eichberg, an important vineyard site with alluvial soils over a volcanic bedrock. Unexpectedly serious for its echelon, it exemplifies the ability of Baden to synthesise Pinot’s twin virtues of unexaggeratedly sweet fruit and soil-transparency. It is like conversing with someone who is both charming and erudite.

2011 Spätburgunder “Aus dem Kessel” \$252 NET

There are plenty of “Spitzenweine”, what you might call “trophy wines”, in Baden, that command relatively high prices (though nothing like burgundy, or even California!). These are eagerly lapped up by the German market and a handful of mostly-European connoisseurs. It is our hope that the California market will before long wake up to these top wines, and we will bring in whatever we are allocated. In the meantime, we offer you this amazing bottle, which hails from a sun-blessed parcel within the Eichberg. Its name means “from the boiler”, an allusion to the warmth of the site, which is perhaps counter-intuitive to the notion that Pinot Noir is at its best in marginal terroirs. But it was impossible to resist the sheer grandeur of this wine, whose lavish aroma and shapely structure are testament to the quality of the 40 year-old vines planted in bare volcanic soil in the vineyard’s steepest section. The minty tone is suggestive of burgundy, and the price is very modest for the quality.

ZIEREISEN (Efringen-Kirchen, Markgräferland)

The Markgräferland is, together with the Bodensee, the southernmost part of Baden. The soils here are predominantly limestone, which is immediately suggestive of a kinship with Burgundy, especially as there are remarkable climatic similarities between the two regions. Hanspeter Ziereisen is a huge personality whom everyone seems to know. He and his endlessly good-humoured wife, Edeltraud, preside over a compact domaine with an influence out of proportion to its size. He makes wines in a resolutely individual way, having long ago given up the notion of conforming to the straitened mind-set of the local wine authorities. Consequently, most of them are not submitted for approval as AO Baden wines, but rather are sold as lowly “regional” wines – albeit the most expensive of them are amongst the dearest wines of Germany. Call this the “Sassicaia Syndrome”.

Without subscribing to the strictest dogmas of “Natural” wine, Ziereisen’s products can be described as nothing but. All vineyard work is manual, all oak barrels are local, no chemicals are employed in the vineyards, fermentations are spontaneous, no wines are filtered and everything is given time to relax on the lees before bottling and in the bottle before release – even if this runs counter to the cycles of the commercial clock. Each product is given a fanciful name in the local dialect, which is strongly influenced by the strange sonorities spoken across the border in Switzerland. Welcome to the wacky world of Ziereisen.

2016 Gutedel “Heugumber” NEW \$124

2014 Gutedel “Heugumber” \$116

It is characteristic of Ziereisen’s originality that he should hang his hat by the regional specialty grape known locally as Gutedel (but better known as Chasselas in France and Fendant in Switzerland). Indeed, his most expensive (and staggeringly so) product is a version of this grape given the full Montrachet treatment. To our plebeian tastes, however, it is this basic wine that best conveys the irresistible charm of this under-appreciated and simply delicious grape variety. Stony, lissome and light, with the faintest hint of astringency in the tail, it slides down the throat as easily as a hot knife slices through butter.

2016 Weisser Burgunder NEW \$172

There is a wonderfully relaxed quality to this wine, curiously evocative of the style familiar from the great Nikolaihof estate in the Wachau. The attack is salty, the texture silky and the flavours just delicious.

2014 Grauer Burgunder \$160

2013 Grauer Burgunder \$160

Many producers have cottoned on to the predisposition of Pinot Gris to élevage in oak, but few manage the art as deftly as Hanspeter Ziereisen. There is a tenderness and vivacity to this wine that are simply elusive to most of its practitioners. The faintest hint of residual sweetness (3 grammes) imbues it with a delicious hint of voluptuousness that falls well short of the obvious. It offers us yet another individual expression of this most recalcitrant of grapes, that seems so happy in Baden.

2013 Blauer Spätburgunder \$184

We could not resist Hanspeter’s “basic” Pinot in 2013. It is a poem of sinuous beauty, subtle, salty and long.

2015 Blauer Spätburgunder “Rhini” NEW 6/750 \$280 NET

2013 Blauer Spätburgunder “Rhini” 12/375 \$156 NET

2013 Blauer Spätburgunder “Rhini” 6/750 \$260 NET

From a parcel rich in iron, this is a truly grand example of the heights that these wines can reach. Smoky on the nose, it is built like a Mercedes Benz – solid, luxurious, shapely and quietly powerful. It will have tremendous staying power and is worth every cent of its price.

CLAUS SCHNEIDER (Weil am Rhein, Markgräferland)

There is nothing more gratifying in our line of work than finding good people making exceptional wine. The Schneider family are as genial and gracious a bunch of people as you could hope to meet and they make wines that are simply revelatory in their quality. Son Johannes, an old soul despite his tender years, is being given ever more rein by his father Claus. Most of their holdings are in the clay-and-limestone escarpment named Weiler Schlipf, butted right up against the Swiss border. The hallmarks of Schneider wines are purity and relaxation. The estate was recently hailed by the influential Gault-Millau magazine as being the single best value estate in all of Germany!

2014 Weiler Schlipf Gutedel \$128

Sporting just 11% of alcohol, this is a simply delightful, appley rendition of the infinitely charming Gutedel grape. Our first importation of the 2013 vintage sold out in a flash. We bought more of this perfect warm-weather wine this time.

- 2015 "L'Ambré" Gutedel Orange Wine** 6/750 NEW \$132 NET
It takes a lot for us to depart from our classicist selves, but we were truly impressed by this, Johannes' maiden voyage into the brave new world of "natural" wines. The color is less orange than most, and the aromas actually evoke fruit – lovely peaches, perhaps. Dry and delectable, with just 11% alcohol, this is a truly pleasurable wine with a long salty aftertaste.
- 2015 Weiler Schlipf Pinot Blanc CS***** 6/750 NEW \$192 NET
Our breath was taken away by this wine, which hails from the oldest vines of the estate. Suavely elegant, slightly smoky from the élevage in lightly-toasted Allier barrels, this is burgundian in inspiration but resolutely Badisch in effect. The Schlipf really is a fantastically mineral site. World class wine.
- 2013 Weiler Grauer Burgunder CS** \$216 NET
- 2012 Weiler Grauer Burgunder CS** \$216 NET
CS is the designation given to the reserve-quality wines of the estate. This beauty has a dramatically smoky nose and voluptuous texture. The oak is effortlessly sucked up and everything about this wine is grand. 13% alcohol and fully dry!
- 2015 Weiler Spätburgunder** NEW \$220
We have waited a long time to get Schneider's "basic" Spätburgunder back, but it was worth it. The nose is clear, dark-toned and refulgent, leading into a palate of unexaggeratedly sweet Pinot fruit braced by a fervid minerality, all cloaked in the softest cashmere. An impeccably composed and aristocratic wine.
- 2013 Weiler Schlipf Spätburgunder CS (Unfiltered)** \$260 NET
All the virtues of the Spätburgunder above are rendered in a form that is simply a little finer and richer. Vibrant, suave and stylish Pinot Noir with the rooty qualities that one hopes for from the grape and a degree of concentration that commands attention.
- 2013 Weiler Schlipf Spätburgunder CS*** (Unfiltered)** 6/750 \$200 NET
As one climbs the quality tree at Schneider, one does not get more power or weight but rather an ever-increasing degree of filigree and concentration. This is the sleekest, purest and most finely balanced of the bunch. The top wine in a top vintage, it would hold its own against vastly more expensive wines from Burgundy or the New World. It proves that very often the best value is not to be found with the cheapest wines but, paradoxically, with the most expensive.

CH. W. BERNHARD (Frei-Laubersheim, Rheinhessen)

This 600 year-old family estate is nominally in the Hessen but its soils, with their complex amalgam of porphyry, quartzite and loam, bear more resemblance to the Nahe, which is just over the hill. Hartmut Bernhard, the current proprietor, is an instinctive wine-grower and maker. He knows exactly what he is doing without intellectualising it. The estate has gone from strength to strength in recent years.

- 2014 Riesling Sekt Brut** \$260 NET
The Germans drink more bubbly per capita than anyone else on earth, but little of it is as fine and delicious as this one. Most producers farm out its elaboration to specialist houses, but Hartmut has long been a master of the champagne method and makes his Sekts himself. This bottling was on the lees for some 30 months, and the luxurious dosage is a Beerenauslese! We asked for it to be moderated at about 7 gm., which has brought the wine into a lovely balance, where the innate fruitiness of the Riesling is tempered by the acidity and minerality.
- 2010 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Weissburgunder Spätlese halbtrocken** \$140
The fresh, flowery nose of this succulent Pinot Blanc belies the creamy richness of the palate with its discreet sweetness and faint hint of botrytis. An excellent choice for white meat with creamy sauces.
- 2014 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken** \$144
We waited a long time before buying an off-dry Riesling from Bernhard, but not without admiring this style from them for a long time. The porphyry soils of Hackenheim seem especially apt to the genre, and this beauty sports an expressive nose, reminiscent of the Nahe, and a perfectly poised palate of impressive length. Exceptional value.
- 2016 Frei-Laubersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Kabinett feinherb** \$140
Hartmut's interpretation of the notion of "feinherb" is a liberal one! The sweetness level here is what you might expect in another producer's "normal" Kabinett. Endowed with a freakish degree of minerality from the quartzite soils of the Rheingrafenberg, this wine over-delivers in every department.
- 2016 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Scheurebe Kabinett** \$132
Bernhard really has a special touch with this characterful grape. This new vintage bursts with the grapefruit and blackcurrant notes we look for, while maintaining an exemplary balance of sweetness and acidity, and sporting the oversized mineral charge characteristic of the estate in 2016. A perfect match for Thai curry.

- 2014 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Spätlese \$144**
2014 was simply too ripe to make a true Kabinett, so Hartmut dropped the pretence and instead offered us a glorious, paradigmatic and unspittable Spätlese with just 9% alcohol.
- 2011 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Auslese \$160**
Hartmut followed the masterly 2010 vintage of this wine with a luscious and beautifully balanced 2011 that wrung every ounce of possibility out of the year. Delicious Auslese at a bargain price, now returned to stock after a too-long absence!
- 2011 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese 12/375 \$400**
*This is not an address where one expects many noble sweet wines, but vintage 2011 enabled Hartmut to make three of them! This was the pick of the bunch – sweet, of course, but ineffably fine and lifted with the purest botrytis tones. A “light” TBA with 184 gm. of R.S., it might actually prove quite useful as such. **LOW.***

WEEGMÜLLER (Haardt, Pfalz)

Steffi Weegmüller has taken this ancient family property to the very pinnacle of Pfalz estates, as has been recognised at home in Germany but also now in the U.S.A., where David Schildknecht has paid tribute to the quality of her wines. Quite literally next door to the famed house of Müller-Catoir, and sharing many of the same fabled vineyards, she offers a series of pristine, almost chiselled wines that unite Pfalz spice and generosity with manic purity and length.

- 2013 Riesling trocken 12/1000 \$168**
What a pleasure to have back this classiest of German liter bottlings, with its fresh nose and lilting Riesling expression. Largely derived from younger vines in Weegmüller’s Grand Cru holdings with a judicious blend of grapes from another grower in Deidesheim, this is a poster-child for quintessential Pfalz Riesling.
- 2016 “Der Elegante” Riesling trocken \$176**
In this vintage, we were especially struck by the wine Steffi coaxed from the Haardter Mandelring vineyard, that she terms “the elegant one”. Uncommonly pungent in its amalgam of ripe fruit and Pfalz punch, it nonetheless presents so silky and fine on the palate that one easily comprehends the choice of moniker.
- 2013 “Vom gelben Fels” Riesling trocken \$160**
Weegmüller have decided on a “fantasy name” approach to labelling their top wines. This one, “From the Yellow Cliff”, is a brilliant cuvée of their three great sites : Bürgergarten, Herrenletten and Mandelring. As such, it offers a panoply of peachy Pfalz fruit flavours that dance miraculously on the tongue. Such poise and clarity are possible only from top vineyards and masterly wine-making hands.
- 2016 Scheurebe trocken \$176**
Steffi has always had a way with the kinky Scheurebe and she excelled in this vintage. Derived primarily from vines in the Herrenletten and Mandelring, the grapefruit aroma is one you can take to the bank. Truly dry, and sporting just 12.5% alcohol, the wine has an electric impact on the palate, simultaneously light-footed and substantial, with an expansive salty finish. Truly masterful.
- 2011 Haardter Bürgergarten Riesling Kabinett \$192 NET**
It is hard to imagine a more sheerly pretty expression of this very great vineyard than Steffi routinely conjures up. A paradigm of great Pfalz Kabinett. The 2011 is especially juicy and gulpable.
- 2015 “Von 4 Morgen” Riesling Auslese 12/375 NEW \$220 NET**
Simply one of the most unforgettable wines tasted last year, it is a masterpiece, and we snapped up every available bottle. Grandiose in its conciliation of botrytis and apricot fruit, the palate is glossy and spicy and unspittably delicious. Don’t miss it!
- 2013 “Von 14 Zeilen” Rieslaner Auslese 12/375 \$228 NET**
When Rieslaner hits just the right threshold of ripeness, it can produce some of the most singular and compelling dessert wine on earth. Perhaps no vineyard suits this grape as brilliantly as the Haardter Mandelring, where the miraculous balancing act of huge sweetness and powerful, almost fierce acidity evokes in this unique variety its signature infra-red glow and hauntingly long flavour. All this with just 7% alcohol. A really amazing wine.

LOTHAR KETTERN (Piesport, Mosel)

NEW

Our favorite way to meet new producers is to have them recommended by our friends. So when Michi Moosbrugger of Schloss Gobelsburg said that he knew this “crazy guy in the Mosel” making great wines, our ears pricked up. The connection between them is famed Douro producer Dirk Neepoort, whose son Daniel has been living with the Ketterern family in Piesport for the last two vintages. Together they have a project called Fio, making “Natural Wines” that challenge the old order and which we hope to bring in ourselves at some point. For the moment, however, we are sticking to the tried and true classics.

The estate was founded in the 1950’s by Lothar, but son Philipp has been in charge since 2009. To describe him as iconoclastic is an understatement. There is a paradox at work in Piesport which is that the easy-to-cultivate but inferior flatland vineyards on one side of the river cost much more than the fabled steep slopes of the Goldtröpfchen bowl on the other. But Philipp is a maniac for quality, so he traded almost all the land bought by his father for more challenging but infinitely more rewarding parcels in the Goldtröpfchen, including some in the great Falkenberg portion and other higher parts whose cooler micro-climates accord better with his aims. He has converted the estate to something approaching organic viticulture, while pushing the envelope with Fio and its no-sulphur wines. He has also converted most of his production to dry and off-dry wines, while maintaining the noble tradition of classically sweet Mosels to the manner born. In short, he offers us something of everything – bone-tingling, electric Mosel classics, modern dry wines and cutting-edge natural wines. Welcome to a new star!

2016 Riesling feinherb **NEW** **\$160**

The whimsical piratical label belies the seriousness of this wine, which derives primarily from higher portions of the Goldtröpfchen. The tired word “classic” inevitably springs to mind in the face of such gossamer weight and juiciness. The sweetness is functional rather than apparent. Don’t be fooled by appearances!

2016 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett **NEW** **\$176**

2016 was a simply exceptional vintage at Ketterern as exemplified by this textbook Kabinett. From the first mysterious whiff of its Böhse-veiled floral scent, to the last salty drop of its slatey tail, this ballerina of a Riesling prances regally on your tongue, hardly there at all, but leaving an ineffable impression.

2014 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese **NEW** **\$212**

It is ironic that in the book-end years around the touted 2015 vintage, Ketterern actually made more compelling wines. Mind you, it is our belief that 2014, a difficult vintage by any standard, actually brought the best out of many German growers, who rose to the challenges of Nature with some complex and interesting wines. With its heady, blossomy scent and the faintest hints of fusel oil, this evokes the Middle Mosel in an unmistakable way, while its cunning balance of sweetness and acidity simply could not be improved upon.

(2010) Spätburgunder Sekt Rosé **6/750 NEW** **\$128 NET**

Philipp took a principled decision to dedicate his estate to Riesling – except for this wine. Like a lot of Riesling-lovers, he also adores Pinot Noir, but does not deceive himself that he can make the equal of burgundy in Piesport. Sparkling wine, however, is another matter, and this entirely original example completely poleaxed us. Its fidelity to Pinot Noir is total – the nose could simply be nothing else. The creaminess of the texture (it was disgorged in December 2017) gives it a champagne-like luxury. But, and most importantly, the piercing clarity of its soil expression is unmissable. There is an almost volcanic quality to the soil flavours. We hope and expect this wine to become a cult favorite. It certainly deserves to be.

AUSTRALIA

SALOMON ESTATE (Finniss River)

The popular perception of Australia’s reds (jammy, soft, huge) stands in stark contrast to that of Austria’s whites (lean, muscular, piercing) so what on earth convinced Bertold Salomon of Austria’s Undhof-Salomon Estate to begin producing wine so far from home? Diversification of assets? Tax evasion? Corporate re-shuffling? No, it was history - a branch of his family emigrated to Australia over 100 years ago, and Bert was just bringing it back together. The Finniss river site, 25 miles South of McLaren Vale, was chosen because of its temperate climate (halfway between Coonawarra and McLaren Vale in degree days), long ripening season and location near the Boar’s Rock winery of ex-Penfolds red wine maker Mike Farmilo (yes, he was responsible for Grange). The initial releases are made at Boar’s Rock.

2003 Finniss River Shiraz **12/375** **\$232 NET**

A decadently delicious Syrah that delivers the requisite blueberry tones of Australia but nonetheless nods deferentially to the Rhône with its sneeze-worthy dose of pepper spice. In an absolutely perfect evolutionary spot in the half-bottles. Only an ascetic curmudgeon could resist this wine’s sensual allure.