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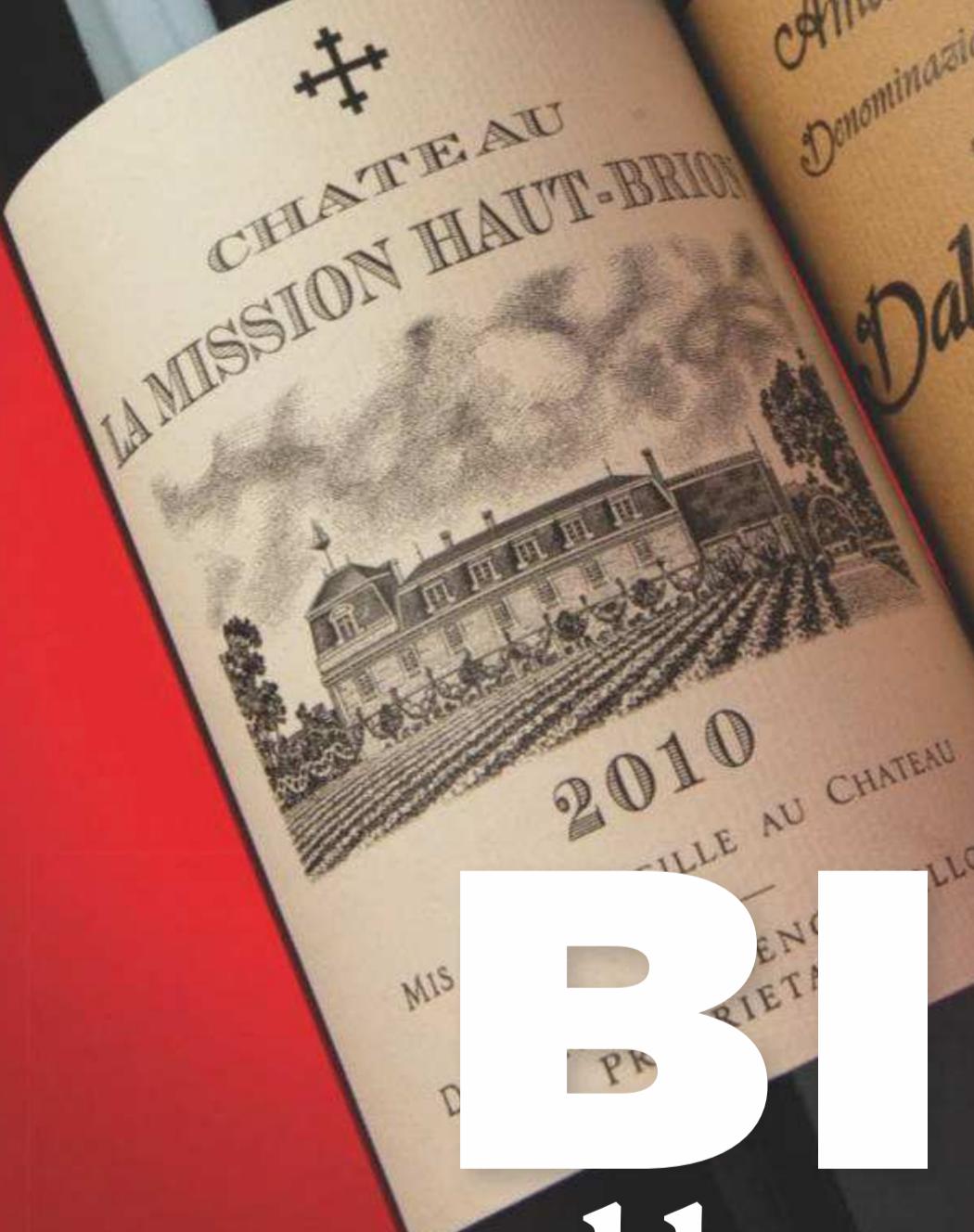
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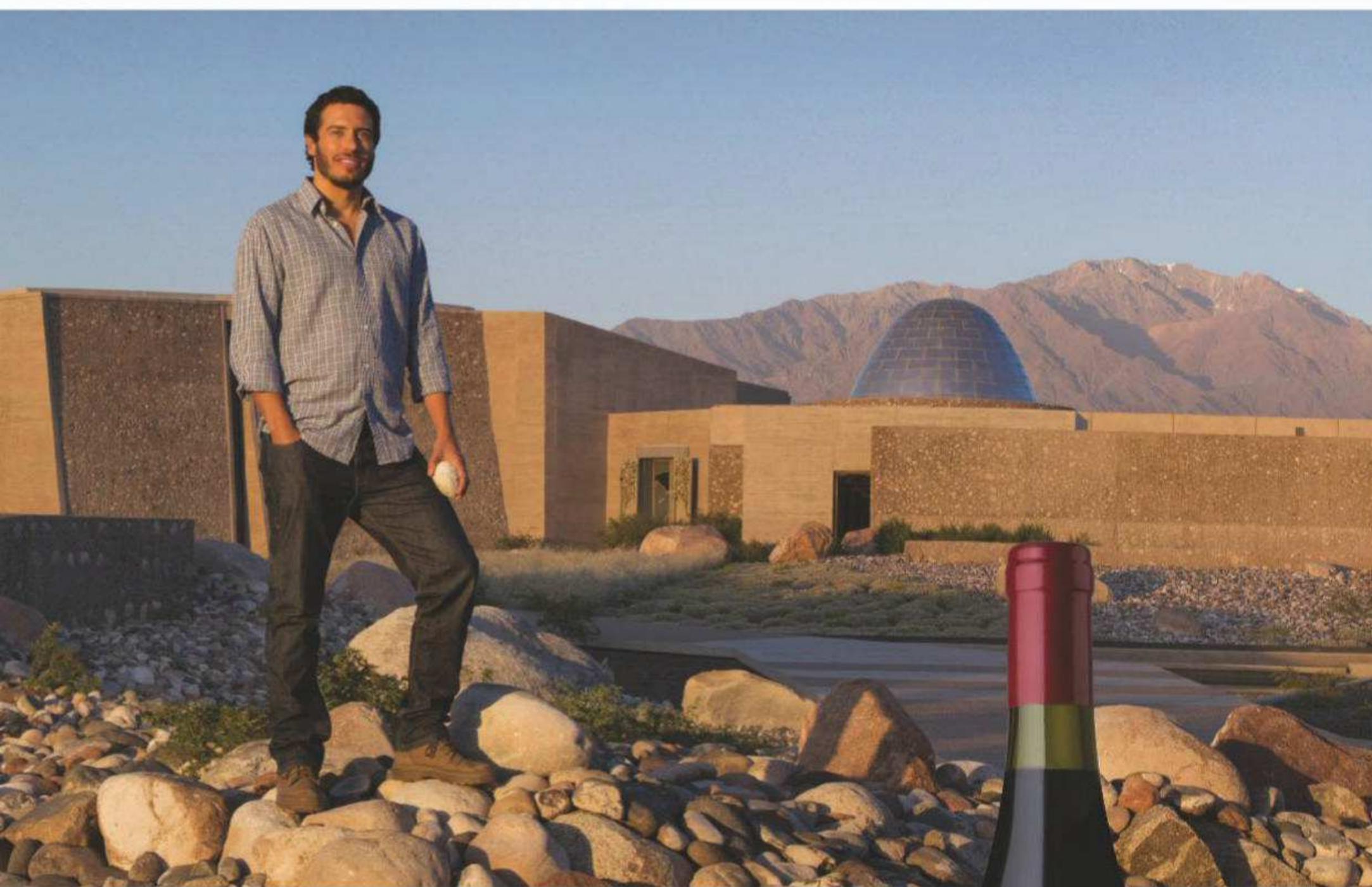
BIG
and beautiful

Andrew Jefford on why some high-alcohol
wines can give enormous pleasure

PLUS • 10 wines to try before you die • Top Cava



MOUNTAIN WINES



SEBASTIÁN ZUCCARDI

• 94 • 93 •

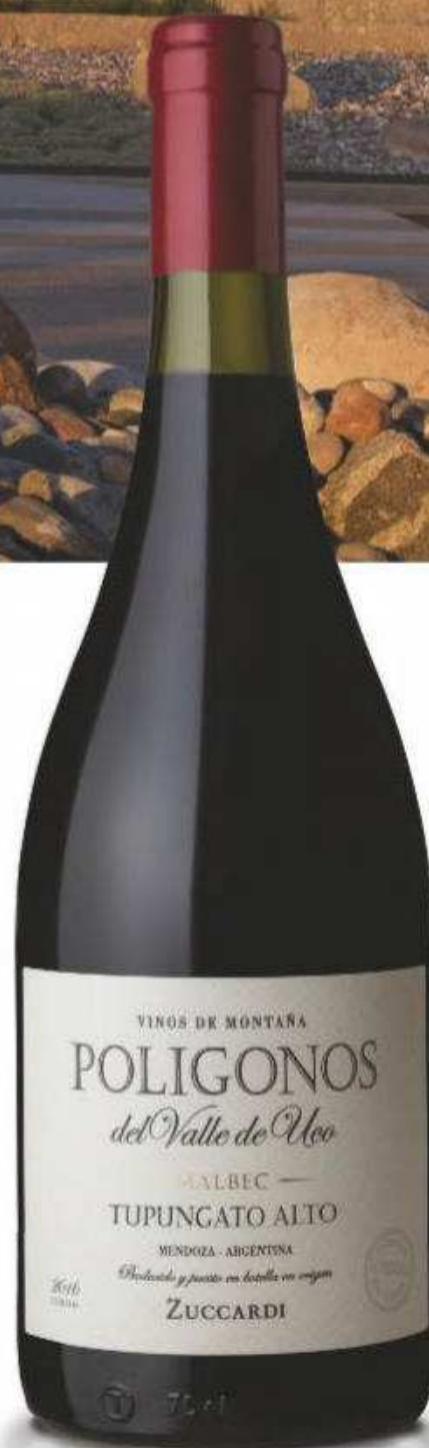
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Robert Parker
WINE ADVOCATE

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Atkin

ZUCCARDI POLÍGONOS DEL VALLE DE UCO
TUPUNGATO ALTO
MALBEC 2016



Decanter



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Roederer, Cristal, Champagne 1959

Cover photograph: Mike Prior. With thanks to Hedonism Wines (www.hedonism.co.uk) and Laithwaite's Wine (www.laithwaites.co.uk) for the loan of the bottles

The joy of terroir

Sunrise over the Cramant vineyards, located in one of only six grand cru villages in the Côte des Blancs area of Champagne, just south of Epernay. These are Chardonnay vines, planted on the commune's east-facing belemnite chalk slopes. The soils are up to 10m deep and are made from fossilised cuttlefish, which contributes mineral and creamy characteristics to the final wine. The vineyards pictured cover 351ha and are owned by Champagne house Laurent-Perrier. It blends Chardonnay from Cramant with grapes from other grands crus and different vintages to make its exceptional Grand Siècle Champagne.



Photograph: Leif Carlsson

Cramant, Champagne Laurent-Perrier



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John Stimpfig

'In between two remarkable bookends is a roll call of fine wine titans'



AFTER 34 YEARS service, *Decanter* is retiring its hugely prestigious Man or Woman of the Year accolade. From 2019, it will become the Decanter Hall of Fame Award.

Back in 1984, the first ever Man of the Year was the late, great Serge Hochar, who put Chateau Musar and the wines of Lebanon on the world map. The most recent and now last ever recipient is Eduardo Chadwick, who did the same for Errazuriz, and Chile.

In between those two remarkable bookends is a roll call of yet more fine wine titans including Bob Mondavi, Emile Peynaud, Miguel Torres, Len Evans, Piero Antinori and Nicolás Catena. All of them have quite literally changed the wine we drink.

Most recipients have been vintners or winemakers, but not all. In 1996, Austrian glassmaker Georg Riedel claimed the prize, and in 2013 it was the turn of super-sommelier Gerard Basset. Wine writers too, most notably the Britpack of Michael Broadbent (1993), Hugh Johnson (1995), Jancis Robinson (1999) and Steven Spurrier (2017).

However, it hasn't always gone to a single person. In 1985, it went to Château Margaux's mother and daughter team of Laura and Corinne Mentzelopoulos. And in 2014, the dynamic Jean-Pierre Perrin and his brother François of Château de Beaucastel rightly collected the accolade.

So why make the change after all this time? Two reasons; firstly, because we wanted a title that conveyed the idea of a long-term contribution to wine. And secondly, we felt it important in today's society to have a name that is completely gender neutral.

Although the name has been updated, the rigorous criteria and judging procedures remain exactly the same. At this time each year, *Decanter* consults with previous Women and Men of the Year, as well as our regular columnists and people of note, to put together a shortlist of worthy contenders. We then deliberate, in the full knowledge that the person chosen must sit well with the names of past winners (who will all automatically be enrolled into the Decanter Hall of Fame). There is no commercial consideration, political correctness or gender bias. The award is given purely on merit.

The identity of the 2019 recipient will be announced in *Decanter's* April issue. □

John Stimpfig is content director of *Decanter*

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TAITTINGER

**COMTES
DE CHAMPAGNE**
GRANDS CRUS | BLANC DE BLANCS
2007



SLEEP SETTLES ALL THINGS. IN WINTER THE VINES REST. THE CELLAR MASTER AND HIS TEAM REPEATEDLY TASTE THE CLEAR WINES YIELDED BY THE PLOTS HISTORY HAS RESERVED FOR CRISTAL. THE FINEST AMONG THEM WILL EARN THEIR PLACE IN A VINTAGE. **LA DIFFÉRENCE CRISTAL.**

A month in wine

All the important issues affecting you across the globe, compiled by Laura Seal

Sommelier exams annulled after leak

THE COURT OF Master Sommeliers Americas has confirmed that 'detailed information' on wines forming part of the notoriously tough MS tasting exam was leaked, and that the results of the tasting part of the 2018 Master Sommelier Diploma Examination have consequently been annulled.

Although candidates will be allowed to re-sit the exam, the announcement effectively stripped 23 master sommeliers of their newly earned and hard-won titles.

The Court said that its board of directors voted unanimously to invalidate the results from the tasting test, which had been taken in the first week of September.

This followed 'sufficient evidence' that the tasting exam 'was compromised by the release of detailed information concerning wines in the tasting flight', the Court said.

It did not name the person, or persons, held responsible for the information breach.

'We understand this decision is a shock to those who recently passed this examination, and we carefully considered the impact our decision would have on our newly pinned masters and their careers,' said Devon Broglie MS, chairman of the board.



'We are committed to developing an expedited process so that all eligible candidates can retake the tasting examination. Maintaining the integrity of the examination process must be our highest priority.'

The affected sommeliers were informed of the Court board's decision just one month after celebrating their success in what Broglie had formerly dubbed 'the most successful Master Sommelier Diploma Examination the Court of Master Sommeliers Americas has ever administered'.

Above: the coveted lapel pin worn by all master sommeliers

Cru Bourgeois classification criteria confirmed

THE ALLIANCE DES Crus Bourgeois du Médoc has confirmed its reinstatement of the traditional three-tier classification system, comprising rankings of Cru Bourgeois, Cru Bourgeois Supérieur and Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel.

Due to take effect in 2020, the classification will be reviewed every five years, meaning it will be possible for a château to move up or down within the hierarchy.

'We have learned a lot from the past and we are confident this will benefit the châteaux, trade and consumers,' said Alliance director Frédérique Dutheillet de Lamothe, at a London press conference in October.

'The new classification maintains the quality and origin of the Crus Bourgeois du Médoc. It is the result of five years of work in consultation with



Above: Alliance des Crus Bourgeois du Médoc director Frédérique Dutheillet de Lamothe, pictured in Paris

all the members of the Crus Bourgeois and the [French] government.'

In 2003, the system was reshaped to recognise 247 châteaux made up of nine Crus Bourgeois Exceptionnels, 87 Crus Bourgeois Supérieurs and 151 Crus Bourgeois. However, it was scrapped in 2007 after a series of appeals by disgruntled châteaux.

In 2010, the Alliance responded to the debacle by creating a government-backed verification procedure in which wines were selected, all with 'Cru Bourgeois' status, in blind tastings by a panel of experts. It published its first 'official selection' based on the 2008 vintage, and has done so every year since.

The revived three-tier system will follow a similar procedure, carried out by a body of expert tasters. For 2020, châteaux can submit a choice of five vintages from 2008 to 2016. The 2025 classification will encompass vintages from 2017 to 2021.

The classification will take into account 'quality, consistency and the capacity of the wine to age' for the top tiers, while also considering other agricultural, environmental and technical factors, plus site visits. ➤

A month in wine

Around the wine world

St-Emilion 2012 classification allegations denied

Bordeaux's Tribunal de Grande Instance confirmed that investigations have been opened into Hubert de Boüard, co-owner of Château Angélus, and Philippe Castéjà, director of one of the region's principal négociant houses, Borie-Manoux.

The move in September followed accusations that the two men influenced the 2012 St-Emilion classification in their favour, while acting as representatives of INAO, the French National Institute of Origin and Quality.

Reports said the investigation centred on suspicion of 'prise illégale d'intérêts', relating to cases where personal interest conflicts with a public role. The charge carries a maximum prison sentence of five years and potential fines up to €500,000.

De Boüard told police he had not taken part in the INAO deliberations relating to



Above: accused pair Hubert de Boüard (left) and Philippe Castéjà

the St-Emilion classification, and denied that he had any influence on the 2012 ranking, in which Angélus was promoted to Premier Grand Cru Classé A status. He told *Decanter* that he was 'certain' of his innocence, and looks forward to the next steps of the procedure 'with serenity'.

Castéjà also denied any wrongdoing, according to French media reports.

Record prices for DRC 1945 in Drouhin cellar auction



The world record for the most expensive bottle of wine sold at auction was smashed twice when two bottles of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti 1945 fetched US\$558,000 and \$496,000 respectively at a Sotheby's sale in New York on 13 October 2018.

Two of only 600 produced by DRC in 1945, after which the celebrated vineyard was uprooted, the bottles were from the personal cellar of Robert Drouhin, patriarch of Maison Joseph Drouhin. They had been expected to achieve a hammer price of \$22,000-\$32,000 each, but confounded expectations by easily surpassing the previous auction record, set more than a decade previously.

The 100-lot auction included vintages from 1937 to 1964 of DRC wines from Drouhin's cellar, fetching \$7.3m, more than five times its high estimate.

Balancing high alcohols is key for Bordeaux 2018

High alcohol levels are a common feature of the 2018 vintage in Bordeaux. Château Margaux director Philippe Bascaules said the 2018 grand vin label may have a 14% abv indication for the first time that he can recall, as Cabernet Sauvignon grown on both gravel and clay hit 14.5% alcohol.

Alcohols of 15.5% have been seen in some Merlots, so estates may end up with very high alcohol second wines, said consultant Thomas Duclos. 'Alcohol is higher than in 2016, but the balance is so great that it compares to 1990,' added Christian Moueix of négociant JP Moueix.

Greek producers battle steep Assyrtiko price hikes

Prices for Assyrtiko grapes on the island of Santorini have risen to €5 per kilo this year, up from €3.40 in 2017.

There is now concern that the market might say 'enough is enough', according to Yiannis Valambous, of Vassaltis Winery.

Growers blame 2018's low harvest for price hikes, caused by a 50% drop in rainfall this year, as well as Santorini's high proportion of old, low-yielding vines.

Some, such as Domaine Sigalas, are even rejecting Santorini's historic 'basket' vine training method in favour of trellising and Guyot pruning to boost yields.

In brief

England's bumper 2018 vintage has caused storage challenges for some UK winemakers. Charles Simpson of Simpsons Wine Estate in Kent said his team were 'desperately trying to find more tanks'. He also urged the English wine industry to work more collaboratively in order to cope with a 'scale problem' in many UK wineries, highlighted by this year's increased yields.

Bodegas Torres has opened a new winery in Catalonia's Costers del Segre DO to provide a permanent home for its Purgatori wine, a blend of Cariñena, Garnacha and Syrah. Named Desterrats, the estate dates back to 1770 and was once owned byMontserrat Abbey.

English sparkling wine producer Nyetimber has launched its 1086 range, aiming to rival prestige cuvée Champagne. The white 2009 and rosé 2010 sparkling wines – blends of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier – will only be produced 'in a year that has all the right stuff,' said head winemaker Cherie Spriggs.

Tibet is home to the 'world's highest vineyard', according to Guinness World Records. The aptly named Pure Land & Super-high Altitude Vineyard sits at 3,563.31m in the Lhasa river valley, comprising 66.7ha of land under vine, including Vidal, Muscat and an indigenous ice wine variety, Bei Bing Hong.

UK gin sales and exports exceeded the £2 billion mark in the 12 months to the end of June 2018, according to the Wine and Spirits Trade Association, as exports hit £532m. WSTA CEO Miles Beale predicted a '£3bn gin empire by the end of 2020'.

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CESARI

FINE WINES OF VERONA

Letters

Enraged or inspired by what you've read? Email editor@decanter.com, or write to: The Editor, *Decanter*, 1st Floor, 161 Marsh Wall, London, E14 9AP, UK

Cellar science

I WAS INTERESTED to read Alistair Macrow's letter about his cellar and its temperature fluctuations ('Notes & Queries', November 2018). I wonder if it has not been built correctly. One of the few times I perked up and paid attention while studying mechanics at university was when we solved heat diffusion equations to determine the optimum depth for a wine cellar. Clearly, surface temperature varies with the seasons. Heat diffuses into the ground very slowly, causing seasonal variation in soil temperature. Beyond a certain point, this variation becomes negligible and the cellar will be at a constant temperature year round. If built correctly, and depending on surrounding soil types, a cellar at around 4m depth should have an acceptably stable temperature, with annual variations of a few degrees at most.

Alastair MacKeown, by email

All in the mind

CORAVIN HAS TRULY changed how I approach wine. Never again will I bring a corked bottle to a tasting. I can drink a favourite bottle, one glass at a time, over the course of a year. Or I can just check where in the drinking window a wine is. Still I hear sceptical comments that imply oxidation is taking place in the bottle, despite the argon that replaces the wine. Really? I recently revisited a private cellar in the US, where in the autumn of 2015 we Coravined a number of legendary Bordeaux. The flight included a stunning Mission Haut Brion 1959, where we siphoned out approximately one third of the bottle. This September we Coravined another glass from the same bottle – it was still in perfect condition. For me, that indicates that it's all a matter of perception. A half-empty bottle can be viewed as an opened bottle, or an 'accessed bottle'. Daring to use Coravin for your top wines is a matter of mindset.

Gunnar Sonesson, Stockholm

Cartoon: robertthompsoncartoons.com



Letter of the month

A little knowledge...

NEWS OF ALEXA providing wine and food pairings ('A month in wine', November 2018) is concerning. Correct me if I'm wrong, but wine and food pairing goes far beyond 'steak and Malbec'. There are many other aspects to consider: what cut of steak? Are you having any sauce? Where is the Malbec from? And what age? As a trainee sommelier, it frustrates me. The app will give zero regard to personal taste and, if it's not mentioning brands, a consumer would most likely pick up the cheapest bottle in the supermarket! Which, frankly, goes with nothing (except maybe a cooking sauce). I fear this app could create a bunch of big-headed people who pretend to know what they're talking about when, in reality, they've just heard a computer-generated voice telling them Sauternes goes well with blue cheese. But what if that blue cheese is on a pizza?

Iona Haston, Glasgow

WIN A MAGNUM OF CHAMPAGNE BOLLINGER

Wine is all about opinions, so why not share yours? If you are amused, enraged or intrigued by anything you've read in *Decanter* or *Decanter.com*, write or email us at the address listed above.

Each month the sender of our star letter will receive a magnum of Champagne Bollinger, courtesy of Mentzendorff, the UK agent (www.mentzendorff.co.uk).

California dreaming

THERE ARE TIMES when reading *Decanter* is a joyful romp through aspiration and wishful thinking, when money is no object and my drinking dreams take me over the rainbow. At other times I wonder what world people are living in. Ronan Sayburn's list of top 30 white wines from California (September 2018) is not so much a joyful romp as a terrified creep through a haunted wood populated by ravenous wolves with one eye on my throat and the other on my wallet. Only two wines under £20! How many wine lovers – how many *Decanter* readers – live in this world? Ironic that Hugh Johnson's column in the same issue takes a beautiful pop at producers who inflate their prices for questionable reasons. No doubt expensive can sometimes be value for money. Equally some price-tags are so bloated as to be obese, but sadly the patient is clearly refusing all treatment.

Tim Frances, Newbury, Berkshire

Torture by tasting note

A JUDGE ON your DWWA Burgundy panel described one of the wines as having, a 'tight palate showing notes of crushed rocks, iodine, lime candy and saline oyster shells'. Not being in the habit of eating rocks, or even shells, I am at a loss to understand what he/she is trying to tell me. Perhaps you could elucidate for those of us with a less adventurous gastronomic disposition? Otherwise, full marks for another year's Herculean effort.

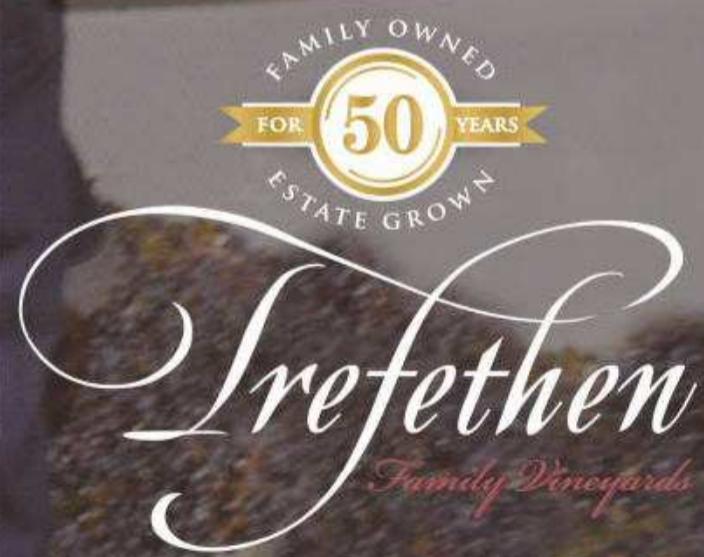
Paul Radford, by email

Left: Some readers may find it hard to relate to certain tasting note descriptors (see right)

NAPA PIONEERS

When our parents Janet and John Trefethen (pictured) began making wine in Napa Valley, there wasn't a lot here. Not a lot of wineries, not a lot of vineyards, not a lot of visitors. There was, however, great soil, an incredible climate, and an abundance of passion. Fifty years later and another generation in, we remain committed to growing every grape ourselves, and doing it all by hand. We hope you will join us as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary this year, and rediscover the pioneering spirit of Napa.

Lenny Trefethen
Haley Trefethen



ONE FAMILY ONE ESTATE ONE PASSION

SINCE 1968

Andrew Jefford

'Wine's complexity replicates that delivered by cooked foods'

IS THERE SOME fundamental difference between the flavours of wine and those of food? This question has long nagged me. If there isn't, why does wine have such a hold over us? Why do fine wines sell at the prices they do? Why are there wine auctions, wine libraries, wine tastings and wine cellars? Why, indeed, does this magazine exist? There's no equivalent for fish, meat or vegetables, though these items are no less diverse and are still more widely consumed than wine.

Alcohol is an answer. Other alcoholic beverages, though, don't command equivalent attention, even if whisky comes close. We have to go back to flavour (and remember that this also means aroma: a continuum, perceived in different ways).

Food flavours are often simple: think of celery, cucumber, lettuce or bread. Foods, though, have an overwhelming textural presence which is absent from wine. Those textures distract – and gratify in themselves, since ingesting mass and substance is a vital part of sustenance. If you eat a bowl of pasta with tomato sauce after a long walk, as much of your pleasure will derive from chewing and swallowing this familiar and trusted food as it will from the taste of the dish itself. The joy of a buttered crumpet, a freshly baked croissant or a slice of pavlova is in large part textural.

We're particularly fond of fatty foods and sweet foods – but not because of their flavours as such. Rather it's because our bodies recognise that such foods are calorifically dense. A little of each would, in the prehistoric past, have carried us us a long way across the savannah, and much further than another handful of tough roots.

There are a number of reasons why we cook food. Safety is one of them, and digestibility another: the heat involved in cooking both kills bacteria and breaks down the indigestible tissues of many raw food items. Just as important to modern humans, though, is that in assembling and transforming raw

What I've been drinking this month

The **Via Nuova Barolo 2013** from **Chiara Boschis** cost me £61.59 a bottle: a very serious purchase. Was it worth it? The wine is deeply resonant, clear and limpid, with complex fruit flavours (pomegranate, cherry, sloe); it combines grace with structure and authority in a way that perhaps only Barolo can; and it made my most wine-savvy friends very happy. So – yes, it was. I have a couple more bottles. Definitely a Christmas Day contender.

ingredients, we can create flavours of greater complexity than those ingredients possess on their own. Eating different foods together achieves the same end.

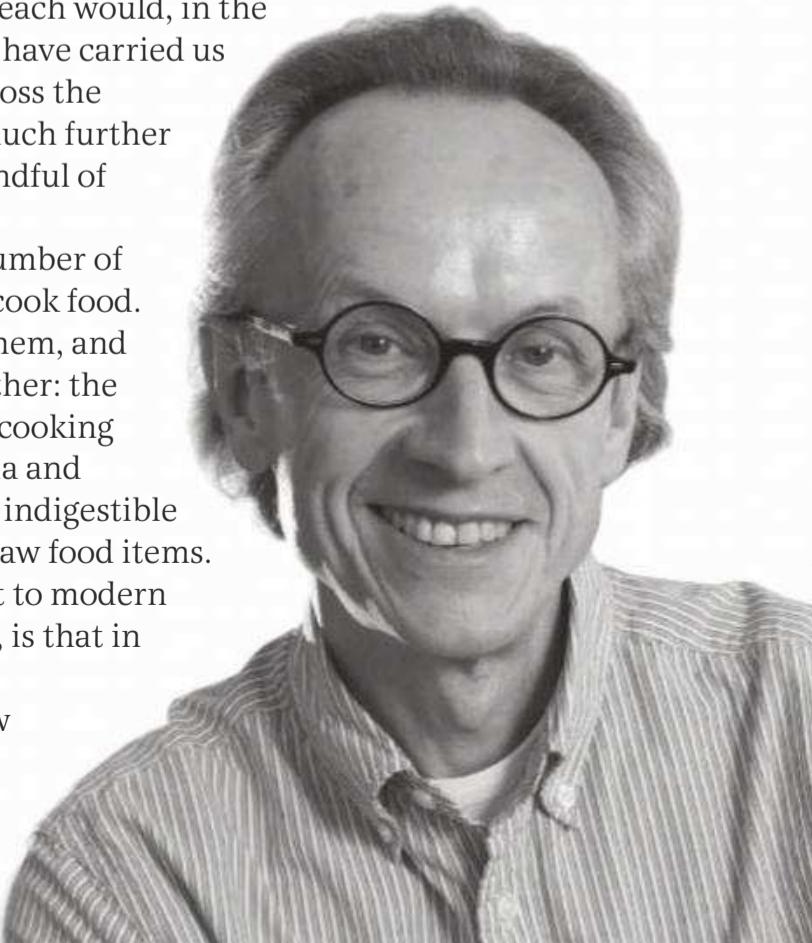
Hence the popularity of 'recipes'. They're routes to complexity of flavour: that which satisfies as well as gratifies.

Good or fine wine has the hold it does over us, I'd suggest, because it offers one of the most complex single-item flavour packages we can put into our mouths, rivalled only (if at all) by a great chef's work on a sauce or a composed dish. Wine's complexity replicates and even exceeds that delivered by cooked foods... and it brings us the mood enhancement of alcohol as it does so. This is why great wine is best partnered by simple food – to avoid a 'clash of complexities'.

Where do these layers of flavour come from? Grapes in fact seem to be less complex in flavour than other fresh fruits like peaches or nectarines; indeed the sugar-acid balance in grape juice makes it seem almost insipid by comparison with orange juice or grapefruit juice. It's the transformation of grape juice into wine via fermentation which increases its complexity to an unparalleled degree.

This is partly because it rearranges the balance in grape juice: since sugars are converted to alcohol, acidity suddenly swings into prominence when grape juice becomes wine. But it's also because of the complexity of flavours which emerge from the action of yeast itself, both as it is active in must and after it dies and sinks to the bottom of a fermentation vessel, together with the extraction of elements hidden in grape skins for red (and orange) wine. The way in which wines are made, and the vessels in which they are calmed and matured after fermentation, adds further layers of complexity, as does bottle-ageing itself.

The result, as all wine lovers know, is that a single sip of wine can speak to us, even sing to us. Wine truly seems to be more complex than almost everything else we eat and drink. □



Andrew Jefford is a *Decanter* contributing editor and the Louis Roederer International Columnist of 2016 for this and his 'Jefford on Monday' column at Decanter.com/jefford



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Jane Anson

'The trickle of international wines sold through La Place has become a flood'

A FEW WEEKS ago I was in Le Pressoir d'Argent restaurant in downtown Bordeaux, headed up by English Michelin-starred chef Gordon Ramsay, tasting through iconic Chilean wines (Seña, Vinedo Chadwick) that were about to be sold by French wine merchants through the local La Place de Bordeaux trading system.

September has become one of the most interesting months of the year around here, as the trickle of international wines being sold through La Place has become a flood.

There is quite clearly no turning back now. Gone are the days when Bordeaux châteaux owners (one in particular, but I'm not one to gossip) threw their toys out of the pram and threatened to remove their wines from any merchant who dared to be distracted from the business of selling Bordeaux.

The new normal is a September that kicks off with the old stalwarts Opus One, Masseto, Almaviva, Beaucastel Hommage à Jacques Perrin and Seña, now joined by a host of other names, which at last count would include Inglenook's Rubicon and Blancaneaux, Jackson Family Wines' Cardinale and Vérité, Harlan's Promontory, Clos Apalta, Viñedo Chadwick, Solaia, Catena Zapata, Caiarossa and Balasto.

Mathieu Chadronnier, managing director of CVBG merchants, kept things understated when he told me it had been an 'intense' start to the annual return to work, known as *la rentrée*, after the extended summer holiday in France. His company has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the new wave of names, and I believe he was instrumental in convincing a number of Californian estates to benefit from the contacts books and globetrotting habits of Bordeaux merchants (it's mainly CVBG, along with Duclot and Maison Joanne taking the lead with the Napa names).

What to make of it all? It's been clear for a number of years that Bordeaux estates have been pulling back from en primeur, releasing less stock each year,

What I've been drinking this month

I've enjoyed **Seña 2016** from Aconcagua Valley in Chile more and more over the past few vintages, and the latest release is another clear success: rich, silky, packed full of violets, black chocolate and tightly packed savoury cherry and cassis fruits, with a juicy and uplifting finish. The winery has been fully biodynamic since 2011 – although they don't promote it as such.

meaning that négociants find themselves having to fill the gaps in their cash flow.

I wonder if the châteaux really understood the power that they were giving up by doing so? Most négociants I speak to now make more margin in September than they do by selling their entire yearly allocation of first growths. And that's without having to tie their buyers into other less-desired wines. There are also Bordeaux wines on La Place in September – notably Yquem in bottle and Château Latour's older vintages. But the stocks that châteaux have held back at the estate are going to have to be released at some point – and it's getting to be a pretty crowded calendar.

It's not all bad for Bordeaux, of course. As Chadronnier points out: 'The September releases get us speaking with wine buyers throughout the year, and so extend the conversation way beyond the en primeur season, which is good for local wines also.'

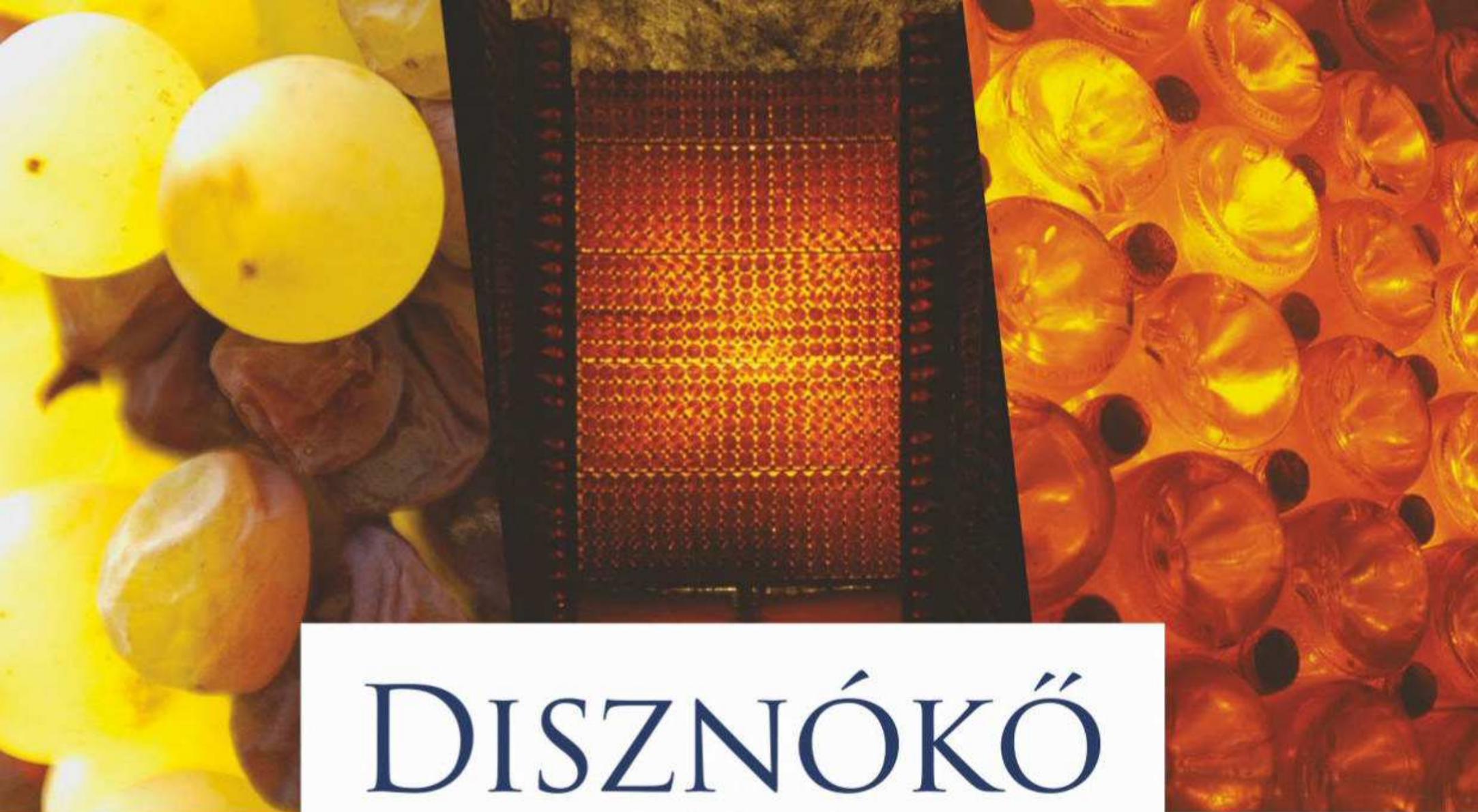
A word of warning to both négociants and the newcomers, who right now are all quite rightly celebrating their successful strategy. Any non-Bordeaux names on La Place seem to be following the rule that this method of distribution gives carte blanche to raise prices year on year. Seña 2016 was released 7.7% up on last year, Masseto up 16.9%, Hommage à Jacques Perrin up 14.9%, Almaviva up 11.5%, Opus One up 9.4%. Spot the trend, anyone?

I guess it's no surprise that Bordeaux is seen as a wonderful place to raise your price irresponsibly. But however much we may berate the Bordelais for introducing the concept, they do at least lower prices in years where quality is seen to be less good. If the iconic names now using the system don't follow suit, they will end up in exactly the same place as their Bordeaux counterparts – asking for prices that the market simply doesn't want to bear.

The risk of that becomes ever higher as the choice of international wines continues to multiply. And if it does, the négociants may find that they are asked to carry the can – at which point they will have moved out of the frying pan, and into the fire. □

Jane Anson is a *Decanter* contributing editor, and Louis Roederer International Feature Writer of 2016. Read her 'Anson on Thursday' blog on Decanter.com/anson





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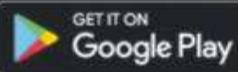
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The image shows a close-up of a Santa Sofia Amarone della Valpolicella wine bottle. The label features the text "Storie di Valpolicella. STORIES FROM VALPOLICELLA", "SANTA SOFIA", "AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA", "DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA", "CLASSICO", and "2012". Below the label, there's a decorative illustration of a building. At the bottom of the bottle, it says "I CLASSICI VINI VERONESI DAL 1811". The Santa Sofia logo, which is a stylized letter 'S' containing a profile of a woman, is prominently displayed on a red background at the bottom of the bottle. Social media links for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are visible at the very bottom.

Hugh Johnson

'Curiosity drives me to taste every English bubbly I come across'



I STOOD IN the vines pinching myself, one hour west of London, counting the crop of perfectly ripe Pinot Noir in a Marlow vineyard. Marlow? Appellation Thames Valley? I still can't get used to the idea, or rather the fact, that the south of England has produced a huge and near-perfect crop of incipient bubbly.

I've been a Champagne addict for half a century. My deliveries go back to 1959. I've often described my favourite White Foil as 'mother's milk'. Now my loyalty is wobbling: sheer curiosity drives me to taste every English bubbly I come across. Curiosity, and local pride, patriotism, chauvinism – call it what you like.

I appreciate acidity in everything I drink. My favourite clarets would rarely appeal to Parker fans. Every wine, in my view, benefits from a proportion of not-quite-ripe grapes. English bubbles (I'm talking about the class acts – and they are surely in the great majority) have exhilarating briskness as their USP.

Certainly it's not enough on its own. It can be (and has been) allied to simplicity. Now, in many cases 10 vintages in, there are reserve wines to play with for complexity, deeper roots in the vineyard, more experience of handling, fermenting... and above all, there is blending. A lot of vintners are fermenting, at least partially, in oak. The range of possibilities, in other words, has expanded exponentially, and the notion of house style, sketchy at first when it was all trial and error, has become reality.

Regional style – let alone county style, as some vintners in a hurry have proposed – hangs in the air. An AP for Dorset or West Sussex might one day seem reasonable – but only when people can distinguish the wines blind. Hampshire, the Sussexes and so on are after all purely political entities. But names will always be contentious. Nobody seems to like my own, cheerful proposal of Bubbly for the whole category, but I haven't heard better. As for WineGB, how would the Scots like whiskyGB, I wonder.

Should Champagne be worried? Quality competition is surely always a good thing. Did the Prosecco craze worry them? I hope it reduced the temptation to trade down-market. New World sparklers have great local markets, but the appeal of Champagne, its style and quality, is quasi-universal. Bubbly? Perhaps one day. □

Hugh Johnson OBE is a world-renowned wine writer



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Decanter Retailer Awards 2018

It was party time at the OXO2 Tower Wharf in London, as the wine trade gathered to celebrate the achievements of the UK's best and most innovative wine merchants. Chair of judges Peter Richards MW was our genial host

1 Douglas Wood of WoodWinters Wines & Whiskies with guest Julia Liewald **2** Decanter Retailer Awards chairman Peter Richards (centre) with The Wine Society's Liz Cerroti and Pierre Mansour **3** Fraser Wotzke of Harrods (*left*) with Decanter content director John Stimpfig **4** Jody Langrish (*left*), James Benn and Natalie Holder from Z&B Vintners/The Vinorium **5** Vilarnau, Pazos de Lusco and Finca Constancia wines were kindly provided by González Byass UK **6** Decanter's Natalie Earl enjoys musical accompaniment provided by The Wandering Hands band **7** Keelan McCafferty from The New Zealand Cellar **8** (*From left*) Teresa Holmes, Irene Lorenzo, Ana Gomez and Francisco Fra

from L'Oculto **9** Stephen Hobley and Lindsay Greatbatch of Decanter with Bruno Cernecca from Vini Italiani (*right*) **10** Laura Michelon of Goedhuis & Co and Decanter's John Stimpfig **11** Chris Rogers (*left*) and Kevin Metcalfe from Love Wine in Jersey.

The awards ceremony was held on 20 September at OXO2 Tower Wharf on the South Bank. Our thanks to González Byass UK, who provided three of their top wines to suit the occasion.





"Labyrinth" is the limited edition label celebrating Famiglia Pasqua's most precious wine: Amarone

Labyrinth is a precious limited edition of 7,000 bottles celebrating Amarone Famiglia Pasqua, one of the wines most appreciated by Italian and international critics. An elegant label designed by the young Venetian artist Giorgia Fincato, who has wrapped the bottle in a continuous line across multiple perspective planes. Using a special serigraphic process, his design has become material and transfigures into a labyrinth.

Labyrinth contains Amarone Famiglia Pasqua 2013 vintage. A wine of great structure and character, whose grapes come from Mizzole vineyards in eastern Valpolicella. Deep red colour, with a broad nose, fresh and decisive aroma of red fruits like

"For us, the labyrinth is a metaphor for our daily search for quality," **Umberto Pasqua**

blackberry and cherry, spicy tones reminiscent of chocolate, toast and sweet notes of vanilla. The palate is warm, balanced, with soft tannins and notes of appassimento on the finish.

"For us, the labyrinth is a metaphor for our daily search for quality," comments President Umberto Pasqua, "the know-how accumulated in nearly 100 years of work in the vineyard and in the cellar is the result of research, determination and audacity. Exactly the qualities needed to navigate a labyrinth and to gain focus."

"The labyrinth can also be considered a metaphor for the wine tasting process," added the CEO Riccardo Pasqua, "every time a great wine is tasted it is decoded. Recalling, through our memory and our senses, experiences that lead us to recognize its qualities, we are able to interpret its complexity. With every sip," concluded the Managing Director, "our knowledge is, in part, amended and consolidated. We journey through our senses until we feel that this wine is "ours" because now we know it, we've met it, we've arrived at its centre."



High scores for labyrinth inspired wine: Amarone Famiglia Pasqua

Robert Parker - 91 points for 2013

Gambero Rosso – Three Glasses for 2013

Wine Enthusiast - 90 points for 2012;
93 points for 2011

Robert Parker - 94 points for 2006 Riserva

Decanter – 93 points for 2003 Riserva

Wine Spectator – 92 points for 2003 Riserva



Like the labyrinth drawn on the bottle, a real labyrinth was created in the park of Cantine Pasqua in Valpolicella, a magnificent permanent installation that extends for 1600 square meters: 991 laurel plants almost 2 metres high define a path 450 meters in length, in which to immerse oneself and strive to find the centre.

*"One does not get lost in the labyrinth. In the labyrinth one finds oneself.
In the labyrinth one does not face the Minotaur.
In the labyrinth one faces oneself"*

H. Kern

BIG and beautiful

In the eye of the beholder? Lean, zippy styles may be the zeitgeist. But, argues Andrew Jefford, there are great terroirs all over the world which naturally produce wines that are rich, ripe, full and fine. Don't miss out



Andrew Jefford is a Decanter contributing editor. He has won numerous awards as a wine writer, author and broadcaster

TORONTO'S PEARSON AIRPORT, January 2014; my first steps on Canadian soil. The immigration officer wanted to know why I'd come. Wine, I said. He relaxed a little, looking up from his screen. We chatted some more. 'You wanna know the definition of a good wine?' That, I replied in all honesty, would be very helpful to me. 'A good wine,' he said, fixing me with a professionally unwavering gaze, 'is one that says 14.5% or more on the label.'

Perhaps you're smiling; perhaps you're rolling your eyes. It's possible that *Decanter* readers prefer 13.5% to 14.5%; there may even be ultras among you who prize 12.5% as the path to heaven and to righteousness. Fair enough – but most drinkers aren't with you.

'Big, full-flavoured wines have an enduring appeal.' The speaker is Justin Howard-Sneyd MW, whose work for Safeway, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Laithwaite's (now for the latter as a consultant) makes him one of the UK's most experienced wine retailers.

'It's a terrible mistake to say everyone is moving toward low-alcohol wines,' he says.

'At Laithwaite's, the cases the team put together of rich, dark reds are almost the best-selling cases they have. I'm very cautious about listening to critics who say that freshness and lightness is what everybody likes. Freshness and lightness can be lovely – but so can the succulent, lush flavours of deliciously ripe wines.'

I'm not quite with the guy at the immigration desk, but I'm certainly with Justin on this.

Rich tradition

Let's briefly visit three wine landscapes. The first is Pinhão, in Portugal's Douro valley: river moorings, a heroic train line through a small, elaborately tiled station – then terrace after terrace of vines soaring upwards on mountain slopes groomed and combed over centuries into swirling, multi-faceted elegance. Porrera in Spain's Priorat is less orderly, but no less dramatic: a village which seems to have landed like a feather on a stormy sea of brown rock. Then there's Maury in Roussillon, southwest France: dark, glittering stonefields ➤



The Three Graces, by Peter Paul Rubens, depicts the daughters of Zeus, Aglaia (elegance), Euphrosyne (mirth) and Thalia (youth and beauty)



Above: Carignan grapes in Roussillon – its naturally high acidity can balance richness in wines

surveyed, eyelessly, by ruined Cathar castles from a high ridgeline.

Each has a resonant wine tradition, both before and after phylloxera; each can furnish multiple bottled proofs of greatness. Yes, two out of the three are perhaps best known for fortified wines (in which richness, we might care to note, is actually amplified, the better to preserve sweetness), but in each case their original reputation was made with unfortified wines, and it is those unfortified wines which now attract most attention once again.

If you want to taste the greatness of those terroirs, then you must be open to generosity of flavour in wine. Rock, sunlight, steep slopes, and the stubborn, deep-rooted old vines which have seen out 80 or more summers here (as well as the no-less-brutal winters which follow them) can give you nothing else. If your palate is closed to wines of this sort, your wine world will be smaller. You'll miss out.

Europe has many fine wine regions of this sort, and the wine world outside Europe has even more: Napa, Mendoza and the Barossa are all outstanding quality regions offering variations on this richly orchestrated theme. A lifetime of wincing avoidance would be sad.

Proper place

Temperate regions (such as Bordeaux) may not express generosity by dint of terroir itself – but all the evidence suggests that their wines are

'Balance on its own, unsupported by depth and substance, may get a wine into middle age, but not much further'



best after generous seasons. No one wants Bordeaux 2013s, though they're as light and fresh as snowdrops. We'd rather get our hands on Bordeaux 2009, 2010 and 2016. Why? The wines are richer, more complex, denser, longer and in every way more satisfying. You may point out that there is freshness in 2010 and 2016; you may, indeed, say that is why you prefer them to the frankly unctuous 2009s. I agree – but that freshness is encased in depth and in substance, not shivering and naked, like a snowdrop.

It's the depth and substance which ensures that the wines will endure. Balance on its own, unsupported by depth and substance, may get a wine into middle age, but not much further.



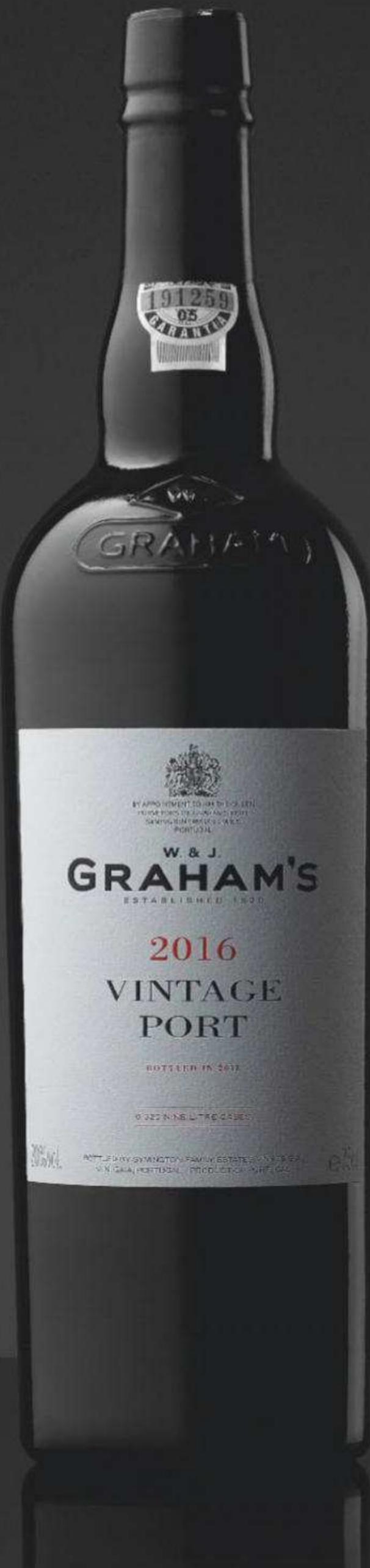
The 2001s were lovely, but the richer 2000s and 2005s will last longer.

True cool-climate wines (like those of the Loire valley, of Burgundy or of Germany) make a more nuanced case for richness, since the much-loved classicism of their profiles is predicated on a vitality of balance, and a truly hot year can mute that. Yet richness there must be – in order for their fruit flavours to possess resonance, and for their acidity levels to achieve pitch and poise without becoming over-dominant and shrill. Great cool-climate varieties like Riesling, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, growing in distinguished sites where they enjoy an extended season, all have the ability to express density and resonance

alongside vitality. The evidence here, too, suggests that richer vintages age more successfully than slighter ones – and for dessert-wine residual sugar styles, of course, the richness of a generous harvest is essential.

I don't believe in the primacy of the grape variety in creating wine flavour; it's places which matter above all, so the contentment of the variety in its place is all that matters. Suppose, though, that you love the paleness, the delicacy and the nuance which Pinot Noir is capable of expressing, yet you're curious to taste the fine wines of distinguished sites in warmer locations. Step forward, Grenache – a variety whose nobility can take different forms of expression, but which can be ➤

Above: the town of Pinhao surrounded by the steeply terraced vineyards of Portugal's Douro Valley



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decidedly Pinot-like in warmer, dry places such as Australia's Clare Valley, in the sandy zones of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, or in the mountainous Gredos region near Madrid.

So what if it's 16%? Grace is possible in Grenache at 16%, just as it is in Pinot Noir at 13%. The difference you will taste is the difference of the place itself. Don't miss out.

Balance of power

Given all of this, how did it come about that richness ever fell from favour? One cause may be the obligatory labelling of alcohol. This leads, I'd argue, to cognitive bias (a deviation from rationality in judgement). Simply knowing that a wine is 14.5% or 15% alcohol predisposes some tasters and drinkers to find that wine 'alcoholic'. Without that knowledge, they might have enjoyed the wine for its freshness, its balance or its other outstanding qualities (see the tasting notes that follow).

'Rich, generous wines must be balanced if their alcohol levels are not to assume excessive prominence'

Any principled objection to an alcohol level of 14.5% or more is illogical unless such drinkers systematically avoid fortified wines (15.5%-22%) and spirits. The average strength of a home-made gin and tonic or a watered whisky will be 15%-20%, while anyone prepared to sip Cognac (enjoying record sales at present) can cope with a drink more than twice as strong as the richest Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Priorat.

I fully understand, though, any drinker who dislikes wines which are laboriously or artificially rich. I dislike such wines, too – and it is perhaps true that, at the apogee of Robert Parker's critical hegemony, aspirational wines of this sort crowded the world stage, since (rightly or wrongly) it was felt that Parker's tastes lay in that direction.

Not all rich wines are great. What are the hallmarks of 'bad' richness? Raisiny notes in the fruit would be one; these are particularly horrible when combined with excessive oak in a wine deficient in other factors of balance, such as acidity, tannin and extract. Rich, generous wines must of course be balanced if their alcohol levels are not to assume excessive prominence – and the best support for such wines, given that they hail from warmer zones and climates, is amplitude of fruit backed by a 'mineral' or 'stony' density, often woven into tannins or extract. ➤

Below: Le Clos du Caillou, La Réserve, Châteauneuf-du-Pape



Photograph: Pepbaix/Alamy Stock Photo

Above: the village of Porrera nestles 'like a feather on a stormy sea of brown rock' in Catalonia's Priorat region

Photograph: Blicker Pierce Wagner



Above: Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' Cask 23 blends fruit from blocks in the SLV and Fay vineyards

Attempting to give such wines a prominent acid balance by artificial means is another route to 'bad' richness, since the result usually tastes artificial and chimerical. An acid intervention of this sort, indeed, actually destroys balance, making both alcohol and oak taste all the more prominent, particularly if the tannin profile is modest. We must accept that rich, generous wines are sometimes low in acidity; indeed their low acidity may be a key part of their pleasure. A low-acid wine balanced in some other manner can offer some of the most sensually beguiling of all wine experiences.

Warm feeling

Other naturally articulated rich wines do indeed contain prominent acid levels – like rich, Carignan-dominated red wines from Roussillon or Priorat, especially if grown at higher altitudes. It's also worth noting that, contrary to received opinion, alcohol is almost always a quiet note in great rich wines. I doubt that anyone who has a chance to compare 2015 Châteauneuf-du-Pape with 2016 will ➤

Domaine André et Mireille Tissot's Château-Chalon 2010 from Jura



Jefford's pick: 10 top wines that are big, balanced and delicious

Domaine André et Mireille Tissot, Château-Chalon, Jura, France

2010 97

N/A UK www.stephane-tissot.com

An outlier in my 'generous 10', perhaps – but I defy anyone to taste this aromatically complex, hugely energetic vin jaune and not find it fresh, entrancing, vivacious: all those things which 15% wines are not meant to be. The only 'warmth' is an umami hint. **Drink** 2018-2026 **Alcohol** 15%



Dal Forno Romano, Monte Lodoletta, Amarone della Valpolicella, Veneto, Italy

2011 99

£182.50 **Fine & Rare**

The strongest wine in my selection, yet this magnificent Amarone's alcohol is barely visible thanks to its astonishing depth, texture and sumptuousness. Pressed black fruits seep with fruit essences; smoke and cinders; herbal complexities; teasing floral notes, all engraved into a palate that expresses creamy finesse but without a trace of superfluous fat, heat or obviousness. Beautifully crafted, as dignified as any grand Barolo. **Drink** 2018-2050 **Alc** 17%

Château La Mission Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan, Bordeaux, France

2010 97

£616.67-£665 **Davy's, Millésima**

Much has been made of the fact that this commanding wine is 15.1% alcohol. It comes across as lithe, energetic, vivacious and intense, curving in a high arrowed arc through the palate and leaving it, 45 seconds or more later, as fresh as when it arrived, and with all the aromatic allusiveness you'd expect: tobacco, plant extracts, incense woods, undergrowth. If there is a generosity of constitution here, it lies in the fruit: roasted plum and

blackcurrant with a grilled meat edge. Arresting concentration.

Drink 2025-2050 **Alc** 15.1%



Dominus Estate, Yountville, Napa Valley, California, USA

2007 97

£189 **Richard Kihl**

This mature wine remains dark black-red in colour. Dark chocolate, roast meat and forest resins haunt the blackberry and plum fruits, but it's surprisingly vital too, with ringing, resonant, ripe acidity in orbit with the flesh, soft textures and overall amplitude. Pure Napa class. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14.5%

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, Cask 23, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley, California, USA

2013 96

£255 (2014) **Enotria&Coe, Great Western Wine**

This head-turner of a wine is saturatedly dark black-red, with irresistible scents of blue forest fruits, a pencilly freshness and a little bitter-orange charm. Intense, fresh, bright and tightly gathered, despite the intrinsic sweetness of the fruits. Perfumes float to the very end of the palate, which finishes clean and fresh: a wine of 'invisible' dimensions whose generosity is carried by its intrinsic grandeur. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 14.5%

Le Clos du Caillou, La Réserve, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Rhône, France

2016 95

£105-£120 **Genesis Wines, H2Vin & Quintessentially**

Grenache with Mourvèdre, aged in demi-muids and amphorae. Dry thyme and underbrush scents mingle with graceful cherry and pomegranate. Smoky, nutty warmth lurks behind the beguiling fruits and intricate plant essences, backed by gentle balancing tannin. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 15.5% ➤



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Above: vineyards in Maury, Roussillon, with the Pyrenees and Canigou mountain in the distance

prefer the 2015s; the 2016s are much denser and fresher, which inevitably suggests that they are lower in alcohol and 'less rich' than the 2015s. Wrong. The 2016s are generally higher in alcohol; it's just that the alcohol is a less prominent part of their constitution, and their fruit style is brighter. As always with questions of wine aesthetics, it's the whole that matters, not the individual parts.

Trying to make fresh, light wines by picking early in sites which would naturally deliver rich wines is, in my opinion, also an error – but not one that need concern us here, since such wines will never taste rich but will rather be lean, austere and hard. There are better solutions in order to endow wines grown in 'rich' regions with freshness – like vineyard soil restoration, canopy work, ultra-rapid harvesting at the first moment of ripeness, ever-more fastidious fruit sorting, delicate and unhurried extraction, or the use of whole-bunch fruit for red wines or skin contact for whites.

Those suffering 'rich-wine neurosis' should seek a cure. The world's climate is warming. Shifting the location of vineyards to higher altitudes or latitudes, or changing the varietal plantings of distinguished sites, will take time. Winemakers' understanding of 'balance' is deepening and becoming more profound all the time. Ripe wines are here to stay – and they're getting better all the time. **D**

Photograph: Hervé Lenain/Alamy Stock Photo

Big, balanced, delicious (continued...)

Quinta do Vale Meão, Douro, Portugal 2012 95

£89.99-£115 **Corks, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Pinot & Chardo, Roberts & Speight**

Deep, savoury, complex, enticing: generosity is just one side of a multi-faceted personality; indeed it's hard to imagine expressive force of this order without the palate wealth to back it up. Black fruits, earth, crushed rock, plant essences: they're all here, and the sweetness the wine showed in its youth is beginning to settle and resolve. **Drink** 2018-2032 **Alc** 14%

Clos Erasmus, Laurel, Priorat, Catalonia, Spain 2015 94

£37.50 (2016) **Indigo Wine**

This accessibly priced offering from the Priorat star seems well named: blackcurrant, citrus blossom and tea-leaf scents provide ample lift to the wine's generous flesh and weight. Great Priorat, though, always has an inner energy and tension; that's evident here. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 15%

Torres, Mas La Plana, Penedès, Catalonia, Spain 2013 94

£40.50-£48.99 **Exel, Italian Continental Stores, Soho Wine Supply, The Wine Shop Winscombe, Waitrose**

A dark, fragrant, aromatically enticing wine whose richly curranty black fruits have now had the time in bottle to meld and soften into something more haunting, resinous, sunlit and Catalan. Svelte, poised and finally melting on the palate: generosity at its gentlest.

Drink 2018-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

Borie la Vitarèle, Les Schistes, St-Chinian, Languedoc-Roussillon, France 2015 93

£21.25 **H2Vin & Quintessentially, Terra Wines, Vagabond Wines**

The scents of this high-grown blend of Grenache and Syrah, with a dash of Carignan, are pure garrigue: pristine and hauntingly perfumed with leaf oils, subtle juniper, lavender and herbs. Richly flavoured, bright, shocking, yet its alcohol doesn't even blip on the radar. **Drink** 2018-2024 **Alc** 14.5%



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Bordeaux: 1989 vs 1990

These two superb vintages came at just the right time to ride the surge of intense market interest in Bordeaux's top wines. Jane Anson looks back at what made them such a standout pairing, and revisits wines from six of the most prominent properties

IT WAS GOOD to be Bordelais in the 1980s. Something shifted with the brilliance of the 1982 vintage – a quickening of interest from international consumers, a confidence from château owners to leave grapes longer on the vines and increasingly to drop fruit and cut yields, risking volume in search of ripeness, concentration and quality. The continued run of good vintages in 1985, 1986, 1988 and 1989 got money flowing into the châteaux on a regular basis for the first time in decades, and made itself felt through investments in château repairs, better cellars and the employment of wine consultants.

The first vintage of the new decade seemed to continue the good run, with 1990 again delivering the conditions needed to produce exceptional wine. But that year was where the good times stopped, pretty much until 1995. That four-year gap added further mystique to the 1980s vintages, but especially to the final flourish of 1989 and 1990, which today is viewed as one of the greatest vintage pairings of all time.

And if there's one thing that Bordeaux loves more than proclaiming a vintage of the century, it's being able to declare the one-two knockout of a vintage pair. From 1928 and 1929, right through to 2015 and 2016, pitting

one vintage against another encourages interest, drives passion, provokes arguments, and no doubt does nothing to hurt sales.

Watershed era

The fascinating thing about 1989 and 1990 is that they don't follow the usual pattern. Typically, when you are comparing two vintages in Bordeaux, they are opposing pairs: the solar 2009 against the cooler 2010, for example, or the hot and dry 2000 against the fresher, more elegant 2001. It begs questions like, which year favoured the Left Bank, which the Right Bank? How did Merlot stand up against Cabernet Sauvignon?

These two vintages, rather than being opposites, in fact had many similarities. Both 1989 and 1990 had hot and dry growing seasons that saw a good-sized crop of small berries with rich tannic structure and fairly low acidity. They are the kind of years that Bordeaux loves, and that can deliver wines of longevity, which just seem to power through the decades. Both were seen as exceptional from the start, even if 1990 was overshadowed for a few years by its older sibling.

At the same time, Bordeaux was undergoing one of its periodic shifts in the late 1980s. Consultants Jacques Boissenot and Pascal



Jane Anson is a Decanter contributing editor, Bordeaux correspondent and author of the book *Bordeaux Legends*





Ribéreau-Gayon were taking over from Emile Peynaud, who had done so much to revolutionise winemaking from the 1960s through to the 1980s. The more generous budgets of these years meant that temperature control was widespread in the cellars – unlike in 1982 and 1983 – and the more careful grape sorting meant it was easier than ever to make the most of the good conditions.

Given all of these factors, it's definitely worth digging out any old bottles that you have, or can track down, because the chances are you're going to find some great surprises. But is one of these two vintages holding up better than the other? And where exactly should you be looking to increase your chances of enjoyment?

Vintage 1989

The Bordeaux oenology school opened its yearly summary with the words: '1989 will leave an unforgettable memory for most winemakers'. At the time, 1989 was the warmest vintage of the 20th century, with sunshine levels second only to 1961 and heat equal to 1947. April was pretty much the only difficult month in the entire growing season, and it gave way to a summer and autumn that were warmer, drier and sunnier than the previous 30-year average. Budding was 10 days earlier than average, flowering 15 days earlier, and by mid-August vineyards were showing the earliest colour change for 40 years. The harvest was the earliest since 1893. Negatives included the drought that affected young vines and any over-loaded vines. There were also touches of hail, and some blockages

'The 1989s had more moments of brilliance, with both Cheval Blanc and Mouton Rothschild right up there'

meant slow phenolic ripeness, so châteaux needed to be careful with picking dates, although the very high sugars were less of a threat than in the past because of the all-important temperature control.

Vintage 1990

Some frost on 27 March particularly affected St-Emilion (made worse by an early bud break after a warm February), but was compensated by lots of secondary budding, meaning this was the second year running with a generous crop. 1990 had a less even flowering and a more drawn-out colour change than 1989, which meant a later harvest. But look deeper and there were a lot of superlatives. July and August were drier and hotter than in 1989, and grape ripening in the continued heat of September was helped hugely by two short bursts of rain on 14-15 September and again on 22-23 September. Alcohol levels were often higher in 1990 than 1989 as a result of the hot summer, and there were also some stuck fermentations, but generally the wines were showing powerful, mature tannins and rich fruits right from the start.

Then and now

I recently presented a horizontal of 1989 and 1990 wines at 67 Pall Mall – a private ➤



We create.

An autumn walk among fallen leaves.
Cinnamon, nutmeg and wild berry aromas.
Touches of silk and velvet.




BARON DE LEY
RIOJA

members club in London that has a cellar with more than 4,000 wines on the list and access to plenty of bottles with great provenance.

We tasted through a fascinating line-up of 10 wines, five from each year, of Châteaux Cheval Blanc, Figeac, L'Evangile, Léoville Barton and Mouton Rothschild. And to round out the tasting with another pairing, I have added in the same two years of Léoville Poyferré that I opened in the same week.

One of the interesting things we found, looking back on them with almost 30 years under their belt, is that having two exceptional and similar years of similar age shows that Bordeaux is far more complicated than just vintage alone. Terroir, choice of grape, vineyard personality, viticultural choices; all of these things come into play and are easier to discern when comparing vintages where many of the conditions were similar.

These were also fascinating years for the individual estates. 1989 saw the introduction of a second wine at L'Evangile, and 1990 was its first vintage under 70% ownership by Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite) – full ownership came only in 1998 (see 'Producer profile', p84). 1989 was also the first vintage at Mouton made entirely under Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, following the death of her father Baron Philippe the year before.

Thierry Manoncourt was over at Figeac and Anthony Barton was getting into his stride at

'Both 1989 and 1990 have enough fruit and structure that they should remain at this level for another decade at least'

Below: harvest at Château Figeac

Léoville Barton, having taken over from his uncle Ronald in 1983, but he was still keeping things traditional with no green harvesting – unlike neighbouring Léoville Poyferré, where crop thinning and green harvesting had been in place since the mid-1980s.

Cheval Blanc was still with the Fourcaud-Laussac family, until the Albert Frère/Bernard Arnault purchase in 1998. They introduced second wine Le Petit Cheval in 1988 (selling off a third selection in bulk), then green harvesting in 1990. Coincidentally or not, the 1990 Cheval is a legendary bottle that today sells for about double the price of any of the other wines we tasted (a case would set you back £10,000 or more – if you can find one).

Relative merits

And what of the bottles we opened and tasted? For a start, so many of them proved exactly why people love old Bordeaux. They retained a freshness and a firm but yielding tannic structure, even at 30 years, and played with the classic signature notes of ageing clarets, revealing by turn menthol, eucalyptus, cedar, melted black fruits.

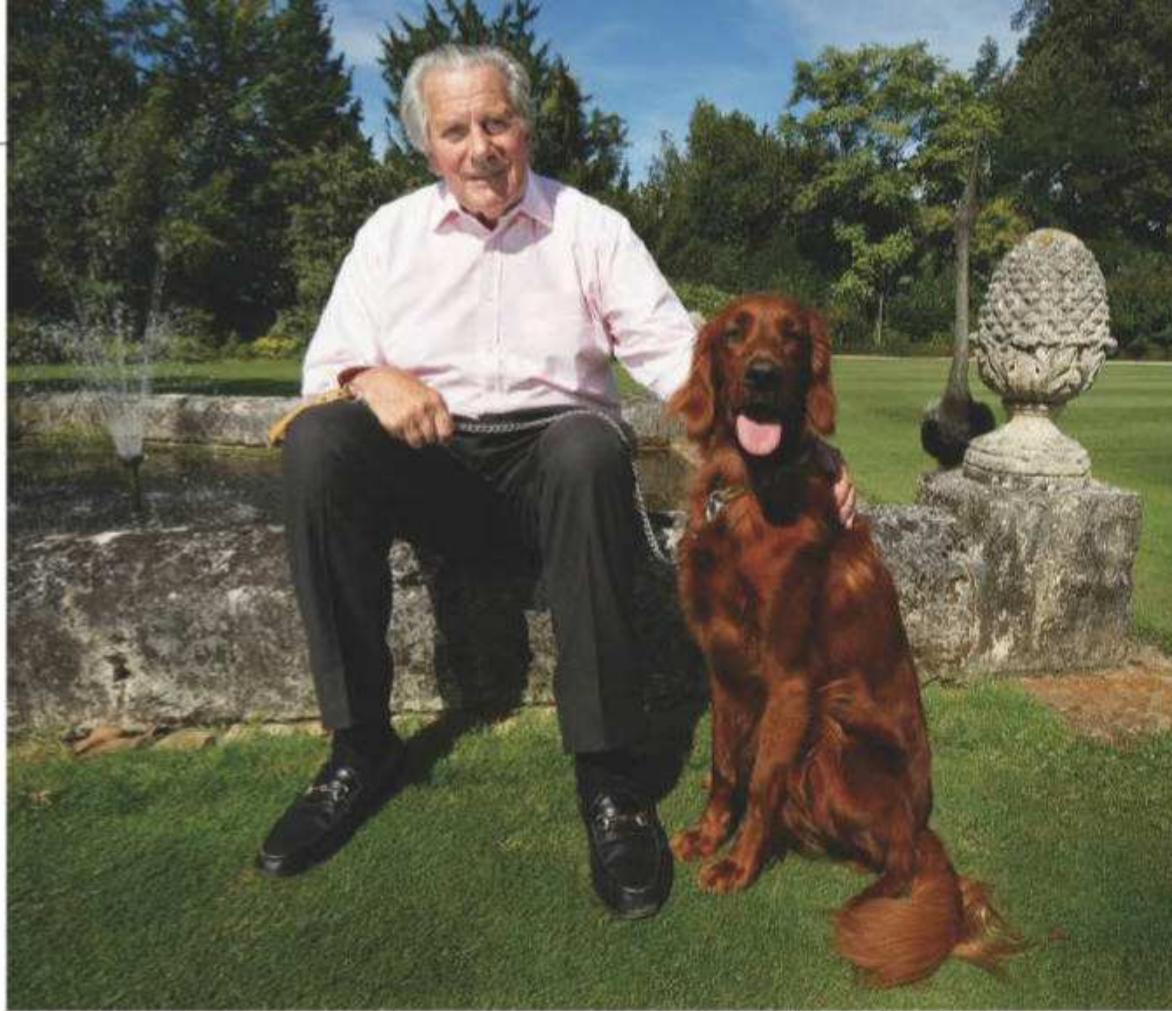
The 1990 seemed more steady perhaps, with stunning density and rich texture, while the 1989 had more moments of brilliance, with both the Cheval Blanc and the Mouton Rothschild right up there. Perhaps the 1990 is tasting marginally better on the Left Bank ➤



today, and 1989 still delivering over on the Right Bank (where Figeac and L'Evangile deserve a special mention).

These are wines that are very much in their drinking window, although there is no great rush to drink them up if you have them in your cellar. Both vintages have enough fruit and structure that they should remain at this level for another decade at least, with perhaps the 1990 having the slight edge in terms of future development.

If I had to pick out one château from the six on display, it would have to be Cheval Blanc – a reminder that while Cabernet Franc is seen as a blending grape, in the shadow of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon across much of Bordeaux, in the right hands it can blossom into something utterly exceptional. ➤



Above: Anthony Barton and canine companion at Château Léoville Barton

Anson's pick: Bordeaux 1989 vs 1990 – Left Bank

Château Léoville Barton, St-Julien 1989

92

£132.67 (ib)-£155 **Christopher Piper, Corkr, Crump Richmond Shaw, Friarwood, Roberson, Top Selection**

A lovely, classic example of a fully mature St-Julien, replete with ripe berry fruits and tannins that whisper rather than shout. You're pulling up a chair right by the fireside here, where the embers are still warm. Coffee, cedar and sandalwood take the lead over brambly black fruits. This is lovely, but unquestionably fully evolved and open.

Drink 2018-2028 **Alcohol** 13%



Château Léoville Barton, St-Julien 1990

94

£124.58 (ib)-£252.99 **Corkr, Christopher Keiller, Crump, Richmond Shaw, Hedonism, Jeroboams, Lay & Wheeler, Richard Kihl, Top Selection, T Wright**

Damien Barton-Sartorius was born in 1990, and he'll be happy to hear that this vintage stands up well against the 1989. It has clearer tannins, is deeper and still virile, taking a long time to open in the glass but then holding on, getting more and more interesting. Still pretty young, with rich, velvety and well-handled tannins, plus a vibrant core of cassis and mulberry notes. Well balanced, confident and deeply spiced.

Drink 2018-2030 **Alc** 13%

Château Léoville Poyferré, St-Julien 1989

91

£91.25-£127 (ib) **Appellations, Bordeaux Vintners, Crump Richmond Shaw, Grand Vin, Top Selection**

The colour remains a deep ruby, with burnt caramel arriving mid-palate. Not quite as luscious as the 1990 vintage at this stage of the game, but still full of vigour. There is shape and form to the tannins and fruit that suggests you are in safe hands. Smoked notes of an autumn fireside draw things to a close. Still much to look forward to. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 13%

Château Léoville Poyferré, St-Julien 1990

96

£253-£259.17 (ib) **Crump Richmond Shaw, Fine & Rare, Top Selection**

The nose lifts right out of the glass and reminds the world how Bordeaux can age. You'll find chocolate, hazelnut, plum, soft liquorice root; a wonderful testament to a brilliant vintage, delivering on its potential even three decades later. I love the softness of the tannins and the freshness at close of play – daring you to suggest when it is going to finally bow out. This is exactly what people look for in older Bordeaux. Smudged around the edges but a core of pure fruit expression, fully integrated with melted oak notes. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 13%

Château Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac 1989

97

£450-£510 (ib) **Corkr, Crump Richmond Shaw, Grand Vin, Richard Kihl, Top Selection, T Wright**

An extremely early year for the property, with harvest from 6-25 September. One to savour, it has the signature smoked, toasted glamour of Mouton, with cappuccino, crushed bilberry and blackberries, pliable tannins, and a drawn-out finish that gets better and better in the glass. The label, by the way, featured Georg Baselitz, a German painter, to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Drink 2018-2030 **Alc** 13%



Château Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac 1990

94

£452.42 (ib)-£655 **Crump Richmond Shaw, Hedonism, Top Selection**

Just pipped by its older sibling. Harvest lasted 18 September to 3 October, and grapes underwent a serious sorting after uneven ripening (they also did green harvesting). Autumn hedgerow aromatics with hawthorn and blackberries. The palate is soft and gentle, not as intense as the 1989 but still loaded with Pauillac signature. It didn't get the most positive reaction on release, but this seems unfair at 30 years of age – this wine is still rippling with power. Label artist Francis Bacon, with one of his last works. **Drink** 2018-2032 **Alc** 13%

MAGICALLY SAINT-JULIEN, ELEGANTLY BARTON



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Price and value

At the time of initial market release, 1989 was priced significantly higher than 1990, because of the widespread feeling that it was the new 1982. Using Liv-ex as a guide, current prices range from £1,160 for 12 bottles of Léoville Barton 1989 to around £10,000 for Cheval Blanc 1990. Both vintages of Mouton can be found for between £4,000 and £5,000 – and both offer beautiful drinking, although the 1989 tipped it on the day.

The best value of this line-up, I would suggest, is the L'Evangile – both vintages are available for under £3,000 per dozen, and both blew us away, although particularly the 1989. The Léoville Bartons are available at less eye-watering prices – although many times more than on release, when the 1989 came out at £132 per case in London – but they have softened more over time than the L'Evangile.

All in all, Bordeaux 1989 and 1990 are two years that have lived up to the hype. □

Anson's pick: Bordeaux 1989 vs 1990 – Right Bank



Château Cheval Blanc, St-Emilion 1989 98

£386-£440 (ib) Christopher Keiller, Corkr, Crump Richmond Shaw, Top Selection

Cheval Blanc saw 25% less rainfall than average in this vintage. Summer was hot but not a heatwave – the grapes were brought in from 7 September to 5 October, the earliest harvest date in the 20th century, and there are clear hints of prune and fig, but with menthol and eucalyptus touches that give it a fresh lift and suggest that blockages of maturity just might have been the key to its longevity. Concentrated, sexy, opulent, lifted through the finish, just smoky enough. The blend, by the way, is not exact because Cabernet Sauvignon was counted with the Cabernet Franc right up until 2014. However, plantings were recorded as 54% Merlot and 46% Cabernet Franc, with a high yield of 50hl/ha (the average between 1946 and 2014 is 33hl/ha, so this is significant). Still in the fullest grip of life. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 13%

Château Cheval Blanc, St-Emilion 1990

100
£850 (ib)-£1,160.59 **Atlas, Berry Bros & Rudd, BI, Brunswick Fine Wines, Corkr, Hedonism, In Vino Veritas, Top Selection**

The standout wine of the entire tasting. Powerful, smooth, mouthfilling sweetness, still deeply coloured. You will find it hard to track down this wine on the market today, and even more difficult to avoid paying crazy sums for it, but I can assure you that it stands out for the intense, finely picked-out, fleshy fruit notes of sweet damson and plum unrolling against smoked coffee and

liquorice notes. Truffles, tobacco and exotic spices are all here – and it's hard to imagine how it can have done better. Oh, and Le Petit Cheval in this vintage was 98% Cabernet Franc, so another one to look out for if the beauty of the Cabernet in the main wine is anything to go by. Harvest 11-25 September, 40hl/ha yield. They made 76% first wine and 12% Petit Cheval, with the rest sold off in bulk. **Drink** 2018-2032 **Alc** 14%



Château Figeac, St-Emilion 1989 94

£145.75 (ib)-£203 **Crump Richmond Shaw, In Vino Veritas, Nickolls & Perks, Roberson, Top Selection**

The vintage at Figeac saw record drought conditions and the second earliest harvest since 1893. St-Emilion was one of the driest areas in Bordeaux and it shows here in the ripe aromatics and mellow tannins. The palate has wild berry fruits, cinnamon and liquorice, with white pepper and a slight salinity that saves the best for last and ushers in a juicy finish. Harvest 11-29 September. The overall feeling is of gentle satisfaction. Definitely on the plateau, but doesn't have as long ahead of it as others in the line-up. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 13%

Château Figeac, St-Emilion 1990 96

£209 (ib)-£300 **Cellar & Co, Friarwood, In Vino Veritas, Top Selection, Vinum**
One-third each of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, 100% new oak, with a harvest that lasted from 17 September to 6 October. Still deep in colour, and is given a huge boost by the Cabernets. The high sugar and low acidity comes

through to give some ripe, almost overripe character with figs and rich berry jam notes. Gentle cold ash and menthol freshness work wonders at the close of play, giving a real boost to the length of the wine on the finish. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 14%



Château L'Evangile, Pomerol 1989 98

£205-£243 (ib) **Brunswick Fine Wines, Grand Vin**

Utterly gorgeous, wonderful white truffle notes coming through the fruit, alongside leather, liquorice and tobacco and pure, juice-filled black cherries. The last year with just Madame Simone Ducasse at the helm, with perhaps 10% new oak used, and 91% first wine produced – it would have been more, but the DBR Lafite team arrived in 1990 for the final ageing and blending, and they introduced Blason de L'Evangile as a second wine. Mouthwatering and succulent: Pomerol at its very heights. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 13%

Château L'Evangile, Pomerol 1990 94

£245.83 (ib)-£328 **Crump Richmond Shaw, Grand Vin, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Wilkinson Vintners**

1990 was a very good vintage, although a bit more difficult to manage than the 1989. Flowering was uneven and as crop thinning was not as widely used as today, there were some ripening difficulties. But the sharp edges of youth have softened now, leaving a rich, round sense of self, with cassis-rich fruit. Black truffle notes after five minutes in the glass. Many years of drinking pleasure still to be had. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 13%



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A Great Burgundy House

From sipping sparkling in business class to tasting exceptional reds and whites inside Burgundy's largest underground cellar!

Founded in Beaune in 1780 by Jean-Baptiste Patriarche, Patriarche Père & Fils is one of the oldest negociants in Burgundy. In 1796 he acquired the Convent of the Visitandines. 222 years later, Patriarche welcomes 45,000 visitors per year in its underground cellars – with 5 km of tunnels – of which some date back to the 13th century. The company's headquarters are still hosted at this historical site!

From the start Patriarche has exported Burgundy wines all around the world. Today the company's wines are sold in more than 80 countries, on all continents. USA, Canada, Japan, United Kingdom and Sweden are among the top markets. Each year Patriarche exports half a million bottles of prestigious Burgundy AOC wines.

The company proposes more than 50 appellations. They include regional appellations like Bourgogne Chardonnay and Bourgogne Pinot Noir, village appellations (Nuits-Saint-Georges, Gevrey-Chambertin, ...), and Premiers Crus and Grands Crus (Clos Vougeot Grand Cru, Corton Charlemagne Grand Cru, ...).

Patriarche has privileged relationships with multiple grape-growers to source its grapes and craft its wines. The bottles age in the company's underground cellars, where 3 million bottles are kept in the best conditions of temperature and humidity.



Patriarche cellars are the largest underground cellars in Burgundy and they are one of the most remarkable places to visit in Beaune. The historical richness of the site includes also an 18th century Baroque chapel. In the 1950s, Patriarche became one of the first houses to open its doors to the public: a pioneer for wine tourism. In 2015, the site was redesigned and renovated to include a 160m² welcoming shop. Once underground you have the opportunity to taste some of the wines. A sommelier can help you pick from 300 references. The oldest wine in the cellar dates from 1904 (not available to taste). The site is open 361 days per year for a self-guided tour (€17), including 10 wines to taste. Modern videos at various points along the tour add user-friendly education.

From the 1950s Patriarche has been at the front row of buyers in the auction room.

Hospices de Beaune

One of the best times to visit Patriarche is during the celebrated Hospice de Beaune wine auction. During the long weekend of the 2018 auction – 16, 17 and 18 November – the estate features a €35-per-person tasting program of 10 wines, including premiers crus of Burgundy reaching back to 1980.

The Hospices de Beaune were created more than 550 years ago to provide care for the sick and shelter for the destitute. Thanks to benefactors, the Hospices today oversee a domain of 61 hectares of mostly premiers and grands crus.

Sparkling skies to seas

Patriarche has been a pioneer for sparkling wines since the 1950s. Whether sipped in business class high in the sky or enjoyed on a Bahamas-bound cruise ship, Patriarche's sparkling wines also are market winners.



Above: Philippe Marion, Sales & Marketing Director Patriarche

For a recent Valentine's Day promotion Delta Air lines travelers who flew between New York's JFK airport and San Francisco received free mini bottles of Patriarche's celebrated *Veuve du Vernay Rosé* sparkling wine.

Over the past five years, it has been offered for business class passengers.

Veuve du Vernay is the largest non-Champagne French sparkling wine sold in the United States, where Patriarche also provides over 2 million bottles of sparkling wine to cruiselines.

2017 sales

- **France** (75% of total sales)
3,420,000 12-bottle cases
- **Export markets**
1,160,000 12-bottle cases
- **Top export markets:**
USA-Canada (38%)
Europe (35%)
Latin and Central America (15%)
Asia Pacific (12%).



Key facts

- 5 km of underground cellars in Beaune with 3 million bottles and 45,000 visitors yearly
- Key player in the sparkling wine business with 45 million bottles per year

Veuve du Vernay is made using the Charmat Method, by which secondary fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks. The 12 grams of residual sugar brings a richer style of dry. The bubbly sells well in markets some may find less obvious, says Philippe Marion, sales & marketing director: 500,000 bottles of its sweeter line of sparklers – Veuve du Vernay Ice – are sold in Nigeria alone. Made from a variety of grapes with 40 grams of



residual sugar, it is often served with ice cubes in large white plastic glasses. A beach party in Kribi, Cameroon, is planned next year to launch the Ice brand there.

Higher end Champagne-method (bottle-fermentation) Patriarche Crémant de Bourgogne which exudes more depth and body, is the second leading non-Champagne sparkling wine sold in France.

In all, Patriarche produces over 45 million bottles of sparkling wine per year from entry level to premiums. Other strong brands include Louis Perdrier, Pol Rémy and Léonce Bocquet.



Key dates

1780 At 22 years old, Jean Baptiste Patriarche founded his own wine business and later the House of Patriarche Père & Fils in Beaune. He bought the Visitandines Convent in Beaune (the company's current headquarters) and later exported his wines to Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium.

1940 André Boisseaux, both a visionary and marketing genius, made Patriarche one of Burgundy's leading wine houses. He focused on creating top brands that continue to meet success today.

2018 Patriarche exports 1,160,000 12-bottle cases to more than 80 countries.

HONG KONG MASTERCLASS

Patriarche hosts promotions all around the world. Philippe Marion, Sales & Marketing director, will join Patriarche Export Director Vincent Goyat for a Master Class on Burgundy AOC wines and Crémants with moderator **Debra Meiburg MW** at the Harbour Grand Hong Kong hotel on 7th November from 2 to 4 pm.

For more information, contact g.camphuis@patriarche.com

10 wines to try before you die

To celebrate the publication of her latest book, *101 Wines to Try Before You Die*, Margaret Rand recommends a selection of offbeat bottles that no wine lover should miss

IT'S A WONDERFUL feeling, when wine across the world begins to turn in the right direction. By which I mean, of course, the direction I think is right: balance, transparency, poise and precision. Apart from a few dinosaurs of the wine world, we're seeing the back of over-oaking and overripeness; producers in many areas are seeking ways of bringing down excessive sugar levels.

Narrowing the wines of the world to just 101 for my book was therefore an even tougher task than it would have been 10 years ago. Every region is sprouting new, ambitious and innovative producers. Should I pick new and barely tried names because their first releases had pleased me so much, or should I look for a track record? Should I focus on biodynamic growers, whose wines can be so wonderful even if the pseudo-science behind them can be so annoying? How many of the acknowledged icon wines of the world should I include?

This last was my biggest problem. Why leave out Latour and Lafite, Ausone and Petrus, when those wines – when I've had occasion to taste them – have knocked me sideways? Space, is the answer. To have included them would have meant leaving out the likes of Wieninger's Gemischter Satz,

Hatzidakis Assyrtiko or Steve Pannell's Grenache – and everybody knows about Latour and Lafite. You don't need me to tell you they're good.

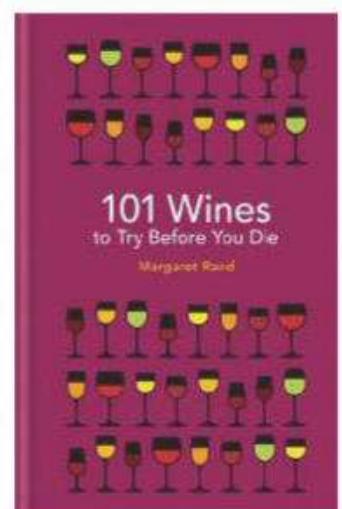
Sometimes a coin came into it: tossed in the air, and coming down heads or tails. A couple of wines were chosen like that. Honestly, how would you choose between Chablis from Raveneau or from Dauvissat? A 10p coin decided it for me. Sometimes, with the great vineyard of Achleiten in Austria's Wachau, even a coin wouldn't work, and I settled for the vineyard itself. It might be a cop-out to say that the wines are so hard to come by that you should grab any you see, but it's easier than deciding between Jamek, Toni Bodenstein, Rudi Pichler or Domäne Wachau.

Some regions I left out altogether; some, given another 100 wines to play with, would have been more heavily represented. You might say: 'Oh, you wouldn't have put in A if you had tasted B.' And that may well be true. I haven't tasted every wine in the world. My personal list of wines I still need to try before I die is probably a lot longer than 101. In the meantime, the 10 wines on these pages will offer you a snapshot of the selection in my book and provide some drinking inspiration.

*'Everybody knows
about Latour and
Lafite. You don't
need me to tell
you they're good'*



Margaret Rand is a widely published and awarded wine writer and DWWA judge



101 Wines to Try Before You Die by Margaret Rand is published by Cassell, £12



SC Pannell, Grenache

McLaren Vale, South Australia

ONE MOMENT STEVE Pannell is a Young Turk; the next he's a Grand Old Man. (Not old at all – sorry, Steve.) One moment Australian Grenache is trying to be Shiraz, with overripeness, masses of extraction; the next it's the warm-climate answer to Pinot, with delicacy, lightness, freshness and a mission to reflect every terroir that comes its way.

That Aussie Grenache has blossomed into such a great delicacy is in large measure due to Pannell. His wines have always had a lightness of touch; before he set up his own winery he was chief red winemaker at Hardy's for 10 years, and before that he worked vintages around Europe (Aldo Vajra, Barolo; Domaines Dujac and Pousse d'Or, Burgundy); Nebbiolo, Pinot and now Grenache – you see the pattern.

He works with old, dry-farmed vines, picks early for freshness and keeps it all simple, with reductive winemaking and early bottling. The result is Grenache with Turkish-delight and raspberry flavours, floral and aromatic with violets, roses and dried herbs. The texture is silky, but with an enlivening edge of tannin. He says he doesn't know why his wines turn out so well; this might not be the whole truth.

Even better news is that he's one of many McLaren Vale winemakers doing great things

with Grenache. Other names include Bekkers, D'Arenberg, Marmont, Ochota Barrels, Yangarra Estate. If you want transparency, lightness and freshness in Australian Grenache, McLaren Vale is where to look.

From the 2017 vintage, this wine is to be named Old McDonald Grenache, after its vineyard source in Blewitt Springs.

**£33.04-£39.99 (2017) Exel, Oz
Wines, Vagabond, The Fine Wine Co**

GRAPE Grenache

DRINK WITH Fish, vegetable dishes, partridge; almost anything, really

BEST AGE TO DRINK From about three years for another 15-plus

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT If you want

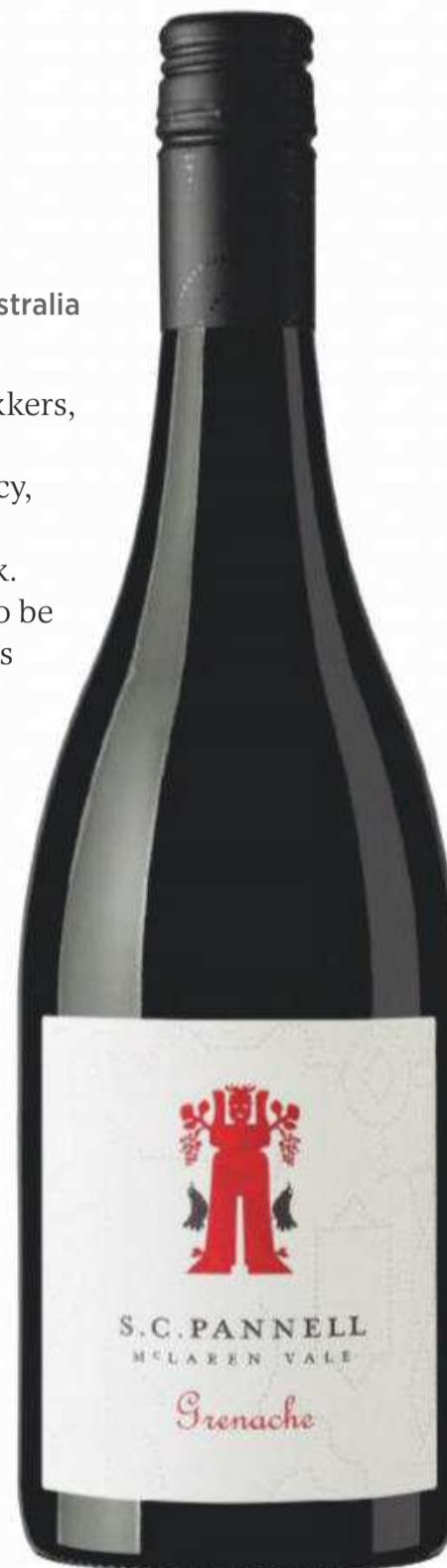
CHILL No

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'What did Pinot Noir teach you about Grenache?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'I'll bet you'd really rather be making Burgundy'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE

None; splash out



P Parra y Familia, Pencopolitano

Itata/Cauquenes, Chile

THIS IS THE new Chile: vibrant, balanced, poised. The old Chile, being a little unsure of itself, strove for authority via over-oaking and over-extraction. The new Chile doesn't need any of that. It's not afraid to take risks, and it seeks acidity in the way that the old Chile sought softness. It is so secure and confident, it feels as though it doesn't have to try.

Enough poetry. The first thing (person, actually) to talk about is Pedro Parra. He's a terroir consultant (not a career likely to feature in a school careers office) with clients from

Sonoma to Burgundy, and he's obsessed with finding the very best terroirs for wine. 'A lot of my job is making people change their mind,' he has said. He has joined forces with Louis-Michel Liger-Belair in a Chilean project called Aristos, but this is his very own project, the grapes sourced from a handful of different vineyards of ungrafted vines of up to 100 years old, some of them field blends, right down in the cool south of the country.

Marginal climates are something Parra likes very ➤





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much. What he also likes is the red granite soils here, which he says give a nervous tension to the wine and lots of upfront flavour on the palate. There is also some schist in these vineyards: schist, he says, brings a more horizontal structure and powerful tannins.

The winemaking uses indigenous yeasts, and there's great purity to the wine, along with vivid black fruit, a stony, mineral character, floral, red-berried notes, medium body and immense moreishness. The tasting sample I have at my elbow while writing this has been followed by a second tasting sample. It's an exhilarating wine.

£20-£24 (2014-2016) Corks, H2Vin & Quintessentially, Highbury Vintners, Terra Wines, Twenty One Wines

GRAPE Malbec, Syrah, Carignan, Carmenère, Cinsault, País

DRINK WITH My tasting sample was rather good with some old Parmesan

BEST AGE TO DRINK From release for five or six years

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT No

CHILL Keep it on the cool side

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'Can you recognise soil types in wine, blind?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY

'I can't even tell red from white, blind'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE

This is the entry-level wine



Clai, Sveti Jakov Istria, Croatia

IF YOU FOLLOW the fertile Mirna River valley inland from the Istrian coast you will see, only an intensively farmed field or two back from the river, a much wilder landscape of forest, of fields carved out wherever the land allows, and the Dinaric mountains rising to the north. The cold air coming off the mountain ridge combines with the gentler maritime influence coming in through the Mirna valley to give hot, dry summers but much cooler autumns and cold winters.

This is where Giorgio Clai has his winery and his 8ha of vines, tucked into a valley 10km from the sea and 30km from the mountains, on limestone that twists and turns to give umpteen different exposures, at altitudes of 150m-250m. And it is here that he makes his very particular wines.

You could call this natural wine, you could call it orange wine – it ticks both those boxes. The grapes are crushed and fermented with the skins for two to four months, just like a red wine, in open wooden vats. That's where the tawny colour comes from: not so much orange as the colour of aged fino Sherry. The texture is so light it's almost ethereal. The nose is – what? Wet clay? Ripening

barley? A touch of apples? The acidity is high, ripe and fine. And it doesn't taste of fruit, it tastes of wine. It's a sort of apotheosis of wine, both intellectual and sensual. It's refined, seamless, lively, intense but delicate, structured, but supple as silk. There's a touch of cooked apple, a touch of Victoria plum straight from the tree; and absolute purity, restraint and dancing tension, with some tannin of the most fine-grained sort stitched through it. ➤

£38.40 (2015) Tannico

GRAPE Malvasia Istriana

DRINK WITH It seems to work with almost anything

BEST AGE TO DRINK Up to 10 or even 20 years

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT Yes, an hour or more before drinking

CHILL A little

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'How do you get such finesse?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'Shouldn't 'orange' and 'natural' mean 'rustic'?'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE None

'You could call this natural wine, you could call it orange wine – it ticks both those boxes...'



Hatzidakis, Assyrtiko Santorini, Greece

IT IS EXTRAORDINARY that somewhere so hot can produce wine with such singing, stinging minerality and acidity, but that's Assyrtiko for you. It is one of the world's great white grapes, yet until we all started to realise how amazing Greece's indigenous varieties are, you could hardly find a bottle of it anywhere.

Santorini is of course a volcano, and volcanic soils seem to give wines with a particular energy, a particular sparkiness. The vines here are extraordinary too: there's a local training system called *koulara* that winds the canes in a basket, with the clusters on the inside. Every 50 years or so everything is cut back to the roots, and the vine starts again. This system offers protection to the grapes from the incessant wind; and there's not much rainfall, so dew and mist have to sustain the vines through the

hot summer. There's no phylloxera on the island so all the vines are ungrafted, and some are allegedly 500 years old. What is more certain is that many are over 100 years old. Hatzidakis farms its vineyards organically and biodynamically, and the grapes ripen early at the beginning of August.

This wine is the standard Assyrtiko; there is also Assyrtiko de Louros, aged in old oak for greater weight and ageability, and single-vineyard Assyrtiko de Mylos. Both are impressive, but I prefer the standard bottling for its purity, clarity and precision.

The wine is substantial, savoury, with keen acidity, and orange peel and floral notes, saltiness and an unmistakable tannic edge. It's energetic, concentrated and vibrant: a structured, sinewy wine from a unique and difficult place.

£28.85 (2016) Exel

GRAPE Assyrtiko

DRINK WITH It's a brilliant match for pungent flavours like anchovies and olives, and will match with both meat and fish

BEST AGE TO DRINK It needs a couple of years in bottle to open properly, and will be good for five or more

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT No

CHILL Yes

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'Fashion has come round to Assyrtiko'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'I prefer Riesling'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE This is very good value



Bouza, B6 Tannat Canelones, Uruguay

URUGUAY IS HEAVEN for people who like old cars – sometimes quite old. Bouza, founded in 2000 in the undulating hills north and northwest of Montevideo, has a remarkable collection of them; a museum, in fact. What with that and a rather good restaurant, the bodega is worth a visit if you happen to be in Uruguay.

If you are, you'll be struck by the clarity of light – almost sea light, because neither the Atlantic nor the broad Rio de la Plata are far away – but also the temperate warmth. It's not that hot here, and there's cloud cover, and humidity. All these things are perfect if you want to make ripe reds with moderate alcohol

– and isn't that what almost everybody wants these days?

So the late-ripening, tannic Tannat grapes can stay on the vine until they're properly ripe – which means no greenness, no rusticity. The bottle is slightly unfortunate because its weight and square-shouldered shape leads you to expect something oaky and extracted, and this isn't; instead it's a burly but fresh glassful of blackberry fruit and spice, extremely easy to drink and a lesson to anyone who thinks that the answer to Tannat lies in oak and chewiness.

The wine is fermented in steel tanks, and then aged in new French oak barrels for 16 months, and it simply soaks up the oak, leaving >



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VINTAGE
2014
93
POINTS

TIM ATKIN MW
BEST OF RIOJA
2018 REPORT

VINTAGE
2014
95
POINTS

TIM ATKIN MW
BEST OF RIOJA
2016 REPORT

VINTAGE
2010
94
POINTS

TIM ATKIN MW
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2017 REPORT

RESERVA 2014 | GAUDIUM 2014 | GRAN RESERVA 2010



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for the facts

no feeling of oakiness. It's not an incredibly complex wine but it is hugely enjoyable, and it's a most accomplished wine, sensitively handled, from a young wine country.

It is one of those instances where a grape variety can seem most at home a long way away.

£31.95 (2016) Jeroboams

GRAPE Tannat

DRINK WITH Roast meat, or the local barbecues; punchy vegetables; flavoursome fish dishes

BEST AGE TO DRINK Young; Tannat doesn't really seem to improve beyond about five years

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT No

CHILL No

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER

'Your combination of humidity and moderate temperatures works wonders'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'Please can I drive one of those cars? Please?'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE The Sin Barrica is cheaper, and (as the name suggests) is not aged in barrique

Meyer-Näkel, Walporzheimer Kräuterberg Spätburgunder Ahr, Germany

THE STORY OF the rise and rise of Meyer-Näkel is a classic. The scion of a wine-growing family sees no future in a world of low prices and low quality, which was the Ahr in the 1970s. So he leaves, only to be brought back to the winery when his father becomes ill. And he never leaves again. Instead he modernises, improves quality, buys vineyards, improves quality some more...

The Ahr used to make pale, wishy-washy Pinot of no great appeal. Werner went to Burgundy and bought barrels; he reduced yields and set about making Pinot that tasted like Pinot.

German Spätburgunder now has a brand-new reputation for quality and interest, and Meyer-Näkel is one of its leaders. And Werner's daughters, Meike and Dörte, are not going anywhere.

Climate change favours the Ahr. These are wines of elegance and finesse, ripe and racy: Werner wants aroma and concentration, but not obvious power, and certainly not obvious oak. The wines are aged in barrels, but the oak is perfectly integrated; it doesn't show except in the form of a little extra structure.

My favourite is the Kräuterberg vineyard in the village of Walporzheim, a Grosses Gewächs site where terraces are patched onto a steep, rocky hillside and soak up the sun. The wines are intensely aromatic, tight, spicy and mineral, full of black fruits, incense, thyme and wild herbs, very balanced, very pure. The Romans cultivated this hillside; everything is simply reinvention. ➤

'Climate change favours the Ahr. These are wines of elegance and finesse, ripe and racy'

£73 (2012-2015) The WineBarn

GRAPE Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir)

DRINK WITH Pork, game, beef; perhaps in the Hofgarten restaurant, run by Werner's brother

BEST AGE TO DRINK Meike recommends ageing them for eight to 10 years, then for probably another 10

TROPHY VINTAGES Not really

DECANT Yes

CHILL No

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'Are you glad you gave up teaching?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'Teachers have good pensions'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE The entry-level Pinot Noir



Wieninger, Gemischter Satz

Wien (Vienna), Austria

GEMISCHTER SATZ IS the speciality of Vienna's own vineyards, grown in various villages within the city boundaries. The vineyards are planted with several different grape varieties all mixed up. It used to be simply the house wine of every grower's *heurige* where locals would go to eat simple home-produced food with a half-litre of wine. Several varieties were grown as a form of frost and disease insurance, and the particular mix became each grower's hallmark.

Grapes that are picked and fermented together – some ripe, some overripe, some a bit green – produce a result that is totally different from the standard practice of growing, picking and fermenting varieties separately and then blending: the wine is more complex, less grape-driven, more 'winey'. Whether it expresses the terroir better, as the growers claim, is a moot point, but there's no doubt that co-fermentation has interesting effects on flavour.

Fritz Wieninger's grapes are in the Bisamberg, Nussberg and Rosengart vineyards. All are cultivated biodynamically. The soils are all different, and the wines different every year. The flavours are always exotic – lime blossom, citrus peel, herbs, held together with good acidity and a silky texture.

Weininger was the driving force behind the revival

of gemischter satz: 20 years ago it was dying. Now it's ultra-fashionable and even has its own organisation, Wien Wein, with half a dozen young members committed to gemischter satz. Weininger has his own *heurige* in Stammersdorf: taste it there, in view of the vineyards, for the full experience.

US\$22.99 (2017) K&L Wine Merchants

GRAPE Any of Weissburgunder, Grauburgunder, Chardonnay, Neuburger, Welschriesling, Grüner Veltliner, Sylvaner, Zierfandler, Rotgipfler, Traminer, Riesling

DRINK WITH A plate of local cured meats

BEST AGE TO DRINK Young

TROPHY VINTAGES None; take what you find

DECANT No

CHILL Yes

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER

'How random is your choice of grape varieties?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'Why don't you want it to be the same every year?'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE It's pretty cheap already, unless you include the airfare to Vienna



Domaine André & Mireille Tissot, La Vasée Vin Jaune, Arbois

Jura, France

THERE ARE JUST 2ha of the La Vasée vineyard at Domaine Tissot, so there's not a lot of this wine about.

Vin jaune is a Jura speciality, and it's rare because it involves putting young wine from the high-acid Savagnin grape into barrel, leaving it for six years while it grows a thin veil of flor, in the manner of fino Sherry, and then bottling it; the barrels aren't topped up,

so what is left in a 228-litre barrel divides neatly into 228 x 62cl bottles called clavelins.

The key differences between this and fino are there is no solera system, and the Savagnin grape has enormous acidity compared to the low acidity of Palomino.

So while the flor affects the flavour, the results aren't the same. You get a similar wet-earth-after-rain note, similar nuts, hay and apples, but allied to steely acidity.

Stéphane Tissot's wine is remarkable stuff: aromatic, linear, austere, pungent and in flavour part-way to malt whisky (Tissot, a great innovator, has even experimented with ageing vin jaune

in an ex-whisky cask from Isle of Jura), with iodine, salt, pickled lemon and cheese notes, savoury and stony. It's also quite restrained: it doesn't shout and you need to spend time with it to get to know it, perhaps over a meal. It's a natural with the local Comté cheese, and if you were feeling flush you could use it in the classic dish of chicken with vin jaune and morels, with more vin jaune in your glass. ➤

US\$86.25 (2011) Nextbottle

GRAPE Savagnin

DRINK WITH Poulet au vin jaune, in an ideal world

BEST AGE TO DRINK From about 10 years old to 30 or more

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT It needs to breathe, so either decant or open in advance

CHILL The producer recommends serving it at 14°C

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'How much extra work is it to be biodynamic?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'Why are you always experimenting?'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE If I was going to be wicked I'd say fino Sherry





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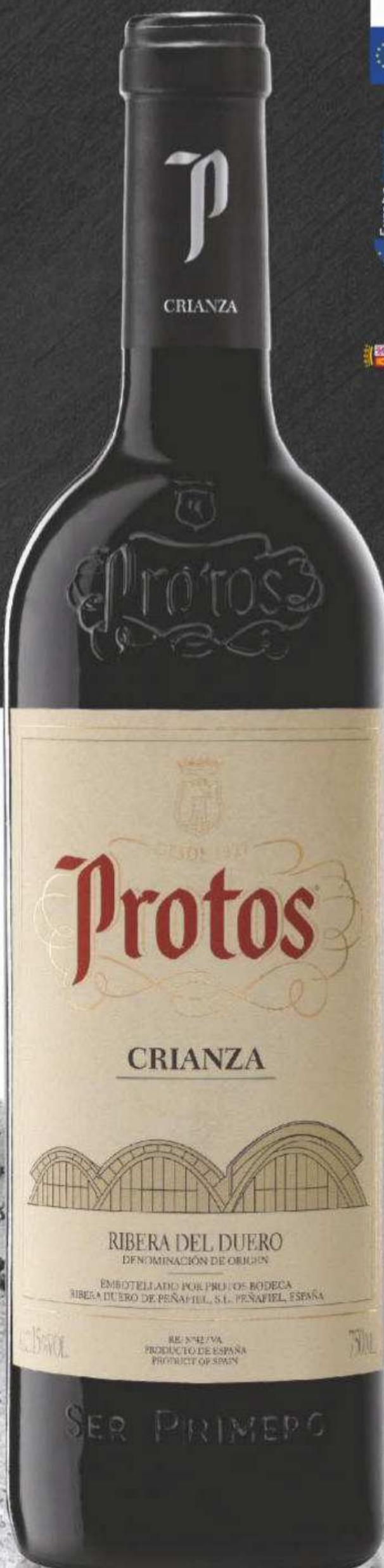
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King Family Vineyards, Roseland

Monticello, Virginia, US



DAVID AND ELLEN King had been looking for 5ha of flat land for a polo field when they bought Roseland in 1996. Vines weren't even a thought; but in 1999 the first ones went in.

You might see a paradox here: a polo field needs flat land, and vines usually prefer slopes. But, says winemaker Matthieu Finot, polo fields also need good drainage, and that's where the terroir wins. It's also high up on the edge of the Blue Ridge mountains, in an area that in the time of Thomas Jefferson used to be called

Mountain Plains. Finot is from the northern Rhône, but even so, he doesn't miss steeper slopes.

Now there are now 12.5ha of the varieties that seem to suit Virginia so well: Petit Manseng, Viognier, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, plus Merlot and Chardonnay.

This blend of about half Chardonnay, the rest Viognier and Petit Manseng, evolved, one gathers, because it works: Chardonnay brings weight and some apple and pear notes, Viognier brings its honeysuckle and apricots, and Petit Manseng, as well as pineapple and citrus notes, brings acidity – plenty of it. Even at high sugar levels (and it was originally planted here for dessert wine) Petit Manseng has a very low pH.

It's a beautiful blend: perfectly integrated flavours of herbs, grass, hay and summer meadows, very long and

complex. There's no new oak; just steel, old oak and acacia barrels. A grown-up wine with about 13% alcohol, fresh and balanced.

**US\$22.95 (2017) Direct via
www.kingfamilyvineyards.com**

GRAPE Chardonnay, Viognier, Petit Manseng

DRINK WITH Scallops, trout

BEST AGE TO DRINK At a couple of years old, for another five or so

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT No

CHILL Yes

WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'How about planting the polo field?'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY 'Why is that horse eating the vines?'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE None

Vittorio Graziano, Fontana dei Boschi Lambrusco

Emilia Romagna, Italy

THIS IS WHAT Lambrusco should be like, and once upon a time was. These days nearly all Lambrusco is industrial. Vittorio Graziano prefers to go in the other direction: instead of massive yields from irrigated, battery-chicken vineyards, he has much lower yields (one bottle per vine) from unirrigated vines on the hills. Instead of high-volume, low-cost fermentation techniques he uses what he terms the 'metodo ancestrale', which involves wild yeasts, fermenting the juice on the skins for three or four days to get colour, bottling in the spring with a bit of sugar and yeast and leaving it in bottle to continue its fermentation to dryness. Eighteen months' or two years' ageing on the lees gives more complexity. Some is then disgorged off the lees,

which means the wine pours clear. Some is not, and is sold sur lie, and therefore is potentially cloudy. It tastes totally different like this: less fruit, more weight. You can have two wines in one bottle.

This is real artisan wine: wild, unpredictable, tasting of savoury blackberries and herbs, with high acidity, a touch of green, and a bit of tannic grip.

Unlike industrial Lambrusco, it ages beautifully. Of course it does: it's authentic wine, made as Lambrusco used to be made before the lure of mass production and cost-cutting.

For a while Graziano was the only one making artisan Lambrusco; now a few others have joined in. It'll be a cult one of these days. D

£18.50 (2014) Uncorked

GRAPE Lambrusco Grasparosso

DRINK WITH Local salami and cheese

BEST AGE TO DRINK Young, or age it for up to seven years to become sleeker and less grippy

TROPHY VINTAGES None

DECANT No

CHILL Yes

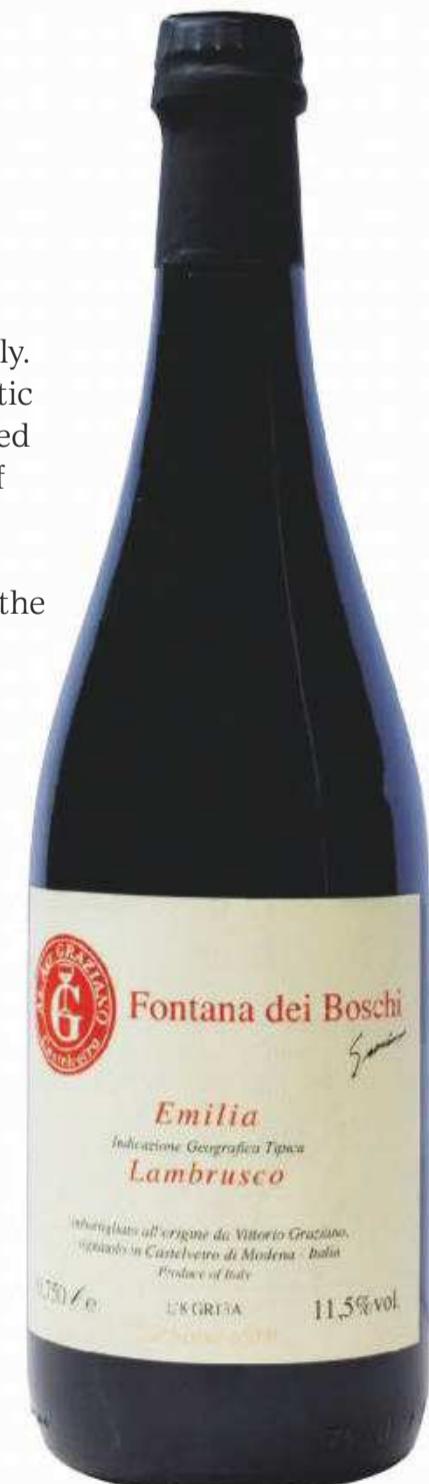
WHAT TO SAY IF YOU MEET THE WINEMAKER 'Tell me about the Lambrusco Grasparosso grape'

AND WHAT NOT TO SAY

'I like wine to be predictable'

PAUPER SUBSTITUTE

Honestly, you don't need one





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Alejandro Bulgheroni Family Vineyards in Italy

Chianti Classico, Montalcino and Bolgheri: three regions, one philosophy

Perhaps the most exciting wine estate in this region right now" is how **Dievole** was described in *Decanter's* Italy 2017 special.

These words ring truer than ever as the historic Chianti Classico wine resort acts as the springboard for a far-reaching project by the Alejandro Bulgheroni Family Vineyards (ABFV) Italy group.

From **Chianti Classico** to **Montalcino** and **Bolgheri**, ABFV is investing considerably in Tuscany, putting sustainable practices first and returning to centuries-old techniques in the cellar.

What began as a worldwide olive oil project in 2012 quickly expanded to other areas with agronomist Lorenzo Bernini proving fundamental to the volte-face at Dievole, overhauling the vineyards according to an organic change of pace, keeping the vines in balance with the utmost respect for the soil, while the estate's oenologist Giovanni Alberio leaves the word to the terroir through spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeast in non-invasive



Dievole

concrete vats before refining the wines in untoasted 41/43 hl French oak barrels.

"Now more than ever, the ABFV Group vaunts an important presence on the Italian winemaking scene," emphasizes Stefano Capurso, General Manager of the ABFV Italy Group. "Our work in the vineyards and in the cellar is exceptional, laying the foundations to achieve the results we have set on all our estates."

All of the wineries in the ABFV Group – **Dievole, Poggio Landi, Podere Brizio, Tenuta Meraviglia and Tenuta Le Colonne** – share the same production philosophy centred on sustainability,

which leads to elegant contemporary wines that showcase the outstanding terroirs of Chianti Classico, Bolgheri and Montalcino through restrained and researched vineyard management and oenological practices.

Refined hospitality is another key feature across the ABFV Group. Every estate will eventually open its doors to visitors, embracing wine lovers with opportunities to take a winery tour and on-site tastings. Dievole Wine Resort, in Chianti Classico, and Podere Brizio, in Montalcino, are the trailblazers in this high-end hospitality project, authentic and discreet places to taste Tuscany's longed-for lifestyle. Just 12 kilometres from Siena, Dievole Wine Resort comprises suites, apartments and double rooms all remodeled in Tuscan style and the gourmet Novecento restaurant presided over by talented chef Monica Filipinska, while Podere Brizio, a 15-minute drive southwest of Montalcino, enthrals travellers with its manicured herb gardens, boutique spa and pastel-tone upscale accommodation.

The wines



Dievole Novecento Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva 2015

An ethereal bouquet of violet nuances and ripe red fruit in this quintessential Riserva that represents over 900 years of history at Dievole.



Poggio Landi Brunello di Montalcino DOCG 2013

Refined for 38 months in French oak barrels and 6 months in bottle, this Brunello di Montalcino DOCG speaks of ageworthy vigour and accessible elegance.



Tenuta Meraviglia Rosso Bolgheri DOC 2016

This full-bodied but breezy Cabernet blend is the perfect expression of the Tuscan coast with its seductive scents and saline finish.



Tenuta Le Colonne

The wineries

Dievole

The heart of the ABFV Group, 12km north of Siena. The estate extends across 158 hectares, 100 of which belong to the Chianti Classico appellation, while the remaining 58 fall under Toscana IGT for the production of the youthful Le Due Arbie labels. The soils differ significantly but are mostly chalky, combining with sandstone, marl and clay in several parcels. Recently reappointed to the finest standards in hospitality, the Dievole Wine Resort is the perfect Tuscan haven. dievole.it

Poggio Landi

The future of ABFV's Montalcino winemaking. 74 hectares of vineyards



Podere Brizio

skirt the most prestigious parcels in the denomination, from historic parcels in the north to those rich in character in the south. Only Sangiovese is planted here to produce ageworthy but accessible Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, also as Riserva in the best vintages, and fruit-forward Rosso di Montalcino DOC. poggiolandi.it

Podere Brizio

A boutique wine estate southwest of Montalcino, set in manicured grounds vaunting 10 refined guest rooms, a cellar door, spa and tennis court. 12 hectares of Sangiovese vineyards produce instantly aromatic Brunello di Montalcino DOCG,

also as Riserva in the best vintages, and disarming Rosso di Montalcino DOC. poderebrizio.it

Tenuta Meraviglia

Poised to revolutionize the way wine is made in Bolgheri. Planted with 30+ hectares of Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, the aim is to convey authentic aromas and flavours through spontaneous fermentation in unrefined concrete vats and refinement in large French oak casks. Wines include the Maestro di Cava, a full-bodied Bolgheri DOC Superiore; a mineral-driven Rosato; and a saline Vermentino. tenutameraviglia.it

Tenuta Le Colonne

The closest winery to the sea in Bolgheri. Instilling Mediterranean breeziness and volcanic minerality, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Vermentino yield fresh and fragrant wines that are elegant and complex, conveying a modern, original character. tenutalecolonne.it



Tenuta Meraviglia

The *Decanter* interview

Paul Hobbs

Described as ‘the Steve Jobs of wine’, this busy consultant winemaker has a hand in projects across four continents. Peter Richards MW catches up with him to discuss his career, influences and winemaking style

SPACE. THAT'S WHERE Paul Hobbs was initially destined. A child of the 1960s, he loved maths, chemistry and physics. ‘I passionately wanted to become an astronaut,’ he recounts. But the doctor put paid to any flying aspirations with an abrupt diagnosis of amblyopia, or lazy eye. ‘I was crushed, crestfallen. At 16, I had to figure out what to do. So I took another approach.’

Challenges, and overcoming them, are an intriguing part of his story. No one gets to the top tier of their profession – where Hobbs unquestionably is, being one of the world’s highest profile winemakers and consultants – without determination and resilience. Yet with Hobbs you get the sense that he relishes the struggle itself.

When I quiz him about the secret of his success, he says: ‘Being told “no” is a good way to motivate me. I like challenges. I’m not afraid of hard work and I like doing things people don’t think is possible. I’m always pushing against the establishment. I love adventure.’ And there he is: the astronaut, vaguely professorial in demeanour, jaw set, plotting his moon shoot.

Farm boy

Wine didn’t figure in Hobbs’ wildest aspirations early on. One of 11 children, growing up on a fruit farm in upstate New York not far from Lake Ontario, the family was largely teetotal, his mother keen to set the kids a good example. Milk was the drink on

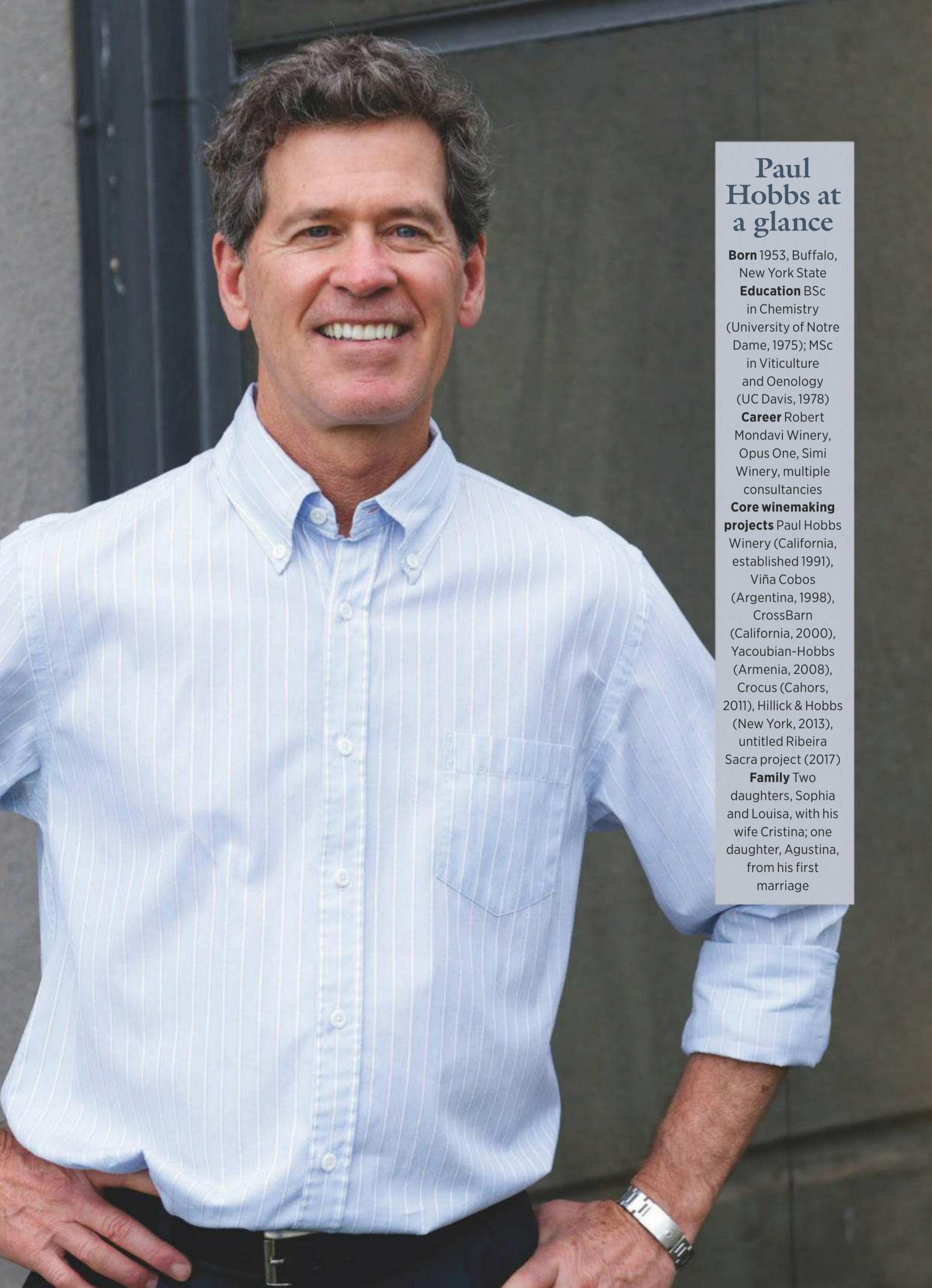
I'm not afraid of hard work and I like doing things people don't think is possible'

the family table. That is, until one fateful day when his father brought home a bottle of Château d’Yquem 1962. Hobbs relates how, that same evening, a decision was made to plant vines on the farm.

Though much has been made of this so-called epiphany, in truth, concedes Hobbs, it was just as much a commercial decision: his father was keen to diversify. And it certainly wasn’t a Damascene conversion for Hobbs himself, for whom the ‘brutal’ experience of work on the farm after school – no sports for him, instead long afternoons toiling, in sub-zero conditions during winter – had taken its toll. ‘All I knew was that I didn’t want to work on a farm or have anything to do with farming.’ He liked science and helping people, so he took himself off to study medicine at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, with the aim of becoming a surgeon.

Things didn’t quite work out that way. At Notre Dame he crossed paths with botany professor (and wine lover) Rev James McGrath who, discovering Hobbs’ family was planting a vineyard, pressed him into joining a wine tasting group and later ‘colluded’ with Hobbs’ father to send him not to medical school but to Davis in California to study winemaking. The paternal aim was for Hobbs to then return to the farm in New York State and establish a winery there, with winemaking becoming a family undertaking.

Instead, Hobbs got caught up in the burgeoning wine scene in California, ➤



Paul Hobbs at a glance

Born 1953, Buffalo, New York State

Education BSc

in Chemistry

(University of Notre Dame, 1975); MSc

in Viticulture and Oenology (UC Davis, 1978)

Career Robert Mondavi Winery, Opus One, Simi Winery, multiple consultancies

Core winemaking

projects Paul Hobbs Winery (California, established 1991),

Viña Cobos (Argentina, 1998), CrossBarn

(California, 2000), Yacoubian-Hobbs (Armenia, 2008), Crocus (Cahors, 2011), Hillick & Hobbs

(New York, 2013), untitled Ribeira Sacra project (2017)

Family Two daughters, Sophia and Louisa, with his wife Cristina; one daughter, Agustina, from his first marriage



Above: Joan and Edward Hobbs at their fruit farm with six of their 11 children, (from left) Greg, Dean, Paul, Debbie, Forrest and Chris

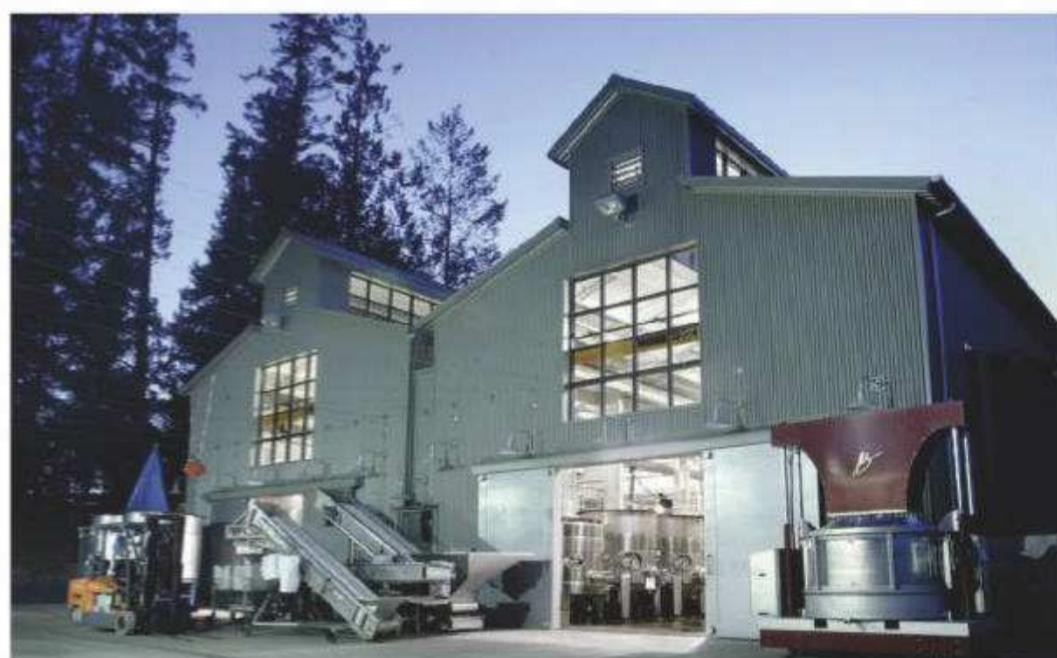
initially working with Mondavi and Opus One in Napa, then Simi Winery in Sonoma. Consultancies ensued – beginning with Bodega Catena Zapata in Argentina and followed by numerous others in South and North America – as did his own ventures, including Paul Hobbs Winery in California, then Viña Cobos in Argentina. Other initiatives followed, including joint ventures in Armenia (Yacoubian-Hobbs) and France (Crocus in Cahors, with Bertrand Gabriel Vigouroux). His two most recent projects are in Spain's Ribeira Sacra and, tellingly, a return to New York State, in the Finger Lakes region.

Napa novice

It's a far cry from his early days at Mondavi when he was, as Hobbs puts it, 'The lowest paid but most highly qualified winemaker on the 200-plus winery staff.' While still studying at Davis, Hobbs had been so impressed by the rigour and detail of Mondavi's operation during a tour that he went straight to Bob Mondavi and announced that he wanted to work for the company and would do it for free. He started off in research, micro-vinifying to study oak or maceration times, but spending so much time on the donkey work that he felt that he'd become, 'the world's leading expert on washing glass ferment vessels, with a Masters degree!' But he saw the value. 'It toughened me up,' he says.

Such toughness didn't make for plain sailing. While at Mondavi, he admits to 'butting heads' with winemaker Zelma Long. He also formed an under-the-radar, after-hours group dubbed Skunkworks to study different aspects of winemaking and challenge accepted norms. He claims, 'We became the epicentre of development at Mondavi.'

After being moved onto the newly formed Opus One project because, 'Mondavi thought



Above: the Paul Hobbs Winery in California, ready for action during another harvest

my qualifications would impress the French,' Hobbs soon saw the irony as he came into conflict with what he perceived as the 'dogmatic, ideological' approach of his French colleagues. He cites the 'protocol-based, heavy use of egg whites to fine, altering the flavour of the wine and encouraging the development of spoilage yeast brettanomyces. 'It bothered me,' he avers, adding, 'We had a serious clash of cultures.'

Science and vines

Hobbs' scientific rigour, attention to detail and an insistence on good hygiene in the winery central to his winemaking approach, according





'To make a really great wine, you have to feel it. It takes years of experience to get it'

to those who work alongside him – but what's also interesting to note is how this isn't the end of the story. Santiago Deicas of Familia Deicas in Uruguay, for example, explains how Hobbs has reduced their use of oak and sulphur dioxide, emphasised the importance of cleanliness and, 'changed the whole winemaking culture'. However, Hobbs interjects, 'In order to do that, the condition and quality of the grapes is the number one

Below: Viña Cobos winery in Luján de Cuyo, Argentina



Above: Paul Hobbs is happiest in the vineyard,

where he says he can find 'serenity'

Left: Stagecoach Vineyard in Napa Valley

factor. Better farming is key. It all comes back to the vineyard.'

Hobbs is at pains to emphasise his focus on viticulture. Reducing pesticides, encouraging better trellising and canopy management, healthy soils and plot selection are all critical in his book. Within this context, he rejects the notion that the scientific system is his only methodology. 'It's an interesting way to structure your thought process,' he states. 'But it's not enough to make a good wine. Not even close. To make a really great wine, you have to feel it. It takes years of experience to get it. For example, I now make picking decisions largely on taste – and it's not just flavour but other, less obvious things, such as texture.' He's described his winemaking approach as, 'one part science, three parts intuition'.

In search of balance

Picking decisions are an important issue with Hobbs because he's often cited as ➤





producing ripe, generous wines notably high in alcohol. ‘In the early days, I leant towards the French model,’ he says, ‘with lower maturity, more acidity. Then [American wine critic Robert] Parker came along and became a dominant force; people wouldn’t buy your wines if Parker hadn’t sanctioned them.

Everyone tried to get on that bandwagon: tell me someone who’s not going to want to be part of that club! It’s important to sell what you make. So sure, I was on board. But I never went over to full sweetness – some made sweet wines without texture or structure – I always wanted backbone and tension.’

Hobbs notes how he is reducing, ‘the imprint of oak’ on his wines but rejects the notion that high alcohol is inherently detrimental to quality, insisting that conflating high alcohol and overripeness is, ‘a mistake’. He explains: ‘When you’re dealing with really fresh fruit that’s not overripe, alcohol is irrelevant. My objective is to make wine that tastes good. I abhor wines that are underripe or overripe. I’m looking for balance.’ (*For more on this topic, see ‘Big and Beautiful’, p38.*)

Hobbs acknowledges that he’s ‘caught up in a constantly evolving dynamic’, but insists on one thing: ‘Trueness of place: wine should give a sense of place, it’s about balance and beauty.’ For him, this aim can co-exist with crafting wine styles that he unashamedly describes as, ‘powerful, exuberant, intensely flavoured, richly textured.’

At the moment, Hobbs notes that he’s ‘got a lot going on’, taking care of ventures on four continents. His current clients include: Pulenta

Estate, Familia Schroeder, Bodegas Toso, all in Argentina; Familia Deicas in Uruguay; the VSPT Wine Group with wineries in Chile and Argentina; Valdivieso and Viu Manent in Chile; Brave & Maiden in California; and Early Mountain in Virginia.

Looking ahead

‘I hope the future doesn’t mean more projects!’ he grins. But peace and quiet doesn’t look set to feature heavily in his immediate destiny. While he admits to being happiest ‘in the vineyard, when I can get a sort of serenity’, he is also, ‘very happy travelling’ plus has young daughters aged one and four, ‘and I love wrestling with them!’

His new ventures also look set to be a major focus. He’s named his Finger Lakes project Hillick & Hobbs (Hillick being his mother’s maiden name). He tells me that his mother cried when he made his initial decision to go into wine (‘she was devastated’) but is ‘fine’ now, happy for his success. Hobbs’ father died in 2002 in a car crash while returning from pruning vines. The family winemaking operation never did happen. ‘My father died doing what he loved, anyway,’ muses Hobbs, noting how his Hillick & Hobbs initiative is like a version of his father’s dream.

It reminds me of a comment that Hobbs made when I asked him about the importance of wine. ‘It’s the fabric of life; it connects us with people. It allows you to smell the flowers and enjoy life a little bit.’ Wine may not have been written in his stars, but he’s made good sense of it since. □

Above: the Yacoubian-Hobbs estate vineyard in Armenia



Peter Richards MW is an award-winning writer, author and broadcaster on wine. He is the DWWA Regional Chair for Chile

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Vintage report

Port 2016

Richard Mayson evaluates a year in which quantities were small, but the best wines are balanced and look set to age for decades

'WE HAVE BEEN spoilt for choice'. These were the words of Johnny Symington at the launch of the 2016 Port vintage in May this year. He was reflecting on the past three harvests in the Douro Valley, which have put the Port shippers in something of a quandary. The 2015, 2016 and 2017 vintages have all been remarkable in their own way, and it is a function of the manner in which vintage Port is 'declared' that the shippers are allowed some foresight and hindsight before making their final decision.

It is worth emphasising that Port vintages do not have the regularity of vintages in, say, Bordeaux or Burgundy, which, almost by definition, happen every year. In the Douro, the Port houses only declare years (ie, attach the name of their house to a vintage) when they believe that they have something truly outstanding. As a rule of thumb, these years come about roughly three or four times a decade. In the whole of the 20th century there were only 20 or so fully declared years. So it is quite something when three years, all with vintage potential, come back to back.

As declarations take place in the second spring after the harvest, this gives Port shippers the opportunity to take a look at the preceding as well as the following year. Even with the knowledge that 2016 was looking very good, a handful of leading shippers declared 2015 outright. For Dirk Niepoort, 2015 was 'about as good as it gets'. Ramos Pinto, much of whose crop was destroyed by ➤



'The 2016 Ports are brimming with colour and full of structure'

Carlos Alves



Photograph: Mike Prior. With thanks to Hedonism Wines (www.hedonism.co.uk), Justerini & Brooks (www.justerinis.com) & Mentzendorff & Co Ltd (www.mentzendorff.co.uk) for the loan of the bottles



Mayson's pick: 25 top 2016 vintage Ports

Wines listed by score, then in alphabetical order by producer

Graham's, The Stone Terraces 99

£106.67 (ib) **Cru, IG Wines, Jeroboams, Montrachet Fine Wine, Wineye**

Mostly Touriga Nacional from stone-walled terraces at Quinta dos Malvedos, Graham's flagship estate. While closed on the nose, there is a hint of liquorice and dark chocolate. Big and dense on the palate, it shows a dark chocolate intensity and broad tannins rising to a massive peacock's tail of a finish. An absolute 'wow' of a wine, this is made in tiny quantities, but it has been fabulous every time I've tasted it. This has to be the wine of the vintage – if you can get hold of a bottle. **Drink 2035-2055 Alc 20%**

Quinta do Noval, Nacional 99

£655 (ib)-£720 **Goedhuis & Co, H2Vin &**

Quintessentially, L'Assemblage, Montrachet Fine Wine, The Oxford Wine Co

Tiny yields from these legendary ungrafted vines, with a total production of just 170 cases in 2016. Closed and dense initially but showing liquorice-like super-ripeness as the wine opens up. A hint of dark chocolate intensity on the palate with layer upon layer of ripe fruit and broad, fine-grained tannins, all the way through to a fine, linear, tannic finish. This is a wonderful wine, as rare as hen's teeth and a privilege to taste at this stage. **Drink 2035-2055 Alc 20%**

Dow's 98

£51.50 (ib)-£89.99 **Widely available via UK agent Fells**

Based on Touriga Franca with Touriga Nacional and Sousão. Tight-knit, with rapier-like tannins – a ramrod all the way through, with the opulent flesh of the fruit on the finish. Fine-grained with great purity and expression. Leaner and more restrained in style than others: Dow's drier style works really well in ripe years such as 2016. Outstanding wine for the long term. 5,480 cases. **Drink 2035-2055 Alc 20%**

Graham's 98

£42.50 (ib)-£89.99 **Widely available via UK agent Fells**

Super-ripe and expressive plum fruit and dark chocolate aroma. Rich, plummy opulence backed by dark chocolate intensity and spicy tannic grip, then big and bold on the finish. Voluptuous, with fabulous richness. This is one for the long haul but is already flattering and very, very impressive. Production of 6,325 cases. **Drink 2030-2055 Alc 20% >**

Excellent with fully flavoured cheeses, especially blue cheeses such as Stilton or Roquefort. It is also delicious with desserts made with chocolate or berry fruits.



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'2016 was a year when it was vitally important to know your vineyards, which varieties to pick and when'

**Johnny Symington
(left)**

hail in 2016, opted for the 2015. Cockburn, a house with deep roots in the Douro Superior where 2015 was outstanding, decided to declare both years, as did single estate Quinta do Noval. But the majority held back from declaring a so-called 'classic' vintage and chose to declare either single-quinta wines or a vintage under a second label (see 'Vintage Report: Port 2015', December 2017). ➤

Vintage guide: Port since 1997

2015 4/5 Very nearly outstanding. Limited declaration, mostly single quinta wines. Niepoort and Ramos Pinto declared over 2016. **Keep**

2011 5/5 Universally declared, outstanding wines with poise and finesse that will keep for life. Approach from 2025. **Keep**

2009 4/5 Hot year; ripe, opulent wines. Limited declaration. Taylor, Fonseca, Croft and Warre declared. Drink medium to long term. **Keep**

2007 4/5 Generally declared. Cool growing season produced wines with great purity and definition. Drink from the early 2020s. **Keep**

2003 5/5 Long hot summer; ripe, voluptuous wines. Some already on the cusp of being ready to drink, others need 10 more years. Generally declared. **Keep/soon**

2000 5/5 Small harvest produced fine, concentrated wines. Universally declared. Drink from 2020, the best will last a lifetime. **Keep/soon**

1997 4/5 Widely declared. Good, well-structured wines, approachable now and for drinking over the next two decades. **Drink now**

Visit Decanter.com/premium for full tasting notes and Richard Mayson's vintage guide back to 1983

Warre's 98

£43 (ib) **Widely available via UK agent Fells**

Nearly 50% of old field blend vines of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca from the Douro Superior. Very pure violet aromas; already utterly charming with lovely supple, seamless fruit. Fresh and lithe with fine-grained tannins building to a peacock's tail of a finish. A beautiful wine with real poise, definition and finesse. Don't be deceived by the early charm – this wine will last. 4,250 cases. **Drink 2030-2055 Alc 20%**

Fonseca 97

£49 (ib)-£66.85 **Widely available via UK agent**

Mentzendorff

Closed and withdrawn on the nose at this stage with an underlying dusting of ripe tannins evident. Firm, sweet cassis and berry fruit, with classic dark chocolate intensity at the core, backed by broad yet tight-knit peppery tannins which lead to a big, grippy finish. All there and very fine with a hugely promising future ahead.

Drink 2035-2055 Alc 20%

Quinta do Noval 97

£52 (ib)-£79.99 **Widely available via agent**

Gonzalez Byass UK

The dense nose opens to reveal dark chocolate intensity with a leafy edge. Ripe and minty initially on the palate with lovely purity of fruit, sweet cassis and broad, grippy tannins. Not as big or immediately impressive as some wines from this vintage, but showing great balance and poise from start to finish. A wine for the long term. 6,000 cases. **Drink 2030-2055 Alc 20%**

Quinta do Vesuvio, Capela do Vesuvio 97

£76.67 (ib) **Davy's, Justerini & Brooks, Portugal**

Vineyards

Only the third Capela vintage to be released, from 90-year-old vines plus Touriga Nacional, Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Franca and Sousão from neighbouring plots. More brooding on the nose than the straight Vesuvio and deliberately drier in style but with similar underlying ripeness and powerful tannins. Just 3,000 individually numbered bottles. **Drink 2035-2055 Alc 20%**

Cockburn's 96

£37.50 (ib)-£69.99 **Widely available via UK**

agent Fells

A Douro Superior blend of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca with Alicante Bouschet and Sousão. Relatively restrained on the nose but with underlying ripeness and intense dark cassis backed by powerful yet fine-grained tannins. Big and broad on the finish. A wine for the long haul. Excellent value: Cockburn is truly back on form. 2,450 cases. **Drink 2030-2055 Alc 20% ➤**

VINTAGE REPORT: PORT 2016

Taylor's 96

£55 (ib)-£68.08 **Widely available via UK agent**

Mentzendorff

Dense and heady nose with an attractive green, leafy edge. A plump palate with lovely bright cherry and damson fruit; nicely defined but not as big as some. Firm tannins on a long, linear finish which shows off the lovely purity of fruit. 6,500 cases. **Drink** 2030-2055 **Alc** 20%

Quinta do Vesuvio 95

£40 (ib) **Widely available via UK agent Fells**

A relatively high proportion of Alicante Bouschet (17%) with Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca. Lovely warm country aromas – ripe, open and very full. Super-ripe cassis flavours, broad and fleshy, weighty tannins yet lovely definition. Finishes with a powerful flourish. Impressive. 1,220 cases. **Drink** 2030-2050 **Alc** 20%

Offley 94

£62.99 **Corney & Barrow, Portugal Vineyards**

The blend includes 45% Touriga Franca and 45% Touriga Nacional, mostly from the Torto Valley. Closed nose; very tight-knit. Expressive berry fruit and minty ripeness on the palate backed by firm, peppery tannins, leading to a spicy, dusty, tannic finish. A lovely wine; could be the bargain of the vintage. **Drink** 2028-2050 **Alc** 20%

Sandeman 93

£51-£61.50 **Bl, Corney & Barrow, Exel, Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, Hedonism, Lea & Sandeman, Mr Wheeler**

Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca (40% each) with Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão and Sousão. Closed and dense nose; the palate shows the powerful spicy tannins that have become the hallmark of Sandeman in recent years. Serious Port – not as extracted as previous years and well balanced for a long future. **Drink** 2032-2055 **Alc** 20%

Smith Woodhouse 92

£27.50-£28.33 (ib) **Widely available via UK agent Fells**

Entirely from Quinta da Madelena in the Torto Valley, primarily a field blend of old vines. Open, fragrant, ripe cherry and floral fruit aromas with a hint of tar-like intensity. Well-defined fruit with fine-grained, peppery tannins leading to a long, sinewy finish. Leaner style than others from the Symington Estates. **Drink** 2028-2045 **Alc** 20%

Croft 91

£39.16 (ib) **Widely available via UK agent Mentzendorff**

Based on fruit from Quinta da Roeda. Plummy aromas, minty ripeness, a touch of hedgerow. Palate in the recent Croft mould, described as Rubenesque: soft, with voluptuous fruit, ripe tannins blossoming on the finish. Approachable early. **Drink** 2024-2040 **Alc** 20% ➤

Photograph: Quinta do Noval



Above: harvesting at Quinta do Noval



Weather report

When it comes to marking out 2016 as a classic vintage, the weather conditions during the growing season are key. The year began with a warm, wet winter. At budburst in March everything looked very advanced, but growth was then curtailed by a cold, wet spring. A poor flowering reduced yields and ultimately made for greater concentration in the wines. The summer months were hot and dry, with a heatwave in August lasting into early September. The hottest day of the year in Pinhão was 6 September, when a temperature of 43°C was recorded with just 9% humidity.

Sugar readings in mid- to late-August were low due to photosynthesis having been slowed by the heat and drought, but rain on 25 and 26 August helped to put things back on track, especially in the more arid Douro Superior. More welcome rain came on 12 and 13 September and this proved to be the saving grace.

Rich pickings

Anyone who picked too hastily was unlikely to get the balance and freshness that came from harvesting evenly ripened grapes. There are a few wines from 2016 that have achieved the near-impossible feat of being both green and raisiny at the same time. Growers who delayed picking to allow the rain to soak in and the grapes to swell took a risk as the September equinox often brings more bad weather. But when picking resumed around 22 September the sun was shining and continued to shine into October. Crucially the nights were cool. Rain only returned on 13 October, by which time nearly all the grapes had been harvested.

According to Symington, whose family firm declared Cockburn, Dow, Graham and Warre as well as Smith Woodhouse and Quinta do Vesuvio: 'This was a year when it was vitally ➤



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Christian Seely
Christian Seely

António Agrellos
António Agrellos



Ferreira 91£82.99 **Berkmann**

From Quinta do Porto and Quinta do Caêdo, 45% Touriga Franca with Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz and Sousão. Closed at the outset, but a touch floral with lovely, pure, ripe bramble fruit beneath. Tight-knit, with seamless, fine-grained tannins on the finish. Great promise for the medium to long term. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 20%

Barros 90£33.21 **Portugal Vineyards**

40% Touriga Franca, 30% Tinta Roriz, 20% Touriga Nacional and 10% Tinta Barroca. Ripe plum and berry fruit on the nose and palate, with an austere green edge emerging. Plump style and a stocky finish. Should be good value for the medium to long term. **Drink** 2025-2045 **Alc** 20%

Quinta da Romaneira 90£38.54 **Lea & Sandeman**

From a huge, mostly south-facing estate, using a blend of older parcels of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca. Exotic and beautifully fragrant, full of mint and violets; lovely purity of fruit, fine-grained tannins. Not that big but balanced, with a firm, spicy finish. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 20%

Quinta de Roriz 90£30 (ib) **Davy's, Justerini & Brooks**

Includes grapes from a 30-year-old Touriga Nacional vineyard with Sousão picked early. Not giving much away on the nose, but the palate is soft and sweet: nicely defined summer fruit, a touch of dark chocolate and refined tannins. Medium term. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 20%

Churchill's 89£33 (ib) **Appellations, Corney & Barrow, Ellis of Richmond, Farr Vintners, Firth & Co, Wineye**

Heady, spirity and rather jammy aromas. Bold, verging on overripe, yet with a green edge. Rich style. Hefty fruit with tannins that are rich and satisfying but not showing much finesse at this stage. 2,000 cases. **Drink** 2028-2050 **Alc** 20%

Dalva 89£34.17 **Corney & Barrow**

Quite restrained aromas, with lovely purity of fruit emerging both on the nose and palate. Well-defined, fresh and ripe cherry, backed by slightly rustic tannins. Loose-knit now but should develop well. **Drink** 2028-2045 **Alc** 20%

Niepoort, Bioma Vinha Velha 89£33 (ib) **Dunell's, Fareham Wine Cellars, Tanners, Uncorked**

Niepoort made Bioma in 2016, an organic Port from old vines on a single estate. Still needs time

The atmospheric Sandeman cellars

important to know your vineyards, which varieties to pick and when.' It was also the first Port vintage in history when the 'pick and mix' from old, inter-planted vineyards has largely been supplanted by varietal picking and often varietal fermentations.

The new planting that took place in the 1980s and 1990s is paying huge dividends and, 30 years on, many of these vineyards are in peak production. Touriga Franca and Touriga Nacional are, in that order, the leading grapes to the almost total exclusion of Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo), which is being demoted by many growers. The 2016 vintage was also the first year when Sousão and Alicante Bouschet have made a small but significant contribution – two varieties that fall outside the so-called 'top cinco' (top five grapes) but are being revived by some of the leading Port shippers.

An exceptional year

So at the launch of these wines earlier this year no one was really comparing 2016 with previous years. Carlos Alves, winemaker for Barros, Burmester, Cálem and Kopke, echoes Symington when he says: 'We had to make profound use of the knowledge of our grapes, as each variety and each plot of vineyard developed at a different pace. The 2016s are brimming with colour and full of structure, with a profile that's more concentrated, robust and intense when compared to the 2015s.'

Luís Sottomayor, of Sandeman, Ferreira and Offley, adds: 'The degrees of complexity, colour and structure make the 2016 wines absolutely exceptional.' David Guimaraens, winemaker for Taylor, Fonseca and Croft, sums it up when he says: 'Balance is one of the keynotes of the vintage. The wines are solidly structured with firm, well-integrated tannins and display very fine fruit quality.'

Some wines are alarmingly attractive already, but have the poise and presence to last. I will hazard more than a guess to say that many 2016s will be good to drink relatively early (perhaps from the mid-2020s) but the best have the balance to keep for decades.

'The new planting that took place in the 1980s and 1990s is paying huge dividends'





LITROS

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to knit together but very charming. The palate is soft and fleshy, with a hint of liquorice, but quite light overall. **Drink 2028-2045 Alc 20%**

Kopke 88£36.84 **Portugal Vineyards**

From 60% old field blend vines and 40% Touriga Nacional. Fragrant, open, brambly fruit is quite loose-knit. A soft and sweet palate initially with some firm tannins building; light- to mid-weight, with a fresh finish. **Drink 2024-2045 Alc 20%**

Quinta Vale D Maria 88£29.17 (lb)-£37.50 **Corney & Barrow, Tanners**

From a well-placed single estate in the Torto Valley. Ripe, balanced fruit with a soft cassis character backed by firm tannins that rise in the mouth. Mid-weight overall with a slight green edge on the finish. **Drink 2024-2040 Alc 20%**

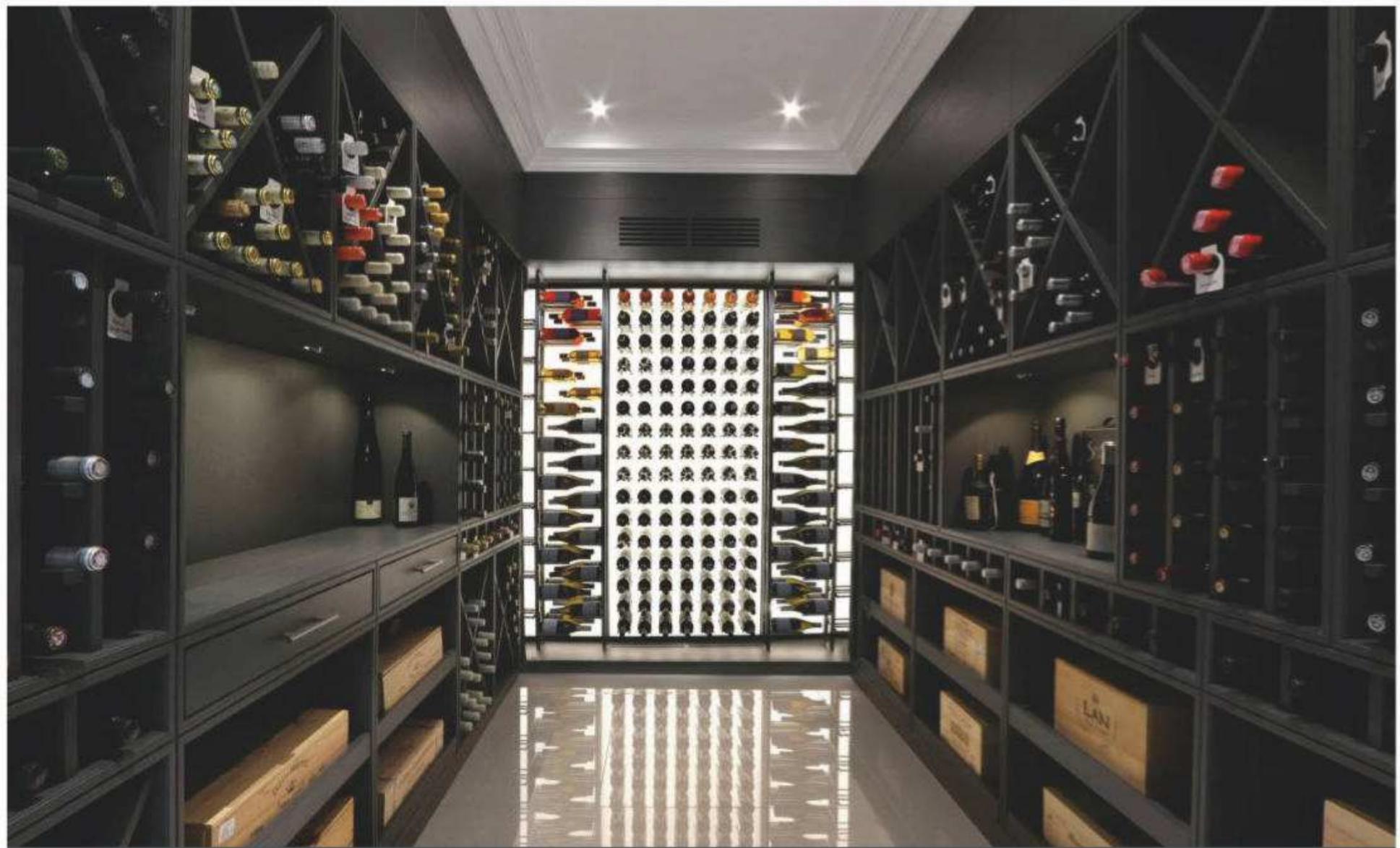
Burmester 87£43.88 **Portugal Vineyards**

An even blend of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca from the Douro Superior. Ripe, exuberant nose but a rather medicinal berry fruit palate. Rather disjointed now. **Drink 2028-2045 Alc 20%**

Quantities are small – in some cases half that declared in 2011 – and sterling prices were up by about 20% to 25% on 2011 (which includes a 15% devaluation over the interim).

So what of 2017? This was the earliest harvest in living memory, with picking all over by the last week of September, the same date that the harvest used to begin back in the 1970s. Yields are tiny but there is no doubt that some wines are exceptional: concentrated, very individual and with good colour. The shippers are always coy at this stage about the prospects of a vintage declaration, but watch this space for news of a more limited declaration early next year. **D**

Richard Mayson is DWWA Chair for Port and Madeira, author of Port and the Douro (fourth edition published by Infinites Ideas) and writes about Port on www.richardmayson.com



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Cava: my top 10

With the introduction of a new top-tier classification for Cava in 2017, there's been a renewed focus on quality for Spain's sparkling wines. From boutique wineries carving a niche to established names pushing boundaries, Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW highlights his pick of the premium producers and recommends top wines to try

Agustí Torelló Mata

Embodying much of Cava's history, Agustí Torelló Mata is a nephew of the Torelló family of Cavas Torelló and the Mata family of Recaredo. He has previously managed some of the most traditional Cava wineries, and established the Cava Brotherhood. Also founder of the oenological lab in Penedès, Torelló Mata is something of an essential reference point for Cava. Despite having extensive knowledge of Champagne, he was one of the first Cava makers who chose not to imitate the French, but to produce wines with



Pedro Ballasteros Torres MW is the DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain and is on the governing board of the Spanish Tasters' Union



Agustí Torelló Mata

a distinctive Catalan profile. He's both a fierce defender of native varieties and a proud apostle of the quality and diversity of Penedès terroirs. But perhaps his most remarkable contribution, back in 1979, was his pioneering effort to produce the first top-class Cava, Kripta, at a time when most other producers were making cheap and cheerful wines. ATM is a flagship for Catalan originality.

Agustí Torelló Mata, Kripta Gran Añada, Gran Reserva 2007 95

£53.95 Wadebridge Wine

Great aromatic complexity, showing long ageing. Deliciously creamy texture on the palate, alongside a lengthy multi-layered, finish. This could be the Cava equivalent to Dom Pérignon, based upon blends and long ageing. Organic. **Drink 2018-2030 Alcohol 11.5%**



Agustí Torelló Mata, Gran Reserva Barrica, Gran Reserva 2012 92

N/A UK www.agustitorellomata.com

Made from 100% Macabeo grapes from three different organic vineyards, which are partially fermented and aged for six months in oak barrels, then aged in bottle for four years. A characterful wine, with nicely defined fruit expression and a round and firm structure. Great Cava for the table. **Drink 2018-2022 Alc 12%** >





Above: Jordi Mata,
the third generation
of the Recaredo
family, disgorging
bottles by hand



Cava Guilera

For many years, the méthode traditionnelle process was the cornerstone of Cava production, while vineyards were deemed a secondary aspect. Small growers, the *payeses*, could not make wine, since the required heavy investments in wineries and distribution, as well as the long time required to produce Cava, precluded them from vinifying their own grapes. Pere Guilera is the exception: a grower who uses someone else's winemaking facilities to produce wines from his own vineyard. Here, winemaking serves to enhance

Photographs: Enric Vernet, Cava Guilera, Toni Galitó

vine growing. Guilera is aware that his Cavas will reveal the character of their terroir only after long bottle ageing. As a result, all of his wines are aged for a minimum of three years, and even his most basic wine is a gran reserva. This quest for identity is consistent not only with his wine philosophy, but also with his social commitment to the Penedès region, where the Guilera family is a leading player.

Above: the Cava
Guilera team in the
vineyard (*from left*),
Jordi Guilera, Marta
Guilera, Pere Guilera
and Miguel Hileno



Cava Guilera, Guilera Xarel-lo, Gran Reserva 2012 92

N/A UK www.cavaguilera.com

Intensely perfumed nose, with citrus, white fruit and fennel notes. The palate displays crisp acidity, typical of the best Xarel-lo, which gives an elegant, fruity and floral aftertaste on the finish. This is a benchmark for single-varietal Xarel.lo Cava. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12%



Cava Guilera, Musivari, Gran Reserva 2007 90

N/A UK www.cavaguilera.com

A classic style of Cava, with evidence of lees ageing on the nose and palate. It's quite fruity, showing a slight but attractive development. The finish is marked with an archetypal suave Cava bitterness, inviting you to drink again. Charming. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12%

'Guilera is aware that his Cavas will reveal the character of their terroir only after long bottle ageing'



Cava Guilera

Codorníu

The house of Sr Raventós, the inventor of Cava, is one of the two behemoths of Cava expansion throughout the world. In tough competition with rival Freixenet, Codorníu created the image of Cava as easy-drinking, low-cost bubbles, thanks to a mix of winemaking efficiency and low grape prices in Penedès. But in the 21st century, Codorníu began to focus on fine wines, creating a micro-winery within its main winery, designed to deliver sparkling excellence. It succeeded. Experimentation with international and indigenous grapes, new understanding of terroirs and sustainable viticulture, extremely careful winemaking and the patience to age the best Cavas – essential conditions for top quality – result in amazingly delicate and particular wines. Volumes are minute now, but I'm confident that Codorníu can increase production at the same quality level. Let's hope this search for excellence is endorsed by the winery's proposed new majority shareholder, The Carlyle Group, once the deal announced in June is concluded.



Codorníu



**Codorníu, Ars Collecta
Paratge Qualificat La
Fideuera, Cava de Paraje
Calificado 2009** 95

N/A UK www.codorniu.com

Pure Xarel·lo from poor limestone soils, aged for 90 months on its lees. A most delicate aromatic expression, nuanced but persistent. Subtle, it needs to be drunk with your detailed attention.

Drink 2018-2024 **Alc** 12%



**Codorníu, Ars Collecta
456, Gran Reserva Brut
2007** 93

N/A UK www.codorniu.com

A master blender's homage to the variety of origins and grape varieties in Catalonia: three different climates and soils, and three varieties, give a unique depth of expression and an intense, finely grained structure. Complex and original. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 12%

Freixenet

A kind of brother-in-arms to its fiercest competitor, Codorníu. Both are old, multi-family companies that developed great viticultural and winemaking skills and exported their basic Cavas all over the world, then, seeing profits cut at the lower quality end, decided to focus on higher quality. What's more, this year both companies have sought new international investment; in Freixenet's case, Henkell & Co from Germany, which is now in 50% partnership with remaining family shareholders José Ferrer Sala and José Luis Bonet. Top-tier wines here are based around two pillars. First, the strict selection of the best grapes from traditional sites, with longer ageing on lees. Second, something both

Photographs: Freixenet S.A. Sant Sadurní d'Anoia 2012

Below: the vintage Champagne press in action at Freixenet



brand new and very old: the restoration of the winery's foundational vineyard, La Freixeneda, and creation of a dedicated micro-winery – including an original 1900 Champagne press. Part of this artisan focus is Can Sala, a stellar Cava de Paraje Calificado (CPC) made under the supervision of Josep Buján, legendary chief winemaker at Freixenet for 41 years.



**Freixenet, Can Sala, Cava de Paraje
Calificado 2007** 94

£50 Tanners

The highly drinkable proof that Parellada can give great wines. Amazing, discreet elegance and fresh expression, which benefit considerably from a long period of ageing. Lovely developed aromas and nice acidity; an austere and serious style of Cava, with lots of character. A real jewel.

Drink 2018-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



**Freixenet, Cuvée DS, Cuvée de
Prestige Brut, Gran Reserva 2013** 89

£20 Freixenet UK, Soho Wine Supply

A special selection of indigenous grapes from various origins, which is then left for a longer period of ageing. Made only in good vintages, it's an archetypal premium Cava: discreet but savoury, very clean and balanced on the palate, with a graceful aftertaste. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 12% >



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Gramona vineyards

Gramona

Gramona defines itself as an artisan of time, though its decision to produce Cavas with lengthy bottle ageing began as a silver lining to the terrible clouds of the Spanish civil war. Following the war, sales were minute, with stocks left in the cellars for many years. On tasting these old bottles, the family realised that its sparkling wines were remarkably better after 10 years or more of ageing. Their vision only became a significant success in this century, when the market recognised the quality of these wines. Indeed, the previously mainstream idea that Cava is best enjoyed young is now obsolete. Great Cava needs long ageing. Gramona has also opted to use cork stoppers during bottle maturation for all its Cavas aged more than five years, meaning that

'The previously mainstream idea that Cava is best enjoyed young is now obsolete'

all processes must be carried out by hand. The current generation has taken the ageing process to even further extremes, with the impressive Enoteca series that spends 15 years on lees. They have also focused on their Font de Jui estate, adopting a biodynamic approach and integrating the vines in an ecosystem with other plants and animals on the estate.



Gramona, Enoteca Paratge Qualificat Font de Jui, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2002 96

£160 Berry Bros & Rudd

Intense and characterful aromas – a wine that needs a lot of aeration before it can be properly judged. Then it is rich, complex and suave, with an impossible sweet bitterness. Gorgeous: the baroqueness of Cava. Biodynamic.

Drink 2018-2032 Alc 12.5%



Gramona, Celler Batlle Paratge Qualificat Font de Jui, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2007 95

£86.99 Blanco & Gomez

The 'second' wine by Gramona, which is aged for 'only' 120 months, but is sourced from the same biodynamic vineyard as the Enoteca. This is liquid elegance: discreet concentration, with a subtle and very long finish. Joyous.

Drink 2018-2030 Alc 12%

Juvé & Camps

The philosophy of Juvé & Camps is closer to that of a Bordeaux château than a Champagne house. Most of its production is sourced from the large 200ha Espiell estate, located in the heart of the Penedès region, where vines grow around the central winery. Two other estates, with different terroirs, provide additional grape varieties that are unsuited to Espiell. Juvé & Camps was the pioneer of what is now the norm for top-quality Cava: the brut nature style. It was also a forerunner in organic viticulture, achieving full certification in 2015. Juvé & Camps hit the market in the early 1980s, with its Reserva de la Familia, which was a resounding success in the US and became the most widely sold gran reserva brut nature Cava in the

world. It produces only reserva and gran reserva Cavas, and is now aiming even higher with its extended ageing and CPC Cavas.



Juvé & Camps, La Capella, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2010 94

£95 Ehrmanns

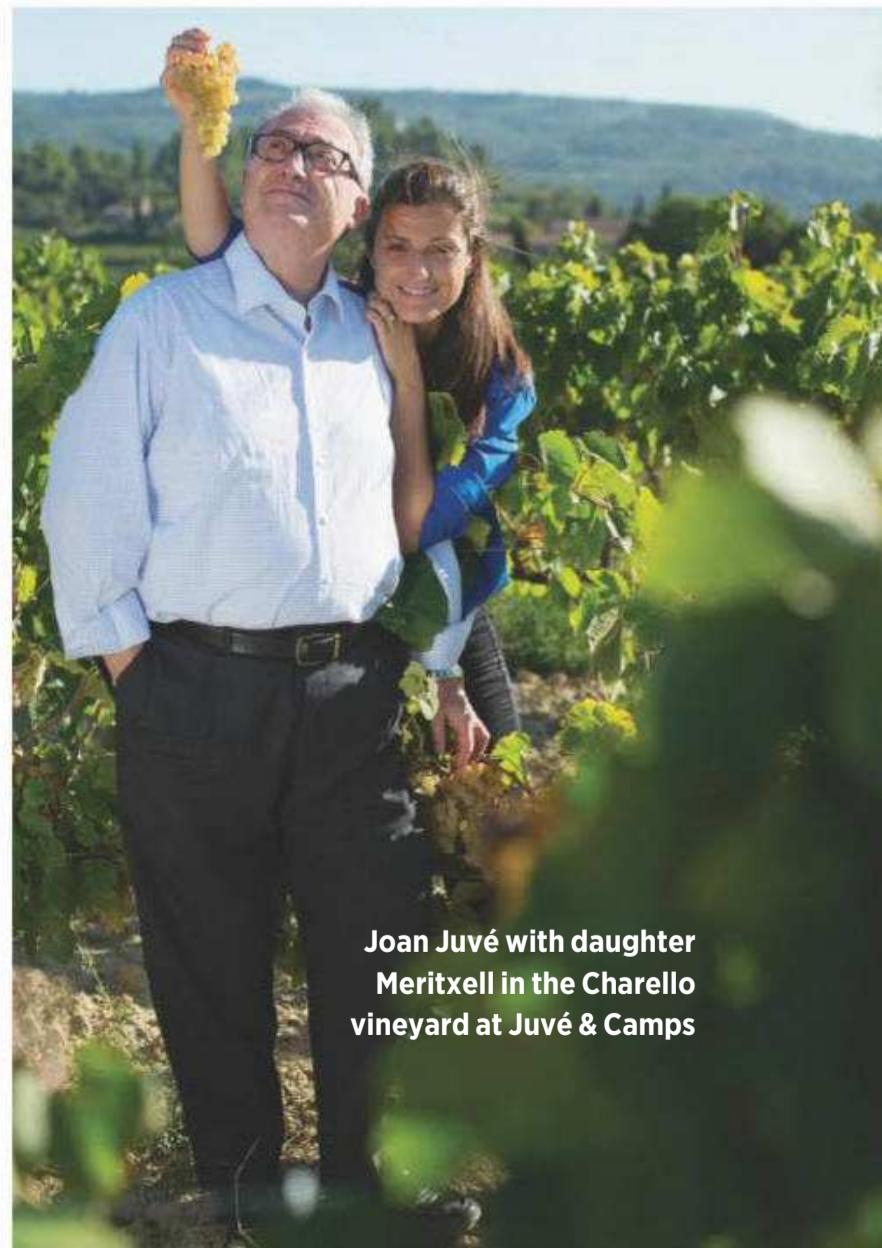
Pure organic Xarel·lo, aged for 108 months. Intense aromas, a hint of white fruit. Multi-layered, fresh, deep; a benchmark.

Drink 2018-2024 Alc 12%

Juvé & Camps, Gran Juvé & Camps, Gran Reserva 2013 95

£28 Ehrmanns, Ministry of Drinks, The Wine Society

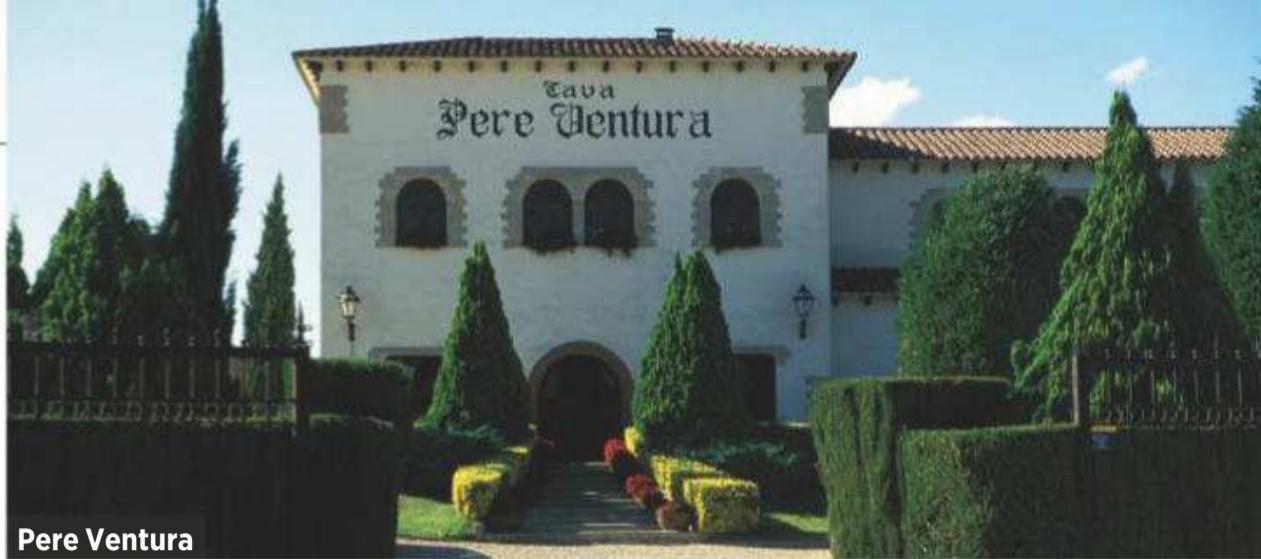
Intensely aromatic, with evidence of long ageing. Quite balanced; powerful and graceful. Organic and very well made. Drink 2018-2024 Alc 12% >



Joan Juvé with daughter Meritxell in the Charelo vineyard at Juvé & Camps

Pere Ventura

Most Cava producers start out by targeting the national market, but Pere Ventura is an exception to this rule. He launched his company in 1992 with the express intention of selling to international markets – and today exports to 51 countries accounting for more than 90% of production. Ventura was supposed to take over his family Cava business, Torreblanca, but preferred to start a winery of his own. He began by buying grapes and base wines to produce his traditional-method Cavas, but in 2011 he was able to acquire the historic Can Bas estate, including some plots of very old Xarel-lo vines. Ventura has endeavoured to reinstate the vineyards, so that now all of the grapes for his top wines come from the 60.5ha of vines at Can Bas.



Pere Ventura



Pere Ventura, Gran Vintage, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2014 93

£37.50 (2012) **Enotria&Coe, Great Western Wine**

Understated and elegant aromas, subtle honey and herbal tones, with dried fruit hints. Quite firm and rich, with nice balancing acidity, and a slightly mineral finish. **Drink** 2018-2027 **Alc** 12%



Pere Ventura, Cuvée Maria del Mar, Gran Reserva 2014 91

£15.50-£16.50 **Enotria&Coe, Exel, Great Western Wine, Great Wine Direct**

Rich and juicy, joyful and expressive. Peachy, spicy, hint of oak; velvety and suave with restraint. More charming than complex, but delicious. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 11.5%

'Recaredo's most important asset is its exceptional vineyards'

Recaredo

Recaredo offers the purest expression of Cava from Alt Penedès, employing a number of self-imposed restrictions to create its unique wines. Production is focused entirely on vintage brut nature Cavas, with long ageing under cork, as the winery believes this type of closure lends character to long-aged wines. (Gramona also follows this practice.) At Recaredo, disgorgement is done by hand and without freezing the neck of the bottle: lees are expelled manually by highly skilled workers, a practice that's considered key to the quality of the wines.

All of this attention to detail in the winery would be merely interesting if it weren't for Recaredo's most important asset: its exceptional vineyards. A combination of poor limestone soils, old vines (mainly Xarel-lo), attentive biodynamic-certified viticulture and

tiny yields result in a Burgundy-style grand cru surrounded by several premiers crus.



Recaredo, Turó d'en Mota, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2004 98

£115.99 **Dunell's, Fine & Rare, Les Caves de Pyrene**

The Romanée-Conti of Penedès, coming from a tiny, very old Xarel-lo vineyard, and needing fermentation in oak vats and more than 12 years of bottle ageing to express itself. A most delicate grand cru. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2018-2035 **Alc** 12%

Recaredo, Serral del Vell, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2008 95

£44.49 **Bottle Apostle, Fourteen Drops, Les Caves de Pyrene**

Great purity of expression: elegant structure and creaminess. Very persistent – the long ageing is barely apparent. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2018-2027 **Alc** 12% ➤



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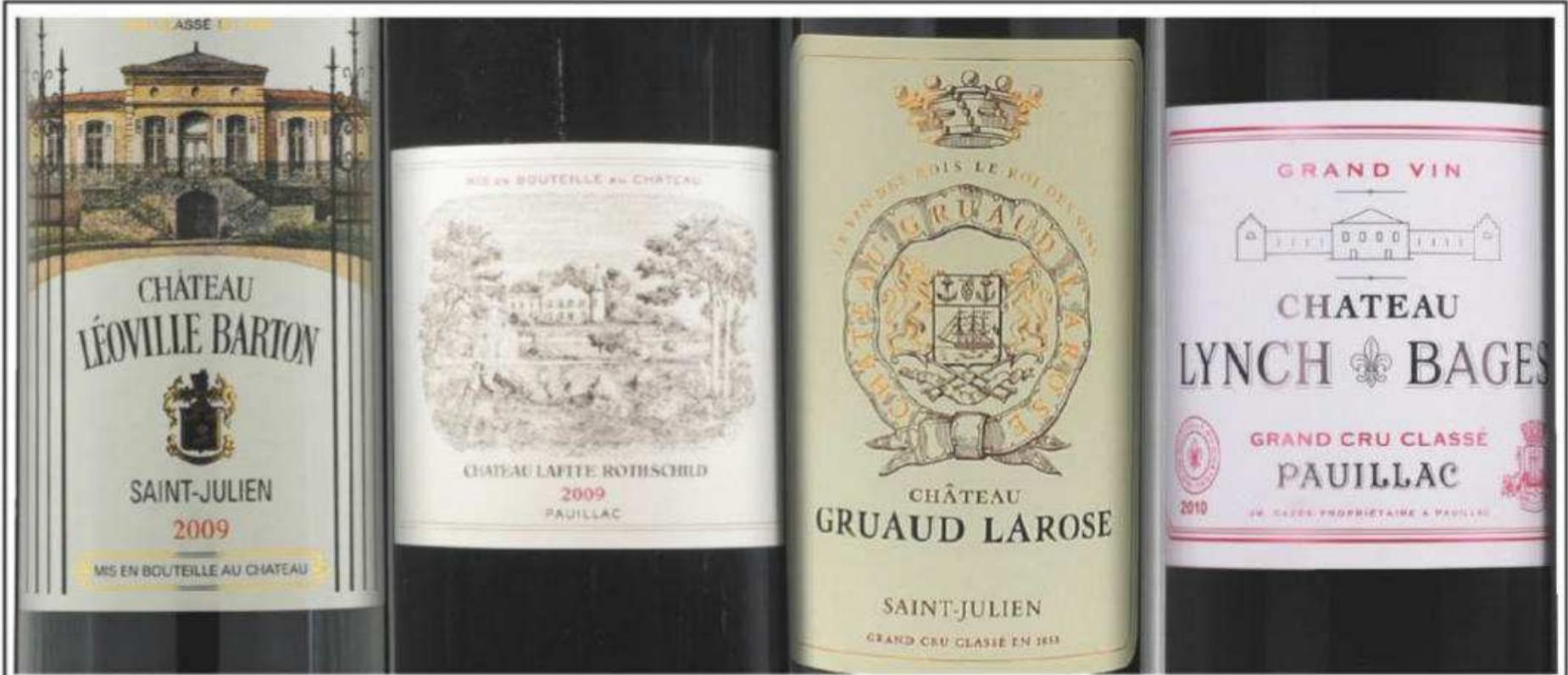
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Sumarroca

The Sumarroca family is a relative newcomer to Penedès. After making their fortune in other businesses, in 1999 the Sumarrocas decided to invest in viticulture, acquiring a 400ha plot of land in the region. The newly christened Sumarroca vineyard, together with two smaller properties, now provides all of the grapes for the company's Cavas and still wines – an impressive two million bottles in all. The estate is textbook Penedès, with limestone soils and a dry Mediterranean climate with some maritime influence. Vineyards are farmed organically. After initial success with its mid-range wines, Sumarroca has only recently jumped on the quality bandwagon, by selecting particular vineyard plots with older vines and lower yields for its top wine; while also raising standards for its gran reservas. Open-minded and innovative, Sumarroca brings a new energy to the Cava elite.

Above: Sumarroca winery and vineyards



Sumarroca, Núria Claverol Homenatge Finca Penetès, Gran Reserva 2014 92

£25 Alliance Wine, Noble Green

An intense style, showing evidence of extended lees contact. The balanced and savoury palate is multi-layered, with a lengthy finish. An unmistakably Mediterranean character: round and soft. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



Sumarroca, Brut Nature, Gran Reserva 2014 88

£15.99 Alliance Wine, Borders Wines

This is a textbook high-quality Cava, with its white fruit character and lees notes. Well structured on the palate, with quite a velvety texture that's well balanced by a slight and agreeable note of bitterness on the finish. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12%

Vins El Cep

Vins El Cep is a very particular kind of cooperative. It was created in 1980, when four families owning neighbouring vineyards in Penedès decided to combine their efforts in a single enterprise to make Cava and still wines. The result is a company with 200ha of prime vineyards, some first planted in the 15th century. The families share a winemaking philosophy and mission. The environment was an early concern; so now vineyards are farmed organically, with the very best sites farmed biodynamically to make the company's top wine. Vins El Cep cultivates most of the varieties authorised for Cava, but favours the three traditional native grapes – Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel·lo – for its flagship wine Claror, a CPC which is marketed as the first biodynamic Cava. In the winery, small-batch vinification is used to highlight individual terroirs and varietal expressions.

Vins El Cep, Claror Gran Reserva Paratge Qualificat Can Prats, Cava de Paraje Calificado 2012 92

N/A UK www.vinselcep.com

Restrained and charming aromatic expression, with a hint of Mediterranean herbs. Nice acidity; a feeling of authenticity and personality.

Biodynamic. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 12%



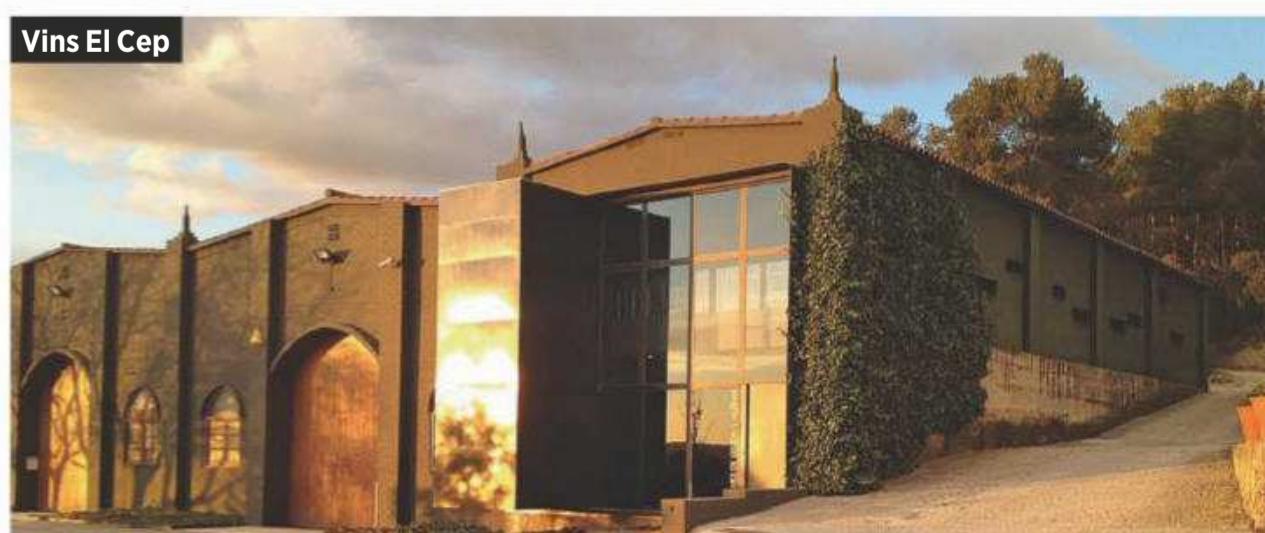
Vins El Cep, MIM Natura Blanc de Noirs, Gran Reserva 2012 89

N/A UK www.vinselcep.com

Clean, well-defined white fruit and grapefruit aromas. Easygoing, balanced, juicy, very well-made 100% Pinot Noir – a confirmation that this grape can deliver nice wines in Catalonia. Organic.

Drink 2018-2020 **Alc** 12% **D**

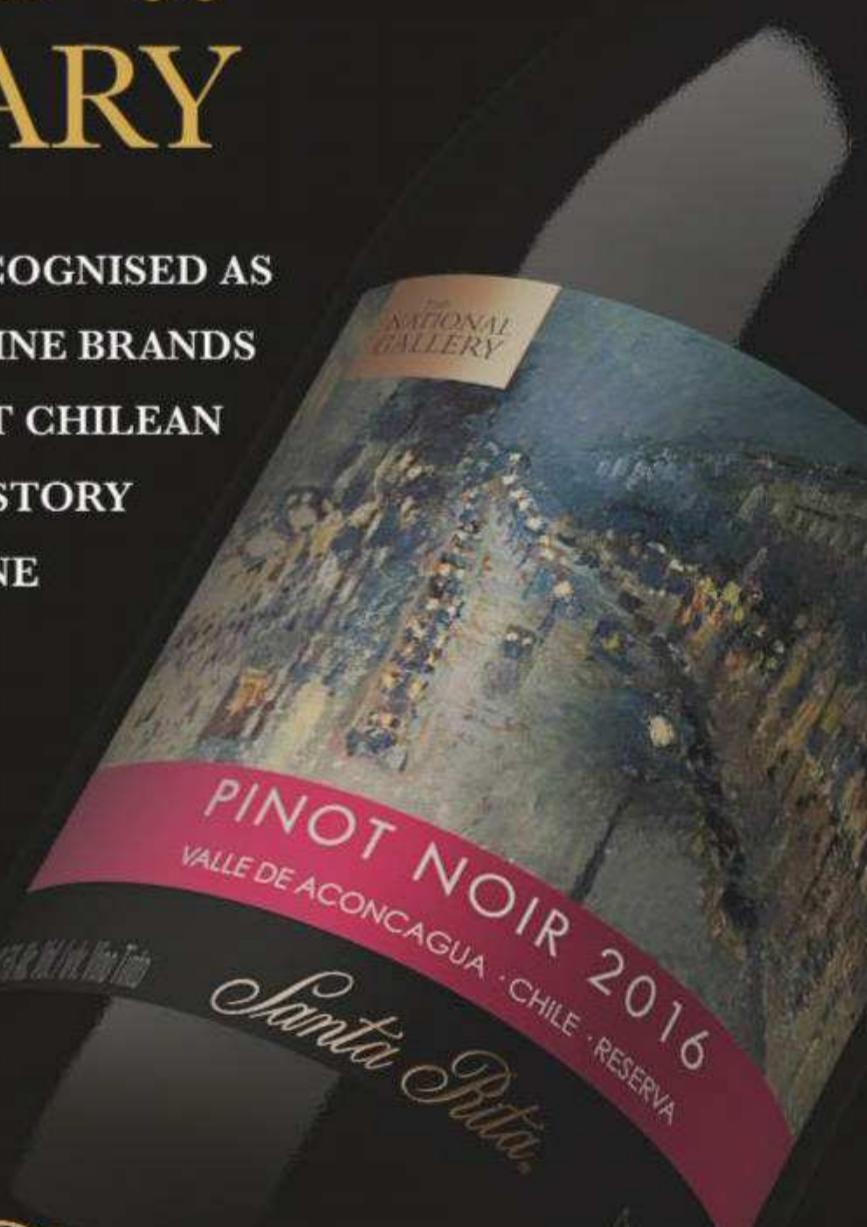
Vins El Cep





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Tenuta Sant'Antonio

A different style of Amarone

For our brothers: Armando, Tiziano, Massimo and Paolo Castagnedi. Years of hard work in the viticultural business led them to decide to produce their own wine, becoming winemakers in their own right, at Tenuta Sant'Antonio in the eastern part of Italy's Valpolicella region. They realised the huge potential of the Monti Garbi area, but it was a great risk. The soil is very calcareous and the grapes are grown at an altitude of 350 metres, a real record for the Valpolicella terroir which mainly extends through the valleys. Here the wide-ranging temperatures which the grapes are exposed to in the last few months of the ripening process undoubtedly give the wine a deeper colour and richer aroma, adding complexity to the end product. This is what gives Amarone – but also Valpolicella and Soave, the other wines made by Tenuta Sant'Antonio – their unusual but unique

flavours. Respect for tradition combined with a desire to look to the future, trusting in innovation: this is how the Castagnedi brothers make their wine.

Amarone della Valpolicella Doc

Amarone is a wine of antique lineage, which is highly treasured not least because of the painstaking care and skill that goes into every stage of processing the meticulously selected very high quality grapes. Whoever produces a good Amarone has done so abiding by ancient, strict and clear-cut rules. And if there have been particularly adverse climatic conditions in certain seasons, it may even be decided not to put the product on the market, meaning that a whole year's work has been in vain. Very little Amarone is produced: two whole vines are needed

for just one bottle. The grapes already undergo a severe selection in the vineyard and are harvested late September and October. They are then laid out in fruit stores for three to four months, where they lose more than half their weight and reach the best concentration of sugars. At the end of the raisining or drying period only the grapes that are perfect in all ways are crushed. The cold temperatures of January and February plus a long period of maceration on the skins encourage natural fermentation as tradition dictates. Time, a long period of ageing in small French oak casks and in the bottle do the rest. Every Amarone, however, has its own peculiar qualities as is only right for a great wine. We are proud to offer three: Campo dei Gigli, Selezione Antonio Castagnedi and Lilium Est.

In making their Amarone wines, Tenuta Sant'Antonio favours a very unique style,

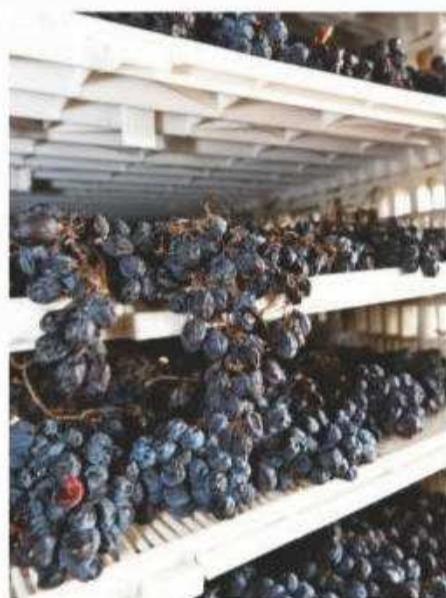


different from what's classically associated with Amarone, aiming for a balance between strength and elegance: the result is a wine that's neither too sweet nor too alcoholic, but most of all a wine where the fruit expresses itself as fresh, not jammy or similar to compote. That's why these wines are also interesting to drink during meals; not necessarily with elaborate

dishes, even just with a simple steak.

Young winemakers with no history of tradition to follow: this is what the Castagnedi brothers are. And that's the reason why it was easy for them make their choice: to give a slightly different interpretation of Amarone wine, while also respecting and honouring the rules of the territory.

How do you make Amarone?



You start, of course, with the harvest, already carefully picking the best grapes, which are placed in a single layer in small 4/5 kg crates. These are then stacked in a shed called "fruttaio" – with a further selection of the grapes, removing the bunches that have been damaged due to transport or excessive size or are not perfectly ripe – and left there for approximately three months for the raisining process. When the three months have passed, a further check is made on the health of the fruit and any bunches of grapes that are not perfectly dried or present abnormal moulds or mildew are eliminated. At this

point the grapes are crushed and fermented in special steel tanks. Finally, after fermentation, the Amarone wine is put into oak barrels to age.

Tenuta Sant'Antonio's Amarone wines



Campo dei Gigli - Amarone della Valpolicella

The wine with most awards from the best international juries. The oldest vineyard is dedicated to the lily, the flower that symbolises Tenuta Sant'Antonio. A single vine grows in that vineyard, giving a unique wine. Its flavour is balanced, very intense, with a lingering robust body, to be drunk at least 5 years after harvesting. The aroma speaks of wild fruits, woody hints and mineral tones with aromas of liquorice, black pepper, tobacco, spices and chocolate.



Selezione Antonio Castagendi - Amarone della Valpolicella

A family tradition, a wine that tells a story. Antonio Castagnedi loves his family and the good wine of his land. This is dedicated to him and to his love. This wine's flavour is well balanced, with fat tannins, soft, warm, savoury, elegant, fine and fresh. The aroma is of ripe red fruit, spicy aromas of liquorice, black pepper and hints of chocolate.



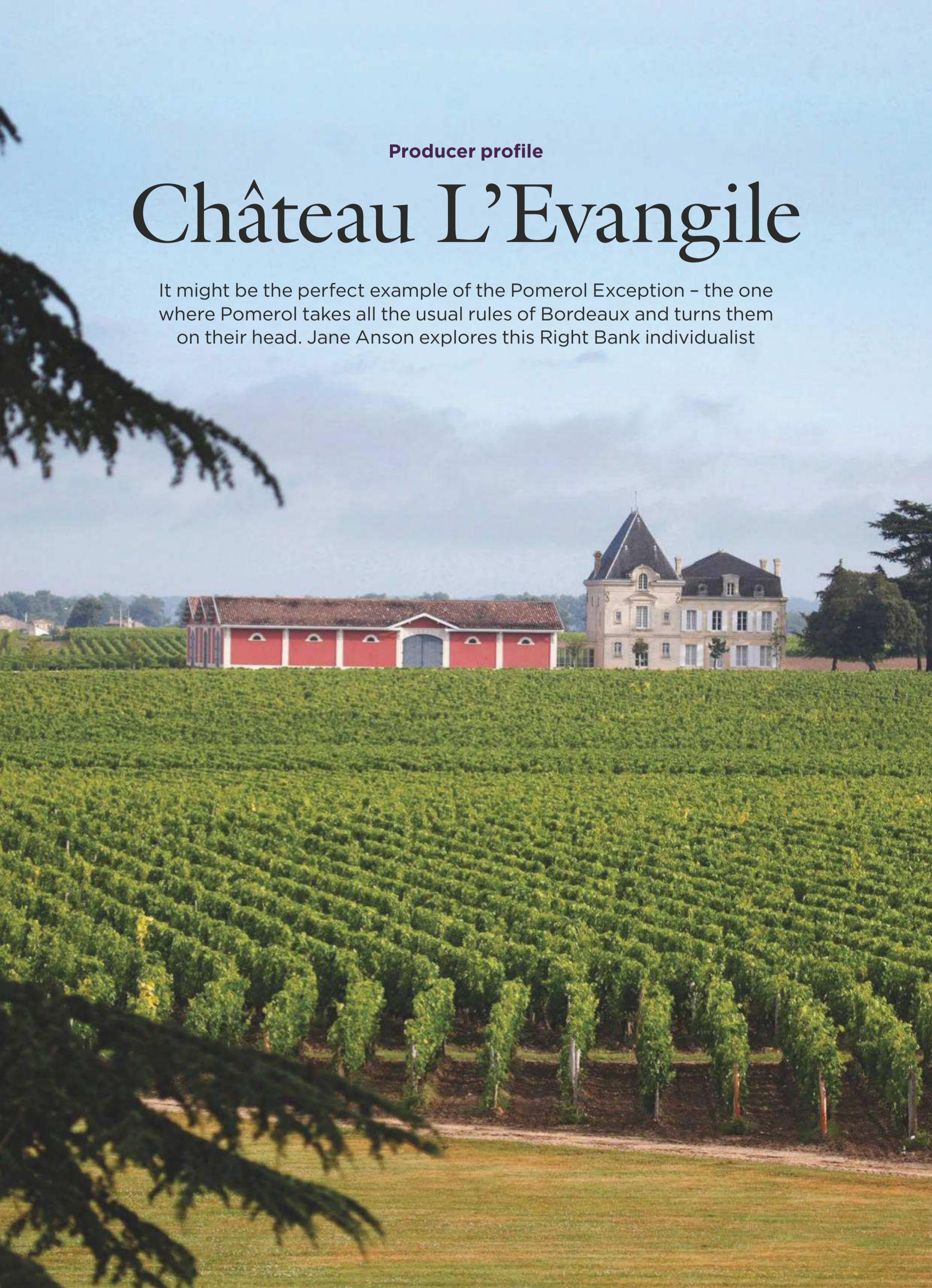
Lillium Est - Amarone della Valpolicella Riserva

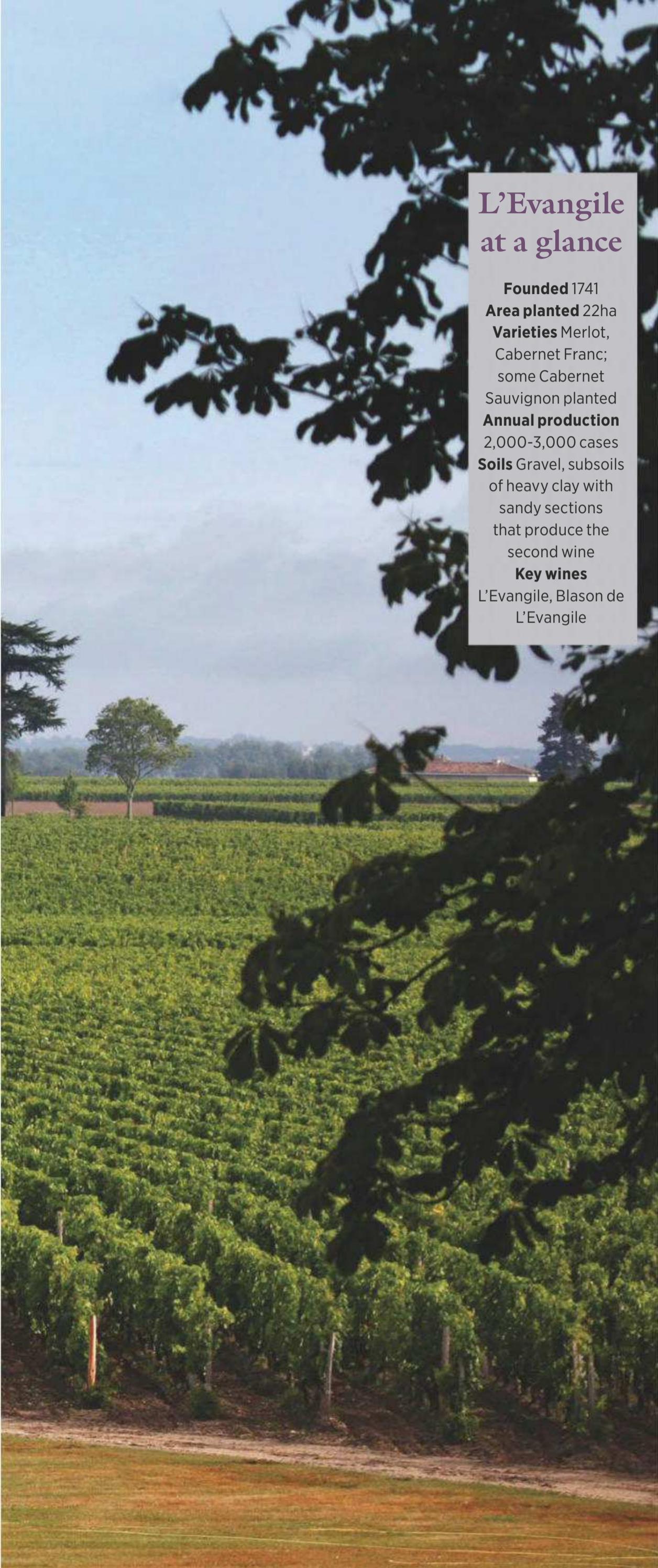
The flower among flowers of Valpolicella. In Latin, the name of the reserve means "it is a lily". This Reserve is dedicated to the best of the whole field. On the palate it is certainly dry, warm and soft, well supported by a notable acidity, richness of flavour and rounded tannin content. Very persistent and with a fine balance. It has the characteristic aroma of ripe cherries, plums, small woodland berries.

Producer profile

Château L'Evangile

It might be the perfect example of the Pomerol Exception – the one where Pomerol takes all the usual rules of Bordeaux and turns them on their head. Jane Anson explores this Right Bank individualist





L'Evangile at a glance

Founded 1741
Area planted 22ha
Varieties Merlot, Cabernet Franc; some Cabernet Sauvignon planted
Annual production 2,000-3,000 cases
Soils Gravel, subsoils of heavy clay with sandy sections that produce the second wine
Key wines L'Evangile, Blason de L'Evangile

IT'S AN APPELLATION that manages to embody all that is small-scale and artisan in a region that is often accused of being overly interested in corporate gloss. Pomerol is also a part of Bordeaux that was little known until after World War II, yet today produces many of its most sought-after and highly priced wines, leapfrogging neighbouring areas that have been making wine since Roman times and have been famed globally since the Middle Ages. And it's a place that takes the Merlot grape, dismissed for being fruity, easydrinking and not quite serious, and turns it into stubbornly long-lasting liquid poetry.

Look into L'Evangile's history and you start to see why all of these things are true. For a start, although it's one of the oldest châteaux in the appellation, with a mention in the land rolls of 1741, it has only been permanently known under its current name (meaning 'the gospel' in French) since the mid-19th century. At that time, then-owner Paul Chaperon selected that title over the decidedly less sexy former name of Domaine de Fazilleau – for the previous 50 years it had switched between the two. The estate remained in his family for the next 130 years, until Baron Eric de Rothschild of Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite) bought a majority stake in 1990 from the formidable Simone Ducasse.

'Maybe having the Rothschild name attached discounts L'Evangile from being truly small-scale'

And okay, maybe having the Rothschild name attached discounts L'Evangile from being truly small-scale, but even their arrival happened in a decidedly Pomerol way.

Subtle difference

'There was no way that Madame Ducasse was going to be impressed by the idea of a fancy name coming all the way over to Pomerol from Pauillac,' is how Baron Eric puts it, as he describes the early discussions for co-ownership. 'I knew that it was a sensitive subject, because although her husband had died several years earlier she was an extremely proud and capable woman and was still overseeing every aspect of running >

Left: Château L'Evangile is one of the oldest estates in Pomerol, dating back to 1741



Above: Simone Ducasse with Baron Eric de Rothschild (right) and Christophe Salin in 1990

L'Evangile. So I sent in what I thought would be my secret weapon to do the talking.'

He is referring to Christophe Salin, the debonair, ex-rugby playing CEO of Château Lafite, who took charge of convincing Madame Ducasse of their suitability.

'I thought I had her in the palm of my hand,' Salin says with a smile, taking up the story as the two of them guide us through a retrospective of the wines dating back to 1982. 'She was always extremely polite and agreeable to my suggestions when we chatted. But the next day, she would act as if we hadn't even had the conversation. I'm not sure I ever got her to budge an inch on anything.'

This meant that from 1990 to 1998, when DBR (Lafite) became sole owners, any investments were done slowly, and often extremely discreetly. A second wine was introduced with just 4% of the crop for the 1989 vintage – the Rothschilds were present for the ageing of it – and the percentage of new oak barrels being used nudged up from 10% to

Photographs: DBR (Lafite)



'From 1990 to 1998, investments were done slowly, and extremely discreetly'

20%, but no more – unlike the 70% new oak that is routine today.

'Madame Ducasse was extremely unwilling to sign off on the investment for new oak barrels,' says Baron Eric. 'So we ended up bringing them in from Lafite over the winter of 1993 to 1994, at night-time when nobody was around to see us. We brought in barrels and pumps from Lafite, but never a bill. And she simply pretended that it wasn't happening, so we were all happy.'

New impetus

This unwillingness to invest may have led to a reputation for uneven quality for a while, but there's no doubt that the Ducasses were

L'Evangile – a timeline

1741
Estate founded by the Léglise family under the name Fazilleau

1862
Estate bought by négociant Paul Chaperon

1874
Current château building designed by architect Charles Lallemand

1930s
Jean-Paul Ducasse killed during World War II. His son Louis takes over the business, becomes a prisoner-of-war, so his wife Simone manages L'Evangile, initially with other family members



1798

Pierre-Raymond Isambert purchases the estate, changes name to L'Evangile



1957

Simone and Louis Ducasse take sole charge of L'Evangile

1982

Louis Ducasse dies just before harvest, having recommended that Simone hire Michel Rolland (above)



Above: the cellar at Château L'Evangile is now home to 70% new oak barrels

visionary owners. Long-time consultant Michel Rolland remembers how Simone's husband Louis Ducasse was the first château owner to come to his laboratory in Pomerol with grape samples, at a time when no other owner ever set foot in oenological laboratories, or even really believed in getting their wines tested at all. Rolland joined more seriously as consultant in 1982, just after Ducasse's death during the harvest of that year, because Louis suggested to his wife that she might benefit from his help. Rolland was the first to suggest adding a smattering of new oak barrels during the ageing (a year earlier in 1981 there had been none at all) and was a great ally for the Rothschild team on their arrival.

Vineyard replanting and serious winery investments were left until they were fully in control, with a beautiful circular cellar, not unlike the one at Lafite, completed in 2004. Herbicide use in the vineyard was halted as of 2001, with organic viticulture introduced in 2007, and full ISO 14001 environmental management certification in place today, along with increasing moves towards biodynamic farming.

Another shift is now underway at L'Evangile, as one generation of Rothschilds hands over to the next – but this time there's considerably less subterfuge. Baron Eric has handed over to his daughter Saskia de Rothschild, while Salin has passed on his own role to new CEO Jean-Guillaume Prats, formerly of Château Cos d'Estournel and latterly LVMH. At the same time L'Evangile's long-term technical director Jean-Pascal Vazart is still in place, as is Rolland. There will inevitably be evolutions under the new team, but the full potential of L'Evangile is already being realised – as is the final piece of the puzzle that makes this estate so emblematic of all that is exceptional about Pomerol.

Well positioned

L'Evangile is nestled on the far southeastern corner of the Pomerol plateau as it tips into St-Emilion. Its handsome limestone château building looks directly out at Château Cheval Blanc, with little more than a small road separating the two in parts – and its soils form a gravel corridor over subsoils of heavy clays, along with a few sandy areas that tend to now go into the second wine Blason de L'Evangile. The first wine's blend is almost ➤

1990

Simone Ducasse sells a 70% stake of L'Evangile to DBR (Lafite), remaining at the estate after the sale

2000

Simone Ducasse dies



1998

DBR (Lafite) assumes full ownership, with the property standing at 16ha

2001

Jean-Pascal Vazart becomes director. Replanting programme introduced

2012

DBR (Lafite) buys 6ha of vines from Châteaux La Croix de Gay and La Fleur de Gay – the L'Evangile vineyard expands to 22ha



2018

Saskia de Rothschild takes over from Baron Eric at the head of DBR (Lafite)

always close to 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Franc, a combination that delivers its signature intense, silky and concentrated flavours, its exuberantly juicy black fruit expression and tender, airbrushed tannins. You find high Merlot plantings all over the Right Bank, but usually on cooler clay soils that tame its exuberance.

'L'Evangile is always a very early-picking location,' says Rolland. 'It's among the first places to ripen in Pomerol – a distinct advantage as there are so often September rains in Bordeaux.'

The highly unusual combination of the early-ripening Merlot on early-ripening soils partly accounts for the seductive quality of

fruit and tannins in L'Evangile. It works because the clay subsoil plumps up the power and keeps a freshness that allows for ageing. Cabernet Franc adds elegance and complexity, although Vazart explains that even though better clones of Cabernet Franc are currently being planted to slightly increase its presence, the dominance of Merlot will remain.

Perhaps those soils also mean that this particular family had another secret weapon when crossing over to the Right Bank from their customary home in Pauillac. Because gravel is a soil most closely associated with the great Cabernet Sauvignons of the Médoc. And everyone agrees that the Rothschilds know a thing or two about those... □



Jane Anson is a Decanter contributing editor, Bordeaux correspondent and author of the book *Bordeaux Legends*

Anson's pick: the best of Château l'Evangile



Château l'Evangile, Pomerol 2005 99
£166.50 (ib)-£290 Corkr, Cru World Wine, Crump Richmond Shaw, Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, Friarwood, Justerini & Brooks, Wilkinson Vintners
85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 70% new oak. A near-perfect growing season, and this approaches perfection as it glides across the palate, with sweet fig and torrefied notes, salted caramel and saline. Utterly gorgeous. Could be drunk with huge pleasure right now – with an amazing balance and feather-like expression that lifts the whole thing up – but there's no rush. **Drink** 2018-2038 **Alcohol** 13.5%



Château l'Evangile, Pomerol 2009 98
£250-£340 (ib) Berry Bros & Rudd, BI, Corney & Barrow, Crump Richmond Shaw, Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, Grand Vin, Wilkinson Vintners
95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc. A vintage that managed to tick all the boxes set down by the Bordeaux oenology school for great years, even though it was a little too warm for true balance in some estates. Not here though, with flavours concentrated but not overly so. This has softened just slightly over the years, still showing an exotic, dark, spicy character and intense black fruits. Just getting going, but don't

feel the slightest urgency to open any bottles that you're lucky enough to have. The tannins are still very present, even if they are like silk. **Drink** 2018-2040 **Alc** 13.5%



Château l'Evangile, Pomerol 1998 96
£159.75-£203.33 (ib) Christopher Keiller, Corkr, Cru World Wine, Crump Richmond Shaw, Fine & Rare, Vinum
72% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Franc. This has real depth of flavour and intensity that keep you gripped from start to finish. Near to its perfect drinking window. Amazing freshness at 20 years old; you can feel the flesh of the soft autumnal berry fruit given an edge by the curling cigar smoke. A true Right Bank vintage – and even more clearly a true Pomerol vintage. **Drink** 2018-2032 **Alc** 13%

Château l'Evangile, Pomerol 2001 95
£109.92 (ib)-£203 Corkr, Cru World Wine, Crump Richmond Shaw, Hedonism, Nickolls & Perks
79% Merlot, 21% Cabernet Franc. A wine that unfolded fairly early in its life, and has remained at that deliciously appealing stage pretty much ever since. This is gorgeous, epitomising the idea of classic Pomerol – so juicy, with such wonderful ripe fruit expression and the torrefied coffee and cassis swirls that this property perfects so well. Mouthwatering Pomerol with the Lafite signature of drinkability. Not

the easiest vintage, with a tough August that meant they had to harvest earlier than expected, but a highly accomplished result. **Drink** 2018-2035 **Alc** 13.5%



Château l'Evangile, Pomerol 2000 94
£267-£308 (ib) Christopher Keiller, Crump Richmond Shaw, Grand Vin, Wine Source
91% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc. Needs aerating and remains a touch closed, even after 17 years. Clearly displays the rich black fruit and sexy Pomerol swagger that you expect of such a big vintage, tempered by the delicacy of the winemaking at L'Evangile. This is a great wine, still young, with a long life ahead of it. **Drink** 2018-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

Château l'Evangile, Pomerol 2012 92
£80 (ib)-£145 Albany Vintners, BI, Corkr, Crump Richmond Shaw, Davy's, Farr Vintners, L'Assemblage, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima, Nickolls & Perks, Richard Kihl
93% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc. Not the easiest vintage, yet the luscious fruit is evident even on the nose. Concentrated and silky, with an intense cassis expression. Perhaps a little short compared to the best vintages, but the attack is very complete. Low Cabernet Franc because many replanted vines were still young at this point. Tasting great today but is not one to age for too long. One of the surprises of the tasting. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 14%

Bodegas Faustino

Essentially the founding father of Faustino, Eleuterio Martinez Arzok was a man with plenty of plans and an abundance of ambition when, in 1861, he acquired a manor house and its attached vineyards in the Rioja municipality of Oion.

Regrettably his aspirations were doomed to fail, as no amount of foresight could have predicted the tide of phylloxera which would soon decimate great tracts of European vineyards. Nonetheless, this family-owned concern endured and in 1920 Faustino Martinez Pérez de Albéniz began to re-establish the wrecked vineyards alongside his father.

Today Faustino operates 650ha of prime Rioja Alavesa vineyards, and the fruits of its labour are enjoyed in over 100 countries around the globe. In Faustino I, it can also lay claim to making the world's biggest selling Rioja Gran Reserva.

Yet, despite its accomplishments there's rarely a lull at Faustino and its ongoing evolution is perfectly encapsulated by a trio of new wines: Gran Faustino 1955; Faustino Art Collection Willy Ramos Edition and Icon Reserva Especial (the 2014 vintage being the second and current release).

With the Gran Faustino 1955, 2018 celebrates the 55th year since it first saw the light of day in 1963 following eight years of ageing. Faustino has marked this by releasing 2,555 bottles of the remaining few and it's something of a history lesson.

Presented in a slender, Germanic-style bottle more associated today with Riesling and the like, this was a design which was hugely popular in Rioja in the 1950s. The lettering and imagery of original labels and official seals also evoke the period, as does a

Below: Faustino's Corrales vineyard, Álava, Rioja, Spain



wrapping of silk paper which replicates a page from a 1955 local newspaper.

Protective handling of grapes at this time was a far less accurate science, so having a fleet of easy-going mules or horses to transfer the fruit in baskets

Below: A trio of new wines: Gran Faustino 1955; Faustino Art Collection Willy Ramos Edition; and Icon Reserva Especial



Left: Faustino's Icon wine is aged for 18 months in French wood

strapped to their sides was both vital and often as good as it got. Minimising the distance between vineyard and cellar (where the grapes went through a fermentation process akin to semi-carbonic maceration) was essential too.

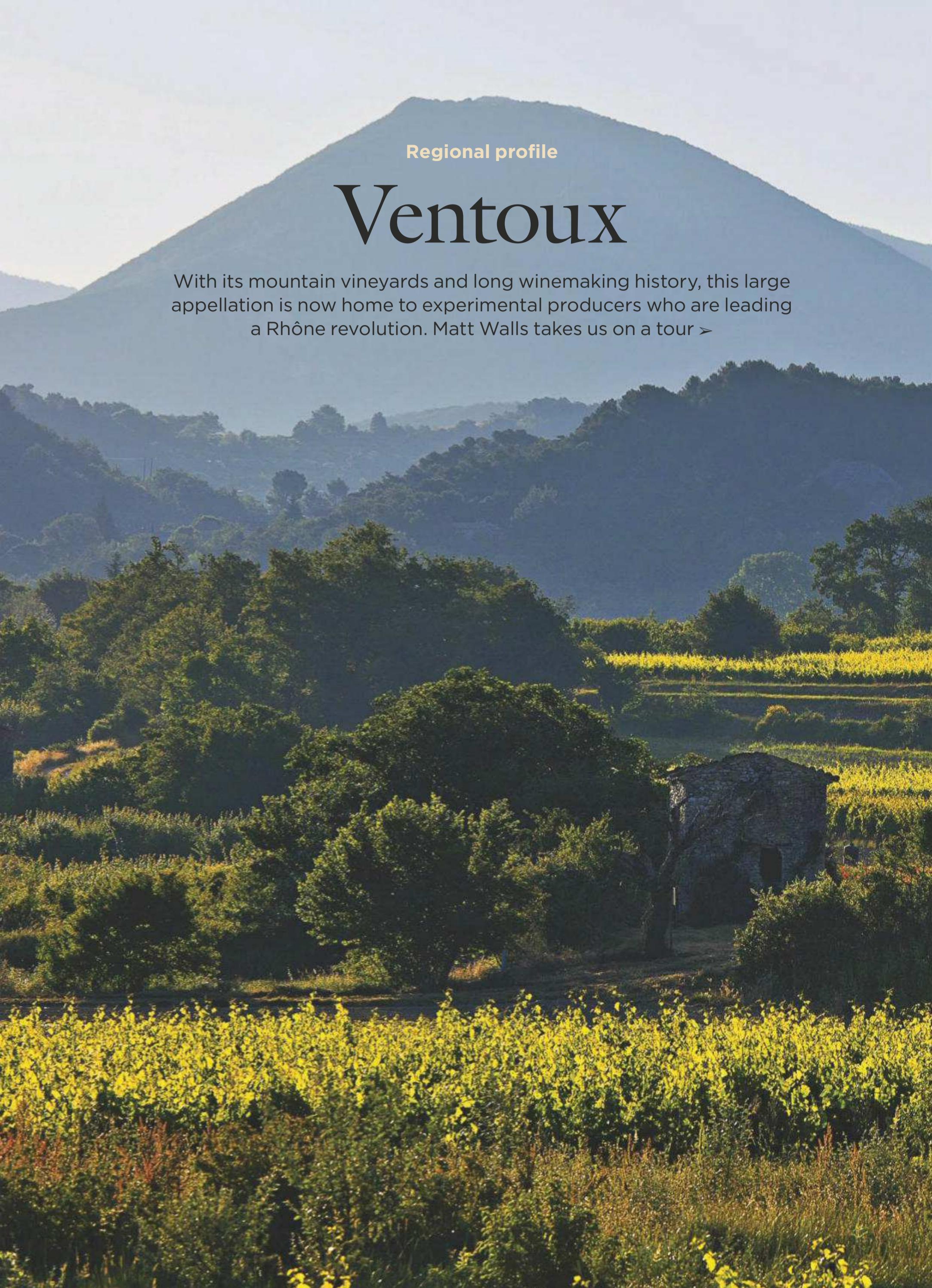
The **Faustino Art Collection** is very much a recognition of Faustino here and now. This 100% Tempranillo is a tribute to one of the country's foremost artistic figures (and Faustino fan), Willy Ramos, who emigrated from Colombia to Spain when he was 14 years old.

Ramos was charged with the task of reimagining Rembrandt's portrait of Dutch merchant Nicolaes Van Bambeeck which graces Faustino's wines, and following months in his studio and hundreds of discarded sketches, the result in Ramos' own words is 'something amazing; full of colour, full of life, full of emotion, like Faustino's wines'.

Finally comes the **Icon Reserva Especial** which, other than a dose of 5% Graciano, is pure Tempranillo, hand-picked from low-yielding bush vines (each vine producing only just over 1kg of grapes), which are around 35 years old and planted on a 6ha plot at an altitude of 500m, producing a wine aged in French wood for 18 months then a further two in bottle before release.

Faustino certainly sits pretty, comfortably positioned as one of Spain's most prominent wine brands. Yet it clearly continues to plough on with no intention of deviating from its path, perpetually adding texture and depth to its range of wines, thereby both consolidating its enviable standing as well as engaging with new audiences and devotees; world-renowned artists or not.

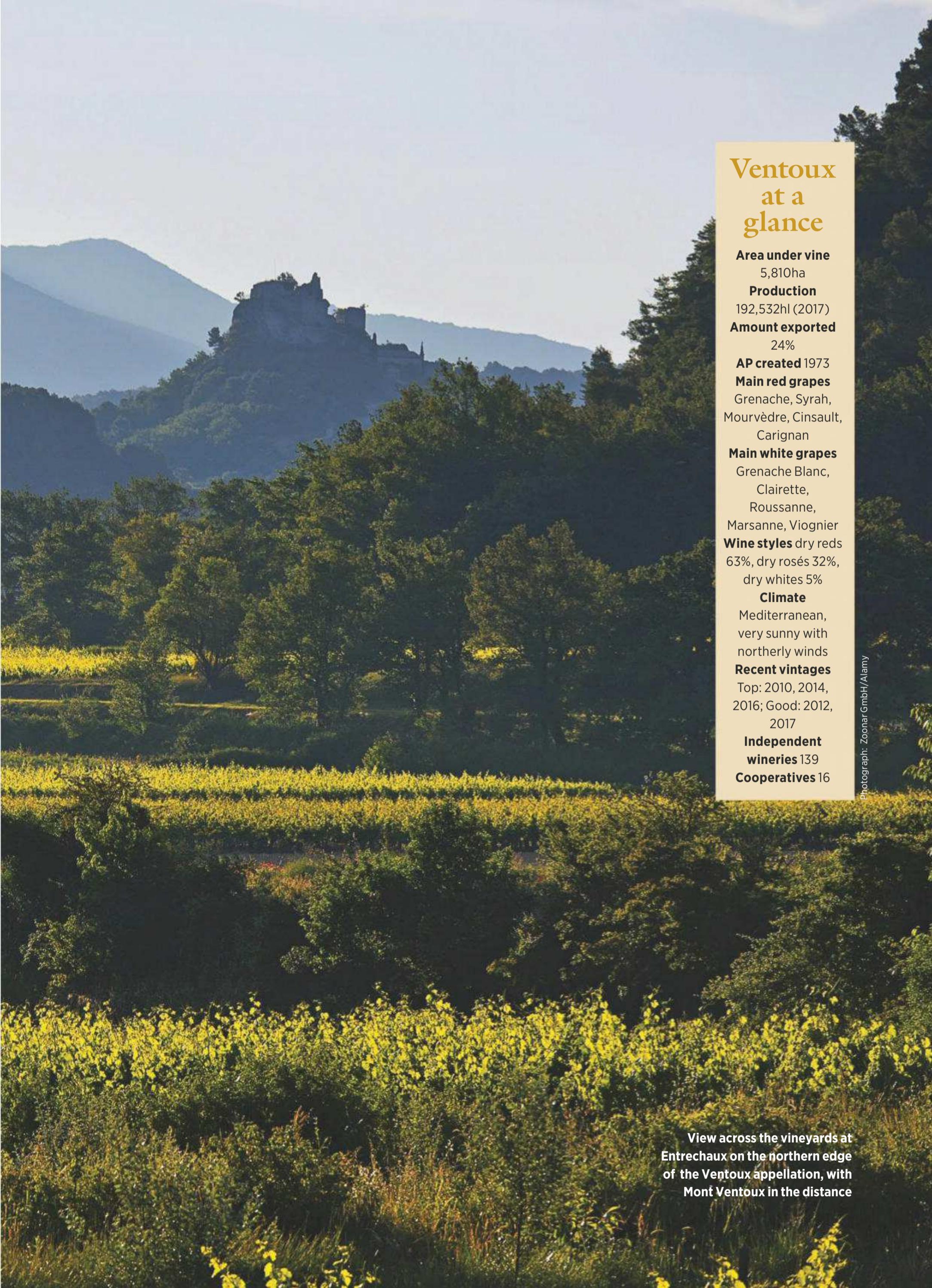


The background image shows a vast, rolling landscape of vineyards. In the foreground, there are dense green vineyard rows. A small, rustic stone building is visible on the right side. The middle ground consists of more vineyard terraces leading up towards a large, dark mountain peak in the distance. The sky is clear and light blue.

Regional profile

Ventoux

With its mountain vineyards and long winemaking history, this large appellation is now home to experimental producers who are leading a Rhône revolution. Matt Walls takes us on a tour ➤



Ventoux at a glance

Area under vine

5,810ha

Production

192,532hl (2017)

Amount exported

24%

AP created 1973**Main red grapes**Grenache, Syrah,
Mourvèdre, Cinsault,
Carignan**Main white grapes**Grenache Blanc,
Clairette,
Roussanne,
Marsanne, Viognier**Wine styles** dry reds
63%, dry rosés 32%,
dry whites 5%**Climate**Mediterranean,
very sunny with
northerly winds**Recent vintages**Top: 2010, 2014,
2016; Good: 2012,
2017**Independent
wineries** 139**Cooperatives** 16

Photograph: Zoonar GmbH/Alamy

View across the vineyards at Entrechaux on the northern edge of the Ventoux appellation, with Mont Ventoux in the distance

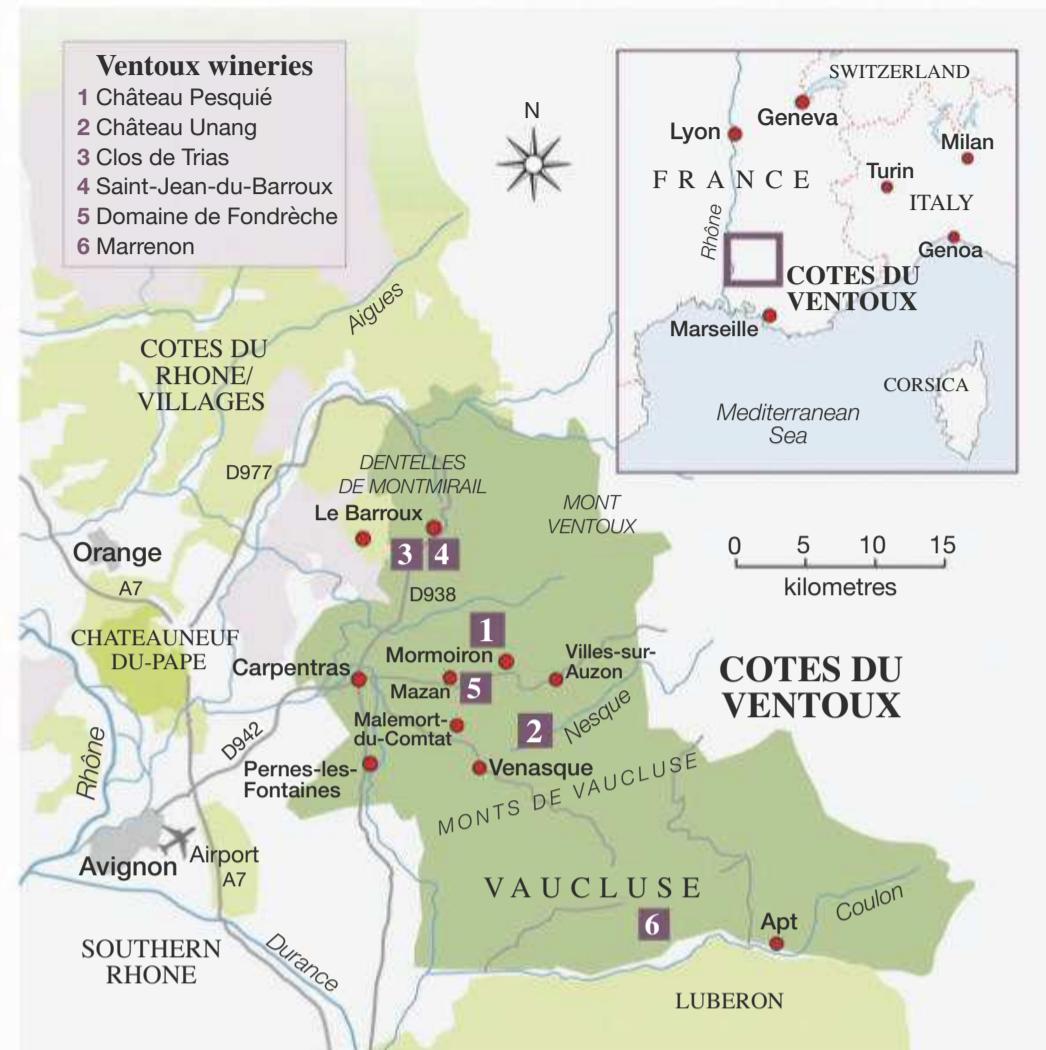
AT THE END of a meal with wine-loving friends, do you ever play that game? You know: 'If you could make wine anywhere in the world, where would it be?' Of course you do. We all do. My answer (well my current answer) is Ventoux.

I would choose this mountainous area 30km to the east of Châteauneuf-du-Pape for a multitude of reasons. For a start, land is some of the cheapest in the region. The wines of Ventoux are identifiably Rhône in style, but with a distinctive lifted freshness. You can successfully make red, white or rosé. You can experiment here – it's not so well known that you'd feel yourself forced into making a 'classic' style for fear of being unable to sell it. And there are pockets of outstanding terroir ripe for discovery.

A handful of prospectors recognised this 20 years ago and had the courage to take the plunge. Today, they're responsible for making Ventoux the most exciting appellation in the Rhône Valley. In the words of Sébastien Vincenti of Domaine de Fondrèche: 'The revolution is coming!'

From co-ops to domaines

Ventoux hasn't always been quite so thrilling. Much of it still isn't. In fact, only 20 years ago, 'Ventoux' was synonymous with 'insipid'.



But winemaking in Ventoux goes back much further than that – more than 2,000 years further, with winemaking in the region traced back to 100 BC. It remained an important industry through the Middle Ages. The first mention of Château Unang (*below*)

Ventoux: six names to know

Château Pesquié

Affable brothers Fred and Alex Chaudière are the third generation to run Château Pesquié, a sizeable traditional Provençale bastide property at the foot of Mont Ventoux. Their parents were pioneers of the Ventoux revolution, leaving the local co-op in 1989 to make their own wines. Back then there were fewer than 10 independent wineries; now there are nearly 140. At more than 100ha, Pesquié is the largest, and has just been certified organic. It has a highly differentiated range of bold, intense, attention-grabbing wines that express the various aspects of their high-altitude terroir. Its opulent whites and ageworthy reds are among the most impressive in Ventoux.

Château Unang

Nestled at the end of the Nesque Valley near the pretty village of Malemort-du-Comtat lies the ancient Provençale



Château Unang

residence of Château Unang, an imposing stone property with landscaped gardens surrounded by 100ha of land. Most is woodland, but 15ha on the slopes are planted to vines. It wasn't always so impressive. In search of Grenache vineyards at altitude, James and Joanna King bought the estate in 2001, when, says James, 'it looked nicer the further away you got from it'. Now it doubles as a film set. The whites and rosé are balanced and unforced, the reds concentrated, with a windswept elegance.

Clos de Trias

High in the hills near the fortified village of Le Barroux, the vibe at Even Bakke's Clos de Trias is two parts Provence to one part Mad Max. Born in Colorado and raised by Norwegian parents in the US and Norway, he worked in various Californian wineries before buying the estate in 2007. His parcellated organic vineyards are grown on ancient Triassic soils and scale the mountainside to heights of 500m. Once vinified, he ages them for up to six years in old barrels



Clos de Trias

was in 867 AD when the local landowner presented the 'Unango' estate – its woods, fields, vines and slaves – to the bishop of the nearby town of Venasque.

During the last century, as in much of the Rhône, mixed farming was widespread. Alongside cherries and olives, farmers grew grapes and delivered them to the local cooperatives. But the climate in this corner of the Rhône was relatively cool, making it difficult to ripen red grapes reliably, particularly at high yields. So Ventoux gained a reputation for thin, light wines that kept prices low and progress slow.

It was only in the 1990s that a handful of winemakers began to see the potential, and in response, certain co-ops and their growers began to raise their game.

The Giant of Provence

The hulking Mont Ventoux, the 'Giant of Provence', rises to a height of 1,912m. It's best known for destroying cyclists during the annual Tour de France, but it can be kind too – particularly to vines. The Ventoux appellation is one of the biggest in France, nearly 6,000ha of vines spreading far into the plains. But the best wines come from the slopes, a patchwork of limestone, sand, clay, marl and gravelly scree.

Below: Château Pesquié's entrance

There are two main parts to the appellation. The northern part is a vast bowl surrounded by mountains on three sides: the Dentelles de Montmirail to the north, Mont Ventoux to the east and the mountains of the Vaucluse to the south. The warmer, flatter, southern section lies to the south of Mont Ventoux in the Luberon Valley.

The foothills of Mont Ventoux help to lift vineyards out of the heat of the valley floor, ➤



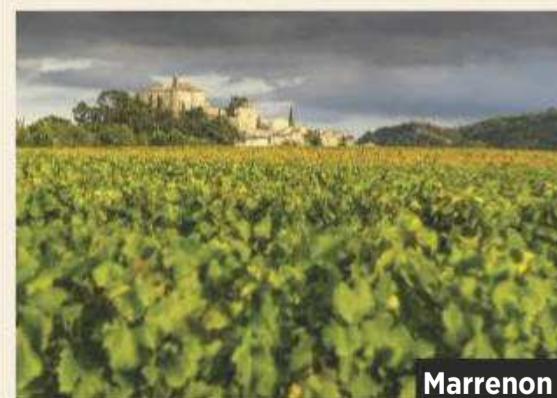
before release. He describes himself as a 'post-industrial winemaker', working as simply as possible to create idiosyncratic wines that are as vital as they are challenging, exploring umami, salt and acidity to electrifying effect.

Domaine de Fondrèche

In the early 1990s, Sébastien Vincenti worked at Domaine Les Cailloux in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. He dreamed of establishing his own domaine, but vineyards in Châteauneuf were prohibitively expensive so he was forced to look further afield. When he was offered Domaine de Fondrèche in 1995 at the foot of Mont Ventoux, he didn't hesitate. Today he makes some of the best pale rosés in the Rhône, but it's his reds that really impress – sleek, polished, precise expressions of Ventoux terroir. The red, white and rosé in his Persia range all offer remarkable bang for buck.

Marrenon

A union of eight cooperative wineries, Marrenon is based in the Luberon Valley, in the heart of the regional natural park, and represents the work of 650 winemaking families. The quality of the wines is consistent despite its size. Managing director Philippe Tolleret explains: 'Whether you are a small estate or a big co-op, you have to know your vineyards.' The union works closely with its suppliers to help them get the most from their land. 'In the past, they were



Marrenon

farmers,' says Tolleret, 'and now they have learned to be wine-growers.'

St Jean du Barroux

'If you study geology, you can find great terroirs that are still unknown,' says Philippe Gimel. In 2003, after working at Domaine de la Janasse and Château de Beaucastel in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, his search led him to Le Barroux. He's divided his vineyards into 99 plots, and can take a month to handpick at perfect ripeness – they've never yet been affected by rot. The largest bunches go into his early-drinking cuvée; the smaller, more concentrated ones are for his bottlings designed to age. These have more stems in the ferments, but even they are sorted for quality. Gimel fizzles with excitement when he talks about his terroir. When you taste the wines, you see why. He creates thrillingly fluent and precise depictions of this fresh, wild, windswept terroir.

the highest rising to an altitude of 700m. Vincenti at Fondrèche explains that although heat builds during the day, cold air flows down the mountain at night, which cools the vines, and this temperature differential contributes to the telltale aromatic freshness and high acidity in Ventoux wines.

The cooler climate isn't always beneficial. In 2017, nearby Château Pesquié lost 60% of its grapes due to frost. 'It's the first time that's happened,' says co-owner Fred Chaudière. 'It's a new way to show that we're cooler than the rest – but not our favourite way!'

Grape varieties in Ventoux are classic Rhône, and although Grenache makes up the bulk of red plantings, Syrah is notably successful here. It produces sleek wines with clean lines, somewhere between northern and southern Rhône in style. Rosé accounts for one third of production and can be very good, particularly when made with Cinsault.

Thanks to the innate freshness and acidity in the wines, I can't help but think Ventoux should make more exceptional whites. There are several stand-out examples, but currently the results are qualitatively and stylistically inconsistent. The best exponents, such as St Jean du Barroux, Clos de Trias, Domaine Vintur and Château Pesquié, however, demonstrate the huge potential.

Stars align

'Ventoux is going through quite a revolution,' says Even Bakke at Clos de Trias, and he's not just talking about his uncompromising wines. But what has changed? There are several aspects, but according to James King of

Photograph: Anthony Collins/Getty Images

Château Unang the most important factor is the gradually warming climate. 'Now nature is on our side,' he says. And as wine lovers around the world begin to favour freshness and drinkability over power and scale, Ventoux wines naturally fit the brief.

The region's close links to co-ops has proved to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it hasn't encouraged meticulous wine-growing, meaning Ventoux has been late to discover its true potential. But this has kept land prices low, leading to an influx of ambitious outsider winemakers with vision but little capital. James and Joanna King at Unang are Scottish, Bakke at Clos de Trias is Norwegian-American, Graham Shore at Domaine Vintur is English. Philippe Gimel at St Jean du Barroux was a pharmacist in Lorraine before he devoted himself to wine. 'Sometimes it's only when you come from outside that you realise how great somewhere can be,' he says. 'And when you change your life, you want to produce something great.'

The Ventoux revolution

In an appellation as extensive and varied as this, not all the output is equally exciting. The name Ventoux in itself is not a guarantee of quality. A further classification of the terroir into smaller plots would make sense, but don't expect it any time soon. In the meantime, small domaines are uncovering pockets of exceptional potential and joining the band of dynamic, headstrong and creative new estates that have made Ventoux the Swartland of the Rhône. So, I have to disagree with Vincenti. The revolution isn't coming – it's here. □

Matt Walls is a contributing editor for Decanter and Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for the Rhône

Below: Ventoux vineyards rise up the flanks of the Dentelles mountain range



Walls' pick: a dozen great Ventoux buys



Domaine Vintur, Cuvée Séléné, Edition Luna 2014 94
£19.95 www.vintur.fr
Grown on clay-limestone soils at 130m, and aged for two years in second-use barrels. The oak is fully integrated into the quince fruit, lending vanilla fudge and nougat notes. A gastronomic style, showing body, texture and energy in a wine that demonstrates the ageworthiness of top-quality white from Ventoux.
Drink 2018-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Chêne Bleu, Rosé 2017 90
£16.60 **Justerini & Brooks**
From vines grown at 550m. With its pale salmon pink colour, this has attractive aromatics between fruit and flowers, with an extra savoury dimension. The rich mouthfeel is cut through with glistening Ventoux acidity, leading on to a lengthy finish.
Drink 2018-2020 **Alc** 14%



St Jean du Barroux, La Pierre Noire 2014 96
£30.20 **Lay & Wheeler**
Lifted loganberry, leaf tea and tarragon. Beautifully mouthcoating, elegant and harmonious, long and svelte, with a tapered finish. Gently perfumed, beautifully balanced. It's concentrated without overextraction, combining the elegance of the northern Rhône with the generosity of the south. A beautiful wine. **Drink** 2018-2026 **Alc** 15%



Clos de Trias, Vieilles Vignes 2012 95
£20 (ib) **Mayfly Wine Co**
Vines from 65 to 100+ years old, 40% destemmed, only bottled in 2018. Meat stock, blood, iron, provocative volatile acidity giving lift to the raspberry fruit. Full, lively, distinctly salty, and it vibrates on the finish. Makes a huge impression – a song of acidities. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 15%

Château Pesquié, Artemia 2016 95
£34.40 (2015) **Stannary St Wine Co**
Two high-altitude single vineyards: one of Grenache, one Syrah. The wine spends 18 months in barrel, with 50% new oak. Tightly wound aromatics, well-integrated oak. It's generous, with supple, intense tannins and piercing acidity. Highly concentrated but not overextracted; powerful and vivid. Will impress – but needs time. **Drink** 2021-2026 **Alc** 14%

Domaine de Piéblanc, Bouquier 2016 94
N/A UK www.domainedepieblanc.fr
50-year-old vines at 300m. No oak used. Immediately impressive aromatics of flowers, berries and a mineral dimension. Remarkable energy and freshness in a direct, snappy, enlivening style. It's long, vivid and bright; very well balanced, no excesses – just beautifully drinkable.
Drink 2018-2022 **Alc** 15%

Domaine de Fondrèche, Persia 2016 93
£15.60-£21 **Brunswick Fine Wines, Cru World Wine, H2Vin & Quintessentially, Noel Young, Terra Wines, Vagabond Wine**
Clay limestone soils, 80-year-old vines, hand-harvested, yielding 20hl/ha. Searching black fruit ingrained with oak spice. Generous in extract with piercing acidity; sleek, fresh, intense; fine, grippy tannins. Warming but balanced, very long. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 14.5%

Château Unang, La Source 2016 92
£11.10 **Justerini & Brooks**
Hilltop vines planted at 350m and grown organically. Lovely nose of lifted violet and currant aromas, slightly mulled. Fresh on the palate, mouth-coating fruit, and finishes with a lick of spice. A touch warming but has real impact and complexity. Long finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Domaine des Anges, Archange 2015 92
£18.99 (2014) **Direct Wine Shipments**
From 50-year-old vines on clay limestone soils, grown at 350m. Spends a year in wooden tank and large amphora before release. Fig, plum and prune on the nose. Good aromatic detail, depth and energy on the palate, with lush tannins. Deliciously textural.
Drink 2018-2021 **Alc** 14%



Domaine du Bon Remède, Les Vignes Rousses 2016 92
N/A UK www.domainedubonremede.com
Carignan rarely takes a leading role in Ventoux, but this cuvée pushes it forward. Soft, gentle figgy aromas, violets and old-vine vinosity. Soft, yielding style, but that Ventoux acidity gives it an edge. Atypical but a really enjoyable, balanced and characterful Ventoux. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Domaine du Tix, Cuvée Garrigue 2016 90
N/A UK www.domaine-du-tix.com
Cuvée from young vines, currently 15 years old. The pretty strawberry and raspberry fruits are juicily ripe to begin with, then the wine finishes dry with a grip of firm tannin. Not the most complex, but has enjoyable intensity and Ventoux style. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Marrenon, Orca 2016 90
£13.50 (2015) **Nethergate Wines**
From 60- to 100-year-old vines, aged in third-use oak barrels for 12 months. Very fresh raspberry and hints of lavender. Its breadth of mouthfeel and gently warming alcohol is tempered with gentle tannins and bright acidity. A real sense of purity and finesse. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 15%



When wine goes wrong...

Making wine is not easy. From natural disasters and vineyard pests to human error and deliberate sabotage, Matt Walls shares some of the trials and tribulations that winemakers have overcome to get the bottle to your table ➤

A toppled forklift lies under a pile of wine barrels that collapsed in a storage room at Kieu Hoang Winery in Napa, California on 25 August 2014

Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

WINEMAKER NIGHTMARES

EVERY BOTTLE OF wine you open represents a minor triumph. Despite the countless things that can go wrong in the vineyard and the cellar, some determined individuals nurtured the vines, harvested the grapes and turned the juice successfully into wine.

Few growing seasons pass without incident, but most issues can be treated, rectified or solved along the way. There are some events, however, that are so severe there's nothing a winemaker can do to overcome them. Whether it's a catastrophic weather event, an invasion of pests, rampant disease or disasters in the winery, occasionally winemakers must face their worst nightmares.

Heaven and earth

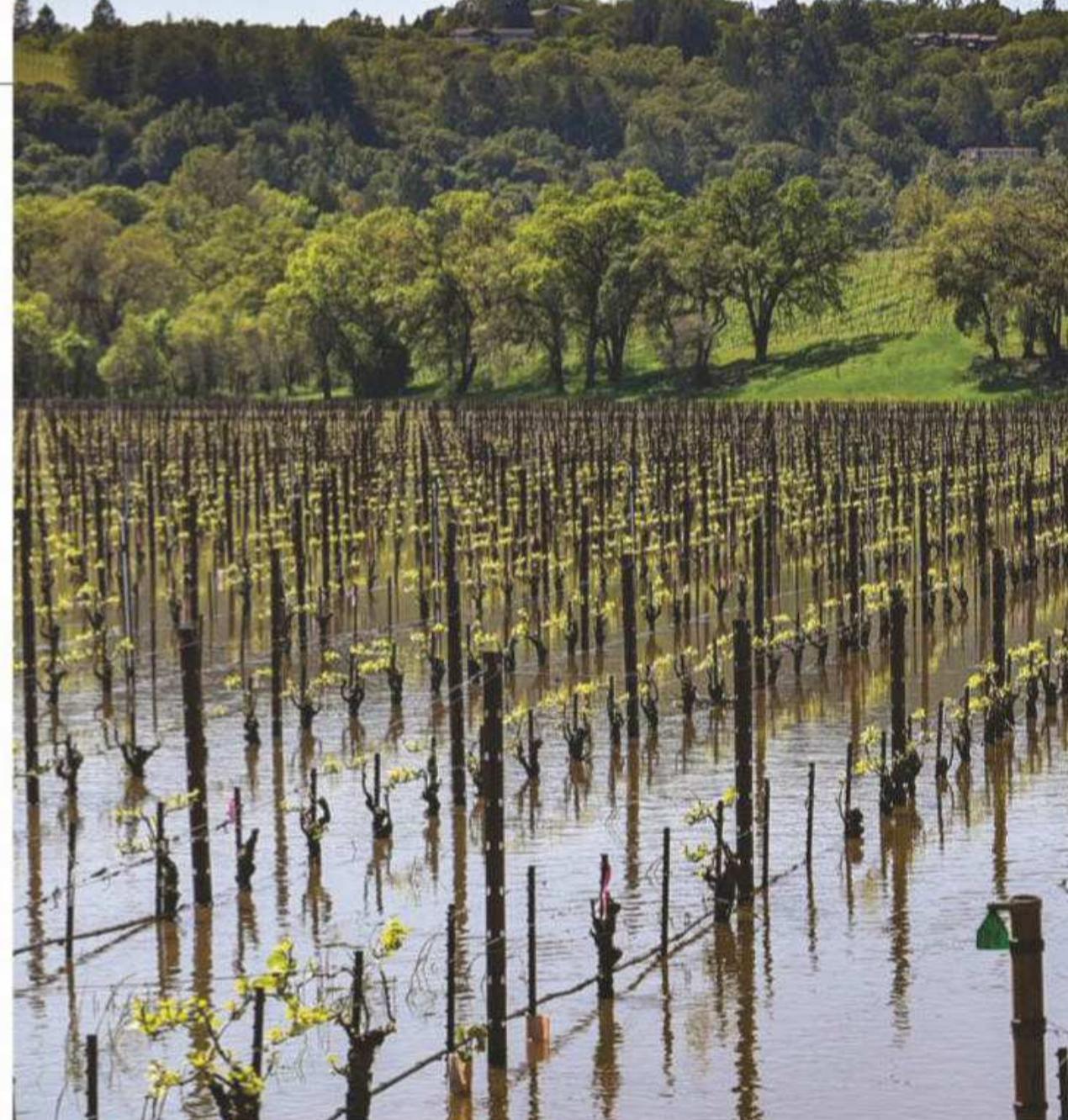
Larry McKenna of Escarpment Vineyard in New Zealand's Martinborough region has three decades of winemaking experience under his belt and has tackled his fair share of climatic disasters. He explains that some, such as drought, develop steadily, worsening day by excruciating day. Others are more sudden. 'Frost is immediate,' he says, 'it happens in a night. It's pretty traumatic. You can light all the fires you want, but sometimes there's nothing you can do – you just have to cop it.'

Other weather events strike even faster. 'The sky goes yellow-orange,' says Amandine Marchive, co-owner of Domaine des Malandes in Chablis. 'When you see this colour, you know it will hail.' She received a call from a neighbour one summer's day in 2016, telling her to visit one of her vineyards urgently. 'Within five minutes hail had completely destroyed the whole 5ha. This was in June, but the day after it looked like February – no leaves, no grapes, nothing – just the wood remained,' she remembers.

'Emotionally it's horrible. The vineyard employees, they work there every day and they feel they worked for nothing. The work is hard, but the payback is seeing the juice in the tanks. It's hard not to be depressed. And we didn't have insurance,' she adds. Marchive bought and installed anti-hail netting straight after at great expense. Then the following year she lost 50% of her production to frost.

Before joining Viña Estampa in Chile's Colchagua Valley as head winemaker, Johana Pereira worked at neighbouring Bisquertt. On 27 February 2010, she suffered one of the most sudden and terrifying events of all. It was two weeks before harvest, and the winery's tanks contained four million litres of wine prior to bottling when it was hit by a massive earthquake, measuring 8.8 on the moment magnitude scale and lasting for around three minutes. 'Tanks were crushed like Coke cans,'

Photographs: DPA Picture Alliance/Alamy; Frank Fennema/Getty Images; Menahem Kahana/Getty Images



Above: wild boar are causing increasing problems for vineyard owners

she says. They lost almost 800,000 litres of wine. 'It was like a river,' she adds. Where the wine eventually pooled and sank into the ground, trees fell ill and died.

The winery also suffered widespread damage to its irrigation systems in the vineyards, but Pereira was amazed by the response from local people and colleagues in other wineries. 'Everybody was in the same situation, but everybody wanted to help,' she says. In the end, the 2010 vintage was one of good quality, if smaller in volume than



Above: spotted-wing *Drosophila suzukii*, a pest that can cause sour rot by piercing the skins of grapes

expected. Despite the destruction, natural disasters such as this can pull communities together and bring out the best in people.

Plagues and pests

If you make Sauternes, watching noble rot spread through your vineyard will fill you with joy. But not if you make Cabernet Sauvignon. This is what happened to Lenz Moser at his family estate Weinkellerei Lenz Moser, near Krems in Austria, in 1996. It rained during harvest, and botrytis seized the vineyard. 'The only way to save the harvest economically was to pick immediately, press, and make a white Cabernet Sauvignon. The grapes were ripe, they didn't lose sugar or flavour, just colour.' It was a desperate last-ditch gamble, but to his amazement it paid off and the wine was a huge success.

Photograph: Matt Wilson/Cephas

Today Moser's main project is making wine at Château Changyu Moser XV in China's Ningxia province. The vast majority of vineyards here are planted with red varieties, but keen to make a white, he decided to have another shot at making white Cabernet – this time by design. It's proved so popular he's now teaching colleagues in other wineries how to do it. The moral of the story for Moser? 'When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.'

Most diseases can be treated by spraying, but insects or larger pests can be trickier to deal with. The 2014 vintage in the northern Rhône got off to a wet start. One winemaker described the situation in Crozes-Hermitage as a textbook example of what you don't want to happen in your vineyards: 'huge disease pressure with symptoms of not only oidium, mildew... but even botrytis on grapes prior to veraison!' To top it off, there was an invasion of *Drosophila suzukii* known locally as 'vinegar flies' because they pierce the skins of grapes to lay their eggs, leading to sour rot. Thankfully they haven't returned since.

The biggest pest of all is the one with two legs. Marc Hochar, of Chateau Musar in Lebanon, explains: 'People often ask about the major challenges facing us in Lebanon such as conflict, war, political unrest, climate change, the ongoing refugee crisis, phylloxera, and so on. But the one thing that no one would think about being a problem for us, is that we >

Above: near Sonoma Valley in California, April 2018, a vineyard flooded following persistent rains that caused a river to swell

'When life gives you lemons, make lemonade'
Lenz Moser

have to deal with our vineyards being raided by people picking the leaves from our Grenache vines to prepare stuffed vine leaves, a traditional local dish... This is not an ideal situation for us, as we absolutely need the canopy to protect our grapes from the heat of the summer in the Bekaa Valley.'

Cellar calamities

Once the grapes are in the cellar they are largely safe from the elements, pests and diseases, but there's a whole host of potential new problems – mostly of the man-made variety. Richard Painter, winemaker for Te Awa's Left Field label in New Zealand's Hawke's Bay, knows this all too well.

'I arrived at the winery one morning and walked past a small tank of about 1,500 litres. Nothing was amiss,' he begins. 'I went upstairs, then one minute later there was this huge eruption – I looked down and wine was volcano-ing out of the small door at the front! If I'd walked past a minute after I did, it would have knocked me off my feet.'

It turns out the tank was still fermenting when it had been sealed off the previous night, and pressure had built up to dangerous levels. 'We lost about 1,000 litres of juice. I put pressure release valves on every vat the next day.' Lesson learned.

Meanwhile in South Africa, Adam Mason is winemaker at Mulderbosch in Stellenbosch, and has his own winemaking project, Raised by Wolves. Despite his success, he admits he's made mistakes over the years. 'I've oversulphured wines by a factor of 10, just because I wasn't thinking. There's nothing you can do to save a wine like that.' He describes how the cellar hand looked on in disbelief but was too scared to question his boss. 'His eyes were popping out of his head,' remembers Mason. He's recently had a family crest designed with



Above: Katie Jones moved from England to the Languedoc region in France 25 years ago

the Latin motto *illud non futuis*. A polite translation would be 'Don't mess it up'...

Everybody makes mistakes. But when a good wine is destroyed on purpose, it's even more upsetting. Katie Jones moved from Leicestershire in England to the Languedoc in 1993, where she took a job with local cooperative winery Mont Tauch. She worked her way up from sales assistant to export sales director, but after 15 years she decided it was time for a change and bought a small vineyard. Along with husband Jean-Marc, she made her first vintage of Domaine Jones in 2009; by 2013, they were making a modest 15,000 bottles a year. In April that year they travelled to a trade fair in Germany to market their wines. They returned home elated, with purchase orders for their entire production, which was ready to be bottled in their garage winery.

'The next day I had a tasting,' she recounts. 'I turned on the tasting tap on the vat and nothing came out.' The same happened with a second tank. 'I thought, "That's strange..." Then I saw the valves at the bottom of the vats were open. It didn't sink in. I called Jean-Marc, and his legs just gave way.'

They looked in the drainage system where waste water collects – 'and it was full of wonderful white wine'. Their tanks had been sabotaged in their absence, destroying 3,000 litres of wine. The police were called but offered little assistance. She has her suspicions as to the culprits, but nothing has yet been proved, jealousy the likely motive.

Jancis Robinson MW picked up on the story via Twitter and featured their plight in an article. 'We got so much support from all over the world,' says Jones. Awareness of her wines increased, sales rocketed, and she was able to buy more vineyards as a result.

When you consider all the things that can go wrong, it's a wonder anyone tries to make a living making wine. Pitfalls are everywhere, some caused by nature, some by winemakers themselves, and others prepared by nefarious others. Thankfully, most bounce back and chalk it up to experience.

Next time you open a bottle, it may not be an award-winner – but it will still be, in so many ways, a remarkable achievement. □

Photograph: V. Zaitsev/Getty Images



Above: ice balls are left on a vineyard floor following a heavy hailstorm that damaged vine shoots and stripped young berry clusters



CONSORZIO DEL VINO
BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO®

Rosso di Montalcino

A **Decanter** guide

Produced in association with the Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino

102 Ripe for discovery

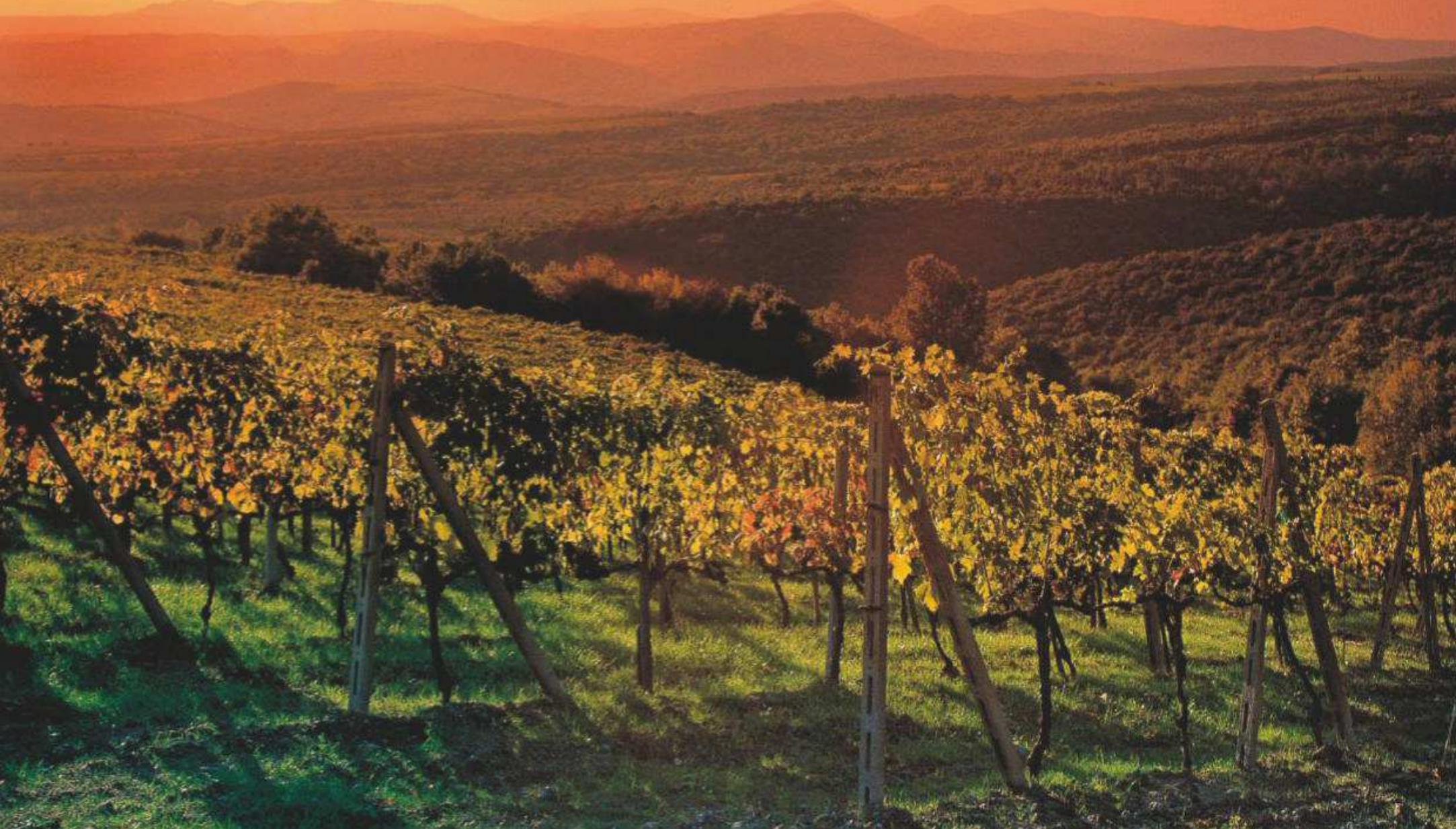
Grown in the illustrious soils of central Tuscany's Sangiovese heartland, Rosso di Montalcino should be the first port of call for those keen to discover the complexities and subtleties of the region and its terroirs, says **Monty Waldin**

105 Tasting: 30 great buys

At an in-depth tasting of wines from producers around the region, **Monty Waldin** selects the best of the crop, with many from the highly rated 2016 vintage

108 Rosso at the table

Why sommeliers at some of the world's top Italian restaurants recommend Rosso di Montalcino's fresh, fruit-focused character as a great match for lighter foods



Rosso di Montalcino: ripe for discovery

One of an elite band of top-quality red wines in Italy that can only be made from a single grape variety, Rosso di Montalcino warrants its own place in the spotlight.

Monty Waldin introduces the region and its wines

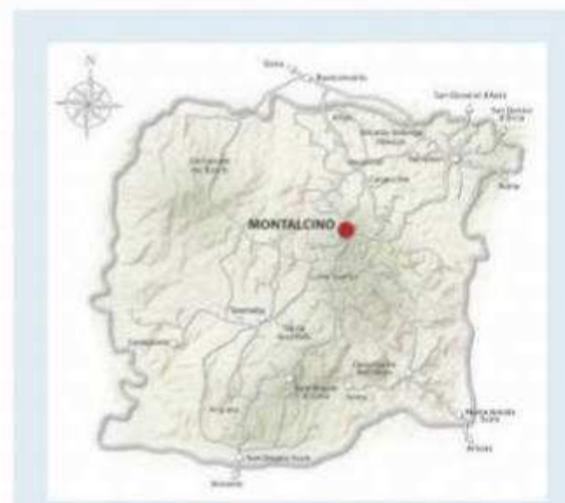
Con average, an email a week arrives from friends or wine-trade insiders asking for tips about Montalcino, because this is where the Italian side of my family is from. Almost without exception they want names of the best producers of Brunello di Montalcino, Montalcino's flagship 100% Sangiovese red wine, and recommendations of the best places to eat. Rarely do they ask about Rosso di Montalcino, despite the fact that it comes from exactly the same 100% Sangiovese vineyards as Brunello, but costs around one third of the price.

Rosso di Montalcino is one of Italy's greatest 100% varietal red wines – the others being Barolo and Barbaresco (both 100% Nebbiolo), Aglianico del Vulture Riserva and Brunello di Montalcino.

You can find other 100% Sangiovese red wines further north, in the Chianti Classico DOCG and Romagna DOC regions, but both also permit other Italian and international grapes in the wine. As a result, you can never be sure what flavours or mouthfeel these wines might show.

Not so for Rosso di Montalcino. It's 100% Sangiovese or bust.

A proposal in 2011 to allow Rosso di Montalcino to include grapes other than Sangiovese – meaning French ones such as Merlot, Cabernet, Petit Verdot or Syrah – was sensibly voted down by Montalcino's wine producers.



Rosso di Montalcino: the facts

- 100% Sangiovese red wine from the municipality of Montalcino in central Tuscany
- No oak ageing required
- DOC since 1983. Yields can be 10% higher than for Brunello di Montalcino DOCG
- Production (2016): 3.82 million bottles [28,646hl] from 501 hectares – one-fifth the surface area of Brunello, whose planted vineyard area [also 100% Sangiovese] is four times the size at 1,979ha, but 10% lower yielding

Data from the 2016 vintage
(Source: Consorzio di Montalcino)

Rosso can be said to have two roles. As a lodestar, it gives you the most obvious indication of how good the pricier Brunello might be if you are thinking of investing in one. This is useful because Brunello is exceptionally hard to make well. Sangiovese needs softish hands in the winery, yet Brunello demands Sangiovese endure a 48 month-long obstacle course before bottling, with potential pitfalls – including over-oaking (24 months in oak is mandatory) or less-than-perfect oak hygiene – which inevitably compromise fruit flavours.

As Rosso di Montalcino can be bottled unoaked, it allows Sangiovese the chance to be a more faithful transmitter of the changes in flavour and texture exerted by Montalcino's multi-faceted landscape on the resulting wines.

Imagine Montalcino as a clockface shaped like a four-sided pyramid with the town itself as the peak a bit north of middle centre (I did say imagine...)

Regional styles

At 1 o'clock, in Montalcino's extreme northeast, lies Torrenieri, a lower-lying, clayey area some distance from the town. Torrenieri's best Rossos have a succulent mouthfeel, perfumed fruit and usually reward drinking within two to four years (assume Brunello would age for roughly at least three times as long, for this and following indications).



Above: vineyards in the undulating landscape of the Canallicchio area

From 2 to 4 o'clock the vineyards are much closer to the town, and at higher altitudes of 430m-500m. This is Montalcino's prized eastern flank, providing mouthwateringly smooth Rossos with the substance to age and improve for a decade in bottle.

Continue south to 5 o'clock to reach the hamlet of Castelnuovo dell'Abate, a hot but rarely blistering area, whose Rossos combine plump fruit with the kind of mouthfeel that suggests you've headed into baby Brunello territory.

At 6 o'clock is Sesta, a hotspot with dry rocky topsoils over subsoil that can hold on to enough rainwater to keep the vines from stressing. The result is a flexible style of Rosso which drinks beautifully when young, but which develops just as beautifully in bottle (three to seven years).



Above: ripe Sangiovese grapes ready to be harvested in the Montalcino region

At 7 o'clock we hit the hottest, driest Montalcino zone, which is called Sant'Angelo. This area comprises both the hilltop hamlet of Sant'Angelo in Colle and the lower lying vales around the hamlet of Sant'Angelo Scalo. The topography helps draw in hot breezes direct from the Mediterranean (Tyrrhenian Sea) to the

west. This creates Rossos with rich, exuberant fruit and slightly higher alcohol levels than in the other zones, and wines with plenty of colour. They drink well very young, but the best also reward two to about seven years in bottle.

At 8 o'clock, the little hand touches Argiano and its slightly lower lying neighbouring areas of Tavernelle and Santa Restituta. West-facing sites here get both hot Mediterranean winds and full afternoon sun. Vines need to spend time digging into the clay to find the moisture and minerals they need to thrive.

The best wines here show piercing, ethereal fruit allied to a generous but not heavy mouthfeel. In the nearby Camigliano zone, a little further west in the direction of the Mediterranean, the wines show an interesting briny note, from the local soils rather than from incoming sea breezes.

As the short hand sweeps from 9 o'clock to midnight, it passes a few, ➤

Vines in Sesta, a hot sector in the south of Montalcino with dry, rocky topsoils



isolated vineyards in wooded or more open but relatively low-lying areas out towards the region's northern boundary, such as Castiglione dei Boschi, Abbadia Ardenga Abbazia and around Altesi. Though not widely planted with vines, this broad, often clayey arc gives brisk, savoury Rossos combining digestibility and early drinkability.

Closer to the centre of our clock, there are also a multitude of vineyards on and around the slopes of the town of Montalcino itself (at 300m-500m), in areas such as Canalicchio and Montosoli to the north and Passo del Lume Spento to the south. Rossos show intensity and longevity in the best years from hot days and cool nights, although moist, morning harvest-time fogs around the northern foothills can compromise grape health if yields are pushed too hard.

Complex yet simple

One of the reasons Rosso now appears to have come of age is that the flood of new estates created by the last influx of new arrivals in the late 1990s (following a smaller but equally influential wave in the

early 1970s) now draw their wines from a core of fully mature vines (Montalcino's vineyard area has been fairly static since 2003), and the owners are much more experienced. They are clearer in their minds now as to which plots, or parts of plots, are best-suited to Rosso di Montalcino rather than Brunello di Montalcino, and also know which plots may go either way depending on the season.

Remember that Italy in general, and Montalcino in particular, is rarely very flat – the result of both ancient and ongoing volcanic-tectonic crumpling. The skyline of Montalcino is overshadowed by mainland Italy's highest volcanic peak, Mount Amiata. The resultant folds in the landscape create huge variations in how much water, light and heat the local Sangiovese vines get, with climate change's unpredictable new joker now also part of the mix.

Sangiovese ripens at its leisurely best with sensible yields, an absence of heat stress and the right balance of direct sunlight and dappled shade.

All this dictates how best suited any particular Sangiovese plot will be either

to Rosso di Montalcino or Brunello, and if Rosso whether it will also benefit from some form of oak before bottling.

Other winemakers prefer to wait to make the 'should this Sangiovese be a Rosso or Brunello' decision until after all the newly fermented wines can be tasted and graded.

Overall, the majority of Rossos see little or no oak ageing. This is why mistaking a producer's Brunello for a Rosso will win you few friends.

Yet the best of the oak-aged Rossos really are like baby Brunellos – not because of the oak, but because of the quality of their underlying fruit.

And yet the most potentially magnetic contemporary Rossos come from producers working single terroirs and eschewing oak, allowing more of Montalcino's terroir jigsaw to fall into place.

And perhaps to provide new lines of inquiry for my regular email interlocutors, once the message gets through.

Monty Waldin is a widely published wine writer, author and Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Tuscany



30 great Rosso buys

Monty Waldin tasted through an extensive line-up of recent-release Rosso di Montalcinos. Here he presents his top-scoring wines

This was an incredibly enjoyable tasting for two reasons. The first is that the bulk of these Rosso di Montalcino DOC wines (which must be 100% Sangiovese under the DOC rules) came from 2016, a cracking vintage in Montalcino that provided clean, ripe, juicy Sangiovese grapes whose wines display a lovely inner freshness – crunchy, mouthwatering and moreish – allied to some really classy and smooth tannins.

The second is the nature of Rosso itself. Unlike its 'big brother' Brunello, Rosso di Montalcino does not have to spend even a nanosecond in oak, whereas Brunello must spend 24 months in oak (36 for riserva).

So much can go wrong when a delicate grape like Sangiovese is asked to spend 24 months in oak in a Mediterranean heat-trap such as Montalcino. Sangiovese can

quickly dry out and lose its fruit, turning tannic and picking up bruised apple notes.

That said, some of my favourite Rossos in the tasting were what I describe as mini-Brunellos – an oaked Rosso can have all the depth and interest of a Brunello while retaining its exuberance and lift, because it has remained in oak for only six or eight months rather than 24.

Given that Rosso di Montalcino generally sells for less than one third the price of Brunello, there is greater value and more versatility from a top Rosso di Montalcino than there is from a moderate Brunello.

Some commentators divide Rosso di Montalcino producers into two groups: those who grow, pick, ferment and age their Sangiovese vines in differing ways according to whether they will be destined for Rosso di Montalcino DOC or

Brunello di Montalcino DOCG; and those who make their Rossos with the 'off-cuts' that don't make it into the Brunello.

I see both choices as perfectly valid, and feel poor cellar hygiene often has far more of an effect on potential quality than any differences between the grape bunches that ended up behind a Rosso or Brunello bottle label.

The new Brunello wines are released each February at a Hollywood-style media and trade event held in Montalcino, called Benvenuto Brunello ('Welcome Brunello').

On this evidence, the burghers of Montalcino need to create a Ricordo Rosso, or 'Remember Rosso Too', event to even things up.

Because, remember, every great Brunello starts life as baby Rosso...



Conti Costanti, Colle al Matrichese 2016 96

£33.99 **Liberty Wines**

Andrea Costanti's Rosso is a mini-Brunello. Wild, pure, refreshing red fruit emerges among oak tannins that are generous, dense, velvety and clearly delineated. Coherent, moreish, stunning mouthfeel. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14%



Rodolfo Cosimi, Il Poggio Sassetto 2016 96

£22 **Bat and Bottle**

Concentration, levity and purity come together in this intense barrel-aged Rosso that boasts well-styled tannins and intense, pure, multi-faceted fruit. Shows Brunello-like sophistication.

Drink 2018-2028 **Alc** 13.5%



Salicutti 2015 95

£29.50-£33.95 (2015) **Four Walls,**

Goedhuis & Co, Handford, Uncorked

Wonderful purity and intensity. Clear fruit and wood tannins create a silky mouthfeel which leads to a cleansing, reverberant and lingering aftertaste. An uplifting meditation wine. Organic. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14%



Siro Pacenti 2016 95

£24.60-£29 **Albany Vintners, Armit,**

Jeroboams

This smooth operator matches pinpoint ripeness with seamless, lightly handled oak, fruit and oak tannins gently swirling together. A mini-Brunello of well-judged intensity. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14%



Canalicchio di Sopra 2016 94

US\$32-\$35 **67 Wine, Italian Wine Merchants**

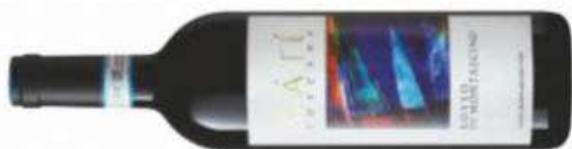
Lovely minor-key, red cherry fruit whose old-vine high seriousness drives a mid-palate with understated richness but obvious clarity. Classic Canalicchio-terroir (warm days, cool nights) Rosso. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



Franco Pacenti Canalicchio 2016 94

US\$25 **Astor Wines**

Old-school wine-grower, warm-climate vineyard but in a coolish zone north of the town: ethereal Sangiovese with underlying power, but light on its feet. Mouthwatering Rosso for purists (like me). **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 14% ➤



Máté 2016 94

US\$22 **Cork Wine Online**

From vineyards in the coveted Santa Restituta area. Pure, gently layered, ethereal tannins integrate seamlessly with expressive, pure fruit. Exuberant now, its underlying savouriness will emerge more fully over the next 3-5 years. Very well constructed. Organic.

Drink 2018-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Collemattoni 2016 93

US\$25 **K&D Wines & Spirits**

Marcello Bucci's Sangiovese vines lie around Sant'Angelo in Colle and Sesta in Montalcino's sometimes torrid southern reaches. His Rosso has a lovely touch of wild dark cherry fruit of smooth texture and understated richness.

Organic. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 14%



La Fortuna 2016 93

US\$18-\$25 **Enoteca Vino Nostro,**

K&L Wine Merchants

Gioberto Zannoni's Rosso offers crunchy cranberry fruit within a frame versatile enough to allow for both solo sipping or serious steak-fests. Nicely sited vines where the Montalcino hill drops away.

Drink 2018-2022 **Alc** 14%



Lisini 2016 93

£20 (ib) **Justerini & Brooks**

A moreish Rosso from the Sant'Angelo in Colle area in the warmest part of Montalcino. No stewed fruit here: supple, savoury style with brightness and clarity. **Drink** 2018-2024 **Alc** 14%



Sesti 2016 93

£25.99-£30 **Armit, Bottle Apostle, Dunell's,**

Handford, Tanners, Uncorked

Rich, smooth, a hint of wildness, good fluidity and sapidity with notable clarity and intensity too. An old-school Montalcino favourite which second generation Elli Sesti is taking to exciting new levels. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14%



Tenuta di Sesta 2016 93

£24 **Mondial**

Sesta is a relatively cool, under-the-radar area in Montalcino's deep, hotter south side, and Tenuta di Sesta is one of Montalcino's historic, but under-the-radar estates. Its rippling vineyards provide a Rosso whose unforced tannins create the levity for gentle fruit expression. **Drink** 2018-2026 **Alc** 14.5%



Col d'Orcia, Banditella 2015 92

£25.45 (2014) **Alivini**

Rare example of a single-vineyard Rosso, from the warmer southern area. Sangiovese infused with wild herbs. A step up from previous vintages, with more flesh, tannins and complexity. Organic. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 15%



Pieri Agostina 2016 92

£18.95 **Jeroboams**

A smooth Rosso which glides across the palate, its ripe but not stewed red fruit well matched to some athletically lithe oak tannins. No rough edges here.

Drink 2018-2024 **Alc** 15%



Podere Brizio 2016 92

£18-£19.56 **Astrum, Field & Fawcett,**

Highbury Vintners, Tannico

Pale colour, like a raspberry infusion. Pure, clear, focused Sangiovese flavours, freshness and lift. Brave, post-modernist Rosso. Delightful, successful surprise. Organic. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Rodolfo Cosimi, Terra Rossa 2016 92

£22 **Bat and Bottle**

This comes across as an infusion of Sangiovese, combining ethereal, fluid, pristine fruit with an underlying power whose gravitational pull you can feel but cannot touch. Very individual, and effective. **Drink** 2018-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Le Ragnaie 2015 91

£13.75 (2015, ib) **Justerini & Brooks**

From single-vineyard Brunello specialist Riccardo Campinoti. His Rosso pairs glossy fruit and matt tannins beautifully in a mid-weight wine with underlying power and lift, allied to subtle salinity and really expressive fruit. Organic.

Drink 2018-2024 **Alc** 14.5%



Baccinetti, Sapororia 2016 90

US\$14.99 **K&L Wine Merchants**

An unashamedly old-school Rosso from iron-rich soils in the Sesta-Sant'Angelo area. Old-vine richness, wildness and spice emerge gradually once poured. A sip-and-savour to catch before the fruit fades. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

**Camigliano 2016 90**£17.25-£19.07 **Eurowines, Great Wines****Direct**

The Camigliano zone is directly influenced by Tyrrhenian Sea breezes. Hence a salty prickle seasons the raspberry-like Sangiovese here. A picnic Rosso like your grandparents used to make, but with a polished, modern feel.

Drink 2018-2023 **Alc** 13.5%**Castiglion del Bosco, Vigneto****Gauggiole 2015 90**N/A UK www.castigliondelbosco.com

Cecilia Leoneschi has re-styled the wines of this celebrity hotel golf course (and vineyard) hideaway in Montalcino's forested northwest. Lighter tannins, more clarity, more depth, no heaviness, clearer flavours, food friendlier. Hole in one. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 14%

**Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona 2016 90**£24 **Mentzendorff**

Another wine from the southern Sesta area. A winning combination of invitingly ripe, juicy raspberry-cranberry fruit from hot days, overlaying tannins whose crunch comes from cool harvest-time nights. An historic estate that has stepped up a couple of gears and is on a roll. **Drink** 2018-2024 **Alc** 14%

**Collosorbo 2016 90**US\$21.50-\$28 **Prima Vini, Rye Brook, Solano Cellars, The Cellar d'Or, Wine Watch Boutique**

This was one half of Tenuta di Sesta until it was divided by inheritance. A solid Rosso with stylish dark cherry fruit, which leaves an agreeable impression of freshness. **Drink** 2018-2024 **Alc** 14%

**Cordella 2016 90**US\$24.99 (2015) **Zachys**

A savoury-salty style of Rosso, very typical of its origins in Torrenieri in Montalcino's northeast, Brunello's so-called badlands due to the dominant white, marine-based clay soils. Oodles of bright plummy red fruit balance this savouriness: a very approachable style. Organic. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 14%

**Fattoria dei Barbi 2016 90**US\$28.99 **International Wine Shop**

Well-executed, everyday style of Sangiovese, whose agreeable fluidity relies on a soft-sour red cherry fruit combination with tannins very much in the background. From well-appointed vines on Montalcino's prized eastern flank. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 14.5%

**La Cerbaiola, Salvioni 2016 90**£49.40-£50.58 **Corkr, Jeroboams, Tannico, Uncorked**

A firmly structured Rosso that needs time to settle and to enable its bright red cherry fruit to shine to the full. Well-styled and open, with underlying life. **Drink** 2019-2024 **Alc** 14.5%

**Le Potazzine 2016 90**£24.80-£29.60 **Bellavita, Lay & Wheeler, Stannary St Wine Co, Tannico**

If the 'Rosso as mini-Brunello' style is too heavy for you, then Le Potazzine has the antidote. Its zippy and unashamedly ephemeral yet tasty Rosso slides across the tongue. **Drink** 2018-2024 **Alc** 14%

**Mastrojanni 2016 90**£25.60-£27.50 **Honest Grapes, Vini Italiani**

Bright, mouthwatering cranberry tone and feel. Carefully weighted, with the typical power of the hot if not always broiling Castelnuovo dell'Abate terroir. Mini-Brunello-like, will develop further. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 14%

**San Polo 2016 90**£17.94-£21.99 (2015) **Alexander Hadleigh, Eton Vintners, GP Brands, Hay Wines, Richard Granger, Valvona & Crolla**

Mid-weight Rosso with a mouthwatering mid-palate and a polite burst of tannin at the end. Youthful – with a couple of years in bottle it will settle fully. Organic in conversion. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 14%

**Talenti 2016 90**£15.85 **Exel**

A Sant'Angelo in Colle stalwart whose Rosso is consistently mid-weight, showing well-honed fruit supported by carefully weighted tannins. Will be even better with 2-5 years in bottle, too.

Drink 2018-2024 **Alc** 14%**Tenute Silvio Nardi 2016 90**£20.28 **Champagnes & Châteaux**

Bright and savoury style, with a nice salty twang to the Sangiovese fruit. Lightly textured but in no way meagre, this is a clear, transparent Sangiovese, and a versatile sipper by the glass. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 13.5%



Christophe Decoux



Matt Cirne



Matteo Zappile



Shelley Lindgren



Simone Bottaro

Rosso at the table

Sommeliers at top Italian restaurants explain why Rosso di Montalcino is a great choice to go with typically Tuscan dishes

Montalcino is a small hillside town with fewer than 6,000 inhabitants, yet it's surrounded by some of Tuscany's choicest vineyards – namely those of the Sangiovese sibling rivals Brunello di Montalcino and Rosso di Montalcino.

For many years, Rosso di Montalcino wines have played second fiddle to bigger, bolder and more cellarworthy Brunellos. But in the restaurant trade, there are many who argue that Rosso should be judged on its own merits as a source of versatile, vibrant wines with their own distinctive expression of the Sangiovese Grosso grape.

'Rosso di Montalcino doesn't have to live in the shadow of its big brother,' says sommelier Matt Cirne, beverage director at both Quince and Cotogna restaurants in San Francisco. 'For me, the best Rossos are not those that seek to mimic the flavours of Brunello, but those that are lighter, vibrant and fresh.'

'Rosso has a relatively light body and is made from younger vines; the shorter ageing period in barrel helps the primary fruit to stand out,' adds Christophe Decoux, head sommelier at The River Café in London.

Matteo Zappile, head sommelier at two-star Michelin Il Pagliaccio in Rome, questions whether the 'little brother' label is still applicable, given the quality now to be found in Rosso di Montalcino wines. 'Production is of such a high level that they're almost equal,' he says.

'I often refer to Rosso di Montalcino wines as the definition of how wine is an integrated part of Italian culture,' comments US sommelier and Italian food and wine writer Shelley Lindgren, who also co-owns SPQR restaurant in San



Above: a glass of Rosso di Montalcino is the ideal accompaniment for Tuscan primi piatti

Francisco. 'Rosso is a wonderful inroad into the life of the locale, in the same way that most of those who live in Piedmont won't choose to drink Barolo every day.'

'Rosso di Montalcino wines may have less ageing and selection requirements, but they are nonetheless made from excellently grown and sourced grapes.'

Names to know

'My dear friend Roberto Fuligni considers his Rosso to be just as important as his Brunello,' says Decoux. 'His single-vineyard Ginestreto has developed a great complexity, fine-grained tannin and length.' He explains how Montalcino's vintages can shift in favour of its Rosso wines: 'In 2004, Andrea Costanti did not release a Brunello due to bad weather. Instead all the greatest grapes were used in a super Rosso with wonderful elegance and structure – and his Vermiglio was born.'

'Caparzo's Rosso di Montalcino is on our wine list, and I also drink it at home,' says Simone Bottaro, head sommelier at London's Locanda Locatelli restaurant, referring to the region's northernmost winery. 'Slightly chilled – with my family, friends and a lovely record playing.'

Matt Cirne reveals his preference for

biodynamic wines, and a benchmark producer: 'Meticulous farming and a light hand in the cellar mean the Padovani sisters at Fonterenza make Rosso packed with purity and finesse. A little more traditional and always a great standby, La Torre's wines can set the standard for classically styled Rosso di Montalcino.'

Ideal with food

Rosso di Montalcino, say our sommelier experts, is an incredibly versatile wine style, perfect for pairing with many antipasti and primi piatti dishes that might be overwhelmed by a Brunello.

'If guests are starting their meal with red wine, then Rosso is often a better first move than Brunello – especially when charcuterie is involved,' says Cirne. 'It's lighter in colour, body and tannins, so it pairs wonderfully with typically Tuscan starters like Cinta Senese salami or panzanella salad,' agrees Bottaro.

In addition, Rosso wines can handle umami flavours, spicy or rich foods and dense tomato sauces when other lighter-bodied wines would fail.

'Rosso di Montalcino is made from Sangiovese Grosso, which means that the skin is thicker than Sangiovese planted in the Chianti area, creating a more substantial style,' explains Bottaro. He recommends 'pasta dishes with mushrooms, or a touch of black truffle; perhaps a ragù sauce, topped with grated pecorino'.

Concurring that Brunello is best left for the secondi piatti in a traditional Italian meal, Decoux outlined his ideal succession of Tuscan wines and dishes: 'It's a pleasure to pair Rosso di Montalcino with ribollita soup and pappa al pomodoro, leaving Brunello for a bistecca alla Fiorentina.'

The *Decanter* guarantee

Our buying guide provides you with trusted, independent, expert recommendations on what to buy, drink and cellar.

Each panel tasting is judged by three experienced tasters chosen for their authority in the category of wine being rated. All wines are tasted blind and are pre-poured for judges in flights of eight to 10 wines. Our experts taste and score wines individually but then discuss their scores together at the end of each flight. Any wines on which scores are markedly different are retasted; however, judges are under no obligation to amend their scores.

Judges are encouraged to look for typicity in wines, rewarding those that are true to their region. When judging, experts are aware of wine price bands – under £15, £15-£30 and over £30 – with the aim to recognise and reward quality and value.

The tastings are held in the controlled environment of *Decanter's* tasting suite: a plain white room, with natural light and no noise. We limit the number of wines tasted to a manageable level – a maximum of 85 per day – allowing judges to taste more thoroughly and avoid palate fatigue.

Drink-by dates are based on how long it is prudent to keep the wine in question. However, some wines will have a longer ageing capacity if stored in pristine conditions throughout their lifespan.

Scoring system

Tasters rate the wines using the 100-point scoring system. The overall *Decanter* rating is the average of all three judges' scores.

The ratings are as follows:

98-100: Exceptional

A great, exceptional and profound wine

95-97: Outstanding

An excellent wine of great complexity and character

90-94: Highly Recommended

A very accomplished wine, with impressive complexity

86-89: Recommended

A well-made, straightforward and enjoyable wine

83-85: Commended

An acceptable, simple wine with limited personality

76-82: Fair

Correctly made, if unexciting

70-75: Poor

Unbalanced and/or bland with no character

50-69: Faulty

Displays winemaking faults

For the Exceptional and Outstanding *Decanter* ratings, judges' individual scores and tasting notes are listed in addition to the average score. For the Highly Recommended and Recommended wines, individual and average scores are also listed but tasting notes are a combination of the three judges' notes.

Decanter Buying Guide

Expert recommendations • Essential reading

This month's panel tastings

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79 wines tasted

Quality and character, and realistic pricing, revealed the value in spending a little bit more on a lesser-known name



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58 wines tasted

The best of the hearty reds from these two contrasting southern regions – just in time for casserole season

132 Expert's Choice: Chablis 2017

By Tim Atkin MW

Bad spring frosts severely reduced the harvest. Prices may rise, but the best wines are classics: Atkin picks his top 30





STEVEN SPURRIER'S fine wine world

Decanter's long-standing consultant editor and 2017 Decanter Man of the Year hand-picks fine wines for drinking now and recommends others to lay down, all priced from £25 upwards

From the cellar

Jim Barry, The Armagh 2000

In the hall of Australian wine fame, there are certain names that rise above others, and Jim Barry (1925-2004) is one. With an oenology diploma from South Australia's Roseworthy College in 1947, he was put in charge of the local co-op that produced mostly fortifieds and 'stickies' (aka sweet wines). In 1968 he planted a 3ha patch of vines and set up a nursery propagating Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Malbec, offering cuttings free of charge. Today the family farms 300ha.

Sam Barry, one of three grandchildren, was in Harrods' new wine department to present nine vintages of the 100% Shiraz **The Armagh** from 2014 to 1994 (sadly



the 1999 was out of condition, the 1994 beginning to fade). The **2014**, vibrantly dense and vigorous, still needed time to smooth out, while the **2013** – the bottle under cork more open than that under screwcap (70% of production) – was tighter for a longer future. The screwcapped **2012** showed florality and stone fruits from a cooler year, while **2010** stood out with rare fragrance for Shiraz. The **2007**, from a dry year, reminded me of the southern Rhône, but with the masculine **2006** we were firmly back north. The **2000** vintage combined both to perfection and will age gracefully for another decade (93/100pts, £210 from Harrods).

For the cellar

Emrich-Schönleber, Halenberg Riesling GG 2017

This 19-hectare estate, planted 85% to Riesling on south-facing slopes of up to 70% above the Nahe river, was unknown to me until the Justerini & Brooks Germany en primeur tasting on 4 September, the wine trade's first day of the autumn term. Based on the Monzinger hill – whose wines the poet Goethe held in high esteem and which were the most expensive in the Nahe, according to the Prussian tax map of 1901 – the rocky blue slate, red slate, dark quartz and gravel soils have been farmed by the Emrich-Schönleber family for more than 250 years. The current generation, **Werner Schönleber** (vineyards) and son **Frank** (who takes



control in the winery once harvest is underway) know their vines inside out, nurturing them to reach their optimum potential, the Halenberg vineyard representing the VDP Grosse Lage (grand cru) designation to perfection. Silver pale in colour, the precision and utter purity of flavour of the **2017** vintage is evident from the start, and it's followed by a natural richness from an excellent vintage. This is a wine that needs 10 years to blossom fully, but it could be opened earlier to enjoy the potential and then kept for future generations. (95pts, drink 2020-2050, £53.60 from Justerini & Brooks).

The Spurrier selection



Domaine Marcel Deiss, Engelgarten, Bergheim, Alsace, France 2015 93

£33.75 Lea & Sandeman

From gravelly soils, this is a field blend of Riesling, Pinots Beurot, Gris and Noir and 5% Muscat, the last present on the nose. The ripeness of the vintage is exuberantly expressed on the palate with minerality on the finish and complexity to come. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 13%



Il Paradiso di Frassina, Moz Art Wine, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy 2013 95

£60 Fortnum & Mason

Carlo Cignozzi, a lawyer who formed the Caparzo Estate in the 1970s, planted La Frassina in 2000 where, thanks to 80 loudspeakers, his vines receive Mozart round the clock. Fresh, almost delicate for Brunello; natural ripeness, great purity. **Drink** 2018-2028 **Alc** 13.5%



Mouchão, Alicante Bouschet-Trincadeira, Alentejo, Portugal 2013 95

£45 Handford

From this large region's most historic estate, 70% of the blend is Alicante Bouschet, showing exotically spicy black fruit aromas leading to structure and depth on the palate, great individuality, and freshness and acidity for the long term. Excellent. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 14%



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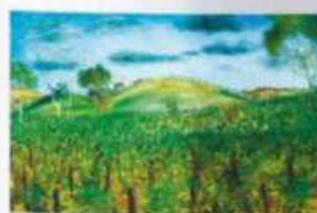


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Four great gift ideas to spoil the
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Weekday wines



Looking to try something different or adventurous, but don't want to make an expensive mistake? Decanter's associate editor Tina Gellie has done the hard work for you, picking out 25 exciting and accessible wines available in the UK for £25 or less



Booths, English Sparkling, Sussex, England 2016 92

£21 Booths

Made by Sussex-based Ridgeview, this rich yet elegant own-brand bubbly is a worthy DWWA 2018 Silver-medal winner, boasting toasty, leesy characters that add complexity to its juicy, crisp green apple flavours and delicate blossom notes. Stock up now ahead of the festive season. Alc 12%



Morrisons, The Best Vintage Cava Rosado, Spain 2016 89

£8.25 Morrisons

A well-made, fresh and frothy pink fizz that's a reliable choice to pop for a party – or as an accompaniment to sushi or salmon. Made from 70% Trepot and 30% Garnacha, it has a dosage of 9g/l, but the ripe strawberries and cream flavours are balanced by firm acidity.

Alc 12%



Domaine de la Pépière, Clos des Briords, Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie, Loire, France 2017 92

£18 Les Caves de Pyrene, The Good Wine Shop

A savoury, saline, biodynamic Muscadet from a 3ha vineyard that's more than 60 years old. It spends seven months on lees so has a weighty, creamy palate and flinty-fresh anise and oyster shell notes. Super! Alc 13%



Domaine Jean-Maurice Raffault, Chinon Blanc, Loire, France 2017 92

£14.75 Yapp Bros

Chenin Blanc is just 2% of production in the Cabernet enclave of Chinon, so this is a rare gem. Made biodynamically, it's dry, unoaked and beautifully complex, with tangy, textural apple and quince fruit, white flowers and crisp acidity.

Affordable elegance. Alc 12.5%



Luis Pato, Vinhas Velhas, Bairrada, Portugal 2017 92

£16-£18 Dorset Wine Co, Raymond Reynolds

First made in 1990, this is one of Luis Pato's iconic wines, based on old-vine Bical. Searing acidity, but in balance with the full-bodied stone fruit, quince and herbal flavours. Smoky, saline and savoury, it will age beautifully. Decanting recommended. Alc 12.5%



Portugal Boutique Winery, Boina White, Douro, Portugal 2017 92

£17.95-£18.50 Bottle Apostle, Swig, The Good Wine Shop

A traditional Douro field blend from 90-year-old vines. Real interest and intrigue: the nutty, leesy, textural palate has super weight of green apple, nectarine and herbs, balancing citrus acidity, and a chalky mineral tone. Great discovery! Alc 13%



Must-try white

Robola Cooperative of Cephalonia, San Gerasimo Robola, Cephalonia, Greece 2016 93

£17.50 Maltby & Greek, Strictly Wine

A gorgeous wine from a co-op that produces almost 85% of all the Robola grown on this mountainous Ionian island. Sweet floral and green tea aromas are followed by stone fruit, citrus, herbs and honey on the complex, mineral palate. Gentle, creamy mouthfeel with lengthy, bright acidity. Alc 12.5% >



**Château Ksara,
Merwah, Bekaa Valley,
Lebanon 2017 91**

£14-£16 Great Wines Direct,

Hallgarten & Novum, Harrods,
Whole Foods Market

From Lebanon's oldest winery comes the world's first 100% Merwah, sourced from a 60-year-old ungrafted vineyard at 1,600m. Unoaked, with a nutty, creamy mouthfeel to the papaya, melon and apple blossom flavours. Alc 12.5%



**Greystone, Sauvignon
Blanc, Waipara, North
Canterbury, New
Zealand 2017 91**

£15.99 Waitrose Cellar

An organic Sauvignon Blanc that undergoes partial malolactic fermentation during its six months of ageing in old barriques, giving lovely texture, subtle oak spice and rich creaminess to the rounded palate of peach and melon fruit. Unusual and delicious. Alc 13.5%



**Pauletts, Polish Hill
River Riesling, Clare
Valley, South
Australia 2013 91**

£12.95 The Wine Society

This sub-region, famed for its Rieslings, is named after the settlers who arrived from Poland in the 1850s. This is a classic Clare style: bone dry, with brisk acidity and complex petrol hints joining the flavours of lime cordial and honey. Focused and classy. Alc 12.5%



**Sainsbury's, Taste the
Difference, Mâcon-
Villages, Burgundy,
France 2017 90**

£9.50 Sainsbury's

A delicious unoaked Chardonnay that punches well above its weight for the quality. Elegant, fresh and mineral yet packed with juicy, tangy green apple flavours on a lengthy palate. The own-label Chablis and Petit Chablis are good too, but this is a fine value alternative. Alc 12.5%



**Château du Rouët,
Estérelle Rosé,
Côte de Provence,
France 2017 90**

£15.99 Liberty Wines

Brothers Martin and Matthieu Savatier are the fifth generation to run this 178-year-old estate. An elegant, bone-dry rosé based on Grenache and Tibouren. Not just for summer, it has garrigue herbs and creamy summer pudding characters. Long and serious. Alc 13.5%



**Le Clos du Caillou,
Bouquet des
Garrigues, Côtes du
Rhône, France 2016 93**

£20.25 Cru World Wines, Genesis,

H2Vin, Jeroboams

A seductive red, from a 45ha biodynamic estate that borders Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Inky bramble fruit with a violet lift and wild herbs, supple tannins and delicate spice from its 14 months in foudres. Delicious now, but will age well. Alc 15%



**Bissoni, Girapoggio
Sangiovese, Emilia
Romagna, Italy 2015**

92

£12.95 Lea & Sandeman

Raffaella Bissoni farms her 5ha estate, founded in Casticciano in 1968, biodynamically. This Sangiovese has overt aromas of black wine gums then juicy dark berries on the silky, vibrant palate, supported by grippy tannins. An exciting discovery at a great price. Alc 13%



**Marc Isart, La
Maldición, Valdilecha,
Madrid, Spain 2016 92**

£10.46 Uncharted Wines

La Maldición ('The Curse') details how these isolated, high-altitude, old-vine vineyards of Tempranillo and white Malvar are so hard to reach and farm. An organic, serious yet quaffable red with fine grip, texture and fresh acidity alongside ripe cherry fruit. Super value. Alc 13.5%



**High
street
choice**

**Asda, Extra Special
Chenin Blanc, Paarl,
South Africa 2017 91**

£6 Asda

The fruit here comes from dry-grown old bush vines in Paarl, given gentle barrel fermentation so as not to mask the purity of the ripe apple and succulent nectarine fruit. It's beautifully textured on the creamy, nutty palate with lovely spiced honey notes and a tropical lift on the finish. Excellent value – you'd think it was twice the price. Stock up now for the party season. Alc 14%



**Zuccardi, Poligonos,
San Pablo Vineyard
Malbec, Uco Valley,
Argentina 2016** 92

£16 Morrisons

From vineyards at 1,450m, this is a bright and sappy red with dusty tannins, great concentration of ripe blue and black berries, and spiced balsamic complexity. It's pure and focused on the fruit thanks to fermentation and maturation in cement tanks. Alc 14%



**Bodega Petralanda,
Marqués de Zearra
Crianza, Rioja, Spain
2010** 91

£10.95 Yapp Bros

Yapp might be a French specialist, but this still-youthful Rioja is a bestseller. It spends 24 months in American oak barrels then three years in bottle. Ripe, creamy mocha tones alongside vanilla-dusted red fruit; oaky but balanced and superb value. Alc 14%



**Delinquent Wine Co,
Roxanne the Razor,
Riverland, South
Australia 2018** 91

£18 Indigo Wines

Behind the quirky labels are serious wines that prove Australia's Riverland can deliver quality as well as quantity. Sour cherry and crunchy dark berries from unoaked, organic Nero d'Avola and 10% Montepulciano shine on a supple, savoury, spicy palate. Alc 12%



**Val di Toro, Rosso
Ribelle, Maremma
Toscana, Italy 2014** 91

£10.95 Handford, Tanners

A new wine for Tanners from Anna Maria Cruciat, whose organic 12ha estate lies near Grosseto, less than 10km from the sea. It's an appealing, approachable Sangiovese with notes of wild raspberry, florals and sweet spice and crisp acidity to refresh. Versatile and very food-friendly. Alc 13%



**Château de Tiregand,
Clos Montalbanie,
Pécharmant,
Bergerac, South West
France 2015** 90

£8 co-op

An exclusive to the Co-op, this Merlot-dominant blend boasts dense, chocolately bramble fruit on a structured palate with dusty tannins from 20% of the wine ageing for 12 months in French oak vats. Smooth, earthy and great value. Alc 14%



**Golan Heights
Winery, Gamla
Cabernet Sauvignon,
Galilee, Israel 2014** 89

£19 Kosher Wine, The Wine Cellar

Golan Heights Winery is a major player in Israeli wine, producing the Yarden brand among others. This is a classically styled Cabernet: full-bodied and high-toned with lots of toasty oak from 12 months in barrel to support rich dried and fresh black berry fruit. Alc 14.5%



**Sainsbury's, Taste the
Difference Fairtrade
Azana, Wellington,
South Africa 2017** 89

£9 Sainsbury's

This modern Shiraz-based blend (and the equally good Azana white) is made by Corlea Fourie, head winemaker at Bosman Family Vineyards, so you are assured of a classy drop. Concentrated, spicy, dark fruit and a hint of oak, but it remains fresh and vibrant. Alc 14.5%



**Lustau, Very Rare Dry
Palo Cortado, Jerez,
Spain** 92

£9/37.5cl Marks & Spencer

Palo cortado ages under flor for a year, like a fino or amontillado, but when this film of yeast dies, the wine then ages oxidatively for another decade, like an oloroso – all of which gives this Sherry its distinctive style. Super complexity and intensity, packed with notes of fruit cake, walnuts and mixed peel. Alc 19%



Must-try
red

**Pérez Cruz, Cabernet
Sauvignon Reserva, Alto
Maipo, Chile 2015** 92

£11.29-£14.75 Corking Wines, Eton Vintners,

Exel, Hic, Noble Grape, Oddbins, Strictly Wine,

The Good Wine Shop, Wineman, Wine Poole

This DWWA 2017 Platinum winner is still showing beautifully, now with hints of savoury saddle leather and cigar box spice to add to the ripe cassis and plum fruit and soft vanilla oak tones. Pretty, with the dashes of Cabernet Franc and Carmenère giving minty herbal freshness and floral lift. Excellent value. Alc 13.5%



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Value Champagne (£40 and below)

Sometimes a special occasion calls for a drop of the real stuff. But where to get the best quality without breaking the bank? Andy Howard MW guides us through

THE TERM 'VALUE' Champagne might seem a bit of an oxymoron or, for seasoned wine tasters, something to dread. Sadly, 'cheap' Champagne can often mean overly acidic, lean and simple wines. So it was with some trepidation that the tasting panel considered a range of 79 different contenders which shared just their appellation and a retail price point of £40 or under.

Champagne remains the leading sparkling wine category worldwide and despite the growth of Prosecco, and recent challenges from its domestic rivals in the crémant category, this situation is unlikely to change any time soon. In March 2018, annual figures released by the Comité Champagne showed Champagne accounted for 36% of the value of worldwide sparkling wine sales in 2017, with a presence in more than 190 countries. Total shipments amounted to 307 million bottles, with over a billion bottles currently stored in the region.

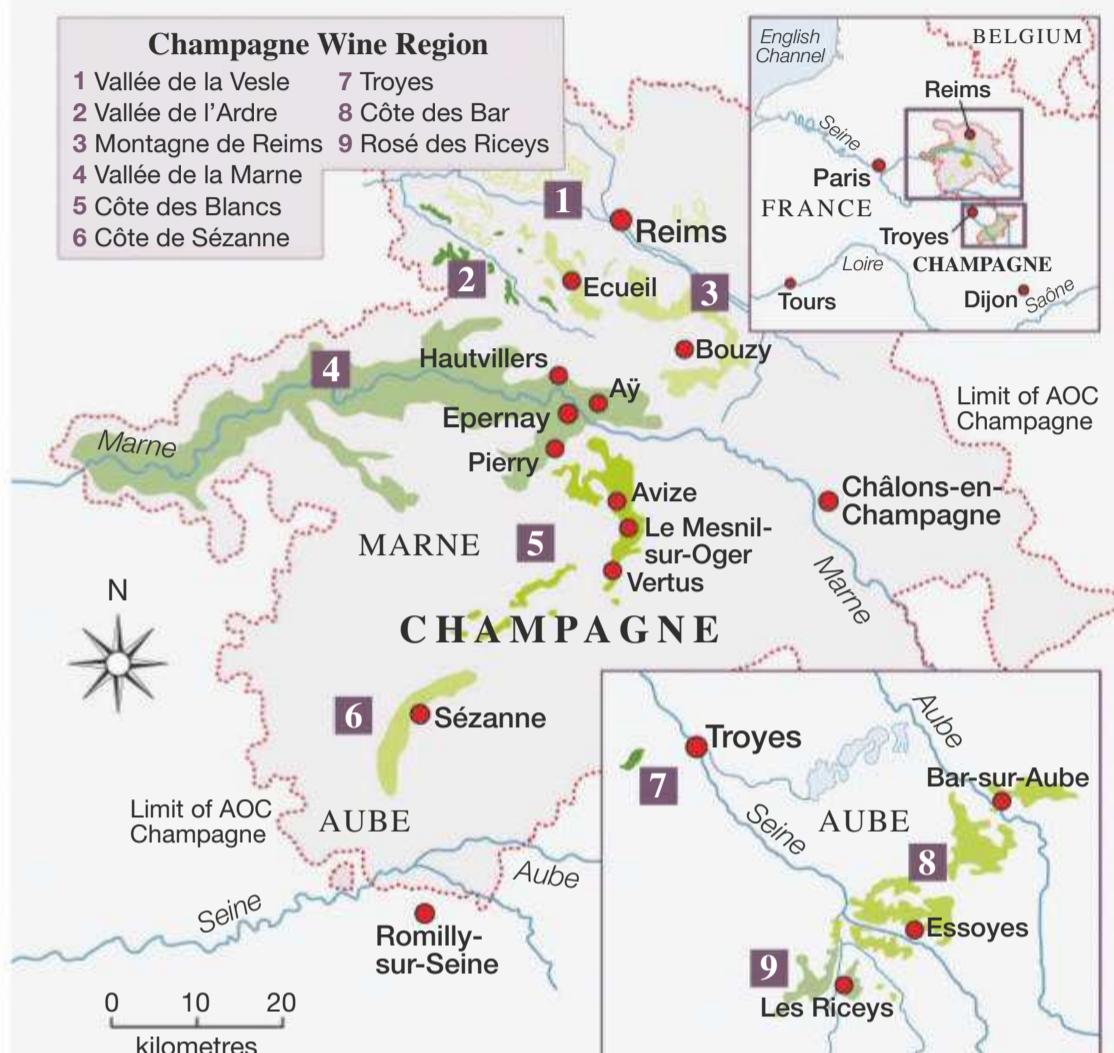
What prompted a significant amount of press coverage was the fact that volumes shipped to the UK had fallen to 27.8m bottles – a decline of 11% and the first time in over 15 years that exports were less than 30m bottles. Was this a reaction to a reduction in discounted Champagne as a result of the pound's weakness; the growth of alternatives such as Prosecco; or even the development of the English sparkling wine industry?

Bright sparks

It is difficult to categorise exactly what wine lovers should be expecting in this sub-£40 category. Drinkers can expect to find value-oriented, own-label wines sourced by supermarkets or online retailers, as well as Champagnes from both smaller growers and some of the larger houses – still the main volume driver for worldwide sales. The region also benefits from a network of strong cooperatives, which can usually be relied on for the production of high-quality, good-value wines.

The lower price tiers are dominated by blends, with the classic mix of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier accounting for 80% of the wines in this tasting. Hardly surprising, as blending different varieties gives winemakers more options. While vintage Champagne is a different beast, the quality of recent vintages is significant as this drives the character of base wines. Both 2010 and 2011 were poor, but in recent years quality has been high, which bodes well for the NV category.

Stylistically, the best Champagnes in this price bracket should offer a fine, lasting mousse, crisp (but not excessive) acidity, finesse and purity of flavour. Some wines may show the development of autolytic characters as a result of longer ageing on lees and, in a few cases, some element of maturation in wood. In most cases, drinkers should anticipate elegant, bright, fresh sparkling wines, full of verve and ready to enjoy now.



Map: Maggie Nelson

Champagne: know your vintages

2013 A very late harvest. Quality is variable between different areas, but the best wines are very promising.

2012 A wonderful vintage with richness, density and very healthy grapes from low yields. High acidity will promote long ageing for vintage.

2011 This was a very difficult – and early – harvest, with few Champagne houses likely to produce a vintage wine.

2010 Heavy August rain led to a generally poor vintage with few high-quality wines.

2009 Variable quality; richness and approachability evident in the best wines. Lacks the drive of 2008 and 2012 but there are some very drinkable wines.

2008 A great vintage: concentration, purity and wonderful balancing acidity. Can be enjoyed while young, but the best will keep for many years.

Champagne: the facts

Area 34,300ha across three regions, five departments and 319 wine-producing communes

Shipments (2017) 307m bottles
Value (2017) €4.9 billion
Structure 15,800 growers, 140 co-ops, 320 houses (which account for 70% of volume sales)

Andy Howard MW is a regular Decanter contributor, DWWA judge and runs wine consultancy Vinetrades >

The summary

Judges were pleasantly surprised at the quality and breadth of character on display here, particularly among the smaller houses and growers, reports Andy Howard MW

WITH ONLY ONE Outstanding score out of 79 wines tasted, this might seem a rather mediocre result for the world's leading producer of sparkling wines. The tasting panel included Simon Field MW and David Vareille, who are both very familiar with the region, as well as the likely variability in this category. The term 'value' Champagne made Field anxious about 'tart, thin and uninspiring wines, devoid of personality, either gaunt and mean, or made-up with sugar'. Vareille was also concerned, and although he went into the tasting room 'with low expectations', he felt there were many 'surprises'.

The tasting encompassed a wide range, both in terms of price positioning, type of producer and the use of blends or single varieties. Monovarietal wines with 100%

Chardonnay or Pinot Noir (and in two cases Pinot Meunier) were generally less successful than where winemakers had used their skills in blending. The classic mix of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier was found in 50% of the wines tasted, with blends of two different varieties accounting for another quarter. Where a single variety was used, Chardonnay stood out as a more successful option, with the only Outstanding, and one of the 10 Highly Recommended awards.

Grower Champagnes performed generally well in the tasting. Within this sector, there are some fine examples that have character, complexity and the attributes one would associate with high-quality sparkling wine. The highest scoring examples showed additional levels of

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit latest-release, non-vintage Champagnes priced at £40 or below and available on UK shelves, but not including rosés

The judges

Simon Field MW



Field was a buyer for Berry Bros & Rudd for more than 20 years and now consults on areas that particularly interested him during that time, with the Rhône, Languedoc and Champagne

topping the list in France, and Spain and the fortified category also featuring prominently.

My top three

■ **André Jacquart, Expérience Blanc de Blancs Brut 1er Cru Brut NV** Not to be confused with the large co-op, André Jacquart makes exemplary Chardonnay Champagnes in the villages of Vertus and Le Mesnil. The marriage of oak with a steely freshness is absolutely textbook and the wine is exceptional value! **95 Drink** 2018-2022

■ **Lopez-Martin, Blason d'Argent Brut NV** New to me, this grower is based in Hautvillers, home of Dom Pérignon no less. Despite the distinctly Iberian name, this is a most commendable effort and dramatically superior to a Cava! **94 Drink** 2018-2020

■ **Alfred Gratien, Brut** Wonderful, if not surprising, to see the great house of Gratien scoring so well. Oak is evidenced, as always, but Nicolas Jaeger has laced it with freshness and lift, perfectly complementing the autolytic complexity beneath. **94 Drink** 2018-2020

Andy Howard MW



A Master of Wine since 2011, Howard worked as senior wine buyer at Marks & Spencer for six years to 2013. He now runs consultancy Vinetrades, which focuses on education, investment and sourcing. Key areas of expertise are Burgundy and Italy, and he has a house in Gaillac.

My top three

■ **Collard-Picard Cuvée Sélection Brut NV** A consistently highly rated grower Champagne. Old foudres are used for 15 months, prior to three years' lees ageing. This gives many extra layers of complexity, combining freshness, power and some biscuity, honeyed notes. **91 Drink** 2018-2020

■ **Gobillard Grand Réserve 1er Cru Brut NV** Located in Hautvillers, just 5km outside Epernay, this is a wonderful small family-owned house that is now in its fifth generation. Aged for three years, this is a classic blend of Chardonnay and the two Pinots. **93 Drink** 2018-2020

■ **Delamotte, Brut NV** A small but very high-quality house, located in the heart of the Côte des Blancs. Delamotte is closely related to cult Champagne Salon, yet at a much more approachable price. Delectable Chardonnay leads the way here. **90 Drink** 2018-2022

David Vareille



Head sommelier at The Arts Club in London, Vareille was raised in Chablis and began his career at 16 at the Michelin-starred La Salamandre. He moved to the UK in 2004 and has worked at top venues including L'Enclume, Hotel du Vin group, Bleeding Heart and Bar Boulud.

My top three

■ **André Jacquart, Expérience Blanc de Blancs Brut 1er Cru Brut NV** This opened up an enormous array of surprises. André Jacquart filled the gap brilliantly, punching way above its weight class – not what you'd expect from an entry-level product. **95 Drink** 2018-2022

■ **Lopez-Martin, Blason d'Argent Brut NV** This was more mature, surfing at the edge of evolution without crossing the limit. Once again, totally unexpected at this price range – I know for a fact that some premium Champagnes are not as balanced as this one. **94 Drink** 2018-2020

■ **Gobillard Grande Réserve 1er Cru Brut NV** Gobillard has a very pronounced profile. My personal tastes lean towards a fresher, more energetic style, but you can't ignore how well made and intensely flavoured this Champagne is. **94 Drink** 2018-2020

'Smaller houses can usually be relied on for high quality, always with their own distinct styles'

complexity – some from extended maturation on lees in bottle, some from judicious oak regimes. The latter was unexpected, but when done well – as with the André Jacquart Chardonnay – the resulting wine was top class. Other, less known growers performed well, for example Lopez-Martin and Collard-Picard (another producer using wood in the form of old foudres).

The major grands marques were notably absent from this tasting, but several of the smaller houses were represented. These can usually be relied on for high-quality Champagne, always with their own distinct styles. Delamotte (Salon's sister property based in the Côte des Blancs), Devaux, Ayala, Deutz and Alfred Gratien all performed well, showing refined Champagnes at realistic prices.

Somewhat surprising was the absence of many supermarket own-label 'discount' Champagnes. This might have come as a relief to the tasters, but it was a shame that more weren't submitted. This category includes some fine examples, with very reasonable prices for well-made Champagne. The Co-op's Les Pionniers (produced by Piper-Heidsieck) has previously won several awards, while Philizot is the house behind Aldi's Veuve Monsigny Brut. These offer good (and in the latter case exceptional) value for money.

What remains a concern is the use of half-price promotions on Champagne – most prevalent close to Christmas. Wine lovers should avoid these promotions, as the heavily promoted 'bargain' price is much more representative of what the wine is worth. Wines such as these give the 'value' end of the category a bad name, and encourage drinkers to look at alternatives.

Our advice? Spend a little bit more on a Champagne from a smaller house, or experiment with the intriguing world of grower Champagne, and you will find much more drinking delight.

The scores

79 wines tasted

Exceptional

0

Outstanding

1

Highly Recommended

10

Recommended

49

Commended

14

Fair

4

Poor

1

Faulty

0

Outstanding 95-97pts



André Jacquart, Expérience Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru Brut NV

Decanter average score: 95/100pts Individual judges' scores:

Simon Field MW 95 Andy Howard MW 95 David Vareille 95

£39.95 Huntsworth Wine, Thirty-Nine 10, Top Selection

For four generations, the Jacquart family were just growers – selling all their grapes – until 1958 when André Jacquart began to bottle his own Champagne. Now headed by his granddaughter Marie Doyard, the business is based in the village of Vertus, in the Côte des Blancs; three-quarters of the family's 24ha of vineyard is here, while the remainder in the Vallée de la Marne and L'Aube provide their Pinots

Noir and Meunier. With such a high proportion of Chardonnay, the family has long specialised in blanc de blancs and are unusual in their use of oak for fermenting the base wines. The family's current annual production is 90,000 bottles of classically styled Champagne.

Simon Field MW Oaky style, with hints of linseed oil and mango. Rich and with a fairly high dosage, this is animated and shows impressive length.

Andy Howard MW Oak ageing is evident on the nose, with a character hinting at slightly browning apples. Warm, full and fleshy on the palate – there is admirable freshness here, as well as a satisfying degree of complexity, with zesty lemon sherbet and some brioche characters. An interesting, alternative style.

David Vareille Exotic fruit and lemon-peel aromas welcome passion fruit and lemon tart nuances on the palate, mobilised by persistent bubbles and zesty acidity, while a fine layer of wood adds richness without compromising the freshness.

Drink 2018-2022 Alcohol 12.5% >

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Highly Recommended 90-94pts



**Lopez-Martin, Blason d'Argent
Brut NV** 94 SF 94 AH 94 DV 94

£40 Finest Fizz

A classic, steely style of Champagne, with roasted almond and pear aromas leading to a lemon meringue-infused mousse and elegant bubbles. Long – and with impressive gravitas.

Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12%



Delamotte, Brut NV
93 SF 92 AH 90 DV 96

£33.95 Corney & Barrow

Floral nose, with a hint of soft spice and nectarine; palate is dry but not austere, with stone fruit and a fine mineral tension. Cerebral, satisfying and impressively wrought.

Drink 2018-2022 Alc 12%



**Gobillard, Grande Réserve 1er
Cru Brut NV** 93 SF 92 AH 93 DV 94

£31.05-£31.50 Enotria&Coe, Exel, Gray's Deli, Great Western Wine

A more full-bodied style, revealing a fairly high level of dosage as well as a pleasing biscuity character, yet with satisfying acidity and finely poised bubbles. **Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12.5%**



Alfred Gratien, Brut NV
91 SF 94 AH 90 DV 90

£35.05-£38 Enotria&Coe, Exel, Gray's Deli, Great Western Wine

Fulsome bubbles, hints of coconut and tropical fruit. Oaky, yeasty and quite rich; a little ‘manufactured’ perhaps, but successful overall and will appeal to many. **Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12%**

‘Grower Champagnes performed generally well in the tasting. There are some fine examples that have character, complexity and the attributes one would associate with high-quality sparkling wine’ Andy Howard MW



**Claude Cazals, Carte Or Grand
Cru Brut NV** 91 SF 89 AH 88 DV 97

£29.99 Laithwaite's

100% Chardonnay. Aromas of baked pineapple cede to a delightful mousse on the palate, with gentle acidity propelling notes of butter biscuit, brioche and lemon cake. Inviting, and fairly long. **Drink 2018-2022 Alc 12.5%**



**Collard-Picard, Cuvée Sélection
Brut NV** 90 SF 90 AH 91 DV 90

£36 Swig

There is plenty of complexity to be found here, with a period of ageing in wood contributing an extra level of interest – crisp and elegant, with savoury notes allied to bright red fruit.

Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12.5%



Deutz, Classic Brut NV
90 SF 90 AH 89 DV 90

£38-£42.10 Exel, Gonzalez Byass

A notably clean, fresh and low-dosage example with bright citrus-like acidity; not overly complex but very typically Champagne in structure, with admirable length to finish.

Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12%



Didier Herbert, 1er Cru Brut NV
90 SF 91 AH 91 DV 88

£30 Finest Fizz

Lively and fairly full-bodied, yet with finely pitched notes of yeast and sweet spice, hints of orange blossom, a touch of smoke and bright citrus fruit. Well-judged and impressively long. **Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12%**



**Marc Hébrart, Sélection 1er Cru
Brut NV** 90 SF 88 AH 92 DV 90

£36 Great Wines Direct, Hallgarten, Strictly Wine, Wine Poole

A good all-round style with some complexity of yeasty, bready notes, in combination with a satisfying freshness and nicely integrated yet persistent bubbles. **Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12%**



**Paul Herard, Blanc de Noirs Brut
NV** 90 SF 90 AH 90 DV 90

£24.50 Davy's

An assertive, fuller-bodied style with biscuity, bready notes dominating, yet with sufficient acidity to keep it in check. Savoury, food-oriented and with a long, steely finish.

Drink 2018-2020 Alc 12%

Recommended 86-89pts

Wine	Score	SF	AH	DV	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Autréau, Brut 1er Cru NV	89	88	88	90	Rather evolved, with stone fruit partnering hints of quince and orchard fruit; falls a little short, yet remains attractive for now.	12%	2018-2020	£29.99	Bodnant, Broadway Wine, Chez Stephan, Ministry of Drinks, Murcato, Sheldon's, Simply Wines Direct, Whalley Wine Shop
Boizel, Réserve Brut NV	89	88	90	90	A lighter style, with an attractive mousse; nicely evened with crisp acidity, although the finish is a little sour.	12%	2018-2020	£32	The Wine Society
Devaux, Grande Réserve NV	89	90	89	89	Not the most complex but a worthy all-rounder, with a satisfying interplay between crisp acidity, hints of autolysis and a soft mousse.	12%	2018-2020	£31-£37.99	Bay Tree Wine Company, Exel, Liberty Wines, Mr & Mrs Fine Wine, Wine Bank
Fleury, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV	89	86	90	90	Just a hint of autolysis combining with a crisp red apple character. The palate is generous though not overly complex.	12%	2018-2020	£33	Vintage Roots
Georges Vesselle, Brut Grand Cru NV	89	87	87	92	Untypical floral aromas. Shows commendable power, with bright acidity and a pleasant, creamy mousse. A well made, commercial style.	12%	2018-2022	£31.95	Jeroboams
Gremillet, Sélection Brut NV	89	87	90	90	Light but highly enjoyable; crisp, clean and bright with lemon sherbet flavours and an attractive mousse.	12.5%	2018-2020	£27.99	Fenwicks, John Hattersley Wines, PH Wine Merchants
Irroy, Carte d'Or Brut NV	89	88	90	88	Big, friendly bubbles and crisp acidity complemented by a nicely judged dosage and a touch of development. Easy to enjoy.	12.5%	2018-2020	£33.55	Juckles of Worcester, Kingsgate, Lindley Fine Wine
Lefebvre, Cuvée Réserve Brut NV	89	87	91	89	Some hints of autolysis emerging, adding notes of toffee and cream, though with crisp acidity to keep it lively; if finishing a touch hard.	12%	2018-2020	£34.99	Laithwaite's
Thomas-Hatté, Brut NV	89	91	89	87	Layered and complex if a little honeyed. The sugar is a bit dominant at the moment though the acidity just about holds it together. Modern in style.	12%	2018-2020	£26.50	Stone, Vine & Sun
Ayala, Majeur Brut NV	88	90	85	89	Full and fleshy, with notes of baked apple and sweet spice. A little too sweet and a touch one-dimensional, yet refreshing on the finish.	12%	2018-2020	£22.95-£30	Gray's Deli, Mentzendorff, Slurp, Wine Trust 100
Baron-Fuenté, Espri Brut Grand Cru NV	88	90	87	87	A rich, yeasty and developed style offering brioche, butter and honeycomb nuances. Distinctive, if a little ponderous at the end.	12.5%	2018-2020	£39.99	Satchells Wine Merchants
Bernard Remy, Blanc de Blancs Brut NV	88	86	88	89	A decent mainstream example with pleasant citrus fruit and bright acidity. Not a great deal of complexity, but well put-together.	12%	2018-2020	£31	Corking Wines, Strictly Wine, Wine Poole
Canard-Duchêne, Cuvée Léonie Brut NV	88	86	88	90	Red fruits dominate here, with bright but slightly astringent acidity. Nicely put-together, for those not averse to marked acidity.	12%	2018-2020	£30-£32	Amazon, Champagne One, Champagnes and Châteaux, Richard Granger Wines, The Wine Library
Duménil, Brut 1er Cru NV	88	90	85	89	A pleasant citric character with hints of honey, swelled by a soft mousse. Just enough dosage to balance the acidity, though it finishes a little harsh.	12%	2018-2020	£31.95	Davy's
G Tribaut, Cuvée de Réserve Brut NV	88	86	87	90	A vibrant, fresh and lean style, with lemon and grapefruit zest to the fore. Streamlined and easy-drinking.	12%	2018-2020	£30	Finest Fizz
Henri Chauvet, Réserve Brut NV	88	88	85	90	Somewhat elementary, but energetic and harmonious. There is no great complexity here but this is well made and true to type.	12%	2018-2020	£30	Private Cellar
Joseph Perrier, Cuvée Royale Brut NV	88	88	87	90	Reasonably weighty with decent acidity and nicely judged dosage; fairly firm and diligent, if perhaps not particularly memorable.	12%	2018-2020	£35	Bancroft, Concept, Dulwich Vintners, Dunell's, Gray's Deli, Harrods, House of Townend, Jeroboams, SH Jones, Street
Lallier, R.014 Brut NV	88	86	88	90	Rich and layered, this is fairly full-bodied with an attractive mousse; but ultimately the acidity somewhat dominates here.	12.5%	2018-2020	£34-£36	Amps Fine Wines, Hoult's Fine Wines
Louis Boyer & Co, Brut NV	88	88	88	89	Reasonably broad in mouthfeel, with a touch of autolysis accompanying the zesty lemon fruit. Clean, fresh and decently made.	12%	2018-2020	£24.95	Davy's
Tanners, Extra Réserve Spécial Brut NV	88	89	86	88	Classic Pinot Meunier plushness, with acidity nicely integrated; savoury and pithy at the same time. The dosage is perhaps a touch too high.	12%	2018-2020	£28	Tanners
Thiénot, Brut NV	88	87	88	90	Soft and slightly leafy, with a gentle smattering of bready notes and a lively mousse. A gently oxidative style, not disagreeable but a touch old fashioned.	12.5%	2018-2020	£34-£36	Amazon, Champagne Co, Champagne One, Champagnes & Châteaux, Eagles Wines, The Wine Library, Yorkshire Vintners
AR Lenoble, Mag 14 Intense Brut NV	87	89	87	85	A well-judged, crowd-pleasing style with pronounced, but not overbearing dosage and firm, if slightly sharp, acidity on the finish.	12%	2018-2020	£36	Stannary St Wine Co
Arlaux, Grande Cuvée Brut 1er Cru NV	87	86	87	89	The acidity is prevalent here, although the mid-palate is rounded and well constructed; finishes firm and just a little taut.	12%	2018-2020	£24-£32.95	From Vineyards Direct, Grand Vin
Barnaut, Blanc de Noirs Brut Grand Cru NV	87	87	91	82	Rich, forceful, full of citrus fruit and bright acidity; no autolytic flavours are evident but it is attractive and enjoyable.	12.5%	2018-2020	£29.95	Lea & Sandeman
Brice, Tradition Brut NV	87	86	84	90	On the lighter side, with an energetic mousse and bright acidity, though a little taut and uncompromising on the finish.	12.5%	2018-2020	£33.95	Top Selection
Collet, Art Déco Brut NV	87	88	84	89	Reserve wine in evidence here, with hints of hazelnut and fino sherry. Traditional style, low acidity, with a creamy mousse and finely poised bubbles.	13%	2018-2020	£37	All About Wine, Great Wines Direct, Strictly Wine
Gardet, Davy's Célébration Brut NV	87	86	86	90	Citric in attack and somewhat austere. Made correctly but without a great deal of complexity: fresh and uncomplicated.	12%	2018-2020	£24.95	Davy's

Recommended (continued) 86-89pts

Wine	Score	SF	AH	DV	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Gatinois, Tradition Brut NV	87	91	82	87	Reticent nose but fairly developed palate, with notes of roasted almond and walnut. Finely wrought and elegant, but for early drinking.	12%	2018-2019	£33.40	Haynes Hanson & Clark
Gratiot-Pilliére, Tradition Brut NV	87	87	87	87	Attractive and well integrated, with a satisfying interplay between the acidity and sweetness; finishes a little abruptly, but appeals nonetheless.	12%	2018-2020	£30	Bancroft, Street Wines
Gremillet, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV	87	90	86	86	Reasonably fleshy with attractive plum fruit, a lick of honeydew melon and a pleasant Pinot finish. Well judged, if a touch sweet.	12.5%	2018-2020	£33.50	Christopher Piper
Hubert Paulet, Cuvée Tradition Brut 1er Cru NV	87	86	87	88	Uncomplicated, a little old fashioned, with notes of brioche and sweet spice, while the tight grip of acidity brings it all into focus.	12%	2018-2020	£40	The Good Wine Shop
Jean de La Fontaine, L'Éloquente Brut NV	87	90	85	86	Full and fleshy, with a well-judged fruit and oak integration, revealing mealy and honeyed elements. Lacking a little in refinement.	12%	2018-2020	£26	Astrum, Au Bon Vin, Burgess & Hall, Corks, Wine Therapy
Joly, Brut NV	87	88	85	87	Open, honest and expansive, with big bubbles and red fruit mobilised by forthright acidity. Pleasant but a little four-square.	12%	2018-2020	£28.50	Peter Watts
Maison Burtin, Laytons Brut NV	87	85	88	89	Soft, spiced red apple character; fresh and approachable but without being especially complex or having a finely etched future.	12.5%	2018-2020	£22.95	Jeroboams
Paul Goerg, Réserve Brut NV	87	87	84	90	A leaner, greener character is evident on the nose, which is replicated on the palate. A brisk, straightforward style.	12.5%	2018-2020	£24.83	Goedhuis & Co
Philizot & Fils, Veuve Monsigny NoIII Brut NV	87	87	90	85	An oxidative style, offering notes of fig, treacle and hazelnut; developed and possibly fragile, but not without appeal at this level.	12%	2018-2020	£10.99	Aldi
René Jolly, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV	87	90	86	86	Lower in acidity but pure, soft and creamy. An easy-to-drink example which will suit lovers of a sweeter style.	12%	2018-2020	£35	ExCellar, Old Butchers Wine Cellar, The Wine Reserve
Sophie Baron, Grande Réserve Brut NV	87	87	85	89	With apple flavours and a rather lean structure, this is a touch old fashioned and lacking in firm autolytic definition, yet retains freshness and balance.	12.5%	2018-2020	£34.99	Alexander Hadleigh Wines, Liberty Wines, Valvona & Crolla
Sunday Times Wine Club, Réserve Brut NV	87	90	85	86	Direct and uncomplicated with a decent mousse and fair weight, propelled by marked acidity. Seems serious in intent but lacks a little in subtlety.	12%	2018-2020	£24.99	Laithwaite's
Union, Pierre Vaudon Brut 1er Cru NV	87	88	84	89	Generous red fruit accompanied by hints of nougat, hazelnut and almond. It is a little clumsy though, with the acidity dominating on the finish.	13%	2018-2020	£30.15	Haynes Hanson & Clark
A Levasseur, Rue du Sorbier Brut NV	86	85	86	87	Unsophisticated but correct. An agreeable level of sweetness compensates for the quite brisk acidity, without being too cloying. At its peak now.	12%	2018-2020	£33-£39	Corks Out, Drinkmonger, Divine Cellars, Park & Bridge, Salisbury Winestore, Ten Green Bottles, Vino Wines
Bernard Pertois, Cuvée de Réserve BdB Brut GC NV	86	86	86	86	Crisp, with a lean lemon sherbet character, yet rather abrupt, although the mousse provides satisfying freshness. Pleasant overall.	12%	2018	£38	Finest Fizz
Brocard Pierre, Tradition Brut NV	86	84	86	87	A broad style with obvious hints of ageing in oak; unusual but not unattractive - though it may not appeal to all.	12%	2018-2020	£32	St Andrew's Wine Co, Swig
Co-op, Les Pionniers Brut NV	86	87	86	86	A golden hue, with a richness and generosity resulting in an appealing style. Perhaps a little cloying on the finish, though unsullied and well made.	12%	2018-2020	£16.99	Co-op
Froment-Griffon, Tradition Brut NV	86	87	82	88	A lean, somewhat meagre style, with stone fruit accompanying the lightweight bubbles and taut, combative acidity.	12%	2018-2020	£29.95	Vino Vero
Granzamy Père & Fils, Brut NV	86	87	84	86	Lean in style, with rather abrupt acidity and thin bubbles partnering notes of roasted nuts and sourdough.	12%	2018-2020	£29.50	Astrum Wine Cellars, Corks, Wine Therapy
Minière F & R, Influence Cuvée Brut NV	86	85	88	86	Fulsome and oaky, quite tightly wound, with woody notes partnering crunchy red berry fruit. Fairly complex, if a little heavy.	12%	2018-2020	£33	Domaine Direct
Paul Goerg, Tradition Brut 1er Cru NV	86	89	84	86	A sound commercial style, with hints of sweet spice and sour honey. The acid-sugar balance is somewhat precarious, but this serves a purpose.	12.5%	2018-2020	£29.99	Laithwaite's
Waitrose, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV	86	89	86	82	A more evolved, full-bodied style with some extra richness and a touch of autolytic development. A touch lactic and weighty, but not without appeal.	12%	2018-2020	£22.99	Waitrose

Commended 83-85pts

■ Brice, Nicolas Fetizon Brut NV 85, 12%, 2018-2020, £31.95 Thirty Nine 10, Top Selection ■ Castelnau, Réserve Brut NV 85, 12.5%, 2018-2019, £28-30 Amazon, Tannin & Oak, The Wine Society ■ Henri Chauvet, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV 85, 12%, 2018-2020, £28.50 Private Cellar ■ Janisson & Fils, Tradition Brut NV 85, 12%, 2018-2020, £38 Fenwick, St Margaret's Wine Co, The Grocery, The Whalley Wine Shop ■ Lelarge-Pugeot, Tradition Extra Brut 1er Cru NV 85, 12%, 2018-2020, £34 All About Wine, Corking Wines, Strictly Wine ■ Pierre Mignon, Grande Réserve Brut 1er Cru NV 85, 12%,

2018-2020, £27.99 Wine Utopia ■ R&L Legras, Blanc de Blancs Brut Grand Cru NV 85, 12.5%, 2018-2020, £33.50 Lea & Sandeman ■ Roger Barnier, Sélection Brut NV 85, 12%, 2018-2020, £28.50 Wanderlust ■ Didier Chopin, Brut NV 84, 12%, 2018-2020, £24.99 Laithwaite's ■ Dosnon, Brut NV 84, 12.5%, 2018-2019, £37 Roberson ■ Duval-Leroy, Blanc de Blancs Brut Grand Cru NV 84, 12.5%, 2018-2020, £39 Waitrose ■ Jacques Picard, Réserve Brut NV 84, 12%, 2018-2020, £34 Bottle Apostle, Fortnum & Mason, Theatre of Wine ■ Laithwaite's, Private Cuvée Blanc de Blancs Brut NV 84, 12%, 2018-2020, £29.99 Laithwaite's

■ Gruet, Sélection Brut NV 83, 12%, 2018-2020, £20-£22.99 Amazon, The Drink Shop, TJ Wines

Fair 76-82pts

■ Guy de Chassey, Grand Cru Brut NV 82 ■ J Dumangin et Fils, Extra Brut 1er Cru NV 82 ■ Serge Mathieu, Tradition Brut NV 82 ■ Delmotte, Brut NV 76

Poor 70-75pts

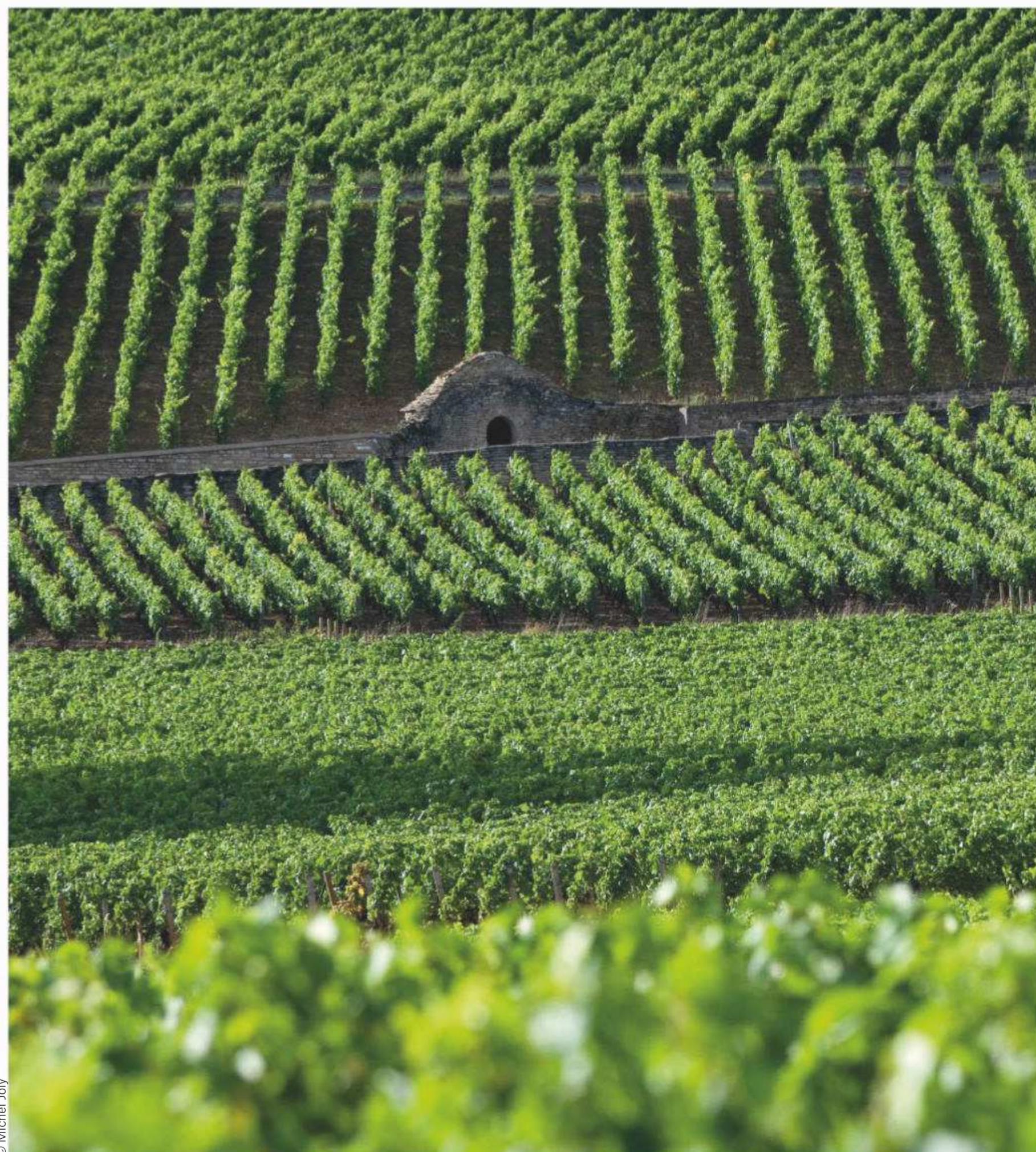
■ Charles Lecouvey, Cuvée Réserve Brut NV 74

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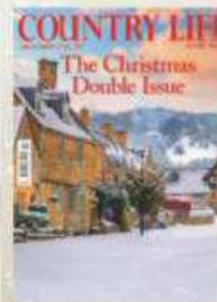


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Terrasses du Larzac and Minervois La Livinière reds

These Languedoc heartland appellations offer ample choice for lovers of chunky, spicy reds. Yet, says James Lawther MW, they are regions of differing outlook

THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN Terrasses du Larzac and Minervois La Livinière is, initially at least, apparent. Both are located in the foothills behind the plain in the shadow of a limestone plateau or causse. A Mediterranean climate prevails but, in both cases, the cool night air from the higher causse helps to preserve freshness and acidity in the wines. With predominantly limestone soils and elevations running from 100m-400m, both appellations require a minimum 60% Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre in the vineyards.

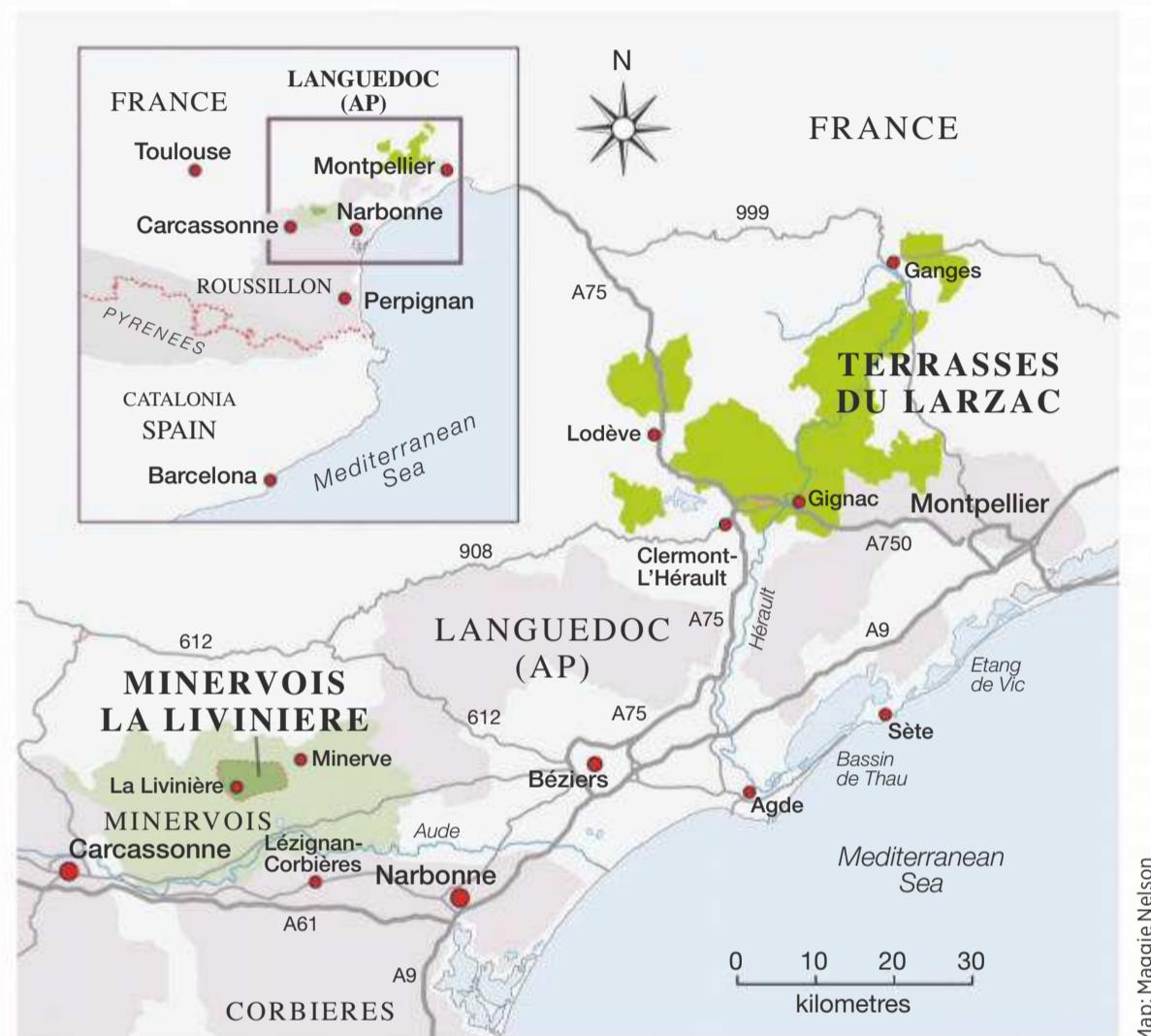
Thereafter the subtle differences kick in. Minervois La Livinière established itself as one of the Languedoc's six crus as long ago as 1999. It's a fairly compact appellation, the 400ha in production located in a delimited zone that encompasses six villages. The soils are essentially limestone and, of the various grape varieties permitted, Syrah often plays a dominant role. Climatically speaking the extremes tend to be avoided, allowing greater consistency from year to year.

All this adds up to a reasonably coherent identity, the wines rich and concentrated with darkly fruited, spicy aromatics and tannins that are soft and generally refined. In terms of production there are some heavy hitters – Gérard Bertrand, Les Grands Chais de France and the Cazes family of Château Lynch-Bages to name a few – but all told the numbers haven't changed over the last 15 years and you would have to describe the milieu as conservative rather than progressive.

Modern mindset

The opposite is the case in Terrasses du Larzac, where in the last five years 25 new domaines have sprung up. Since acquiring appellation status in 2014 – even before – Terrasses du Larzac has been the place to be, would-be vigneron attract by the availability, potential and price of land. One consequence of the new flow has been the adoption of organics on a large scale, with more than 75% of the vineyard now organically or biodynamically farmed, or under conversion. Otherwise, the area under vine is wider spread than in Minervois La Livinière, the 568ha presently declared extending through 32 different villages or communes. Certain zones have a mountain feel and the diurnal range of temperature can be as much as 20°C. It makes for a more extreme regime.

Soils are preponderantly limestone with a varying mix of stones or galets roulés, silt and clay. But on the higher slopes in the northwest, schist and sandstone prevail with, in the valley below, a moonscape of volcanic red earth known locally as ruffe. Consequently, there's perhaps more diversity in blends and styles, though a defining vibrancy and structure is generally present.



Map: Maggie Nelson

Languedoc reds: know your vintages

2017 Frost in some areas. Hot, dry summer. Low yields but quality satisfactory. Will open sooner than 2016.

2016 Hot and dry but cool nights. Concentrated wines with marked acidity. Potential for ageing. Low volume.

2015 Warm and dry, but rain when needed. Balanced wines. Quality and quantity.

2014 Hail in parts. *Drosophila suzukii* fruit fly was also a problem. Mixed results.

2013 Coulure in the Grenache. Later harvest. Carignan, Syrah and Mourvèdre fared best.

2012 A difficult year, with some mildew then a hot, dry summer resulting in uneven ripening. Better in Minervois La Livinière.

Languedoc reds: the facts

Minervois La Livinière

Area under vine 400ha

Production (2016)

1.5 million bottles

Producers 41 including two co-ops

Grape varieties Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah (minimum 60% of these three), Carignan, Cinsault, Terret, Piquepoul, Aspiran

Terrasses du Larzac

Area under vine 568ha

Production (2016)

2.2 million bottles

Producers 92 including five co-ops

Grape varieties Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah (minimum 60% of these three), Carignan, Cinsault ➤

James Lawther MW is a Decanter contributing editor and DWWA Languedoc-Roussillon Regional co-Chair

The summary

Though no wines wowed, our judges found a good range of full-bodied reds, spanning reliably traditional and more modern styles. James Lawther MW reports

THE PROSPECT OF two leading lights in the Languedoc, Minervois La Livinière and Terrasses du Larzac, going head to head over two notable years, 2016 and 2015, gave an air of expectancy to this tasting. The judges' enthusiasm was palpable, hence the disappointment with the results at the end of the day. The highlights just seemed wanting; the upshot being an absence of any Outstanding or Exceptional wines in either category.

Were the judges over-expectant? Seventeen Highly Recommended (nearly a third of the wines tasted), with almost two-thirds Recommended is an honourable score, but it was the ultimate lack of excitement that tipped the scales. One possible reason is that the 2016s, accounting for more than half the wines tasted, are

rather firm and reserved at the moment. I had already heard this explanation from producers, particularly in Terrasses du Larzac, and the theory was supported by the fact that a wine that won Platinum at the Decanter World Wine Awards back in early May only received a Recommended score here. The 2016 vintage is good but it's a keeper with marked acidity and structure, so bide your time and enjoy later. Certainly 2016 fared better than 2015, the generosity of the latter seemingly absent.

As to the individual appellations, Justin Howard-Sneyd MW felt there was probably more consistency in style among the wines from Minervois La Livinière. 'They tend to be Syrah-dominated and fruit-forward and stylistically more recognisable.' Simon Field MW, who

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest release reds from the Languedoc appellations of Terrasses du Larzac and Minervois La Livinière only

The judges

Simon Field MW



Field was a buyer for Berry Bros & Rudd for more than two decades. He now works as a consultant in areas which particularly interested him during that time, with the Rhône,

Languedoc and Champagne topping the list in France, and Spain and the fortified category also featuring prominently.

My top three

■ Château Capion, Le Chemin des Garennes, Terrasses du Larzac 2016

The times are a-changing at Capion it seems, and this is a far cry from the varietal domination I recall from way-back-when; changes all for the best judging by this lifted and richly complex wine. **94 Drink 2019-2024**

■ Mas des Brousses, Terrasses du Larzac 2016

A magnificently exciting Terrasses takes on a Bandol theme, with its brooding Mourvèdre, a dense organic backdrop and very finely honed tannins to complete the picture. **94 Drink 2019-2023**

■ Château Ste-Eulalie, Minervois La Livinière 2016

Open and richly textured, for me an archetype from the appellation, marrying tradition, courtesy of the Carignan, with colour and a fleshy texture, thanks to the Syrah and Grenache. **93 Drink 2019-2023**

Justin Howard-Sneyd MW



In 2012 Howard-Sneyd founded The Hive Wine Consulting. His biggest client is Direct Wines, where he previously spent three years as global wine director. He is a DWWA Regional co-Chair for Languedoc-Roussillon, and he also makes wine with his family and partners at the 4ha Domaine de la Bee estate in Roussillon.

My top three

■ Gérard Bertrand, Le Viala, Minervois

La Livinière 2015 Gérard's wines certainly don't lack in ambition, with eyebrow-raising pricing and heavy glass bottles, but I can't help loving the wines too: hugely impressive concentration and complexity, underpinned by minimal intervention production methods and biodynamic farming. **95 Drink 2019-2022**

■ Domaine La Rouviole, Minervois La

Livinière 2013 I really enjoyed this more mature wine from an underestimated vintage. Impressive concentration, notes of garrigue herbs and church incense. **94 Drink 2018-2021**

■ Clos Aguilem, Terrasses du Larzac

2016 A very small and relatively new project, not really showing up on most people's radar yet. A 6.7ha vineyard owned by 16 wine-loving friends. This shone, with extremely expressive and very ripe black fruit. **93 Drink 2019-2024**

James Lawther MW



A contributing editor to Decanter and Regional co-Chair for Languedoc-Roussillon at the DWWA, Lawther is an independent wine writer, lecturer and tour guide based in Bordeaux. A Master of Wine since 1993, he has been writing about the Languedoc-Roussillon for the last 20 years.

My top three

■ Mas des Brousses, Terrasses du

Larzac 2016 Mourvèdre (50%) shapes the dark, firm, complex character of this wine. A percentage comes from massal selection at Domaine Tempier in Bandol, so it's impeccably sourced. **94 Drink 2019-2023**

■ Château Ste-Eulalie, Minervois La

Livinière 2016 The emphasis is on the raw material with an equal blend of old vine Carignan (80-100 years), Grenache (80 years) and some relatively youthful Syrah, bottled early, no oak. Delicious. **92 Drink 2019-2023**

■ Mas Cal Demoura, Terre de

Jonquieres, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 The flagship wine from this estate is produced from the five permitted grape varieties and is always dark and intense, the tannins rounded out by ageing in 600-litre demi-muids and larger foudres. **92 Drink 2019-2024**

'Go with Minervois La Livinière for the comfort zone, but Terrasses du Larzac is pushing the bounds'

wrote his Master of Wine thesis on Minervois La Livinière in 2001, found the standard correct, but felt that there hadn't been much evolution in the intervening years.

Overall, all the judges commented on one point: how the winemaking often submerged the terroir. There were definitely a number of wines where over-extraction and the use of (new) oak seemed heavy-handed. That said, it's worth pointing out that the highest scoring Minervois La Livinière wine came from an unoaked blend of one third each Carignan, Grenache and Syrah.

Of the top 20 highest-scoring wines, 14 came from Terrasses du Larzac, the appellation also getting closest to the elusive Outstanding note. This in itself is recognition of how far this young appellation has come, and reconfirms the positive results seen at the 2018

Decanter World Wine Awards. There were plenty of new names sitting alongside the more established domaines like Montcalmès and Mas Cal Demoura.

Stylistically, though, there is far greater variability, the wines ranging from elegant to those that are deeper and riper, with some more profound in nature and clearly constructed for ageing. All this goes hand-in-hand with the extent of the Terrasses du Larzac appellation and the disparity in terroir and blends.

This was highlighted by the profiles of three of the top-scoring wines. Mas des Brousses 2016 includes 50% Mourvèdre and has depth, structure and minty complexity. The multi-blend of Château Capion 2016 (37% Syrah, 25% Grenache, 23% Cinsault, 15% Mourvèdre) offers a slightly riper note but equal depth and reserve, while Clos du Prieur 2016 – from a higher, cooler site with 70% Syrah – is all about elegance and finesse.

The message in the end seems to be to go with Minervois La Livinière for fruit, accessibility and the comfort zone. But if you accept stylistic variability, then Terrasses du Larzac is the one pushing the boundaries.

The scores

58 wines tasted

Exceptional

0

Outstanding

0

Highly Recommended

17

Recommended

36

Commended

3

Fair

2

Poor

0

Faulty

0

Highly Recommended 90-94pts



Mas des Brousses, Terrasses du Larzac 2016

Decanter average score: 94/100pts

Individual judges' scores: Simon Field MW 94
Justin Howard-Sneyd MW 93 James Lawther MW 94

£19.95 Stone Vine & Sun

Complex and finely etched, with a minty dark fruit aroma ceding to a firm and layered yet rounded and refined palate. A wine that's full of resonance, and has ageing potential.

Drink 2019-2023 Alcohol 14%



Château Capion, Le Chemin des Garennes, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 93 SF 94 JHS 91 JL 94

POA Awin Barratt Siegel

Complex and confident yet reined-in, with loganberry and summer pudding aromas; the palate is agreeably ripe, round and lush, with fine balancing acidity. Long and poised, with ageing potential. Drink 2019-2024 Alc 14.5%



Château Ste-Eulalie, Minervois La Livinière 2016

92 SF 93 JHS 91 JL 92

£13.50 (2015) The Wine Society

A big, modern, bramble-fruited style with a well-judged ripeness and firm yet graceful tannins. Long, impressive and easy to appreciate. Drink 2019-2023 Alc 14%



Clos du Prieur, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 92 SF 94 JHS 92 JL 90

N/A UK www.closduprieur.fr

Exuberant in character yet elegant and finely crafted. Opens with red fruit aromatics leading to a less ripe, cooler-climate palate that delivers an intriguing herbal complexity.

Drink 2018-2022 Alc 14%



Mas des Quernes, La Villa Romaine, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 92 SF 93 JHS 91 JL 92

N/A UK www.mas-des-quernes.com

Dark and dense, with aromas and flavours of rosemary partnering cedar red fruit and a red gum sweetness, intensified by finely etched acidity. Solid in structure, yet layered and lush.

Drink 2019-2024 Alc 14%



Mas Haut-Buis, Costa Caoude, Terrasses du Larzac 2016

91 SF 92 JHS 92 JL 90

N/A UK www.mashautbuis.com

Restrained blackberry liqueur nose augmented by a hint of charcuterie and black pepper; dense, savoury and earthy on the palate, with plenty of extract. Characterful and impressive. Drink 2019-2024 Alc 13.5% >

Highly Recommended (continued) 90-94pts



Château Cesseras, Minervois La Livinière 2014 90 SF 91 JHS 90 JL 90
£18.50 (2012) Ocado

A dense and complex style, oaky without being excessively so, savoury yet tight-knit, supported by evident but supple and refined tannins. Expressive and resolute.

Drink 2018-2022 Alc 14%



Château des Crès Ricards, Stécia, Terrasses du Larzac 2016
90 SF 90 JHS 89 JL 92

£12.99 olivers Wine Warehouse

A smooth and suave style, offering aniseed, herbal and eucalyptus nuances against a backdrop of smoky red fruit and touches of vanilla oak. Rounded, long and fresh.

Drink 2018-2022 Alc 14.5%



Château Laville Bertrou, Minervois La Livinière 2016
90 SF 90 JHS 88 JL 92

N/A UK www.gerard-bertrand.com

An attractive tripartite blend, with elegant tannins adorning notes of spiced black fruit, toasted nuts and hints of wild strawberry. Nicely judged, offering lots of southern French rusticity. **Drink** 2019-2023 Alc 15%



Clos Aguilem, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 90 SF 87 JHS 93 JL 91

N/A UK www.closaguilem.com

Evidence of some new oak here, with tell-tale notes of vanillin and mocha. Plush and rich in extract, yet accompanied by deliciously mouthwatering acidity and rounded tannins.

Drink 2019-2024 Alc 15%



Domaine Gayda, Villa Mon Rêve, Minervois La Livinière 2014
90 SF 93 JHS 90 JL 87

£49.99-£55 Cambridge Wine Merchants, New Generation

Seductive notes of garrigue-infused red fruit, distinctly Mediterranean, interspersed with touches of nutmeg and blueberry. Nicely judged, effortless. **Drink** 2018-2020 Alc 14%



Domaine La Rouviale, Minervois La Livinière 2013
90 SF 90 JHS 94 JL 87

£18.05-£20.99 Corking Wines, Exel, Hallgarten, Strictly Wine

A big, more mature, oaky style, with a notable herbal-garrigue character encircling a lush sweetness of fruit, indicating this is still in great shape. Lovely. **Drink** 2018-2021 Alc 14.5% ➤



Frédéric Portalié, Domaine de Montcalmès, Terrasses du Larzac 2015 90 SF 89 JHS 91 JL 90

£29.50 Yapp Brothers

Attractive and easygoing yet with a generous volume of red berry fruit and a fair dose of minty new oak, with acidity bringing welcome freshness. **Drink** 2018-2022 Alc 14%

'The 2016 vintage is a keeper, so bide your time and enjoy later'

James Lawther MW



Gérard Bertrand, Le Viala, Minervois La Livinière 2015
90 SF 88 JHS 95 JL 87

£58 Hallgarten, Strictly Wine, Corking Wines

A more modern style with a big, powerful vanilla oak nose ushering in a ripe, full palate with lots of extraction and lush Syrah fruit. Highly impressive and concentrated, if not for the faint-hearted. **Drink** 2019-2022 Alc 15%



Marie et Frédéric Chauffray, Domaine de La Réserve d'O Hissez O, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 90 SF 89 JHS 90 JL 90

N/A UK www.lareservedo.fr

Modern, oaky style: savoury, meaty aromas and a muscular palate. Deep, impressive, if not especially delicate. **Drink** 2019-2023 Alc 14%



Mas Cal Demoura, Terre de Jonquières, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 90 SF 90 JHS 89 JL 92

£24.99 Alliance Wine

Nose of finely judged oak embellished with clove, violet and incense. Tightly packed red fruit and ripe, lush tannins mobilise the palate. Generous, persistent. **Drink** 2019-2024 Alc 14%



Mollard & Fillon, Vu d'en Haut, Terrasses du Larzac 2016
90 SF 88 JHS 91 JL 91

N/A UK +33 (0)4 67 88 21 96

A proper 'terroir' wine: inviting garrigue, pine and rosemary aromas mirrored on the palate; rounded yet grippy, with a satisfying freshness on the finish. **Drink** 2018-2022 Alc 13.5% ➤

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Recommended 86–89pts

Wine	Score	SF	JHS	JL	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Cap d'Aniel, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	89	87	89	91	Enticing cassis and garrigue/herbal notes; lush and appetising, with even-handed acidity and a long finish.	13.5%	2018-2022	N/A UK	+33 (0)6 82 14 26 84
Ch Pepusque, Les Cailloux Blancs, Minervois La Livinière 2016	89	88	92	88	Rather animal – sausages and spice – with a herbal nuance behind. Really rather tasty, though perhaps not ‘fine’.	14%	2019-2022	£21.47 (2015)	Uvinum
Dom Combe Blanche, La Chandelière, La Livinière 2015	89	85	91	90	Exotic and layered, with a smoky seductiveness to the spicy dark fruit. Generous yet compact in style.	14%	2018-2021	£16.99-£18.99	Cambridge Wine Merchants, Leon Stolarski
Dom de L'Ostal, Grand Vin, Minervois La Livinière 2015	89	88	91	89	Attractive summer pudding, soft spice character; gently seductive but maybe not for the longer term.	14.5%	2019-2021	N/A UK	www.jmcazes.com
Le Clos Rouge, Babel, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	89	88	90	88	Intriguing charcuterie notes amid a satisfying raspberry-leaf freshness. Not top-drawer, but very pleasing.	13.5%	2018-2021	N/A UK	www.leclosrouge.fr
Lorgeril, La Croix, Minervois La Livinière 2014	89	90	86	91	Easygoing, layered and rounded, with exuberant fruit held in check by structured yet finely pitched tannins.	14%	2019-2022	N/A UK	+33 (0)4 68 72 65 29
Mas Lasta, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	89	87	91	89	Plush, layered and characterful, bright and spicy, with a real southern warmth, if perhaps slightly ‘safe’.	13.5%	2019-2023	N/A UK	+33 (0)6 86 97 77 45
Calmel & Joseph, Les Crus, Minervois La Livinière 2016	88	86	88	89	With a sinewy Mourvèdre backdrop; youthful, a little rustic, but correct and admirably fresh.	13.5%	2018-2021	£14.99	Grape & Grind, New Forest Wines, The Jolly Vintner, Vinology
Calmel & Joseph, La Planette, Cuvées Rares, La Livinière 2016	88	85	89	90	Concentrated, lush and ripe, with raspberry compote fruit; fresh and lifted but a touch foursquare on the finish.	15%	2019-2022	£19.99	Daniel Lambert
CastelBarry, Les Hauts de Terval, Terrasses du Larzac 2014	88	90	87	86	An old-school style, wonderfully uncompromising: savoury, leafy and eminently food-friendly, though for early drinking.	13.5%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.montpeyroux.org
Ch de Gourgazaud, Réserve, Minervois La Livinière 2016	88	88	88	88	Straightforward, bright and juicy with rather lovely raspberry fruit engraved by hints of vanilla oak.	13.5%	2018-2021	N/A UK	www.gourgazaud.com
Clos des Roques, Minervois La Livinière 2016	88	86	87	90	Bright, vibrant, rather elementary in style; juicy, easygoing and tasty, though not one for the cellar.	14%	2018-2020	£16.50	Stannary St Wine Co
Dom de la Senche, Cuvée Somi, Minervois La Livinière 2016	88	89	86	88	Ripe, modern and plush, with vanilla oak apparent; competent but international in style.	13.5%	2019-2021	£16.82	Linlithgow Wines
Dom du Pas de l'Escalette, Le Grand Pas, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	88	89	92	82	Wild strawberry fruit partners chalky yet quite persistent tannins; nicely pure, though slightly pinched on the finish.	14%	2018-2021	N/A UK	www.pasdelescalette.com
Géraldine Laval, Clos Maïa, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	88	88	88	87	Somewhat tighter in style, less showy; a nice wine, pure-fruited and delicate, but a little restrained right now.	14%	2018-2021	N/A UK	closmaia@hotmail.fr
La Croix Chaptal, Cuvée Charles, Terrasses du Larzac 2014	88	87	87	89	Showing some age, but with an impressive aromatic weave and structural harmony. Rather nice, though for early drinking.	14%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.lcroixchaptal.com
Le Clos du Serres, Les Maros, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	88	90	86	89	Supple, rounded and enjoyable, with herb-imbued cassis fruit and smooth tannins, if a touch short.	14%	2018-2021	N/A UK	www.leclosduserres.fr
Vignobles Coulet, Tour de Baulx, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	88	89	89	85	Poised if slightly jammy Syrah fruit and fine-grained, chalky tannins amid hints of scrub. Elegant and easy.	13.5%	2018-2021	N/A UK	www.vignobles-coulet.com
Caizergues, Les Amoriers, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	87	90	88	84	Lovely open, ‘southern’ characters of herbal, sausagey fruit. Attractive and elegant, but lacks a little complexity.	13.5%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.domainelescaizergues.com
Château Maris, La Touge, Minervois La Livinière 2016	87	84	87	89	More linear, still with a youthful austerity and hard to assess; a definite food wine, with plenty of lush black fruit to sustain it.	14%	2019-2023	£16.99	Kwoff
Dom de l'Eglisette, Terre Astrale, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	87	89	88	85	Supple attack with notes of dark chocolate, violet and fig, though a little dry and chewy on the finish.	14.5%	2018-2021	N/A UK	www.domainedeleglisette.com
Dom St-Sylvestre, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	87	87	87	88	Firm and layered yet lively with a satisfying touch of minerality, though lacks a bit of resonance. A food wine.	14.5%	2018-2021	£18.50	Leon Stolarski
G Bertrand, Ch La Sauvageonne Grand Vin, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	87	87	89	85	Pleasant bilberry, undergrowth character; quite oaky and richly extracted with hints of raisin and prune. A Douro-like extravagance here.	15%	2018-2021	£25.49	Hallgarten, Wine Poole, Strictly Wine
Guy Vanlancker, Clos du Causse, Minervois La Livinière 2015	87	88	87	85	Open and straightforward, with a gentle spiciness and attractive if slightly confectioned red and black fruit. Pleasant, if not great.	15%	2018-2020	£14.50	Leon Stolarski
Les Hauts d'Arboras, Terrasses du Larzac 2014	87	89	86	87	A little lean, with a hint of tiredness creeping in, albeit with hints of aniseed to provide interest.	13.5%	2018-2020	£15.99	The Fine Wine Importers
Les Vignes Oubliées, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	87	87	89	86	Still somewhat reticent, but there's plenty here: powerful, tightly coiled dark fruit, with warmth and depth.	14%	2018-2022	£20.95	Berry Bros & Rudd
Lorgeril, Borie Blanche Terroirs d'Altitude, La Livinière 2014	87	84	88	88	Evolution in evidence; nose and palate have a slightly stewed character, though it's round and generous, with a gentle touch of garrigue.	13.5%	2018-2022	£14.95	Ellis Wines

Recommended (continued) 86-89pts

Wine	Score	SF	JHS	JL	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Mas Combarèla, Ode aux Ignorants, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	87	88	88	85	Austere and uncompromising, with a rigid structure and firm, awkward tannins; needs time and patience.	14.5%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.mas-combarela.com
Mas Laval, La Grande Cuvée, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	87	84	88	89	Slightly lifted and confectioned, loose-knit in structure, with a pleasing raspberry-ripple sweetness and hints of vanilla oak.	14%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.maslaval.com
Ch de Jonquieres, La Baronne, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	86	89	84	86	Leafy, broad Mourvèdre character; sinewy, ripe and food-friendly if a touch old-fashioned and angular.	13.5%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.chateau-jonquieres.com
Domaine l'Aiguellerie, Velours, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	86	88	87	84	Soft and appealing, this is loaded with gentle plum and strawberry fruit. Deliciously drinkable, if a touch angular.	14%	2018-2021	£12.95	Ten Acre
Domaine Croix de St-Privat, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	86	84	89	85	Uncompromising and heavily extracted, with rich and spicy notes of liquorice, sweet coconut and vanilla.	14%	2019-2022	N/A UK	+33 (0)4 67 57 21 66
Dom du Causse d'Arboras, La Faille, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	86	83	92	84	Plump and indulgent – a powerful, mineral-charged mouthful of extremely lush tannins and opulent liquorice-laden fruit.	14%	2018-2023	N/A UK	www.causse-arboras.com
La Croix Chaptal, Le Secret de Gellone, Terrasses du Larzac 2015	86	84	87	86	Soft, open and straightforward, with herbal-toned fruit amid hints of the farmyard, but without a great deal of freshness or backbone.	14%	2018-2020	N/A UK	www.lacroixchaptal.com
Mas Conscience, L'Eveil, Terrasses du Larzac 2016	86	85	86	87	Still youthful, austere and reticent, with herbal-garrigue and olive tapenade nuances over a firm tannic base.	13.5%	2018-2023	N/A UK	www.mas-conscience.com
Mas Fabregous, Le Centaure, Terrasses du Larzac 2011	86	85	88	85	Rather nice now if slightly resinous, with evolved notes of graphite and woodsmoke. Mature; drink up.	14%	2018-2019	£36 (2007)	Ranmore Wines

Commended 83-85pts

■ Château Mignan, Oeil du Temps, Minervois La Livinière 2014 85, 14%, 2018-2020, N/A UK www.chateaumignan.com ■ Château St-Jean d'Aumières, L'Alchimiste, Terrasses du Larzac 2016 85, 14%, 2019-2022, £18.60 Rodney Fletcher ■ Château La Croix Martelle, Bélaya, Minervois La Livinière 2014 84, 14%, 2018-2019, N/A UK www.chateaulacroixmartelle.com

Fair 76-82pts

■ Patricia Boyer-Domergue, Clos Centeilles, Minervois La Livinière 2013 79 ■ Marie et Frédéric Chauffray, Domaine de La Réserve d'O, Terrasses du Larzac 2015 77

Next month's panel tastings
Haut-Médoc 2014 & Prosecco
Conegliano Valdobbiadene

CHÂTEAU
Phélan Ségur

Chablis 2017

Severe frosts slashing yields made this a year many producers would prefer to forget. Nevertheless, the best wines are surprisingly fresh and taut, reports Tim Atkin MW



CHABLIS, A REGION used to freezing temperatures, suffered terribly between 18 and 29 April 2017, as a series of black frosts descended from the north.

'In 30 years, I've never seen vines in the high part of the Valmur grand cru hit like that,' says Jean-Claude Bessin of his eponymous domaine. Vineyards on the right bank of the River Serein suffered worse than those on the left, but what was unusual about the frosts was that they didn't just hit low-lying areas. All grands crus were affected to a greater or lesser extent, as were the top premiers crus of Montée de Tonnerre and Mont de Milieu.

Further north, the villages of Lignorelles, Ligny-le-Châtel, La Chapelle-Vaupelteigne and Villy took a pounding, too. Overall, Chablis produced about two-thirds of a normal crop.

Chablisien used anything they could to protect their vines: bonfires of tyres or straw bales, large candles, electric cables, fans and watering systems. Their success rate was patchy, but these measures staved off the worst effects of the frost. Some lost everything, others fared well under the circumstances, but after 2016 – another short crop hit by the gruesome threesome of



Domaine François Raveneau, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 98

POA Raeburn Fine Wines

One of the very best wines of the vintage, as it often is, this is a wine to cellar and cherish. It would be a crime to drink it young. Focused, chiselled but with layers of underlying richness and concentration. **Drink 2024-2035 Alc 13%**



Domaine Vincent Dauvissat, Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses 98

POA Domaine Direct

The Dauvissat holdings touch La Moutonne but make a very different style. Fine, delicate and subtle, this lightly wooded grand cru takes your breath away with its focus, its poise, its thrilling length. **Drink 2024-2035 Alc 13%**



Samuel Billaud, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 97

POA Berry Bros & Rudd, Jeroboams, Lay & Wheeler

The parcel may be tiny at only 0.1ha, but these old vines, planted high on the slope in 1951, have produced a stunning 2017 Les Clos: rich, savoury, intense; stylish oak and refreshing balancing acidity. **Drink 2022-2035 Alc 13%**



Domaine Billaud-Simon, Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses 96

POA Goedhuis & Co, Jeroboams, Laytons

The best of the Billaud-Simon grands crus in 2017, from old vines in the northern part of the slope. Unwooded, but not lacking in flavour and salinity, with considerable complexity and understated power. **Drink 2022-2033 Alc 13%**



Domaine Christian Moreau, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 96

N/A UK www.domainechristianmoreau.com

A Côte d'Or-meets-Chablis style showing subtle vanilla spice, creamy weight and a fresh, palate-cleansing finish. I slightly prefer this to Fabien Moreau's more expensive Clos des Hospices bottling. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 12.8%**



Domaine Jean-Paul et Benoît Droin, Chablis Grand Cru Blanchot 96

POA Domaine Direct, Jeroboams

Unwooded, as always, this remarkable wine comes from a single, east-facing parcel. Saline, focused, elegant, with a pithy austerity that's almost Riesling-like. **Drink 2020-2032 Alc 13%**



Domaine Laroche, La Réserve de l'Obéissance Chablis 96

£119.99 (2016) Liberty Wines

Laroche's top wine is actually made with the best barrels from its Blanchot grand cru holdings. A taut, monastic wine, with deftly integrated wood, bracing acidity and stony, sappy minerality. **Drink 2022-2032 Alc 13%**



Domaine Long-Depaquit, Chablis Grand Cru La Moutonne 96

POA H2Vin & Quiteessentially

Chablis' so-called 'eighth grand cru' is sourced 95% from Vaudésir, 5% Les Preuses. Rich and powerful, leesy, textured, it's complete, with aromatic oak, stone fruit sweetness and racy underlying acidity. **Drink 2021-2028 Alc 12.8%**



Domaine Pinson, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 96

POA Alliance Wine, Goedhuis & Co

The less wooded of the two Les Clos bottlings from the Pinsons, but it's still quite a rich, powerful style. Dense and complex with notes of baking spices, subtle stone fruit and a saline, minerally flourish. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 13%**

frost, hail and mildew – long faces were more than common among producers.

And yet, after a terrible start, 2017 has turned out rather well. The only problem is the small quantities – there was so little wine that some producers were selling their 2017 Chablis by January 2018. With demand exceeding supply, prices on the bulk market increased from €500 a feuillette (a 132-litre barrel) to €1,100.

The low yields produced concentration in the berries – so much so that it could potentially overwhelm Chablis' freshness and trademark minerality, according to Patrick Piuze. 'It was all about when you picked,' he explains. The early birds started in the last few days of August, while the late harvesters were putting away their secateurs on 16 September.

The best 2017s are surprisingly fresh and taut, thanks to a cool summer, with significant rainfall in July, but also to producers' desire to pick early to counter the high

sugar levels. Despite the wet July, there was little if any botrytis, as August was very dry.

Do the wines resemble another Chablis vintage? Most producers plumped for a combination of two: 2014 and 2015 (Patrick Piuze), 2014 and 2002 (Vincent Dauvissat) or 2014 and 2010 (Benoît Droin). The balance between power and acidity is a key feature of many 2017s. Some wines are a little exotic, edging closer to the softness and richness of 2016, but the top examples are classic Chablis.

They may lack the thrilling crunch and bite of the majestic 2014s but, at their best, they aren't far behind in quality. Alcohol levels are reasonable at between 12% and 12.5%, and the top wines have the structure to age better than the 2015s and '16s.

If you like classic Chablis for medium-term drinking, this is a vintage for you. Prices will increase on 2016 in many cases, but these wines are comparative Burgundian bargains.

Tim Atkin MW is Decanter's contributing editor for Burgundy. See his full report on the 2017 Chablis vintage on Decanter Premium

Look out for his extensive en primeur report on the Burgundy 2017 vintage in our February 2019 issue, and also on Decanter Premium

For wines marked 'POA', prices and allocations are yet to be confirmed



Domaine William Fèvre, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 96

POA Jerooboams

No one can rival Fèvre's 4.12ha holdings in Chablis' most prestigious grand cru. Leesy, waxy, complete, it has understated wood, layers of citrus and umami and the backbone to age in bottle. **Drink 2022-2035 Alc 13%**



Maison Laroche, Chablis 1er Cru Vaucoupins 96

N/A UK www.larochewines.com

Made with a 1ha selection of purchased grapes, sourced from a 1955 vineyard planted on very stony soils, this is chiselled and oceanic, with finely balanced flavours and mouthwatering, grapefruity acidity. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 12.8%**



Patrick Piuze, Chablis Grand Cru Bougros 96

£52 Latimer Vintners

Hit by the frost in 2017, this vineyard produced only 12hl/ha. But what a wine, with notes of kelp and green malt, focused, mouthwatering acidity and remarkable extract and palate length. **Drink 2022-2030 Alc 12.2%**



Domaine Gérard Duplessis, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 95

N/A UK www.chablis-duplessis.com

The only wine from Lilian Duplessis' that is barrel fermented, rather than aged in wood – from an old-vine parcel in the heart of the grand cru. Profound; white flower aromas and backbone of acidity. **Drink 2020-2029 Alc 13%**



Domaine Julien Brocard, Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses 95

N/A UK +33 (0)3 86 41 49 00

Julien Brocard's biodynamic wines are worth tracking down. This impressive, foudre-aged Preuses is from a 0.35ha parcel. Pithy, sappy, proudly modern, with subtle wood, pear and grapefruit notes. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 12.8%**



Domaine Nathalie et Gilles Fèvre, Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses 95

POA Domaine Direct

The Fèvres have a fine 2.3ha parcel in Les Preuses. Oaked and unwooded components; rich yet focused, with the classic bite and tang of the best 2017s. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 13%**



Domaine Sébastien Dampt, Chablis 1er Cru Beugnons 95

N/A UK www.sebastien-dampt.com

Fermented in concrete eggs since 2013, this comes from a vineyard planted in 1959 and is impressively complex. Pithy, taut and saline; mouthwateringly fresh, long, notes of celery and pink grapefruit. **Drink 2019-2028 Alc 13%**



Domaine Servin, Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses 95

N/A UK +33 (0)3 86 18 90 00

François Servin calls Les Preuses the 'gifted child', referring to its brilliant singularity. It's beautifully judged, with savoury complexity, a dusting of vanilla spice and incredible concentration. **Drink 2022-2030 Alc 13%**



Domaine Gilbert Picq, Chablis 1er Cru Vosgros 94

N/A UK +33 (0)3 86 42 18 30

Often my favourite of Didier Picq's range: a classic unoaked Chablis from two southwest-facing parcels. Subtle, stony reduction and lemon and lime flavours combine winningly on the palate. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 12.8% >**



Domaine Guillaume Vrignaud, Chablis 1er Cru Côtes de Fontenay 94

£37.99 (2015) Liberty Wines

Vrignaud's top wine is from a sub-appellation within the larger Fourchaume premier cru. Old-vine concentration, a note of gunflint, some honey and an undertone of iodine make this a classic Chablis. **Drink 2019-2028 Alc 13%**



Domaine Guy Robin, Chablis 1er Cru Montée de Tonnerre 94

N/A UK www.domaineguyrobin.com

It's good to see this extensive domaine back on form. Combining fruit from the three lieux-dits of Montée de Tonnerre, it's a stylish, perfumed, leesy Chablis with real focus and precision. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13%**



Domaine Jean Collet, Chablis 1er Cru Les Forêts 94

N/A UK www.domaine-collet.fr

Les Forêts (spelt with an 's' chez Collet) is one of the few Chablis that's fermented in concrete eggs. Pale, pithy and very stony, with some struck-match aromas, it's savoury, complex and intriguing. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 13%**



Domaine Jean-Marc Brocard, Chablis 1er Cru Vauorent 94

N/A UK www.brocard.fr

The focus at this predominantly organic domaine is increasingly on older wood and larger foudres rather than new oak. This is subtle, juicy and aromatic with nectarine and grapefruit flavours and a leesy mid-palate.

Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13%



Domaine Louis Michel, Chablis Grand Cru Grenouilles 94

£55 (2015) Enotria&Coe, Great Western Wine

Domaine bottlings of this grand cru are comparatively rare, such is the dominance of the La Chablisienne cooperative. But this unoaked example is delicious, with real zip and zest and crunchy pear and citrus flavours.

Drink 2020-2026 Alc 13%



Domaine Louis Moreau, Chablis Grand Cru Valmur 94

POA Jeroboams

All of Louis Moreau's Valmur vines face south, so this wine can be quite rich. For the first time in 2017, it was unwooded, which has added more zip and life. It's waxy, fresh and leesy, with stone fruit sweetness and a tangy finish.

Drink 2019-2026 Alc 13%



Domaine Roy, Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses 94

£53 Montrachet Fine Wines

Highly rated as a grape grower, Domaine Roy sells to several of the top names, but also makes some excellent wines. This elegant, refined Preuses comes from the Fontenay side of the grand cru and has crystalline purity and focus. **Drink 2020-2029 Alc 13%**



La Chablisienne, Les Vénérables Vieilles Vignes Chablis 93

£30 Astrum Wine Cellars

Often one of my favourite wines in La Chablisienne's extensive range, this comes from old-vine parcels with an average age of 50 years. Lightly wooded, it has focused flavours of citrus, grapefruit and chalk.

Drink 2019-2024 Alc 12.5%



Domaine de la Motte, Vieilles Vignes Chablis 92

£17.99-£18.99 (2015) Blas Ar Fwyd, D Byrne & Co, Welch & Co Wine Merchants, WoodWinters

It's worth trading up from the regular Chablis to secure a bottle of this old-vine cuvée, which shows subtle oak and more zip and freshness to balance the pear and nectarine fruit.

Drink 2019-2023 Alc 12.5%



Domaine Oudin, Cuvée Les Serres Chablis 92

N/A UK +33 (0)3 86 42 44 29

Nathalie Oudin is a winemaker to watch. This tasty Chablis comes from two parcels on the plateau across the river from Chichée and is a fresh, zesty, lees-influenced delight, revealing pear and citrus fruit with a saline finish.

Drink 2019-2023 Alc 12.5%



Domaine Eleni et Edouard Vocoret, Les Pargues Chablis 91

£25 Roberson

Les Pargues is one of the best generic Chablis sites, with the same exposure as the premiers crus. This has quite a rich style, but also underlying notes of baking spice and white pepper, finishing with a zesty flourish.

Drink 2019-2023 Alc 12.5%



Domaine Vincent Dampt, Petit Chablis 90

N/A UK www.vincentdampt.com

Marrying fruit from Fyé and Troesmes, this is a Petit Chablis that combines fruit from the Left Bank and the Right. Lightly wooded, it's an ambitious wine at the price, exhibiting crunchy minerality and accompanying weight.

Drink 2018-2021 Alc 12%



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THE DECANTER TRAVEL GUIDE TO

Quebrada de Humahuaca

Home to the world's highest vineyard, this dramatic north Argentinian valley is a fascinating place for adventurous wine lovers to explore. Sorrel Moseley-Williams shares her tips

DRAMATIC MOUNTAIN RANGES, indigenous villages and Inca history await in Quebrada de Humahuaca, tucked away in Argentina's remote northwest province Jujuy. Since 9,000 BC, early hunter-gatherers, the Quechua people, conquistadors and European migrants have made this altitudinous valley their home, and a captivating indigenous identity still flourishes.

Granted UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 2003, the Quebrada comes especially alive during carnival, a high-spirited pagan festival celebrated in February and also in August. This is the time when jujeños give thanks to Pachamama (Mother Earth).

An array of picturesque villages dot the valley such as Purmamarca, nestled at the foot of the Cerro de los Siete Colores (Hill of Seven Colours), and Tilcara. Either would make a great base for a visit, with a choice of luxury and traditional lodgings as well as restaurants serving llama dishes and spicy empanadas.

Wine highs

While Uco Valley and Cafayate are Argentina's benchmark for making wine at altitude, the Quebrada is taking those extremes to new heights; it is home to the world's highest vineyard at 3,329m above sea level. Granted Geographical Indication (GI) in 2015, just 12 years after the first commercial plantings, what the tiny 22ha Quebrada lacks in size it makes up for with flamboyant character.

The Quebrada's winemaking story is both new and extreme, starting at 2,192m altitude in Chañarcito and ending 50km north and 1,137m higher near Uquía. When a law that permitted only tobacco and sugar cane plantations was relaxed in 2003, agricultural engineer Fernando Dupont saw opportunity. His pioneering **Bodega Fernando Dupont** (www.bodegafernandodupont.com) is >

FACT FILE

Planted area 22ha

Production 123hl (2016)

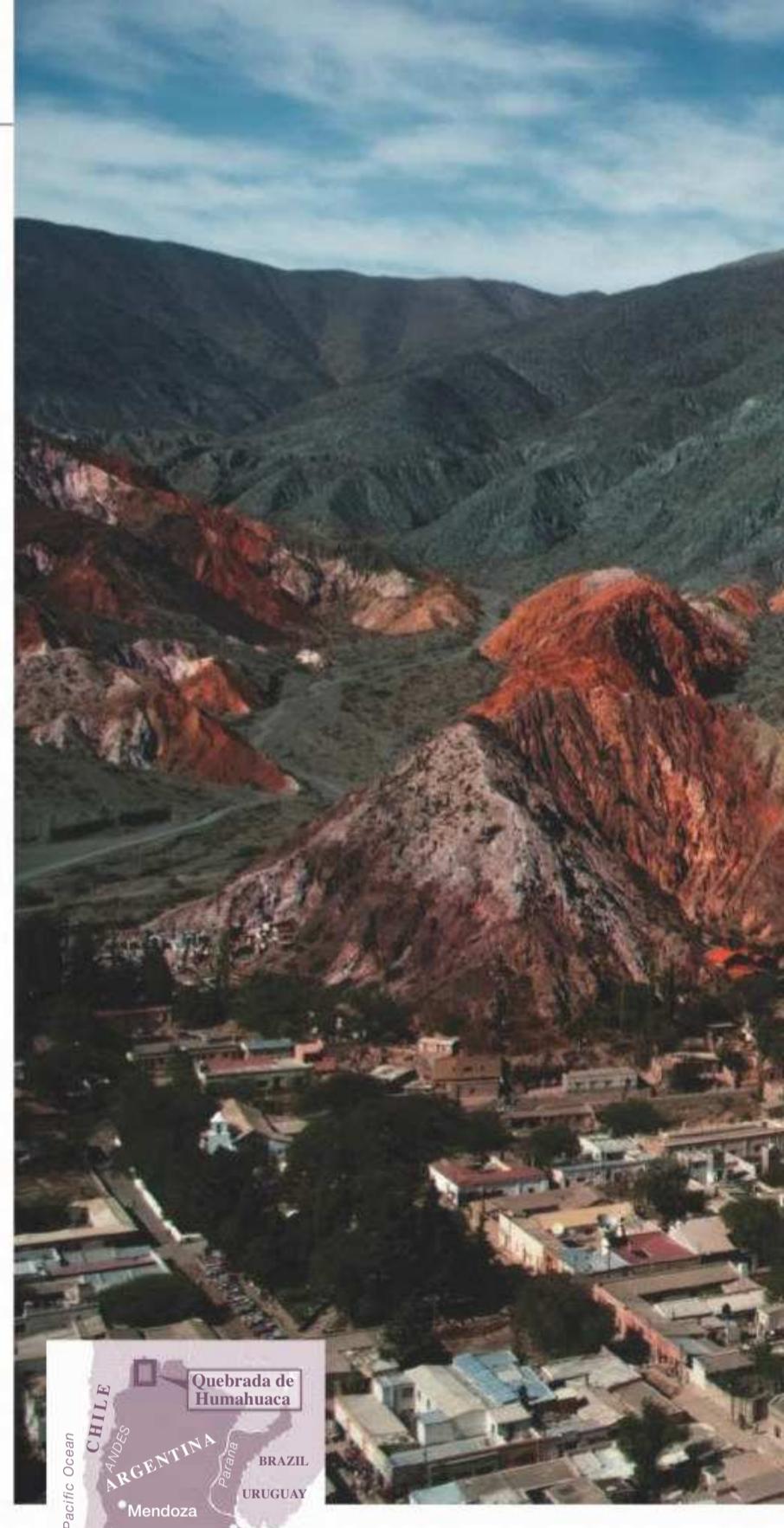
Main grape varieties

Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah

Main soil types

alluvium, sandy, gravel

Right: the village of Purmamarca at the foot of the dramatic Cerro de los Siete Colores (Hill of Seven Colours)



Quebrada de Humahuaca vineyards and wineries

- 1 Mina Moya
- 2 Fernando Dupont
- 3 Viñas del Perchel
- 4 Don Milagro
- 5 Claudio Zucchino
- 6 Molino de Chicapa
- 7 Amanecer Andino
- 8 Tukma
- 9 Yacoraite



Maps: Maggie Nelson. Photograph: Skoutatruillo/Getty Images



MY PERFECT DAY IN QUEBRADA DE HUMAHUACA

MORNING

After a light breakfast at **Villa del Cielo** in Tilcara (www.villadelcielotilcara.com) to help cope with the altitude, drive north for half an hour to meet winemaker Claudio Zucchino near Uquia (see p139). Visit his Finca Moya, the world's highest vineyard at 3,329m above sea level. The bumpy but exhilarating 90-minute vertical excursion is only possible in a 4x4 and is astounding. With your head in the clouds, sample his wines with local charcuterie (£61) and astounding views of the Quebrada at Mina Moya, a former mine turned wine cellar.

LUNCH

Head to Los Morteros* in Purmamarca, first stopping off at the **Museo en los Cerros** (www.museoenloscerros.com.ar), an adorable photography museum tucked



Museo en los Cerros

away in Huichaira and curated by Lucio Boschi. Try empanadas with spicy llajua chilli sauce, followed by grilled local trout paired with regional bottles. In the afternoon drive the winding RN52 up to the Salinas Grandes salt flats to take in Jujuy's highest point – Cuesta del Lipán, at 4,170m above sea level. Ideal photo opportunities abound at the Salinas and in Purmamarca, known for its vibrant Cerro

de los Siete Colores (Hill of Seven Colours). Here you can enjoy a short tasting with Gastón Cruz at his home-based bodega project Don Milagro (see p138). Or work off lunch wandering the Quebrada's largest winery, Bodega Fernando Dupont (see p138). A 40-minute site tour costs AR\$100 (£2), while a more detailed tasting teamed with charcuterie costs AR\$2,600 (£50).

EVENING

Return to Tilcara and take a 40-minute transfer up the mountain for dinner and overnight at Casa Colorada*, a charming hotel based 3,200m above sea level, managed by owner and top-notch guide Santiago Carrillo.

For details of entries marked with an asterisk () see p139*

Quebrada's largest producer, bottling 23,000 litres a year. Once his 5ha of Malbec, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon vines in Maimará were up and running, he enlisted winemaker Marcos Etchart of Bodega San Pedro de Yacochuya in Salta, who recalls: 'Fernando planted vines on the mountain and went up, rather than down, to ensure he'd get grapes.'

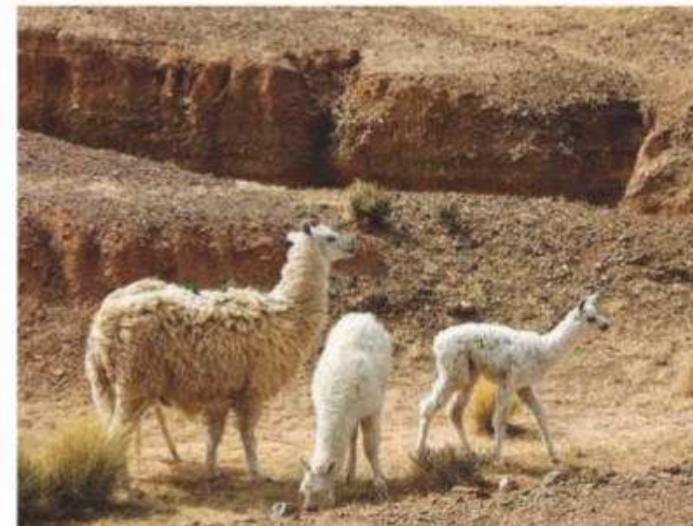
The lofty view from the tiny wooden tasting room located at 2,400m above sea level is one of countless unique vistas in the Quebrada: to the east, zigzag brush strokes stain Mt Paleta del Pintor, while 3m-tall cardon cacti tower above vines. Fernando's wife Amelia guides visitors around the vineyard and small winery, then through a tasting of wines such as the Pasacana blend, accompanied by local charcuterie and fresh goats' cheese, and the ever-present breeze that keeps vines healthy.

While Etchart was the first oenologist to embark on the Quebrada adventure – he also consults at Claudio Zucchino near Uquia and Maimará's **Molino de Chicapa** – he's since been joined by an all-star winemaking cast. This includes Lucás Niven at Amanecer Andino and Yacoraite; José Luis Mounier at **Tukma**; Gabriela Celeste at Viñas del Perchel; and Alejandro Sejanovich at Huichaira. And although the Quebrada's portfolio is slim at 20 wines, it's promising: 14 of the wines were rated in Tim Atkin's 2018 *Argentina Report* and every one scored over 90 points.

Tasting in the mountains

What started out as Alfredo González's hobby a decade ago has turned **Amanecer Andino** (see Facebook), located a few kilometres from Purmamarca, into a family-run winery business. Cross the Río Grande via footbridge

Photograph: AA World Travel Library/Alamy



Left: the Quebrada's llamas are reared for their wool and meat

Right: Sorrel Moseley-Williams enjoys a tasting with a view at Claudio Zucchino's **Mina Moya** winery

GETTING THERE

The Quebrada de Humahuaca is located a 90-minute drive north of Jujuy airport. Aerolíneas Argentinas flies here daily from Buenos Aires, as do budget airlines Andes and Fly Bondi.

– the only access during summer when the valley's main tributary floods with Andean snowmelt – to sample the winery's range at the stone-coloured bodega that blends seamlessly into the mountains. Alfredo and his son, Alfredo Junior, pair locally sourced charcuterie such as llama hams with their eponymous Bonarda-Cabernet Sauvignon blend at a tank-side tasting.

As well as working for Amanecer Andino, winemaker Niven joined forces with agricultural engineer Ezequiel Bellone Cecchin to assess **Yacoraite** (yacoraitevinos@gmail.com), located at an altitude of 2,777m and owned by US-based economist Alejandro Izquierdo. The vineyard's debut will be Mallku 2017, a 10% whole-cluster Malbec that will be available at Yacoraite's mountain wine bar, which is due to open in late 2019 and will stock bottles from the Quebrada and the northwest.

Old vines

Niven also lends a hand at Purmamarca's **Don Milagro** (purmamarca.wines@gmail.com). Here, winemaker Gastón Cruz tends 80-year-old Criolla vines – said to be the oldest in the Quebrada – as his grandfather Milagro did before him, to make wine for February's fiestas. From a tiny, humble winery in his back garden, in full view of the Siete Colores hill, he proudly shares Carnaval Torrontés 2017.

Heading north, **Viñas del Perchel** (www.vinosdelaquebrada.com.ar) is located at an altitude of 2,650m and is another family concern. Now led by Mabel Vargas, only Dupont had contemplated winemaking here when her brother Javier planted 12 years ago. There was plenty of trial and error, thanks to its remote location, but the pros outweigh the cons. 'The satisfaction is that we're from Jujuy and we're making wine here,' she says.

Try Runa, an intense Malbec-Syrah blend, and the newly released Cactus, a 100% Tannat, on a short tour of the winery, whose facade





sports a colourful, street art-style mural of a picker reaching to the stars. The winery is due to start construction of a larger bodega further up the mountain, to allow for more wine tourism in the future.

Hit the heights

Meanwhile, **Claudio Zucchini** (www.ayni.tv) captures Jujuy's vertiginous essence with an array of accolades. Not only is his Uraqui Minero Corte A 2016 sourced from Finca Moya, considered the world's highest vineyard, he also owns the highest winery and cellar, Mina Moya, housed within a disused mine where his father once worked, located at 2,750m and 3,700m altitude respectively.

The winding track up is breathtaking, but the view from the mine itself has to be seen to be believed: sipping his red blend with your head in the clouds, looking deep into the valley below, is an unforgettable experience.

The Quebrada's future is as dazzling as the sunlight, according to Sejanovich, who is excited about **Huichaira** (see Facebook), a 4ha vineyard at 2,710m above sea level. Its first vintages, including a co-fermented Malbec-Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah, were made at Amancer Andino in 2018, but there are plans to build a winery in 2019. 'Exceptional quality and styles are being made in the Quebrada. There's plenty to look forward to,' he says.

Looking ahead, other new projects are on the craggy horizon: Sofía Pescarmona of Bodega Lagarde is set to plant 1ha next to the Museo en los Cerros photography museum in Huichaira, while Casa Colorada at 3,200m is the site of Niven and Bellone Cecchin's next venture; some 20ha will be added next year. As long as these boutique projects can offer visitors a way of sampling their wines in this unique terroir, the future is bright indeed. □

Sorrel Moseley-Williams is a food, wine and travel journalist and sommelier based in Buenos Aires

YOUR QUEBRADA DE HUMAHUACA ADDRESS BOOK

ACCOMMODATION

Casa Colorada

A charming, 10-room mountain lodge built from local stone and nestled 3,200m above sea level near Tilcara. The remote location ensures a total disconnect. Trekking, birdwatching and horse riding are available; though kicking back with a glass of Quebrada Malbec is equally pleasurable.

www.casacolorada.com.ar



Casa Colorada

El Manantial del Silencio

A warm, colonial-style, 18-room lodge, located close to Purmamarca's authentic Plaza 9 de Julio. Enjoy stunning vistas of the Siete Colores from the indoor jacuzzi. Book into the restaurant to sample chef Sergio Latorre's detailed Andean cuisine.

www.hotelmanantialdelsilencio.com

Hotel Huacalera

This 1940s-built, state-run hotel close to the Tropic of Capricorn underwent a substantial facelift when it was reopened in 2009. Contemporary Andean design and comfortable king-size beds are the norm, as are llamas keeping the gardens spruce.

www.hotelhuacalera.com



Hotel Huacalera

Viñas de Uquía

Cross Río Grande's riverbed to pitch up at this four-room B&B set among the world's highest vineyards. Most breakfast supplies come from the organic garden. Ask about sleeping

on animal skins at the rustic three-walled lodge located en route to Mina Moya wine cellar. www.ayni.tv

RESTAURANTS

El Nuevo Progreso

An artsy ambience is combined with traditional northwestern dishes given a contemporary twist at this restaurant in Tilcara. The service is efficient. Try the llama fillet served with warmed quinoa and broad bean salad. See Facebook

La Picadita

Hearty dishes such as *humita a la olla* (mashed corn) served in generous portions and a strong wine list rule at this cool multi-room spot in Tilcara, which is led by a dynamic husband-and-wife team. See Facebook



El Nuevo Progreso

Los Morteros

This eatery in Purmamarca serves up hearty llama stew, lamb with lentils and quinoa, and goats' cheese empanadas. It also offers one of the Quebrada's more extensive wine lists. Book a cosy table around the vast salamander fireplace in winter.

+54 388 490 8063

Pachamanka

After spending a morning wandering Humahuaca, the Quebrada's largest town, refuel at this colourful café that serves tamales, empanadas and /ocro (pork and bean stew). See Facebook

SHOPS

Mercado municipal de Tilcara

For an engaging slice of daily life and an abundance of regional produce, visit Tilcara's indoor market and snap up delicious La Huerta goats' cheese.

Rivadavia 254, Tilcara



Ian Dai

My Shanghai

Explore the increasingly sophisticated food and drink scene in this vibrant and cosmopolitan city at the mouth of the Yangtze river. Ian Dai shares his tips on the best restaurants and bars to visit

WHENEVER I'VE VISITED Hong Kong in the last few years, I've been to a French bistro called La Cabane. It offers top-quality cider, as well as wines from the Jura, the Loire and even natural wines from all over the world. Such diverse choice was once the envy of wine lovers in Shanghai like me – we thought restaurants like La Cabane could never take root in Shanghai. But things have been changing fast during the last few years...

In 2018, a restaurant called Le Bec Boutique opened in Shanghai, offering a huge choice of intriguing wines from around France. RAC, an all-day venue with a wine bar specialising in natural wines, soon followed.

Today you can find the whole wine world in Shanghai: from classic Burgundy and grower Champagne to upcoming New World regions such as Tumbarumba in Australia. While the Hong Kong wine market is still dominated by Bordeaux and Burgundy, Shanghai is increasingly opening up to wines from Portugal, Georgia, Greece and elsewhere. It means that the diversity of the Shanghai wine market is closing in on – if not already surpassing – that of Hong Kong.

In addition to this, the BYO scene is thriving in Shanghai. Many Chinese restaurants are amenable to guests wishing to bring their own bottle, only charging a small corkage fee, if any. (However, do note that western-style restaurants and top hotels don't usually welcome BYO.) Even better, in order to offer more competitive dining prices, many restaurants – especially new-generation modern Chinese eateries – charge a reduced mark-up on their wines.

While Cantonese cuisine used to be the only Chinese player on the international fine-dining scene, the last three years have seen a variety of regional cuisines step into the limelight. Shanghai is now a showcase for these colourful expressions of Chinese food.

Inspired by Thomas Keller's The French Laundry in California, Yu Zhi Lan (*see right*)



Above: the distinctive Shanghai city skyline, with the Oriental Pearl TV Tower to the fore

Ian Dai is wine buyer at Amazon China and also works as a wine judge, writer, journalist and translator. He is a judge at the Decanter Asia Wine Awards

Translation by Sylvia Wu

has established a Michelin star-worthy reputation among connoisseurs with its boutique Sichuan cuisine. Meanwhile, the renowned Xin Rong Ji is widely praised for its Taizhou cuisine from Zhejiang province.

While the entire wine world is settling in Shanghai, the city has also quickly caught up with other international trends in fine dining, cocktails, craft beers and boutique cafés. Speak Low, now one of Asia's best cocktail bars, has pioneered premium cocktail culture in Shanghai. Its inventive and well-crafted offerings are given a local twist – you can even order a selection of specially matched tapas to complete your experience. After a drink in the lounge, guests can choose to drink and dine on either the second or third floor, each with unique decor and its own wine list.

Craft beer is also taking Shanghai by storm and you'll find a range of locally brewed products alongside imported offerings, while coffee lovers will be spoiled for choice by the range on offer in the city's increasingly popular boutique cafés. □

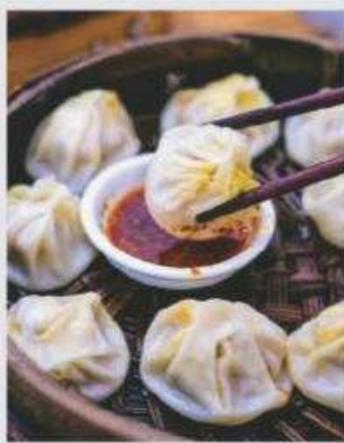


1 Le Verre à Vin

A favourite among sommeliers in Shanghai. The izakaya-style decor and Italian-Japan fusion menus show that owner Jeffery is passionate about Japanese culture. If you can read Chinese, take a look at the funny handwritten signs on the ceiling while waiting for food. **+8621 5403 4278**

5 Jia Jia Tang Bao

The locals flock here for steamed buns. The speciality is a bun stuffed with gelatine made from pork broth, then steamed. The gelatine dissolves into soup inside the bun – hence the name Tang Bao, literally ‘bag of soup’. **+8621 6327 6878**

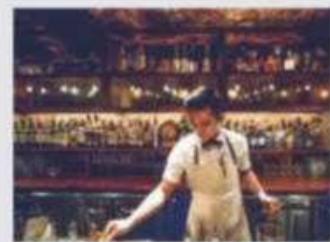


8 Xin Rong Ji

Authentic Taizhou cuisine in a restaurant that's also keen to showcase fine and rare ingredients – try the nine-year lily from Lanzhou in Gansu with honey, and enjoy the endless aftertaste. Also has a fine collection of grower Champagnes. **+8621 5386 5757**

2 Yu Zhi Lan

Chef Lan Guijun runs this fine-dining restaurant, with just four tables. High-end Sichuan cuisine; fascinating tasting menu; the signature ‘golden thread’ noodles are laboriously cut by hand. **+8621 5466 5107**



4 Speak Low

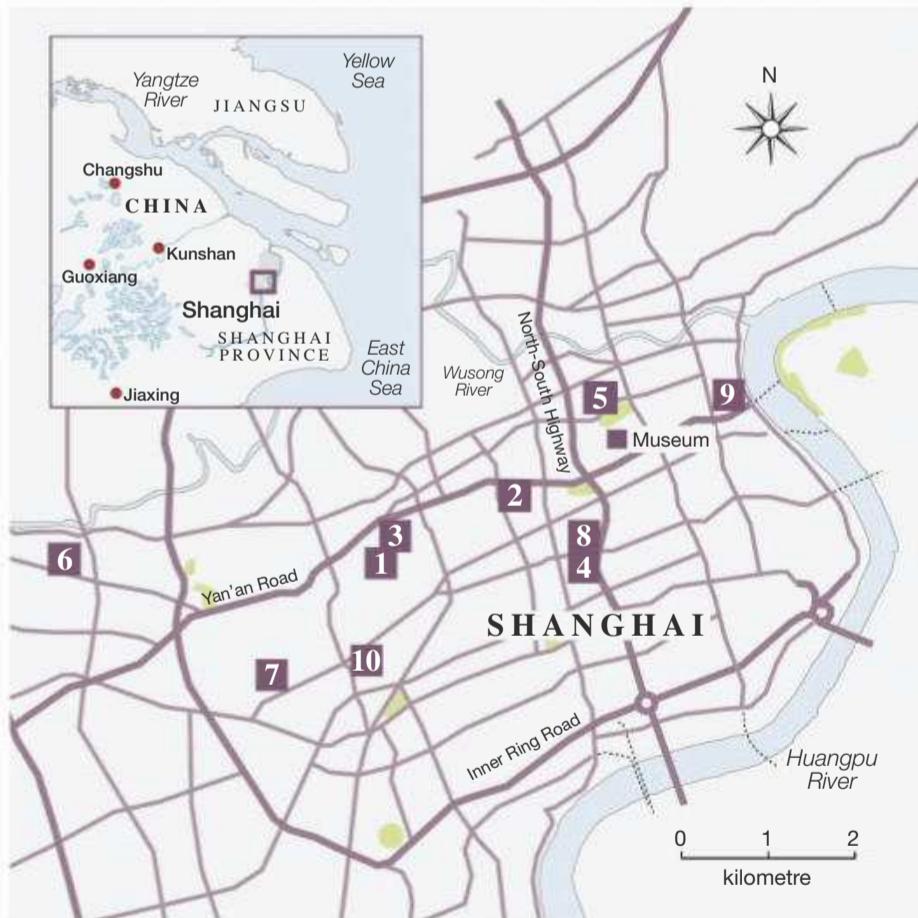
The same team runs this speakeasy cocktail bar and its sibling Sober Company on Yandang Lu. In its lounge and on the two floors above, Speak Low offers different deco themes and wine lists, aiming to provide a three-course connoisseur experience. The oolong tea-infused Negroni is a must-try. **+8621 6416 0133**

6 Ruby Red

Among the earliest boutique fine wine importer-retailers in Shanghai. A diverse portfolio includes Sherry and Madeira, plus a splendid selection of New Zealand wines. www.rubyred.com.cn

7 Le Bec Boutique

An extension of popular French eaterie Bistro 321, further along the same road, Nicolas Le Bec's new outlet sells delicious bread and nibbles in Epicerie 62, while the adjacent Caviste section includes a coffee shop area and 8vin, a wine bar offering value bottles from France's top regions. www.lebec.com.cn



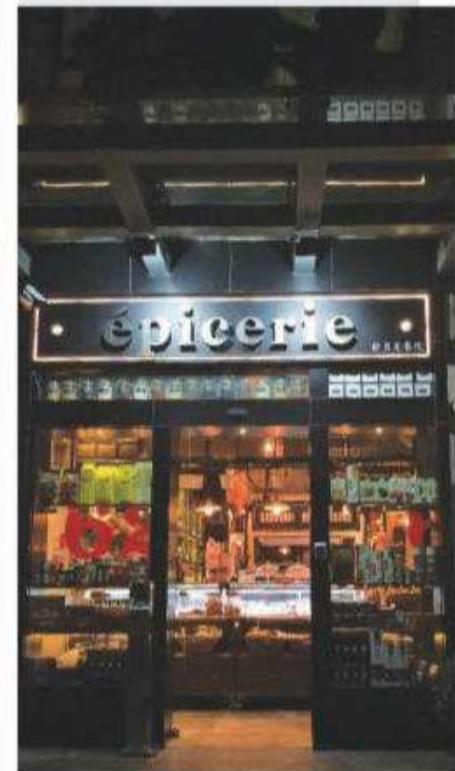
9 Yi Mian Chun Feng

Along with King Kong Dumpling & Noodles on Mengzi Rd, this is the best of the next-generation noodle restaurants in Shanghai. Quality ingredients and creative recipes. I recommend the spicy meat noodles. **+8621 6467 5517**

3 RAC

A popular café and crêperie by day, and a French bistro and bar in the evening. Offers an intriguing selection of French wines, including less conventional choices such as Jura by Bénédicte and Stéphane Tissot.

Building 14, 322 Anfu Lu



10 Old Jesse

The presentation may look simple, but this is authentic Shanghai cuisine – and it tastes gorgeous. Fried river shrimp and red braised pork belly with egg are worth trying. The restaurant allows BYO. **+8621 6282 9260**

Notes & Queries

Each month our experts answer readers' wine queries and share their knowledge

Email: editor@decanter.com. Post: The Editor, Decanter, 161 Marsh Wall, London, E14 9AP, UK

This month's experts



Anthony Rose
is DWWA Regional
co-Chair for Australia



Ben Gestetner
is head of
management at
Kedem Europe



Kevin Glastonbury
is senior red winemaker
at Yalumba in Australia



Mature Aussie fortified

I have this bottle, but can't see any bin details. Can you tell me more about it?

Mach Dinh-Vu, by email

Anthony Rose replies:

The label itself provides more useful information than you'll find on your average vintage Port

from the Douro. But then this is not from the Douro – rather from New South Wales in Australia, and made mainly from Shiraz.

Treasury Wine Estates' regional winemaker Wayne Falkenberg confirms that this wine was made by Ron Prince at the Lindemans Corowa Winery, which has since closed. It was made from a blend of Shiraz and Grand Noir fruit grown on Lindemans' Felton and Southern Cross vineyards, which are no longer owned or operated by Lindemans.

Originating in France, and known as Gran Negro in Spain (Valdeorras and Ribeira Sacra), Grand Noir is a red-fleshed Petit Bouschet and Aramon Noir cross used, as a teinturier, for colour (*Wine Grapes*). Made from the fruit of the 1978 vintage, the crushed grapes were fermented on skins with grape spirit added to arrest the fermentation; the wine was then pressed off, clarified and matured for a couple of years in barrel before bottling.

In the view of Mr Falkenberg, 1978 was a good year for fortified wines from Corowa and,

providing the bottle has been cellared correctly and kept in good condition, it should be a perfect drop to drink this Christmas.

Vegan and kosher?

I refer to Tina Gellie's choice, Recanati, Carignan-Petite Sirah, Judean Hills ('Weekday Wines', September 2018 issue). I am curious and have never seen reference to a wine being vegan and kosher. I appreciate it is from Israel, but what specifically ensures it's either. For reference, I'm neither.

Harry Rouse, by email

Ben Gestetner responds: There is no intrinsic link between a wine being kosher and being vegan, but it can be both. While kosher wine is made in the same way as any other, in order to be certified as kosher it must only have been handled by religiously observant Jewish people throughout its production. I find many consumers expect and perceive that kosher wine might be more likely to be vegan – indeed, most kosher wine is made without coming into contact with any animal-derived ingredients, although some do use egg white for fining. So if egg is not used, any kosher wine can in theory be suitable for vegans.

There is as yet no internationally accepted certification scheme for vegan wine, however, so a number of our suppliers have agreed to sign a letter to confirm all their wines are vegan-friendly. Thus far, from Israel, these include Castel, Covenant, Flam, Jezreel and Vitkin, along with Capçanes and Elvi in Spain, Koenig in Alsace and Hagafen in California.

Others such as Barkan, Or Haganuz and Tabor also have wines in their wider range that are suitable for vegans.

Toning down the tannins

I work in wine retail in Australia and am often asked about wines produced in an early-drinking style that are 'approachable while still young'. I assume my customers are talking about tannin management; a softer and more integrated, balanced mouthfeel. How does one achieve that in the winery? For example, a big Cabernet can have big tannins, which

Say what you see

The two-word answer is a Port producer (see p68 for a clue)

For the answer, see p144



Tasting notes decoded Oyster shell



Few of us will have taken a bite out of an oyster shell instead of its edible innards. But if you have ever shucked one of these premium shellfish you will likely have come into contact with the smell, taste and texture of its calcified casing.

Oyster shells are predominantly made of gritty or powdery calcium carbonate that was secreted by the oyster over time. In this sense, 'oyster shell' describes a mineral character, perhaps with some savoury qualities, salinity or a chalky mouthfeel and flavour.

The term is a source of some debate among wine critics, but it broadly applies to dry, less fruit-forward wines that hail from cooler climates and have high levels of acidity.

Cool-climate, unoaked Chardonnay styles commonly express mineral notes, along with firm acidity and citrus. These could include Chablis, Champagne or examples from New World appellations such as Sonoma Coast in California.

The Chenin Blanc grape can also produce wines with such mineral and acidic characters, notably those from South Africa's cooler regions made with little or no oak influence.

prolong its life and reward cellaring, but how do you tame down the tannins in the winery for an early-drinking style?

Toby Graham, by email

Kevin Glastonbury replies: There are several ways to achieve this. First is selecting the right vineyard that can/will produce less tannic grapes. Second is picking the grapes at the desired level of balanced ripeness. Third is ensuring the pH and acid levels are in balance (a slightly higher pH will give a rounder, softer mouthfeel). Lastly, when the grapes are in the winery, fermenting at a lower temperature (ie, 24°C) and less pumpover and wetting of the skins with the red juice will reduce the extraction of tannins.

This should give red wines that are rounder, softer and more approachable. □

Confused by a label? Unsure how to serve a wine? A burning bottle question on your mind? Ask Decanter...
Our expert contributors are here to advise on any aspect of wine. Each month we will print the most interesting queries with a personal reply from a relevant expert. Simply email editor@decanter.com with your question – the more specific, the better – in no more than a single paragraph, and you could see your query, and a reply, in print. Please note we can only respond to those queries selected for publication.

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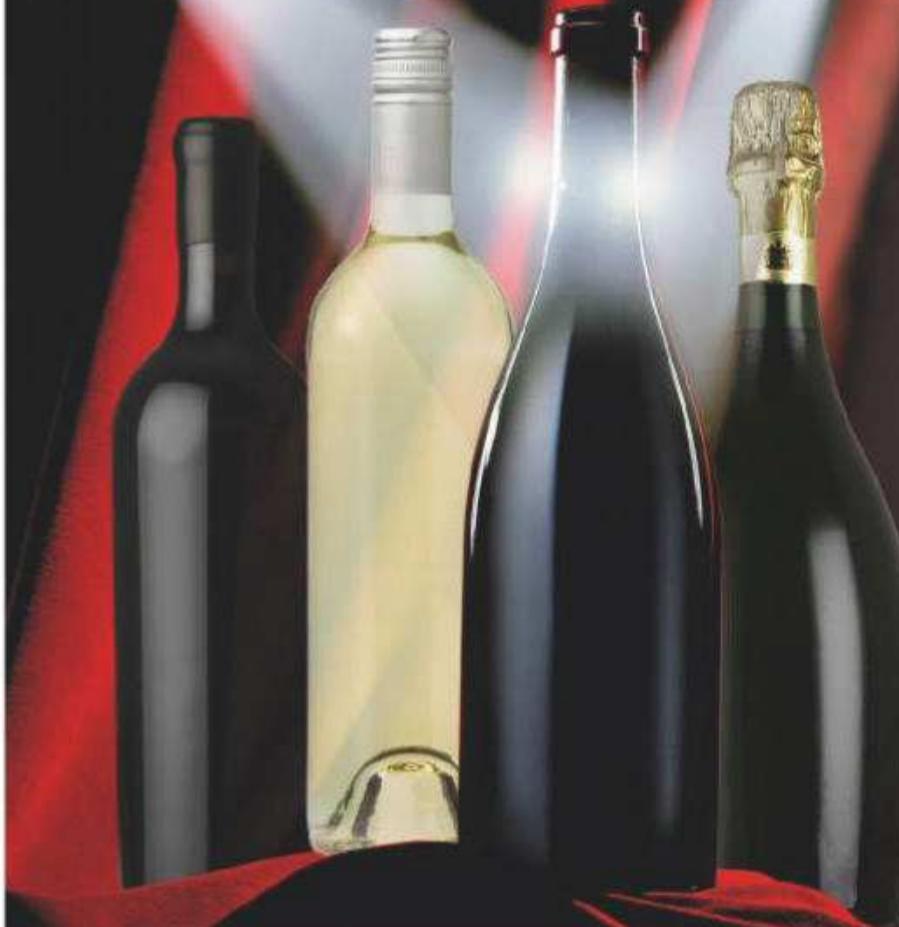
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Guess the producer (see p142) Smith Woodhouse [smith, wood+house]

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Marketwatch

Compiled by Chris Mercer

Champagne rewards patience

While returns on top-level Champagne cuvées have been strong in recent years, investors should still allow time for value to accrue

TOP VINTAGE CHAMPAGNE is not just for Christmas, according to new investment research highlighting consistent returns on top names.

Liv-ex said its Champagne 50 index has shown a compound annual growth of 9.5% since it was created in 2004.

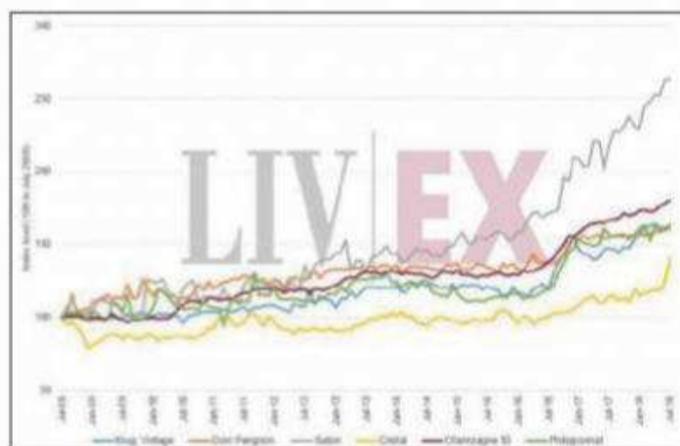
The index has risen in value by 35% since the beginning of June 2016, said Liv-ex in its October 2018 report, *Champagne: a market without bubbles*.

Champagne is a relative newcomer to the wine investment scene and there may be cause to question whether the success story would hold should the world find itself facing another financial crisis.

But several top houses have perennial appeal, according to about 50 merchants surveyed by wine ratings agency Wine Lister.

Salon, Krug and Dom Pérignon vintage brut, Roederer's Cristal and Jacques Selosse's Substance grand cru brut were all considered names that every collector would still want in their cellar in five years from now, Wine Lister said prior to its release of a full report on the Champagne market.

Champagne's appeal has also widened beyond traditional EU markets, with demand for top-end wines in the US and Australia driving global sales to a record €4.9bn in 2017, according to the Comité Champagne trade body.



Above: a Liv-ex chart shows improving growth in the top-name Champagne market since mid-2016

On the secondary market, 95% of trades are for vintage and prestige cuvée-level wines, confirmed Liv-ex.

Purchasers shouldn't necessarily expect a quick return if they're in the market for investment purposes, however.

'Age stands out as the most important price determinant when it comes to Champagne vintages,' said Liv-ex.

Some Champenois believe that wine lovers still underestimate Champagne's capacity to age. 'Most people don't have the chance to be exposed to very old Champagne, so it's more about a lack of understanding,' said Bruno Paillard, of the eponymous producer.

However, he would rather drink his personal cellar than sell it. 'I've never looked on Champagne as an investment,' he said.

Salon Champagne
Over the past decade, 'Salon has considerably outperformed the broader [Champagne 50] index, with a gain of 163%', Liv-ex says.

Margaux 1996
Mature Bordeaux has sold well in 2018, according to BI Wine & Spirits, and Liv-ex reports that this top wine from a strong Left Bank vintage has risen in price by 49% in five years.

Le Petit Mouton 2007
It doesn't have to be first wines, and it doesn't have to be a lauded vintage. This younger-vine second wine of Château Mouton Rothschild is up by 128% in five years.

Dom Ruinart 2004
Highlighting the point that vintage Champagne sometimes needs time to generate returns, Dom Ruinart was down by 7% in the 12 months to August 2018.

Latest Grange vintage offers early approachability

Penfolds has released its latest collection of top-end wines, including Grange 2014 – the 64th consecutive vintage of this flagship wine.

Wine writer Anthony Rose, who attended the launch and tasted the wines for *Decanter*, awarded 97 points to the Grange 2014.

'As the tannins appear to be



softer, juicier and more approachable than previous, more 'classic' Granges at this

stage, the voluptuousness presages well for excellent medium- to long-term drinking, starting in the next couple of years,' Rose said of the wine, a blend of 98% Shiraz and 2% Cabernet Sauvignon.

Reviews of all the latest release Penfolds Collection wines are available online at www.decanter.com/premium.

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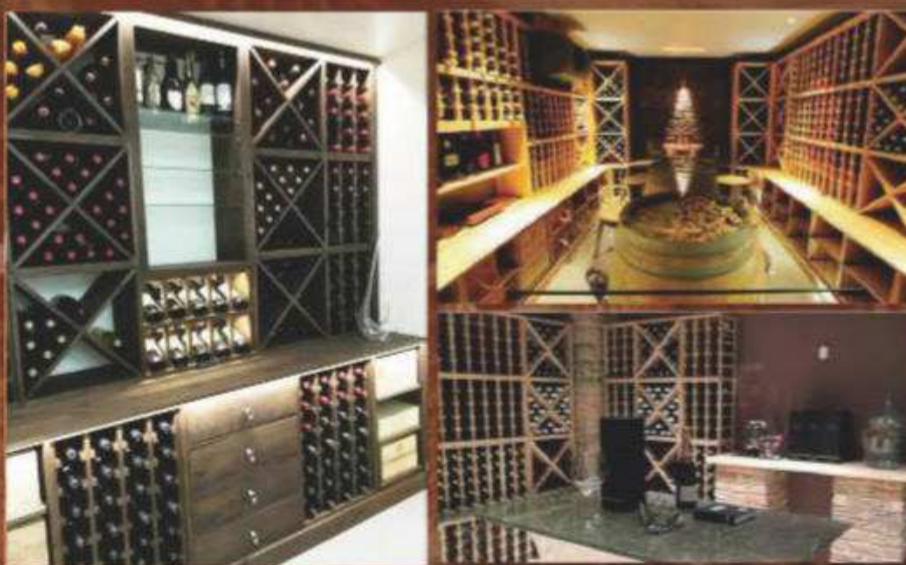
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Decanter Fine wine price watch

Below are the most recent merchant case prices (equivalent 12 x 750ml bottles) for wines that are actively traded among a global network of merchants on Liv-ex, the fine wine market.

Liv-ex records transactions between its merchant members in the UK, US, Asia and Europe. All prices are in GBP and exclude sales tax. The numbers in red indicate those prices which have changed since last month.

Bordeaux prices

Red Bordeaux	1982	1985	1986	1988	1989	1990	1995	1996	1998	2000	2001
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
First Growths											
Haut-Brion	9598	4500	4404	4500	23438	8500	4100	4150	4276	6750	3750
Lafite	37500	7500	12200	7500	8000	7795	7350	9450	7510	13800	6700
Latour	11760	4731	4850	5298	4790	8250	5213	6240	5300	8500	4400
Margaux	10121	5268	5200	4200	4435	13349	4700	7200	4100	8150	4180
Mouton Rothschild	14800	4600	9400	3864	4408	4685	5100	5088	4931	19538	4650
Second Growths											
Cos d'Estournel	3500	1800	1600	1347	2013	2296	1672	1596	1240	1597	1210
Ducru-Beaucaillou	3460	1520	1550	1213	1299	1020	1578	1900	1300	1900	1168
Gruaud-Larose	3995	1042	1750	1160	914	1750	800	850	743	1000	670
Léoville Barton	2475	1250	1080	1287	1175	1467	892	990	750	1176	701
Léoville-Poyferré	2848	1225	840	897	1095	2940	950	1046	717	1440	710
Léoville-Las-Cases	3950	2402	3650	2182	1800	2950	1860	2250	1650	2500	1526
Montrose	2400	1200	1068	1153	3934	6000	1268	1455	960	1480	914
Pichon Baron	2350	1380	1950	1200	1920	2700	1274	1390	1168	2050	1347
Pichon Comtesse	4944	1917	1905	1500	2200	1395	1847	2400	1146	2160	1192
Third Growths											
Calon-Ségur	1600	1078	1047	1032	1703	1500	1014	958	850	950	800
Lagrange	960	576	816	894	732	1280	564	695	720	740	520
Palmer	2400	2600	1980	2000	3896	2950	2400	2000	1976	2800	2076
Fourth Growths											
Beychevelle	2196	1068	1200	900	920	924	950	1050	986	1369	914
Duhart-Milon	1200	990	780	744	1260	1033	720	880	716	879	642
Talbot	1650	900	1152	840	840	1050	795	700	721	840	750
Fifth Growths											
Grand-Puy-Lacoste	3560	1067	1050	648	1280	2915	1075	1030	660	1100	576
Haut-Batailley	840	552	888	552	535	600	431	600	456	620	375
Lynch-Bages	2650	1950	2048	1580	3989	3288	1336	1680	1146	2161	1250
Pontet-Canet	1598	864	840	732	850	888	826	810	720	969	780
Second wines											
Carruades de Lafite	3312	3150	2652	3240	3500	2830	3000	2833	2900	2995	2990
Le Clarence de Haut-Brion*	936	708	1008	1068	5450	1140	1059	1020	1074	1100	926
Le Petit Mouton de Mouton Rothschild	10836	-	-	-	-	-	-	2261	2222	2688	2512
Les Forts de Latour	2628	1764	1548	1824	1886	2500	1972	1980	1940	2175	2100
Pavillon Rouge	3460	1068	1994	1994	1620	1764	1346	1880	1780	1974	1750
Médoc Crus Bourgeois											
Chasse-Spleen	1292	638	580	661	535	600	300	420	272	450	287
Sociando-Mallet	984	1033	650	495	787	995	450	560	480	510	540
Pessac-Léognan											
Domaine de Chevalier	1500	750	760	638	876	1250	763	676	580	770	510
Haut-Bailly	1643	900	720	800	1048	1437	910	740	778	1185	750
La Mission Haut-Brion	13500	3226	3126	2750	15000	5750	2097	1980	3200	5800	1980
Pape Clément	1285	1066	1598	972	1280	1778	920	1100	1190	1550	1185
Smith Haut Lafitte	1157	1080	905	528	1011	1076	820	817	940	1350	893
St-Emilion											
Angélus	3026	4500	2292	3557	4800	5500	3267	3428	3460	4840	3400
Ausone	5040	3998	3204	4320	2160	4728	4800	5174	5250	11000	5500
Cheval Blanc	10252	4790	4248	4226	4400	11380	4450	3900	6000	7200	4100
Clos Fourtet	1943	1064	1404	696	1080	1014	700	740	1126	1157	1078
Figeac	3600	1350	1936	1495	1750	2700	1876	912	1960	1719	1850
Pavie	2712	2156	2424	2236	2145	1920	1980	1764	2750	5400	2900
Troplong-Mondot	744	970	780	1032	1392	2672	850	656	820	1185	700
Pomerol											
La Conseillante	4250	2400	2119	1750	3665	3336	1274	1642	1550	2000	1500
L'Eglise-Clinet	2278	2940	1475	1131	2024	2450	1650	1200	2700	2700	1750
L'Evangile	7213	1960	1904	1368	2663	2628	1368	1104	1950	2929	1350
Lafleur	39144	11686	6240	5000	9528	14496	2660	3000	5100	14000	4800
La Fleur-Pétrus	4404	1830	1800	1900	2934	2364	2100	2000	2350	2800	1900
Le Pin	155952	24504	17556	17760	25800	44304	27648	18600	33000	42000	38400
Petrus	49950	20472	21021	20748	43680	42852	26000	22960	32000	45000	24600
Trotanoy	3960	1831	1290	1560	1900	2713	217	1512	2900	2700	1764
Vieux Château Certan	3902	1392	1416	1980	1980	3007	1285	1330	2246	2200	1703
Sauternes											
	1982	1985	1986	1988	1989	1990	1995	1996	1998	2000	2001
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Climens	2724	1008	1020	968	669	1080	580	575	396	525	1700
Coutet (Barsac)	192	480	480	400	360	450	600	300	330	220	340
Rieussec	814	564	864	812	500	528	360	365	340	360	840
Suduiraut	672	399	576	468	480	450					

The Liv-ex 100 Index

Index level at end of September 2018

316.25 +0.08%

PRICES FROM
LIV|EX
THE FINE WINE MARKET

The Liv-ex Fine Wine 100 Index represents the price movement of 100 of the most sought-after fine wines for which there is a strong secondary market and is calculated monthly. The majority of the index consists of Bordeaux wines – a reflection of the overall market – although wines from Burgundy, the Rhône, Champagne and Italy are also included. The index is calculated using Liv-ex Mid Prices and is then weighted to account for original production levels and increasing scarcity as the wine ages. As such, the index is designed to give each wine a weighting that corresponds with its impact on the overall market.

The Liv-ex 100 Index was rebased at 100 in January 2004.

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Red Bordeaux
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	First Growths
3550	3900	3600	6760	3660	3400	3700	6478	6750	3390	3500	Haut-Brion
6552	9134	6550	7700	6400	6580	7400	7300	7150	5000	4920	Lafite
4837	7100	4500	6850	4640	4200	4750	9778	11400	4546	1895	Latour
3900	4800	3800	6200	3800	3900	3800	6600	6500	3600	3650	Margaux
4197	5100	4368	5400	4400	4200	4400	5600	5800	3940	3900	Mouton Rothschild
1150	1590	1030	1620	1039	1030	975	2400	1690	960	990	Second Growths
1224	1400	1211	1800	1190	1150	1200	2200	1750	976	980	Cos d'Estournel
563	580	580	664	570	520	600	770	696	575	500	Ducru-Beaucaillou
674	1025	650	950	659	598	624	840	1020	545	525	Gruaud-Larose
638	1090	690	895	628	525	700	1652	1050	500	540	Léoville Barton
1450	1600	1340	2100	1400	1300	1300	2100	1880	1194	1195	Léoville-Poyferré
766	1700	780	1200	793	780	800	2200	1895	670	695	Léoville-Las-Cases
995	1240	1100	1261	1040	1035	1052	1340	1340	850	800	Montrose
968	1320	980	1200	1080	980	980	1300	1295	920	925	Pichon Baron
											Pichon Comtesse
880	860	745	860	835	857	850	875	970	710	780	Third Growths
540	480	400	539	400	420	420	450	457	314	300	Calon-Ségur
1859	1859	1789	2520	1850	1944	1850	2400	2700	1980	1961	Lagrange
											Palmer
878	929	950	959	940	850	860	920	950	860	825	Fourth Growths
774	755	692	783	649	660	650	770	714	570	540	Beychevelle
650	616	646	617	590	625	570	590	640	440	440	Duhart-Milon
											Talbot
557	490	455	822	500	440	445	620	680	388	383	Fifth Growths
423	398	414	450	389	372	360	390	398	300	291	Grand-Puy-Lacoste
1040	1299	1075	1300	964	997	1025	1300	1200	846	850	Haut-Batailley
635	815	638	1045	690	616	720	1546	1530	560	620	Lynch-Bages
											Pontet-Canet
2990	3094	2950	3050	2961	2940	2850	2750	2700	2834	2776	Second wines
3384	852	895	1050	960	1089	1050	1185	1098	1074	1200	Carruades de Lafite
2364	2244	1932	2900	2200	2714	2420	2380	2450	2356	2375	Le Clarence de Haut-Brion*
1950	2050	1900	2020	1752	1975	1900	2036	2000	1750	1766	Le Petit Mouton de Mouton Rothschild
2136	1620	1550	1821	1720	1928	1750	1850	1800	1768	1720	Les Forts de Latour
											Pavillon Rouge
260	372	272	350	360	339	348	295	306	244	237	Médoc Crus Bourgeois
300	420	309	450	300	245	301	331	304	215	224	Chasse-Spleen
											Sociando-Mallet
500	600	520	744	500	372	476	617	636	420	395	Pessac-Léognan
523	664	620	1014	640	500	680	1800	1144	578	620	Domaine de Chevalier
1476	1720	1600	4625	1840	1700	1825	4790	4600	1700	1811	Haut-Bailly
840	1054	852	1650	950	824	710	1360	1730	745	766	La Mission Haut-Brion
804	680	740	1110	747	700	745	2100	1171	612	628	Pape Clément
											Smith Haut Lafitte
2996	3420	2800	4600	3000	2849	3000	3400	3370	2600	3450	St-Emilion
3956	8900	3900	12400	5580	3580	5000	9776	10500	4500	4200	Angélus
3850	4100	3600	6750	4150	3800	3800	6800	8400	4020	3650	Ausone
795	1049	916	1420	780	704	800	2000	1170	841	854	Cheval Blanc
920	1050	926	1580	1078	964	1146	1764	1810	851	856	Clos Fourtet
2608	2750	2260	3650	2530	2296	2360	3100	3240	2100	2757	Figeac
732	840	557	1900	800	540	650	1220	1220	628	660	Pavie
											Troplong-Mondot
916	900	900	1950	940	750	960	1384	1580	790	950	Pomerol
880	1258	920	4000	1250	890	1280	2800	2600	950	1680	La Conseillante
900	918	990	1990	990	900	1000	2900	1980	970	940	L'Eglise-Clinet
4430	4840	3260	13788	3800	3350	4800	12200	12000	3100	3800	L'Evangile
1800	1700	1750	1900	1600	1790	1650	2000	2100	1500	1480	Lafleur
19900	-	19800	29000	23000	20000	21500	44500	36000	18400	20000	La Fleur-Pétrus
23000	23000	21426	33000	22638	21000	23568	34000	36000	22000	22000	Le Pin
1283	1324	1074	2446	1164	1057	1700	2651	2226	1200	1650	Petrus
1080	1222	1200	1850	1440	950	1200	2450	2674	1200	1185	Trotanoy
											Vieux Château Certan
2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Sauternes
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	Climens
597	420	400	600	480	616	480	500	495	550	438	Coutet (Barsac)
220	220	214	240	240	280	246	340	340	395	280	Rieussec
285	319	280	300	324	266	300	310	300	288	299	Suduiraut
258	320	420	385	308	315	367	350	380	372	-	Yquem
2300	1920	1900	1950	2000	2100	1950	3593	2900	2200	1594	

Port & Champagne

Port	1977	1983	1985	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003	2007	2009	2011
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Cockburn's	824	615	430	360	326	444	350	340	400	-	460
Croft	800	240	475	420	450	420	320	320	360	360	444
Dow's	900	580	550	480	520	350	420	432	770	-	1450
Fonseca	1950	700	600	528	1140	400	425	380	440	360	750
Graham's	950	550	660	475	500	360	420	450	415	-	650
Quinta do Noval	-	-	960	550	1200	1300	600	660	550	232	850
Sandeman	840	360	500	-	500	289	310	444	480	-	480
Taylor's	1450	640	600	744	1150	516	575	492	460	420	580
Warre's	750	450	600	470	420	350	365	395	340	390	704
Champagne	1989	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Bollinger, RD	-	3600	3600	2400	1700	-	1000	1300	1250	936	-
Jacques Selosse, Blanc de Blancs Brut	-	24300	-	21420	-	6900	1000	6900	-	4200	-
Krug, Vintage Brut	4986	5950	2950	3500	-	2450	1920	2800	2060	-	-
Louis Roederer, Cristal	3096	3600	2796	4020	2605	-	1700	2550	1800	1578	1460
Moët & Chandon, Dom Perignon	-	3000	1800	2350	-	1650	1450	1475	1080	1100	1150
Perrier Jouêt, Belle Epoque	2290	3090	1236	1956	-	1560	1038	1752	1728	-	1735
Pol Roger, Sir Winston Churchill	-	3660	2292	2990	-	2400	1400	1735	1200	-	1170
Pommery, Louise	1344	5100	1224	1620	-	804	1354	680	1100	446	400
Salon, Mesnil	-	12000	6000	6200	4300	-	-	4600	4300	-	3980
Taittinger, Comtes de Champagne	3000	4800	2332	3400	1704	2100	1560	1780	900	740	810

PLEASE NOTE: The Fine Wine Price Watch features monthly prices for the most traded Bordeaux wines and rotates coverage of Port & Champagne, Burgundy, Italy and a Rest of the World basket of fine wines from the Rhone, Spain, Australia, Chile and California.

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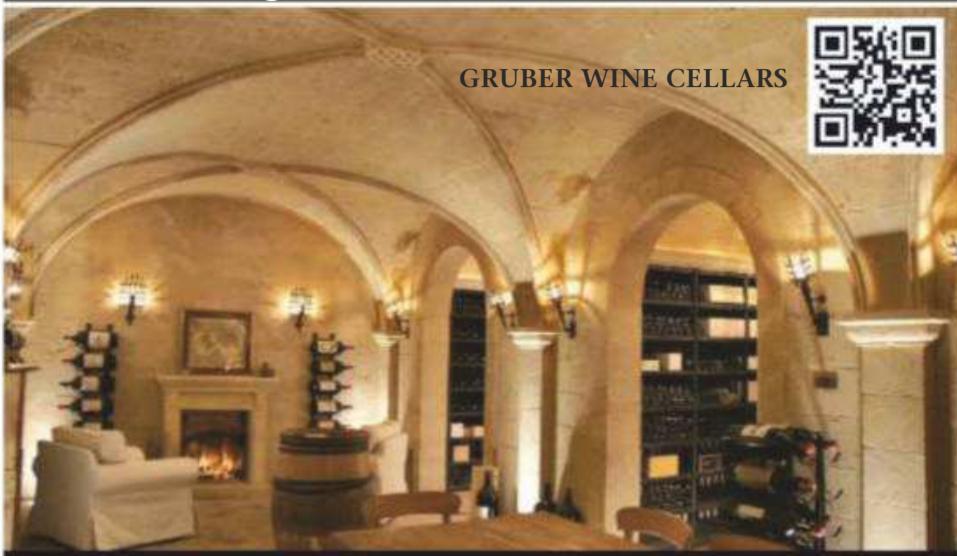
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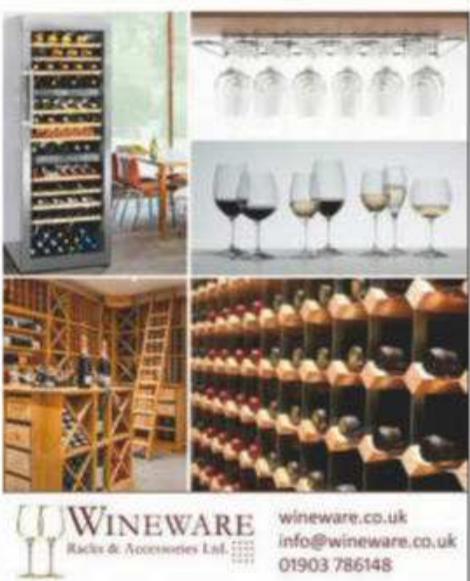
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A photograph of a modern wine cellar. In the background, there's a bar area with dark cabinets and stools. To the right, a spiral cellar room is visible, with its spiral structure and wine bottles stored on shelves. In the foreground, a large circular inset shows a built-in wine rack embedded in a light-colored wall, filled with many wine bottles.

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A photograph of a traditional wine cellar. On the left, a curved metal wine rack stands next to a staircase. In the center, a large, built-in wooden wine rack unit with glass doors is filled with many wine bottles. The ceiling has a decorative chandelier.

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Louis Roederer, Cristal 1959

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Created in 1876 for Tsar Alexander II, a great admirer of and customer for Roederer wines, this Champagne remains universally recognised due to its presentation in a clear bottle, cellophane-wrapped to protect it further. The wine created for the tsar is remote from the modern incarnation, as it was extremely sweet. The unique packaging was patented in 1928, when the brand, which ceased production after the Russian Revolution, was revived as a prestige cuvée. It is rare for any vintage of Cristal to disappoint, given the scrupulous attention paid to quality and balance before the Champagne is declared and released. The 1959 is clearly exceptional, and so too were past vintages such as 1949, 1955, 1962 and 1964.

Looking back

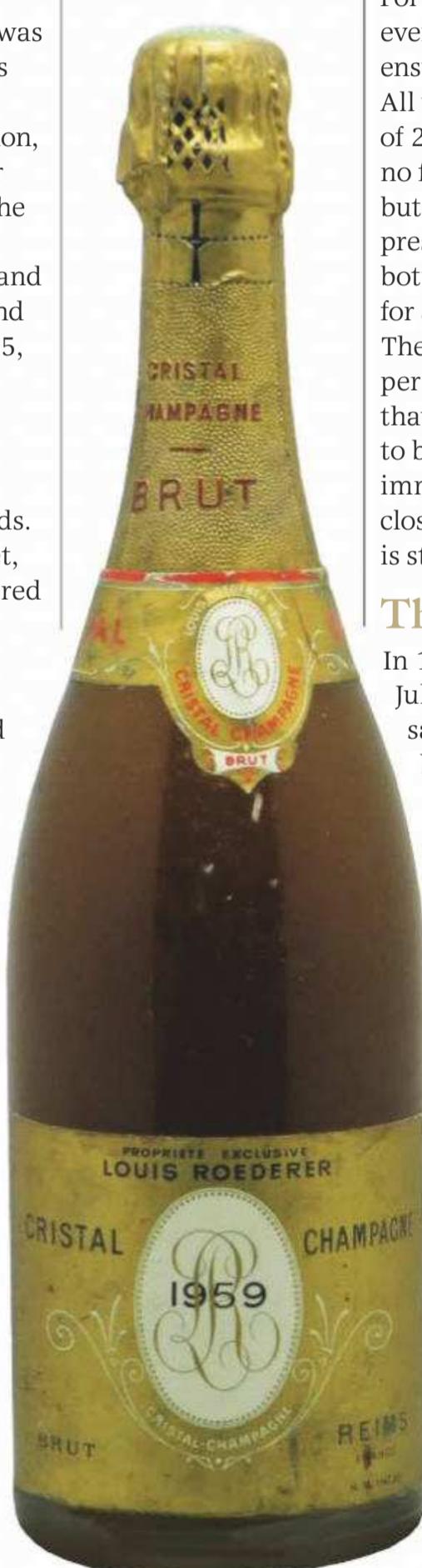
Then as now, the wine was produced solely from grapes grown in the Roederer vineyards. Although the original Cristal was very sweet, once the Russian connection had been severed due to the Revolution, the blend gradually evolved to its present dry style. Its iconic character – above all its packaging, which established its status as a brand – remained unchanged. The wine was made to the most exacting standards, as is still the case today. The even more revered Cristal Rosé did not exist at this time, and was first produced in 1974.

The vintage

As in other parts of France, the summer in the Champagne region was hot and dry, generating a large crop of very ripe grapes. The grapes were picked between 12-25 September. Pinot Noir attained natural alcoholic ripeness – that is, without chaptalisation – of 12°-12.5°, and Chardonnay was even riper at 13°. Acidity was low, but as with the top wines of Bordeaux, the best 1959 Champagnes have stood the test of time.

The terroir

The vines were given a severe pruning and the bunches thinned during the growing season to give optimal ripeness and concentration. In this vintage the



Pinot Noir was sourced from top vineyards in Verzenay, Verzy, Beaumont-sur-Vesle and Aÿ; the Chardonnay came from Avize, Mesnil, Cramant and Chouilly.

The wine

For Cristal, only the first pressing is used, and even those pressings are tasted and graded to ensure the base wines are of the highest quality. All the wine is fermented in oak, using barrels of 205 litres and casks of 6,000 litres. There is no fixed rule about malolactic fermentation, but in this vintage there was no malolactic, presumably because the acidity was low. After bottling, it is aged six years on lees, and then for a further eight months after disgorgement. The dosage is relatively high, at up to 11 grams per litre, but this is required to balance a wine that typically has high acidity and is intended to be capable of prolonged cellaring. Indeed, immediately after release Cristal can seem closed and inexpressive, but that is because it is styled as a Champagne for the long haul.

The reaction

In 1996, Swedish Champagne expert Richard Juhlin found it ‘majestic and irresistible’, saying: ‘As usual Cristal manages to charm both the expert and the novice with its beautiful, exotic sweetness and creamy toffee flavour. This wine doesn’t show us anything new or unexpected, but quite simply offers more of all the good things one finds in these wines.’

In 2013 the current cellarmaster at Roederer, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, who has been responsible for recent vintages of Cristal since 1999, tasted the wine and noted: ‘Delicious sweetness, charming and irresistible. Almost exotic in character with caramelly creaminess but also rich in extract. Yet there is a strong acidity, giving a powerful, concentrated wine.’ □

THE FACTS

Bottles produced N/A

Composition 60% Pinot Noir,
40% Chardonnay

Alcohol 12%

Release price N/A

Price today £2,400

by Stephen Brook

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