



WineWise

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CHAMPAGNE

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

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

DIEBOLT-VALLOIS (Cramant)

We are inordinately proud to have been appointed the California importers for this celebrated Côte des Blancs producer. Because she is married to Jean-Paul Hébrart, we have known and liked Isabelle Diebolt for many years. Presiding over an 11 hectare estate raised to prominence by her father Jean since the 1970's (though they trace their roots to Cuis in the 1500's), she is an indefatigable perfectionist whose vivid wines have won acclaim in all quarters. The majority of their chardonnay vines lie in Cramant (Grand Cru) and Cuis (1er Cru), with additional holdings in Chouilly and Le Mesnil (Grands Crus) and the Côtes d'Épernay. Their small plantings of black grapes (which are not currently included in any of our selections) are from the Montagne de Reims and the Côte de Bar.

The juice for all their Blanc de Blancs wines is exclusively cuvée. With the exception of the Fleur de Passion, their tête de cuvée (soon to be added to our assortment), the wines systematically go through malolactic fermentation. The result is a range that stylishly limns the capacity of chardonnay to offer tautness, fruit and minerality. Drawn from a relatively small geographical expanse, the wines expertly reflect both the bracing particularity of their origin in the north of the Côte des Blancs and the rounder qualities derived from the vineyards towards Épernay – the best of both worlds!

N.V.	Blanc de Blancs Brut		SOON
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N.V.	Blanc de Blancs Brut	12/375	\$240
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Based on the exuberant 2015 vintage, with reserve wine from 2014 and 2013, this is a forthright champagne that shows Blanc de Blancs at its most charming and generous. The grapes come from Cuis, Chouilly and an excellent cru in Épernay called Justice. The dosage is 5.5 gm.

N.V.	Blanc de Blancs "Prestige" Grand Cru Brut	6/750	\$240
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This is a fascinatingly composed wine. 85% is a stainless-steel fermented blend hailing from Cramant, Chouilly and Le Mesnil from the years 2014 and 2013. The balance is a "solera" of reserve wines from the same villages, aged in 40 hl. casks, composed of all the years between 2009 and 2014. With dosage at 4 gm., the effect is dry but not austere, with the oak-aged component adding subtle roundness and depth to the plangent harmonies of the base. A palpably big-time champagne for a modest premium.

2010	Blanc de Blancs Brut		\$480
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From a silvery year of infinite nuance comes this simply beautiful example of nicely-aged Blanc de Blancs. It is exemplary of a biscuity style that aficionados consider to be the finest expression of champagne. On a basis of Cuis (60%), the balance of the grapes come from Chouilly, Épernay and young Cramant vines. It is hard to exaggerate the finesse and appeal of this beautiful wine.

N.V.	Rosé Brut (40% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir, 10% Meunier)		\$408
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Isabelle makes 8,000 bottles of this wine every 2 years, and sells it mostly to clients in Asia, but we were able to persuade her to part with some for CA. The colour is imparted by a 10% component of Pinot Noir from a grower friend in Bouzy, added to a base of 2015 and 2014. The style is oriented to fruit and freshness, and sheer deliciousness compared to the more complex efforts of Coessens and Labruyere. At 3 gm. of dosage it takes advantage of today's propensities.

LAURENT LEQUART (Passy-Grigny)

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

N.V.	"L'Héritière" Extra-Brut (40% Pinot Noir, 40% Meunier, 20% Chardonnay)		\$328
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This house has a philosophy of leaving the wines "en tirage" for an extended period and using a serious proportion of reserve wines. In this case, we are looking at a base of 60% 2012, with the balance coming from the two previous years. "L'Héritière" is Lequart's ambassadorial wine, designed to show what the assemblage of Champagne's three main grapes can achieve in Passy-Grigny (they make an entry-level Meunier that is excellent but less compelling). Fine mousse, toasty nose, perfectly judged dosage (6 gm.) and delicious flavor.

N.V.	Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (100% Pinot Noir)		\$360
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Our reservations about the growing trend towards undosed wines were entirely banished by the swaggering authority of this wine, the only pure Pinot Noir made in Passy-Grigny. Based on 70% 2013, the balance again coming from the previous two years, it is a suave, vinous yet chiseled champagne of very high class.

N.V.	"Blanche d'Andésyne" Rosé Extra Brut (60% Meunier, 15% Chardonnay, 15% red wine)		\$372
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A stunningly mineral and chiseled rosé that punches way above its weight. Believe in Meunier!

2008 Brut (50% Chardonnay, 50% Meunier) 6/750 \$280
We snapped up everything we could of this imposing vintage wine with its unusual composition. Great years like 2008 benefit immeasurably from extended aging on the lees, such as this one received before its disgorgement in January 2016.

JÉRÔME COESSENS (Ville sur Arce)

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

(2013) “Largillier” Brut 6/750 \$300
This flagship wine constitutes half of the estate’s production – all of 800 cases in 2013. Forthright and generous, and judiciously dosed at 8 grammes, the forceful flavor of yellow fruits topped with caramel gives way to a surprising trail of salt in the finish. A fine ambassador for Pinot Noir from the Côte des Bars.

(2013) “Largillier” Brut Nature 6/750 \$352
Jérôme only makes this undosed wine in what he terms “rich” years, which 2013 was in these parts (as opposed to the rest of Champagne). From a parcel that he names the “minéral”, it was left en tirage until the end of 2016, the better to allow a graceful evolution. A lovely, scented wine that shows the way for the “Nature” style.

(2014) “Largillier” Rosé Brut 6/750 \$352
Jérôme coaxed 3000 bottles from a parcel he nicknames “Matière” in 2014 and the results are simply and singularly stunning. A saignée of delicate hue drawn from the grapes destined for his excellent Coteaux Champenois, the floral extravagance of the nose would not disgrace a Lacrymae di Morro d’Alba. While this perfumed quality also infuses the palate, what impresses overall is the contained exotic richness of the Pinot Noir fruit, braced by perhaps the most overt minerality of the entire range. This really is a rosé champagne that resembles no other we know.

(2009) “Les Sens Boisés Brut 6/750 \$360
It takes a special hand to craft a wine of this slender and nervous quality from a ripe vintage like 2009 and an élevage in old Chablis Grand Cru barrels. It is not hyperbole to say that followers of Vilmar will find a satisfying echo of that iconic house in this wine. We were honestly surprised and exhilarated by it. Disgorged at the end of 2015.

DEHOURS ET FILS (Mareuil-le-Port)

ORGANIC

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

N.V.	"Grande Réserve" Brut (70% Meunier, 20% Pinot Noir, 10% Chardonnay)	6/750	\$188
N.V.	"Grande Réserve" Brut <i>Drawn from the entirety of the estate's holdings, the idea behind this wine is to exemplify the expression of champagne in the vicinity of the domaine, with an emphasis on the prevalent Meunier grape. Based on 2015, with the balance coming from a solera of reserve wines dating back to 1998, the wine more than meets its remit. There is a tenderness to the fruit that belies the low dosage of 7 gm. and testifies to the fastidiousness of the viticulture and wine-making. We don't use the word "perfect" lightly, but it is appropriate to a champagne like this that so effortlessly evokes the uniqueness of the genre and delivers it in such a seductive fashion.</i>	12/375	\$236
N.V.	"Terre de Meunier" Extra Brut <i>Jérôme is a fierce proponent of Meunier, which dominates his holdings. And who could refute his belief in the grape's innate quality when confronted with such a masterly wine as this? A blend of 80% 2014 and 20% 2013, dosed at just 2 gm., it again demonstrates the house's remarkable ability to coax finely-textured wines from their grapes, even at this ultra-dry level. It is reminiscent of the single-parcel Meunier wines made by Jérôme's friend Alexandre Chartogne.</i>	6/750	\$224
N.V.	"Oeil de Perdix" Rosé Extra Brut (83% Meunier, 17% Chardonnay) <i>Meunier once again dominates the blend in this wine based on the 2015 vintage, though a little Chardonnay adds cut and elegance. Unlike many wines with no dosage, one's first impression here is of sheer deliciousness, and it is only on reflection that one notes the complexity and sense of purpose behind this beauty.</i>	6/750	\$228
2008	"Brisefer" Extra Brut (Chardonnay)	6/750	\$288 NET
2009	"Brisefer" Extra Brut (Chardonnay) <i>Only 1300 bottles of this fine, piercing, body builder of a wine were made, from the oldest vines on the estate (including a parcel planted in 1947). The 2008 vintage in 750 ml. bottles was released after the 2009, as befits one of the great post-war vintages. But you ignore the magnums of 2009 at your peril, because Jérôme achieved miracles of focus and style in this vintage, whose potential for sprawl defeated so many others.</i>	3/1500	\$332 NET
2008/9	"Maisoncelle" Extra Brut (Pinot Noir) <i>Pinot Noir is a challenge met with equal skill. The nose is reassuringly accurate, and the wine has an appropriately bracing and masculine style, redeemed by the expected tenderness of Dehours. TEN 6-PACKS ALLOCATED TO US!</i>	6/750	\$292 NET
2011	"Vieilles Vignes" Extra Brut (1/3 ea. Meunier, Pinot Noir, Chard.) <i>This recent addition to Dehours' range emanates from some of the estate's oldest vines and is designed to showcase their potential to make a "classic" blend that is true to the house's signature style of purity and suavity. A lovely example of how old vines can triumph in a difficult year. TEN SIX PACKS ONLY.</i>	6/750	\$260 NET

R. RENAUDIN (Moussy)

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

(2009)	Brut "Réserve" 1er Cru (70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir) <i>Our debut "vintage" of this cuvee was 2008, which was a hard act to follow. But Renaudin rose to the occasion and harnessed all that was possible from the seductive 2009 vintage. Still fresh from its extended period en tirage, the mousse is noticeably fine. The nose is markedly expressive, while the palate is broad yet taut. This will be another long-distance runner.</i>		\$360
2001	"L'Espiegle" Brut Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru <i>Partly because they block the malolactic fermentation, "L'Espiegle" always shows especially vibrantly. Another wine for the long haul, that spent ten months in barrel. Rather as in Burgundy, 2001 has been overshadowed by its showier successor, 2002. But there is an argument to be made that wines like this have the extra degree of nerve that marks out the really great vintages. Disgorged in the last few months, it is showing absolutely beautifully at the moment, with years ahead of it.</i>		\$480
1996	"L'Espiegle" Brut Blanc de Blancs 1er Cru <i>Another miracle of suspended animation, this was Renaudin's chosen Millennium wine. Ignore, if you will, the questionable bottle and concentrate instead on the preternatural verve and brightness of the flavours. 1996 is a controversial vintage, but this is one of those examples that bolsters its claim to being among the handful of great post-war years. That such a wine has remained undisgorged at the property until now is baffling, but we are not looking a gift horse in the mouth. Being in MAGNUMS has only accentuated the wine's slow evolution. It has decades of life ahead of it.</i>	3/1500	\$400 NET

LÉGUILLETTE-ROMELOT (Charly-sur-Marne)

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

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

It should be noted that tragedy befell the family in the summer of 2018 when Laurent succumbed to illness at the unthinkable age of 45. Christine has taken over the reins and is showing great determination and optimism.

N.V. “Prélude” Extra-Brut (80% Meunier, 16% Chardonnay, 4% Pinot Noir) \$328

An enchantingly direct nose and palate with 4.5 gm of dosage that shows less dry than that because of the vinosity imparted by the old vines. Based on 52% of the 2014 vintage, the reserve wines are a solera of the years 2010-13 and lend a depth of flavor that is quite palpable. Dry but far from austere.

N.V. “Festival” (45% Meunier, 21% Pinot Blanc, 18% Pinot Noir, 10% Petit Meslier, 4% Chardonnay, 2% Arbanne) \$360

This new iteration of the wine formally known as “Op. No.12” draws heavily on the arcane varieties planted in the Clos du Mont Dorin, a small vineyard situated right at the winery. As such, it is impossible to dismiss comparisons with Aubry. But it stands on its own feet by dint of its seething mass of flavours - white fruits, citrus, salt – and its prodigious length on the palate. It is dosed at 9 gm.. It is a blend of 48% 2014 and 52% 2013, vintages that imbue the wine with uncommon nervosity and cut.

(2008) “Notes Noires” Brut (73% Meunier, 27% Pinot Noir) 6/750 \$240

What a pleasure to find another example of this great vintage available to us. It is an unusual rendition of the Blanc de Noirs concept, but the result is vivid and chiseled. After 7 years sur lies, secondary development is just beginning in a champagne that displays both power and finesse.

GEORGES RÉMY (Bouzy)

All hail a new star! We were lucky enough to visit and taste with this producer just as he was releasing his first vintage (2014) in June. He has taken his time getting things right, having made still red wine commercially since 2011, and gradually getting his vineyards (in the best parcels of Grand Cru Bouzy) to where they will be biodynamically certified this year. Bouzy fruit is renowned for its generosity and sweetness, and the house style is to harvest ripe, never chapitalize, and vinify 100% in oak, so this is Bouzy at its most expressive.

(2014) Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut Nature (100% Pinot Noir) 6/750 SOLD OUT

The sweet (peak season strawberry) fruit is lifted up by complimentary oak. Despite its youth and recent arrival on these shores, the wine is already delicious, full, and long, a hedonist's delight. Of the 859 bottles made, we were accorded 60. So act fast, because they will not last! Look for more cuvees in the future.

J.M. LABRUYÈRE (Verzenay)

BIO-DYNAMIC

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

(2012) “Prologue” Brut Grand Cru (70% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay) 6/750 \$272 NET

The estate's flagship wine is by rights Extra Brut, as the dosage is a mere 4.8 gm.. The juice is entirely cuvée, and the wine is aged 60% in steel and 40% in used barrels passed on from Prieur. 2012 was a fortuitous year for a debut, since it provided such inherent balance for a champagne made without reserve wines. There is an aristocratic poise to the flavours and a thrilling nerve to the cut. All is in place and the result is pure class.

(2013) "Anthologie" Brut Rosé Grand Cru (72% Pinot Noir, 28% Chardonnay) 6/750 \$308 NET
The addition of 8% still Pinot Noir from a small plot in nearby Bouzy and the increase of the dosage to a still-low 6.4 gm. serve to heighten the fruit qualities of this wine while leaving intact its distinctive Verzenay expression. A markedly pretty and uniquely rosé nose leads to a serious, structured wine that perhaps serves best at the table rather than as a cheerful quaffer. For those so inclined, it should also age gracefully.

(2012) "Page Blanche" Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru 6/750 \$348 NET
From a tiny parcel in Verzenay, this is an exceptional Chardonnay champagne from a village renowned for its Pinot Noir. Also aged 60% in steel and 40% in used Prieur barriques, with a dosage of 3.2 gm., just 3000 bottles are made each year. It is a stately, fine and deep-flavoured champagne, well-suited to gastronomy as much as an aperitif.

FOREST-MARIÉ (Trigny)

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

N.V. Brut "Tradition" \$340
This is the cuvée that won the coveted Coup de Coeur from the Guide Hachette in France. Made from equal parts Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Meunier, 40% 2011 and 60% 2012. It has that insinuating nose that only champagne can offer, full of biscuity intrigue. Crisp and fresh, with a beguiling gingery overtone, this is a mighty satisfying "basic" champagne that is a poster-child for what makes our grower friends such a rewarding source for this most important of beverages.

N.V. Brut de Blancs \$360
It was a bottle of this wine that grabbed my attention in that restaurant in Saumur where I was dining with Julien and Corinne Fouet. One never expects very much of the ritual aperitif champagne in France, but this one was startling for its class, its wonderful biscuity evolution and its length on the palate. Clearly an older cuvée than the one we offer you now, it showed the potential of their Chardonnay to evolve into the sort of rococo classic beloved of champagne aficionados. This cuvee is composed of 40% 2012 and 60% 2013, with almost four years en tirage.

N.V. "L'Absolu" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut \$380
Similarly composed to the Brut de Blancs above, but finished without dosage, this is an entirely compelling rendition of the modish style. Nutty and full-flavoured, with length to spare and a sense of refined composure.

N.V. Cuvée St. Crespin 1er Cru Brut \$380
*This wine came to Thierry from the Premier Cru village of Écueil, home of Gracianne Marié, his wife, whose terroir presents entirely differently. The previous cuvée was blended from 2005 and 2004, from a base of 65% Pinot Noir (the balance is Chardonnay). An imposingly spicy, gingery champagne made in a dry style (just 6 gm. of dosage), it would serve as well at the table as as an aperitif. The **NEW** cuvée, however, is a blend of 2010 and 2009 (two really complementary vintages) and is made entirely from Pinot Noir fermented in used wood. It is a splendidly vinous champagne, spicy and firm, and brimming with contained power.*

N.V. Rosé Brut \$376
Made entirely from black grapes (80% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier) and based on 40% of the silky 2012 vintage (the balance is 2013), it sports a charming nose of wild strawberries and cunningly allies fruitiness and nervosity. Exceptional value.

2008 Brut Millésimé \$460
How thrilling that Thierry's current vintage is the legendary 2008, when others are releasing their 2015 wines. An equal blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, entirely from the Ecueil holdings, this is a grand, dry champagne, gingery and long, with prodigious depth of flavour.

LANGUEDOC

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

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

2017 Cornet & Cie., Banyuls Rimage (100% Grenache) 12/500 \$156

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

2003 Banyuls Grand Cru Sec, Cuvée Joseph Nadal 6/750 \$176 NET

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

2000 Banyuls Grand Cru, Cuvée Christian Reynal 6/750 \$216 NET

The finest Banyuls, aged for a minimum of six years in small oak casks, is a wine of transcendent quality. The nose is redolent of oranges macerated in brandy, giving way to a palate of silky intensity and great persistence. Superb dessert wine.

DOMAINE FONTANEL (Côtes du Roussillon)

This splendid domaine goes from strength to strength, making an impressive array of modern reds and traditional vins doux naturels. Pierre Fontanel is a painstaking grower who gives more thought to every stage of the grape-growing and wine-making process than most. The domaine has now been taken over by a young couple called Elodie and Matthieu Collet, though Pierre remains by their side to aid in continuity.

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

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

2010 "L'Age de Pierre", Muscat de Rivesaltes \$212 NET

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

2008 Rivesaltes Ambré \$216

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

CH. DE FONTARÈCHE (Corbières)

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

2017 Ch. Fontarèche "Tradition" Rosé (Corbières) \$96

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

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

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

2016 Ch. Fontarèche “Sélection Rouge” Vieilles Vignes (Corbières) \$104
For a small premium, we offer you this full-flavoured but supple wine that benefited from the favorable climatic conditions in 2016. A classic blend of Carignan (40%), Syrah (30%), Mourvèdre (20%) and Grenache (10%), it exemplifies the generous qualities that make the Languedoc, at its best, an incomparable source for interesting wines at challengingly low prices.

VIGNOBLE BELOT (St. Chinian)

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

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

2015 Ch. Belot “les Mouleyres”, St. Chinian (60% Syrah, 25% Mourvèdre, 15% Grenache) \$132
This mid-range wine offers an absurd amount of class for the money. Dominated appropriately by the high-toned, floral aspects of Syrah, its fruit is sweet but structured, and the 12-month passage in used barrels has left its judicious mark, too. In short, what you have here is a wine of real breed for the price of a daily quaffer.

VERGNES (DOM. DES MARTINOLLES) (Limoux)

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

N.V. Blanquette de Limoux (Mauzac) \$140
Mauzac is Limoux's calling card. A variety essentially unique to the region that provides the essence of what makes this appellation different. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Chenin Blanc have all made their mark in recent decades, but it is Mauzac that imparts its singular green apple tones to the aroma. This is an unpretentious but hugely satisfying sparkler, gentle, easy and suave, with perfectly judged dosage.

N.V. Crémant de Limoux Rosé (70% Chardonnay, 20% Chenin Blanc, 10% Pinot Noir) \$172
This exceptionally elegant rosé has won a passel of awards for readily understandable reasons. As easy on the eye as Catherine Deneuve, it sports a fine mousse, a beautiful nose and a tender, subtle and fine palate.

N.V. Blanquette de Limoux Méthode Ancestrale (Mauzac) \$148
As its name implies, this is the Big Bang of French sparkling wine! The wine is made by stopping fermentation via filtration with the third new moon of the year, in March. It is then bottled with added yeast and left to continue a gentle secondary fermentation in bottle – but there is no disgorgement. The result is a fascinating and delicious sweet sparkler (90 grammes of residual sugar) with just 7.5% of alcohol. It makes an original alternative to Moscato d'Asti.

CH. L'ARGENTIER / FAMILLE JOURDAN (Sommières)

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

2018 Aramon Rosé (I.G.P. Hérault) \$148

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

2016 Vieilles Vignes de Cinsault (I.G.P. Hérault)**\$140**

Cinsault is one of those overlooked grapes most usually consigned to oblivion as rosé. In the skilled hands of the Jourdans, however, it proves to be a wine of irresistible charm. The color is light, to be sure, but the heady strawberry scent is beguiling and the 40 year-old vines lend to the palate a startling intensity of sweet fruit flavour, cloaked in the gentlest imaginable veil of silk. It is hard to imagine anyone disliking such a pleasing wine.

DOMAINE PAUL LOUIS EUGÈNE (Siran)

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

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

(2006) “Canto Pébré” (Carignan and Grenache)**\$192**

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

(2007) “Trois Pommes” (Grenache)**\$168**

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

SOUTH WEST**CLOS D’AUDHUY (Cahors).....**

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

2018 “Les Polissons” Cahors Rouge (100% Malbec)**\$132**

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

2015 “Clos d’Audhuy” Cahors Rouge (100% Malbec)**\$200**

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

NICOLAS GÉLIS (Côtes du Frontonnais)

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

2014 Ch. Ferran Rouge "Classique" (60% Negrette, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Gamay) \$112
Seriously tasty red from the first property bought by Nicolas in 1994 and completely replanted at that time. The brambly tones of Negrette dominate as they should, while the Cabernet lends firmness and the Gamay acid brightness.

BORDEAUX

VIGNOBLES BAYLET (Sadirac).....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CH. CARBONNEAU (Ste. Foy)

It is many a year since we tasted a petit château Bordeaux worth its classic \$10 or \$11 retail price-tag, so our hearts leapt when we encountered this old-fashioned beauty seemingly caught in a commercial time-warp. Wilfrid Franc de Ferrière, despite his aristocratic-sounding French name, speaks an unaffected English with a disconcerting New Zealand twang to it (he's married to a Kiwi). Ste. Foy is in the extreme south-eastern part of Bordeaux. In 2018, son Pierre began his assumption of control and has already made several innovations in a progressive direction. Herbicides have been replaced by mechanical weeding and insecticides eliminated in favour of pheromonal confusion. We can look forward to new cuvées in the "natural" direction.

2017 "Classique" (70% Merlot, 25% Cab. Sauvignon, 5% Malbec) \$100

Seriously tasty Bordeaux at a silly price that will please the purists for its structure and the hedonists for its fruit. 2017 is a pleasingly dialled-down vintage after the generous joys of 2015 and 2016.

2016 “Séquoia” (54% Merlot, 32% Cab. Sauvignon , 12% Cab. Franc) \$116

A different blend again in this vintage, the 2016 is predictably grand. Sumptuous fruit, skilfully raised in barrique, with a more classic tone than 2015’s heavily Cabernet Franc- influenced blend. The sheer generosity of this wine is some compensation for Nature’s niggardliness.

CH. VRAY CANON BOYER

2004 Canon-Fronsac (90% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cab. Sauvignon) \$144

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

CH. COUTELIN-MERVILLE

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

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

LOIRE

GILBERT CHON (Muscadet)

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

2018 Clos de la Chapelle (Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie) NEW \$100

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

A wine of unusual authority and texture, but unmistakable origin, from schist-grown vines over 70 years old in a 4 hectare plot. Muscadet for those who appreciate fruit as well as the authentic saline minerality of the genre. The 2017 marries suave texture and bracing acidity in an especially compelling way. It swells with air, making it an exceptional glass-pour choice.

2018 “Le Tristan” (Cabernet Franc, Vin de Pays du Val de Loire) NEW \$88

Little did we know that les frères Chon also make an unspeakably delicious and soft Cabernet Franc that offers all the uncomplicated charm of which this grape is capable. As might be expected, the sunny generosity of 2018 imbued this often-lightweight wine with an uncommon degree of sheer fruitiness. And what a bargain! This has understandably developed a following.

DOMAINE AUX MOINES (Savennières – Roche Aux Moines) ORGANIC

Monique and Tessa Laroche, are the charming mother and daughter team who run this formerly pocket-sized estate in La Roche Aux Moines. Over the last decade or so, Tessa has had a transformative effect, first by completing a conversion to certified organic viticulture in 2010 but also by greatly expanding the vineyard holdings. Her sagacious father had presciently bought large swathes of land over a long period, to the extent that Aux Moines is now the largest estate in the appellation.. We are delighted to be able to offer an older vintage (made by Monique) that shows off the aging potential of this great wine.

2018 “Le Berceau des Fées” (Vin de France) \$248 NET

This wine comes from young Chenin vines, mostly within the appellation. Deliberately made in an easier style than the Roche-Aux-Moines, it nonetheless enjoys a fruit endowment in this lavish vintage that suggests a capacity for aging, if one has the fortitude to resist the siren call of its youth. Gorgeously floral, it is a picture of prettiness.

2017 Savennières - Roches Aux Moines \$340 NET
This ideal year did not require miracles of intervention by Tessa to enable her to follow in the elegant line of 2015. Another flowery, lissome beauty with a dense mineral charge beneath the flattering exterior. The wine is made in mostly used barriques, but does not undergo malolactic fermentation. Production in 2017 was ravaged by spring frosts, as it was almost throughout the Loire region.

1999 Savennières - Roches Aux Moines \$240 NET
This is not a mis-print! This "new" vintage is the latest to have crossed over to what one might describe as its tertiary stage. There is a smoky quality to the aroma that does not exactly prepare you for the delicious fusion of marmalade fruit and piquant minerality on the palate, nor the intriguing chocolate nuance in the tail. A poetic wine that offers endlessly changing stimulation. Made by Monique in the pre-organic era, it shows that the quality of terroir trumps all other considerations and that Tessa had a good teacher in her mother!

LA FAMILLE VAILLANT (Anjou).....BIO-DYNAMIC.....

*This relatively large (55 hectares) domaine has unbroken family history going back to the 18th century. Completely organic for more than fifteen years, it makes an impressive range of wines from several Anjou appellations. We have been especially impressed with their reds, which are made without additional sulfites, fining or filtration. To give an idea of Vaillant's approach, when they do use small quantities of sulphur for spraying purposes, they get it direct from a Polish mine, rather than using the petro-chemical products that are the norm in the wine world. **DEMETER CERTIFIED.***

2018 Cabernet Breton (100% Cabernet Franc) \$164
Named after the Bourgueil abbot who adopted the grape in the 18th century, this is a wonderfully expressive rendition of Cabernet Franc that packs an improbable intensity into its light (12%) frame. Equal parts animal (think blood), vegetable (floral scent) and mineral (think pulsating saltiness in the tail), this is a brilliant miniature that, in its quiet voice, says more than many a powerhouse roaring in a stentorian voice. This version is a little more unbuttoned than usual, as befits the generosity of the vintage.

2017 "L'Aubinaie", Anjou (100% Cabernet Franc) \$168
This stalwart wine forms an interesting bridge between the perfumed varietality of the Cabernet Breton and the rugged strength of "L'Ancrerie". An entirely honest Loire red that blossoms with air and offers great pleasure. The 2017 is purer and more classic than the ebullient 2016 was. Derived from calcareous soils and aged in 3-4 year-old barrels.

2015 "L'Ancrerie", Anjou Villages (100% Cabernet Franc) \$208
In a series of fine Loire red vintages, 2014 stood out as something quite special, then 2015 came along and made its own strident claims, as exemplified by this late-release "Tête de Cuvée". The magnificent, iron-drenched nose alone declaims the singular quality of the vines, which are planted in schistous soils. And the palate's vibrant yet structured expression of Cabernet Franc makes this a well-nigh perfect example of the grape's masculine side, while avoiding any tendency to tannic obstruction. The wine macerates on the skins for four weeks and is given 15 months in old wood. A not-to-be-missed highlight.

DOMAINE FOUET (Saumur)

ORGANIC

We have worked with Julien Fouet for eighteen years now and have watched him grow in stature with each passing vintage, especially since the premature passing of his father in 2016. Having long used organic practices, he is also in the course of being certified by Ecocert. Also, for the last three years, Julien has been making his Crémants in-house, having previously farmed out the process to an external specialist (a very common practice in France and other countries). The result is a palpable gain in finesse. We have steadily increased our range of selections as the domaine's exceptional quality becomes recognized and as we find more and more wines to our taste.

2018 Saumur Blanc, "L'Ardillon" (100% Chenin Blanc) \$140
After the cruel privations of 2016 and 2017, Nature was finally kind again in 2018, offering the possibility both of more normal volume and exciting quality. There is opulence to the aromas of this wine and richness to the palate, but the wine is still dry and has more than adequate acidity. Really delicious.

2017 Saumur Champigny, "L'Amarante" (100% Cabernet Franc) \$172
Entirely in the lineage of Julien's many masterly essays at his signature grape. The irresistible charms of Cabernet Franc and the limestone soils of Saumur both receive due deference and the result is pure pleasure.

2018 "Buvons des Fruits" (100% Cabernet Franc) \$192
Julien is proudest of his red wines. And this is his second essay at a "Natural" wine – six days of carbonic maceration, unfined, unfiltered and unsulfured. To describe it as "delicious" is to understate the indecently charming beauty of its varietal character. "Let us drink Fruits" is how the name translates – a little ponderous, perhaps, but entirely apt to the simple ambition of the wine. After last year's rapturously received debut vintage, we were gratified to receive a much more substantial allocation of the 2018.

N.V. Crémant de Loire (95% Chenin Blanc, 5% Cabernet Franc) \$192
This ravishing sparkler radiates finesse, from the tiny mousse that it sports, through the first whiff of its unmistakably Chenin honeysuckle notes to the bracingly pure palate and its extended finish. Importantly, it has the kind of harmony that derives from extended aging on the lees. A worthy alternative to champagne.

N.V. Crémant de Loire Rosé (100% Cabernet Franc) \$192
With Champagne Rosé costing ever-more-ridiculous sums, it is a pleasure to discover such a compelling escape as this. Stylish, Loire-ish and dry, this coral-colored gem has all the authenticity of its white counterpart but an added fruitiness appropriate to its hue. We never seem to buy enough.

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

MARC PLOUZEAUORGANIC

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

2013 Les Devants de la Bonnelière Sauvignon (Touraine) \$132
As always, the Chinon terroir yields a wine long on minerality that transcends the Sauvignon (whereas Delaunay’s example, for instance, exalts it). Unapologetically dry and serious wine for rock-hounds. Good with oysters. It must be stated that the wine has been improved rather than weakened by age.

2018 Dom. de la Croix Marie Chinon Rosé \$132
Those who followed the long-running Devants de la Bonnelière Touraine Rosé will know what a deft hand Marc has with rosé wine. This latest example is a step-up appellation-wise and offers the familiar thrill of Cabernet Franc gone pink. Poised between earth and fruit, it presents a drier, tangier and arguably more food-friendly rendition of the genre than is typical in France.

2017 Dom. des Hautes Troglodytes, Saumur Champigny \$140
High-toned, silky wine that walks a thrilling tightrope between pleasure and seriousness. A textbook example of how 2017’s niggardly yields were compensated by exceptional fruit endowment – without excess. The Hautes Troglodytes never disappoints!

2017 Dom. de la Croix Marie Chinon “Vieilles Vignes” SOON
The uncanny resemblance to the long admired Ch. de la Bonnelière is not coincidental. Brilliant old-vines, big-time Chinon from a landmark vintage. Drink now or keep 20 years.

DOMAINE DU PETIT BONDIEUORGANIC.....

This small ten-hectare domaine was a discovery we could not resist. The Pichet family have long cultivated nothing but Cabernet Franc (though they recently bought a small parcel of white grapes in Chinon, which is something of a rarity). Since son Thomas Pichet came on board in 1995, the domaine has been converted to organic viticulture and now makes five different wines from its collection of parcels which are divided between the “sables” and the “tuffeaux”. We have examples of each in the stellar 2017 vintage.

2017 “Vendôme” (Bourgueil) \$148
Bourgueil differentiates itself from other Loire appellations by dint of its more rustic profile. In this case, the lighter sandy “graviers” give rise to an entirely delicious and gulpable Cabernet Franc that will please any aficionado of this most delightful variety. Being unfiltered, it has thrown a significant sediment – which we regard as a badge of honor!

2017 “Le Petit Mont” (Bourgueil) \$172
*The clay-and-limestone soils of this parcel give rise to a sumptuous, more structured wine that nonetheless presents no obstacles to immediate pleasure by virtue of its sheer fullness and declamatory style. No surprise that the illustrious Guide Hachette accorded this wine its highest accolade, the **COUP DE CŒUR**.*

XAVIER FRISSANT (Touraine-Amboise)

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

2016 “Les Roses du Clos”, Touraine Blanc (Fié Gris) **\$180**

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

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

2013 “M de la Touche”, Côt (Touraine-Amboise) **\$140**

There is little resemblance between the popular Malbecs of Argentina or the brooding wines of Cahors and a wine such as this, made from the same grape with its Loire moniker. Once past the dark hue, you enter the unmistakable world of energetic, nervy and mineral Loire wines. The low alcohol keeps the wine bouyant and the finish is long. The 2013 is in a lovely spot right now, while the 2014 promises great things.

2011 “Cuvée Renaissance” (50% Côt, 50% Cabernet Franc) **\$164**

There is a vivid brilliance to the best 2011 Loire reds which this splendid wine exemplifies. Deep-colored and forcefully scented, it melds that unmistakable Loire earthiness that seems to transcend varieties with a thoroughly pleasing fleshiness.

VINCENT RAIMBAULT (Vouvray)

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

N.V. Vouvray Brut **\$168**

Fruiter and slightly less dry than Fouet's Crémant, this offers a fascinating perspective on sparkling Chenin grown in the Loire's different tufa soils.

2015 Vouvray Sec “Bel Air” **\$144**

Inevitably, the power of the vintage asserts itself, but like all Raimbault wines this does not lose sight of its origins. The first shipment sold out fast.

2016 Vouvray Demi-Sec “Les Terrages” **\$144**

Chenins like this, with their subtle balance of sweetness and acidity, are really the only wines in the world that give German Riesling a run for its money. A more sheerly useful and delicious French wine is hard to imagine.

JOEL GIGOU (Jasnières)

Joël Gigou continues to be the iconic producer of Jasnières. This miniscule appellation is 25 miles north of Tours in the Coteaux du Loir (itself an appellation barely larger, where Gigou also has holdings). The whites are a product of that magical Loire symbiosis between Chenin Blanc and tufa. Arguably, the expression here is the most singular and extreme in all the Loire region. Gigou is a conscious archaist. One look at the ancient photograph on his labels of peasants tilling the vineyards will confirm that. But the wines will hold their own against all that modern wine-wizardry can throw forth. They have that thrilling fusion of fruit and mineral which only the greatest Rieslings, white burgundies and Savennières can offer, surmounted by an ethereal floral perfume that brings tears to the eye. Son Ludovic has been groomed to take over the estate, and he has proved to be as attuned as his father to the qualities that are Jasnières' hallmark. When tasted amongst other wines of the appellation, they were as palpably dominant as any producer we have ever encountered in a comparative tasting. Unsurprisingly, they are a big hit with David Schildknecht. We have now bitten the bullet and brought in our first reds and sparkling wine. The wines have been organic for years, but starting with the 2018 vintage will be certified as such. The yeasts are native.

2016 “Jus de Terre”, Jasnières **\$168**

2014 “Jus de Terre”, Jasnières **\$160**

This is our first wine made by Ludovic, and what a calling card it is. The signature piercing Jasnières scent is unmistakable – recognisably Loire Chenin but utterly unlike any other appellation. Sappy, dry, vibrant and long, with a huge mineral charge and tremendous length on the palate. This is a great portent for the new regime. The newly-arrived 2016 confirms the promise of its predecessor.

- 2000 Cuvée Clos St. Jacques, Jasnières \$216 NET**
Always the flagship of the estate, the old vines of Clos St. Jacques give rise to greater vinosity and texture without sacrificing in any way the signature ethereal scent of Jasnières nor its searing minerality. It bears mentioning that Gigou patiently ages his wines in small old casks in his perfect cellar until he deems them ready for release. This is very much the exception to the rule in the area, but the resultant benefits are easy to appreciate. Until very recently, these barrels were exclusively made of traditional chestnut, but, starting in 2006, oak has begun to play a role in the aging as well, with a gain in finesse. This library release is stunning testament to the inherent quality and longevity of these old school wines. The golden colour indicates the wine's maturity, but the freshness of attack and spicy richness bear witness to its vigour and potential for further development. This is a classic if ever there was one.
- 2017 Pineau d'Aunis, Coteaux du Loir \$160**
Ludovic is especially happy with this classic vintage, preferring it to its predecessor. This normally pallid grape has a distinctively briary, almost foxy tone that not everyone warms to – in some ways it is like Zinfandel's spindly but clever foreign cousin. But Ludovic has made something singular from it here – slender but innerly sweet, with an insinuating earthy flavour. This really is something completely different.
- 2012 "Cuvée Gigou't", Vin de France (Gamay) \$164**
- 2010 "Cuvée Gigou't", Vin de France (Gamay) \$152**
While we waited for the perfect Cru Beaujolais to come our way (see Perrachon on page 18), we found this remarkable essay in Gamay from the north. Uncommonly well coloured, it was aged in used Bordeaux barriques for upwards of two years then aged patiently in Gigou's labyrinthine caves before release. Plummy, smoky and not insubstantial, it should make a true believer of any doubters in the possibilities of Loire Gamay.
- N.V. "La Bulle Sarthoise" Rosé (Pineau d'Aunis) \$180**
Tempting though it might be to cite the off-the-charts hipness factor of this wine (sparkling Pineau d'Aunis from one of France's most obscure appellations, made without malolactic fermentation) we prefer instead to concentrate on its ebulliently original aroma (blackberries licked with tar) and its unspittably delicious flavour, allied to alcohol of just 11.5%.
- N.V. "La Bulle Sarthoise" Rouge Demi-Sec (Pineau d'Aunis) \$180**
And if that were not enough, along come its big brother, all dressed in red and sporting a most unusual lick of sweetness to add to its spice-box full of flavours.
- JOEL DELAUNAY (Touraine)**
Thierry Delaunay has firmly established the estate he runs with his father in the forefront of this sprawling appellation. The village of Pouillé where he resides is home to several of the top Touraine growers and would seem to be exceptionally privileged, perhaps by dint of its relative elevation. His Sauvignon has developed a devoted following over the last few years for very good reason. What is truly impressive about Thierry is that he has greatly increased the size of his estate and production, but the average quality level of the wines has only gone up. He makes less red now than before, but what he makes is exemplary.
- 2018 "Le Grand Ballon" Rosé (Vin de Pays du Val de Loire) \$96**
Pale but definite pink wine artfully blended from Cabernet Franc, Côt and Gamay to a delightfully sprightly effect. It sports that inimitable Loire tension between fruit, acidity and earth components.
- 2018 Sauvignon "Le Grand Ballon" (Vin de Pays du Val de Loire) \$104**
This wine goes from strength to strength. The well-chronicled weather woes of 2017 had the silver lining of imparting unusual weight to a wine that always shows Sauvignon cut and breed.
- 2017 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc \$128**
This cuvée offers real typicité year in and year out. 2016 is in the tradition of full-flavoured, precise and incisive wines that have developed such a following for this impeccable producer. The well-chronicled weather troubles of this year resulted in unusual concentration and torque.
- 2016 "La Voûte", Sauvignon Blanc (Chenonceaux) \$168**
A tête de cuvée given skin-contact and extended aging on the lees, it quite overwhelmed us by its combination of precision and generosity. A style that one suspects our Antipodean friends would give their eye-teeth to emulate. Starting in 2014, the vineyard is classified in the new Chenonceaux appellation, which is defined as the best sloping vineyards along a 20 kilometer stretch of the Cher river. Despite successive reduced harvests, the wine offers exceptional value.
- 2017 Touraine Gamay \$112**
We opted for this slightly more expensive estate-grown Gamay over the entirely acceptable Grand Ballon version on account of its extra endowment and clarity of flavour. Loire Gamay of this quality gives Beaujolais a serious run for its money, with perhaps an even more emphatic minerality to add to its passel of fine qualities.

2016 **“L’Antique des Cabotières”, Touraine (Cabernet Franc, Côt)** **\$124**
Thierry’s red wines have achieved a degree of polish and purity in recent vintages that was less apparent in the past. This quintessential Loire blend has a sumptuous colour, penetrating aroma and a satiny texture on the palate to match its uncompromisingly authentic fruit.

PASCAL BELLIER (Cheverny)

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

N.V. Rêveries” Brut Rosé (Pinot Noir) **\$168**
Pascal makes a miniscule quantity of this highly perfumed and flavorful sparkler. It has been embraced by the market for its varietal exactness and excellent value.

2018 Cheverny Blanc (80% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Chardonnay) **\$120**
Where you might expect to be taken aback by the foreign aspect of Chardonnay in this blend, that most plastic of grapes instead serves to intensify its Sauvignon character, to make the wine grassier and imbue it with more lemon-and-lime perfume and cut. Irresistibly delicious in 2018, but also reassuringly incisive.

2018 Cheverny Rouge (80% Pinot Noir, 20% Gamay) **\$120**
The sheer prettiness of the Pinot fruit is reason alone to want this, but here is one of those wines whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is an animated, proportionate and thought-provoking wine that also happens to be awfully easy to drink. Perfection of its understated kind. When a sun-kissed vintage like 2018 meets the inherent tension of this terroir, you really do get a Platonic ideal of the intellectual and the hedonistic.

DOMAINE DE VILLARGEAU (Coteaux du Giennois)

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

2017 Domaine de Villargeau (Sauvignon Blanc) **\$140**
We represent a serious number of different Loire Sauvignons, which is justified by the fact that each offers a subtly different expression of this popular and ever-rewarding variety. The defining influence here is the flint component of the vineyards, which lends to this light but penetrating wine an uncompromisingly dry but nonetheless salivating quality. Tucked underneath the puckerish surface is an ingratiating fruit sweetness. The 2017 has the characteristic concentration of this frost-marked vintage.

PATRICE COLIN (Coteaux du Vendômois).....ORGANIC.....

From a little-known satellite to the north of the Loire region, not far from Tours, comes this super practitioner of old vines Chenin Blanc (and Pineau d’Aunis), offering us yet another expression of this most miraculous of white grapes. The soils boast a lot of flint (rather like parts of Sancerre and Pouilly Fumé). They have 20 parcels spread over 30 hectares, all of which are laboriously worked ten times a year. Colin attributes the dependable acidity, even in hot years, to this practice.

(2017) “Les Perles d’Anne Sophie” (Chenin, Chardonnay, Pineau d’Aunis) **\$188**
The decision to incorporate chardonnay in the blend meant a Vin de France designation, but that is hardly a handicap for you hipsters! Daringly dry and scintillatingly salty, this is a paradigm of the “old is new” approach to Loire bubbles today. This Pétillant Naturel is an absolute must for rock-hounds.

2017 “Pierre à Feu”, Chenin Blanc (Coteaux du Vendômois) **\$168**
Named after the “gunflint” that defines the terroir, this bracing Chenin enchants with its floral scents as it provokes salivation with its uncompromising acidity. Made from 30 year-old vines.

MAUROY-GAULIEZ (Pouilly Fumé)

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

2018 **Domaine de Bel Air “Cuvée Riquette”, Pouilly Fumé** **\$200**
“Cuvée Riquette” derives from parcels of old vines planted in “Caillottes” (clay and limestone) and represents the third different wine we have bought from this admirable woman-run estate. The climatic deprivations of 2016 and 2017 were nowhere more severe than in Pouilly-sur-Loire. 2018 offered a welcome respite from Nature’s cruelty. For a relatively modest further premium you receive a truly elevated Loire Sauvignon experience.

JEAN-CLAUDE ROUX (Quincy)

2017 **Quincy** **\$168**
Grain-farmer turned wine-grower Jean-Claude Roux turns out to have a deft hand with Sauvignon Blanc. With dynamic son Albin now at his side, the quality being delivered is higher than ever. With its vivid musky nose, brisk palate and exemplary balance, this is a perfect fallback from Sancerre or Pouilly Fumé in today’s market. 2017, like the preceding vintage, compensated for nature’s cruelty in terms of yield (frost, hail) by delivering a sheerly beautiful rendition of Loire Sauvignon at its most piquant and delicious. It drives memories of previous excellent vintages out of mind!

ALSACE

BOECKEL (Mittelbergheim)

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

2016 **Crémant d’Alsace Rosé Brut (Pinot Noir)** **\$220**
Delicious is the only word that comes to mind when drinking this wine, with all the uncomplicated pleasure that that implies. Dry, but not too dry, bursting with berried Pinot charm and dangerously easy to drink.

2017 **Riesling Brandluft Vieilles Vignes** **ORGANIC** **\$192**
This lieu-dit was the first sold by Boeckel in the 19th century and holds a special place in their pantheon. Its highly complex soils on a sandy base give rise to a hauntingly-scented wine with a finesse suggestive of a Grand Cru (as with the Clos Eugénie below). Quite exceptional in this vintage.

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

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

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

BEAUJOLAIS

LAURENT PERRACHON (Juliéna).....

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

- 2017 Beaujolais Villages “Terres de Loyse” \$120**
That wonderful French expression “vin de plaisir” might have been invented to describe this beauty. The explosive nose screams of Gamay, while the soft cushiony fruit with its characteristic tang and modest minerality reminds you that this is a wine from somewhere – in this case the two villages of La Chapelle de Guenchay and Lancié.
- 2016 Juliéna “Les Mouilles” \$160**
From a granite-and-schist site planted to 50 year-old vines in the Ferrachon’s home-village, this is an impressively mineral wine that shines in the sleek profile of 2016.
- 2016 Morgon “Côte de Py” \$188**
If Grands Crus existed in Beaujolais, Côte de Py would be in the elite. Its celebrated pebbly schistous soils, so rich in iron oxide, render wines of power and authority with serious aging potential. Suitably aged for fifteen months in oak, this is a deep-coloured, brooding and deadily-serious wine that demands your attention and respect. 2016 is more classic than the super-charged 2015.

BURGUNDY

ALAIN GEOFFROY (Chablis)

We were delighted to discover this impeccable producer of Kimmeridgean Chardonnay at reasonable prices. We think that you will be, too. Their estate extends to 55 hectares, all in the vicinity of Beines and points west. They also boast a fascinating museum of wine paraphernalia, including the largest collection of corkscrews that one can imagine.

- 2017 Petit Chablis \$160**
The distinction between “Petit” Chablis and the “real” thing can be quite minor, as evidenced by this absolutely paradigmatic wine, whose uncompromising quality and saline tang mark it out as a serious candidate for oysters. 2017 was a vintage calculated to blur the supposed distinctions of class.
- 2017 Chablis \$192**
As in 2016, the trials of producing wine in this weather-challenged year are well known. The recompense for the difficulties presented by untimely frost and hail is wines of uncommon poise and tension with an intensity and nervosity bespeaking the challenges faced by the vintners. Exceptionally fragrant and lithe Chablis here.
- 2018 Chablis Beauroy 1er Cru Vieilles Vignes \$260 NET**
- 2017 Chablis Beauroy 1er Cru Vieilles Vignes \$260 NET**
There is real grandeur in this 1er Cru from a privileged old vines plot. Intense without being big, salty and long on the palate. 2017 shows its pedigree here, and the oak élevage is discreet to an extreme. 2018 offers a little more flesh on the bones.
- 2016 Bourgogne Pinot Noir \$172**
Always showing ravishingly pretty, pure stone fruit evocative of grander origins than the simple Bourgogne appellation. Exceptionally low yields of two tons an acre helped, and the decision was made not to fine given the elegance of the fruit. Successive tiny vintages have necessitated a price increase, but this still offers good value for such quality.

DOMAINE THEULOT-JUILLOT (Mercurey)

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

- 2016/7 Côte Châlonnaise Blanc \$196**
The Theulots’ “entry level” wines are made with the same care as the premiers crus but from more modest terroirs. Nathalie Theulot’s name appears on the label of this cuvée, which comes from a vineyard she owns. It is a perfect miniature white burgundy – modestly proportioned but brimming with that archetypal sweet-salt burgundian savour, and kissed ever so gently with the most reticent oak you ever met. Brilliant.
- 2009 Mercurey Blanc 1er Cru, Les Saumonts \$296 NET**
Jean-Claude Theulot makes rather little white wine from a handful of small plots, but he lavishes a degree of care on them that is repaid with wines like this that demonstrate exceptional purity, unfussiness and salinity, with an unerring sense of just how much oak the fruit can comfortably live with. If Montrachet is a Tchaikovsky symphony then this is a Haydn string quartet – but a great one!

2017	Côte Châlonnaise Rouge		\$200
2016	Côte Châlonnaise Rouge		\$200
2014	Côte Châlonnaise Rouge		\$180
<i>To describe this wine as "pretty" is to understate its appeal but to capture its distinction. Why should red wine not flatter the senses, after all? This one pleases the sight with its palely lovely hue, the nose with its uncommonly incisive Pinot beauty and the taste with its refined and crystalline beauty. Your sighs of pleasure will supply the matching sounds. All three vintages offered here excel.</i>			
2016	Mercurey 1er Cru, La Cailloute (Monopole)		\$336 NET
2014	Mercurey 1er Cru, La Cailloute (Monopole)		\$296 NET
<i>This monopole vineyard is a connoisseur's special, as it makes the subtlest and arguably finest of the domaine's wines. The 2014 is an unexpectedly swaggering wine that punches way above its weight. The 2016 is indescribably elegant and sweet-fruited, with a refined and pleasing finish.</i>			
2017	Mercurey 1er Cru, Les Combins		\$336 NET
2017	Mercurey 1er Cru, Les Combins	12/375	\$180 NET
2016	Mercurey 1er Cru, Les Combins		\$340 NET
2016	Mercurey 1er Cru, Les Combins	12/375	\$188 NET
<i>Les Combins is perhaps not intrinsically superior in quality to, for instance, La Cailloute. But it always has a degree of velour and depth that are hard to resist. Simultaneously weighty and buoyant, with a ravishing scent of cedar and cocoa. Pure class. And 2016 is in the lineage of such classic "pleasure" years as 2009, 2001 and 1999 (the last of these was sensationally vibrant and intact when drunk recently).</i>			

SAVOIE & JURA

DOMAINE MARTIN FAUDOT (Jura).....

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

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

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

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

N.V.	Crémant du Jura Extra Brut (55% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir, 5% Poulsard, 5% Trousseau)		\$272 NET
N.V.	Crémant du Jura Extra Brut	6/1500	\$288 NET
<i>Since the 2009 vintage, Stéphane has succeeded in finding the balance in his grapes that enables him to make this wine without dosage, his Platonic ideal of how Crémant should be. What a triumph! Beyond the wine's familiarly uncanny resemblance to champagne, it has a depth and persistence of flavor that pay tribute to the bio-dynamic regime of the domaine. The wine has never been better, and the news is out, because we have now had our allocation of this and other Tissot wines severely reduced.</i>			
N.V.	Crémant du Jura Rosé Extra Brut (60% Pinot Noir, 20% Poulsard, 20% Trousseau)		\$272 NET
<i>A determinedly "pink" wine, in the sense that it is made predominantly from black grapes, lending it a weight and earthy flavor profile quite different from that of the more "champenois" white versions.</i>			

N.V.	Crémant du Jura “Indigène”		\$340 NET
<i>Who but Stéphane would have contrived the notion of conducting a secondary fermentation with his yeast-and-sugar-rich Vin de Paille? The result is fascinatingly different – fruitier, deeper, more mysterious – and has quickly developed a cult-like following. This is the model that he intends to follow in the future. Truly delicious.</i>			
N.V.	“BBF” Crémant du Jura Blanc de Blancs Fût Extra Brut		\$360 NET
<i>100% Chardonnay, 75% from 2012 in the barrel for a year, and the remainder from 2013 in stainless. Again, no dosage, and great fidelity to the Champagne model of toast, yeast and fine beaded complexity. After more than four years on the lees, it is still young and, alas, in short supply.</i>			
2016	Chardonnay “Mailloche” (Arbois)		\$480 NET
<i>Amazingly, this is our first importation of this particular parcel, with its degraded clay soils giving rise to the most powerful of Stéphane’s chardonnays. TWO CASES AVAILABLE.</i>			
2016	Chardonnay “Les Bruyères” (Arbois)		\$440 NET
<i>The clay-and-limestone soils of this superb site give rise to a wine that is generally released later than the other crus. We had a total of 15 cases to play with!</i>			
2018	“DD” (Arbois Rouge)	NEW	\$304 NET
2017	“DD” (Arbois Rouge)		\$300 NET
<i>Stéphane’s red wine yields were pitifully cut by Nature in 2013 and 2014, so he contrived this new blend of Trousseau, Poulsard and Pinot Noir. It took off, so now he makes it every year! Relatively pale, it surprises with an effusively berried nose. The palate, however, shows a more serious, earthy aspect, with a long, salty tail. This is “natural” red the way it should be made.</i>			
2018	Poulsard Vieilles Vignes “Sans Souffre” (Arbois)		\$320 NET
2016	Poulsard Vieilles Vignes “Sans Souffre” (Arbois)	3/1500	\$180 NET
<i>Such irresistible charm in this ethereal light Jura red. Tissot mastered the sulphur-free game many years ago!</i>			
2017	Poulsard “en Amphore” (Arbois)	6/750	\$216 NET
<i>LESS THAN 2 cases available.</i>			
2016	Poulsard “en Amphore” (Arbois)	3/1500	\$256 NET
<i>3 3-packs of magnums available.</i>			
2017	Trousseau “en Amphore” (Arbois)	6/750	\$240 NET
<i>2 6-packs of available.</i>			
2017	Pinot Noir “Sous La Tour” (Côtes du Jura)	NEW 6/750	\$236 NET
<i>Stéphane’s best Pinot vines are outside the Arbois appellation. Those familiar with the “En Barberon” from previous vintages will be reassured by the distinctively resonant and firm expression of the grape in this new wine, while appreciating the relative suppleness and approachability offered by the vineyard.</i>			
2016	Traminer (“Savagnin Ouillé”) (Arbois)	6/750	\$232 NET
<i>You may remember Stéphane’s earlier successes with Savagnin made without flor. He has taken the style to new heights now with this late-released version. The name cocks a snook at the Alsaciens, who claim exclusivity in France with the Gewurztraminer, but, in truth, the two grapes are closely related. The expression here is aromatic, for sure, but less perfumed and extreme. Like all Tissot wines, it declaims its mineral roots, while sporting a startlingly smooth texture borne of two years spent sur lies.</i>			
2015	Savagnin (Arbois)	6/750	\$232 NET
<i>Think of this as “baby” Vin Jaune. It has all the flor-induced characteristics beloved of the true believers in a slightly less intense, one might argue more useful form.</i>			
2016	Savagnin en Amphore “Sans Souffre” (Arbois)		\$660 NET
<i>5 cases available.</i>			
2012	Vin Jaune “En Spois” (Arbois)	6/620	\$420 NET
<i>In typical Tissot fashion, Stéphane can’t resist experimenting, so he now has five vineyard sites, bottled separately, for Vin Jaune, all made in the classical fashion, all expressing their different terroir despite the overriding presence of the flor. One is supremely mineral, one closed and brooding, and this is perhaps the most “typical,” if anything Stéphane does can be so named.</i>			
2011	Vin Jaune assortment (Arbois)	6/620	\$460
<i>We persuaded Stéphane to make available to you this unique 6-pack. It comprises two bottles of the 2011 En Spois, and single bottles of Mailloche, Les Bruyères, Les Vasées and the Vieilles Vignes. To our knowledge, Tissot is unique in making single-vineyard Vin Jaune. These provide a fascinating contrast with each other, highlighting the indisputable fact that, while the “technical” aspect of this kind of wine leaves an overarching mark on them, the different terroirs nonetheless shine through.</i>			

2015 "Spirale" (60% Savagnin/20% Poulsard, 20% Chardonnay) 6/375 \$308 NET
Too sweet (300 grams residual sugar!) to be a table wine, and too low in alcohol (8%) to be a dessert wine, this extraordinarily rich and pungent nectar comes from grapes laid out to dry for five months and then pressed. The closest analogy is something between Vin Santo and TBA. This needs to be tasted to be believed.

DOMAINE LABBÉ (Savoie)

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

2017 Abymes \$124
Brilliant as a diamond and light as a feather. A poem of delicately delicious mountain white, with especially pronounced fruitiness in this superb vintage.

2016 Pinot Noir \$148
This is a highly characterful Pinot which nods towards both burgundy in its delicate, leafy flavours and to Alsace in its tensile strength. One can never have too many expressions of this wonder-grape!

RHÔNE

CHRISTOPHE PICHON (Côte Rôtie)

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

2017 Viognier, Collines Rhodaniennes \$200
The vines lie just to the north-west of Condrieu, planted on gentle granitic slopes. 30% is aged in used barriques, the balance in cuve. The resulting wine has an unmistakable honied nose that melds with the oak as a hand fits in a glove. The glossy texture of the fruit could distract you from the wine's surprising mineral charge. At 13.5% alcohol, it passes for moderate in today's world. Exceptional class for the modest tariff.

2016 Condrieu 6/750 \$232 NET

2015 Condrieu \$364 NET
At this echelon, Condrieu demonstrates its reputation as one of the world's great white wines. As powerful and intense as a fine burgundy, it is made like one, too, being mostly vinified in barrique (30% new), with complete m.l. Just 20% is done in cuve to retain freshness. The resulting wine is voluptuous but contained, vibrant and complete with impressive length on the palate.

2016 St. Joseph Rouge \$248 NET
The elegance and suaveté that Pichon brings to this wine are ravishing. Deep-coloured, entirely "typique" Syrah nose with a seamless oak integration. This is St. Joseph at the highest height.

2013 Côte Rôtie "Promesse" (90% Syrah, 10% Viognier) \$392 NET
*The startlingly beautiful and exemplary Syrah nose of this wine makes its name entirely apt, for rarely has a perfume offered so much promise that is then fully realised on the palate. This is a silkily gorgeous wine with such purity of fruit that it is hard to believe that 75% of the barrels in which it was aged were new. To achieve such high class for such a tariff is scarcely to be believed. **ALMOST GONE.***

DOMAINE MUCYN (Crozes Hermitage)

It is ironic that we, who love Syrah almost more than any other black grape, had never before imported a producer from the northern Rhône. In truth, it is only because we had never encountered one available to us who was special enough to warrant the move. All that changed due to our discovery of Hélène and Jean-Pierre Mucyn, a young couple introduced to us by Jean-Marc Espinasse of Rouge-Bleu. Established in Crozes and St. Joseph since 2001, they have quietly charted their own course and developed a European following for their stylish, unexaggerated wines. 2016 was especially successful here, perhaps because of rather than despite the chronicled climatic challenges. But prices had to rise because of the pitiful yields.

2015 St. Joseph Blanc “Les Carats” (100% Roussanne) \$240 NET
The stylishness of this wine is testimony to the strides that Mucyn has made with his white wines. Roussanne brings its own particular extravagances to the table, but Jean-Pierre shrugs them aside to craft this refined yet succulent Rhône white that barely hints at its oak aging. Exemplary wine that will age well.

2008 Crozes Hermitage Blanc (100% Marsanne) \$208 NET
*Initially suggestive more of Burgundy than the Rhône on account of its subtly smoky notes and firm underpinning of acidity, with air this wine blossoms beautifully to display a succulent, apricotty palate. Fermented and aged in four-year-old Vosges barrels, it is a remarkably intelligent synthesis of burgundian technique and Rhône character. An original. **LOW STOCK***

2016 “GamSy” Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes (60% Syrah, 40% Gamay) \$144
Renamed to better convey its constituent parts, it is hard to conceive of a more sheerly joyous and brilliant wine in this lighter vein. Masterfully combining the complementary virtues of perfumed syrah and snappy gamay, it slides down the throat with the ease of a serpent and then tempts you to commit non-stop sin.

2016 Crozes Hermitage Rouge “Les Entrecoeurs” (100% Syrah) \$208
After the pitfalls of a torrid 2015 vintage so skillfully negotiated by the Mucyns, the more proportionate 2016 vintage came as a welcome balm. This is an effortlessly graceful and vibrant Syrah, seductively easy to drink now but with a balance suggestive of at least a healthy middle age.

2016 St. Joseph Rouge “Les Salamandres” (100% Syrah) \$240 NET
There is no question that the best St. Joseph wines bring an added dimension of power and concentration to the table and this is no exception – except the premium you pay is so negligible! This beauty has the hallmark tensile strength of the vintage and a flowery Syrah perfume of unmissable class.

DOMAINES BOUR (Roussas, Grignan-les -Adhémar)

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

2013 Domaine de Grangeneuve Vieilles Vignes (50% Syrah, 50% Grenache) \$136
That familiar blend of scented Syrah and Rhône strength is here in spades. This is the sort of shapely wine that made Grangeneuve's reputation in the old days. It offers a wonderful contrast to the prevailing ruggedness of most Rhône wines on the market.

2013 Domaine de Grangeneuve “La Truffière” (90% Syrah, 10% Grenache) \$176
This remarkable vineyard, which gains its name from the truffle-bearing oaks that surround it, never fails to deliver its signature rendition of cocoa-scented Syrah. Aged in barriques of 2-6 years' use, it is unexaggeratedly ripe and stately, confident in its bearing and refined in its finish. It will please its many followers.

2014 L'Esprit de Grenache (Côtes du Rhône Villages) \$132
This uncommonly pretty rendition of the Rhône's signature grape hails from a leased parcel of old vines in Vinsobres, a few miles to the south of Domaine de Grangeneuve, the Bour's home estate. The nose reeks of strawberries and the silky texture presents no obstacle to imbibement.

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

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

2018 Dentelle Rosé (55% Carignan, 45% Grenache) \$132
In 2018, Caroline built on the success she found the previous year with her rosé wine. The old, deep-rooted vines cultivated bio-dynamically enabled her to achieve proper ripeness with the familiar and improbably low alcohol level of 12%. Carignan-based rosé is a relative rarity, and this one has an irresistible snap to go with the expected berry fruit. Southern rosé does not get much more refreshing and delicious than this!

2015 Dentelle (55% Carignan, 45% Grenache) \$132
Carignan is thought of as the Languedoc variety par excellence, but it can make distinctively brambly and authentic wine in the Rhône as well, especially when blended with the local kingpin grape Grenache. As the vineyards are restored to health, Caroline and Thomas go from strength to strength. This is the best vintage since the miraculous debut year of 2007.

2015	Mistral (71% Grenache, 19% Syrah, 8% Mourvèdre, 2% Roussanne)		\$168
<i>In a vintage which often yielded too much of a good thing, Rouge Bleu's viticultural techniques served to temper nature's abundance. The result is an undeniably generous and spicy Rhône red which comfortably avoids all excess.</i>			
2014	Vendangeur (71% Grenache, 19% Syrah, 8% Mourvèdre, 2% Roussanne)	6/750	\$108
2014	Vendangeur	3/1500	\$108
<i>This is a special bottling of Mistral distinguished from the normal one by an élevage in wood. Because the barrels are mostly used and large, the oak aspect is discreet. But the wine shows a sumptuous, spicy quality that will be very attractive to many palates. It is a special project for Vincent de Kime, one of Rouge-Bleu's American investors. 2014 was an especially well-balanced vintage at this address.</i>			
2015	Lunatique (Grenache)	6/750	\$192 NET
<i>This prodigious wine hails from a tiny parcel of gnarled old vines and is doled out in miniscule quantities. Dense rather than fat, it is a backward beast that will unfold for years if not decades.</i>			

DOMAINE DU BANNERET (Châteauneuf du Pape)

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

2017	Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc "Le Secret"	6/750	\$264 NET
<i>Audrey has already put her stamp on the domaine by purchasing a parcel from Ch. Vaudieu, whose steep, calcareous slopes, dotted with silex and iron, have long been considered the appellation's best spot for white wines. Composed of 40% each of Grenache Blanc and Clairette, the balance is Picardan, Bourboulenc and Roussanne. Just 15% is fermented in barrique in an effort to preserve freshness at all costs. And, at 13.5 % alcohol, this is an uncommonly fragrant, incisive and elegant Châteauneuf, which blossoms beautifully with air. Only 1200 bottles were made, of which we got 120.</i>			
2017	Châteauneuf du Pape		DECEMBER
2016	Châteauneuf du Pape	3/1500	\$232 NET
<i>Banneret in a Banner Year! 2016 is set fair to go down as a great all-time vintage. Just 30 cases allocated to us.</i>			

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

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

2017	Séguret Blanc (50% Viognier, 40% Roussanne, 10% Grenache)		\$132
<i>We have always found this to be one of the most stylish and compelling whites of the Rhône, and it does not disappoint in 2017. Stressing elegance and balance above flamboyance, it offers an understated authenticity to those who appreciate quiet but characterful wine as a dining companion. It improves markedly with air.</i>			

MAS GRAND FLAGNIOL (Costières de Nîmes)

I first met Cyril Marès when he was a teenager, and his father Roger was still in charge of the estate and presiding over the appellation. He took over in 1998, married the girl next door (Nathalie Blanc of Mas Carlot) and took the domaine to ever higher heights. The wines always show exceptional aromatic appeal, supple texture and uncannily intelligent balance between fruit and oak. We never seem to buy enough of them, mainly because they have little to sell. Wines like these offer incontrovertible proof that not much money can buy you a lot of love. In a market now brimming with Nîmois wines, these remain at the top of the pile. Since 2017, the estate has been in conversion to Organic viticulture. Starting with the 2020 vintage, the wines will be certified Organic.

2017 Rosé (30% Syrah, 50% Grenache, 20% Cinsault) \$116

Cyril has always managed to keep his boisterously perfumed and fruity pink wine safely within the bounds of good taste while never cheating in the pleasure department. It ages with unexpected grace. The 2017 is perhaps the most mannerly and mineral-infused vintage in memory.

2017 Rouge "Tradition" (50% Syrah, 50% Grenache) NEW \$112

2016 Rouge "Tradition" (50% Syrah, 50% Grenache) \$108

The great ones do their best work in the lesser vintages (not that 2016 or 2017 fall into that category), as proved by Cyril in years like 2008 and 2002. We challenge you to find a wine that better combines aromatic flair, suave texture and sheerly delicious spicy Rhône fruit at such a silly price.

PROVENCE

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

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

2016 Ch. La Rouvière, Bandol Rosé \$252 NET

The flagship brings just a little extra gloss and charge to the table. Bandol rosé at its grandest and suavest.

2013 Moulin des Costes, Bandol Rouge (Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah) \$240 NET

2012 Moulin des Costes, Bandol Rouge (Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah) 12/375 \$128 NET

One of the special pleasures of working with Bunan is that they are in no hurry to release new vintages, preferring instead to offer their wines to the world when they have softened somewhat. Four-year-old Bandol is far from fully mature, but it does offer a seductively rich and potent brew of dark fruits and iron-tinged, faintly animal Mourvèdre character.

2014 Ch. La Rouvière, Bandol Rouge 6/750 \$196 NET

2014 Ch. La Rouvière, Bandol Rouge 6/1500 \$420 NET

Paradoxically, Bunan's flagship vineyard gives rise to the most forward of their reds - though it is essentially pure Mourvèdre - on account of its full-south exposure and steep slope, which result in wine of exceptional, but not excessive, ripeness. Bandol of this stature remains one of the great values in wines for aging that the world has to offer.

2010 Moulin des Costes "Charriage" 6/750 \$300 NET

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

2015 Bélouvé "Vin de Pierre" (I.G.P. Mont Caume) \$132

Bunans have decided to blend the traditional Mourvèdre with 50% Syrah to excellent effect. The familiar Bandol nuances are now surmounted with the pretty lavender tones of Syrah. A well-endowed wine that promises to give pleasure for several years.

SPAIN

ADEGA FAMILIAR ELADIO PIÑEIRO.....BIODYNAMIC

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

2018 "Envidiacochina" Albariño (Rias Baixas)

\$216

The name means "the envy of the worm", the pithy Spanish way of conveying that "I want to be in your shoes when good things are happening". This is the "second" wine, which Eladio resisted making for years, but debuted with the 2011 vintage. It spends six months on the lees in stainless steel, with weekly batonnage, and is then blended with 15% Frore de Carme from the previous vintage and held a year in the bottle before release. Super-charged Albariño with honey and tropical fruit, but showing also the lees contact with an almost balsamic sweetness and a mineral finish.

2015 "Amodiño" Albariño (Rias Baixas)

\$280 NET

Ever the restless one, Eladio conceived the original notion that aging this wine on the lees of THREE vintages (2014 and 2016, in addition to its own), might be interesting. And was he ever right! The textural gains are really remarkable, and yet the overall impression on the palate is slender, saline and fine, after the gorgeous, shimmering, floral nose. "Amodiño" means in the Galician dialect something like "slow down and savour" – an excellent piece of advice to appreciate the myriad attractions of this utterly original wine.

2013 Frore de Carme Albariño (Rias Baixas)

\$320 NET

Abandon everything you think you know about Albariño when you taste this wine, which was on the lees for fourteen months with monthly batonnage, then given extended bottle age before release. Think instead of recent releases of aged Muscadet, but then add a layer of fruit and density you will never get in that region, and the cognate becomes somewhere between Muscadet and Riesling, a land of milk and honey that you want to visit again and again.

2009 "La Coartada" (Alentejo - Portugal) (80% Aragonez, 15% Alicante Bouschet, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon)

\$264 NET

Eladio wanted to make red wine, and he knew Rias Baixas was not the place for it, so he bought an estate with vineyards near his holiday home in the Alentejo and made a red wine which is again about as far from an "industrial" wine as you can get. Four YEARS in new barrels, 3 years in stainless after that, at least six months in the bottle, no clarification, no fining etc. , designed to be drunk on release but will age effortlessly...The methods are somewhat evocative of López de Heredia in the sense that the wine is released when deemed ready to drink, while remaining capable of much longer aging. But the warmer Portuguese climate makes for a broader shouldered vein, not at all overripe but concentrated, minerally, and sublime. 2009 follows in the lineage of the vintages that have made this wine's excellent reputation.

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

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

2013 Finca Cuarta Godello (Ribeira Sacra)

6/750

\$116 NET

Distilling this wine down to its essence, it is Godello made in the style of white burgundy, fermented in 500 liter barrels and on the lees with batonnage for three months. Tiny production, rated the best wine of Ribera Sacra in a local competition, this will dazzle as it gains bottle age.

2017 Finca Cuarta Mencia (Ribeira Sacra)

\$120

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

TENOIRA GAYOSO (Bierzo).....

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

2014 Godello (Bierzo) \$136

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

CASAL DE ARMAN (Ribeiro)

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

2018 Eira dos Mouros Blanco (Treixadura) \$132

2017 Eira dos Mouros Blanco (Treixadura) \$136

2016 Eira dos Mouros Blanco (Treixadura) \$132

2015 Eira dos Mouros Blanco (Treixadura) \$148

Treixadura is king in Ribeiro, being especially well-suited to its weathered granitic soils. Although rarely given the chance, it is also a variety of some structure that enables serious aging. The “entry level” wine is stainless-steel fermented with some time on the lees. Remarkably expressive, vivid, and spicy, this charms as it seduces.

2016 Casal de Arman Blanco (90% Treixadura, 5% Godello, 5% Albariño) \$192

Whole-cluster pressed, wild- and selected-yeast fermented, there is a pervasive minerality to this wine rare in the region. All the flowers, spices, and honey the nose offers are balanced and focused by the finish of lime, ginger and gunflint.

2016 Eira dos Mouros Tinto (50% Sousón, 40% Caiño Longo, 10% Brancellao) \$132

2015 Eira dos Mouros Tinto (50% Sousón, 40% Caiño Longo, 10% Brancellao) \$136

There is a passing resemblance to the wines of Gaillac in these dark-toned, not-too-polished Ribeiro reds. This is entirely authentic, a vivid, juicy wine with a long finish of sour cherries. For connoisseurs of the original.

2016 Casal de Arman Tinto (Sousón, Caiño Longo, Brancellao) \$192

2015 Casal de Arman Tinto (Sousón, Caiño Longo, Brancellao) \$188

Composed of roughly equal parts of these three autochthonous grape, it is not surprising that this densely-coloured, sappy red seems entirely original. There are lashings of fruit, to be sure, braced by a judicious frame of tannin. Wild, dark yet bright, it is a lovely evocation of these Atlantic-influenced vineyards.

FRAGAS DO LECER (Monterrei)

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

2018 Frago do Corvo Blanco (Godello) NEW SOON

The Godello here is actually two distinctive types, one of which is confusingly called Verdello – an older clone that produces small, tight bunches of grapes ending in a point, whose juice is tauter and more mineral than the newer clone.

2016 Frago do Corvo Tinto (Mencia) \$152
Esteban's touch with Mencia is equally assured. The wine's middle-weight surprises a little after the huge colour, but the fusion of earth and fruit is simply perfect. A lovely counterpoint to the more ethereal style of Ribeira Sacra and the common rusticity of Bierzo.

R. LÓPEZ DE HEREDIA (Rioja)

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

2010 Viña Cubillo Crianza (75% Tempranillo, 25% Garnacha) \$224 NET
Redolent of red fruits, tomato and mint, equal parts rustic and refined, this earthy, lively red bears no resemblance to the current "international" style of Rioja, nor to the pale, oaky, "smooth" overcropped wines of the 1970's. Cubillo stands out in today's wine universe for the mannerliness and clarity of its expression and its unmistakable class. In warm years such as 2009, it doesn't exhibit any particular excess of ripeness.

2006 Viña Tondonia Reserva (75% Tempranillo, 20% Garnacha, 5% Mazuelo & Graciano) \$388 NET

2006 Viña Tondonia Reserva 6/1500 \$440 NET

2006 Viña Tondonia Reserva 12/375 \$220 NET

Tondonia typically stays in the oak a year longer than Bosconia, so this was released later. Despite the extra wood, sweet fruit and lead pencil notes dominate this wine, whose brightness and liveliness promise decades of potential. Ancient vines and great know-how ensure that Tondonia always delivers the goods. This is the one wine offered us by Lopez de Heredia whose supply is essentially unrestricted, so have at it! We do not know of a more consistent wine in existence, and 2006 follows smoothly in the footsteps of its forebears.

2007 Viña Bosconia Reserva (80% Tempranillo, 15% Garnacha, 5% Mazuelo & Graciano) \$312 NET

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

VIÑA IJALBA (Rioja).....ORGANIC

At first glance this rather modern producer might seem to have little in common with its illustrious companion above, but in fact Maria José was pleased to hear we would be representing the property. Ijalba has set the standard for environmental awareness in the region, from its organic production to its extensive re-cycling and environmental certification for the winery. The vineyards were all planted in disused quarries, which perhaps explains the remarkable minerality they are endowed with, especially the bigger reds with bottle age. The estate's other distinction is the championing of the less-known varieties of Rioja such as the two Maturanas and Graciano. They have now unveiled some attractive new packaging to go with their never-ending efforts at improvement, spearheaded by long-time talented cellar master, Pepe, who absolutely excelled with his red wines in 2016.

2017 Génoli (Viura) \$96

We have become impassioned devotees of Macabeo – Viura's other name in Spain. López de Heredia alerted us to the variety's innate class and age-worthiness, and we now find more and more examples of it – including this fresh, leesy beauty, so full of fruit and lift, perhaps deriving partly from its deft seasoning of Maturana Blanca and Sauvignon Blanc.

2016 Maturana Blanca \$148

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

2017 Solferino (90% Tempranillo, 10% Maturana Tinta) NEW \$108

Packing a little more heft and structure than the easy-going Tempranillo, Solferino represents a selection of superior grapes that are well suited to an understated élevage in four- and five-year barriques. A subtly rendered Rioja that slyly bridges the divide between traditional and modern.

2016 Graciano (100% Graciano) \$168
Ijalba's mission statement is to resurrect the traditional grapes of Rioja, and this wine from their 20 hectares of Graciano (the largest holding in the world) has been the flagship since they premiered the varietal bottling in 1995. Growers moved away from Graciano because of its inconveniently low yields, but the high acidity and intoxicating perfume of the grape are a huge part of what makes Rioja blends distinctive. The 2016 is liquorous and suave, with melted tannins. One cannot help but notice how many imitators this forerunner now has.

2016 Maturana Tinta 6/750 \$120 NET
It is safe to say, despite some seemingly authoritative claims to the contrary, that this rare autochthonous Rioja variety is NOT the same grape as the Trousseau of the Jura or the Bastardo of the Douro, with which pale, some would say effete, varieties this strapping, brooding beast of a wine has nothing in common. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only mono-varietal version of this grape on the market. It miraculously combines improbably dark colour and biting peppery nose with a fruit expression that is unmistakably Riojan, suggesting that the terroir of this fabled land really does in the end conquer all. This is as singular and compelling a wine as Spain offers in its vein, named after the estate's founder (at least until the great 2016).

BODEGAS PROELIO (Rioja)

Proelio is one of three wineries belonging to Javier Palacios, each dedicated to different genres : Nivarius exclusively (and most unusually to white Rioja), Trus to Ribeira del Duero, and Proelio to red wines. The vineyards are relatively high in the Rioja Alta at 650 meters, and offer an impressive variety of soil types and inclinations. But they are generally north-facing and have an average age of 45 years. Also, unusually for the region, the wines are produced 85% from their own holdings. Farming practices are very traditional, with all the plowing done by horses. The estate is in the second year of conversion to organic certification. Fermentation via indigenous yeasts is achieved in large wooden vats, with further aging all done in increasingly large barrels and final assembly executed in concrete.

2015 Crianza (100% Tempranillo) \$136
We were hardly looking to add a Rioja to our collection when this one came knocking, but we were seduced by its authenticity and innate harmony. Neither self-consciously traditional nor overtly modern, it impresses with its clear, cherry-toned fruit and honestly tannic, briary texture. Real wine for real people.

BODEGAS VALDUERO (Ribera del Duero)

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

2017 Yunquera (100% Albillo) \$180
This, the solitary white wine that they produce, is a head-turner. The Albillo is an autochthonous variety that renders a golden-hued, fullish dry white with a startlingly floral aroma not unlike Viognier. This is the ninth vintage we have imported of a unique wine that has developed a devoted following in California.

2016 Finca Azaya (Castilla y Leon) (100% Tinto Fino) \$192
This new presentation of the wine from their Tierras Altas vineyards is an entirely compelling rendition of Tempranillo in this singular locale. The huge boysenberry fruit is beautifully contained by the 14 months spent in oak, and the overall result is a joyously rollicking wine that manages to be both serious and hedonistic.

2012 Arbucala Esencia (Toro) (100% Tinta de Toro) \$136
Produced from vineyards owned by their winemaker, this is Toro as seen through Ribera del Duero eyes - exuberant and fruity, just over 14%, raspberry-scented and thoroughly engaging.

2014 Crianza (100% Tempranillo) \$248 NET

2011 Crianza (100% Tempranillo) 24/375 \$240 NET
Valduero's tendency towards a finesse and style unusual in Ribera del Duero is exemplified by the contained power of this wine, with its quintessential marriage of urgent fruit and American oak.

2011 Reserva (100% Tempranillo) LOWERI \$360 NET
Valduero's vineyards are amongst the highest in the D.O., with several resultant benefits. The grapes hang longer while retaining their acidity and not developing excessive alcohol. This Reserva is aged largely in French oak, with a smattering from eastern Europe thrown in. It is lithe and persistent, with a palpable saltiness in the finish. Very much built for the long haul.

BODEGAS PEREZ PASCUAS (Ribera del Duero)

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

2015 El Pedrosal (100% Tempranillo) \$200

Fruity and pretty, yes, but this entry level wine demands much more attention for its mix of richness and elegance than its relatively modest price would suggest. Serious wine from serious people. 2015 brings a sweetness of fruit characteristic of this lovely European vintage, while not stinting in the stones department!

2006 El Pedrosal Reserva (100% Tempranillo) SOON

What an inspiration from the brothers to hold back a quantity of the 2005 vintage and release it ten years later. No further proof of the intrinsic class and age-worthiness of even the "entry level" wine is needed than this startlingly firm and vibrant beauty, which has entered a beguiling middle-age with the promise of very long life ahead. The endless salty finish is alone worth the price of admission. 95+ points from Luis Gutierrez in the Wine Advocate.

2013 Viña Pedrosa Crianza (100% Tempranillo) \$264 NET

The estate's flagship vineyard has a remarkable propensity for delivering over-performing yet understated wines year-in, year-out. Meaty and fresh, with a signature saltiness to season the flesh. Perhaps it is the memory of the extravagant banquets of Cordero grilled over vine cuttings that the family customarily offers its visitors which evokes these carnal associations, but there was never a better wine created for lamb than this.

2014 La Navilla Reserva (100% Tempranillo) \$440

La Navilla comes from a single, eponymous, south-facing vineyard, the highest in the estate, where the vines average 35-40 years old. It is aged, uniquely, for 20 months in exclusively French oak. Fresh berries ooze from the glass, and the deep color suggests an altogether different wine from the others, but reassurance comes when the jamminess is cut by fresh, bright acidity in the finish.

BODEGAS FRONTONIO (Valdejalón)

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

The little-known region of Valdejalón, centered around their village of Épila on the banks of the River Jalón, nestles north of Calatayud. The climate is Mediterranean, with significant diurnal temperature changes and low rainfall. The vineyards lie at altitudes between 350 and 700 meters, and benefit from loose soil structure with significant limestone content. Many of the best vineyards are also conspicuously schistous. The team's preference is for north-facing slopes, rich in stones, and planted to old vines. In their masterly hands, they give rise to Grenache wines (red AND white) of a purity and intensity we rarely see, at a price ridiculously fair, which have already been acclaimed by reviewers everywhere.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this story is that Frontonio is quite literally the only producer making wines under the Valdejalón imprimatur. It is a tribute to Fernando's intuition, particularly, that he could divine the remarkable potential of this area, whose results are, to our subjective judgment, consistently superior to anything else in Aragón.

2018 "El Casetero" Macabeo (Campo de Borja) NEW \$96

We have become just crazy for the Macabeo grape, valuing its limey twang and remarkable structure. Frontonio predictably ace this "entry level" version, offering a worthy counterpart both to their Valdejalón version below and Viña Ijalba's lovely Génoli rendition from Rioja. You can't have too much Macabeo!

2017 "Microcósmico" Macabeo (Valdejalón) NEW \$148

Macabeo is, of course, known as Viura in Rioja. As there, it can yield such a shapely, rich and well-structured wine with honied, expressive fruit and expansive palate. Frontonio goes from strength to strength with this wine. Our allocation of their 2017 was increased to all of 44 cases!

- 2018 "El Casetero" Garnacha (Campo de Borja)** **SOON**
Just to the northwest of Valdejalón, and enjoying a similar climate and topography, strongly influenced by the cold, north-eastern cierzo winds, this IGP styles itself the "Empire of Garnacha". With good reason! We were frankly stunned by the price-quality ratio of this entry-level wine. Produced from dry-farmed, head-pruned vines and fermented with indigenous yeasts, this shows the ripe, plummy and spicy side of the grape, with good freshness and length.
- 2015 "Microcósmico" Garnacha (Valdejalón)** **\$148**
More than any wine, this convinced us Fernando was on to something. Vibrant, sweet fruit, oozing with white pepper and very much at ease with itself, this wine expresses purity and completeness throughout. VERY LOW.
- 2015 "Telescópico" Garnacha (Valdejalón)** **NEW \$200**
Equally pure, but a step up in richness, sweetness, and high-toned expression of the grape, this is balanced, focused and long. It exemplifies the "cool" aspect that separates Frontonio from other practitioners of the art of producing well-balanced wines in warm climates. Strawberries galore sprinkled with black pepper.
- 2016 "Supersónico" Garnacha (Valdejalón)** **\$216**
This selection hails from a single, windy vineyard of old vines at 1000 meters elevation. The addition of some stems adds structure to the expected berry purity. It was aged briefly in used 300 liter French barriques. Wild and suave at the same time, this offers another window into the miracle of Valdejalón Garnacha.
- 2016 Garnacha "Special Cuvée" (Valdejalón)** **6/750 \$228 NET**
We were accorded 48 of the 1160 bottles of this beauty, which derives from especially old vines and was aged for 11 months in Allier barriques. You could do worse than offer your customers a horizontal tasting of these five exceptional Garnacha wines. The experience of ascending the staircase of Frontonio's Garnachas is akin to that of Claus Schneider's Spätburgunders, in that the wines do not necessarily become richer and more powerful. Rather they attain increasing finesse, nuance and length.
- 2016 "Telescópico" Carignan (Valdejalón)** **\$220**
We could not resist the sheer bravado of this stunner, which dares you to question all pre-suppositions about the lowly Carignan. It is almost redundant to mention the purity of flavor, which is this producer's hallmark. Allied to such declamatory power and sculptural strength as to add up to a statement of true importance.

MESTRES (Penedès)

We are very excited to bring you a new cava producer, though Mestres and "new" are not words which co-exist often. Indeed Mestres not only pioneered production with no dosage (in 1945) but actually registered the word "cava" in 1959, and these are recent developments for them. The current owners are the 30th generation to run the estate, as the first records of the family as vinegrowers and négociants date back to 1312. In the 1600's they began construction of the winery in San Sadurni d'Anoia, which was finished in 1861. They bottled their first sparkling wine in 1925, and opened their first bottle to celebrate Christmas in 1928. They make López de Heredia seem like arrivistes! All that aside, it is the quality of the wines that drew our attention. The youngest of their wines is aged 2 years in the cellar, making all of their bottlings either Reserva or Gran Reserva. In order to achieve cavas that are full and rich, development is never rushed - the wines undergo a natural stabilization process during their long aging, so that the crystals which form can then be disgorged along with the yeasts. All of their production is aged under cork during tirage, and all bottles are riddled and disgorged by hand. They have about six vintages worth of stock in their impressive cellars under the main square of San Sadurni. They also have the luxury, being so long on the scene, of owning excellent vineyard land not yet in production that they are carefully and methodically bringing on stream.

- N.V. Cava "1312" Brut Reserva** **\$164**
Although made from the same three classic grapes as Castell d'Age below, and despite also being on the dry side (6 gm. of dosage), this cava makes a friskier and fruitier impression, while retaining a refreshing tang.
- 2012 Cava "Coquet" Brut Nature Gran Reserva** **\$236 NET**
Four years on the lees have imparted to this wine a marked depth and length of flavor. Undosed, it holds its dryness effortlessly. A cava to eat with.
- 2012 Cava "Visol" Brut Nature Gran Reserva** **6/750 \$156 NET**
In 1945, Visol was the first Cava ever sold without the addition of dosage after disgorgement. The tradition continues successfully, as old vines, a fermentation and initial passage in traditional chestnut barriques and five years on the lees combine to produce a uniquely savory and long-flavoured wine.

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

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

N.V. Cava "Anne Marie" Brut Nature Reserva \$160

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

2013/14 Cava "Aurèlia" Brut Nature Gran Reserva \$200

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

N.V. Cava "1988" Brut Nature Reserva \$236 NET

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

2017 L'Essència del Xarel-lo \$160

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

2018 Garnatxa 0% SO2 NEW \$188

2017 Garnatxa 0% SO2 \$168

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

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

The Buil and Giné family returned to their winemaking roots in the rapidly evolving Priorat region in 1996 and since then have expanded into neighboring Montsant, as well as Rueda and Toro. The defining thread linking their wines seems to be pure fruit expression, richness without heaviness and excellent price-quality ratio. Xavier Buil, the proprietor, shows an uncanny sensibility and instinct for proportion and is now a seasoned veteran of his craft. The winery has become a showcase for the region, with a swank hotel and tasting room.

2018 Nosis, Rueda Blanco (100% Verdejo) NEW \$120

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

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

2017 Giné Giné, Priorat (Garnacha, Cariñena) NEW \$180

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

This unoaked old-vines cuvee remains an exceptional bargain in this pricey neighborhood. Bottled with screw-caps. Bold and full of flavor in 2015 and 2017 alike.

2014 Joan Giné Giné Roure Classic, Priorat (45% Cariñena, 45% Garnacha, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon) NEW \$268 NET

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

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

2017	17-XI, Montsant (Garnacha, Cariñena and Tempranillo)	NEW	\$144
2015	17-XI, Montsant (Garnacha, Cariñena and Tempranillo)		\$160

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

2009	Buil, Toro (100% Tempranillo)	\$320 NET
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Xavi continues to make superb Toro, with a relative lightness of touch compared to the norms of the region.

N.V.	Vermut	\$224 NET
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Xavi turned a lot of heads when he unveiled this new product a few years back. A dramatically flavorful and imposing Vermouth, this has proved a major hit with mixologists everywhere, who have warmed to its unusually dry and forceful flavour. The herbs are grown organically and macerated for two years in oak barrels before being blended with white Priorato wine. A solera system that dates back to their first, century-old vermouths, ensures uniformity of taste from bottle to bottle. Delicious neat, it will also elevate any cocktail to which it is added, whether a simple Martini or something more exotic.

ARANLEÓN / MONTESANCO (Requena - Valencia)

ORGANIC

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

2018	MÓN Macabeo (Utiel-Requena) ORGANIC	NEW	\$176
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Our love affair with Macabeo continues with this latest entrant to the field. Unirrigated vines aged 50 years and older planted at an altitude of 2300 feet give rise to this taut and deeply coiled wine, which entirely belies its burgundian vinification. A brilliant addition to our range of top Spanish whites.

2017	Encuentro (100% Bobal) ORGANIC	\$88
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Before the rise of Tempranillo, Bobal and Garnacha were the dominant black grapes grown in Spain. Garnacha has staged a huge comeback in esteem in recent years, due to the efforts of such proponents as our own Frontoño. Maybe it is now the turn of Bobal, which can turn out utterly delicious wines like this one. Juicy and smooth, but with a reassuring lick of asperity, it evokes blackcurrants on the nose and offers sheer pleasure on the palate. Ridiculously cheap for the quality, especially considering the well-known additional expense of organic production.

PORTUGAL

It is now ten years since we dipped our toes into Portuguese waters. We have never taken a better decision! By now, the rest of the world has woken up to the vinous riches of this blessed land, with its treasure of autochthonous varieties and remarkable variety of climates and terroirs for so small a country. Our producers are a Who's Who of the best - from the biodynamic hipster Vasco Croft at Aphros to the solidly grounded Mário Sérgio Alves Nuno of Quinta das Bageiras. Isolated for years from the "happening" areas of Europe, the Portuguese have been free to make wine their own way, for better or worse, from coiled, snappy whites and mysterious, minerally reds to entirely singular sparkling wines. In no small part due to your warm embrace of these wines, we have been able to extend our reach to most of the significant wine-growing regions.

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

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

2015	Loureiro Espumante Reserva Brut	\$192
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Fermented partially in oak and aged 18 months on the lees. Quite dry, as Portuguese sparklers tend to be, with lovely citrus and biscuit notes, a touch earthy but never coarse, offering elegance and discretion.

2018 "Ten" (Loureiro) \$132
The return of this low-alcohol (roughly 10%, hence the name) wine as a frame to the classic Loureiro, with the Daphne on the other side. Vasco's aim is to demonstrate that this grape in this place can produce a panoply of styles and weights, all faithful to its origins. The market has embraced it with a passion.

2017 Loureiro \$152
One lovely aspect of our Portuguese whites is that though they mostly play in the same field - lively, snappy, unoaked - they are as different from each other as night and day. This one starts off citrusy/grassy and fills out with honey, before ending with a hint of fennel. Need we say that it's much more than a simple palate cleanser? Indeed, it is one of those gratifying wines that prove to be fascinating mid-term developers despite its modest price tag.

2017 Daphne (Loureiro) \$216
Vasco swears by Loureiro, and who can argue with him in the face of such a compelling wine? Made only in the best years, Daphne is given 70% skin contact and 30% barrel fermentation (used oak and chestnut). Pure, vibrant and long, it sports a mere 12% of alcohol, proving that a wine does not need to be big in order to be important.

2018 Vinhão \$168
How much red Vinho Verde have you had recently? You'll want more after tasting this, though from the reviews it may be the exception that proves the rule among these wines. Crazy deep purple in the glass, sappy, wild berry fruit, huge acidity and freshness and more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Just when you thought you had tried everything, along comes this!

PASSAGEM (Douro)

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

2012 Douro White (40% Gouveio, 30% Viosinho, 30% Rabigato) \$120
Poised, sappy and stony wine in the tradition of the popular DouRosa white. Faintly resinous flavour with lip-smacking acidity and unexpected length on the palate.

2016 Douro Red \$128
Made from a kitchen sink of traditional port varieties, this sumptuously-coloured red brings off the difficult feat of offering the Douro's inherent power in a gently fruity style that is nonetheless true to its roots. 2016 was a cooler year than its predecessor, yielding a more moderate wine - not such a bad thing!

2016 Reserve Red (45% Touriga Franca, 40% Touriga Nacional, 15% Tinta Cao) 6/750 \$116 NET

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

The warmth of the Upper Douro was tamed by the relatively restrained 2012 vintage, so while we have excellent color here, and lovely cocoa notes from the French oak, there is also an invigorating fresh snap to this lush wine. We feel it's a harbinger of great things to come from the area. 2016 bears out this prognosis. It is sumptuous without being exaggerated, superbly balanced between fruit and oak and brimming with life.

N.V. Tawny Port 6/500 \$76
This is the producer's "five year old" style, aged in smaller barrels than the ruby for faster evolution. Even so, it is ruddier in hue than the name would suggest. This is vivid, authentic tawny port.

N.V. Ruby Reserve Port 6/500 \$76
It is hard to conceive of a more sheerly joyous and delicious "basic" port than this. We could not resist it, especially in the fetching squat 500 ml. bottle that we have selected for the Passagem ports.

2012 L.B.V. Port 6/500 \$96
The genius of this style of port is that it strikes a perfect balance between the added structure of vintage wine and the supple texture gained from extended barrel-aging. Especially delicious in 2012.

N.V. Ten Year Old Tawny Port 6/500 \$124 NET
Many a port-fancier swears by aged tawny as being the finest example of the genre. This seductively classy wine bears out such a contention, with its subtle brandied raisin aroma and integrated, not-too-sweet palate.

2011 Vintage Port 6/750 \$260 NET
From a big-time vintage, this wine does not stint in its delivery of powerful but shapely fruit. Obviously for the long haul, it nonetheless offers considerable pleasure now by dint of its sheer endowment.

QUINTA DE LA ROSA (Douro)

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

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

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

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

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

QUINTA DAS BAGEIRAS (Bairrada)

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

2017 Espumante Bruto Natural (Maria Gomes, Bical, Sercial) \$132

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

2016 Espumante Bruto Natural Rosé (Baga) \$136

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

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

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

2017 Colheita Branco (Maria Gomes, Bical, Sercial) \$104

Anyone who had the pleasure of tasting the 1994 vintage of this wine at the Top 100 tasting in 2011 will remember how improbably fresh and refined it was. One does not normally expect a sprightly, Muscat-scented light white like this to age and develop. Well, think again. Drink it or age it, there is no better value in our portfolio. The 2016 enjoys a spiffy new label.

2013 Branco Garrafeira (Maria Gomes, Bical) 6/750 \$136 NET

Availability of the estate's top white is tiny and we have until now always missed the boat in ordering it. In the lovely 2013 vintage, however, our timing was just right. Matured in old oak, the powerful nose is herbal and citric, veering to the wild side. Concentration and intensity of this order are suggestive of a wine capable of long aging. While not left in oak as long as the wines of López de Heredia, there is nonetheless something reminiscent of the Rioja masters here.

2014 Colheita Tinto "Chumbado" (70% Baga, 30% Touriga Nacional) \$112

Mário Sérgio held back this vintage of his anything—but—"basic" red for a couple of extra years to give it a chance to settle into its frame and develop secondary flavours. Unfined and unfiltered, this is a deadly serious wine at a steal of a price.

2016 Reserva Tinto (60% Baga, 40% Touriga Nacional) \$144

Part of Mário Sérgio's genius is to find the inner sweetheart in the brooding Baga – or maybe it just needs the right partner in Touriga Nacional to bring out its kinder, gentler side. This is a spicy, open, incense-like wine with a strong brambly undertow. It should age very nicely.

2011 Tinto Garrafeira (Baga) 6/750 \$160 NET

This is world-class wine made from a parcel of vines over 75 year old. Old-style Nebbiolo is perhaps the best cognate, but married with some Roussillon (think Gauby) opulence, with toasted walnut and coffee notes in the bouquet and powerful structure. Not cheap, but well worth the price for a flavor from the past that could improve for 30 or 40 years. The 2011 garnered some extravagant ratings from the press.

FÍLIPA PÁTO (Bairrada)**BIO-DYNAMIC**

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

N.V. 3B Blanc de Blancs Sparkling Wine (Sercial, Bical, Maria Gomes) \$152
AT LAST! The white counterpart to Filipa's perennial best-selling rosé sparkler. It is every bit as delicious and sheerly drinkable. We expect it to be just as popular, too. Unfortunately, it is scarcer.

N.V. 3B Rosé Sparkling Wine (75% Baga, 25% Bical) \$156
Let Filipa describe this for us—"Raspberries and strawberries on the nose, the palate has the freshness and body of the [Baga grape](#) and the creaminess of [Bical](#)." She says, "I believe that Baga and Bical in [Bairrada](#) are like the Chardonnay and the Pinot in Champagne. They need each other to make a balance..." we will just add that the farming is organic, only indigenous yeasts are used, and there is very little RS....

2018 FP Branco (Arinto, Bical) \$132
Filipa never fails to deliver an unlikely quotient of animation and sheer character in this, her "basic" white wine. We will sell our allocation fast, so jump on it while we have it!

2016 Nossa Calcário Branco (Bical) 6/750 \$144 NET
For her trophy white, Filipa uses only her best and oldest Bical grapes from the Ois do Bairro, where stony clay overlays an extremely chalky subsoil. Fermented burgundy-stye in 500 liter barrels with batonnage every two weeks until bottling in May, this is always rated one of the top whites in Portugal. A study in contrast, with creaminess balanced by an assertive flinty character – as if Meursault were made in Sancerre.

2018 DNMC Baga (Bairrada) \$132
Bairrada is a region rich in small holdings of old vines planted on limestone soils with excellent qualities. This new wine is the happy result of Filipa's and William's ceaseless search for good sources of grapes to supplement their own to meet the burgeoning demand for their wines. Entirely consistent with the familiar FP Baga, which it replaces in the range, you will find it to have the familiar aromatic flair, thoughtful balance and sheer deliciousness that have made Filipa the shining star that she is.

2017 Baga "Post Quercus" (Beiras) 6/500 \$80 NET
The magic that Filipa wreaks on the recalcitrant Baga has to be tasted to be believed. Inspired by burgundy, she tames the beast and offers us a wine of breathtaking perfume and improbably silky texture. A wonderful juxtaposition to the more rugged style of her friend Mário Sérgio at Quinta das Bageiras. This was made in amphora, whose transpirational qualities are of huge benefit to the grapes. Just 11% alcohol!

2016 Baga "Territorio Vivo" (Bairrada) 6 x 750 \$120 NET
Filipa has been methodically buying up small parcels of old-vine Baga (particularly) throughout Bairrada. This has enabled her to make a larger palate of wines, including this one, which is intended to showcase the nature of her incomparable region. Fermented in lagares, with 30-40% whole clusters, then aged in a combination of foudre, amphora and pipas, it is a forceful yet fine ambassador, nicely contrasted to the more delicate charms of the Post Quercus.

2017 Nossa Calcário Tinto (Baga) 6/750 \$160 NET
It is truly gratifying to reflect that the market recognises Baga as a major grape so that we are now able to offer four expressions of it from this house (together with several from Quinta das Bageiras) without saturating it! From their most prized parcels in the home commune of Ois do Bairro, this is a sanguine, coiled and febrile wine with all the potential of a top burgundy.

[QUINTA DO PINTO](#) (Lisboa – Alenquer)**NEW**

Rather as Vienna's wines are something of an afterthought to many in an Austrian context, so do the wines of Portugal's capital, Lisbon, suffer occlusion from the bigger shadow thrown by the Douro, Dão and Vinho Verde. But, there are no fewer than ten sub-districts to this region and they offer an impressive variety of wines, from the commanding age-worthy reds of Colhares to the vivid wines of Alenquer.

We were immediately struck by the authenticity of the wines here, which so clearly matches that of its proprietors, sisters Rita and Ana Cardoso Pinto. The vineyards are planted to no fewer than 27 varieties, both autochthonous and international, in clay and limestone soils on gentle slopes that enjoy a southern exposure. The proximity to the Atlantic confers a cool lift that is most welcome. Production methods are integrated and all yeasts are native.

2018	Vinhos do Lasso Colheita Seleccionada White (Arinto 50%, Fernão Pires 50%)	NEW	\$104
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The synergy between these two grapes is akin to that of Semillon and Sauvignon. Arinto provides the fruit and substance, while Fernão Pires, with its Muscat-like qualities, supplies aromatic lift and nervosity. The end result here is a simply impeccable mid-weight wine that sports lovely freshness, an enticing oriental spice nose, perfect texture and excellent acidity.

TERRAS D'ALTER (Alentejo)

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

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

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

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

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

GREECE

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

NAOUSSA

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

VAENI (Naoussa, Macedonia)

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

2016 Naoussa (Xinomavro) \$88
This is a perfect introduction to the aromatic joys of Xinomavro and its capacity for producing refined, tense and expansive red wine. It could plausibly cost much more. Let us be glad that it does not.

2013 Grande Réserve (Xinomavro) \$144
It is not clear why the Macedonians like to use French names to describe their top wines, but old habits can die hard. Made from the best grapes available and aged for a minimum of five years in wood, there is an added weight, depth and beauty here that add up to something close to greatness. We challenge you to find a wine of this class and maturity at a price remotely close to this.

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

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

2016 Preknadi \$216 NET

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

2017 Naoussa (Xinomavro) 6/750 NEW \$144 NET

It is a given that Xinomavro evokes Nebbiolo more than anything, but Giorgios' wine reminds us unavoidably of Côte Rôtie. A heady blend of peppers, olives and Syrah spice evoke the Mistral rather than zephyrs. But then those reassuring tannins in the tail remind us of where we are, while the relatively sumptuous fruit suggests a potential for generosity that not all Naoussa offers in its youth. Those of you who remember fondly the great Uranos of Thimiopoulos will find a kinship here. This lives up to the great reputation of 2017 in this region.

CHRISOHOOU (Naoussa, Macedonia)

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

2013 Naoussa (Xinomavro) \$132

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

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

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

2014/5 Assyrtiko \$152

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

TETRAMYTHOS (Ano Diocopto, Patras) ORGANIC

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

N.V. Retsina \$108

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

2017 Roditis \$120

2011 Roditis \$116

What a great and often under-rated grape Roditis is. Witness this beautiful wine, endowed with uncommon weight and intensity for its modest price-tag. Scented and fine, it offers a honied driness underpinned by firm acidity that confers a certain seriousness, while nonetheless offering a generous measure of pure vinous pleasure. Such is the brothers' success, that they sell out quickly each vintage. The 2011 shows the grape's unexpected capability of graceful aging.

2018 Roditis "Natur" (IGP Peloponnese) NEW \$140

There is a certain beauty in the ineluctable fact that this object lesson in "natural" wine-making (absolutely nothing added to the wine) should derive from Europe's oldest wine culture. The sheer dimension and clarity of flavour, allied to a luxurious texture, yet all packed into an orderly frame, are breathtakingly good. There is nothing even remotely offbeat about this classy and delicious wine.

2017 Agiorgitiko \$112

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

2018 Mavrokalavrytino "Natural" NEW \$140

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

INOMESSINIAKI (Kalamata, Messinia).....

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

2018 "Mate Fortuna" Mantinia (Moschofilero) NEW \$132

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

2010 Fare Nemea (Agiogitiko) \$132

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

MYLONAS (Keratea, Attica)ORGANIC

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

2013 Savatiano

\$124

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

METHYMNAEOS (Chidira, Lesbos)ORGANIC

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

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

2015 “Orange Wine” (Chidiriótico)

\$228 NET

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

2015 Chidiriótico

\$240 NET

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

ENDOCHORA (Crete)

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

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

2015 Théra (Vidiano)

\$144

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

AUSTRIA

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

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

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

2017 Gelber Muskateller "von den Terrassen", Ried Stiegelstal \$160

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

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

2018 Grüner Veltliner Federspiel "Rupertwein" Ried Stiegelstal NEW SOON

We arrived too late to buy the 2016, but did not miss the boat in 2017. This is textbook GV Federspiel – glassy, delicate, dry and markedly mineral, as Maria's wines are wont to be. Attention need not be drawn to its bargain price.

2017 Grüner Veltliner Smaragd "Glauberkreuz", Ried Stiegelstal \$212 NET

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

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

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

2018 Riesling Smaragd Ried Stiegelstal SOON

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

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

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

2018 Grüner Veltliner Wolfsgarten DECEMBER

This wine accounts for half of Richard's production and will seem familiar to those who cut their teeth on Nigl's Freiheit. Slender and piquant, with lovely ripe acidity, it is a juicy, mouth-watering and sheerly delicious Grüner Veltliner with real Kremstal cut and a classic creamy loess expression of Veltliner. Allocated to us despite being the entry-level wine!

2017 Grüner Veltliner Gebling \$240 NET

This is Richard's top wine, ratcheting up the loess expression to the n'th degree. The harvest ended on October 25, and the resultant power and concentration manifest in a rich but unexaggerated palate evocative of yellow fruits like mirabelle. Fermented with natural yeasts, so unsurprisingly boasting a whisper of sweetness that merely heightens the gorgeous fruit flavours. Exceptional value for the high quality echelon.

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

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

2017 Roter Veltliner Wagram \$176

We have always had a weakness for this unusual grape, which feints towards its eponymous Grüner non-relative but presents itself more spicily and broadly. Delicious, sappy and vivid, with a caressing texture.

2017 Weissburgunder Wagram \$176

2016 Weissburgunder Wagram \$188

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

2017 Zweigelt (Wagram) \$152

2016 Zweigelt (Wagram) \$164

There are all sorts of ways to make red wines smooth and alluring, not all of them straightforward. But sometimes you come across an example that comes by its virtues honestly, and this is such a one. Gushingly aromatic and bursting with insanely delicious brambly fruit, this is a wine that comes out to shake you by the hand and does not let go. 2017 is in the lineage of its predecessor, but slenderer.

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

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

2017 Blaufränkisch (Burgenland) \$144

2015 Blaufränkisch (Burgenland) \$160

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

2016 Blaufränkisch "Rhodolith" (Burgenland) \$200

Rhodolith is an unusual stone of petrified algae, found in limestone form on the surface of the vineyard. Gernot made us an irresistible offer in the interests of showing you what he can achieve with Blaufränkisch beyond his excellent basic wines. Made from a special clone of the grape and aged for 14 months in second-use large barrels, this gorgeous wine sports a deep colour, svelte texture and fantastically pure flavour, predicably suffused with the iron tone that makes this variety so distinctive. Like all Schreiner wines, the value is improbable for the quality.

2015 Cabernet Franc "Confidentia" (Burgenland) 6/750 \$240 NET

It is not unknown for us at WineWise to make Quixotic choices, and this one will rank high in the historic stakes. But how to resist the aristocratic poise of this densely constituted yet balletic wine? By now, the world has come to accept Cabernet Franc as a serious grape yielding powerful, long-lived wines – think Quintarelli's Alzero and Clos Rougeard, for example (not to mention Ch. Cheval Blanc). It is perhaps immodest to mention such icons in this context, but not when you taste the wine! Please trust us – this is the Big Time!

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

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

POLZ (Südsteiermark).....

If you have a long memory, you will recall that this iconic estate was part of Terry Theise's opening Austrian portfolio. We were therefore delighted when the brothers Erich and Walter Polz approached us to see if we would be interested in resuming relations, since we had nothing but positive recollections of our earlier co-operation. Styrian wines sell with the utmost of ease on the Austrian market, but have not done as well in America, perhaps because they compete so directly with other countries practising the "international" varieties, often at lower prices. So credit our farsighted friends for consciously offering us their wines at extremely competitive prices. The quality is unimpeachable across the range, from the entry-level Steirische Spiegel range to the trophies emanating from their celebrated single sites of Hochgrassnitzberg and Obegg.

Polz has grown to a quite considerable size over the years. The core estate in Spielfeld sits quite literally on the Slovenian border, and offers as dramatic a picture as can be imagined, with its intersecting patchwork of vineyards trained at different angles across the steep folds of this verdant landscape. Because rainfall is so heavy in this region, grass and other cover crops are allowed to freely grow in all the rows, both to encourage competition and to fix the soil against erosion. For several years, Polz also managed the estate of Rebenhof, in the neighbouring village of Wittsheim. That estate was taken back by its owners, but Polz retained some vineyards here, too. They also have their famed Theresienhöhe site in the Kitzegg area. Then, in 2008 they bought the estate of the bankrupt producer Tscheppe in Leutschach. This came complete with an exceptional Sekt cellar, so sparkling wine is now a significant part of the producer's programme. They also converted the building into a magnificent hotel which also offers a deservedly popular restaurant where you can drink just about every Polz wine offered at risibly reasonable prices. And then, ever questing for new frontiers, Polz has joined with several other leading Styrian growers to open up a regional tasting project called Vinofaktur.

And, in future, you can look for wines from the Thermenregion, where they have taken over the grand but neglected estate called Thallen.

Styria is joining the DAC system soon, which is going to bring with it some very interesting changes to how the wines are categorized and sold. Young Christoph Polz, who has been making the wines now for the last several years, seems exceptionally well qualified to face the many challenges this and other developments will present him with. Our initial selection of wines is designed to showcase Polz's mastery of Sauvignon, as well as showing off a couple of their other tricks.

2017 Steirische Spiegel (70% Riesling, 30% Sauvignon Blanc) \$116

This wine is quite simply one of the most ridiculous bargains in the history of Austrian wine. Riesling is not a big thing in Steiermark, but Polz has a small area planted to it in their best sites of Grassnitzberg and Hochgrassnitzberg, where it thrives on the limestone-rich soils. The class asserts itself spectacularly, while the idea of blending in Sauvignon Blanc is simply inspired, the two varieties melding seamlessly and unexpectedly. Overall, the wine is tender and snappy, with a cool green tone and quince fruit.

2017 Gelber Muskateller Klassik \$152

A lot of thought goes into this wine. Muskateller is a tricky variety in the vineyard, due to its large, tightly compressed bunches and their resultant tendency to rot. Christoph's solution is to cut the bunches in half in June to increase aeration and reduce the yields. He also likes to macerate the juice overnight on the skins, which lends a welcome note of asperity to the overwhelmingly lovely and typical Muscat aromas and slightly minty fruit. The finish is long and salty.

2017 Weissburgunder Klassik \$132

There is a quiet authority to this wine, which avoids all ostentation and excess. The limestone soils suit this variety perfectly, and lend the wine an intriguing smokiness. An electric attack leads to a medium-bodied palate replete with juicy fruit and wet-stone minerality.

2017 Sauvignon Blanc Klassik \$160

While Welschriesling is the most planted variety in Steiermark as a whole, Sauvignon has always been Polz's calling card, and was largely responsible both for their and the region's high reputation. This wine is a blend from their various holdings and showcases admirably the Styrian genius for recognizable but not overt Sauvignon expression. As such, it can hold its own against the its peers from the Loire and New Zealand.

2016 Sauvignon Blanc Spielfeld "84/88" 6/750 \$104 NET

We snapped up the last few remaining bottles of this sensational wine that hails from the home vineyards of Grassnitzberg and Hochgrassnitzberg. The tiny hail-and-frost reduced yields of 2016 had the silver lining of endowing the wine with uncommon thrust, authority and length. Musky and important. Styria near its best.

GERMANY

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

BADEN

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

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

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

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

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

2017	Burg Ravensburg Riesling trocken - Sulzfeld	NEW	\$132
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2016	Burg Ravensburg Riesling trocken - Sulzfeld		\$144
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There is an unexpected Mosel-aspect to this wine, starting with its greenish hue, continuing to its mown hay aroma, and finishing with its salt-and-apple palate. A delicate and incisive dry Riesling, sporting a mere 11.5% alcohol.

2016	Burg Ravensburg Riesling Kapellenberg, Grosses Gewächs	6/750 NEW	\$148 NET
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We have been coveting the Riesling from this tiny fillet vineyard since we first encountered it, but had to wait for the luscious 2015 to get any. Kapellenberg enjoys a combination of limestone-sandstone and volcanic soil unique among the holdings of the estate. It gives rise to a ravishingly aromatic wine, more on the "green" than the "yellow" side of Riesling. In this cooler 2016 vintage, it is almost unbearably focused and intense.

2012	Burg Ravensburg Riesling Husarenkappe, Grosses Gewächs	6/750	\$140 NET
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How enlightened of this estate to hold back their top wines, even the whites, until they have entered a calm second stage. This is magnificent, grand-scaled Riesling with an insistent herbal twang to its sumptuous fruit.

2011 Heitlinger Riesling Schellenbrunnen 6/750 \$128 NET
Starting with the 2012 vintage, Schellenbrunnen, a steep 8 hectare monopole, with 40 year-old vines planted in iron-rich "Keuper" (marl) soil over coloured limestone, is officially classified as a Grosses Gewächs. The resulting wine is a poem of beauty, seethingly spicy, lavish and grand. The price is a pittance for wine of this quality. LOW STOCK.

2017 Heitlinger Auxerrois \$140
Hiding under the fanciful Marketing Department name and the striking, geometrical label lurks a lyrically beautiful wine, with a ravishing orange blossom nose and a tender, dry and long palate. 80% of all the Auxerrois in Germany is planted in the Kraichgau. When done like this, it seems more relaxed and searching than its cousin Pinot Blanc. The word "delicious" might have been invented to describe this beauty.

2016 Burg Ravensburg Pinot Noir - Sulzfeld \$160
The distinctive soil-type of the Kraichgau is "Keuper", a red-coloured, iron-rich clay and limestone conglomerate that seems tailor-made for what might reasonably be termed a "burgundian" style. This nicely coloured and unexaggerated wine has been a success from Day One. It is predictably stylish and honest, with well-judged oak tones and a salty tail. After 2015's high charge, 2016 offers a more moderate, some might say typical, expression

2012 Burg Ravensburg Pinot Noir Löchle, Grosses Gewächs 6/750 \$148 NET
Löchle is the top Pinot Noir cru of Sulzfeld, offering wines of density and force. This makes an excellent claim for Burg Ravensburg's status as the district's leading light. Years of life ahead of it.

2011 Heitlinger Pinot Noir Königsbecher, Grosses Gewächs 6/750 \$140 NET
The red marl atop a solid limestone base makes for the distinctive terroir of this Grosse Lage. Exceptionally rich wine from a warm vintage that has arrived at a juncture where spicy Pinot fruit and new oak have melded seamlessly. Another Grand Cru wine with a very long future at a bargain price for this stature.

2015 Burg Ravensburg Blaufränkisch (Lemberger) - Sulzfeld LOWERI \$160
Lemberger, as Blaufränkisch is known in Baden, produces a higher-toned, perhaps finer wine than is typical of the better-known Burgenland examples. Claus has always had an especially deft touch with this truculent grape. The 2015 shows exceptional finesse at a very early age.

2012 Burg Ravensburg Lemberger "Dicker Franz" Grosses Gewächs 6/750 \$160 NET
"Fat Franz" was Baron Franz Göler of Ravensburg, a renowned 18th century gourmand. The steep monopole grand cru named after him, however, gives rise to strikingly fine and intense wine, stripped of all needless weight but brimful of power and spice. This is a picture-perfect Baden Blaufränkisch at its apogée because of the estate's enlightened policy of holding its top reds back for few years. In this, the first vintage where the vineyard was officially accorded Grosses Gewächs status, the wine recalls a Yirgacheffe coffee by dint of its gorgeous blueberry notes and roasted overtones. It speaks in a penetrating but not a loud voice.

2014 Heitlinger Pinot Meunier Reserve Alte Reben (Spiegelberg) \$204
Spiegelberg is a Grosse Lage whose class shows in this dramatically fine rendition of a grape that is rarely if ever allowed to shine so brightly. The vines planted in 1968 evoke burgundy both in the wine's pallid hue but more particularly in its sweet-salt flavor tension and the nobility of its structure. This is a game-changer. The 2014 is all finesse and delicacy.

SCHLOSS ORTENBERG (Offenburg - Ortenau)

The Ortenau is a distinct sub-region centered around the ancient mid-sized town of Offenburg. The predominant soil-types here are granitic, with high sandstone outcroppings and loess. This estate has a fascinating history dating back to 1300. It is one of a handful of great German estates, such as the Juliusspital in Franken and the Vereinigte Hospitien in the Mosel, that are publicly owned – in this case by the municipality of Offenburg. Run with fastidious care by the young and dynamic Matthias Wolf, the vineyards are cultivated sustainably (think feromonal interference instead of insecticides, organic fertilisation and composting). They were innovative in German terms by eliminating cork in 2004, and they offer employment to handicapped people in their vineyards. We have increased our range without exhausting anything like the possibilities here! Starting with the 2016 vintage, they also have snazzy new packaging that highlights the soil types.

2013 Klingelberger (Riesling) Kabinett trocken \$160
The Ortenau makes so special a style of Riesling that they even give it its own name, Klingelberger, used nowhere else in Germany. Uniquely in Baden, a significant proportion of the vineyard area is dedicated to the Queen of Grapes. When you savour the suave, honied, yet vibrant style of this wine (just 11.5% alcohol and 7.2 gm. of acidity), you will understand why. Be among the first to champion this singular expression of Riesling with its long salty tail.

2016 Klingelberger (Riesling) Alte Reben trocken 6/750 \$132 NET
Riesling accounts for 25% of the estate's vineyards, which enables them to make the selections necessary to single out this top cuvée. Its greenish tinge is a reassuring entrée to the unmistakable, fine Riesling scent. What marks this wine is its finesse, not its power (it sports a mere 12% alcohol). But the minerality is ringent!

2015 Grauer Burgunder trocken Alte Reben 6/750 \$132 NET
This is a triumphant rendition of a challenging variety. Absolutely fastidious viticulture enabled Matthias to pick fully ripe grapes with exceptional acidity. Fermented and aged in new 300 liter barriques, it is a flamboyantly smoky spice-bomb, luscious in texture yet brimming with vitality. An object lesson in Pinot Gris.

2016 ein Pinot Noir "Granit" trocken \$192

2015 ein Pinot Noir "Granit" trocken \$200
Schloss Ortenberg cultivates both Baden and French clones of Pinot Noir, and it is the latter which give this wine its French rather than German name. Grown, as the name implies, in granitic soils, and aged in a mix of Stückfässer (large casks) and barriques, this is a fine, restrained and tensile version which will age beautifully.

BERCHER (Burkheim - Kaiserstuhl)

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

2016 Chardonnay SE trocken 6/750 \$200 NET

2016 Chardonnay SE trocken 12/375 \$224 NET
We never expected to import chardonnay from Germany, but found ourselves helpless in the face of this beauty's ineffable quality and, most importantly, its authentic differentness, for this is an unmistakably German wine in its blossomy aromas and focused, glossy and salty palate.

2016 Burkheimer Weissburgunder trocken \$176
Bercher's originality is to offer an education in the influence of volcanic soils (Burkheim) versus loess (Jechtingen). In 2016, as in 2014, we narrowly preferred the fervid pungency of Burkheim as it influenced the Pinot Blanc. This is an imposing, palpably mineral wine that nonetheless has plenty of flesh on its manly bones. Wines like this lend support to the notion that Austria has a serious rival to its claim to make the world's best Pinots Blancs!

2013 Jechtinger Grauburgunder trocken \$164
The loess-rich soils of the village of Jechtingen produce a more delicate style of wine that we thought offered a charming counterpoint to some of the other Pinots Gris in the selection. The impression is tender but well-braced, with a billowing quality to the fruit and a deliciously sweet-fruited yet spicy aftertaste. It is however a real trocken wine!

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

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

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

2013 Jechtinger Eichert Spätburgunder Erste Lage 6/750 \$168 NET
Grown from 25-plus year-old vines in a mostly volcanic, south-facing "Premier Cru" vineyard in Jechtingen, this wine shows all the virtues of Bercher's over-performing basic Pinot on a grander and more imposing scale. Its seriousness, however, detracts in no way from the innate sweetness of the fruit, which hauls you right into the wine's beating heart of stone. The 2013 is easing into its prime. The 2015 is a declamatory Pinot, with lovely volcanic notes and a suave texture.

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

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

FREIHERR VON GLEICHENSTEIN (Oberrotweil - Kaiserstuhl)

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

2018 Pinot Noir Rosé "Hofgarten" trocken \$136

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

2016 Grauer Burgunder "Hofgarten" trocken \$164

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

2016 Grauer Burgunder Henkenberg trocken \$268

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

2015 Pinot Noir Hofgarten \$160

2013 Pinot Noir Hofgarten \$160

"Hofgarten" is the name that they give to their basic estate-grown wines, though this originates largely from the Eichberg, an important vineyard site with alluvial soils over a volcanic bedrock. Unexpectedly serious for its echelon, it exemplifies the ability of Baden to synthesise Pinot's twin virtues of unexaggeratedly sweet fruit and soil-transparency. It is like conversing with someone who is both charming and erudite. Perhaps because of the screw-cap closure, the wine is slow to evolve. The 2013 is in a perfect spot now, sweetly and silkily exemplary of its great vintage. The 2015 shows the tremendous promise of another landmark vintage.

2011 Spätburgunder "Aus dem Kessel" \$252 NET

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

ZIEREISEN (Efringen-Kirchen, Markgräferland)

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

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

2016 Gutedel "Heugumber" \$124

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

2016 Weisser Burgunder \$172
There is a wonderfully relaxed quality to this wine, curiously evocative of the style familiar from the great Nikolaihof estate in the Wachau. The attack is salty, the texture silky and the flavours just delicious.

2014 Grauer Burgunder \$160
Many producers have cottoned on to the predisposition of Pinot Gris to élevage in oak, but few manage the art as deftly as Hanspeter Ziereisen. There is a tenderness and vivacity to this wine that are simply elusive to most of its practitioners. The faintest hint of residual sweetness (3 grammes) imbues it with a delicious hint of voluptuousness that falls well short of the obvious. It offers us yet another individual expression of this most recalcitrant of grapes, that seems so happy in Baden.

2013 Blauer Spätburgunder \$184
We could not resist Hanspeter's "basic" Pinot in 2013. It is a poem of sinuous beauty, subtle, salty and long.

2015 Blauer Spätburgunder "Rhini" 6/750 \$280 NET
From a parcel rich in iron, this is a truly grand example of the heights that these wines can reach. Smoky on the nose, it is built like a Mercedes Benz – solid, luxurious, shapely and quietly powerful. It will have tremendous staying power and is worth every cent of its price.

CLAUS SCHNEIDER (Weil am Rhein, Markgräferland)

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

2014 Weiler Schlipf Gutedel \$128
Sporting just 11% of alcohol, this is a simply delightful, appley rendition of the infinitely charming Gutedel grape. Our first importation of the 2013 vintage sold out in a flash. We bought more of this perfect warm-weather wine this time.

2015 "L'Ambré" Gutedel Orange Wine 6/750 \$132 NET
It takes a lot for us to depart from our classicist selves, but we were truly impressed by this, Johannes' maiden voyage into the brave new world of "natural" wines. The color is less orange than most, and the aromas actually evoke fruit – lovely peaches, perhaps. Dry and deft, with just 11% alcohol, this is a truly pleasurable wine with a long salty aftertaste.

2015 Weiler Schlipf Pinot Blanc CS* 6/750 \$192 NET**
Our breath was taken away by this wine, which hails from the oldest vines of the estate. Suavely elegant, slightly smoky from the élevage in lightly-toasted Allier barrels, this is burgundian in inspiration but resolutely Badisch in effect. The Schlipf really is a fantastically mineral site. World class wine.

2013 Weiler Grauer Burgunder CS \$216 NET
CS is the designation given to the reserve-quality wines of the estate. This beauty has a dramatically smoky nose and voluptuous texture. The oak is effortlessly sucked up and everything about this wine is grand. 13% alcohol and fully dry!

2016 Weiler Spätburgunder \$204
The nose is clear, dark-toned and refulgent, leading into a palate of unexaggeratedly sweet Pinot fruit braced by a fervid minerality, all cloaked in the softest cashmere. An impeccably composed and aristocratic wine.

2013 Weiler Schlipf Spätburgunder CS (Unfiltered) \$260 NET
All the virtues of the Spätburgunder above are rendered in a form that is simply a little finer and richer. Vibrant, suave and stylish Pinot Noir with the rooty qualities that one hopes for from the grape and a degree of concentration that commands attention.

2013 Weiler Schlipf Spätburgunder CS* (Unfiltered) 6/750 \$200 NET**
As one climbs the quality tree at Schneider, one does not get more power or weight but rather an ever-increasing degree of filigree and concentration. This is the sleekest, purest and most finely balanced of the bunch. The top wine in a top vintage, it would hold its own against vastly more expensive wines from Burgundy or the New World. It proves that very often the best value is not to be found with the cheapest wines but, paradoxically, with the most expensive.

ALDINGER (Fellbach, Württemberg)**NEW**

Württemberg is a region even more obscure outside Germany than Baden, but it enjoys tremendous renown at home for its singular renditions of autochthonous grapes such as Trollinger, Lemberger and Kerner, as well as the classics of Riesling and the burgundy varieties. With Germany's automotive capital Stuttgart sucking up the lion's share of the region's wines, together with towns such as Heilbronn, Karlsruhe and Pforzheim, there has been little motivation for the best producers to seek export markets.

This is the background against which we had the unbelievable good fortune to add this celebrated producer to our portfolio. The first and only producer in Württemberg to be given five "grapes" by the Gault Millau guide, the family has been established in Fellbach since 1492, both as coopers and wine-growers. In the sure hands of brothers Hansjörg and Matthias Aldinger, they have been propelled into the stratosphere of quality and acclaim. Their urban winery lies within spitting distance of the Mercedes Benz headquarters and Museum (whose exceptional restaurant, open to the public, naturally offers their wines). Among the many accolades they have won was a 100 point rating from Gault Millau for their 2011 Brut Nature Sekt. In short, what we have here is as good a wine producer as Germany offers, making an astonishing array of wines across the board and at every price echelon. Welcome to their world.

(2013) Pinot Brut 2 Sekt (65% Pinot Blanc, 35% Pinot Noir)**NEW 6/750****\$148 NET**

It is characteristic of the collegiality of the Aldingers that they should have co-operated with friends and colleagues to produce their "basic" Sekts. In this case, the collaborators are fellow producer Hans-Peter Wöhrwag and Germany's absolute mage of bubbles, Volker Raumlund. Cutting no corners, this cuvee, which hails from the excellent Sekt vintage of 2013, was left on the lees for 56 months before disgorgement. This long aging has imbued it with a fine mousse and an ineffably creamy and insinuating nose. The acme of elegance, it will fool many a champagne-fancier.

(2013) Brut Rosé 2 Sekt (30% Pinot Blanc, 70% Pinot Noir)**NEW 6/750****\$148 NET**

With similar origins to the Pinot Sekt above, it has all the same virtues while obeying its prime dictum to be distinctly rosé in style. So, in addition to the creamy texture, it sports gorgeous wild strawberry fruit and finishes distinctly, but not austere dry.

2018 Untertürkheimer Gips Riesling trocken**NEW****\$196**

Gips is perhaps the most storied vineyard owned by Aldinger. A disused gypsum quarry, it was converted to vines in 1973. Like other converted quarries, such as the famed Kupfergrube in Schlossböckelheim, it gives rise to wines that seemingly explode with a mineral charge. The ravishing perfume and vibrant palate complete the picture. Riesling always seems to assert its supremacy in the face of the challenge of other grapes!

2018 "Feldhase" Trollinger**NEW****\$132**

No grape exemplifies Württemberg quite like Trollinger. Italophiles lap it up when it is called Vernatsch or Schiava. But it is indigenous to Germany! Susceptible to over-cropping and wateriness, in Aldingers' hands it becomes a thing of beauty – with plenty of color and fruit, against which the trademark earthiness manifests as a nuance rather than a dominant trait. The name "Feldhase", or "hare", pays homage to the producer's devotion to nature. They are big supporters of Stuttgart's Zoo, as well.

2017 Fellbacher Trollinger Alte Reben**NEW****\$164**

From a 35 year-old plot in the Lämmle (a Grosse Lage), and given 12 months in used barriques, this is a mid-weight but strikingly salty and insistent wine that demonstrates the impact that Trollinger can make when deliberately constrained by low yields and the vinification is as serious as that accorded to Pinot Noir.

2017 Lemberger**NEW****\$148**

Lemberger, the local name for Blaufränkisch, is Württemberg's other red calling card, and what a beauty Aldingers make. Fermented for six weeks on the mash, and aged in used barriques, it is simultaneously firm and satiny, with a perfumed sheen and pulsing minerality.

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

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

2015 Riesling Sekt Brut**\$216 NET****2014 Riesling Sekt Brut****\$260 NET**

The Germans drink more bubbly per capita than anyone else on earth, but little of it is as fine and delicious as this one. Most producers farm out its elaboration to specialist houses, but Hartmut has long been a master of the champagne method and makes his Sekts himself. This bottling was on the lees for some 30 months, and the luxurious dosage is a Beerenauselese! We asked for it to be moderated at about 7 gm., which has brought the wine into a lovely balance, where the innate fruitiness of the Riesling is tempered by the acidity and minerality.

- 2016 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Silvaner Kabinett trocken \$112**
Silvaner has a long and storied history in the Rheinhessen and it excels in this site. The wine is zippy and fresh, with an attractive grassy edge and mouth-watering finish. Very easy to drink but not exactly simple!
- 2017 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Auslese trocken \$144**
The price-quality ratio of this wine beggars belief. The grandly luscious nose is instantly suggestive of some very Grosse Gewächs indeed, but Hartmut is not a member of the club, so you get a glorious mouthful of grandiose dry Riesling for an inconsequential tariff. Don't miss it.
- 2014 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken \$144**
We waited a long time before buying an off-dry Riesling from Bernhard, but not without admiring this style from them for a long time. The porphyry soils of Hackenheim seem especially apt to the genre, and this beauty sports an expressive nose, reminiscent of the Nahe, and a perfectly poised palate of impressive length. Exceptional value.
- 2016 Frei-Laubersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Kabinett feinherb \$140**
Hartmut's interpretation of the notion of "feinherb" is a liberal one! The sweetness level here is what you might expect in another producer's "normal" Kabinett. Endowed with a freakish degree of minerality from the quarzite soils of the Rheingrafenberg, this wine over-delivers in every department.
- 2016 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Scheurebe Kabinett \$132**
Bernhard really has a special touch with this characterful grape. This new vintage bursts with the grapefruit and blackcurrant notes we look for, while maintaining an exemplary balance of sweetness and acidity, and sporting the oversized mineral charge characteristic of the estate in 2016. A perfect match for Thai curry.
- 2017 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Spätlese \$128**
Another absurd bargain in sheerly delicious and perfectly poised Spätlese that will delight all traditionalists.
- 2011 Hackenheimer Kirchberg Riesling Auslese \$160**
Hartmut followed the masterly 2010 vintage of this wine with a luscious and beautifully balanced 2011 that wrung every ounce of possibility out of the year. Delicious Auslese at a bargain price, now returned to stock after a too-long absence!

WEEGMÜLLER (Haardt, Pfalz)

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

- 2017 Scheurebe trocken \$156**
Steffi has always had a way with the kinky Scheurebe. Derived primarily from vines in the Herrenletten and Mandelring, the grapefruit aroma is one you can take to the bank. Truly dry, and sporting just 12.5% alcohol, the wine has an electric impact on the palate, simultaneously light-footed and substantial, with an expansive salty finish. Truly masterful.
- 2011 Haardter Bürgergarten Riesling Kabinett \$192 NET**
It is hard to imagine a more sheerly pretty expression of this very great vineyard than Steffi routinely conjures up. A paradigm of great Pfalz Kabinett. The 2011 is especially juicy and gulpable.
- 2016 Gewürztraminer "Alte Reben", Haardter Bürgergarten 6/750 \$140 NET**
Quite honestly, this is everything that Alsace Grand Cru wine aspires to be but rarely manages. A Turkish Delight nose that you can take to the bank, a peppery punch to the palate that brooks no opposition, and a texture of such voluptuous luxuriance as to induce swooning. All this in a dry format with no hint of heat, despite the 14% on the label. The 2003 vintage of this wine tastes magnificent today. This is similar.
- 2015 "Von 4 Morgen" Riesling Auslese 12/375 \$220 NET**
Simply one of the most unforgettable wines tasted last year, it is a masterpiece, and we snapped up every available bottle. Grandiose in its conciliation of botrytis and apricot fruit, the palate is glossy and spicy and unpitifully delicious. Don't miss it!

LOTHAR KETTERN (Piesport, Mosel)

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

The estate was founded in the 1950’s by Lothar, but son Philipp has been in charge since 2009. To describe him as iconoclastic is an understatement. There is a paradox at work in Piesport which is that the easy-to-cultivate but inferior flatland vineyards on one side of the river cost much more than the fabled steep slopes of the Goldtröpfchen bowl on the other. But Philipp is a maniac for quality, so he traded almost all the land bought by his father for more challenging but infinitely more rewarding parcels in the Goldtröpfchen, including some in the great Falkenberg portion and other higher parts whose cooler micro-climates accord better with his aims. In the last year, he has expanded into Leiwen, buying parcels in the great Josefsberg vineyard, as well as increasing his holdings in Piesport. He has converted the estate to something approaching organic viticulture, while pushing the envelope with Fio and its low-sulphur wines. He has also converted most of his production to dry and off-dry wines, while maintaining the noble tradition of classically sweet Mosels to the manner born. In short, he offers us something of everything – bone-tingling, electric Mosel classics, modern dry wines and cutting-edge natural wines. Welcome to a new star!

(2016) Fio “Piu Piu” Riesling Pétillant 6/750 SOON

Everybody’s doing Pet Nat, but few do it as well! This is a simply lovely rendition of Riesling, true to its roots, but done another way. Not a hint of funk gets in the way of the wine’s dry and salty Mosel dialect. The first shipment sold out in a trice. We eagerly await the second.

2016 Fio “Teppo” Riesling \$176

An object lesson in how to do “Natural Wine” right in the Mosel, in the sense that it declaims its origins much more powerfully than its technique. Classic green-tinged Mosel colour and a big smoky nose. The wine spent 18 months on the lees, giving it a beautiful silky balance. Filigree and focused. “Genius” I wrote on tasting it!

2016 Riesling feinherb \$160

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

2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett \$164

From the first mysterious whiff of its Böhse-veiled floral scent, to the last salty drop of its slatey tail, this ballerina of a Riesling prances regally on your tongue, hardly there at all, but leaving an ineffable impression. 2017 yielded just 1500 bottles, but what bottles they are – classic, puckerish Piesport Kabinett.

2014 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese \$212

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

(2015) Spätburgunder Sekt Rosé Brut 6/750 \$128 NET

Philipp took a principled decision to dedicate his estate to Riesling – except for this wine. Like a lot of Riesling-lovers, he also adores Pinot Noir, but does not deceive himself that he can make the equal of burgundy in Piesport. Sparkling wine, however, is another matter, and this entirely original example completely poleaxed us. Its fidelity to Pinot Noir is total – the nose could simply be nothing else. But, and most importantly, the piercing clarity of its soil expression is unmissable. There is an almost volcanic quality to the soil flavours. We hope and expect this wine to become a cult favorite. The speed with which the first tranche sold out encourages us to believe that it will! The second release is actually from the 2015 vintage, which Philipp considers readier than the wines of intervening vintages.