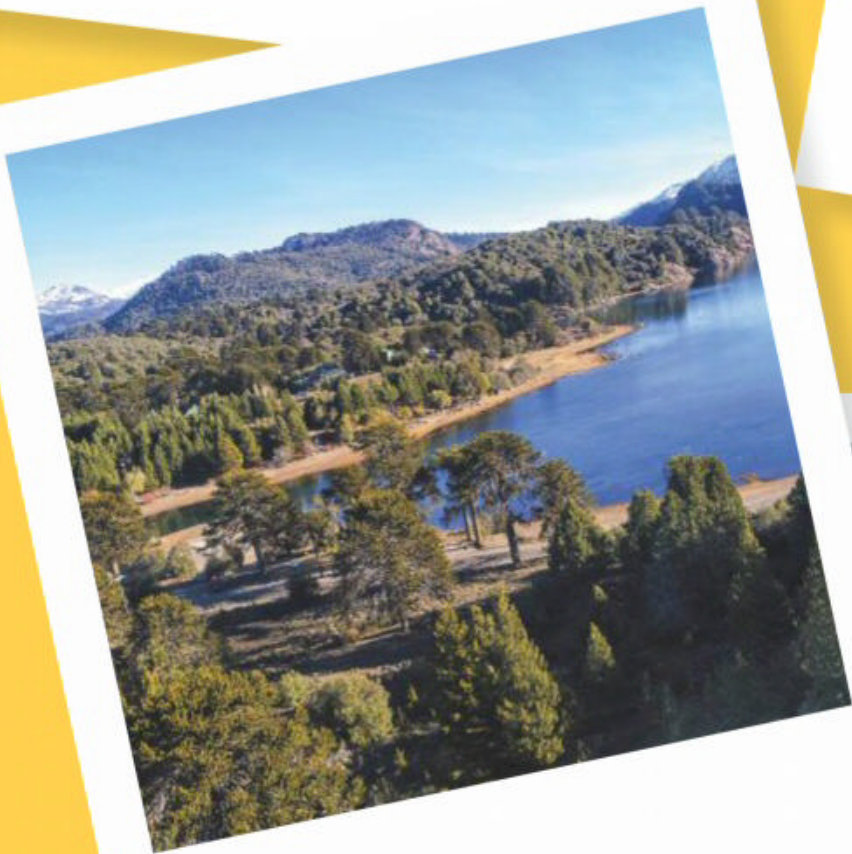




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April 2020

Decanter

The top Bordeaux blends from around the world

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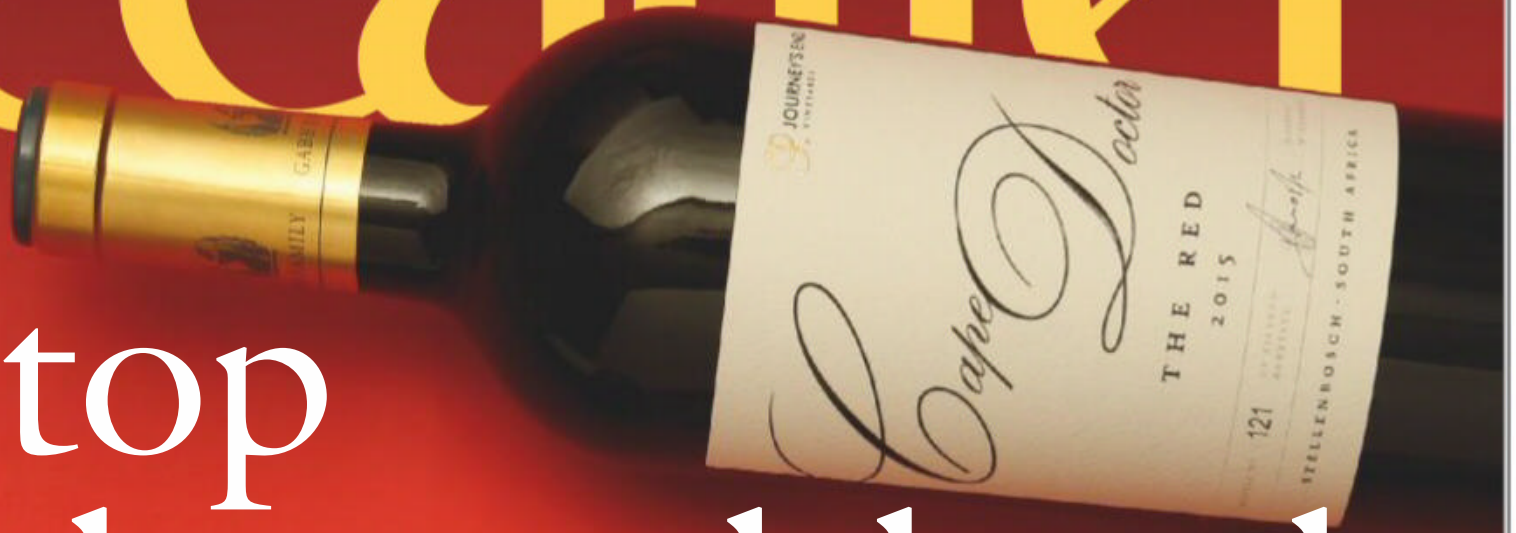
South American Chardonnay

Languedoc: Corbières reds

Barolo 2006

PLUS

- *California Zinfandel*
- *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti new releases*
- *Peloponnese for wine lovers*



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The art of wine

A pressing matter

Eola-Amity Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon

At Cristom Vineyards, owner Tom Gerrie (*left*) and winemaker Steve Doerner position their glasses to collect a sample of freshly pressed Pinot Noir during the 2016 harvest. In 2017, Gerrie began the transition of the estate to biodynamic farming, implementing a philosophy of minimal intervention in the vineyard and the winery – but a little taste test in the name of quality control is necessary, no matter the producer's ethos.

Photograph: Robert Holmes





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Month in wine

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

Vineyards at severe risk, study warns

More than half of the world's vineyards could cease to be viable if the planet warms by 2°C – the upper limit set by the Paris Agreement climate accord – according to a new study.

That figure rises to 85% if global warming hits 4°C, said the study, which was published in the scientific journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Researchers used existing data on warming scenarios and vine-growth behaviour to build models exploring how 11 grape varieties would perform in different regions.

It is one of the starkest warnings published so far regarding the impact of climate change on vineyards, but its authors said there is still time to adapt.

Switching grape varieties could reduce losses by more than half in some areas, they said. However, their research acknowledged the financial, legal and cultural hurdles involved in, for example, uprooting Pinot Noir for Grenache in Burgundy.

One of the lead authors, Dr Elizabeth Wolkovich from the University of British Columbia, told *Decanter* that extensive adaptation of vineyards could prevent the worst-case scenario in some areas.

'We've only seen to date roughly a quarter of the warming we expect by the end of the century, given current emissions,' she said.



Drought is causing vines to die in California



Above: Dr Elizabeth Wolkovich, University of British Columbia

'Growers need strategies that will work for much greater warming, or an aggressive global strategy to limit further warming.'

Researchers said they hoped that other agricultural sectors would also find the study to be useful.

'Wine is like the canary in the coal mine for climate change impacts on agriculture, because the grapes are so climate sensitive,' said study co-author Dr Benjamin Cook, of Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

'There are still opportunities to adapt viticulture to a warmer world,' said Dr Cook. 'It just requires taking the problem of climate change seriously.'

Champagne faces mounting challenges in 2020

Even without the prospect of US import tariffs, Champagne faces a difficult situation this year, said Vincent Perrin, general director of Comité Champagne.

He said provisional numbers pointed to a 2% drop in Champagne shipment volumes in 2019 for the second

consecutive year, despite a rise in the value of bottles shipped.

Based on 302 million bottles shipped in 2018, that would amount to about six million fewer bottles shipped in 2019.

Weaker demand in France and the UK, particularly among lower-priced supermarket orders, were a problem, said Perrin, speaking at the Archiconfrérie St-Vincent de la Champagne festival.

He promised investments to producers for ecological targets and marketing.

'We need these investments to create a new desirability for our product in the coming decades,' he said.

Plans for Beijing wine museum and theme park announced

Chinese authorities have agreed to pay £51m for an 18,000m² wine museum in Beijing, set to open in 2021 and named Musée Universel du Vin.

The foundation behind Bordeaux's Cité du Vin has helped with the design, inspired by the St-Emilion skyline.

Located in Beijing's Fangshan district, the museum will be the centrepiece of an 'international wine village' of vineyards, a hotel and restaurants.

Officials hope to create a destination for Chinese wine lovers, and to attract 500,000 visitors in its first year. ➤





Harvest at Pierro Vineyards

Margaret River vintage is ‘epic’

Chardonnay grapes have been picked a month ahead of schedule in Margaret River, prompting winemakers to hail 2020 as the greatest vintage on record.

‘It’s going to be an epic vintage,’ declared Deep Woods Estate winemaker Julian Langworthy. ‘Warm, dry conditions in November have resulted in the perfect storm of a very early, very fast vintage.’

Pierro Vineyards winemaker Dr Mike Peterkin said he was ‘highly optimistic about 2020’, given that it was his ‘earliest vintage in 41 years in the region’.

‘We have never looked better as a Chardonnay region,’ agreed Vasse Felix winemaker Virginia Willcock.

Margaret River’s run of consistently idyllic vintages is now in its 15th year, with many attributing its proximity to the ocean as a significant factor.

Langworthy explained: ‘The vineyards are shielded from extremes by the Indian ocean, Southern ocean and Geographe bay, which results in an even heat accumulation throughout the growing season. It really is grape-growing nirvana.’

Flametree winemaker and general manager Cliff Royle noted 2020 is also promising for Cabernet Sauvignon.

‘Early-heat vintages like this set the scene for us to make great, long-lived Cabernets, and the 2020 Cabernets have the potential to be amazing – even better than 2018,’ he said.

Non-EU and UK wines to see post-Brexit boost

Wine-producing countries outside Europe could have the advantage in post-Brexit Britain, according to the international Wine Trade Monitor trends survey published by communications agency Sopexa.

More than half (53%) of UK wine professionals surveyed foresaw growth for Chilean wines, 45% predicted an increase for Australian wines and 40% backed Argentinian wines.

More than one in four of the UK respondents expect that Brexit’s impact will boost the production of local wines, and 79% predict that English sparkling wines in particular will experience ‘healthy growth’.

In addition, the report confirmed that France, Italy and Spain remain the most ‘prominent’ wine-producing countries in terms of global presence on UK lists.



English sparkling

Wine leak at Sonoma County vineyard spills into river

A vat containing 367,000 litres (97,000 gallons) of Cabernet Sauvignon wine burst open at Rodney Strong Vineyards in Sonoma County, spilling its contents into the nearby Russian River.

A quantity of wine said to be between 174,000-363,000 litres escaped into local waterways, according to the incident report issued by the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services.

But Chris O’Gorman, Rodney Strong’s spokesperson, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that winery staff diverted half of the spillage, adding that they notified authorities immediately following the ‘apparent mechanical failure’.

In brief Stay up to date with the latest wine news on Decanter.com, or follow us on Facebook or Twitter @Decanter

■ Michelin France 2020 demoted France’s longest-standing three-star restaurant, Auberge du Pont de Collonges near Lyon, to two stars. It had held three stars since 1965 and was run by chef Paul Bocuse until his death in 2018. Inspectors gave a third star to three new contenders, including Kei Kobayashi in Paris, now the first Japanese chef in France with three stars.

■ Provence producer Château Miraval, co-owned by Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie and Famille Perrin, is set to launch a rosé Champagne in partnership with Pierre Péters Champagne, ‘effectively creating a new Champagne house’, according to winemaker Rodolphe Péters. The project aims to combine Miraval’s expertise of saignée-method rosé winemaking with Pierre Péters’ blending knowledge.

■ Bordeaux cooperage Surtep has launched barrels ‘toasted’ with a patented heating system using jade stones instead of open fire. It will use the jade method as part of its ‘BioOak’ range, which already includes barrels toasted with volcanic stones. Surtep CEO Thomas Moussié said jade allows for greater precision, and that the stones are prized by the company’s target market, China.

■ Château Smith Haut Lafitte’s owners, the Cathiard family, have bought the Napa Valley estate Flora Springs. Founded by the Rennie brothers in 1885, it covers 100ha across the St Helena and Rutherford AVAs. ‘We feel at home,’ said Florence Cathiard, citing the estate’s focus on Bordeaux varieties. Its former owners, the Komes and Garvey families, will retain control of the Flora Springs brand name.



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Looking outwards

Michael Beard, Portland, Oregon

Fear for the future

Niamh Boylan, Dublin, Ireland



Left: one family pet may have fallen victim to a first experiment in winemaking (see *Letter of the Month*, above)

Adventures in winemaking

Paul Mckelvey, St Albans, Hertfordshire, UK



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Journeys in wine

Sacha Calixte, Québec city, Canada

Letter of the month



The world flocks to Washington

While most of Washington's 1,000 producers are home grown, or at least from the US, stroll through the vineyards and wineries and you'll notice a melting pot of international accents.

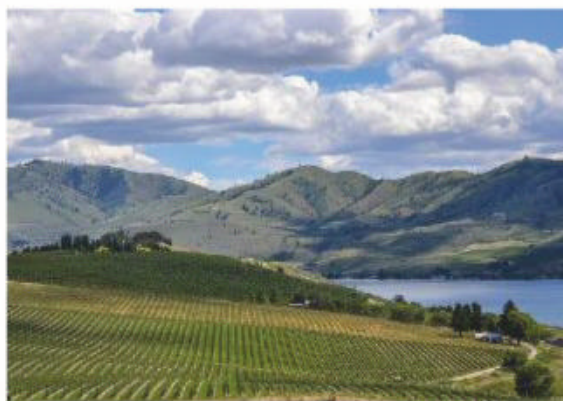
Over the past 30 years, the state – the second-largest wine producer in the country – has increasingly been attracting global investment and talent.

Winemakers and viticulturalists, particularly from Europe, have been enticed by Washington's unique terroirs and climate – not to mention the freedom of working in a burgeoning wine region with less restrictive appellation rules.

'Washington is all about opportunities,' explains Burgundian Marie-Eve Gilla, head winemaker for Rioja giant Valdemar Wine Estates, Washington's first non-American owned winery.

'When I arrived here in 1992, it was definitely a road less travelled, but it attracted me more than an already established area like California.'

'In France, the wine industry has many rules that were created to preserve the tradition of an appellation's specificities and characteristics but limits the creativity of the viticulturists and winemakers,' says Rhône-born Gilles



"It's a perfect crossroads between the Old and New Worlds"

Nicault, director of winemaking at Long Shadows, and husband of Gilla.

'Being able to work with many different wines styles here in Washington opens up a whole new level of inspiration and personal research. It pushes me to explore new limits.'

Also from the Rhône is Michel Gassier of Tenet Wines, a project with Chateau Ste-Michelle, a founding winery of Washington and its largest. He has been fascinated to see how Syrah expresses itself in the state's diverse terroirs.

'It has been great discovering the

nuances of each,' he says. 'The unique signatures between the rolled black pebbles of the Rocks District of Walla Walla; the loamy, sandy river beds of the Yakima Valley; or the very sandy zones of Horse Heaven Hills.'

Also involved in joint projects with Chateau Ste-Michelle are Germany's Riesling maestro Dr Ernst Loosen and Marchese Piero Antinori of the historic Italian family wine company.

'In the future we might explore new grape varieties not yet planted in Washington,' suggests Marchese Antinori, 'but with Col Solare being a boutique winery based in Red Mountain, we've decided to focus on varieties that have proven to give the best results here – primarily Cabernet Sauvignon.'

Ernie Loosen is equally focused on Riesling for Eroica, whose 2018 vintage marks the 20th anniversary of the joint project. 'I wanted to find out what could be done in Washington using the hundreds of years of Riesling experience gained in Germany,' he explains.

'We've never tried to make a German Riesling – the climate and soils of Washington are completely different – but I've loved discovering and exploring the terroir here, and we've learned to get a finer expression of that into the wines.'

'Washington is a perfect crossroads between the Old and New Worlds,' asserts Swiss born Jean-François Pellet at Pepper Bridge.

'We have the generosity of the New World combining with some great intricacy attributes from the Old World. I really believe the state has a great wine future ahead.'



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Andrew Jefford

‘Fire, I fear, will be a wine theme of the coming decade’



The bushfires affecting Australia as I write this column, shortly after the turn of the year, are deeply traumatic: 5.9 million hectares burnt and counting.

The vineyard region most grievously affected so far is the one I know – and love – best: the Adelaide Hills. About one third of the 2020 crop has been lost and some 1,100ha burned, including vineyards and wineries I remember well from the 15 months my family and I spent living there between 2009 and 2010: those of Geoff Weaver, James Tilbrook, the Henschke vineyards at Lenswood, Petaluma and Bird in Hand.

We register the facts – but can we actually imagine how these losses must feel? Creating a vineyard and a winery business for a small-scale, ex-Oddbins émigré like James Tilbrook is much more than a job: it is a life in its near-entirety, truly a life less ordinary. Imagine everything you have put your efforts into – not just your physical and mental labour but your passion, your creative forces, your vision, everything you fought for and cared about – destroyed in a few hours. Vines, winery, bottle stocks (the proof of those efforts): the lot.

Geoff Weaver’s loving engagement with his landscape took the form of brushstrokes on paper as well as the growing and fermenting of wine grapes: the cabin next to his vineyard was an artistic refuge as well as a place in which to shepherd wine into being. Geoff lost 30 years’ worth of his landscape paintings in the fire. He tried to defend his holding against the flames but was beaten back, down to the dam at the lowest point, where he was picked up by a friend.

Australia, we know, is a land of fire. Vegetation becomes fuel every summer. Hot winds from the interior meet cool ocean air: storms, lightning, ignition. The open, low-lying landscape offers little topographical resistance, either to the weather systems or to a fire train. Everyone is conscious of this. I remember our friends who lived up on Green Hill at the edge of Adelaide building an underground shelter in their garden, so that if

fire cut them off they could go down into the earth until it passed overhead. No Australian sleeps in the countryside in summer without thinking about an escape route.

Indigenous vegetation has evolved to cope with (and in some cases exploit) fire. The vine may not be native, yet it too (akin to certain species of eucalyptus) hides adventitious buds beneath its cambium. Anyone planting a vineyard in Australia knows that fire may come for it. The damage that fire does is a matter of chance: the more quickly it passes, the better. Perhaps most of the vineyards affected by the recent fires are recoverable with a season’s loss of crop. If the fire tarries, though, you are looking at seven years lost, aside from the cost of re-establishing the vines. The smallest are hit hardest. Tilbrook had spent more than a million Australian dollars, he estimates, on establishing his 4ha vineyard and winery, plus stock; the vineyard is insured for A\$100,000.

Fire, I fear, will be a wine theme of the coming decade, and not just in Australia. The area where I live in the Languedoc is acutely vulnerable, like all Mediterranean biotopes: Catalonia, Portugal, California, South Africa, Chile and Argentina all now live with constant fire risk. A warming world ups the risk, perhaps to the point at which the economics of viticulture become senseless: another small reason for making atmospheric decarbonisation humanity’s principal goal over the next decade.

Is human resilience a function of the biotope too? Everything I know about Australians suggests it might be. The friend who picked Geoff Weaver up was Brian Croser. ‘Geoff looked and smelled,’ Brian told me, ‘like Father Christmas having come down the chimney head-first, but he was unharmed, except emotionally. I said to him that he can paint all the lovely places in the Adelaide Hills, the Flinders Ranges and Fleurieu again, and this time he can get it right.’ **D**

Andrew Jefford is a *Decanter* contributing editor and multiple award-winning author

WHAT I’VE BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH

This was a wine about which I knew nothing: the **Cholfirst, Pinot Noir 2017**, produced by **Winzerkeller Strasser** in Uhwiesen in Switzerland, and brought by a fellow guest to the table of a generous friend just before Christmas. It looked rather grand (in a minimalist kind of way). What we responded to, though, was the wine’s sweet grace, its quenching delicacy and its cherry-blossom charm. Gossamer tannins – yet it held our attention as only perfectly balanced wine can do.



Elin McCoy

‘If we want wine to survive, we need to put our money where our values lie’



My favourite beverage is, I think, an important part of contemporary culture, but what does that mean? As the third decade of the 21st century begins, I find myself reflecting upon the cultural values that lurk behind the label, not just the quality of the liquid in my glass.

No wine exists in a vacuum. Each one is a microcosm of society: people, communities, agriculture, ideas, politics. Things we take for granted – wine’s future, its connection to a particular place, its diversity, availability and more – seem to be under threat in 2020. If we want wine to survive and make the world a better place, we need to ask hard questions and put our money where our values lie.

That concept is central to the recent rise of ethical consumerism. A 2019 Accenture poll of 6,000 consumers in 11 countries, for example, reported that half of respondents were willing to pay more for products able to be reused or recycled. Just think how many people now carry refillable water bottles.

Consider what follows as my manifesto of wine values for the 21st century.

Let’s start with a concern that touches us all: climate change. Shouldn’t we be asking our favourite fine wine producers what eco-friendly steps they’re taking to reduce carbon emissions? And encouraging them to be more transparent about what they’re doing for the environment – or not doing?

Before most governments were acknowledging the human causes of climate change (some still don’t, sadly), a handful of winemakers such as Spain’s Miguel Torres were pleading for action. Torres has invested heavily in research, including technology to recycle carbon dioxide during fermentation. Last year he co-founded International Wineries for Climate Action with California’s Jackson Family Wines, aiming for a reduction of 80% in winery carbon emissions by 2045.

Among the world’s first certified carbon-neutral wineries are Fetzer in the US and South Africa’s Backsberg. Planting cover crops in the vineyard, building sustainable cellars

that rely on solar panels, harnessing the power of wind and geothermal energy to generate electricity, and recycling water are actions we should applaud. I consciously avoid wines in pretentious, super-heavy glass bottles because the carbon cost of shipping them is so high.

Doing away with harmful pesticides, herbicides and fungicides that contaminate soils and affect the health of vineyard workers seems a no-brainer. I still hear too many winemakers argue that it’s impossible to grow grapes organically in their region, while others in the same region (think Louis Roederer in Champagne) manage to do so.

What about social responsibility? How can we take pleasure in drinking a fine wine if the winery that makes it doesn’t take care of its workers? Portugal-based Symington Family Estates achieved B Corporation status last year, which commits them to environmental, social and ethical practices. I’m a fan of the Frescobaldi Gorgona project on an island off the coast of Tuscany, not just because the red and white are superb, but also because it trains prison inmates in winemaking skills.

Lastly, wine should promote people-to-people diplomacy, something the world needs more of. Part of wine’s appeal for me is the way it unites strangers at a table and fosters understanding and tolerance. That idea was behind peace tastings held at a wine shop in Haifa during the 2006 Israeli/Lebanese conflict. Wines from Lebanon (like Chateau Musar) and Israel (Tzora) stood side by side.

The term ‘borderless wine’, from US sommelier turned wine importer Peter Weltman, is apt. He created his Borderless Wine Alliance to bring in wines from war-torn places and help advance peace. Bravo.

There are those who say wine should stand apart from politics, but I’m not one of them. The bottom line is basic: we should buy wines from companies that do good and avoid those from companies that don’t. **D**

Elin McCoy is an award-winning journalist and author who writes for *Bloomberg News*

WHAT I’VE BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH

Birthdays are a wonderful excuse to pull out very special birth-year bottles. At a celebratory family dinner in Montreal, the [Kopke, Colheita Port 1981](#) didn’t disappoint. With its rich, deep amber colour, scents of dried apricot, cloves and orange peel, and complex, tangy, layered flavours, it was at a perfect point in its life, reminding the guest of honour that getting older has its rewards.





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| - Castello di Volpaia | - La Togata | - Pieropan | - Talamonti | - Zeni 1870 |
| - Cavallotto | - Le Rughe | - Planeta | - Tenuta Carobbio | |
| | - Marcarini | - Querciabella | - Tenuta di Biserno | |

GRAND TASTING

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11am – 12.30pm Tuscan Greats

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Speaker: Monty Waldin, wine writer, winemaker and DWWA Regional Chair for Tuscany

This masterclass will capture the essence of Tuscan winemaking, from SuperTuscan Ornellaia to avant-garde Avignonesi's single-site *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*. Four contrasting Brunello di Montalcinos demonstrate that there is no single Montalcino style, and two outstanding micro-terroir wines in Chianti Rufina and Chianti Classico highlight Chianti's diversity. But it's not all red in Tuscany: you will start with a refreshing San Gimignano Vernaccia white wine, and finish with a rare 'meditation' wine, a classic Vin Santo from near Florence.

- Cappella Sant'Andrea, Prima Luca, Vernaccia di San Gimignano 2015
- Monte Bernardi Sa'etta, Chianti Classico Riserva 2013
- Selvapiana, Bucerchiale, Chianti Rufina Riserva 2013
- Avignonesi, Poggetto di Sopra, *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* 2016
- Argiano, Brunello di Montalcino 2010
- Val di Suga, Vigna Spuntali, Brunello di Montalcino 2015
- Casanova di Neri, Tenuta Nuova, Brunello di Montalcino 2015
- Castelgiocondo, Brunello di Montalcino 2005
- Ornellaia, Bolgheri Superiore 2012
- Capezzana, Vin Santo di Carmignano Riserva 2012

1.30pm – 3pm Exploring Italy's Top Volcanic Crus

£45

Speaker: John Szabo MS, volcanic wine expert

Italy is a leading source of volcanic wines, with an enviably rich collection of volcanic terroirs - both extinct and alarmingly active. Master Sommelier John Szabo, author of *Volcanic Wines... Salt, Grit and Power*, will lead you on a journey from north to south, from Soave to Sicily, pausing along the way to explore the magnificent volcanic landscapes of these key regions, including their history, culture and incredible wines.

- Casa d'Ambra, Frassitelli Biancolella, Ischia, Campania 2018
- Quintodecimo, Exultet, Fiano di Avellino, Campania 2018
- Benanti, Pietramarina Bianco Superiore, Etna, Sicily 2016
- Fattorie Romeo del Castello, Vigo, Etna Rosso, Sicily 2013
- Elena Fucci, Titolo, Aglianico del Vulture, Basilicata 2012
- Cantina Leonardo, Vigne d'Alto Enza, Taurasi, Campania 2012
- Gini, Contrada Salvarenza Vecchie Vigne, Soave Classico, Veneto 2010
- Vignalta Gemola, Colli Euganei, Veneto 2006
- Galardi, Terra di Lavoro, Campania 2007
- Donnafugata, Ben Ryé, Passito di Pantelleria, Sicily 2010

4pm – 5pm Vertical tasting of Mastroberardino's Radici Riserva, Taurasi

£55

Speaker: Piero Mastroberardino, 10th generation Mastroberardino family & CEO

Mastroberardino is one of the oldest family-run wineries in Italy, producing premium wines in Campania for the past three centuries. The family played a fundamental role in the revitalisation of Campania's ancient vines, and is considered solely responsible for the resurrection of the Fiano, Greco and Aglianico varieties in Campania. The winery's Radici Riserva, Taurasi, is renowned around the world for its ageability and quality. Join Piero Mastroberardino in this masterclass as he shares his passion and knowledge, taking you through 10 vintages of this prestigious wine, from 1997 to 2014.

- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 2014
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 2012
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 2011
- Mastroberardino, Radici Antonio Riserva, Taurasi 2008
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 2007
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 2001
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 2000
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 1999
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 1998
- Mastroberardino, Radici Riserva, Taurasi 1997

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45 GREAT BUYS FOR BORDEAUX LOVERS

We asked **Andy Howard MW** to taste a wide selection of top red blends from around the globe, produced using differing combinations of the classic Bordeaux grape varieties. The standard was pleasingly high across every region, and Howard's favourite wines, revealed in the following pages, represent particularly good quality and value in this popular category

This was a very interesting tasting, as well as a highly successful one in terms of the high scores. With *Decanter* casting its net around the globe (but excluding Bordeaux) for red Bordeaux-style blends, hopes were high that producers would submit a wide range of high-quality blends. The wines didn't disappoint. With an overall return of six Gold/ Outstanding awards (95 points) and 54 Silver/ Highly Recommended (90-94pts) – respectively 7.5% and 68% of the total of 79 wines tasted – this was an impressive set of results.

What was particularly encouraging was the high scoring in each key region around the globe. Wines were subdivided into those from Australia and New Zealand, South America, Europe, South Africa and the US. Every region picked up one Gold, with many having a large number of high-scoring Silver medals too. There were also 18 Silvers which scored either 93 or 94 points – highly impressive wines which were very close to gaining a Gold.

Strong showing

So, what is meant by a Bordeaux blend? For most traditional claret lovers, this would suggest red wines produced in the southwest of France, made from a combination of grape varieties including (and often dominated by) Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Some small additions of Petit Verdot might add some 'seasoning' to the mix.

However, Bordeaux blends can be found across the continents. Depending on regional styles, varying percentages of Carmenère or Malbec may also be found, with the occasional use of varieties such as Mourvèdre and Syrah (although not a permitted Bordeaux AP grape, the latter has been used by Château Palmer to create its Historical XIXth Century Wine, a cross-regional Vin de France blend).

As the brief for this tasting was for Bordeaux blends, rather than 'blends from

Bordeaux', it was hoped that the wines would celebrate their own regional 'take' on the classic Bordeaux mix, rather than just trying to imitate classic Left- and Right-Bank bottles. In this respect, the wines shone, with each area demonstrating individual characters which largely lived up to type, and showed why regions such as Napa Valley in California, Apalta (Chile), Hawke's Bay (New Zealand), Stellenbosch (South Africa) and Margaret River (Western Australia) have gained the reputations they have.

When I was studying for the blind tastings in the Master of Wine exam, I always hoped for wines that were 'true' to their area. A Napa Valley Cabernet could usually be identified by its weighty palate loaded with ripe dark fruit and glossy richness; Stellenbosch wines would exhibit a bit more red fruit, spice and a floral note; Chile would emphasise dark-cherry fruit and smoky oak; Margaret River would show precision, crisp acidity and fine tannins. Although the world has moved on and many wine regions now

produce myriad styles, a lot of these characters were evident in these Bordeaux blends.

Stellenbosch has dominated the Bordeaux blend scene in the Cape for many decades, so its strong representation here was no surprise. Far more impressive was the quality on show (seven Stellenbosch wines scored between 93-95 points). Cedar, spice and hints of fynbos were often noted on the top



Andy Howard MW is a *Decanter* contributing editor and DWWA judge. Formerly a wine buyer for retailer Marks & Spencer for 30 years, he now runs his own wine consultancy, Vinetrades, focusing on education, judging, investment and sourcing





Cabernet Sauvignon



Cabernet Franc

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit red blends from any region other than Bordeaux, priced at £20 and above and made only from the permitted Bordeaux red grapes, with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc individually constituting no more than 75% of the blend

Regional highlights

Wines from the US west coast were dominated by luscious, ripe black fruit, with layers of plush, velvety tannins, plentiful oak and a polished gloss on the finish. Unsurprisingly, Cabernet Sauvignon played a bigger part in most Napa Valley wines (although the 95-point Hyde & Villaine blend is dominated by Merlot). In general, these wines are more approachable now, but all the wines tasted had good futures.

Australia (led by Margaret River) and New Zealand (particularly Hawke's Bay) showed a different style, with precise, structured wines which emphasised purity with notes of black

wines, and one of the most pleasing characters was a pronounced freshness, encouraging more than one glass.

The best Bordeaux wines have this coolness on the palate, and it was surprising to see this welcome character in many Western Cape wines, despite generally higher alcohol levels.

Cabernet Franc played a big role in many of the blends, with Raats Family Wines delivering on the reputation of Bruwer Raats as one of the Cape's top exponents of this grape variety.

pepper, eucalypt and fresh acidity allied to intensity and balance. A number of these were still very youthful, with the (slightly) low score for Te Mata's Coleraine only held back by my desire to see it with a few more years' age.

The Antipodean wines showed how Bordeaux blend wines – when well made – have an innate capacity to develop in bottle. The top-scoring Margaret River wine (Rolling Stone from McHenry Hohnen) is from a blend which varies considerably year by year. The 2013 bottling combines Cabernet Sauvignon with 25% each of Malbec and Merlot, with a surprisingly high 12% Petit Verdot – the latter providing freshness and a bitter-cherry edge, softened with 18 months' maturation in oak.

Chile and Argentina also provided some highlights, yet did not quite match the consistency seen elsewhere. Although Malbec and Carmenère added extra dimensions to the classic Bordeaux blend style, they didn't elevate it higher in terms of overall quality.

Europe was interesting and exciting, with good blends from both Greece and Turkey. Bolgheri was strong, with some beautifully crafted Tuscan examples confirming that this is a great area for the production of fine wines. Poggio al Tesoro's Sondaia, a Cabernet Sauvignon-dominated blend, emphasised red-berry fruit from vines planted on red sand and iron-rich soils, tempered by sea breezes.

Inherent qualities

Although the tasting produced some high scores, it is worth noting that the majority of blends are not aiming to exactly match classic Bordeaux wines. The latter can often have a slightly austere edge, with a cool intensity on the palate largely driven by the fresh maritime climate, and firm tannins when young. Bordeaux blends from Napa Valley, Apalta, Bolgheri and Gimblett Gravels deliver in terms of quality and interest, but provide distinct styles relating to their specific origin.

However, two common themes became evident during this tasting. Firstly, the 'Bordeaux blend' provides winemakers with the opportunity to create complex, high-quality and interesting wines which seem to emphasise their individual sense of place. Secondly, in nearly all cases, these are wines that have long drinking windows. Several would have gained even higher scores given a further three to five years of ageing.

Wines from Bordeaux have a deserved reputation for their ageing ability, and it seems that this extends to high-quality Bordeaux blends, whatever their origin. ➤

■ For full tasting notes on all 79 wines from this tasting, go to [Decanter.com/Premium](https://www.decanter.com/premium)



1 Esk Valley, Winemakers Reserve Merlot-Malbec-Cabernet Franc, Gimblett Gravels, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand 2014 95

£21-£25.25 Bon Coeur, Exel, Flagship Wines, Sissinghurst Wines, The Halifax Wine Co, The New Zealand House of Wine, The Oxford Wine Co, Vino Wines

Deep, luscious, great purity of flavour here; this is a fine New World take on a Bordeaux blend with subtle flavours, ripe fruit and lots of fine-grained tannins and good acidity to keep everything in check. Dark-cherry notes with a touch of spice and some warming cedar-wood character. Very inviting and enveloping. Already drinking well, this has potential to keep for many years. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alcohol** 14%

2 Hyde de Villaine, Belle Cousine, Napa Valley, California, USA 2012 95

£62.50 Corney & Barrow, Hic, Swig
Full in body, with fleshy, dark berry and

currant fruit character, yet there is a great balance between the fruit ripeness and fresh acidity to finish. It's very clean and pure, an attractive wine that has good ageing potential. A fine Napa Valley blend. So youthful, despite its relative age.

Drink 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%

3 Las Niñas, Amante Cabernet Sauvignon-Merlot, Apalta, Colchagua Valley, Chile 2017 95

N/A UK www.vinalasninas.com

A fine blend with a great combination of ripe dark fruits, good acidity and a structure of fine-grained tannins. Clean and crisp, with pure fruit flavours, this is elegant and refined, with a very long finish. Has excellent potential for further ageing.

Drink 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

4 McHenry Hohnen, Rolling Stone, Margaret River, Western Australia 2013 95

£46.99 Oz Wines, The Drink Shop, Weavers

Showing a little more evolution in terms of colour in the glass, and on the nose, this is a full-bodied, rich and ripe style with plenty of concentration for further ageing. Still youthful on the palate, there are intense flavours of damson and bitter-cherry fruits, complemented by nicely integrated oak, firm tannins and layers of flavour. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 15%

5 Poggio al Tesoro, Sondraia, Bolgheri Superiore, Tuscany, Italy 2016 95

£47.85-£58.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Exel, Glug, Hay Wines, Hedonism, In Vino Veritas, Liberty Wines, NY Wines of Cambridge, Oasis Wine Shop, Park Vintners

Deep, intense and complex, this wine is a fine example from the great 2016 vintage. Despite sporting 15% alcohol, there is real finesse and a deft touch here. Flavours of spice, red-cherry conserve and damson fruits come through with a hint of chocolate. This has a long-term future.

Drink 2022-2035 **Alc** 15%



6

6 Raats, MR de Compostella, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2017 95

£59.99 Alliance Wine, Handford, Wimbledon Wine Cellar

Quite classic on the nose and palate, this is still a vibrant, youthful wine with much more to give. Weighty and concentrated on the palate, with vibrant dark-fruit notes. Fresh acidity, well-integrated oak and fine tannic structure; this will age very well. Refined and complex. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 15%



7

7 Campo alla Sughera, Arnione, Bolgheri Superiore, Tuscany, Italy 2015 94

£38.60 Mondial Wine

Another fine 2015. This has rather more in the way of dark blackcurrant and bitter-cherry fruit, married with some fine tannins and oak, which needs a little longer to integrate fully. Will be very fine given another couple of years of maturation. **Drink** 2023-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



8

8 Journey's End, The Cape Doctor, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2015 94

£24.50 Bibendum Wine, Vin Cognito

There's plenty of concentration and depth here, with loads of concentrated, dark red-cherry and berry fruit flavours. Good complexity and layers of flavour. Full, fleshy fruit characters. Very different to a classic Bordeaux blend but nevertheless a complex and highly pleasurable wine.

Drink 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%



9

9 Morgenster, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2010 94

£45.90 Hedonism

Intense, deep, dark and brooding, with plenty of life left. Although it shows evolution, there is dark-cherry and berry fruit character, spice and leafy fresh notes to finish. Acidity keeps everything in check. An intriguing Bordeaux blend which, though clearly not from southwest France, shares similarities with the classic style. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



10

10 Pauletts, Polish Hill River Cabernet-Merlot, Clare Valley, South Australia 2016 94

£13.25 Exel

Deep, dark and brooding, with inky fruit flavours. Lots of dark conserve-type fruits, some oak in the background and, despite 15% alcohol, a good amount of acidity to keep everything in balance. Surprisingly for a Clare Valley Cabernet, there is lots of depth and complexity. A very appealing style. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 15% ➤

‘Well-made Bordeaux blend wines have an innate capacity to develop in bottle’

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2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
92	91	91	94	93	91	93
POINTS	POINTS	POINTS	POINTS	POINTS	POINTS	POINTS

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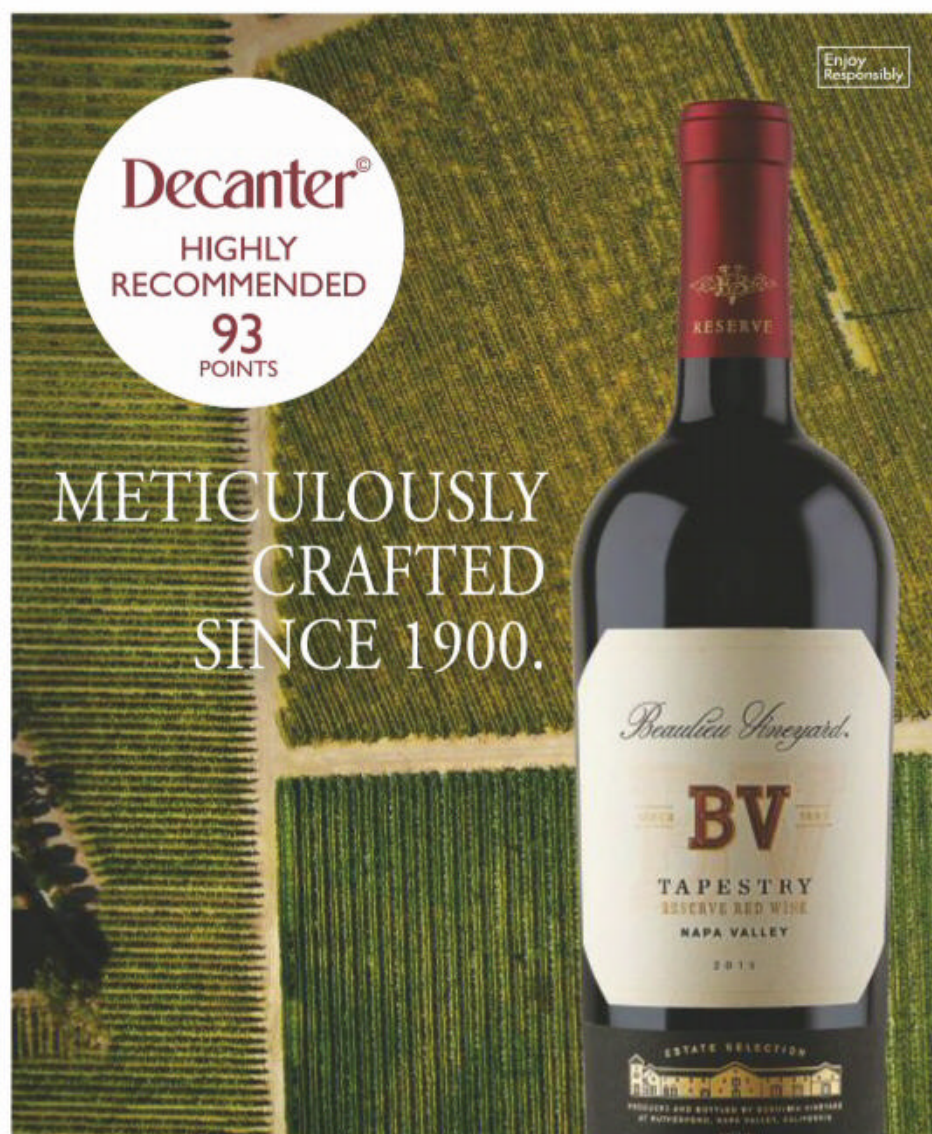


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11 St Supéry, Elu, Napa Valley, California, USA 2015 94

£65 Jeroboams

Sweet fruit, smooth, rich, lovely oak on the palate. There is plenty of ripeness here, yet the wine retains great freshness and drive. Complex, with sweetness of fruit matched by fine tannins, crisp acidity and refined oak. Good potential for further ageing. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 14.5%**

12 VIK, Milla Cala, Cachapoal Valley, Chile 2016 94

£32.95 Slurp

Cool, elegant, crisp acidity to match the sweet and ripe, dark fruit character on the palate. A very successful marriage of savoury elements, good acidity and great purity of fruit. Complex and layered. Very nice tannins and oak and has potential to age very well. **Drink 2021-2028 Alc 14%**

13 Beaulieu Vineyard, BV Tapestry Reserve, Napa Valley, California, USA 2015 93

£56-£73.30 Elicite, Grand Vin, Millésima, Philglas & Swiggot

Dark black berries, notes of cassis on nose and palate. Intense, focused and precise, it shows a lovely purity of flavour. Excellent oak, concentrated and fresh, very good ageing potential. A fine example from Napa Valley. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 15%**

14 Carmen, Delanz Alto Jahuel Estate Blend, Maipo Valley, Chile 2018 93

£45 Santa Rita Estates

Cool on the palate with lovely acidity. There is plenty of ripe, rich dark fruit here to keep everything in balance. Elegant oak. Some spice flavours, Soft, generous and very clean, with potential to age. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 13.5%**

15 Doña Paula, 1350, Gualtallary, Uco Valley, Argentina 2017 93

£22.49 Hallgarten Wines

Cool and fresh in character: there is plenty of drive as well as complexity here. Spice notes on the palate among ripe, dark-fruit flavours and very well-integrated oak, with fine tannins. Finishes with a lovely freshness of spice and a hint of mint. **Drink 2021-2029 Alc 14%**

16 Laibach, The Ladybird, Simonsberg-Stellenbosch, South Africa 2015 93

£20 Harrods

Firm and full-bodied, with loads of concentrated, dark berry and cherry fruits, combined with fresh acidity and high-quality oak. A Bordeaux blend with potential for further ageing. Spices, cedar wood, fine tannins. Complex and highly enjoyable. **Drink 2022-2030 Alc 14%** ➤



17 Meerlust, Rubicon, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2016 93

£26.50-£29.50 Davy's, Fortnum & Mason, Hard to Find Wines, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Lay & Wheeler, Le Vignoble, Noble Green, Whole Foods Market

Cedar wood, spice, a touch of fynbos on nose and palate. Good acidity and layers of flavour that balance the ripe fruit, with a deft touch. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 14%

18 Pegasus Bay, Maestro Merlot-Cabernet-Malbec, Waipara Valley, North Canterbury, New Zealand 2015 93

£29.99 Field & Fawcett, House of Townend, Must Wines

Dark red and black berry fruits, some leafy notes and crisp acidity. Ripeness and concentration. Not a blockbuster, but has balance and loads of purity. A pleasurable Bordeaux blend. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

19 Raats, Jasper, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2017 93

£18.99 Alliance Wine, Darley Abbey Wines, The Wine Society

A different take on the Bordeaux blend, with a high percentage of Cabernet Franc and Malbec, this is complex and intriguing. Great purity of fruit, combined with freshness, leafy characters and some fine tannins. Good acidity to finish. Elegant and refined – a very good Stellenbosch blend. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 15%

20 Sleight of Hand Cellars, The Conjuror, Columbia Valley, Washington, USA 2017 93

£34 Ester Wines

Soft, rich, ripe and very fruit-forward, this has loads of plush characters balanced with crisp acidity and fine tannins. Although not a classic Bordeaux blend in style, there is plenty of pleasure to be had here. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14.5%

21 Sutil, Acrux, Colchagua Valley, Chile 2015 93

£40.50 Castelnau Wine Agencies

An attractive Carmenère-influenced style. Plenty of density and dark-fruit flavours here, combined with some herbal notes, crisp tannins and good acidity. Purity of flavour and a very good balance with oak. This will continue to age well. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 14%

22 Te Mata, Coleraine, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand 2015 93

£59.75-£70 Farr Vintners, Field & Fawcett, Flagship Wines, John E Fells, Specialist Cellars, The Solent Cellar, Vintriloquy

The oak is a little obvious on both nose and palate now, but there is plenty of concentration and depth to the dark-fruit character. Rich and intense with some great spicy notes, there is enough acidity and depth for this to develop for a number of years. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14% ➤

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23 VIK, La Piu Belle, Cachapoal Valley, Chile 2015 93

£49.95 Slurp

Rich, ripe dark fruits on the palate. Ripeness of fruit is a little to the fore here, combined with evident tannins. A little dry on the finish. Could almost do with more time to settle down. Impressive, but at a slightly difficult point at the moment. There is very good potential here, but it is not quite in balance now. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14%

24 Zorgvliet, Richelle, Banghoek, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2017 93

£23.99 D Byrne & Co, Hoult's, NY Wines of Cambridge

Youthful, primary and deep in colour, this has plenty of plush dark fruit character. Soft and ripe on the palate, and there is an appealing freshness which keeps

everything in check. Understated oak. Nice bite of acidity to the finish, with the potential to develop well over several years. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

25 Atamisque, Catalpa Assemblage, Tupungato/La Consulta, Uco Valley, Argentina 2016 92

£18.95-£24 Drinkmonger, Dunell's, Good Wine Online, Martinez Wines, Noble Green, North Coast Wines, Roberts & Speight

Ripe dark-fruit flavours. Some spice and a bit of development on the palate. There is plenty to like here, with bright cherry and currant flavours, tannic grip and fresh acidity. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%

26 Avondale, La Luna, Paarl, South Africa 2012 92

£25.99 House of Townend

Rich, dark, concentrated and complex. Good evolution here, with notes of dark

fruits and spice, and a cleansing acidity to keep the palate fresh. Still quite firm and austere on the palate, this has the potential to age for several more years. Good complexity. Although it's a Bordeaux blend in terms of the mix of grapes, this is in a very different style compared to wines made in the southwest of France. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14%

27 Craggy Range, Single Vineyard Te Kahu, Gimblett Gravels, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand 2017 92

£20.99 Bibendum Wine, Specialist Cellars
From a challenging but potentially great vintage, this is still pretty youthful but shows lots of promise. It boasts bright red fruits on the nose and palate, with some waxy oak character showing through. The acidity is a little dominant now, but give this a year or two and it will be a delicious, warming and inviting wine. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 13% ➤



28

28 Groot Constantia, Gouverneurs Reserve, Constantia, South Africa 2016 92

£33.99 Hallgarten Wines, The Drink Shop, Wine Poole

Dark, brooding and intense in colour, aromas and flavour. There is no shortage of concentration here. Dark-fruit flavours, firm tannins, potential to age very well. Has an attractive floral hint with zesty acidity on the palate. Good depth, but this is combined with the typical cool, slightly eucalypt character of Constantia. Fresh and lively finish. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

29 Journey's End, Pastor's Blend, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2018 92

£11.69-£12.33 All About Wine, Tanners, The Fine Wine Co

Displays typical Bordeaux blend aromas on the nose, with a nice combination of red and black berry fruits, a touch of leafy character, and hints of cedar and cinnamon spice too. It's not overly heavy on the palate, then there's a very nice



29



30

balance of clean acidity and tannins on the finish, making a well put-together wine. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

30 La Tour Melas, Achinos, Greece 2014 92

£50-£64.99 Alliance Wine, The Fine Wine Co, Wimbledon Wine Cellar

A great combination of maturation, warm red-berry fruits and well-integrated oak. A wine with subtle flavours and nuances. It's not as big and showy as some, but has fine tannins, elegance and interest on the palate. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%

31 Legacy, Red Wine, Alexander Valley, California, USA 2014 92

£72 New Street Wine Shop

Ripe, full-bodied, oak-driven style but with lots of plush, ripe, rich berry and cherry fruits, a touch of dark plum and good acidity to finish. Lovely purity of fruit here. A blockbuster of a style, but it still shows restraint and elegance. Finishes with fresh acidity to keep everything in check. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



31



32

32 McHenry Hohnen, Rolling Stone, Margaret River, Western Australia 2014 92

£46.99 Oz Wines, The Drink Shop, Weavers

Powerful, quite pungent and dominated by dark-fruit characters: there is no shortage of intent here. Fleshy, quite showy on the palate, but with refined glossy oak and fine-grained tannins. A serious wine with the depth and concentration to age very well. A classic Margaret River example, well worth buying and laying down for several years. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

33 Morandé, House of Morandé, Maipo Andes Valley, Chile 2017 92

£27.49 Berkmann

Cool, fresh and something more of a classic Bordeaux blend in style than others in this tasting, this has dark fruits, crisp acidity and concentration. There's a deftness and a lightness of touch here which is very appealing. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 13.5% ➤



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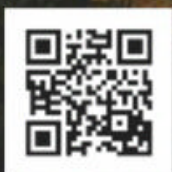




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34

34 Morgenhof, The Estate, Simonsberg-Stellenbosch, South Africa 2012 92

£20.99-£26.23 The Drink Shop, South Africa House of Wine

Good evolution evident here. A serious, complex, savoury blend which marries density of fruit and layers of oak with spices and secondary flavours. Concentrated and deep, with the potential to age for several years, this is a fine combination of warm-climate ripe fruits merged with more traditional characters such as fine tannins and high-quality oak. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 14.5%**

35 Mulderbosch, Faithful Hound, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2016 92

£19.99 Hallgarten Wines, NY Wines of Cambridge, Wine Poole

Ripe, full, fleshy red fruit character on the palate and nose. This is an attractive, fruit-forward style, but it's very different to a classic Bordeaux blend. Appealing and ready to drink already, showing some attractive savoury notes combined with



35



36

36 Paşaeli, K2, Izmir, Turkey 2015 92

£26 Graft Wine Co, Vino Wines

Ripe, fruit-forward style with a great palate of dense, dark black-fruit flavours. Marries fruit ripeness with some crisp acidity to keep everything in balance. Subtle spice notes, a touch of leaf and elegant oak to finish. Light on its feet. A fine example from Izmir on Turkey's Aegean coast. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14%**

37 Poggio al Tesoro, Il Seggio, Bolgheri, Tuscany, Italy 2016 92

£23-£28.50 Bottle Apostle, Butlers Wine

Cellar, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Exel, Latitude Wine, Liberty Wines, Philglas & Swiggot, Roberson, The Wine Reserve, Tivoli Wines, Village Vineyards Rich, full-bodied, fleshy and glossy. This is a fine Bolgheri wine with quite a lot of showy character. Attractive wood is a little too evident at the moment, but will fully integrate in 12 months. Despite its 14.5%



37



38

38 RedHeads Wine, Esulé Woman with Gun, McLaren Vale, South Australia 2018 92

£27 Laithwaite's

Overtly primary and youthful at the moment, this needs at least 18 months in bottle to develop more complexity. However, there is no shortage of dark-fruit flavour, ripeness and structure for this to develop into a great Bordeaux blend. Needs time. **Drink 2023-2030 Alc 15%**

39 Reyneke, Cornerstone, Polkadraai Hills, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2016 92

£20.50-£22.50 Harvey Nichols, The Good Spirits Co, The Whalley Wine Shop

Full-bodied, fleshy dark fruits on the palate with good intensity, purity and complex flavours. Has an appealing leafy character with good freshness. An appealing Bordeaux blend.

Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14% ➤



39



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40 Tenuta di Biserno, Il Pino di Biserno, Tuscany, Italy 2016 92

£39.99-£43.95 AG Wines, Corney & Barrow, Dunell's, JN Wine

Deep, dark and brooding colour and nose. Still very much an infant. A good melange of cedar and spice, combined with dark berry and currant fruit, fine-grained tannins and a deft touch of oak. Lots of potential here, but too young at the moment. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 14.5%

41 Vasse Felix, Tom Cullity Cabernet Sauvignon-Malbec, Margaret River, Western Australia 2015 92

£102-£120 Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, John E Fells

The higher proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon comes through with an extra depth of blackcurrant and leaf character on the palate. Clean, fresh and lively, there is great lift here. Elegant, with lots of purity, this is not a blockbuster style, but rather a refined, mid-term blend with wide appeal. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14%

42 Vilafonté, Series C, Paarl, South Africa 2016 92

£62.99-£70 Handford, Hard to Find Wines, John E Fells

This is a wine with rich, plush primary fruit character featuring complex flavours of dark cherry, berry and plum. It is quite different to a typical blend from Bordeaux, packing loads of appeal into a ready-to-drink, soft and easy-drinking package. It is currently at its best, but there isn't any great hurry to open it just yet. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14.5%

43 Viu Manent, Viu Infinito, Colchagua Valley, Chile 2016 92

£45 Available via UK agent Louis Latour Agencies Malbec and Cabernet Franc complement Cabernet Sauvignon in the blend, coming together to contribute leafy herbal notes to the nose and ripe dark fruits to the palate. This one is not quite in balance at present, but hold onto it. The wine will certainly benefit if you allow it to develop for another couple of years before drinking. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14%

44 Warwick Estate, Trilogy, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2016 92

£28.99-£32 Hard to Find Wines, Hennings, John E Fells, The Wine Society

Rich, smooth and oak-driven with good acidity and attractive, spicy dark-fruit notes on the palate. Quite full and fleshy, with some smoky spice notes evident. Not a classic Bordeaux blend but a highly enjoyable style with the ability to age. **Drink** 2022-2028 **Alc** 14%

45 Zorgvliet, Silver Myn Argentum, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2018 92

£7.49-£9.99 Ake & Humphris, D Byrne & Co, Great Grog, Handford, KWM, ND John, Noble Green, NY Wines of Cambridge, Palmers Wine

Store, Talking Wines, Vin Neuf, Welch & Co Ripe red berry fruits on the nose and palate. Good density here allied to fresh acidity, well-integrated oak and fine tannins. Very youthful, but it has all the elements in place for excellent long-term evolution. A little 'wiry' at the moment. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 14.5% **D**

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ALAIN BRUMONT

His path to success has been far from smooth, but this Madiran-based producer has managed to surmount every obstacle he has encountered, making some of southwest France's most lauded wines along the way.

Stephen Brook meets a man defined by his persistence and tenacity

For three hours, Alain Brumont whizzed me around his properties, greeting his staff, checking the bottling line, sampling some of the newly fermenting wines and then driving me to some of his best vineyards, explaining the terroir of each.

At every stop he leaped from his truck to show me how his vines were trained, while also showing me the errors of others: 'Look at those rows! The guy's a biodynamic producer. That's well and good, but he's got 16 bunches per vine, while I never have more than nine. It'll show in the wine, I promise you.'

That wine is Madiran, and the top cuvées, from other estates as well as from Brumont, are often pure Tannat. It was not always thus.

Although historically Tannat had been the main – and in some cases the only – variety planted in this deeply rural, hilly area of southwest France, by the 1970s many producers had planted Bordelais varieties as well. This was partly to soften Tannat's ferocious tannins, but also to add volume, since Tannat is fairly low-yielding.

In an interesting footnote, Brumont told me: 'Everyone talks of how Syrah from Hermitage was sent to Bordeaux to improve poor vintages. That's a myth, and that's confirmed by my friends Guigal and Chapoutier. What they did use was Tannat.'

In 1985, Brumont released the region's first pure Tannat for many years: his barrique-aged Château Montus Prestige. It was inspired by a visit to Bordeaux in 1979, just as similar visits caused a revolution in Barolo and Barbaresco in Italy. This Prestige wine caused a sensation and his reputation was made. It was a satisfying moment for a man who had started with almost nothing.

'My father owned Château Bouscassé. At the age of 16 he made me leave school and work for him.' Brumont took over Bouscassé in 1979 and bought the abandoned Château Montus in 1980. There were no vines, so he planted 18 hectares. It's not entirely clear how he financed his purchases; there seems to have been a measure of wheeler-dealing.

ALAIN BRUMONT AT A GLANCE

Born 20 April 1946

Education No formal training after age 16

Main properties In Madiran, Bouscassé (80ha); Montus (60ha)

Family Married to Laurence, his third wife. Two children, two stepchildren

'Remember, at that time, no one valued terroir here. But I chose my plots carefully. I made massal selections and planted a low-yielding clone of Tannat to ensure quality. I also picked my vineyards by hand at a time when nearly all my neighbours were using machines. They thought I was crazy.'

How, I wondered, did he choose the terroirs where he wanted to plant? 'Instinct. I just had a nose for good soils and microclimates. As Léonard Humbrecht from Alsace told me, you need to imagine the wine you can make.'

Building an empire

He expanded swiftly. 'The best terroirs were on slopes that were often hard to work. Hardly anybody wanted them, and they were going cheap. At that time, farmers preferred to grow wheat in the valleys rather than grapes on the hillsides.' But he admits he isn't infallible, and sometimes he has had to pull out or sell parcels that didn't meet his expectations.

He has also stopped farming organically. 'I used to, but stopped, as organic viticulture doesn't require environmental actions, which I'm keen on. These days we repackage all our plastic and cartons, and the kitchen waste is fed to our chickens.'

Brumont, with his inextinguishable energy, likes to push things to extremes. Some cuvées, such as Montus XL, are pure Tannat aged in wood for 40 months; both his Prestige bottling from Montus and his Bouscassé Vieilles Vignes spend two years in 100% new oak.

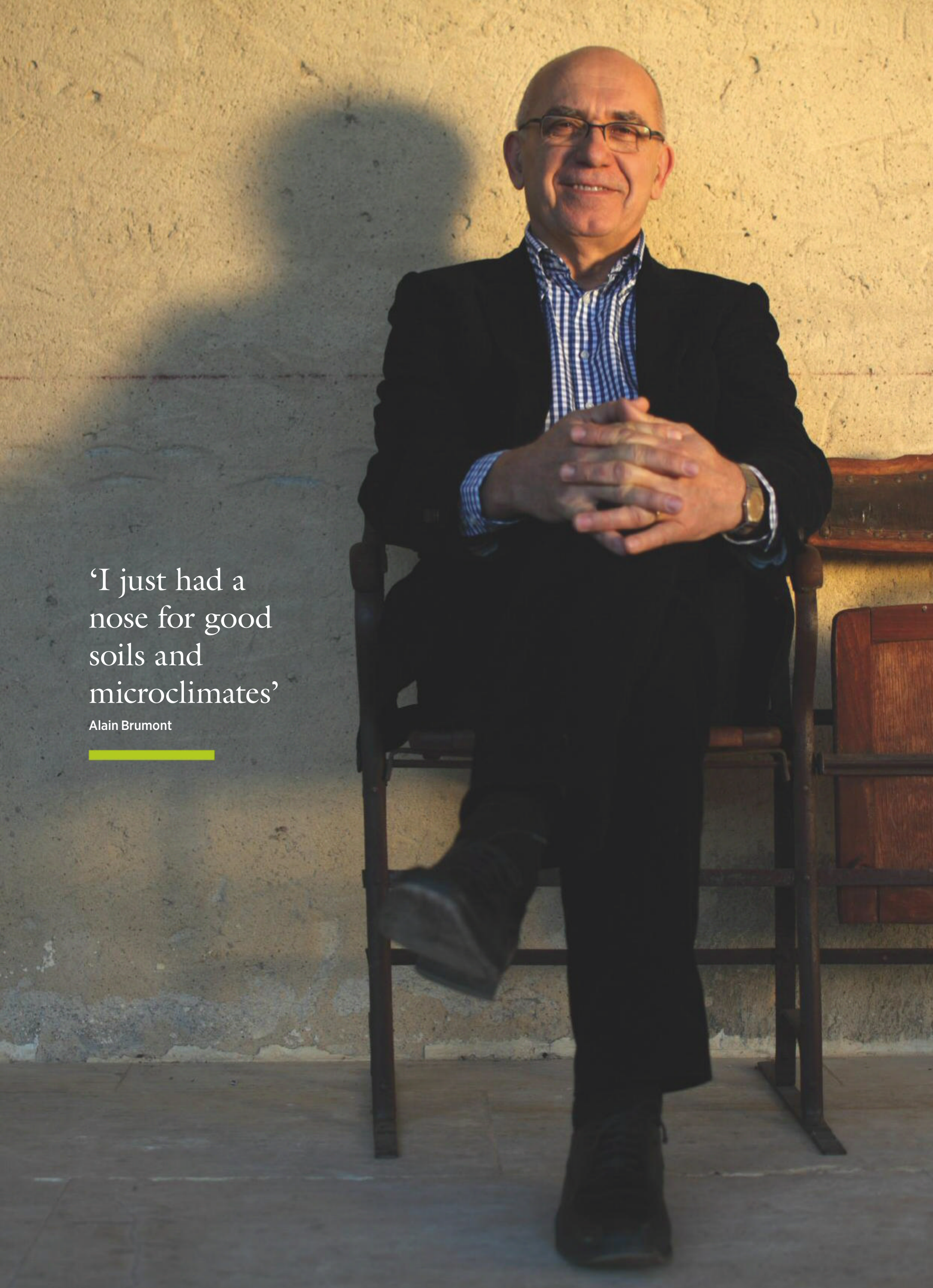
Unfortunately, he expanded too fast, perhaps from over-confidence, and in 2004 the business was threatened by some severe financial difficulties. His costly conversion of the château at Montus into a luxury hotel, and the construction of a huge new winery at Montus, may have contributed to the setback.

But it was short-lived, and Alain Brumont soon bounced back. Precisely how he managed to keep his empire alive and thriving is hard to discern, but he did so.

In addition to the 300ha he owns or controls in Madiran, he buys from a further 300ha in the Côtes de Gascogne, creating a ➤



Stephen Brook is an awarded author and has been a *Decanter* contributing editor since 1996

A full-page portrait of Alain Brumont, a middle-aged man with glasses, wearing a dark blazer over a blue and white checkered shirt. He is sitting on a dark wooden chair, leaning back with his hands clasped in his lap. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The lighting is warm and directional, coming from the right, casting a soft shadow of him onto the wall behind him. The floor is a light-colored, slightly uneven surface.

‘I just had a
nose for good
soils and
microclimates’

Alain Brumont

range of inexpensive wines that transcend the very commercial image of that appellation. And while he would claim that his top Tannats are among the finest wines of southwest France, he has also created the brand Torus, made with fruit sourced from young vines and intended for relatively early drinking.

Always moving forward

Now in his early 70s, with his third wife Laurence and her son Antoine by his side, he shows no sign of slowing down. Although very much the boss of the operation, he dislikes any notion of hierarchy. Each lunchtime, he sits down at Bouscassé to enjoy a good lunch with his team and with any visitors, whether from the wine trade or from his extensive private clientele. It was the same set-up when I visited Brumont 20 years ago, and it hasn't changed.

He likes to hold forth, but is not easy to interview, and his slight regional twang sometimes makes him hard to follow. As does his tendency to leap from topic to topic, so that a response to any question can follow tangents such as 19th-century vine training, Gascon chicken breeds and his method of sterilising barrels. All very interesting, but not always to the point.

He likes to design equipment or have it tailor-made, and is keen on technological



innovations. 'If the air conditioning at the warehouse breaks down, the walls have been designed so that the interior will lose just one degree Celsius in three months!'

Aware that French summers are becoming increasingly torrid, even in a region used to

Above: Château Montus, bought by Brumont in 1980

Photograph: Nicolas Marty

Brook's pick: the best of Brumont

① **Château Montus, Blanc, Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh Sec 2012** 92

£29.95-£35.95 (2013) Christopher Keiller, Hennings, South Downs Cellars, WoodWinters
The full straw colour is a bit alarming, but there's no oxidation here. The nose is waxy, with apricot aromas. Rich and creamy, this is very concentrated and spicy, lifted by fine acidity. It displays energy as well as opulence, and it's long. **Drink 2020-2022 Alc 15%**

② **Château Montus, XL, Madiran 2000** 95

£82 Thorman Hunt
Opaque red. Despite the bottle age, the nose remains surprisingly closed. In contrast, the palate is rich and concentrated, with dark chocolate and black fruits blending together. Yet it has drive and freshness too, and fine tannins. There's nothing overbearing about it, for all its power. The finish is exceptionally persistent. **Drink 2020-2032 Alc 15%**

Château Montus, Cuvée Prestige, Madiran 2009 93

£54.75-£59.99 (2002) AG Wines, Hedonism, Hennings, Joseph Barnes Wines Direct, The Smiling Grape Co
Even in its eleventh year, the colour remains opaque red. There's a wealth of plum and black-cherry on the nose, with a perceptible oakiness and a chocolatey tone. Suave and very rich, it shows depth and spice as well as immense concentration, but it's balanced by high acidity that keeps it taut. Powerful and long. **Drink 2020-2035 Alc 15%**

③ **Château Montus, La Tyre, Madiran 2009** 93

£101.68-£109.48 (2011) Cru, The Wine Society, Wineye
A selection of the best grapes of a single plot in the commune of Castelnau-Rivière-Basse. The nose is lush and damsony, showing a seductive richness of fruit. Velvety and very concentrated, it nonetheless has vivid acidity

and spice. The alcohol gives it a peppery and long, bitter-chocolate finish. Perhaps too much of a good thing, but this is undeniably impressive. **Drink 2020-2032 Alc 15%**

④ **Château Bouscassé, Vieilles Vignes, Madiran 2010** 92

£32.99-£39.99 (2008) AG Wines, Joseph Barnes Wines Direct, The Smiling Grape Co, Thorman Hunt
The black-fruited nose is almost Porty, with thick blackberry aromas. Very rich and concentrated, like most Brumont Madirans this shows a great deal of heft and power. The tannins are still a touch brutal, giving a solid and monumental style, with a long, spicy finish. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 14.5%**

⑤ **Château Bouscassé, Argile Rouge, Madiran 2011** 91

£22 (2015) Thorman Hunt
One third each of Tannat, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon, from a single



dry heat, he is working on a kind of shutter system with movable blades that can protect vines from direct sunlight. He has a dizzying number of other projects on the go, such as promoting local gastronomy, raising Noir de Bigorre black pigs on the pastures at Montus, and producing caviar from the Adour river. His two chefs bake bread daily, made from flour sourced from a local organic farmer. And in his spare time, he consults for two large estates in Morocco.

With his chief winemakers at the helm for many years, the wines have not suffered from inconsistency. The main ranges are divided between the two properties. Bouscassé is on clay-limestone, and has the very old vines lacking at Montus.

‘Bouscassé is a terroir that permits me to plant other varieties to blend with Tannat, whereas Montus has *galets rouges*, the large stones similar to those at Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Here I plant mostly Tannat, but Cabernet Sauvignon also works well, and is blended into the basic Madiran.’

The Brumont wines are quite extracted and benefit from long ageing. ‘Tannat doesn’t oxidise easily, which is an advantage, but it also has very high acidity, so even at maximum ripeness levels it can retain freshness.’ Wines tend to be released about

four years after harvest, so Brumont undertakes the initial ageing in his cellars.

For some reason, the Madiran producers decided that the ideal name for their white-wine appellation should be Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh, rather than something more self-explanatory (and pronounceable). That’s a shame, as it obscures the fact that the whites can be very good indeed. Brumont chooses the Petit Courbu grape for his dry white, which comes in two versions: the first, Les Jardins Philosophiques, fresh and unoaked; the second, Montus Blanc Sec, given long ageing in 600-litre barrels and in Austrian ovals. There are sweet wines too, from the Petit Manseng grape popular in Jurançon. Like sweet Jurançon, sweet Pacherenc is made from grapes dried on the vine, not botrytised.

Brumont, ever aspiring to the heights, produces up to three versions of the sweet wine, depending on sugar content and residual sugar. The fruit for the top bottling, Frimaire, is often picked in December, and the wine is aged for two years in new oak; it can have up to 150 grams per litre of residual sugar. Madiran is warmer than Jurançon, so Petit Manseng in Madiran doesn’t always deliver the intensity and high acidity of the latter region, but the Brumont wines do not have any softness or sag. ➤

parcel on red clay soils, rare in France’s southwest, resulting in a more supple style of Madiran, though it can still age well. Inexpressive on the nose, yet suave and concentrated, with formidable texture and spice, polished tannins, and a long, velvety finish. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14.5%

Château Montus, Madiran 2010 91
£29.99-£34.99 (2014) Christopher Piper, Corks, Philglas & Swiggot, Selfridges
Tannat with 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, grown on steep slopes of rounded pebbles. A nose swathed in black fruits, but with a rich herbal quality too. Very ripe and juicy, it has concentration and sucrosity without jamminess. Taut, spicy, good acidity, ample power, though perhaps at the expense of finesse. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 15%

⑥ **Château Bouscassé, Frimaire, Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh Doux 2010** 94
£49 Thorman Hunt

Made from fruit picked on 10 December. The colour is a full gold, while the sumptuous nose has aromas of oranges, peach and honey. It’s the Petit Manseng that gives this

wine its leanness and precision, as well as its bright flavours of mandarins and apricot. Silky but dry, this shows amazing length. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 13%





The hero of Madiran

Brumont is a fighter, as he's had to be all his life, deprived of parental support and plain broke at the start of his career, and again midway through it.

The unwillingness of some growers to sell him land persuaded him to use his employees' names as fronts for such acquisitions. He wanted to increase the density of plantings at his top vineyard, La Tyre, but, he says: 'I was refused permission by INAO, so I suspect there were intrigues against me, especially when someone came down from Bordeaux to plant a vineyard and was granted the same density that was denied to me.'

He confesses to a willingness to flout regulations or expectations when he thinks they impede quality. His first Montus vintage was made from unusually young vines; some of his sweet Pacherencs broke with tradition by having very high residual-sugar levels. Yet all that mattered to him was making the best wines of which he and his vines were capable.

Alain Brumont is a heroic figure: driven, probably exasperating at times, controlling yet convivial, obsessed by terroir and quality, free of false modesty yet no braggart. It can't be an accident that his top employees have stayed with him for decades.

Nearly 40 years after his first vintage, he has created a stunningly consistent range with wines at all price levels. His long-aged Montus XL impressed me hugely on my recent visit, as did the costly La Tyre bottling and the experimental Montus Tannats, aged for up to 10 years. But the same goes for the

Above: Brumont poses in front of his top vineyard, La Tyre, located on Madiran's highest slope at 260m

'All that mattered to him was making the best wines of which he and his vines were capable'

inexpensive wines, such as the dry Pacherenc Les Jardins Philosophiques and the barrique-aged Menhir Côtes de Gascogne, an equal blend of Tannat and Merlot – not the apotheosis of pure Tannat that Brumont so worships, but still a delicious and affordable bottle that is excellent for everyday drinking.

However, the mainstays of the range are the wines he makes under the labels of his domaines. The production of Bouscassé Madiran is substantial, and it is made from 60% Tannat, given a long maceration and then aged in one-third new barriques. The Bouscassé Vieilles Vignes, meanwhile, is pure Tannat from vines at least 50 years old, aged in new oak for two years. Brumont describes it as the most classic of his wines, often requiring 10 years to deliver its full potential.

The Montus rouge is Tannat with 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, but these grapes are grown at a high density on entirely different soils some 11km from the Bouscassé property. This wine is aged for about 14 months in up to 80% new oak. The domaine's Prestige bottling comes from a south-facing 4ha parcel of Tannat, and it spends two years in new oak, bottled without filtration. The same parcel is used for XL. This can spend up to four years in new 600-litre barrels, which sounds way over the top, but it's beautifully judged.

Alain Brumont, quite simply, has mastered all the wine styles – red, dry white, sweet white – native to his region. Once a lone voice, he has succeeded in lifting up the standards throughout Madiran, now surely one of the great red wines of France. **D**

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NORTHERN RHONE 2018

Thanks to large yields helping to balance the very ripe fruit, the north fared better than the south this year, delivering plush, generous and potent wines. It's a vintage that favours the reds, particularly Côte-Rôtie, with whites from St-Joseph and St-Péray performing better than Condrieu. **Matt Walls** reports, based on his extensive tastings and visits in the region ➤





At Domaine E Guigal, above the Rhône river, pickers enjoy breakfast on the steep slopes of the Côte-Rôtie

Unlike in the south, for some producers in the north the 2018 vintage was something dreams are made of. It was very hot and dry, resulting in a plentiful, ripe crop. While there were many wines with low acidity and potent alcohol, those that could achieve balance were impressive.

It's not that the conditions were wildly different – both ends of the Rhône valley experienced a wet spring followed by a sweltering summer – but in the north these conditions translated themselves into large yields of ripe fruit, often very ripe.

Growers were pleased, and occasionally delighted, with the results; Stéphane Montez of Domaine de Monteillet in Côte-Rôtie said it was 'the vintage everyone dreams about'.

The rains in the north mostly arrived later in May and June, encouraging rapid plant growth and raising the spectre of mildew. Pierre Clape of Domaine Clape saw nothing overly serious however, just 'a little on the whites but not the reds'. Organic growers managed to keep outbreaks at bay without undue worry.

Spring was warm and temperatures continued to rise, culminating in a July and August heatwave. The result was a marked drop in acidity and rapid build-up of sugars. As the hot, parched weather continued, some vines faced blockages in maturity, but a few showers in mid-August helped push the vines over the finish line.

The choice of picking date was crucial. 'In years like this,' says Jean-Louis Chave (*below*), 'if you leave it too long the ripeness explodes.' He even picked on a Sunday to ensure the grapes didn't ripen a day too long.

The result is a rosy-cheeked vintage in the northern Rhône, with lush, velvety fruits and often warm levels of alcohol. High yields aren't always associated with quality, but according to Montez: 'If we'd had half the crop, the

Decanter northern Rhône vintage rating

2018



2017



2016



2015



2014



2013



2012



2011



2010



2009



alcohol would have been too high, but thanks to the yield it was balanced.'

Christophe Pichon of Domaine Pichon also pointed out that the high yields helped improve overall acidity levels, if not concentration.

The best reds tended to come from the more northerly vineyards in 2018 – Côte-Rôtie and the northern part of St-Joseph, where the wines are rich but retain good balance and an upright character.

It's a very ripe and potent year elsewhere, including Cornas, which produced some very impressive wines at the top end. In Crozes-Hermitage it's a plush, ripe year that's occasionally a bit over the top. It's not so good for Hermitage though: while a handful of wines impressed, many lacked depth and Hermitage character.

It's largely a vintage for reds in the northern Rhône. For whites, there are plenty of very good wines in Condrieu to choose from, but buy on recommendation as there are even more that lack the opulence that makes this appellation so distinctive.

You can find more safe-bet whites in St-Péray and St-Joseph this year, many of which are generously proportioned but also fresh and drinkable.

Around the regions

Côte-Rôtie

'A rich year,' according to Jean-Paul Jamet, which neatly sums it up. Even if 2018 as a whole doesn't have the charisma and natural harmony of the stellar 2015 vintage, it's nonetheless very good in Côte-Rôtie: ripe and easygoing, with some beautiful wines.

Some wines, however, are prone to over-ripeness and unbalanced levels of alcohol, others to over-oaking. They will take time to blossom. Stéphane Ogier points out that the alcohols are even higher in 2019.

Use of stems was commonplace in Côte-Rôtie this year – a growing trend across the northern Rhône. Christophe Pichon explains they can give 'a sensation of acidity, and perhaps a little more freshness', both of which are welcome in an opulent year like this.

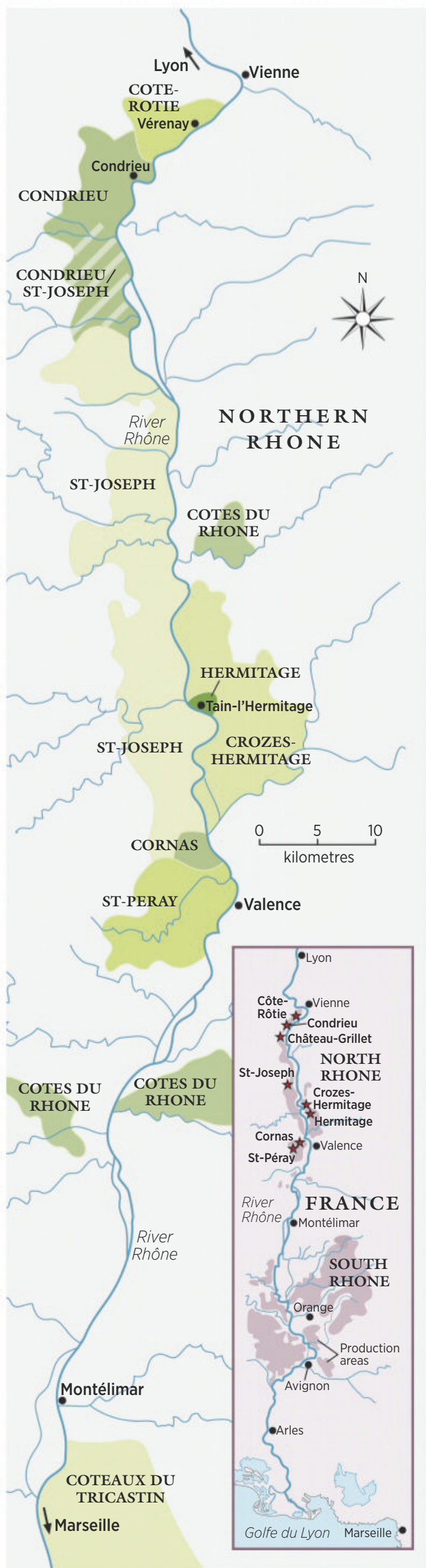
Key producers in 2018: Domaine JP Jamet, Domaine du Monteillet, Domaine Rostaing, Domaine Stéphane Ogier

Condrieu

A vintage with more misses than hits, 2018 is a fairly dilute year on the whole, lacking the opulence and fullness that make these Viogniers so irresistible. Yields were very high, leading to a lack of concentration, while the scorching weather caused the acidities to

Photographs: Nanda Gonzague; Mick Rock/Cephas (previous pages)





Jean-Paul Jamet (right) with son Loïc

Photograph: www.cote-rotie-jamet.com

drop, giving a corresponding lack of freshness in the finished wines.

After sifting through 50 wines, a dozen stood out – often from the most adept producers with vineyards on the most prestigious terroirs. Domaine Niero in particular made some fantastic wines in 2018, as did Domaine du Monteillet. This was not a great vintage by any means in Condrieu; but there are a few very attractive wines if you know where to look.

Key producers in 2018: Domaine Chambeyron, Domaine du Monteillet, Domaine Niero

St-Joseph

A vintage that was ‘hot, hot, hot,’ said Jean Gonon of Domaine Gonon, but his red hit no more than 13.8% alcohol thanks to the generous yields – 38hl/ha in both red and white in 2018.

Yields at Domaine Monier-Perréol were a little lower at just 30hl/ha for their reds, and Guillaume Monier reduced the maceration time by nearly half.

Over-extraction is an occasional problem in 2018, as is over-oaking, with raised levels of alcohol accentuating the aromatic impact of the wood. Those who opted for a light touch in the cellar this year have made elegant, juicy wines.

‘It’s a good year for whites too,’ says Monier, and there are many with a surprisingly fresh profile, even if they tend towards a rounded, generous style.

Key producers in 2018: Domaine

Chirat, Domaine Gonon, Domaine JL Chave, Domaine Jolivet, M Chapoutier

Hermitage

Yields were high in Hermitage in 2018, which might explain in part why some wines lack the depth and concentration expected for a hot vintage. A lighter style doesn’t necessarily mean disappointing wines, but too many producers soldiered on with robust extraction and long oak maturation, resulting in some harsh and clumsy reds this year.

A concomitant issue appears to be a lack of full ripeness in some of the wines. Those who waited for full physiological ripeness then extracted lightly, such as Jean-Louis Chave, have produced elegant examples.

The best wines of Hermitage this year, both reds and whites, are impressive, displaying good energy, freshness and drinkability if not muscle. But a surprising proportion lack profundity and true Hermitage appeal.

Key producers in 2018:

Cave de Tain, Domaine JL Chave, M Chapoutier

Crozes-Hermitage

The reds of Crozes-Hermitage this year are ripe, plush and juicy. Many of the wines are technically well balanced, with plenty of impact and volume that makes them immediately impressive.

However that bright, peppery, refreshing style of Crozes will be hard to find this year. Most ➤

should be best drunk while juicy and vibrant, as they could feel cumbersome as they age.

Red Crozes certainly beat whites this year, with a few honourable exceptions – 2018 is a corpulent vintage for Crozes whites, all too often lacking in freshness and acidity.

Key producers in 2018: Domaine Fayolle Fils & Fille, Domaine Gaylord Machon, Domaine les 4 Vents, Domaine Melody, Domaine Yann Chave

Cornas

Pierre Clape stressed the importance of picking early in 2018 – his team started as early as 12 September. His domaine's wines don't have an excessively ripe expression, but you will find that elsewhere.

More broadly it's a very full-bodied, extravagant vintage in Cornas, which can be enjoyably seductive. These characteristics can however occasionally detract from the cut and focus that makes these reds so appetising.

Those with old vines on assertive terroirs really excelled, balancing the natural richness

of the vintage with bristling tannins and a mineral grind.

Key producers in 2018: Domaine Clape, Domaine du Tunnel, Domaine Guy Farge, Domaine Johann Michel, Domaine Vincent Paris

St-Péray

Hot vintages are rarely the most exciting for Rhône whites; the last compelling vintage here was 2014. Nonetheless, the white grapes here are adapted to warm climates, and growers in St-Péray understand how to get the best out of them even when the mercury rises.

Unsurprisingly, the wines of St-Péray are on the broad side in 2018, but several have a lovely aromatic freshness that will provide lots of pleasure when young.

Wines majoring on Marsanne were generally more successful than those based on Roussanne, which often felt a bit gloopy.

Key producers in 2018: Alain Voge, Domaine Bernard Grippa, Domaine Clape, Domaine du Tunnel **D**



Matt Walls is a *Decanter* contributing editor and DWWA Regional Chair for the Rhône. He spent three weeks in October last year tasting more than 1,200 wines for his Rhône report, published in full on *Decanter Premium*

A taste of the top northern Rhône

Wines are listed by commune, from north to south, then by score, then alphabetically by producer. Some 2018s have not been bottled yet, hence some prices, stockists and alcohol levels are not yet known. Contact specialist merchants for en primeur offers

Côte-Rôtie

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine JP Jamet, Côte Brune** 97

Jamet's only single-vineyard bottling. 2018 is a soft, rich, easygoing vintage. Sunny and ripe, juicy tannins, slightly higher alcohol than a typical year. Expressive, cheerful, with potpourri, cedar, blueberry and blackberry and signature rose petal aroma. Menthol freshness and no overripeness of flavour. **Drink** 2026-2044

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine Rostaing, Côte Brune** 97

£223 Berry Bros & Rudd, Lay & Wheeler
Now in the hands of René's son Pierre. Just starting to reveal its classic rose and dried flower aromas, but tightly coiled. Lovely density, but still a medium-bodied wine. Good acidity, freshness and balance, with fine, silky tannins. Great personality and classicism. Very long. **Drink** 2026-2042



1 **Domaine Rostaing, La Landonne** 97
£85 (ib)-£135.99 Berry Bros & Rudd, Davy's, Justerini & Brooks, Lay & Wheeler
As for all Rostaing's Côte-Rôties: 18 months in oak, limited new oak, natural yeasts, and as many stems as possible – 100% in this case. Fresh juniper and black pepper aromas. Dense tannic base, plush texture with exceptional finesse. Long finish, no excessive alcohol. A fruity and approachable Landonne. **Drink** 2026-2040

Domaine JP Jamet 96
POA The Solent Cellar
A tasting of six barrels revealed a vintage with lush fruit, very ripe, but with balanced alcohol despite being higher than average. It will drink early, but should last well, too, thanks to the weight and finesse of its tannins. Good concentration and depth, but might not age with the same definition and clarity of some recent vintages. **Drink** 2025-2036

Domaine Bernard Burgaud 95
POA Lay & Wheeler
From a small, traditional family domaine of 4.5ha, this is round and very pure, with immediate impact. Juniper and thyme on nose and palate, over deep blackberry and loganberry fruit. Depth, concentration and length. **Drink** 2023-2031 **Alc** 13%

Domaine Chambeyron, La Chavarine 95
Dark, brooding, mineral style, with a graphite streak on the finish. Straight and focused. Oak is discreet; this is more about the fruit and, more precisely, the terroir. Real energy and thrust, well balanced with glossy fruit, fine sandy tannins and a long finish. Serious. **Drink** 2024-2030 **Alc** 14%

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine du Montillet, Les Grandes Places** 95
From a 0.4ha plot planted in 1951, Grandes Places is the yang to the yin of Montillet's Bons Arrêts. Full-bodied, deep and darkly fruited with serious depth. Great elegance of juniper and violet, not overripe or over-rich. A Côte-Rôtie of perfect balance and good length. **Drink** 2024-2034

E Guigal, La Landonne 95

Vines planted in 1975 to commemorate the birth of Philippe Guigal. Less pepper and herbal notes (thanks to 100% lignified stems), but still shows black olive and bay leaf notes. Thunderous style: full-bodied, dense, firm and muscular tannins, with acidity on the low side. Exceptional length. At the start of its 42 months in new French barriques. **Drink** 2029-2045

KEY PRODUCER Stéphane Ogier, Lancement 95

POA H2Vin, Lay & Wheeler

Firework smoke and Szechuan pepper – very expressive nose. Juicy but not as concentrated as expected on the palate, but lovely freshness and sage and thyme lift. Medium-bodied and fairly discreet, with 1% Viognier. More gentle tannins than some of his single-vineyard cuvées. A beautiful, delicate wine. **Drink** 2023-2031

Tardieu-Laurent, Vieilles Vignes 95

£57.90 Millésima

Old vines from a mix of Côte-Brune terroirs. An ambitious, concentrated style, lots of oak influence but tempered by the lack of overt barrel toasting plus the use of whole bunches. Ripe tannins and real classicism: balanced and compelling. **Drink** 2024-2029 **Alc** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Christophe & Maryline Billon, Les Elotins 93

Includes 3% Viognier and aged for 22 months in one- and two-year-old barrels. Very smooth and elegant style: good concentration and well balanced, with well-polished tannins. Elegant, precise and classic. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Domaine François Merlin 93

Very soft, opulent style – ripe and juicy, but also fairly tannic, though the tannins are ripe and yielding. Palate-coating, very ripe black fruit coulis and fairly high alcohol, though there's a liquorice freshness and a saline edge. Will be good when it's ready. **Drink** 2022-2028 **Alc** 14%

TOP VALUE Domaine Martin Clerc, Collet 93

Martin Clerc took over this estate in 2015 and this is from 18-year-old vines, matured for 18 months in barrique, 25% new. Concentrated but not forced blackberry fruit with good freshness. The alcohol shows but it has length and a certain profundity. A fast-improving domaine and good-value. **Drink** 2022-2029 **Alc** 13.5%



Domaine Bernard Burgaud

TOP VALUE Domaine Bott 92

POA Lay & Wheeler

A fairly new domaine from New Zealander Graeme Bott and partner Julie. This is a rounded, fairly full, rich, ripe style of Côte-Rôtie with balancing acidity, gently grippy ripe tannins and a long finish. Nicely done with good sense of clarity and precision. **Drink** 2021-2024

Condrieu

KEY PRODUCER Domaine du Monteillet, La Grillette 95

From a 0.25ha parcel close to Château-Grillet. Powerful aromas of violet, citrus and peach. Profound and full-bodied, with good tension and sapidity. Straight and direct despite the breadth on the palate. Fresher than most in 2018, with good energy and balance. Grand cru material. **Drink** 2022-2032

KEY PRODUCER Domaine Niero, Chéry 95

60% fermented in barrel, which also sees some lees stirring, then it all goes through malolactic fermentation. Round yet fresh aromas, then there's good intensity of pithy citrus fruits of real persistence on the palate, with low but balanced acidity. Huge length in an otherwise dilute vintage. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

Domaine Niero, Coeur de Roncharde 95

A new cuvée for Niero, this is a rounded, sweetly fruited style, silky with oak. Very

pure, with a nice palate-coating oiliness to the fruit, bringing length, depth and texture. Very long and balanced finish. Attractive, but drink soon rather than keep. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 14%

KEY PRODUCER Domaine Chambeyron, Vernon 94

Perfumed nose of jasmine – very delicate aromas, but far from faint. It's rounded and balanced on the long palate with a good sense of tension and concentration. The oak is fairly generous but it works, and is well integrated with the fruit. A very convincing effort in this vintage. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 14%

TOP VALUE Domaine Aurelien Chataignier 93

£58 The Winery

Almond nougat aromas along with floral hints and lychee. Nice freshness, balance and acidity. Rounded, full-bodied and freshly fruited, with a citrus twist on the finish. Gently vibrating, tense finish. An estate going from strength to strength. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 14.5%

TOP VALUE Jean-Michel Gerin, La Loye 92

£39.17-£40 Millésima, Vinatis UK

A vibrant, expressive, flamboyant style from 35-year-old vines planted on south-facing granite terraces. Freshness and adequate acidity teamed with good concentration – very rich but not overtly oaky this year. **Drink** 2020-2022 ➤

St-Joseph

TOP VALUE Domaine du Monteillet 92

£22.71 Vinatis UK

A blend of 66% Roussanne and 34% Marsanne, giving fresh cut pear and lime blossom. Pure and full-bodied but a little low in acidity. Gently creamy, saline finish with a subtle bitter twist. **Drink** 2020-2022

KEY PRODUCER Domaine Gonon 94

£130-£160 Berry Bros & Rudd, Fine & Rare

Jean Gonon says this 2018 reminds him of the 1990 and 2015, 'soft, ripe but with something deep'. Depth and oregano lift to the crunchy black fruit, in a vivid style. Ripe tannins and high but not unbalanced alcohol, thanks in part to its concentration and depth. **Drink** 2024-2032

2 KEY PRODUCER Domaine JL Chave, Clos Florentin 94

A tasting of the young-vine and old-vine components of the blend shows a serious, sleek, mid-bodied and well-balanced wine in 2018, with very fine tannins and creamy black cherry fruit. **Drink** 2020-2026

3 Domaine Vincent Paris, Les Côtes 94

£22-£25 Cru, Farthinghoe, Four Walls, NY Wines of Cambridge, Private Cellar, Uncorked, Vin Cognito Lifted spicy aromas of cedar, cigars and star anise over vivid, ripe blackberry fruit. Medium-bodied palate and well-balanced acidity. Grippy and ample tannins, but not excessive. Long finish. More precise than most in 2018. **Drink** 2020-2026 Alc 13%

KEY PRODUCER Vignobles Chirat, Les Côtes 94

Aurélien Chirat is the fourth generation to work at this family-owned estate, founded

in 1925. Soft, ripe black fruits and roses, oregano and black pepper but no lack of structure. All teamed with elegant tannins and a general sense of juicy exuberance and positivity. **Drink** 2021-2025 Alc 13.5%

André Perret, Les Grisières 93

POA Lay & Wheeler

70-year-old Chavanay Syrah, bolstered by some domaine fruit, aged for nearly two years in 20% new oak. Deep, concentrated blackberry fruit for what's typically a fairly lean, structural style. Higher alcohol than usual but balanced by good freshness and energy. A strong vintage for this cuvée. **Drink** 2020-2024 Alc 14.5%

Domaine Coursodon, Silice 93

Kalamata olive brings a savoury edge to the ripe but not overly sweet fruit. Very well balanced, with great softness and plushness of tannin. The alcohol is a little higher than usual, but this is a lovely wine. **Drink** 2020-2023 Alc 14%

4 TOP VALUE KEY PRODUCER

Domaine Jolivet, L'Instinct 93

£21.68 Justerini & Brooks

Good intensity, but not very expressive at this stage. Soft, yielding, ample tannins, not overly sweet or ripe. Has a serious, powerful grip on the finish, but retains a sense of elegance. Alcohol fairly high, but it's all in balance for a wine of this stature and style. **Drink** 2022-2027 Alc 13.5%

Yves Cuilleron, Les Serines 93

£31-£38 Cru, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima

Savoury, with a touch of black olive to the dark, ripe fruit. Medium-bodied, intense, but not overly fruity, with salinity and a certain strictness to the structure. Tannins

are a little grippy on the finish, so give it time. Drive and depth. **Drink** 2022-2026

5 TOP VALUE Domaine Catherine & Pascal Jamet, Tour d'Arras 92

Unusually has 4% Roussanne. Upright style of St-Joseph, but well-endowed with concentrated berry fruits, good length and focus. Not flamboyant but well-made and classic in style, with an engaging character. Fresh, compared to some of its peers. **Drink** 2020-2022 Alc 14.5%

Hermitage

6 WHITE WINE OF THE VINTAGE KEY PRODUCER M Chapoutier, L'Ermite 96

£338-£398.68 BI Wines & Spirits, Lay &

Wheeler, Millésima

Some pre-phylloxera Marsanne vines from 1860 on a rare kind of alkaline granite, 80% matured in demi-muid using 15% new oak. High yields of 32hl/ha means it's not as concentrated as other years but more immediately drinkable. Gentle almond nougat and rhubarb, then a saline, vibrant palate with gentle honeycomb edging to pear and mango fruit. **Drink** 2020-2035

7 TOP VALUE KEY PRODUCER Cave de Tain, Grand Classique 93

£52.99 Boutinot

Full-bodied – lots of Marsanne oomph and concentration. Round and opulent, long with good balancing acidity. Not complex, but it has a classy demeanour. If there is no great jump in pricing, this will offer the best quality/price ratio of any white Hermitage in 2018. **Drink** 2020-2027

KEY PRODUCER Domaine JL Chave 96

A tasting of five lieu-dit wines points to a ripe, rich, dark-fruited vintage with high but not unbalanced alcohol. With opulent, liqueur fruits and deep concentration on the palate, this is very ripe, but shows no raisined or jammy character, and has remarkable freshness considering its opulence. **Drink** 2026-2042

M Chapoutier, L'Ermite 96

£233.68-£276.28 BI Wines & Spirits, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima

High-yielding fruit matured 100% in barriques, 20% new. Pure, lovely intensity of fruit with remarkable tension and a saline edge. Real drive and thrust, just a little leaner and lower in alcohol than some recent vintages and perhaps not quite as long: the same Ermité skeleton, just not so much flesh. **Drink** 2022-2036



TOP VALUE Fayolle Fils & Fille, Les Dionnières 93

£48-£55 Salusbury Winestore, The Solent Cellar
Juniper, blueberry, loganberry and lavender – smooth and juicy with inner sweetness to the fruit. Pure, not loud, this is the most elegant red Hermitage of the vintage; not overextracted, overoaked or terribly concentrated. Svelte shape and fine tannins. **Drink** 2022-2028

8 TOP VALUE Domaine Yann Chave 92
Organically-grown vines nearly 50 years old. Sappy, generous blackberry and loganberry – good depth and Hermitage muscle. Tannins are plentiful and ripe, but the fruit lacks a little length though it is fresh. Will drink sooner than many more recent vintages. **Drink** 2022-2028 **Alc** 14%

Crozes-Hermitage

KEY PRODUCER Domaine Gaylord Machon, La Fille dont j'ai Rêvé 92

70% Marsanne and 30% Roussanne, matured for nine months, 60% in ovoid tanks. Alive with pear, citrus peel, passion fruit and lime leaves. Full-bodied and concentrated with a firmness allied with a nice bitterness that gives balance and direction. Long with integrated oak. Excellent for 2018. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 13.5%

9 Fayolle Fils & Fille, Les Pontaix 92
£22-£25 The Solent Cellar, The Wine Society
Old-vine Marsanne planted in the 1950s, fermented then aged in older oak for 11 months. Fennel and honeysuckle aromas, then a round, full-bodied palate with more freshness and acidity than most this year. A touch of honeycomb on the long finish. Very drinkable. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 13.9%

10 TOP VALUE Domaine Combier, Laurent Combier 92
£23.50 Great Western Wine, Vinatis UK
Organically grown Syrah destemmed and fermented in concrete tanks, matured in 7hl concrete ovoids for eight months. Refined style that accentuates acidity and texture over concentration. Aromatic raspberry and loganberry fruit, lavender and sage. A Crozes of peerless finesse in 2018. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12.5%

11 KEY PRODUCER Domaine Les 4 Vents, St-Jaimes 92
£30 The Solent Cellar
A parcel of 50-year-old organically grown Syrah next to the family farm in Mercurol, matured for 18 months in demi-muids.

Juniper and bay from the whole bunches and nice textural finesse on the palate that is smooth in fruit and tannins. An exciting wine: nicely weighted and good intensity and length. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%

Domaine Les Bruyères, Georges 92
Biodynamically farmed 30-year-old vines, destemmed and fermented in concrete tanks, then aged for 12 months in old oak and concrete eggs. Vibrant fruitiness alongside bay, olive and juniper. Ripe and soft but not overdone, with lovely textural relief and salinity on the finish. Thoroughly enjoyable. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13.5%

12 Domaine Philippe & Vincent Jaboulet, Nouvelère 92
Better than most Crozes in 2018, this has real depth and vinosity, from old vines grown on galets roulés, matured in oak for 24 months. It's ripe, but it's intense too, with deep, searching tannins and a long finish that fans out like a peacock's tail. Well-integrated oak and lovely harmony and balance. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 14%

TOP VALUE Domaine du Coulet, Et la Bannière 91
Biodynamically grown, all destemmed, fermented and matured for nine months in concrete with no additions. Exuberant, juicy, open-knit and aromatic: juniper, raspberry, garrigue herb notes. Powerful, friendly style, with some wet clay tannins. Enjoy now. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

TOP VALUE Domaine Les 4 Vents 91
Organically grown vines, 30-40 years old. The 50% whole-bunch imbeds a herbal vein: sage, olive brine, bay. The tannins are ripe and there is a big natural swell on the

palate, with quite an impact, rolling away again fairly swiftly. Characterful Crozes, full of interest. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

13 TOP VALUE KEY PRODUCER Domaine Melody, Friandise 91

£19.75 The Good Wine Shop
Young-vine cuvée fermented then matured in stainless steel for seven months. A spicy hint of reduction lifts the berry fruit, and a touch of dark chocolate adds interest. Ripe but not excessive with lovely juicy berry acidity. Compulsively drinkable! **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14%

Cornas

KEY PRODUCER Domaine Clape 97

£100 (ib) Fine & Rare, L'Assemblage
A tasting of the lieu-dit wines suggested a fairly classic vintage, on the riper side but not as much as 2015. Balanced acidity and ripe tannins are relatively approachable for this domaine. Some tanks showed a little raised volatile acidity, which may show up in the final blend. This score is an early indication. **Drink** 2028-2042

RED WINE OF THE VINTAGE KEY PRODUCER Domaine Vincent Paris, La Geynale 97

£33.33 (ib)-£48 Berry Bros & Rudd, BI Wines & Spirits, Farthinghoe, NY Wines of Cambridge, Private Cellar, Uncorked, Vin Cognito
From 100-year-old vines, whole-bunch fruit is wild-yeast fermented and aged for 16 months in old barriques. Remarkably vibrant blackberry fruit aromas beneath juniper and oregano – very fresh, defined and focused despite the power and ripeness. Exceptional length, vibrancy and terroir expression; a force of nature! ➤





High alcohol this year – high everything: intense, mouthcoating tannins turn your mouth inside out. A wine that consumes you. **Drink 2028-2045 Alc 14%**

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine du Tunnel, Vin Noir** 96

£50-£55 **Averys, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima, Vinatis UK**
100-year-old vines from three granite plots; fermented in stainless steel, aged 14 months in old barriques. Depth, vinosity and an attractive aromatic lift. Bright and long with lots of energy, freshness and precision. Purity and impact combined. **Drink 2022-2035 Alc 13.5%**

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine Guy Farge, Reynard** 96

The mouthcoating berry fruit is deeply saline and full of energy. Spicy, peppery and expressive. The tannins are like tiny teeth, really gripping you like a terrier, and the oak isn't excessive, it's required. Vibrant, fresh, intense; texture with a mineral drive. **Drink 2022-2035 Alc 13.5%**

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine Johann Michel, Mère Michel** 96

Fresh, elaborate, detailed aromatics. The intense fruit matches the oak without being swamped by it. Serious wine, but without relying on overripeness or extraction. Full-bodied but not excessive, deeply saline and mineral with serrated, edgy tannins. **Drink 2026-2036 Alc 13%**

TOP VALUE **Ferraton Père & Fils, Les Grands Mûriers** 93

A little flamboyant perhaps – very concentrated and the alcohol is a little on the high side – but in that sense, it reflects the vintage. Fresh, enticing juniper, thyme

and rosemary nose and a weighty, ripe, mouthcoating, juicy palate. A cuvée that often overperforms. **Drink 2024-2030**

TOP VALUE **Domaine Guy Farge, Harmonie** 92

Medium-bodied style, expressive and enticing already. The acidity is intense and driving though not entirely integrated at this stage. A herbal vein to the aromatics brings interest. Very fresh, with quite marked tannic grip. Not the most concentrated this year, but enjoyably vibrant. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13.5%**

St-Péray

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine Clape** 93

£35-£37.50 (ib) **Atlas Fine Wines, Yapp Bros**
A mix of 60-year-old and seven-year-old Marsanne (80%) and Roussanne vinified in oak. Delightfully floral, flinty pear aromas then a weighty palate with good acidity and lengthy brightness. Vibrant and fresh with no overt oak influence: a stricter style than an average year and all the better for it. **Drink 2020-2022**

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine Alain Voge, Ongrie** 92

POA **Lay & Wheeler**
Organic 50-year-old Marsanne fermented and aged in barrels, 30% new. Expressive, zesty fresh pear and spicy aromatic lift. The acidity is a little low but it has a nice saline touch for balance and great length. An authentic style that reflects the hot vintage. **Drink 2020 Alc 14%**

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine Bernard Grippa, Les Pins** 92

£24.17 **Millésima**
70% Marsanne, 30% Roussanne. Softly

fragrant meadow flowers and apricot. Acidity is low but adequate. Feels natural and unforced, with lovely finesse and a long, meandering finish. Better than Les Figuiers this year, which feels broad and fat on the palate. **Drink 2020 Alc 13.5%**

KEY PRODUCER **Domaine du Tunnel, Pur Blanc** 92

£34 **Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler**

From a parcel of 100-year-old vines in a clos in the centre of the village, this is full-bodied but with freshness and lift – the acidity is better than many in 2018, and there's a good sense of tension. Fresh and floral with a gentle pithiness that gives balance, leading to a long poached-pear finish. **Drink 2020-2021 Alc 13.5%**

Yves Cuilleron, Lieu dit Biousse 92

£22.50-£28 **Cru, Millésima**

This 100% Marsanne is much better than most in 2018. It has good precision, tension and focus, with a fresh, petal-soft finish. A little touch of honeycomb brings interest and length. A lovely wine; classic St-Péray. **Drink 2020**

TOP VALUE **Cave de Tain, Fleur de Roc** 90

£25.99 **Boutinot**

The co-op's top St-Péray cuvée, this is a plot selection of old-vine Marsanne (95%) from across the appellation. Fermentation starts in tank and ends in barrel. Floral fennel aromas then a tense, vibrant palate, fresh despite the full body. Very drinkable with a nice bitter twist. **Drink 2020**

TOP VALUE **Domaine Guy Farge, Grain de Silex** 90

A concentrated style (90% Roussanne), with sappy, mouthcoating flavours of lemon and lime alongside mango. Long finish of citrus oil, lime pastille and, unexpectedly, raspberry. A nice bitter twist brings freshness. Not the most elegant St-Péray in 2018, but lots of interest. **Drink 2020 Alc 13.5%**

Decanter
PREMIUM

For the full tasting notes of these 59 wines and 71 more that Matt Walls tasted from the northern Rhône, PLUS all the prices and stockists on release – as well as our comprehensive vintage analysis, please see [Decanter.com/premium](https://www.decanter.com/premium)



CRU BOURGEOIS EXCEPTIONNEL

BEST BUYS OF THE NORTHERN MEDOC

This may be the less talked-about, cooler part of Bordeaux's Left Bank, but there is still plenty of good value to be found if you know the best producers. **Stephen Brook** recommends two wines from each of his top eight northern Médoc estates

Of the two generic Médoc appellations, Haut-Médoc and Médoc, the latter has always been at a disadvantage. Consisting essentially of the northern part of the region, it is climatically less favoured than the Haut-Médoc, which stretches from just north of St-Estèphe southwards to the gates of Bordeaux itself. Nonetheless, there are sectors close to the estuary that enjoy the same benefits of a more moderate climate as similarly located estates further to the south.

In the past, the challenge was climatic. The northern Médoc is colder, and although the soils can be perfectly well suited to classic Bordeaux red wine, ripening tends to happen later than it does further south. Especially in vineyards with a high proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon, greenness can be an issue.

However, global warming is bringing its mixed blessing to this region as to so many others. Recent hot vintages have benefited the Médoc appellation: ripeness is less of a problem. It remains true that there are many indifferent or dull or tart wines from here, yet there are also some very well-run estates that consistently produce wines of excellent quality, and usually at fair prices.

It has sometimes been pointed out that farming standards are lower in the northern Médoc because most vineyards are machine-harvested. Machines are indeed quite common here, but that does not mean that the wines produced by them are necessarily inferior. The technology behind such machines has improved greatly over the last decade or so, and consequently the grapes processed by machines are handled much more gently, reducing the risk of oxidation.

Nonetheless, many of the leading properties maintain strong links with families of workers that return each year, often from Spain, for the harvest. They are fortunate, as other estates struggle to find local harvesters, such as students, prepared to make the two-hour trek up from Bordeaux.

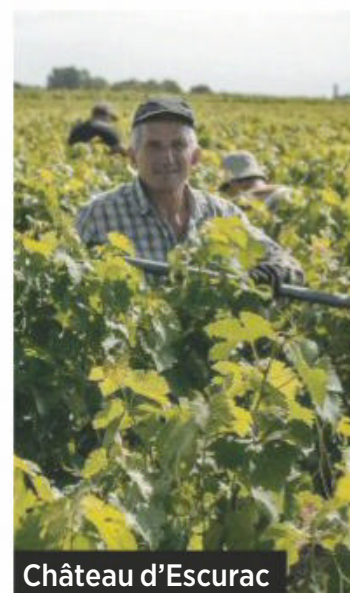
All the factors that have contributed to the



Château Pontensac



Château Les Ormes Sorbet



Château d'Ecurac

overall improvement in red Bordeaux – less reliance on chemical fertilisers and herbicides, lower yields and greater selection, gentler handling of the fruit with far less pumping than in the past, less extraction, more judicious use of oak – apply just as much to the best estates of the northern region. It's pointless to deny that there remain many uninspiring and mundane wines here, but the best wines can rival the best of the Haut-Médoc, and you will usually find them at a more tempting price.



Stephen Brook is an awarded author and has been a *Decanter* contributing editor since 1996



Château Rollan de By



Château Tour Haut-Caussan



Château Laujac



Château Fleur La Mothe



Château Loudenne

Château Rollan de By

Jean Guyon began his career as an interior designer and property developer before purchasing this property in Bégadan in 1989. Before long he was buying other Médoc properties too, and today his domaine extends to 190 hectares, about half of which are here. The soils are complex, with gravel and limestone. Merlot is the main variety at 68%. Guyon's approach has always been to pick by machine at full maturity.

There's a 15ha parcel, Haut Condissas, that is picked at super-ripe levels, with the resulting wine aged entirely in new oak. Meanwhile, Rollan de By spends up to 18 months in one-third new barrels. Haut Condissas is an impressive wine but perhaps too self-consciously garagiste, unlike Rollan de By, a modern-style wine that often punches above its weight. It has good tannic structure, but also freshness and bite. It often delivers a balanced and stylish claret in lesser vintages such as the 2012. Given the substantial volume produced – close to half a million bottles – quality is consistent and high.

Château Rollan de By, Médoc CB 2010 93

£22 (ib) Fine & Rare

Deep, lustrous red. The nose is rich, savoury and smoky, with black-fruit aromas. There's a fine attack, excellent concentration, yet ample freshness and bite, and all supported by firm ripe tannins. The finish is minty, stylish and persistent. **Drink 2020-2028**
Alcohol 14%

Château Rollan de By, Médoc CB 2015 90

£18.25 (ib) Fine & Rare

The high proportion of Merlot in the blend gives aromas of black cherries. Suave and juicy, this is already approachable, with supple tannins balanced by good acidity. This is harmonious and persistent, but there's no lack of concentration. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 13.5%** ➤



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Château Potensac

The renown of this 60ha estate near Ordonnac is not surprising, as it has been owned by the Delon family of Château Léoville Las Cases for 250 years. Part of the vineyard is on gravelly clay, and there's a sector with limestone that gives very long-lived wines. The anomaly here is that Cabernet Sauvignon only represents 35% of the plantings, with Merlot at 45%. But the remainder is Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, varieties that often deliver some of the most impressive lots.

Except for a few parcels of old vines, the vineyards are machine-harvested. Yields rarely exceed 40hl/ha, which helps to explain the wine's concentration, as does the fact that a substantial proportion of the production is downgraded into the second wine or sometimes simply sold off. Until 1997, older barrels were exclusively used, but today Potensac is aged for about 12 months in 30% new oak. The result is a dense and structured wine that can safely be cellared.

It's the policy of Potensac to hold back stock of about one third of each vintage, which means that it is often relatively easy to find mature bottles.



Château Potensac, Médoc 2015 92

£17.50 (ib)–£27.50 Crump Richmond Shaw, Farr Vintners, Fine & Rare, Millésima One might have expected Potensac to have produced an intimidating wine in this fine vintage, but it's actually quite accessible and fluid.

The nose is sweet and ripe, with elegant cherry and blackcurrant aromas. The tannins are firm but ripe, giving grip, but there's complexity and spice too. Assertive and long. **Drink** 2021-2032 **Alc** 13.3%

Château Potensac, Médoc 2000 92

£37 (ib) Fine & Rare After almost 20 years, the colour is only showing slight evolution. The nose is fragrant and charming, with blackcurrant aromas. Hefty in its youth, it has become supple and graceful, with lift and charm, though it still has the Potensac tannic backbone. Ready, but no rush to drink. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.2% ➤



‘It’s the policy here to hold back stock of each vintage, which means it’s relatively easy to find mature bottles’



Photograph: Mick Rock/Cephas

Château Pontensac

Château Tour Haut-Caussan

I was once served this wine over lunch at a classed growth, and I was sufficiently impressed to seek it out in subsequent vintages. I am rarely disappointed. It is owned by Philippe Courrian, who for many years has preferred to live in Corbières, where he has another wine estate. This property at Blaignan is run by siblings Fabien and Véronique. Even back in the 1970s, Philippe Courrian was a believer in low yields, and his children have maintained the standards he set.

The property's 17ha are divided between two sectors: on the plateau of Potensac, and on clay-limestone soils near a windmill set on a point said (as are a few others) to be the highest spot in the northern Médoc. The vineyards are split between Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, with, since 2018, a dash of Petit Verdot. The average age of the vines is 50 years.

The harvest is manual. No new oak has been used since hail wiped out most of the

crop in 2014, but gradually it will be re-introduced. There is no fining or filtration. This is an honest, concentrated and stylish Médoc, well balanced with no excesses, and it often shows surprising longevity.

Château Tour Haut-Caussan, Médoc CB 2016 91

£15.99 (2014) **Majestic**

Exuberant and stylish on the nose, this displays splendid blackcurrant aromas. It's concentrated but plump and slightly soft, though there are polished tannins and fine acidity. Elegant and long, with discreet structure. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 14%

Château Tour Haut-Caussan, Médoc CB 2010 91

N/A UK www.tourhautcaussan.com

Still very deep in colour in its 10th year, this has a lean, oaky, blackcurrant nose of considerable finesse. Juicy and supple, this is medium-bodied but concentrated, with polished tannins and good acidity. It's drinking well now and has a long, peppery finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Les Ormes Sorbet

I first met Jean Boivert some 20 years ago at the Médoc Marathon, but sadly he died young, in 2004. His 19ha property remains in safe hands, run by his steely widow Hélène and their two sons, Vincent and François. The Boivert family has owned the estate since 1764. Theirs is a classic wine, produced from vineyards dispersed throughout the neighbourhood of Couquèques, where the winery is based. The soil is sandy gravel over a deep limestone subsoil.

Cabernet Sauvignon dominates with two-thirds of the plantings, which takes some courage in this northerly location. And some of the Petit Verdot is more than 70 years old. The harvest is manual, drawing on families of Romany travellers who have been coming here for three decades. The vinification is unremarkable, but the Boiverts are shifting gradually from selected to indigenous yeasts. Ageing takes place for up to 14 months in



20%-40% new Tarransaud barrels before bottling without filtration.

I would describe these as careful wines: not super-concentrated or flamboyant, but marked in their youth by firm, even austere tannins, and then, with more maturity, showing elegance and balance.

Château Les Ormes Sorbet, Médoc CB 2016 91

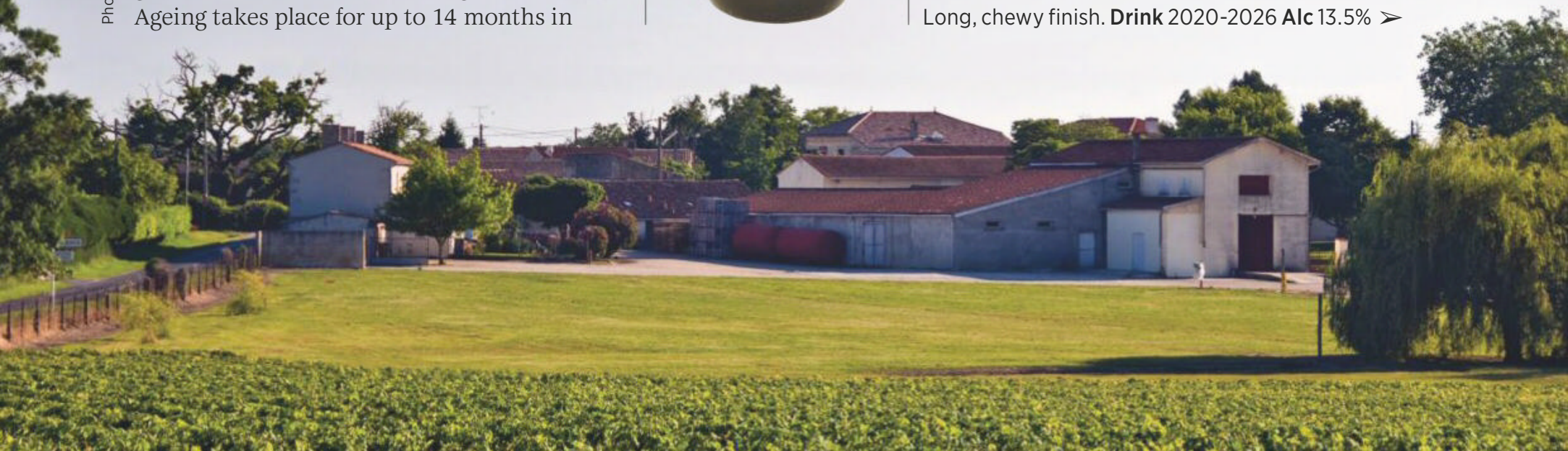
N/A UK www.ormes-sorbet.com

Perfumed blackcurrant fruit leaps from the glass. The palate is medium-bodied yet concentrated, with ample grip on the mid-palate. It's a touch austere now but spicy and persistent, with good acidity. Fine potential. **Drink** 2021-2032 **Alc** 13.5%

Château Les Ormes Sorbet, Médoc CB 2011 90

£10.50 (ib) **Crump Richmond Shaw, Fine & Rare**

Many 2011 wines remain a touch austere. This is no exception, but it's developing complexity. The nose is lightly savoury, with blackcurrant and liquorice. Tannins are firm, with a minty oakiness and vigour. Long, chewy finish. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5% ➤





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Château d'Ecurac

Château d'Ecurac

It was with the 1996 vintage that this property won the Coupe des Crus Bourgeois du Médoc, an annual blind-tasting competition with international judges and copious meals. I was one of the judges in 1998, so I went with colleagues to visit this little-known property in Civrac. Its triumph was no fluke, and many subsequent vintages proved to be just as good. The owner Jean-Marc Landureau died in 2017, but his wife Merete Larsen is an experienced oenologist, so the property lives on.

The 23ha of vines are planted on an isolated hillock of well-drained and well-ventilated gravel soils. Landureau picked by machine, but Larsen has returned to partial manual harvesting and has implemented biodynamic practices.

The winemaking is modern, with a long cold soak and a long maceration, followed by a year in one-third new oak. Although the proportion of Merlot can be quite high (60% in the vineyard), Escurac is a wine that can age

well. Selection is rigorous, with lesser lots going into the second wine, La Chapelle d'Ecurac, named after the remarkable 11th-century chapel on the hill.

Château d'Ecurac, Médoc CB 2016 91

N/A UK www.chateaudescurac.com

This is still youthful, with dense aromas of black cherry and blackberry. It's very ripe and concentrated, with robust and firm tannins. Moderate acidity gives it a graceful character, but there is ample grip, and the finish is long and chewy. **Drink 2021-2032 Alc 14%**

Château d'Ecurac, Médoc CB 2010 89

£18.48 Rodney Fletcher

The colour remains youthful and unevolved, and the nose, too, is reserved. However, the palate is bright, showing ample sucrosity, though the tannins remain firm. This has substance and weight, but is a tad austere. Long, savoury finish, with liquorice tones. Patience required! **Drink 2020-2035 Alc 14.5%** ➤



Château Loudenne

In the 1970s, this pink hilltop château in St-Yzans was a British colonial outpost, managed by Martin Bamford, who was known for his legendary hospitality. It was sold in 2000 to a Cognac tycoon, Jean-Paul Lafrayette, who eight years later was arrested on charges of embezzlement. In 2013, Loudenne was sold to the Chinese Moutai group, with a share going to another Cognac producer, Camus.

Such fluctuating fortunes resulted in fluctuating wine styles and quality. However, Lafrayette did make some good wines, and the same is true of the current owners. Loudenne has long been famous for its white as well as its red Médoc. Yields have been reduced and ageing vineyards are being replanted.

The vines, almost equally divided between Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot for the reds, occupy more than 60ha and are being converted to organic farming. Loudenne Le Château is the main red here, and very good it



is too. It is aged in one-third new oak, but a proportion now remains in tanks to conserve freshness as the climate heats up. The winemaking team exudes confidence, and quality has never been higher.

Château Loudenne, Médoc CB 2009 91

£17.25-£30 Fareham Wine Cellar, Hayward Bros, Millésima, Penistone Wine Cellars

There are dense black fruits on the nose, mirrored on the palate. It's full-bodied and generous, with ample weight of fruit and a good deal of spice and energy. Quite long, this is a vibrant 2009 without any flabbiness. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14%

Château Loudenne, Le Château, Médoc CB 2016 89

N/A UK www.chateau-loudenne.com

Forceful nose, with dense aromas of black cherry and blackcurrant. Rich and full-bodied, this has a suave texture, supple tannins, and sufficient grip and acidity to sustain it. There's weight here, but it has attractive length, too. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14%



Château Fleur La Mothe

Just over 10 years ago, three oenologists pooled their resources to acquire the former Château La Mothe in St-Yzans. Their first vintage was 2008. There are 15ha of vines, with an average age of 40 years, and half the plantings are Merlot. Since 2014, some Petit Verdot has been added to the Château Fleur La Mothe blend. The vineyards, on gravelly soils with some clay sectors, are machine-harvested, destemmed and then sorted on a vibrating table. The flagship wine is aged in one-third new oak for up to 14 months.

Above from left: Antoine Médeville, Edouard Massie, and Henri Boyer, oenologists at Château Fleur La Mothe

What's admirable about Fleur La Mothe is the consistency and polish of the wines. They have fine aromas and sufficient weight of fruit to balance the tannins, which have a typically Médocain grip. These are not flashy wines, but they always avoid any suggestion of rusticity. They demonstrate just how good the soils of the northern Médoc can be, if farmed with care and vinified with a constant eye on the balance of the wine.

Château Fleur La Mothe, Médoc CB 2016 90

N/A UK www.chateaufleurlamothe.fr

The nose is ripe and charming, with blackberry aromas. This is creamy and full-bodied, but at the same time it shows freshness and lift, giving a limpid character alongside the tannic structure. Spicy and lively, this has elegance thanks to a welcome light touch. Long and full of flavour. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14%

Château Fleur La Mothe, Médoc CB 2015 90

N/A UK www.chateaufleurlamothe.fr

Although overall the wine is denser than the elegant 2016, the nose is delightful, with fresh and perfumed blackberry aromas, expressing charm and finesse. The attack is suave, leading to a concentrated and fleshy palate, which shows some tannic grip without being too extracted. There's impressive extract on the long finish.

Drink 2021-2032 **Alc** 13.5% ➤



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Château Laujac

The Danish négociant Hermann Cruse made Bordeaux history when, in a courageous roll of the dice, he bought up almost the entire 1847 vintage in 1848, as the market was troubled by revolutionary agitation across Europe. He cleaned up and went on a spending spree, acquiring Château Pontet-Cantet, Château Giscours and other properties. He also bought Laujac near Bégadan, as it was a working farm as well as a vineyard.

With 80ha under vine, it remains an important estate, and it's now owned by his descendant Vanessa Cruse and her urbane husband René-Philippe Duboscq. Cattle still roam the pastures, and the vineyards, planted to 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, are farmed conscientiously, aided by complimentary fertilisers from the animals. The finished wine generally has 60% Cabernet, preserving its Médocain character.

I tasted Laujac extensively in the 1990s and the wines were undistinguished. Today they are fresher, fruitier and well balanced. They

are not over-ambitious – this is probably a good rather than great terroir – but they admirably meet a need for stylish, discreetly oaked claret suited to pleasurable medium-term drinking.

Château Laujac, Médoc CB 2016 90

£7.92 (ib) Davy's

Even in 2016, Laujac hasn't gone all-out for extraction, and even the colour is only a moderately deep red. The nose has intense cherry aromas with a dash of vanilla, but on the palate it's concentrated and assertive, although the tannins are supple. There's welcome acidity, and the finish is balanced, stylish and long. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 13.5%**

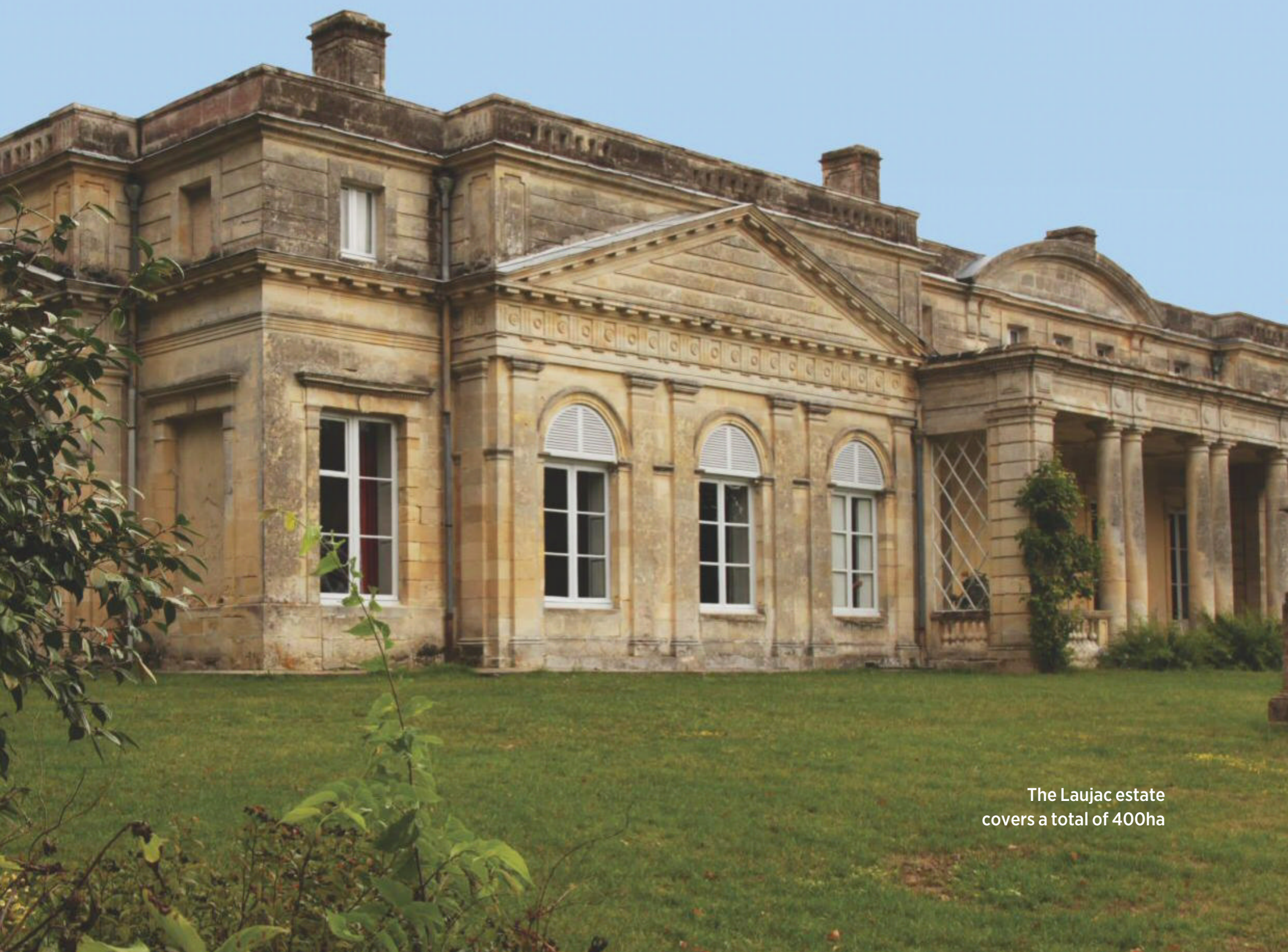
Château Laujac, Médoc CB 2014 89

£17.95 Davy's

Surprisingly, this 2014 shows more depth of colour than the superior 2016. There are ripe blackberry aromas on the nose. The attack is fresh and svelte, and the firm acidity gives tension. Spicy, elegant and long. **Drink 2020-2026 Alc 13.5% D**



Photograph: www.chateau-laujac.com



The Laujac estate covers a total of 400ha

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DOMAINE NICOLAS-JAY

It took more than 25 years for a chat about a joint winemaking venture to bear fruit, but the past five years have seen this project between a former US music mogul and a Burgundian winemaker become one of the big names of Oregon Pinot Noir. **Matthew Luczy** reports

A late September evening, and Jay Boberg is loosening the ratchet straps securing harvest bins to a flatbed trailer in preparation for the picking of Pinot Noir in the Nysa Vineyard at dawn. The Nysa site, in the Dundee Hills in Oregon's Willamette Valley, offers a stunning panoramic view of the area, including the estate vineyards of Domaine Drouhin Oregon.

The quarter-tonne bins have been hauled here by Furiosa, a rusty Dodge Ram 250 Cummins Turbo Diesel, affectionately named after Charlize Theron's character in *Mad Max: Fury Road*. This weathered truck has become something of an entrenched character at Domaine Nicolas-Jay, and in a sense solidifies the healthy humility that runs throughout this project.

Ex-music industry power player Jay Boberg's role in the winery runs the gamut from co-founder, winery planner, field sorter and harvest-bin transporter. It seems that the higher up the ladder you are in a project, the larger the chasm can be between people's perception of that role and its reality.

'When I'm in the market setting up appointments with wine buyers, I often get the feeling that my music industry executive background leads them to think that I'm "the establishment" or something,' says Boberg. 'People think I'm just the guy writing the cheques, that other people get things done.'

Earlier, heading up the washed-out dirt road leading to Nysa Vineyard, Boberg had been recalling the story of how it was his now-neighbours, Véronique Drouhin and David Millman of Domaine Drouhin Oregon, who originally encouraged him to start a winery project in the Willamette Valley.

Mere moments later, almost as if on cue and surely with ears ringing, Drouhin herself drove by. With a surprised and joyous wave, she pulled over to catch up, talk over the vintage conditions, and watch the imminent, and soon-to-be stunning, sunset.

It was a serendipitous and full-circle moment, and one that brought into a ➤

Domaine Nicolas-Jay at a glance

Founded 2014

Location Willamette Valley, Oregon

Owners Jean-Nicolas Méo and Jay Boberg

Production 3,500 cases

Area under vine 5.5ha at Bishop Creek, with additional fruit sourced from Hyland, Hopewell, Knight's Gambit, La Colina, Momtazi, Nysa and Temperance Hill



Certified sommelier
Matthew Luczy is wine director at Mélisse, one of the top fine-dining restaurants in Los Angeles. He also regularly contributes on US wines for *Decanter*

Domaine Nicolas-Jay's
Bishop Creek Vineyard in the
Dundee Hills AVA, Oregon

‘It is densely planted and on a slope – Bishop Creek is a very Burgundian-looking vineyard’

Jean-Nicolas Méo (*right*)

different focus both how far Oregon has come as a now world-class winemaking region, and also how it very much feels like a tucked-away secret that only those in the know are in on.

The early years

The genesis of Domaine Nicolas-Jay occurred in 1987, when Jay Boberg met his now-business partner, Jean-Nicolas Méo, over conversations about wine and music at a dinner party hosted by Boberg’s sister in Philadelphia. She had attended the University of Pennsylvania with Méo while he was studying abroad there. Two years later, he returned to Burgundy, preparing to take the helm of Domaine Méo-Camuzet under Henri Jayer’s tutelage.

Boberg’s career in the music industry began in 1979 with the founding of IRS Records, which launched and/or honed the careers of artists such as REM, Black Sabbath and Fine Young Cannibals. In 1994, he became the head of Universal Music Publishing and MCA/Universal Records, where he counted The Roots, Mary J Blige and Sublime as clients.

Throughout this time, a love for the great wines of the world ran deep. Serious talks of the two beginning a winery project in Oregon started in 2012, with the official creation of the label occurring the following year.

Many apt corollaries appear at the intersection of music and wine: the winemaker functioning as the producer of an ‘album’; and the blending process being analogous to the mixing of individual tracks. You can even liken the character of a wine to that of an audio signal: on the one hand, a wine can be bright and clean, more treble-driven; or it could be weighty and expansive, with more prominent bass frequencies.

This musical thread flows throughout the ethos and execution of winemaking at Nicolas-Jay. The team itself can be viewed in musical terms, with Boberg wearing the executive producer hat, also mirroring his role of planning, guidance and mentorship from the record label days.



The players

If Boberg’s A-list, headlining act is Jean-Nicolas Méo, then his tried-and-true studio session player is Tracy Kendall. With a master’s degree from UC Davis and experience making wine in both hemispheres, Kendall serves as the executor of daily logistics at the winery and the third pillar of the project as a whole. This combination of indie-rock-minded guidance, traditional Burgundian winemaking and level-headed diligence translates into a free-spirited precision and class in the resulting wines.

At present, a visit to Domaine Nicolas-Jay entails being welcomed into a charming 1920s Craftsman house in the heart of Dundee, Oregon. This is the antithesis of increasingly popular flashy tasting rooms that overlook picturesque vineyards; this is a real home. There is a charm and soul to the tasting experience, which is markedly (and thankfully) free from smoke and mirrors. ➤

DOMAINE NICOLAS-JAY: A TIMELINE

1987 Jay Boberg and Jean-Nicolas Méo meet at a dinner at the house of Boberg’s sister Jill in Philadelphia, where she and Méo were studying at the University of Pennsylvania

1989 Méo returns to his family’s property, Domaine Méo-Camuzet, and works alongside Henri Jayer, preparing to take over winemaking in 1991 ➤

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Jay Boberg

2011 Véronique Drouhin and David Millman of Domaine Drouhin Oregon encourage Jay Boberg to look into the Willamette Valley for a future wine project

2012 Boberg approaches longtime friend Méo about starting a winery together in Oregon

2012-2013 Méo makes many trips to Oregon to visit cellars with Boberg, tasting fruit from more than 200 vineyards

2013 Domaine Nicolas-Jay is officially founded

2014 Nicolas-Jay purchases the organically farmed Bishop Creek Vineyard

2014 The winery produces its inaugural Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, as well as estate bottlings from Bishop Creek Vineyard and Nysa Vineyard

2015 Chardonnay is planted at Bishop Creek Vineyard

2018 Nicolas-Jay buys a 20ha property in the Dundee Hills and begins work on the construction of a winery and planting additional estate vineyards

‘Boberg’s role runs the gamut from co-founder to harvest-bin transporter’

Winemaking

Unsurprisingly, winemaking practices derive from those of Domaine Méo-Camuzet. Grapes are field-sorted into quarter-tonne bins (typically used for cherries), rather than the usual half-tonne size used locally, in order to reduce stress and breakage among individual berries. Fruit is entirely destemmed before a four- to six-day cold soak. Pumpovers are favoured for the initial stages of fermentation, while punchdowns are used near the end before the wine is moved into barrels.

This regimen of gentle handling, or ‘vine to vat’ as the team have coined it, is integral to achieving a silky, snappy texture. Once in barrel, the wines spend 15 months in French oak, the majority from François Frères.

The single-site wines receive about 50% new oak, and for the signature Willamette Valley blend, about one-third of the wood used is new. This blend is the centrepiece of the project, and allows Méo to combine more vineyard sources than the historical holdings of Méo-Camuzet make possible. ➤



Tracy Kendall

You are greeted and led by Jonathan Ziemba, director of consumer sales and hospitality, whose background includes a sommelier position at Chicago’s three-star Michelin Grace. His personable and humble approach matches that of the service at a fine restaurant, and is one that makes you feel instantly at ease and taken care of – not one that reminds you how fortunate you are to have scored a table.

The wines of Domaine Nicolas-Jay clearly show the pedigree of both their affiliations and their influences. Across the board they are perfumed, expressive and well integrated, providing a nuanced and plush drinking experience now, while having the stuffing to provide an even more multi-faceted one in the future.

The vines

The flagship of the Nicolas-Jay vineyards is the 5.5ha organically farmed estate site, Bishop Creek. Own-rooted Pinot Noir vines were planted in 1988 on the predominantly southwest-facing site's sandstone, silt and shale soils.

While tasting the fruit from dozens of sites to narrow down possibilities, Bishop Creek was an early standout. 'We liked the structure and the intensity, and of course the fact that it is own-rooted. And that was before we knew it was for sale,' says Méo. 'It is densely planted and on a slope – Bishop Creek is a very Burgundian-looking vineyard.'

Even excluding Bishop Creek, most of the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir fruit that Nicolas-Jay works with comes from own-rooted vines, which they believe provide a level of aromatic intensity and length on the palate that grafted vines cannot.

Working with own-rooted vines adds to the list of things that Méo gets to play with in

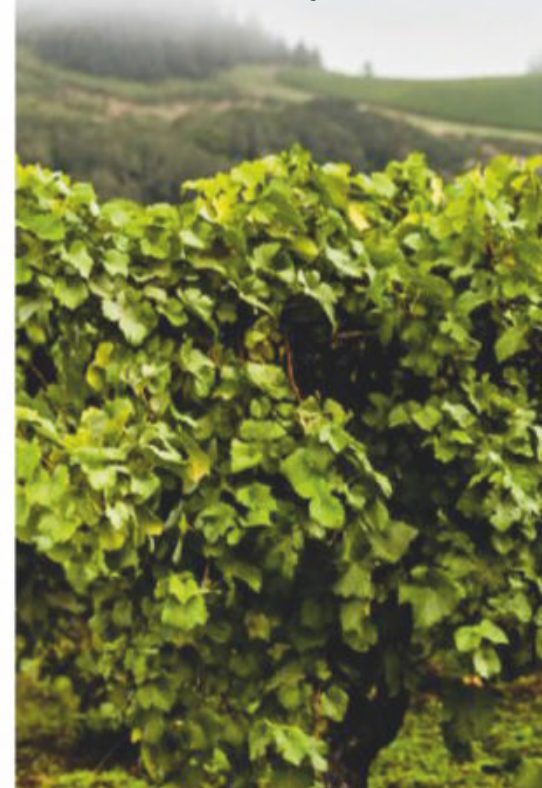
Oregon that just aren't possible in Burgundy. 'We know we are putting things at risk, but nonetheless, when you make wine in Europe it's just not something you can do.'

Since the founding of the winery in 2013, Nicolas-Jay has crafted its wines in neighbouring cellars – first at Adelsheim Vineyard and later at Sokol Blosser Winery. In mid-2018, however, a 20ha property was secured in the Dundee Hills, which will serve as the permanent home for the Nicolas-Jay winery. Plans for planting an estate vineyard at this site are already under way.

'We will plant the estate vineyard in two phases,' says Boberg. 'The first will be using existing clones from Bishop Creek, and the second will involve Jean-Nicolas bringing Méo-Camuzet plantings over from France.'

With a home base and a growing roster of estate vineyard sites, this at once new yet established producer has positioned itself as one of the top names in the Willamette Valley – a fact which will be music to Boberg's ears. **D**

Hyland Vineyard is one of several sources of top-quality fruit for Nicolas-Jay's wines



Luczy selects the best from Nicolas-Jay

Nicolas-Jay, Bishop Creek Chardonnay, Yamhill-Carlton, Willamette Valley 2017 91

N/A UK www.nicolas-jay.com

Sourced from organic, newly planted upper blocks of the estate Bishop Creek Vineyard. Just two barrels of the domaine's only white wine were made. Aromas of cinnamon, apple blossom and French toast, the latter from 13 months in French oak. Honeydew melon, mango and yellow apple on the palate. A supple, acid-driven but not sharp expression of Willamette Valley Chardonnay. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alcohol** 13.5%

① Nicolas-Jay, Bishop Creek Pinot Noir, Yamhill-Carlton, Willamette Valley 2016 94

£99.99 Berry Bros & Rudd

From Nicolas-Jay's estate vineyard, 100 cases were made of this organic wine. Poised and patient at first, aromas are driven by red and citrus fruits with a subtle woody quality in the background. The palate is silky and focused, with an elastic texture not unlike a bungee cord, snapping into an explosive and multi-faceted finish. A kingpin of the Nicolas-Jay line-up. Like all the Pinots, it spends 15 months in French oak. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 13%

② Nicolas-Jay, Own-Rooted Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley 2017 94

£94.99 Berry Bros & Rudd

A blend of entirely non-grafted vineyard sites, this takes the purity of forest, citrus and red-fruit found in the other wines to another level – like a lid came off that you didn't know was on in the first place.

Seductive, enticing, three-dimensional, with notes of root beer, clove and struck matches. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

Nicolas-Jay, Momtazi Vineyard Pinot Noir, McMinnville, Willamette Valley 2016 93

£65-£94.99 Berry Bros & Rudd, BI Wines

& Spirits

Momtazi is the most savoury, structured Pinot in the portfolio. Aromas of conifer and rose, plus a meaty note reminiscent of porchetta. The palate is edgy and firm, with a long, focused and nuanced finish that slowly builds in intensity. Quite rapidly went from being reticent to beautifully expressive. Eighty cases produced. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 13.5%

④ Nicolas-Jay, Nysa Vineyard Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills, Willamette Valley 2016 93

£94.99 Berry Bros & Rudd

Perfumed, fine and elegant, Nysa exudes aromas of cherry blossom and rose water.

The texture is deft and its complexity sneaks up on you, with notes of nectarine skin and tangerine appearing long after the wine has left your palate. The majority of the Nysa Vineyard was planted in 1990 to own-rooted Pommard clones. Eighty cases produced. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 13%

④ Nicolas-Jay, Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley 2017 93

£64.99 AG Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd

High-toned with aromas of wet earth, Earl Grey tea and cocoa, and flavours of pomegranate and red-plum skin. Hits the mark of a classic Oregon Pinot Noir, and one can see the Méo-Camuzet influence, albeit with a softer generosity. The blend is based around Bishop Creek Vineyard, with smaller portions of other sites including Hyland, Knight's Gambit and Hopewell. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

Nicolas-Jay, Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley 2016 93

£72.75 Berry Bros & Rudd

Ripe but restrained for what was a warmer vintage in the Willamette. Aromas of pine cone, hazelnut and dried mushroom, then flavours of black cherry and salted watermelon rind. There is a pleasing tension across the 2016 Nicolas-Jay



line-up, gliding back and forth between plump, svelte fruit flavours and a subtle, sinewy grip. **Drink** 2020-2029 **Alc** 13.5%

Nicolas-Jay, Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley 2015 92

£71.67-£72.75 Berry Bros & Rudd, Millésima Plush and structured, with aromas of baked cherries, clay and conifer. The texture is muscular as Oregon Pinot Noir goes, finishing with a velvety grip that hangs in the background. A ripe and forward vintage handled with care and grace. Despite 2015 being the hottest year on record in Oregon, Nicolas-Jay was able to get its fruit in early and arrive at 13% finished alcohol. **Drink** 2020-2029 **Alc** 13%



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THE ZENITH OF ZINFANDEL

It's a variety synonymous with Californian wine, but for years it was overlooked in favour of fashionable Bordeaux styles. Now, thanks to some of the state's best winemakers, it's the star of field blends and single-varietal bottlings alike. **Jeff Cox** shares his top producer picks

Anyone who likes 'the blood and sun of California', as a European friend characterised his first taste of Zinfandel, should give recognition to the early Italian pioneers who settled the coasts of central and northern California.

The regions looked like northern Italy. They had Italy's Mediterranean climate. And those Italian farmers brought with them more than 2,000 years of grape-growing and winemaking experience. They didn't have degrees in viticulture or oenology. They farmed by the seat of their pants. But they were savvy as hell.

The pioneers are long gone, though you can still taste that savvy in wines from their vineyards, many planted between 100-140 years ago. These vineyards are mostly Zinfandel, a variety that came to California just a few years before the Italian settlers, and which the Italians favoured almost immediately upon their arrival.

They planted a few other varieties along with the Zin: Carignan, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Grenache, Mataro (their name for Mourvèdre) and even a few vines of white Chasselas, among others, to give diversity. These field blends were yielding wine grapes when Monet and Van Gogh were painting their masterpieces.

The head-trained vines in those vineyards are ancient, thick and gnarled now. They don't yield much fruit, but they clutch the earth in a strong embrace and impart its essence, and the richness of their age, to their grapes.

Dismissed for years as not worth much – even torn out to be replaced by the new darlings of Bordeaux varieties, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir – the true nobility of these ancient vines is now being recognised. Historic Vineyard Society is a non-profit organisation devoted to their preservation (www.historicvineyardsociety.org).

Newer plantings of Zinfandel can certainly produce delicious, worthy wines. The variety

goes easy on the tannins, but finds backbone in its acid profile and spiciness on the palate. One of its glories is its ability to age, as was proven at a recent gathering of friends when a double magnum of 1987 Joseph Swan Vineyards' old-vine Zinfandel had the crowd cheering. 'I can smell that wine in here,' yelled a cook from the kitchen.

It was an obscure and ancient Croatian variety called Crljenak Kaštelanski that emigrated to America in the early 19th century and became California's signature variety, Zinfandel. Unlike the first waves of human immigrants to the United States, who have now all passed on, some of those first-generation vines are still with us, providing glorious drinking.

DRY CREEK VALLEY

E&J Gallo

If any winemaking company knows a lot about Zinfandel, it's the world's largest, E&J Gallo. Founded in 1933, Julio Gallo made the wine and his brother Ernest sold it. They labelled the good stuff 'Hearty Burgundy', but it was less hearty than yummy and had absolutely nothing to do with Burgundy.

Times have changed. Gallo has become the 800-pound gorilla of the wine world. The company has many wineries, labels and price points, and makes some very sophisticated, high-quality wines. One of the latter is Gallo's Signature Series Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel, and the winemaker's signature on the label is that of Gina Gallo, Julio's granddaughter. She's dedicated to good wine, as is her husband, Jean-Charles Boisset (*see p74*).

'Julio loved Zinfandel,' says Gina. It's a penchant among the Italian families who re-established winemaking after Prohibition, and her Signature Series showcases why. The fruit – 93% Zinfandel and 7% Petite Sirah –

Gina Gallo,
winemaker at
E&J Gallo,
Dry Creek Valley



comes from some of the oldest (more than 130 years) and best vineyards in the Dry Creek Valley, and a portion of the Zin comes from the outstanding Monte Rosso vineyard in the Sonoma Valley appellation.



Gallo, Signature Series, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County 2017 92

N/A UK www.gallosignatureseries.com

There's a whiff of freshly baked bread on the nose leading to boysenberries, raspberries and blackberries on the palate, with hints of brown sugar, sweet smoke and molasses. It's ripe but not jammy – in other words, it has attraction, not just extraction. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alcohol** 15.9%

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

Carlisle

'I was a software developer,' says Carlisle's Mike Officer. 'This (he gestures at the buildings, silvery steel tanks and rolling hills with their marching rows of vines) is my second career.' Recently, he and his wife Kendall made 1,000 cases of Papera Ranch Zinfandel 2017, but it wasn't easy.

'We had severe heat on 1 and 2 September [about 45°C] and we lost a lot of fruit because many of the pedicels that connect the grape berries to the clusters shrank and died, cutting off the fruit's water supply.' They had to haul sorting tables to the vineyards, then sort again in the winery to separate the unripe, high-acid raisins from the good fruit.

It was worth it. 'The 2017 is very high quality,' he says. The vineyard is about 96% Zinfandel and 4% Carignan, and was planted in 1934 by Italian immigrant Celestino Papera a few kilometres west of Santa Rosa.

The Papera vineyard may be 86 years old, but Officer says he's 'never seen another old-vine vineyard as healthy and in such good shape'. He should know: he's the president of the aforementioned Historic Vineyard Society.



Carlisle, Papera Ranch, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County 2017 92

N/A UK www.carlislewinery.com

The flavour of red raspberries and blood oranges is Papera's signature note. Also, ethereal hints of tobacco, spun sugar, redcurrant and macerated cherries. Zinfandel with 4% Carignan, this is silky and graceful on the palate, and the high acidity bodes well for lengthy ageing. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 15% ➤

DRY CREEK VALLEY

Nalle Winery

Back in the mid-1980s, when many Zinfandel producers were making big, muscular trophy wines, Doug Nalle and his wife Lee started their winery with the intention of making elegant, lean and complex Zins in the European style of noble red wines. ‘We were following tradition,’ says Doug, ‘using French oak and making wines under 14% alcohol. We wanted the wine to be food-friendly.’

They had good fruit to work with. Their property included 0.6ha of old Zin vines planted in 1927 by Lee’s great-grandparents, Fred and Ruby Henderlong. Today that fruit is augmented with Zinfandel from the Bernier-Sibary vineyard, 8km north. Both sites are dry-farmed and the vines head-trained, with some Petite Sirah and Carignan in the field blends.

Doug, and now his son Andrew and daughter-in-law April, the current winemakers and proprietors, achieved this elegant style by picking the fruit at its initial burst of ripeness. ‘We sort at the picking bins and again when we get the fruit into the winery, looking to discard any overripe berries,’ says Andrew. April adds: ‘Younger folks in the tasting room are looking for low-alcohol wines that are nicely balanced.’ It’s a trend other Zinfandel producers have noticed, too (*see box p75*).

Photograph: Holly Leitner



Map: Maggie Nelson



Nalle, Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County 2016 94
 £29 (2014) **Domaine Direct**
 Nalle wines show Zinfandel’s nobility. The variety’s natural blackcurrant and raspberry fruit exuberance is tamed by early picking, yielding bright acidity for long ageing. Its earthiness (combined with 5% each of Petite Sirah and Carignan) harmonises with roses and herbs. **Drink 2020-2036 Alc 13.9%**



Doug Nalle

SONOMA VALLEY

Ridge

Pagani Ranch sits in the middle of a stretch of the Sonoma Valley so picturesque that cars are often parked along the highway, their occupants taking photos of the ranch’s Victorian farmhouse and barns, century-old vines and the mountains to the east.

Felice Pagani bought the property in the late 1880s and put in 12ha of the field blend – mostly Zinfandel – from 1896 to 1922. Another 2.4ha were planted to Zin and Petite Sirah in 2013. Pagani’s descendants still manage the vineyard. Several wineries purchase its fruit, but half of the harvest goes to winemaker John Olney at Ridge. Pagani Ranch has been a part of Ridge’s array of Zins since 1991.

The site is gravelly clay loam in a cool part of the valley that allows for slow ripening and a delayed harvest. ‘In 2017,’ says Olney, ‘we finished picking on 7 October.’ The next night, fire blazed through Kenwood, but the fruit had been safely trucked away. ‘Pagani Ranch shows character,’ says Olney, referring to a terroir best described as giving honest, focused red- and black-fruit flavours.



Pagani Ranch field blend vineyard



Ridge, Pagani Ranch Zinfandel, Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County 2017 94
 N/A UK www.ridgewine.com
 Winemaker John Olney says that the long hang-time of the grapes shifts the red-fruit notes towards sweet cherries and boysenberries, without any cloying overripeness. Pagani has earthiness, too. This is Zinfandel with Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet and Mataro. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 14.9%**

Photograph: Heidi Nigen/Ridge Vineyards

DRY CREEK VALLEY

Seghesio Family Vineyards

The Seghesio winery and tasting room in Healdsburg, Sonoma County is a veritable temple of Zinfandel, with a dozen different labels of either single-vineyard wines or blends sourced from vineyards scattered around the county. The flagship wine is the Cortina Zinfandel, made from vines planted in 1972 by fourth-generation Ted Seghesio and his father Ed. The Cortina soils flank the streambed that gives Dry Creek Valley its name.

Winemaker Andy Robinson, who works with vineyard manager Ned Neumiller, calls the Cortina 2016 ‘perfection’. By that, he means it is a precise balance of acid, tamed tannins and bright red fruits that culminate in a long finish. ‘Zinfandel is best when there are three layers,’ says Robinson, referring to a grape cluster. ‘There are some underripe berries, most are perfectly ripe and a few are overripe.’ This is fairly typical of Zinfandel, especially in Dry Creek, where nights are chilly and often foggy, while days are warm or hot.

And why do they focus on 100% Zinfandel? Didn’t pioneers like the Seghesios, who founded the winery in 1895, make field blends? ‘They did, but we intentionally kept more



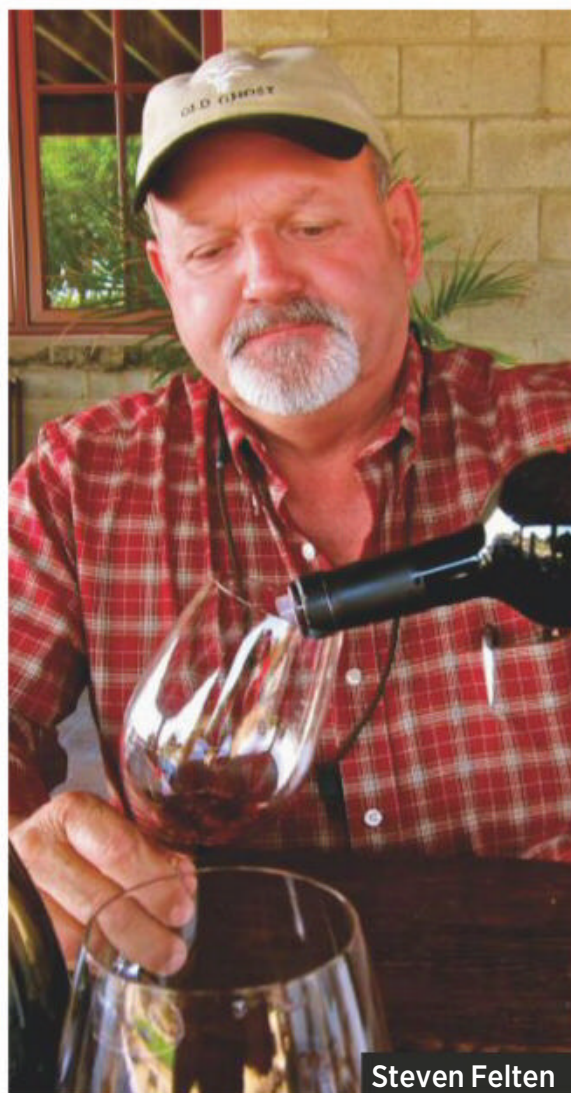
Above: Ted Seghesio

recent plantings to pure Zin because of the quality of our fruit,’ Robinson says. ‘There’s a certain elegance that doesn’t need any other varieties in the blend.’



Seghesio Family Vineyards, Cortina Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County 2016 93

£39.40-£52.99 (2015) AG Wines, Christopher Keiller, GP Brands, The Fine Wine Co, The Wine Reserve, Vinvm, Wine Direct
Sage, earth and dried herbs on the nose; then rich flavours of raspberries, cherries and blueberries. A core of acid and smooth tannins make this fun now and for several years to come. A wine that defines Dry Creek Zin. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 15.3%



Steven Felten

LODI

Klinker Brick Winery

Klinker Brick’s Old Ghost flagship bottling isn’t tied to any particular vineyard in the Mokelumne sub-appellation of the Lodi AVA, but is made from fruit selected as the highest quality from several vineyards. In fact, each vintage of Old Ghost may be from different vineyards. ‘It could be a different set of vineyards next year,’ says Steven Felten, who owns the winery with his wife Lori. ‘But we’re always looking for elegance and the best-quality fruit.’

The winery is named for the old, burnt-surfaced bricks that ring with a ‘klink’ when struck, characteristic of brick buildings in the area. What the chosen vineyards have in common is age – from 40 to more than 100 years old – and restricted yields of about

30hl/ha, lower than the average 50-60hl/ha typical of the Lodi AVA.

The result, says Felten, is ‘more like a fine wine’: ‘Elegant and smooth, not peppery or spicy. It tastes more like a Cabernet Sauvignon.’ The quality of Lodi’s old-vine Zinfandels made a leap forward at the end of the 1980s, when drip irrigation replaced flooding ditches between rows. Less water meant smaller berries, greater skin-to-juice ratio, and better wines. The Old Ghost is evidence of that.



Klinker Brick, Old Ghost, Lodi, San Joaquin County 2016 91

£35 Daniel Lambert

This wine carries its luscious flavours of brambles, vanilla, caramel, dried cherries and herbs from start to finish, accented by aromas of anise and cloves. It’s 100% inland Zinfandel, but remarkably

graceful. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 15.9% ➤

SONOMA COUNTY

DeLoach Vineyards

While the winery is in the Russian River Valley AVA, the fruit used to make DeLoach's Forgotten Vines bottling comes from vineyards in several Sonoma County appellations. Russian River Valley supplies 75% of the grapes in the blend, 10% is from the Monte Rosso vineyard in Sonoma Valley, 10% from Fountaingrove in Santa Rosa, and 5% from Knight's Valley in far eastern Sonoma County. Winemaker Brian Maloney, who came up with the name for the bottling, says the vines that contribute to Forgotten Vines have an average age of more than 100 years old.

Jean-Charles Boisset, the owner of DeLoach and husband of Gina Gallo (*see p70*), says these old vines impart a notion of history. 'There's spirituality in the wine, and a deep terroir that gives you a sense of the time these vines have been alive.' The components of Forgotten Vines are also sold as single-vineyard old-vine

field blends by DeLoach. These vineyards include Fanucchi, Riebli, Rue and Saitone in Russian River Valley.

Maloney wants to emphasise the fresh fruit character in these grapes, so he lightly crushes them and gives them a four- to seven-day cold soak. He then ferments and presses them when the wine is dry. He uses native yeasts and finishes any laggard fermenters with commercial yeast if needed.



DeLoach, Forgotten Vines, Sonoma County 2016 91

N/A UK www.deloachvineyards.com

The aroma of this elegant organic wine, part of the Boisset Collection, features fresh red raspberries, tobacco leaf and chocolate. On the palate, its red fruits are bright and acidic, giving it a succulent appeal, and Zinfandel's spice is exhibited as white pepper. Burgundian Jean-Charles Boisset likes that sinewy,

elegant style, and winemaker Brian Maloney delivers it. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 15.6%

'There's a deep terroir that gives a sense of the time these vines have been alive'

Jean-Charles Boisset

SONOMA VALLEY

Bucklin Old Hill Ranch

The 4.9ha of ancient vines at Will Bucklin's Old Hill Ranch in Glen Ellen, Sonoma County, were planted in the 1880s, after phylloxera wiped out the original vines planted in 1852. At 140 years old, some of them cling to life on spindly trunks, while others are thick and massive. All of them carry history on their gnarled shoulders right into the glass, where you can taste it.

William McPherson Hill came west in 1849, but he didn't toil for gold. Instead, he made his money selling food and equipment to the

Below: Will Bucklin lives on and manages Old Hill Ranch with his wife, Lizanne Pastore

miners. With peaches sold at \$2 each, he soon had enough money to buy extensive land in Sonoma Valley, and today's ancient-vine field blend is a remnant of his land holding.

The Hill ranch was sold to Will's grandfather Otto, an early environmentalist whose farming method was 'benign neglect'. When deer would nibble the vines and fruit, Will says his grandfather's response was: 'A deer's gotta eat, too.'

Thankfully, the vineyard survived. Ampelographers have identified between 28-35 different varieties mixed in with the 65% Zinfandel. 'We even have an unknown vine,' says Will. 'It doesn't show up in any other vineyard and no one has ever identified it.' It adds a note of mystery to wine handed down to us from the century before last.



Bucklin Old Hill Ranch, Ancient Field Blend, Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County 2017 93

N/A UK www.buckzin.com

This Old Hill Ranch cuvée (about 65% Zinfandel, plus others including Grenache, Alicante Bouschet, Petite Sirah and Grand Noir) offers ethereal violet and crushed-pepper aromas, and a characteristic terroir note of eucalyptus, cardamom, dried leaves, earth, yeast and

cloves. Dark-fruit flavours are seductively rich, as though the volcanic and seabed-derived soil is sending a message from times gone by. Vines were planted in the 1880s. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 15.3%





DRY CREEK VALLEY

Dry Creek Vineyard

At a tasting set up by proprietor Kim Stare Wallace and winemaker Tim Bell, the surprises just kept coming. It seemed that this well-established Zinfandel winery's Heritage Vine Zinfandel 2017 would be the hands-down star of the show, as the fruit comes from budwood taken from pre-Prohibition vines found in old field blends and grafted onto new, phylloxera-resistant rootstock. It is a fine and fruity Zin, and they made a lot of it in 2017: 15,000 cases. That year, horrendous fires burned through large swathes of Sonoma County, but not Dry Creek Valley; luckily, the wine was safely in tanks as the fire blazed and the county was blanketed in smoke, so there's no smoke taint in the wines.

But more impressive still was the Old Vine Zinfandel 2016, made with fruit from several vineyards in the valley with an average age of more than 95 years. Steady, moderate weather during ripening produced a perfect vintage.

The biggest surprise came when the Four Clones vineyard's 2017 blend of Zin, Petite Sirah and Alicante Bouschet was poured. This 1.78ha vineyard flanks the winery. It was planted in 2009, and the rootstocks were

Above: old-vine Zinfandel at Dry Creek Vineyard

grafted to clones from four Dry Creek Valley vineyards. The wine shimmers with bramble fruits, allspice and leather.



Dry Creek Vineyard, Old Vine Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County 2017 92

N/A UK www.drycreekvineyard.com

The spiciness of nutmeg, cardamom and cinnamon from these old vineyards is very apparent in the wine. As well as this, you get blackberry cobbler and the sharp acid notes of fresh-crushed cranberries on the nose, and rich black cherries, raspberries and dark chocolate on the

palate. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14.5%** ➤

Next-gen Zin

While ancient field blends continue to enchant, producers report that among younger California Zinfandel wine lovers, the trend is toward lighter, lower-alcohol, fruit-forward wines – especially those showing the perfume of carbonic maceration. Some winemakers are taking advantage of this trend by making small-batch fermentations that contain whole berries and some whole clusters. Erik Miller at Kokomo (see p77) and Greg La Follette at Alquimista (p78) are two who have climbed aboard this bandwagon.

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UK:

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5 Clos Iechyd, Pen-y-Fai,
Bridgend,
CF31 4BF

Tel : (44) 01656 661010
E: daniellambertwines.co.uk



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mikeandmollyhendry@gmail.com



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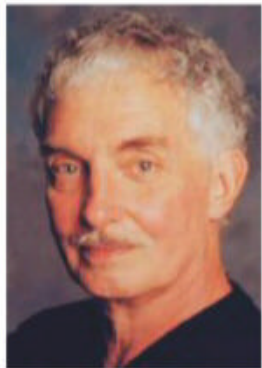
PASO ROBLES

Turley Wine Cellars

Larry Turley is a fanatical Zinfandel maker, producing 47 bottlings from 50 vineyards, many old field blends that he nursed back to health. It figures – he was an emergency room physician for 25 years before starting Turley Wine Cellars in 1993. He and his director of winemaking, Tegan Passalacqua, make some of the world's best Zinfandels.

A candidate for the best of the best is the Ueberroth Vineyard 2016, made from vines planted in 1885 in Paso Robles, near the sea. 'You can smell the salt air from the top of the hill,' says Turley. The hill is a knoll at 460m altitude, with 40° slopes and 6.5ha planted to 95% Zin, plus some Carignan and Grenache.

The soil is calcareous shale and seabed mudstone, with a strongly alkaline pH of 8.5-8.9 in some spots. 'People said you can't grow grapes in soil that alkaline,' laughs Turley. Grow the vines did, counterintuitively yielding acidic wines of pH 3.3 with a deliciousness that prompted one taster to remark: 'If you don't like this wine, you don't like wine.'



Jeff Cox is a food, wine, gardening and travel journalist based in Sonoma County, California who has published 17 books, including *Cellaring Wine* and *From Vines to Wines*



Larry Turley



Turley, Ueberroth Vineyard, Paso Robles, San Luis Obispo County 2016 96

£60 (2017) Thorman Hunt

Beautifully pure, chewy, rich and sweet flavours of plums and cherries overlay hints of Christmas spices, a dark baritone note and wet-stone minerality. Ripe but not roasted; outstanding. Blended with 5% total of Carignan and Grenache. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 15.9%

Photograph: www.turleywinecellars.com

California Zin: ones to watch

ALEXANDER VALLEY: ZIALENA

Zialena's roots go back to the early 1900s, when Italian immigrant Giuseppe Mazzoni joined the Italian Swiss Colony and became a grape farmer and winemaker. His great-grandchildren, Mark and Lisa, now carry on the legacy at their 49ha estate. Mazzoni fruit is prime stuff for the family's own-label Zialena, as well as for other local wineries.



Zialena, Zinfandel, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County 2017 93

N/A UK www.zialena.com

The second vintage from the estate's new winery, which features concrete fermenting tanks. This beautifully crafted wine is 100% Mazzoni-clone Zinfandel, with black-cherry, plum, dark-chocolate, clove and nutmeg aromas, and cherry and cranberry flavours flecked with cracked pepper and cacao on the finish. Barrel-aged in neutral French oak for 18 months. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.8%

ALEXANDER VALLEY: SCHERRER

Fred Scherrer worked for Pinot Noir pioneer Tom Dehlinger in Sebastopol for several years before he made his first vintage in 1991. He used fruit from his family's old-vine Zinfandel, which was planted in 1912 and grown on benchland in the beautiful Alexander Valley. His style is meticulous, with a focus on balancing 'the angles' (tannin, acid and non-fruit elements) and 'the rounds' (glycerol and fruity elements). The Zinfandels are big and bold, and they dance with rich fruit flavours.

Scherrer, Old & Mature Vines, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County 2014 92

N/A UK www.scherrerwinery.com

The vines endured drought-like conditions in 2014, which resulted in thick-skinned, intensely concentrated berries with fresh plum flavours and verve from plentiful and succulent acidic energy. The spicy nose leaps out of the glass, partly due to ageing in 30% new oak barrels. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 14.8%

DRY CREEK VALLEY: KOKOMO

Why the name? Because owner Erik Miller is from Kokomo, Indiana. He has partnered with lifelong Dry Creek grape-grower Randy Peters to source fruit from three prestigious Zinfandel vineyards, making for a wine with intriguing facets of flavour. All of Kokomo's varietal wines have earned rave reviews from critics since the winery started out in 2004.



Kokomo, Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County 2018 93

N/A UK www.kokomowines.com

An almost-perfect growing season in 2018 produced a larger-than-average crop of beautifully balanced fruit. The wine spent 11 months in 20% new French oak and it opens with Zin spice, leading to black cherries and dark plums and finishing with long, lingering notes of anise and dried herbs. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 14.9% ➤

SONOMA VALLEY: BEDROCK WINE CO

Less than 2km south of Bucklin's Old Hill Ranch is a vineyard planted 130 years ago by the father of publisher William Randolph Hearst – a field blend of 27 varieties, including 50% Zinfandel, plus Carignan, Mataro, Syrah and Alicante Bouschet, among others. Owners Morgan Twain-Peterson MW (the son of Ravenswood's Zinfandel maven Joel Peterson) and Chris Cottrell bought the vineyard in 2004 and named it Bedrock.



Bedrock Wine Co, The Bedrock Heritage Red, Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County 2018 93

£42.88-£47.99 (2016) AG Wines, Bowes Wine, Noble Green, NY Wines of Cambridge, Q Wines, Vintriloquy Remember how gobstoppers would change colour and flavour as you sucked them? This layered beauty is like that

– first full of blackberries, then black plums, citrus and dried herbs, all hung on a solid acid core. It's intense, but nothing in it is raisined or screechy. A field blend of up to 27 varieties, based on 50% Zinfandel with about 20% Carignan and 5% Mataro. Drink 2022-2028 Alc 14.5%

NAPA VALLEY: MIKE & MOLLY HENDRY

Napa Valley's climate gets progressively cooler going south. At the far southern end is the Coombsville sub-appellation, influenced by the San Pablo bay's cold waters. That's where 10ha of a Zinfandel-based field blend were planted in 1905 (now known as RW Moore Vineyard). Today, Mike and Molly Hendry turn those grapes into a sturdy wine that changes its flavour profile depending on the vintage, but is always fresh and fruity.



Mike & Molly Hendry, RW Moore Vineyard Zinfandel, Coombsville, Napa Valley, Napa County 2017 91

N/A UK www.mikeandmollyhendry.com

A blend of 95% Zinfandel and 1% each of Petite Sirah, Carignan and Mourvèdre as well as 2% of the rare Cabernet Pfeffer. In some years it shows red fruits like raspberry and cherry; in others, dark fruits like black cherries and blackberries. The vines are dry-farmed, giving small, peppery, intense berries. Drink 2020-2028 Alc 15.5%



LODI: ALQUIMISTA CELLARS

Long-time Pinot Noir superstar Greg La Follette and his business partner Patrick Dillon make wine from Jessie's Grove Vineyard, planted in 1888 to Zinfandel, Carignan, Flame Tokay, Black Prince, Mission and Malvasia Bianca. After the Flame Tokay's whole clusters are fermented, La Follette goes through the must and crushes them by hand. The wines are like the best Beaujolais you've ever had.



Alquimista Cellars, Jessie's Grove, Lodi, San Joaquin County 2018 91

N/A UK www.alquimistacellars.com

Whole-berry fermentation yields a wine that's floral, estery, ebullient and 'balletic', says Greg La Follette, with bright cherry-berry red-fruit flavours and signature Zin spiciness. The overall impression is light and lively, in a wine made up of 86% Zinfandel with a blend of Carignan, Flame Tokay, Black Prince and Mission varieties. Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14.9%

LODI: MCCAY CELLARS

Owner and winemaker Mike McCay launched his label in 2007. He is widely respected for his terroir-driven single-vineyard bottlings, including his Jupiter Vineyard Zinfandel. The vineyard is 6ha, planted in the 1930s to 100% Zinfandel. Its wine crackles with acid bones and fruit flesh. McCay's approach is 'hands on in the vineyard, hands off in the winery'.

He ferments using only native yeasts to enhance the nuances of terroir.

McCay Cellars, Jupiter Zinfandel, Lodi, San Joaquin County 2016 91

N/A UK www.mccaycellars.com

Cola, tobacco and exotic sandalwood perfume the nose, while a mix of black cherry, red raspberry, a hint of hazelnuts, plus the soft tannins typical of Zinfandel fill the mouth. The 2016 vintage was exceptional and shows its stuff in this wine. Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14.2%

LODI: ST AMANT

Step back in time by sampling the Mohr-Fry Ranch Old Vine Zinfandel produced by winemaker Stuart Spencer at St Amant in the heart of the Lodi AVA. These vineyards were planted between 1901 and 1945 on their own roots in sandy Sacramento delta soil, which faces less risk of phylloxera. Old Zin clones benefit from cool nights and warm days, and are picked ripe to create a rough-and-ready wine – like great-grandad used to drink.



St Amant, Mohr-Fry Ranch Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi, San Joaquin County 2017 89

N/A UK www.stamantwine.com

Here's Zin in the old style: ripe, chewy, blustery, bold and packed with tarry, earthy flavours. A bit rough around the edges, but you might like it that way. Flavours are reminiscent of the sweet and thorny blackberries slowly taking over California. Drink 2020-2025 Alc 15.8% **D**



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TOP 20 UNDER £20: SOUTH AMERICAN CHARDONNAY

There's a world of Chardonnay out there to try, and while it will always be subject to differing opinions, it remains the world's favourite white wine grape. **Peter Richards MW** focused on quality and value to pick his 20 top Chardonnays from around South America

According to the US parenting website BabyCenter, the girl's name Chardonnay saw its usage peak in the 1990s, at 47 babies per million. It has declined since, to the point where *www.parents.com* ranked it the fourth worst baby name of 2019, stating: 'Only next-level wine moms need consider this one.'

That's Chardonnay: ubiquitous yet often invisible, fashion victim and victim of fashion. According to Kym Anderson's *Which Winegrape Varieties are Grown Where?* (University of Adelaide Press, 2013), the worldwide Chardonnay vineyard nearly trebled between 1990 and 2010. An OIV study in 2017 cited Chardonnay as the fifth most widely planted wine grape variety in the world, with an area of 211,000 hectares globally.

There's a yawning gulf between the deplorable and the divine when it comes to Chardonnay – yet many regions manage to produce both. South America is no exception.

Chile has the largest plantings of Chardonnay in South America, with 11,297ha (8% of the national vineyard). It's the fourth most widely planted variety after Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot, producing 91 million litres of wine in 2019.

While there's a fair amount of commercial dross, the overall standard of Chilean Chardonnay has improved markedly of late as producers promote freshness, typicity and, at the very top end, terroir. Quality hotspots include Limarí, Aconcagua Costa, Casablanca, San Antonio and Malleco. The deep south looks to hold good potential for the future, and there are promising things emerging from cooler Andean altitudes in the east.

Given that only 19% of Argentina's vineyard is dedicated to white varieties, it's little surprise that Chardonnay accounts for a paltry 3% of national plantings. With 6,044ha, it ranks sixth after Malbec, Bonarda, Cabernet



Peter Richards MW is an awarded wine writer, author and broadcaster on wine, a regular *Decanter* contributor and the DWWA Regional Chair for Chile

Sauvignon, Syrah and Torrontés. And yet the country's finest Chardonnays have set an impressive standard – some of the best are grown at breathless altitude in the Uco region of Mendoza, with Tupungato a particular area of note. There are also good examples from the cooler latitudes of Patagonia further south.

Accurate data are hard to come by for Brazil, but Chardonnay undoubtedly ranks as one of the top *Vitis vinifera* plantings, mainly for sparkling wine, but also still. Producers such as Guaspari, Pizzato and Valduga have shown the potential for expressive, elegant styles. In Uruguay, Chardonnay ranks a measly ninth in plantings, with 104ha, yet the natural freshness, purity and refinement of the better examples clearly suggest a bright future for the variety, especially in more Atlantic terroirs. Chardonnay can also be found in Bolivia, Peru and further afield.

In order to select my top 20, I tasted 74 Chardonnays from Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay blind in February 2020. The best were re-tasted across another four sessions, all blind, one including food. The focus was on wines available in the UK (or US) market and under £20. Scores take price into account. The results reveal a commendably high hit rate, the sweet spot being in the £12-£20 range, with producers clearly prioritising freshness and texture, both essential qualities in the best Chardonnay. Wine lovers seeking alternatives to Burgundy and its pricey cousins would do well to check these out.

‘The results reveal a commendably high hit rate, the sweet spot being in the £12-£20 range’

① **Arboleda, Aconcagua Costa, Chile 2017** 94

£16.95 Corney & Barrow

Beautifully judged Chardonnay with real energy and focus. Excellent fruit quality and freshness allied to a well-integrated, praline and creamy-textured generosity. The oak is deftly integrated and the quality of both the vineyard site and winemaking expertise is evident.

Drink 2020-2025 **Alcohol** 13%

② **Caliterra, Tributo Single Vineyard, Casablanca Valley, Chile 2018** 94

£11.35-£15.95 Vagabond, The Solent Cellar, Wine Direct

Great value. Even though it's oaked, this is a style more reminiscent of Chablis on speed, majoring on vibrant, crisp, crunchy citrus and green-apple fruit. Wonderfully harmonious and persistent with an attractive leesy texture and stony quality. Really cultured and classy.

Drink 2020-2024 **Alc** 13%

③ **Errazuriz, Aconcagua Costa, Chile 2018** 93

£17.50-£18 Hennings, Noble Green

The 2018 vintage was one of the coolest ever recorded in this vineyard, and the results, up to and including the top brand, Pizarras, are impressive. The focus on terroir, elegance and energy is commendable, and this wine is a beautifully poised expression of Chardonnay's apple freshness with creamy texture. There's an underlying minerality here that offsets the vibrant acidity and savoury depths to electric effect.

Drink 2020-2023 **Alc** 13%

④ **Errazuriz, Max Reserva, Aconcagua Costa, Chile 2017** 93

£13.23-£15.40 D Byrne & Co, The Drink Shop, Wine Direct

Errazuriz is doing an outstanding job with Chardonnay and is now undoubtedly a leading name on the world stage. This is a style that wears its oak on its sleeve but in a stylish way, with toasted-nut and clotted-cream aromas leading into a complex but refreshing palate and an energetic, revitalising finish. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%

⑤ **Terrazas de los Andes, Reserva, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2018** 93

£15.95-£16.99 Clos 19, ND John, Ocado

Brimming with fresh curry-leaf and struck-match aromas, this is a wine with a very distinctive ('reductive') character. It's well judged, though, and has just enough fruit weight to balance the toasty, savoury overlay. A food wine – put it with chicken and mushroom pie or a chunk of cheddar. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14% ➤





⑥ **Atamisque, Catalpa Single Vineyard, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2018** 92

£20 Corks, Starmore Boss

Proper Chardonnay! Cultured in feel, good fresh acidity with lovely body, breadth and depth. A relatively full-bodied style in the context, somewhat heavy-handed on the finish but nonetheless very drinkable and rewarding. Chill it properly and serve it with hearty food. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

⑦ **Errazuriz, Wild Ferment, Casablanca Valley, Chile 2018** 92

£13.99-£16.99 Asda, Hennings

One of the best-value Chardonnays from Errazuriz, and the easiest to find in the UK (the 2017 vintage is also excellent). Lovely balance of savoury and fruity characters, with minerality and a creamy texture. Stylish, lively, food friendly. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13%

⑧ **Finca Flichman, Dedicado Tupungato Vineyard, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2017** 92

£19.99 Available via UK agent Liberty Wines

A generous, friendly Chardonnay that wraps your taste buds in an expansive bear hug of rich, golden flavours. Broad, creamy texture with flavours of toasted nuts and red apple. Effusive but stylish – lots of wine here. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13%

⑨ **Undurraga, TH, Limarí Valley, Chile 2016** 92

£17.59 Fintry Wines, Hallgarten Wines, Strictly Wine

An extroverted style that sees flavours of roasted nuts, butter and red apple cascade over your palate. It's very much at the creamy and generous end of the spectrum, the bottle age accentuating this character, but the fresh acidity and Limarí minerality balance it out nicely. One for Chardonnay hedonists. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%

⑩ **Volcanes de Chile, Tectonia, Malleco Valley, Chile 2017** 92

£19.99 Simply Wines Direct

Malleco is a quality hotspot for Chilean Chardonnay, the cool southerly region giving naturally vibrant acidity and ageworthy styles. This is a full-throttle style within that context, exuding ripe-peach and red-apple fruit flavours, plus marked buttery and frangipane notes, with an intense, spicy finish. All more or less held in check by a savoury, nutty profile and juicy, mouthwatering acidity. Somewhat breathless. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%

⑪ **Cono Sur, Single Vineyard Block 5**
Quebrada Alta, Casablanca Valley,
Chile 2018 ⁹¹

£13.99 Majestic

Both fleshy and racy, this is a finely balanced Chardonnay with notes of clotted cream, lemon curd and fresh red apples. It's a style that grows on you incrementally, with plenty to say for itself. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

⑫ **Familia Schroeder, Alpataco, Patagonia,**
Argentina 2018 ⁹¹

£12.49-£13.95 Ellis of Richmond, Frazier's, ThirtyFifty

A gentle, unadorned rendition of Chardonnay, and very welcome for it. Crisp, fresh and upbeat – moreish and mouthwatering. An ideal aperitif or accompaniment for an oyster or two. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%

⑬ **Viña Edén, Maldonado, Uruguay 2017** ⁹¹

N/A UK www.vinaeden.com.uy

Viña Edén, as the name intimates, is a captivating place, from the striking architecture to the panoramic views out towards Punta del Este and the Atlantic coast. It's a relative newcomer on the Uruguayan scene but already making waves with its carefully crafted wines, this one an understated but richly textured rendition with a hint of orange rind. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 12%

⑭ **Concha y Toro, Marqués de Casa**
Concha, Limarí Valley, Chile 2017 ⁹⁰

£12.99 Tesco, TJ Wines, Villeneuve Wines

Smoky, rich and generous. Since launching its Maycas operation, Concha y Toro has been sourcing more and more Chardonnay from Limarí, and here's why – the generous flavours are underscored by a fine balancing acidity and gentle earthiness and minerality. Toasty, peachy flavours and a touch of spice. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

⑮ **Familia Falasco, Hermandad Single**
Vineyard, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina
2017 ⁹⁰

£19.99 Bonafide Wines, Flagship Wines, House of Townend, The Oxford

Wine Co, Vinos Latinos

Takes a short while to get going in the glass, but when it does, it's brimful of praline and tropical fruit with a wonderfully vibrant acidity and lifting spice on the finish. Grown at 1,150m altitude in Vista Flores (Uco). **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13% ➤





16 Santa Carolina, Reserva de Familia, Itata Valley, Chile 2018 90

£20 Available via UK agent Ehrmanns

There's both a ponderous richness and bright energy to this wine that just about manage to co-exist. On the one hand is the leesy, lactic, creamy, biscuity breadth of the thing. On the other is the appley acidity and energetic, spicy character. Tame it with a mushroom risotto. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

17 Morandé, Gran Reserva Single Vineyard, Casablanca Valley, Chile 2016 89

£14.99 Berkman

Okay, so it's a bit old school (that whiff of popcorn is undeniable), but it's also pretty winning. Generous flavours of clotted cream and buttered toast are matched by a lime-scented freshness underscoring it all. Rich but balanced. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

18 Zuccardi, Apelación Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2018 88

£15.95-£17.75 Handford, Tanners

The emphasis here is on freshness and upbeat, unalloyed fruit character. There's a deft attention to detail in terms of the texture and stony hints, too. Flavours of fresh pears and peaches with hints of blanched nuts. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

19 De Martino, Legado Reserva, Limarí Valley, Chile 2017 87

£11.99-£13.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, Christopher Keiller, Hic, L'Art du Vin, NY

Wines of Cambridge, Vintriloquy, Waitrose

An understated style with a gently enticing nose of fresh peach, melon and a hint of curry leaf. Elegant balance of fruit freshness and savoury, creamy elements. Subtle and stylish. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

20 Familia Deicas, Single Vineyard Juanicó, Canelones, Uruguay 2019 87

£19 Vinos Latinos

Plush and expansive, with a sour cream and roasted-lemon character. It's a generous wine that harks back to Chardonnays of the past, but it's a style that grows on you, winning you over with its insistent acidity and peachy fruit. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13.5% **D**



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ROBERT PARKER'S WINE ADVOCATE

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ABRUZZO EXPLORED

Hard to pinpoint on a map it may be, but this central Italian region has long been a default choice for restaurant-goers thanks to its soft, easy-drinking reds, with its light whites a popular choice too. **Susan Hulme MW** reveals how Abruzzo's forward-thinking producers are harnessing their native varieties to create character in the bottle

The Abruzzo landscape is breathtaking, with its dramatic, snow-capped mountains on the western horizon dropping down to the sun-drenched beaches and shimmering sea of the Adriatic coast. Sandwiched in between are hilltop villages and a harlequin pattern of tumbling green and yellow hillsides of wheat and vines. The mountains and the sea are never far away, providing constant breezes to moderate the summer heat and cool the vines at night. The drying winds help to prevent the diseases that thrive in dampness, thus making organic viticulture practical.

This varied landscape allows for different elevations, aspects and microclimates – it really seems meant for viticulture.

Yet, on re-reading Luigi Veronelli's *The Wines of Italy*, published in 1960, there is

Below: the vineyards of Gianni Masciarelli in Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

hardly a mention of the Abruzzo. It gets no introduction and is skipped over in about 200 words, mentioning just two grape varieties, Trebbiano and Montepulciano, along with a few of the key towns and suggested pairings with local dishes.

In those days, many of the average wines were easily forgettable. As Cristiana Tiberio of Cantina Tiberio says: 'Trebbiano d'Abruzzo often oxidised after a few months in bottle, and Montepulciano d'Abruzzo was tannic and fruitless, when not downright flawed.'

One thing most wines from the Abruzzo lacked was a clear identity – a sense of place and personality. In an attempt to redress this, the Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC was established in 1968, formalising regulations designed to ensure quality: maximum vineyard elevation within specific sites;



maximum yield and minimum alcohol; and a minimum percentage of Montepulciano – 85% in some areas, rising to 100% in others. Four years later, in 1972, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOC was established. In 2003, in another big step towards quality, the Colline Teramane sub-zone was granted a DOCG, further defining and delimiting some of the best quality vineyards in the north of the region. The latest area to achieve DOCG status, in 2019, was Terre Tollesi (also known as Tullum). Production is low but the wines are considered distinctive enough to stand on their own, while still flying the flag for Montepulciano.

The grapes

One of the Abruzzo's natural strengths is its native grape varieties. Montepulciano, which comprises 70% of the Abruzzo's output, produces friendly, fruity and accessible red wines. The deeply coloured, dark-berry, fruity wines, not overly tannic, are easy to enjoy. Producers have responded to market tastes and moved away from heavily oaked styles. There has been an increase in the use of stainless steel and a return to the use of cement vats; coupled with a reduction in both the use of small oak barrels and in the time spent in oak. The result is a fresher, more approachable style of red that is in keeping with modern taste.

Abruzzo has characterful indigenous white grape varieties such as Pecorino, Cococciola and Passerina, as well as Trebbiano Abruzzese. Pecorino especially, with its apple and citrus notes and its high acidity giving a juicy brightness, has increased dramatically in popularity and plantings. The grape gets its name from the Italian for sheep, *pecora*, the story being that sheep ate the grapes as they moved up and down the hillsides grazing.

Typically part of Trebbiano blends, Cococciola has also started to feature as a varietal wine. It often produces lightly floral, softly textured, herbal wines that are gentle and approachable. Passerina is steely and minerally in style with a salty, savoury finish. Better examples can be quite Chablis-like.

Traditionally, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo wine can be made from Trebbiano Abruzzese and/or Trebbiano Toscano grapes. Although the result can be quite dull if made from the latter, a handful of stunning wines are made from the intriguing Trebbiano Abruzzese. In fact, Trebbiano Abruzzese is capable of producing some of Italy's most exciting white wines. It does not accumulate sugars easily, instead considerably keeping alcohol levels fairly low at about 12%-13%. It is delicate and bright in its aromas and flavours of flowers and citrus, yet for all its fragility it is intense, persistent and incredibly long lived. ➤



Susan Hulme MW is a wine writer specialising in Italian wines. Since 2016 she has written regularly for *Decanter* and *Decanter.com*



In July 2019, I tasted the wonderful Valentini Trebbiano 1978 (*see tasting notes, p90*). It was a revelation, showing how good Trebbiano Abruzzese can be in the right hands. It shone bright, almost Riesling-like, not in its aromas – though pretty, floral, honey notes are true to both varieties – but in its rapier-like qualities of acidity and intensity, combined with delicacy, finesse and its incredible ability to age.

Making a mark

In recent years, Abruzzo whites have been making their presence felt on UK shelves, often in the form of supermarket own-brand wines. Lisa de Leonardis at Elledue, a public relations and export company based in the Abruzzo, comments: ‘In the last 10 years, something has changed... People have started to look for white wines. This fact has determined the success of Passerina and Pecorino both in Italy and in the global market. According to our experience in export, these are becoming the most requested regional labels.’

But, according to Valentino Di Campi, president of Consorzio Vini d’Abruzzo, ‘Abruzzo sparkling wine is the news’, a development that is due to ‘the natural predisposition of the native Abruzzo grapes to the sparkling process, from Trebbiano to Pecorino, from Cococciola to Montonico and Passerina’.

The consorzio also notes an upturn in the sales of Cerasuolo d’Abruzzo, a traditional, serious-style dry rosé which is more deeply coloured than current fashion dictates, but has delightful, sappy, savoury red/green flavours such as rosehip and cranberry. The wine received its own DOC in 2010, which allowed this distinctive and characterful rosé to stand out from the crowd. It is popular in Italy, where it rivals the traditional pairing of beer with the traditional Sunday night pizza.

Whether red, white or rosé, sparkling or still, recent figures show that, in the five years from 2013 to 2018, exports of Abruzzo wines increased by 50%, placing them in the top three exporting regions in Italy. Germany remains the top destination market for Abruzzo wines in terms of volume (19%), yet, in the period analysed, the UK recorded the largest percentage growth, with a staggering 259% upturn. The region’s cooperatives have played a particularly significant role in this success, not just in meeting the increased market demand but also in providing a route to market for their members’ grapes. In fact, 40 cooperatives are responsible for as much as three-quarters of production in the region.



Above: Trebbiano grapes are harvested at Emidio Pepe

‘One of the Abruzzo’s natural strengths is its native grape varieties’

The innovators

In the past, the Abruzzo has been fortunate to have a few pioneering, artisanal wine producers who have shown what can be achieved with Abruzzo wines. In Italy, Valentini wines have an almost mythical status, and the producer is rightly regarded as one of the country’s best. Its Trebbiano d’Abruzzo commands prices that most white-wine producers could only dream of – and the wines have an extraordinary ageing potential. Valentini’s Cerasuolo and Montepulciano d’Abruzzo are equally complex, ageworthy wines with their own identity.

Two other producers are important in the history of Abruzzo wines. Emidio Pepe founded his eponymous winery in 1964, and was very much ahead of the curve in making ‘natural’ wines, a long time before they became super-trendy. He also believed strongly in the ageing potential of the two traditional varieties grown in the region, Montepulciano and Trebbiano. Pepe’s naturally made, foot-trodden and handcrafted wines have achieved cult status among the cognoscenti.

Gianni Masciarelli is another of the region’s pioneering producers. His ideas about using the Guyot training system instead of

ABRUZZO AT A GLANCE

Total area under vine 36,000ha

Total production 3.8m hl

Producers More than 200, from 40 cooperatives

Main grapes Montepulciano, Trebbiano, Pecorino, Passerina, Cococciola, Montonico

ABRUZZO DOCS

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC 9,325ha; 834,470hl (2018)

Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOC 2,121ha; 107,500hl (2018)

Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo DOC 851ha; 62,290hl

Abruzzo DOC 224ha; 13,430hl

Colline Teramane Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOCG 134ha; 3,320hl

Controguerra DOC 36ha; 2,360hl

Terre Tollesi (Tullum) DOCG 19ha; 687hl

Villamagna DOC 16ha; 190hl

Ortona DOC 8ha; yield not reported

(All figures from 2017 unless otherwise stated. Sources: Consorzio Tutela Vini d'Abruzzo; www.italianwinecentral.com)



Map: Maggie Nelson

traditional pergolas played their part in putting Abruzzo wines on the map.

These producers make world-class wines with the local varieties from which so much ordinary wine was once – and in some cases, still is – made. In the past, they were swimming against the tide, but they were proving it could be done. Now, every year there are more producers who desire to excel and to express the uniqueness of their grape varieties and terroir. The swell is growing.

Below: Cristiana Tiberio has witnessed an upturn in quality in Abruzzo



Generational shift

Cristiana Tiberio owes her involvement in wine to her father's discovery of a special vineyard of Trebbiano Abruzzese in 1999. Since 2004, she and her father have been producing some excellent examples of Abruzzo wine. Highlighting the dramatic upturn in quality, Cristiana has noticed how importers are now happy to take more than one Abruzzo wine – proof that the personalities of the wines are becoming more differentiated, whether through style, mesoclimate or terroir.

'Today,' she says, 'thanks to a new generation of winemakers taking over at the helm of their family estate – individuals who have trained in viticulture and oenology, and have travelled the world learning from the best – there is a good number of high-quality wines being made in the region. That wasn't really the case 30 to 40 years ago, when there was essentially only one estate making world-class wine – Valentini.'

Indeed, in the last 20 years, there has been a natural evolution as the next generation of winemakers continue the work of their parents and grandparents, for example Francesco Valentini at Valentini and Sofia Pepe at Emidio Pepe. There is also an increase in the number of independent producers, many of them from the Abruzzo itself. They have either inherited old family properties or land that they want to renovate, or they have decided to liberate themselves from the role of grape-grower and produce their own wines instead.

Perhaps most importantly, in their travels outside the region and outside Italy, they ➤

have tasted great wine. With this experience in mind, they have reassessed vineyard locations, and many of the quality-minded producers are now looking for cooler, higher-elevation sites. There is also a much greater respect for the environment and an awareness of the need to protect it, so organic and environmentally sustainable concerns inform what is done in the vineyard.

For wine is, more than anything else, about the people who make it. Their passion, their dedication and their commitment to what they do is transmitted through their wines to us, the wine drinkers. I suspect that if Luigi Veronelli, that much-loved Italian wine critic, were still alive today, he would have a lot more than 200 words to say about the Abruzzo. **D**

A taste of Abruzzo: Hulme's picks

① **Valentini, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2015** 98

£130 Berry Bros & Rudd, The Solent Cellar
Like an immature but great Riesling, this wine shows little of its full potential when it's young. Having tasted the 1978 in summer 2019, I was astonished by just how well it can age. The longer you sit with it in your glass, the more facets of this beautiful yellow diamond appear. It just shows how good Trebbiano Abruzzese can be: delicate, fine and ethereal, yet at the same time incredibly tenacious and persistent. Citrus, wildflower and honey notes, gentle, yet with steely precision and poise. Lace-textured and beautifully delineated. **Drink** 2020-2050 **Alcohol** 12.5%

② **Tiberio, Pecorino, Abruzzo 2017** 92

£13.75-£15 Armit, Hic
Pecorino has become super-trendy in Italy – maybe it is that combination of juicy fresh lemons and greengage, with the savoury, dry finish. This is a really lovely example from Cristiana Tiberio. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 14%

Marchesi de Cordano, Brilla Cococciola, Colline Pescaresi 2018 90

N/A UK www.cordano.it
Really pretty example of Cococciola with delicate orange flower and dried camomile notes. Lively and juicy on the palate with a white grapefruit twist and lingering savouriness. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13%

Cantina Citra, Pecorino, Terre di Chieti 2018 88

£7.99 Waitrose
Lemon peel, light floral and sea salt notes on the nose are followed by a soft, round-textured palate offset by zesty, lively citrus fruit and a savoury, tangy finish. Altogether very moreish! **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%

Contesa, Pecorino, Abruzzo 2018 88

£9.95 The Wine Society
Lively bitter lemon and grapefruit flavours with very juicy, bright acidity and a salty, savoury finish. A bit more personality than most large-scale cooperative Pecorinos. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%

③ **Luigi Valori, Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo 2018** 93

£12.63 Bibendum Wine, Christopher Keiller
This organic rosé is beautiful in every way. Pretty, salmon-pink colour with delicate wild strawberry and cranberry aromas, bright, refined cherry flavours and a bitter-almond, savoury finish. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%

Cataldi Madonna, Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo 2018 89

£14 Astrum Wine Cellars
Pretty but serious rosé: deep cherry colour, ripe cherry fruit and cherry-candy aromas then a long, salty-savoury finish with lightly sappy tannins. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%

④ **Emidio Pepe, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 2015** 95

£60-£78 Buon Vino, The Solent Cellar
Pepe's 2015 Montepulciano has flavours and aromas of blackberry, smoke, flint and green herb woven into a wonderful velvet texture, supported by fine-grained tannins and bright acidity. Beautiful balance and harmony. **Drink** 2020-2040 **Alc** 13%

⑤ **Masciarelli, Villa Gemma Riserva, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 2014** 93

£54.99 (2013) AG Wines
Attractive roast coffee bean and dark toast aromas on the nose. Big, bold and concentrated on the palate, with flashes of vanilla oak but plenty of black cherry fruit in support. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

⑥ **Cantina Tollo, Mo Riserva, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 2014** 90

£16.62 (2013) Great Wines Direct
Round and full-bodied with dark-berried, brambly, smoky fruit. A great effort by the Tollo co-op: concentrated but not heavy. Lovely freshness and intriguing spiciness on the finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14%



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SEKT REBORN

Though initially a luxury product, German sparkling wine experienced a downturn in quality that marred its reputation for years. Now, a renewed focus on traditional winemaking techniques is revitalising the category, says **Anne Krebiehl MW**



You can still be forgiven for turning your nose up at Sekt – German sparkling wine – in New York or London, but in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich, Sekt is the new ‘sexy’. About time too, since Germany has an illustrious but almost forgotten history when it comes to effervescence. In the 19th century, Sekt spelled pure luxury, but by the turn of the millennium, 20 years ago, it had become a byword for sweetish, mass-produced plonk. Sekt, which had lagged behind in Germany’s quality revolution, is the country’s latest category to experience a revival. It is back with a vengeance – and real quality.

Circuitous journey

When Georg Christian Kessler founded Germany’s first Sekt house in 1826, he was the disruptor of the day. Soon more Sektkellereien sprang up. Kessler had worked for Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin in Reims, France – the widow herself – rising through the ranks to become partner in the Champagne house before founding his own business in Germany.

The Germans had experimented with making sparkling wines for a while, but

Napoleon's occupation and annexation of the German territories on the left bank of the Rhine from the 1790s until 1814 had left a distinct fashion for that new-fangled, fizzing French wine which soon turned into serious business. Making sparkling wine was, after all, a way of adding value to the naturally acidic and slender German base wines.

By 1900, Germany produced more than 10 million bottles of Sekt. This roaring trade attracted taxation: in 1909, the Sektsteuer that had been introduced in 1902 to finance Kaiser Wilhelm's navy started taxing Sekt according to price. This turned the tide against the best and most expensive Sekts and allowed Champagne to cement its place in the world. Two world wars did the rest.

Sekt's fortunes only rose again in the 1950s, when big houses such as Henkell and Kessler introduced 20cl piccolo/pikkolo bottles that popularised the former luxury. By the late 1960s, most of the German Sekt houses had adopted cheaper, more efficient tank fermentation and turned German, then pan-European base wines into easy-drinking, affordable Sekt. What had once been the preserve of the rich was democratised – but the art of bottle fermentation was almost lost.

In the late 1980s, it was once again taxation, or rather a technicality in its administration, that changed Sekt's fortunes. Winemakers could now hold untaxed Sekt in bond in their own cellars: traditional-method Sekt became an option again. Experimentation duly started. Some made it their main business, others developed a sideline. The 1990s then saw the legal framework for quality Sekt expanded with the definition of the terms 'Crémant' and 'Winzersekt' (see box). Over the past decade, the once-demeaned term 'Sekt' has been revived and rehabilitated. In 2018, the VDP, Germany's association of elite wine estates, published its own Sekt statute – signalling that Sekt has come full circle. Making Sekt is now a serious discipline with ambitious producers setting their sights on quality. Plots are dedicated to growing base wines for Sekt and are farmed accordingly, while quality notches higher.

‘Over the past decade, the once-demeaned term “Sekt” has been revived and rehabilitated’

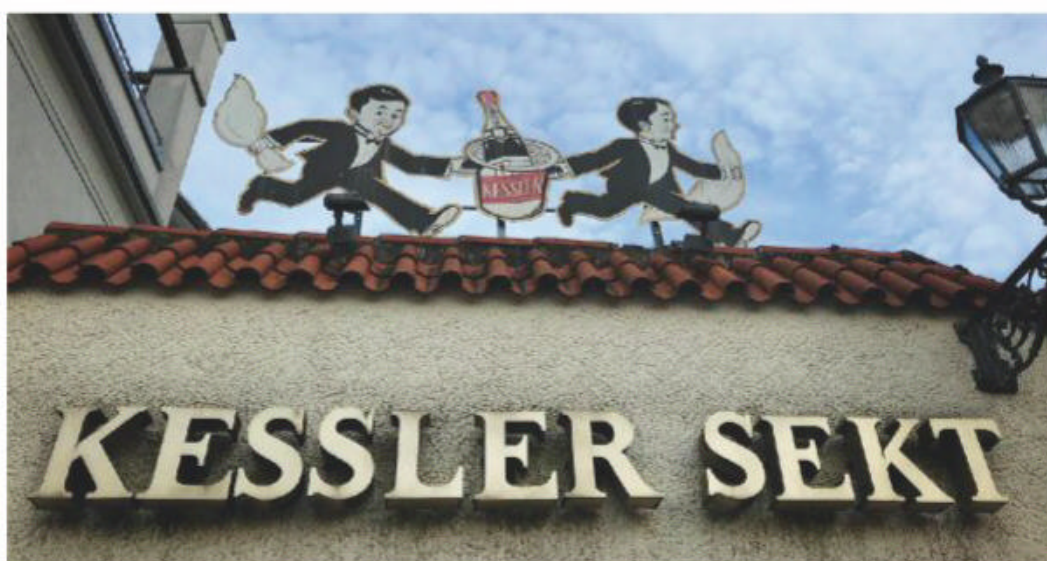
Sekt: what to look for on the label

Traditionelle flashchengärung (traditional bottle fermentation) This is the key term to look out for. While the law defines Sekt, Winzersekt and Crémant, not all producers choose to use these terms.

Winzersekt Prescribes traditional bottle fermentation and 100% estate-grown fruit; must state grape variety and vintage (minimum 85% of that variety and vintage).

Crémant Now less used; prescribes whole-bunch pressing for white grapes, a maximum yield of 100 litres of must from 150kg of grapes, and traditional bottle fermentation.

VDP Sekt statute This stipulates grape varieties, yields, pressing regimen and traditional bottle fermentation. It distinguishes between Ortssekt (village) with a minimum of 15 months on lees in bottle; and Lagensekt, from a single site classified as either Erste or Grosse Lage, with a minimum 36 months on lees.



Above: the Kessler logo depicts two waiters, referred to in the past as 'piccolos'

The state of Sekt

In terms of grape varieties, Sekt is either classical or uniquely German. When made from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay as single variety or blend, Sekt takes its place neatly alongside other traditional-method sparkling wines from around the world – benefiting from inherent freshness. More and more, Pinot Blanc also plays a role. But Germany's unique proposition in the sparkling realm is Rieslingsekt. Natural lightness and acidity predestine Riesling for sparkling wine production, but its aromatic make-up, with notes of citrus, herbs and stone fruit, can result in distinctive Sekts.

Some producers aim for varietally pronounced Sekts, harvesting later to capture most of the aromatic development. Such Sekts illustrate the aromatic evolution of Riesling flavours. Rieslingseks can become honeyed with post-disgorgement ageing, even when bone-dry, and some producers give it a greater varietal edge by adding a small dosage of a ➤



Anne Krebiehl MW is a freelance wine writer, wine judge and author of *The Wines of Germany*

mature sweet Riesling. Others bring out Riesling's essential steeliness with long-aged, thrilling, zero-dosage Sekts that should carry the warning 'for acid-loving adults only'. Rieslingsekt is a category to watch.

Niko Brandner, the winemaker at Griesel & Compagnie, who turned heads with his first releases in 2015, speaks of a 'minimalist' approach that the top estates adhere to: no filtration, no fining, no enzymes, little or no sulphur dioxide and enough time on lees for both base wine and Sekt. These producers try to make do with no or very low dosage to show off the wine's purity. Brandner says: 'Artisanal-quality Sekt is experiencing a real upswing, and this affects all producers.'

While the production of premium-quality Sekt is still dwarfed by the vast production of tank-fermented Sekts, the Germans have upped their game over the past decade, and continue to do so – at a different level from the initial traditional-method Winzersekte of the late 1990s and 2000s. The best bottles are still slumbering in deep, cold cellars waiting to be disgorged. If you know where to look, there is much to look forward to. **D**



'Artisanal-quality Sekt is experiencing a real upswing and this affects all producers'

Niko Brandner, Griesel & Compagnie (above)

Krebiehl's five standout Sekt selections

① Griesel & Compagnie, Pinot Brut Nature, Hessische Bergstrasse 2015 94

£30.05 The WineBarn

Red apple and fresh pastry are mellow on the nose, but a lifted streak of zesty lemon steals the show. The palate also plays between citric sharpness and mellow, autolytic roundness while showcasing its bone-dry fruit and creamy layers of evolution. Compelling and utterly refreshing: Niko Brandner shows his mettle here, working in an intentionally classic, international style. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alcohol** 12.5%

Sekthaus Solter, Riesling Reserve Berg Roseneck, Rheingau 2012 94

£39.65 The WineBarn

Lifted camomile, dried lemon rind and smoky earth immediately promise Riesling complexity. The palate sparkles gently and the bubbles are like a tonic on these fresh but wonderfully evolving Riesling notes. The finish is rich with flavour but slender in body. This is a Sekt style that does everything to pronounce its Riesling credentials from a single, famous site: Berg Roseneck (quartzite). Exquisite. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 12.5%

② Reichsrat von Buhl, Reserve Brut, Pfalz NV 92

£23.99-£28.50 Averys, Cellar Door Wines,

Dalling & Co, Ellis Wharton, Grape & Grind, Hennings, Vineyards of Sherborne, WoodWinters Creamy, mellow apple notes suggest Cox's Orange Pippin as much as Golden Delicious, while all the yeastiness recalls apple pie. The palate is wonderfully light, super-fresh, creamy and dry with fine, vivid mousse. Made by ex-Bollinger chef de cave Mathieu Kauffmann, this blend of Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay is from a master's hand and sets new standards. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

③ Bibo Runge, Provokateur Brut, Rheingau NV 93

£25.99-£27.25 Butlers Wine Cellar, Connolly's, Delibo, Secret Bottle Shop

Riesling's stone fruit shimmers on the nose, but the colour throws you – it's achieved by the addition of some red Pinot Noir and a mystery red variety that's kept a secret. Hence the name Provokateur. The palate unites smoke, Mirabelle plum and citrus, all carried on fine, tender but lively foam, no doubt made even creamier by ageing the Riesling base in large oak casks. Very food friendly. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12.5%

Schloss Vaux, Rosé Réserve, Rheingau 2015 93

£26.87 Jascots, The Winery

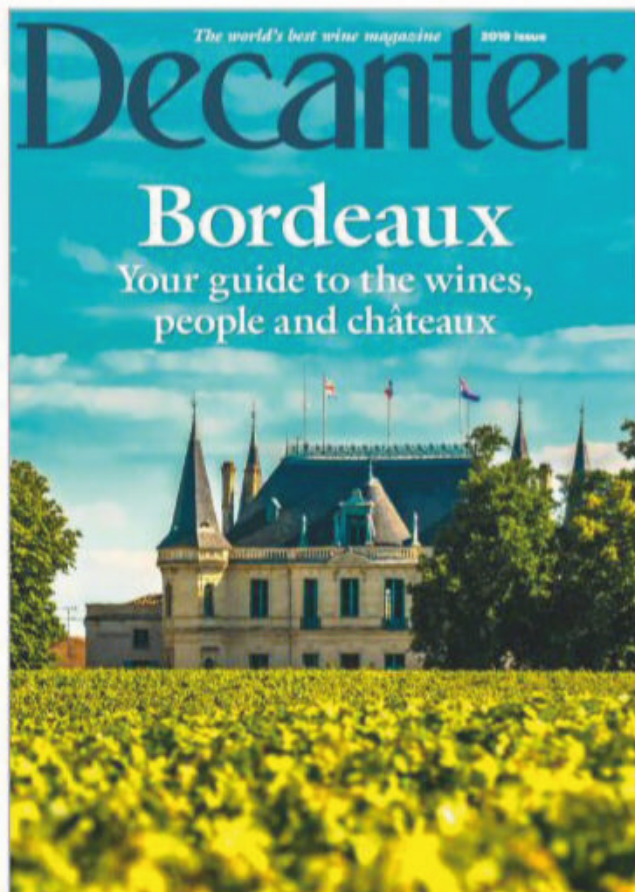
Red apple and redcurrant appear on the fresh nose, framed by yeasty creaminess. The light body is rounded out by yeasty richness and has a lovely generosity, despite the slender dryness. The mousse is fine and persistent. Its substance means that this could also go with food.

Drink 2020-2023 **Alc** 12%



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Bodegas Montecillo: a contemporary classic

With a proud tradition of family winemaking in Rioja for 150 years, Bodegas Montecillo celebrates its anniversary in 2020 with the release of an exceptional limited-edition Gran Reserva

All great journeys begin with a single step and often it is a pioneer with exceptional vision who takes that step. This certainly applies to Don Celestino Navajas Matute, who established the very first winery in his Rioja Alta hometown of Fuenmayor in 1870. Surrounded by flat-topped hills, and bordered by the Ebro river and Cantabrian Mountains, Fuenmayor had huge potential for making fine wines. Don Celestino named his winery 'Montecillo' – meaning 'little mountain' – in honour of this unique topography.

Today that winery is still in use. Boasting its original golden stone masonry, with the name Montecillo emblazoned in wrought iron above the door, it's the third-oldest winery in Rioja. Meanwhile Fuenmayor has become a key wine-producing town, boasting one of the longest grape-growing traditions in Rioja Alta. The history of Bodegas Montecillo in the intervening years is a story that intertwines two winemaking families and witnesses the evolution of modern Rioja wine.

The year 1880 was the dawn of new era for Rioja. In the wake of the phylloxera epidemic that ravaged vineyards in France, winemakers introduced new techniques from Bordeaux (particularly oak barrel ageing) to the region. Seeing the opportunities, Don Celestino sent his son Alejandro to Bordeaux to study. Returning home, he began making a new style of Montecillo wines aged in oak, which soon garnered international attention.

Showing the same spirit of innovation, Alejandro's son, José Luis, studied in Burgundy and became the winery's manager in 1943, driving quality with the introduction of techniques such as cold vinification, which became key to the elegant style of

Montecillo's ageworthy wines.

Having no heirs, in 1973 José Luis entrusted the winery to another winemaking dynasty: the Osborne family. One of the world's oldest family-run companies, Osborne was established in 1772 by Englishman Thomas Osborne in Jerez, and has remained in family hands ever since. Today the business is overseen by the sixth generation.

Without doubt this family winemaking heritage has helped to shape the character of Bodegas Montecillo wines. But these are also wines that speak of the unique terroir of Rioja Alta. Located in the west of Rioja, this is an area where vineyards are planted on slopes with limestone and clay soils, that can be rich in iron or full of pebbles. In these challenging conditions old bush-vines

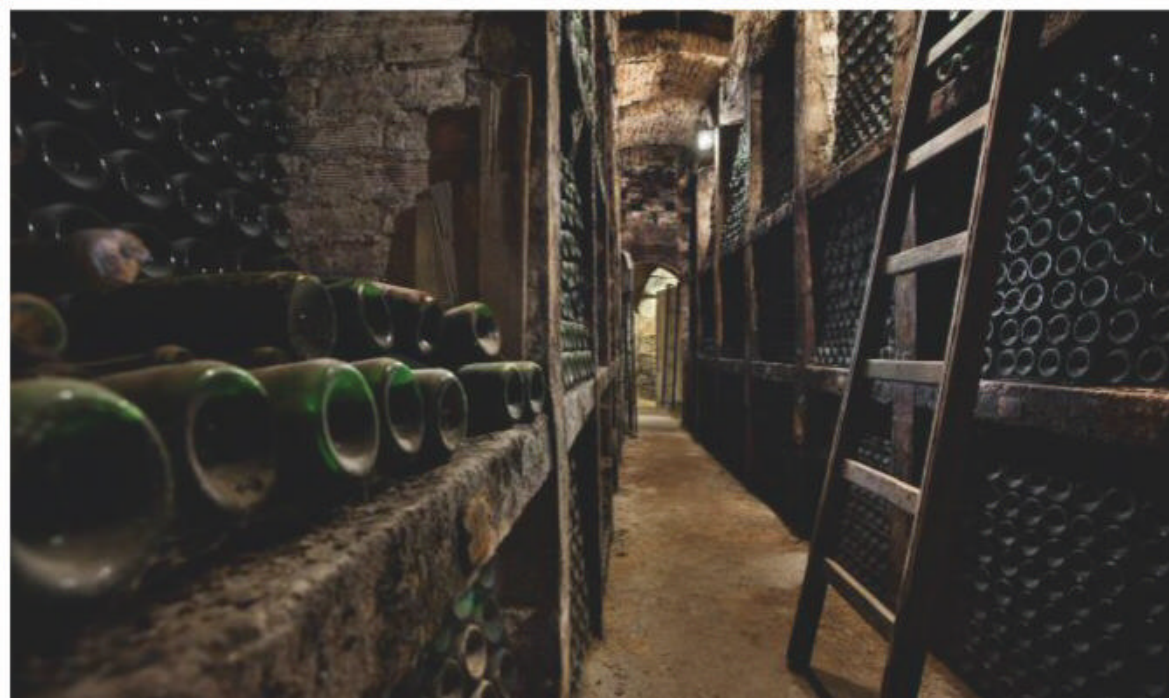
are dry-farmed and yields can be as low as 3,500kg/ha, producing grapes with concentrated flavours.

Montecillo works with top growers in Rioja Alta, maintaining relationships that stretch back decades, which enables the winery to select the very best fruit from over 800 separate parcels across the region. Varieties include Tempranillo, Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo. Modern innovations such as GPS-controlled vineyard systems ensure the optimum quality of the grapes.

For chief winemaker, Mercedes García Rupérez, respect for the vine and selecting the best grapes are key to the Montecillo winemaking philosophy, along with choosing the winemaking techniques best suited to each varietal. She sees her challenge as updating



'A family winemaking heritage has helped to shape the character of Bodegas Montecillo wines'





Carmelo Espinosa, Viticulture Manager and Mercedes García Rupérez, Chief Winemaker

Montecillo's wines without ever losing their essence, tradition and roots. To that end she uses technological innovations including small flex tanks in the winery, to create wines with greater complexity and expression.

The Classic Rioja range of Bodegas Montecillo includes crianza, reserva, gran reserva, blanco and rosé expressions. The winery also produces a Signature collection featuring Montecillo Limited Edition and Montecillo 22 Barricas, as well as a selection of historic vintages: Montecillo Gran Reserva Selección Especial 1973, 1982, 1994 and 2001. This year, to celebrate its 150th anniversary, the winery is also releasing the limited-edition Bodegas Montecillo 150 Aniversario Selección Especial Gran Reserva 2005 (see box).

All wines are aged in the winery's cellar, a veritable treasure trove of old and rare bottles – including vintages dating back to 1926, the year the Rioja DO was created. It's a testament to the journey begun by Don Celestino 150 years ago – and a story that Rioja lovers will be enjoying for many more years to come.

For more information visit
www.bodegasmontecillo.com

A wine of celebration

The Bodegas Montecillo 150 Aniversario Selección Especial Gran Reserva 2005 is an exceptional wine released to celebrate a very special anniversary. Hailing from a vintage that was classified as 'Excellent', grapes were sourced from a traditional mixed vineyard with bush-trained vines aged over 60 years old that flourish in the pebbly calcerous-clay soil.

After selective harvesting, Tempranillo (70%), Graciano (20%) and Maturana Tinta (10%) grapes are fermented in underground cement tanks, with continuous pumping over and maceration on skins for two weeks. The wine is then transferred to fine-grained French oak barrels, where it is aged for over five years, then aged for

at least another nine years in bottle.

This produces an intense ruby-red wine with aromatic intensity and significant complexity. Aromas of spiced oak, liquorice, black pepper and tobacco combine with very ripe black fruit and a dusting of pepper. The harmonious palate is creamy and robust, with a noticeable silkiness to

the texture and a distinctive, lingering finish. Best served at 18-19°C, it can be savoured on its own, but also pairs beautifully with a range of food including red meat and game dishes.

Only a very limited edition of 2,798 bottles of Bodegas Montecillo 150 Aniversario Selección Especial Gran Reserva 2005 have been produced.

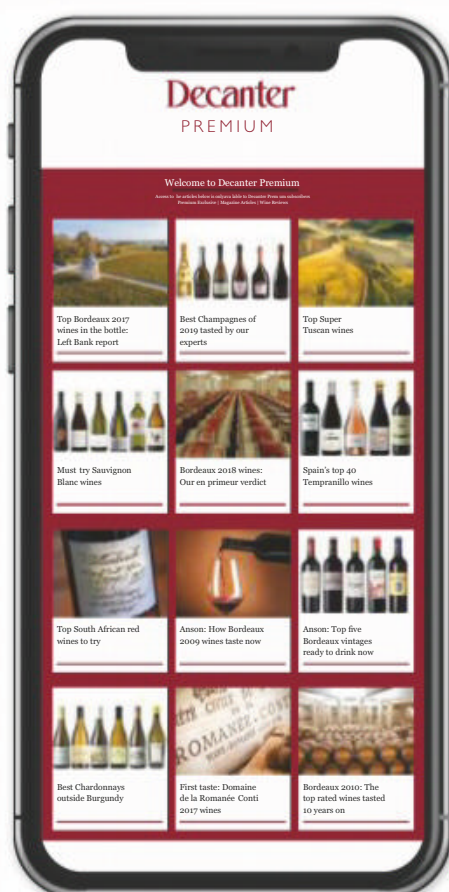


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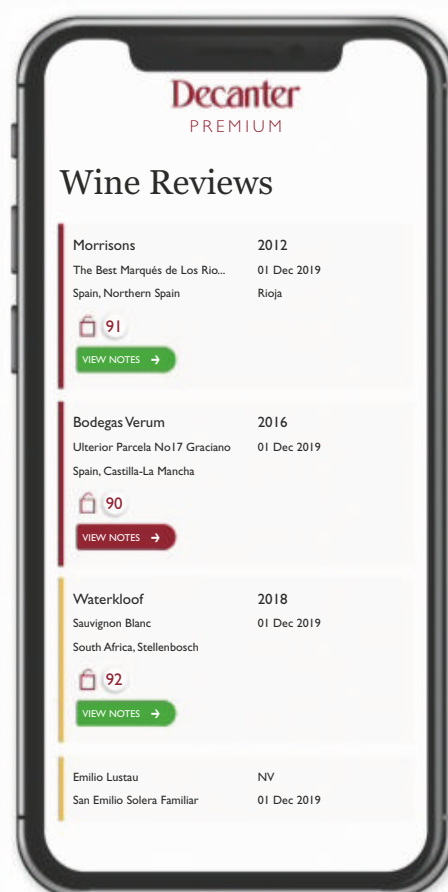
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THE DECANTER GUARANTEE

Our buying guide provides you with trusted, independent, expert recommendations on what to buy, drink and cellar.

Each panel tasting is judged by three experienced tasters chosen for their authority in the category of wine being rated. All wines are tasted blind and are pre-poured for judges in flights of eight to 10 wines. Our experts taste and score wines individually but then discuss their scores together at the end of each flight. Any wines on which scores are markedly different are retasted; however, judges are under no obligation to amend their scores.

Judges are encouraged to look for typicity in wines, rewarding those that are true to their region. When judging, experts are aware of wine price bands – under £15, £15-£30 and over £30 – with the aim to recognise and reward quality and value.

The tastings are held in the controlled environment of *Decanter's* tasting suite: a plain white room, with natural light and no noise. We limit the number of wines tasted to a manageable level – a maximum of 85 per day – allowing judges to taste more thoroughly and avoid palate fatigue.

Drink-by dates are based on how long it is prudent to keep the wine in question. However, some wines will have a longer ageing capacity if stored in pristine conditions throughout their lifespan.

Scoring system

Tasters rate the wines using the 100-point scoring system. The overall *Decanter* rating is the average of all three judges' scores.

The ratings are as follows:

98-100: Exceptional

A great, exceptional and profound wine

95-97: Outstanding

An excellent wine of great complexity and character

90-94: Highly Recommended

A very accomplished wine, with impressive complexity

86-89: Recommended

A well-made, straightforward and enjoyable wine

83-85: Commended

An acceptable, simple wine with limited personality

76-82: Fair

Correctly made, if unexciting

70-75: Poor

Unbalanced and/or bland with no character

50-69: Faulty

Displays winemaking faults

For the Exceptional and Outstanding *Decanter* ratings, judges' individual scores and tasting notes are listed in addition to the average score. For the Highly Recommended and Recommended wines, individual and average scores are also listed but tasting notes are a combination of the three judges' notes.



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THIS MONTH'S PANEL TASTINGS

Corbières reds & Barolo 2006



100 Steven Spurrier's fine wine world

Our consultant editor and 2017 *Decanter* Hall of Fame recipient picks fine wines to drink now and to lay down, all priced at £25 and above

101 Weekday wines

By the *Decanter* team

Want something more adventurous in your midweek wine selection but don't want to make an expensive mistake? We've found 25 exciting wines to try for £25 or under



105 Corbières reds

55 wines tasted

A strong showing, with three Outstanding wines, our judges highlighting quality and terroir expression

111 Barolo 2006

29 wines tasted

This concise selection showed a vintage reaching a sweet spot of freshness and continued ageing potential

118 Expert's Choice: Alto Adige

By Michael Garner

Known for its lively white wines, the region is now producing an increasing number of impressive reds

120 First taste: Domaine de la Romanée-Conti 2017

By Tim Atkin MW

The full background on a warm and relatively abundant vintage, with Atkin's notes on the seven grand cru reds



Steven Spurrier's FINE WINE WORLD

Decanter's long-standing consultant editor and 2017 Decanter Hall of Fame Award recipient picks fine wines for drinking now and recommends others for laying down, all priced from £25 upwards

FROM THE CELLAR

Domaine Courbis, Champelrose, Cornas, Rhône 2007

This was my favourite from the usual medley of fine bottles (in magnums on this occasion) brought to The Shortest Day Lunch on 19 December. Created by the late Tim Stanley-Clarke on the basis that one doesn't leave the table until it is dark outside, we are down to 14, average age well above 70, with Robin Yapp guarding the senior spot. After Robin's excellent house **Champagne** from **Dumangin** and a **Pol Roger 2000**, a mystery wine was revealed as a 2016 Müller-Thurgau and Traminer blend from the Czech Republic. A beautiful **Michel Niellon, Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru Les Chaumées 2015** was followed by a mature **Michel Caillot, Le Limozin Meursault 2010**, leading to three 2005

clarets: **Château de Fieuzal, Pessac-Léognan; Dassault, St-Emilion GC; and Bourgneuf-Vayron, Pomerol**. All scored well, but were out-pointed by the 2008 'quintessential claret' of **Langoa Barton, St-Julien 3CC**. **Geoff Merrill's McLaren Vale**



Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 was a robust prelude to the **Champelrose Cornas 2007**, from vines planted in 1919 on the lower slopes and in 1999 on the higher: marvellously expressive and incredibly elegant – not a typical Cornas characteristic. As dusk fell, the **Château Coutet, Barsac 1967** was magnificent, the **Royal Tokaji, Essencia Aszú 1995** like heavenly treacle, and **Graham's 1985 Port** gave warmth for the darkness outside.

FOR THE CELLAR

Yves Cuilleron, Bonnavières, Côte-Rôtie, Rhône 2018

While the wine trade's attention has recently been focused on the superbly ripe 2018 wines from all over Burgundy, the equally successful vintage from the northern Rhône valley (see *'Vintage report'*, p40) has produced less noise. Top merchant Johnny Goedhuis told me that the region was 'a hard sell', but this is changing. The Cuilleron family has, just since 1987, managed to acquire 90ha across six appellations. For medium-term reds at a modest (compared to Burgundy) price, I would choose St-Joseph over the easier Crozes-Hermitage and tougher Cornas, but further up the scale the elegant, cellarworthy Côte-Rôties are hard to beat.



Yves Cuilleron's top cuvée of three, **Bonnavières** comes from a single plot of 60-year-old, east-facing vines on the Côte Brune, harvested late and fermented partially de-stemmed for three weeks in open-top, temperature-controlled vats with regular cap-punching and pumping-over, but no over-extraction. Malolactic in barrels and 18 months' ageing completes the picture. Spicy black fruits on the nose lead to a velvety texture and exceptional purity of flavour. Never assertive, the best Côte-Rôties need patience, and this **2018** will open up after three years, still be there at 30, at its best during the next decade (available from September priced at about £60, Uncorked).

The Spurrier selection



Finca La Anita, Gran Corte, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina 2017 93

£25 Delibo Wine Agencies
Syrah (59%) dominates, but Malbec plays its supporting role superbly, with 8% Malbec from the 2015 vintage added to the 2017s before spending 15 months in barrel. The La Anita is one of Mendoza's most elegant and impressive wine styles.
Drink 2020-2027 Alc 14.5%



Tasca, Tascante Contrada Pianodario, Etna Rosso, Sicily, Italy 2016 93

£60 Berkmann
From the Tasca d'Almerita family comes this stunning 100% Nerello Mascalese grown on shallow sand over volcanic pumice and rock: rich, slightly exotic, lovely texture, flavour, and the finesse of a Vosne-Romanée. Presence and class.
Drink 2020-2028 Alc 13.5%



Domaine Chevalier, Ladoix, Burgundy, France 2017 92

£29.67-£36 Exel, GP Brands, Quercus Wines, The Fine Wine Co, Vinvm
From this lesser-known Côte de Beaune appellation next to Aloxé-Corton, slightly spicy, deep-textured fruit on nose and palate. Smoothness and grip: a very good wine from this highly regarded estate.
Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13%

WEEKDAY WINES

Looking to try something different or adventurous, but don't want to make an expensive mistake? The *Decanter* team has done the hard work for you, picking out 25 exciting and accessible wines available in the UK priced at £25 or less

Recommended by: James Button, Tina Gellie, Georgie Hindle, Julie Sheppard, Amy Wislocki and Sylvia Wu



La Cave des Hautes Côtes, Crémant de Bourgogne, Burgundy, France NV 89

£10 Marks & Spencer

A blend of 75% Pinot Noir with Aligoté, Chardonnay and Gamay, this good-value fizz has a fine, creamy mousse and pear, white blossom and citrus on the nose. The palate features candied pear and bright acidity, with lime peel on the finish. **SW Alc** 12.5%



Villa Cialdini, Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro, Emilia-Romagna, Italy 2019 90

£15.99 Via UK agent Liberty Wines

In 2002, the Chiarli cousins built a winery to produce Lambrusco. This versatile style is a great aperitif and is delicious with charcuterie. Despite 13g of residual sugar, it's dry to taste – just a cherry sweetness. **AW Alc** 11%



Quails' Gate, Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada 2016 92

£22.49-£24.24 All About Wine, Corking Wines

From a family winery founded in 1989, this is drinking beautifully, packed with ripe apple, pear and acid-driven pineapple. Toast and vanilla notes come from partial ageing in French oak. **TG Alc** 13%



Babich, Organic Sauvignon Blanc, Wairau Valley, Marlborough, New Zealand 2019 91

£14.99 Via UK agent Berkmann

Croatian-born Josip Babich made his first Kiwi wine in 1916. His family's third generation is still going strong. This has purity and vibrancy of apple, peach, orange blossom and zesty citrus acidity with a wild-yeast tang. **TG Alc** 13%



Domaine de La Cendrillon, Nuance, Vin de France 2018 91

£12.80 Tanners

A fruit salad of varieties – 38% Petit Manseng plus seven other grapes – all sourced from the vineyards of a Corbières family estate founded in 1750. Leesy, creamy cashew roundness and a raspy texture, with pear juice, spiced apple, stone fruit, and a long apricot finish. **TG Alc** 14%



The Great SA Wine Co, Grand Blanc, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2018 91

£18.95 Swig

From DeMorgenzon cellar master Carl van der Merwe, this Semillon-Chenin-Sauvignon Blanc blend is made with minimal intervention. It has aromas of honey, grapefruit and pineapple. The waxy palate has citrus, yellow fruit and a refreshing finish. **JS Alc** 14%



Tierhoek, Old-Blocks Chenin Blanc, Piekenierskloof, Western Cape, South Africa 2018 92

£14.50 Berry Bros & Rudd

From blocks of 41-year-old, organically farmed vines rooted on weathered sandstone sourced from Piekenierskloof pioneers Tierhoek. This is vibrant, with a nose of zesty lemon and green apple. The palate has earthy minerality, racy acidity, and creaminess from both tank and barrel fermentation. Lingering finish, with real elegance. Superb value! **GH Alc** 13.5% ➤



Cantina Antonella Corda, Vermentino, Sardinia, Italy 2019 90

£19.99 Via UK agent Liberty Wines
Buying Vermentino can be a leap of faith, as many are insipid and neutral. Not this one, however – steel aged for six months on its own yeasts, there's a good weight here, with citrus notes and attractive salinity. The Mistral wind helps preserve acidity and freshness. **AW Alc 14%**



Matošević, Alba Malvazija Istarska, Istria, Croatia 2019 90

£17.99 Via UK agent Liberty Wines
Described by Steven Spurrier as 'Croatia's best winemaker', Ivica Matošević has championed the indigenous grape Malvasia Istriana. This wine is made with a blend of grapes from six vineyards, vinified separately, and fermented in stainless steel with no skin contact. Fresh, herby and mineral, with crunchy pear fruit. **AW Alc 12.5%**



Kranz, Riesling, Pfalz, Germany 2018 89

£12.95 The WineBarn
Pure and mineral, this wine has white blossom, citrus and green apple notes on the nose. It's a refreshing Riesling that features a dry palate with notes of crunchy green apple, as well as salivating lime-peel bitterness and white-pepper spice from natural yeast fermentation. A perfect partner for seafood. **SW Alc 12.5%**



Wine & Soul, Manoella Branco, Douro Valley, Portugal 2017 89

£13.15 Corney & Barrow, Tanners
This white field blend shows the talents of winemakers Sandra Tavares da Silva and her husband Jorge Serôdio Borges. From old vines on granitic soils, with spicy stone-fruit and hawthorn notes. Extended lees contact gives texture. **AW Alc 12.5%**



Berry Bros & Rudd, Pomerol by Château Feytit-Clinet, Bordeaux, France 2017 92

£24.95 Berry Bros & Rudd
From Jeremy Chasseuil, this has lovely depth and richness. A nose of black fruit, chocolate and mocha, and a lush palate of black berries, integrated tannins and aniseed spice. With a pleasing bite on the finish, it's a great food wine. **GH Alc 14%**



Famille JM Cazes, Domaine de L'Ostal, Estibals, Minervois, Languedoc, France 2016 91

£13.99 Davis Bell McCraith
A juicy, ripe Syrah-Carignan-Grenache-Mourvèdre blend from the youngest vines on one of the domaine's finest parcels. Silky palate with inky red- and black-berry fruit, garrigue herbs and oak spice, enlivened by fresh acidity. **TG Alc 14%**



Aldinger, Estate Spätburgunder, Württemberg, Germany 2017 90

£14.45 The WineBarn
This gets its light pink hue from 40%-50% whole-bunch fermentation. A nose of fragrant herbs, strawberry and hawthorn, with a touch of savoury bacon complexity. The lengthy, juicy berry palate is supported by fine-grained, dusty tannins. **SW Alc 12.5%**



Boekenhoutskloof, The Chocolate Block, Western Cape, South Africa 2018 90

£19.95-£25 Widely available
Mainly Syrah, with Grenache, Cinsault, Cabernet and a dash of Viognier, this red's fans love it for its big, smooth, rich – even chocolatey – flavours. This latest vintage has violet-tinged black fruits with coffee, chocolate and woody notes, balanced by bright acidity. **JB Alc 14%**



HIGH STREET choice

Sir Ian Botham, The All-Rounder Chardonnay, South Eastern Australia 2018 89

£7.75-£7.99 Morrisons, Ocado, Waitrose Cellar

Unlike many other celebrities, cricket legend Sir Ian has had actual involvement in his new wine project. Here, he wanted the lightly oaked Margaret River fruit to give a tropical, peachy flavour, which joins green apple, zippy grapefruit acidity and vanilla hints. Great value – especially when on offer for £5.99. **TG Alc 12.5%**



**Monte del Frá,
Bardolino, Veneto,
Italy 2018** 90

£9.50-£12.99 Bay Tree Wine Co, Booths, Caviste, Field & Fawcett, Noble Green, Richard Granger, Slurp The Bonomo family's estate is east of Lake Garda, 15km from Verona. This light, easy-drinking, Corvina-dominant red has cranberry, redcurrant and fresh cherry fruit, plus baking spices. Serve slightly chilled with antipasti. **TG Alc** 12.5%



**Mt Beautiful, Pinot
Noir, North
Canterbury, New
Zealand 2017** 90

£16.95 Wine Utopia, Dunell's In addition to food matches like 'moussaka on a rainy night', owner David Teece suggests pairing this savoury Pinot with jazz music by Miles Davis. It has black-cherry, violet and bramble notes, a nice grip of tannins and spice from 10 months in barrel. **TG Alc** 13%



**Cantina Diomede,
Lama di Pietra Nero
di Troia, Puglia, Italy
2018** 89

£11.50-£13.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Eton Vintners, GP Brands This has soft blackberry and mulberry fruit, with a twist of liquorice. Aged for six months in steel for a fruit-forward style. Deliciously modern – none of the rusticity you might expect from Puglia. **AW Alc** 13%



**Matsu, El Recio, Toro,
Spain 2017** 89

£14.99 Majestic El Recio translates as 'tough guy', a clue to the style of this Tempranillo (Tinta del Toro locally). Sourced from old vines cultivated biodynamically, the wine matures in new French oak for 14 months, giving it polish and opulence. Firm, sweet black fruit, fruitcake-like in character, with earthy and coffee notes. **AW Alc** 14.5%



**Lidl, Azinhaga de Ouro
Reserva, Douro Valley,
Portugal 2017** 88

£5.99 Lidl Made from the same grapes used in Port production, this is packed with smoky plum and mulberry fruit, framed by some spicy oak. It doesn't have the concentration that more expensive red wines from the Douro region would offer, but it is still a good-value, uncomplicated, crowd-pleasing choice. **AW Alc** 14%



**Lidl, Mezquiriz
Reserva, Navarra, Spain
2013** 88

£5.99 Lidl This Spanish Tempranillo is part of Lidl's latest Wine Tour line-up – a revolving selection available alongside the core range. The vintage may be 2013, but the wine is still youthful, showing fresh, soft blackberry fruit and a touch of spicy oak. It makes a good-value alternative to Rioja. **AW Alc** 13.5%



**Allendorf, Winkeler
Hasensprung Riesling
Auslese, Rheingau,
Germany 2018** 90

£15.15/50cl The WineBarn Sourced from one of the producer's top sites, Hasensprung, this displays a lovely perfume of beeswax, apricot and citrus fruits, while crisp acidity (8.9g/L) thrusts through marmalade and ripe stone-fruit sweetness. A decent, affordable treat. **SW Alc** 8.5%



**Emilio Lustau,
Irresistible PX Sherry,
Jerez, Spain** 90

£6/37.5cl co-op Co-op has released its first own-label Pedro Ximénez Sherry, aged for up to 12 years in an American oak solera system. A little goes a long way here, as the flavours are so intense that you'll really only need a small glass. This is a treacly, mouthcoating delight with raisiny, grapey fruit flavours. **AW Alc** 17%



**MUST-TRY
red**

**E Guigal, St-Joseph,
Northern Rhône, France
2016** 92

£25 Millésima, Vinatis This 100% Syrah is made from the fruit of a selection of old vines aged between 20 and 50 years old. The nose immediately packs a powerful punch, full of bright red fruit and subtly spicy oak aromas. The palate is loaded with delicious, crunchy cherry notes, which are supported by supple, rounded tannins and underpinned by zippy acidity. It's a wine that is well worth the money. **GH Alc** 13.5%

Domaine Serres Mazard



VINTAGE 2017

In the heart of the Corbières hills in Languedoc, a tiny vineyard nestles among the wild orchids growing naturally in drifts of thyme and rosemary. Old vines of syrah, grenache and carignan are lovingly nurtured by the Mazard family, owners and growers since the 16th century.

The Cuvée Henri Serres, named to honour an uncle with a shared passion for vines, wines and the local flora, is a concentrate of the heady perfumes of the garrigue, amplified by the sun and wind so typical of this little corner of paradise.



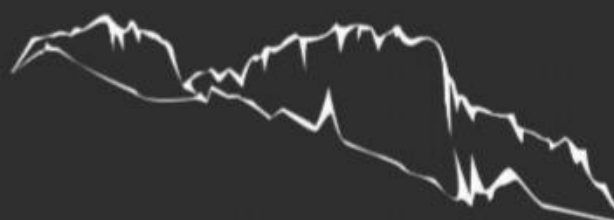
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CORBIERES REDS

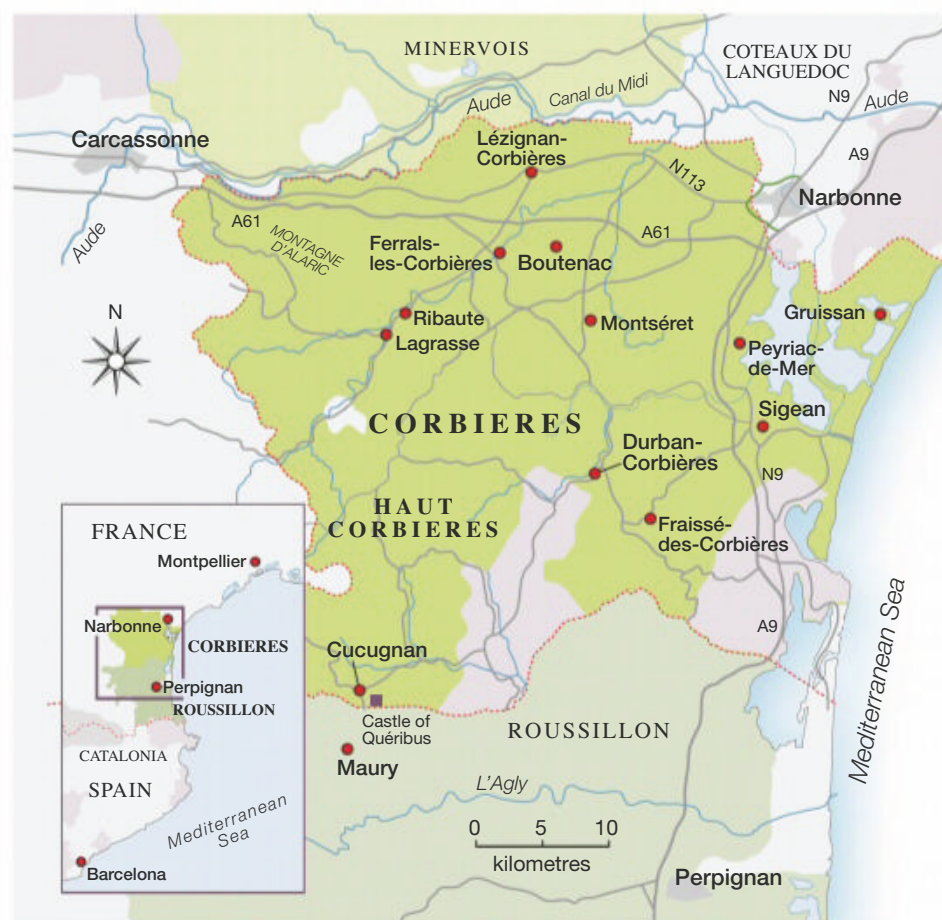
This rugged Languedoc landscape is familiar by name to many wine lovers, but the sprawling nature of the region and its varied wine styles take time to understand. **Andrew Jefford** explains

Corbières is the Languedoc's sphinx: enormous, haunting and enigmatic. I first went there more

than 20 years ago and it seemed an excitingly wild, promising wine landscape: rugged, geologically and topographically chaotic, sparsely inhabited, full of savage allure. Every time I tasted a range of Corbières, I seemed to get a glimpse of that grandeur: unique, unbridled, now austere, now flamboyant. Just a glimpse.

I remember climbing up to the Cathar castle of Quéribus, high above a ridge dividing two valleys. The valley to your south is that of the Roussillon's Agly: you can clearly see the town of Maury from the vastness. To the north is Languedoc: Corbières and the beautiful village of Cucugnan. Less than 10km separate the two. I tasted the local wines. They were shockingly different, given the geographical proximity. Why?

Corbières' girth is a challenge. In terms of surface under vines, this Aude appellation is the giant of the Languedoc and the fourth



largest appellation in France. It's had its AP since 1985, but market progress has been slow. Prices are modest (the region recently vaunted the fact that some 46% of its red wine now sells for more than €5 a bottle). It's hard to make great wine for modest prices. Good wine and great value, yes

– but great wine demands effort and sacrifice which modest prices can never adequately reward.

What, too, should be the model? Setting aside the cru appellation of Boutenac (which in some ways is a showcase for old-vine Carignan), the styles of the different sectors of Corbières are very different. Close to Narbonne and down towards Sigeon along the coast, you can produce wines of flesh and voluptuousness. (Parts of Boutenac are the same.) The further you go towards the south and west, though, the higher the altitude; indeed the 200m that separate lower-lying Maury from higher-sited Cucugnan surely accounts for some of the stylistic difference I was first struck by.

When I wrote *The New France* back in 2002, there was a plan to create 11 crus rather than just one; that would have helped our understanding. It didn't happen. There are rumours, though, that we will see a Corbières-Durban before long, and a Corbières-

CORBIERES: KNOW YOUR VINTAGES

2018 A mild, wet spring was followed by a hot, dry and often windy summer, with cool nights in September. Most harvested a top-quality crop, but storms on 15 October damaged vineyards, particularly near Narbonne.

2017 April frosts after a very mild late winter and early spring cut yields, but for those whose vineyards came through unscathed, quality was good.

2016 The driest Languedoc summer since 1944 reduced the crop and led to some raisining, but higher vineyards fared well, with wines of freshness and poise.

2015 After a cold winter and spring, summer was hot and dry, aided by August storms. A good vintage, though not as good as the three that followed.

2014 A very dry spring was followed by hail in Corbières in July, and stormy conditions after that, with some September flooding. A difficult year.

Older vintages

The high-quality wines of 2005 and 2010 are worth a look.

Villages appellation, too: welcome developments. It's still there, anyway; still beautiful, still mysterious, still huge, still offering glimpses of grandeur (see the results of our tasting). Follow them up, and we may see more; and enjoy the value as you go.

Andrew Jefford is a *Decanter* contributing editor and lives with his family near Montpellier ➤

CORBIERES: THE FACTS

Wine styles Red 88%, Rosé 9%, White 3%

Production About 390,000hl, depending on the vintage

Area under vine 10,600ha

Producers 1,210 growers, 23 cooperatives, 221 private cellars

Appellation AP since 1985

Exports 30% (largest markets China and Germany)

Grapes Red & Rosé Carignan, Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Lladoner Pelut, Piquepoul Noir, Terret Noir; White Grenache Blanc, Macabeu, Bourboulenc (locally

called 'Malvoisie'), Marsanne, Roussanne, Rolle (Vermentino), Clairette, Piquepoul, Terret Blanc

Corbières Boutenac

Production (red only) 6,000hl

Area under vine 2,668ha classified; 1,500ha under vine; 165ha in production

Producers Three cooperatives, 28 private cellars

Appellation AP since 2005

Grapes Carignan (30%-50% of blends), Grenache, Mourvèdre

(Source: CIVL)

THE VERDICT

From an appellation that's been unpredictable in the past, our judges found these Languedoc reds full of character and interest, with value to be found in all parts of the region, says **Georgie Hindle**

This was certainly the most successful Corbières tasting I've ever done,' opened Andrew Jefford. Despite not having high expectations, commenting that in the past 'the outstanding wines have been intermittent rather than a regular feature', he said: 'Well under a quarter of the wines could be described as disappointing in some way or another, or even average, so it was a really exciting tasting.'

Justin Howard-Sneyd MW agreed: 'I feel we tasted some top-quality wines. We ended up with a group of seven wines that really stood out, and the three that we rated Outstanding (see *right*) were the ones that we all agreed were most worthy of that accolade.' Frederic Marti was 'surprised and impressed at the overall quality', highlighting the 'expressive, fruit-forward styles' and overall 'brightness' of the wines.

'I had the preconceived idea that the wines would be a bit alcoholic, a bit rich and warm on the palate,' Marti said. 'But I found them to be well balanced and well managed, with real energy and bite.'

In terms of wine styles, Jefford said the Corbières region is 'so big it's hard to generalise', though essentially it rises in the west, where wines benefit from the freshness brought by higher altitudes, while wines from the

lower-lying vineyards in the east are broader and more opulently ripe.

The variation in style was also picked up by Marti, who highlighted the 'duality' of the tasting. 'There was a noticeable difference in the old-school, richer, more flamboyant style of winemaking and the modern, lighter-touch, more refined styles,' he said, though he added that 'all the wines, even at the rich end, were still balanced and drinkable'.

With respect to vintages, the judges were unanimous in their praise for the 2018s, lauding their 'youthful, fruity expression' and 'immediate drinkability'. 'I was expecting to find more from 2017 that were really exciting, but the 2018s were slightly overshadowing them,' said Howard-Sneyd, while Jefford advocated to 'drink them as young as possible'.

Marti also suggested to drink now; 'For me, I'm really happy. I come from the area and sometimes it's difficult to find wines that are so accessible, approachable and drinkable, which is something I was a bit concerned about. I thought there would be chewy tannins, high alcohol and wines that were hard to drink, but I found the complete opposite'.

Value-wise, Howard-Sneyd said: 'It's not an expensive appellation, and a lot of Corbières can be found that are characterful and very affordable. Compared to Australian Shiraz or

'I found these Corbières to be well balanced, with real energy and bite' Frederic Marti

Argentinian Malbec, or any other big, individual style of red, I think you can get a lot more wine for your money.'

Howard-Sneyd continued: 'Not every one's a winner, but it's a good appellation to look at for characterful, quality, interesting wines in that £10-£15 price bracket.' It's a region which 'should appeal to people who are a bit more adventurous, who want to get off that beaten track and explore', he added. 'Even if there's the occasional disappointment, there are some absolute heights to encourage you to keep on exploring.'

If any further endorsement were needed to go out and buy these Corbières wines, Marti hinted that they may soon appear on the wine lists under his management at the five-star 45 Park Lane hotel in London: 'I can't wait to see the names and the prices, because I'd like to get some of these wines on my list now!'

THE SCORES

55 wines tasted
Exceptional 0
Outstanding 3
Highly Recommended 18
Recommended 31
Commended 3
Fair 0
Poor 0
Faulty 0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release AP reds from the Corbières region

THE JUDGES

Justin Howard-Sneyd MW



In 2012 Howard-Sneyd founded The Hive Wine Consulting, after heading up the wine teams at both Direct Wines and Waitrose, and now works as a consultant globally. He is a DWWA joint

Regional Chair for Languedoc-Roussillon, and makes wine with his family and partners at the 4ha Domaine of the Bee estate in Roussillon.

Andrew Jefford



Jefford has been writing about wine since the 1980s, winning many awards. He is a contributing editor to Decanter magazine and writes a widely followed blog for Decanter Premium.

After working as a senior research fellow at Adelaide University from 2009-2010, he now lives with his family in Languedoc, France.

Frederic Marti



Marti is director of wines at five-star 45 Park Lane in London. Born and raised in the south of France, he began as a waiter, working up through Michelin-starred restaurants including

El Bulli in Spain and Le Crillon in Paris, before being appointed to his first head sommelier role at Pollen Street Social in London in 2013.

OUTSTANDING 95–97pts**Castelmaure, Les Hauts de Castelmaure, Corbières 2018**

Decanter average score: 95/100pts **Individual judges' scores:**

Justin Howard-Sneyd MW 92 **Andrew Jefford** 95 **Frederic Marti** 98

£11.95 Excl

Embres-et-Castelmaure is a tiny village in Corbières with about 150 residents, all of whom are grape-growing families and many are members of the local cooperative, which produces this wine. Collectively they own 350ha of vineyards divided into 760 separately managed plots of vines aged up to 80 years. The grapes for Les Hauts de Castelmaure are hand-harvested and vinified using ultra-modern

equipment. The Carignan goes through carbonic maceration to best display the fruit characters before being blended with Syrah and Grenache and transferred into one-, two- and three-year-old barrels to be matured for 10–12 months.

Justin Howard-Sneyd MW Big, ripe nose showing deep sweet kirsch and strawberry jam notes. Some oak vanilla too, and the sweet oak supports some tasty, ripe fruit aromas showing great concentration of ripe fruit. Nice spice on the finish.

Andrew Jefford Refined and compelling aromas of black fruits, fine leather, soft spice and herbal freshness. Concentrated and deep, with a real Languedoc nobility. The tannins are not prolific but well-managed, supple and supportive. Classy, drinkable, very much of its place.

Frederic Marti Yummy! Rich and powerful with a great finish, a touch warming though.

Drink 2021–2025 **Alcohol** 14.5%

**Château Saint-Estève, H de M, Corbières 2017**

95 JH-S 91 AJ 95 FM 98

£14.95 Excl

Château Saint-Estève owes its name to the Chapel of the Virgin built near the abundant spring that still provides the estate with its water. This wine is dedicated to the memory of famous adventurer Henry de Monfreid, grandfather of domaine owner Eric Latham. The Lathams took over the 150-year-old property in 1984 and now own 55ha of vineyards. The Syrah, Carignan, Grenache and Mourvèdre in this blend are grown on chalky clay, southwest-facing hillsides. Hand-harvested, after traditional destemming and fermentation, the wine is aged for six to eight months in oak barrels and bottled without filtration.

JH-S A honeyed cassis note, with vanilla and cinnamon showing evidence of quite a lot of oak in the ageing of this wine – rather too much perhaps? Tannins are still a bit stalky, but the fruit is dying away.

AJ Impressively complex aromas: wild dark plums, forest scrub, thyme and cade. Very beguiling yet classic. Deep, sumptuous and mouthfilling, broad and ripe, though without excessive ripeness. Soft and accessible tannins. Masterful, rich Corbières: excellent. Long, herb-strewn finish.

FM Sweet fruit, rich and spicy, really delicious and pleasant drinking, with a complex mix of layers and fruits.

Drink 2020–2024 **Alc** 14%

**Domaine Serres Mazard, Cuvée Henri Serres, Corbières 2017**

95 JH-S 95AJ 90 FM 99

£11.95 Excl

The Mazard family has a legacy of winemaking dating back to 1545 in the Corbières region. In 1975 it joined a local cooperative of growers with shared values and this group now collectively own 60ha of vineyards between them, with soils made up of rocky clays and limestone. The domaine has recently earned the Level 3 HEV (High Environmental Value) certification, underlining the family's passion for sustainable viticulture alongside producing traditional styles of wine which represent the terroir. This Corbières is made from a blend of Syrah, Carignan and Grenache.

JH-S Aha! Magnificent black-olive nose – very Syrah, but laden with dark oozing fruit, dates, ripe plums and tincture of violets. Big palate. Showy and impressive. The pick of the wines so far, and very 'Corbières'

AJ Dark, dense black red. This is carbonic-maceration style, I believe, but well done: attractive sweet floral notes, honeysuckle and peach. Very much as the aromas suggested on the palate, too: easy-drinking but plenty of richness and velvet, and in a pleasingly ripe style.

FM My personal favourite so far, showing great aromatics and great vibrancy on the nose and palate.

Drink 2020–2022 **Alc** 14% ➤



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HIGHLY RECOMMENDED 90–94pts



Ollieux Romanis, Atal Sia, Corbières-Boutenac 2016

94 JH-S 92 AJ 96 FM 95

£20.25–£25 Exel, Les Caves de Pyrene, The Good Wine Shop

Hugely impressive aromas of black fruits, bergamot, honey and lavender; beautifully pure and perfumed with a fresh, elegant core.

Drink 2020–2026 **Alc** 14.5%



Domaines Barons de Rothschild, Château Ausières, Corbières 2017

93 JH-S 92 AJ 95 FM 92

£27.95 DBM Wines, Laithwaite's, Lay & Wheeler, Slurp
A delicious purity of blackcurrant fruit interwoven with jasmine, wild plum, thyme and lush creamy oak. Mouthwateringly complex and exciting. **Drink** 2020–2027 **Alc** 14.5%



Château Cascadais, Corbières 2016

92 JH-S 90 AJ 91 FM 94

N/A UK www.tourhautcaussan.com

Full of flamboyance, this broad and generous style is a heady combination of dark liquorice notes, menthol, sweet oak and lush fruit.

Drink 2020–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Château Fabre Gasparets, Corbières-Boutenac 2016

92 JH-S 92 AJ 91 FM 92

£19.49–£21 D Byrne & Co, Eynsham Cellars, Hoult's, Noble Green

A delightful fruit basket of cherries, strawberries and plums; the rich, full palate is offset by a lively acid freshness. **Drink** 2020–2028 **Alc** 13.5%



Gérard Bertrand, La Forge, Corbières-Boutenac 2017

92 JH-S 94 AJ 90 FM 92

£51.50–£63 Exel, Great Wines Direct, Hallgarten
A veritable beast! Layer upon layer of blackberry, charred oak, chocolate and savoury olive. Very powerful and concentrated. **Drink** 2020–2026 **Alc** 15%



Castelmaure, Grande Cuvée, Corbières 2017

91 JH-S 90 AJ 93 FM 91

£14.50 (2016) The Wine Society

An intrigue of graceful fruit and floral notes interwoven with a star anise and dark plum sauce richness. **Drink** 2020–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Cellier des Demoiselles, Château de Durfort, Corbières 2017

91 JH-S 92 AJ 91 FM 89

£13.49 Butlers Wine Cellar

A bustling blend of dark, leafy forest fruit, spiced rum, chocolate and vanilla oak. Lively, vibrant and exuberant. **Drink** 2020–2025 **Alc** 14%



Château Camplong, Grande Réserve, Corbières 2018

91 JH-S 91 AJ 88 FM 94

POA Frederick's Wine Co

Big, plush, plum and sweet bramble flavours contrast with a rustic savoury note; rounded and ripe with a freshness on the finish.

Drink 2021–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Château Fontarèche, 1682, Corbières 2018

91 JH-S 87 AJ 92 FM 94

N/A UK www.fontareche.fr

Opulent layers of raspberry compote, vanilla, orange peel and lifted herbal characters with generous tannins and a lush, mouthfilling texture. **Drink** 2020–2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Spencer La Pujade, Le P'tit Spencer, Corbières 2018

91 JH-S 92 AJ 87 FM 94

£11.95 Carte du Vin

Oozing with sweet black fruit and exotic tobacco spice notes. Reminiscent of the garrigue in winter after rainfall. **Drink** 2020–2023 **Alc** 14%



Laurent Miquel, Château Auzines, Les Garrigues, Corbières 2017

91 JH-S 91 AJ 90 FM 91

N/A UK www.laurent-miquel.com

An abundance of boisterous plums and cherries mingled with savoury olive and thyme notes. Close-textured and rewarding.

Drink 2020–2024 **Alc** 14.5%



Les Celliers d'Orfée, Ego in Terra, Corbières 2018

91 JH-S 92 AJ 90 FM 90

N/A UK www.celliersdorfee.com

Beautifully rich and aromatic with lush sweet fruit, ample tannins and an underlying salty twist cutting through. Very well made.

Drink 2020–2024 **Alc** 15%

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (continued) 90–94pts



Château Ardolou, Corbières 2019 90 JH-S 89 AJ 87 FM 94
N/A UK [See Facebook](#)
A perfume of black cherries and plums with a slatey edge and well-furnished, soft tannins. Moreish and fresh. **Drink** 2020–2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Château de Caraguilhes, Prestige, Corbières 2018 90 JH-S 90 AJ 90 FM 89
£15 [Villeneuve Wines](#)
Lovely singing fruit, plush and generous with lots of textured layers and a soft, rounded structure. Polished and long. **Drink** 2020–2024 **Alc** 14.5%



Château Montfin, Vincent, Corbières 2018 90 JH-S 90 AJ 92 FM 88
£14.95 [Joie de Vin](#)
Juicy redcurrant, ripe strawberry underpinned by a thyme-infused, rustic core; a harmonious and very typical style of Corbières. **Drink** 2020–2025 **Alc** 14%



Château Pech-Latt, La Chapelle, Corbières 2018 90 JH-S 88 AJ 93 FM 90
N/A UK [www.pechlatt.bio](#)
Deep, mouthfilling, beautifully pure Syrah-led fruits, an undertone of warmed stones and a herbal sweetness. Enticing and smooth. **Drink** 2020–2024 **Alc** 14%



Château Vaugelas, Le V, Corbières 2014 90 JH-S 90 AJ 90 FM 91
£13.99 [Fine Wine Store](#)
Refined and elegant with subtle new oak and mellow blackberry fruit; a sucessfully aged example of a cooler vintage in Corbières. **Drink** 2020–2024 **Alc** 14%



Famille Bonnafous, Domaine Aquilan, Corbières 2018 90 JH-S 88 AJ 91 FM 90
N/A UK [www.vinadeis.com](#)
Inviting spiced plum and gentle bramble fruit supported by a backbone of old-vine fruit concentration; long, pure and sustained. **Drink** 2021–2024 **Alc** 13.5%

RECOMMENDED 86–89pts

Wine	Score	JH-S	AJ	FM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Calmel & Joseph, Le Roc Les Cuvées Rares, Corbières 2017	89	91	85	90	A concentration of black olive, eucalytus, juniper and rich black fruit. Svelte and compact.	14%	2020–2024	£19.99	Daniel Lambert
Château de Mattes-Sabran, Le Clos Redon, Corbières 2018	89	88	89	90	Stewed plums with hints of coffee and meaty spice; deep and powerful.	14%	2020–2024	N/A UK	www.mattes-sabran.fr
Château du Vieux Parc, La Sélection, Corbières 2016	89	86	92	89	Succulent fruit, honeyed thyme and vanilla with a generous, ample structure.	14%	2020–2026	£14.95–£15.95	Great Western Wine, Jeroboams
Château La Boutignane, La Révélation, Corbières 2018	89	88	91	89	A lavish burst of blueberry pie, sloe, blackcurrant, damson and black cherry.	14.5%	2021–2027	N/A UK	+33 (0)4 68 43 53 46
Domaine Py, Cuvée Antoine, Corbières 2017	89	89	86	91	Mouthwatering savoury cooked meat juices with layers of dark prune and fresh fruit complexity.	13.5%	2020–2024	N/A UK	www.domaine-py.com
Domaines Barons de Rothschild, Blason d’Aussières, Corbières 2017	89	88	91	89	A cascade of pure fruits with a core of menthol; lively yet rounded.	14.5%	2021–2026	£16	C&O Wines, Cheers, Darts Farm, The Oxford Wine Co
The Wine Society, The Society’s, Corbières 2017	89	89	89	88	A wealth of hedgerow berries and damsons with a touch of soft oak.	14.5%	2020–2024	£8.50	The Wine Society
Aubert & Mathieu, Marie Antoinette, Corbières 2018	88	84	88	91	A dark core of peppery fruit with some herbal intrigue. Linear and youthful.	14%	2021–2027	N/A UK	www.aubertetmathieu.com
Castelmaure, La Pompadour, Corbières 2017	88	89	88	87	Opulent late summer berries and autumn leaves; soft and generous.	14.5%	2020–2023	£13.50	Richard Kihl
Château des Crozes, Corbières 2018	88	88	84	92	Broad and juicy with sweet liquorice notes and chewy tea-leaf tannins.	14%	2021–2024	N/A UK	+33 (0)6 81 31 56 32

RECOMMENDED (Continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	JH-S	AJ	FM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Château Drolou, Corbières 2017	88	84	90	89	Ample lush fruits, root spice and fragrant herbs; youthful and lively.	13%	2021-2027	N/A UK	www.advini.com
Château Haut Gléon, Corbières 2016	88	87	87	90	A complexity of exuberant fruit with a rustic Corbières typicity.	13.5%	2020-2024	£24	Fine Wines Direct
Château Vaugelas, Fût de Chêne, Corbières 2018	88	86	88	91	Warming spice and fruit-cake characters with prominent, rounded tannins.	13.5%	2021-2025	N/A UK	m.ceysson@bonfilswines.com
Famille P&J Allard, Château de Lastours, Corbières 2016	88	89	90	85	Vibrant plum compote, lifted acidity and a glowing, curranty finish.	14%	2020-2025	N/A UK	www.chateaudelastours.com
Foncalieu, La Lumière, Corbières 2015	88	89	86	90	Striking kirsch, red fruit and menthol with a mulberry earthiness.	14.5%	2020-2024	N/A UK	www.foncalieu.com
Les Maîtres Vignerons de Cascastel, Héritage de Bonnafous 2017	88	90	83	90	Enticing ripe fruit with a chocolate sweetness and lively acidity.	14%	2020-2022	£15	Watermill Wines
Château Fabre, Cuvée des Jumelles, Corbières 2017	87	87	84	89	Meaty and spicy on the nose with a lush summer-fruit note on the palate.	14.5%	2020-2024	N/A UK	www.famillefabre.com
Château Haute-Fontaine, La Grande Réserve, Corbières 2015	87	88	84	89	Earthy and grassy with a concentrated black-fruit palate and soy-sauce savoury undertones.	14.5%	2020-2024	£9.35	Watlington Fine Wines
Domaine de La Cendrillon, Essentielle, Corbières 2016	87	87	86	89	Lifted red fruits and black pepper, fleshy with soft, ripe tannins.	14%	2020-2024	£12.95	Tanners
Domaine Sainte Croix, Le Fournas, Corbières 2016	87	85	86	89	Robust red fruit with woody hints of pine and lingering acidity.	13.5%	2020-2024	£15.49	Cambridge Wine Merchants, De Burgh Wine Merchants
Dom Ste Marie des Crozes, Les Mains sur les Hanches, Corbières 2018	87	88	85	89	Soft mineral notes with lots of tangy red fruit. Vibrant and fresh.	14.5%	2020-2025	£15	Matthew Clark
Domaine Serres Mazard, Le Bois des Bécasses, Corbières 2017	87	88	85	89	Concentrated, ripe plums with appetising herbal notes, drinking well now.	13.5%	2020-2024	N/A UK	www.vinadeis.com
Famille Fabre, Château de Luc Les Jumelles, Corbières 2017	87	88	85	89	Nicely mature with notes of black olive tapenade and hints of herbaceousness.	14.5%	2021-2026	£15	The Grocery
Paul Mas, Château Jérémie, Corbières 2017	87	87	84	89	Engaging autumnal fruits topped off with sweet, plump raisin notes.	14%	2020-2023	£11.99	Soho Wine Supply
The Way of Wine, Les Herbes Hautes by Jeff Carrel, Corbières 2018	87	85	86	90	Alluring sweet red-cherry fruit, with generous structure and tannins.	13.5%	2020-2024	N/A UK	www.jeffcarrel.com
Castelmaure, Le Rouge Vigneron, Corbières 2017	86	86	87	86	Fragrant red fruit with a twist of bitter almond; deep and intense.	14.5%	2022-2024	£10.40	Tanners
Château La Baronne, Alaric, Corbières 2015	86	86	86	86	A bold, warming, jammy style interspersed with savoury, gamey flavours.	14.5%	2020-2025	POA	Nothing but the Grape, Tiger Vines
Dom Le Champ des Murailles, La Petite Muraille, Corbières 2017	86	86	82	90	Sweet, ripe blackcurrant and bramble fruit with a medicinal edge.	14%	2020-2023	£13.95	Davy's
Domaine Py, Cuvée Mondière, Corbières 2017	86	87	84	87	A crunch of fresh red fruit and a zippy acid bite.	13%	2020-2022	£12.25	Yapp Bros
Famille Sichel, Château Trillol, Corbières 2014	86	88	85	86	Vivid damson and plum fruit with a hint of farmyard and fresh acidity.	13.5%	2020-2024	£15.50-£16.25	Charles Taylor, Christopher Piper, Harrods, Private Cellar
Les Clos Perdus, Cuvée 151, Corbières 2017	86	88	80	89	Bold and energetic juicy, ripe fruit with an attractive finish.	14%	2020-2022	£12.18-£13.55	Field & Fawcett, Justerini & Brooks

COMMENDED 83-85pts
■ **Domaine des Deux Anes, L’Enclos, Corbières 2017** 85, 14%, 2020-2024, POA Iberian Drinks
■ **Domaines Robert Vic, Château Mandirac,**

Corbières 2017 85, 14%, 2020-2021, POA Milton Sandford
■ **Bonfils, Tour d’Autan, Corbières 2017** 84, 13%, 2020-2023, £7.25 Co-op

BAROLO 2006

Stylistically a vintage that divided opinion in its earlier stages, but it came at a significant time for the great Piedmont region. **Stephen Brook** explains the history and character of 2006 in Barolo

Like so many vintages in this complex corner of Piedmont, 2006 had a mixed reception on release. The growing season was complicated. After a cold, wet winter came a hot and dry May, with good weather into early summer. Temperatures cooled in August, but it remained mostly dry until mid-September when there was considerable rainfall. Cooler nights preserved acidity and tannin while most growers waited for drier conditions before harvesting.

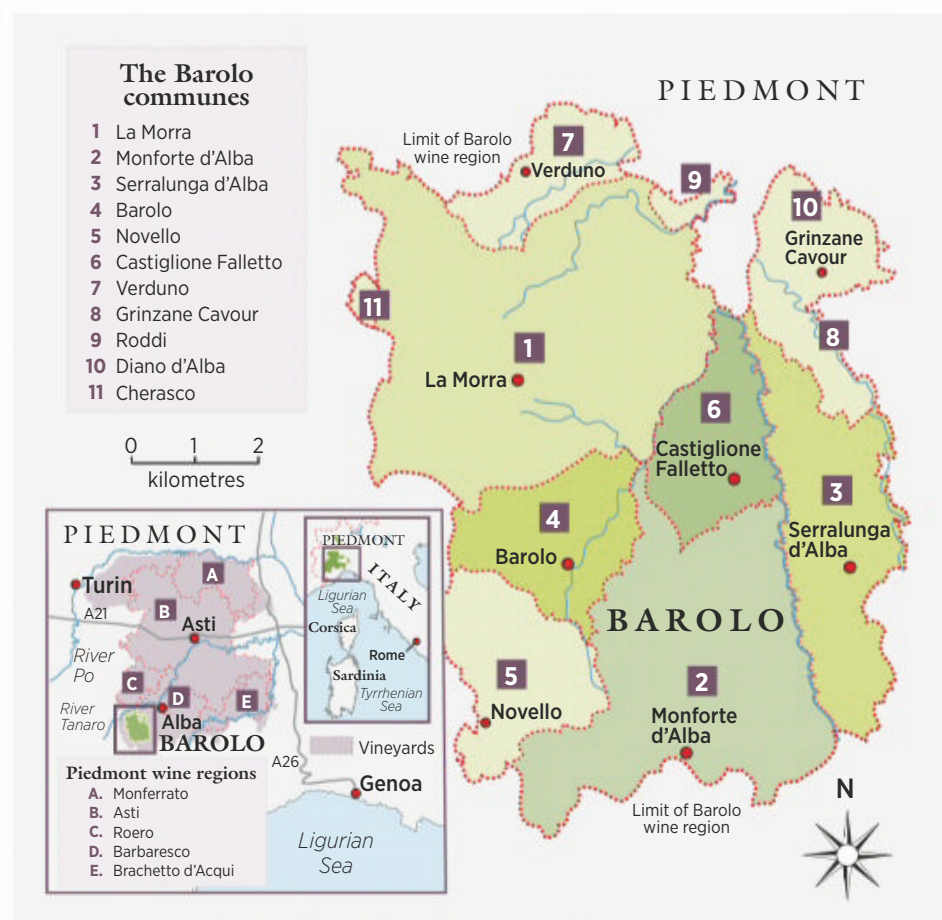
Initial assessments varied. Some acclaimed the wines from Serralunga; others detected greenness in some examples. Monforte and Castiglione Falletto were considered to have been successful, but some found La Morra relatively disappointing.

Most agreed, however, that this was a tannic vintage, with wines that were austere from the outset. Crowd-pleasers they were not, but it was clear they had the potential to age well.

Turning point

The 2006 vintage took place at a transitional moment for Barolo. The much-discussed battle between 'traditionalists', who favoured large neutral casks, and 'modernists', who preferred shorter macerations followed by ageing in barriques, was beginning to calm down – at least in the sense that the distinction between the two styles was becoming blurred. There were still partisans on both sides, but many producers were becoming more flexible and pragmatic when it came to vinification and ageing.

The young wines had not been easy to taste, but they were less punishing than in some previous vintages, when extraction had been pushed much further, and



tannins could overwhelm the palate. Tannin management seems to be the name of the game in 2006, with the top winemakers succeeding in fashioning wines with polish and integrated tannins. Those who were less successful produced overly firm, tannic examples, which in some cases were quite drying. The Riservas were not necessarily superior: although three of the top six wines of this tasting were indeed Riservas, there were also four among the less admired.

2006 is a classic vintage for Barolo. It is less charming than 2004, less fruit-driven than 2007, less intense than 2010, but with rich colours and an appealing and complex sturdiness and structure. Many wines are now mature, in the sense that secondary aromas (wet leaves, bacon, tar) are developing, although many of the best wines still have beguiling red-fruit aromas and a marked floral character. Some do need to be drunk soon, but in this tasting these were in the minority. Most

BAROLO: THE FACTS

DOCG from 1980

Area under vine 2,150ha (100% Nebbiolo)

Production About 14 million bottles per annum

Production zone Principally the communes of Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, La Morra, Monforte and Serralunga d'Alba, plus parts of Cherasco, Diano d'Alba, Grinzane Cavour, Novello, Roddi and Verduno

Ageing rules At least 18 months in wood, with a total ageing of 38 months for Barolo and 62 for Barolo Riserva

wines will cruise on for many years to come.

Given the limited number of wines poured in this tasting, each had to be assessed on its own merits, and the best examples demonstrated freshness and precision with integrated tannins.

BAROLO: KNOW YOUR VINTAGES

2016 ★★★★★ (Not yet released.) Very warm weather in early September and October fully ripened the grapes, which remained healthy. Potentially excellent. Keep.

2015 ★★★★★ Torrid July but cooler, moister August and September brought the grapes to ripeness, especially in Barbaresco. Small crop, charming wines. Keep.

2014 ★★★★★ After a stormy summer, a fine September saved the vintage, although hail did much damage. Yet top growers produced fine, elegant wines. Better in Barbaresco. Keep.

2013 ★★★★★ A cool summer but an abundant crop that needed to be thinned to achieve full ripeness. Fragrant, elegant wines now gaining in structure. Keep.

2012 ★★★★★ Hail and sunburn were among 2012's problems, and growers had to respond adroitly in the vineyards. Some fine wines, but others are soft and forward. Drink or keep.

2011 ★★★★★ Hot, humid conditions led to wines that are ripe and sumptuous, but already beginning to drink well. Excellent in Barbaresco. Drink or keep.

2010 ★★★★★ Superb weather in late summer and September, giving slow ripening. Wines are vibrant and structured, with admirable tension and ageability. Marginally less successful in Barbaresco. Keep.

Stephen Brook is a *Decanter* contributing editor and DWWA Regional Chair for Piedmont ➤

THE VERDICT

Sufficient time has now passed for the quality of the top wines to shine through – the best 2006 Barolos offer both maturity and freshness, says **James Button**, and many will continue to age well

With only 29 wines to be tasted, our judges agreed it was impossible to draw any broad conclusions as to which of the Barolo communes (see p115) performed the best. But in fact, the top 10 featured at least one wine from each of the major Barolo communes, with six wines in all awarded an Outstanding score.

Covering cross-communal blends, single-vineyard (Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive, or MGA) bottlings and Barolo Riservas, our judges were faced with a diverse line-up. Nicolas Clerc MS said he was ‘pleasantly surprised’ by the wines, adding that, ‘although it’s not a vintage I have come across often, I have heard about it a lot – it’s a kind of controversial vintage’.

By the mid-2000s, the disputes within the region among the proponents of ‘traditionalist’ and ‘modernist’ winemaking philosophies (see *Stephen Brook’s introduction*, p115) had in the end become a catalyst for stylistic change.

Aldo Fiordelli explained: ‘The region’s tradition was originally for very extractive styles, but today we have arrived at a less extractive and more balanced style of wine overall.’

‘Barolo 2006 was a bit in the middle, with some examples which are still quite extractive and powerful

compared to other wines which show more freshness and balance.’

Stephen Brook added: ‘I’ve noticed before that, with age – these wines are now 14 years old – what comes through is the quality of the fruit, the quality of the winemaking and the quality of the terroir; not whether the vats were this size or that size.’

‘In the old days they would have been fermenting at extremely high temperatures – they would have been punishing those grapes. They don’t do that any more and it makes a huge difference.’

The performance of the Barolo Riservas sparked a discussion between our judges with respect to producers’ motives in extended ageing. ‘I found the Riservas a bit more difficult to assess, despite the fact that some of them were among the best wines,’ asserted Clerc. ‘I have to question why they are Riserva, though – sometimes the standard length of ageing is enough.’

Brook agreed, stating that there were ‘two or three Riservas which had a power and tension that set them apart from the non-Riservas’, but he was ‘not sure why the majority of this category are labelled as Riservas’.

These 2006 Barolos are ready to drink now, our judges agreed, although they emphasised that the best wines will easily age for another decade. Fiordelli outlined: ‘We don’t expect

‘I’ve heard a lot about 2006 – it’s a kind of controversial vintage’

Nicolas Clerc MS

too much evolution from these wines yet, because Nebbiolo is one of the world’s most ageable varieties, so you would expect freshness alongside a little evolution at this point. And we have this, I think, in the best examples.’

Brook stressed that ‘the best wines have a lot of freshness as well as staying power. But the strong secondary characters in evidence may not please those people who want fruit above all.’

Summing up, Clerc concluded: ‘I think what we had today was quite excellent. The levels of maturity and evolution were there, and I mostly rewarded the wines which were showing a slower evolution, which has always for me been a sign of great wine. The best wines here have retained acidity, precision and gastronomic tannins. Some of them still have the potential to age even longer – I think most of them actually!’

THE SCORES

29 wines tasted
Exceptional 0
Outstanding 6
Highly Recommended 16
Recommended 6
Commended 1
Fair 0
Poor 0
Faulty 0

Entry criteria:
 producers and UK agents were invited to submit their 2006 Barolo wines, either blended or single vineyard, with no limit on price

THE JUDGES

Stephen Brook



Brook is a Decanter contributing editor and the DWWA Regional Chair for Piedmont. The author of almost 40 books in all, he has won several awards for his work in wine. He fully revised

the last two editions of Hugh Johnson’s Wine Companion, and his definitive study The Complete Bordeaux is now in its third edition.

Nicolas Clerc MS



Clerc is a wine buyer for Armit Wines. A Master Sommelier since 2010, he is the current president of the sommelier arm of the UK Academy of Food & Wine Service, and a board member

at the Court of Master Sommeliers Europe. He won UK Sommelier of the Year in 2007.

Aldo Fiordelli



A certified sommelier since 2003, Fiordelli is a widely published Italian journalist, wine writer and author, and a DWWA judge. Editor of the L’Espresso restaurant and wine guide, he also writes

for *Civiltà del Bere*, Italy’s oldest Italian wine magazine. In 2017 he was named Chevalier de l’Ordre des Coteaux de Champagne.

OUTSTANDING 95–97pts



Castello di Verduno, Monvigliero, Riserva

Decanter average score: 97/100pts **Individual judges' scores:**
Stephen Brook 96 **Nicolas Clerc** MS 98 **Aldo Fiordelli** 98

POA Lay & Wheeler

Nebbiolo was first produced at Castello di Verduno in 1838. In the early 20th century, the Burlotto family bought the property, opening a hotel and restaurant which they still own and run. This wine is only produced in exceptional vintages, hand-harvested from a 30-year-old vineyard at 280m on the Monvigliero hill. It was aged for 44 months in Slavonian oak, one month in a steel tank and a further 18 months in bottle.

Stephen Brook Charming on the nose, unusual opulence with red fruits and cherries shining through. Very rich, concentrated and forthright.

Nicolas Clerc MS Delicate and charming nose, complex, distinguished. Ripe, tertiary character of smoke, tar, dry leaves and flowers. Superb and charming. Fleshy and tense, harmonious, superb and really classy.

Aldo Fiordelli Super restrained nose, toasty and smoky notes first, floral and slightly peony aromas, pomegranate fresh fruit. Firm yet velvety tannins at the core, full and powerful, yet with youthful elegant fruit.

Drink 2020–2028 **Alcohol** 15%



Ceretto, Bricco Rocche 95 SB 95 NC 96 AF 95

£210 **Mentzendorff**

The Ceretto winery was established in the 1930s; however, it was a trip to Burgundy in the 1960s that inspired brothers Bruno and Marcello Ceretto to purchase land in Langhe and Roero with a view to creating wines from specific sites, labelling them with individual vineyard names or crus. This wine comes from the prestigious south-facing Castiglione Falletto commune. The family owns the entire 1.46ha plot and built the Bricco Rocche winery in 1982, from which the wine takes its name.

SB Fairly deep red. Raspberries and a hint of bacon on the nose, but it's not tarry and has considerable freshness and lift. Rich and textured, this has fine depth of fruit, intensity, some coffee tones and some Indian spices. Long, chewy finish with a light leathery tone. Complex.

NC Earthy and rustic nose, mineral, stony and restrained, quite distinctive but needs time to open. Huge complexity. Round and fleshy, firm and precise, grippy and generous, very distinctive.

AF Restrained toasty nose, smoky woodland notes. The refined tannin is powerful yet ripe, and the perfect balance gives elegance and a layered finish of liquorice and rhubarb candy, only found in the best examples.

Drink 2020–2028 **Alc** 14% ➤



Poderi Marcarini, Brunate 96 SB 94 NC 98 AF 97

POA Berry Bros & Rudd

The Marcarini family has been producing wine in Piedmont for six generations and owns much of the Brunate vineyard area where the grapes for this Barolo are grown. The 4.5ha site is 300m above sea level and is made up of calcareous clay soils with low-yielding vines between 30–40 years old. The juice and skins undergo a minimum of four weeks' maceration, followed by a period of malolactic fermentation. The wine is then aged in medium-sized oak barrels for at least two years.

SB Fairly deep red, not that evolved. Perfumed red-fruits nose. Quite rich, but there's a welcome fluidity here, concentrated but reasonably fresh, though with a firm tannic backbone. Probably time to drink up.

NC Discreet, earthy and complex, rich and ripe, savoury and tertiary, a real charmer. Fleshy texture, dense, with distinctive tension, a generous finish and stunning tannic structure, firm and distinguished. Superb.

AF Dried flowers, potpourri, Earl Grey, depth of evolved fruit of dried prunes and toasty notes yet with minerality and vibrancy. Full, plenty of liquorice, firm yet condensed tannins, chewy and perfectly balanced.

Drink 2020–2027 **Alc** 14%



Monti, Bussia 95 SB 94 NC 96 AF 94

N/A UK www.paolomonti.com

In 1996, 30-year-old Paolo Monti purchased this historic estate in Monforte d'Alba and with his friend Roberto Gerbino started producing a range of varieties from Nebbiolo to Riesling. They now own 18ha in Langhe. From a site at 280m–300m on limestone-clay soil, the juice is macerated for 10 days; 50% of the wine is then aged for one year in new French oak barriques and 50% in one-year-old barriques, before blending and ageing for a further 18 months in 16hl barrels.

SB Perky, perfumed nose, still with a raspberry character and good lift. Fresh and juicy, this shows no sign of flagging. A hint of tea on the palate, but it's lively and zesty too. Long, well balanced and moreish.

NC Discreet, floral, complex and very charming on the nose. Elegant and distinguished. A subtle blend of tertiary expression and mature fruit. Rich and fleshy, but tense and grippy, it has a generous and harmonious palate, real identity and breeding.

AF Wild strawberry and earthy character, full of rose petal and incense aromas, more austere than obvious. Shows fierce sternness, though the tannin seems to be condensed and mature with great balance to finish.

Drink 2020–2028 **Alc** 14.5%

OUTSTANDING (continued) 95–97pts**Parusso, Bussia, Riserva** 95 SB 95 NC 94 AF 95N/A UK www.parusso.com

Gaspere Parusso acquired his first vineyard in 1901, though it wasn't until the 1980s that the family started producing wine on a commercial basis. Today, it owns 23ha and produces 120,000 bottles per year. The Barolo Bussia comes from the Cascina Rovella vineyard, a sandstone-marl dominant site purchased in 1925 and where the winery is located. Fermented in small oak barrels for 18 months using indigenous yeasts with no sulphites, then aged in the bottle for at least five years.

SB Deep red. Distinctly floral nose, with lush raspberry fruit and a slight meatiness. Rich and sleek, concentrated but still fresh, with plenty of acidity and spice. Bright, energetic, lively and not too extracted.

NC Complex and distinguished, ripe and floral, earthy and pretty nose. Very slow evolution. Distinguished and precise palate, ripe and round, generous and firm. Balanced, harmonious and long.

AF Dense colour and dense on the palate with a 'toastiness' of oak first then depth of red fruit and dried flowers, rhubarb, liquorice, tar, hints of 'framboise sauvage'. Typical, savoury, plenty of youthful character.

Drink 2020–2029 Alc 14%

**Sordo Giovanni, Perno Castiglione Falletto, Riserva** 95 SB 96 NC 94 AF 94N/A UK www.sordogiovanni.it

The Giovanni Sordo estate was founded in 1912 and, with a total of 53ha of vineyards, is the only producer to vinify eight different Barolo crus. The southeast-facing vineyard is at 270m–400m on red clay and sand, vines aged 25–35 years. The family prefers to use large Slavonian oak casks to ensure the wine tastes of the terroir and is not too oaky.

SB Sweet intense raspberry nose, surprising charm and elegance, and only a trace of evolution. Fresh and nimble, with ample finesse.

NC Earthy, delicate nose, restrained chalk, flint and stony notes, forest floor, floral and complex. Tense and fresh, a subtle blend of elegance and power. Pronounced tannins, but harmonious and distinctive.

AF Deep aromas of liquorice, wild strawberry and earthy minerality, supported by firm tannins which start to condense, good freshness, and then straw and blond tobacco on the finish. Not an easy wine due to its austerity, yet full of complexity. Very classic, with great length.

Drink 2020–2027 Alc 14%

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED 90–94pts**Boroli, Villero, Riserva**

93 SB 93 NC 95 AF 90

£90 Top Selection

A finesse of bright fruit and floral notes flow through a palate of firm, velvety tannins, robust structure and subtle elegant length.

Drink 2020–2030 Alc 14%

**Brezza Giacomo & Figli, Sarmassa**

93 SB 94 NC 96 AF 90

N/A UK www.brezza.it

The essence of aged Nebbiolo: charming rose petal and red fruit elegance along with ample acidity and exquisite tannins melting together.

Drink 2020–2029 Alc 14.5%

**Cogno, Ravera** 93 SB 93 NC 93 AF 94N/A UK www.elviocogno.com

Ripe, fleshy damson fruit layered with notes of liquorice, cigar box, tar and truffle; firm, ripe and persistent with a long, mocha finish.

Drink 2020–2028 Alc 14%

**Rivetto, Serralunga**

93 SB 93 NC 96 AF 90

£120 Ellis of Richmond

Fantastic purity of terroir displaying a cured meat, truffle, mineral savouriness with a delicate, precise structure and firm, elegant tannins. Drink 2020–2028 Alc 14%

**Agricola Gian Piero Marrone, Pichemej, Riserva** 92 SB 95 NC 92 AF 90N/A UK www.agricolamarrone.com

Tasted from magnum. Superb strawberry and cherry tones with an earthy, tarry backbone; suave, rounded and generous with great tension and depth. Drink 2020–2030 Alc 14.5%

**Bric Cenciurio, Coste di Rose**

92 SB 93 NC 90 AF 92

N/A UK www.briccenciurio.com

Delicate florals, rustic smoky notes and lively cherries with a refined tannic structure and an exuberant, still youthful elegance.

Drink 2020–2026 Alc 14% ➤

Bodega Monteviejo

GETTING READY TO WINEROCK!

The big day that every rock and Malbec lover is waiting for, Monteviejo WineRock has become one of the best known dates in Mendoza, Argentina since its first edition in 2010. Celebrating its 10th anniversary next April 4th, WineRock is an all-day music festival in the vineyards of Bodega Monteviejo, framed by the vines and Andes mountains. The rock festival is the brainchild of head winemaker at Monteviejo, Marcelo Pelleriti, who has always fostered his passion for music alongside forging a successful career in making wine in Argentina and France. As an end-of-harvest celebration, he started Monteviejo WineRock by inviting musician



WineRock stage among Monteviejo's vineyards



Marcelo Pelleriti pouring Petite Felur Malbec

friends of his, and it snowballed into the hotly attended music festival it is today.

The event is being expanded to foreign regions, holding editions in Buenos Aires, Mexico, soon in Spain and still looking for the next place to go. "The idea is to expand WineRock as a companion to our wines in the countries where we are selling them," says Marcelo Pelleriti.

Marcelo has done vintages for the Péré-Vergé family, who own vineyards and Chateaux in France – Château Montviel, Château La Gravière, Château Le Gay and Château La Violette in Pomerol – and in Argentina – Monteviejo in Mendoza –, since 2001. His life is a tale of two countries, as he splits his time in France and Argentina, trying to achieve winemaking excellence in both. His efforts have been rewarded, and rightfully so, he

is the first winemaker in South America to gain a perfect 100 point score from Robert Parker. Also a true music lover, Marcelo plays guitar when he's not at work during harvest season. It is this love of music which led him to start Monteviejo WineRock.

During the festival, the wine plays a main role and many of Monteviejo's wines can be enjoyed there. Such is the case of its iconic medium range line Petite Fleur. A line of fruity and elegant wines, which carry expressivity and sophistication. This wine is born in Valle de Uco, where the alluvial soils and irrigation with pure meltwater impart a very characteristic minerality and finesse.

For more information about Winerock you can visit the fan page @WineRockOk.



HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (Continued) 90–94pts



Gianfranco Bovio, Gattera
92 SB 91 NC 90 AF 94

POA Decorum Vintners

Layers of dried flowers, prunes, nutmeg, vanilla and cinnamon underpinned by firm tannins, silky texture and amazing length.

Drink 2020–2024 **Alc** 14%



Manzone Giovanni, Gramolere, Riserva 92 SB 94 NC 91 AF 91

N/A UK www.manzonegiovanni.com

With rich imposing flavours of dried prunes, truffles and game, this sleek, powerful and distinctive Barolo has plenty of grandeur.

Drink 2020–2027 **Alc** 14.5%



Mauro Molino, Conca
92 SB 91 NC 92 AF 94

£ 115 Champagnes & Châteaux

Bursting with aromatic herbs and charming cherry and rhubarb flavours; fresh and nimble for its age, with a stylish and persistent finish.

Drink 2020–2025 **Alc** 15%



Cascina Ballarin, Bussia
91 SB 88 NC 92 AF 93

N/A UK www.cascinaballarin.com

Fragrant herbs and vibrant fruit aromas lead onto a sleek and elegant palate that shows powerful tannins and a vanilla chocolate finish.

Drink 2020–2026 **Alc** 14.5%

‘Many of the best 2006s still have beguiling red fruit and a marked floral character’

Stephen Brook



Negretti, Bricco Ambrogio
91 SB 92 NC 89 AF 92

N/A UK www.negrettivini.com

Beautifully polished and complex with notes of smoky game, tea and After Eight chocolates, tense and fleshy with a firm spectrum of tannins. **Drink** 2020–2026 **Alc** 14.5%



Ascheri, Coste & Bricco Podere di Sorano 90 SB 92 NC 90 AF 89

POA Enotria&Coe

Earthy and stony character with lots of woody spice, showing a finesse of finely grained tannins and a lifted persistence on the finish.

Drink 2020–2028 **Alc** 14%



Ca' Rome, Rapet 90 SB 90 NC 92 AF 88

N/A UK www.carome.com

Packed with dark, rich fruit, liquorice notes and roasted coffee; smoky and sleek with a meaty overtone and a rounded texture.

Drink 2020–2027 **Alc** 14.5%



Manzone Giovanni, Bricat
90 SB 91 NC 89 AF 90

£56.68 Lay & Wheeler

Powerful and concentrated with earthy mineral notes and hints of vibrant sweet cherry; solid, firm and full-bodied.

Drink 2020–2026 **Alc** 14.5%



Marchesi di Barolo, Sarmassa
90 SB 92 NC 91 AF 88

£109 Vinissimo

A lively explosion of berry fruit with a saline freshness and grip of refined tannin, and a generous finish. **Drink** 2020–2027 **Alc** 14.5%



Terre del Barolo, Castiglione Falletto 90 SB 89 NC 89 AF 91

N/A UK www.terredelbarolo.com

Distinctive rhubarb and sweet spice with a savoury, mineral edge; delicate and understated with a long, harmonious finish.

Drink 2020–2025 **Alc** 14.5%

Decanter

PREMIUM

See Stephen Brook's Piedmont new releases report, including Barolo 2016s and Barbaresco 2017s, available exclusively on Decanter.com/Premium from late March. Sign up, too, to our new Decanter Premium app, which also gives access to a full archive of *Decanter* issues including panel tastings back to 2012.

RECOMMENDED 86-89pts

Wine	Score	SB	NC	AF	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Batasiolo, Cerequio	89	88	89	90	A complexity of dried prunes, mocha and savoury leaves; velvety, with a tight-knit structure and tannins.	14.5%	2020-2023	£42.44	Mondial Wine
Marchesi di Barolo, Riserva	88	89	88	88	A rustic, earthy character on nose and palate, with notes of macerated flowers and a cigar-smoke maturity.	14%	2020-2024	£54	Vinissimo
Michele Chiarlo, Cerequio, Riserva	88	86	89	88	Ripe, jammy fruit accompanied by warming sweet spice, caramel and chocolate. Generous and broad.	14%	2020-2026	£142.48	Hallgarten Wines, Tannico
Sobrero, Pernanno, Riserva	88	87	90	86	Attractive sweet spice and floral aromas; ripe and rounded palate with a firm, leathery texture.	14%	2020-2023	N/A UK	www.sobrerofrancesco.it
Cordero di Montezemolo, Monfalletto	87	85	88	89	Lifted strawberry fruit and floral notes on the nose with a fleshy, ripe-fruit palate and an earthy finish.	14.5%	2020-2024	N/A UK	www.corderodimontezemolo.com
Poderi Gianni Gagliardo, Archivio Storico Serre, Riserva	87	87	88	87	Gamey, forest floor, a touch of cherry compote and smoky oak with firm, drying tannins.	14%	2020-2023	N/A UK	www.gagliardo.it

COMMEDED 83-85pts
■ Boroli, Cerequio 82, 14%, 2020, £70 Top Selection

NEXT MONTH’S PANEL TASTINGS
Chianti Classico Riserva and
Gran Selezione 2015 & 2016;
Valpolicella Ripasso and
Veronese Ripasso-style reds

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ALTO ADIGE

Northeast Italy's verdant alpine region has a reputation for fresh, pristine white wines, but its rocky slopes are producing impressive reds too. **Michael Garner** selects his favourites from both camps



The biennial Wine Summit in Bolzano is more than just another anteprima tasting. Seminars and winery tours form an integral part of the event, providing the background knowledge for a better-informed approach to the 200 or so new releases available to taste. The unique conditions of the Alto Adige's jaw-dropping vineyard scenery – climate, topography and altitude – are the key feature.

An extraordinary turnaround since the 1980s has seen the area transformed from a supplier of anonymous,

mainly red, bulk wine into Italy's most exciting source of fine whites. While international grapes like Chardonnay and Sauvignon paved the way, nowadays the stunning cocktail of freshness, aroma and structure that varieties such as Gewürztraminer, Pinot Bianco and Riesling deliver with such grace takes centre stage. Even Pinot Grigio can produce something special.

Meanwhile, heading along the autostrada from Bolzano up the Isarco valley (or Eisacktal, as it is frequently called in this quintessentially bilingual area) towards the Brenner Pass, Italy's northernmost



Cantina Tramin, Epokale Gewürztraminer Spätlese, Alto Adige 2013 98

POA Hallgarten Wines

Once bottled, this is aged for a further four years at 4km below ground. Despite its depth of flavour, plus 45g/L residual sugar, it's light on its feet. Exquisite. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 13%



Ignaz Niedrist, Berg Pinot Bianco, Südtirol 2018 96

POA Astrum Wine Cellars

From low-yielding vines at 600m on Appiano's famous Monte hillside, Ignaz Niedrist produces a textbook Pinot Bianco. Vibrant and floral-toned. Sumptuous yellow-fruit characters and ageing potential. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 14%



Markus Prackwieser, Praesulis Weissburgunder, Alto Adige Valle Isarco 2017 96

£20.50 (2016) Arthouse Wine

A wizard with Pinot Bianco, Prackwieser always conjures up something special. A wine of precision, with aromas of preserved lemon and white flowers. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%



Cantina Tramin, Troy Riserva Chardonnay, Alto Adige 2016 95

POA Hallgarten Wines

Exemplary Chardonnay which balances 'rich and ripe' with 'fresh and lively' in the classic alpine style. Clever use of oak and salty mineral tones to the finish add extra depth. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Cantina Valle Isarco, Sabiona Kerner, Alto Adige Valle Isarco 2018 95

£42 Astrum Wine Cellars

Sabiona monastery is surrounded by one of Italy's most beautiful vineyards. The wine lives up to the setting, with grapefruit, passion fruit, mint and flowers. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 15.5%



Köfererhof, Riesling, Alto Adige Valle Isarco 2013 95

N/A UK www.koefererhof.it

Günter Kerschbaumer makes great wines, but you sense that his 'baby' is Riesling. His 2013 is still incredibly fresh and juicy. Bottle age has accentuated the wine's depth and length, bringing finesse. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 12.5%



Pacherhof, Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige Valle Isarco 2018 95

£19.20 Italvinus

From vines grown at up to 900m, this stunning Pinot Grigio almost reinvents the variety. Rich and spicy, with purity of fruit and partial oak fermentation. Finish of candied pear and toasted hazelnut. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Pacherhof, Alte Reben Sylvaner, Alto Adige Valle Isarco 2018 95

N/A UK www.pacherhof.com

From 40- to 45-year-old vines and partially fermented in acacia barrels. Classic alpine splendour. Voluptuous, spicy green-fruit aromas and a tapering palate. Mineral-toned, soft fruit finish. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 13.5%



Tiefenbrunner, Feldmarschall von Fenner Müller-Thurgau, Alto Adige 2018 95

£40-£44.54 (2017) Armit, Christopher Keiller, Hic

Surprisingly rich: jasmine, green tea, nutmeg aromas. It will continue to develop beautifully in bottle, too. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

vineyards produce outstanding examples of the less fashionable Müller-Thurgau, Sylvaner, Kerner and Grüner Veltliner at altitudes of up to 1,000 metres. Think ‘as clean and fresh as a mountain stream’.

While the higher vineyards clinging to the rocky slopes seem predestined to produce fine white wines, more surprising perhaps is the commendable surge in quality of the reds. Again, international grapes have played an important role. Mumelter Riserva, a Cabernet Sauvignon from excellent local cooperative Cantina Bolzano, even won a 2019 Decanter World Wine Awards Best in Show trophy. Similarly, the Alto Adige enjoys a burgeoning reputation for Italy’s finest Pinot Nero (Pinot Noir), primarily on the cooler, west-facing slopes of the Adige valley around the villages of Mazzon and Montagna.

As with the whites, attention is turning back towards the red grapes traditionally associated with the area. The variety behind those oceans of anonymous bulk red,

Schiava (Vernatsch in German), is undergoing a radical shift in favour. Experiments with lower yields and vines grown in different types of *terreno* (the Italian word for terroir) are beginning to tease out unexpectedly impressive nuances from this working-class hero.

Preferring the lower altitudes around the area’s principal city of Bolzano, the other important indigenous red grape is Lagrein. Until just a few decades ago, the variety was mainly used to produce Kretzer (a rosé wine) but nowadays the pendulum has swung the other way and 80% of Lagrein is made into a full-bodied red that’s usually at its best by its 10th birthday.

Still, if the Alto Adige has an iconic wine, it has to be Pinot Bianco (Weissburgunder). Its unique combination of scintillating freshness and juicy ripeness seems to encapsulate the best of this remarkable area. Add in the wine’s undoubted ageing capacity, and its true potential becomes as clear as the alpine sky.

Michael Garner is a co-owner of Italian wine specialist Tria Wines, and DWWA Regional Chair for northern Italy



Tiefenbrunner, Rachtl Riserva Sauvignon Blanc, Alto Adige 2017 95

POA Armit

Symphonic, from a tiny plot near Fiè allo Sciliar in the Isarco valley. A crescendo of pineapple, lime and kiwi aromas, with notes of rosemary, mint and ginger. **Drink 2020-2027 Alc 13.5%**



Cantina Terlan, Nova Domus Riserva, Alto Adige Terlano 2017 94

POA Astrum Wine Cellars, Hedonism, Huntsworth Wine Co, Harrogate Fine Wine Co

Terlano is the prototype of the area’s white blends. Mineral-toned fruit with pinpoint acidity and style. **Drink 2022-2035 Alc 14%**



Cantina Valle Isarco, Aristos Grüner Veltliner, Alto Adige Valle Isarco 2018 94

£24 Astrum Wine Cellars

Grüner Veltliner makes a scented wine here: sweet spice, fresh herbs, greengage, marron glacé, plus white pepper. 50% fermented in large acacia barrels. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14%**



Gottardi, Südtiroler Blauburgunder 2016 97

POA Les Caves de Pyrene

Alexander Gottardi’s first time using whole-bunch fermentation has paid off. Bewitching aromas and a balanced palate. Graceful, supple and long. On this showing, Italy’s top Pinot Nero. **Drink 2022-2035 Alc 14%**



Cantina Bolzano, Mumelter Riserva, Alto Adige 2016 95

POA Mondial Wine

Compelling Cabernet from vineyards close to Bolzano. Juicy and expressive aromas of cassis, molasses and eucalyptus, and a velvety palate with lightly seasoned oak notes. Hugely impressive. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14.5%**



Ignaz Niedrist, Pinot Nero vom Kalk, Südtirol 2016 94

£65 Astrum Wine Cellars, Christopher Keiller

Pinot Nero can also work well on the Appiano Monte hillside. From low-yielding vines, this is suave and round with lashings of caramelised red fruit and sweet, ripe tannins. Should age really well. **Drink 2022-2030 Alc 14.5%**



Muri-Gries, Abtei Muri Riserva Lagrein, Alto Adige 2011 94

N/A UK www.muri-gries.com

Classic Lagrein at the peak of its maturity: a heady mix of blackberry, loganberry, dark chocolate, liquorice and tobacco with the ripe but slightly rustic tannins typical of the variety. Firm and satisfying. **Drink 2019-2022 Alc 13.5%**



Hartmann Donà, Liquid Stone Granit, Mitterberg 2018 93

N/A UK www.hartmannadona.it

A distinctive, original take on Schiava grown at 500m near Merano. Fragrant, almost floral red-fruit aromas and flavours with liquorice and woodsmoke. Poised and stylish. Almost Pinot Nero-like. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 12.5%**



Untermoserhof, Hub, Südtirol St Magdalener Classico 2018 93

POA Les Caves de Pyrene

Delightful example of a denomination once feted by Mussolini. Mostly Schiava with 5% Lagrein. A lighter-bodied red: fresh, lively and intense with marzipan, loganberry, violets and a hint of liquorice. **Drink 2020-2023 Alc 13.5%**

FIRST TASTE: DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI 2017

This hot vintage has divided opinion, but the wines from Burgundy's most vaunted estate could reap rewards for those who are lucky enough to get hold of any, says **Tim Atkin MW**

We ask that you taste in silence', said the sign by the door, alongside a further request to refrain from snapping selfies or bottle shots. Those entreaties were in vain: social media was full of attendees' photos and, even though the packed room was quiet and respectful, conversation was still audible, not least between Aubert de Villaine, DRC's esteemed co-manager, and journalists who wanted to discuss the vintage.

Welcome to the annual tasting of the new releases from the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Burgundy's most famous and prestigious domaine, held in the basement of UK importer Corney & Barrow's offices near Tower Bridge in central London.

His verdict? 'A classic, elegant year' that stands out from the more concentrated wines produced in 2015, 2016 and yet-to-be-released 2018 and 2019. More poetically perhaps, his nephew, Bertrand de Villaine, said the wines were 'like a young musician, whose talent is already apparent but needs more time to mature and develop'.

In Burgundy, it must be said that 2017 is not a vintage with a stellar reputation. When the majority of the Côte d'Or reds were offered en primeur a year ago, they were rightly described as fruity, bright, juicy and approachable young. More dismissive Burgundians called them 'restaurant wines', ideal to sell through comparatively quickly.

Aubert de Villaine, on the other hand, has always maintained that this was a 'superb harvest'. Was the great man right after all? It was time to find out.

Increased yields

But first, a little background. By the standards of some recent harvests, quantities were generous at DRC in 2017, partly as a result of vines over-compensating for the frost damage in 2016, especially in Echézeaux and Grands Echézeaux, which were nearly wiped out. This means that there is more wine to go round this year.

All seven red grands crus produced more than 30hl/ha and Grands Echézeaux hit 41hl/ha. It could easily have been otherwise, as spring frosts struck again between 27-29 April. This time, vignerons in Vosne-Romanée and other villages saw off the threat by burning bales of straw to create a protective layer of smoke above the vines. Greta Thunberg might not approve, but Burgundy lovers certainly do.



Above: Aubert de Villaine, co-director of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

Right: harvesting Pinot Noir grapes in Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's La Tâche vineyard at Vosne-Romanée

Demand always outruns supply at DRC, even though the wines are undeniably expensive. The Romanée-Conti 2017, for example, is being offered at £3,000 a bottle in bond (see p122), which seems astronomical until you see the line of people queuing up to buy it. At least Corney & Barrow has slightly reduced the release prices for all of the wines compared with the 2016s. Small mercies and all that, as the cheapest grand cru, Corton, is still £300, compared with the 2016's £310 starting price.

The latest in a series of growing seasons marked by climate change, 2017 was a hot, early vintage, with thermometers hitting 39°C in Vosne-Romanée on 21 June and a further heat spike at the end of August. But partly because of the large crop – reduced, it must be said, by bunch thinning in some parcels – the wines don't taste over-concentrated or figgy. Indeed, quite the opposite. These are elegant, charming, fine-boned wines for people who like understated red Burgundies. They may not have the structure for long ageing in most cases, but I think they could surprise us as they evolve and mature.

Subtle qualities

Since I tasted the wines in barrel at the domaine in October 2018, they have gained a little in weight and concentration, but these are still comparatively light on their feet. La Tâche in particular is more forward at this early stage of its development than it can be. Romanée-Conti will probably age the longest of the septet, with Romanée-St-Vivant not far behind.

So, was Aubert de Villaine, writing just after the grapes had been picked, justified in calling the harvest 'superb'? Yes and no. In style, the wines remind me of a combination of 2007, 2011 and 2014, showing ample fruit, good freshness and minerality, and clear differences between the terroirs.

2016 was a superior vintage at DRC, but not by much. 2017 will have its fans, and deservedly so. And this time, there's more wine available. You just have to secure an allocation. ➤

'These are elegant, charming, fine-boned wines for people who like understated red Burgundies'



Rare taste: Atkin's verdict on the DRC 2017s

① **La Tâche Grand Cru Monopole 2017** 98 £970 (ib) Corney & Barrow

The La Tâche was the palest of all the DRC 2017s, almost to the point of transparency. This is a floral, open-knit expression of the monopole grand cru, which is very far from being a blockbuster this year. Scented and appealing, with notes of dried rose petals, fresh leather and peat smoke on the nose, then lots of whole-bunch spice and structure, racy acidity, a hint of salinity, succulent red-berry fruit and remarkable palate length. A layered, understated red. **Drink 2029-2037 Alc 13%**

② **Romanée-Conti Grand Cru Monopole 2017** 98 £3,000 (ib) Corney & Barrow

This has gained in weight and intensity since I tasted it from barrel in October 2018, but it's still innately graceful: a string quartet rather than a full orchestra perhaps. On the nose, aromas of incense, fresh tobacco and forest floor are complemented by sweet spices and stylish new oak. The palate is layered, refined and savoury, gaining in intensity on the tongue and finishing clean, bright and refreshing with the promise of greater things to come. Stunning. **Drink 2029-2040 Alc 13%**

③ **Romanée-St-Vivant Grand Cru 2017** 97 £920 (ib) Corney & Barrow

Bertrand de Villaine sometimes refers to Romanée-St-Vivant as 'monastic' and

there can indeed be a taut, almost ascetic note to the wine when it's young. This is the tightest and most focused of the 2017 DRC wines, showing subtle, struck-match reduction, chalky top notes and subtle whole-bunch aromas of clove and aniseed. The palate is refined, refreshing and almost mouthwatering, with red-cherry and wild-strawberry fruit, underlying tension and wonderful length. **Drink 2029-2037 Alc 13%**

④ **Corton Grand Cru 2017** 96

£300 (ib) Corney & Barrow

Still blended from the Les Renardes, Bressandes and Clos du Roi grands crus – the original idea in 2008 was to produce three separate wines – this Corton is appreciably more than the sum of its parts. Floral, direct and engaging, at least by the standards of many Cortons, it arguably reflects its producer as much as its terroir, with clove spice from 75% whole bunches, subtle wood and a long, engaging, refreshing finish. **Drink 2025-2035 Alc 13%**

⑤ **Grands-Echézeaux Grand Cru 2017** 96

£545 (ib) Corney & Barrow

Showing more colour as well as more weight and intensity than the Echézeaux, as it often does, this is also a much more complete, harmonious wine with more flesh on its bones. Stony, stemmy and peppery, it handles its 100% whole bunches with style. A hint of good

reduction and leafy, autumnal, forest-floor aromatics segue into a palate that has fine-grained new oak, refreshing minerality and sweet, beguiling, wild-strawberry fruit. **Drink 2027-2035 Alc 13%**

⑥ **Richebourg Grand Cru 2017** 96

£850 (ib) Corney & Barrow

Richebourg can often be quite closed at this early point in its development, but the comparative brightness and charm of the 2017 vintage are apparent here too. Earthy, savoury, slightly animal aromas with some fresh tobacco notes from whole-bunch fermentation lead you into a palate that is sappy, chiselled and focused, showing notes of pomegranate, redcurrant and citrus fruits, with scented framing oak and impressive underlying grip, intensity and depth. **Drink 2027-2037 Alc 13%**

⑦ **Echézeaux Grand Cru 2017** 94

£366 (ib) Corney & Barrow

Delicate, light and pale in colour, this pure, scented Echézeaux shows how well the vines bounced back from the catastrophic 2016 harvest, when frost resulted in super-concentrated yields of only 6hl/ha. Spicy, savoury and appealingly perfumed, with notes of red berries, fresh tobacco and green malt from 75% whole-cluster fermentation, medium weight, sappy tannins, redcurrant and raspberry fruit and a slightly bitter, almost medicinal undertone. **Drink 2025-2032 Alc 13% D**





CHÂTEAU
GRAND-PUY-LACOSTE

Grand Cru Classé en 1855 - Pauillac

THE PELOPONNESE, GREECE

Ancient wonders, magnificent landscapes and diverse wines made with dedication, from local varieties – this dramatic peninsula in the south of mainland Greece has much to offer the adventurous traveller. Make the most of a holiday here with a wine-focused road trip, says **Ines Salpico**



FACT FILE: PELOPONNESE

Area planted
19,400ha,
responsible for
31% of total Greek
wine production
**Indigenous
varieties** 91% of
total plantings
Wineries 180, with
plots at altitudes
ranging from
30m-1,000m
above sea level

(Source: Greek Ministry of
Agriculture; Wines of
Greece)

The Peloponnese peninsula, set in the heart of the Mediterranean south from mainland Greece, is a multifaceted territory, impossible to fully grasp if you only visit once. Vast and fascinating in equal measures, its landscape changes dramatically throughout the seasons and its sub-regions offer such a wide array of landscapes and interest points that you'll easily be seduced to return.

Above all, the Peloponnese challenges the easy stereotypes of what Greece offers to visitors: warm seas, sun-drenched white terraces, fresh seafood... Yes, there is all of that, in abundance, but there are also snow-peaked mountains, endless architectural and historical landmarks, tempting local meat dishes, extreme sports havens. And there is, of course, the wine. The Peloponnese is home to the largest number of Greek wine PDOs, and its strategic location and the variety of its

‘The strategic location of the Peloponnese and the variety of its terroirs have made it an area of diverse wine production’

terroirs have made it an area of intense and diverse wine production since ancient times.

So how, as a first-time visitor, should you approach the region and start discovering its hidden treasures? The key advice is to trust the locals and stay away from the touristy hotspots that give a pale idea of the region's true character. As appealing as it might sound to fly to Kalamata and settle on a seaside resort in the south Peloponnese, a more adventurous exploration will have its rewards – especially for the wine-loving traveller.

Ancient & modern

Fly to Athens instead, rent a car and start your journey by enjoying the less-than-two-hour ➤

Left: the view of the seaport town of Nafplio, as observed from the Venetian-era Palamidi fortress

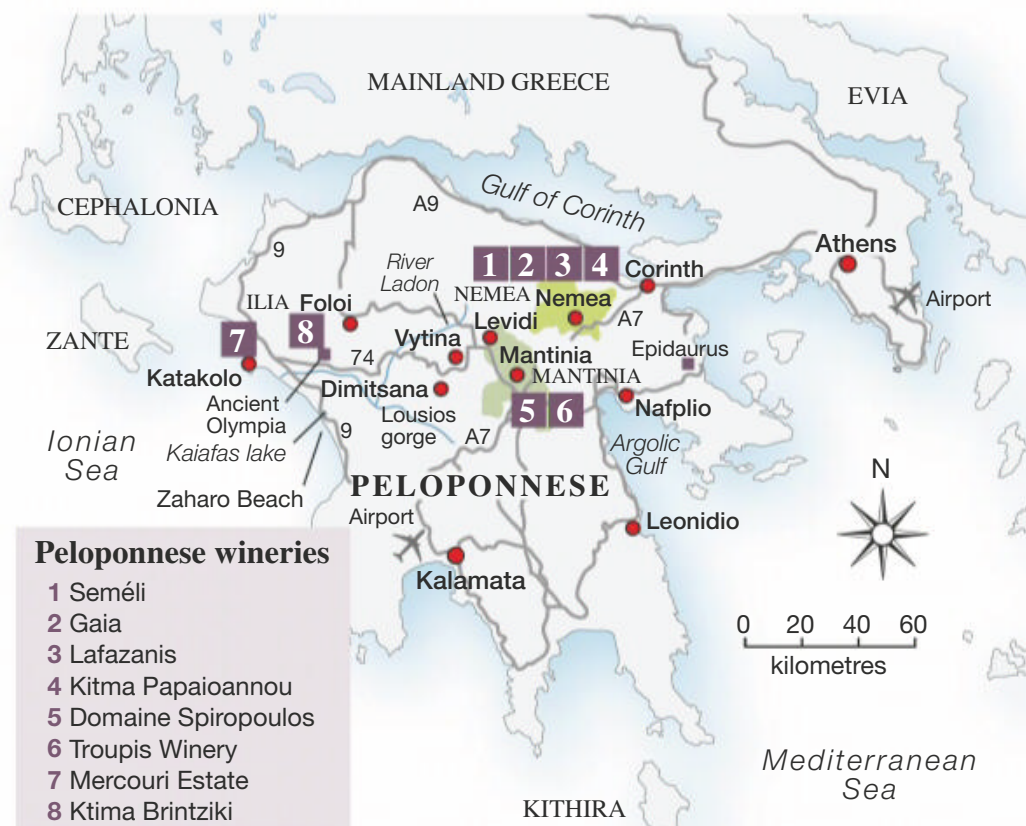
GETTING THERE

Both easyJet and Aegean Airlines fly to Kalamata in the south Peloponnese (only twice a week September-May, three times a week May-September), as well as Athens (daily flights). The best option might be flying to Athens and driving to the Peloponnese across the Isthmus of Corinth: the approach to the peninsula is beautiful, and you'll need a car to explore the vast region.



drive that takes you from the capital, through the Isthmus of Corinth and on to Nafplio, a seaport town perched over the Mediterranean on the north side of the Argolic gulf. Nafplio was, between 1823 and 1834, the first capital of the new-born Greek state, and its picturesque centre is full of both ancient and modern historical cues. A short 30-minute drive from Nafplio is the ancient theatre of Epidauros, considered one of the greatest architectural achievements of classical Greece – and an absolute must-see.

Both Nafplio and Epidauros are great places to stay for two or three nights while you explore the eastern Peloponnese. A compulsory day trip is a visit to the city of Nemea, just a 40-minute drive from Nafplio. Nemea is the epicentre of the wine appellation of the same name, one of the most important in Greece, producing intense reds made exclusively from the local Agiorgitiko variety.



Peloponnese wineries

- 1 Seméli
- 2 Gaia
- 3 Lafazanis
- 4 Kitma Papaioannou
- 5 Domaine Spiropoulos
- 6 Troupis Winery
- 7 Mercouri Estate
- 8 Ktima Brintziki

‘The local PDO wines are aromatic, vibrant and have mouthwatering acidity’

Below: Seméli vineyards and winery

Here, you will find no shortage of renowned wineries that organise tastings and tours, including **Seméli** (www.semeliestate.gr), **Gaia** (www.gaiawines.gr) and **Lafazanis** (www.lafazanis.gr). And although the **Ktima Papaioannou** (www.papaioannouwines.gr) winery doesn't routinely offer tours, you should also try to pay a visit – it's a historical producer and the true pioneer of Nemea, Agiorgitiko and organic farming in Greece.

From Nemea, make your way – an easy 40-minute drive – to Mantinia, another lovely town and interesting wine appellation, sitting on the mountainous core of the Peloponnese. The local PDO wines, made from at least 85% of the indigenous pink-skinned Moschofilero grown at high altitude, are aromatic, vibrant and have mouthwatering acidity. **Domaine Spiropoulos** (www.domainspiropoulos.com) and **Troupis Winery** (www.troupiswinery.gr), two of Mantinia's most prominent estates, are well worth visiting.

After wine tasting, what better than to investigate the local food? The nearby village of Vytina is known for its traditional feta cheese producers and exquisite honey, laboriously made by busy bees in the surrounding hills. From there you can easily reach the quaint Dimitsana, a quintessential stone-built Arcadian settlement, and the ➤



My perfect day in the Peloponnese

MORNING

Start with a long breakfast at **Villa Vager*** in Levidi. It's easy to over-indulge, but hold back – there's plenty more food and wine to come. Then it's off to Vytina (a 20-minute drive along 19km of winding roads) to spend a morning shopping for local produce, including artisanal feta, honey and herbs. You'll almost certainly buy more than you should.



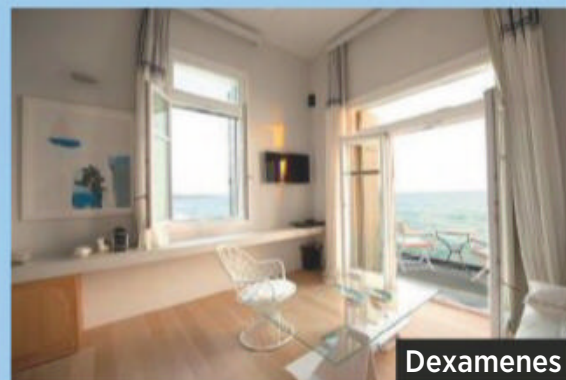
Vytina

LUNCH & AFTERNOON

Another 20 minutes behind the wheel takes you to Dimitsana for lunch at **Zérsoba*** taverna. The restaurant is known for its meat dishes (best enjoyed when the mountains outside are covered in snow), which pair well with aged Agiorgitiko from **Ktima Papaioannou** (buy a few bottles at the estate in Nemea the day before: see p126). After lunch, a 90-minute drive brings you to **Ktima Brintziki** (www.brintzikis.com) for a tour, a tasting and views of the Enipeas valley. Hear all about the last harvest and taste the new release of the winery's Augoustiatis: a rare, indigenous red.

EVENING

When the sun starts to set, ask where to go to enjoy freshly cooked fish by the sea. You'll be directed to one of the local



Dexamenes

tavernas in Katakolo, 27km from the winery. The soft Mediterranean breeze will be a gentle reminder to head to the last stop of the day, the **Dexamenes Seaside Hotel***, just 20 minutes away. Once you've settled into your room, have a nightcap overlooking the calm sea while deciding what to do tomorrow.

For details of entries marked with an asterisk (), please see p129*

Seafront tavernas and marina at Katakolo





Vines and ruins at one of Ktima Papaioannou's organic vineyards

nearby Lousios gorge monastery trail. The dramatic canyon along the river Lousios has its quasi-vertical walls dotted with the Prodromou monastery, as well as the ancient and modern Philosophou monasteries. Along the way, you'll also find the ancient Arcadian city of Gorys, making it one of the most beautiful and interesting hikes in Europe.

The central Peloponnese is a great destination for foodies, history nerds and adventure-sports freaks alike. The limestone escarpments around the town of Leonidio offer impressive climbing challenges, the river Ladon is famous for rafting, and the village of Foloï, located in a nature reserve, offers beautifully scenic trekking routes.

Seaside sightseeing

After a few days of challenge and indulgence, it's time to head west to the coastal area of Ilia, where locals go to enjoy the seaside, away from the crowds and the shadows of cruise ships. There, you'll easily find small, secluded beaches where Greek is the only language spoken. The Kaiafas lake (which has natural sulphur-rich hot springs) and the nearby beach of Zacharo, a long expanse of bright, thin sand, are two of the most idyllic spots to spend a full day simply enjoying the healing powers of the sun and the water.

Ilia is also – and perhaps above all – a historical and archaeological treasure trove. The list of places to visit is almost endless, but among the unmissable is the archaeological site of Olympia, one of the most important complexes of ancient Greece, the cradle of the Olympic games and the backdrop to the iconic altar of Zeus. Also worth visiting are the temple of Apollo Epicurius, part of the Bassae archaeological site, and the Chlemoutsï castle, a medieval fortress on the westernmost promontory of the Peloponnese, offering impressive views of the Ionian sea and surrounded by a beautiful hexagonal keep.

In Ilia, sightseeing is easily paired with great wine tasting. The historic **Mercouri Estate** (www.mercouri.gr), founded in 1864, makes some of the best wines in the Peloponnese and a visit is therefore obligatory. There are also very interesting smaller estates, such as **Ktima Brintziki** (www.brintzikis.com), making delicious bottles while adhering to an ethos of sustainability.

And finally, at the end of each day, there are, of course, the dramatic sunsets over the Ionian sea. **D**

Ines Salpico is a Lisbon-born, London-based wine writer and consultant. She contributes to multiple publications, organises tastings and manages The Wine Gang events and website

Your Peloponnese address book



Agroktima

ACCOMMODATION

Agroktima, Leonidio

A stylish, traditional property at the foot of the imposing Mount Parnon, with carefully built stone guesthouses, this makes an ideal place to stay for all those wanting to explore the best climbing and hiking spots in and around Leonidio. www.agroktima.com

Asfendamos, Zacharo

Lovely self-catering holiday homes amid olive groves and orange trees. The Kaiafas lake and thermal springs (see left) are a stone's throw away, and the archaeological site of Olympia is just 15 miles to the north. There's a beautiful, secluded wild beach that you can reach through a pine forest. www.asfendamos.gr

Dexamenes Seaside Hotel, Amaliada

A thoughtfully designed boutique resort, located on a converted post-war winery right on the coast. It's a great base to explore all of Ilia – although you might be persuaded to just relax and stay put... www.dexamenes.com

Mouria, Epidaurus

With a name meaning 'mulberry tree', this is a lovely, family-run business with rooms and a fantastic restaurant where you'll truly feel at home. www.mouria.gr



Mouria

Villa Vager, Levidi

The best place to stay in the central Peloponnese. The rooms are beautiful, the breakfast is outstanding and the service is impeccable. They also organise wine tours and cooking lessons. www.hotelvager.gr

RESTAURANTS

Kati Psenete, Kakovatos

A great tavern on Kakovatos beach, south from Zacharo, with all the fresh produce you might expect and a vibrant, friendly atmosphere. [+30 2625 032 147](tel:+302625032147)

Savouras Fish Tavern, Napflïo

Beloved by locals, this is the must-go place to make the most of the excellent service and super-fresh fish. www.savouras.gr



Savouras

Taverna Hani, Parga

An authentic Peloponnesian taverna (warning: website and menus only available in Greek!). The ideal fuelling point when driving from Nemea to Mantinia. Properly old school and delicious. www.taverna-hani.gr

Taverna H Klimataria, Vytina

After some feta and honey tasting (and loading up to take home: see p127), you'll want to visit this outstanding tavern for proper nourishment. Reservation recommended! [+30 2795 022 226](tel:+302795022226)

Zérzoba, Dimitsana

This taverna offers comforting, traditional central-Peloponnese cuisine made exclusively with local, seasonal produce. The best place to replenish your energy after a long hike along the Lousios gorge. [+30 6932 847 358](tel:+306932847358)

Photographs: www.agroktima.com; www.mouria.gr; www.savouras.gr

A city tram passes
by Christ Church
Cathedral, as it
was before the
2011 earthquake





Jo Bates

MY CHRISTCHURCH

In the face of adversity, this New Zealand city has rebuilt itself with community at its foundation – evident in its welcoming restaurants, wine bars and destination wineries. It's an exciting time to visit, says **Jo Bates**

Momentum is gathering in Christchurch that will shake off any unwanted monikers associated with the earthquakes that have reshaped New Zealand's southern city. Nearly 10 years into its recovery, a new city and skyline are forming.

The city changes daily as buildings are completed and heritage treasures restored. Neo-Gothic civic buildings and modernist gems were felled in 2011, but enough remain that the landscape is still aesthetically rich.

Yet perhaps it's the less tangible forces emerging from the rubble that are truly shaping the city.

Christchurch had earned a reputation for conservatism. When the chandeliers and chimneys came down in the quakes, the social barriers fell too. Conduits for new ways of thinking burst forth.

Yet while this new course was well underway, the city was hit again – this time by a terror attack in March 2019

that targeted the Muslim community. The nation went into shock as 51 people were killed by a lone gunman. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern responded with compassion, and the people of Christchurch doubled down and opened their hearts and homes to their Muslim neighbours.

It's a lot for a city to endure, let alone overcome. However, many locals say that the new social fabric is far more sustainable. The city will never be the same, nor does it want to be. The energy and dynamism is palpable – the groundswell is that anything can be achieved, which makes Christchurch an exciting place to be right now.

There's much to do in the city itself, the ocean is a 20-minute drive east, and the North Canterbury wine region is less than an hour's drive north.

Exploring the coast is a must, and the Godley Head walkway is a prime spot. Starting at Taylors Mistake beach, you'll walk past a string of Kiwiana cribs (humble little holiday homes), then scene-stealing views.

On the way back, take Summit Road to Lyttelton, a port town full of character and characters. Stop at Civil & Naval, a bar-eatery where local musos muse alongside wharfies thumbing copies of *The New Yorker*.

About 70 wineries dot the North Canterbury region, with its own distinctive microclimate. It's home to destination wineries such as Black Estate and Pegasus Bay, which have award-winning restaurants.

As a wine region, North Canterbury is still finding its identity. However, it's evolving as a hub for organic and biodynamic wine (and food), with the The Hermit Ram, Greystone, Pegasus Bay, The Boneline and Terrace Edge leading the way. Come for the North Canterbury Food & Wine Festival in March (www.ncwineandfood.co.nz) or the South Island Wine & Food Festival in December (www.winefestival.co.nz).

Jo Bates has travelled extensively in her journalism career and is now based in New Zealand

My Top 10 in Christchurch

1 Inati

Simon and Lisa Levy have created an absorbing dining experience at this restaurant they established in 2017. The couple met in London, Simon's hometown (Lisa is from Hawke's Bay, NZ), but they've become locals through their sophisticated eatery that buzzes like a London hotspot. A former head chef for Gordon Ramsay, Simon says that – aside from serving quality food and wine – their ethos is about breaking down barriers and building relationships (easily done at the

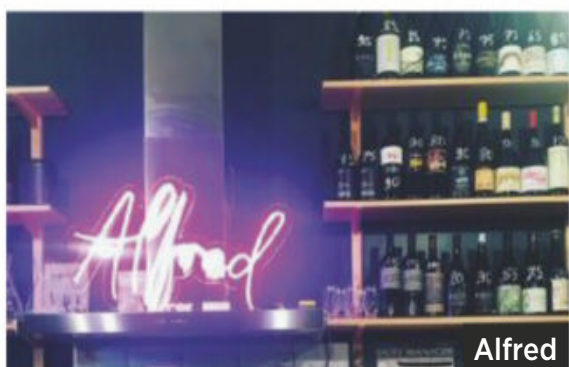
bar-cum-chef's table). The boeuf-nuts is a signature dish and the Our Collection wine list stocks some serious New Zealand vintages. www.inati.nz



Inati

2 Gatherings

Chef Alex Davies describes his innovative, immaculately executed, plant-based dishes as 'an expression of myself, my values and who I am – I think it's important to respect the environment we live in and honour the people who are doing things properly and looking after the earth'. The care is all there on the plate, and his intimate restaurant serves wines from Bell Hill, Greystone, Mountford and Rippon Valley, with more from Alfred, the wine bar next door. www.gatherings.co.nz ➤



3 Alfred

Co-owned by Gatherings' Davies and Omer Shadich, this unpretentious local bar serves natural wines. Shadich is the man behind the bar, and he likes to keep hard-to-source New Zealand and international wines at an approachable price, but there's a top shelf for those with the budget. From Waipara to Georgia, he'll lead you through his thoughtful selection. [See Facebook](#)

4 Vesuvio

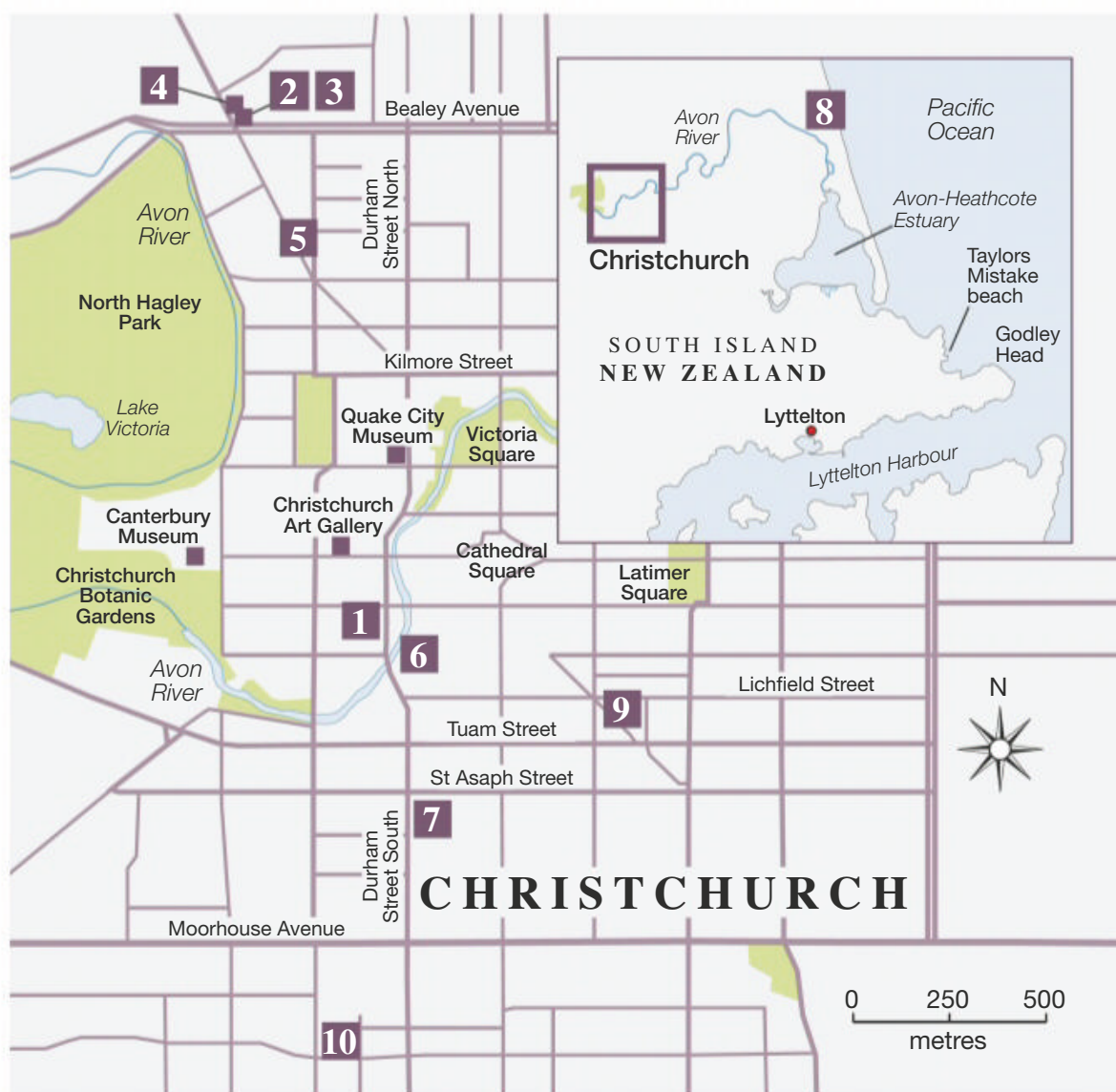
The brick-paved courtyard of this little Papanui Road local has seen numerous long nights thanks to its great live music and formidable wine list, with European greats alongside North Canterbury wines. The cocktails are classic, the food is delicious, and the calendar of happenings includes poetry, live music, vinyl nights and kitchen takeovers. Owner Matt Lingens is a stalwart of the Christchurch food scene and his staff know their wine. www.vesuvio.co.nz

5 Gin Gin

Gin Gin exemplifies the pop-up nature of bars and eateries that evolved after the 2011 quakes. With buildings razed and nowhere to go, people felt a desperate need to connect and socialise, and places appeared in a makeshift, haphazard kind of way. This hole-in-the-wall bar further extends the theme with a rotating line-up of food trucks that pull up outside to serve delicious morsels. It boasts more than 80 gins (including local and New Zealand-made), and the wines focus solely on the South Island. www.ginggin.business.site

6 Riverside

Aptly named (the lovely Avon river runs close by), this seven-day farmers' market gives the city a pumping new heart. Riverside brings together the region's best food producers and purveyors in their first permanent home – no more shipping containers and Portakabins – a beautifully crafted building. As well as local-produce vendors, there are eateries



Map: Maggie Nelson

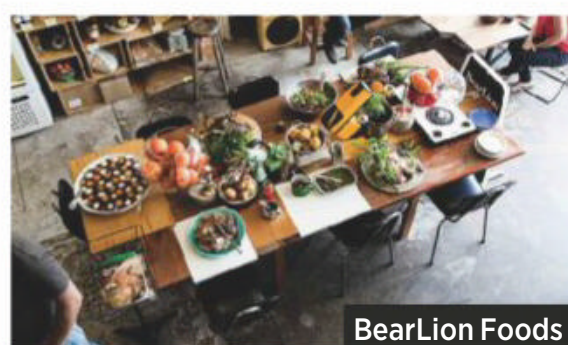
with Greek, Vietnamese, Korean, Argentinian, Mediterranean and European cuisines filling the hall. www.riverside.nz

7 Vino Fino

Weekly guided tastings with winemakers and Masters of Wine for a mere NZ\$20 (about £10) are among the many good things here. Knowledgeable staff and a good catalogue of local, New Zealand and international wines complete the offering. They can also arrange overseas deliveries, should you find yourself fixated with a dazzling North Canterbury Riesling or two. www.vinofino.co.nz

8 BearLion Foods

Chef Alesha Bilbrough-Collins prepares quality deli fare with passion and flair. You'll pick up on Ottolenghi influences (she worked at the Israeli-English chef's restaurant in London before returning to Christchurch to set up BearLion).



BearLion Foods

Bilbrough-Collins uses local, organic produce to prepare small-batch fare – stop in for picnic provisions and head to the coast. www.bearlionfoods.co.nz

9 Earl

This inner-city bistro has an inviting at-home feel. Only it's so much better than home – the welcome is always warm, the chefs in the open kitchen are obligingly chatty and the washing up is taken care of. Earl serves modern Mediterranean cuisine at lunch and dinner and has a tightly edited wine list. There's also the very tempting aperitivo offering from 3pm-5pm. www.earl.co.nz

10 Pinot Cave & Grater Goods

When musician Flip Grater returned from Paris to Christchurch with her French husband Youssef Iskane, they felt bereft of the wine bars they'd left behind. So they established their own, Pinot Cave, in an old warehouse, where they host events with European flair: a mushroom festival, a tasting of Pinot Nouveau fresh from the barrel. They serve predominantly, though not exclusively, natural and vegan wines sourced from New Zealand and abroad. They also serve vegan food – their KFT, Kentucky Fried Tofu, has become a hit. www.gratergoods.co.nz [D](#)

"Vintage is a tremendous watch. A really absorbing, informative and at times emotionally charged view of the universal magic of a wine vintage."

Oz Clarke, OBE



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Each month our experts answer readers' wine queries and share their knowledge

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



Marisa Finetti

is a freelance food, wine and travel writer based in Las Vegas



Andy Howard MW

is a contributing editor to *Decanter*



Anthony Rose

is a widely published wine critic, judge and author, and a regular *Decanter* contributor

You say ramato...

I enjoy Italian white wines in general, but have recently come across a style called 'ramato' – can you tell me what it is please?

Lucy Mason, by email

Marisa Finetti replies: Ramato is for the wine lover who wants more from their Pinot Grigio. It's produced when Pinot Grigio grapes are crushed and the skins allowed to spend time with the juice, resulting in a distinctively teasing, tactile texture and a coppery hue: the word ramato means 'copper' in Italian.

What distinguishes ramato from a rosé or orange wine is that ramato is a product of a historical winemaking style from Friuli in northern Italy, made with Pinot Grigio grapes.

Today the style is also made in other parts of Italy and has recently emerged in the New World – producers in the US include Barrett Family Wines in California and Channing Daughters in New York. For the real thing, in the UK Lea & Sandeman has Visintini's Ramato Collio 2018 at £14.75, and Shelved Wine is offering a Vigneti delle Dolomiti 2018 version by Casata Monfort, priced £14.59.

Burgundy newcomer

I've been reading about the new Bourgogne Côte d'Or appellation. Could you recommend any in particular? Can I really expect to find a noticeable step up in quality from 'normal' Bourgogne wine? James Turnbull, London

Andy Howard MW replies: The new appellation was officially created in June 2017, hence few wines have appeared so far. At the Burgundy en primeur tastings in January this year, more bottles were shown, so the volume available is likely to increase in the next year or so. The AP was created as the top of the Régionale Bourgogne quality pyramid (ie, below grand cru, premier cru and villages level, but above generic Bourgogne/Hautes Côtes wines).

Early indications are that quality should be a step up in many cases (although many leading domaines are likely to focus on their individual Bourgogne Rouge/Blanc rather than Bourgogne Côte d'Or). The new AP requires use of 100% Pinot Noir or Chardonnay; a minimum planting density of 9,000 vines per hectare; and grapes must come from just the 'mid-slopes' of the Côtes de Nuits/Beaune. This excludes the higher Hautes Côtes sectors, and much of the lower land where generic Bourgogne comes from.

Impressive bottles from the 2018 vintage were Méo-Camuzet Frère & Soeurs, Domaine Michel Bouzereau, Domaine Henri Magnien and Domaine Rémi Jobard's Vieilles Vignes.

Storing up problems

What are my rights if I buy an expensive bottle of wine to lay down, then discover on opening it five or 10 years later that it's corked?

Steven Chen, by email

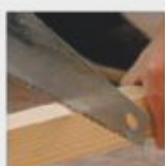
Anthony Rose responds: In the UK, where a merchant sells goods in the course of a business, it's implied that the goods are of satisfactory quality, fit for their purpose and correspond to any description applied to them. (Sale of Goods Act 1979, as amended by the Sale & Supply of Goods Act 1994). So a corked bottle would clearly be neither of satisfactory quality nor fit for the purpose for which it was bought, ie to be drunk.

The merchant wouldn't be liable if any defect were specifically drawn to your attention before you bought, or where, on examination, you should have noticed it, but TCA (cork taint) by its nature would not have been apparent on purchase.

On the face of it, you're entitled to a refund just as you would be if you'd bought the bottle today and opened it to find it corked. The retailer may claim that the passage of time

Say what you see

This two-word answer is a Barolo wine producer (see p114 for a clue). For the answer, see p136.



+



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TASTING NOTES DECODED



Earthy

Earthy as a tasting note can encompass a range of wine flavour profiles; from dry and dusty to tertiary aromas such as wet forest floor, or even farmyardy odours. It can be seen as belonging to the same flavour set as wet wool, mineral and tar; all are naturally occurring substances, but they have little in common with fruit, vegetal or floral notes.

If subtle, then 'earthy' notes can be regarded as a welcome addition to a wine's aroma, particularly in more full-bodied reds. A number of examples can be found in this issue's Barolo 2006 panel tasting report (see p113-p117), for example in Parusso's Bussia Riserva, and it may also crop up in

other Italian wines such as Brunello di Montalcino or in more rustic varieties such as Primitivo and Aglianico.

Earthiness is also positive in some Pinot Noir and Syrah wines, where it can add complexity as a secondary and tertiary aroma. If earthy notes veer more towards 'farmyard', this could be due to *brettanomyces*, a wine-altering strain of yeast – while contentious, some wine lovers do enjoy its effects at low levels.

Earthy notes can also derive from the chemical compound geosmin, which occurs naturally in grapes. The same compound is released into the air by newly turned soil, or in a garden after rain. In wine, high levels of geosmin generally indicate a fault. If earthy smells eclipse expected fruit aromas, or tend towards the smell of wet cardboard, then your wine could in fact be corked.

means that you've accepted the wine, but you can justifiably counter that laying a fine wine down doesn't amount to accepting it as there's no way of detecting a latent defect such as TCA until the day of opening.

Rights are one thing, but going to court is a grey area. You're better off cultivating a relationship of trust with a merchant prepared to accept the argument because you're a loyal client, especially if you can suggest that he or she revert to the château for a refund on your behalf. If they agree, regardless of what the château says, you've won the argument. **D**

Confused by a label? Unsure how to serve a wine? A burning bottle question on your mind? Ask *Decanter*...

Our expert contributors are here to advise on any aspect of wine. Each month we will print the most interesting queries with a personal reply from a relevant expert. Simply email editor@decanter.com with your question – the more specific, the better – in no more than a single paragraph, and you could see your query, and a reply, in print. Please note we can only respond to those queries selected for publication.

Written by Laura Seal



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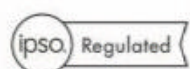
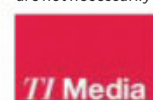
China Marketing Manager Nina Feng

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Email format: firstname.lastname@decanter.com

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Guess the producer (see p134) Sordo Giovanni (Saw+dough G+o+van+knee)

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Marketwatch

All the important fine wine investment news, compiled by Chris Mercer

Burgundy gets a reality check

Has Burgundy peaked on the fine wine market after prices for top wines stumbled in 2019?

Meteoric price rises for famous Burgundy labels have captivated fine wine market watchers in recent times, but the Liv-ex Burgundy 150 index dropped by nearly 9% in 2019.

Domaine de la Romanée-Conti wines led the fall, said Liv-ex. 'The past year has highlighted the vulnerability of Burgundy's high prices,' it said in its *Burgundy: after the peak* report.

The news comes amid wider political and economic pressure on the fine wine market, from US tariffs to disruption in Asia.

However, Liv-ex said its Burgundy 150 index was still up by 445% over the last 16 years.

It also reported an increase in the number of Burgundy wines traded in 2019, partly because buyers were seeking out promising labels further down the price ladder.

Miles Davis, head of professional portfolio management at Wine Owners, told *Decanter*: 'Certain wines have become so expensive that even the mega-wealthy have begun to say "enough is enough".'

But he cautioned that some newer Burgundy names on the secondary market still needed to demonstrate staying power.

Matthew O'Connell, head of wine investment at UK merchant BI Fine Wine & Spirits, said concerns of a Burgundy bubble ultimately proved unfounded in 2019.



Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

'While prices were marginally softer, there was little or no evidence of a [significant] correction,' he said.

BI expected 'blue-chip domaines' and top vintages to be most resilient to any pressures on the fine wine market, he added.

Of the recent Burgundy 2018 en primeur campaign, O'Connell said demand was skewed towards the reds, adding: 'We have seen some price sensitivity and questions about potential lack of homogeneity across a warm vintage, but broadly buyer interest has been strong.'

See p120 for Tim Atkin MW's vintage review and tasting notes for the newly released Domaine de la Romanée-Conti 2017 wines, also available online at [Decanter.com/premium](https://www.decanter.com/premium).

▲ Tenuta San Guido, Sassicaia, Bolgheri 2006

This wine has risen by 5.4% in the past year, 20% over two years, and by 48% over five years, demonstrating this SuperTuscan label's potential.

▲ Domaine Prieuré Roch, Chambertin-Clos de Bèze Grand Cru, Gevrey-Chambertin 2010

This wine has risen by 10.5% in the last 12 months but by nearly 178% over two years. Liv-ex said prices spiked after the death of owner Henry-Frédéric Roch in 2018.

▼ DRC, Romanée-Conti Grand Cru, Vosne-Romanée 2015

This highly rated vintage of DRC's top wine has slipped by nearly 15% in the past 12 months, but it's still one of world's most expensive wines.

▼ Château Cos d'Estournel, St-Estèphe 2017

This wine has dropped by 12% in the last 12 months, but things could change with the Bordeaux 2017 in-bottle ratings (see [Jane Anson online at Decanter.com/premium](https://www.decanter.com/)).



Sassicaia 2017

Price eases for SuperTuscan 2017

Sassicaia 2017 has been released in the UK below market prices for the 2016 and 2015 vintages.

Armit Wines was offering Sassicaia 2017 from Tenuta San Guido at £850 per six-bottle case in bond (ib), equivalent to £1,700 per dozen.

Sassicaia prices 'have been on a steady upward trend', said Liv-ex. UK merchant BI Fine Wine & Spirits said the 2014, 2015 and 2012 vintages gained the most in price among Italian wines on its LiveTrade platform in 2019.

At the time of writing, a 12-bottle case of the widely praised Sassicaia 2016 was £2,400 (ib) on LiveTrade, with the 2015 at £1,063 for six bottles.

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Decanter *fine wine price watch*

Below are the most recent merchant case prices (equivalent 12 x 750ml bottles) for wines that are actively traded among a global network of merchants on Liv-ex, the fine wine market.

Liv-ex records transactions between its merchant members in the UK, US, Asia and Europe. All prices are in GBP and exclude sales tax. The numbers in **green** indicate those prices which have increased since last month, whilst the numbers in **red** have decreased.

BORDEAUX PRICES

Red Bordeaux 1982 1985 1986 1988 1989 1990 1995 1996 1998 2000 2001 2002

First Growths	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Haut-Brion	8500	4392	4252	3999	19900	7650	4200	3966	4300	6500	3600	3325
Lafite	25265	5400	11000	7178	7038	7937	6566	9000	7134	12600	6280	6250
Latour	9600	4344	4164	3960	4950	7086	5175	5900	4755	8356	4680	4710
Margaux	5700	4722	4800	4155	4800	10396	4680	6472	3976	7650	4204	3750
Mouton Rothschild	14400	3888	7950	4200	4110	3968	4750	4700	4677	17764	4062	4150

Second Growths												
Cos d'Estournel	3036	1320	1606	1274	1800	1983	1617	1440	1209	1620	1162	1106
Ducru-Beaucaillou	3125	1250	1370	852	1500	1450	1559	1920	1195	1800	1200	1098
Gruaud-Larose	3300	1194	1380	1113	1200	1650	756	868	720	995	684	595
Léoville Barton	2050	804	1181	900	1175	1495	875	962	695	1190	732	624
Léoville-Poyferré	2950	1118	840	900	1131	3050	900	1047	802	1313	690	672
Léoville-Las-Cases	3683	2124	3307	1960	1764	2823	1700	2160	1530	2450	1469	1446
Montrose	1776	1116	1392	1061	4823	5424	1320	1530	830	1393	1086	802
Pichon Baron	2016	1368	3000	1285	2409	2136	1265	1462	1029	1908	1250	852
Pichon Comtesse	7500	2180	1620	1132	1668	1500	1984	2323	1140	2280	1322	1086

Third Growths												
Calon-Ségur	1272	1040	1584	1260	744	1032	1073	963	926	980	764	859
Lagrange	840	708	900	684	804	1079	696	757	625	760	600	500
Palmer	3900	2124	2400	1924	4150	2901	2126	2126	1984	2800	2100	1895

Fourth Growths												
Beychevelle	1384	984	1100	828	1039	936	900	1010	926	1340	960	830
Duhart-Milon	1536	992	756	504	801	1037	740	800	848	853	643	623
Talbot	2220	744	1140	840	900	840	840	840	800	900	727	736

Fifth Growths												
Grand-Puy-Lacoste	2700	1320	900	1056	976	2076	1150	962	830	973	750	450
Haut-Batailly	756	700	468	630	650	656	564	550	456	590	480	394
Lynch-Bages	3504	1884	1560	1625	3700	2424	1450	1550	1208	2000	1125	944
Pontet-Canet	1300	714	788	821	732	888	802	830	636	1000	780	600

Second wines												
Carruades de Lafite	4092	3250	2553	2124	2280	2787	2736	2750	1920	2995	2700	2598
Le Clarence de Haut-Brion*	1104	2988	1008	1968	2232	1488	864	1100	1075	1468	1032	972
Le Petit Mouton de Mouton Rothschild	10836	-	-	-	-	-	-	1668	2580	2892	2868	2200
Les Forts de Latour	2052	1884	2300	2257	2001	2500	1841	1747	1800	2022	1839	1800
Pavillon Rouge	1680	1500	1860	1800	1819	1584	1651	1718	1569	1800	1750	1748

Médoc Crus Bourgeois												
Chasse-Spleen	727	420	580	432	520	408	377	372	302	400	340	400
Sociando-Mallet	1137	732	456	360	816	935	420	415	425	520	524	340

Pessac-Léognan												
Domaine de Chevalier	1367	950	720	642	960	648	697	680	552	732	650	443
Haut-Bailly	1560	888	960	792	840	1147	660	720	778	992	820	660
La Mission Haut-Brion	9048	2640	1884	1836	15800	5962	2437	1788	3140	5050	2011	1500
Pape Clément	1692	984	1176	960	1313	1800	926	935	1008	1548	1100	841
Smith Haut Lafitte	1128	1068	792	756	1152	1140	841	822	850	1280	720	718

St-Emilion												
Angélus	2400	3075	2592	2939	4140	5172	3280	2940	4200	4677	3240	2829
Ausone	4596	3156	2916	3396	3300	4176	4874	5400	4995	9900	5592	4440
Cheval Blanc	6000	4812	3872	3778	4250	10664	4076	4200	5923	7115	3872	3600
Clos Fourtet	1839	852	1265	840	1839	1140	780	909	1227	1036	1024	614
Figeac	3800	1176	1368	900	1560	2076	1776	1320	1850	1800	1776	888
Pavie	2376	1788	1776	1536	1500	2028	1500	1984	2750	4800	2539	2526
Troplong-Mondot	720	913	960	648	1752	2016	753	720	750	1086	954	595

Pomerol												
La Conseillante	4250	1788	1548	1620	3300	3300	1209	1500	1600	2200	1269	792
L'Eglise-Clinet	1680	2976	1200	1455	2100	2400	1890	1523	3350	2700	1750	888
L'Evangile	4469	2100	1416	1080	2100	2580	1319	1200	2200	2816	1275	962
Lafleur	50400	8016	4440	4932	8592	14148	6300	3750	5700	15574	5600	3110
La Fleur-Pétrus	3552	2356	1800	1896	3206	2700	1872	1596	1928	2320	1900	1952
Le Pin	95028	23880	22896	15288	27792	36828	24756	21600	39900	40634	36500	19374
Petrus	30000	20424	19200	19644	37776	43500	25264	20304	30204	42984	22852	23748
Trotanoy	6144	1572	1524	1260	1884	3600	1847	1300	2697	2234	1604	1020
Vieux Château Certan	2640	1776	1524	1596	1680	2268	1584	1416	2431	2721	2600	1320

Sauternes 1982 1985 1986 1988 1989 1990 1995 1996 1998 2000 2001 2002

	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Climens	1200	720	795	720	668	1080	495	400	396	548	1474	480
Coutet (Barsac)	660	1152	804	400	348	516	441	300	338	318	295	242
Rieussec	624	560	600	600	598	504	492	629	469	360	960	320
Suduiraut	1608	636	660	864	460	600	349	300	345	324	480	242
Yquem	1980	2040	2477	2679	2700	2628	1960	2020	2000	2278	3942	2076

* Formerly named Château Bahans Haut-Brion; beginning with the 2007 vintage, it was renamed Le Clarence de Haut-Brion

The Liv-ex Fine Wine 100 Index represents the price movement of 100 of the most sought-after fine wines for which there is a strong secondary market and is calculated monthly. The majority of the index consists of Bordeaux wines – a reflection of the overall market – although wines from Burgundy, the Rhône, Champagne and Italy are also included. The index is calculated using Liv-ex Mid Prices and is then weighted to account for original production levels and increasing scarcity as the wine ages. As such, the index is designed to give each wine a weighting that corresponds with its impact on the overall market.

The Liv-ex 100 Index was rebased at 100 in January 2004.

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2015	2016	Red Bordeaux
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	First Growths
3808	3300	6270	3525	3350	3422	5938	6319	3230	3215	4380	4505	Haut-Brion
8968	6000	7100	6100	6044	7150	7075	7250	4900	4900	5040	5757	Lafite
6780	4175	6400	4400	4450	4545	9350	10378	4400	-	-	-	Latour
4620	3510	5860	3656	3650	3705	6200	6050	3640	3600	10100	4824	Margaux
4700	4156	5389	4300	4060	4345	5280	5554	3706	3750	4350	4952	Mouton Rothschild
												Second Growths
1566	1000	1590	1042	960	1000	2240	1700	980	1030	1280	1560	Cos d'Estournel
1425	1180	1750	1190	1080	1175	2200	1675	1000	995	1306	1426	Ducru-Beaucaillou
630	576	690	558	525	580	745	675	520	528	528	544	Gruaud-Larose
960	678	870	630	550	630	830	1015	485	550	625	800	Léoville Barton
1066	650	885	646	610	616	1568	1000	555	523	650	739	Léoville-Poyferré
1550	1260	2100	1300	1280	1218	2040	1940	1150	1182	1465	2172	Léoville-Las-Cases
1550	756	1116	792	750	780	2080	1750	675	690	1010	1350	Montrose
1223	1113	1316	1066	1080	1046	1476	1350	864	825	1040	1152	Pichon Baron
1280	992	1190	1113	992	1040	1313	1380	880	936	1172	1558	Pichon Comtesse
												Third Growths
810	800	875	795	750	810	900	960	740	760	800	960	Calon-Ségur
500	456	570	420	400	440	520	426	284	304	314	352	Lagrange
1920	1937	2599	1900	1786	1850	2450	2490	1790	1869	2540	2425	Palmer
												Fourth Growths
884	925	1020	890	850	870	925	880	838	890	810	795	Beychevelle
737	684	725	640	600	650	795	690	577	565	550	566	Duhart-Milon
661	633	700	494	579	550	684	586	546	480	438	426	Talbot
												Fifth Growths
490	647	810	520	520	440	650	671	384	370	520	608	Grand-Puy-Lacoste
446	380	540	480	393	400	373	420	298	345	306	308	Haut-Batailley
1275	1010	1284	1020	926	1000	1250	1190	860	800	890	1030	Lynch-Bages
760	620	950	660	580	670	1425	1450	550	580	750	1070	Pontet-Canet
												Second wines
2976	2780	2800	3102	2820	2845	2720	2750	2750	2700	2548	2582	Carruades de Lafite
1000	940	998	1081	900	1020	1040	1050	1010	950	1000	960	Le Clarence de Haut-Brion*
2244	2434	2650	2374	2476	2324	2400	2300	2476	2325	2126	2130	Le Petit Mouton de Mouton Rothschild
1850	1720	1900	1626	1750	1800	1830	1920	1680	1666	-	-	Les Forts de Latour
1700	1750	1656	1650	1696	1704	1740	1760	1700	1523	1707	1510	Pavillon Rouge
												Médoc Crus Bourgeois
300	300	370	300	339	290	330	350	240	249	252	216	Chasse-Spleen
385	310	440	304	235	310	340	320	403	191	228	252	Sociando-Mallet
												Pessac-Léognan
543	550	600	500	403	433	630	600	416	380	452	500	Domaine de Chevalier
650	580	995	573	519	732	1600	1144	548	575	900	928	Haut-Bailly
1750	1558	4170	1750	1610	1695	4300	4140	1515	1690	3037	3158	La Mission Haut-Brion
1015	756	1600	918	766	830	1299	1640	722	682	740	715	Pape Clément
740	720	1200	708	660	750	1895	1090	626	626	860	798	Smith Haut Lafitte
												St-Emilion
3300	2692	4080	2880	2700	2630	2880	2930	2500	3325	2474	2778	Angélus
7414	4039	9920	4143	3840	4400	8500	9600	4200	3900	7130	6922	Ausone
4042	3800	6950	4140	3620	3700	6820	7840	3540	3520	5640	5350	Cheval Blanc
1100	914	1400	921	480	830	1929	1100	984	780	900	957	Clos Fourtet
960	1091	1500	950	980	990	1571	1706	900	950	1130	1768	Figeac
2425	2300	3200	2425	2140	2234	2850	3100	1950	2526	2546	2971	Pavie
708	550	1950	750	630	725	1290	1300	800	652	827	1024	Troplong-Mondot
												Pomerol
924	940	2100	940	758	909	1550	1540	788	875	1390	1670	La Conseillante
1150	980	3950	1180	828	1196	2400	2300	840	1280	2000	2273	L'Eglise-Clinet
962	1020	2024	990	868	1000	2580	1980	961	900	1600	1800	L'Evangile
4960	3580	15000	4400	3200	5600	12000	13060	3100	3744	11600	11000	Lafleur
1800	1623	1921	1556	1600	1640	1850	1990	1300	1440	1580	1750	La Fleur-Pétrus
-	28000	29256	25000	22344	21220	36060	35000	19652	19700	32000	33200	Le Pin
22840	22204	32000	23600	21000	23000	31600	30066	21732	22000	34026	32800	Petrus
1398	1150	2600	1350	980	1438	2370	2200	1200	1560	2324	2122	Trotanoy
1313	1218	1950	1600	963	1250	2400	2700	1140	1230	2300	2816	Vieux Château Certan
2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2015	2016	Sauternes
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
420	400	528	491	650	504	464	425	575	420	460	460	Climens
220	281	223	235	275	289	330	282	300	260	257	184	Coutet (Barsac)
300	260	330	265	240	297	293	260	295	299	340	350	Rieussec
320	342	350	293	354	332	488	324	313	-	460	320	Suduiraut
1920	1870	2200	1822	2130	1892	3400	2531	1960	1455	2528	2527	Yquem

Decanter *fine wine price watch*

PORT & CHAMPAGNE

	1977	1983	1985	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003	2007	2009	2011
Port	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Cockburn's	580	650	475	450	550	550	380	330	400	-	500
Croft	790	240	480	420	460	359	375	300	300	340	342
Dow's	810	600	595	500	600	390	410	390	790	-	1390
Fonseca	1770	650	595	528	1050	430	420	410	480	350	600
Graham's	875	680	695	550	575	375	425	444	420	-	648
Quinta do Noval	-	-	660	550	750	1440	550	600	560	232	840
Sandeman	1584	360	540	-	500	289	310	444	480	-	510
Taylor's	1295	720	550	732	1100	440	500	420	430	430	500
Warre's	780	450	560	350	480	345	360	384	360	350	540

	1989	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006	2008
Champagne	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Bollinger, RD	-	3300	3200	2600	1900	3000	2099	1340	1250	936	-	-
Jacques Selosse, Blanc de Blancs Brut	9180	14400	7776	10286	6354	8430	1000	7200	-	4032	5400	-
Krug, Vintage Brut	4080	5400	3000	3800	-	2580	2100	2700	1818	-	1950	-
Louis Roederer, Cristal	4524	3840	3300	3576	2400	-	2256	2150	1800	1550	1540	1750
Moët & Chandon, Dom Perignon	-	3000	2040	2400	-	1692	1400	1440	1190	1300	1220	1250
Perrier Jouët, Belle Epoque	2628	2892	1368	1800	-	1560	2913	1740	1740	-	1728	1380
Pol Roger, Sir Winston Churchill	-	3300	3000	3800	-	2400	1440	1590	1212	-	1180	1600
Pommery, Louise	1524	1777	1472	1903	720	1332	1248	656	650	446	582	-
Salon, Mesnil		12000	5250	6000	4800	-	-	4700	4350	-	4200	-
Taittinger, Comtes de Champagne	3600	4200	3000	4200	2010	2100	1300	1750	1000	740	820	-

PLEASE NOTE: The Fine Wine Price Watch features monthly prices for the most traded Bordeaux wines and rotates coverage of Port & Champagne, Burgundy, Italy and a Rest of the World basket of fine wines from the Rhone, Spain, Australia, Chile and California.

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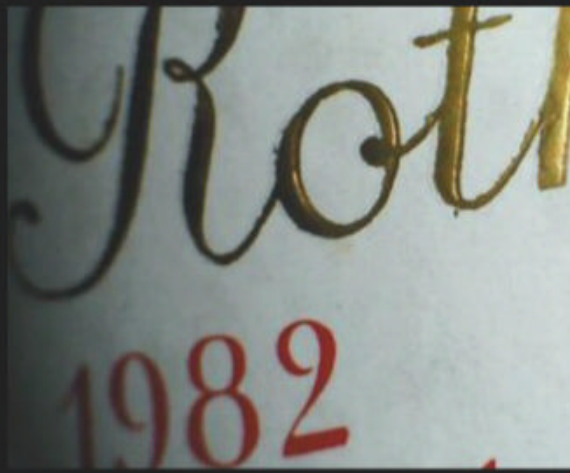
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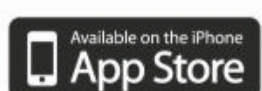
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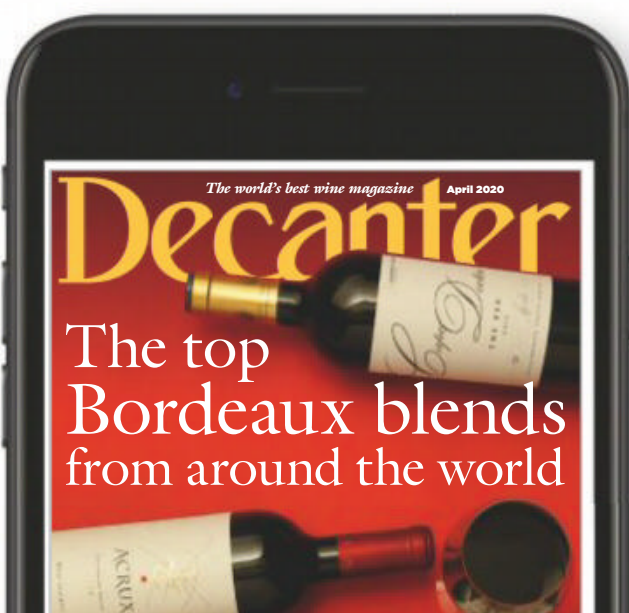
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LANZERAC, PINOTAGE 1959

Stellenbosch, South Africa

A legend because...

This was the first-ever monovarietal Pinotage bottled and released in South Africa. Nowadays, Pinotage is a staple variety in many parts of the country, even though it is not universally loved. This wine was produced by the huge cooperative Stellenbosch Farmers' Winery (SFW) and was not released until 1961. In the late 1950s, SFW had purchased the trademark of Lanzerac, an estate founded in 1692, and decided to use that label for its pioneering Pinotage. It went on to win the trophy at the Cape Young Wine Show in 1959.

Looking back

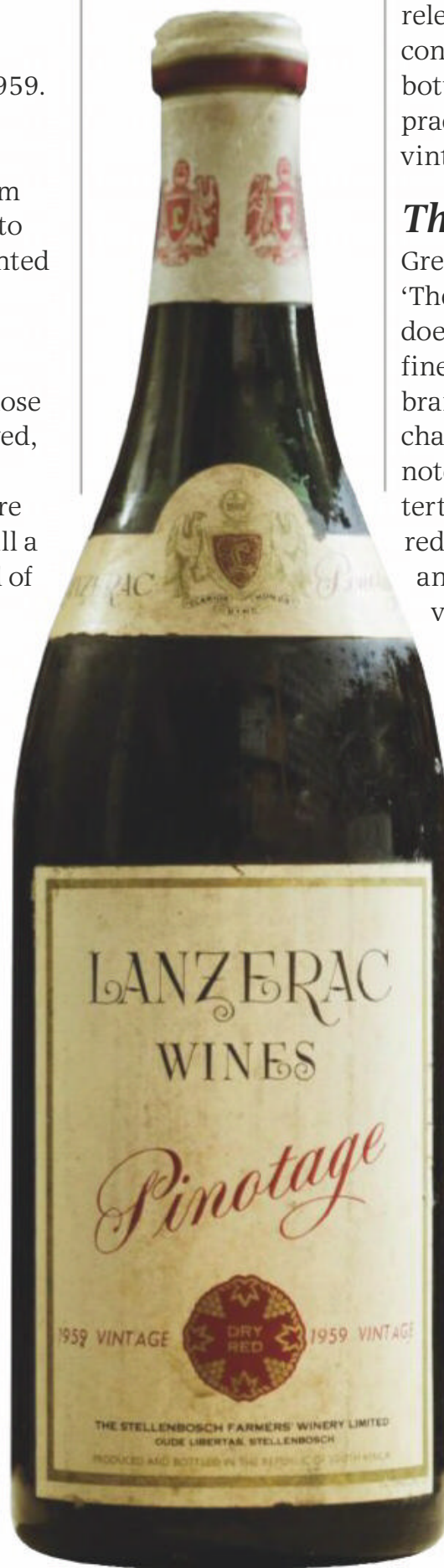
It was the inspiration of Professor Abraham Perold of Stellenbosch University in 1924 to cross Pinot Noir with the more widely planted Cinsault, resulting in a hardy variety that could give wines of deep colour and good structure. Perold was obliged to leave his house soon after, and seedlings planted close by were neglected. Indeed, just one survived, and all Pinotage wines thereafter are its descendants. It wasn't until 1941 that there was sufficient Pinotage in the ground to fill a barrel. This wine was made by CT de Waal of Stellenbosch University; Perold himself never tasted it, as he died that same year. A decade went by before Pinotage was first planted on an experimental basis in 1951. Soon the variety was performing well at local wine shows. The SFW took notice and decided to produce the wine under its Lanzerac label. It didn't own the property but had been entrusted with managing it. Today, Pinotage occupies more than 7% of South African wine-grape plantings.

The vintage

It has proved difficult to find any information on the vintage. The wine's longevity suggests it was of good quality.

The terroir

This wine was a blend from two Stellenbosch vineyards: Bellevue Estate, owned by Pieter Morkel, with vines planted in 1953; and Kanonkop, planted by Paul Sauer. The latter would go on to produce the best known of all South African Pinotages, but at this time it was a blending component, as plantings were limited in the 1950s.



The wine

Pinotage is notorious for an acetone aroma and flavour that is hailed as the variety's footprint, or detested as an unwelcome intrusion of nail-varnish aromas into a sturdy red wine. A by-product of fermentation, its presence can be moderated by fermenting at cooler temperatures. It hasn't proved possible to unearth details about how this wine was made, but it's known that the 1961, the second release of Lanzerac Pinotage, was fermented in concrete and aged in 50-hectolitre vats. The bottled wine may have followed common practice at the time as a blend of different vintages, despite the label's vintage indication.

The reaction

Greg Sherwood MW tasted the wine in 2018: 'The wine carries a now-legendary status and does not disappoint in the glass... Fantastically fine, complex nose of sweet leafy savoury bramble berry fruits, sweet tobacco leaf, black chai tea, dried herbs, earthy wood spice and notes of macerated cherries. All the wonderful tertiary complexity of a very classy, expressive red wine that retains an impressive harmony and poise, textural elegance with pinpoint vibrant acidity, freshness and an all-round air of elder statesman confidence. You know you are in the presence of greatness when you taste this old beauty.'

Jamie Goode reported on the same tasting: 'Very fine and expressive with a hint of green and some notes of tobacco and tea, together with vibrant berry and cherry fruit. Harmonious and expressive with maturity but also freshness. This has aged so nicely with amazing purity considering its vintage. Subtle earthy notes, too. A really beautiful wine.'

In 2019, DWWA Regional Chair for South Africa Fiona McDonald was fortunate enough to taste one of the two remaining half-bottles from the Lanzerac cellars: 'The wine was evolved and tertiary with toasty coffee bean, a touch of leather and macerated red- and black-cherry fruit. It was drinking well, showing distinct signs of life in its relative freshness and succulence.' **D**

THE FACTS

Bottles produced 82,400

Composition 95% Pinotage, 5% Cinsault

by Stephen Brook



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V. 2012 – 2016
NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
MUNDUS VINI

96
POINTS

V. 2015
NAPA VALLEY
TRANSCENDENT
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
ROBERT PARKER WINE ADVOCATE

97+
POINTS

V. 2015
NAPA VALLEY
BUCEPHALUS
RED WINE BLEND
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South America 2020

A *Decanter* guide to the wines, regions and styles



Produced in association with





Welcome to *Decanter's* 2020 South America Guide



'Todo se transforma' – everything changes – is one of the best-loved songs by Jorge Drexler, Uruguay's most famous musician. Drexler lives in Madrid these days, but his lyrics, complete with a reference to a glass of red, could be applied to the South American wine scene over the last three decades. The transformation has been remarkable. I've been lucky enough to sit in the front row and watch it happen, as it were, visiting the continent at least twice a year. In their different ways, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have all joined the modern wine world, each of them bringing something

unique, whether Malbec, old-vine Carignan or Tannat.

However much you can see and appreciate as a frequent visitor – putting South American wines in a global context is also important – having people you trust on the ground is vital too. They're closer to the gossip, see the trends as they develop, watch the vineyards change colour and stay up to date with new ventures as well as current releases from older ones.

That's the advantage of this guide. In large part, it's written by South Americans. And not just any old South Americans. Patricio Tapia, Marina Gayan MW, Alejandro Iglesias and Joaquin Hidalgo are all perceptive observers of the local wine scene, with palates to match. Of the foreigners, Amanda Barnes lives in Mendoza and is one of the best wine writers in Mendoza, covering both sides of the Andes; Chris Losh is a first-rate journalist from the UK who is always worth reading; and Alistair Cooper MW is a Chilean expert who once lived in the country and returns regularly to what the poet Pablo Neruda called his 'long, thin ship'.

This, then, is a snapshot of the South American wine scene at an exciting moment in its development. I can still remember what the local *vino* tasted like in the early 1990s, and, in most cases, it was pretty parochial stuff aimed at domestic palates that valued oxidation and time in old barrels over perfume and primary fruit. After that, what we might call the first 'modern' wines were heavily influenced by American critics, consumers and consultants, often emphasising power, ripeness and new oak. It was a necessary change, even if it exaggerated what was best about South American wines.

Now these countries have entered a new phase. Call it quieter or subtler if you like, but I think it's more about self-confidence. The best South American winemakers, many of whom travel widely to Europe's leading wine regions, have returned home determined to make the best of their own terroirs and traditions, rather than copy what happens elsewhere. The result is wines with greater freshness and precision, as well as a sense of place, or rather places.

Some of these places are very new indeed – Alcohuz in Chile, Maldonado in Uruguay and Uspallata in Argentina are all new, world-class areas that have emerged in the last decade. Imagine where South America will be in 30 years' time. I'm looking forward to the ride.

Tim Atkin MW, contributing editor to Decanter

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Breaking new ground

In striving to establish a more terroir-based approach to viticulture, wine producers in Argentina are revealing the striking diversity of their land – and producing wines with a truer sense of place, finds Marina Gayan MW

Argentina's vineyards have undergone a more radical transformation in the past two decades than in any other period in the country's almost 500-year viticultural history. Returning to my homeland after 20 years in the UK, I have discovered that Argentina's long-heralded potential is finally becoming an exciting reality. A country known for its easy-going Malbec has been transformed by a colourful spectrum of quality, diversity and nuance.

At the heart of this transformation lies the ultimate quest: to express a sense of place. This is being achieved through sophisticated modern viticulture, all the while preserving Argentina's heritage of grape diversity. The transformation has been driven by a group of focused, passionate, thoughtful and creative producers who are, quite literally, breaking new ground.

Key to understanding the evolution of wine-growing in Argentina is the relationship between the vineyards and the mountains. The main producing region, Mendoza, is a desert. From the earliest times, wine production has been dependent on flood irrigation from Andean snowmelt. The long and intricate network of irrigation channels was originally devised by the Huarpes, the pre-Colombian civilisation that predated the Spanish arrival in the region in 1551. For hundreds of years these fixed

channels limited the scope of vine plantings. However, the development of drip irrigation in the late 1980s opened up possibility of planting vines in places not previously viable for viticulture.

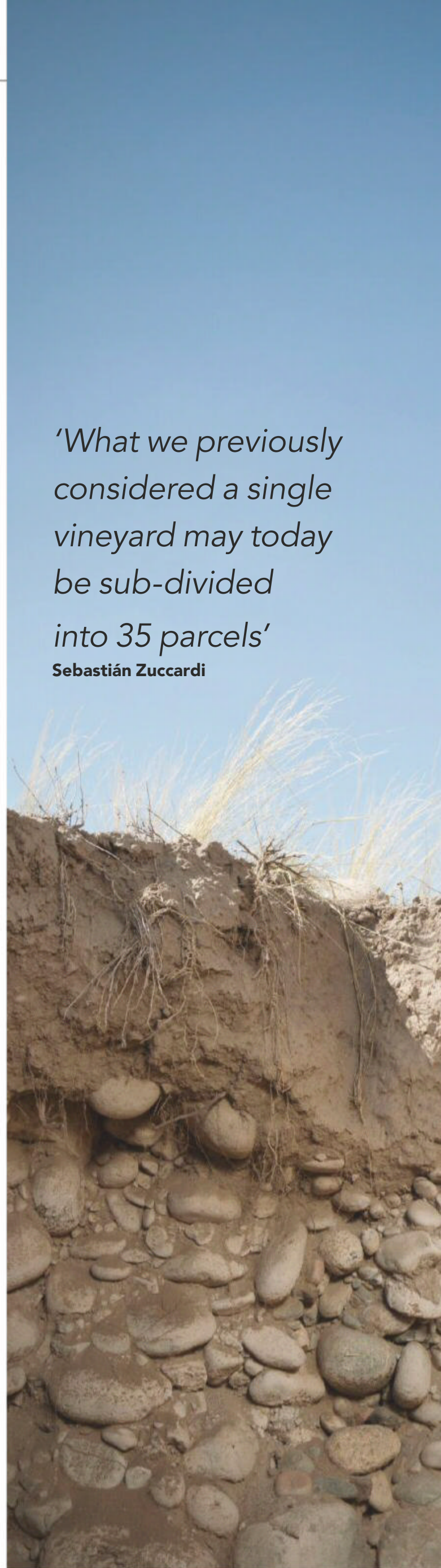
Aiming high

In search of grapes of 'grand cru' quality, Nicolás Catena ventured up into the mountains. 'It was clear to me that if we wanted to produce high-quality wines, we needed to plant in cooler areas of Mendoza,' he says. In 1993 he planted the Adrianna Vineyard in the Uco Valley's Gualtallary region, at 1,500m above sea level. Nobody had ever tried to ripen red grapes at such chilly heights. But ripen they did, and high-altitude Malbec was born. Fast-forward to today and Gualtallary is considered one of Argentina's top-quality sites, with 2,200ha of vineyards planted.

Since then, Argentina's vineyard map has stretched out in every direction, into increasingly challenging terroirs, cooler areas and ever-higher altitudes. In the west, mountain vineyards are defying supposed viticultural limits. The Precordillera vineyards, for example, climb up to the Calingasta and Pedernal valleys in San Juan, rising up to more than 2,000m above sea level in Uspallata and La Carrera in Mendoza, and reaching their highest altitude (3,329m) in Uquía, Jujuy, Argentina's northernmost viticultural region.

'What we previously considered a single vineyard may today be sub-divided into 35 parcels'

Sebastián Zuccardi





Photograph: Tim Atkin MW

In search of cooler conditions, some producers are growing grapes near the coast, and, in Patagonia in the south, near riverbanks. The success of ocean-influenced vineyards in Chapadmalal (Buenos Aires) and San Javier (Río Negro) even led to the planting of a vineyard right on the beach in Bahía Bustamante (Chubut). Patagonia's vineyards now extend as far south as Capitán Sarmiento, in Chubut, at a similar latitude to New Zealand's southernmost vineyard region, Central Otago. Single projects have sprung up in non-viticultural areas all over the country; there are now vineyards in 18 of Argentina's 23 provinces.

Digging deep

As well as planting new vineyards, wine-growers are increasingly analysing the ground beneath their vines. 'For many years we talked about climate and altitude,' explains Sebastián Zuccardi, one of Argentina's most influential winemakers. The realisation that they were working with such varied alluvial soils created the need for a precise understanding of place, and how this translates into each wine. 'What we had previously considered as a single vineyard may today be sub-divided into 35 parcels,' adds Zuccardi.

It is hard to find a vineyard these days that doesn't have at least one *calicata*. These soil pits (pictured left) provide a window into what lies beneath the

surface and are an indispensable tool for terroir-focused wine-growers (while the specific effects of soil on wine are unproven, they are suggested by observation and experience).

Guillermo Corona is a geophysicist working in Mendoza. In 2015 he began studying the Uco Valley soils as a hobby. To date he has identified 40 sub-regions by their geomorphology. 'My intention was simply to provide a framework for growers to understand the variations of where their vines are planted,' explains Corona. Understanding and quantifying these diverse alluvial soils is proving to be key to accurately managing vineyards.

Of particular interest to producers of quality grapes are Argentina's recently discovered calcareous soils – regarded by many as the holy grail of wine-growing. 'The vast majority of Argentina's calcareous soils have been formed in situ by the interaction of native plants and the calcium in soils,' explains Marcelo Belmonte, viticulture director of the Peñaflor Group. The alkalinity of these soils limits the vine's ability to absorb nutrients. This stress, in turn, promotes the production of the components crucial for making high-quality wines: tannin and flavour compounds. Also, in cool climates, the calcium in these soils yields grape juice with good natural acidity, which affects the way we perceive the texture of tannins. Belmonte calls the tannins 'grippy', Zuccardi 'like liquid chalk'. ➤



Bahía Bustamante, Chubut

‘Nowadays, the focus of viticulture here is optimising existing terroirs and exploring new ones’ **Paul Hobbs, Viña Cobos**

In 2013, Paraje Altamira became the first geographical indication (GI) to be classified based on soil, climatic conditions and history, rather than political boundaries. The GI was created following a six-year campaign from a group of local producers who wanted to validate the area’s reputation as one of the top sites of the valley. This marked a new chapter for Argentina’s viticulture: the arrival of the terroir-driven classification. Other Uco Valley districts Los Chacayes, Pampa El Cepillo and San Pablo are part of this new generation of GIs.

Forward thinking

‘Nowadays, the focus of viticulture here is optimising existing terroirs and exploring new ones,’ says renowned American winemaker Paul Hobbs of Viña Cobos. Growers use leading technology to monitor key factors affecting the vines, including high-resolution drone photography, real-time satellite data to control vine vigour and water stress, and 3D soil structure profiling.

I recently visited Gabriel Dvoskin’s 2ha organic vineyard in Pampa El Cepillo, known locally as ‘the fridge’ for its cold temperatures. At one corner of the vineyard there was a giant black curtain. After studying the local geography, Dvoskin identified that cold air causing frost damage in the vineyard was coming



Gabriel Dvoskin

from this particular corner. So he installed a 6m-high, 50m-long curtain to prevent this air from getting to the vines. This is a typical example of the technology, creativity and attention to detail that is having a profound impact on producers’ understanding of their vineyards and on the resulting quality of their wines.

Such attention to detail extends to farming methods. Unthinkable in the 1990s, more than 6,000ha of vineyards in Argentina are now farmed organically, and 300ha biodynamically. Sustainable farming has joined the agenda and many producers strive to make it the norm. In 2013, Bodegas de Argentina (BAAC), an association of 250 wineries, released its Wine & Viticulture Sustainability Protocol, which is tailor-made for Argentina’s local conditions. More than a dozen producers have been certified so far.

Grape diversity

In the past decade our understanding of Malbec has changed at high speed. Continuous research is being done into the variety’s genetic diversity and complexity. New vineyard areas have been developed, old vineyards have been brought back to life and winemakers have taken a step back to allow for better site expression. For Alejandro Vigil, Catena Zapata’s winemaking director and co-owner of Bodega Aleanna, the first step was to stop making Malbecs like Cabernets. ‘We started harvesting Malbec earlier, shortening maceration times and lowering fermentation temperatures,’ he explains. ‘Now, it’s all about finding the grape’s identity and expressing it, linking it to a place: Malbec of Agrelo [in the Luján de Cuyo sub-region], Malbec of La Consulta [Uco Valley], and even down to a specific parcel of a vineyard.’

But Malbec isn’t everything. In their search for authenticity, winemakers are going back to the past. ‘We have gone out looking for old vineyards with varieties planted by Italian and Spanish immigrants more than 100 years ago,’ says Matías Michelini, founder of the Passionate Wine project in Tupungato in the Uco Valley. Grape varieties such as Criolla Chica, Moscatel, Semillon and Bonarda, to name but a few, are enjoying a revival throughout the country.

These join a new wave of Mediterranean varieties including Garnacha, Monastrell (Mourvèdre), Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Mencía, Nebbiolo and Petit Verdot – adding further diversity to the already established Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

Argentina’s winemakers are taking great strides in discovering and understanding their land. Today, the focus of quality-minded producers is on site expression rather than the sometimes overworked wines of yesteryear. The result? A new generation of fresh, vibrant and diverse wines showing a sense of place and real excitement. Argentinians have learned that less is more, and to trust the treasure beneath their feet.

Marina Gayan MW is Argentina’s first and only Master of Wine. She was the DWWA Regional Chair for Argentina from 2010 until 2014

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Argentina: my top 25

While Malbec remains Argentina’s flagship variety, winemakers are increasingly producing innovative blends, as well as exploring new varieties and styles. Alejandro Iglesias recommends his favourites

① **Susana Balbo Wines, Susana Balbo Signature White Blend, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2019** 95
£16.95-£20 (2018) **Bottle Apostle, Christopher Piper, Grapevine Wine Services, Hedonism, Hennings, Noble Green, The Whalley Wine Shop, Vegan Wine Box**
A leading light among Argentinian white blends, made with Semillon, Torrontés and Sauvignon Blanc from Paraje Altamira at 1,050m above sea level. With a distinctive combination of mineral notes, hints of white flowers, fresh citrus, pear and green apple over subtle spices, it offers refreshing acidity and a full body. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13%

② **Otronia, III & VI, Patagonia 2017** 94
£60 **Bibendum Wine**
Juan Pablo Murgia and Alberto Antonini produce this exciting white with organic Chardonnay grapes from a Patagonian vineyard located at 45° of latitude to the south. The extreme climate, limestone soils and 16 months in barrel make this a pure, expressive wine with bright fruit, citrus, honey and cinnamon aromas. Long finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.8%

③ **Andeluna, Blanc de Franc, Tupungato, Gualtallary, Uco Valley 2019** 93
£29.99 **Hallgarten & Novum Wines**

Andeluna, a top producer in Gualtallary, has taken the unusual step of producing a 100% Cabernet Franc rosé. Unoaked, this is a pale, Provence-style rosé, expressive with raspberry, redcurrant, strawberry and rose notes. Taut and crisp, with a juicy-fruit palate, it is subtle and elegant. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

④ **Escorihuela Gascón, MEG, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2018** 96
N/A UK www.escorihuelagascon.com.ar
Matías Ciciani Soler knows how to bring out the character of the grapes from El Cepillo (southern Uco). A red blend of Malbec (60%) and Cabernet Sauvignon (40%) – elegantly complex with vibrant red fruits, the mineral personality of the terroir and well-integrated oaky aromas. Juicy and flavoursome with a chalky texture. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.7%

⑤ **Bodegas Bianchi, Enzo Bianchi Gran Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017** 95
£46 **Walker & Wodehouse**
A new luxury Malbec from Bodegas Bianchi made with grapes from Los Chacayes. Aged for 12 months in French oak, this is a lush, vigorous wine that stays true to the stony vineyard soils, offering a mineral profile with crisp red fruits, a chalky texture and refreshing acidity. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%

⑥ **Rutini, Single Vineyard Gualtallary Cabernet Franc, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2016** 95
£45.50 **Wine Direct**
Cabernet Franc wines are the latest jewel in Argentina’s crown. Mariano Di Paola, winemaker at Rutini Wines, is responsible for this refreshing wine from Gualtallary, sourced from a vineyard at 1,300m. It achieves a refined balance between berries and wild herbs, along with gentle spices and toasted hints from the oak ageing. Deliciously rich, with juicy tannins and a long finish. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13.6%

⑦ **Trapiche, Terroir Series Finca Coletto Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2015** 95
£27.25-£30.99 **Exel, Fareham Wine Cellar, NY Wines of Cambridge, The Fine Wine Co, Vintriloquy, Vinvm**
This is an original Malbec; an exquisite combination of luxury and freshness. The key lies in where it comes from: a 50-year-old vineyard in El Peral, Tupungato, at 1,130m above sea level. The mild climate of the region produces a fruity bouquet of cherries, berries and fresh flowers that continues on the palate, along with a firm, opulent mouthfeel. A rich and eloquent wine. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



8 Zuccardi, Aluvional Paraje Altamira, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2015 95

£65-£75 **Firth & Co, Wine Direct**

Sebastián Zuccardi is an Uco Valley producer and Aluvional is his collection of mountain wines from different terroirs. This Malbec, from Paraje Altamira, is aged in used barrels and concrete vats. It offers a wild profile evoking mountain breezes and herbs. Delivering vibrant red fruits with balsamic hints, in the mouth it is direct and full-bodied with a chalky texture.

Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14%

9 Domaine Bousquet, Ameri Single Vineyard, Tupungato, Gualtallary 2017 94

£28 **Vintage Roots**

Domaine Bousquet produces wines from its organic vineyards in Gualtallary, Uco Valley, located at 1,100m. This red is the flagship wine, a blend of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot that spends 16 months in barrel to establish an unusual, refined style. Rich and perfumed, it's full-bodied but well-balanced with juicy tannins.

Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14.5%

10 Durigutti Family Winemakers, Proyecto Las Compuertas Cabernet Franc, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2018 94

N/A UK **www.durigutti.com**

Héctor and Pablo Durigutti are committed to reviving Las Compuertas, a historic terroir of Luján de Cuyo at 1,050m above sea level. This unoaked Cabernet Franc is one of their most recent releases. Violet red in colour with lively red fruit and hints of fresh herbs, it is taut in the mouth with firm tannins.

Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13.9%

11 Luigi Bosca, DOC Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2018 94

£16.99 (2017) **Dunell's, Loki Wine**

A textbook Malbec produced by Luigi Bosca using grapes sourced from an old vineyard in Vistalba, Luján de Cuyo, for the first ever Designation of Origin in South America. Aged for 14 months in French oak, it delivers an intense mix of mature red fruits, violet aromas and oaky spices. Opulent and rich on the palate, with juicy tannins. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14%**

12 Salentein, Numina Gran Corte, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2016 94

£21.50 **Exel**

The unusual conditions in 2016 (a cold, rainy year in Mendoza) allowed Salentein winemaker José Galante to create one of his best ever versions of this red blend, combining Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Rich in colour, the wine displays bright red fruit and sweet spice aromas, along with attractive hints of Mediterranean herbs. It's polished and refined, with mouthwatering acidity.

Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13.5%

13 Trivento, Golden Reserve Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2017 94

£16 **Ocado, Tesco, The Pip Stop, Wine Pig**

Germán Di Césare makes this Malbec using grapes from different vineyards in Luján de Cuyo. Faithful to the fruity style he favours, this seductive wine offers aromas of cherry and blueberry in tandem with sweet oaky spices. A typically voluptuous Malbec from the region, it is refreshingly firm with a distinctive, sophisticated profile.

Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14%

14 Alta Vista, Terroir Selection Malbec, Mendoza 2017 93

£17 **Sainsbury's**

Alta Vista winery is a pioneer in the exploration of Mendoza terroirs. This Malbec, made with grapes from five different vineyards in the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo, is an expressive wine full of fruity character. Blackberry and blueberry notes mingle with slightly toasted aromas and Mediterranean herbs. In the mouth it is vigorous, but balanced, with graceful tannins.

Drink 2020-2024 Alc 14.5%

15 Colomé, Auténtico Malbec, Calchaquí Valley, Salta 2019 93

£30.30 (2018) **Liberty Wines, Quality Wines**

Made with grapes from old vineyards surrounding the winery at 2,500m in Salta, this unoaked Malbec is a classic expression of high-altitude terroir. Deeply coloured, it offers black cherry, wild herb and violet aromas, with hints of balsam and ripe figs. Luxurious but juicy mid-palate, with firm acidity and character. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14.5%**

16 Vistalba, Tomero Reserva Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017 93

£17.99-£18.50 **All About Wine, Bibendum**

Wine, The Fine Wine Co

Bodega Vistalba makes wines from grapes grown in the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo. The Tomero Reserva is one of its classics, a Malbec that combines a traditional character and a nod to modern palates. With a bouquet of black cherry and quince fruit, along with elegant floral aromas and oaky hints, on the palate it is elegant and lively, with a pleasantly lingering finish.

Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14% ➤



17 **Casarena, Single Vineyard Naoki's Vineyard Malbec, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2017** 93

£31 (2014) **Vinatis**
A self-proclaimed guardian of Luján de Cuyo, Casarena specialises in single-vineyard wines from the region. Naoki is an interesting vineyard in Agrelo whose soils have a high limestone content, resulting in an unusual Malbec with a distinctively fruity aroma. Light and taut with a refreshing mouthfeel and firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14.5%

18 **El Esteco, Old Vines 1958 Criolla, Cafayate, Salta 2018** 93

N/A UK www.elesteco.com
Criolla wines are some of the most inspiring bottles being produced in Argentina. Alejandro Pepa was one of the first producers to take an interest in this heritage and rescued an old Criolla vineyard in Cafayate, Salta. Unoaked and fermented with whole bunches, this wine offers fresh strawberry, with floral and leafy hints. Light and crisp on the palate. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14.4%

19 **Finca Sopenia, Estate Reserve Malbec, Gualtallary, Uco Valley 2018** 93

£13.95-£17.40 **Christopher Piper, Ellis Wines, Quality Wines**
Made by Julia Halupczok from Gualtallary grapes grown at 1,200m in the Uco Valley, this is very recognisably high-altitude Malbec. It offers deep black plum aromas with generous helpings of cherries, blackberries and violets. Lively on the palate, with polished tannins and refreshing acidity, this wine stands out in its price segment. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

20 **Pyros Wines, Single Vineyard Block No 4 Malbec, Pedernal Valley, San Juan 2015** 93

£29.95-£31 **Via UK agent New Generation**
Located at 1,400m in the province of San Juan, the Pedernal Valley has become an exciting terroir to explore. The vines grow in a mild, sunny climate in flinty limestone soils, resulting in wines like this, which combines herbal aromas with earthy, mineral flavours, cassis and cherries. Dense in the mouth, it offers excellent freshness and a chalky texture. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

21 **Altocedro, Año Cero Malbec, La Consulta, Uco Valley 2019** 92

£13-£16 (2018) **House of Townend, Noble Grape, Taste Argentina, The Good Wine Shop, Vinos Latinos**
Karim Mussi's entry-level Malbec is a very pure expression of La Consulta, a traditional wine region in the Uco Valley. This is a simple wine with red fruits and floral notes that temper the smokiness of the oak. In the mouth it's taut, savoury and fresh. A versatile food wine that can accompany a wide range of dishes. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14.2%

22 **Clos de los Siete, Vista Flores, Uco Valley, 2017** 92

£14.50-£17.50 **Champagnes & Châteaux, Sainsbury's**
The 15th vintage of this wine made by Michel Rolland. Grown at 1,100m, it's an intense and refreshing blend of Malbec, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc. Aged in French oak, it delivers ripe red fruits, dried herbs and smoky notes. Rich structure, well-defined acidity and firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

23 **Diamandes de Uco, Grande Reserve, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2015** 92

N/A UK www.diamandes.com
The Bonnie family, who own Château Malartic-Lagravière in Pessac-Léognan, make this assemblage of 75% Malbec and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon in the Uco Valley, in a recognisably Bordeaux style. Aged for 18 months in French oak, this is a lively wine in which Malbec dominates with its aromas of violets, ripe red fruit, redcurrant, cinnamon and vanilla. Mild, well-balanced and full-bodied, with firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

24 **La Celia, Pioneer Cabernet Franc, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017** 92

N/A UK www.lacelia.com.ar
In Argentina, Cabernet Franc tends to be fairly expensive, but a few good, reasonably priced examples can still be found, and this is one of them. Produced with grapes from La Consulta in the Uco Valley, it is made in a fruit-forward style, showing hints of Mediterranean herbs and smoky aromas. On the palate it is juicy in character with gentle tannins. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

25 **Monteviejo, Petite Fleur Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017** 92

N/A UK www.monteviejo.com.ar
Marcelo Pelleriti makes Petit Fleur Malbec, Bodega Monteviejo's entry-level offering, using grapes from the Uco Valley. A typical example of high-altitude wine, it combines red fruits and wild herbs with subtle toasted notes that underscore the fruity flavours. Medium-bodied, it offers lush tannins and a mineral finish. Excellent value for money. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



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Argentina for wine tourists

With a bit of careful planning – and armed with this guide to where to go and what to see – it's possible to get a taste of everything Argentina's wine country has to offer

Argentina wine country has never been a more attractive destination. With wine styles moulded by the high altitudes, a little tradition and plenty of modern ingenuity, it's no wonder that 1.2 million travellers a year come to see the country's vineyards, set against the craggily dramatic skyline of the Andes.

Offering a unique mixture of luxury, architecture and Latin American culture, the vineyards of Argentina require a little effort to visit but they repay the investment in spades. Organisation is key: crossing the wine country in its entirety is the equivalent of travelling from Edinburgh to Morocco, so it's important to do a little research and choose your destinations carefully.

AROUND MENDOZA

Located 987km west of Buenos Aires, the province of Mendoza accounts for 70% of the wine produced in Argentina. The region boasts 153,000ha of vineyards and 625 wineries, of which 146 offer hospitality services and activities. Of its three sub-regions, the Primera Zona to the north and the Uco Valley to the south can be easily visited in a day trip from the eponymous capital city, with vineyards located from 30km to 130km away. It is essential either to rent a car or book your travel through an agency.

Luján de Cuyo & Maipú

The Primera Zona is made up of two districts that border Mendoza City: Luján

de Cuyo and Maipú. These districts have formed the heart of wine country in Argentina since the 19th century, when Malbec first found a home here.

Against a backdrop of long rows of cottonwoods, the region offers a mixture of traditional and modern culture. A pair of wineries – Alta Vista and Trivento – are good examples of each, respectively. **Alta Vista** (www.altavistawines.com), built in 1890 and owned by the D'Aulan family since 1998, is a refurbished winery that today sits next to residential areas and has an olive garden suitable for picnics or a traditional *asado* barbecue.

Trivento (www.trivento.com), 10km east, is a more hi-tech winery. It even has an art museum on site, which is well worth a visit before you take a tour of the

Below: horseriding at Casa de Uco



'Luján de Cuyo and Maipú have formed the heart of wine country in Argentina since the 19th century, when Malbec found a home here'

neighbouring vineyard by bicycle. And if you're stopping here for lunch, the winery restaurant serves tapas.

It is across the Mendoza river (4km south), however, that you can really get a feel for how Argentina's wine industry has developed in recent times. Agrelo, a sub-district of Luján de Cuyo, boasts more than 100 wineries, all established after 1990. Make your first stop **Susana Balbo Wines** (www.susanabalbowines.com.ar), which has just celebrated its 20th anniversary. Taste wines from the local terroir before enjoying a five-course lunch at Osadía de Crear tapas restaurant.

About 15 minutes' drive south brings you to **Bodega Budeguer** (www.budeguer.com). This pretty family winery opened in 2012 and has now become a hot spot for wine lovers looking to head off the beaten track. View the Virgen de la Carrodilla chapel (designed by Mendoza architect Gonzalo Merlo) before enjoying an exclusive wine tasting.

Your third stop in Agrelo, **Pulenta Estate** (www.pulentaestate.com), is about five minutes' drive to the

southwest, and can be identified by the row of olive trees that line the entrance. The winery, which offers regular scheduled tours, belongs to an historic fourth-generation wine family, whose cellars also contain the odd classic Porsche.

Uco Valley

Drive south on Ruta 40 and you'll come to the Uco Valley (about an hour from Mendoza City). Casa de Uco and Alpasión Wine, Lodge & Vineyards are both located in the new Los Chacayes GI (geographical indication) and make an excellent base from which to explore the area on a one- or two-day tour. **Casa de Uco** (www.casadeuco.com) is a luxury hotel designed by the architect Juan Tonconogy. If you can't stay overnight, a day visit includes a tour of the 'telescopic' winery, while the restaurant serves food made from ingredients produced on the estate. Horseriding treks through the mountains are also on offer.

Alpasión Lodge (www.alpasion.com) is a warm and welcoming inn that's suitable either for a lunchtime visit or ➤

Mendoza: where to stay

CITY CENTRE

Amérian Executive Mendoza Hotel An elegant four-star hotel overlooking Plaza Italia, with an outdoor pool and a sun deck.
www.amerian.com

Diplomatic A five-star hotel that's close to shops and museums, with views of the Andes mountains from all rooms.
www.diplomatichotel.com.ar

Park Hyatt An imposing central hotel opposite the historic Plaza Independencia, with an outdoor pool and a casino.
www.mendoza.park.hyatt.com

Sheraton Mendoza Hotel A modern hotel featuring an indoor pool and a restaurant that offers panoramic views of downtown Mendoza and the Andes mountains.
www.sheratonmendozahotel.com-mendoza.com

OUTSIDE THE CITY

Alpasión Lodge Cosy, six-room accommodation in the Uco Valley offering a pool and a roof terrace with dramatic mountain views.
www.alpasion.com

Casa de Uco Set in the Andes foothills, this contemporary Uco Valley hotel has been designed to blend in with its breathtaking surroundings.
www.casadeuco.com

Entre Cielos Mendoza This modern boutique hotel in Luján de Cuyo has an outdoor pool and duplex suites with private terraces overlooking the vineyards.
www.entrecielos.com



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The wine cellar at Piedra Infinita

How to get there

Flights from the UK to Buenos Aires take just under 14 hours (daily flights from Heathrow with British Airways). It takes 1 hour 50 minutes to fly from Buenos Aires to Mendoza (12 daily flights) and 2 hours 45 minutes from Buenos Aires to Salta (four daily flights). There is also one direct daily flight between Mendoza and Salta, which takes 2 hours 15 minutes.

an overnight stay. The restaurant serves Argentinian cuisine, including llama meat, paired with wines from the vineyard.

From there, it's a 30-minute drive to **DiamAndes** (www.diamandes.com) in Vista Flores. The winery is part of Clos de los Siete – Michel Rolland's wine project – and is owned by the Bordelais Bonnie family. A visit here is a fascinating architectural experience. Make time to stop at Diam's Bistrot & Bar à Vin for a glass of wine on the terrace.

About 20km south is another new GI: Paraje Altamira. **Familia Zuccardi** (www.zuccardiwines.com) has built its striking Valle de Uco winery here. Designed by Fernando Raganato, the concrete structure features a copper dome and specially designed tanks and circulation spaces. While the architecture is the main attraction, the winery's Piedra Infinita restaurant is also well worth a visit.

Heading 45km north again, your next stop will be at **Bodegas Salentein** (www.bodegasalentein.com), designed by

Bórmida & Yanzón. The estate is also home to the Killka visitor centre, with its art museum containing part of winery owner Mijndert Pon's personal collection and an elegant chapel. If you're looking for a cosy place to sleep among the vines, the guesthouse here is very alluring.

Nearby, the flagstone-roofed **Bodega Atamisque** (www.atamisque.com) is located on the border between the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo. Surrounded by one of the region's prettiest estates, the vineyards adjoin groves of walnut, cherry and peach trees, as well as a trout farm supplying the restaurant. Allow half a day to visit the winery and estate, then spend the night in one of the lodges or have lunch at the restaurant. ➤

Eating, drinking and shopping in Mendoza City

Winery restaurants are an excellent option for lunch while you're staying in Mendoza City. **Azafrán** (www.azafranresto.com), **Maria Antonieta** (www.mariaantonietaresto.com) and **Anna Bistró** (www.annabistro.com) are among the best on offer.

At night, a meal at the lively **Fuente y Fonda** (www.fuenteyfonda.com.ar) is a good option for groups, while those seeking a more sophisticated atmosphere should head to **Orégano** (www.restauranteoregano.com), **Josefina Restó** (www.josefinaresto.com.ar) or **Siete Cocinas** (www.sietecocinas.com.ar).

If the plan is to drink plenty of wine or buy bottles to take home,



Azafrán

Cabrera Charif Wine House (www.cabreracharif.com) on Avenida Arístides Villanueva is worth a visit. Said avenue boasts a bustling nightlife,



full of pubs, bars and eateries. Mendoza also has a burgeoning craft beer scene, with **Chachingo Craft Beer** (@chachingo.aristides),

Antares (@antares.mendoza) and **Hangar 52** (@hangar52mza) all offering a good range. For cocktail lovers, the popular **Gingger** (www.ginggerbar.com) has an excellent list.

There are two main shopping areas in Mendoza: the pedestrianised city centre and **Palmares Open Mall** (www.palmares.com.ar). Recently opened in the Maipú district, the gourmet market **Il Mercato** (www.ilmercato.com.ar) is a 25-minute drive away.



Bodega Colomé

SKIES OF SALTA

The province of Salta lies in the far north of Argentina, on the Tropic of Capricorn. Amid a breathtaking landscape of deserts and ravines, cacti grow building-high and the sky is an extraordinarily pure blue: it's here that Salta's Calchaquí Valley produces a range of unique wines.

It is important to bear in mind that it takes at least three hours to get from Salta airport to the local wineries, as the surroundings shift upwards from jungle to a more lunar landscape.

Your first stop is the sleepy little town of Cafayate. At its entrance is **Bodega El Esteco** (www.elesteco.com), where you can experience both the past and present of the Calchaquí Valley. A visit to the old, colonial-style bell tower – built in 1892 – gives a good idea of its remote location. The winery provides tastings and tours of the vineyard (advance reservation required).

Heading north into the Calchaquí Valley, drive for at least two hours along winding mountain roads – it's an arduous

journey, but it's well worth it – and you'll arrive at **Bodega Colomé** (www.bodegacolome.com). Set in a remote, extraordinary landscape amid the peace and quiet of its 1,600m-high slopes, Colomé offers wine tastings, austere but well-appointed accommodation and absolute tranquillity.

Spend the night at the lodge after visiting the winery and the onsite James Turrell Museum, which is home to nine immersive light installations by this celebrated light and space artist.

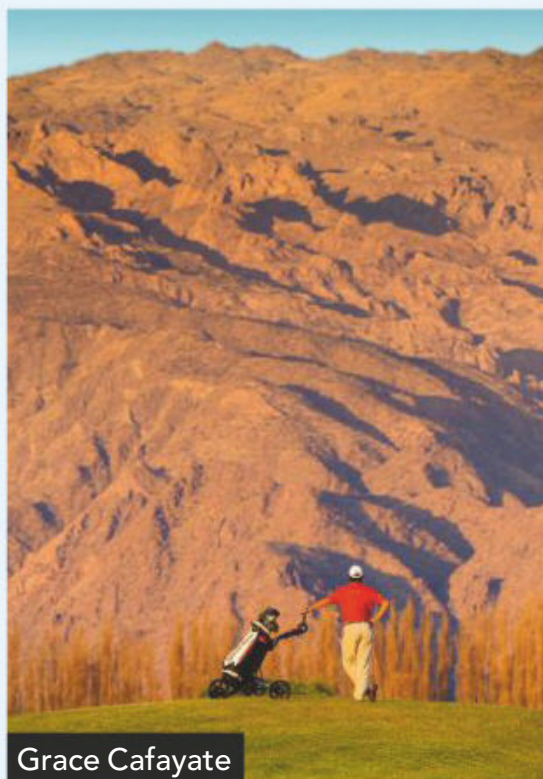
Salta: where to stay

IN CAFAYATE

Grace Cafayate This boutique spa hotel just south of the town centre is set in La Estancia de Cafayate residential and sporting estate, featuring vineyards, equestrianism and a golf course. www.graceargentina.com.ar

Patios de Cafayate Part of the El Esteco wine estate, this colonial-style hotel is set in the original estate farmstead, which dates back to 1892. www.patiosdecafayate.com

Viñas de Cafayate Just west of the town centre, this Mediterranean-style wine resort is set in vineyards and offers wine tastings and an outdoor pool. www.cafayatewineresort.com



Grace Cafayate

IN THE VALLEYS

Estancia Colomé Colonial-style lodging in a remote location, with an outdoor pool, a unique light museum and magnificent mountain views. www.bodegacolome.com

Finca El Carmen A cosy and laid-back guesthouse in Angastaco offering valley views, an outdoor pool and a museum. www.vallesdelcarmen.com.ar

Hacienda de Molinos A refurbished 18th-century hacienda that makes a tranquil stop-off on any Argentinian wine tour, boasting a swimming pool and a terrace with mountain views. www.haciendademolinos.com.ar

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ROBERT PARKER'S WINE ADVOCATE

Issue 245 End of October 2019

Argentina wine regions



Uruguay wine regions

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FORGING THE PATH OF ARGENTINE WINEMAKING SINCE 1883



Understanding Uruguay

Despite its long wine heritage, Uruguay has been slow to win the global recognition it deserves. But as producers make viticultural advances and explore new terroirs, this is beginning to change. Patricio Tapia reports



Bodega Bouza vineyard at the foot of Pan de Azúcar



Tango offers some of the most beautiful but also the saddest lyrics in the world of music. Disenchantment, loneliness, nostalgia, all surrounded by a halo of melancholy that makes tango a pleasure, but a rather guilty one.

There are many voices of tango, but without a doubt the most famous, the 'Elvis' of tango, is Carlos Gardel. The impeccable look, the perfect hairstyle, the cross-lapel jacket, the polished shiny shoes, the bright eyes and his raspy but sweet voice, singing the classic tangos that made a generation of South Americans sigh.

Gardel was a naturalised citizen of Argentina, but he claimed to be Uruguayan by birth (although there is evidence to suggest that he was actually born in Toulouse, France). He certainly fits the mould of a Uruguayan. While generalisations can be tedious, especially when it comes to defining the people of a particular country, Uruguayans seem to display a certain melancholy in their way of being, in their way of seeing life.

That was one of the things that most caught my attention when I first visited Uruguay, in early 2000. Under the shadow of the Chilean wine boom and the incipient growth of Argentinian wine, the melancholy of the Uruguayans translated into a certain resignation at not being able to compete with those new wines, but also some mistrust when showing their wines, as if what they did was not up to the same standard as their neighbours. Today that has changed, and has changed radically, especially

'Uruguayans have realised that what they have has very little to do with what is done elsewhere in South America'

since Uruguayans seem to have realised that what they have is not only of good quality, but also has very little to do with what is done elsewhere in South America.

Climatic conditions

Uruguay looks towards the Atlantic and a large part of its territory, in the northwest, flanks the mighty Río de la Plata. Both bodies of water play a very important role in the climate of the viticultural areas, which are humid, but at the same time have moderate temperatures, never reaching the heat levels of Mendoza in Argentina, or the Central Valley in Chile.

It is these conditions which have made Tannat the star grape of Uruguay. Imported for the first time in 1870 from the southwest of France by the Basque Pascual Harriague, Tannat has a firm, thick skin strong enough to prevent the rot of grapes under the heavy Atlantic rains. Thanks to viticultural advances, the diversity of wine grapes in Uruguay is today relatively wide, but in those first years of trial and error it was Tannat that survived. Today it is still the country's ➤



The Arizus are pioneers in Mendoza's winemaking history. They have consistently worked to achieve the ultimate expression of Argentine wine. They recognise that they have been blessed with a privileged terroir where soil, climate and plant varieties find the perfect combination.

The harmony of these elements together with the study of the environment, and of each plot where the vineyards are planted, allow Luigi Bosca to obtain unique wines, full of character and personality.

The different collections of wines from Luigi Bosca find success throughout the world for their authenticity and elegance. In constant search of terroirs that give the grapes unique character, Luigi Bosca have launched wines made from specific regions that depict a true sense of place.

Luigi Bosca has become the paradigm of an Argentine brand not only for the consistency in quality and hard work, but also because it has created a lasting bond with the terroir, knowing what to expect and how to bring the best of the land.



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BODEGA NORTON CELEBRATES ITS 125 harvests

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BODEGA
NORTON

OUR TEAM



MICHAEL HALSTRICK
President & CEO of Bodega Norton

In 1991, at the age of 27, Michael Halstrick was appointed by his father, Genot Langes-Swarovski, as the CEO of Bodega Norton. Michael immediately moved to Mendoza and started a new phase of investment, modernization and growth in both the domestic and export markets. The company started growing substantially, becoming one of Argentina's most renowned wineries in just 20 years.



DAVID BONOMI
Winemaker

"One of the 10 best winemakers in South America" since Tim Atkin's report of April 2019, Bonomi is recognized for his experience, serenity and ability to communicate what is inside each bottle of wine. Bonomi is part of a new generation of winemakers focused on the goal of making each variety express itself with excellence.

THE WINES

NORTON HISTORY. In 1895, an English engineer, **Edmund James Palmer Norton**, arrived in Mendoza to construct the Transandine railway that crossed Mendoza on the route between Buenos Aires and Chile. He fell in love with the land of Mendoza and decided to change his field of work and started a business that at that time seemed promising, the wine business. He acquired a virgin land in Luján de Cuyo, at the south of Mendoza river, at that time it was a wild and distant land, and he planted vines imported from France. This way, he established the first winery at the south of Mendoza's river.

In 1989, the Austrian entrepreneur **Genot Langes Swarovski**, attracted by the exceptional conditions for vine cultivation in Mendoza, purchased Bodega Norton with the ambition of creating world-class wines.

In 1991, **Michael Halstrick**, the current President and CEO, initiated a new phase in the history of the company: investments were made in the winery and vineyards that would enable expansion into export markets around the world.

SPECIALISTS IN MALBEC. Only a few locations worldwide are blessed with the necessary conditions to create unforgettable wines. Today, our winery has 5 estates located in Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, in the foothills of the Andes.

Norton's vineyards cover 1,265 hectares across five estates, with 730 hectares in full production, and expanding year by year. The estates are not only characterized by their geographical location, more than 1,000 metres above sea level, but also by the age of their vines, some of which are over 90 years old.

With 125 harvests to date, Bodega Norton has succeeded in positioning itself as an expert in Malbec.

Over the years, we've grown and developed with the expertise of our winemakers; our people and our natural resources, gaining multiple awards and accolades across our portfolio of premium wines.

These 125 years of experience have helped us play a leading role in the history of Argentinian wine. This anniversary is not just a celebration; it is an inspiration to look ahead, to keep on growing, as stewards of this land that we love and know so well.

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Paul Hobbs: a 'gringo' winemaker in Uruguay

American consultant winemaker Paul Hobbs has been visiting Uruguay since the early 1990s. Today, he is a consultant for the Deicas family projects, one of the most dynamic forces on the new Uruguayan scene.

What are the differences between viticulture in Uruguay and the rest of South America?

Everything. Mainly because the climate here is majorly different relative to any of the well-known wine regions of Argentina or Chile – it's drier and warmer. Climate impacts the entire biosphere, so the soils are unique too. Viticulturally speaking, it's unlike any other place on the continent.

How have Uruguay's wines developed since your first visit?

Fast. In the 1990s I was struck by how backwards the industry was – it made Argentina look positively space age. There was an intense, driving will to improve, but we were racked by where to get the money to finance these capital-intensive dreams. Today, I can only speculate on how they did it, but when I returned 17 years later to work with Deicas, I really could not believe my eyes. Certainly it didn't hurt that deep-pocketed foreign investments were made – for example at Garzón – but Deicas and others had advanced in major ways as well.

You've worked in numerous vineyards throughout Uruguay. Which area has provided you with the most satisfaction?

Of the Deicas holdings, which are diverse and extensive, ironically one of my favourites is its home vineyard in Canelones. I didn't expect much from the relatively heavy clay soils, but I was wrong. I found energy, vitality, freshness and finesse.

Tannat is considered Uruguay's unique selling point, but is there another grape that has potential?

The short answer is that we don't really have a handle on this yet, but we are working hard on it. Several white classical varieties certainly excel, while some rarified varieties such as Petit Manseng can be very good. Merlot, Marselan and Cabernet Franc all show promise.

What are the major challenges for Uruguay?

There are major challenges to making great wine anywhere. Years ago, economic factors and climate would have been my answer. Today, I don't see either of those as concerns. For Uruguayan producers it strikes me that the next big hurdle is gaining international awareness and being accorded due respect for the beautiful wines they are making.



Tannat

'Granitic soils and the strong influence of the sea have served to uncover a more fruity and friendly face of Tannat'

most-planted variety, accounting for 1,600ha of the 6,000ha of land under vine.

Many of those hectares of Tannat are concentrated in Canelones, the country's most-planted region, accounting for more than 60% of its production. The reason for this concentration is its proximity to Uruguay's capital, Montevideo, which has always been the main market for Uruguayan wines. Annual consumption in Uruguay is 27 litres per capita – the highest of any South American country.

Soil types

The soft hills of Canelones combined with the region's clay and limestone soils produce a Tannat that is austere in aroma but has a great intensity of textures, such as those obtained in Las Violetas, one of Uruguay's top viticultural areas. 'The soils in Las Violetas are very fertile: production must be controlled to obtain ripe grapes and soft tannins,' says Javier Carrau of Bodegas Carrau, one of the main promoters of Tannat in Uruguay. 'Under those conditions you get reds with an intense colour and very rich fruit flavours.'

The Tannat of Canelones could be considered a classic Uruguayan style. ➤



Paul Hobbs



Los Cerros de San Juan, Colonia

With firm tannins, great structure and concentration it can be compared to a Romanesque church, with the same austerity and those thick walls.

In contrast, newer styles of Tannat are beginning to appear in regions towards the east, in Maldonado Bay, facing the Atlantic Ocean. This area has only been planted since the beginning of this century, but during the past five years it has demonstrated that it has much to contribute to the diversity of Uruguay's wine scene.

The topography of Maldonado is made up of gentle slopes that gradually slide to the Atlantic. The influence of the ocean is felt in constant winds, which help control humidity, while granite soils have low fertility and good drainage – the latter particularly important in a country where it rains a lot.

According to Alberto Antonini, Italian winemaker and adviser at Bodega Garzón, one of the main recent forces in Uruguayan wine: 'Due to its terroir, Garzón's Tannat is juicy, vibrant and acidic, with bright black fruit. [It is] more textural and less concentrated than the examples from Canelones, with a deep and smooth reactive tannin.'

Galician accent

In fact, those granitic soils and the strong influence of the sea have not only served to uncover a more fruity and friendly face of Tannat, but also to produce very good wines from other grapes. Red varieties to look out for are Cabernet Franc and Syrah, while for whites there are very good Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs. The new white star of Uruguay, however, is Maldonado's Albariño, especially those made by Garzón, Bodega Océanica and the pioneer of the grape in Uruguay, Bodega Bouza.

'The conditions in this area are similar to those found in Galicia: humidity, and granite soils. That is why I think we have obtained good results with this grape,' says Juan Bouza about his perfumed and deliciously refreshing Albariño de Maldonado. It is an ideal white to drink on the beaches of Punta del Este, one of the most famous spots in South America and the gateway to this new wine region.

The Maldonado area represents a new face of Uruguay, but this is a country with a long wine heritage. Colonia, in the southwest, for example, is home to the oldest winery in Uruguay, Los Cerros de San Juan, founded more than 160 years ago. Colonia is the second most-planted

region, with about 1,100ha of vineyards, and it is here that Uruguay's first Sauvignon Blancs were made, influenced by its proximity to the Río de la Plata. Today the fresh, herbal style of these Sauvignons continues, but the region also produces firm, tense Tannats.

The recent history of Uruguayan wine has had its ups and downs. Until very recently, and perhaps wanting to imitate the success of Argentinian Malbec, producers tried to make their Tannat with a similar silkiness, a similarly charming, enveloping character – something that Malbec has to spare. But Tannat is the opposite of that style. By researching more in the vineyard and exploring new terroirs, today's producers are managing to find a truer personality for Tannat; and at the same time they are discovering new grapes and new flavours in this small but dynamic South American wine-producing country.

Today, there is a growing confidence among Uruguay's winemakers – and they are right to be proud of their wines.

Patricio Tapia is a regular *Decanter* contributor and the author of the annual *Descorchados* guide to the wines of South America

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Sustainable Uruguay

Producers in this verdant country have embraced eco-friendly methods across all aspects of their winemaking, from the vineyards to packaging, discovers Amanda Barnes

With a maritime climate much like that of Bordeaux, the grass is certainly greener in Uruguay than in the arid wine regions of nearby Argentina and Chile. But while the grass may be greener, managing that grass – between the vines at least – is certainly harder. Indeed Uruguay has the most labour-intensive climate of all South American wine regions.

‘Uruguay has a much more temperate climate, and high rainfall,’ explains flying winemaker Duncan Killiner, who has been making wine in South America for 25 years. ‘There’s much more disease pressure in Uruguay and, as a lot of the viticultural work has to be done by hand, the labour costs increase four-fold when compared to the rest of the New World. Hence the extra love in each bottle of Uruguayan wine costs a little more!’

The maritime climate is what makes Uruguay’s wines so distinctive in South America: delicately aromatic, fresh and balanced. But the changeable climate also means Uruguay’s wine-growers have to work much harder to strike a balance between effective, efficient and ecologically sensitive viticulture. Despite the challenges, sustainable viticulture is firmly on the agenda in Uruguay – at both a local and national level.

Biodiversity matters
at Cerro Chapeu in
northern Uruguay



A strict code

Uruguay's wine producers have been using integrated farming techniques widely for decades, and a new association set up last year put into action a three-year sustainability programme and certification. 'We already have 34 producers and 642ha in the programme for this first year,' says Bettina Bértola from the National Viticulture Institute, on a number that already represents more than 10% of the country's production. 'And there are many producers interested in joining next year,' she adds.

The sustainability qualification is being developed in conjunction with producers to create a strict code focused on sustainable and ecological production of high-quality wine grapes. 'This new certification will limit use of some agrochemicals and eliminate many altogether,' explains Sebastian Ariano, fourth-generation winemaker at Ariano Hermanos winery. 'But beyond this certification, we've always thought of wine grapes as a sustainable crop. This year, our winery celebrated 90 years as a company, and sustaining the business for future generations has always been the focus.'

Family winery Giménez Méndez has also been focusing on integrated farming for multiple generations. 'Sixty years ago we started talking about the negative effects of conventional agriculture on the environment,' explains export manager Sebastián Pedreira, 'and since then we've been moving towards the more sustainable alternatives available through integrated farming and organic production – for the benefit of the environment and human health.'

Focus on biodiversity

Many Uruguayan wine-growers feel that caring for their vineyards runs in their blood. 'On the vineyard we have always been 99% organic,' explains Daniel Pisano, the fourth generation of his family to make wine in Canelones. 'We were born and live in the midst of our vineyards, so we are very conscious of having a healthy place to live and work.'

In recent years, like many wine families in Uruguay, the Pisano family has prioritised biodiversity in its vineyards. This has meant cutting out herbicides entirely, even in the rich, fertile clay soils of Canelones and Montevideo.



Narbona



Pablo Fallabrino

'Since 2006 we've been working in our Montevideo vineyard without herbicides, simply using machines to control the grass growth,' explains Marcos Carrau, 10th generation at Bodegas Carrau. 'By leaving the wild grass, we see a greater diversity of vegetation and microflora, which is beneficial for the soil and the plant.'

Cerro Chapeu in northern Uruguay is another winery focused on using the natural biodiversity of their site to aid viticulture. 'We've been using native yeasts for our wine ferments since 1988,' explains export manager Pia Carrau, 'and we also apply these native yeasts in the vineyard – they effectively work as a fungicide.'

Maintaining the natural characteristics of the site is also a top priority for Narbona winery in Carmelo. 'We are working with minimum intervention in order to revalue the region and its very specific characteristics,' explains winemaker Valeria Chiola, who feels less intervention in the soil helps the terroir translate better to the wines.

Many wineries, including Narbona, Toscanini Wines, Varela Zarranz and one of the country's largest producers, Establecimiento Juanicó, have been trialling organic viticulture – and in some

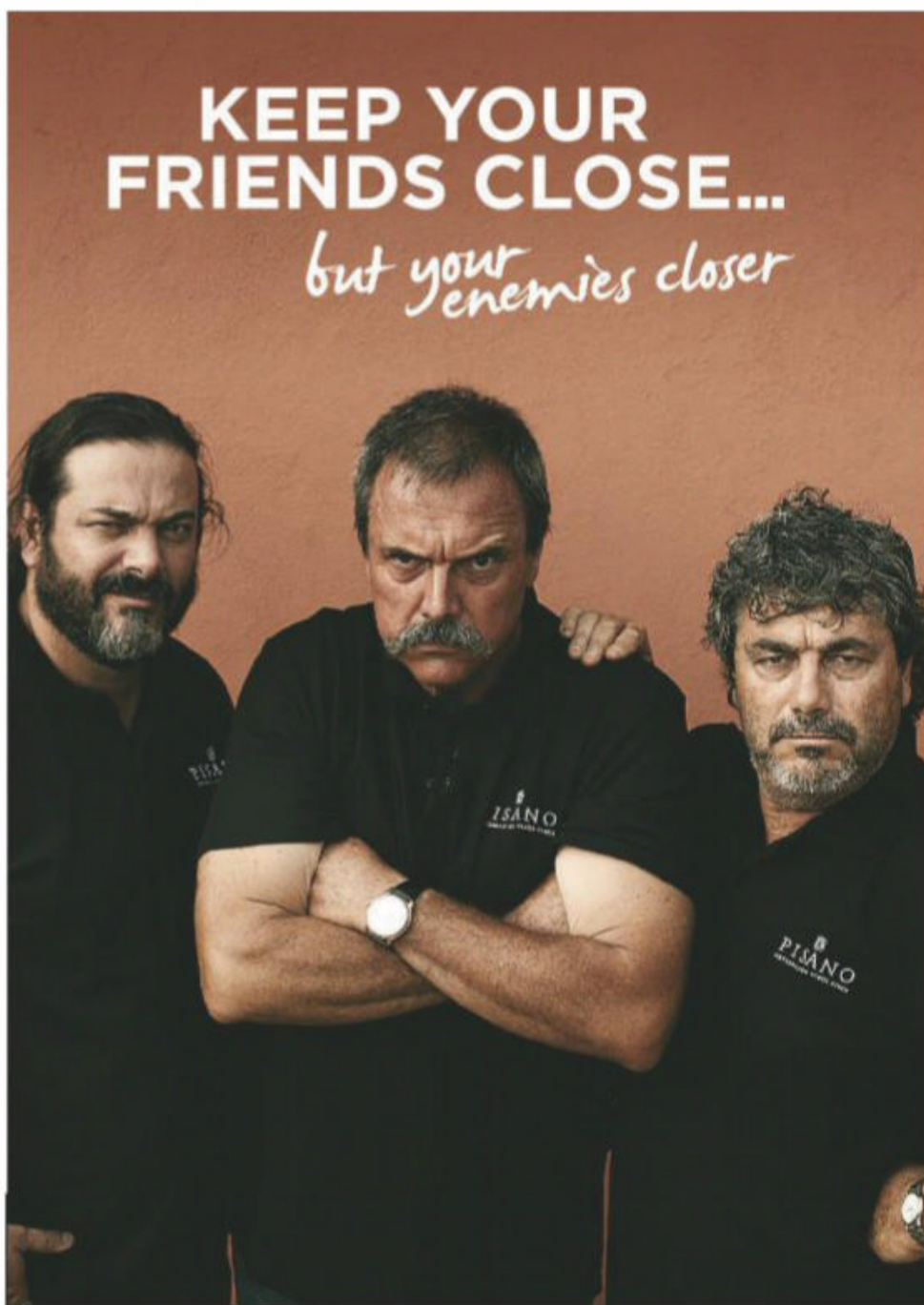
cases organic practices have also filtered into the winery. 'We've been reducing the use of sulphur dioxide each vintage,' says Juanicó winemaker and third-generation owner Santiago Deicas. 'We are using three times less than we did 10 years ago. This includes making some natural wines under our Bizarra label.'

Minimal intervention

Pablo Fallabrino of Viñedo de los Vientos is also a champion of low- to no-sulphur winemaking. 'My philosophy is to produce grapes with minimal intervention from chemical products, in a balanced ecosystem – and in the winery we've also been on a path towards minimal intervention,' he explains from his winery in Canelones, just 4km from the coast. 'Although Uruguay is humid and we have problems with downy mildew, we don't have any problems with oidium – so we don't need to use any sulphur treatments. This is an advantage we have compared to the other dry regions in the New World, which have to apply tons of sulphur per hectare. This sulphur is a petrol derivative, so it's not at all ecological.'

Fallabrino's major initiatives in the winery include native yeast ferments, using no added sulphites or enzymes, and reusing barrels for up to 15 years. Fallabrino says the changes have been doubly beneficial: 'We are now producing wines with more personality – and much healthier wines.'

A neighbouring winery, Bracco Bosca, focuses on the most ecologically sensitive way for the grapes to reach not only the winery, but also the consumer. 'We've been using ecological bottles ➤



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- 100 years old vineyards and cellars, owned and managed by 5th Generation Pisano Family members.
- Pisano is a Family of wine lovers, wine is our life & passion. We enjoy rain just like vines after a drought.
- We combine biodynamic, organic & Integrated Pest Management practices.
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Coastal influence has a great impact in winemaking. There are many attributes that affect the style of wines, and Uruguay, by having coastal proximity to the Atlantic Ocean is naturally gifted to producing high quality wines. If we have to highlight one of the main aspects of coastal influence, it would be the overall lower temperatures during the ripening of the grapes.

During this stage, days are usually mild to hot reaching up to 32°C or 90°F; however, at night these temperatures decrease substantially to around 10°C or 50°F. This is the result of the sea



Atlántico Sur Wine by Familia Deicas.

breeze, the natural cooling effect of the ocean. These characteristics allow for a balanced ripening profile of flavours and tannins, while naturally achieving refreshing acidity. Familia Deicas Winery has been the pioneer of Atlantic Wines in Uruguay.

With vineyards in twelve terroirs in different regions of Uruguay close to the Atlantic Ocean, including in the Garzon region of Maldonado, Cerro de Guazuvira in Lavalleja, and other micro terroirs in Rocha and Maldonado, Familia Deicas has vast experience farming oceanic vineyards. Santiago Deicas, third generation of the family and winemaker, has been specializing in finding terroirs close to the shore.

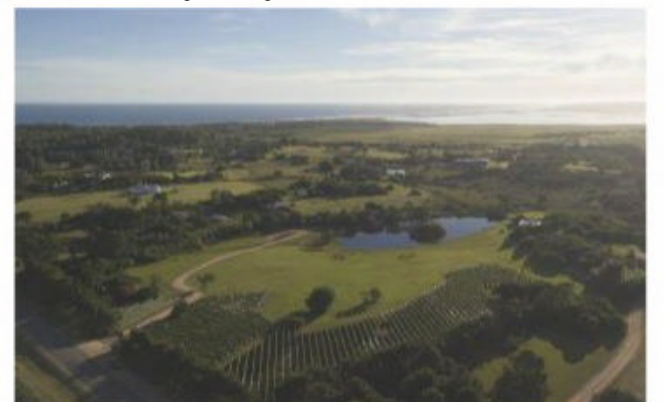


Fernando Deicas President of Familia Deicas Winery and Santiago Deicas third generation and Winemaker.

He explains: "Like winemakers planting in high altitudes, we are farming on the coast, searching for cooler weather. Wines from these regions reflect the uniqueness of the place, expressing more diversity when you have different soils. I think the Atlantic Ocean is what gives identity to Uruguayan wines, even more so than Tannat."

Atlantic wines can be either modern, bright and full of energy such as in Galicia, Portugal and New York or can age gorgeously like in Bordeaux. Familia Deicas is making top-notch vanguard wines, notably the Extreme Vineyards or Massimo Deicas, and is also known for its iconic aging wine Preludio, which can be enjoyed 25 years after harvest.

Micro terroir in Jose Ignacio, region of Maldonado





Bodega Garzón

'I felt we had the responsibility to construct something that would protect the purity of the surrounding land and wildlife'

Alejandro Bulgheroni, Bodega Garzón

made from recycled glass for the past three years,' explains owner Fabiana Bracco. 'We also recycle the cardboard wine boxes with local customers. At first, people were a bit uncomfortable receiving boxes that had been used before, but now they understand the ecological impact and love it.'

Ecological bottles and packaging are being adopted widely in Uruguay, and wineries including Antigua Bodega, Familia Dardanelli and Familia Traversa have also made the transition from traditional heavy bottles to lighter, ecologically friendly bottles.

Forward thinking

A recent explosion of new producers in Uruguay's coastal Maldonado region has also made sustainability a focal point. Bodega Garzón, established in 2016 by Argentine billionaire Alejandro Bulgheroni, became the first 100% LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver-certified winery outside North America last year.

'I felt we had the responsibility to construct something that would protect the purity of the surrounding land and wildlife,' explains Bulgheroni. 'I'm extremely proud of my team for setting a new benchmark in the wine industry for sustainable design.' Every installation and building has LEED Silver certification, from the innovative waste-water system

to the 'living roof' featuring 70,000 plants – the largest in Latin America.

Viña Edén, also in Maldonado, was designed in 2009 to not only recycle water but to generate its own electricity from wind turbines and solar panels in the vineyard, which in fact supplies double the electricity it needs. 'The excess energy we generate goes into the local power grid for the nearby villages,' explains owner Mauricio Zlatkin. 'Our ethos is to have a positive environmental impact on the region.'

New Maldonado wineries such as Viña Edén, Garzón and Bodega Oceánica José Ignacio have also had a positive economic impact, creating a new tourism industry that has provided hundreds of jobs for locals and revived local artisan traditions.

Historic wineries are also planting anew, with an eye for grape varieties that are sustainable for the future. 'Marselan has great characteristics for sustainable viticulture in Uruguay,' explains Varela Zarranz winemaker Santiago Degásperi. 'Its thick skin protects the berries from splitting in the rain, and we can work the vineyard organically and biodynamically. Its naturally high acidity also makes it more stable in the winery – so we aren't adding any sulphur to the wine at all.'

As Uruguay's producers continue to explore more sustainable vineyard and winery practices, the emphasis grows on respecting not only the environment of today, but that of tomorrow. 'We work with techniques that respect the harmony of our natural environment,' explains Florentina Casao from El Capricho in Durazno. 'We do it for our land, for us and for the generations to come.'

Amanda Barnes is a wine and travel writer who has been based in South America since 2009. She is the author of the *South America Wine Guide*



Viña Edén

Sustainable Uruguay: Barnes shares her top 12 wine recommendations

① **Cerro del Toro, Albariño, Maldonado 2019** 91
N/A UK www.cerrodeltoro.uy
This new hillside coastal vineyard shows great promise from its debut vintage of Albariño. Juicy peach aromas lead into a lively wine with a tangy, saline finish that leaves you dreaming of the sea. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12%

② **Bracco Bosca, Ombú Moscatel, Canelones 2018** 90
£14.49 **Latin Wines Online**
Fabiana Bracco is on a mission to revalue her old vines. Her Moscatel and Ugni Blanc blend is scented with citrus and white blossom. This is a crisp, sea-salt fresh wine; ideal for sushi on the beach. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12%

El Capricho, Verdejo, Durazno 2019 89
N/A UK www.elcaprichowinery.com
One of the few producers in the inland Durazno region, El Capricho also pioneered the Verdejo grape. This lemon-scented, steely white shows classic fennel and pink grapefruit aromas, with a fresh finish. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12%

③ **Bodega Oceánica José Ignacio, Pinot Rosé, Maldonado 2019** 92
N/A UK www.ojoseignacio.com
Mouthwatering Pinot Noir rosé from this new coastal vineyard located just 10km from the sea. Precision, purity and pink pleasure guided by the hand of renowned winemaker Hans Vinding-Diers. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12.5%

Viña Progreso, Underground Barrel-less Tannat, Canelones 2019 94
£25-£28 **Drinkmonger, House of Townend**
Unoaked and sulphite-free: this is the bold approach of one of Uruguay's most promising young winemakers, Gabriel Pisano. This sumptuous Tannat reveals elegant, silky tannins on the palate and a rich perfume of berries and violets. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

④ **Alto de la Ballena, Reserva Tannat-Viognier, Maldonado 2015** 93
£23.62 (2010) **Connolly's**
The modern-day pioneer of coastal Maldonado is also a pioneer of adding Viognier (14%) into its Tannat blend,

lending an inviting perfume to this complex, ageworthy red blend. **Drink** 2020-2027 **Alc** 14%

Bodegones del Sur, Amphora Merlot-Tannat, Maldonado/Canelones 2019 93
£18.99-£19 (2018) **The Good Wine Shop, Vinos Latinos**
The youngest generation of one of Uruguay's best-known wine dynasties delves into the world of natural wines with this impressive debut blend of Tannat and Merlot (50% each) aged in amphora. Juicy, fresh and polished. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14.8%

Viñedo de los Vientos, Anarkia Tannat, Canelones 2017 93
£13 **Condor Wines, Vinos Latinos, Wines of Uruguay**
Tannat, but not as you know it. Pablo Fallabrino was the first Uruguayan to make a foray into natural wine and this no added-sulphite 100% Tannat is pure forest fruit expression, muddled with exotic spice and polished tannins. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14%

Toscanini, Adagio Espressivo, Canelones 2016 92
N/A UK www.toscaniniwines.com
This family winery blends Tannat, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in this rich red from Paso Cuello in northern Canelones.

Deep fruit intensity lifted with notes of forest herbs and fresh black pepper. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.9%

Varela Zarranz, 1888 Marselán, Canelones 2018 92
N/A UK www.varelazarranz.com
This stylish natural wine has deep concentration balanced with supple tannins and a long, aromatic finish. Setting the bar high for this promising new variety that's being planted widely in Uruguay. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.8%

⑤ **Artesana, Tannat-Merlot-Zinfandel, Canelones 2016** 89
N/A UK www.artesanawinery.com
Each family brings its own unique twist to Uruguay's wines – and this Californian family planted the country's first Zinfandel, which adds a juicy plushness to this red blend (55% Tannat, 30% Merlot, 15% Zinfandel). Ideal for summer barbecues. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13.8%

Bodega Brisas, Altos de José Ignacio Reserve Tannat, Maldonado 2018 89
£14-£15.59 (2017) **Bibendum Wine, Buy Great Wine, Exel, The Fine Wine Co**
From the granitic soils of Maldonado on the northern coast, this vibrant and youthful Tannat is a fresh, spicy style of Uruguay's emblematic grape variety from the sister winery of Garzón. Ideal with grilled lamb. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



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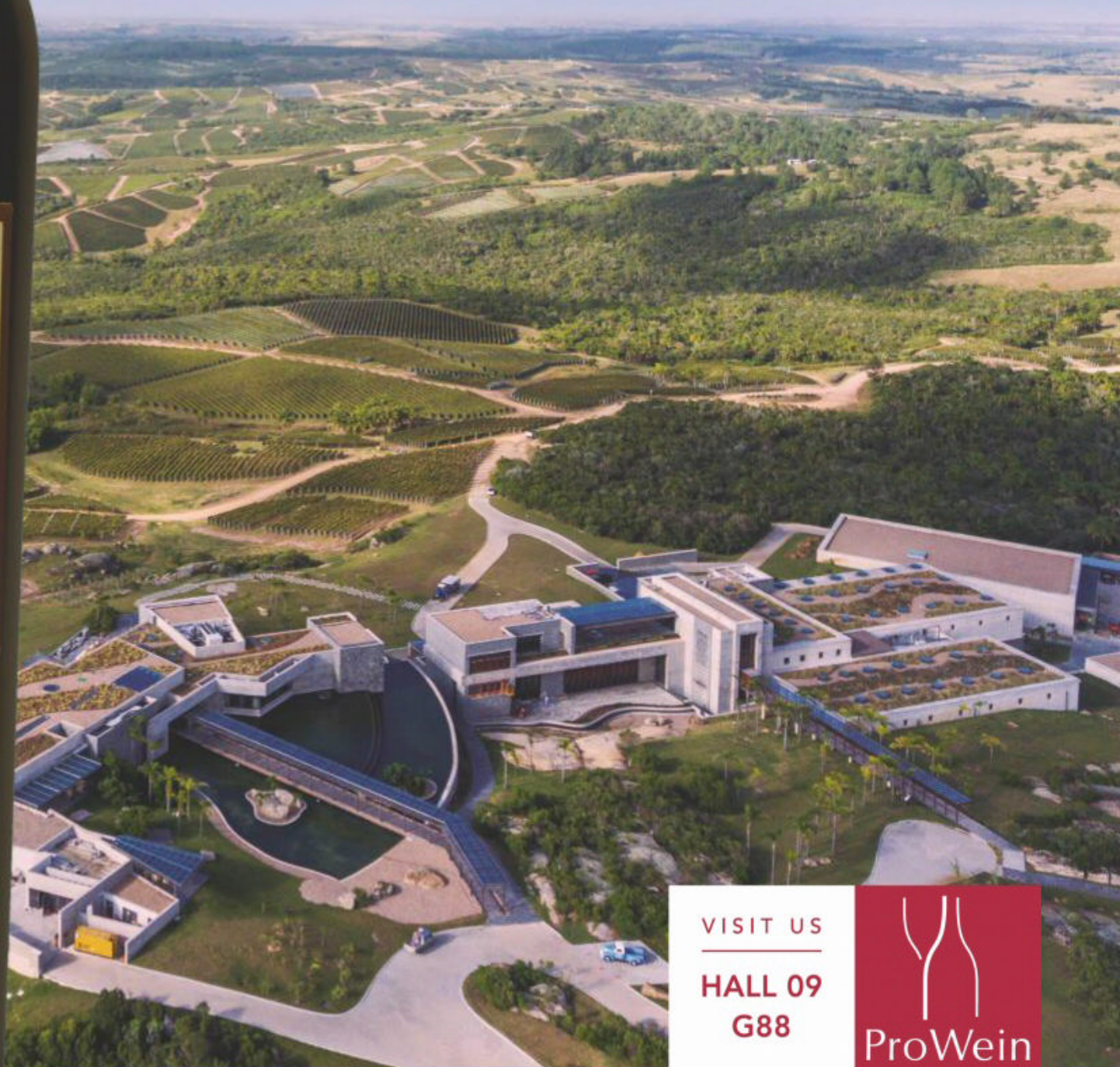
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Renowned wine guide Descorchados chose
Bodega Garzón as Winery of the Year and
our Petit Clos Tannat as Uruguay's best red.



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Expert's choice: Uruguay

From intense, textured Tannats to fresh, ocean-influenced Albariños, Marina Gayan MW selects 18 wines to kickstart your journey of discovery



Many wine lovers around the world are yet to taste Uruguayan wines. This is perhaps because of the small scale of the country's wine production and Uruguay's relatively recent arrival on the international wine scene. Bearing in mind that only 5% of the country's bottled wines are exported, this tasting showcases fully half of the producers who export the highest quality Vinos de Calidad Preferente (VCP) wines.

The predominance of red wines is perhaps not surprising in a country where most of the land is dedicated to beef production. Uruguay has the highest per capita consumption of beef in the world (56kg, followed closely by Argentina with 54kg). Of the 6,100ha of vineyards in Uruguay, 4,900ha are planted with red grapes, predominantly Tannat and Merlot.

All but one of the reds in this selection are made, wholly or in part, from Uruguay's flagship grape variety,



Bouza, Albariño, Canelones 2019 95

£19.95 (2018) **Jeroboams**

This wine is the perfect Albariño archetype. Lovely fresh apricots, white-fleshed nectarines and yeasty notes. Beautifully lifted palate of layered citrus and stone fruits, with mineral notes and an underlying saltiness. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Bodegas Carrau, Juan Carrau Sauvignon Blanc Sur Lie, Canelones 2018 95

N/A UK www.bodegascarrau.com

What a nice surprise! A Sauvignon Blanc that is elegant and mineral; marked by yeasty aromas together with citrus and subdued tropical notes. Lovely texture and zingy acidity. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%



Bodega Garzón, Balasto, Maldonado 2017 95

£100 **Liberty Wines**

A blend of Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Marselan made only in the best years. Dark and bold with intense aromas of plum and spices. A wine that begs for time in bottle. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%



Familia Deicas, Extreme Vineyards Cerro del Guazuvirá, Lavalleja 2018 95

£31 **Condor Wines, The Good Wine Shop,**

Vinos Latinos

Merlot, Tannat, Petit Verdot and Viognier. Entices with notes of black plums, olives, spice and toast. Structured, concentrated, with juicy fruit. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Viña Edén, Cerro Negro Gran Reserva, Maldonado 2016 95

N/A UK www.vinaeden.com

A blend of Tannat, Merlot and Marselan with complex aromas of blueberries, spices and smoky oak. Beautiful elegance with a vibrant acidity showing off its oceanic influence. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13.9%



De Lucca, Río Colorado Reserve, Canelones 2011 94

£25 **Vinos Latinos**

Shows Tannat's ageing potential. Blended with Cabernet and Merlot, it displays classic earthy aromas of tobacco and dark fruit. Meaty and juicy on the palate. A serious wine. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13.5%



Giménez Méndez, Premium Tannat, Canelones 2018 93

£25 **Laithwaite's**

Packed with aromas of blueberries and blackcurrants. The palate opens with a chocolatey attack, layered with black pepper and vanilla. Chalky tannins and powerful oak. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



Marichal, Grand Reserve A Tannat, Canelones 2015 93

£27.99 **Vinos Latinos**

Lovely expression of black forest fruit and spices with a hint of vanilla. Concentrated chalky tannins are balanced by juicy fruit, keeping the plentiful oak in line. Let it breathe. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13.5%



Ariano Hermanos, Don Julio Ariano Special Reserve Tannat-Merlot-Syrah, Canelones 2017 92

N/A UK www.arianohermanos.com

Juicy dark fruits and toasty oak notes are followed by spices and plums, rounded out nicely by sweet tannins. Persistent finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14%

Tannat. The eight single-variety Tannats here share a few characteristics: colour intensity, oak ageing (two wines are unoaked), textured tannins, refreshing acidity and a savoury edge that enhances the dark fruit.

All in the blend

To my mind, Tannat blends are Uruguay's secret weapon. The top three wines here showcase the quality that can be achieved in this country. Surprisingly, none of them comes from Canelones, Uruguay's most important wine region, which accounts for 65% of the country's vineyards. One is a Merlot-based blend from the volcanic soils of Cerro del Guazuvirá in Lavalleja. The other two are Tannat-based blends from coastal Maldonado – one from Viña Edén and the other from Garzón.

'To my mind, Tannat blends are Uruguay's secret weapon'

When it comes to whites, Albariño and Sauvignon Blanc are logical grape varieties for the terroir. Uruguay is surrounded by water on all sides except for its northern border with Brazil. The maritime climate is similar to that of Galicia, the Spanish homeland of Albariño, and even though the variety remains niche in Uruguay, with only 47ha of vineyards planted, quality is blossoming. There is a little more Sauvignon Blanc planted (about 120ha) and the wine I have recommended here demonstrates the quality potential of this variety in Uruguay. Salud!

Marina Gayan MW is Argentina's first and only Master of Wine. Now based in Buenos Aires, she was DWWA Regional Chair for Argentina 2010-2014



Cerro Chapeu, Reserva Tannat, Rivera 2018 92

N/A UK www.cerrochapeu.com

A balanced, modern and approachable Tannat with substance. Violets, blue fruit and quince, smooth tannins and light toasty oak. Lovely blueberries lifted by acidity. Fantastic value. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13%



Narbona, Roble Tannat, Colonia 2015 91

£21.99 **HispaMerchants**

Its dark inky colour is rapidly matched by dense dark fruits and red plums. Then come the tobacco nuances giving it a classic feel. Quite big and tannic, with a fair amount of oak adding structure and complexity – but still juicy. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



Antigua Bodega Stagnari, Mburucuyá, Canelones 2015 90

N/A UK www.antiguabodegastagnari.com.uy

Pepper aromas with dark fruit and a touch of white pepper. Juicy raspberries and blackberries with a vibrant acidity and light yet grainy tannins. Serve this unoaked blend slightly chilled. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%



Bodegas Castillo Viejo, Catamayor Reserva de la Familia Tannat, Canelones 2017 90

N/A UK www.castilloviejo.com

Floral notes and ripe plums give way to savoury and spicy notes. Textured yet supple tannins and well-integrated sweet oak flavours. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Familia Traversa, Viña Salort Reserva Tannat, Canelones 2018 90

£10.99 **Condor Wines**

Good value. Supple tannins coupled with sweet coconut oak notes deliver pure charm. Luscious red fruits and a smooth texture make this wine very approachable – if you like oak. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Pizzorno, Maceración Carbónica Tannat, Canelones 2019 90

N/A UK www.pizzornowines.com

Carbonic maceration makes this Tannat soft, juicy and delicious. We are in the land of serious Beaujolais, deliciously fruity but with a savoury undertone and a minerality to its tannins. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%



Casa Grande, Super Blend, Canelones 2015 89

N/A UK www.vinoscasagrande.com

The character in the funky label mirrors this wine's charm. Packed with red and black fruit and meatiness. The blend includes Tempranillo and Arinarnoa, a crossing of Tannat and Cabernet. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 13%



Familia Dardanelli, Family Reserve Merlot, Canelones 2018 89

£15 www.familiadardanelli.com.uy

Cake-like aromas carry through to the palate. Prunes and figs combined with sweet oak notes. Powerful tannins match the ripe fruit, while the acidity holds the wine together. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.4%



Pisano, Río de los Pájaros Reserve Tannat, Canelones 2018 89

£21.95 **Fine Wine Direct**

Lovely bright purple colour. Perfumed aromas of violets and blueberries. Good concentration of juicy, soft, dark fruit balancing a pleasant structure. A good lunch wine. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



A dream come true.

Bouza, first South American Albariño.

Chile wine regions

Chile sub-regions

- 1 Copiapó Valley
- 2 Huasco Valley
- 3 Elqui Valley
- 4 Limarí Valley
- 5 Choapa Valley
- 6 Aconcagua Valley
- 7 Casablanca Valley
- 8 San Antonio Valley
- 9 Maipo Valley
- 10 Rapel Valley
- 11 Curicó Valley
- 12 Maule Valley
- 13 Itata Valley
- 14 Bío-Bío Valley
- 15 Malleco Valley
- 16 Cautín Valley
- 17 Osorno Valley

Chile zones

- 18 Leyda Valley
- 19 Cachapoal Valley
- 20 Colchagua Valley
- 21 Teno Valley
- 22 Lontué Valley
- 23 Claro Valley
- 24 Tutuvén Valley
- 25 Loncomilla Valley

Chile areas

- Coastal
- Between mountains
- Andes



Map: Maggie Nelson



Location, location

Chile is not defined by one grape in particular. Patricio Tapia considers the diversity of its varieties and styles, and explains why site can matter most

One might compare it to the sense of disappointed love after a brief yet intense romance. The fact is that when the Chilean wine industry realised that its newly rediscovered Carmenère was a difficult grape – and that not everyone liked it – the idea of having it as a flagship variety lost appeal. Suddenly it had the same feeble foundations as the fantasies of a betrayed lover.

It was at that point – around the middle of the last decade – that Chilean producers began to talk about diversity. They argued that a single grape variety shouldn't represent Chile (like Malbec in Argentina), but that many different varieties should represent the diversity of climates and soils that can be found in the country. Indeed, in a territory with

two such major geological formations as the Cordillera de la Costa and the Andes mountains, plus the strong influence of the Pacific and latitude stretching across over 2,000km of vine-growing territory, the idea of highlighting diversity made perfect sense.

After this general reflection in the industry, producers slowly began to look at their wines from another perspective. So today, if you want to understand Chilean wines in terms of styles, the best thing to do is to look at their origins and how the grapes have adapted to Chile's particular, myriad growing conditions. Let's start in the north.

Fresh from Limarí

Winemaker Marcelo Papa has worked with grapes from the Limarí Valley since

the mid-1990s. Today, among his many other responsibilities as technical director of the giant Concha y Toro, Papa is in charge of the company's Maycas line, which focuses on grapes from Limarí, an area located about 300km north of Chile's capital, Santiago.

For Papa, the limestone soils of the area and the freshening influence of the Pacific are the keys to understanding why grapes such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are giving such good results here.

'The fresh character of these wines is accentuated thanks to the morning fog that comes in from the sea, reducing the brightness of the sun and lowering temperatures. The more light and heat, the more ripe and tropical flavours, and the less mineral character that comes from the lime of the soil,' says Papa.



The sun rises over
Viña Santa Rita estate
in the Maipo Valley

These Limarí Pinots and Chardonnays are among the most distinctive styles of wine in Chile. They boast exuberant fruit, a lack of sweetness in the most successful examples and an accentuated minerality which, as Papa says, seems to come from the soil of the place, helped by the strong influence of the refreshing breezes from the Pacific.

Coastal wines

The presence of the Pacific is a permanent force in Chilean wine, a force that manifests itself in all of Chile's coastal valleys, from the classic areas such as Casablanca and San Antonio, to



Above: Cabernet dominates in Concha y Toro's Puente Alto vineyard in Maipo



Photograph: Matt Wilson/Cephas

'The fresh character of these Limarí wines is accentuated thanks to the morning fog that comes in from the sea' **Marcelo Papa (left)**

newer regions such as Paredones in the Colchagua Valley and Aconcagua Costa in the Aconcagua Valley.

The vineyards in these coastal areas are located in the hills of the Coastal Range, or Cordillera de la Costa, the mountainous formation that runs parallel to the ocean and receives the fresh sea breezes from the icy waters of the Pacific. These hills are composed of clay and granite from which some of the best Chilean Sauvignon Blancs traditionally ➤



BODEGA OCEÁNICA
JOSÉ IGNACIO
 OCEAN WINES

The essence of Bodega José Ignacio's wine is our land. The knowledge and commitment of our winemaker Hans Vinding Diers, who acts as interpreter of our land and brings out the best of each grape, joins our passion to produce excellence in wines that express a great sense of oceanic origin.

The distinguished setting of José Ignacio is where our land gives birth to our vines & wines. A genuine natural enclave with the ritual charm of countryside work.

The cycle of the moon and the stars guides our production processes. In harmony with the oceanic breeze and the richness of our land, they set out the rules for our day-to-day work in the estate.

Our local wine collection is conceived in Bodega Oceánica José Ignacio, set in an inspiring surrounding. The fresh marine breezes from the Atlantic Ocean, the morning mists and the wind come together in our elegant oceanic

wines, with a very special sensitivity that renders soft flavors and intense varietal aromas.

Elements seek elevation, lightness, and this movement reveals our work philosophy with determination. The architectural design aims the sky; José Ignacio's marine breeze bestows vitality to the crops; art pieces inspire, in substance, the estate character. Agriculture focused in the detail, environmental commitment and team work, together with the passion for art and cutting-edge architecture, forge our purpose: the satisfaction of experiencing and offering everyday meaningful sensations. A simple and stylish lifestyle in which magic occurs.



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Viña Cousiño-Macul vineyards on the outskirts of Santiago

originate. These are white wines with unctuous body thanks to the clay, but at the same time, crisp acidity and refreshing flavour thanks to the Pacific influence.

While there are many examples of the vital and exuberant style of Chilean coastal Sauvignon, other grapes also give very good results when they're planted in coastal vineyards. Look out in particular for Syrah, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from the Chilean coast.

Evolution of Carmenère

Between the Cordillera de la Costa and the Andes, the soils are more fertile and the temperature higher. Historically this 'intermediate depression', as it is known, has been the source of large-volume wines. But it also produces quality reds made from grapes that like heat and sun, far away from the cooling influence of the sea. Carménère is one of them.

'Carmenère is versatile, being able to deliver big and expansive wines with a riper style, or fresher and lighter reds in its juiciest version'

Sebastián Labbé (below)

'Carmenère is always a challenging variety, from the vineyard to the winery. It is versatile, being able to deliver big and expansive wines with a riper style, or fresher and lighter reds in its juiciest version,' says Sebastián Labbé, winemaker at Viña Santa Rita.

In the Colchagua Valley, Labbé produces a 'new school' expression of Carmenère. This is a recent style in which herbal notes are clearly present. In the past, that herbal side would have been hidden by ageing and by the extensive use of new oak.

'I think that today we're seeing a new wave of Carmenère,' continues Labbé. 'Winemakers are no longer afraid of vegetal characters and are seeking to show that fresher and crunchier side of the variety. They are making wines with character and more red fruit, that have greater acidity, but without losing their body. However, I think that both styles have a point in common, which is the silkiness of their texture, something which is always distinctive to Carmenère,' he adds.

Classic Cabernet

The Carmenère grape was imported to Chile in the mid-19th century, along with several other French grapes, among them Cabernet Sauvignon – the grape variety perhaps most often associated with Chile. Although Cabernet has been planted in practically all of Chile's wine regions (except in coastal areas, where it seems to be too cold for the variety), the classic Chilean Cabernet comes from the strip of land that runs at the foot of the Andes, especially in the so-called Alto Maipo.

On the alluvial soils of the banks of the Maipo River, rich in stones and sands – and with temperatures moderated by the cold breezes that descend from ➤



the Andes – Alto Maipo Cabernet displays its trademark herbal and eucalyptus notes, plus firm tannins coated with black and red fruit flavours. This classic style has not evolved, except for the presence of eucalyptus notes which, in modern versions made by the likes of Cousiño-Macul, Domus Aurea, Don Melchor or Almaviva, seem to have been attenuated.

‘We don’t consider eucalyptus aromas, which come from trees near the property, to be a characteristic of the Cabernet grape. And that’s why we avoid selecting lots that have that character,’ explains Almaviva’s winemaker, Michel Friou.

Southern styles

If Cabernet from Maipo represents the classic side of Chile, wines from the south – from Maule Valley to Bío-Bío – represent the pure tradition of the Chilean countryside. These are dry-farmed areas, with non-irrigated vineyards and very old vines. The Maule is the land of Carignan, a grape that was imported into Chile in the 1940s and today gives wines of deep acidity, firm tannins and intense colour; hearty reds to go with the rustic yet delicious food from the region.



Almaviva

‘If Cabernet from Maipo represents the classic side of Chile, wines from the south represent the pure tradition of the Chilean countryside’

Further south, in Itata, scented Moscatel and fruity Cinsault dominate. Itata’s wine history stretches back almost 500 years, when the Spanish

conquistadors established the first vineyards in this area of mountains and hillsides. Traditionally Moscatel has been made – and continues to be made – in a full-bodied style, usually fermented on its skins, and with intense aromas of flowers and fruits. In comparison, Cinsault produces a light, refreshing and crunchy wine with red fruits.

In a similar style, although perhaps more earthy, are wines made from the País grape in Bío-Bío. The grape variety was originally brought to Chile by the Spaniards during the conquest of the New World. ‘The País here reflects the coldest climate in the area. It has a herbal, balsamic and sometimes floral character. It gives delicate reds, even refined,’ says producer Roberto Henríquez, one of the most important País producers in Chile.

To compare the País of Henríquez with the Pinot Noir of Marcelo Papa in Limarí is to compare different worlds. And this exercise can be done with many other wines in Chile, a country where more than grape varieties, the diversity of the landscape defines the wines.

Patricio Tapia is a regular *Decanter* contributor and the author of the annual *Deschorchados* guide to the wines of South America

Sustainability in Chilean wine

As in other areas of the world, most of Chile’s vineyards are located in regions with defined seasons. Dry summers are followed by seasonal rains that begin only in the autumn, providing a good natural framework for growing healthy vines.

However, increasing production volumes and the industrialisation of the Chilean wine industry in the past have affected the environment. Producers today are acknowledging this impact, and consequently the idea of sustainability has begun to gain strength.

Since 2008, efforts have been made to regulate the production of wines in Chile, from the vineyard to bottling and transportation. ‘Today there is a sustainability code that originally covered vineyards, winery, bottling and social responsibility. This year, we added a new area of wine tourism,’ says Patricio Parra, who is

the head of the sustainability project for Wines of Chile.

The code certifies aspects such as waste management, maintenance of native trees, integrated pest management, rational use of water in the winery and the wellbeing of workers and communities. When the requirements of all areas of the code have been met, certification allows wineries to use sustainability seals on their bottles.

‘Although certification in the vineyard, for example, is not as strict as that of a certified biodynamic entity, there is a strong commitment to produce wine of high sustainability standards,’ adds Parra.

Initially, in 2011, the Certification Code was signed by 11 Chilean wineries. By last year there were already 76 committed wineries, which today represent 80% of the wine that Chile produces.

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Extreme viticulture

Desert regions with salt-laden soil, snowy mountainsides and active volcanoes are among the unlikely locations where Chile's winemakers are experimenting – and often succeeding. Chris Losh hails their spirit



Viñedos de Alcohuaz
at up to 2,000m altitude
in the Elqui Valley



'If you want to make a great wine, you must take a risk. Safe places [equal] boring wine'

Marcelo Retamal (above)

Around the millennium, much of Chile's wine production – and just about all the interest – was firmly centred within a 150km radius of Santiago. Well, not any more. Over the past 20 years, Chile's grape-growing boundaries have not so much been pushed back as disappeared altogether. Producers are planting in areas that previous generations probably couldn't even have found on a map, let alone considered for viticulture.

From the dust of the Atacama Desert in the north to the verdant hills of the Lake District in the south, from the breezy Pacific coast to the stony Andes slopes, vineyards are springing up everywhere. It's a wholesale reimagining of what Chilean wine is, can be, and perhaps always should have been, all about.

Chile's central plain – the area between the Andes and the Coastal Range – is a ridiculously easy place to grow, well, anything. But vines need to struggle. Marginality is where the good stuff is. So Chile's wineries began to push the envelope, mostly heading west towards the sea and north towards the desert.

Given that the Atacama is one of the driest, most sun-drenched regions on earth, it might seem a strange place to look for a cooler climate, but in fact once you get to the Limarí Valley, 400km north of Santiago, the Coastal Range is far lower. Fog fills vineyards until lunchtime and there are cool breezes all the time.

With temperatures significantly lower, it's no surprise that grapes in places such as Tabalí's Talinay vineyard ripen much

later than they do inland. In fact, it's one of the particularities of Chile's topography that moving 10km east or west can have a greater impact than moving hundreds of kilometres north or south.

Mountain influence

Of course, if you go far enough away from the coast other factors start to come into play. Factors such as the Andes. These mountains have some effect even on the Central Valley, with cool air from the peaks washing down over the vineyards at night. But over the past couple of decades, some pioneers have even taken to planting into the mountains themselves.

Tabalí's Río Hurtado vineyard might (like Talinay) be in the Limarí Valley, but it could hardly be more different. Situated 100km from the coast, it's 1,600m up into the Andes on the granitic east-facing slopes of a narrow river valley. It's a place of endless sunshine and big diurnal temperature swings that make it possible to grow varieties such as Malbec and

Viognier. Aresti, meanwhile, is going down a different route with its 1,200m-altitude estate located 130km from the sea in the Curicó Andes, bringing a more elegant spin to Merlot.

Chile's king of high-altitude viticulture, however, is Marcelo Retamal of Viñedos de Alcohaz. At 85km from the coast, his vineyards in Elqui are a (literally) dizzying 2,000m above sea level. The Andes here are famous for the purity of their light – one of the reasons they're loved by astronomers (and if the local legends are true, aliens). The sun intensity and altitude here combine to give reds of rare tannic structure, ripeness and lift.

'Elqui is one of the cleanest skies in the world,' says Retamal. 'The problem is the radiation. The temperature in summer is not really high, but light and the UV are very strong.' He's putting his money on the likes of Grenache, Syrah, Touriga Nacional, Carignan and Malbec – and foot-treading for gentle tannin extraction.

At these altitudes, it's hardly risk-free. In 2016, springtime snow cost the winery more than 80% of its production. But Retamal is unfazed. 'If you want to make a great wine, you must take a risk,' he says. 'Safe places [equal] boring wine.'

Northern challenge

Until fairly recently Elqui was as far north as Chilean wineries went. But in 2007, Viña Ventisquero started planting in Huasco, 800km north of Santiago in the Atacama Desert, a place where, as winemaker Alejandro Galaz points out, 'it hasn't rained in 50 years'.

Soberingly, this isn't even the biggest challenge. After all, there's always irrigation from the nearby river. No, the big issue here is stupendously poor soil that is, moreover, so salty you could probably sprinkle it on your chips. ➤



Viña Ventisquero, Atacama

Photograph: Estanis Nuñez



Cono Sur
VINEYARDS & WINERY

SUSTAINABILITY MEETS EXCELLENCE



Matías Ríos Langevin, Winemaking Director.



Cono Sur Pinot Noir Winery.



Cono Sur Ocio Pinot Noir.

Cono Sur Vineyards & Winery is an innovative company that has achieved great reputation in its 27 years. It was born around the first Pinot Noir vines planted in Chile and consequently the variety became the winery's expertise. But Cono Sur has also created quite a name when it comes to sustainability. From day one the company has been committed to environmental care and organic farming.

Back in 2002, the winery already had certified organic surface, today they register 315 hectares under organic management. Another milestone came in 2007, when they became the first winery in the world to obtain the CarbonNeutral® delivery status, which has been renewed annually ever since. Water, energy and waste management is also among the winery's efforts, alongside its commitment to local communities and employee care, which has led the winery to receive the For Life certification in 2018.

All of this translates into great wines. Cono Sur is one of the leading Pinot Noir producers of the New World. From the fruity and fresh Bicicleta Pinot Noir - #1 Pinot Noir sold in the UK* - to their icon Ocio Pinot Noir, and all in between. Sparkling, rosé and still wine.

Matías Ríos, Chief Winemaker, explains that Chile has the perfect conditions for this grape to thrive. The country's natural barriers and Mediterranean climate - with well-defined seasons and rain concentrated in the winter - give exceptionally

healthy grapes. The cold Humboldt Current is another key element: it moderates the temperatures in the coast of Chile, it is responsible for the region's considerable cloudiness and cool summer making Casablanca and San Antonio the best valleys for Pinot Noir. They deliver the precise sunlight exposure and the right temperature to nurture grapes full of color, tannins and fruit without losing acidity and freshness.

Still left to mention is the great work that is done in the cellar. Matías is inspired by the traditional Burgundy vinification methods. As such, the Pinot Noir grapes are destemmed, later they go through a selection table and placed in open-top tanks to undergo a cold maceration followed by foot crushing and manual pigeage; the wine is later aged in French oak barrels and fudres. The result is an elegant Pinot Noir. Their icon wine, Ocio, is soft, silky, ripe, full of red cherries notes and concentrated on the palate. Yet, it is fresh and with great acidity. If you want to know excellence in Chilean Pinot Noir, Cono Sur is the way to go.

Source: Nielsen, 2019.





Casa Marin vineyards
in coastal Lo Abarca

'If you read the research about what a vine can hold in salinity levels, we are over 10 times that amount,' says Galaz cheerfully of his poor struggling plants. 'It's an extreme place that produces extreme wines, [but] nature finds a way!'

Unsurprisingly, given the costs, effort and unpredictability of planting up in the Andes or on the fringes of the world's driest desert, the north and the east of Chile are only for the seriously committed.

Coastal effect

But there has been no shortage of growers prepared to look for sites with maritime influence. In fact, this boundary has been steadily moving seawards ever since the Casablanca Valley was planted in the 1980s. The Leyda Valley has been the most obvious success story, but nearby Lo Abarca, just 4km from the sea, is even cooler. Casa Marin and Matetic make excellent wines here with the likes of Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir on the more exposed slopes, and bright, elegant Syrah and (experimental) Grenache on warmer folds in the hills.

'We are sheltered from the ocean by just one small hill,' says winemaker Felipe Marin of the area that received its own DO in 2018. 'We have less than 1,000 growing degree days – similar to the coolest regions of France. The difference is that we have a lot of sun intensity and no rainfall,' he adds.

Incredibly, some producers are planting even closer to the ocean than this. Viña Luis Felipe Edwards has an experimental vineyard of Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay a couple of kilometres from the Pacific in what it believes is the most coastal site in Chile. The country's wineries will be awaiting the results with interest.

Southern success

Chile's southern renaissance has perhaps been the big story of the past 20 years.

The shift from growers selling grapes to bottling their own wine has re-energised the Maule and Itata Valleys. Old vines are part of the attraction, but don't underestimate the lower temperatures and regular rainfall, both of which are seen as a long-term counterpoint to climate change.

Rebecca Palmer, associate director and buyer at merchant Corney & Barrow, has taken on a number of the country's southern producers. 'There's no doubt that there's a lot going on,' she says. 'The south of Chile has always been very vibrant and there's a real sense of fomenting energy and spirit.' She cites the more savoury Pinot Noirs from places such as Bío-Bío as being particularly worth a look – especially with Burgundy prices soaring.

Wine producers, however, are moving on even from what used to be seen as the far south – so much so that in 2012 the country's wine body announced the designation of a new region, Austral, with two DOs below Malleco.

De Martino has just planted in Pucón, on the foothills of Villarrica – one of Chile's most active volcanoes. With winter snow, high rainfall and lava soils, Sebastian De Martino describes it as 'an extreme continental climate... a cool-climate version of Etna' and can't wait to see how his ungrafted Pinot, Chardonnay and

Riesling perform. 'We expect the wines to be mineral,' he says.

Casa Silva is even further south down the Pan-American Highway, planting Champagne grapes in Osorno. 'I think it is becoming the region for *espumantes* (sparkling wines) in Chile,' says Mario Pablo Silva. Similar thinking lies behind Aurelio Montes' decision to plant on the eastern side of the Chiloé archipelago, at a similar latitude to New Zealand's Marlborough, but in the full glare of the Pacific's mighty cooling influence. It's a gamble, yes, but it's also hugely exciting.

The past 20 years have seen unparalleled exploration and experimentation in Chile. Traditional varieties are being made in different styles and new grapes are coming to the party. There will be a few failures along with the successes for sure, but it's going to be one heck of a ride.

And the best bit of all is that it's only just begun. ➤

Chris Losh has been writing about wine for more than 20 years and was editor of *Wine Magazine* and *Imbibe*. His latest book is *Where to Drink Wine: the essential guide to the world's must-visit wineries* (£22, Quadrille, September 2018)



Mario Pablo Silva of
Viña Casa Silva in his
vineyard in Lago Ranco

Losh selects his top 12 wines from Chile's extreme vineyards

① De Martino, Tres Volcanes Chardonnay, Malleco 2017 95

£26.99-£27.95 **AG Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd**

De Martino is consistently at the forefront of new thinking in Chile, and when its Quebrada Seca vineyard in Limarí keeled over due to drought, it headed 650km south of Santiago in search of rainfall and coolness. This is the result – a wonderful expression of cool-climate Chardonnay, all white pear and apple fruit, with a lovely crunchy minerality giving the palate stretch and length. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alcohol** 13.5%

Concha y Toro, Marques de Casa Concha Chardonnay, Limarí 2017 92

£12.99 **Tesco, TJ Wines, Villeneuve Wines**

Concha is a big believer in the potential of northern Limarí for Chardonnay – and this wine shows why. It's a hugely beguiling mix of classic oaked Chardonnay flavours – white peach, melon and creamy hazelnut – with inherent lift and lovely structural integration. The 2015 picked up a DWWA Trophy, so it has pedigree. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

J Bouchon, Batuco Estate Granito Semillon, Maule 2018 90

£34.99 **Bacchanalia, Banstead Vintners, Connolly's, Dronfield Wine World, The Oxford Wine Co, Vinos Latinos**

There's not a lot of Semillon in Chile, but on this evidence perhaps there should be. Dry-farmed from old vines in Maule, there's plenty of vibrant fruit character here – lemon balm, orange peel, citrus leaves – but the most striking aspect is the salty, mineral note coming from the granitic soil. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

Casa Silva, Lago Ranco Riesling, Futrono, Austral 2017 89

£17.28-£20 **Cartwright Brothers Vintners, Field & Fawcett, Penistone Wine Cellars, The Oxford Wine Co**

A Riesling for the purists from one of Chile's coolest vineyards, looking out over mighty Lake Ranco. This wine is all about cool apples and lemon edges. Zesty and fresh with bright, mouthwatering acidity. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 11.5%

② Massoc Frères, La Gringa Moscatel, Itata 2017 89

£14.95 **Corney & Barrow**

This shows the potential of old-vine Moscatel in Itata. La Gringa translates as 'American Girl', and there's something feminine, but also coolly assured, about this. Orchard fruit, almond blossom and a gently smoky, mineral palate. Hugely drinkable. **Drink** 2020-2020 **Alc** 13.5%

Falernia, Riesling, Elqui 2018 87

£11.25-£12.37 **Exel, Great Western Wine, Great Wines Direct**

Elqui is a very particular place to grow grapes – and this is an interesting expression of Riesling. Fresh lime and tropical flavours; while the acidity is gentler than you'd expect in the variety. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 12.5%

Maturana Wines, Naranjo Torontel, Maule 2018 90

£14.95-£15.25 **Corney & Barrow, The Bon Vivant's Companion**

An orange wine with an intriguing nose of honey, blood oranges, white peach, thyme and white pepper. The exotic attack tapers to a dry, spicy palate with gentle tannic grip that makes it great for food. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

Clos des Fous, Arenaria Aconcagua Costa Pinot Noir, Aconcagua 2014 95

£31.99-£32.99 **AG Wines, Simply Wines Direct**

Two of the three 'fous' (crazies) worked in Burgundy and sought to bring Burgundian, terroir-driven winemaking to Chile. This pale, perfumed coastal Pinot is a classy example of what Chile can do with the grape. Its raspberry core is overlaid with spice and gentle earthy notes. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 15%

③ Tabalí, Talinay Pinot Noir, Calcareo Costero, Limarí 2015 93

£17.95-£20.99 **All About Wine, D Byrne & Co, Exel**

Tabalí's Talinay vineyard is one of the closest to the sea in Limarí and you can see the influence of the cooling fog and sea breezes here. The charming black cherry fruit is topped off with violets and a dusting of five spice. And though the palate is juicily succulent, the fruit is held in check by a gentle salinity on the finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

Carmen, Loma Seca Cinsault, Itata 2019 92

£25 **Santa Rita Estates**

Carignan has become something of A Thing in Chile's southern valleys, but another C-grape worth looking out for is Cinsault. With its delicate raspberry and strawberry fruit, a flick of spice and bright acidity, this out-Pinots many of the country's Pinots. One to pair with salt marsh lamb or monkfish in pancetta. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

La Ronciere, Idahue Estate Malbec, Curicó 2017 89

£13.95 **Corney & Barrow**

Chilean Malbec is quite different from versions on the other side of the Andes. With 8% Merlot and 7% Cabernet Franc, this has plush plum fruits, but also bitter chocolate. Oak adds a coffee note, so it's more savoury and textural than you'd expect. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

Laurent, Polemico País, Itata 2018 87

£11.95 **Corney & Barrow**

País has seen a big turnaround in fortunes over the last 10 years. Integrated redcurrant and red cherry fruit, with a comforting kiss of almonds and red leather on the finish. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%



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Chile: my top 20

With an increasingly diverse range of wine styles being produced in Chile, Alistair Cooper MW recommends a selection of his favourite red, white and rosé bottles to give you a taste of what's on offer



Miguel Torres, Estelado Sparkling Rosé NV, Secano Interior, Maule 90

£12.50-£14.99 Available through UK agent Fells
A project that helped to kickstart the Chilean País revival. A delicious traditional-method sparkler with subtle red fruits and a lively, focused palate. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12%



Casa Silva, Lago Ranco Sauvignon Blanc, Futrono, Austral 2017 94

£20.94 **Jackson Nugent**
A superb wine from one of Chile's most southerly vineyards on volcanic ash soils. The nose is citrus-led with a steely minerality. The palate has tantalising acidity and the finish is very long. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12%



Ventisquero, Kalfu Sumpai Sauvignon Blanc, Huasco, Atacama 2017 92

£16.59-£18.65 **Cambridge Wine Merchants, Frontier Fine Wines, Promotion Wines, Salut, Waples Wines**
Subtle herbal nose, lime tomato leaf, smoke. Zippy palate marked by a salty twang from the area's very saline soils. Long and well-defined finish. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12.5%



Calyptra, Vivendo Rosé, Cachapoal 2017 91

N/A UK www.calyptra.cl
85% Syrah, 15% Sauvignon Blanc. A lovely aromatic combination of ripe red fruits and subtle pepper notes. Real tension on the palate with crisp acidity and a long, linear mid-palate. Sweet fruit but with marked freshness. A rosé style I'd love to see more of in Chile. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 14%



Aresti, Family Collection, Curicó 2012 94

£19.95 **Slurp**
An intense nose of roasted coffee, grilled meat and balsamic notes with a splash of well-controlled volatility. Tannins still give amazingly firm support to a lively fruit core with kirsch and a dash of eucalypt. Powerful yet still refined and very well put together. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



Longaví, Glup Cinsault, Itata 2018 94

£18.99 (2017) **House of Townend**
From Chilean producer Julio Bouchon and Cederberg's David Nieuwoudt. A vibrant, mineral and fruit-driven nose, with redcurrant, spice and pepper. Texturally this is supreme. Benchmark Itata Cinsault. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12%



Undurraga, Terroir Hunter Syrah, Limarí 2015 94

£20.95 **Eurowines**
Crackling nose of black fruits, bitter chocolate and tapenade. Superbly concentrated with menthol, meat and olives, plus silky, elegant tannins. From a dry-farmed coastal site, this really shines. Long finish. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Viñedos de Alcohuz, La Era Malbec, Elqui 2015 94

£33 **Indigo Wine**
A brooding Malbec from 1,700m altitude. Packed with dark fruits and spice, and a hint of smoky reduction. A lovely streak of acidity keeps the wine crackling with energy. Concentration and nicely tuned tannins. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 13%



Bisquertt, Q Clay, Marchihue, Colchagua 2015 93

N/A UK www.bisquertt.cl
Classic Colchagua pastille fruit and a vibrant cassis nose, with hedgerow fruit aplenty. The palate is still very youthful with a nice, earthy coolness and loads of fruit concentration. From one of my favourite recent vintages. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14.5% ➤



Santa Rita, Floresta Field Blend Tinto, Colchagua 2018 93

£25 **Santa Rita Estates**
The ultimate Chilean blend? A juicy, spicy nose showing both red and dark fruits, with liquorice root and sculpted tannins. It shows the spice of Carmenère yet with great drinkability, especially for Apalta. **Drink** 2020-2027 **Alc** 14.4%



Tarapacá, Gran Reserva Carmenère, Maipo 2018 93

£12.85 **Great Western Wine, Great Wines Direct**
Spice-led nose with dried figs and hedgerow fruit. Medium-bodied with silky soft, fine tannins and a mineral palate saturated with dark fruits, mocha and cedar spice. This should age beautifully. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14%



Volcanes de Chile, Parinacota, Maule 2016 93

£21.99 (2014) **Ministry of Drinks**
An inky, deep red with aromas of black pepper and a touch of menthol. Rounded, robust tannins balance the palate of red fruits and smoky dark cherries. All supported by a lovely freshness from the Carignan. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%



Bouchon, País Viejo, Maule 2019 92

£11.95-£12.95 (2018) **Connolly's, Roberts & Speight, Slurp, Vinos Latinos, Yorkshire Vintners**
Bursting with redcurrant, liquorice, rosehip and cherries on the nose. An invigorating palate, with fine-grained tannins, plus a slightly leathery and smoky kick. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



Cono Sur, Single Vineyard Block 21 Viento Mar Pinot Noir, San Antonio 2017 92

N/A UK www.conosur.com
Beautiful nose with earthy notes, vibrant fruit and a real freshness. The red and dark fruits are more in the background here. This is all about grip, earth and structure. Superb value. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.3%



Korta, Seleccion Especial Grosse Mérida, Sagrada Familia, Curicó 2017 92

N/A UK www.korta.cl
A rare French variety with a distinct herbal and floral nose, plus notes of clove and strawberry. An interesting wine that reminds me of Trousseau. Serve lightly chilled with cold meats. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%



Viu Manent, Viu Infinito, Colchagua 2016 92

£45 Available via UK agent **Louis Latour Agencies**
An attractive, ripe and powerful nose with cassis, leather and cedar, plus a vibrant pastille note. Fine, sinewy tannins that need some time to resolve. Fresh acidity with dark fruit and some Christmas spice. A long and clean finish. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%



Odfjell, Aliara, Central Valley 2014 91

£31.49 **Carruthers & Kent**
A pronounced and meaty nose showing quite a lot of development. There is a distinct meaty, leathery note on the mid-palate, with herbal and red fruit notes and firm tannins. Definitely a wine that would benefit from food: grilled red meat. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%



San Pedro, Sideral, Cachapoal Andes 2017 91

£21.50 **Great Western Wine**
I'm surprised at how evolved the nose is: liquorice and leather with roasted coffee and herbal notes. A distinct mocha and sweet cassis attack is followed by powdery and firm tannins, with quite primary oak. Will come together nicely with time. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%



Viña Leyda, Lot 21 Pinot Noir, Leyda 2015 91

£24-£29.50 **Exel, Great Western Wine, Great Wines Direct, The Fine Wine Co**
Aromatic nose with mulberry, raspberry and wild strawberry. Medium-bodied with fine tannins and a candied cherry note. Bags of freshness. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Errazuriz, Max Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Aconcagua 2017 89

£13-£15.40 **Christopher Keiller, Ocado, Waitrose, Waitrose Cellar**
Attractive blend of cassis, roasted coffee and subtle chocolate notes. Full of ripe black fruit, with firm tannins and a generous dollop of acidity. A great value all-rounder. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%



Alistair Cooper MW has worked for wineries in Argentina and Chile. He is a judge at DWWA and resident wine expert for BBC Radio Oxford

