

The 100 Most Exciting Wine Finds

A number of these wines will be available on certain markets, but many are so new, restricted in production, or downright obscure that the only way to get hold of them would be to visit the producer – if he has not already sold out.

The entire *raison d'être* of this section is to bring to the attention of serious wine enthusiasts the different and most surprising wines being developed in classic areas, the best wines from emerging regions, and other cutting-edge stuff. The prices are retail per bottle in the local currency of the country of origin (see About This Guide, p.5). My tasting note follows the contributor's own note, for comparison or contrast, or simply a different take.

Touraine Gamay Cuvée d'Eos 2003

Domaine Jacky Marteau (Loire Valley, €9)

Fine, spicy fruit – the back label says blackberries (mûres) ... I'd go with that. A hint of surmuri, almost overripe grapes on the nose. Palate and attack all soft fruit and fraîcheur – big, fat, and enticing allspice finish.

Charles Sydney

Very ripe, creamy-blackberry aromas: striking! A melange of creamy-blackberry and strawberry fruit on the palate, both individually distinct. Quite rare and extraordinary for a Loire red, and a totally ridiculous price! A brilliant selection, Charles; thank you. TS

Alpha Syrah 2003

Alpha Estate (Greece, €23) *Bright fruit with black pepper spice. Deftly fuses concentration with elegance. Finely oaked. Poised. Good ageing potential; at its peak in 8–10 years. From the never-ceasing-to-surprise vineyard of Florina.* Nico Manassis

The most impressive wine (by far) from the most impressive estate (by far) I visited in Greece in early 2006. It has beautiful Syrah fruit of such elegance and is supported by tannins that are so silky and ripe that I suspect most bottles will be consumed years before this wine starts to show its true potential complexity. TS

Saumur-Champigny Lisagathe 2003

Philippe Vatan, Château du Hureau (Loire Valley, €15) *Huge mass of soft, sweet blackberry fruit – without even a hint of pepper, green or otherwise. Great concentration on the middle palate, and fine length. A wine that just pretends it's easy to drink but that will keep on getting softer and more complex.* Charles Sydney
Definitely, Charles. All chocolate and soft fruits, yet with nice grippy tannic acid on the aftertaste. Beautiful. TS

Rully Les Pucelles 2004 Domaine Henri and Paul Jacqueson (Burgundy,

€10) *Very lovely peachy fruit, excellent harmony, and lots of finesse.*

Clive Coates MW

Class, Clive, class. Beautifully restrained use of oak. This is what they called a 'wow' wine in the old days. TS

Tappa Pass Vineyard Selection

Shiraz 2002 Henschke, Barossa (Australia, A\$57) *This is classic, spicy, meaty, cool-year Shiraz with the extra layer of complexity conferred by a great year. Charcoal, spice, blackberry, and cedar; deliciously succulent.*

Huon Hooke

Huge cassis aroma, very fine and complex in the mouth, with the potential to achieve vastly more complexity. Incredibly fresh, luscious, black-fruit flavours. My advice is to keep it as long as you can keep your hands off it. In my house, that won't be very long at all. TS

Croft Vintage Port 2003 (Port & Madeira, €40) *Lovely, perfumed fruit, open and expressive; rich and fleshy, quite soft initially, pure and focused. By no means the biggest wine of the vintage, but fine and sinewy, with rapier-like length. One for the medium term. The best Croft since 1970.*

Richard Mayson

Deep coloured for Croft, with neat, beautifully focused, bright fruit on the palate. All too easy to drink now, it will be a dream wine in 10 years. TS

Graham's Malvedos Vintage

Port 1996 (Port & Madeira, €35) *Vibrant berry fruit, powerful, focused with great purity of flavour. Sleek and ready to drink now with sufficient depth and concentration to develop over the next 10 years.*

Richard Mayson

The fruit aromas are so perfumed, particularly on the palate, with a big smack of sweetness on the finish, making it a delight to drink now, but it really needs five of those 10 years for the layered fruit complexity to begin to unfold on the finish. TS

Delaforce Curious and Ancient

20 Year Old Tawny Port (Port & Madeira, €30) *The palest pink-amber-orange tawny, supremely delicate meld of dried fruits, and a hint of freshly roasted almonds on the nose; silky smooth with creamy concentration of flavour, like the finest white chocolate. Finishes with great poise and finesse. As near a perfect example of a 20-year-old as you will find. Richard Mayson I was looking forward to this, since 20-year-old is my favourite tawny (the best 30-year-old and over-40-years-old being too liquorous, and most 10-year-olds not really tawny enough for my liking), and I was not disappointed either. Your note says it all, so I'll just add "exquisite".* TS

Côtes du Jura Chardonnay A la

Percenette 2004 Domaine Pignier (Jura & Savoie, €9) *A pale greenish colour, with a youthful apple and mineral nose, and oak emerging after a while. It is dry – with almost steely lemon acidity – stony, and mineral: almost reminiscent of a Chablis. The oak is noticeable but well balanced, and the finish is very fresh and mineral. A lovely lightness to it. Wink Lorch Truly a stunner, Wink, and I can't believe I'm saying that about a Chardonnay, but it has such intensity of acid-charged, oak-laced minerality of fruit that if it was Chablis, it would cost €39, not €9! TS*

Pinot Noir 2003 Schloß Halbturn, Neusiedlersee (Austria, €30) *A summer lawn, leafy notes, complex; lovely fruit. Good tannic backbone. Nobility and refinement. Long. Philipp Blom A delightful Pinot Noir, full of grace and elegance.* TS

Coteaux du Layon Rablay Le

Vilain Canard 2003 Domaine des Sablonettes (Loire Valley, €25.60 per 50-cl bottle) *Vibrant amber-gold colour with a lovely glacé mandarin nose leading straight to the same on the palate – a mass of fruit, fraîcheur,*

and concentration. Maybe the alcohol shows a touch, but with a balance of 13 per cent to 200 g/l of sugar, this is pretty damn fine. Charles Sydney *All pineapples and cream – and as clean as a whistle, despite the deep colour suggesting oxidation with high levels of VA, both of which are noticeable by their absence. Domaine des Sablonettes is the finest producer – and organic to boot.* TS

Château Messile-Aubert Montagne-St-Emilion 2003

(Bordeaux, €13) *Lovely, highlighted fruit aromas on the nose; the palate is full of very luscious, sweet fruit with a freshness rare in 2003 on the Right Bank. Delicious early drinking, while the way the wine kept and improved on ullage also suggests ageing potential.* David Peppercorn MW *Dramatic fruit and restrained use of oak make this a very classy claret for the price. I'm certainly going to buy some!* TS

Côtes du Roussillon Ciel Liquide

2003 Domaine Padié (Languedoc-Roussillon, €20) *Darkly transparent ruby in the glass; ripe southern 2003 fruit on the nose, moderated on the palate by soft tannins and a gentle touch of acidity. The flavour is almost northern in its classic elegance. Restrained and fine on the finish.*

Paul Strang

Absolutely gorgeous, Paul – just one glass and I'm in heaven! TS

Château Ducla Expérience XII

Bordeaux Blanc 2004 (Bordeaux, €12) *A wine of pronounced character, very spicy, scented nose, creamy impression on the palate, full-flavoured with an extra lift at the finish; the result of an unusual 52 per cent Sauvignon Gris with 48 per cent Sauvignon Blanc and cask fermentation with lees stirring. And it tastes even better on ullage! An experience worth having.*

David Peppercorn MW

There's not much Sauvignon Gris in Bordeaux these days, and it is a more

subtle form of Sauvignon; thus it's no surprise that the Sauvignon Blanc bullies its way to the top of this cuvée. On initial taste, the minority Sauvignon Blanc in this wine was so distinctive and expressive that it fought with the oak, but I followed your lead, David, and tasted this on ullage the following day, and all I can say is wow! The varietal excesses were subdued, the Gris brought an orderly calm to the squabbling in this wine, and the oak became seamless. Beautiful. TS

Ariyanas Dulce 2004

Bentomiz (Spain, €12 per half-bottle) *Instantly recognizable but delicate Moscatel nose, with herby scents up front and a hint of honeyed sweetness in the background. Gentle sweetness on the palate but with clean, fresh acidity, this Málaga doesn't cloy, and it manages a crisp, mineral finish that is ultimately dry.* John Radford *Beautifully perfumed Moscatel fruit that just swells and swells in the mouth, finishing with a bright, crisp finish that I find distinctly sweet, but so refreshing and – yes – a minerality that is atypical for both variety and origin. A brilliant find, John.* TS

Amarone di Marchetto 2001

Trabucchi, Verona (Northern Italy, €30) *A superb wine of the eastern Valpolicella terroir: wonderful aromatic array, with clean-edged blackberry, liquorice, dried plum, mint, and thyme; remarkably sapid with a distinctive minerality and earthiness – dense but also crisp and lively on the palate. An excellent expression of the year 2001 from a most estimable producer.* Franco Ziliani *All those who, like me, are put off the Amarone style by its raisiny-oxidative character should check this wine out. A whole potpourri of floral elegance pervades this entire wine, with only a touch of breakfast tea on the finish to hint that it is indeed an Amarone.* TS

Syrah/Cabernet Sauvignon 2003

Cave Kouroum (Lebanon, LL 26,000) An award-winner at Vinexpo 2005, this is a real fistful of Syrah that will develop into a thoroughbred with time. It weighs in at a whopping 14.5 per cent alcohol and may still be a little too playful for some wine drinkers, but it has lovely tannins and the structure to carry it along and allow the full spectrum of flavours – strawberry, chocolate, pepper, and tobacco – to develop into a very suave wine over time. Michael Karam *One of the best Lebanese wines I've ever tasted, and I've been tasting this country's wines since I met Serge Hochar at the Bristol World Wine Fair 30 years ago. The nose on this wine is all chocolaty-oak at the moment, but the fruit will dominate in a few years, and it is the cleanest, freshest, sweetest, non-VA-lifted fruit I've encountered in a Lebanese red wine.* TS

Edelzwicker 2004 Navarro, Mendocino (California, US\$11) Stylish and aromatic white with Gewurztraminer and Riesling on the nose, dramatic spice note in the mid-palate, and a complex finish that's off-dry but balanced by good acidity. Dan Berger

An Edelzwicker that boasts more Gewurztraminer spice on the nose and palate than most pure Gewurztraminers from the New World normally do. If this was sold as a Gewurztraminer, the acidity would be too high, but an Edelzwicker (now that's a wine name the French won't bother to defend!) is supposed to be blended with other more acidic varieties; thus the balance is fine. TS

Sangiovese 2003 Flat Creek Parker, Texas (Other US States, US\$35) Tannic and spicy, this is good wine only if you can overlook the rough astringency. But there is an interesting wine there... Doug Frost MW *I think you're doing it down, Doug.*

Maybe it depends what side of the Atlantic you're on, but I don't find any "rough astringency". If only 95 per cent of Italian Sangiovese was this good! It looks light in colour compared to most other US reds, particularly those from California and Washington, but it has more elegance than weight, so is not lacking in fruit, flavour, or length. TS

Grüner Veltliner Tradition 2003

Schloß Gobelsburg, Kamptal (Austria, €19) Oxidative softness and complexity and great depth, dried-flower aromas, and opulent but fine delicate hints of wood. Deeply individual and exhilarating. Philipp Blom *Although I know what you mean, it's not at all oxidative – just a softening effect from the micro-oxygenation effect of the barrels. The result is very classy indeed.* TS

A Cru Malbec 2003 O Fournier, Valle de Uco (Argentina, AP 110) Sourced from 85-year-old vines in the high-altitude Uco Valley, this is Argentine Malbec at its most richly expressive. The alcohol is on the high side at 14.5 per cent, but this oaky, youthful, densely packed, ultra-ripe red has the concentration to age for a decade or more in bottle. Tim Atkin MW

A big but beautifully proportioned wine – thus not in the least bit heavy, due to its perfumed, ultra-ripe fruit having enjoyed a relatively slow véraison. Lovely depth and length, with tremendous potential complexity. TS

Riesling Dürnsteiner Freiheit

Smaragd 2004 Schmelz, Wachau (Austria, €18) Full, clear, typically fine Riesling aromas; delicate acidity, pure and long, great persistence. Philipp Blom *Beautiful peachy fruit, with floral retronasal aromas creating the finesse.* TS

EQ Syrah 2004 Matetic, San Antonio (Chile, CLP 22,000) Attractive, inviting aromas of grilled dark fruit, savoury meat, herbs, and spice. The palate is

well integrated and complex, with sleek fruit, firm but round tannins, and a touch of warming alcohol. A stylish rendition of cooler-climate Chilean Syrah. Peter Richards *Definitely sleek and stylish. In its own style this is in the same quality league as Craggy Range Le Sol from New Zealand.* TS

Juraçon Les Jardins de Babylone

2004 Didier Dagueneau (Southwest France, €40 per 50-cl bottle) Dagueneau does not aim for ultimate sweetness in the sense that Cauhapé or Guirouilh do; elegance and restraint underlie this gentle extraction from Petit Manseng. Moelleux and not a vendange tardive wine, relatively pale, citrus fruits prominent on the nose; in the mouth, gentle, exotic flavours, with the acidity balancing perfectly the modest sugar levels. Long, subtle, and deeply satisfying. Paul Strang *Beautifully elegant, sweet, ripe citrus and pineapple fruit on the palate, with gentle notes of fresh oak on the finish. The level of VA is higher than I would have liked, but much less than that found on the average Canadian icewine, and the balance between fruit and acidity is so exquisite that I am willing to forgive this wine almost anything.* TS

Antique Sherry Pedro Ximénez

Fernando de Castilla (Sherry, €31.25) *I have long been a great admirer of the wines from this boutique bodega, which has fine old wines but does not get them certified as VOS or VORS. Although I am not a great fan of Pedro Ximénez, this one strikes me as exceptional. It is very sweet, but it is much less cloying than most, more complex in its flavour, and with excellent length.* Julian Jeffs QC *It's an amazing wine to taste, but like all PX it has the consistency of engine oil! Top quality indeed, but I'm sure that you have it on ice cream, Julian, like most of the wine trade! There's a big*

deposit in the bottle that requires strenuous shaking to dislodge from the sides. You should do this 24 hours before opening, and decant the wine. TS

Black Rock Red 2004 The Winery (South Africa, R93) Harmonious marriage of predominantly Shiraz (76 per cent) with Carignan/Grenache. Rich and pure; cranberry fruit infused with green tea, lavender, and the Cape's beloved savouriness. Young, but without the clumsiness and brashness of youth, this southern-Rhône-inspired blend demonstrates that elegance need not be sacrificed at the altar of power. Cathy van Zyl MW *Elegance and freshness dominate this wine, which shows how well-used oak works well with delicious, sappy fruit.* TS

Buzet La Badinerie du Pech 2002

Domaine du Pech (Southwest France, €10) Very dark (the black wine of Buzet?), with good, obstinate legs. A young curranty nose suggests the Cabernet Franc influence. A basketful of young fruits spills on to the palate, chased by liquorice and prunes. The finish is still developing, and the wine should be at its peak in 2007. Immensely promising. Paul Strang *With intense flavours, and layers of fruit waiting to unfold, this is a serious red wine for the price.* TS

Barolo Monprivato Riserva

Cà d'Morissio 1997 Giuseppe Mascarello, Langhe (Northern Italy, €125) A wine of consummate elegance, with an aromatic complexity rich in subtle tonalities. The tannins are plentiful yet velvety, the wine exhibiting sweetness of ripe fruit and a breadth of flavour allied with an enjoyment quite out of the ordinary. From a great if rather forward vintage, it is magnificent already but destined to live a long time. Franco Ziliani *Great Barolo, this wine is indeed rather forward due to the year, but it has the tannic structure to outlive me!* TS

Viognier 2003 Tibor Gál, Hungary (Eastern & Southeastern Europe, HUF 4,500) *Hungary's only Viognier, showing a fine balance between apricot and spice aromas, followed by peachy fruit and mineral undertones, with plenty of weight and a lingering finish.* Dr Caroline Gilby MW

Powerful but beautiful oak aromas overwhelm the varietal character, yet I found it very beguiling, with a lovely weight of fruit, as you point out, and excellent acidity and length. Despite the obviousness of the oak, it is one of the best Viogniers I have tasted. TS

Merret Bloomsbury 2003

RidgeView (Great Britain, £15.95)

Toasty, almost oak-like nose with great Pinot fruit. Balanced acidity and a succulent middle palate add up to a really drinkable, enjoyable sparkling wine. Stephen Skelton MW

My sample was obviously disgorged much more recently than yours, Stephen, since there is no hint of toastiness, let alone "oak-like" aromas. This illustrates perfectly how difficult it is for critics to review sparkling wines when they are disgorged to order, as they so often are, and the wine the consumer buys bears no relation to the one the critic tasted! In its freshly disgorged mode, the nose on this wine shows great finesse, with elegant, yeast-complexed fruit on the palate. TS

Pinot Noir 2003

Sandhurst Vineyards (Great Britain, £10.99) *Huge Pinot character on the nose, together with some sensitively used oak notes. On the palate, the fruit is just so ripe and attractive that it belies its origin. This is a wine that shows what Pinot in a great year in a marginal climate can do.* Stephen Skelton MW

It's a miracle considering how difficult it is to get Pinot Noir right in the winery, even when the grapes arrive full of potential. This should be a peach of a wine if carefully cellared for 2–4 years, but it will be interesting

to see what future hot years yield when winemakers have had a few Pinot Noir vintages under their belts. TS

Faugères 2003 Domaine du Météore (Languedoc-Roussillon, €4) *Garnet and clear, fairly translucent; initial burnt aromas give way to ripe brambly fruit; showing 'hot' character of the year. Very southern, but a suitable partner for spicy food. Persistent flavour and finish; rather more than 'simple'.* Paul Strang
Your "initial burnt aromas" come across to me as hot stones, and you're absolutely right about the brambly fruit follow-through. What a find for €4 – an absolute steal! TS

Silver Selection 2003 Massaya (Lebanon, LL 13,000) *Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Grenache combine to produce one of Lebanon's most characteristic and affordable reds. Good use of Cinsault from a winery that is proud of how it uses this unfashionable grape. Deep cherry red, with a lovely nose of framboise that is a prelude to rich, cooked fruit and pepper in the mouth, yet supple and soft with decent length. This is where modern Lebanese wine should be going.* Michael Karam
A deliciously fresh and ridiculously easy-to-drink red wine that, because of its emphasis on Cinsault, is not predictably Cabernet or in the least bit international. You are right, Michael – this is where Lebanese wine should be going. TS

La Cote Rouse Syrah 2003 Betz Family, Washington (Pacific Northwest, US\$44) *A dark, dense, tannic wine, tightly wound and vertically structured. Dark roasted scents suggest espresso and moist earth, along with classic Red Mountain minerality. Clean, silky, fully ripe, but sleekly styled cherry and plum fruit finishes with dense, chocolate tannins. Definitely a wine to tuck away for a few years.* Paul Gregutt
Big, blowsy, toasty-roasted fruit aromas make it more cappuccino than

espresso for me. Paul, Rich, concentrated black fruits on the palate, which does indeed finish with chocolate tannins. I love this wine, although I suspect the toasty-roasted aromas might put off some people. TS

Cabernet Sauvignon 2003

Water Wheel, Bendigo (Australia, A\$18) *Rich and concentrated blueberry, cassis, and blackberry fruit; very ripe, but the Cabernet identity shines through. Solid tannin grip to close. Its generosity of sweet, very ripe fruit is seldom seen at this price.* Huon Hooke
Yes, I get that sweet blueberry aroma just before the richer, riper, more intense cassis fruit. It has such a lovely, creamy finish, leaving a tingly impression in the mouth that demands another sip – great value! TS

Traminer Concept No. 1 Trocken

2004 Winzerverein Sommerhausen, Franken (Germany, €8) *Gentle, spicy aromas and the fragrance of rose petals distinguish this wine from the generally more opulent Gewürz style of lychees and Turkish delight. Subtle and dry, it's equally suitable for drinking with or without food.* Michael Schmidt

Match this to Traminer in Alsace (the pathetic Klevener de Heiligenstein) and Jura (which is increasingly impressive, but totally non-aromatic), and your "gentle, subtle, less opulent" spice is really quite assertive! In fact, I think it is Gewürztraminer, not Traminer. It certainly has the correct low acidity, and rather than jazz this up, Sommerhausen has opted to leave a spritz of gas to liven up the finish. This works without ruining the spice – something that increased acidity does. Great with smoked-haddock mousse. TS

Chignin-Bergeron Saint Anthelme

2004 Denis & Didier Berthollier (Jura & Savoie, €9) *Denis Berthollier's first inspiration in white wine was Châteaude Beaucastel's white (as this, from 100 per cent Roussanne). Pale yellow,*

it has an attractive honey and fruit-salad nose. It is dry (often not the case with Bergeron) with a crisp acidity lacking in 2003. It's fermented and matured in oak for nine months, and the oak shows through on the palate, balancing well with the fruit and building to the finish. It has a wonderful, soft texture. Wink Lorch
A serious wine with a difference, this Roussanne is far more minerally than anything from the Rhône or Australia, and unbelievably classy for the price. TS

Gimblett Gravels Vineyard

Chardonnay 2004 Craggy Range (New Zealand, NZ\$26.50) *Very classy Chardonnay that earns a big tick in every box. It has concentration, complexity, a great texture, and that indefinable X factor that raises it above the herd. I particularly like the wine's lovely wholemeal/hazelnut flavours and creamy texture.* Bob Campbell MW
Yes, it is oaky; and yes, I was almost flippant about this wine when tasting a number of Craggy Range wines with Steve Smith earlier in the year, but that's because I am invariably all Chardonnay'd out, and I think Craggy's other single-vineyard varieties are far more interesting. However, when tasted in the company of other Chardonnays, it does stand out, even when some of the others are pretty damn good. Ultimately, I have to say there is too much oak influence, but I agree totally with everything you say, Bob. TS

Sion Vin Mi-doux 2004 Cave des Cailles, Cédric Flaction (Switzerland, SF 29) *This sweet wine was made from 100 per cent Chasselas and reached 127° Oechsle. The slightly buttery nose shows aromas of bananas and ripe apples. On the palate, there are lots of sweet cooked fruits and a charming sweetness. Acidity is not too strong. A new way of drinking Chasselas.* Chandra Kurt
A tremendously fresh and elegant

wine, with tinned pears and Beauty of Bath apples on the palate, and a focused, clean, refreshing finish. TS

Vouvray Sec Clos de la

Brettonnière 2004 Jacky Blot, Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Loire Valley, €10) *Delightfully intense and concentrated dry Chenin (genuinely dry, none of that '9 g of residual sugar' rubbish here) with gras and minerality being held up by the oak fermentation and maturation. Brilliant now; brilliant in five years or more – if you've got any left. I won't!* Charles Sydney *Hey Charles, ship this down to South Africa before they get the wrong idea about how Chenin Blanc should taste. Truly expressive from nose to finish. Brilliant! TS*

Alentejano Tagus Creek Shiraz

Trincadeira 2005 Falua (Portugal, €3.50) *Deep, youthful colour, big, ripe, and forward from a warm vintage; supple, sweet cherry fruit from Trincadeira complemented by the spice and blackberry character of super-ripe Shiraz. Both these varieties are well matched in this inexpensive red. Richard Mayson So young, fresh, and vibrant. Really needs three years in bottle to show anything like its true potential. Obviously some whole-bunch fermentation going on here. Delicious. Can't believe the quality for the price! TS*

Estremadura Reserve 2003

Chocapalha (Portugal, €15) *Fine, fragrant, floral blackcurrant fruit; full-flavoured and fleshy, wrapped around a ripe tannic core. Judicious use of oak complements the unusual but exciting blend of fruit (Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz, and Alicante Bouschet). Richard Mayson Only modern Portugal could produce such an expressive, exciting, full, rich red such as this – clean, full of Touriga fruit, and lovely drying tannins on the finish. TS*

Cossart Gordon Verdelho Colheita

Madeira 1995 (Port & Madeira, €16.50) *Pure, expressive, redolent of tea leaves and dried flowers, slightly smoky, with fine, dry, cognac-like flavours. Lovely, accessible madeira with real character. Richard Mayson A brilliant, powerful, knockout finish for the price demonstrates the wisdom of allowing vintage-dated madeira to be bottled after just five years, as opposed to 20 years for so-called vintage madeira. TS*

Privada 2003 Norton, Luján de Cuyo (Argentina, AP 210) *This outstanding blend of 40 per cent Malbec, 30 per cent Merlot, and 30 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon is one of Argentina's best reds but is priced some way below most of the country's icon wines. This is a soft, spicy, coffee-bean/chocolate-perfumed red showing excellent oak integration and fine-grained tannins. Tim Atkin MW Initially deceptively soft on the palate, but those finely grained tannins start to pucker the mouth once the wine has gone down, and the only way back to that deliciously soft, elegant fruit is to take another mouthful, and another, and another. TS*

Marcillac Lo Sang del País 2004

Domaine du Cros (Southwest France, €4.50) *Brilliant ruby colour shot with violet, a full bouquet of red- and blackcurrants; blackberries, too, with spice. Carries through with more of the same on to the palate. The idiosyncratic character derives from a lot of iron and manganese in the soil. Ideal with charcuterie. Paul Strang A delightfully soft and easy-to-drink red wine that is fairly bursting with red and black fruits on the nose and palate. Not too alcoholic (turned out to be 12 per cent): a relief in this age of high-octane headline grabbers. TS*

Cabernet Sauvignon Kayoumi

2003 Carmel (Israel, NIS 135) *Luscious and elegant, this deep-garnet,*

full-bodied, softly tannic wine shows fine structure and balance. On the nose and palate, a generous array of blackcurrants, blackberries, and spicy wood in first attack; these yielding nicely to hints of Oriental spices, chocolate, and tobacco. Enjoyable now, but don't hesitate to cellar this one until 2014. Daniel Rogov A menthol edge without any herbaceous pyrazines upsetting the deliciously ripe, sweet blackberry fruit. TS

Barbera 2003 Shannon Ridge, Lake County (California, US\$19) *Black-cherry fruit, but in a lighter style, with the same bright acidity that marks some of the best Barberas of Italy. More succulent, though, and truly delivers fruit. Dan Berger Big cedary-oak fruit nose, with bright acidity to lift the fruit on the palate, making it very easy to drink. TS*

Estate Selection Merlot 2000 Lenz, New York (Atlantic Northeast, US\$23) *Coming off mostly 26–27-year-old vines and held five years before being released, this Merlot demonstrates how the big, complex flavours and tannic structure of Long Island (NY) reds can marry into something glorious if you give them time. Sandra Silven A lovely wine, Sandy. Mellowing on the nose, with beautiful fruit that's ready to drink now but has more than enough acidity to allow for at least another five years' ageing in a good cellar. TS*

Cuvée Forté Brut NV Mountain Dome, Washington (Pacific Northwest, US\$30) *This is the winery's reserve cuvée, half Pinot and half Chardonnay, made from the best of the best grapes and vintages. (Just the second release in the winery's two-decade history.) Though NV, it is based on the very ripe 1998 vintage. Mountain Dome's most elegant sparkling wine, it has a fine, textured mouthfeel and nicely nuanced flavours of pear, apple, and light citrus. Paul Gregutt*

A tad fat if I'm to be super-critical, but the palate is bursting with impressive yeast-complexed fruit that could take a few more years on yeast (which is one hell of a compliment). TS

Bruñal 2003 Ribera de Pelazas (Spain, €89) *Dark, spicy, subtle 'woodsmoke' on the nose; big, almost toffee-richness on the palate, with warmth, spice, and myriad complex flavours capped by a long, mouth-filling finish full of autumnal fruit flavours. John Radford This needs 10 years in bottle! TS*

Marsala Vergine Riserva 1962

Carlo Pellegrino, Sicily (Central & Southern Italy, €45) *Brilliant amber/caramel colour, luminous, slightly old-gold on the rim. A very complex bouquet recalling apricot, date, fig, dried fruit, tobacco, dried mushrooms, candied fruits, saffron, flint, and dark chocolate. Uppish alcohol (19 per cent) but perfectly balanced with nothing aggressive. In the mouth, it is dry, clean, sapid, salty, and nervous, inviting one to drink; it leaves the palate perfectly clean. Franco Ziliani The finish is vibrant and complex, with just a memory of sweetness on the never-ending finish. A forgotten classic. Stunning! TS*

Chardonnay Unwooded 2004

Peninsula Cellars, Michigan (Atlantic Northeast, US\$14) *The most exciting producer of white wine in Michigan, if not the whole Northeast, treated a great batch of Chardonnay juice the way it does Riesling, Pinot Blanc, and Gewurz – fermented in steel. Bryan Ulbrich gave up on barrel-fermented Chards in 2000 when he couldn't get the fruit-wood integration right. This wine has evolved over the months, tempering the herbaceous flavours and broadening the apple, pear, and tropical-fruit character. It's most unique for an American, let alone Michigan, vineyard to produce flavours this focused. Sandra Silven*

The sort of wine that builds in the glass over lunch. This is definitely the way to go for Michigan Chardonnay, but as good as it is in today's context of the state's wine evolution (and it does have finesse), I think we'll look back on it and wonder what all the fuss was about when Bryan is eventually happy with making this variety. In the meantime, I recommend the good folk of Michigan buy this in preference to any Chablis AOC and even some Chablis premiers crus. TS

Nadja's Vineyard Riesling 2004

Flat Rock Cellars, Ontario (Canada, C\$19.95) *This wine won the Canadian Wine Awards top Riesling prize – and it deserved it. Pale straw colour; minerally floral nose; full on the palate, with tart lime and green-apple flavours; lovely mouthfeel with great length. Very Mosel Kabinett in style, but heftier on the palate. Tony Aspler With a bit of bottle age between your tasting and mine, the minerally floral nose has become very petroly. I see what you mean about Mosel Kabinett, but it has a bit too much alcohol, and is far too dry, to be convincing. However, it is tremendously expressive Riesling and well deserving of its top prize. TS*

Chianti Classico 2002 Rocca di Montegrossi, Chianti Classico (Central & Southern Italy, €8.50) *From a modest year, this wine overcomes its disadvantages with a clean, mature nose recalling violets, earth, and gladioli. On the palate, it's rich and earthy, with a good but not exaggerated tannic backbone, full of flavour and highly drinkable. Franco Ziliani Brilliant, ready-drinking, truly expressive Chianti, with moreish, chocolaty-blackcurrant fruit. A true bargain. TS*

Pioneer Block 1 Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Saint Clair (New Zealand, NZ \$30) *Classic Marlborough style with plenty of passion-fruit flavours together with an underlying lemon-grass character and a sweaty/box-hedge*

influence. Seductive wine with a gentle texture and lingering finish, from one of Marlborough's top Sauvignon Blanc producers. Bob Campbell MW Yes, Bob, all those things (bar the sweaty stuff: keep those dirty thoughts to yourself!), but especially the passion fruit and lemon grass. Super fresh. So intense, it's perhaps too much for some. TS

Costières de Nîmes Scamandre 2003

Domaine Renouard (Rhône Valley, €14) *This wine displays a deep ruby colour. Nice red fruits on the nose and luxurious cedar flavours. Medium-bodied, this Costières de Nîmes offers intense aromas with a long, mineral finish. Olivier Poels Lovely toasted oak and roasted fruit aromas, with pleasingly dry fruit on the palate. Excellent food wine. TS*

Robyn's Block Chardonnay 2002

Tawse Winery, Ontario (Canada, C\$48) *Straw colour, more restrained and elegant than this winery's Beamsville Bench Reserve; toasty, tangerine bouquet; full-bodied, mouth-filling, great balance, with buttery, melon, pineapple, and toast flavours that linger on the palate to a roasted hazelnut finish. Well-integrated oak. Tony Aspler I was trying to convince myself of the tangerine, Tony, and almost got there. I think it's the alcohol that is giving this impression. I find this wine more complete than complex, with plenty of well-integrated oak. Food detracts; best on its own, with friends. TS*

Ribatejo Marquês de Cadaval 2003

Casa Cadaval (Portugal, €30) *Refined, elegant, floral-berry fruit, with some of the qualities of a fine Cabernet-based wine but made from Touriga Nacional and Trincadeira. Intense, bitter-sweet character and fine-grained tannins. Richard Mayson So Portuguese, so distinctive, and so beautiful. Now that's something you could not say about many reds from this country 10 years ago. TS*

Black Sage Vineyard White

Meritage 2004 Sumac Ridge, British Columbia (Canada, C\$19.99) *Lush gooseberry and peach fruit bouquet with floral overtones leads to complex, mouth-filling flavours of orchard fruit, melon, and green mango. Great structure and balanced oak treatment with a long, tangy finish. A rich, beautifully crafted white wine with depth and complexity. Tony Aspler A very elegant, super-fresh melange of classic Bordelais varieties. Good food wine. TS*

Corbec Appassimento 2002

Masi (Argentina, AP 55) *This is a bit of a curve ball, even by Argentine standards. It's an Italo-Argentine blend of the Veneto's Corvina with Malbec, made using the ripasso technique. The result is an Argentine wine with a marked Italian accent, with the acidity of the Corvina lifting the weight of the Malbec. Tim Atkin MW I suppose if any Italian producer in Argentina is going to employ the ripasso process, it would have to be Masi, but its use here is very understated and totally fresh, with absolutely no oxidative overtones, and the result on a Corvina-lifted Malbec is more than a little bit interesting. I'd love to see how this wine develops after a few years in bottle – not many, say 2–3 years. TS*

Arneis 2004 Ponzi, Oregon (Pacific Northwest, US\$20) *It's too bad Ponzi doesn't make more of this lovely wine, or inspire someone else in Oregon to plant Arneis. Penetrating scents and flavours show pineapple, citrus, peach, and tropical fruits, and the piercing aromatics blossom on the tongue into a long, seductive, marmalade of a wine. Unique and flavourful. Paul Gregutt Pungent, leaf-green aromas from nose to palate, where they mingle with intense passion-fruit flavours to produce something that is a million miles away from the overhyped,*

underwhelming examples of Arneis found in Piedmont. TS

Aeolia Roussanne 2004 Giaconda, Beechworth (Australia, A\$85) *Concentrated fruit, barrel-fermented, malo'ed and aged on lees, it's a bright-yellow-coloured, spiced-honey-scented wine of great richness and mouth-filling generosity. Huon Hooke Certainly has more finesse than most Australian Roussanne. TS*

Roussanne 2004 Rustenberg (South Africa, R115) *A subtle nose of pear, ginger, and fynbos belies the weighty mouthfeel, emphasized by just a brush of tannin from the barrel-fermented smidgen, and enlivened by firm acidity. Long, with white peaches on the finish, this wine offers jaded local palates a refreshing – if somewhat expensive – alternative to retail shelves overflowing with Chardonnay, Chenin, and Sauvignon Blanc. Cathy van Zyl MW Thankfully not overoaked like most Australian Roussanne, this wine has lovely fresh notes and has obviously been immaculately handled in the cellar. But, to be super-critical, it does have a tad too much alcohol. I love it, nonetheless, and think it would be interesting to age two or three years, when it will deserve to be served with food. That's the third exceptional Roussanne in this year's tasting. TS*

Chablis Vieilles Vignes 2004

Domaine Christophe & Fils (Burgundy, €7) *Clean, crisp, refreshing, yet with no lack of underlying concentration. It will last. Clive Coates MW A man after my own heart! This sort of wine would be bog-standard Chablis when we were lads, Clive, but in those days, bog-standard Chablis was something to write home about. Now any Chablis bearing such clean lines as this and with such wonderfully fresh, crisp, orchard fruits is rare indeed. TS*

St-Chinian Lo Tabataire 2002

Domaine du Tabatau (Languedoc-

Roussillon, €9) *Brilliant, limpid deep garnet in the glass, the nose of berry fruits taking time to develop (decanting recommended). Some natural vanilla, lightly crushed peppercorns, and spices burst on the palate, followed by prunes. Nicely balanced with good acidity and soft tannins. Elegant and fine, reflecting the lighter character of this vintage. Good long finish.* Paul Strang *We're singing from the same hymn sheet, Paul: elegant, indeed, and that burst of spice with underlying crushed white peppercorns augurs well for the future.* TS

Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2003 Flam (Israel, NIS 155) *Made from grapes harvested in Kerem Dishon and Kerem Ben Zimra in the Upper Galilee, this full-bodied, dark-garnet/deep-purple wine was oak aged for about 14 months. Generous blackcurrant and cherry fruits with mineral, herbal, and light earthy aromas and flavours all come together with a hint of oak that at one moment feels toasty and another spicy. Super-smooth tannins and a long finish. Approachable now but best 2007–12.* Daniel Rogov *Plenty of sappy, sweet spearmint fruit, with nicely judged tannins that would be quite dry and puckering but for the sweetness of fruit, and this all makes for a very long and clean finish.* TS

Château Lezongars L'Enclos Premières Côtes de Bordeaux 2001 (Bordeaux, €10) *This cuvée from the older vines in this Premières Côtes vineyard has a satisfying depth of fruit and richness of flavour and real harmony, which makes it my favourite ahead of their more aggressive Special Cuvée. A wine that really tastes well above its Premières Côtes station.* David Peppercorn *MW Smooth and satisfying, with nicely balanced, soft-tannin structure. A civilized wine for the table.* TS

Grenache Rosé 2004 Beckmen, Santa Ynez Valley, Purisima Mountain

(California, US\$15) *Cranberry and black-cherry notes with bright fruit in the mid-palate (almost a light red!), with the weight to go with a wide array of barbecued foods. Dan Berger You're right, Dan: it does have the colour of a light red, but it also has more of the weight and structure of a light red than a rosé. In a black glass and served at room temperature, it would be assumed by most tasters to be a red wine, and the touch of oak helps in that respect. Probably too good for a barbecue.* TS

Ethos Chardonnay 2003 Chateau Ste Michelle, Washington (Pacific Northwest, US\$30) *A brilliant effort, sophisticated and modern. Leesy, textured, long, and elegant, the winemaker's light touch balances hints of herb, yeast, and new oak against gorgeous fruit. No reliance on buttered-popcorn flavours or excessive new toasty oak.* Paul Gregutt *Seriously structured, nicely oaked Chardonnay, with deep flavour. A food wine. I'm surprised I can enthuse about an oaked Chardonnay these days, Paul, and not sure that I should thank you for it!* TS

Gramp's Five Generations Cabernet/Merlot 2002 Orlando, South Australia (Australia, A\$16) *Dark colour; concentrated blackcurrant and mint aromas; deep, firm, ripe fruit plus persuasive tannins; a gutsy, solid red that comprehensively transcends its modest price point.* Huon Hooke *There is something other than mint for me, and it makes the nose a bit rustic. But I'm totally convinced on the palate, with its rich, ripe fruit that threatens sweetness, yet never gets there because the balance of tannins has been calculated to perfection.* TS

Lemberger Junges Schwaben 2003 Wachtstetter, Württemberg (Germany, €20) *Gentle aromas of blackcurrant, mint, and seaweed are supported by a prudent use of oak with scents of roasted coffee beans and chocolate.*

None of the elements is obtrusive; this is a finely crafted wine. Michael Schmidt Bags of soft fruit overlaid by subtle aromas of coffee and chocolate oak. It is indeed a finely crafted wine, and well worth €20 in my estimation. TS

Côtes du Rhône Villages Kayâm 2004 Mas de Libian (Rhône Valley, €7) *Perfect to drink now, full of fruit and spice flavours. This delicious value-for-money wine is a pure pleasure – sweet and refreshing. Olivier Poels The rich, saturated fruit in this wine packs a lot of flavour per euro, although its hot, spicy finish would have benefited from half a degree less alcohol (15 per cent on label), but that's nit-picking at this sort of price!* TS

Auxerrois 2004 Apostelhoeve, Netherlands (Belgium, Netherlands & Scandinavia, €9) *The wine is open on the nose with a lot of white fruit – pear, apple, and citrus – and is lively and well balanced on the palate, with good length.* Ronald de Groot *The freshness of this wine was such a relief after so many oaky Chardonnays, even if a couple were very good. You have to go to the most northerly villages of Alsace to find Auxerrois as fresh as this, and even then they lack the fruit that this delightful wine has. I reckon this wine is worth twice the price.* TS

Cabernet Sauvignon Special Reserve 2003 Margalit (Israel, NIS 160) *Rich, ripe, and concentrated, with layer after layer of dark plum, currant, anise, mocha, black cherries, and sage. An oak-aged blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah (87 per cent and 13 per cent respectively), this distinctly Old World wine has excellent balance between wood, lively acidity, and well-integrated tannins. Complex and long. Best 2008–13.* Daniel Rogov *I know what you mean, Rogov: it's that dry, herbal oak that gives the fruit its Old World feel or, more accurately, its*

Old World feel c. 1970s – reminiscent of Cabernet blends before new oak became so fashionable. I like the sweet fruit in this wine and the drying tannins on its finish. One to serve from a decanter into large, fine-quality glasses at the table, to fox the wine geeks! TS

Tinto 7 Meses Barrica Arribes del Douro Crianza 2003 La Setera (Spain, €9) *Rich, dark plummy/damson fruit on the nose; big, warm fruit and strong but manageable tannins balance it off on the palate as it develops in the mouth. Lovely long finish; a wine with a great future.* John Radford *After the covers came off, I noticed that this claimed to be 15 per cent alcohol. If asked to guess blind, I doubt that I would have put it at much more than 13.5 per cent. As it happened, this wine was tasted immediately after another 15 per cent wine, and by comparison it seemed such a relief, alcoholically, and tasted so remarkably fresh. Pretty impressive for any producer who can achieve that sort of elegance at such a high strength, especially at such a cheap price.* TS

Salento Rosso Carminio 2003 Cantine Carrozzo, Puglia (Central & Southern Italy, €7) *This pure Negroamaro has perfumes born of the sun. It's sweet, warm, suave, and tight, recalling plum, cherry, blackberry, and liquorice with hints of chestnut and goût de terroir. In the mouth, it is ample, finely woven, rich of material, mature, pulpy, and finishing dry with firm but correct tannins, good length, and plenty of flavour.* Franco Ziliani *An excellent-value, expressive Salento Rosso, full of lively fruit, with a mellow creaminess on the finish to balance the tannins.* TS

Pinot Gris Domaine & Tradition 2004 Clos des Rochers (Luxembourg, €9) *Very fine and minerally, with flavours of red apple and peach and a long, warm, spicy finish.* David Furer *Rich and satisfying in a fresh, elegant,*

more-than-Pinot-Blanc-but-not-quite-Pinot-Gris way (although certainly more expressive than most Italian Pinot Grigio). TS

Alpha 1 2003 Alpha Estate (Greece, €48) *Bright fruit, strongly reminiscent of wild cherry and black figs. Dense with allspice and freshness on the very long finish. It has exemplary balance for such a concentrated wine and the structure for ageing for up to 15 years.* Nico Manessis *Greek Tannat and Montepulciano!* Decant at least five hours before serving. Quite extraordinary, but the wines from Alpha stepped up another level from the 2005 vintage (see Alpha Syrah on p.403), when its state-of-the-art winery came on-stream, whereas the first three vintages were made in rented premises. TS

Pinot Noir Barrique Selection 2003 Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (Luxembourg, €20) *Deep, dark red; brown spices, plum and dark cherry on the nose; a well-balanced, medium-bodied palate with subtle shadings of spices, red fruits, and chalk. Medium length. Better in a few years.* David Furer *Alcohol comes through a tad on the aftertaste, making it seem higher than the 12 per cent claimed on the label, but the beautiful coffee-oaked fruit in this wine makes it an exceptional red for Luxembourg, thanks in part to the extraordinarily hot conditions enjoyed by this marginal viticultural region in 2003.* TS

Eyholzer Roter 2004 Chanton (Switzerland, SF 18) *Pale red, with an expressive, fruity nose. Lots of raspberry and black-cherry notes. Crisp and elegant structure. A speciality from the Haut-Valais marked by freshness and liveliness. Some spiciness on the finish. Drink slightly chilled.* Chandra Kurt *Very spicy on the finish, but also on the nose, with a striking floral aroma*

to the fruit on front and mid-palate: violets and rose petals. Very fresh, pure, and elegant, and so expressive of the style that I've come to know you like, Chandra. TS

Pirom Khao Yai Reserve Tempranillo 2004 Khao Yai Winery, Thailand (Asia, THB 825) *Appropriates a surprising amount of the traditional varietal characteristics despite its vastly different tropical growing environment – a deep reddish hue, ripe, smoky berry aromas, with a soft yet fulfilling palate structure and good length.* Denis Gastin *A Thai Tempranillo: only you could dig up such a wine, Denis! An obvious touch of VA-lift, and there is a distinct high-yield feel about the wine, but there is plenty of that smoky, sweet berry fruit you mention, and it's great to see how quickly Thai wines are developing.* TS

Heida Maître de Chais 2004 Pro vins (Switzerland, SF 23.50) *Not for nothing is this grape also called "wine from the glacier" (Glestcherwein). Very pale and fresh, with lots of good acidity. This refreshing table wine is dominated by notes of citrus fruits. Good balance between fruit and acidity. The finish is complex and almost a little bit fat.* Chandra Kurt *You're right: soft, almost fat, yet crisp and refreshing, citrusy fruit. How weird.* TS

Dão Duque de Viseu Tinto 2003 Sogrape (Portugal, €4) *Lovely savoury, smoky, cask-aged aromas and flavours, somewhat akin to mature Rioja; soft and smooth initially, yet with just enough grip and backbone to cope with rich food. Well-ripened spicy fruit tempered by oak. Tastes like a wine worth twice the price! Richard Mayson *Savoury-coffee oak on the nose, with delicious, elegant fruit on the palate. It's remarkable just how good this large-volume brand of Dão has become. Serve it in large, fine, expensive glasses**

at dinner, and no one would imagine that it's just a €4 wine. TS

Amayna Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Garcés Silva, San Antonio (Chile, CLP 7,800) *San Antonio is starting to create some very distinctive styles of Sauvignon that major on a broad palate structure and ripe aromas. Amayna's third release is full of roasted grapefruit, honey, and peach, with a spicy, full-on palate.* Peter Richards *A big, serious Sauvignon Blanc that leans more to Bordeaux than anywhere else, but with much higher alcohol and more complexity than varietal character. When the covers came off, I discovered that it boasted 14.5 per cent ABV, which is big for a red wine and frankly far too whopping for a dry white. It is produced from clone 242 (French) and UC1 (of Marlborough fame). Despite its high alcoholic strength, I really liked this wine, but I think it would be even better with a greater contribution from UC1 and less alcohol.* TS

Nemea 2004 Mitravela Estate (Greece, €15) *Black-cherry essence, textured sappy style. Spicy vanilla notes lifted by elegant, melt-in-the-mouth tannins. A Nemea made from 30+-year-old bush vines.* Nico Manessis *That spicy vanilla has more than a bit of bubble gum on the nose and palate, but it will be overwhelmed by the fruit if well cellared for 3–4 years.* TS

Pinot Noir 2005 Cono Sur, Colchagua (Chile, CLP 4,000) *This is one for bargain lovers. In this line, Cono Sur has consistently produced what must be one of the world's best-value Pinots. Perfumed, hedgerow fruit and a fresh, balanced, berry-fuelled palate.* Peter Richards *Pure strawberry fruit. Ridiculously low price!* TS

Hillside Chardonnay 2003 Denbies Wine Estate (Great Britain, £11.99) *The beauty of this wine is its great*

attractive acidity, which is a cross between lemons and limes, with enough alcohol and oak to temper the acid. This is what really good Chardonnay from a cool climate should taste like. Stephen Skelton MW *Elegant, toasty Chardonnay, with a long, fresh, sweet-yet-crisp fruit finish, and toastiness coming back on the aftertaste. Probably the greatest English Chardonnay ever made, but if I'm to be super-critical, this standard has been achieved by a relatively simple elegance born of ripe fruit rather than an abundance of true finesse, which must be the next stage for English Chardonnay.* TS

Ribera del Duero Flores Silvestres 2004 Rauda (Spain, €4) *This has lovely, delicate aromas, literally 'flowers of the forest' in high summer, with delicious musky fruit on the palate and just enough tannin to throw it into relief. Long, warm finish. More bodegas in RdD should be making wines like this (and at this kind of price) with grapes from their young vines.* John Radford *Absolutely right about the floral aromas, John, this might not be a fine wine per se, but it is very fresh, soft, and suicidally easy to drink. If only all €4 wines from Spain were this good!* TS

Riesling Domaine & Tradition 2004 Gales (Luxembourg, €8) *Harvested at September's end from the Gales' recently acquired Remich Primerberg vineyards, this exhibits the nose and palate of wet stones and a complex finish of citrus, peach, and apple. Medium intensity, tapered finish.* David Furer *Elegant plum and white-peach fruit on the palate. Keep three years for the terpenes to develop bottle aromas.* TS

QmP Siebeldinger Mönchspfad Reberger 2003 Institut für Rebenzüchtung, Germany (Grape Varieties, €7 per 50-cl bottle)

Dark-red full-bodied wine, with a nose of forest fruits and discreet oak; rather like a southern French wine, with smooth tannins and good length.

Dr François Lefort

I have not had much experience of Reberger (Regent x Lemberger), but this example certainly has a more classic vinifera character than other hybrids that have been recently and uniquely permitted for wine production by EU authorities. Good length, with nice grippy tannins on the finish. TS

Pinot Noir Réserve 2003 (Marjan) Simčič, Slovenia (Eastern & Southeastern Europe, SIT 4,320) *Not many Pinot Noirs are produced in Slovenia and certainly not at this level of quality and finesse. Simčič has a surprisingly fine touch with his reds – a young but graceful wine with notes of wild strawberry and cocoa, and an elegant structure. Dr Caroline Gilby MW*

First bottle corked. Second bottle clean. A touch of VA-lift on the nose, but the palate is excellent, with fresh, sappy fruit and a nice grippy finish. TS

Minervois Les Aspres 2002

Domaine Cros (Languedoc-Roussillon, €18) *Almost a Guigal style of wine, pure Syrah, deep brooding colour, peppery and spicy on the nose, with huge concentration; tannins just starting to soften, complexity on the finish starting to develop with age. Twenty months in new barrels have mercifully left the fruit more or less intact. Paul Strang*

The oak hits you immediately, and it returns pretty quickly after a brief appearance of the mid-palate fruit. While I appreciate this wine might develop more favourably, I still think that 10 months in new oak would have been more than enough. TS

Syrah 2004 Ziereisen, Baden (Germany, €28) *Eighteen months in oak have not managed to subdue the pronounced morello-cherry aromas backed up by an abundance of*

pepper and spice. Will it improve with age? Not in my house, where I would not be able to keep my hands off it!

Michael Schmidt

This has so much ground white pepper on the nose that I felt like sneezing, yet it is surprisingly soft in the mouth. Fascinating to find a German Syrah, but I'm sure it will be even more fascinating when the vines are older, and the grapes are riper, to provide the concentration and depth of fruit that is lacking and to replace the spadeful of ground white pepper with just a pinch of cracked black peppercorn for complexity. TS

Condrieu Côte de Vernon 2003

Georges Vernay (Rhône Valley, €45)

This is a fabulous combination of concentration and elegance. With rich aromas of exotic and tropical fruits, combined with a mineral touch, the wine has a steely finish. Olivier Poels Gosh, Olivier, where's the wine? It has so much oak that I'm still pulling splinters out of my teeth! TS

Pinot Noir 2003 Genoels-Elderen, Belgium (Belgium, Netherlands & Scandinavia, €21) *The warm climate in 2003 helped red-wine production in Belgium, and Genoels-Elderen has shown the way forward with this quite sweet and well-made Pinot Noir. Aged for one year on fine lees in barrels and a further year in bottle, this is well balanced with honest Pinot Noir flavours, soft tannins, and decent depth for the northern climate.*

Fiona Morrison MW

Belgium comes an honourable third behind Luxembourg and England in the 2003 stakes to produce the best red wine in a marginal viticultural region blessed by extraordinary climatic conditions. I think it would have been even better with a little acidification – not something I normally encourage. It would also have benefited from just two-thirds the time in barrel, but unlike

winemakers in true red-wine regions, these guys had just one chance to get it right. This vintage in Belgium reminds me of the missed opportunities in England in 1976. TS

Sparkling Campbell Early Rosé NV

Tsuno Winery, Japan (Asia, ¥1,600)

Vivid pink colour with luscious rosewater/fruit-candy aromas and flavours. Although on the bouquet it threatens to be sweet, it has a surprisingly fresh finish. A real mind-stretcher. Denis Gastin

There is no mistaking the strawberry-jelly aroma in this medium-sweet sparkling wine, but the carbonic gas does the native American hybrid no favours, highlighting more "foxiness" than in the still version recommended in Wine Report 2004. TS

Vinos de Madrid Divo 2000

Ricardo Benito (Spain, €141)

A wonderful, rich, subtle perfume with ripe summer fruits, hints of oak, but dark, hidden fruits below the surface. On the palate, big but austere fruit, power, soft tannins... dark chocolate and damson? Plum? Rich mince-pie mincemeat, cinnamon, a hint of tar? Unbelievably complex. John Radford And high VA, John... although some of the best vintages of Australia's Grange also had high levels of VA, so at this price I suppose I will have to give it the benefit of doubt for the next 10 years or so. TS

Côtes du Jura Savagnin Cuvée

Privilège 2003 Domaine Ganevat (Jura & Savoie, €13)

A very pale lemon-green; almost confit (crystallized) lemons on the nose, with a touch of creamy oak. These flavours are repeated on the palate, which shows good fresh acidity for a 2003 (it was not acidified) and excellent concentration. With two years on lees in demi-muids (600-litre casks) that have given it depth, it exemplifies Savagnin when made in a non-Jurassien way. Wink Lorch Mind-blowing Wink, but it could have

been mind-altering had there been less oak influence: thank goodness they did not use small barriques! Savagnin requires a light touch. TS

Empery Cupid Wild Grape Wine

2002 East of Eden, South Korea (Asia, Won 25,000) *A sweet red wine with intense Amarone-style fruit concentration. Dense purple colour with exotic wild-berry and raisin aromas and flavours. Denis Gastin Unfortunately I had this after the wonderful Amarone from Trabucchi, and Amarone-style it isn't! It has vastly more acetaldehyde than even the most oxidative Amarone, and without the fruit to back it up, the acetaldehyde is horribly spiky. I still wonder if it's the grape, as claimed, or crude production methods and conditions, as I suspect – but you've been there, Denis; I haven't. And you've got strong support from Huon Hooke, so I'll put it in the book-launch tasting to see if my wine-scribe colleagues think I'm being wholly ungenerous. TS*

Cabernet/Shiraz 2005 Sula Vineyards, India (Asia, Rp 375) *This has all the boisterous richness of New World Shiraz but is cleverly tempered with 20 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon – though the label on the domestic market indicates the varieties in reverse order! The Cabernet tones down the Shiraz marginally and firms up the structure. Good fruit concentration, very modern style – and a real bargain at this price. Denis Gastin In the UK it's labelled simply Shiraz. I'm probably being unfairly harsh on a wine from a country with so few wineries, and even less experience, but in terms of expectations on the international market, this wine is let down by aromas that are not so much reductive as indicative of the overuse of cheap inert gas. Having said that, I think the fruit underneath this wine shows potential, so I'll probably also show this wine at the launch. TS*