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THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWS

July 3, 2018 Issue

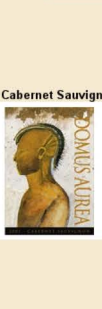
CHILE

Red:

Domus Aurea, Upper Maipo Valley (Chile) Cabernet Sauvignon 2014 (\$70, Global Vineyard Importers). This consistently outstanding example of Chilean Cabernet shines yet again in the 2014 vintage. The fruit profile is a bit riper than usual, resulting in quite soft texture and immense enjoyability, yet with no pruny notes. Although the structure is soft, the wine is very expressive in aroma and deep in flavor, with savory notes and subtle wood beautifully intertwined with fruit notes. Drink now or hold for 5 years. **94 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018

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CROATIA

Red:

Josic, Dabarce Region (Croatia) "Ciconia Nigra Cuvée" 2013 (\$24, Topocinches Vino). This is an impressive, internationally-styled blend that demonstrates Croatia's potential for vinous excellence. Much of that potential remains un-actualized (as was indicated to me during a week of tasting in autumn of 2017), but it is only a matter of time before excellent wines such as this become more widely made and available in the USA. Composed of 55% Cabernet Franc, 30% Syrah, 20% Merlot and 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, it shows weight and substance on the palate with no over-ripe notes, and nicely restrained oak that lends a bit of structure but no astringency. Very well grown and made. **91 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018



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FRANCE

Sparkling:

Gustave Lorentz, Crémant d'Alsace (France) Brut NV (\$30, GustaveLorentz.com). The taste buds are whetted by this sparkling wine's enchanting aromas – fruity, a little floral, along with discreet suggestions of citrus and hard candy. On the palate, the salmon-pink wine has just the right amount of bubbles and discreet hints of strawberry flavor. The wine is crisp and dry, and with 12% alcohol it is an easy sipper. It is fermented in tanks, followed by a second fermentation in bottle. Serve this Crémant as an aperitif with Maroilles and/or other salted nuts, or for dinner with light summery fare such as poached salmon or lobster salad. Gustave Lorentz is located in the medieval village of Berghheim. **91 Marguerite Thomas** Jul 3, 2018



Le Grand Courtaud, France (France) "Grande Cuvée" Blanc de Blancs, Brut NV (\$35). Here is another light sparkling wine suitable for the brunch table or happy hour on the deck. This one has suggestions of grapefruit and other citrus fruit with a hint of slate on the finish, and nice, fine bubbles. **87 Marguerite Thomas** Jul 3, 2018



Beaujolais:

Red:

Château Thivin, Côte de Brouilly (Beaujolais, Burgundy, France) 2015 (\$28). The wines from Côte de Brouilly, one of top-tier of the ten cru of Beaujolais, are not to be confused with those from Brouilly, another cru, but whose wines have less consistent quality. Although Château Thivin, one of the region's best producers, makes a range of wines from Côte de Brouilly depending on the position of the vines on the slope, this one is a blend from several sites. In a word, it's marvelous. Stony and firm, without being hard, it delivers bright red fruit flavors and has beautiful balance without a trace of over-ripeness. Great acidity keeps it fresh and lively. **92 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018

Languedoc-Roussillon:

Red:

Château Bas-d'Aumelas, Languedoc AOP (Languedoc - Roussillon, France) "Barathym" 2017 (\$51, Thiga and Shitward). A delightful wine perhaps does not deserve 90 points, but it gets extra love for value. A blend of Grenache (70%) and Carignan, this fresh and lively red delivers a balanced combination of fruit flavors, spice and herbal elements. This light red is perfect in the summer when you need something more substantial than a rosé. The tannins are barely perceptible so it would be good chilled when you grilling burgers. (You may see the family name of the owners, D'Abernas, on the label rather than the official name of the château.) **90 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



Domaine D'Auphilaac, Montpeyroux Languedoc (Languedoc - Roussillon, France) "Les Colalières" 2016 (\$36, Kermit Lynch). Consumers need to learn more seemingly obscure geographic names. Wine regulators in the Languedoc have identified 34 sub-regions, six of which no longer carry even Languedoc on the label and are referred to as cru, that produce more distinctive wines. Another 28, such as Montpeyroux, are allowed to put their name on the label. This system is analogous to the hierarchy in the Rhône Valley, so think of Montpeyroux as equivalent, at least in pedigree, to one of named Côtes du Rhône Villages. Although potentially confusing to the consumer, the quality in the bottle, at least for this wine, which stands head and shoulders above most wines labeled just Languedoc, makes understanding the system worthwhile. Domaine D'Auphilaac, one of the top producers in the region, uses the typical trio of Mediterranean grapes, Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre, for this single vineyard bottling. The vineyard sits at about 1000 feet above sea level and faces northwest, both of which mitigate against over-ripeness in the grapes. The wine conveys both power and herbal earthy notes. What's amazing is its great freshness that imbues a liveliness often missing in wines from the south of France. Quite suave and refined, I can't think of a better match for grilled leg of lamb this summer. **93 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



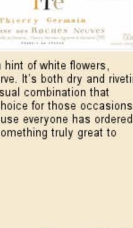
Loire Valley:

White:

Joseph Mellot, Sancerre (Loire Valley, France) "La Chateillanne" 2016 (\$36). The wonderful thing about really good Sancerre is that, though made from the Sauvignon Blanc grape, it doesn't taste like most Sauvignon Blanc, which can be raspy and vegetal. Good Sancerre, such as Mellot's, has a chalky minerality underpinning the bite provided by the grape. A vivid finish thanks to its brilliant acidity keeps it fresh. **90 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



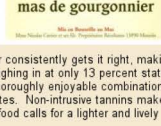
Thierry Germain, Domaine des Roches Neuves, Saumur (Loire Valley, France) "L'Insolite" 2015 (\$40). Thierry Germain is one of the most talented and enthusiastic winemakers in the Loire. He makes small quantities of outstanding individualistic reds and whites that are always worth the search. Take this one, for example, L'Insolite (unusual). Made from 95-year-old Chenin Blanc vines planted on silex, it conveys a hint of white flowers, minerals combined with freshness and vine. It's both dry and riveting with the barest hint of fruitiness – an unusual combination that makes for a thrilling wine. It's a perfect choice for those occasions there's a variety of food on the table because everyone has ordered something different. Or if you just want something truly great to drink. **95 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



Provence:

Red:

Mas de Gourgonnier, Les Baux de Provence (France) 2015 (\$16, North Berkeley Imports; Skunkin Wines). Though located in the heart of Provence, Les Baux de Provence, an appellation of barely 600 acres, is known for its reds, rather than its rosés. The allowed grapes include the usual Mediterranean suspects, Grenache, Syrah, and Carignan, among others, and, perhaps surprisingly, Cabernet Sauvignon. Cabernet in this blend can easily overwhelm, but Mas de Gourgonnier consistently gets it right, making fresh and lively reds. The 2015, weighing in at only 13 percent stated alcohol, indicates an engaging and thoroughly enjoyable combination of light red fruit, earth and herbal notes. Non-intrusive tannins make it easy to enjoy this summer when food calls for a lighter and lively red. **90 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



White:

Domaine des Terres Blanches, Les Baux de Provence (France) 2016 (\$15). Les Baux de Provence, a small appellation in Provence that is entirely organic, is an outlier because it is known best for its red wines. That said, it's home to some satisfying whites, such as this one. A blend primarily of Rolle (a.k.a. Vermentino), it delivers crisp freshness and vivacity. It's an ideal choice for a sticky summer evening. **88 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



Rhône:

Rosé:

Antoine Ogier, Tavel (Rhône Valley, France) "Etamines" 2017 (\$15). Tavel, an appellation established in 1936 solely for rosé, usually produces wines that are notably more robust than other rosé wines. Indeed, in this case, you could consider many of them as light reds, and Ogier's, befitting the appellation, has more color and depth, balanced by vigorous acidity. It's a good choice for the barely cooked tuna atop a salad Niçoise. **88 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



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ITALY

Alto Adige:

Red:

Peter Zemmer, Alto Adige DOC (Italy) Pinot Noir "Rohrut" 2017 (\$19, HB Wine Merchants). A delicate aroma profile of subtle cherry, strawberry, roses and soft spice lead to a bright palate with moderate weight and full-flavored expression of the nose elements, with a finish that intrigues and begs another sip. An absolute steal at the price! **91 Rich Cook** Jul 3, 2018



White:

Peter Zemmer, Alto Adige DOC (Italy) Pinot Grigio 2017 (\$18, HB Wine Merchants). A step forward for this bottling, with pure lemon, lime and peach aromas and flavors, with a viscous midpalate and a crisp finish where the fruit blows forward convincingly and lingers long. If more Pinot Grigio was made in this manner the naysayers would be easily converted. **91 Rich Cook** Jul 3, 2018



Piedmont:

Red:

Renato Ratti, Barbaresco d'Asti DOCG (Piedmont, Italy) "Battaglione" 2016 (\$20, Renato Ratti Wines USA / Gallo). This terrific Barbaresco is certainly one of the best bargains I've tasted this year – out of more than 5,000 wines to this point. It shows wonderful purity and freshness, but is also full of red and black berry flavors, with just the right tannic grip to enable it to excel at the table. I opened my press sample bottle for review purposes one afternoon last week, and was so impressed with its quality that I took it to show at an evening wine class on that same day. Of 12 wines shown in that class, this was the consensus favorite of a set including other wines at 3 times the price of this one. **92 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018



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SPAIN

Sparkling:

Bohigas, Cava (Spain) "Roset" NV (\$13, Polaner Selections). It can be difficult to find a wine to accompany Vietnamese, indeed most Asian fare, with its plethora of flavors. This Roset Cava worked splendidly with the stellar food at the Hanoi House in New York. It was gentle enough to work as a celebratory pre-dinner drink and firm enough to cut through the spice and lemongrass. The spine of acidity makes it a fine choice even with something like barbecued pork. It's good to remember the "wine" in "sparkling wine" because they can be perfect throughout a meal. **90 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



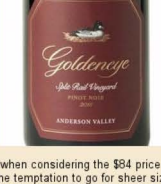
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UNITED STATES

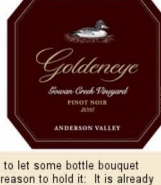
California:

Red:

Goldeneye, Anderson Valley (Mendocino County, California) Pinot Noir Split Rail Vineyard 2015 (\$84). This wine and Goldeneye's Gowan Creek Vineyard 2015 Pinot Noir side-by-side, and it was pretty damned tough to decide on a favorite. This won by a nose, and that was simply because this showed a bit more delicacy and nuance, though both wines are extremely well made in a rich, flavorful profile while still coming off as stylish (which is an extremely impressive achievement). You might think the achievement is less impressive when considering the \$84 price tag, but I take the opposite view. The temptation to go for sheer size over style only gets harder to resist as one moves up the price scale. **94 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018



Goldeneye, Anderson Valley (Mendocino County, California) Pinot Noir Gowan Creek Vineyard 2015 (\$84). I was fortunate to taste this wine and Goldeneye's Split Rail Vineyard 2015 Pinot side-by-side, and it was pretty damned tough to decide on a favorite. This is slightly the richer, softer and more luxurious of the two, though either could fit that description perfectly well. Although the stated alcohol for this bottling is 14.5%, it doesn't show the slightest hint of over-ripeness or heat in the finish. If you buy this, I'd recommend aging it for 3 to 5 years to let some bottle bouquet develop, but that's exactly the only reason to hold it. It is already delicious, and has already absorbed all of its oak, and is terrific right now. **93 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018



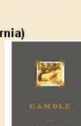
Chappellet, Napa Valley (California) Cabernet Sauvignon Signature 2015 (\$65). This beautiful expression of hillside Cabernet Sauvignon offers characteristic notes of cassis, violet, and mocha, wrapped in earthy flavors of fragrant herbs and cedar. Tannins are grippy, yet velvety, leading to a lingering finish of spice and anise seed. **96 Jessica Dupuy** Jul 3, 2018



Cain Vineyard & Winery, Napa Valley (California) "NV13 Cain Cuvée" NV (\$30). A blend of two vintages (2012 and 2013) of Cain's signature Bordeaux-style blends, this wine has the maturity in structure from its 2012 percentage nestled into the more pronounced vibrancy of the younger 2013 vintage. Notes of blueberry and black cherry commingle with light herbal and pipe tobacco flavors dusted with dark cocoa powder. **95 Jessica Dupuy** Jul 3, 2018



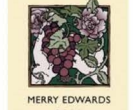
Gamble Family Vineyards, Napa Valley (California) "Paramount" Red Wine 2014 (\$30). A Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petite Verdot, this wine offers juicy aromas of ripe raspberry, macerated blackberry, and currant cordial followed by a rich, dark earthiness and cocoa-dusted figs. Smooth and round, this wine is offering a pronounced grip that softens into a lingering finish. **93 Jessica Dupuy** Jul 3, 2018



Vineyard 25, Napa Valley (California) Cabernet Sauvignon "CRU" 2015 (\$60). Balancing the opulence of classic Cuit Cabernet Sauvignon with nuanced structure and finesse, this wine offers aromas of rich black fruit, graphite and cocoa powder leading to a complex palate layered with black currant, tar, clove, and dried fig. **91 Jessica Dupuy** Jul 3, 2018

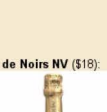


Merry Edwards, Russian River Valley (Sonoma County, California) Pinot Noir 2016 (\$48). If you tasted this wine blind, I bet you'd never guess that this is a winery's entry-level offering. But that's really not a fair bet, as this is no ordinary winery, and Merry Edwards is no ordinary winemaker. This is a sizeable Pinot Noir that is loaded with open, delicious flavors, and yet it also shows lift and freshness that makes for excellent versatility at the table, and timeless enjoyability sip after sip. Based on how good this is, I'm licking my chops at the prospect of tasting Merry's 2016 single vineyard Pinots. **91 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018



Sparkling:

Chandon, California (United States) Blanc de Noirs NV (\$18). Though Blanc de Noirs typically means that only "black" grapes, traditionally Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, the Chandon website indicates that Chardonnay is included in the blend. Whatever the blend, this is a fresh and friendly sparkling wine. Not labeled Brut – Chandon bottles another one labeled as such – this one has a softness that makes it easy to sip as a stand-alone aperitif. Those looking for more firmness in their sparkling wines, should select the Chandon labeled Brut. **87 Michael Apstein** Jul 3, 2018



White:

Apothic, California (United States) White, "Winemaker's Blend" 2015 (\$14). A little treat for folks who like their wine's sweet, Apothic White is bursting with floral richness and ultra ripe fruit flavors. A gentle hint of acidity balances the wine and keeps it from being too cloying, but make no mistake – this is definitely a sweet wine. **88 Marguerite Thomas** Jul 3, 2018



Mayacamas Vineyards, Mt. Veeder (Napa Valley, California) Chardonnay 2015 (\$50). Beautiful notes of ripe pear and lemon pulp are framed by fragrances of morning herbs. Light touches of oak bring a broader structure to this wine with a distinct roundness broadened up by a surge of acidity. **92 Jessica Dupuy** Jul 3, 2018



J. Wilkes, Santa Maria Valley (Santa Barbara County, California) Chardonnay 2015 (\$27). This nicely crafted California Chardonnay from J. Wilkes delivers mouth-watering flavors of peach and other summer fruit along with citrus zest, plus a little extra oak barrel richness. 2015 was winemaker Wes Hagen's first year at J. Wilkes, which was one of the earliest harvests in modern winemaking. Three years later, that early harvest seems to be becoming the norm. May all California Chardonnay be as successful as this one. **91 Marguerite Thomas** Jul 3, 2018



WINES FROM THE CELLAR

White:

Domaine Christian Moreau, Chablis Grand Cru Valmur (Burgundy, France) 2010 (\$99). The 2010 vintage of Moreau's Chablis Grand Cru Valmur has turned out beautifully with some time in cellar, showing marvelous complexity at this stage of development while still retaining fruit that is freshened by the very energetic acidity of the vintage. Although the wine can certainly hold (and most likely improve) for years to come, it happens to love excellent white Burgundy most when the wines still show freshness and some primary fruit—but after they have integrated any wood involved in their production and developed some "bottle bouquet." This wine suits that description perfectly at the moment, with aromas and flavors that meld bright fruit notes, subtle nutty accents, and very prominent minerality. The finish is very persistent, showing superb proportionality as all the nuanced flavors tail off evenly... and deliciously. This won't be easy to find (Kogod Wine Merchant in Encinitas, CA is still offering it for \$99), but consider looking for other top 2010 Chablis wines, or purchasing Moreau's future renditions of Valmur for your cellar. **95 Michael Franz** Jul 3, 2018



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