

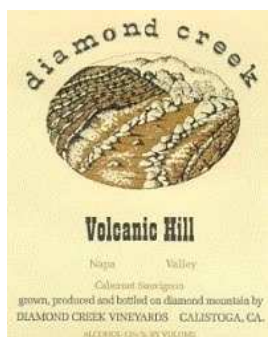
The Successful Collector – By Julian Hitner

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~ Napa Sub-Appellations II – case studies in respect for terroir ~
Saturday, January 21st, 2012

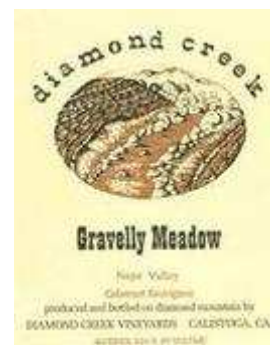
Wineries with a track record:

Back in October, I published a column on all fifteen sub-appellations of the Napa Valley, from ones as famous as Oakville and Rutherford to the lesser-known ones of the Oak Knoll District and Chiles Valley. The point of this exercise? To introduce wine collectors and enthusiasts to the idea that the notion of *terroir*—i.e. soil, geography, climate, and human intervention—does, indeed, have a place amongst the mindsets of Napa Valley winegrowers; that growing attention is nowadays being heeded to the well-proven concept that far better wine can be produced from specific regions, even single vineyards, than those crafted from anonymous Central Valley sources.



And so, for the second part of my series on Napa Valley sub-appellations, I thought it worthwhile to examine three prestigious Napa-based wineries that seem to endorse the ideal(s) of *terroir* on a greater level than their peers, specifically within the framework of the existing sub-appellation system. The first one on my list? **Diamond Creek Vineyards**. Established by Al Brounstein (d. 2006) in 1968, the winery is

effectively made up of four separate vineyards based out of the Diamond Mountain AVA. They are Volcanic Hill, Red Rock Terrace, Gravelly Meadow, and Lake. The speciality for each is Cabernet Sauvignon, accompanied by dollops of Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Merlot, and Petit Verdot. What I like most about these wines is how different they taste from another, with soil content playing a pivotal role in reflecting the remarkable diversity of *terroir* to be found in just a single sub-appellation. In fact, they are so different that it is virtually impossible to come up with generalizations when referring to them, other than that they are all powerful, well balanced, characterful, and insanely delicious. At the same



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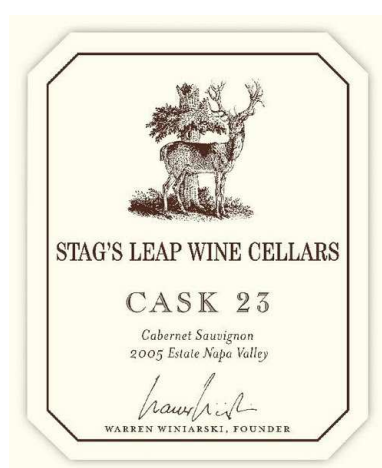
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time, they also seem to perform according to their origins; in the case of Spring Mountain, which seems to possess remarkably varied soils (volcanic in predominance), this means inescapable differences in texture, structure, and flavour profiles. FYI: Diamond Creek is currently represented in the Ontario market by **Lifford Wine Agency**, and the latest vintage of 2007 is nothing short of fabulous. True collectors' wines, each bottle fetches \$250 per bottle, but will reward proper cellaring like few other Napa bottlings.

The next winery is **Dunn Vineyards**. Founded by Randy and Lori Dunn in 1979, only two wines are made at this modest establishment. For our purposes, the one of note is the Cabernet Sauvignon-blend crafted entirely from Howell Mountain AVA grapes. Consistently one of the greatest wines produced in the Napa Valley year after year, it is unmistakably Bordelaise:



elegant, moderate in alcohol, and sophisticated yet 'upright' in both breed and stature. Truly, to produce such a wine, one might be considered *compelled* to have respect for *terroir*, which, in the case of Howell Mountain, means taking advantage of the cooler conditions to allow for better balance and acidity—both hallmarks of Dunn wines. In



Ontario, Dunn Vineyards is represented by **The Small Winemakers**, with the '07 fetching \$96.95. A wine that almost seems underpriced when considering the quality.

Finally, the last Napa-based winery I wish to discuss is none other than **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars**, one of the most well-known premium wineries in Napa. Founded in 1970 by former political science professor-turned sage winemaker Warren Winiarski (who sold in 2007), there are few other wineries in

Napa whose bottlings reflect the terroir of their sub-appellation so adroitly: silky, powerful, with wonderfully fragrant aromas. In large part, the wines are crafted from two vineyards within the Stags Leap District AVA, arguably the most elegant valley-floor sub-region in Napa: the S.L.V.

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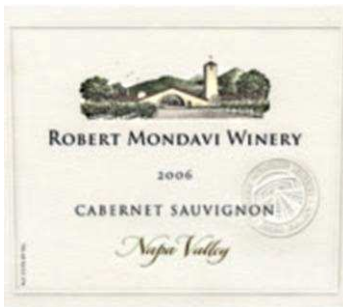
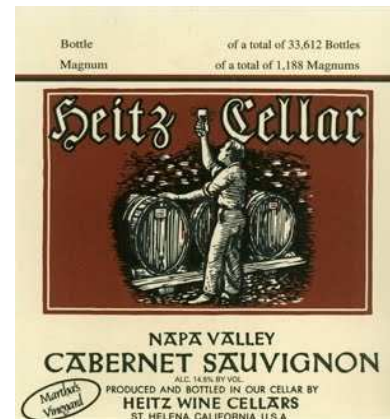
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and Fay Vineyards (both have their own bottlings), with the flagship Cask 23, a profoundly refined, powerful Napa Cabernet Sauvignon-blend, constituting the best grapes from both. In Ontario, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars is represented by **Profile Wine Group**, with an asking price of \$275 for the 2005 Cask 23—costly, though a stunning collector's wine no matter which way you look at it.

Of course, there are many other premium-oriented Napa wineries embodying a firm commitment to, though perhaps in various degrees, the ideals of *terroir*, ones that have continuously and successfully crafted collectors' wines worth seeking out. Why, just off the top of one's head, one can think of a few: Araujo, Dominus, Harlan, Heitz, Opus One, Pride Mountain, Screaming Eagle, Shafer, Spottswoode, and Viader. Granted, each of these wineries will have their own take on exploiting *terroir*, yet all of them have consistently demonstrated a knack for creating wines emblematic of their origins, of their place in the Napa Valley.



The question remains, however, is have such wineries yet to outnumber their counterparts, wineries that pay only 'token heed' to *terroir*. In my opinion, the answer is no; the wineries mentioned here are still in the minority. But things are changing fast. And what with climate change, combined with the desire for ever-more powerful, concentrated wines, such change cannot come soon enough. After all, even a über-concentrated, mighty Mondavi Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, tastes better with hints of its Oakville origins (91% To Kalon Vineyard)—quite happily, the '06 tastes precisely that!

[Click here for a few gems from the 21 January 2012 Vintages Release along with several others](#)

A few gems for collectors:

White Wines:

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Faiveley 2008, Puligny-Montrachet AOC, Burgundy, France: For a village wine, the 2008 Puligny-Montrachet behaves as if it has higher aspirations; excellently formatted, elegant, and forthright. Starbright, light lime in colour, the wine is lightly toasted, delivering textbook, refined 'Puligny' scents of gentle hazelnuts, pears, quince, caramel, white flowers, lemon zest (very subtle), minerals, and a hint of spice. Complex, with beautiful, well-established fruit, balanced acidity, and a rather poignant yet elegant hint of pears and hazelnuts on the finish. Compared to past outings, I would say this serves as something of an improvement over Faiveley's other village bottlings. Now-2019. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

90++ \$51.95 (#241125) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Trefethen Estate 2009 Chardonnay, Oak Knoll District (Napa Valley), California: Sourced from the up-and-coming Oak Knoll District, a cooler-climate winegrowing region located north of Carneros, I was very much taken the 2009 Chardonnay right from the start. Starbright, pale-light lime in colour, the wine offers beautifully restrained scents of pears, mild quince, ripe green apples, wet pebbles, and a lovely hint of white flowers and lime. Complex, with seriously fine fruit, balanced acidity, and an elegant, un-Californian hint of pears and quince on the finish. Exceedingly refreshing at 13.5% alcohol, with excellent balance and style. Now-2020. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

90+ \$39.95 (#95760) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release

Benziger 2009 Sangiacomo Vineyard Chardonnay, Carneros, California: A sad state of affairs when this is the best wine I have ever tasted from Benziger. Granted, in all fairness I have never sampled that many bottlings, but this has always been an operation I have never taken too seriously. Still, the 2009 Sangiacomo Vineyard Chardonnay remains a successfully satisfying, polished wine. Starbright, pale-light lime in colour, it is moderately toasted, revealing lovely scents of ripe pears, lemon, butterscotch, apricots, flint, and a hint of spice. Reasonably complex, with very full, round fruit, balanced acidity, and a crisp, poised hint of toasted oak, pears, and quince on the finish. A very impressive outing, actually; let's hope more such wines are produced. Now-2016. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, July 2011)

89 \$28.95 (#172205) Vintages 3 September 2011 Release

Dog Point Vineyard 2009 Sauvignon, Marlborough, New Zealand: Under owners Ivan and Margaret Sutherland, Dog Point Vineyard has consistently performed excellently, with the 2009 Sauvignon Blanc serving as the latest example. Starbright, very pale lime in colour, it exhibits intense scents of gooseberry-infused citrus white grapefruit and lemon, asparagus, orange zest, and minerals. Mouthfeel: really zesty and steely fruit on display, with great acidity, and a lingering hint of grassy gooseberries on the finish. Lovely vibrancy and intensity. Screwcap closure. Now-2012. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

89 \$19.95 (#677450) Vintages 13 November 2010 Release

Ostler 2010 Blue House Vines Pinot Gris, Waitaki Valley (Central Otago), New Zealand: One of few Central Otago-based Pinot Gris' I have in my database, the 2010 Blue House Vines is an undeniably appealing, round, and focused wine. Starbright, pale-light straw in colour, it reveals lovely, pure varietal scents of straw-infused poached pears, peaches, orange skins, white flowers, wet stones, and a delicate hint of Asian

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spice. Complex, with beautiful fruit (slightly botrytis-infected), balanced acidity, and a mellow, well-rounded hint of generous peaches and white flowers on the finish. Most impressive. Screwcap closure. Now-2017. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

89 \$24.95 (#269142) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Pikes 2009 Traditionale Riesling, Clare Valley, South Australia, Australia: Easily one of the best Riesling producers in the Clare Valley, the 2009 Traditionale is a wine of splendid intensity, minerality, and 'cut.' Starbright, pale lime in colour, it features beautiful scents of line cordial, white flowers, delicate kerosene, lemon, spice, and lots of slate. Palate: very fine steely fruit showing, with balanced acidity, and an enduring, utterly refreshing hint of minerally lime on the finish. The type of wine that I can never seem to get enough of. Screwcap closure. Now-2015++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

89 \$19.95 (#66894) Vintages 13 November 2010 Release

Drylands 2011 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand: For the most part, my notes from Drylands have always suggested an admirable winery. Starbright, extremely pale lime in colour, the 2011 Sauvignon Blanc displays lovely, typically 'Marlborough' notes of gooseberries, white grapefruit, tomato leaf, rosemary, lemon, and a hint of star fruit. Palate: intense zesty fruit and acidity showing, ending with a lingering hint of grassy gooseberries on the finish. Very refreshing and satisfying. Screwcap closure. Now-2013. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

88 \$19.95 (#675405) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Cave des Vignerons 2010 Le Gravillas, Côtes du Rhône-Villages Sablet Blanc, Rhône, France: On the rarest of occasions have I recommended white Côtes du Rhône-Villages. Most are usually very weak and entirely uninteresting, but the 2010 Le Gravillas definitely has more of a personality. Starbright, pale-straw lime, it reveals pleasant notes of slightly herbed green stone fruit, beach pebbles, lemon, and a hint of pineapple. Palate: decent dry, crisp fruit showing, with balanced acidity, and a hint of dried, herbed green apples on the finish. Solid, respectable, and balanced. Grenache Blanc, Clairette, Roussanne, and Marsanne. Now-2012. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

87 \$17.95 (#251520) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Domaine Salmonière 2010 Vieilles Vignes, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie AOC, Loire, France: Just in case you haven't tried it, Muscadet is one of the best wines in France for crisp, simple drinking. Starbright, the 2010 Vieilles Vignes offers mild notes of lemon, dried green apples, and a hint of seasalt and straw. Palate: crisp, very dry fruit, with balanced acidity, and a hint of dried lemon/green apples on the finish. Nicely balanced, basic, and fresh—just the way Muscadet ought to be. Screwcap closure. Now-2012. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

86 \$13.95 (#142380) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Red Wines:

Château Canon-la-Gaffelière 2005, St-Emilion Grand Cru Classé AOC, Bordeaux, France: Having now tasted this beauty on multiple occasions over the past three years,

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it's safe to say that the '05 is the best vintage Château Canon-la-Gaffelière has ever produced. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby-red currant in colour, the wine is still beautifully toasted, with awesome aromas of fresh, elegant mocha, red currants and plums, graham crackers, graphite, earth, vanilla, and spice. Truly complex, with extraordinary fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lengthy, extremely decadent hint of mocha and red plums on the finish. Developing fantastically, with a very long life ahead of it. 55% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Now-2028++. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, August 2011)

94 \$235.00 (#88625) **Vintages Special Offer**

Domaine Armand Rousseau Père & Fils 2007, Gevrey-Chambertin Premier Cru Clos St-Jacques AOC, Burgundy, France (Magnum): From arguably the most stellar producer in the commune, the 2007 Clos St-Jacques is a near-masterpiece of ultimate complexity, gorgeousness, and pedigree. Brilliant, medium ruby in colour, the wine is finely toasted in just the right measure, with remarkably alluring aromas of cherried raspberries, red plums, cinnamon, white truffles, white mocha, vanilla, and spice. Incredibly complex, possessing marvellous fruit, fine tannins, balanced acidity, and a darling hint of white mocha, plums, and truffle traces on the finish. For such a limited vintage, this wine performs so far ahead of the pack that it's almost insane—tasting it from magnum only heightens its prowess. Now-2024++. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, April 2011)

94 \$439.00 (#154559) **Vintages February 2010 Classics Collection**

Domaine Tour Saint Michel 2009 Cuvée Feminessence, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, Rhône, France: One of the most stupendous wines I have yet to taste from the magnificent 2009 vintage, the 2009 Cuvée Feminessence is a fantastically multi-pronged wine of utter sumptuousness, balance, and length. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour with a touch of purple, it is beautifully toasted, with unbelievably alluring aromas of mocha and plummy kirsch, shortly giving way to abundant black raspberries, blueberry crumble, licorice, leather, Provençal herbs, vanilla, and spice. Truly complex, possessing excellent, opulent fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a multilayered, engrossing hint of black raspberries and kirsch on the finish. Incredibly attractive, deep, and built to last—you can bet collectors will want to stock up on this. 75% Grenache and 25% Syrah. Now-2028. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, July 2011)

94 \$59.95 (#244830) **Vintages Online Exclusives**

Domaine de Beurenard 2007 Boisrenard, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, Rhône, France: Checking my database, I have no other notes from this operation; so it was with great pleasure to be introduced to the Domaine de Beurenard on such a high note. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the excellent 2007 Boisrenard is beautifully toasted, with inviting aromas of baked leathery mocha, pepper, plums, damson, mild wild flowers, and a hint of vanilla, licorice, and spice. Very complex, with wonderful fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a very long, incredible hint of brambly leathery plums on the finish. Very powerful, more extracted in style, yet bearing all the hallmarks of an exceptional Châteauneuf. Now-2024. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, April 2011)

92+ \$79.00 (#964585) **Vintages February 2011 Classics Collection**

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San Felice 2006 Poggio Rosso, Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Tuscany, Italy: For some reason, I have this aching feeling that most collectors aren't aware just how great a vintage 2006 was in Tuscany, with the Poggio Rosso serving as an excellent example of the quality to be had from this year. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine is deceptively delicate, featuring beautiful aromas of elegant, slightly mocha-infused cherries, plums, flowers, mild cedarwood and spearmint, underbrush, and a hint of vanilla and spice. Very complex, with superb, bold yet refined fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a delicious, truly well-structured hint of plums and wild blackberries on the finish. Excellent, somewhat backward, and definitely worth seeking out. Now-2020++. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, July 2011)

91++ \$52.95 (#965665) Vintages Online Exclusives

Villa Rinaldi 2001 Maior, Amarone della Valpolicella DOC, Veneto, Italy: Once in a while, I am fortunate to come across properly aged Amarone—a different animal in comparison to its youthful counterparts; most enthusiasts prefer the latter. Either way, the 2001 Maior, brilliant and opaque garnet-brown in colour, delivers a truly 'veteran' bouquet of cigar box and cedar, earthy baker's chocolate, tobacco, tar, spicebox, and figs. Very complex, possessing delicious mature fruit, (still-) firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a powerful, lingering hint of dark cedary baker's chocolate on the finish. Superb outline: extremely well aged, vibrant, and characterful; excellent wine. Now-2015. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, June 2011)

91++ \$99.95 (#98277) Vintages Online Exclusives

Tenuta dell' Ornellaia 2008 Le Serre Nouve dell' Ornellaia, Bolgheri DOC, Tuscany, Italy: The 'second wine' of Ornellaia and typically an outstanding buy for collectors year after year, the 2008 Le Serre Nouve, while not as rich as most other vintages, nonetheless represents a superbly tight, polished, and substantial bottling. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, it offers beautiful aromas of toasted oak and reserved dark chocolate that gives way to black cherries, currants, plums, raspberries, flowers, leather, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, offering great fruit, very firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lengthy hint of currants on the finish. Excellently done. 55% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Cabernet Franc, and 6% Petit Verdot. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, September 2010)

91+ \$59.95 (#606194) Vintages 30 October 2010 Release

Perrin & Fils 2006 Vieilles Vignes, Gigondas AOC, Rhône, France: An older note: in case anyone's curious, Perrin & Fils is the négociant arm of the Perrin family, the same persons who own the iconic Château Beaucastel. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the exciting 2007 Vieilles Vignes Gigondas is finely toasted, with beautiful aromas of stewed mocha, reddish brambleberries, plums, currants, roasted meats, and a hint of incense, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with delicious, superlative fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lengthy, elegant hint of baked plums, incense, and minerals on the finish. Much more complex than the 'straight up' Gigondas of the same operation. Now-2022+. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, December 2008)

91+ \$59.00 (#14985) Vintages November 2008 Classics Collection

Bodegas Alejandro Fernandez 2006 Tinto Pesquera Reserva, Ribera del Duero DO, Spain: For the past several years, the 'Tinta Pesquera' range has been consistently excellent: modern, full-bodied in style, yet marvellously crafted and delicious. Brilliant,

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opaque ruby in colour, the 2006 Reserva offers multilayered, inviting aromas of toasted oak that quickly switches to blackberries, refined currants, leather, granola, coconut shavings, vanilla, and spice. Complex, carrying beautifully polished fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lasting hint of blackberries (gently laced with raspberries) on the finish. Superbly integrated, with a sort-of ‘American oak freshness’ that stands as a virtual contradiction in terms. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

91 \$41.95 (#323345) Vintages 30 October 2010 Release

Sanford 2008 Pinot Noir, Santa Rita Hills (Santa Barbara County), California: Though logging in at a hefty 14.5% alcohol, the 2008 Sanford Pinot Noir is a bottling of excellent depth, balance, and purity. Brilliant, dark violet-ruby in colour, the wine is moderately toasted, featuring attractive aromas of dark cherries and raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, rhubarb, cinnamon, vanilla, and spice. Complex, delivering beautiful pure fruit, fine tannins, milder acidity, and a truly lovely hint of dark raspberries and cherries on the finish. In all honesty, I so wish there were more Pinots like this coming out of California. Granted, the alcohol is high, but it’s so well integrated that one hardly notices its presence. Now-2015++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

91 \$44.95 (#206680) Vintages 30 October 2010 Release

Yabby Lake 2007 Pinot Noir, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia: On the eastern coast of Port Phillip Bay, the Mornington Peninsula, oceanic playground to the Melburnians (spelled correctly), has fast become a source of some of the best Pinot Noirs in Australia. Brilliant, medium red currant in colour, the 2007 Yabby Lake reveals clear Chambolle-inspired aromas of cherries, plums, loamy earth, a slightly gentle cedary element, game, and a hint of vanilla and spice. Complex, with truly refined fruit, silky tannins, balanced acidity, moderate alcohol (13%), and a stylish, sophisticated hint of cherries and subtle cedarwood on the finish. A real beauty: elegant, proper, yet somewhat enigmatic. Screwcap closure. Now-2016. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

91 \$49.95 (#262402) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Domaine Beau Mistral 2009 Saint Martin, Côtes du Rhône-Villages Rasteau AOC, Rhône, France: An absolute bargain for collectors and enthusiasts, alike, the 2009 Saint Martin is a wine full of enticement, structure, and flavour—an amazing success. Brilliant, opaque purple-ruby in colour, it features inviting, concentrated aromas of Provençal-inspired blackberries, black raspberries, blueberries, kirsch, lavender, licorice, and spice. Quite complex, possessing delicious, sumptuous fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a wholly lingering hint of blackberry liqueur on the finish. Almost succulent, really, this should please every palate its liquid comes into contact with. 50% Grenache, 40% Syrah, and 10% Mourvèdre. Now-2020++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

90++ \$22.95 (#251629) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Coeur d’Alene 2006 Boushey Vineyard Syrah, Yakima Valley, Washington State: Forget Merlot for a moment; Syrah seems magnificently at home in Washington State, with the 2006 Boushey Vineyard lending evidence to the case. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine displays really fine purity of the varietal, showcasing

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brambling plums and white pepper at the outset, giving way to dried violets, forest floor, a little smoke, and spice. Complex, with seriously delicious fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a long, appetizing hint of plums, incense, and forest floor on the finish. Powerful, superbly satisfying, and truly delicious. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, July 2011)

90++ \$42.95 (#227579) Vintages 3 September 2011 Release

Pecchenino 2005 San Giuseppe, Barolo DOCG, Piedmont, Italy: A wine of great traditionalism and purity, the 2005 San Giuseppe, though hailing from a weak vintage, should not deter collectors from buying it. Brilliant, dark red-garnet in colour, it is (actually) finely toasted, displaying engaging aromas of elegant dried cherries, red plums, tealeaves, underbrush, a little tar, cedar, and spice. Complex, featuring extremely fine fruit, very firm tannins (rather tight at the moment), balanced acidity, and a lovely hint of fresh cedarwood and dried cherries on the finish. Endowed with adorable expression, a Barolo with much appeal to it. Now-2018+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

90++ \$44.95 (#181396) Vintages 30 October 2010 Release

Ravenswood 2008 Single Vineyard Belloni Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (Sonoma County), California: From one of the best Zinfandel specialists in California (along with Seghesio and Ridge), the 2008 Belloni is an extremely tempting, well-structured, and focused offering of instant, eager appeal. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine displays powerful, attractive aromas of cherry/blackberry treacle, incense, dried mocha, licorice, forest floor, leather, vanilla, and spice. Complex, offering fulsome, sumptuous fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting, polished hint of blackberries and licorice on the finish. Checking my records, I have no other recent notes from this single vineyard. Now-2020++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

90++ \$44.95 (#672741) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Domaine de Cristia 2009, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, Rhône, France: Powerful, lengthy, and definitively desirable, the 2009 Domaine de Cristia is a worthy Châteauneuf for collectors to buy. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine delivers rich, ripe aromas of fig-dominant plums, blackberry compote, kirsch, walnuts, woodsmoke, licorice, and spice. Complex, offering deeply delicious, full-throttle fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, concentrated hint of blackberries and figs on the finish. Rather hefty, almost chunky at 15% alcohol, with unmistakable baked components; yet so deftly satisfying and tempting that I'm not one to complain. 90% Grenache and 10% Syrah. Now-2022++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

90+ \$42.95 (#67678) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Château Haut Selve 2006 Réserve, Graves AOC, Bordeaux, France: At 42 hectares, Château Haut Selve represents one of the larger properties in the Graves AOC; and judging by the high-activity, inviting 2006 Réserve, quality seems to be steadily improving. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine is finely toasted, exhibiting highly flattering, modern aromas of 'forested' mocha shavings and currants, plums, woodsmoke, blackberry compote, dark licorice, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with extremely fine, well-structured fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an elegant, focused hint of currants and dried 'forested' mocha on the finish. Excellent stuff. 57%

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Cabernet Sauvignon and 43% Merlot. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

90 \$29.95 (#235424) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Alain Voge 2007 Les Vinsonnes, St-Joseph AOC, Rhône, France: Belying the otherwise rudimentary reputation of the domaine, the 2007 Les Vinsonnes is a clear step up for Alain Voge. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, the wine reminds one of forested pine trees at the outset, with lovely aromas of brambleberries, blackberries, plums, leather, and a hint of violets and spice. Complex, with beautiful fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a really pure, satisfying hint of brambleberries and violets on the finish. A St-Joseph of great harmony, finesse, and character. It will probably age longer than my initial prediction. Now-2017+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, July 2011)

90 \$34.95 (#245720) Vintages Online Exclusives

McKinley Springs 2006 Syrah, Horse Heaven Hills, Washington State: For technocrats, the Horse Heaven Hills AVA is located between the Yakima Valley and the Columbia River, and is said to be ‘particularly promising.’ If the 2006 Syrah is anything to go by, I would tend to agree: brilliant, very dense ruby in colour, the wine is finely toasted, with inviting aromas of leathery currants, ‘purplish’ blackberries and plums, incense, lavender, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with great forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting hint of leathery currants and plums on the finish. Great, pure Pacific Northwest Syrah, with lovely structure and grace. The website states that it is co-fermented with 3.5% Viognier. Now-2017++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

90 \$27.95 (#199794) Vintages 13 November 2010 Release

Peter Franus 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California: Though I have many notes from Peter Franus, this is probably the first time I have ever recommended one of his wines. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon is finely toasted, with abundant, sumptuous aromas of mocha shavings (laced with a wisp of cedar), switching to currants, baked plums, dried cherries, figs, forest floor, vanilla, and spice. Complex, carrying delicious, well-structured forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting hint of mocha and baked currants on the finish. Powerful and baked (logging in at 14.8% alcohol), still totally alluring for the many North American collectors. Now-2021. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

90 \$45.95 (#907477) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Rust en Vrede 2007 Estate, Stellenbosch WO, South Africa: Like most Stellenbosch reds, the flavour profile of the 2007 Estate is unmistakably identifiable, both for better and/or worse—luckily, the former would seem to apply. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, this beautiful wine is finely toasted, featuring distinctive aromas of roasted coffee beans, switching to tarry baked currants and plums, leather, dried mocha, and a hint of dried cherries, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with very fine, splendidly focused fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lingering, slightly ‘rustic’ yet near-smooth hint of baked currants and roasted coffee beans on the finish. Quite a big, deliciously crafted wine. Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, and Merlot. Now-2017++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, July 2011)

90 \$37.95 (#997742) Vintages 3 September 2011 Release

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Hecht & Bannier 2009, St-Chinian, Midi, France: Continuing its hot streak of delicious, eager-to-please wines, Hecht & Bannier again comes through with its highly impressive '09 St-Chinian. Brilliant, opaque purple-ruby in colour, it possesses abundant aromas of blackberries, plums, spring flowers, licorice-laden Provençal herbs, incense, and spice. Complex, delivering full-bodied, fairly saturated fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, polished hint of velvety blackberries and incense traces on the finish. Delectable, balanced, and downright appealing. 'Mainly' (according to their website) Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvèdre. Now-2019++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

89++ \$23.95 (#184184) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Montirius 2006 Le Clos, Vacqueyras AOC, Rhône, France: Funny as it might seem, I have no notes from this operation—a shame, for the 2006 Le Clos is an extremely good Vacqueyras. Brilliant, dark ruby-red currant in colour, the wine features a very rugged, 'Provençal' bouquet of light leathery plums, lavender, undergrowth, gentle cedarwood, and a lovely hint of licorice and spice. Complex, with delicious fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, leathery hint of plums and cedary Provençal herbs on the finish. Impressively aged, with lots of character and style. The '07 was a 50/50-blend of Syrah and Grenache; no doubt the '06 was of a similar, if not the same, blend. Now-2015++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

89+ \$28.00 (#76547) Vintages Online Exclusives

Pike & Joyce 2009 Pinot Noir, Adelaide Hills, South Australia, Australia: My first ever note from Pike & Joyce, the 2009 Pinot Noir suggests an operation that takes winemaking seriously. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour with a touch of red currant, it boasts lots of red cherries and cola gummy bears at the outset, giving way to accompanying notes of rhubarb, cranberries, red currants, and a hint of cinnamon hearts and spice. Reasonably complex, with very good, tasty soft fruit and tannins, balanced acidity (very important), and a silky hint of red cherries on the finish. Truly appealing, flavourful bottling. Screwcap closure. Now-2013. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

89+ \$24.95 (#68064) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Domaine Zumbaum Tomasi 2007 Clos Maginai, Côteaux du Languedoc Pic St-Loup AOC, Midi, France: For those who are curious, the sub-appellation of Pic St-Loup, located well north of Montpellier, is part of a rocky set of hillsides with unfailing potential for producing world-class wines. Brilliant, opaque purple-ruby in colour, the 2007 Clos Maginai is finely toasted, with intense aromas of leathery herbs that give way to flowery brambleberries, black raspberries, kirsch, vanilla, and spice. Complex, boasting really lovely fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a splendid, even refreshing hint of leathery, herb-infused plums on the finish. Impressive stuff. Now-2017+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

89+ \$18.95 (#185868) Vintages 30 October 2010 Release

Vieux Château Gachet 2006, Lalande-de-Pomerol AOC, Bordeaux, France: My only note from this winery, the 2006 Vieux Château Gachet is a claret of impressive depth, structure, and focus. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, it is finely toasted, with inviting yet restrained aromas of mocha and red plums, switching to black raspberries, currants, leather, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with fine, fuller-style fruit, firm tannins, balanced

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acidity, and a lovely, lasting hint of currants on the finish. Like most wines from Lalande-de-Pomerol, this doesn't taste a thing like an actual 'Pomerol,' but this doesn't matter; it is still a very elegant, well made wine. Now-2016++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

89+ \$23.95 (#191023) Vintages 16 October 2010 Release

Cave de Tain 2007 Les Hauts du Fief, Crozes-Hermitage AOC, Rhône, France: Once in awhile, this well-respected co-operative manages to produce a finer bottling than their typical range, with the 2007 Les Hauts du Fief serving as but one example. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, this Crozes-Hermitage is intensely peppery, with lovely aromas of brambleberries, blackberries, plums, lavender-dominant herbs, and the slightest hint of toasted oak and spice. Complex, with fine 'regional' fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a delightful hint of peppery brambleberries on the finish. Textbook wine from the appellation, though a little fruitier than most. Now-2015+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

89 \$24.95 (#958843) Vintages 16 October 2010 Release

Lammershoek 2006 Roulette, Swartland WO, South Africa: Along with its white counterpart, I have always found the Roulette an interested assemblage of many different, Rhône-derived grapes. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, the '06 offers fairly tempting aromas of fragrant plums, dark raspberries, dried flowers, incense, and spice. Complex (though I do pick up a slight rubber element), featuring fine forward fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering hint of silky raspberries and plums on the finish. Delicious wine, to be sure, though slight rubber notes costs it a point. 62% Shiraz, 20% Carignan, 13% Grenache, 4% Mourvèdre, and 1% Viognier. Now-2017. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, July 2011)

89 \$25.95 (#58164) Vintages 3 September 2011 Release

Dauvergne Ranvier 2009 Vin Rare, Vacqueyras AOC, Rhône, France: Worthy of its appellation origins, the 2009 Vin Rare is a big, characterful Vacqueyras that I very much like. Brilliant, virtually opaque ruby in colour, the wine delivers unique aromas of slightly brambling, peppery currants intermixed with sweet Provençal herbs, kirsch, anise, and a hint of dried raspberries and spice. Complex, with very fine, well-styled fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering hint of brambling plummy currants and white pepper on the finish. Very well done: lots of appreciate here. 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah. Now-2017++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

89 \$25.95 (#244863) Vintages Online Exclusives

Viña Montes 2008 Montes Alpha Cabernet Sauvignon, Colchagua Valley, Chile: Impressive everyday wine (for collectors), the 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon ranks as a desirably flavourful, well-structured bottling. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, it seems to emit an excess of cassis on first examination, which gently gives way to toasted oak, currants, plums, blackberries, roasted coffee, vanilla, and spice. Palate: boasting really appealing fruit, with firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting hint of mocha and cassis on the finish. Full-bodied, best enjoyed when the weather takes a turn for the colder. Also contains 12% Merlot. Now-2015+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

88+ \$19.95 (#322586) Vintages 13 November 2010 Release

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Turkey Flat 2009 Butcher's Block Shiraz/Grenache/Mourvèdre, Barossa Valley, South Australia, Australia: Seriously, it is with such rarity nowadays that I come across a well-made, acceptably priced Aussie SGM that I'd almost given up ever finding one. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the 2009 Butcher's Block reveals lovely, 'juicy' aromas of leathery plums and reddish blackberries, switching to cherries, mint, eucalyptus, licorice, and a hint of vanilla and spice. Complex, with full-bodied, supple fruit and tannins, mild acidity, and a lingering hint of leathery plums and eucalyptus on the finish. Appealing, balanced, and very tasty. Screwcap closure. Now-2019. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2011)

88+ \$19.95 (#90241) Vintages 21 January 2012 Release

Seigneurs d'Aiguilhe 2006, Côtes de Castillon AOC, Bordeaux, France: The 'second wine' of the Château d'Aiguilhe, under the same ownership as Canon-La-Gaffelière in St-Emilion, the '06 Seigneurs is attitudinally fruity and fresh. Brilliant, dark ruby-red currant in colour, it offers red plums and currants, dried cherries, licorice, and spice. Palate: lovely approachable fruit, with firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a hint of red plums on the finish. Like other second wines, rounder and fruitier than the 'grand vin,' though not without a sense of elegance and quality. Now-2016. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

88 \$19.95 (#195172) Vintages 16 October 2010 Release

Mas de Lunès 2007, Coteaux du Languedoc, Midi, France: One of a growing number of well made wines from the gargantuan Languedoc 'wine lake,' the 2007 Mas de Lunès is very pretty and approachable. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, it exhibits intensely fragrant wild flowers at the outset, with accompanying notes of leathery currants, plums, violets, white pepper, and spice. Palate: very good food expression, with firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lovely hint of violet currants on the finish. Tasty and balanced. On the website: 70% Syrah and 30% Grenache. Now-2015+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

88 \$18.95 (#183376) Vintages 16 October 2010 Release

Pascual Toso 2008 Reserve Malbec, Barrancas Vineyards (Mendoza), Argentina: A constant joke in the wine trade; that so many Argentinean (or Chilean) wines carry the term 'Reserva' on the label, no matter how inexpensive the wine might be. Luckily, the 2008 Pascual Toso Malbec, hardly dirt-cheap, remains satisfying and well made. Brilliant, opaque purple ruby in colour, the wine is moderately toasted, with semi-fragrant notes of violet currants, blackberries, leather, and a hint of smoked meat and spice. Palate: very good fruit showing, with firm tannins, milder acidity, and a hint of 'purple' currants on the finish. Tasty, appealing stuff. Now-2014++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

88 \$19.95 (#183897) Vintages 13 November 2010 Release

Sparkling Wine:

Huré Frères NV l'Inattendue Blanc de Blancs Brut, Champagne, France: As an ardent enthusiast of Blanc de Blancs, it was with great pleasure that my first note of the l'Inattendue turned out so impressively. Starbright, pale straw in colour, the bubbly is amazingly youthful, with really lovely scents of fresh biscuits and pears, switching to lemon, green apples, pistachios, and lime. Complex and boasting lots of finesse,

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possessing very crisp, polished fruit, splendid acidity, and a refined hint of biscuits and green apple-laced lemon on the finish. A champagne of remarkable freshness and value. Now-2015++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2010)

90 \$38.95 (#191312) Vintages 13 November 2010 Release

Dessert Wine:

Château Rieussec 1996, Sauternes AOC, Bordeaux, France: Sadly, I have only a handful of notes of Château Rieussec from the 1990s, but at least the dazzling '96 is one of them. Starbright, medium orange in colour, this extraordinary Sauternes reveals intoxicatingly tempting scents of honey, fresh marmalade, apricots, toasted nuts, lemon, and a hint of lychees and spice. Sincerely complex, with exceptional sweet fruit, vibrant, layered acidity, and an extremely long hint of honey, apricots, and sweet marmalade on the finish. A dessert wine of utterly excellent finesse, stylization, and length. Bravo! The exact blend does appear to be available for perusal. Now-2030++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

97 \$109.00 (#72173) Vintages May 2008 Classics Collection