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ITALY'S MERLOT MOMENT, PLUS A LEGEND GROWS IN THE MOSEL: WEEKLY TASTING REPORT

Thursday, July 20, 2023

848 Tasting Notes



Left: James tasting 2021 releases with Stefano Frascolla of Tua Rita. | Right: Two of our top wines this week are Tua Rita's 2021 Toscana Redigaffi and 2019 Toscana Rosso Redigaffi 7.

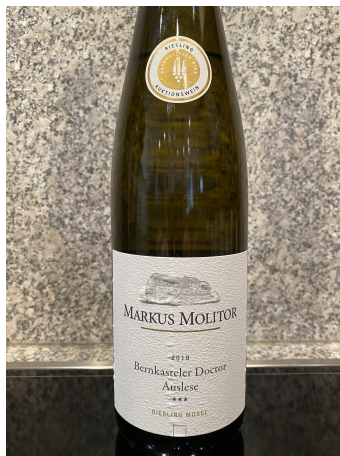
If you drink or collect some of the top names of Tuscany, then you are going to want to check out this weekly report. Ratings include such illustrious names as Masseto, Saffredi, Galatrona, Solaia, Siepi, Biserno, Ornellaia, and Redigaffi as well as some relative newcomers such as Sette. Most are from the excellent 2021 and 2019 vintages – years that delivered fresh and structured Super Tuscans from all grape types. But merlot really seemed to excel if you simply look at a few of the names above.

I have written this before but merlot is a terrific variety in Tuscany, delivering unique character that is hard to match anywhere in the world. It gives you some of the character of Bordeaux (read Pomerol), yet it has more freshness with lower pH that gives it a different underlying acidity and energy compared with France's famous region.

This report also includes bottles that are clearly and soulfully Italian, the great reds of Sicily's volcano, Etna. The wines of some of the best producers have been reviewed including Passopisciaro, Tenuta delle Terre Nere, Pietradolce, and Girolamo Russo. And some of their bottlings – from ancient vines as old as 100 years or so – are truly amazing.



The top 2021 rieslings from Markus Molitor. White caps indicate dry wines and gold caps are wines with unfermented grape sweetness.



The perfect dry Markus Molitor Riesling Mosel Bernkasteler Doctor Auslese *** (White Cap) 2019.

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In Germany, Senior Editor Stuart Pigott tasted a range of 2021 vintage Mosel riesling wines from Markus Molitor, plus a couple of this producer's already legendary dry wines from the 2020 and 2019 vintages.

Markus Molitor is a quality fanatic, but even more than that he's a zealous collector of vineyards in the best vineyard sites of his home region. If you include his vineyards on the Saar, the most important tributary of the Mosel, then his portfolio contains holdings in a couple dozen vineyard sites. That flies in the face of modern wine marketing, which emphasizes clarity. Who is right?

When you taste a perfect dry wine like his enormously concentrated and beautifully proportioned Markus Molitor Riesling Mosel Bernkasteler Doctor Auslese *** (White Cap) 2019, then all those marketing theories land in the trash can. The radically different personality – more exotic and spicy with a bitter almond character – of the dry Markus Molitor Riesling Mosel Erdener Prälat Auslese *** (White Caps) 2020 confirms that terroir is not fantasy in this producer's extensive range.

These are very expensive, limited-production wines that will be difficult to track down, but not all of Markus Molitor's wines are like that. His range of 2021s also impressed, with several wines among the stars of this challenging vintage, like the concentrated and youthful Markus Molitor Riesling Mosel Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Auslese *** (White Cap) 2021. Check out the tasting notes below for even more great finds from Markus Molitor.

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A BOUNTY OF BLANC DE BLANCS

Many of this week's top scorers are from the team's trip to Champagne earlier this month. At the top of the list are two vintages of Champagne Taittinger's prestige cuvée, the Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs. The 2013, which will be released in September, is nervy and driven, with chalky minerality and a long, tight finish. It was one of the last cold, continental seasons in recent years with all the chardonnay harvested in October, as Taittinger's president, Vitalie Taittinger, told Associate Editor Claire Nesbitt, and is one that will reward cellaring. The 2002, also in this week's report, is not a new release, but it demonstrates incredible freshness from a powerful and concentrated vintage and complexity after ten years on lees and ten years in the bottle.

Another fantastic blanc de blancs is the Salon Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs 2013. 2013 was a relatively generous vintage in Le Mesnil-Sur-Oger, the grand cru village from which chardonnay is sourced for this single cru wine. It expresses beautiful mineral and sourdough character alongside ripe yellow and even orange fruit notes. Check out the recently disgorged "Edition 2020" Salon 1997, too. It's the first vintage from Salon that has been released as a late-disgorged



Herve Dantan (chef de cave, left) and Emmanuel Gantet (export director, right) of Champagne Lanson in Reims, holding the 2008 Clos Lanson.

wine and is now showing a complex and mature nutty, toasted brioche character, remaining vivid and lively with a deliciously long and salty finish.



Left: The walled plot of chardonnay above the cellars at Clos Lanson in Reims. | Right: The Piper Heidsieck Champagne Hors-Série Millésimé Extra Brut 1982.

Contrast these to a bolder vintage blanc de blancs from Reims rather than the Cote des Blancs. The Lanson Champagne Clos Lanson Extra Brut 2008 is produced in limited quantities (less than 7,000 bottles from 2008) from a warm, one-hectare walled plot of chardonnay in Reims just above their cellars, where the soils are exceptionally chalky. It's powerful and full-bodied, with intriguing spice and white tobacco notes, and will be released on La Place de Bordeaux in October.

You'll find a few stunning older Champagnes in the notes below. The Piper Heidsieck Champagne Hors-Série Millésimé Extra Brut 1982 is part of the new "Hors-Série" collection, disgorged last year and now on the market. It's a blend of 60 percent pinot noir and 40 percent chardonnay and displays fantastic freshness and energy, with yellow flowers and fruit alongside ginger spice. Another couple of older Champagnes to check out (although not recent releases) are the 1998 and 1986 Billecart-Salmon Champagne Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart. Disgorged in 2007 and 1992, respectively, these are also blends of pinot noir and chardonnay, both retaining plenty of tension and showcasing the ageability of top vintage Champagne.



Olivier Riviere produces soulful and terroir-sensitive wines in Rioja, like the standout Pozo Alto and the Tempranillo-based Losares, while the garnacha-based Ganko and Gabaxo show great drinkability.

Meanwhile, the highlights in our Hong Kong office this week include some exciting discoveries from Spain – a mixed bag from Rioja and Ribera del Duero as well as some sparkling wines, including a few serious cavas.

The most epiphanic were from Frenchman Olivier Riviere, who applies a Burgundy approach in making terroir-sensitive Rioja wines from old vineyards at altitudes ranging from 300 meters to 1,000 meters – not only in Rioja but also Arlanza, a rather young DO near Burgos, between Ribera del Duero and Rioja.

Having helped one of Spain's terroir vanguards, Telmo Rodriguez, convert to biodynamic farming, Riviere quickly started his own projects, including vineyards in Cardenas from which his crunchy and pristine garnacha-based red Ganko 2020 derives, showing

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stemmy, peppery berries to the nose and a highlight of texture and drinkability on the palate.

But the top scorers from Riviere are two single-vineyard wines – the Losares 2020 and Pozo Alto 2020. The former is a result of old-vine tempranillo that dates back to the 1930s, co-planted with graciano, mazuelo and white grapes, while the latter comes from centenary vines in the village of Leza in Rioja Alavesa.

The Pozo Alto is mostly graciano with some tempranillo and garnacha, and it gave birth to an enticingly complex red full of stemmy blue fruit, pepperiness, flowers, mineral, lard and grilled herbs, knit through with tension, visceral concentration and al dente tannins.

We also discovered a few other outstanding reds, such as the full-bodied yet refined and polished Félix Callejo Ribera del Duero Sotillo de la Ribera 2020 and the demure and complex Emiliano Falsini Cabernet Franc Costa Toscana Limite 2021 from Italy.

Among the sparkling wines we liked were a unique, traditional-method riesling fizz from Cantabria, the Bodegas Sel d'Aiz Spain Maldita la Horra Brut Nature 2017 – a rare and fun yet serious offering that is intense, ripe and tropical. For Zekun, it captures “the essence of hedonism hidden in a paradoxically Brut Nature riesling fizz.”

Freixenet's flagship cavas, the Can Sala Cava Paraje Calificado Brut Nature 2013 and Can Sala Cava Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2005, impressed with their concentration and persistency but showed very little of their age. As the beads get finer and more dissolved with time, these top cavas get richer and broader on the palate with excellent richness to the bone-dry palate that is neither overly generous nor austere.

– James Suckling, Stuart Pigott, Claire Nesbitt and Zekun Shuai contributed reporting.





The list of wines below is comprised of bottles tasted and rated during the past week by James Suckling and the other tasters at JamesSuckling.com. They include many latest releases not yet available on the market, but which will be available soon. Some will be included in upcoming tasting reports.

Note: You can sort the wines below by country, vintage, score and alphabetically by winery name. You can also search for specific wines in the search bar.

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The Bodegas Sel d'Aiz Spain Maldita la Horra Brut Nature 2017: intense, ripe and tropical.

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ALEXANDRE PENET CHAMPAGNE PREMIER CRU RÉSERVE PERPÉTUELLE EXTRA BRUT	
ALVEAR PEDRO XIMENEZ MONTILLA-MORILES SIERRA DE MONTILLA TRES MIRADAS VINO DE PUEBLO 2021	▼
ANIMAETNEA ETNA BIANCO ANIMALUCENTE 2022	▼
ANIMAETNEA ETNA ROSSO ANIMARDENTE 2021	▼
ANITA & HANS NITTAUS BLAUFRÄNKISCH LEITHABERG KALK UND SCHIEFER 2021	
ANITA & HANS NITTAUS WEINLAND KALK UND SCHIEFER WEISS 2022	▼
ANITA & HANS NITTAUS WEINLAND MANILA ROT 2022	▼
ARGENTIERA BOLGHERI SUPERIORE 2020	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE 7	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE ESPRIT BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE ESPRIT ROSÉ DE SAIGNÉE	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE MILLÉSIME BRUT 2014	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE QUINCONCE BRUT	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE QUINCONCE BRUT NATURE	▼
BARON-FUENTÉ CHAMPAGNE QUINONCE GRAND CRU BRUT	▼
BARONE RICASOLI CHIANTI CLASSICO GRAN SELEZIONE CENIPRIMO 2020	▼
BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD CHAMPAGNE BLANC DE BLANCS	▼
BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD CHAMPAGNE BRUT	▼
BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD CHAMPAGNE BRUT NATURE	▼
BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD CHAMPAGNE ROSÉ	▼
BERESFORD WINES GRENACHE SHIRAZ MATARO MCLAREN VALE BARREL SELECT GSM 2021	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE BLANC DE BLANCS GRAND CRU BRUT	
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE BLEU BRUT	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE BRUT ROSÉ	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE CUVÉE BB 1843 BRUT	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE CUVÉE BRIGITTE BARDOT	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE CUVÉE DES MOINES BRUT 2013	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE EXTRA BRUT	▼

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BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE MILLÉSIME RÉSERVE BRUT 1992	▼
BESSERAT DE BELLEFON CHAMPAGNE TRIPLE B BRUT NATURE 2015	▼
BILLECART-SALMON CHAMPAGNE BRUT RÉSERVE	▼
BILLECART-SALMON CHAMPAGNE BRUT RÉSERVE 1985	▼
BILLECART-SALMON CHAMPAGNE CUVÉE NICOLAS FRANCOIS BILLECART 1998	
BILLECART-SALMON CHAMPAGNE CUVÉE NICOLAS FRANCOIS BILLECART 1986	
BIRGIT BRAUNSTEIN BLAUFRÄNKISCH BURGENLAND HEIDE 2020	▼
BIRGIT BRAUNSTEIN BURGENLAND PURBACH 2022	▼
BIRGIT BRAUNSTEIN BURGENLAND WILD WUX ROTWEINCUVÉE 2020	▼
BODEGAS SEL D'AIZ SPAIN MALDITA LA HORRA BRUT NATURE 2017	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE BRUT RÉSERVE	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE CUVÉE SOUS BOIS BRUT 2009	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE GRAND VINTAGE EXTRA BRUT 2013	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE GRAND VINTAGE EXTRA BRUT 2014	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE LA CÔTE PREMIER CRU BLANC DE BLANCS	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE LA MONTAGE	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE ROSÉ ABSOLU	▼
BOIZEL CHAMPAGNE ULTIME ZÉRO DOSAGE	▼
BOLLINI PINOT GRIGIO VIGNETI DELLE DOLOMITI ROSATO 2022	▼
BOVERI GIACOMO TIMORASSO COLLI TORTONESI DERTHONA MUNTÀ L'È RUMA 2019	▼
BOVERI LUIGI TIMORASSO COLLI TORTONESI DERTHONA LACRIME DEL BRICCO 2019	▼
BOVERI LUIGI TIMORASSO COLLI TORTONESI DERTHONA PIAZZERA 2018	▼
BOVERI LUIGI TIMORASSO COLLI TORTONESI DERTHONA PICCOLO 2021	▼
BRANCAIA TOSCANA IL BLU 2020	▼
BRIAR RIDGE CABERNET SAUVIGNON WRATTONBULLY BIG BULLY 2021	▼
BRIAR RIDGE CABERNET SHIRAZ HILLTOPS 2022	▼
BRIAR RIDGE HUNTER VALLEY KARL STOCKHAUSEN SIGNATURE SERIES 2022	▼
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BRIMONCOURT CHAMPAGNE BRUT RÉGENCE	▼
BRIMONCOURT CHAMPAGNE BRUT ROSÉ	▼
BURGE FAMILY WINEMAKERS BAROSSA VALLEY BAROSSA BOY LIFE BLOOD 2018	▼
BURGE FAMILY WINEMAKERS GRENACHE SHIRAZ MATARO BAROSSA VALLEY BAROSSA BOY LITTLE TACKER 2018	▼
BURGE FAMILY WINEMAKERS MATARO BAROSSA VALLEY YOUNG WISDOM 2020	▼
BURGE FAMILY WINEMAKERS SHIRAZ CABERNET SAUVIGNON BAROSSA VALLEY DOUBLE TROUBLE 2019	▼
CAMILLE BONVILLE CHAMPAGNE BRUT ROSÉ	▼
CAMILLE BONVILLE CHAMPAGNE GRAND CRU BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT	▼
CAN SALA CAVA GRAN RESERVA BRUT NATURE 2005	▼
CAN SALA CAVA PARAJE CALIFICADO BRUT NATURE 2013	▼
CANTINA ANDRIAN CHARDONNAY ALTO ADIGE DORAN 2020	▼
CANTINA ANDRIAN GEWÜRZTRAMINER ALTO ADIGE JUVELO PASSITO 2021	▼
CANTINA ANDRIAN LAGREIN ALTO ADIGE TOR DI LUPO RISERVA 2020	▼
CANTINA TERLAN ALTO ADIGE TERLANER 1 2020	▼
CANTINA TERLAN ALTO ADIGE TERLANER NOVA DOMUS RISERVA 2020	▼
CANTINA TERLAN LAGREIN ALTO ADIGE PORPHYR RISERVA 2020	▼
CANTINA TERLAN PINOT BIANCO ALTO ADIGE RARITY 2010	▼
CANTINA TERLAN SAUVIGNON BLANC ALTO ADIGE QUARZ 2021	▼
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CASTELLO DEI RAMPOLLA TOSCANA LIÙ 2021	▼

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