

KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANT

FEBRUARY 2019



The tree of life has grapes on it

© Gail Skoff

2016 LES PALLIÈRES

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT ■ WHAT IS RATAFIA?

A TRANSCENDENTAL VINEYARD FROM PIEDMONT

Think About It

IN 1980 I SOLD Henri Mayer's 1978 Vosne-Romanée "Cros-Parantoux" for \$31 per bottle. More recently, a case of twelve of the same sold at auction for one quarter of a million dollars.

You might call it liquid assets.

In 1992 I sold Gérard Chave's 1990 Hermitage Rouge "Cuvée Cathelin" for \$110 per bottle. The other day I saw it offered in London for \$14,720 per bottle. If you are on a budget, a New York merchant has it at \$5,000. I'm drinking my stash, by the way.

I'm sure I don't have to draw a conclusion for you. However, the next time you are walking through the aisles at 1605 San Pablo in Berkeley, think about it.

—KERMIT LYNCH



VOSNE-ROMANÉE CROS-PARANTOUX

APPELLATION VOSNE-ROMANÉE CONTRÔLÉE

Mis en bouteille par

Henri Mayer

VITICULTEUR A VOSNE-ROMANÉE (COTE-D'OR)

LES PALLIÈRES

by Anthony Lynch

WINES FROM THE 2016 VINTAGE in southern France generated plenty of excitement from growers and critics alike, so I carried correspondingly high expectations upon arriving at Domaine Les Pallières in the summer of 2017 for our annual blending session. Before a mesmerizing backdrop of stubby old Grenache vines, dense pine forest, and dramatic limestone outcrops, the Bruniers—brothers Daniel and Frédéric, along with sons Edouard and Nicolas—recounted the vintage over a raucous chorus of cicadas.

In many ways, they explained, 2016 presented the same challenges—hot, dry summer weather—that have become the norm as of late. The drought especially took its toll at Les Pallières, where the extremely old vines already eke out a bare minimum of juice each year. The vintage’s strong point, then, is certainly not its yields. Rather, cool nights throughout the growing season ensured superb balance, color, and aromatic complexity in the resulting wines. The high-elevation, north-facing *terroir* at Pallières accentuated this effect, giving wines defined more by a salivating freshness than by exaggerated ripeness or heat. By the time we had perfected the final blends, we all bore purple-toothed smiles and were ready to raise a cool glass of Gigondas rosé to a successful *millésime* 2016.

In bottle, the two cuvées of *rouge* confirm my initial impression—one of purity, completeness, and, most of all, great balance. Both feature the succulent perfume we love in Gigondas: black cherries picked ripe off the tree, fragrant *herbes de Provence* oils liberated by the pulsating summer sun, earthy licorice root . . .

Each *terroir* leaves its stamp on the palate. Supple and elegant, Racines conveys the generosity and velvety depth of ancient vines deeply rooted in clay-dominant soils. Terrasse du Diable, in contrast, relays its rocky environment with shameless audacity. Perched above the rest of the domaine on crunchy limestone rubble, it brings a chewy touch of rusticity and a saline finale.

You may find you have a taste for one cuvée over the other, or perhaps, like me, your preference will oscillate between the two with every sip. One thing is certain: each bottle I uncork leaves me more convinced that 2016 ranks among the top vintages ever produced at Les Pallières.

2016 GIGONDAS “RACINES”

\$40.00 PER BOTTLE

\$432.00 PER CASE

2016 GIGONDAS “TERRASSE DU DIABLE”

\$40.00 PER BOTTLE

\$432.00 PER CASE

CELLAR-WORTHY ITALIAN WHITES

by Anthony Lynch

UNLIKE FRANCE, Italy does not have a Meursault, Alsace, or Hermitage—appellations capable of producing epic, cellar-worthy white wines on a yearly basis. But that does not mean Italy cannot make great whites that stand to improve with time. On the contrary, exceptional *terroir* abounds on the boot, and individual growers across many appellations carry the flag for excellent *bianco*. Here are three of our favorites that not only can be enjoyed now, but also will offer many pleasant surprises down the road.



© Gail Skoff

Serena, Diamante, and Brunello of Villa Diamante

2017 FIANO DI AVELLINO “VIGNA DELLA CONGREGAZIONE” • VILLA DIAMANTE

This tiny property is perched high on the lush, green mountainsides inland of Naples, where the Fiano grape becomes a noble instrument for expressing the subtle nuances of great Campanian *terroir*. Now run by the fierce mother-daughter duo of Diamante and Serena Gaita, Villa Diamante is a historic estate whose stunningly fresh, gloriously perfumed old vintages have made a serious case for Fiano di Avellino as one of Italy’s premier white wine appellations. While their 2017 abounds with immediate charm in the form of luscious fruit and wild herbs, something magical happens with bottle age—hold some for a few years to see the nose veer toward salted butter, hazelnuts, petrol, and smoke.

\$42.00 PER BOTTLE **\$453.60** PER CASE

2014 VERDICCHIO DEI CASTELLI DI JESI “PASSOLENTO” • LA MARCA DI SAN MICHELE

Verdicchio is rarely considered more than a simple thirst-quencher, but thanks to the young, ambitious team that is La Marca di San Michele, such stereotypes can be all but forgotten. Their recipe for success—organic farming, natural vinification and aging in enormous oak casks with malolactic fermentation, and unfiltered bottling—yields a wine that does indeed provide vivacious refreshment, but also delivers ample layers of flavor and refined texture. Suggestions of pine nuts, hay, and spring flowers lead to an ultra-precise, stony finale recalling the ancient seabed the vines call home, in the shadow of the Apennines and within view of the Adriatic Sea. Tuck a few bottles away for six to eight more years, or serve immediately with a local specialty: porchetta.

\$36.00 PER BOTTLE **\$388.80** PER CASE

2015 VENEZIA GIULIA “MORUS ALBA” VIGNAI DA DULINE

This unusual Friulan blend combines an ancient, near-extinct clone of Sauvignon with old-vine Malvasia Istriana, aged in barrel and bottled without filtration. The tiny yields give an intensely concentrated wine of immense complexity, with delicate aromas of white flowers and ripe citrus soaring over a deep, rich structure, the whole balanced on a taut beam of minerality. It already drinks well, but will age like an electrically charged, exotically scented *premier cru* white Burgundy. A creamy risotto is the perfect match.

\$55.00 PER BOTTLE **\$594.00** PER CASE

A STORIED SAMPLER

by Will Meinberg

THE STORY OF A WINE is the story of the people who made it—hard-working, passionate people. When I joined the team at KLWM, I was captivated to hear wine talked about with a focus on the *terroir* and wine-makers rather than on a laundry list of tasting notes including more and more obscure aromas, superficial descriptions, and point(less) scores. After nearly four years of learning and sharing these rich stories secondhand with our customers at our Berkeley shop, I finally decided it was time to travel to France and Italy to meet our winemakers and stand in the vineyards. I wanted to feel the different soils, see the ancient cellars, smell the fermenting newborn wines, taste the grapes right off the vine, and talk with each winemaker to hear their stories and to better understand what makes them tick. This experience taught me more about wine in two weeks than the years I spent studying it.

Here is a sampler filled with vibrant wines that are best described by the stories that frame them. The wines included in this sampler come from historic domaines dating back to 1259, with the newest founded in 2003. Tales of great frosts, rebellion, war, romance, heartbreak, struggle, and success all come together in the bottle to produce something truly unique. When you pour a glass, you are tasting the work of centuries of people passing down their experience through the grapevine.

PER BOTTLE

NV PIGNOLETTO FRIZZANTE • FATTORIA MORETTO	\$18.95
2015 RIESLING • KUENTZ-BAS	14.95
2017 ROERO ARNEIS • TENUTA LA PERGOLA	16.00
2017 LANGUEDOC <i>BLANC</i> • CHÂTEAU LA ROQUE	20.00
2017 FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI PINOT GRIGIO • LA VIARTE . . .	24.00
2017 MARSANNAY ROSÉ • RÉGIS BOUVIER	26.00
2017 PAYS D'OC <i>ROUGE</i> "LES TRAVERSES" • CHÂTEAU FONTANÈS	14.95
2017 CORBIÈRES <i>ROUGE</i> • DOMAINE DE FONTSAINTE	16.00
2015 GARDA MARZEMINO "LE MORENE" • LA BASIA	19.00
2016 PAYS D'OC <i>ROUGE</i> "GARSINDE" • QUATRE SOUS	19.95
2015 CORSE CALVI <i>ROUGE</i> "E PROVE" • MAESTRACCI	24.00
2012 LUSSAC SAINT-ÉMILION • CHÂTEAU DE BELLEVUE	26.00

Normally \$239.80

SPECIAL SAMPLER PRICE **\$179.00**

(a 25% discount)

WHITE BEFORE RED

BURGUNDY EDITION

by Jane Berg

THE WINTER SEASON in Burgundy can be a brutal stretch of time for locals. Tourists have migrated away, days are short and gray, and the vineyards—once a patchwork of color-blocked parcels—look deserted and bare. But come February the Côte is back to business as usual. Vignerons who have been busy in their cellars since harvest ascend one by one, equipped with warm gloves and a pair of pruning shears, to perform *la taille*. Last year's branches are trimmed, clipped, and then gathered into neat piles and used as kindling in wheelbarrow-like furnaces parked downslope. The burning bundles, like snuffed candles, release billows of scented smoke into the icy air. The sight and smell of roasting rootstock all the way from Chassagne to Chablis is a unique delight. It's with this distinct memory of Burgundy in February that we've chosen two exciting interpretations of its *terroir* by producers Valentin Montanet and Bruno Colin. While tasting these wines, remember that a regional appellation under the care of a skilled artisan has an infinitely more authentic expression than a fancy *grand cru* at the mercy of a clumsy one.

2017 BOURGOGNE *BLANC* LA SŒUR CADETTE

The fruit in this *blanc* comes from the northern Mâconnais, which explains its textbook orchard fruit and crystalline finish. To relate to this wine, Valentin suggests you grab a barstool, a whole saucisson, and a hunk of chèvre and post yourself at the zinc countertop of a classic French bistro for a tête-à-tête. Or if, like me, you don't live in Paris, pour a glass with Jacques Pépin's *finest herbes* and goat-cheese omelet for Sunday lunch.

\$27.00 PER BOTTLE

\$291.60 PER CASE

2016 BOURGOGNE PINOT NOIR BRUNO COLIN

There's a little hint of Christmas spirit left over in this wine. Tiny red berries, sweet spice, and pine sap, maybe. Unlike some Bourgogne *rouge* struggling to make an impression, this one won't lose its cool. It's pure Pinot with an earthy core, reminding you exactly which part of the world it comes from.

\$35.00 PER BOTTLE

\$378.00 PER CASE

SERRALUNGA'S VIGNA RIONDA

by Dixon Brooke

WE HAVE BEEN IMPORTING the soulful Langhe reds of the Porro family since the 1997 vintage. Guido took over from his father, Giovanni (still a permanent presence at the *azienda*), in 1996. Their cantina is at the entrance of the eastern Barolo fortress town of Serralunga d'Alba as you approach from the north. It hangs over the top of a steep western-facing slope, overlooking their vineyards in the Lazzarito *cru*, from which they craft two Baroli, a Barbera and a Dolcetto. For the past twenty years these wines have, for the very most part, remained firmly off the radar of most serious collectors of Langhe wines; instead they get snapped up faithfully by fans of authentic, affordable, trattoria wines who enjoy them young and old.



The family's acquisition of the historical heart of Serralunga's most famous and qualitative *cru* (and one of the best in all of Barolo) stands to change all this. Guido remains the same humble *contadino*, but the buzz surrounding this fortuitous turn of events—at the *azienda*, within the region, and beyond its borders—has been significant. This is Guido's inaugural vintage of Vigna Rionda, and it will be a lot of fun to follow the evolution of this great *terroir* as he continues to unlock its full potential over time. I have now tasted the next four vintages in cask, and, suffice it to say, the future is very bright. The nobility of this *terroir* is immediately evident, as the vinification is the same as for his other *crus* but the wine is not! It simultaneously has more finesse and more concentration, with beautiful aromatics, length, perfume, density, and noble structure. There is an extra gear here on every level.

2014 BAROLO "VIGNA RIONDA"
GUIDO PORRO

\$165.00 PER BOTTLE

\$340.00 PER MAGNUM



Vigna Rionda

© Gail Skoff

NEW ARRIVALS: TOP VALUES

by Anthony Lynch

2017 PAYS D'OC ROUGE "LES TRAVERSES" CHÂTEAU FONTANÈS

This is the only pure Cabernet Sauvignon bottling we consistently stock, and it is not even from the grape's spiritual home of Bordeaux—it instead hails from the craggy hillsides of Pic Saint-Loup, a top appellation of the Languedoc. Compare the price tag to what's available from Bordeaux or Napa. Now picture the aristocratic Cabernet Sauvignon at its summer home in the south—a place where it can ditch pretension, soak up the sun, let its hair down, and breathe in the fragrances of the Mediterranean countryside.

\$14.95 PER BOTTLE **\$161.46** PER CASE

2017 MUSCADET CÔTES DE GRAND LIEU SUR LIE "CLOS DE LA BUTTE" • ÉRIC CHEVALIER

Éric Chevalier is out to prove that Muscadet is a versatile white, with countless purposes beyond washing down oysters. He boldly switched to organic farming and ditched his machine harvester for the tried-and-true two hands and a pair of pruning shears—sadly, both uncommon practices in the region. His cellar practices further differentiate him from the Muscadet masses, as he relies solely on indigenous yeasts for fermentation, uses tiny doses of sulfur, and filters minimally. The outcome? This utterly mouthwatering, lip-smacking Melon de Bourgogne—much more than a simple oyster wine, but that isn't to say that a cold glass alongside shucked bivalves won't land you in Melon heaven.

\$17.00 PER BOTTLE **\$183.60** PER CASE

2017 "IL GOCCETTO" • TENUTA LA PERGOLA

Wine is all too often described as "floral," but unless you've purposefully sniffed a hawthorn blossom, thrust your snout into a bouquet of peonies, or happened upon a field of lilies of the valley on the eve of the vernal equinox, you may simply roll your eyes at such poetic, yet brutally out-of-touch nomenclature. But consider Il Gocchetto, from Piemonte's rare Brachetto grape: this adorable bargain quaffer has an aroma so unmistakably redolent of rose petals that roses themselves might consider claiming royalties for every bottle sold. Silky on the palate with a dry, thornless finish, this red will pollinate your dreams of everyday Piemontese deliciousness.

\$12.00 PER BOTTLE **\$129.60** PER CASE

BEAUJOLAIS

by Emily Spillmann

2017 CHÉNAS • LA SŒUR CADETTE

The persistent risk of frost, hail, disease, or an unforeseen combination thereof over the last few years has forced many French winemakers to get creative, and Valentin Montanet is just the kind of scrappy vigneron who thrives under pressure. A case of nasty frost in Vézelay? You'd sooner find Valentin in a refrigerated truck headed south to buy grapes than mourning the diminished harvests in his own vineyards. "Since I'm a Burgundian making Beaujolais now, I had to find a place of my own," he says, explaining his choice of the rarest *cru* in Beaujolais, Chénas. The vines are such antiques, even the grower can't remember when they were planted. ("As long as I've owned them, they've been old," he told Valentin.) Vinified whole-cluster and bottled unfiltered, this solid cuvée packs a powerful, structured punch balanced by ripe black fruit and approachable tannins. Watch out, Gang of Four, the Burgundian is in town!

\$30.00 PER BOTTLE

\$324.00 PER CASE

2017 MORGON • GUY BRETON

"Petit Max" says that when he bought his higher-altitude Morgon vines many years ago, some people called him crazy. It gets colder in this microclimate and growers worried about proper ripeness. Now, "I'm the one who has the last laugh," he says with a mischievous chuckle. His wines are known for their unrivaled crispness despite hot, dry vintages like 2017. This Morgon is spicy, charming, and . . . *ripe* for any number of carefree occasions.

\$36.00 PER BOTTLE

\$388.80 PER CASE

2017 BEAUJOLAIS BLANC "CLOS DE ROCHEBONNE" • CHÂTEAU THIVIN

Just south of Odenas, atop a panoramic vista, lies a hectare of Chardonnay vines with wildflowers growing between the rows and Ouessant sheep grazing to keep the weeds at bay. These trademark emblems of Geoffray family viticulture give the parcel away as belonging *not* to the Château de Rochebonne as the name of the *clos*—and its location—would imply, but to Château Thivin. A stunning setting is the appropriate birthplace for a wine with an unexpectedly aromatic bouquet and bright, zippy palate—a testament to the natural elegance that embodies all of Château Thivin's wines.

\$29.00 PER BOTTLE

\$313.20 PER CASE

CORSICAN REDS

by Dixon Brooke

2017 ÎLE DE BEAUTÉ ROUGE DOMAINE DE MARQUILIANI

Our collection of reds from Corsica now has the kind of depth and variety that our collection of Loire, Rhône, Languedoc, and Beaujolais reds has long possessed. The Île de Beauté, as the French refer to Corsica, is blessed with incredible geological complexity and *terroirs* that are magically suited to the vine. This blend of Sciaccarellu, Grenache, and Syrah is from the eastern side of the island, in the foothills of the steep central mountains that plunge into the ocean, planted in the glacially polished stones of an old riverbed. Dark, full-bodied, and structured, this *rouge* channels the Rhône with its meaty, brambly fruit infused with flavors of black olive tapenade and woodsmoke.



\$27.00 PER BOTTLE

\$291.60 PER CASE

2017 VIN DE FRANCE ROUGE “FAUSTINE” COMTE ABBATUCCI



This cuvée is planted in the decomposed granite *terroir* of Ajaccio in southwestern Corsica and is named for vigneron Jean-Charles AbbattuCCI's daughter. He left the appellation of Ajaccio a number of years ago, because they refused to evolve their laws to accommodate the ancient grape varieties he had planted that were native to Corsica and pre-date the appellation system itself! In the 2017 vintage his Sciaccarellu vines produced less, and there is a touch of Carcajolo Nero in the blend, along with Nielluccio (his father's spelling for these grapes!). This medium-bodied red is a stunner with intense aromas of the local *myrte* that grows wild on this part of the island, great freshness, energy, and crunch, and the type of versatility that can accompany fish or meat and everything in between.

\$40.00 PER BOTTLE

\$432.00 PER CASE

2016 BONIFACIO ROUGE “TARRA DI SOGNO” CLOS CANARELLI

This is the first vintage produced from Canarelli’s “land of dreams,” the incredible white limestone *terroir* of Bonifacio. Planting this land, where there are only three vigneroni currently working, has long been a dream of Canarelli’s, and he has spent years clearing by hand the land he purchased of trees, scrub, and massive amounts of rock in order to plant it to both white and red. His confidence in the results despite lack of proof in bottle elsewhere was inspiring, and I waited patiently and excitedly to be able to finally taste the first wine, after following the preparation, planting, plowing, and nurturing of the vineyards over the last five years. A blend of Sciaccarellu, Carcaghjolu Neru, and Minustellu, it is a red with a character unlike any other in Corsica. Each variety brings something interesting to the table: Sciaccarellu is Chambolle-like in its delicacy, while the Carcaghjolu brings the growl and brawn of Gevrey, and the Minustellu the silky seductiveness of Vosne. A wine of towering finesse and ethereal beauty, this new creation from Yves Canarelli emphatically reinforces the potential of Corsican wine to compete with the best from anywhere for your interest and attention.

\$84.00 PER BOTTLE

\$907.20 PER CASE



The coastline of Bonifacio, Corsica

© Dixon Brooke

DIDIER MEUZARD & RATAFIA, THE FORGOTTEN DRINK OF BURGUNDY

by Chris Santini

GROWING UP, Didier Meuzard, like many in Burgundy, didn't drink much ratafia. He may have been born and raised in a rural, forgotten corner of the region once celebrated near and far for the beverage, and he may today be the most acclaimed producer of it, but for a long time it wasn't something that he gave much consideration to. The art of artisanal ratafia-making was on the verge of disappearing, along with the art of craft distillation.

Didier left the region as a young man for better opportunities and soon found himself climbing the corporate ladder far from home. After several years of climbing, Didier "burned out," as he calls it, and his doctor told him that, if he wanted to live much longer, he'd better change career paths and do it quick. I doubt the doctor had in mind becoming a master distiller, but that's just what Didier did. One day back in 1996, shortly after leaving his job and returning to Burgundy, while out for a walk, Didier stumbled upon an old man working a still in a town square. It was shortly after harvest, and vigneronns were bringing their lees and grape pomace to the still for the distiller to make spirits. They began talking and tasting and soon hit it off. Didier was captivated by the smells, the mystique, and the mechanics of the nineteenth-century machine. The old man, sensing Didier's interest, invited him to come back the next day, and the next; before long, the distiller had found his successor and Didier had found his calling. He brought the still to his village at Saint-Pierre-en-Vaux, to an old family farmhouse his uncle had been watching over. The barn was in awful shape, with large cracks in the stone walls and holes dotted all over the tiled roof. His uncle, outraged at the pigeons nesting in the barn, would often take his shotgun and shoot at them, from the inside. "He was a bit unusual," Didier says with a grin. All this, though, was perfect for his project. He had retained as much information as he could from the old man, including the fact that you need to give your distilled spirits a good dose of cold in the winter, to settle and clarify the spirit, and a good dose of heat in the summer, to blow off all the harsh, alcoholic volatile notes from the bouquet. He had dutifully noted to keep only the finest lees from the best, most naturally working domaines, to distill into *fine*, and to keep only the best, organically grown grape



pomace to distill into *marc*. He learned to keep only the heart—or the middle part—of the distilled liquid, as it's the purest, cleanest part of the process. With this and countless other details in mind, Didier was soon making some of the best and most reputable *fine de Bourgogne* and *marc de Bourgogne* in the region. Once he had that worked out, he set out to re-think and re-master ratafia from the start. Most ratafia was (and still is) made with white juice, muted with *marc de Bourgogne*. For starters, Didier wanted his ratafia to be red, and muted with the softer, smoother *fine de Bourgogne*. The goal was to change the perception of ratafia from rustic to elegant, harsh to gentle. Working with some top growers in the Côte de Nuits, Didier takes freshly harvested Pinot Noir and Gamay grapes and puts them in tank, exactly as if he were going to make a red wine. The trick is to prevent the juice from beginning to ferment (otherwise the taste of the juice will be negatively altered, with less fresh grape flavor) and to do this without adding any sulfur (which can effectively kill yeast, but will also harm the purity of flavors in the juice). So the tanks are set outside, where the cold keeps the yeasts from acting up right away. Didier pushes the maceration as far as he can go before the yeasts finally get to work, which can be anywhere from four to ten days, allowing maximum color, tannins, and aromatics from the grape skins to seep into the juice. As soon as Didier tastes fermentation on the horizon, he presses off the juice from the skins and then cuts it with one-year-old *fine* (of his own production, of course), following the traditional ratio of two-thirds grape must, one-third spirit. The spirit kills off the yeast and the ratafia is born. Didier puts it in old enameled tanks for several months, constantly tasting. When all is harmonious, he bottles his tank, by hand, one bottle at a time. The result is aromas of earth, red Burgundy, and fresh fruit, with only the slightest hint of the *fine*, which stays in the background and lets the fruit do the talking. The palate is soft and velvety, and the sweetness is tamed and enhanced by the *fine*, with all coming together seamlessly. You can drink it with dessert, certainly, but you can also do as Didier suggests and just drink it on its own. Didier does recommend drinking it at cellar temperature, with just the slightest chill. There's no need to finish the bottle with any great haste. It will keep several months once opened, much like a great port.

You may wonder why the label has an eel on it, of all things. Didier's first still, the one he got back in 1996, was handmade back in 1860, and the maker's mark was that small eel engraved on the swan neck of the still. About ten years ago, Didier had to retire that old still and got a much more modern version . . . from 1902! As an homage to his first still, its maker, and the old man who left him the keys, Didier had a copper eel spout made for his current still and added the image to his label.

RATAFIA DE BOURGOGNE • DIDIER MEUZARD

\$36.00 PER BOTTLE

\$388.80 PER CASE

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“Of all Barolos, the mere mention of single-vineyard bottlings from Serralunga d’Alba’s hallowed crus, including Vigna Rionda, Lazzarito, and Cascina Francia, can cause Barolo lovers to go weak in the knees.”

—Kerin O’Keefe, *Barolo and Barbaresco:
The King and Queen of Italian Wine*

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