

Wine Spectator Weekly

Internet Only

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GET WINE SPECTATOR RATINGS HERE FIRST—EVERY THURSDAY

This week we range around the world for rare and unique wines from a diverse basket of grape varieties. From Alsace comes an extraordinary series of late-harvest whites, including a 100-point Pinot Gris from Zind-Humbrecht (see Hot Wines, page 4). Another late-harvest white, this one from the Rhône Valley, shows the potential of Marsanne grapes. A botrytized Riesling from Australia rounds out the sweet-wine section of this issue.

On the dry side, you'll find some distinctive whites from Chapoutier in Hermitage, a strong set of Napa Valley Cabernets and some bold reds from Australia. Whether from established winners or rising stars, these wines are worth seeking out for their quality and style.

France / Alsace

Alsace has had three fine vintages in a row. The 2002s possess elegance, exotic flavors and firm structures.

Although less consistent across the board than the 2001s, early results show promise and the top wines are sublime.

The rare, late-harvest wines from 2001 prove that this vintage is clearly outstanding; several individual wines received classic ratings (95–100 points). Zind-Humbrecht's Pinot Gris Clos Windsbuhl Sélection des Grains Nobles is stunning, earning 100 points (see Hot Wines, page 4), while Laurence Faller of Domaine Weinbach made SGNs from all three varieties for the first time.—B.S.

Weinbach

Riesling Alsace Grand Cru Schlossberg Quintessence de Grains Nobles 2001

95 points | \$233 | 6 cases imported

Thick and intense, yet not heavy or cloying, this shows plenty of botrytis, with honey, spice, bergamot and dried tropical fruit flavors. Well-balanced, with a honey note on the finish. Drink now through 2015.—B.S.

Weinbach

Tokay Pinot Gris Alsace Altenbourg Quintessence de Grains Nobles 2001

95 points | \$449 | 10 cases imported

Great purity of flavor, showing pear, quince and honey notes; unctuous and concentrated, backed by

a moderately firm structure. It's dominated by the residual sugar now, but will improve over time. Best from 2006 through 2020.—B.S.

Zind-Humbrecht

Gewürztraminer Alsace Grand Cru Rangen de Thann Clos St.-Urbain 2002

95 points | \$98 | 45 cases imported

This puts it all together. Gorgeous aromas and flavors of tropical fruit, honey, smoke and mineral permeate the lush texture, all supported by firm, bright acidity. Though full-bodied and almost fat, it never gets heavy (there's no botrytis here); in fact, it's harmonious. A long finish caps it off. Best from 2005 through 2015.—B.S.

Zind-Humbrecht

Pinot Gris Alsace Turckheim Clos Jepsal Sélection des Grains Nobles 2001

95 points | \$209/375ml | 45 cases imported

Intense aroma of dried pear, followed by elegant flavors of honey, spice and more pear. It's all backed by lively structure, keeping the whole presentation balanced and long on the finish. Drink now through 2020.—B.S.

Zind-Humbrecht

Pinot Gris Alsace Wintzenheim Rotenberg Vendange
Tardive 2002

95 points | \$120 | 30 cases imported

A big wine, seemingly soft at first, with an open-knit texture, but the acidity emerges midpalate and picks up steam toward the finish. It all serves as a well-defined backdrop for the intense peach, apricot and pineapple flavors. Lovely, mouthwatering finish.—*B.S.*

Weinbach

Gewürztraminer Alsace Grand Cru Furstentum Quintessence
de Grains Nobles 2001

94 points | \$449 | 10 cases imported

Very pure, with dried citrus, honey and floral aromas and flavors providing an essence of Gewürztraminer character, in addition to spice accents like anise. But it's the harmony and lightweight feeling that makes this stand out. Fine length.—*B.S.*

Zind-Humbrecht

Gewürztraminer Alsace Hunawirh Clos Windsbuhl 2002

94 points | \$68 | 100 cases imported

A delicious white, concentrated and expressive, offering mango, litchi, apricot and mineral aromas and flavors, all kept focused by the vibrant structure. It picks up a characteristic grapefruit peel note on the finish, which goes on and on. Best from 2005 through 2012.—*B.S.*

Zind-Humbrecht

Riesling Alsace Grand Cru Turckheim Brand 2002

94 points | \$80 | 150 cases imported

Bold, full-bodied and ripe, with peach, quince and mineral aromas and flavors; concentrated and vivid, with the electric structure resonating on the palate. Dry and focused, it has a lingering finish of peach and mineral.—*B.S.*

Weinbach

Gewürztraminer Alsace Altenbourg Cuvée Laurence 2002

93 points | \$69 | 75 cases imported

Luscious and honeyed, with a texture like cashmere and intense flavors of pineapple, vanilla pastry and grapefruit. It starts out full, with the firm structure emerging on the finish. This will benefit from time. Best from 2005 through 2012.—*B.S.*

Australia

David Franz

Shiraz Barossa Benjamin's Promise 1999

93 points | \$40 | 800 cases imported

David Franz Lehmann is the son of modern-day Barossa Valley pioneer Peter Lehmann. This, his first Shiraz available in the U.S., is a pedal-to-the-metal Barossa, big, ripe and rich, a huge mouthful of spicy, slightly pruny, definitely exotic dried cherry, fresh cherry and plum flavors, with impressive depth and length. It's like a big, bounding mastiff puppy. If it ever achieves some discipline, it will be amazing. Best from 2008 through 2020.—*H.S.*

Brown Brothers

Riesling Victoria Late Harvested Noble Patricia 1999

92 points | \$33/375ml | 693 cases made

This botrytized Riesling has better balance and more intensity than most from Australia. Aromatic, sweet and rich, with deep honey, caramel and spice flavors that persist on the long, elegant finish. Enjoy now and over the next decade.—*H.S.*

Jasper Hill

Shiraz Heathcote Georgia's Paddock 2002

92 points | \$100 | 100 cases imported

An Australian classic, this lithe, racy Shiraz from central Victoria balances lively acidity with a wonderful wad of flavor, packing in a seamless range of blackberry, black cherry, black olive and black pepper flavors that fill the mouth and last impressively on the focused finish. Hints of exotic spices dance around. Drink now through 2015.—*H.S.*

David Franz

Cabernet Sauvignon-Shiraz Barossa Georgie's Walk 1999

90 points | \$40 | 800 cases imported

Not quite the blockbuster the Shiraz is, but this earthy, ripe blend of 80 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 20 percent Shiraz is distinctive for a minty, mineral layer over the ripe currant and licorice flavors, which persist on the solid finish. Drink now through 2012.—*H.S.*

California

Caldwell

Napa Valley 2001

93 points | \$83 | 732 cases made

Complex, with gamy blackberry, fresh earth, cedar and currant flavors. It shows off a muscular side, too, with a beefy, peppery quality that gives it density and structure. Young and rambunctious, it packs in a load of intense flavors with a long, strong, persistent aftertaste. Best from 2005 through 2012.—*J.L.*

Hartwell

Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District 2001

93 points | \$115 | 760 cases made

Smooth, rich and creamy. This is a plush and inviting wine with generous black cherry and blackberry fruit that's ripe and layered, offering depth and concentration and finishing with a warm chocolate aftertaste. Drink now through 2012.—*J.L.*

Sebastiani

Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Centinaio 100th

Anniversary Cherryblock 2001

92 points | \$75 | 2,000 cases made

This wine strikes an excellent balance between ripe, grapey, plum and currant flavors, and the spicy, toasty oak adds a wonderful dimension. Intense and concentrated, sharply focused and long and complex on the finish, where the fruit and wood work in harmony. Best from 2005 through 2012.—*J.L.*

Schaefer Sonoma

Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley Mountain Terraces 2000

91 points | \$27 | 568 cases made

Smooth, with a fleshy band of ripe currant, blackberry, cedar, anise and spice. The oak gives it a hazelnut and nutmeg edge and the acidity keeps the flavors vivid. Finishes with firm tannins and excellent length. Drink now through 2010.—*J.L.*

France / Rhône

Though the Rhône's 2002 vintage offers little hope for red wine lovers, those who appreciate its exotic whites will not be disappointed. Many whites were picked before the heavy rains that fell in early September dashed the red wine harvest. Still, Michel Chapoutier, one of the region's

leaders, remains philosophical about 2002.

*"It is true to say that the 2002 vintage was a difficult one, but from a quality point of view, it's also with difficult vintages that we get the most out of our winegrowing efforts," says Chapoutier, who has been farming his vineyards biodynamically for several years. Chapoutier's lineup of '02 whites is particularly strong. All the wines are aged in 100 percent new oak, and get additional lees contact (with bâtonnage) for several months.—*J.M.**

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage White L'Ermité 2002

94 points | \$210 | 100 cases made

From Chapoutier's oldest vines, located at the top of the Hermitage hill on poor, granite soils. Wonderfully pure, with crème fraîche and toast aromas, this beautifully ripe wine packs pear tartine, quince paste, green almond and floral flavors that course through the full-bodied finish. Think of the texture and power of a great white Burgundy, with an extra dimension of fruit.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage White de l'Orée 2002

92 points | \$165 | 600 cases made

From 60- to 70-year-old Marsanne vines in a parcel called Les Murets. Tight now, this is a rich, butter-scotch- and toast-driven white, with plenty of fig, Bosc pear, dried pineapple and floral notes as well. Focused and lengthy on the finish, but this needs cellaring to show its best. Best from 2005 through 2009.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Ermitage White Le Méal 2002

92 points | \$165 | 400 cases made

From Marsanne vines (50-plus years old) on the pebbly Le Méal portion of the Hermitage hill. Lush and corpulent, with creamy melon, dried pineapple, star fruit and white peach flavors all kept honest by a pleasantly bracing edge. Firm almondine and mineral notes frame the finish. Impressive.—*J.M.*

M. Chapoutier

Hermitage White Chante-Alouette 2002

90 points | \$70 | 2,000 cases made

This comes from younger vines extending from the top to the bottom of the hill. Juicy, with lots of honey, fig, anise, piecrust, almond and floral flavors supported by fresh, almost citrusy acidity. Though lengthy and open now, this also has the structure to develop further.—*J.M.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in Wine Spectator Weekly. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

Zind-Humbrecht

Pinot Gris Alsace Clos Windsbuhl Sélection des Grains Nobles 2001

100 points | \$264/375ml | 20 cases imported

"I've rarely seen botrytis in Clos Windsbuhl, but in 2001, it had one of the highest levels of all our vineyards," said Olivier Humbrecht, when we tasted this wine together in April 2003. It also marks the first time the domaine has made a Pinot Gris SGN from this site. Like liquid candy, this is a mouthful of apricot, quince, coconut, honey and smoke flavors matched to a thick texture and vibrant structure. Despite the concentration, it seemingly melts in the mouth, as the acidity takes over from the initial sweetness. Incredibly long butterscotch aftertaste. Drink now through 2025. From France.—*B.S.*

M. Chapoutier

Hermitage Vin de Paille 2001

97 points | \$180/375ml | 50 cases made

If you're lucky enough to be offered a taste of Chapoutier's Vin de Paille, don't pass it up. Made from Marsanne grapes that are air-dried on straw mats for two months before pressing, it's one of

the wine world's great rarities. This gives all the caramel, dried apricot, date, marzipan and lemon crème flavors you expect from a great German TBA Riesling, along with a burnished leather, mineral and matchstick underpinning that sets it apart. An amazing wine. Drink now through 2020. From France.—*J.M.*

Zind-Humbrecht

Gewürztraminer Alsace Grand Cru Gueberschwihr Goldert Vendange Tardive 2002

96 points | \$120 | 75 cases imported

A rich, powerful VT, fragrant with honey, guava, apricot, spice and smoke aromas and flavors. It softens across the palate, revealing a silken texture and ample acidity to keep it fresh and lively on the finish. Think foie gras or Muenster cheese. Drink now through 2012. From France.—*B.S.*

Wine Spectator's Tastings

Wine Spectator reviews more than 10,000 wines each year; our senior editors comprise the most experienced staff of professional wine tasters of any publication in the world. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed.

We always taste wines blind, in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. We score wines using our 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Per-Henrik Mansson Senior editor, Switzerland

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1987. Tasting beat: Burgundy, Rhône Valley

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: Languedoc-Roussillon/Midi, Portugal

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Loire Valley, South Africa, South America

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1993. Tasting beat: Alsace, Austria, Champagne, Germany

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

James Suckling European bureau chief, Italy

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1981. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Italy, Port

Daniel Sogg Tasting Staff

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very Good
80-84	Good
70-79	Average
50-69	Not Recommended