

PINOT NOIR from the US of A

- Bethel Heights**, Willamette Valley, OR 2008 (Awesome year for Willamette fruit) 40.
Montinore Estate, Willamette Valley, OR, 2010 (spicy-floral with some very elegant dirt) 44.
Au Bon Climat, Santa Barbara, CA, 2009 (Jim Clendenen the gray-maned master) 50.
Alysian, Russian River Valley, CA, 2008 (Gary Ferrell the early-bird knows when to pickem) 52.
Eyrie, Dundee Hills, Oregon, 2009 (RIP David Lett, the Oregon pioneer—ethereal/gorgeous) 56.
Fiddlehead Cellars, 'Fiddlestix 728', Santa Rita Hills, CA 2008 (Kathy Joseph's got your #) 58.
Lioco, Sonoma Coast, CA, 2008 (this wine represents the future of CA; the revolution is now) 64.
Robert Sinskey, Carneros, CA, 2008 (wemiss his defunct Merlot but there's always the Pinot) 65.
Big Table Farm, 'Cattrall Bros Vineyard', Willamette Valley, OR 2009 (lean/spicy/boutique) 68.
Whetstone, 'Jon Boat', Sonoma Coast, CA, 2007 (plush & friendly; a people pleaser) 72.
Alexana, 'Revana Vineyard', Willamette Valley, OR 2009 (Dr. Revana's lush & long Pinot) 74.
Arcadian, 'Dierberg Vineyard', SLH, CA, 2006 (Joe Davis is cool, worked at Dujac. His wines age.) 85.
Merry Edwards, Sonoma Coast, CA, 2008 (the cult of Merry; big but balanced) 90.
Radio-Coteau, 'la Neblina', Sonoma Coast, CA, 2009 (by Eric Sussman; long and good) 105.
Calera, 'Mount Harlan', Central Coast, CA, 2006 (limestone at the site! what shape!) 110.
Brewer-Clifton, 'Mt. Carmel Vineyard', Santa Rita Hills, CA, 2008 (Greg and Steve got style) 115.

PINOT NOIR of EUROPE

- Pinot Noir, **Roncier**, Burgundy, NV (unheard of price point for pinot from Burgundy.) 24.
 Gamay, **Henry Fessy**, Brouilly, Beaujolais, 2009 (09s from Brouilly have bodacious bods) 32.
 Pinot Nero, **J. Hofstätter**, Alto-Adige, Italy, 2009 (well-made and very, very pretty) 36.
 Bourgogne, **Lucien Muzard & Fils**, France, 2009 (chewy, rich PN from down south Burgundy) 44.
 HALF-BOTTLE, Aloxe-Corton, **Edmond Cornu**, Vieilles Vignes, 2006 (brilliant aromatic style) 48.
 Bourgogne, **Meo-Camuzet**, France, 2009 (drinks like everybody else's Premier Cru) 56.
 Pinot Noir, **Rebholz**, Spätlese Dry, 'Tradition', Pfalz, Germany, 2007 (Hangin' with Hansjorg) 62.
 Chassagne-Montrachet Rouge, **Paul Jouard**, Vieilles Vignes, Burg, 2007 (relaxed muscle) 67.
 Santenay 1^{er} Cru, **Lucien Muzard & Fils**, 'La Maladiere', Burg, 2007 (lean minerals/healthy cherries) 68.
 Gevrey-Chambertin, **Sylvie Esmonin**, Vieilles Vignes, 2007 (lush and commanding) 85.
 Volnay 1^{er} Cru, **Jean-Michel Gaunoux**, 'Clos des Chenes', Burg, 2004 (Cote de Beaune got soul) 99.
 Beaune 1^{er} Cru, **Chat de Chorey**, 'Les Cras', Vieilles Vignes, Burg, 2006 (in the sweet spot) 110.
 Chambolle-Musigny 1^{er} Cru, **Michele & Patrice Rion**, 'Les Charmes', Burg, 2006 (cherry broth) 150.
 Chambolle-Musigny 1^{er} Cru, **J.F. Mugnier**, 'Les Fuées', Burg, 2007 (right next to Bonnes Mares!) 195.
 Echezeaux Grand Cru, **Mongeard-Mugneret**, Vieilles Vignes, Burg, 2007 (great growth, vines) 205.
 Chambolle-Musigny 1^{er} Cru, **Comte de Vogüé**, Burg, 2006 (the Count's young-vine Grand Cru!) 325.

SPAIN

- garnacha, **Evodia**, Spain, 2009 (one the great buys of the wine world) 22.
 Rioja, **Calma**, Spain, 2008 (updated old-school with tempranillo & graciano) 32.
 Ribera del Duero, **Vizcarra**, 'Roble', Spain, 2008 (all-tempranillo and spice, all the time) 36.
 Mencia, **Vico**, Bierzo, Spain, 2008 (Raul Perez is a Mencia monster and this is his new pet) 48.
 Ribera del Duero, **Frontaura**, 'Nexus' Crianza, 2005 (purple stuff) 58.
 Priorato, **Buil & Gine**, 'Joan Gine', 2006 (Priorat rules; it's mean but it's not severe) 65.
 Priorato, **Coster del Siurana**, 'Miserere', 2004 (beastly carignan) 110.
 Priorato, **Partida Bellvisos**, Gratallops, 2003 (Clos Martinet & Mogadorinone; only 1000btl!) 125.
 Priorato, **Partida Bellvisos**, Gratallops, 2004 (When you pair Barbier & Perez it gets good) 125.
 Rioja, **Muga**, 'Torre Muga', 2004 (layers of mammoth tempranillo, graciano and mazuella) 130.

MERLOT & ZINFANDEL

- Zin blend, **Owen Roe**, 'Abbots Table', Yakima Valley, WA, 2010 (zin/cab/sangio/syrah/kitchensink) 44.
 Zinfandel blend, **Ridge**, 'Geyserville', CA 2009 (Paul Draper is one of Cali's best) 56.
 Merlot, **Truchard**, Carneros, CA, 2008 (the dash of Cabernet Franc in it really sets it off) 44.
 Merlot, **Scarbolo**, 'Campo Del Viotto', Friuli, Italy, 2007 (Valter's best, one of our favorite people) 56.
 Merlot, **Pride Mountain**, Spring Mountain District, Napa, CA 2008 (year in year out Pride rules) 95.

ITALY.ITALIA.ITALIE

PIEDMONT

- barbera d'Asti, **Damilano**, 2009 (great winery that keeps getting better and better) 32.
 barbera d'Alba, **Vietti**, Tre Vigne, 2008 (we love this winery and this wine—elegant & awesome) 48.
 nebbiolo/barbera, **Brandini**, Langhe Rosso, 2007 (ahh the awesome oh-sevens) 48.
 Barolo, **Seghesio**, Monforte d'Alba, 2007 (this is the best ratio of dollars-to-Barolo out there) 65.
 Barolo, **Vietti**, 'Castiglione', 2006 (Classy Nebbiolo from an artful producer) 82.
 Barolo, **Bongiovanni**, 2003 (warm vintage drinking lush and great now) 89.
 Barolo, **Massolino**, 2004 (truffles and delicate earth; wonderfully fine) 105.
 Barolo, **Massolino**, 'Vigna Rionda', 2001 (The way Barolo should be, big time. 3 B) 159.
 Barolo, **Bartolo Mascarello**, 1999 (Bartolo did things the old way; power and class) 165.
 Barolo, **Giuseppe Mascarello**, 'Monprivato', 2003 (400 yr old vineyard; otherworldly) 165.
 Barolo, **Pianpolvere Soprano**, 'Bussia Riserva', 1999 (Valentino of Manzoni's insane goodness) 225.
 Carema, **Ferrando**, Black Label, 2004 (delicate, ethereal and deep nebbiolo; special stuff) 120.
 Barbaresco, **Poderi Elia**, 'Serracapelli', 2005 (straight up delicious Barbaresco; jump on it) 82.
 Barbaresco, **Marchesi di Gresy**, 'Camp Gros', 2000 (Awesome deep cherry and roses) 120.

TUSCANY, VENETO, & beyond

- Chianti, **Poggio Vignoso**, Tuscany, 2009 (The original blend of Sang/Canaiolo/Malvasia) 24.
 Rosso di Montepulciano, **Corte alla Flora**, Tuscany, 2007 (Prugnolo performs) 28.
 HALF BOTTLE, Chianti Classico, **Fontodi**, Tuscany, 2007 (half bottles are so darn useful) 36.
 Chianti Classico, **Felsina**, Tuscany, 2008 (old-schoolers playing the Sangiovese hits) 36.
 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, **Duca di Saragnano**, Tuscany, 2007 (small-production/old-style) 40.
 Rosso di Montalcino, **Talenti**, Tuscany, 2008 (drinking great; Brunello Jr.) 48.
 Chianti Classico, **Castello dei Rampolla**, Tuscany, 2005 (dried cherry and mean minerals) 56.
 sangiovese, etc., **La Mozza**, 'Aragone', Tuscany, 2007 (Joe B's beast bound w/ syrah) 74.
 Brunello di Montalcino, **Vitanza**, 'Tradizione', Tuscany, 2006 (Vitanza's old-school—no French oak) 75.
 Brunello di Montalcino, **Vitanza**, Tuscany, 2004 (the moderate one; aged in 30% big French barrels) 84.
 Brunello di Montalcino, **San Felice**, 'Campogiovanni', Tuscany, 2006 (3 snaps up in z formation) 84.
 Brunello di Montalcino, **Poggio di Sotto**, Tuscany, 1999 (this is unbelievable) 175.
 Brunello di Montalcino, **Poggio di Sotto**, Tuscany, 2001 (redonk) 175.
 sangiovese, **Monteverzine**, 'Le Pergole Torte', Tuscany, 2004 (tour de force! in Italian) 160.

- Aglianico del Vulture, **Bisceglia**, Basilicata, 2008 (wonderful leather and cigar-tobacco spice) 36.
 refosco, **Scarbolo**, Friuli, 2006 (big, rustic, and delicious—good wine by a good man) 56.
 merlot, **Scarbolo**, 'Campo Del Viotto', 2007 (the best wine by Valter, one of our favorite people) 56.
 nero d'avola, **COS**, 'Nero di Lupo', Sicily, 2008 (the most elegant nero d'avola you'll ever have) 40.
 nero d'avola- frappato, **COS**, Cerasuolo di Vittoria, Sicily, 2008 (resurrecting the ancients) 48.
 nero d'avola- frappato, **COS**, PITHOS, Sicily, 2006 (river of flavor; made in Amphora!) 72.
 Etna Rosso, **Terre Nere**, 'Calderara Sottana', Sicily, 2006 (cool stuff—voluptuous wildberry/minerals) 72.
 valpolicella, **L'Arco**, Classico Superiore, Veneto, 2004 (brothy, savory, sweet, leathery, super duper cool) 44.
 valpolicella, **Quintarelli**, Veneto, 2000 (godfather of Amarone; iconic length & complexity) 120.

SOUTH AMERICA

- Cabernet, **Crios de Susana Balbo**, Mendoza, Argentina, 2009 (Susana's biodynamic beauties) 28.
 Malbec, **Flechas de los Andes**, 'Gran Malbec', Mendoza, Arg, 2008 (Ede Rothschild's just right) 36.
 Malbec, **Luca**, Mendoza, Argentina, 2008 (Laura Catena's opaque and spicy gem) 65.
 Bordeaux blend, **Susana Balbo**, 'Brioso', Mendoza, Argentina, 2006 (just loads of pleasure) 78.

AMERICAN CABERNETS & BLENDS

- Cain Vineyards**, 'Cain Concept', Napa Valley, 2007 (Believe it.) 52.
Elodian, Napa Valley, 2006 (Tom Eddy makes pitch-perfect cabernets) 54.
Hawkes, Alexander Valley, 2004 (Young Jake is doing his family proud; great food cab) 64.
Branham, Napa, 2007 (shhh... this wine drinks like it costs way more) 65.
Sineann, Baby Poux Vineyard, Washington, 2007 (Peter Rosback's gift to the glass) 72.
Paul Hobbs, 'Crossbarn', Napa Valley, CA, 2008 (big Paul makes it all) 75.
Georg Rafael, Napa Valley, 2005 (OR you could try the latest release) 90.
Tom Eddy, Napa Valley, 2003 (this one is just hitting its stride) 110.
Paradigm, Oakville, Napa, 2007 (Heidi Peterson-Barrett still makes it right) 120.
Cain Vineyards, 'Cain Five', Spring Mountain, Napa, 2006 (a true Cali classic) 150.
Robert Foley, Claret, Napa, 2005 (graceful giant) 175.
Peter Michael, 'les Pavots', Calistoga, 2006 (amazing wine from a Knight) 275.

GRENACHE, SYRAH & THEIR BLENDS

- Cotes du Rhone, **Galevan**, 'Paroles de Femme', 2009 (Grenache guzzler) 32.
 Vacqueyras, **Chateau du Trignon**, 2007 (awesomely expressive) 48.
 Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape, **Mas de Boislauzon**, 2007 (Brooding and beastly) 72.
 Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape, **Domaine Monpertuis**, 2007 (we ♥ this guy; all class all the time) 78.
 Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape, **Le Vieux Donjon**, 2008 (charged with old-style vitality) 90.

- Vind Pays d'Oc, **Puydeval**, Languedoc, 2009 (cab franc, syrah, merlot; made for the meat-lover) 32.
 Crozes-Hermitage, **Ferraton**, 'La Matiniere', N. Rhone, 2009 (Chapoutier's new biodynamic playground) 40.
 St. Joseph, **J.L. Chave**, 'Offerus', N. Rhone, 2007 (resounding stuff from a Syrah genius) 52.
 St. Joseph, **Alain Graillot**, Northern Rhone 2007 (black pepper & medium-rare meat) 65.
 Hermitage, **Marc Sorrel**, 'Le Greal', N. Rhone 2000 (Aimez Hermitage! Aimez M. Sorrel!) 120.
 mour-syrah-cab, **Dom. de la Grange des Pères**, VdP de l'Hérault, 2004 (Languedoc's best) 125.

BIG FRENCH REDS: Loire & Bordeaux

- Saumur-Champigny, **Domaine de Nerleux**, 'Clos des Chetains', Loire, 2006 (ultra-aromatic & husky) 40.
 Chinon, **Charles Joguet**, 'Clos de la Dioterie', Loire, 2006 (Cab Franc at its best; Joguet simply rules) 56.

- St. Emilion, **Chateau Puy-Blanquet**, Bordeaux, 2008 (vivacious Emilion) 48.
 Pomerol, **Chateau Gombaude-Guillet**, Bordeaux, 2000 (succulent & stocky right-bank) 65.
 St. Estephe, **Chateau Phelan-Segur**, Bordeaux, 2005 (ooh yeah it's got that silky top on it) 99.
 St. Emilion, **Pavie-Macquin**, Bordeaux, 2004 (one of the right-bank's emerging superstars) 115.
 Pessac-Leognan, **Chateau Pape-Clement**, Bordeaux, 2004 (fleshy and lush but classy too) 165.

THINGS THAT SPARKLE

Cava, Conde de Subirats , Spain, Brut NV (crisp, lean, clean and frothy)	32.
HALF BOTTLE Champagne, Duval Leroy , brut, NV (just the right amount)	27.
Prosecco, Nino Franco , 'Rustico', brut, Valdobbiadene, Italy, NV (prickly-spicy)	36. ¹
Cremant d'Alsace rosé, Lucien Albrecht , Alsace, France, NV (YES. Bubbly rosé rules.)	40. ²
Blanc de Blancs, Wolf Mountain , brut, Dahlenega, GA, 2009 (easily our favorite GA wine)	44.
Champagne, Aubry , brut, Jouy-les-Reims 1er Cru, NV (we must support the growers!)	52.
Champagne, Claude Genet , Blanc de Blancs, Chouilly Grand Cru, NV (same grapes as all the greats)	69.
Champagne, Pierre Gimmonnet , Blanc de Blancs, 'Cuvee Gastronome', Brut, 2005 (great food matcher)	95.
Champagne, Rene Geoffroy , 'Expression', Vallee de la Marne, Brut, NV (big, rich & superbly complex)	105. ³
Champagne, Louis Roederer , 'Cristal', France, 2000, (yes...that Cristal)	250.

ROSE

rosé, Brumont , Cotes de Gascogne, France, 2010 (To be, or Tannat be? Sorry that joke's awful)	32.
vin gris of pinot noir, Robert Sinskey , Carneros, CA, 2010 (Rob's is unmatched & ultra-limited)	48.

SAUVIGNON BLANC & CHENIN BLANC

Les Hexagonales , Loire, France 2009 (chalky, lemony, all you want from the Loire)	24.
Mount Nelson , Marlborough, NZ, 2010 (Ludovico Antinori's NZ tribute to the Loire)	36.
Domaine du Salvard , Cheverny, France, 2010 (Loire delight; like Sancerre+Chablis)	36.
Sancerre, Roger Neveu , 'Clos des Bouffants', Loire, France, 2009 (lovely/long)	44.
Montlouis, Le Rocher des Violettes , 'Touche Mitaine', Loire, France, 2008 (bone-rattling Chenin)	44.
Sancerre, Dom. Vacheron , 'Les Romains', Loire, 2008 (those Vacheron boys are crushing it)	86.
Sancerre, Edmond Vatan , 'Clos la Neore', Loire, 2009 (pretty much the finest around)	90.

CHARDONNAY of the USA, etc

Windsor-Sonoma , RRV, CA, 2009 (just right juice from our friends at Girard)	40.
Stuhlmuller , Estate Chardonnay, Alexander Valley, CA, 2009 (so good...full and layered.)	48.
Ramey , Russian River Valley, CA, 2009 (majestic great deal; less buttery/oaky than you think)	62.
Brewer-Clifton , Mt Carmel Vineyard, Santa Rita Hills, 2007 (Greg & Steve's Asian pear explosion)	85.

CHARDONNAY of FRANCE

Bourgogne, Jean-Marc Brocard 'Kimmeridgian' 2008 (clean complexity)	36.
Bourgogne, DeMontille , Burgundy, 2007 (mean & steely version of the famous Cote de Beaune)	44.
Chablis 1er Cru, J.P. & B. Droin , 'Les Vaillons', Burgundy, 2009 (wonderful powdery minerals)	48.
Rully, Domaine de la Folie , 'Clos la Folie', Burgundy, 2008 (springy Chalonaise)	52.
Pouilly-Fuissé, Elizabeth Hugary , 'Les Chailloux', 2009 (the Auvigues bringing their best)	58.
St. Aubin 1er Cru, Marc Colin , 'La Chateniere', 2007 (beautiful wine; we love Aubin)	72.
Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru, Marc Colin , 'Les Champs Gains', 2006 (gain some ground)	82.
Puligny-Montrachet, Joseph Drouhin , 2008 (this is exactly what Puligny should be)	85.
Meursault, Vincent Girardin , 'Les Narvaux', 2006 (like big fat angels singing)	95.
Puligny-Montrachet, Bachelet-Monnot , 2009 (young dudes making grownup Puligny)	105.
Beaune 1er Cru blanc, Domaine de Montille , 'Les Aigrot', 2007 (this is epic)	110.

the WHITES of ITALY

Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi, Marchetti , Marche, 2010 (awesome small-production; old skool)	32.
Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, Valle Reale , 'Vigne Nuove', 2010 (squeaky clean & ready for the dinner table)	32.
Roero Arneis, Vietti , Piedmont, Italy, 2010 (this wine brought Arneis back from the brink!)	36.
Pinot Grigio, Borgo M , Veneto, Italy, 2010 (good acidity and tasty minerals; stylin')	32.
Pinot Grigio, Livio Felluga , Collio, Friuli, Italy, 2009 (Livio's a hero. Taste a grown-up PG)	48.
Bianco, Radikon , 'Oslavje', Venezia Giulia, Italy, 2005 500 ML BTL (orange wine! yes!)	52.

AUSTRIA & GERMANY

Riesling, Leitz , 'Einz Zwei Dry', Rheingau, Germany, 2007 (a dry and happy QbA)	28.
Riesling, Karthäuserhof , Feinherb, Mosel, Germany, 2009 (achtung! this almost-dry wine rules)	36.
Riesling, Dr. F. Weins-Prüm , Graacher Himmelreich Kabinett, Mosel, Ger, 2008 (classic vintage)	40.
Riesling, Dr. F. Weins-Prüm , Wehlener Sonnenuhr Trocken, Mosel, Ger, 2009 (bone dry & thrilling)	40.
Riesling, J.J. Christoffel Erben , Ürziger Würzgarten Kabinett, Mosel, Ger, 2007 (the spice garden)	44.
Riesling, Leitz , Rudesheimer Berg Roseneck Spätlese, Mosel, Germany, 2004 (Oh honey.)	52.
Riesling, Schlossgut Diel , Dorsheim Burgberg Kabinett, Nahe, Germany, 2007 (deal me in)	58.
Riesling, Hiedler , 'Maximum', Kamptal, Austria, 2007 (OH GOODNESS. Big, DRY, and layered+++)	64.
Riesling, Joh. Jos. Prüm , Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese, Mosel, Ger, 2009 (few can compete)	65.
Riesling, Dönnhoff , Kreuznacher Krotenpfuhl Spätlese, Nahe, Ger, 2007 (among the world's best)	70.
Gruner Veltliner, Ecker , Austria, 2009 (spicy zesty Gruner in a fat liter bottle)	28.
Gruner Veltliner, Nigl , 'Freiheit', Kamptal, Aus, 2009 (for lack of a better word, this one is nimbly-bimbly)	44.

MANY OTHER WHITES

viognier, Le Paradou , Rhone Valley, France, 2010 (fresh juicy style-fantastic value)	28.
Pinot Blanc, Lucien Albrecht , 'Cuvee Balthazar', Alsace, France, 2007 (light little airborne peach flowers)	36.
Vermentino, Clos Teddi , Patrimonio, Corsica, France 2009 (slippery dancing island mangoes)	48.
Heida Paien, Cave Caloz , 'Les Bernunes', Switzerland, 2008 (Yes, the Swiss make wine & it's good)	68.
St. Joseph blanc, J.L. Chave , 'Celeste', Rhone, France, 2008 (a crazy good price for good Chave)	52.
Chateauneuf-du-Pape blanc, Cuvee du Vatican , Rhone, 2007 (fat and round and wondrous)	90.
Condrieu, Andre Perret , 'Chery', France, 2005 (this wine has wings)	120.
Pinot Gris, Maysara , 'Arsheen', McMinnville, Willamette Valley, Oregon, 2010 (crispy)	28.
Pinot Gris/Pinot Blanc, Au Bon Climat , Santa Barbara Co., CA, 2009 (rich & zingy at the same time)	36.
Gewurztraminer, Foris , Rogue Valley, OR, 2007 (keep your peepers peeled for dry OR whites)	32.
HALF BOTTLE Pinot Blanc, Robert Sinskey , CA, 2009 (pretty wine from our friend Bob)	32.

FOOTNOTES:

We are just crossing the threshold of the holiday season. There's no better time to talk bubbles:

1. What on earth is Prosecco these days, anyway? Well the simple old answer is that it's a sparkling wine from northeast Italy. The new, more complex answer—and feel free to skip this highly uninteresting and technical italicized passage—is this: *Prosecco is a wine that was once also synonymous with its principal grape, but in the interest of clarity (haha) the new rules decree that the grape will henceforth be known as 'Glera' and there will no longer be a Prosecco DOC appellation, but there will be a DOCG-level appellation called Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore (try and say that, it's actually kind of fun), and a lesser IGT limited to five provinces in Veneto (Treviso, Vicenza, Venezia, Padova & Belluna) and four in Friuli (Udine, Gorizia, Trieste, & Pordenone).* What all of this adds up to is that the Italians are trying to better protect something special that they do. Prosecco is a distinct wine with its own character (not just a cheapo Italian version of champagne), and it's true that the best stuff comes from the towns of Conegliano and the unpronounceable Valdobbiadene. One of my consistent faves is **Nino Franco's** 'Rustico' Prosecco from Valdobbiadene (\$36). It shows off the vivacious texture and spice aromas that—thanks to the new rules of distinction—will always set true Prosecco apart.

2. YAY FUN. By now we should all know that champagne is a word we reserve for wine from the French region called Champagne. It's not Cook's or André (both of which are allowed to be labeled 'California Champagne', a result of grandfathering-in), it's not Tott's Asti. It's a thing that is produced only in one area of the world, Champagne. The French understand this distinction in a very natural way, and since they do produce sparkling wines from other regions, they created a catch-all term, *Cremant*, to describe them. In the case of **Lucien Albrecht's** rosé Cremant (\$40) from the picturesque slopes of Alsace, we have a wine produced from 100% Pinot Noir. Its lively pink color is matched with tough, round, cool-climate Pinot-fruit in the mouth. Yay, so much fun.

3. But then there's *the Thing Itself*. If you want to know the difference between champagne and all the other stuff we use as substitutes, I urge you to buy a bottle of **Rene Geoffroy's** "Expression" (\$105) from Champagne's Vallee de la Marne. If you do, I'll gladly pour you a taste of Cava alongside. The difference is a clear one, not just of a step up in richness and intensity that that tends to correlate with such a jump in price, but in sheer chills-and-thrills, in story. In sweeping scope, in texture, in layers and layers of ever-developing savory nuts,

cereal-box, and baked apple smells, in twists and turns. In short, the wine has drama—a sense of living and breathing—that the Cava simply doesn't. Great champagne is not just for toasting. It is an experience altogether, and it can easily go the whole meal. And the party will abound.

—SG