

January 2025 Tasting Report: Latour Perfection, Pinot Heaven and Hobbs' Showstoppers

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1479 TASTING NOTES

Tuesday, Feb 11, 2025

We rated 1,479 wines in our first tasting month of 2025 – not including all the bottles we rated for our Bordeaux 2022 Vintage Report – and found two perfect-scoring wines, as well as a bounty of goodness from regions such as Napa Valley, the Rheingau in Germany, Barolo and Greece.

James uncorked an absolute beauty while he was tasting the soon-to-be-released wines of Chateau Latour. He found the Chateau Latour Pauillac 2016 to be at the same level as the legendary 1982, calling it a new “benchmark” because of its superb balance and ultra-fine yet intense tannins.

Senior Editor Stuart Pigott also tasted a few extraordinary French wines during the month, starting with the “almost perfect” Domaine de la Chapelle Hermitage La Chapelle 2022, which Stuart said showed incredible focus and structure. Domaine de la Chapelle is owned by the Paul Jaboulet Aîné winery and shares the same winemaker, Caroline Frey, who also made the bold (and moderately priced) Paul Jaboulet Aîné Crozes-Hermitage Domaine de Thalabert 2022, which represents the best vintage of Domaine de Thalabert in more than a decade, as well as the Paul Jaboulet Aîné Cornas Domaine de Saint Pierre 2022, whose tension between the energetic tannins, the aromas of elderberry, flint and graphite plus the hardcore stony minerality makes it really exciting, according to Stuart.

Frey is also the owner of a domaine in Burgundy that was recently renamed after her, and her offerings from the 2023 vintage are “in another league” from the 2020 wines from the same estate, Stuart said. The Caroline Frey Corton Grand Cru Le Clos du Château Monopole 2023 “beautifully expresses the dark side of Burgundy, and in spite of the wine’s enormous structure it is extremely energetic with an amazing velvety texture, as well as incredible length,” Stuart said of it.

2023 was also a solid vintage for Domaine Boris Champy in Nantoux, with the star of the range of wines there the Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune Bignon 421 2023 and “its haunting aromas of black and sour cherries and incredible floral complexity.”

And one wine Stuart tasted at an event at Erno's Bistro in Frankfurt, Germany, to celebrate winemaker Frederic Mugnier of Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier in Chambolle-Musigny – one of Burgundy's most famous domaines – really hit it out of the park. His Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru Les Amoureuses 2015, Stuart said, "is almost perfect," with its interplay of chalky minerality, great concentration and finesse resulting in a "dreamy texture through the spectacularly long finish."

A DREAM OF PINOT NOIR HEAVEN

German spatburgunders – or pinot noirs, as the rest of the wine world knows them – ruled our January tastings from the country, with two offerings from the slate soils of Ahr region in the Mosel rising to the top. The most amazing of these was our other 100-pointer for the month, the Bernhard Huber Spätburgunder Baden Wildenstein GG 2022, which Stuart said "is a dream of pinot noir heaven," while the Jean Stodden Spätburgunder Ahr Herrenberg GG 2022 "displayed a wonderful finesse and precision from the first moment."

Another terrific German pinot, with "an amazing combination of concentration, precision and finesse," was the Fürst Spätburgunder Franken Hundsrück GG 2022. And Furst pinot noirs were also on display of a special vertical tasting Stuart attended in Berlin, with the Fürst Spätburgunder Franken Centgrafenberg R 2005 documenting a turning point in the development of German pinots in the way the tannins in the wines became significantly finer, while the Fürst Spätburgunder Franken Centgrafenberg GG 2007 was the first vintage in which GG (Grosses Gewachs) replaced R (Reserve) on the label and the first vintage made by Paul Furst's son Sebastian. This is a "super-elegant pinot noir with terrific structure and mineral freshness," Stuart said.

And from one under-the-radar German producer, the Albrecht Schwegler winery in the Wurttemberg region, was a "spectacular" new release, the Albrecht Schwegler Württemberg Solitär 2015, which underwent long barrel aging – eight years in barrique oak casks – to achieve its "insanely beautiful German take on the same idea of a tannic red" as Vega Sicilia's Unico wine.

PAUL HOBBS' SHOWSTOPPERS

We saw a strong showing by California wines in January, starting at the cool and minimalistic Paul Hobbs winery in Sonoma County, where Executive Editor Jim Gordon tasted through Hobbs' pinot noirs and chardonnays from 2023 and his layered and velvety cabernet sauvignons from 2022. Jim found two show-stopping pinots from the 2023 vintage in the Paul Hobbs Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Fraenkle Cheshier Vineyard 2023, which he found "muscular, intense and laced with black tea nuances," while the Pinot Noir Russian River Valley George Menini Estate 2023 is saturated with dark berries and a smoky, earthy character from the Calera-clone grapes and 15 percent whole-cluster fermentation.

Out of Hobbs' most recent chardonnay releases, the Paul Hobbs Chardonnay Russian River Valley George Menini Estate 2023 and Paul Hobbs Chardonnay Sonoma Mountain Richard Dinner Vineyard 2023 were "equally brilliant," according to Jim, with the latter wine "giving a different take on the vintage, coming from a different district where a clay-rich soil brings out white peaches, pears and even honey notes."

And Jim found two 2022 cabernet sauvignons from Hobbs to be "absolute beauties that show how a coolish climate like the Coombsville district in Napa Valley can truly shine in a year challenged by severe heat just as harvest was in full swing. The Paul Hobbs Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Coombsville Nathan Coombs Estate 2022 is lush, saturated and layered, while the Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Coombsville 2022 is right on its heels, according to Jim.

Napa's Dunn Vineyards gave us two more notable cabernet sauvignons, each of which underwent gentle extraction during fermentation followed by extended barrel aging for up to 32 months in French oak barrels to help build and lengthen the wines' structure and textural complexity on the palate. Both the Dunn Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Howell Mountain 2021 and Dunn Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Howell Mountain 2019 are full of generous character and will age gracefully for years to come, Jim said.

From the neighboring state of Oregon, Associate Editor Claire Nesbitt tasted the latest releases of from 00 Wines' cool and long 2022 vintage, and their electric chardonnays included the immensely concentrated, fresh, textured and creamy VGW (Very Good White). But it was a single-vineyard expression from Dijon clones, the 2022 Eola-Amity Hills Seven Springs chardonnay, that was the most impressive of 00 Wines' offerings. This is a layered, creamy and mouth-filling wine but at the same time it's tense, energetic and vivid, and shows wild aromas of cardamom, miso and white fruit.

'TAILOR-MADE' YEAR FOR BAROLO RISERVAS

Barolo's 2019 vintage was the focus of our Italy tastings, in particular the riservas from that year. Although the category has lost some of its allure for a variety of factors, 2019 seems "tailor-made" for riservas, according to Senior Editor Aldo Fiordelli.

It's a structured vintage, at the same time leaner, lusher and more austere, and emblematic of how riservas used to be made, he said. Out of the top riservas from the year, the Paolo Scavino Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata Riserva 2019, stands out for its restrained complexity, with dark notes interwoven by hints of bergamot, oak-bark, licorice and dried violets, while the Mauro Veglio Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata Riserva 2019 exudes depth and elegance.

The Massolino Barolo Vigna Rionda 2019, meanwhile, has a different profile than its usual style – more old-fashioned, with aromas of coffee grounds, leather, prunes and licorice already emerging, underscored by a full-bodied texture and dense concentration. Also worthy of mention is the Ettore Germano Barolo Lazzarito Riserva 2019 and its stunning, elegant tannins, as well as the Gagliasso Barolo Riserva 2019, which showcases a classic, postmodern style full of detail and complexity.

Aldo also tasted in the Italian wine region of Jesi, where he found some ambitious and energetic producers who mostly work with the old verdicchio grape variety and who now make wines that are “clean, taut, and brimming with minerality and salinity.” The best of the wines he tasted here was the Pievalta Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico San Paolo Riserva 2021, which overachieves with its precision and chalky minerality.

EXCELLENCE FROM THE DAO

Senior Editor Jacobo García Andrade was in Portugal tasting the offerings of renowned Portuguese producer Dirk van der Niepoort, and found two exceptional wines from the Dao region. The Niepoort Dão Quinta da Lomba Garrafeira 2016 and Niepoort Dão Conciso 2021 both come from old head-trained vineyards predominantly planted with the complementary varieties baga and jaen, and they illustrate the potential of the region’s older, co-planted vineyards to yield elegant wines that are both floral and earthy, accompanied by a very attractive wild berry character, Jacobo said.

Niepoort’s Douro Branco Redoma Reserva 2023, meanwhile, is a white produced from a meticulously selected group of vineyards. A blend of rabigato, codega de larinho, viosinho, arinto and other grapes from old vines in mica-schist soils, it delivers exceptional quality. And the Niepoort Douro Robustus 2019 was the highest-scoring of Niepoort’s wines. Jacobo liked it for its full body and juicy character, with lovely fruit and firm yet polished tannins.

We also tasted a few terrific wines from the Slovenian wine region of Brda, which is rightly celebrated for its superb chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, sauvignon vert and ribolla, with the latter variety – whether macerated or not – tending to showcase the region’s personality most vividly. Its red wines are also coming on strong.

What dominates among Brda producers is their embrace of mature viticulture, as influenced by Marco Simonit, the renowned pruning guru and consultant who hails from the Collio province in northeastern Italy (straddling Slovenia and Brda). One Brda winery that works directly with Simonit, Movia, made the Movia Goriška Brda Veliko White 2021, a blend of ribolla, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and pinot grigio that offers freshness and zest with mint, stony minerality and layered notes of mirabelle plums, pears, and peaches.

On the red side, some of the standout bottles from Brda include Simcic's Numerals Unico M 2020, a Bordeaux blend of cabernet franc (50 percent), cabernet sauvignon, and merlot, produced in limited quantities with super-precise cassis aromas, hints of pepper, spices and smoke, all wrapped in an elegant, taut body.

Finally, from Greece, James tasted the latest bottlings from T-Oinos, the winemaking project on the island of Tinos run by French consulting enologist Stephane Derenoncourt and his Greek friend Alexandros Avatangelos. James has praised the T-Oinos wines for their great focus and complexity, and that was no different for the single-vineyard T-Oinos Mavrotragano Cyclades Clos Stégasta Rare 2022, which was “clearly the best” of the Oinos lot, as well as a complexly dry and minerally rosé made from malagouzia, assyrtiko, mavrotragano and avgoustiatis.

– *Vince Morkri, Editor-in-Chief*

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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SCORE (HIGHEST TO LOWEST) ▼

MIGRATION CHARDONNAY SONOMA COUNTY SONOMA COAST 2022 ^

Score 93

Color White

Country United States

Region California

Vintage 2022

Bright aromas of preserved lemons, pastry, green apples and honeysuckle. The palate is medium-bodied with a creamy texture and integrated acidity, giving notes of lime curd, grapefruit pith and orange rind. Generous, with a fresh backbone. Drink or hold.

Avg. Price \$ 38

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MIGRATION PINOT NOIR SONOMA COAST M 2022 ^

Score 93

Color Red

Country United States

Region California

Vintage 2022

Bright and lifted aromas of dried strawberries, wild raspberries and spices. The palate is light- to medium-bodied with finely integrated tannins and bright acidity, giving notes of blackberries, sarsaparilla and dried herbs. Nicely balanced and refined. Drink or hold.

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MIGRATION PINOT NOIR SONOMA COUNTY SONOMA COAST 2022



Score 93

Color Red

Country United States

Region California

Vintage 2022

Bright and perfumed aromas of raspberries, potpourri and orange peel. The palate is medium-bodied with fine tannins and bright acidity, giving notes of blackberry bush, dried herbs and earth. Balanced and fresh. Drink or hold.

Avg. Price \$ 40

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MIGRATION CHARDONNAY CARNEROS EL VEREDICTO 2022



Score 92

Color White

Country United States

Region California

Vintage 2022

Generous aromas of lemon curd, pastry, poached pears and baking spices. The palate is medium-bodied with bright acidity and a creamy texture, giving notes of red apples, lime blossoms and chalk. Powerful and textural. Drink or hold. Screw cap.

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MIGRATION PINOT NOIR CARNEROS EL VEREDICTO 2022



Score 92

Color Red

Country United States

Region California

Vintage 2022

Ripe and rich aromas of blackberries, cassia bark and potpourri. The palate is medium-bodied with fine tannins and bright acidity, giving notes of sarsaparilla, mocha and dried herbs. Bold and powerful. Drink or hold.

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