

MARCH 2017 • \$6.95

THE *tasting* panel

MAGAZINE

100

Years IN THE
BOOKS!



The Riboli family (left to right): Steve Riboli, Santo Riboli, Cathy Riboli Colombatti, Dante Colombatti, Lisa Riboli-Elzholz, Christopher Riboli and Anthony Riboli.

Publisher's PICKS

In each issue, The Tasting Panel's Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May selects her favorite wines and spirits of the month. Check here for the latest arrivals in our offices, the hottest new brands on the market and an occasional revisited classic.

PHOTO: DAVID GADD



WINES



The White Knight 2015 Viognier, Clarksburg (\$12) Fermented and aged in stainless steel, this Viognier is expressive in ultra-aromatics and texture. With just a dab of Chardonnay blended in, the flavor sensation and scents of just-ripened white peaches and honeyed apples offer a sumptuous quality. White petals bloom, while lemon-dill edges in to add a crisp tonality. **91**

3 BADGE BEVERAGE



Okapi 2013 Chardonnay, Oak Knoll, Napa Valley (\$40) Buoyant and light-hearted with a marshmallow/lemon drop thrill commencement. Texturally developed and balanced. Notes of savory spiced chai, buttered chamomile and a French toast-apple finish. A wow of a white! **93**



Best Value!



Hopes End 2015 Red Blend, South Australia (\$12) From the Angove family comes this modern, energetic array—Shiraz, Grenache, Malbec and Petit Verdot—awash with dense, ripe, summer-sweet fruit. Boysenberry, blueberry, cherries: wound together and tied with a chocolate string. Sumptuous and silky, a broad surge of licorice and salted caramel mocha latte on the finish. **91**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Champagne Lombard Brut Nature Le Mesnil sur Oger Grand Cru, France (\$80)

This 100% Chardonnay blanc de blancs has zero dosage. Its flinty nature and chalky finish are softened by lemon blossoms and apple pie. A hint of caramel toast adds body and the tickling bubbles are fresh and clean. **92**



Stemmari 2014 Nero d'Avola, Sicilia IGT, Italy (\$10) Owing to a thrilling acidity, this red over-delivers in fruit and savory. Raspberry and soy sauce greet on the nose, with a chocolate cake middle and an earthier exterior. Spiced nutmeg adds another layer of vibrant flavor. Wonderfully food-friendly, with a roundness that makes it a sensual sip. **90**



PRESTIGE WINE IMPORTS



Michael David Winery 2014 Petite Petit, Lodi (\$18) The blend of 85% Petite Sirah and 15% Petit Verdot is a fruit bomb—no question. But it's also a class act, with ripe raisins, dark chocolate, plums and lilacs creating a balance of jammy fruit and fine acidity. **90**



Maddalena 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20) Ripe, with gritty, grainy tannins. Tobacco and dark cherry take the lead, painting the palate with some Old World acidity. Earth and Italian herbs add another dimension. In fact, if we were blind-tasting, the panel agrees we would have thought this a Tuscan gem. For Paso, it's equally admirable. **93**



SAN ANTONIO WINERY

Worthy of a smooch.
French-style double bizou.
Wildly infatuated.
Seriously smitten.
Head over heels in love.



Ancient Peaks 2014 Renegade, Paso Robles (\$24) Grapes grown on ancient sea beds and shale from the Santa Margarita Ranch in Paso Robles's most southern district show themselves magnificently in what I suspect is this wine's finest vintage yet. Deep, ripe spiced plum and tarry blackberry are mouth-gripping and teeth-coating. The wine—a blend of 80% Syrah, 18% Malbec and 2% Petit Verdot—possesses a dense chocolate-violet middle with a mineral thread dappled with black plum and soy sauce. **93**



A to Z Wineworks 2015 The Essence of Oregon Pinot Noir, Oregon (\$28) Thirty-five vineyards contributed to this blend that commemorates the winery's 15th anniversary. Floral notes abound: roses and tropical scents, perfumed berries, cinnamon and lanolin fill this ripe red up. Its earthy foundation is pleasant and mouth-filling. **89**



Tolosa Winery 2013 Heritage Syrah, Edna Valley (\$32) From this solar-powered winery comes a cool-climate Syrah that over-delivers in style, texture and flavor. With just a whisper of soy sauce, intoxicatingly perfumed candied plums and a sweet-savory note that violet imparts, the wash of satin on the palate creates a memorable mouthfeel. Tart rhubarb eeks out in mid-palate, elongated with milk chocolate, cinnamon sugar and red licorice. **94**



Babylonstoren 2014 Nebukadnesar, WO Simonsberg-Paarl, South Africa (\$42) A brilliant blend of all five Bordeaux varieties. The elegance begins immediately on the nose, with rich blackberry pipe tobacco and herbs. On the palate, white-peppered plums, espresso bean, violets and fruited cedar swoosh in a balanced array of finely grained tannins and great acidity. This is a stand-out. **93**



CATAMARCA IMPORTS



Broken Earth 2013 Merlot, Paso Robles (\$48) Ripe, chewy cherry-cocoa tannins—dry and dusty mid-palate—with energetic red fruit and a pinch of nutmeg. Earthy toward the finish with root vegetables and dark chocolate soil. Delicious. **92**



Kelly Family Vineyards 2013 Red Wine, Napa Valley (\$48) From Napa's Oak Knoll District comes this plush wine, a blend of 78% Cabernet Sauvignon and 22% Merlot. While notes of pencil shavings and brooding savory chocolate notes exist, this is a feminine red, sending up flirty ripe, bright fruit, lilac and gracefully appointed notes of baking spices. It showcases the brilliance of Merlot from this district. **92**



Renwood 2014 Special Reserve Grandpère Zinfandel, Amador County (\$50) From one of Amador County's earliest harvests on record (beginning August 11) due to a mild winter and summer, with low yields and a fine natural acidity despite the drought conditions, this red performed exceptionally. A blend of 75% Zin, 20% Petite Sirah and 5% Barbera, the grapes—grown in elevations exceeding 1,600 feet—hail from 21-year-old vines; the wine was aged for 21 months in French oak. From its telling black-purple hue to its spiced plum, blackberry and clove juiciness, its elegance is apparent from first sip. White pepper, mocha and violets add to its complexity and keep delivering deliciousness. **94**



Franciscan 2013 Magnificat Meritage, Napa Valley (\$55) It's that time of year when we get to sample this all-star blend: 73% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Merlot, with additions of 2% Malbec and 1% Cab Franc. Chewy tannins express deep notes of cherrywood and espresso. This is a muscular body-builder vintage, aged 20 months in oak, packed with tobacco and iron and setting a mood of shadows and ripeness. **92**



CONSTELLATION WINES U.S.



Seghesio Family Vineyard 2013 Barbera, Alexander Valley (\$38) Proprietary Barbera clones were planted in Alexander Valley by Edoardo Seghesio in 1895. This outstanding red

offers sensations on nose and palate. From the gorgeous scent of summer cherries and plum blossoms, a red licorice taste and sensation spreads and inspires the palate with a dab of white pepper. Seasoned and brushy with a soothing vanilla toast finish, this is a perfect barbera-cue wine. **94**

CRIMSON WINE GROUP



Mercer Estates 2013 Robert Willis Reserve Malbec, Horse Heaven Hills (\$55) Not surprising, one of the Washington vineyards supplying these exquisite "seasoned" Malbec grapes is named Spice Cabinet, which sits on a sun-exposed southeast-facing slope above the Columbia River. While '13 was the hottest vintage on record in the region, this red was impeccably balanced with an acidity that charmed the fruit out of the glass. Cherry, pomegranate and lush plum are centered within a deep meatiness with an abounding blue floral tone. Food-friendly with silky tannins. **94**



Cherry Pie 2013 Huckleberry Snodgrass Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$60) A savory beauty! Red pepper, cinnamon, cherry and sarsaparilla earthiness make up just part of the energy this wine exudes. Tomato leaf, basil and a pinch of black pepper keep it finely tuned. **92**



ONETRUEVINE

SPIRITS



Bib & Tucker Small Batch White Whiskey, USA (\$40)

Clean nose of pencil shavings and vanilla. Warm, generously spreading mouthfeel: white pepper, marshmallow, wet stone, rye plus a dab of raspberry-pomegranate and orange marmalade. Sweet corn on the finish, white petals and that inching up of heat makes for a good time double-distilled whiskey. 92 proof. **94**

3 BADGE MIXOLOGY



Nautical American Gin, USA (\$33) Sea salt is one of this 84-proof domestic gin's unique ingredients—along with 14 other botanicals, mainly U.S.-grown. The bottle design is also unusual due to its flat back. On the nose, freshly cut spearmint wafts through, along with lilacs and a sweeter juniper than most. The brininess shows itself right away, with mint, black pepper and a lavender-orange note that is notably exotic. **93**

VERTICAL SPIRITS



Stonecutter Spirits Single Barrel Gin, USA (\$55)

Lilac-scented, juniper-inspired, this 90-proof bourbon-barreled gin—a Double Gold medalist at last year's San Francisco World Spirits Competition—starts off with an exquisiteness. The floral and biting-spiced palate turns into a charcoal and anise smoothness. This is a liquid chameleon—charming and intriguingly changeable. **93**



Short Mountain Distillery "Prohibition Tea" Tennessee Moonshine, USA (\$30)

This 60-proof sweet peach tea moonshine cocktail is based on stone-milled corn and uses Tennessee spring water. The aroma is pure whiskey, with hints of molasses and stone fruit. The slight burn on the palate begs for an ice cube to be dropped in to settle down the peppered mouthfeel. Black tea comes through mid-way, with a dry finish—not overly sweet. Would do well with added chilled juices and more of that ice. **89**

This quartet of new cream liqueurs, sold in individual servings, is an exciting discovery.



Café Agave French Vanilla Cream, USA (\$2.99/50 ml.)

Clean, vivid vanilla is not shy with an echo of tropical fruit behind it on the nose. The flavors incorporate so many underlying pleasant-ries such as orange blossom, vanilla wafer and a hint of lilac. Superb. **92**



Café Agave Salted Caramel Cream, USA (\$2.99/50 ml.)

A treat on the nose, the aroma of freshly made caramel is definable. With an echo of coffee bean and a mellow salinity, this creamy dream can be savored without any overindulgent characteristics. **93**



Café Agave Toasted Coconut Cream, USA (\$2.99/50 ml.)

One of the cleanest, purest expressions of coconut—it perfumes the glass and you can picture the fresh juice and meat of the fruit. On the palate, the soft, billowy creaminess embraces the coconut flavors with a lingering note that keeps sweetness at bay for a just-right finish. **93**



Café Agave Mocha Cream, USA (\$2.99/50 ml.)

For chocolate aficionados, the regal aromas of the dark variety is apparent and offers an extra savory perfumed note of just-brewed espresso. The surprise on the palate is the delicacy of the liquid, the lithe texture of the cream and the slow-to-fade finish of melting mocha. **92**



Stonecutter Spirits Heritage Cask Whiskey, USA (\$61)

Finished in Cabernet Barrels, this Kentucky whiskey traveled to Vermont to undergo a triple-barrel aging process. Dusky orange, milk chocolate and porridge are heart-warming aromatics. At 90 proof, it barely pinches the palate with heat, but the demure notes of coconut, chocolate pudding and apricot are welcoming and sensual. **94**



Hanson of Sonoma Espresso Flavored Vodka, USA (\$30)

By the cocktail hour, you may have already downed your quota of caffeine, but if the desire is still there to sniff the roasted coffee-mocha aromas you so dearly love, this is your afternoon and evening delight. While the nose lures with sweet, the palate appeals to the bitter bean. Seven-times-filtered and gluten-free, this small-batch 80-proof grape-based California vodka is a wake-up call that sure tastes like that first cup of the day. The just-enough sweetness is from the addition of agave nectar. **92**



HANSON HANDMADE SPIRITS LLC



Calamity Gin, USA (\$27) With a name that in itself should garner praise, this white spirit is a play on the American folk hero and Wild West pioneer woman who befriended Wild Bill Hickok. Scents of violets, cheery peppered white petals of freesia and a honeyed white grapefruit are some of olfactory music coming from the glass of this 80-proof Texan. The pepper gains ground on the palate, along with grapefruit rind and an elaborate bunch of blue flowers. The finish of vanilla and bread dough adds textural buoyancy. **95**

SOUTHWEST SPIRITS