ALICE FEIRING

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Wine Business Magazine Feature

The Feiring Line Sample Issue
NEW YORK CITY Alice Feiring was raised on Manischewitz but it didn’t take her long to find the better stuff. To Feiring, “better” means wines made from organic viticulture with nothing added and nothing taken away.

Controversial and feisty, Alice Feiring leads an international debate on wine made naturally. She found her métier in 2001 when she wrote an award-winning article for the New York Times, “For Better or Worse, Winemakers Go High Tech.” Through researching the topic she uncovered a world of flavor and aroma changing additives. “Fraud,” she cried, “Give me my wine back!” And then she went to work.

An early attention-getting blogger, in 2008, she wrote the influential book, The Battle for Wine and Love: Or How I Saved the World From Parkerization and followed that up with her 2011 Naked Wine, a narrative romp through the history and the personalities of vin naturel. Translations of her books have been published in French, Spanish, Italian and Georgian. She launched The Feiring Line, the only subscription-based natural wine newsletter, enjoyed by drinkers in fifteen different countries.

She has helped to define “natural”, uncovered the abuses of ubiquitous terms like “organic” and provoked her readers to share her concerns and passions. Approaching wine from the ground up, Feiring works much like an anthropologist to respect and preserve what is indigenous to wines and their traditions. From the ancient vines of the Canary Islands to the qvevris of Georgia, she unearths century-old practices. She identifies wine that unlocks culture and heritage, methods that reflect and relate human stories.

With Feiring’s encouragement, a revolution in the wine world has finally been ignited. This parallels recent movements that promote organic foods, foods free of technological manipulation, locally-sourced products, and “slow food.” Feiring believes strongly in requiring ingredient lists that include any additives on wine labels. (Would you buy a wine that listed oak chips or wood tannin on the label?) She advocates for more transparency and less intervention in the winery. Arguably fanatical, she still never loses sight of the fact that wine is meant for pleasure and needs to be delicious as well as affordable.

Please consider profiling Feiring. Known for her integrity, passion, spirited commentary and New York humor— she is outspoken, forthright and capable of taking any audience on a wine journey. Remember, she’s the woman who has shaken up the “Goliaths” of the wine industry and has already changed the wine in your glass.

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“Alice Feiring’s voice is crucial to the American wine discussion.” –Eric Asimov, The New York Times
THE FEIRING LINE WINE SOCIETY:
 NOT FOR EVERYONE. AND PROUD OF IT!

NEW YORK CITY Alice Feiring, wine rebel, activist and general pot stirrer is now the reluctant retailer. When she started The Feiring Line, the paid-subscription natural wine newsletter, some readers complained that the wines were too hard to find outside of a wine retail epicenter like New York City. In order to extend service to more readers in outlying areas, she started The Feiring Line Wine Society, a body that would be known in the mainstream as a wine club.

The wines offered each month are genuinely hard to find, artisanal, natural, and delicious.

Because the selected wines are produced on a small scale, The Feiring Line Wine Society can serve only a limited number of wine-loving people. But those folks should expect to unpack a terrific, no-sulfur discovery from the Jura, or a limited bottling of champagne from Riceys. Anything is possible, as long as the wines fit Alice’s standards; that is, they all reflect responsible viticulture, minimal winemaking (using just one ingredient, that is: grapes), and perhaps just a little bit of sulfur.

The Feiring Line Wine Society is not a “club” for those wanting bragging rights to the latest 95+ point trophy that they snagged. But it is one for those looking to answer the question: Does wine have a soul?

The Feiring Line Wine Society provides a monthly offering of two to four bottles of wine chosen by Alice, always wines she adores. The monthly cost is $75 plus shipping and taxes. To keep things legal, all billing and fulfillment is handled by New York’s cutest and most resourceful wine shop, Frankly Wines. But the selections are all Alice.

For more information on how to order or subscribe to the society, click this link to Frankly Wines.

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About Alice Feiring

Writing professionally since 1988, Alice is the winner of both the James Beard and Louis Roederer Wine Writing Awards. In 2013 she was named *Imbibe Magazine*’s Wine Person of the Year. Her blog at alicefeiring.com has been published since 2004. In addition to the various awards, it’s been named by *Food & Wine* and *Forbes* as one of the world’s top wine blogs. In 2012, she launched a paid-subscription newsletter, *The Feiring Line*, The Real Wine Newsletter. This is the only independent newsletter that focuses on wines that are organic, biodynamic, and natural. **The cost is $68 per year.**

Cited on Wikipedia as a major wine personality and champion of natural wines, Alice Feiring also lectures on wine globalization, terroir, natural, biodynamic, and organic wines worldwide, from sustainable agriculture conferences in Spain to winemaking conferences in the country of Georgia. She has appeared in several wine documentaries such as *Wine From Here*. The past wine correspondent for *Wall Street Journal Magazine* and *Time*, she currently freelances for *The New York Times, Town & Country, Wine & Spirits, World of Fine Wine, and Newsweek*, among others.


Alice is available for television, radio and print interviews.

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To Sip: Uncork the Uncommon Once a Month

Alice Feiring, a wine writer who has contributed to The New York Times, has particular tastes, preferring uncommon selections, often natural, biodynamic and organic. Now she has a monthly wine club. Working with Frankly Wines in TriBeCa, she picks two to four bottles a month, while Christy Frank, the shop’s owner, takes care of the shipping. Some of the wines included during the first weeks of the club were La Ferme des Caudalies 2011 Les Mots Bleus, a blend of sauvignon blanc and chenin blanc from the Loire Valley, and Weingut Holger Koch 2012 Spätburgunder, from Germany: Feiring Line Wine Society, $75 a month, plus shipping and tax; alicefeiring.com, franklywines.com.
Alice Feiring: Imbibe Magazine’s Wine Person of the Year

ALICE FEIRING
NEW YORK CITY

We’ll always love Aretha, but there’s a new Natural Woman on our chart this year. Alice Feiring, a longtime wine writer and champion of additive-free, unaltered “natural wines” debuted The Feiring Line, a monthly newsletter all about “real wines,” late last year. It may sound like a nutty topic—after all, the vast majority of wines, even celebrated boutique wines, don’t qualify as “natural,” but Feiring had no trouble drumming up subscribers. Last summer her Kickstarter campaign landed almost $17,000—nearly triple her fundraising goal of $6,000—and more than 200 advance subscribers for the $65-a-year dispatch. “It was a real indication that people want this information,” says Feiring, who will offer independent reviews of natural wines—those made without defoaming agents, oak chips, reverse osmosis or the hundreds of other approved additives and industrial processes—in each issue. Not even added yeasts, enzymes or acids are allowed.

While she concedes that natural wine is too narrow a category to be deemed the wave of the future, “it will have tremendous impact, much the same way many are looking for foods that aren’t processed,” she says. “It’s a very exciting time for wine.”

The return to primitive winemaking is a recent one in the United States—Feiring encountered her first natural wine, from French maker Thierry Puzelat of Clos du Tue Boeuf, in the late-’90s. “I didn’t call it ‘natural’—I just went wild for it,” she recalls. “[It] seemed so alive and real.”

Now she hopes to return the favor by introducing a new audience to the small but growing cadre of natural winemakers. “Alice Feiring’s voice is crucial to the American wine discussion,” says Eric Asimov, wine critic at The New York Times and author of the recent How to Love Wine: A Memoir and Manifesto. “She has offered a point of view long in need of forceful expression, and she has insisted that it be heard. That’s a brave and sometimes lonely place to be, yet she has carried it off.”
ROOTSTOCK SYDNEY 2014
AN HOUR WITH ALICE FEIRING

THE ART OF SALES

YEAR OF THE HORSE
THOROUGHBRED OR DONKEY?
They must have Alice Feiring under their skin. They are riled up and playing the woman, not the issue. She is a zealot with dry-farmed convictions, they say, the Joker to Robert Parker’s Batman and, to one blogger, suffers from a low skin-to-fruit ratio. No question she can be off-piste, and so she was on her arrival in Australia last month for Rootstock Sydney.

The diminutive Feiring, resolute and plain-speaking despite the jetlag – she is a leading light of the burgeoning ‘natural’ wine movement – gives the firm impression of une femme du monde who sails on above the fray. “I used to drink Jacob’s Creek Shiraz,” she said to WBM at Rootstock, “until I tired of the sameness.” In her first book – The Battle For Wine and Love or How I Saved the World from Parkerisation – Feiring explains that “by about 2001, unless I carefully navigated my choices, almost any wine I tasted would explode into a fruit bomb, styled by technology and chemistry.” This revelation, she says, “cattle-prodded my inner whistle-blower.” She had found her calling: to seek out the world’s more beguiling wines – “the delicious, intriguing and hard to find” – and to enchant those consumers who want their wines to have a story to tell. And to “bell the cat” on those wines styled into fat, oaky, thick, dense wines made to generate at least 94 points, the minimum required to hear the anticipatory ‘pop’ in the marketplace. It wasn’t long before Feiring’s search for the beguiling led her to the natural wine movement. She is now a forceful advocate for it through her books and a paid content newsletter, The Feiring Line, which focuses on natural, organic and biodynamic wines. “I don’t like wines that are too controlled and technical,” she said. “What is the point of (the New World) trying to emulate Burgundy? California can’t emulate Burgundy.”

The blogger Fred Reiss (‘Fred For Your Head’) who was so offended by Feiring, had taken exception to a 2007 article she had written for the online site of GQ. “A hand grenade in a dress with a short fuse” is what he called her. Persuaded to name the world’s 10 most overrated wines, along with Australian Shiraz (“Robitussin”), Feiring listed “pleasure bomb” Bordeaux Garagistes wines, “cat piss” Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, Super-Tuscans lacking a sense of place, “mediocre” Clos de Vougeot, Napa’s over-cooked Screaming Eagle, Galicia’s “pretentious” Albariño, Santa Barbara’s...
Just what is it about sulphur?

Because SO₂ is a poison, used at high levels it will inhibit the malolactic conversion, but at low levels it offers no protection from oxidasic breakdown, critical where less than perfectly healthy grapes are present. For natural winemakers the argument goes that it is perhaps better not to treat at all and allow carbon dioxide produced by the fermentation to provide a degree of protection. But because this will be much easier to achieve in a sound vintage with healthy fruit, its use is not proscribed when the winemaker determines it is needed. For others it is vineyard practices that are determinant. Certainly, the natural wine movement in all its multifarious and glorious permutations was on display at this year’s Rootstock.

All natural winemakers resist the dousing of grapes in sulphur after harvest because it kills ambient yeasts. They argue that naturally-fermented wines will be more indicative of site than those relying on commercial yeast strains which bring foreign flavours and aromas. Not surprisingly, there is debate about this because sulphur binds with acetaldehydes produced by the fermentation that might actually mask terroir. But when they’re good, natural wines have a weightlessness and delicacy to them. It is also said that natural wines occasionally display a ‘puppy-breath finish’, a phrase coined by Feiring for her second book: Naked Wine: Letting Grapes Do What Comes Naturally.

A more disarming descriptor of aldehydes is a ‘most wines are natural’, Feiring thinks Parker just doesn’t get it. “(He) never viewed the use of (the vacuum) concentrator, over-used in Bordeaux, which is a mega-filter, as filtering,” she responded in her newsletter last year. After all, there are more than 2,000 in use in Bordeaux, including one-stark differences between the various appellations are made less distinguishable than ever. Among 1st and 2nd Growths, and this has contributed to the wines of many châteaux becoming more alike in style. The swathe of wine regions but was not about to let up on her campaign to liberate consumers and gatekeepers from identikit New World blockbuster wines.

“Parker has gotten such shit in the industry for that rant,” says Feiring. “It was really an embarrassment and caused a lot of negative attention for him. It really has chipped away at his reputation.” Still, the natural wine movement has itself been criticised within the industry for sanctimony and as an excuse for badly-made wine. It is only when you frame the movement as a broad church that it becomes possible to see how its contribution benefits the industry overall. Natural wines are made using sustainable practices in the vineyard, of which there are many, and as naturally as possible in the cellar. Some make judicious use of sulphur dioxide (SO₂), others try not to use it at all. The principal desire shared by natural winemakers is to rely on the fewest possible manipulations or additions. But some natural wine supporters are doubtless too ardent for the movement’s own good and, just like the mainstream industry, it produces its share of poorly-made wines. Nevertheless, in arguing that “most wines are natural”, Feiring thinks Parker just doesn’t get it. “Not every place can make important wine,” she would tweet that “the undefined scam called ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ wines will be exposed as a fraud (most serious wines have no additives)”. This line of attack isn’t new.

“The reference to ‘Parkerisation’ soon roused the Sage of Monkton and he retaliated by denouncing Feiring as a ‘charlatan’ with “snake-oil” who was “selling a gimmick”.

Most wines are natural, Parker said to Sommelier Journal in 2012. “I am totally in agreement that the responsibility of a wine producer is to put the most unmanipulated and natural product possible into the bottle; I’m totally against enzymes and agents. But I have no problem with commercial yeasts. One of the commercial yeasts that is widely used for Pinot Noir is called RC because it is cultured from Romanée-Conti, and it’s wonderful; it gives a real Burgundian character to the wine. If you are going to go the route of purity, you would prefer that everything comes from your microclimate, your whole little existence in the vineyard.” Well, yes, that rather is the point Feiring likes to make about identity. And then last January, in one of his New Year predictions, Parker tweeted that “the undefined scam called ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ wines will be exposed as a fraud (most serious wines have no additives)”. This line of attack isn’t new.

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By the end of her trip to Australia, Feiring had visited a swathe of wine regions but was not about to let up on her campaign to liberate consumers and gatekeepers from identikit New World blockbuster wines. Australia is in a similar place as California, she said, both having been taken off the path of finding their identity and instead gone chasing
Why natural wines?

The momentum behind the natural wine movement was initially driven by reaction against use of technology in winemaking, something that was actually pushed by Parker. “Whether it is the excessive filtration of wines or the excessive emulation of winemaking styles, it seems to be the tragedy of modern winemaking that it is now increasingly difficult to tell an Italian Chardonnay from one made in France or California or Australia,” he thundered in his essay *The Dark Side of Wine* (1999). “When the corporate winemakers of the world begin to make wines all in the same way, designing them to offend the least number of people, wine will no doubt lose its fascinating appeal and individualism to become no better than most brands of whiskey, gin, scotch or vodka.” In fact, opposition to intervention began decades ago with resistance to use of agrichemicals in the vineyard, followed by Parker’s championship of the unfined and unfiltered, and now the strong push against use of SO₂ in winemaking.
the market. “You’ve got all this damn Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz,” she said. “And Chardonnay. Do we really need another Chardonnay? It can be fine but do you really have the terroir and climate for it? I’m not so sure. I did have some fine Shiraz, also some damn fine expressions of Gamay, but there is very little acreage of that around. Is there a problem with your government, perhaps? I talked to people who are trying to plant (alternative varieties) and it takes four to eight years for it to clear. And what is it with the cheese? There is no unpasteurised cheese available. I’m sure that in your (grower markets) you have gorgeous fruits and vegetables, but there is very little much good in your (supermarkets). That was shocking to me. What with the climate and the land you should have some of the best stuff around. I mean, I barely had a good tomato. The benchmark for me is that if you’re growing great tomatoes, you’re making great wine. The two seem to go together.”

Feiring said she was “appalled” by the amount of chemical farming she saw. “I thought it would have been a little bit less,” she said. “Of course I was mostly visiting people who work organically or biodynamically, but then on the road – Whoa!” She said it was very interesting meeting people who are successfully dry-farming their land. “I was really impressed by a new generation of winegrowers intent on buying land less dependent on irrigation, and those working with alternative varietals that better suit the climate. That was very heartening,” she said. “Their numbers will be limited and their acreage isn’t going to be great but, similarly throughout the world, they’re going to be driving the engine a lot more. Their size might be small but their influence will be great.” Brian Croser couldn’t have put it better.

A final plea. Conversations with Wine Australia, which provides no financial backing to Rootstock, suggest it sees natural wine as a movable feast with overly broad parameters, implying it has other, more important agenda. Rootstock is justifiably proud of its self-sufficiency, but is not bringing the possibility of wine to uninvolved consumers a priority? That, along with celebrating the inherent diversity of wine in all its shapes and sizes, is surely something to be safeguarded. Or as Robert Parker once put it: “One must not forget that the great appeal of wine is that it is a unique, distinctive, fascinating beverage and different every time one drinks it.”

For some consumers, and especially Generation Y (1983-2000), natural wines provide an avenue into appreciation of wine as a beverage. Research shows that the perception of wine as complicated and intimidating to the uninvolved is at least partly responsible for the relative slowness with which Generation Y has come to wine. But when they progress to natural wine from the food or even craft beer perspective – with their emphasis on freshness, raw ingredients and authenticity – wine is lifted from its niche and made cross-cultural. This is something to which younger consumers can relate because natural wine is nothing if not authentic. Natural winemakers frequently even look as though they have a story to tell and Generation Y wants to hear it because it takes wine out of its traditional, exclusionary role. Wine is demystified and made accessible: sustainable vines, hand-picked fruit, no additions or adjustments, just a naturally-made artisan product. Rather than florid notes that list more attributes than a human person has the physiological capacity to perceive in one taste, the emphasis is on the story of the wine. And with its impeccable countercultural credentials, natural wine is on the cusp of being ‘cool’. All this with minimal marketing spend.
Some 13,500 consumers attended Rootstock 2014. Sixty-eight producers also attended and slightly more than half were Australian. Some very fine and more established Australian producers included Cullen (Margaret River), Castagna (Beechworth), Paxton (McLaren Vale), Gemtree (McLaren Vale), Jasper Hill (Heathcote) and Lark Hill (Canberra). Notable foreign producers were Muddy Water (North Canterbury), Millton (Gisborne), Albert Mann (Alsace), Radikon (Friuli), Rippon (Central Otago), Cappellano (Piemonte), Poggerino (Chianti Classico) and Hiedler (Kamptal).

Less well-known producers – receiving a little more coverage here – included Ochota Barrels (Adelaide Hills), represented by their savoury 2013 ‘I am the Owl Syrah’. Harvested early to retain high natural acidity, the wine was 100 percent whole bunch-fermented with no additions and then macerated in seasoned oak on skins and stalks for 12 weeks. Their medium-bodied, bright ruby 2013 Fugazi Grenache from Bawin Springs has a sweet red berry character but with chalky tannins and savouriness. Bobar Wines’ medium-bodied 2012 Syrah (Yarra Valley) is a wine of quiet intrigue. Quite fragrant and layered with a distinctly spicy, tarry Northern Rhône character, it was fermented by carbonic maceration.

There is much to savour in Tom Shobbrook’s wines and a more articulate and enthusiastic proponent of natural wines is hard to find. His 2013 Il Cicco Riesling from the Eden Valley spent a year on skins and is cloudy but unmistakably varietal with its intense, high-acid citrus line. Shobbrook says his wines are like him, presumably meaning disheveled and unruly, but in fact there is keen intelligence at play behind all of them. His 2013 Giallo Sauvignon Blanc under his Didi label is also cloudy from extended skin contact but vibrant and crisp with primary tropical fruit. His red wines are closer to the mainstream though not less natural. Tommy Ruff, the entry-level red, is a Shiraz Mourvèdre (Barossa) blend that is soft and round but savoury, while the 2012 Seppeltsfield Syrah (Barossa) is clearly of place with its nose of sweet black fruits and rich palate, but with a fineness and elegance untrammeled by overt use of oak. Shobbrook also bottles under his Didiier label for which fruit is sourced from local growers: a light and delicate Cinsault from 90-year-old vines and an earthy, minerally, structured Carignan. Smallfry’s 2013 Joven from a Tempranillo, Garnacha, Monastrell, Carinena, Bastardo and Tinto Arinto Barossa blend had lovely primary black fruit and good mid-palate density but a 2012 Dandy in the Clos Cabernet Franc (McLaren Vale) was outsized and lacking in varietal definition.

Pyramid Valley Vineyards (North Canterbury) is establishing a reputation for its various Pinot Noir offerings – Earth Smoke, Angel Flower, Calvert – which are widely liked for their lovely scents, earthy nose and structure to age from natural acids and fine-grained tannins. Now they have produced a quite remarkable 2010 Cabernet Franc with striking fruit purity that is varietally correct and without herbaceousness or, it must be said, puppy-breath finish (see main story). Sourced from Howell Vineyard in Hawkes Bay, handpicked and 80 percent destemmed, the fruit underwent a seven-day cold soak, 27-day fermentation on skins, natural Spring malolactic followed by 15 months on original lees in used French oak barrels (predominantly hogsheads). It was bottled unfined and unfiltered on the Winter equinox with no sulphur added at any stage, including bottling. In other words, nothing added, nothing taken away. All wines are bottled under screwcap and no shipping issues have arisen. Now that is quite a story.

From the cradle of wine civilisation came a range of Georgian wines made from indigenous red and white varieties, fermented and raised in qvevri (subterranean organic beeswax-lined clay pots) by a certified biodynamic winegrower, Pheasant’s Tears, using minimal sulphur at bottling. The whites – some quite amber-coloured – included 2009 Rkatsitelli (amber, rich ripe fruit, spicy with grainy texture and dry finish), Mtsvane (bold, apricot kernel character, good mid-palate density, tannic), 2011 Chinuri (lighter, zesty, lifted, grainy), and a 2011 Kisi (smokey, quite astringent). The reds included a 2012 Tavkveri (bright, medium-bodied, fine tannins though fruit was diffused), 2007 unfiltered Saperavi (powerful, earthy, firm, characterful and classy) and a 2013 Shavkapito (tank sample showing very firm tannins, sweet black ripe primary fruit and spice, very dry finish). None of the wines exceeded 12.5 percent alcohol and all were carried by firm acids.
WHERE TO EAT AND WHERE TO DRINK

I STAYED AT CLAY’S When my friend and colleague, the photographer Clay McLachlan, suggested I stay at his refurbished home and guest house all the way in Bonvicino, I knew that the location wasn’t really central to my plans. Sure, it was outside the heart of zona Barola, but the offer was so generous, I didn’t hesitate too terribly long. And as it turned out, if I hadn’t stayed at his Villa San Lorenzo, just above the Dolcetto-town of Dogliani I’d have missed great coffee, my first baby fox and a cozy nest to burrow into after a day of tasting. It didn’t take more than a few minutes to know the perfect way to enjoy the spot, high up in the foggy hills, was to pack the rafters with barolo-freak friends whose idea of heaven is dragging off local produce, focusing on white truffles, hauling the bounty back to cook ensemble in the fully equipped kitchen, and downing gallons of older nebbiolo before rolling into a fluffy bed a mere few meters away from the action. While that wouldn’t happen on this trip, I did get comfort, wireless, excellent views, deep tubs, a perfectly appointed house deep in beauty. And as I left in the morning, I came to love the ten-minute drive to coffee and the privacy of it all.

If you book Clay’s for truffle season or if you just feel like an adventure in search of small pleasures, jot these two tips down:

EUGENIO TRUFFA This was my ten-minute drive away caffeine joint. You won’t find it in any guide books, probably because its hometown, Bossolasco, isn’t in any of the guidebooks either. (Even if it is on the road Napoleon traveled.) What you will find is morning coffee and apricot crostada from their fancy pasticceria and artisanal chocolate bars as well. But as fab as all that is, the one thing you must travel to Truffa for is afternoon gelato. Please, take my word for it, this is a serious must-visit for any serious food person in the area. After a day in Barbaresco I continued on page 8

HOW TO MAKE A VIRGIN BLUSH

The story goes that at last October’s Meilleur Sommelier de France competition, Olivier Poussier (who held the title of Meilleur Sommelier du Monde) was asked to offer a toast to rosé. Instead, he delivered its obituary. In front of his Provençal hosts he proclaimed that due to technology, rosé had become a travesty. The true version no longer existed. It seems behind the death of rosé was the obsession with a certain blushing virgin color. Palest of pinks. Onion skins. Delicacy and beauty. And when one is obsessed with a color instead of a wine, problems bubble over.

One way the thirst for a pale rosé color is quenched is through the use of PVPP (polyvinylpyrrolidone) a polymer with a checkered past. Its usage history ranges from blood plasma substitute to battery additive. To find out more, I went to enologist Pierre Sanchez who had this to say:

continued on page 9
In this issue I’ve a few traditional wines that just are beauties even if they aren’t natural at heart. This is one. It is compellingly gorgeous. If you can find the 2004, it’s salt caramel without the sugar, all honey and nut and flowers and edge. Easier to find is the 2006. Almond and spice. This is the reason we drink wine.

Fabio Bartolomei is an ex-patriot Scott who is Italian, who moved to Spain and is a nut who is a little mad genius of a hybrid. He’s happy at an outdoor gin bar in Madrid in the freezing rain, but he also can manage birthing this: peach juice masquerading as wine.

I’m beginning to think that the appley chenin is one of the hardest grapes to work with. It reacts poorly to overworking and easily loses its acid. But when it’s beautiful, it’s beautiful. This is beautiful. From the glorious vintage of 2010. Little Jo (not Big Jo Pithon, but step-son, Little Jo Paillé) bought grapes from two parcels, one from schist and the other from limestone. Has its charm and attitude and that extra something I adore: a slight bitter edge.

Love this one from Chardons, it has that pale blush without the use of any pea or PVPP. Refreshing. Yum.
**La Clarine Farm**

**2012 Rosé**

*Where:* Sierra Foothills, California  
*Grape:* Syrah, Mourvedre, Semillon, Viognier  
*Ag:* Sustainable  
*SO₂:* At bottling  
*Price:* $20  
*Importer:* Amy Atwood Selections in California, David Bowler Wine in NYC

Loved this summery wine from Hank, wonderfully refreshing. The pale color comes from 2-3 hours of skin contact and time in the press. As to the flavor? Well it kind of tastes like Hank blended in watermelon juice.

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**Alfredo Maestro**

**2012 Amanda Rosado**

*Where:* Ribera del Duero  
*Grape:* Garnacha Tintorera  
*Ag:* Organic  
*SO₂:* None  
*Price:* $25  
*Importer:* Jose Pastor Selections

Damned serious wine from a single vineyard, called El Cuchillejo, with high elevation, almost 1000 meters. These are 60-year-old vines grown on grape-loving clay calcareous soils. No pea protein or PVPP here. Instead the dramatic color comes from 3-5 hours skin contact, fermented in small stainless steel vats, and bottled early with nothing added and nothing taken away. 500 bottles produced, so get online.

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**Vinos Ambiz**

**2010 Malvar Sobremadre**

*Where:* Madrid, Spain  
*Grape:* Pinot, Gamay  
*Ag:* Organic  
*SO₂:* None  
*Price:* $27  
*Importer:* Jose Pastor Selections

The color is rose, the spirit is orange. Low in acid which makes this very much like fruit juice (black currant juice to be specific)—and extremely appealing with its food-worthy tannin.

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**La Clarine Farm**

**2011 Home Vineyard**

*Where:* Sierra Foothills, California  
*Grape:* Various  
*Ag:* Organic  
*SO₂:* At bottling  
*Price:* $24  
*Importer:* Amy Atwood Selections in California, David Bowler Wine in NYC

Home Vineyard always has a higher alcohol level than Hank’s other wines and we feel it here even in 2011. But it’s a beauty, with plenty of that savory sage underfoot with silty tannin. Goes for days, if you can keep your hands off that long.
Iuli
2010 Nino
Where: Monferrato, Italy
Grape: Pinot Nero
Ag: Organic
SO₂: Middling
Price: $33
Importers: Indie Wineries

Talk about a wine growing on you. Over a period of four days, this really crawled into my bed. At first pop the fruit subdued nicely, impressed by the balance. But as we went on, my, this cookie talked. 12.5% alcohol, it fits like a glove. It’s got that blood and iron thing going on. With an aspirin finish and a dose of rosewater. Fabrizio calls himself a barberista, but this pinot nero was the shit.

Cascina Roccalini
2009 Barbaresco Roccalini
Where: Barbaresco, Italy
Grape: Nebbiolo
Ag: Organic
SO₂: Not so sure, but not too high, not super low
Price: $40
Importers: Indie Wineries

Another great find from the Indie Wineries people. This smacked of old world rusticity in the best possible authentic way. The story here is that the grapes went to Giacosa for a while until the family wised up and kept them for themselves. A touch of volatility which works well in the round 2009 vintage. I would stash this away for a while and let those gorgeous tannins develop into their next phase.

Eugenio Rosi
2010 Poiema
Where: Vallagarina, Trentino, Italy
Grape: Marzemino
Ag: Organic
SO₂: No information, but sensible
Price: $38
Importers: Savio Soares Selections

We had the 2009, and the 2010, likewise aged in local cherry and chestnut barrels, is equally delicious. It’s still like pelaverga with the complexity of nebbiolo and full of stunning tea and flower power. There’s a dusty dolcetto-like quality. Seductive, chalky. Soils are clay, basalt and some limestone, and the wine made me think of crumbly stones.

A Vita
2010 Ciro Rosso Classico Superiore
Where: Calabria, Italy
Grape: Gaglioppo
Ag: Organic
SO₂: Lowish
Price: $20
Importers: David Bowler Wine/Chambers Street Direct

Tasted this for the first time in Vini Veri and shame on me because Chambers Street has carried them. Fell in love with the old-fashioned goodness of clay and dust.
Terre de Chardons
Bien Luné
WHERE Costières de Nîme, France
GRAPE Syrah
AG Biodynamic
SO₂ A little high for the natural side, very low for conventional
PRICE $15
IMPORTER Indie Wineries

A white mashup of favorita, arneis, cortese, and sauvignon blanc. I could have sworn Alessandra told me the reason a muscat florality was there was because a little bit sneaked into the 2010. A little drier this year than last and at a lower price. Just a delightful, fun white.

Bera Vittorio E Figli
2010 Bianco Arcese
WHERE Asti, Italy
GRAPE Arneis, Cortese, Sauvignon Blanc
AG Organic
SO₂ At bottling
PRICE $15
IMPORTER Louis/Dressner Selections

A basic from one of my favorite burgundy producers, this is made from the leftovers of barrels which makes it mainly a declassified Savigny. But there’s a little bit of Grand Cru Corton in there too. Whatever they call it, I call it pretty, silky and delicate.

Cantina Filippi
2011 Castelcerino Soave Classico
WHERE Veneto, Italy
GRAPE Garganega
AG Organic
SO₂ Middling low
PRICE $15
IMPORTER Polaner Selections

Soave can be delightful and sometimes profound. I tasted this at Villa Favorita, the springtime wine fair run by Angiolino Maule. This lovely expression of garganega comes from soils of basalt and chalk and gets pretty concentrated with lemon and stone. Just delicious and age worthy. They also make the more serious version, Montesorania. It sometimes develops an oxidizing flor as it did in the 2008. Melon, muted and mineral. Seek it out, please.

Domaine Chandon de Briailles
2011 “Louise” Bourgogne Pinot Noir
WHERE Savigny, Burgundy
GRAPE Pinot noir
AG Biodynamic
SO₂ Low
PRICE $20
IMPORTER David Bowler Wines

A basic from one of my favorite burgundy producers, this is made from the leftovers of barrels which makes it mainly a declassified Savigny. But there’s a little bit of Grand Cru Corton in there too. Whatever they call it, I call it pretty, silky and delicate.
As we tried to suss out which apartment was Lorenzo Accomasso’s, I noticed roosters doing a damned good imitation of a Chagall painting perched there on the roof of the coop’s hut. We then walked into an open door, into a disheveled receiving room and saw the baseball-capped, blue-eyed Barolo legend himself, waiting for us.

Lorenzo Accomasso of La Morra is an outsider as well as a holdout for tradition. The winemaker is now in his 70s, and only speaks Piemontese dialect. Which is why Giorgio, a Piemontese man who lives in and imports wine into Australia, and wants Lorenzo for his portfolio, convinced Marta Rinaldi (Giuseppe’s daughter) to come along and interpret.

Lorenzo talked slowly and poured even slower. He finally allowed us the dregs of two open bottles while he rattled on to Marta. I sipped. I scribbled. “These wines are my new heartthrobs.”

Lorenzo is an elderly bad boy who makes thrilling wines, or at least the two that I tasted that afternoon. I’d never had them before as they are currently not available in the United States. I imagine they still remain somewhere on some wine lists, purchased in the days when Winebow was their stateside importer. But Lorenzo stopped that relationship fifteen years back. He found the process too much hassle—the back label, the front label, the rules and the red tape. His is old-fashioned, traditional Barolo, showing off all of that Baroloness that left me speechless before I had a wine vocabulary; road tar, roses, licorice, a fine translucent sun-bleached, Brook’s bicycle seat. His fermentation occurs in cement vats for about 25 days, maceration on the skins, then into old big botti. Done.

“He could make out a little of the conversation and whispered to me, “He said he had lots of girlfriends and women friends he’d have loved to take to bed but he didn’t want to mess with the friendships.”

Ah, I thought, the roosters weren’t only on the roof. If Lorenzo was gunning for Marta, a clear 45 years his junior, then good luck to this fine winemaker with the missing teeth and sparkling violet eyes and mischievous grin.

He finally poured us one more wine, the Rocche. It had more color, with a needle mouth, rustic edges, a touch of Good’N’Plenty candy and fresh salty air. “They’re not polished,” he said of his wines. Thank goodness for that.

But if you want to drink them, you have to go to Germany or Japan, or better still, go knock on his door. His is brilliant stuff, but it’s over when Lorenzo is over. Seek him out. Bring cash. Or maybe just bring Marta instead.

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When I said I was headed to Cantina Vallana in the Alta Piemonte—the northeast of the region—I saw the eyebrows arch. Then would come the “Why?”

After all, the Vallanas aren’t on the current list of hipster-approved wines. But from the 1950s to the 1980s—when I first encountered them—they had their celebrated moment. My friend Peter (aka the Young Collector in The Battle) discovered the wines while reading Frank Prial in The New York Times.
back in the late 70s. When we tasted them, we loved them for their sophistication, for their price and for their complexity and indestructibility—old-fashioned deliciousness. And then sometime in the late 90s they were gone.

I assumed wrongly they either went out of business or went barrique-crazy like the rest of Italy at the time. Now, thanks to Michael Skurnik Wines and the Rare Wine Company, the Cantina is back in the USA and still respectfully, unapologetically traditional: long bottle age, no perceptible wood, high on the acid, medium on the sulfur.

So, on my last night in Piemonte, I drove past the sea of designer outlets (Prada! Loro Piana!) and turned right into the parking lot under the imposing, flat signage.

Here’s the short overview of the Cantina: “Mummy,” Giuseppina Vallana, from the family’s 4th generation, fell in love with Guy Fogarty, a teacher from the UK. They married in 1980 and her father, Antonio, took his new son-in-law, who seemed to have a good palate and a love for the stuff, under his wing. Guy made the wines until 1996 when he died in an accident during the harvest, leaving two young daughters and a fifteen-year-old son, Frances.

The teenager started to work alongside his mother, bringing the number of winemaking generations to five. I have some knowledge of Guy’s wines, but it was mostly the grandfather, Antonio (third generation, if you’re keeping count) who’s glorious, indestructible vintages I drank too long ago.

While looking for Frances, I snooped around the deserted winery: Huge post war concrete vats, ancient destemmers…there was something untouched here, in that Lopez de Heredia way.

Hearing voices, I stopped snooping and climbed up the stone steps to find him, now 32, and Giuseppina preparing an extravagant tasting that was to stretch back to 1955. It was hard not to plunk myself down and taste, but with the sun still up, I dragged him off to the DOC vineyards of Boca, beautiful, rural, rolling, and largely forgotten.

We drove into the rear of the 10 ha appellation where the sprawling Maggiorino trellising still thrives.

Chemical farming also seemed to dominate. I wondered if this included my beloved Vallana.

I couldn’t really tell. Their vineyards in Boca had been grubbed up, awaiting replanting. But we arrived to the naked plot, isolated, on an incline overlooking the huge monastery. “See the different colored soils?” Frances pointed to veins of rose, red and white. He explained that the highly acidic, granitic porphyry soils might be why the wines have an even longer life than the wines of Barolo, where the grapes grow on limestone. Also the soil in Boca out-acids those of nearby Ghemme and Gattinara, perhaps the reason the DO rules requires the addition of the grapes vespolina and uva rara to soften up the wine and add gentle aromatics.

The soil lesson was intense, but I still wanted to see if Frances farmed as poorly as his neighbors. So I begged a trip to his vineyard in Gattinara, the most well known DOCG of this area that, along with Boca, includes Bramaterra, Colline Novarese, Fara, Ghemme, Lessona and Sizzana. Not exactly household names.

Marina, Frances’s sister, says in their family “tradition is a religion,” and so this youngest generation still believes in the old-fashioned way of long bottle aging, natural malos and no other adjustments. Frances himself says that because they are small, they can take their time and give the bottles the aging they need. All oak used is ancient and if he had his way if it wasn’t required by the DOC laws, he wouldn’t use it at all.
But as traditional as all of this is, I do have some concerns about the future. Except for the Gattinara plot, the newly planted vines will be clones. And while I was snooping around, there was a package of organic yeast. Frances explained it away saying because harvest always happens in the colder weather, without temperature control he’s had experiences with irregular ferments, and so to pre-empt, he sometimes yeasts. And, as he says, “I don’t believe in dogma.

His mother laid out a little spread with savory cake and a neighbor’s cheese. As we started in, Frances couldn’t wait to show his first methode champenoise—a nebbiolo-based bottling. It was raspberry and fun. The next two wines seemed yeasted, but by the time we got into Gattinara 2004, I felt a more natural fermentation (but perhaps it was my imagination?) We went through three generations of winemakers in that afternoon. The wines were beautiful examples of the Italian bottles that lead me into the country decades ago. As we delved deeper into the older vintages, heading towards the 1955, Frances said with that family-inherited twinkle in his eye, “My grandmother used to complain that my grandfather Antonio never looked at her the way he looked at a glass of wine.”

And that 1955? It was a field blend of God knows what and from own-rooted vines, thanks to that high acid soil in Boca. It was certainly lively, changeable, leathery, a little pruney but juicy and frankly thrilling.

I do have my prejudices, such as my belief that native yeast ferments provide for more complex wines. But still, this is one case where I will just have to get over myself.

Boca 2004 still has the old Boca vines and it is just luscious. Long acidity, cherry, strawberry, sage and licorice. Savory and a mile-wide finish. The taste of dirt in the best of ways. The 2000 was beautifully evolved with a little bit of funk, with rust and blood, chocolate and spice. The 1997 went whoa! Nebbiolo! Acidity! The 1996 was Guy’s last vintage and Frances’s come to Jesus wine, his benchmark. It was far younger than the 2000, fleshy with a handful of Indian spices. Prices for new vintages of Boca seem to sit under $30. ❖

continued from page 1 “Where to Eat and Where to Drink”

drove by on my way back to Villa San Lorenzo. I eyed the bikers on their break, thought about my growing waistline and threw reservations over the cliff. I’ve been around the gelato block, but this unsung spot grabbed me. The purity and power of the dairy, the barely sweet sensibility. You’ll be glad I told you.

DOWN THE OTHER ROAD On the two nights I was without dinner plans, I was lucky to have the fratelli of Osteria dei Binelli take care of me. When fagged out from visits, this restaurant, tucked into the woods, was just ten minutes down the other road from San Lorenzo. They have a solid little wine list at gentle markups and a first for me in Italy—the alcohol levels were listed.

An entire bottle of Nicoletta Bocca’s 2010 San Fereolo Dolcetto and two dishes of steamed potatoes with fresh anchovies, a little salad and a little wrap of eggplant and cheese were mine for 24€. Unable to finish, they sweetly packed me off with the leftovers from my bottle and a fresh baked loaf of bread just in case I was hungry in the middle of the night. I wasn’t, but this little sweetie was hard to resist at 1am.

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Closed on Tuesday
LUNCHING WITH SOLDERA
After a torturous interview with Gianfranco Soldera (look to Town & Country, November 2013 issue) and a trip to his vineyards where he explained the fragile iron-infused schist, we retired to his ‘office,’ the little rustic restaurant Il Leccio.

The food has that kind of happy, simple Tuscan perfection that I long for. In deference to me, in spite of my protestations, Gianfranco and his daughter Monica went meatless. The man can eat, let me tell you. Of course it was easy to pack it in. It was wild asparagus season and we indulged. Wild asparagus and eggs, toothsome pasta with wild asparagus and somehow the best was magical wood-roasted vegetables including the kind of potato that could wring out emotions.

I never got to see the wine list—Soldera had his wines along and I felt if I asked to see it, he might hit me for being impolite. But Francesca Padovani, who lives in the town, told me the verticals are deep and decently priced. Soldera was packing the 2000 Riserva and the 1985 Vigna Institieti. The first was easy to love, the second started out difficult, but became easier and easier as it bloomed in the glass. I found myself thinking that both these wines made up both sides of this difficult man, who was sometimes lovable, sometimes difficult—but definitely knows how to pick a restaurant.

TRATTORIA IL LECCIO
Via Costa Castellare, 1 | Sant'angelo in colle, 53024 Montalcino, Italy
39 0577 844175
Closed on Wednesday ¬

"Provençal grapes are harvested relatively ripe and at rather high temperatures. The juices are generally quite colorful in the press but with oxidation and bacteria, sometimes colored juices can turn dark or orange. Provençal winemakers therefore use large doses of PVPP. In rosés, it’s used to remove the color, but also much of polyphenols—oxidized or not. PVPP also tampers with certain aroma and flavoring compounds. PVPP "corrects" bitterness and smooths out the flavor."

But there’s a problem. While this PVPP used to be allowed under EU organic law, it’s no longer the case. So what can winemakers who want super control over that hue do? They can try to adjust the wine with blending, they can try to capture the right color with the right amount of skin contact and they can still use casein and decolorizing charcoal (as they did before the arrival of the PVPP) and they can avail themselves of a new product from the enological company, Martin Vialatte. This chemical derived from pea protein now joins a growing group of additives and treatments allowed by European organic wine law.

Oh, not that it’s so bad…peas are natural, right? But if you want something real, if you’re the kind of drinker who drinks wine and not color, feel safe knowing there are plenty of glorious ones, and real virgins come in all shades of pink. ¬