

## JUNE 2018 – USA Gets Natty

*At the very least, all RJ wines are farmed organically/biodynamically (certified or verified practicing), fermented only with native yeasts, and produced with no additives except a small amount of sulfur (50ppm or less).*

### 2017 Johan Vineyards Pétillant-Naturel Melon de Bourgogne \$25

Region: Willamette Valley < Oregon

Grapes: Melon de Bourgogne

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter certified biodynamic farming, white clay/limestone/flint soils, grapes were destemmed and crushed, then left for 24 hours of skin contact before pressing. After pressing, the juice was fermented in barrel before it was bottled at the tail end of its primary fermentation on November 1, 2017; no added SO<sub>2</sub>; 36 cases; 11% ABV

Winemaker: Dan Rinke

We love our Pétillant Naturel (Pet'nat) here at Rock Juice! A quick refresher: Pet'nat is the OG method of producing sparkling wine, also called *methode ancestrale*, where the carbonation occurs from bottling the wine during the primary, alcoholic fermentation – capturing the carbon dioxide that is naturally released. This one from Demeter certified Biodynamic® Johan Vineyards is from their estate Melon grapes, a Loire variety they grafted into the vineyard in 2011. It's disgorged, so no cloudiness, no sediment. Just pure, elegant, lightly fizzy bubbles that tastes of fresh pear, flowers and rainbows. Pet'Nat for everybody, not just the adventurous! And only 36 cases made.

### 2017 Ovum 'Big Salt' White Blend \$18

Region: Elkton < Oregon

Grapes: 90% Gewurztraminer & Riesling, 8% Early Muscat, 2% Melon, Savignin Rose + Pinot Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic, 40+ year-old-vines on Windygap soils (deep, well-drained residuum and colluvium from sandstone and siltstone); Gewurztraminer & Riesling co-fermented in stainless steel, the rest fermented in old barrel; bottled, unfiltered, after 6 months on lees; no additions except a small amount of SO<sub>2</sub>; 12% ABV

Winemaker: John House

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: Last year's crowd favorite is back! A refresher: a couple falls in love working at a winery, decides to go off on their own and make natural, terroir-driven wines out of the best raw material they can find. Ovum is a project from John House and his wife in Oregon's Willamette Valley, who make 'Big Salt' from a mixed bag of aromatic varietals. There is grit and saltiness in the wine, along with floral, honeysuckle and tropical fruit notes balanced by chalky texture and pebbly minerality. Like a Hawaiian garden planted in the middle of Germany's Pfalz region. Aromatic but not sweet. A supremely satisfying sipper, and excellent food wine – at an everyday pricepoint -- to boot.

### 2017 Two Sheperds Trousseau Gris \$24

Region: x < California

Grapes: Trousseau

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Dry-farmed, organic farming (practicing); grapes are partially destemmed and left 5 days on the skins in a small open top container to start fermentation with native yeast, then pressed to neutral (old) barrels to finish fermentation and age for 7 months; left on heavy lees for 6 months; bottled unfiltered/unfiltered with 30ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 13.1% ABV; 125 cases made

Winemaker: William Allen

William Allen slings software by day, but his heart is in the Rhône. He was making wine in his garage and blogging about it for years before going pro with Two Shepherds, his one-man micro-winery. He works from purchased grapes, careful about organic, and models his wines on the Rhône and other French styles he loves, making tiny lots of old

world, low-intervention bottlings from cool climate sites. Like this Trousseau Gris, one of the world's most obscure varieties -- there is just a single planting in CA, the Fanucchi Vineyard, in the foggy Russian River Valley of Sonoma. A light pinkish-gray skinned grape originally from the Jura region in France, where the grape is now essentially extinct, making the 10 acres in Sonoma the only source. The 5 days on the skins imparts a beautiful rose gold color that makes you think rosé, but this is most definitely a white, with texture and body. A Unicorn wine for sure, one that transports you to the glorious days of teen summer, before you were a responsible adult (sigh). Like rolling down the windows and feeling the fresh wind in your face. It's breezy, like Yacht Rock playing on the radio of your mom's Cadillac Eldorado. It's like biting into a fresh peach and licking the juice as it drips on your salty hands. It's super delicious. Grab some before she disappears, like all unicorns inevitably do.

### **2015 SSON Albariño Wentzel Vineyard \$20**

Region: x < California

Grapes: Albariño

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming; Franciscan sandstone mixed with clay loam; hole cluster processed using a gentle champagne press for 3 hours; fermentation in stainless steel; bottled unfinned with 15ppm SO<sub>2</sub>; 99 cases

Winemaker: James Wasserman

Most rookie winemakers take the plunge with popular grapes (you know, Cab, Chard, SB...) But when forestry major, long-distance runner and former restaurant consultant James Wasson threw his hat in the winemaking ring, he went out on a limb with Riesling and aromatic white varieties. And insisted on organic/family farmed fruit, a somewhat limiting requirement that led him to the Wentzel Vineyard -- and its bounty of Albariño -- in Anderson Valley. The result is a gorgeous and complex example of the Albariño grape, a native of Galicia and rarity in California -- one that isn't flabby or high-alcohol as most Cali attempts at this grape have been. This is the 2015 vintage, as James holds it back a bit -- he says it started out angular and austere, but with some bottle age, the wine is finally coming into its own. You get an electric jolt of grapefruit, with a salty rim. Bright and punchy yet complete (thanks to the bottle age), James manages to bring out Albariño's true varietal character in the wine. Like it's Spanish brother, this wine is AMAZING with food, especially fish, yogurt-based sauces (hello, all Mediterranean food), greens and anything fried.

### **2016 Stolpman Estate Sauvignon Blanc \$20**

Region: Santa Ynez Valley < CA

Grapes: Sauvignon Blanc

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: biodynamic farming, dry farmed; limestone soil; 50% fermented and aged in tank; 50% in large French oak barrels; bottled with <20ppm sulfur; 12.5% ABV

Winemaker: Sashi Moorman

Peter and Jessica Stolpman practice not only clean farming and winemaking, but also employ what might be the most progressive fair-trade policies in the US wine business. Their vineyard team is employed year-round (instead of seasonally, as with most wine operations), earn true living wages and a share of the profits. The vineyards have been organic and dry farmed since day one, so the soils have never seen pesticides. An homage to the stony Sauv Blancs of the Loire Valley that Peter and Jessice love, this pretty SB is all about the crystalline minerality from the limestone. Because limestone drains all water, of which there is already very little (because, California + dry-farming), so roots are forced to search deeper and deeper in pursuit of water. The search is futile, and the roots suck dry minerality instead, resulting in a bright, zippy wine with limey passion fruit notes, ripping acidity and stony minerality. With none of that green pepper, cat pee thing you often see in SBs. Total crowd pleaser.

### **2017 Ruth Lewandowski Rosé, Fox Hill Vineyard \$25**

Region: Mendocino County, California / Salt Lake City, Utah

Grapes: Touriga Nacional, Souzão

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; direct press; from Fox Hill Vineyard in Mendocino; sandstone rocky soils; full malolactic fermentation; bottled unfinned/unfiltered, just 5ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 11.8%ABV

Winemaker: Evan Lewandowski

**NEW VINTAGE ALERT:** It's super allocated but we got 4 cases of the 2017! Although made from grapes grown in Mendocino, CA, the Ruth Lewandowski wines hail from the area around Salt Lake City, Utah. Umm, why DRY Utah? He went to college at the University of Utah and fell head over heels for the place. Already a big-time ski bum, he went similarly all-in on wine and vowed to converge his two favorite things. After spending years traveling the globe, including Australia, France, New Zealand, Italy and California, Evan finally returned to Utah to realize his dream. One small glitch – Utah is not the hot bed of natural winemaking (as you might expect), so he had to start by buying fruit from organic vineyards in California and trucking the fermenting juice cross country in a refrigerated U-Haul. He has now planted his own vineyards in Utah, and wine from them is expected soon. So, could Utah be the next wine frontier? He sees great potential (6000+ foot elevations, cool, dry weather enhanced by high rainfall and melting Boulder Mountain snow, and a range of grape-friendly soil types), and also wants to offer a more sustainable option to the region's endless fields of alfalfa, a plant that strips land of its nutrients and requires 5x more water than vines. And OOOOOH, this rosé – so freaking delicious! It's made from two Portuguese grapes, Touriga (used to make Port) and Souzão, picked at optimal ripeness, pressed directly, fermented naturally without additions or subtractions. He allows malo to go through – because he says it really wanted to. It's dark pink, thanks to the thick Touriga skins, which also give a touch of tannin. Texturally it's white tea-like, and tastes of blood orange, peach and rose petal, with a slight hint of bubble gum. The palate is full, but not heavy, yet bright and snappy with a refreshing 11.8% ABV. It's a totally different and extremely pleasurable rosé drinking experience. Another American winemaker to watch.

### **2017 Lalalu Rosé \$22**

Region: Contra Costa County < France

Grapes: Mourvedre with a kiss of Merlot

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; sandy loam soils, picked for rosé, pressed off immediately, about 100 gallons separated out to let a flor develop then mixed back in; fermented in stainless steel and aged in old barrel on lees; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with 30ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>;

Winemaker: Laura Brennan Bissell

Lalalu is the second label from Laura Brennan's Inconnu, a 2017 [SF Chronicle Winemaker to Watch](#) and working mama of three whose babies travel with her as she travels the US slinging wine. She's a good friend, and total badass. All her wines have an elegance and balance to them, but this rosé is a standout. Made partially under flor -- in homage to Clos Tibouren, a culty Provençal rosé – but also to encourage more savory, herbal notes without having to age it for years. And to ensure that it is affordable and delicious right off the bat. Which it is. A beautiful light pink Provençal-style rosé, with mint and melon, salty acid and the slightest hint of tropical fruit. So refreshing for summer. Drink up. Now.

### **2017 Purity “Quench Orangerose” Rosé \$22**

Region: Sierra Foothills + Mendocino County < California

Grapes: Mourvèdre Tempranillo, Chardonnay

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: CCOF certified organic farming; granite and shallow clay/loam soils; Mourvèdre is direct pressed; Tempranillo + Chardonnay direct-pressed and co-fermented for 3 months; then blended and bottled unfinned/unfiltered under crown cap with no added SO<sub>2</sub>; 48 cases (so far – he bottles to order - total will be somewhere around 140); 11% ABV

Winemaker: Noel Diaz

Noel has begun giving his wines affectionate nicknames, and this one is the Orangerose, orange because, well, it's technically a rosé wine and has a vibrant orange hue. But this slightly pétillant beauty is a mash-up of wines, not your typical rosé blend. There is a long story about how this wine came to be, but basically there was a long heat spike

last year around around Labor Day (bad timing for grapes). This shut down the vines and they stopped photosynthesizing, to protect themselves, so, the Mourvèdre ended up with very high acids and relatively low sugar (not a very tasty combo). As Noel explains: *“this wine, already zippy from the granite soils, was lean and biting, too austere. One day I was tasting a friend on my rosé of Tempranillo and a small amount of Chardonnay that had been direct pressed and co-fermented for the longest time, maybe 3 months. And it stuck at like maybe 1 degree brix. After malo, it got a bit blousy, awkward, not very exciting. Back to tasting with that friend, it occurred to me as we tasted that maybe the two wines could support each other, maybe the sum would be better than the parts, because I always felt that each one had merit but was incomplete. Then I took two samples and combined them proportionally; they sang! The wine was harmonious, and much better as a blend. But then that RS started to get jiggy with the yeasts in the other barrels and the wine began refermenting, that wine is still fermenting. Funny thing though, it tastes super dry with this great acidity. And when I bottle, the ferment stops. That’s the reason for the crown cap, just in case, for insurance - sparkling or not, I love it.”* So do we, almost as much as we love the adorable Noel.

#### **2015 Purity Syrah ‘Blue Licorish’ Oakstone Vineyard \$24**

Region: Beaujolais < Burgundy < France

Grapes: Gamay

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; light red clay over granite soils at 1800 feet elevation; foot-stomped and fermented whole cluster in an open top fermenter, then 26 months in huge, old wooden casks; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with 15ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 125 cases; 13% ABV

Winemaker: Noel Diaz

Noel Diaz is one of California’s natural winemakers on the rise. And he’s not just calling it in. He farms two of the five vineyards he works with himself, makes the wine, then bottles, labels, and delivers the wine by hand. Everything he works with is organic, and many of his wines get no added sulfur, and all are squeaky clean – no faults, no funk – and reflective of their place. Noel is a poetic writer, so we’ll let him describe this Syrah: *“boy, the blueberries, the bay, fennel – it’s like a warm cozy comforter by the fireplace on a cold night. It spent something like 26 months in barrel. It’s dark, but not heavy, it unfolds over time like passages in a great piece of writing. I’m so smitten with this one, it’s kind of exotic with all that spice, but then it’s got these cocoa powder tannins. Blue, every time I drink it the image of blue comes to mind. I don’t know if I’d be able to peg it as Syrah in a blind tasting -- that characteristic is there, but very subtle. Blue, that’s the best way to describe this wine, blue, herbaceous, powdery, layered.”* His description is spot on -- this is blueberry juice. Forget what you know and expect in Syrah, and drink this. Mind-blowingly good.

#### **2017 St. Reginald Parish The Marigny Carbonic Pinot Noir \$26**

Region: Willamette Valley < Oregon

Grapes: Pinot Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: From the Sisu Vineyard, which is 1 year into Organic certification); marine sediment, volcanic soils; 14-day whole bunch carbon fermentation in stainless steel. Fruit pressed off and juice fermented to dryness in a separate tank. Filtered only to separate out large solids and bottled without sulfur and no fining; 75 cases; 13% ABV  
Winemaker: Andrew Reginald Young

Andrew Young, the son of a preacher man from New Orleans, started as a musician but later caught the wine bug. This happens a lot in the world of natural wine. In 2007 he immersed himself in Willamette Valley’s natty winemaking scene, then launched The Marigny label (a nod to that neighborhood in the French Quarter known for its live music). All fruit is sourced from friends with old, established sites – an important point, as access to top quality fruit means he doesn’t need to do much in the winery. Bootstrapping things together, he started with a press he rented from a beer store and would use his friend’s meat fridge to cold soak. Things have evolved a tiny bit from there, but Andy intends to keep things simple and small. In fact, he makes miniscule quantities (75 cases here), so we’re super excited to get some of this neon-red, extremely gulp-able Pinot. Going down, it’s all sour cherry and blood orange with the texture of Jello – no sharp edges, softly spicy, and a bit squishy, in the very best way. A little Campari on the finish.

Outrageously good. Wish there was more, but this is it. So...if you love it, act fast, get your bad self a small stash to ration out over the summer. Chilled, of course.

#### **2017 Amplify Carignane Camp Four Vineyard \$24**

Region: Santa Barbara County < CA

Grapes: Carignan

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming (practicing); gravely loam soils; foot-crushed whole-cluster on the bottom, layering uncrushed whole-cluster on top, creating a mixture of regular and carbonic fermentation, then pressed off after 12 days; completes primary/secondary fermentations in neutral barrel and ages in barrel for an additional 5 months before being bottled unfinned/unfiltered with 10ppm SO<sub>2</sub>

Winemaker: Cameron and Marlen Porter

I had the pleasure of visiting Cameron Porter last summer at his production facility in Santa Maria, tasting his wines at the source – and was seriously blown away. Cam and his wife Marlen are making some of the best natural wines in Santa Barbara County under their brand, Amplify, working thoughtfully and respectfully, rather than dogmatically. Cam explains, “I don’t consider what we do non-interventionist. For me, it’s like any other piece of artwork. You start with this block of clay and shape it into something. So, we’re maybe not intervening by adding yeast, acid, etc., but we are very clear about the direction we are taking these wines. We approach each vineyard, asking, “What does this want to be?” Though they’ve been at it since 2013, they still hold down full-time day jobs in the wine biz, focusing on Amplify every day before and after work, every day off, and hand-bottling/labeling all 550 cases. The Camp 4 vineyard, located on the eastern end of Santa Ynez Valley, in the sub-AVA known as the Los Olivos, is owned by the Chumash band of Native Americans, which Cam believes contributes to the incredible energy he feels there. He was inspired to work with Carignane by his love of wines from the Roussillon, of which his 2017 Carignane reminds him. It was a cooler vintage, so they didn’t pick until September and let the fermentation go longer, hence the darker color and stemmy spiciness, with bright, lifted fruit and low tannins from the carbo treatment. Ultimately, though, says, Cam, it tastes like it came from California, more specifically Camp 4 vineyard, and that has always been the end goal. We love the bright and juicy red fruit and spice that seems to soar in your mouth. Fab with a little chill.

#### **2017 Combe Trousseau \$30**

Region: Ballard Canyon < Santa Ynez Valley < California

Grapes: Trousseau

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, limestone soils 30% whole cluster press, grapes crushed by foot in concrete then aged 8 months in neutral French barrel; bottled unfinned/unfiltered; zero added SO<sub>2</sub>; 330 cases; 13% ABV

Winemaker: Raj Parr & Peter Stolpman

Famed somm turned winemaker Raj Parr has gone rogue, putting himself in the natural wine camp with his new collaboration with organic farmer/winemaker Peter Stolpman, called Combe (a French term for a small sheltered valley within a vineyard). A few years ago, Raj became convinced of Ballard Canyon’s potential for the pale red Trousseau grape, native of the Jura region in France, on the limestone soils of the Stolpman estate vineyards. His hunch was right. Peter says: “the all limestone soils and the arid, windy conditions of Ballard Canyon created the perfect storm for making a Trousseau that has no mold/mildew. Because the clusters are large and tight, and the skins are so thin, mold is always an issue in Jura, but here we have the opportunity to make the purest Trousseau in the world. We don’t need to barrel age it long for oxidation/integration, and there is no need to preserve it because we bottle it within 6 months of harvest.” We’re loving the result, a gorgeous light-bodied red with bright red fruits and a funky, deep soul. Despite having no added sulfur, it’s clean and pure, with the flavor coming purely from the fruit, rather than mold and Brett which you often find in Trousseau from Jura. With sour cherry, red berry and that raw, sexy spiciness that comes from whole-cluster, this is the light red that keeps the party going long after dinner is finished.

#### **2017 Purity Viognier ‘Vio/Vio’ \$22**

Region: Sierra Foothills < California

Grapes: Viognier

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; light red clay, dusty soils over granite, lots of granite at 1800 feet elevation; tread by foot and pressed the following day. The juice was then held in a settling tank for 2 days before being transferred to 4 used French and American oak barrels. The ferment began in short order and took approximately 4 weeks; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO<sub>2</sub>; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Noel Diaz

One more wine from the nicest, and one of the nattiest, Cali winemakers. We'll let him describe the wine: *"I threw it in the freezer one day for a quick chill, then decided to work out - 30-ish minutes later I was hot and thirsty and the Viognier sounded like a great idea. By then, it had started to freeze, there were these weird striations running down the inside of the bottle, like ice chains. I opened the bottle thinking the whole thing was going to seize up like a slushy, but it didn't -- the wine was so tight and laser sharp, but dense at the same time. It was very refreshing, like drinking concentrated mint and cucumber. Later as the wine came to room temp, it began unfolding and lime and bergamot characteristics develop, then as I kept drinking it, over the course of maybe an hour and a half, with dinner, I couldn't stop going back to the glass, to inhale it, and for another taste. Something in it just kept me so involved, then suddenly it occurred to me that what I was drinking was like a dry Chartreuse. I've run that thought by several friends while sharing other bottles and they all agreed with my assessment. It's a beautiful wine. As with all my wines, it is not filtered, there is a very light settling at the bottom of the bottle, nothing heavy, just like a wispy lace."*  
Yes please!

### **NV Fausse Piste 'Pizza Sauce' \$22**

Region: Camuntum < Austria

Grapes: Malbec, Syrah, Grenache, Pinot Noir + more

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Fruit from 2014,2015,2016 vintages from a bunch of Oregon vineyards: Red Willow, Jaxon, Patina, Sonrisa, Johan, Cooper Mtn., Mae's, Granite and more; fermented using a mix of carbonic, traditional whole cluster, stems, 100% destemmed and other fermentation techniques; aged on the lees in older French oak barrels & puncheons for 10 to 45 months; no fining or filtration; 40ppm So<sub>2</sub> at bottling; 400 cases; 13.5% ABV

Winemaker: Jesse & Maryna Skiles

From a chef-turned-winemaker who works out of a small cellar in SE Portland, with minimal handling and no additions except a bit of SO<sub>2</sub> at bottling. When he founded the Fausse Piste label in 2008 (a mere baby at 24), Jesse Skiles was one of Oregon's youngest winemakers. Complex wines from France's Rhône Valley were his inspiration, but he fell hard for natural winemaking. He says: "At first you think you're going to ruin everything by not controlling the wine. Then it turns out so much more beautiful than it had ever been before." This is his kitchen-sink wine, made up of small batches of juice from multiple vineyards, different varietals and three vintages. Meant to be the everyday table wine that goes with everything, but especially tomato and red-sauced things (and duh, pizza), it's bright, fresh, easy -- and super tasty. Note: Jesse confirms that large amounts of Pizza were consumed in making and bottling the wine. And we did verify the pairing over wood-fired pies at our SF favorite [Del Popolo](#)...

### **2014 Two Sheperds Pastoral Rouge \$25**

Region: Russian River + Dry Creek Valleys < Sonoma < California

Grapes: Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; fermented in small ½ ton open top bins, 50% Whole cluster. Aged 13 months in neutral French barrels, on heavy lees for 9 months; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with 40ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 120 cases; 12% ABV

Winemaker: William Allen

Another wine from William Allen, his Burgundy-meets-Rhone blend, which William calls an "anti Châteauneuf-du-Pape -- basically a statement against the common belief that Grenache based wines are naturally

higher in alcohol. Layered with sweet red fruits, pomegranate, thyme, pepper and bright acidity, this is crunchy and juicy and very Chât-du-Pape like, without the weight. Or price tag. A hefty 12% alcohol – enjoy 2 bottles with friends and something on the grill.