

ROCK JUICE WINES April 2018

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).

2015 Domaine Giacometti 'Sempres Contentu' \$26

Region: Patrimonio < Corsica < France

Grapes: Sciaccarellu

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, dry farmed, granite soils; fermented in stainless and aged on the lees for 9 months

Winemakers: Christian Giacometti

As the name implies, this wine is “always happy”, probably because the grapes are raised on the beautiful French island of Corsica, in an arid vineyard by the sea. Christian Giacometti makes the native Corsican grape in a fresh, crunchy style full of tangy strawberry, brambly raspberry and juicy plum fruits mixed with zesty blood orange, flinty mineral and minty notes. It’s medium bodied-brightness belies the alcohol content, which is a surprising 14%, but it wears it well – this pretty wine goes down easily, especially with a light chill that brings out its uncontrollable zest.

2016 Domaine Santamaria 'Tranoi' Vin de Pays de L'Île de Beauté Blanc \$24

Region: Patrimonio < Corsica < France

Grapes: Vermentino

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic/biodynamic farming; dry-farmed younger vines on schist soil; fermentation in stainless steel tanks; bottled unfiltered/unfiltered with minimal SO₂; 13% ABV

Winemaker: Thomas Santamaria

On Corsica, the dreamy island off the coast of France, Thomas Santamaria is the 6th generation to make wine on his family’s estate on the scrubby northern end of the island. Thankfully, his family had always farmed old-school, never giving in to outside pressure to use herbicides and pesticides, which unfortunately became common on the island in the 70s. Thomas has taken this a step further, starting to work in biodynamic treatments as well as following the lunar cycle for his vineyard work. The ‘Tranoi’ is a distinctly Mediterranean white, all about tension, without the voluptuousness to which this grape, especially in the hot, dry island climate, often succumbs. Think ripe mango with lemon zest, bitter almond and a briny sea breeze blowing white sand over your toes.

2017 En Cavale Sauvignon Blanc \$22

Region: Contra Costa County < California

Grapes: Sauvignon Blanc

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; sandy soils of the Sacramento Delta; grapes are foot trodden then fermented for 12 days with no temperature control; the juice rests in old neutral French barrels for 4 months, then is bottled unfiltered/unfiltered with 20ppm added SO₂; 11.5% ABV; 200 cases

Winemaker: Wolfgang Weber + Chad Hinds

From an organic vineyard on the sandy shores of the Sacramento Delta (to which Wolfgang can sail) and made in a natural wine co-op in the Richmond Marina, this is a coastal wine, albeit urban and gritty. Chad Hinds of Methode Sauvage notoriety has partnered here with the incomparable Wolfgang Weber to make this zippy Sauvignon Blanc that keeps it natty enough for Rock Juice, while still making my classic-SB-loving mama happy. Fermented with a bit of skin contact, then pressed into neutral barrels. No fining or filtering, so she’s a bit cloudy. Super bright and punchy, a little tropical, citrusy and downright delicious.

2016 Sclavos Alchymiste \$18

Region: Cephalonia < Ionian Islands < Greece

Grapes: Tsaousi, Moscat, Vostilidi, Moschatela

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic, dry-farmed 60-100 year old vineyards on limestone; fermented and aged in stainless steel; bottled unfiltered/unfiltered with minimal SO₂; 12.5% ABV

Winemaker: Vladis Sclavos

Cephalonia is the shimmering, turquoise-watered Greek island of your dreams. Here, vines seem to rise out of pure limestone. Vladis Sclavos is a mystic winegrower who biodynamically farms his tiny 4-hectare estate, where he names and talks to his vines. His focus on indigenous varieties and hands-off approach to winemaking is very unusual in greater Greece, where international varieties, big production and lots of manipulation are the norm. So, we were psyched to discover this wine, which channels Cephalonia’s limestone terroir so intensely that it transports you straight to this cave paradise (link to: <https://kefaloniaisland.org/sights/melissani-cave/>) Textbook boat wine, the Alchymiste is super rocky, mineraly, salty, limey - it’s your Greek margarita on the (limestone) rocks!

2016 La Marca di San Michele 'CapoVolto' Verdicchio di Castelli dei Jesi \$23

Region: Marche < Italy

Grapes: Verdicchio

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, clay and limestone soils, fermented and aged on lees in stainless steel, no malolactic fermentation; bottled unfiltered/unfiltered with minimal SO₂; 13% ABV

Winemakers: Alessandro Bonci, Beatrice Bonci, Daniela Quaresima

The sibling team of Alessandro, Beatrice and Daniela at La Marca di San Michele is way ahead of most of their neighbors, growing their six hectares of Verdicchio vines entirely organically, making the wine with basically no intervention, and bottling unfiltered/unfiltered with minimal SO₂. Castelli di Jesi, the Marche region where the Bonci family works, is nestled in the foothills of the Appenines just above the Adriatic Sea, where fresh sea breezes

maintain acidity and add structure. The flesh and brine of this coastal Italian white makes us crave simple grilled fish with fresh herbs and a squeeze of lemon. It is elegant and vivid with the weight and texture in the mouth for which Verdicchio is known, followed by pretty pink grapefruit, golden apple and salt. Sort of like a less-boozy, slightly appley Salty Dog cocktail – perfect for savoring on a Spring evening!

2015 Zlatan Otok Cuvee \$19

Region: Island of Hvar < Dalmatia < Croatia

Grapes: 25% Bogdanuša, 25% Pošip, 25% Maraština, 25% Prč

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; dry farming on rocky, volcanic soils; separate fermentation of all four varietals and then blended; aged 8 months in enox then 3 months in bottle; 13% ABV

Winemaker: Davor Sestanovic

Zlatan Otok was founded by Zlatan Plenković, one of the OG Croatian wine dudes. He started as a poor fisherman who hustled, taking on vast quantities of personal debt, to build the 2nd private winery in Croatia in the wake of Yugoslavian communism. After he passed in 2016, sons Marin and Nikola took over. Located on the extreme slopes of Hvar Island, with altitudes ranging from sea level to 1,000 meters, there is nothing in the wine world that compares to the vineyards of Zlatan Otok. Hvar Island is one of the sunniest (and most beautiful places) on the Mediterranean sea, with an organic microclimate perfect for vine growing - something the Ancient Greeks figured out pre-Roman Empire, when they settled here and planted vines. All four varieties in this white blend are incredibly old, indigenous Dalmatian grapes from around 4th century BC, that combined provide a unique snapshot of the Dalmatian Island terroir and those rocky, volcanic soils. A glowy golden color, with denseness and minerality, this wine is a fresh and savory Adriatic breeze, with bright gusts of flowers, melon, figs and salinity.

2016 Vina Stoka Teran Rosé \$18

Region: Kras < Slovenia

Grapes: Teran

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, limestone/dolomite soil; bottled unfinned/unfiltered; no added SO₂

Winemaker: Primož Stoka

On the Bay of Trieste in the Adriatic sea, the Slovenian/Italian border region of the Kras (aka Carso) was historically covered in oak forests until the Venetians deforested nearly everything to build ships and the city of Venice. The resulting erosion, famously strong “burja” winds, and soluble bedrock soil have since made it a perfect place for grapes to suffer and become great. The famous local grape here, Teran, has a medicinal history dating back to Roman times. Grown in iron-rich soils, this grape is said to be higher in resveratrol, lactic acid, and iron than most grapes, it was historically given to pregnant and lactating women to replenish their iron stores. With naturally high acidity and low sugar even when ripe, this wine looks intense because of the bright pink color, but its more bone than fat, with tangy Marasca cherries, wild berries and blood orange. Like an early spring romp in the forest. Don't fear the pink!

2017 Oyster River Winegrowers 'Morphos' Pétillant Naturel \$20

Region: Maine < USA

Grapes: Seyval Blanc, Cayoga

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming, white clay and limestone soil with a lot of flint, 50-year-old vines, hand harvested, no added SO₂; 10% ABV; 300 cases

Winemaker: Brian Smith

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: 2017 IS HERE, AND WE GOT EVERY CASE (A MERE 4) THAT MADE IT TO CALI! We featured the two previous vintages of this kick-ass bubbly, and this is our favorite one yet – a touch more floral and peachy and bright. A quick review: this cloudy Pét'Nat from Maine-native Brian Smith is extremely charming, low in alcohol (10%) and full of life. Brian, who makes cider with local apples as well as wine with native American grapes, lets this wine ferment slowly in his naturally cool cellar over several months. His sums up his hands-off ethos: “I believe my role in the winemaking process to be more nature's assistant than winemaker. We add nothing and take nothing away from the natural chemistry of the fruit.” Made using the ancestral method for bubbly, Morphos is bottled before fermentation is complete, trapping the CO₂ that gives it a natural fizz, and the spent yeast, which makes cloudy. Refreshing, tart like an apple, with a zingy acidity that cuts through fat, this wine is amazing with anything fried, fresh oysters, or soft cheeses.

2016 Nino Baracco Rosamare \$24

Region: Marsala < Sicily < Italy

Grapes: Nero di Avola

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; 24-hour maceration on the skin, basket pressed then fermented in stainless steel; no added SO₂

Winemaker: Nino Baracco

Like so many new generation Italian winemakers, Nino took over his family's vineyards in 2004 and started working organically, using only the native grapes of his Western Sicily, and focusing on single vineyard expressions of the grapes. Note: in Western Sicily, this is all very rare. As are his wines, which really taste like Marsala, a barren stretch of coastline with dry winds, golden light and an omnipresent sea. Nino's wines are aromatically intense, mysteriously light and incredibly saline. Like this wine, which we call a light red but, given its lit-from-within cherry pink color and 10.5% ABV, some might call a rose. Grapes are picked early, in the middle of August, to ensure that the acid is high and the alcohol low. The juice is gently pressed in old-school baskets, never seeing wood or any sort of manipulation or additive. The result is an extremely refreshing, transparent wine that exudes cherry and strawberry, with salty, bitter orange Campari notes, that comes alive with air and chill. All of Nino's wine are made in a reductive style to protect them from oxygen, since he uses no sulfur. Which means this wine can be a bit weird or off-smelling when you first open. THIS IS NORMAL. She just needs to breathe. Decent into a pitcher – nothing fancy, something with a wide opening. Wait 20 minutes and pour a glass. Smell, sip, enjoy, then pour another glass 30 minutes later. It will be completely different, more alive. So cool to watch it evolve!

2015 Casa Comerci Calabria Rosso Rosina \$25

Region: Calabria < Italy

Grapes: Magliocco Canino

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming, fermented and aged in stainless steel for 8 months, then 2 months in bottle; <20ppm SO₂ at bottling; 13% ABV; 550 cases

Winemaker: Domenico Silipo

Calabria, Italy's big toe, is a haunting place, with warm (sometimes sandy) breezes from the Sahara Desert, half-abandoned villages hanging off cliffs on the sea, and lots of rugged mountains. But the region is pretty much off the radar of most wine drinkers, which is a shame, as they can be so good. Like this this unique red made of young vine Magliocco grapes, from the estate of Domenico Silipo and his sons. Light in color but with a deep core, the 'Rosina', named after the family matriarch, shows bright energy and easy *glou glou* drinkability. But far from simple, the Rosina goes from earthy to floral to boysenberries, tar and a lick of tannins. Zesty and refreshing, with such beautiful bitterness and complexity, we could drink this all night. Especially with a slight chill and some spicy food.

2017 Jamsheed Illaj Pinot Noir \$28

Region: Upper Goulburn < Victoria < Australia

Grapes: Pinot Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Shale & schist over granite, aged 4 months in old barriques; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 11.5% ABV

Winemaker: Gary Mills

We're featuring island wines this month, and Australia is as big and beautiful as they come, so we searched hard and long for an Aussie wine with the Rock Juice vibe. And to be totally honest, this is the first Australian wine we've ever featured – generally that larger-than-life style is not the type of juice that gets us excited. But it seems that the continent is on the verge of a natural wine revolution, with Gary Mills of Jamsheed at the forefront. The Illaj project is designed to be more affordable and is a blend of different Pinot Noir vineyards, released early for prime springtime consumption up here in the Northern Hemisphere. Deliciously fruity and gulp-able, we'd definitely chill this down a touch and pop the cork (I mean, screwcap – we're in Oz after all!) and order a case for any upcoming festivities. It's a bright and fresh, with brambly red fruit, citrus and an herby, even slightly meaty note. Glou glou, Aussie style!

2016 Azienda Vinicola Cherchi Isola dei Nuraghi Cagnulari \$26

Region: Isola dei Nuraghi < Sardegna < Italy

Grapes: Cagnulari

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, clay soils on a hilly vineyard site located at about 200 meters above sea-level. Hand harvested, de-stemmed, gently crushed and soft-pressed, 8-10 days of skin contact, aging in mostly steel tanks, some in half-new oak barriques for 6 months; 13.5% ABV

Winemaker: Giovanni Cherchi

We've always been a champion of rare, indigenous Italian grape varieties, so we're happy to bring you our first Cagnulari. Unique to Sardegna, it is only cultivated in the far northwest corner of the island. Giovanni Cherchi, the Godfather of Cagnulari, helped revive the varietal on his family's estate starting in the 1970s when it was nearly extinct. He believed in its potential and even bottled the first examples to be exported off the island. Not surprisingly he did this working naturally, letting the uniqueness of Cagnulari speak for itself. The surprisingly deeply colored (purpleish ruby) for a light coastal red, but the sea breeze seems to be exactly what this wine needs to retain freshness. Dusty, garrigue-y and dark fruited, it takes us to the Sardegnian coast for a split second – blue sky, scrubby sage brush and sandy soils – we get all of that in the glass. Plus spicy plum, red cherry and blueberry and minerals. Would be so good with a roasted whole fish with black olives and tomatoes or Sardegnian Pecorino!

2016 Chateau de Léoube Rosé Côtes de Provence \$22

Region: Côtes de Provence < France

Grapes: Cinsault, Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming, with biodynamic practices; coastal vineyards with 25-year-old vines, mixture of clay mica schist and sand soils; whole cluster pressed and fermented in stainless steel, on lees 6 months before blending.

Winemaker: Romain Ott

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: 2016 in the house! Because, while we love our weird wine from far off places, sometimes it's nice to go straight to the source. Especially when we're talking rosé and the Côtes de Provence. This bottle, from an organic/biodynamic estate on the Côte d'Azur, comes with pedigree in the form of winemaker Romain Ott of the famed Domaine Ott. Léoube is a big estate (160 acres), stretching 2.5 miles along the coast in a national park spitting distance from St Tropez. But unlike most rosé factories in Provence, it's one founded on principles of organic farming, environmental stewardship and low-intervention winemaking. Which makes sense, considering this is the baby of Lord and Lady Bamford, Britain's OG organics power couple (they founded Daylesford Organics, the successful British "farm fresh to you" business). Based on the traditional Cinsault and Grenache grapes, Romain's classic Provencal rosé bottling not only satisfies on the poolside and picnic fronts, it seems to get better as the wine opens up. Tons of garrigue, green olive and spice paired with ripe strawberry, and denseness on the palate shows the skilled and serious winemaking. Go classy and share this at the season's first picnic. Your Domaine Ott-loving friends will have minds blown.