

# ROCK JUICE WINES ✈ January-February 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).*

## **2016 Štoka Vitovska Peneče Pet-nat \$22**

Region: Kras < Slovenia

Grapes: Vitovska

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, limestone/dolomite soil, no added SO<sub>2</sub>, native yeast, unfiltered/unfiltered; no added SO<sub>2</sub>

Winemaker: Primož Stoka

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. Vitovska, the white grape of the Kras, generally makes a high-acid still white, but here Primož funks it up in the pétillant-naturel style by stopping the fermentation before all the sugar has been converted to alcohol. The wine is bottled under a crown-cap, trapped with its yeast cells and some residual sugar. As the yeast eats the sugar, gentle bubbles are created. Slovenia is one of our favorite wine regions in the world – they’re working with their native grapes to make really interesting wines with soul, have a propensity towards natural winemaking and the wines are still terrific bargains. Like this high acid, intensely mineral bubbly that would be so good with an *aperitivo* spread, oysters or anything fried!

## **2015 Domaine du Haut-Planty, “Gwin Evan” Au Gre du Vin \$23**

Region: Loire Valley < France

Grapes: Melon de Bourgogne

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming; silty and sandy soils with schist subsoil; fermented in concrete then rests on lees for 12-16 months before being bottled with <10ppm SO<sub>2</sub>; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Michel Couillaud

Located in the heart of Muscadet Sèvre et Maine, between Loire river and the Atlantic ocean, Le Haut-Planty was a farm that Michel Couillaud took over from his father and converted into a vineyard. In the early 2000’s, sons Alain and Christian, took over the operations and led the conversion to organic, also bringing with them fresh ideas and a commitment for working naturally. Unlike most lean, linear (and often banal + mass-produced) Muscadet wines, this is certified organic Melon that steeps on its lees for 12-16 months in concrete tank, giving it a deep, golden hue, and a round, creamy texture you don’t typically find in Muscadet. We love the slight effervescence and floral, ripe peach and pear notes that balance the salty minerality – exactly what we want to drink on a boat, or sitting in a café by the sea. Or sitting in SF wishing we were on a boat, or day-drinking at a café by the sea.... Whereas traditional Muscadet is the classic oyster pairing, the Gwin Evan wants fried food, or seafood in general.

## **2016 Andi Knauss Weiss \$20**

Region: Württemberg-Remstal < Germany

Grapes: Kerner, Müller-Thurgau, Riesling

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; limestone and keuper (a limestone derivative) soils, 300 – 400m elevation; minimal sulfur added

Winemaker: Andi Knauss

Swabia’s (the name for this region in Southern Germany) Andi Knauss says that for him, low-tech winemaking is the key. Which makes sense, if you remember his “Without All” bottling that we worked with last year, which was not only completely additive- and sulfur-free, it was also label-free, his statement about this truly naked wine. Not all of Andi’s wines are zero-zero, but they’re all super low-intervention yet clean as a whistle (no barnyard or dirty socks here). The Weiss is a blend of three aromatic grape varieties, totally dry with floral, white peach and apple-y notes, and a sweet-tart lemony finish that reminds me of those old-school lemon drop candies, way more tart than sweet. It goes down easy, easy like Saturday afternoon, light and fresh yet interesting enough to keep you going back for more.

## **2016 Burja Zelen \$22**

Region: ZPG Vipavska Dolina < Slovenia

Grapes: Zelen

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: certified organic farming; Flysch (marl, loess and breccia in alternation) soil; minimal SO<sub>2</sub> at bottling, 375 cases

Winemaker: Primož Lavrenčič

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: you enjoyed the 2015 vintage last spring, and now we’ve got the 2016! The third generation to cultivate grapes in his region, Primož left the family estate in 2009 to start his own label, ‘Burja’, the name of the strong wind that blows through the Vipava Valley. ‘Zelen’, a beloved local grape, is Slovene for “green” – because the grapes have an intensely-colored pulp, and, if left unfiltered, the wine will emerge a vivid emerald green color. This wine is gorgeous and aromatic, with a perfumed nose of white flowers, green apple, then jolts of grapefruit, zippy lemon, apple and floral notes on the palate. We love the intensely mineral, racy, saline edge. Sadly, with the harsh climate and the unpredictable nature of the Burja wind, Primož doesn’t make this wine every year.

### **2015 Domaine des Accoles Vin de Pays des Coteaux de l'Ardèche Chardonnay 'Les 4 Faisses' \$25**

Region: Coteaux de l' Ardèche < France

Grapes: Chardonnay

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, using some biodynamic practices; terraced vineyards, clay and limestone soils surrounded by forest; 50-100% whole cluster fermented, aged in neutral oak barrels; 12.5% ABV; 167 cases (and only 15 imported to the US!)

Winemaker: Olivier Leriche

Chardonnay is often called 'the winemaker's grape' because it can handle all kinds of manipulation – new French oak, crazy industrial yeast, added sugar (yes this happens – all the time!) But what are the true markings of Chardonnay? Many would point you to its ancestral home, Burgundy, France, as a reference point. We don't disagree, but with the changing weather patterns and rise in prestige of the region, you're getting hotter wines and higher prices here. Which is why we were thrilled to discover Domaine de Accoles, which is sort of like getting OG Burgundy in the Ardeche (near the Rhone). Because it's the passion project of famed Burgundy winemaker Oliver Leriche, who made wine for one of the most esteemed properties, Domaine l'Arlet, for 12 years, honing his Chard skills and converting the estate to organic farming. Chardonnay in his expert hands truly tastes as it should – fresh, clean, somewhat vinous but also with major hits of green apple and pear, and that tangy acidity that Chardonnay flaunts when grown on limestone.

### **2017 Folk Machine 'A Red Herring Afternoon' Dry Muscat \$18**

Region: Suisun Valley < California

Grapes: Muscat Canelli

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: organic farming; stainless steel fermentation; bottled in December 2016 after a light filtration, with 35ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 11.5% ABV

Winemaker: Kenny Likitprakong

The Folk Machine label comes to us from Kenny Likitprakong and falls under the umbrella of his Hobo Wine Company, which also houses his other labels - Banyan, Camp and Ghostwriter. The name Hobo came from his experience traveling the country in his early 20's, journaling and pursuing the life of an American hobo. He found that this character was something of a forgotten treasure in our country's landscape and he makes wine to channel this ideal. Not surprisingly, he doesn't own any vineyards, nor does he want to. All of Kenny's projects were founded with a theme in mind, and Folk Machine is where he nestles his more esoteric bottlings, all extremely small production. Kenny is young and laid back, but he's no slouch – the wines are clean, precise and distinctive. And super tasty. Like this bone-dry Muscat, which Kenny says is the wine that he and the crew were most excited about during the harvest of 2017. Its aromatic and floral, with white nectarine and the tiniest touch of funk to make it interesting. Perfect hot tub wine (we road-tested that situation), with brunch or anytime you want a low-alcohol, mouth-watering refresher.

### **2016 Andi Knauss Württemberg Rosé \$18**

Region: Württemberg-Remstal < Germany

Grapes: Trollinger, Spätburgunder, Lemberger, Zweigelt, Merlot

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, limestone soils, 300 – 400m elevation; three hours maceration before press and fermentation then aged for 6 months in stainless steel; just 20ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>

Winemaker: Andi Knauss

Another fantastic wine from southern Germany's natural wine darling, Andi Knauss. This pretty coppery rosé is heaven in winter, when you're craving a hit of sweet strawberry, tart cherry and rose garden to remind you of spring and sun. The grapes come from all around Andi's property and reflect the qualities of his varying limestone soils. We love it on its own, but it isn't a mindless porch pounder – there are layers of complexity here, and a savory, salty finish that perks up whatever is on your plate, making it an excellent food wine as well.

### **2016 Vino di Anna Palmento Rosso \$30**

Region: Mt. Etna < Italy

Grapes: 87% Nerello Mascalese + a smattering of Nerello Cappuccio and local white grapes

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; mineral-rich soil of decomposed lava; some of the grapes were destemmed by hand and the rest left as whole bunches; the lot was foot trodden over 4 days, then fermented in a combo of Palmento, (the traditional open-top stone vats of Etna) with some in tank and old oak foudre, then aged for 7 months in another cocktail of tank + foudre + Qvevri (clay amphorae buried in the earth); unfinned/unfiltered; 530 cases made

Winemaker: Anna Martens

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: we worked with the 2015 last year, and are thrilled to bring it back with the 2016! Anna Martens cut her teeth in Australia and Tuscany before starting her own project on Etna. While fairly new to the scene, she's already made the short list of best natural winemakers on the mountain, known for her pure, unadulterated expressions of Nerello Mascalese. She calls this bottling Palmento, an homage to the traditional Etnean wine cellar with stone troughs for crushing grapes by foot – the old (and now, technically, illegal) style in which this wine was made. It's classic Etna but lighter, juicier and more energetic than most of the wines from the mountain. Tart and savory, with blood orange, Campari, raspberry and an elusive umami quality. If you like the Frank Cornelissen Contadino that is a Rock Juice staple, you'll love this – they're like brothers from another mother. Serve slightly chilled.

### **2016 Lapati 'Super Ravi' \$27**

Region: Kakheti < Georgia (the country!)

Grapes: Saperavi

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, fermented whole cluster in quevri, then removed, destemmed and basket-pressed. The remaining juice is returned to the quevri for 6 months and then bottled.

Winemaker: Vincent Julien

Saperavi as an aperitif? Wouldn't normally go there, but this is by far the most approachable Georgian red we've come across. So it isn't surprising that it is an unlikely pairing of Frenchmen who are making some very unlikely wine. Vincent, the winemaker, and Guillaume, the artist, met at an art gallery in Georgia and decided that their interests matched up enough that they should form a partnership and start a winery. Lapati was born in 2015 and currently their production is only 300 cases – enough to fill 4 quevri, the clay vessels traditionally used in Georgia to ferment and age wine. 'Ravi' means happy in French, hence the (again, unlikely) name 'Super Ravi', but it is completely appropriate. The wine is bright and fresh, and we love how the carbonic action during fermentation softens this otherwise astringent and chewy grape. Here it practically dances on the tongue, with juicy red berry fruit and a hint of the Saperavi leather-y qualities in the background. Drink it before dinner while cooking (like we do), then open another bottle with your pizza, pasta and other red sauces. This one is great on its own, or wants something with lots of herbs, maybe some black olives, with roasted chicken perhaps.

### **2016 Bow + Arrow Rhinestones \$25**

Region: Willamette Valley < Oregon

Grapes: Pinot Noir, Gamay

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming; aged in a combo of concrete and old barriques; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with minimal SO<sub>2</sub>; 12.5% ABV

Winemaker: Scott Frank

Scott Frank freaked out after witnessing the twin towers fall in Manhattan on 9/11 -- "I was on the 47th floor of a skyscraper that day and watched that shit in real time live." So, he moved to Portland, where he was jobless and "bottoming out" until he bluffed his way into a job at the wine department of local market, where he found his passion. He worked harvest in Australia, drank his way through France, and now makes his Bow & Arrow wine in a basement in downtown Portland. Frustrated by the high price of Oregon wine, he says he wants his to be "wines of the people, ready to drink now, and at a price they'd be willing to pay at the corner store". He considers himself a scrappy négociant, but we think he's a serious winemaker to watch. Because his wines are not only super clean, but incredibly delicious. Like this Rhinestones bottling from Willamette Valley's biodynamic Johan Vineyard (in one of the region cooler areas). 60/40 Pinot + Gamay, an homage to the wines of the Loire's Cheverny, it's like a greatest hits album, dishing up the best of both grapes in a juicy black raspberry, tart cherry and Mediterranean spice package (thanks Gamay!), wrapping with a pure Pinot finish. Super chuggable on its own, but also a versatile food wine that would be great with anything mushroom or meaty.

### **2014 Muhr-van der Niepoort 'Samt & Seide' \$26**

Region: Carnuntum < Austria

Grapes: Blaufränkisch

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, granite/limestone soil, fermented in oak and aged on lees for two years, then bottled unfinned/unfiltered; 20ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 12.5% ABV

Winemaker: Dorli Muhr

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: we're on our 3<sup>rd</sup> vintage of the Blaufränkisch 'Samt & Seide', which means velvet & silk - apt descriptors for this sexy wine. Together with Portuguese Dirk Niepoort, famous for his Port and Douro wines, Austrian Dorli Muhr resuscitated her family vineyards in a protected nature preserve to produce some of Austria's very finest Blaufränkisch. The Romans planted vines in the easternmost Austrian winemaking region, Carnuntum, many ages ago, but it had fallen into wine oblivion. Blaufränkisch sits somewhere flavor and weight-wise between Pinot Noir, Nebbiolo and Syrah, but remains distinctively Austrian. Soils are limestone-rich, all work is done by hand, and the cellar – actually more of a shed – is like a mad scientist's lab with different potions brewing. Some grapes are foot-trodden, some whole cluster fermentation, some with extended periods of maceration, then all the juice is combined to age in neutral barrel. You get sour cherry, plum and plush tannins, with lively acidity and a warm, spicy finish. This vintage is a little rounder and juicier, with less grip, than the 2012 we worked with last year...

### **2015 Pax Carignan Testa Vineyard \$28**

Region: Mendocino County < California

Grapes: Carignan

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; 100% whole cluster fermented; picked early for freshness; carbonic maceration; aged in neutral French oak barrels and concrete for 6 months; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with 30ppm SO<sub>2</sub>; 11.9% abv

Winemaker: Pax Mahle

Pax Mahle is legendary in low-intervention Cali winemaking circles, having brought us Wind Gap, famous for esoteric wines like Trousseau Gris, from cool, windy NorCal sites. Pax is the eponymous label that he recently relaunched (after 2008 legal drama with former partners forced him to reboot) to do some small production, site-specific stuff from cool climate vineyards in Sonoma and Mendocino. Grapes for this wine come from historic Testa Vineyard just north of Ukiah, planted in 1911. Pax says that these old Carignan vines are nestled into some of the fluffiest soil he has ever walked through – which shows in the delicacy of this wine. Little to no crushing enables a carbonic fermentation and a fresh, bright wine with that Hot Rocks, poppy red fruit thing we love. Like classic Carignan on acid. There's very little tannin (typical with carbonic ferments) but tons of spice and fresh acidity to keep everything in check. Serve slightly chilled – 30 minutes in the fridge is perfect.

### **2016 La Ferme du Plateau 'Grapeful Grolleau' \$18**

Region: Azay-le-Rideau < Loire Valley < France

Grapes: Grolleau

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming, clay + silex soils; whole cluster press, carbonic maceration; fermented and aged in stainless steel then bottled unfinned/unfiltered with zero added SO<sub>2</sub>

Winemaker: Adrien Baloche

Adrien and his wife of La Ferme du Plateau are fairly new to the scene. Their "estate" (basically a house with a yurt out back where they live with their young children) is a true polycultural farm dedicated to raising goats, mainly for cheesemaking, and veggies – there are only 6 hectares dedicated to grapes. The couple is deeply committed to biodynamic farming, and winemaking is about as "natural" as it gets. And technically spot on, as Adrien learned from one of the best winemakers in the region, Marie Thibault, with whom he worked for years before making his own wine. This is our happy place - pure, juicy, no-added-SO<sub>2</sub> glouglou Grolleau that finishes with a hint of earth and dirt. Totally not sweet or frothy, this is serious wine in kids clothing. Serve slightly chilled, 30 minutes in the fridge...

### **2016 Cacique Maravilla Pipeño Pais 1L \$20**

Price: \$20

Region: Yumbel < Región Sur < Chile

Grapes: País (aka Mission)

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, no irrigation; volcanic soil; fermented in cement then rests in fiberglass vats before bottling; minimal SO<sub>2</sub> added just at bottling

Winemaker: Manuel Moraga Gutiérrez

NEW VINTAGE ALERT! Natural wine from Chile? Yes! Manuel Moraga Gutiérrez, who sports the long, wavy mustache depicted on this bottle's label, is the seventh generation of his family to work this vineyard in the small town of Yumbel, about 300 miles south of Santiago. It was originally planted by his great-great-great-great-grandfather Francisco Gutiérrez, who arrived from Spain in 1766 and quickly earned the respect of the local Mapuche tribe, who called him Cacique Maravilla. Manuel, who has been farming his 30 acres biodynamically for 25 years, used to make wine just for his family to drink, selling off most of his grapes, but in 2010 started bottling wines to sell under the label Cacique Maravilla. Now we can all enjoy this lovely Pipeño, an old name for the simple local wine farmers used to make, which typically is vinified as naturally as possible (wild yeast, no additions of any kind, minimal sulphur), and bottled young, in big bottles. It was the dodgy stuff gauchos and farmers used to guzzle from a gallon jug, but now it's the juice cool sommeliers drink. And for good reason: herbal, rustic, a bit smoky, slightly cloudy, earthy and red-fruited, and joyously presented in 1L bottles. While it looks light, it has more structure and body than most of this genre. Savagely drinkable, and a total bargain.