

# ROCK JUICE WINES November 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).*

## **NV Domaine Lelievre Leucquois Methode Traditionelle \$21**

Region: Cotes de Toul < Alsace/Lorraine < France

Grapes: Gamay Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic/biodynamic farming; clay and limestone soils from Jurassic age; made in *methode traditionnelle*, where juice from direct press goes into fermentation and is raised on fine lies in stainless steel tanks for 3-4 months; the 2nd fermentation happens in the bottle, and the wine is raised on racks for 12 months followed by 18 months on the lees in bottle; minimal So2 at bottling only; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Vincent and David Lelièvre

Once flourishing, vineyards in the Alsace/Lorraine area were destroyed by 3 consecutive French-German wars before being revived in the early 1950's by several local families, including the Lelièvres. Nearly 70 years later, vines are blossoming and the Cotes de Toul appellation is back on the map, benefiting from a "cuesta" topography similar to that of Burgundy. This is sparkling Gamay Noir, with bright red raspberry fruit, high acid, and a dry, herbal finish. Crushably tasty, and an extreme value for biodynamic pink fizz. Not to mention the adorable bunny package.

## **2017 Zahel 'Orange T' Orangetraube \$22**

Region: Vienna < Austria

Grapes: Orangetraube

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: organic farming, fermented in stainless steel, bottled under screw cap with minimal So2; 12.5% ABV

Winemaker: Richard Zahel

Fun fact: Vienna is the only city in the world that has real wine production within its city limits! The 4<sup>th</sup> generation Zahel family estate cultivates 25 acres of organic vineyards throughout Vienna proper, a little bit in each of the city's 5 wine-growing zones. It's current leader, Richard Zahel, joined the family business in 1989 after a brief stint as a race car driver. This is a bright, aromatic, zesty white, made entirely of the rare Orangetraube grape – it's NOT an orange wine -- and is the only 100% Orangetraube wine out there (this grape is only ever used in blends). Like an Oompa Loompa, the grapes' skin turns orange when ripe, hence the name. The orange theme carries over into the palate, where you taste mandarin, apricot and orange flowers, but the racy acidity keeps it refreshing and tight. An unusual and totally charming wine, kind of like dry Riesling meets fleshy Pinot Gris. So good with Thanksgiving food!

## **2016 Domaine Labbé Abymes Jacquère \$19**

Region: Savoie < France

Grapes: Jacquère

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic, clay and limestone soil with large stones that collected from avalanches, vines are de-budded in spring to control yields; vinified in foudre, 11% ABV

Winemaker: Alexandra and Jérôme Labbé

The alpine Savoie region of France is better known for its skiing, hiking, white water rafting (and Mont Blanc!) than for wine. But while production isn't huge here, it's pretty special, thanks to the high-elevation, rocky sites (minerals!) and the extreme temperatures. Grapes need to suffer to become beautiful. And Jacquère, the most widely planted white grape there, is most definitely beautiful when done right. Alexandra and Jérôme, the second generation of Labbés – two cousins - who in 2004 took over from their parents, are doing it right. This wine is the very definition of alpine -- light and crisp, like walking outside on a chilly fall morning in the mountains, when maybe a touch of frost has formed overnight on the grass. The trees are still changing colors and you just want to run down the rocky, grassy slope singing the Sound of Music at the top of your lungs. But instead, you drink. Apples and floral notes dominate, flowing into a salty finish – so clean and minerally, it will clear your head of any stress-induced fog. Invite the neighbors over and share a glass over some cave-y cheese and channel your inner Julie Andrews.

## **2017 Johannes Zillinger St. Laurent 'Reflexion' \$27**

Region: Niederösterreich < Austria

Grapes: St. Laurent

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter certified biodynamic farming; 97-year-old vineyard on loess and lime sandstone soils; fermentation occurs in open vats, with slow and gentle pressing, followed by 18 months in used acacia and oak barrels (no new oak); bottled unfinned/unfiltered with zero added So2; 333 cases; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Johannes Zillinger

Johannes Zillinger learned early on from his father about the importance of organic winemaking, about viewing the vineyard as a habitat and protecting the environment instead of poisoning it. His father Hans turned to organic viticulture in 1983, two years before the Austrian [Anti-freeze Scandal](#), and was one of its pioneers in Austria. When Johannes took over the 350-year-old winery in 2013, he transitioned to biodynamic farming in a big way -- he even grows his own herbs for tea tinctures to use as treatments. So, what the hell is Saint Laurent? Good question. No one really knows. At one point it was thought to have a Pinot Noir parent. But recently, that theory was disproved. Oh well. All you need to know is how freaking delicious it is. Aromatic with a Pinot Noir-like florality (roses!), there's also an alluring spicy tomato character and red berry lushness. Mouth-filling texture but medium-bodies, it's soft enough for fans of New World Pinot, but earthy and structured for Old World fans.

### **2016 Leon Boesch Edelzwicker 1L \$21**

**Region:** Alsace < France

**Grapes:** Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Muscat

**Vineyard/Cellar Stats:** Demeter-certified biodynamic farming, raised in old foudre; bottled unfined/unfiltered with zero added SO<sub>2</sub>; 12% ABV

**Winemaker:** Leon Boesch

Domaine Leon Boesch is an 11<sup>th</sup>-generation estate (certified Biodynamic since 2000) in the heart of the Ballons des Vosges nature reserve in France's northern Alsace region. Today Gerard and Matthew Boesch (father and son) are making some of the freshest, most interesting Alsace wines around. This one, a full liter of joy, is so perfect for Thanksgiving. For starters, Edelzwicker is a category in Alsace for white blends, and what is Thanksgiving other than a mish mash of flavors and traditions? And then there is the wine itself, aromatic, crisp, balanced with peach and peach pit, and a cleansing hit of grapefruit acidity that makes you reach for more. Super food-friendly and versatile with the explosion of flavors on the table.

### **2016 Pojer e Sandri Muller Thurgau \$20**

**Region:** Trentino < Italy

**Grapes:** Solaris

**Vineyard/Cellar Stats:** Organic farming; sandstone, siltstone, limestone and dolomite soils; stainless steel fermentation; bottled unfined/unfiltered w/ 35ppm SO<sub>2</sub>; 12% ABV

**Winemaker:** Fiorentino Sandri + Mario Pojer

In 1975 Pojer e Sandri was started by two buddies, Fiorentino Sandri and Mario Pojer in the alpine region of Trentino. Pojer had just graduated with his enology degree and Sandri's family owned 2 steep hectares of vineyards, so they joined forces to make wine and distill grappa in Sandri's mom's kitchen. Fast-forward 30+ years and the two, with help from Pojer's daughter Elisa and son Fede, are making some of the region's best wines using a mix of modern innovations and old-school simplicity. Like pressing grapes in a vacuum so that sulfites are not necessary, making barrels from the trees that grow on their property, or experimenting with ways to cleanse grapes of environmental residue. When I met Fede recently in SF, he told me about a jacuzzi-like contraption they built to gently wash the grapes after harvest. Because, even though they are working organically, not everyone in the tightly-packed Trentino region is -- and with wind, rain and water table contamination, there is bound to be some pesticide residue on all grapes. By giving them a little bath before fermentation, they safely remove any bad stuff, while preserving 70% of the natural yeasts -- the strong guys, enough to kick start the fermentation naturally. Love this! Müller Thurgau, a hybrid of Kerner and Riesling, is the dominant white grape of this Alpine area, precisely because it requires mountain soils and extreme diurnal range (difference between day and night temps) to take on the minerality and acid that balances the intense aromatics. Boldly peachy, citrusy and floral, this wine wears its Alpine character proudly, but the zippy acid finish keeps it fresh and clean. Fantastic food wine -- drink with Indian, Thai or any exotic flavors, as well as your very American T-day feast.

### **2015 Brkic Greda \$23**

**Region:** Čitluk < Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Grapes:** Greda

**Vineyard/Cellar Stats:** Organic/biodynamic farming; limestone soils; half of the grapes were fermented on the skins, with some whole clusters, in 3000L Bosnian and neutral American oak barrels; grapes are pressed on rubber rollers to avoid damaging the stalks and seeds; bottled unfined/unfiltered; 11.7% ABV

**Winemaker:** Josip Brkic

Southern Herzegovina was once a distinguished wine region, starting 2000+ years ago with the Illyrians, but then invasions (the Ottomans, 1362-1689) and horrific conflicts (the [Bosnian war](#), 1992-1995) happened. While an uneasy peace has returned, the country still suffers from poverty and ethnic tension, strong forces that continue to obscure the nascent local wine industry. But the region's temperate Mediterranean climate and rich Karst limestone soils, as well as some really cool indigenous grape varieties, are starting to get some attention on the international wine scene. In the late 70s, Josip's father planted vineyards in

Čitluk—a wine district in southern Bosnia and Herzegovina—at 800-1,300 feet. After his father's death, Josip Brkić took over the domain and converted the vineyards and cellar to biodynamic practices. But Josip didn't always work organically - 15 years ago he became a disciple after attending an organic wine conference in Italy and realizing that making wine was more than making a product: it was making something alive. From then on, he decided he would only produce organic or not at all. Initially, when Josip stopped using chemicals, the vineyard suffered from shock, like a drug addict being detoxified. But he believes diseases have to be accepted to allow the vines to grow stronger, and that the compromise is not only worth it, it is the only way for him. He even states this on the label: *I will make wine this way or I will not make it at all*. This is Josip's white wine, made of the local Greda grape. Often compared to white Burgundy, Greda has both richness and density without high alcohol. And with 50% of the grapes macerated on the skins, this is a baby orange wine, not too golden, bold or tannic. Just softly peachy and layered, with a distinctive savory, smoky finish. Crisp and cozy, this is a distinctly fall wine, a perfect white for sipping by a fire or pairing with a golden roast chicken.

#### **2017 Andi Knauss Württemberg Rosé 'Boutanche' \$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.

TAGS: rose, rosé, France, German wine, organic, Germany, Swabia

#### **2017 Domaine Brand Maître Renard \$28**

Region: Alsace < France

Grapes: Gamay, Negrette

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming (Demeter certified); granite soils; 10-day maceration of handpicked grapes; whole cluster fermentation and maturation for eight months in demi-muid barrels; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with zero-added SO<sub>2</sub>; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Philippe Brand

It's a common story all across Europe: Philippe joined his father in the family estate in 2006, and pushed him to take the organic estate even further into biodynamics and working without any additives. Since 2015 they've been Demeter-certified and add no SO<sub>2</sub> -- and the wines have never been better. This wine is ripping, full of bright red fruit, herbal plumminess and a red-hot spice that balances aromatic rose petals and soft tannins. We always love us a good Gamay blend, and the addition of Negrette here takes it a whole new direction, a bit wild and feral, but not funky in the least. Coastal Cali Pinot lovers take note: this is your jam. And you can drink a whole lot more of it at just 12% and no added SO<sub>2</sub>.

#### **2017 Furlani VINO Bianco 'Alpino' \$24**

Region: Trentino-Alto-Adige < Italy

Grapes: Nosiola with a touch of Verdarbara + Lagarino

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: biodynamic farming, clay over schist and broken granite, known as sasso dolomitico, 700m altitude, pergola trained for ventilation, fermented in cement tanks and small glass demijohns, fermented wine left outside in the snow over the winter to clarify; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with zero added SO<sub>2</sub>; 11.5% ABV

Winemakers: Danilo Marcucci and Matteo Furlani

Another wine from our new Italian crush, Danilo Marcucci, who makes this pretty alpine white with 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer Matteo Furlani in the hills above Trento in Italy's Trentino region. It's a light, fresh field blend of local grapes from super high-elevation vineyards. A bit tropical, a bit xxx, this is an awesome all-purpose daily drinker. Goes with everything, low enough ABV that you can crush a bottle on a Tuesday.

#### **2017 Oyster River Winegrowers 'Morphos' Pétillant Naturel Rosé \$22**

Region: Maine < USA

Grapes: Merlot

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming; hand harvested, no added SO<sub>2</sub>; 11% ABV; 200 cases

Winemaker: Brian Smith

We featured 3 vintages of Brian Smith's killer Pét'Nat of native American grapes Seyval Blanc + Cayoga, from the ultimate US cold climate, Maine. This is his rosé Pét'Nat of Merlot from Long Island. Like the white version, this cloudy, fizzy wine is extremely charming, low in alcohol (11%) and full of life. Brian 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, making the raspberry pink hue softly hazy, like the tail end of a sunset with wildfire smoke in the air. Like now. Brutal. But the wine is delicious, dry and savory with a hint of green spice (duh, Merlot). Sort of like watermelon kombucha with the tiniest hit of jalapeno.

### **2017 Irene El Dorado County Mourvedre \$30**

Region: El Dorado County < California

Grapes: Mourvedre

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming; volcanic soil over decomposed granite; 100% whole cluster fermentation, pump overs/punch-downs and aged in neutral oak for seven months; bottled unfined/unfiltered with 30ppm added so2; 11.8% ABV; 220 bottles

Winemaker: Brian & Katelynn Jessen

NEW VINTAGE ALERT! In case you missed the 2016 last fall, let's catch you up: Irene is a 3-year-old bootstrapped project from thirty-something couple Brian + Katelynn Jessen. Bryan, originally from Monterey County, studied wine business and viticulture/enology at Sonoma State at Santa Rose JC, then worked around Italy, New Zealand, and finally as cellar master at Copain Wines before starting his own project with wife Katelynn. They both still have day jobs (he sells vine cuttings and rootstock to nurseries, she's an artist), but their passion is Irene, their own label, named in honor of Brian's mother, who passed away when he was young. Brian makes the wine at a custom crush facility in Healdsburg, and Katelynn paints the labels. Like most upstart Cali producers, they don't own vineyards, so the biggest challenge is sourcing good, organic fruit. But somehow they managed to secure Mourvèdre from Neighbors Vineyard, a well-regarded, practicing organic, high-elevation site northeast of Placerville in El Dorado County, with that glorious volcanic soil. They pick and bottle earlier for this wine, to bring out the freshness and keep it light. These guys were one of my favorite discoveries last year, and this wine is incredible: clean and bright Cali *glou glou* that tastes of wet earth and vibrant red fruit and baking spice, then opens up to reveal more Violet, floral notes. Pair with roasted squash salad w/ dandelion, bacon + pecans (tested with Suzanne Goin's recipe!); pasta with mushroom Bolognese sauce, or anything mushroom. Or best of all, a roaring fire and someone to snuggle!

### **2017 Pfneiszl Blaufränker 2015 Pfneiszl Blaufränker (1L) \$18**

Region: Sopron < Hungary

Grapes: Blaufränkisch

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming; dry farmed, slate and sandstone soil; fermented and aged in stainless steel; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Birgit Pfneiszl

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: We featured the 2016 last fall, now the 2017 1L jug is in the house! And who doesn't love a 1-liter bottle? Especially when it is this fun and delicious! A little like Gamay, a little like Cab Franc, Blaufränkisch is a noble grape native to Austria and Hungary. From a young sister duo, Birgit and Katrin Pfneiszl, who branched out from their family's successful winery in Austria to start their own project when they were given the opportunity to take over the family's original vineyards just over the border in Hungary. Birgit and Katrin's father fled Hungary to escape Communism and decided to stay in Austria even after the opportunity arose to move back to his homeland. Enter Birgit. With university and several vintages under her belt in places like Italy, Australia and New Zealand, she was drawn back to Hungary and produced her first vintage in 2004. She has been farming organically ever since, and the vineyards are now certified. We believe this sort of wine is the 'new' Hungary, and Birgit and Katrin are poster chicks for this movement. Blaufränkisch has been around for thousands of years, but through their eyes we see it in a new light – fresh, fun, with just the right amount of cherry spice mixed in. And this one goes down *real* easy, so the supersized jug is much appreciated.

### **2017 Furlani 'Negrik' Rosso Alpino \$22**

Region: Trentino-Alto-Adige < Italy

Grapes: Field blend of native Dolomite grapes

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming, clay over schist and broken granite, known as sasso dolomitico, 700m altitude, pergola trained for ventilation, fermented in cement tanks and small glass demijohns, fermented wine left outside in the snow over the winter to clarify; bottled unfined/unfiltered with zero-added So2; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Danilo Marcucci and Matteo Furlani

We featured the Italian wine whisperer, Danilo Marucci, last month with his own wine, Vini Conestabile della Staffa. Danilo originally got his start in winemaking as a mentee of the old guard of natural winemakers throughout Italy – Maule, Capellano, just to name a couple. After consulting up and down the boot, he met his wife, and transformed her family's unloved vineyards into the esteemed estate it is today. But, when he first started, he was working only with unknown, unproven small producers already working organically, and Furlani was his first target. Though the estate is tiny, just 3 hectares of land scattered high in the hills above Trento, at the incredible altitude of 700-720m., he knew the bones were good and that he could help coax the vines into producing something special. Working with 4<sup>th</sup> generation "custodian of the vineyards" Matteo Furlani, Danilo brings his zero-intervention philosophy to the biodynamic Cantina Furlani to make a cool line-up of tiny-production mountain wines that are so reflective of that place. Like this light, juicy red, a field blend of unknown local varieties, that is undeniably alpine juice. The perfect après-ski red, best enjoyed slightly chilled, preferably in a hot tub under the softly falling snow.

#### **2015 Maurer Kadarka 1880 \$24**

Region: Sremska < Serbia

Grapes: Kadarka

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: organic farming; pre-phylloxera vines (100 years+ old) on Danubian green sand soils; horses used to work vineyards, fermented in open vat then aged in big old oak casks for 12 months; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with 0-20ppm added SO<sub>2</sub>; 10.8% ABV

Winemaker: Oszkár Maurer

Another Balkan gem, a lovely skin-contact Kadarka from Serbia. The Maurer family, originally from Salzburg, is now one of the only natural winemakers in Serbia. They've worked the vines here, on the Hungarian border in the region of Szabadka, for 4 generations. And their Kadarka vineyard, planted in 1880, is the oldest in the world -- no small feat, given that most producers have given up on this challenging-to-grow grape (tight clusters = susceptible to rot). Oszkár's Kadarka is simple and refreshing, with bright acidity and tart fruit to cut through the fat of *aperitivo* snacks or Thanksgiving dinner. It tastes like a brisk fall day – pomegranate and blood orange with potpourri spice and barely-there tannins. Factor in the extremely low ABV (10.8%) and you've got the perfect holiday wine – without the post-party hangover. Serve slightly chilled.

#### **NOVEMBER ADD ONS**

#### **2015 Claire Nadin 'Orchis Mascula' \$55**

Region: Burgundy < France

Grapes: Pinot Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic, dry-farmed vineyards,

Winemaker: Claire Nadin

In 1994 Claire, fresh out of Oenology school, started making wine at the estate she took over from her father, halfway between the Cotes de Beaune and Cotes de Nuits in Burgundy. Her style has always been very minimalist, but she started experimenting with no sulfur winemaking in 2001, in response to the terrible migraines she started suffering after work in the cellar. Not only did this solve her migraine problem (newsflash: SO<sub>2</sub> is bad shit!), but she found the wines were more expressive and more stable without. Claire found that by using long, slow 3-hour whole cluster pressings to slowly expose the juice to oxygen and fortify it with the antioxidants found in the stems, she got very stable wines that would not oxidize further or fade upon opening. We tested this, it's true folks – tasted over 3 days, the wine never fell apart, remaining bright and beautiful and intoxicatingly delicious – not always the case with sulfite-free wine. As you would expect in a top-quality Pinot, the texture is polished and pristine, with fine tannins, and seductive smoky, chalky, crunchy red berry fruits. Different here though is the magical floral perfume that emanates from the wine, along with real lift and energy - the palate evolves constantly, from cherry blossom, to red apples and tart red cherries, to stemmy, savory spice. Even better, it is incredibly affordable, given how inflated Burgundy pricing has become. But not for long – Claire is a star on Paris' natural wine scene, and her wines hard to come by there – and the word is bound to spread soon, tightening the supply for us here. So, treat yourself and grab a bottle now, before it's all gone.