

ROCK JUICE WINES July/August 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).

2017 Meinklang 'Foam' Somló \$23

Region: Somló, Hungary

Grapes: Hárslevelű, Juhfark

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter certified biodynamic, sandy, loam topsoil, volcanic subsoil, unfiltered and disgorged by hand, no added SO₂

Winemakers: Werner, Hannes and Lukas Michlits

We love when we find a producer we haven't worked with before who not only checks all of our boxes, but is certified biodynamic to boot and adds no sulfur. Friends, meet Meinklang. The Michlit family were farmers on this land before World War I, when this part of Austria still belonged to Hungary. They have always worked a fully integrated farm with animals (cows, chickens, pigs, sheep and horses), orchards and grains in addition to grapes. They practice crop rotation and nothing goes to waste. After the war, the farm was broken in two and their village ended up across the border in Austria meaning they had to give up their parcel in Hungary. Parents Anneliese and Werner proudly reclaimed this after the fall of communism which worked out very well when it became clear that not just one, but *all* of their three sons would stick around to carry on the family business! This month's bubbly, 'Foam Somló' Pet'Nat, comes from their property in Hungary. Made from a combination of indigenous Hungarian varieties, Hárslevelű and Juhfark, it speaks to every wine drinker – geek or not. Super delicious and perfectly balanced between the stone fruit and bruised apples in the Hárslevelű and firm acidity, brightness and minerality from the Juhfark. With the alcohol a ridiculously low 10.5%, and no added SO₂ this is really a wine you should always have on hand – for poolside, early evening aperitifs and any summery dinner combo.

2017 Cosimo Maria Masino 'Annick' \$21

Region: San Miniato < Tuscany < Italy

Grapes: Sauvignon Blanc, Vermentino

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter-certified biodynamic farming; Sauv Blanc is free-run juice, Vermentino macerates 4 days on the skins; both are bladder pressed and fermented in concrete; after fermentation, the two wines get blended and stay in concrete for 4 months before bottling; unfinned/unfiltered with zero added SO₂; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Francesco De Filippis

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: 2017 is in the house! This summer we not only went back and stayed at Cosimo Maria Masini in Tuscany, near Pisa, but we brought my 18-year old nephew and left him to learn biodynamic farming for 3 weeks. The physical beauty of the place is spectacular, from the cellar (19th century) under the 15th century villa, built by the Medici family, later the home of the Bonaparte family (Napoleon once lived there.) And oh yes, the stunning guest house with the infinity pool overlooking the countryside did not suck. But it was the symbiotic chaos of the thriving, wild ecosystem – vineyards surrounded by gardens, fig trees (where fat fig-eating chickens nest) and acres of olive groves – that got me. For Francesco, the estate's winemaker/partner, biodynamic farming (which focuses on the soil vs. the vine) is the only way. The dude has a PhD in Agricultural Science, so for him, it's not a hippie thing, it's science – in fact, he's leading one of the first scientific studies to measure how the vitality of soil affects the quality of grapes (and wine). He says that when biodynamic farming began ten years ago in the Cosimo Maria Masini vineyards, the nearly 100% clay soil was hard as rock, with deep cracks where the it had split apart. After changing from conventional to biodynamic practices, the soil has become looser, richer and revitalized with micro-organisms. The vines are healthier, and the wine has finally reached its potential. In fact, it's pretty damn awesome. We're in love with the new vintage of Annick, a pretty white blend named after a Masini family member. Fresh and zippy with lemon zest, nectarine and white flowers. Zero-added sulfur, yet so clean, not a hint of funk.

2017 Sam Vinciullo Warner Glenn Sauvignon Blanc/Sémillon \$34

Region: Margaret River < Australia

Grapes: Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic farming, grapes co-fermented and spends two weeks on the skins before pressing; no additives of any kind, no temperature control; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with trapped CO₂ (for freshness) but no added SO₂

Winemaker: Sam Vinciullo

Sam is a disciple of Etna's Frank Cornelissen, one of our faves (and Italy's Yoda of natural wine). So, Sam is the Jedi to Frank's Yoda, having worked with him on Etna for two years, absorbing his hands-off philosophy then bringing it all back home with him to Australia in 2016, where he is now making sensational natural wines in Margaret River. He is progressive and obsessed about biodiversity, working without sulfites, temperature control, filtration or oak -- practically unheard of in Margaret River. Sam allows fermentation to run wild, with no temperature control, but every stage of vinification is scrupulously monitored, and the winery is spotlessly clean – an important lesson he learned from the great Frank C. Also, he bottles the wine with plenty of trapped CO₂ to insure freshness (another trick he learned on Mt. Etna.) This guy has serious star quality, and his wines are ALIVE, exactly what we want to drink! Like this vibrant SB/Sémillon blend. Though the grapes are typical of the region, this a skin-contact white (super atypical here) that will make your heart flutter with zingy lemon curd, subtle jalapeno spice (from the Semillon) and pineapple kisses.

2016 La Vrille et le Papillon 'Caprice du Chateau' Viognier \$24

Region: Ardeche < France

Grapes: Viognier

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming, argilo-calcareous soils with lots of pebbly rocks; matured in stainless steel vat; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Meryl and Géraldine Crozier

The Ardeche region is part of northern Rhone, and mostly known for the famous AOC wines of Cornas and St. Joseph. Here Meryl and Géraldine are making tiny lots of not famous but super delicious and über natural wines - native yeast only, no additives, no enzymes, no SO₂ before or during fermentation, no fining, no filtration. This is light and lovely Viognier that glows in the glass with a cloudy golden haze. It starts with an electric jolt of pear and lime, then wild mint and fuzzy peaches that tickle your tongue. But the most remarkable thing about this wine is how it evolves. On day 3, it was still as fresh and gorgeous as ever (in and of itself amazing for a no-sulfur wine!) The peach flavors were popping, and it got a little creamier, like lemon curd, finishing with that distinctive lime acid pop.

2017 Cosimo Maria Masino 'Matilde' Toscana Rosato IGT \$19

Region: San Miniato < Tuscany < Italy

Grapes: 80% Sangiovese, 20% Sanforte

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter certified biodynamic wine; clay and limestone soil with many calcareous fossils in the vineyard, 600 meters altitude, certified biodynamic and organic, fermentation in concrete; bottled unfining/unfiltered with no added sulfur; 12% ABV

Winemaker: Francesco De Filippis

NEW VINTAGE ALERT: 2017 is here! Another great wine from our friends at Cosimo Maria Masini, where grapes have been grown since the 1600's. The Masini family acquired the estate in 1997 (though Napoleon Bonaparte was a previous owner) and made several exciting discoveries when they began rehabilitating the property, including a very few, old, Sanforte vines. Sanforte, unique to Tuscany, was previously thought to be Sangiovese, and produces a wine that is slightly more full-bodied. The Masinis lovingly restored these vines and converted the entire property to biodynamic viticulture in 2005. The Matilde rosato, certified biodynamic and organic, is 80% Sangiovese + 20% Sanforte that is fermented in concrete, unfining/unfiltered, with only a tiny amount of SO₂ added at bottling. More than just a summer quaffer, it's savory, watermelon notes, plush, fuzzy peach and typical Sangiovese sour cherry reveal themselves as the wine opens up in your glass. This one goes both ways – an excellent food wine, and so delicious on its own.

2017 Domaine Gentile Corse Rosé \$24

Region: Patrimonio < Corsica < France

Grapes: Nielluciu

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Ecocert certified organic farming with biodynamic practices; clay/limestone soils; maceration in rotary tank / saignée after 12 hours maceration / then stainless steel tank for 4-8 months; unfining, filtered manually (cross-flow, no additives); minimal added SO₂ at bottling only; 13% ABV

Winemaker: Jean-Paul Gentile

Corsica is stunning (a whole other story, on the blog soon), but I was blown away by the great lengths producers go to make wine in this mountainous, rocky and dry island region that is challenging to work and even traverse (it is something like 80% wild national park!) As a result, they make very little, and seem to drink it all on the island. But we ventured to the Patrimonio region to visit Jean-Paul Gentile, one of the island's few organic/bioD producers that is actually exported to the US, at his cellar this summer. Seeking a deeper standard than is required of organic certification, Jean-Paul now works in biodynamic territory, even avoiding the use of copper. Instead he relies on a cocktail of orange zest, horsetail and clay to dry the vine's leaves, controlling rot and mildew at the source rather than trying to kill off the mold and other harmful microbes that result. This is one of the key tenets of biodynamics: treating the root problem not the symptoms. As we were tasting through all of his wines and falling in love with his deep pink rosé, Jean-Paul explained that this is the natural color of his quickly pressed-off rosé from a thick-skinned grape like Nielluciu. And then he blew our minds by demonstrating the sneaky trick so many industrial rosé wines employ to get that popular salmon-colored "Provençal pink" – he added a faint drop of SO₂ and voilà, the wine instantly turned light coppery pink! Super gross. The moral of the story: do not fear the brighter pink wines, the color is no indication of dense fruit or sweetness! In fact, this pretty baby is savory and tart with a salty edge, like fresh watermelon juice with a shot of lime. We loved it so much that at least 6 bottles were harmed over the course of 4 days...

2016 Famille Vaillant L'Aubinaie \$20

Region: Anjou < Loire Valley < France

Grapes: Cabernet Franc

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter and AB certified biodynamic + organic farming; young vines on gray/green shale + quartz soils; fermented and aged in used barrique then bottled unfining/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 12% ABV

Winemakers/proprietors: Jean-Francois, Dominique and Laurence Vaillant

In the Loire Valley, the Famille Vaillant domaine has an unbroken family history dating back to the 18th century. They were one of the first French producers to adopt biodynamic practices in the 1980's, and they produce an impressive range of wines from various Anjou appellations, using no additives at all, and never fining or filtering. The L'Aubinaie is their young vine Cab Franc, a beautiful and honest portrayal of the local grape, with wild strawberry and expressive red fruits, and intense but soft tannins. Pour it in your glass and watch it blossom with air, revealing the spice and savory, almost tomato-y, notes of the grape, but not in the crunchy, fall-leaves-under-your boots sort of way. More feminine and elegant and silky smooth. Incredible bargain as well. Stock up.

2017 Johan Vineyards 'Farmlands' Pinot Noir 00 \$30

Region: Willamette Valley < Oregon

Grapes: Pinot Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter certified biodynamic farming; basalt soils with Missoula flood deposits as topsoil; some whole cluster but mostly destemmed; fermented and aged in used barrel; bottled unfining/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 13.2% ABV; 42 cases

Winemaker: Dan Rinke

This is certified biodynamic wine from a gorgeous, meticulously farmed vineyard – a great intro to Oregon pinot and no-added-sulfur wine! Willamette Valley's Johan Vineyards is one of the earliest and most respected biodynamic growers in the region, having started conversion in 2007 -- Dan Rinke's first order of business when he came on as winemaker. Dan had been a firm believer in biodynamics since the 90's, and the owners of Johan were game. Biodynamic farming has a bunch of different components, but for them, it boils down to viewing the vineyard as a single organism and placing equal focus on every aspect of the process, from the vines themselves all the way down to the soil and its microbial ecology. They sell most of their fruit to local wineries, but make a small amount of their own, under both the Johan Vineyards label and the Farmlands label (all from fruit from the home vineyard, not purchased fruit as with many second labels). Dan says, "we made Farmlands to emphasize the fact that we are farmers first. I farm 76 acres of grapes at Johan and we sell 60% of the fruit to 22 different wineries."

They make a regular Farmlands Pinot, which has a little added sulfur, and this no-added-sulfur cuvee. When asked which one he prefers, Dan goes on without hesitation, saying without the added sulfur, even a small amount, the wine itself is so much purer. And how did they end up making the same wine with and without sulfur? Well, we have my friend Wolfgang Weber, the wine's distributor and a natural winemaker himself, to thank. He explains, "we were up there last January as a full team from Revel for a visit to Johan and after tasting the wines in bottle, Dan started pulling some barrel samples, one of which was a block of pinot that hadn't yet had a sulfur add. The wine was delicious and fresh, and all that I wanted to drink. I also kept going back to that glass during our visit and was impressed with how the wine maintained that freshness. I asked Dan if he could fill a bottle for me to drink later, followed by asking if he could bottle a barrel or two without sulfur for us to sell in California. All through the vintage and before bottling they just kept calling it the "Wolfgang Wine", which I thought was hilarious." This wine is tart and juicy and PG-rated wild, like a romp in a raspberry forest, a quick roll on the forest floor, a little skunk on the nose, but all in all, really wholesome at the core. Best bang for the buck Pinot around.

Note: we are also featuring their regular Farmlands Pinot this month, which sees a very small (25ppm) addition of SO₂ 8 weeks before bottling. Fun experiment: try them both side by side to see for yourself the how added SO₂ changes a wine!

2017 Jauma Disco Special \$24

Region: McLaren Vale < Australia

Grapes: Shiraz (Syrah) +Grenache

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic, dry-farmed vines; tank fermented then bottled unfinned/unfiltered no added SO₂ in recycled beer bottles; 12% ABV

Winemaker: James Erskine

We're totally crushing on natural Aussie producer Jauma, who makes organic and additive-free wines in the Basket Range region of Australia's Adelaide Hills. You gotta love a producer who describes himself as "embracing a wild and creative lifestyle coupling cooking, poetry, painting, and organic vegetable farming along with their vineyard and winery work." Groovy. James makes wine in a Shed (the cute name for what they call a small winery), using meticulous fruit from Jauma's dedicated vineyard partner, Fiona Wood. All of his wines are super fresh, lively and crazy low in alcohol (especially for Oz), with plenty of acidity and drinkability (like killing a second bottle is no problem). Disco Special is an all-purpose party drinker, full of tart black plum, crunchy blue fruit and salty black olives with glittery acidity – and none of the dense, syrupy fruit that gives Shiraz a bad name. Great for barbecues or burgers or late-night dance parties.

2017 Subject to Change Sunhawk Red Blend \$26

Region: Mendocino County < California

Grapes: Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Counoise, Roussanne, Zinfandel, Cabernet, Viognier, Picpoul Blanc and Muscat

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter certified biodynamic farming, each varietal picked separately (when ripe), then foot trod and left on skins for 24 hours before being pressed and then transferred to neutral French oak barrels for fermentation and a 5-month élevage; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 206 cases produced, 12% Alcohol.

Winemakers: Alex Pomerantz + Brad Friedman

We love the newish Cali-natty wines from my good friend Alex Pomerantz (formerly of Sonoma's Kivelstadt Cellars) and his partner, Brad Friedman, formerly assistant winemaker at Santa Cruz's Big Basin. They've been around for around 9 months but are so busy trucking grapes and making wine that they still haven't had time to develop real branding or labels, hence the name of their project, Subject to Change... This new release is kind of like a beefed-up version of the juicy Carbonic Red that we featured in December. Hailing from a biodynamically farmed vineyard on the very top of a pretty hill overlooking the town of Hopland in Mendocino County, this wine is comprised of a random assortment of red and white grapes grows happily together. Following an old European (mostly French) method, Alex and Brad are co-fermenting everything together, as mixing in a small amount of white juice with red boosts the wine's aromas and adds a freshness to the palate. We love its chillable, quaffable side and also its more nuanced side, expressing both the exuberance of berry and stone fruit from the Rhone varieties along with lovely herb and sage-y note to round out the finish. Would be fab with your end of summer tomato dishes or zucchini and herb frittata, but also excellent on its own for pre- or post-dinner sipping.

2017 Basket Range Winery Pinot Noir \$32

Region: Basket Range < Adelaide Hills < Australia

Grapes: Pinot Noir

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming; dry farmed; half of the ferment was whole bunch and settled on skins for a week before pressing gently; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 11.8% ABV

Winemaker: Sholto Broderick

Phillip Broderick has made a more classic style of wine from his biodynamic estate in the Basket Range area of the Adelaide Hills for the last few decades, and now sons Sholto and Louis have started making their own juice alongside pop. The son's stuff is a bit looser in style, more in line with the frisky 'vin-de-soif' style of wine coming from the growing natural wine community here, made with no additions. Sholto works alongside his old man, picking this Pinot a touch earlier 'for juicy fruit and bright acidity'. with no added sulphur. Translucent light red color, bright, juicy peppery cranberry

juice with a teensy jalapeno garnish – a spice note I’m coming to associate with the Aussie soil – this wine is heart breakingly pretty. Sip slowly, make the bottle last, because, like that one lucky date with the hot guy/girl you know is out of your league, you know it’s not going to happen again. We got the last 2 cases of this in California, and who knows if/when we’ll see it again...

2017 Didier Montchovet Coteaux Bourguignons Gamay \$27

Region: Burgundy < France

Grapes: Gamay

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Demeter-certified biodynamic, conserves rainwater and repurposes throughout the year, operates the wine cellar by gravity only; 70 year-old vines on stony clay-limestone soils; after hand harvest, fruit goes into vat whole bunch for 8 days fermentation; aged in enamel-lined cement vat for 6-8months, then bottled under screw cap (to preserve “purity” of wine and encourage drinking now) with <20ppm SO₂; 12%ABV
Winemaker: Didier Montchovet

Farming biodynamically, Didier has slowly grown his estate from just half a hectare to 9.2, keeping with the same vineyards-first philosophy and turning out stunning wines with low intervention. An oddball for sure, this is Gamay-based Bourgogne from 70-year-old vines – and the only Gamay in these parts, 6km from Pommard in Bouze-les-Beaune. Super floral and vivid while still maintaining precision and elegance, it’s like grown-up Beaujolais, with crisp cranberry, raspberry and sour cherry fruit wrapped around a core of invigorating acidity, silky tannins coating your tongue like a lollipop. Maybe not fireworks like Beaujolais, but everlasting Gamay love.

2016 Philippe Viret MPN \$22

Region: Southern Rhone Valley < France

Grapes: Cinsault, Counois, Sciaccarello, Mondeuse, Muscat d’Hambourg

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic++ farming, calcareous clay soil; fermented and aged in amphora, then bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO₂; 12.5% ABV; 410 cases

Winemaker: Philippe Viret

Going way beyond even Biodynamic, 4th generation farmer (of sheep, pigs, and apricot, cherry and olive trees and grapes), Philippe practices “cosmoculture”. What kind of hippie-dippie baloney is that, you ask? So did we, and we are self-admittedly hippie-dippie. So, he follows not only the holistic farming practices and eschews all chemicals and additives, he’s goes a step further into biological energies. He says that by studying these energies, man can intervene to rebalance the elements, essentially creating a natural “immune system” for the farm/vineyard. In addition, Philippe's father built the winery on an ancient Roman site around an underground spring which they believe energizes the vineyards and the winery, and have obelisks dotted around the vineyards to transmit energy from the stars. I love this shit. And I really love this wine, called “MPN” for “Mon Pinot Noir” meaning “My Pinot Noir”, except it isn’t actually Pinot, it’s just done in the lighter style of Pinot. I know. But trust, this wine is awesome. Light, feminine, pretty, in a very understated way, and squeaky clean – like the quiet girl who isn’t demanding attention but gets it anyways because she is naturally beautiful and just so NICE. It’s soft red fruit, sour cherry with a little white pepper, no perceptible tannins or acid, just easy, joyful drinking.

Jauma ‘Tikka the Cosmic Cat’ \$32

Region: McLaren Vale < Australia

Grapes: Shiraz (Syrah) +Grenache

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic, dry-farmed vines; Silty Loam with Ironstone soils; two varieties are co-fermented and given 40 days of skin contact during carbonic maceration before resting 11 months in neutral barrel; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added SO₂ under crown cap; 12% ABV; 500 cases

Winemaker: James Erskine

Jauma, you had me at the cute label and name (in honor of Tikka, the winery cat), but then you sealed the deal with this divine inky, purple juice. And I thought I hated Shiraz! But this is a juicy, summery, fragrant, sloshy red that begs for a slight chill – right up our alley. Because the grapes are co-fermented whole cluster, long and slow, carbonic maceration happens, which lifts the fruit and prevents the density that often weighs down Aussie reds. You still get an explosion of dark fruits and peppery spices, plus some brambly herb and black olive. And there is enough structure and backbone to stand up to BBQ meats if that’s your jam. Yet, at only 12% ABV, with racy acidity and minerality, you could take this awesomely dark little wine in so many directions.

2017 Jauma '1000 Fires' Sémillon/Chenin Blend \$32

Region: McLaren Vale < Australia

Grapes: Sémillon and Chenin Blanc

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Organic, dry farming; the Sémillon is fermented whole cluster and the Chenin is fermented on its skins in neutral barrel; bottled unfinned/unfiltered under crown cap with no added sulfur

Winemaker: James Erskine

We were lucky enough to score a few bottles of Jauma’s summery blend of Sémillon and Chenin Blanc, sourced from vineyards planted close to the sea in Basket Range. Golden and fuzzy in the glass, a wave of salty sea water hits you first, giving way to slurpy nectarine, grapefruit and mango with that Chenin acid ping to finish. There's also an earthy note that reminds me of turmeric, making me feel healthy like I'm drinking some beautifying golden tonic. And at only 10.5% alcohol with no additives, it can’t be that far off...

NV Bonnet Huteau ‘Terres Australe’ Pétillant Naturel \$19

Region: Muscadet < France

Grapes: Melon, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Folle Blanche

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Certified organic farming, clay-calcareous gneiss soil; 10.5% ABV

Winemaker: Remi and Jacques Bonnet

Remi and Jacques Bonnet have been running this 40-hectare estate for the last 12 years (certified organic since 2005 and now working towards biodynamics), focused on bright, fresh, salty Muscadet wines. This is their lovely Pet'Nat of Melon and friends. It's fresh, clean and fleshy (but not fat), with a lovely honeyed pear thing, and a touch of salinity to remind you that you're in Muscadet territory. Would be amazing with cheese, but also an excellent summer *aperitivo* or brunch wine. Trade up from cheap Prosecco for your all-purpose bubbly, this is a way more interesting (and cleaner) option!

2017 Basket Range Winery 'Backstroke' \$30

Region: Basket Range < Adelaide Hills < Australia

Grapes: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon

Vineyard/Cellar Stats: Biodynamic farming; half of the ferment was whole bunch and it settled on skins for a week before pressing gently, no punchdowns; bottled unfinned/unfiltered with no added So2

Winemaker: Sholto Broderick

Another wine from Sholto and Louis Broderick, the latest generation of Basket Range Wine, comes an eccentric but super delicious red blend. This is an unorthodox marriage of Cabernet and Pinot Noir – I mean, coupling these two varieties, which are almost polar opposites, is crazy right? Yes, crazy delicious, in Sholto's hands, it turns out. Light bodied and fresh, with spicy red fruit and a touch of eucalyptus, you could easily down a slightly chilled bottle of this crazy Aussie...