

In each issue, The Tasting Panel's Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May selects her favorite wines and spirits of the month. Check here for the latest arrivals in our offices, the hottest new brands on the market, and an occasional revisited classic.

Publisher's PICKS

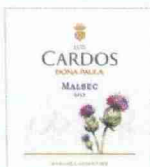
PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



WINES



Doña Paula Los Cardos Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14) Plums and dark chocolate waft from the glass with aromas of grilled steak. The palate is as focused and seductive as a couple dancing the tango: Iron and espresso wind around cocoa and nutmeg as licorice coats the tongue. Vibrant with good acidity and a long finish. **92**



TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Cline Cellars 2016 Ancient Vines Zinfandel, Contra Costa County (\$15) A luxurious sipper! Coffee and strawberry please the nose as they lead to an intriguing mouthfeel. Blackberry jam washes over the soft, round palate dotted with white pepper. Plum notes go creamy on the finish with a dusting of heather. The winery's oldest, most historic, and "shyest-bearing" Zinfandel blocks contribute to 94% of this blend. **93**



Baldacci Family Vineyards 2015 Allwin Syrah, Honey B Vineyard, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$45) This sumptuous, inky-black, cool-climate Syrah features a nose of grilled meat and summer plum. On the palate, rich notes of dark plum and blueberry are streamlined with heather and violets. A smattering of black pepper spices things up. **94**



Loveblock 2016 Pinot Gris, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$23) The orange-blossom aromatics steadily flow from this crisp, bright white. With searing acidity and a dry style, the freshness factor is firmly in place. On the salty mid-palate, zesty lime rind interplays with Asian pear. This wine is a perfect match for seafood. **92**

TERLATO WINES



Maryhill 2014 Malbec, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$24) This wine is rich, ripe, and meaty with notes of cedar and cherry liqueur. Rhubarb, coffee bean, and leather keep it savory and texturally concentrated. Aged 20 months in French oak. **92**



Clos Galena 2014 Crossos, Priorat, Spain (\$22) Aged six months in oak and planted in stone-filled soil, this blend of Garnacha, Carignan, and Cabernet Sauvignon is earthy and savory. Scents of cherries and tilled soil lead to a palate of black fruit, balsamic-laden orange peel, and coffee bean. The silky mouthfeel completes the journey. **91**



SNARKY & SPIRITED, LLC



Worthy of a smooch.
 French-style double bizou.
 Wildly infatuated.
 Seriously smitten.
 Head over heels in love.



Pellet Estate 2016 Un-Oaked Chardonnay, Sunchase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$42) From a site that's been producing wine grapes for more than 150 years comes this stunning unoaked Chardonnay (see the adjacent review of the oaked version) aged nine months in stainless steel and produced with extended lees stirring. The richness is there, as is depth and mineral-tinged complexity, while the nose picks up notes of pineapple and white flowers blooming out of the glass. Its lees-y vanilla-pudding body is sumptuous, and the acidity underscores it all with a crisp-melon and Asian-pear "crunchiness." Spiced jasmine continues to add aromatics on the finish. **95**



Pellet Estate 2015 Chardonnay, Sunchase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$68) In producing this wine aged 16 months in new French oak, winemaker Tom Rinaldi demonstrates his ability to keep things from tasting toasty as he brings forth savory aromas of oregano, spearmint, and lime-charged pears and pineapples. The crème brûlée effect glides in mid-palate as lemon curd and brush develop at the finish. **95**



Byron 2015 Julia's Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$40) This

iconic vineyard has graced many bottles and certainly shows respect for the fruit in this savory red. Hints of portobello mushroom, tilled soil, and tart cherry seem reserved at first, but once the wine opens up, their aromas seem to sweeten the air. Earth-kissed red fruit, cranberry tea, and that familiar forest-floor effect chime in as the acidity keeps flavors bright. Black olive and balsamic contribute, but raspberry and cherry lead the way. **93**



Sonoma-Loeb 2016 Sangiacomo Vineyard Fedrick Ranch Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$60) A silky, elegant Pinot, this wine intrigues the drinker with aromatics of earth, boysenberry, and butterscotch. On the palate, the mouthfeel is luxuriously creamy and accented with mocha, ripe blue/black berries, and a touch of heather. This hails from a label owned by the Chappellet family and is crafted by the dedicated, talented winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus. **96**



Tola 2016 Terre Siciliane Nero D'Avola, Sicily, Italy (\$13) A fragrant nose of blackberry, currants, and mocha is indicative of ripeness and indulgence. The bright palate displays violets, toasted almonds, and black fruit seasoned with basil and thyme. Cedar soaks into the finish for a pleasant wash of flavor. **91**



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Levendi 2015 Stagecoach Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$95) Juicy elements meld with teeth-coating tannins as dark chocolate and black beans intensify this wine's depth. Luscious, sun-drenched black fruit and savory Worcestershire sauce lead into a chewy finish. So much going on here! **96**



Levendi 2015 Symphonia Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60) Select Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards from Napa Valley form the brass, strings, and woodwinds of Symphonia. On the nose, leather and black cherry dig deep as red-fruited notes exude juiciness on the palate, where they harmonize with a chorus of chalky tannins. Black tea, slate, cedar, and dark chocolate interplay with mouthwatering plum underscored by a hum of black pepper. It finishes boldly and sweetly in perfect pitch. **93**



Goldschmidt Vineyards 2014 Game Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$89) Aromas of spiced cinnamon and cedar open up to a black violet/graphite texture and flavor profile with an underscore of intense blackberry and black plum. Smacking, dry tannins keep things in check as the wine opens up to a sensuously smoky, dark-chocolate finish. Aged 31 months in French oak. **94**



Katherine Goldschmidt 2016 Crazy Creek Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$23) Perfumed with tart blackberries and chocolate-covered raisins, the palate possesses silky tannins spotted with white pepper and enveloped in notes of plum, raspberry, and heather. **91**



Viña Zaco 2015 Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain (\$18) With lemon and a hint of flint on the nose, this wine features salty, lime-squeezed flavors softened by notes of lanolin and white flowers. It's both pretty and refined. **91**



AVENIU BRANDS



Gehricke 2016 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$32) This white draws you in with its intensely sensual aromas of lemon/lime tart, jasmine, and chamomile. Mouth-filling flavors enter the light as this Chard shines with notes of pineapple upside-down cake, toffee, pear, and Rainier cherries. The beautiful acidity balances it all out: This is the best yet for Gehricke. **95**



PHOTO: ALEX RUBIN

3 BADGE BEVERAGE

Best Value!

Little Black Dress 2017 Rosé, California (\$10) Created by Fetzler Winemaker Margaret Leonardi at the Mendocino winery, LBD is a wonderful wine to sip alone or paired with light fare. A value-driven release, it's accented on the nose with raspberry and plumeria flowers. Crisp acidity and a hint of minerality raise the bar for food-friendliness as white peach and pink grapefruit add a gemstone-like touch. **89**



Mother 2017 Rosé, California (\$15) You wouldn't expect a snarling wolf on a label emblazoned with the name "Mother," as this bad-boy rosé probably isn't a mama's boy. On the nose, perfumed rose petals smeared with cherry make this wine more inviting than fierce, while the crisp acidity and cranberry-and cherry-tinged minerality have a mouthwatering effect. Its "tough love" byline on the back label, which refers to the wine being "crushed, fermented, and raised in the California wilds," proves it's one mother of a ride. **91**



SPIRITS

Padre Azul Silver Tequila, Mexico (\$55) Tied up in what looks like a leather bottle vest as part of its intriguingly dramatic packaging, this tequila opens with aromas of vanilla and fresh agave with a touch of salinity. It glides across the tongue with nary a bite—but perhaps a dot of white pepper—to morph into a creamy, lime-kissed beauty. **93**



Tequila Sin Rival Silver, Mexico (\$37) This spirit features a pungent nose of cooked agave and fresh lime with a palate sweetened by marshmallow and mocha. The agave freshness shows through and contributes an earthiness to the finish. **92**

CORAZON AZUL SPIRITS

Chute Eight American Whiskey, USA (\$35) An essence of orange peel, stone fruit, and brown sugar perfumes the air, and before the spirit's flavors even register, a satiny sensation preps the palate for high-toned peach notes. Mellow and approachable hints of dried mango and oatmeal emerge on the graceful finish. **93**

ROSE CITY DISTILLING

New Amsterdam No. 485 Gin, USA (\$11) Juniper, pine, and coriander create a subtle perfume that simultaneously offers woody and salty tones. On the palate, chocolate mint aligns with lavender and grapefruit peel as the flavors broaden progressively toward the finish. Made in the USA, this spirit is thoroughly modern and sophisticated. **93**

E. & J. GALLO



La Pivón Vermouth Blanco, Spain (\$29) This fantastically aromatic, 32-proof spirit is made in Madrid from locally sourced herbs and botanicals. Assertive notes of lemon blossom, cedar, Valencia orange peel, clove, and heather ring true on the nose and palate with vanilla entering midway. Lemon reigns on the finish with a burst of cinnamon. **94**

3 BADGE MIXOLOGY



Salish Sea Organic Maple Liqueur, USA (\$36) At 39 proof, this handcrafted organic liqueur undergoes cold maceration; this process leaves some sediment in the bottle, which means the product is minimally filtered to ensure the highest quality possible. The maple aromatics are delicate and demure, yet they become more extroverted on the palate. Not cloying or sugary, the gracefully authentic thread of maple leaves behind a satisfying dry finish. This is absolutely exquisite. **95**



Burnside Goose Hollow RSV Garryana-Finished Small Batch Bourbon, USA (\$39) With a nose of oatmeal, cedar, and toffee, this easy-drinking, 92-proof whiskey is produced in Portland and has an incredibly creamy mouthfeel (Garryana refers to a specific type of oak indigenous to Oregon). Delightful notes of burnt orange peel and pekoe tea lead to an astringent mid-palate that soon settles into a white-peppered, cinnamon-spiced cedar finish. **93**

EASTSIDE DISTILLING



OMAR Single Malt Bourbon-Type Whisky, Taiwan (\$38) This spirit sends you to a garden with perfumed aromas of jasmine and ginger-caramel. On the palate, flavors of peach, melon, and honeyed orange peel are alluring. The lean, satiny, and sinewy 92-proof spirit goes grassy toward the finish with a green-pepper spice and a wave of salinity. **94**

OMAR Single Malt Sherry-Type Whisky, Taiwan (\$38) This single malt takes to the forest with scents of cinnamon, date nut bread, and nutmeg. Sandalwood and caramel apple interplay with savory, woody notes of porcini mushroom, orris root, sandalwood, and bergamot. The long finish is dotted with a salinity reminiscent of Himalayan sea salt and a sweet note of spearmint. **97**

JCB Vodka, Burgundy (\$125) With an expressive, feminine nose of blueberries, lavender, and vanilla bean, this charming spirit uses hand-harvested Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes from Jean-Charles Boisset's estate vineyards in Burgundy. After the varieties are fermented separately, the grapes are aged for six months in barrel before blending (they sit for two additional months for the flavors to meld). The result of this labor-intensive process is an exquisitely exotic vodka with flavors of summer roses, gardenia, and a continuous perfume on the nose and sumptuous palate. **100**



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL