



FOCUS: MINERVOIS

Our blind panels tasted **25** new-release wines from Minervois for this issue. Our critic for Southern France, **Tara Q. Thomas**, rated **10** as exceptional (90+) and **2** as Best Buys. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

91 | Clos du Gravillas 2016 Minervois L'Inattendu \$28 (06/20)

This could stand in for a white Châteauneuf-du-Pape, it's so rich, firm and structured. The Bojanowskis at Gravillas blend it from grenache (gris and blanc) with 20 percent macabeu from 90-year-old vines, all of it grown in the rocky, calcareous soils near the Haut-Languedoc Natural Park. Fermented and aged in *demi-muids*, it's creamy and nutty, with a chicken-broth richness; the fruit, while fresh, has a mellowness that recalls baked lemons. Riff on that note when it comes to food: Lemon-stuffed roast chicken or lemony pork chops would be two ways to go.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME

92 | Clos du Gravillas 2016 Minervois Rendez-Vous Sur La Lune \$25 (06/20)

A blend of half syrah with carignan, cinsault and grenache, all grown in the rocky moonscape of Cazelles, this fermented with ambient yeasts and aged in stainless-steel tanks. The fruit flavors sing with the clarity of an eau-de-vie, slightly boozy but pleasingly pure and spicy; earthy notes ride underneath, giving the wine extra purchase on the palate without weighing it down.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME

IMPORTED NEW RELEASES

Our blind panels tasted **429** imported new-release wines for this issue. Our critics rated **69** as exceptional (90+) and **40** as Best Buys.

Joshua Greene reviews Chile, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and Spain; **Stephanie Johnson** reviews Italy; **Rachel DeRocco Terrazas** reviews South Africa and central Spain; **Tara Q. Thomas** reviews Argentina, southern France, Germany and Hungary.

Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

93 | Clos du Gravillas 2018 Cotes du Brian a fleur de peau Muscat \$28 (06/20)

This beautiful, unusual expression of muscat arose out of a bumper crop at Gravillas in 2015. That year, the Bojanowskis made five different bottlings; this one has become a regular in their lineup. As with all their vines, the muscat is farmed organically and hand-picked; then they leave it to macerate on the skins for two weeks, pushing down the cap repeatedly. The 2018 is as deep in color as it is in scent, the ochre liquid giving off heady notes of orange blossom grounded by an earthiness that recalls warm sand. It's spicy and saline, musky and floral, with enough density to absorb the slight hint of bitterness muscat's phenolics can give. The lively acidity keeps the wine buoyant, and ready for rich foods—anything under a blanket of Swiss cheese would work, or try it with the mashed potatoes whipped with cheese that the French call *aligot*. —T.Q.T.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME

93 | Clos du Gravillas 2015 Cotes du Brian Pic de Saint-Jean \$45 (06/20)

Nicole and John Bojanowski took over an abandoned winery at 1,000 feet in altitude in St-Jean de Minervois in the early 2000s. Now they farm 15 acres, much of it in old-vine carignan and grenache gris, but they also planted a little syrah and mourvèdre, as well as a plot of cabernet sauvignon in Pic de Saint-Jean, the highest vineyard in St-Jean de Minervois. The cabernet had been intended for blending, but in 2015, Nicole thought the grapes were too good to blend away, so they bottled it alone, under the Côtes du Brian IGP. Aged for two years in French oak *demi-muids* and further mellowed in bottle, it's cool and earthy, with notes of tea and dried leaves surrounding a center of still-fresh red-currant fruit. It lasts on that freshness, feeling steadfast, suggesting that it has plenty more life ahead of it. —T.Q.T.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME

90 | Clos du Gravillas 2011 Vin de Pays des Cotes Du Brian Lo Vieih de 100 ans Carignan \$32 (06/14)

This comes off five acres of carignan, some of it planted in 1911, growing at an altitude of 1,000 feet. It's smoky from over a year in 400-liter French oak casks, wood tones of caramel and coffee enriching carignan's herbal red tones, a dressed-up version of a rustic Languedoc red.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME

90 | Clos du Gravillas 2018 Cotes du Brian Sous Les Cailloux des Grillons \$18 (06/20)

A singer, John Bojanowski likes to give his wines fanciful names; this one means "under the pebbles are the crickets." The blend is just as playful, a combination of syrah, cabernet sauvignon, cinsault, carignan, terret noir, counoise, mourvèdre and grenache. It's an energetic red, refreshing and fun, with notes of pine and wild herbs lifting the sweet, tangy red-cherry fruit. —T.Q.T.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME

88 | Clos du Gravillas 2016 Cotes du Brian Lo Vieih Carignan \$28 (06/20)

All animal and mineral, this is a selection from vines planted in 1911, the fruit destemmed, foot-stomped and left on the skins for six weeks. It doesn't have much structure, but it's fascinating in flavor, earthy, ferrous and leafy, with caramel notes around the edges that suggest a pairing with roast game birds.

Chartrand Imports, Rockland, ME