

Publisher's PICKS

In each issue THE TASTING PANEL's Publisher and Executive Editor, 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.

HOTO: LEIGH CASTELLI



WINES



Anaba 2010 Chardonnay, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$37) A paradigm, subdued yet dominant... steely, juicy and vibrant—the mineral complexity seasons the fleshy fruit while a subtle creaminess hints at caramel and vanilla. There is a resemblance to Puligny-Montrachet excellence. **94**

HOLLYWOOD & WINE



Riverbench 2010 Estate Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley (\$26) It's dessert up front: buttered coconut, while a hint of oak melts on the tongue. Bright fruit and an elegant mouthfeel lends a charmed finish. **93**

STRANGE WINES



Riverbench 2010 Estate Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, (\$28) Strawberries push up through the earth and are spotted with clove and cinnamon. A straw of cocoa pulls through, weaving into the ripe red fruit again and again. Wonderful mouthfeel. **91**

STRANGE WINES



Benziger 2011 de Coelo Pinot Noir, Quintas Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$50) The 25-acre certified Biodynamic estate vineyard, divided into two blocks, sits on a rugged hilltop five miles from the Pacific. Unfiltered and fermented with native yeast, de Coelo rests in French oak for 16 months. Therein lies some of the story behind this startling and changeable red.

The initial supercharged strike of acidity is flavored with tea tannins and unsweetened cranberry. The scenery amazingly takes a different shape: A silkiness evolves, with cherry and rose formation becoming a fashion-forward Pinot. **93**

KOBRAND



Melée 2010 Grenache, California (\$35) Superstar grower and winemaker Tuck Beckstoffer was inspired by the Grenache of Southern France to purchase fruit from Paso Robles (and some from Mendocino) to create this blend of 90% Grenache and 10% Syrah, which enhances the rose petal, blue floral aromatics, concentrated plums and new leather that he sought. Henry Beylin, Sommelier at Gjelina in Venice, CA, tasted with us and noted, "Wonderful fleshy fruit with defined notes of cinnamon-cherry and rhubarb; chocolate and sweet tobacco on the finish. A great expression of this style." **92**

VINTAGE POINT



Buccella 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$140)

Sourced from small vineyards in Rutherford, Oakville, Stags Leap, Yountville and Coombsville, Buccella—the name means "mouthful" in Latin—is just that. Candied grape notes come alive in a luxuriously rich setting, under a wash of extremely supple tannins. Espresso notes develop a roundness, and for a Napa Cab, a unique occurrence: A garden of violets bloom and cherries blossoms. Rhubarb pie is smattered with hints of cinnamon and nutmeg. I was lucky enough to enjoy this on my birthday. **96**



Worthy of a smooch.

French-style double bizou.

Wildly infatuated.

Seriously smitten.

Head over heels in love.



SakéMoto Premium Junmai Saké, Japan (\$11) A gentle breeze of peach and mandarin and newly blossomed night jasmine soothes on the nose. Take a sip and the baby dove feather turns into an ethereal liquid. Clean dew drops of tangerine and fresh linen work with a natural acidity. **90**

SAKÉ ONE



SPIRITS



Iceberg IceFusion Crème Brûlée Flavored Vodka, Canada (\$15) Oh Canada import! This true-to-its-name north-of-the-border flavored vodka is plenty good. If it weren't in a clear glass and I were tasting it blind, I would think it possessed a cream base. But the glacier-clear white spirit, made with water harvested from icebergs off the coast of Newfoundland, is packed with aromas of toffee, dairy cream, pudding and cocoa. On the palate, a coffee mocha comes into play. The finish continues evenly on the path of pudding and coffee. **91**

ADMIRAL IMPORTS



Spring44 Gin, USA (\$25) This USA-made 88-proof gin has spring to its step! The nose is a wake-up call of juniper, anise and peppercorns and the palate follows closely. Texturally, its zing hits the middle of the tongue and an increasing amount of flavor flows to the back of the mouth, where it warms and soothes. **91**



Clyde May's Conecuh Ridge Whiskey, USA (\$30) Pass the peach pie! This 85-proof Alabama-finished whiskey (55% corn, 30% rye, rounded out with barley and aged in new caramel-charred white oak barrels) is heavenly scented with cinnamon and peach. The round sensation of cooked apples and peppered peaches is palate-pleasing enough, and vanilla-toffee sends out sweet signals, but the finish is actually dry and a touch stony. **93**



Given Liqueur, France (\$33) The agave cannot hide in this citrus-based French liqueur—at least not on the nose. Richly baked notes of apricot pastry, lime and jasmine waft straight to the senses, with pungent agave straddling the stone fruit. But the taste is not a straight shot from nose to palate; instead, lean orange-lime tangs the tongue and is as authentic a juice note from start to finish as we've tasted in a liqueur—with hints of jasmine and sandalwood to create an exotic landing. **90** ■■



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BYR

Riedel Bar is available in 13 spirit enhancing shapes; starting at \$4.40 per glass.



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Cognac Glass Height: 7-1/2" Capacity: 6-1/8 oz.