



Sauvignon and Syrah

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



Sauvignon and Syrah? Really? No. Well, at least not together. But it is amazing how many really good Sauvignons and Syrahs I have tasted and in many cases drank of late. Of course, the other side of that is to note that only 13% of the Sauvignons and 2% of the Syrahs I have tasted made the cut, so for every wine note listed in this article, there are at least 3 or

4 wines I tasted that were not good enough and many of those were frankly bad. The down side of tasting more wine than almost anyone else is that I taste more bad wine than anyone else. In general, that means I am tasting them so you don't have to. Still, I am not complaining.

Here are some of the best of wines I have tried recently. All are either Sauvignon Blanc or Syrah. Some are brand new to Spec's and a few will not be in until November 1st or 2nd (or soon after) but all are worth a try. Some of these will be limited to the Spec's Smith Street store in Houston and the Spec's Brodie Lane store in Austin. And a couple may be limited to Smith only. This is all due to market forces, price, and availability.

Sauvignon Blanc

After a few (ok, several) years of lethargy, Sauvignon Blanc is heating up. While this has been and in many cases still is a disheartening category, there are now some bright spots and even a few exceptional New World Sauvignons to go with the likes of old-reliables such as Dry Creek Vineyards, Groth, Turnbull, and Pezzi King. These new wines are fresh and exciting.

MARKHAM VINEYARDS Sauvignon Blanc, Oak Knoll AVA, 2009 12x750ml \$11.99 \$132.98

Tech Note: 13.8% Alcohol. 94% Sauvignon Blanc (including 24% Sauvignon Musque) and 6% Semillon, 100% whole berry pressed (de-stemmed but not crushed), with 7.5% given skin contact before a 100% stainless steel fermentation and 4.5 months aging in large old wooden tanks. Straw in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-light-bodied with freshly balanced acidity. Richer but still focused Sauvignon offering more feel in the mouth to go with its citrus and tree/stone fruit. Bear Note: Very fresh and quite yummy. Much better than it has to be and better than I expected it to be. Spec's Score: 90.

STOLPMAN VINEYARDS Sauvignon Blanc, Santa Ynez Valley, 2010

12x750ml \$15.29 \$172.02

Tech Note: 13.9% Alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc, 95% fermented and aged in stainless steel with the remaining 5% fermented and aged in neutral French 500 liter puncheons. Straw in color with well formed legs; light-to-medium-bodied with refreshing acidity. Clean, refreshing, easy to drink, very citrusy (but not much grapefruit) Sauvignon Blanc offering hints of grass and floral. Bear Note: Very fresh and quite refreshing. Did I mention that it is refreshing? Delicious. Spec's Score: 91.

KAWARAU Sauvignon Blanc, Central Otago, New Zealand 2009

12x750ml Coming Soon

Tech Note: 13% Alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc, 100% estate grown from a single vineyard in Central Otago. Fermented in stainless steel using wild yeasts with lees contact (Certified Organic Wine). Pale-straw in color with good legs; light-to-medium-bodied with refreshing acidity. Softer, rounder, richer Sauvignon Blanc (more California than Marlborough) with nice tropical fruit notes. The citrus is there but it is ripe and integrated. Fine feel in the mouth. Who says all the good Sauvignon in New Zealand comes from Marlborough. This wine from Central Otago gives New Zealand a whole new reference point. Spec's Score: 90.

Le JAJA de JAU Sauvignon Blanc, Vin de Pays d'Oc, 2010

12x750ml \$8.69 \$97.65

Tech Note: 11.5% Alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. Skin contact fermentation with regular stirring of the lees. 4 months on the fine lees in temperature controlled stainless steel vat. Straw in color with good legs; dry, light-bodied with fresh acidity. Crisp, clean, fresh, gooseberry and citrus Sauvignon. Bright and alive. Bear Note: Quite refreshing and a super value. Yes, it really is that good and that cheap. Spec's Score: 88+.

TUDAL HONKER Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, 2010

12x750ml \$12.39 \$138.49

Tech Note: 13.8% Alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. No oak, no ML. Green straw in color with good legs; dry, medium-light-bodied with freshly balanced acidity. Fresh, clean, decidedly Sauvignon Blanc. Lots of citrus and some grass. Bear Note: Laser focus. A pure and clean expression of Sauvignon with no manipulation. Spec's Score: 89+.

DUCKHORN Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, 2009

12x750ml \$20.89 \$250.88

Tech Note: 13% Alcohol. A blend of 75% Sauvignon Blanc and 25% Semillon fermented in a mix of new French oak (15%) and stainless steel tanks (85%) before 5 months of sur-lie aging in all French oak barrels. Straw in color, and with good legs; dry, medium-bodied with balanced acidity. Supple, softer and richer style with all the Sauvignon fruit and extra dimension from the Semillon. Hints of pear and more tree fruit. No grassiness. Bear Note: Yum. A lot of manipulation went into this but it doesn't show in the finished wine. Quite rich and seamless. Spec's Score: 90+.

DECOY Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, 2010

12x750ml \$17.59 \$197.49

Tech Note: 13% Alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc sourced from 11 Napa Valley appellations. 100% stainless steel fermented for 21 days at 55°F. Straw in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-light-bodied with fresh acidity. Fresh, non-grassy, citrusy. Bear Note: Very easy to drink. Bright and fresh. YUM. This is one of those cases where the "second wine" (Decoy is the second wine of Duckhorn) is very nearly as good as the first wine. Spec's Score: 89+.

ARAUJO Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, 2009

6x750ml \$49.99 \$281.82

Almost all Sauvignon (including Musque) with a hint of Viognier fermented 2/3 in stainless steel barrels and 1/3 steam-bent (un-charred) wooden barrels with lots of lees stirring. Straw in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-plus-bodied with fresh acidity. Supple, sweet, mineral. Ripe citrus and tropical fruit with a swirl of mineral. No grass. Bear Note: Vivid, vibrant, and alive with exceptional integration. Puts me in mind of Ch. Haut Brion Blanc. Utterly Delicious. Excellent. Spec's Score: 95VHR.

SYRAH

I don't get it. Oh, I get Syrah. I get it with the zeal of a religious convert because there was a time when, well, I didn't like Syrah –not one little bit. And then something happened. High quality American and even some New Zealand and even Argentine and Chilean Syrah began to grow on me. I still have a hard time with much of the wine I taste from the northern Rhone but even there, some light shines through. I am thinking about the incredible Cote Roties from Saint Cosme ... No, I get Syrah. I have become an American Syrah evangelist. What I don't get is why it hasn't taken off. People – Try these wines. They are fantastic. Really. Trust me on this. Syrah is the most exciting (from a quality and value standpoint) category in red wine today. (23 wines noted out of 95 tasted.)

BABY BEAR Syrah, Walla Walla, 2008**12x750ml Coming Soon**

Tech Note: 14.2% Alcohol. From Dunham cellars and actor Kyle McLachlan comes this 100% Syrah aged 24 months in all new French oak Taransaud barrels. Purple in color, and with well formed legs (stains the glass); dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Deep, rich, delicious. Has some Mocha Latte and sweet red fruit on the nose. Asian Spice and supple, darker fruit on the palate. Bear Note: The wine is brilliant in the mouth. Delicious. Spec's Score: 94.

DUSTED VALLEY "Stained Tooth" Syrah, Columbia Valley, 2009**12x750ml Coming Soon**

Tech Note: 15.2% Alcohol. 87% Syrah, 5% Grenache, 5% Petite Sirah, and 3% Mourvedre aged 12 months in American and French oak barrels (30% new). (The American barrels are from extra tightly grained Wisconsin oak), 70% neutral. Purple in color with well formed legs (stains the glass); dry, medium-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and medium chewy phenolics. Deep and dusty Syrah offering dark red fruit with fine spice and a bit of pepper. Bear Note: Vivid. Alive in the mouth. Delicious. Spec's Score: 92.

JUSTIN Syrah, Paso Robles, 2009**12x750ml \$23.69 \$263.11**

Tech Note: 15% Alcohol. 100% Syrah. Fermentation: stainless steel, 12 days with UV-43 yeast. Pump-overs: 2 times daily during fermentation. Maceration: 21- 27 days including fermentation. Maturation: 16 months in French oak barrels (Allier and Nevers - 40% new). Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Big, juicy Syrah. Lots of richness. Black and red fruit with some coffee grounds, earth and some dark spice. Bear Note: Classically delicious. Spec's Score: 92.

JC CELLARS Rockpile Syrah, Russian River Valley, 2007**12x750ml \$52.24 \$588.53**

Tech Note: 15.5% Alcohol. 100% Syrah destemmed into ½ ton open-top fermenters (three day cold soak then punched down five times per day) and aged 18 months in Burgundian French oak barrels (80% new). Racked right before bottling. Purple-black-violet in color with well formed legs; stains the glass; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Dense, rich, dusty, dark-red-merging-into-black fruit Syrah with coffee and coffee grounds, spice, black pepper, and dark earth. Classic. What great new world Syrah should be. Bear Note: Satisfying and Delicious. Spec's Score: 95+.

STOLPMAN VINEYARDS Originals Syrah,**Santa Ynez Valley, 2008****12x750ml \$34.99 \$395.28**

Tech Note: 14.9% Alcohol. 97% Syrah and 3% Viognier fermented using punch-downs. Syrah yield 1.25 tons per acre from the oldest block in Ballard Canyon. Viognier is co-fermented. Aged 10 months in French 300 liter cigar barrels (50% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with balanced acidity and medium-chewy phenolics. Cooler and more finished in the mouth. Offers power and elegance. DELICIOUS. Succulent, juicy RIPE Syrah but in precise balance. Deep, lovely, supple red and some black fruit. Black and a bit of white pepper. The earth and oak are nicely integrated. This really got me going on Syrah again. Spec's Score: 96.

STOLPMAN VINEYARDS Estate Syrah, Santa Ynez Valley, 2009**12x750ml \$22.79 \$257.66**

Tech Note: 14.5% Alcohol. 97% Syrah and 3% Viognier. (Syrah yield 1.5 ton per acre). Fermented in 2 ton fermenters with 3 daily punch-downs. Viognier is co-fermented with additional pressed Viognier skins and 25% sorted brown stems included. Aged 16 months in French 300 liter cigar barrels (33% new). Deep-dense-purple-blue-red in color, with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Ripe, rich, chewy. As much black as red fruit Syrah offering lots of coffee and coffee grounds with black and some white pepper along with toasty oak and warm earth. Some dark floral and cassis perfume emerges as it opens. Dense but layered. Delicious. Excellent. Stopman is a real discovery and may be a harbinger of the potential of Santa Ynez. Spec's Score: 94.

BIG TABLE FARM Syrah, Santa Barbara, 2007**12x750ml \$46.89 \$527.04**

Tech Note: 15.1% Alcohol. 100% Syrah aged 14 months in 100% French oak (40% new). Dense-purple-red in color with well formed legs (stains the glass); dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and medium-plus phenolics. Rich, juicy, ripe, lovely, dark red Syrah fruit. Bright and alive but satisfying. Both black and some white pepper. Earthy and rich. Bear Note: Delicious. Just a great bottle of wine. Spec's Score: 94.

MISSION ESTATE Syrah, Hawkes Bay (New Zealand), 2009**12x750ml Coming Soon**

Tech Note: 13.5% Alcohol. 100% Syrah from vineyards on Ohiti Road in the Gimblett Gravels. Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with balanced acidity and medium-plus phenolics. Lovely, balanced, elegant Syrah that will appeal to Pinot Noir fans, whether Burgundy or New World. Lots of red fruit with black pepper and spice. Bear Note: Delicious. Complex. Holds the interest. Spec's Score: 92.

McPRICE MYERS Syrah Larnier Vineyard,**Santa Ynez Valley, 2007****12x750ml \$32.29 \$364.68**

Tech Note: 16.2% Alcohol. A co-fermented blend of 97% Syrah and 3% Viognier aged 23 months in French oak barrels (35% new). (142 cases produced.) Black-purple-red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with softly balanced acidity and medium chewy phenolics. Supple in the mouth. Dusty black fruit. Dark Asian spice and black and white pepper with coffee grounds and earth. Bear Note: This is really not my style but I recognize its excellence and would drink it on occasion. As such, I think of it as a valued situational or special teams player rather than as a starter. Spec's Score: 91.

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WATERS Pepper Bridge Vineyard Syrah, Walla Walla Valley, 2008
12x750ml \$37.99 \$427.78

Tech Note: 14.1% Alcohol. 100% Syrah aged 16 months in all French oak barrels (10% new). Pepper Bridge is one of the oldest vineyards in Walla Walla, planted along elevated terrace islands formed by slack water drainage from the Walla Walla River. Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Much earthier and bigger. Dark red and some black fruit. Black raspberry and red raspberry with red cherry and lots of coffee grounds. Bear Note: Bright and fresh but huge in the mouth. Completely different style than the Waters Loess Vineyard. Spec's Score: 93+.

WATERS Loess Valley Vineyard Syrah, Walla Walla Valley, 2008
12x750ml \$37.99 \$427.78

Tech Note: 14.1% Alcohol. 90% Syrah and 10% Viognier co-fermented and aged 24 months in all French oak barrels (40% new). (Loess is owned and managed by Leonetti Cellars - only 2 acres of Syrah are planted.) The fruit was crushed and destemmed then the stems are dried in small slotted cherry bins for 36 hours and then approximately 30% are added back into the fermentation. Deep purple red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and medium-chewy phenolics. Spicy, juicy, ripe, red and black raspberry and some cherry fruit Syrah. Offers dark spice, black and white pepper, and plenty of coffee grounds. Finishes more red cherry than raspberry. Bear Note: Bright and alive. Spec's Score: 92+.

CALCAREOUS Syrah, Paso Robles, 2007
12x750ml \$28.39 \$319.59

Tech Note: 14.5% Alcohol. 100% Syrah aged 24 months in French oak barrels (30% new). Purple-red-black in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Rich and ripe with LOTS of dark red and black fruit. Complex mix of fruit and spice with well integrated earth and oak. Bear Note: DELICIOUS. Spec's Score: 94.

TWISTED SISTER Syrah, Paso Robles, 2007
12x750ml \$17.99 \$202.47

Tech Note: 14.7% Alcohol. 100% Syrah aged 24 months in French, American, and Hungarian oak barrels (33% new). Purple-black in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with softly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Juicy, supple, dark red and more black fruit with notes of coffee grounds, earth, and oak. Spec's Score: 89+.

CRAGGY RANGE Le Sol Gimblett Gravels Vineyard Syrah, Hawkes Bay, 2008
12x750ml \$xx.xx \$xxx.xx

Tech Note: 14.21% Alcohol. 100% Syrah 100% hand harvested. Fermentation in closed top oak cuve and aged 20 months in French oak barriques (42% new). Deep-dense-purple-red in color with well formed legs (stains the glass); dry, full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Supple and juicy-rich with lots of black and some red raspberry and other berry fruit. Bear Note: Vivid in the glass. New Zealand is not the first country I think of when I think of Syrah but it has made some good ones. The warmer parts of the North Island tend to do best but I wonder if Central Otago might not do just as well. Spec's Score: 94.

GREY STACK Marie's Block Syrah, Sonoma (Bennett Valley), 2007
12x750ml \$39.89 \$449.74

Tech Note: 13.5% Alcohol. 100% Syrah given a 5 day cold soak, fermented in open tops with punch downs, and aged for 12 months in French oak barrels. Purple-black in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Supple, fresh, juicy dark red and some black fruit accented with dark spice and a hint of coffee. Bear Note: Ripe and well integrated: rich, dark and delicious. Spec's Score: 92.

DUXOUP Teldeschi Vineyard Syrah, Dry Creek, 2007
12x750ml \$16.29 \$183.00

Tech Note: 13.5% Alcohol. 90% Syrah and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon aged 7 months in French oak barrels (25% new). All hand sorted, gravity flow, with malolactic fermentation in barrel. Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Funky, rich, juicy Syrah offering what starts as black and then goes to dark red fruit. Fresh Balance. Bear Note: Excellent. I root for you to like this as much as I do both because of the wine and because I like the owners/winemakers (Andy and Deborah Cutter) here - a couple of iconic old hippies doing winemaking on an low-footprint, almost subsistence level in a tumbling-down-a-hillside gravity-flow winery with a feline carbon-dioxide detection system. If you visit, maybe they'll let you sign their door. Spec's Score: 91.

Domaine Serene ROCK BLOCK Del Rio Syrah, Rogue Valley, 2005
12x750ml \$18.99 \$213.74

Tech Note: 14.4% Alcohol. 100% Syrah sourced from Del Rio Vineyard in Southern Oregon overlooking Rogue River. Rocky, clay loam soils. Aged 14 months in primarily French oak barrels (63% new). Black-purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Rough and rustic. Mostly black fruit and earth with notes of coffee grounds, tobacco, black pepper and dark spice. Bear Note: Delicious. Drinking beautifully. Don't be put off by the vintage. Spec's Score: 91+.

DUNHAM CELLARS Syrah, Columbia Valley, 2006
12x750ml \$33.89 \$380.64

Tech Note: 14.6% Alcohol. 100% Syrah. 14 months in 50% French and 50% American oak (100% new). Black-purple-red in color, and with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. A bit reductive and closed at first but lots of swirling gives some fine spice and black fruit flavors. Bear Note: Works its way to delicious. Excellent. Spec's Score: 93.

Domaine de MOURCHON Family Reserve S (Syrah), Cotes du Rhone Villages - Seguret, 2008
6x750ml \$48.40 \$266.40

Tech Note: 14% Alcohol. 100% Syrah from 60 year vines grown on pure grey sandstone on steep slopes yielding only 15 Hl/Ha. Vinification in small stainless steel tanks, aging in oak barrels (about 10 months) and bottled with no filtration. (Less than 200 cases made.) Deep-dark-blue-purple-black in color, with subtle red highlight and with well formed legs (paints the glass); dry, very full-bodied with balanced acidity and quite chewy phenolics. Deep, dense, but alive. Real WOW Wine. Explosive black Syrah fruit. Great texture. Syrah and sand terroir with black pepper and dark spices. Bear Note: Delicious. Really Excellent. Very Limited. Very new world in style. Spec's Score: 95.

ARAUJO ESTATE Eisele Vineyard Syrah, Napa Valley, 2007

6x750ml \$97.49 \$536.14

Tech Note: ___% Alcohol. 100% Syrah fermented in open tops with punch downs and aged 22 months in all French oak barrels (50% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Subtle, elegant, focused but juicy Syrah. More black than red fruit (but the red fruit is present). Notes of spice and dry earth. Lovely perfume. Very well integrated. Bear Note: Delicious. Great texture and feel. Outstanding. As good as American Syrah gets? Spec's Score: 96+.

SAINT COSME, Cote Rotie, 2007

12x750ml \$60.99 \$688.08

100% Syrah (mostly old vine "Sirene" selection) from several terroirs aged 15 months in all new French oak barrels. Deep purple in color, bright but slightly cloudy with good legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Offers developed, juicy, dark black raspberry-cherry-and-mixed-berry fruit, limestone and dark earth terroir, and accents of dark spice, black pepper, bacon fat, and a hint of white pepper. Very long finish. Bear Note: Complete and integrated but focused; lovely-in-the-mouth. Part of my "religious conversion." Spec's Score: 95.

SAINT COSME, Cote Rotie, 2008

12x750ml \$53.69 \$603.90

100% Syrah (mostly old vine "Sirene" selection) from several terroirs aged 15 months in all new French oak barrels. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Deep, focused, minerally, vibrating. Super concentration. Much more red (albeit dark red) than black fruit. Supple, clean but with real tension on the balance. Bear Note: Vivid, [enervating](#), delicious. St. Cosme owner/winemaker Louis Barruol is a genius with both Syrah and Grenache. Spec's Score: 94.

SAINT COSME, St. Joseph, 2007

12x750ml \$29.90 \$336.72

Alcohol. 100% Syrah, (much of it Sirene grown in granite soils) aged 12 months in all French oak barrels (25% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Offers juicy black fruit with raspberry, blueberry, blackberry, cherry, and smokey bacon fat with granite earth; Very long finish. Bear Note: Integrated, complete, quite tasty. WOW. Spec's Score: 91+. ✨

