



Robert M. Parker, Jr.'s

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# The WINE ADVOCATE®

## The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine RATING SYSTEM

Robert Parker's rating system employs a 50-100 point quality scale. It is my belief that the various twenty (20) point rating systems do not provide enough flexibility and often result in compressed and inflated wine ratings. THE WINE ADVOCATE takes a hard, very critical look at wine, since I would prefer to underestimate the wine's quality than to overestimate it. The numerical ratings are utilized only to enhance and complement the thorough tasting notes, which are my primary means of communicating my judgments to you.

96-100

An extraordinary wine of profound and complex character displaying all the attributes expected of a classic wine of its variety. Wines of this caliber are worth a special effort to find, purchase, and consume.

90-95

An outstanding wine of exceptional complexity and character. In short, these are terrific wines.

80-89

A barely above average to very good wine displaying various degrees of finesse and flavor as well as character with no noticeable flaws.

70-79

An average wine with little distinction except that it is soundly made. In essence, a straightforward, innocuous wine.

60-69

A below average wine containing noticeable deficiencies, such as excessive acidity and/or tannin, an absence of flavor, or possibly dirty aromas or flavors.

50-59

A wine deemed to be unacceptable.

## TASTING NOTES AND RATINGS

When possible all of my tastings are done in peer-group, single-blind conditions, (meaning that the same types of wines are tasted against each other and the producers' names are not known). The ratings reflect an independent, critical look at the wines. Neither price nor the reputation of the producer/grower affect the rating in any manner. I spend three months of every year tasting in vineyards. During the other nine months of the year, six and sometimes seven-day workweeks are devoted solely to tasting and writing. I do not participate in wine judgments or trade tastings for many reasons, but principal among these are the following: (1) I prefer to taste from an entire bottle of wine, (2) I find it essential to have properly sized and cleaned professional tasting glasses, (3) the temperature of the wine must be correct, and (4) I prefer to determine the time allocated to the number of wines to be critiqued.

The numerical rating given is a guide to what I think of the wine vis-à-vis its peer group. Certainly, wines rated above 85 are very good to excellent, and any wine rated 90 or above will be outstanding for its particular type. While some have suggested that scoring is not well suited to a beverage that has been romantically extolled for centuries, wine is no different from any consumer product. There are specific standards of quality that full-time wine professionals recognize, and there are benchmark wines against which others can be judged. I know of no one with three or four different glasses of wine in front of him or her, regardless of how good or bad the wines might be, who cannot say, "I prefer this one to that one." Scoring wines is simply taking a professional's opinion and applying some sort of numerical system to it on a consistent basis. Scoring permits rapid communication of information to expert and novice alike.

The score given for a specific wine reflects the quality of the wine at its best. I often tell people that evaluating a wine and assigning a score to a beverage that will change and evolve in many cases for up to 10 or more years is analogous to taking a photograph of a marathon runner. Much can be ascertained but, like a picture of a moving object, the wine will also evolve and change. Wines from obviously badly corked or defective bottles are resealed, since a wine from a single bad bottle does not indicate an entirely spoiled batch. Many of the wines reviewed have been tasted many times, and the score represents a cumulative average of the wine's performance in tastings to date. Scores, however, do not reveal the important facts about a wine. The written commentary that accompanies the ratings is a better source of information regarding the wine's style and personality, its relative quality vis-à-vis its peers, and its value and aging potential than any score could ever indicate.

Here then is a general guide to interpreting the numerical ratings:

90-100 is equivalent to an A and is given only for an outstanding or special effort. Wines in this category are the very best produced of their type. There is a big difference between a 90 and 99, but both are top marks. As you will note through the text, there are few wines that actually make it into this top category because there are not many great wines.

80-89 is equivalent to a B in school and such a wine, particularly in the 85-89 range, is very, very good; many of the wines that fall into this range often are great values as well. I have many of these wines in my personal collection.

70-79 represents a C, or average mark, but obviously 79 is a much more desirable score than 70. Wines that receive scores between 75 and 79 are generally pleasant, straightforward wines that lack complexity, character, or depth. If inexpensive, they may be ideal for uncritical quaffing.

Below 70 is a D or F, depending on where you want to school. For wine, it is a sign of an imbalanced, flawed, or terribly dull or diluted product that will be of little interest to the discriminating consumer.

In terms of awarding points, my scoring system gives every wine a base of 50 points. The wine's general color and appearance merit up to 5 points. Since most wines today are well made, thanks to modern technology and the increased use of professional oenologists, they tend to receive at least 4, often 5 points. The aroma and bouquet merit up to 15 points, depending on the intensity level and dimension of the aroma and bouquet as well as the cleanliness of the wine. The flavor and finish merit up to 20 points, and again, intensity of flavor, balance, cleanliness, and depth and length on the palate are all important considerations when giving out points. Finally, the overall quality level or potential for further evolution and improvement-aging merits up to 10 points.

Scores are important for the reader to gauge a professional critic's overall qualitative placement of a wine vis-à-vis its peer group. However, it is also vital to consider the description of the wine's style, personality, and potential. No scoring system is perfect, but a system that provides for flexibility in scores, if applied by the same taster without prejudice, can quantify different levels of wine quality and provide the reader with one professional's judgment. However, there can never be any substitute for your own palate nor any better education than tasting the wine yourself.

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## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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ARTADI	2001	GRANDES ANADAS	RIOJA	(\$125.00)	RED	98+
ARTADI	2001	PAGOS VIEJOS	RIOJA	(\$80.00)	RED	97
ARTADI	2001	VINAS DE GAIN	RIOJA	(\$20.00)	RED	94
<p>Now in bottle, these are great Riojas. The 2001 Vinas de Gain (100% Tempranillo) is a fabulous effort for the price (one of the <b>best buys</b> in the marketplace). Aged in French oak casks (about 40% new) for 12-14 months, it boasts a deep purple color to the rim as well as a perfume of raspberries, blackberries, crushed stones, and white flowers. With extraordinary precision, definition, and finesse, great elegance, wonderful sweetness, medium body, and a gorgeously textured finish, it caresses the palate, offering considerable personality and overall symmetry. It will drink beautifully for 7-8 years. A brilliant effort, it's a steal at \$20. Aged 18 months in 100% new French oak from 75-year old Tempranillo vines, the 2001 Pagos Viejos is one of Spain's greatest wines. A singular red of extraordinary stature and intensity, it exhibits an inky/ruby/purple color as well as a luxurious bouquet of lead pencil shavings, black and blue fruits,</p>			<p>espresso roast, and floral notes. This full-bodied, dense 2001 possesses layers of flavor, a sweet integration of tannin and wood, and a finish that lasts for nearly a minute. Drink this riveting Rioja between 2005-2015. The prodigious, inky/purple-colored 2001 Grandes Anadas marries elegance with tremendous power and flavor intensity. It represents Spain's version of Comte de Vogué's Musigny ... in a top vintage. Aromas of spice box, violets, raspberries, blackberries, plums, cherries, and an undeniable minerality are found in this structured, ripe, phenomenally intense red. The finish exceeds one minute, yet it gives the impression that it is not close to being mature. While it offers plenty of enjoyment now, ideally it should be given 3-4 years of cellaring and consumed over the following two decades. Importer: Eric Solomon, European Cellars, Charlotte, NC; tel. (704) 358-1565</p>			
ARTAZU	2001	SANTA CRUZ	NAVARRA	(\$30.00)	RED	92+
<p>A single vineyard 100% Grenache from 80-year old vines planted in pure chalk at an elevation of 750 meters, this estate is the creation of Juan-Carlos Lopez de la Cal, who learned his craft at Artadi. It is a fabulously concentrated, complex, medium-bodied Spanish red that tastes like a grand cru from the Côte de Nuits. The combination of limestone soil and Grenache grown at a high elevation appears to have given the wine a</p>			<p>complex, elegant, raspberry, black cherry, and floral-scented nose with medium body, great fruit, tremendously vivid flavors, and amazing precision as well as finesse. This stunningly singular wine must be tasted to be believed. Remarkably airy and light for its intense flavors, it will provide immense pleasure over the next 5-6 years. Importer: Eric Solomon, European Cellars, Charlotte, NC; tel. (704) 358-1565</p>			
DOMINICO DE ATAUTA	2000	VALDEGATILES	RIBERA DEL DUERO	(\$75.00)	RED	95
<p>A spectacular 120-case cuvée produced from 165-year old vines aged in 100% new French Damajou barrels, this is a super-expressive Spanish red offering a gorgeously deep purple color as well as a rich nose of creosote, espresso roast, graphite, blackberries, and <i>crème de cassis</i>. Rich, full-bodied, and unctuously textured, with fabulous flavor</p>			<p>intensity and overall balance as well as a long, concentrated, seamless personality, it can be enjoyed now and over the next 10-12 years. P.S. This new estate was established in 1999 by proprietor Miguel Sanchez. Can anyone imagine how stupendous the 2001 might be? Importer: The Rare Wine Co., Sonoma, CA; tel. (707) 996-4484</p>			
AVINYO	N.V.	CAVA BRUT	PENEDES	(\$13.00)	SPARKLING WHITE	89
AVINYO	N.V.	CAVA BRUT NATURE	PENEDES	(\$16.00)	SPARKLING WHITE	89
<p>Two more <b>excellent values</b> in sparkling wine from Spain, the non-vintage Cava Brut (made from 80% free run juice and aged 18 months) is a tasty, light to medium-bodied, dry sparkler. Notes of bread dough, grapefruit, and other citrus as well as tiny pinpoint bubbles are offered in a refreshing, vigorous style. Enjoy this</p>			<p>Macabeu, Parellada, and Xarel-lo blend over the next year. More austere is the bone dry non-vintage Cava Brut Nature. Light-bodied, with great fruit, elegance, and precision offered in a zesty, refreshing style, it will drink well for 12-24 months. Importer: André Tamars, De Maison Selections, Inc., Chapel Hill, NC; tel. (919) 933-4245</p>			
SENORIO DE AYLES	2001	MERLOT/TEMPRANILLO	CARINENA	(\$13.00)	RED	88
<p>I had mixed tasting notes on this bodega, but I immensely enjoyed the equal part blend of 2001 Merlot/Tempranillo, which was aged 3 months in French oak prior to bottling. A <b>fine value</b>, it exhibits aromas of scorched earth, licorice, and dense, sweet black cherry fruit offered</p>			<p>in an opulent, medium-bodied, luscious, fruit-driven style. Enjoy it over the next 12-18 months. Importer: Aurelio Cabestrero, Grapes of Spain, Washington, DC; tel. (202) 413-3875</p>			
AZAGADOR	2002	PAGO DE LA JARABA	LA MANCHA	(\$8.00)	RED	85
<p>I could have sworn this was an uncomplicated French southern Côtes du Rhône. Made from primarily Tempranillo with a touch of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in the blend, this light ruby-hued, <b>value-priced</b> 2002</p>			<p>exhibits loads of peppery strawberry and cherry notes. Soft and easy-going, it can be served chilled if desired. Enjoy it over the next year. Importer: Peter Weygandt, Weygandt-Metzler, Unionville, PA; tel. (610) 488-0800</p>			
BAJOZ	2003	JOVEN	TORO	(\$9.50)	RED	86
BAJOZ	2003	OVACION	RUEDA	(\$10.00)	WHITE	86
<p>Several more expensive cuvées were dominated by too much American oak, but the stainless steel-fermented 2003 Ovacion (60% Verdejo and 40% Viura) is a crisp, floral, fresh, light-bodied white. Enjoy this vibrant, refreshing 2003, preferably with Spanish tapas, over the next 12 months. The 2003 Joven may be Spain's answer to a French Beaujolais. Made</p>			<p>from 100% Tinto de Toro, 5% was aged in barrel, and the balance in tank. This deep ruby-colored, fruity, soft, medium-bodied red exhibits loads of strawberry and cherry fruit, crisp acidity, and a lively personality. Consume it over the next 12-18 months, chilled if you prefer. Importer: Langdon Shiverick, Cleveland, OH; tel. (216) 861-6800</p>			
CASTILLO DEL BARON	2001	CRIANZA	YECLA	(\$11.00)	RED	87
<p>Another <b>good value</b> from this backwater, but interesting Spanish region, this excellent offering reveals sweet blue and black fruits, fine texture, little complexity, but loads of fruit, medium body, and no hard edges. Drink it</p>			<p>over the next 1-2 years. Importer: a Christopher Canman Selection, various American importers including Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; tel. (516) 677-9300 and Diamond Wine Merchants, Oakland, CA; tel. (510) 567-9897</p>			
BIENVENIDA	2001	SITO DEL PALO	TORO	(\$30.00)	RED	92
<p>The debut vintage for this boutique winery from Toro, this 2001 (made from old vine Tempranillo) was aged in French oak prior to bottling. It exhibits an inky/purple color as well as a tremendous nose of blackberries, chocolate, and espresso roast. Full-bodied, rich, and</p>			<p>dense, it offers a hedonistic mouthful of layered, opulent, heady juice. Impressively endowed with purity and palate presence, it should be enjoyed over the next 5-6 years. Importer: Eric Solomon, European Cellars, Charlotte, NC; tel. (704) 358-1565</p>			
BIURKO GORRI	2001	GRENACHE	RIOJA	(\$25.00)	RED	88
BIURKO GORRI	2002	TEMPRANILLO	RIOJA	(\$12.00)	RED	87
<p>A <b>very good value</b>, the 2002 Tempranillo (100% Tempranillo) was aged 4 months in new American oak. This richly fruity, elegant red exhibits sexy black cherry and strawberry notes intertwined with notions of tobacco leaf and licorice. Medium-bodied and soft, it is best consumed over the next 2-3 years. Slightly better is the kirsch</p>			<p>liqueur/candied cherry-filled 2001 Grenache. Aged 12 months in American and French oak, and bottled unfiltered, it reveals medium body, a fine texture, and a hedonistic personality. Drink it over the next 1-2 years. Importer: André Tamars, De Maison Selections, Inc., Chapel Hill, NC; tel. (919) 933-4245</p>			
BODEGAS BORSO	2002	TRES PICOS (GARNACHA)	CAMPO DE BORJA	(\$11.00)	RED	88
<p>Made from 100% old vine Grenache, this 2002 reveals classic aromas of kirsch liqueur, raspberries, licorice, and subtle pepper. Ripe and medium-bodied, with good underlying acidity as well as loads of fruit,</p>			<p>it will provide pleasure over the next 1-3 years. It is a <b>terrific value</b>. Importer: Jorge Ordoñez, Fine Estates from Spain, Dedham, MA; tel. (781) 461-5767</p>			
JUAN-MANUEL BURGOS	2000	AVAN CEPAS CENENARIAS	RIBERA DEL DUERO	(\$100.00)	RED	92
JUAN-MANUEL BURGOS	2000	AVAN CONCENTRACION	RIBERA DEL DUERO	(\$57.00)	RED	90?
JUAN-MANUEL BURGOS	2001	AVAN NACIMIENTO	RIBERA DEL DUERO	(\$29.00)	RED	91+
<p>A 100% Tempranillo aged in French oak, the deep ruby/purple-colored 2001 Avan Nacimiento is the best value of this trio. Powerful notes of</p>			<p>espresso roast, roasted meats, sweet black currants, and creosote emerge from this primary, young, juicy 2001. With loads of character as well as an</p>			