Natural, Organic & Biodynamic Wine

“NATURAL” Wine:
- General, broad reference to wines made in low-tech, non-interventionist style, e.g.:
  - Low or no use of chemicals in vineyard
  - Native yeasts used in fermentation
  - Low or no use of sulfur in winery
  - No chemical or technical “adjustments” to the final wine
- Technically, zero regulations about what can/can’t be declared “natural”

“ORGANIC” Wine:
- Organic defined by USDA National Organic Program (NOP) as a product that uses no pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms, or ionizing radiation
- To be labeled as organic in US, must be inspected and approved by USDA
- TTB, USDA and NOP labeling laws for wines sold in the US:
  - Organic: at least 95% organically produced ingredients and NO added sulfur allowed (or less than 10 ppm)
  - 100% Organic: 100% organically produced ingredients and NO added sulfur allowed (or less than 10 ppm)
    - Additional approved labeling: USDA Organic seal; “Certified Organic by ____”
  - Made from organic grapes: MUST note “contains sulfites”
    - Is it a problem if “made from organic grapes” can also include up to 30% non-organic grapes or “other ingredients”?
    - Is it a problem if many wines are made entirely organically yet with sulfur and so can’t be labeled organic when sold in US?
    - In the EU, wines with up to 100 ppm of sulfites can be labeled organic

“BIODYNAMIC” Wine:
- Biodynamic agriculture is a sustainable system proposed by Rudolf Steiner that involves using natural preparations in the field and following the lunar calendar for viticulture/vinification steps
  - Natural preparations are all organic, herb-, root- or animal-based products
  - Lunar calendar suggests fruit/flower/root/leaf days corresponding to certain tasks such as picking, pruning, racking, bottling
- Many producers practice biodynamics but are not certified (expensive process)
- Major certifying body is Demeter; certified wines can carry seal on their label
1) Afros Loureiro ’10 - Vinho Verde, Portugal
   • Vinho Verde’s first biodynamic estate, headed by Vasco Croft, a Steiner disciple
   • Afros’ philosophy is “whole eco-system” and creating a “symbiotic relationship
     between the vine and the environment”
   • 100% Loureiro grape, one of the approved varieties for Vinho Verde region

2) Denavolo Catavela Vino Bianco ’11 - Emilia-Romagna, Italy
   • Biodynamic vineyards planted on limestone soil at 1,500 feet
   • Also very “natural” winemaking style: skin-fermented “orange wine” from local Ortrugo
     grape with Malvasia and Marsanne

3) La Clarine Farms Syrah & Mourvèdre Rosé ’11 - Sierra Foothills, California
   • Vineyards planted at 2,700 feet in Sierra Foothills east of Sacramento
   • Practices biodynamic principals; was certified though hasn’t renewed; now in favor of
     a “do nothing” approach
   • No sulfur at harvest; foot stomping; no new oak; only act when absolutely necessary
   • Philosophy is to “throw out preconceptions” and “embrace surprises”

4) Domaine Marcillet Hautes-Côtes de Nuits ’10 - Burgundy, France
   • Organic viticulture though doesn’t qualify as 100% organic for US labeling
   • Focus on low yields and “natural, sensible” winemaking incorporating some modern
     and some traditional winemaking techniques
   • 100% Pinot Noir from the Hautes-Côtes de Nuits in Burgundy region

5) Venus Dido "La Universal" ’09 - Montsant, Spain
   • Husband and wife winemakers René Barbier Jr. and Sara Pérez from Priorat region,
     focusing here on a more “elegant” and “feminine” style—hence the name “Venus”
   • Very strictly natural (but not certified organic/biodynamic) viticultural practices
   • Blend of mostly Garnacha with Syrah, Cabernet and Merlot, fermented in cement and
     used oak barrels

6) Clos Ouvert Carmenère Cauquenes ’09 - Maule Valley, Chile
   • Organic, old vines; gentle, low-intervention winemaking and old oak barrels
   • Made by two Frenchmen focused on finding “terroir” in Chile
   • 100% Carmenère, an old Bordeaux variety that’s gaining fame in Chile