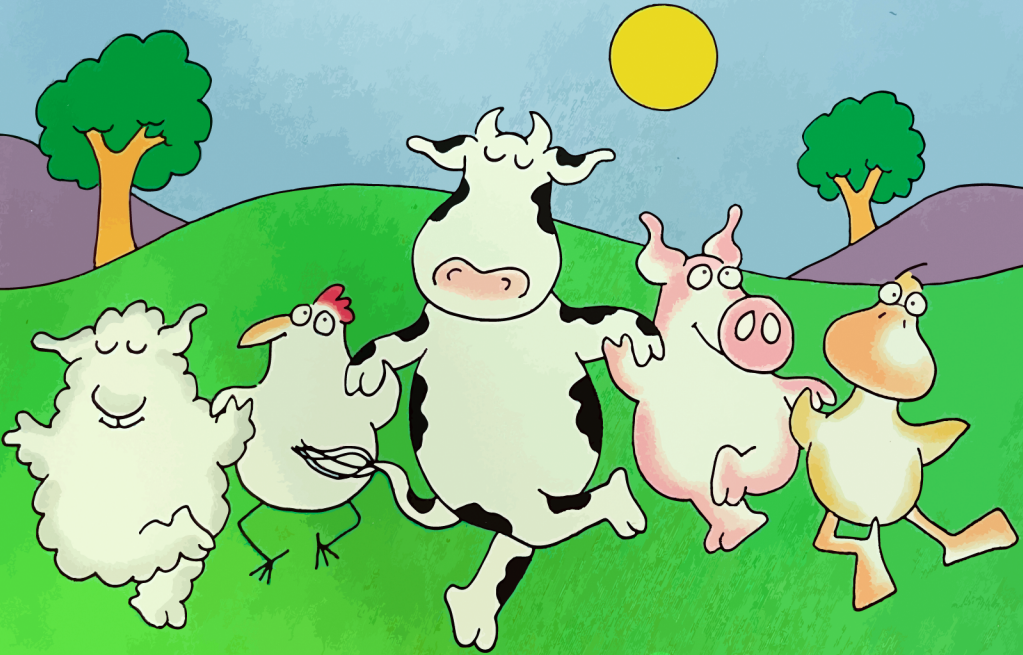


DIRECT PRESS
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BARNYARD DANCE!



EXPLORING
BRETTANOMYCES

*Stomp your feet! Clap your hands!
Everybody ready for a barnyard dance!
Bow to the horse. Bow to the cow.
Twirl with the pig if you know how.*

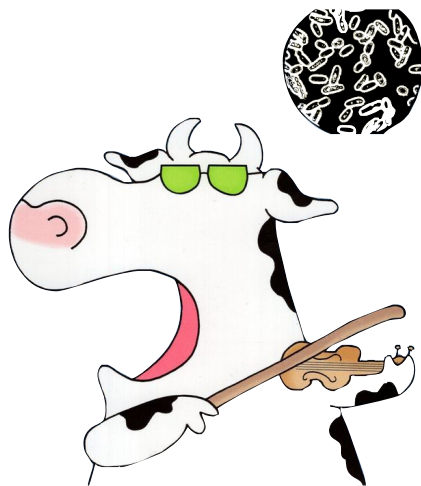
This is the introduction to Sandra Boynton's 'Barnyard Dance,' a children's book my one-year-old has been read several thousand times. It's not a wine book, but it does the same thing that I find myself doing frequently in the course of my job: creating a romanticized version of rural farm life. Wine often gets me projecting all sorts of quaint and distorted ideas about agricultural communities that provide an escape from my anxious, modern, urban life. So, for me, a wine that literally smells like a barnyard is a ticket to an imaginary world with dancing, happy cows and horses. I'm all too happy to indulge. Others feel differently.

The yeast genus known as *Brettanomyces* is responsible for this barnyard-y scent, and it's found in barns, horse stalls, wine cellars, vineyards, and foods like salami. Beer brewers intentionally cultivate and add *Brettanomyces*, or Brett — as it's known in more casual circles — to beers to get some of the complexity and unique flavors it brings to the table. Saison and lambic beers are the most famous examples, and it's no coincidence they are sometimes called 'farmhouse ales.' Brett and humans have existed symbiotically for millennia, with some studies theorizing that it helped make many water sources safe to drink by overpowering and kicking out harmful pathogens. Brett is our friend.

However, Brett is the kind of friend that might overstay its welcome. For winemakers, it's difficult to eradicate once it takes hold. Brett lives in barrels, concrete tanks, cellar walls, and many other yeast-friendly nooks. As it proliferates, it can go from a subtle hue in a wine's flavor palate to a paint bucket dousing the canvas. At which point, winemakers are often left with no choice but to replace all of their barrels, cement tanks, or amphorae at significant cost.

There is a whole spectrum of Brett, however, and it coexists with many elements in fine wine. Shades of Brett can be found not only in funky natural wine but top-growth Bordeaux and Northern Rhône crus like Côte Rôtie. As a genus, *Brettanomyces* has enough variants in its species that are present in far more wines than you would guess. Its effects are so broad that it's tempting to dismiss it as being in everything and not worth singling out. However, there are some very typical, telltale signs of Brett that I think are worth identifying. Love it or hate it, knowing a little about Brett can be useful in finding the wines that you want to drink.

The three Musketeers of natural wine ‘flaws,’ so to speak, are: Brettanomyces, volatile acidity, and the goût de souris (or taste of the mouse). We discussed the proverbial mouse in last month’s zero-sulfur newsletter, and it is easily the most-despised of the three. Brett is sometimes mistakenly used interchangeably with mouse, but mouse is a more complex microbial phenomenon. It’s complicated to understand. For one, it relies on an interaction with an individual’s saliva to be detected, so it’s hard to agree on its presence. Some can’t taste it. It appears and disappears without warning. You can’t smell the mouse, only taste it on the finish. It often tastes pretty nasty, even to natty wine lovers. Even we draw the line at skunked Budweiser and dirty socks. I don’t need to relive my freshman dorm.



Mr Cow says science is cool!!!!

Volatile acidity, or VA, is the type of acidity that is nearing the vinegar side of the fermentation spectrum. In small doses it’s tolerable, even lending some energy to low-acidity grapes. In large doses it can smell like nail polish and taste like stomach acid. It doesn’t go away, though sometimes getting a wine to open up helps the fruit flavors mask some of the VA.

Brett— to me, anyways— is the friendliest and least problematic of the trio. As with anything, it is a matter of degree. But in the right doses it is an exciting element that can be wild and beautiful. The wines this month try to showcase the more appealing effects of Brett while still featuring enough to be identifiable as such.

A UC Davis study from a few years ago published a flavor wheel with a whole host of descriptors that a panel of judges deemed the result of Brett in wine. Included were *sewer gas*, *vomit*, *rancid fish*, *wet dog*, and *fecal*. We avoided these.

Though the beauty of *barnyard* and *horse* notes are in the nose of the beholder, the panel of judges also included the more universally appealing terms *soap*, *lilac*, *root beer*, and *clove*. In white wines and orange wines you may find yourself more in the root cellar than the barn, with notes of *ginger*, *cabbage*, *horseradish*, and *pickles*. Certain combinations bring to mind far more than farm life. Taste a wine with enough sandalwood and lavender notes and you're transported to a head shop or a hippie food co-op. The right kind of rancid fish notes with some star anise and cedar? Well, I'm instantly in the Chinese grocery near Ohio State that my family used to frequent when I was in preschool.

Of course, these pungent aromas were not so strange to most of our forebears. Only with modern science did it become standard to sterilize everything, good and bad microbes alike. Stainless steel, temperature control, and sulfur dioxide all keep *Brettanomyces* at bay. pH is another factor: Brett thrives in higher pH wines, which are often the result of riper grapes and warmer climates. Not surprisingly, a lot of the wines we tasted this month were from areas like the south of France, where a mixture of pre-industrial winemaking and plenty of sunshine make for very high ratings on *Brettanomyces* Tripadvisor®.

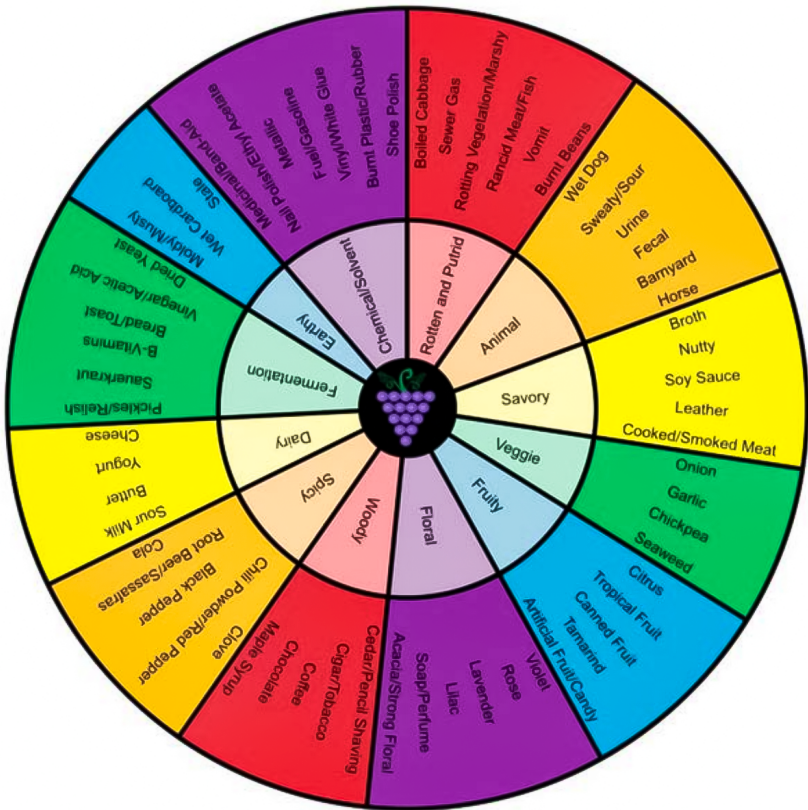
That is the origin of the first wine with Brett I encountered. Many years ago, when I was working as a teacher, we were all gifted bottles of Côtes du Rhône from a student's parent who owned a wine shop. I had taken some wine classes in college and thought I knew a thing or two. When I opened the wine it smelled to me like salmon skin, a mix of metallic and briny elements on top of strawberry fruit leather. I feared for my health and poured it out.

When I got my first job in wine not long after, I learned this kind of thing wouldn't hurt me, and so I began to enjoy it, even seek it out. It was a sure sign of low tech and anachronistic methods. I began to root for these scruffy Herbets against the predominance of sleek, sterilized Kens. The truth is far more complicated, of course. The wine in this month's selections that most resembles the bottle I poured out so many years ago is the Famille Brunier 'Le Pigeoulet' from the Southern Rhône [Press 4 Red]. This is not made by a bunch of hippies but the family of Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe, one of the most famous Chateaufeu-du-Pape estates and recipients of 100-point scores from wine writers over the decades. They know not to fix what isn't broken, so much of the winemaking would still be recognizable to their ancestor Hippolyte Brunier who started the estate in 1898. That means no temperature control, large old oak foudrès, and a whiff of Brett that is mixed in with the classic Rhône notes of black olive and spicy garrigue.

Judging by the responses from importers to my inquiries about wines with notable *Brettanomyces* influence, this is still a sensitive subject. To me, that's

all the more reason to shine a light into the dark corners of the cellar and try to talk about this microbial companion that is impacting the wines we drink. If you take a wine education certification class like WSET, it's likely that Brettanomyces will be referred to as spoilage if it's mentioned at all. I understand it's a wild card that can be eliminated from a craft that is already full of variables that can risk ruining a vintage. But it can expand the color box that winemakers use to evoke emotions and reactions that go deeper than a checklist from UC Davis. The best wines startle us and take us to places that words can't quite capture. The magic of fermented foods is thanks, in part, to a whole world we can't see. But we sure can smell it and taste it.

Cheers,
Jonathan Kemp



Jeremie Choquet 'Simorgh' Chenin Blanc 2022

Loire • France

Press 4 Mix/White

Brettomyces expresses itself differently in white wines—typically I find myself less in the barnyard and more in the root cellar. Pickled ginger and horseradish are found here, along with celeriac and fresh cole slaw notes. Matched with some candied green apple and a stony finish, this Chenin is quite refreshing, and all the more complex perhaps due to a little Brett.

Jérémie Choquet began working for Pierre-O Bonhomme and Thierry Puzelat and eventually bought some vines and a cellar in 2018 not far from Bonhomme and Puzelat in Cheverny. He now has 2.5 hectares and supplements this with some purchased fruit, as is the case with this Chenin Blanc. All his farming is organic and he uses homemade teas as well as some copper and sulfur in the vineyards. Sulfur in the cellar is kept to about 10-20ppm at bottling. His wines are distinctive and full of quirky vitality. *Jonathan Kemp*

Succes Vinicola 'Patxanga' Trepats Rosado 2022

Catalonia • Spain

Press 4 Mix/White

Mariona Vendrell and Albert Canela started Succés when they were only 20 years-old, taking advantage of a local incubator program for young winemakers. Though Albert's family were grape growers, he wanted to start a project that leaned more natural and paid farmers more to work organically. Located in Tarragona, northwest of Barcelona in Catalonia, they focus a lot on a local grape called Trepats that was typically sidelined to being used in rosé Cava.

The Patxanga rosado is 100% Trepats from bush-trained vines planted in the 1970s, fermented in steel tank and bottled with zero sulfur. It's always a crowd favorite during warmer months, but it arrived in the US last summer and took a little while to resolve some issues with the dreaded 'mouse.' Luckily the mouse is not in the house anymore and it's a salty, refreshing treat as always. There is a touch of Brett in the wine, with an earthy bread yeast note on the finish along with some briny mineral notes and a touch of gingersnap—this last note being how I find Brett to be expressed in a white or rosé. Overall it's what Mariona and Albert intended: an unpretentious wine for summer and friends. 'Patxanga' refers both to a Catalan game of street soccer where the point is more fun than competition, and a style of music that often accompanies local summer festivities. *Jonathan Kemp*

Cascina Degli Ulivi 'Semplicemente' Rosso 2022

Piedmont • Italy

Press 4 Mix/Red

Stefano Bellotti embraced Biodynamics as far back as 1984, and he was a huge figure in the push for natural wine and better farming in Europe. Cascina degli Ulivi is still a lush, mixed farm with livestock, cereals, beehives, pastures, and of course grapevines, and the wines and the farm are safely in the hands of Stefano's daughter Ilaria. The agriturismo attached to the farm is a beautiful place that is not to miss if you're in the area, only an hour and a half from both Milan and Torino.

'Semplicemente' is certainly rustic. It's bottled without sulfur under crown cap, mostly to prevent the cork from popping out. There is abundant life in this wine, and used to be one of my favorite ways to get people into the deep end of the pool of natural wine. These days it's less provocative since natural wine has become more mainstream but it's no less enthralling and irreverent. A mix of Barbera and Dolcetto, it's ripe and juicy with some grippy tannins and some Brettanomyces that gives off plenty of feral funk. Chill it, chug it, love it.

Jonathan Kemp



Stefano Bellotti of Cascina Degli Ulivi

Sainte Croix 'Le Pourboire' Rouge Vallee du Paradis 2020

Languedoc-Roussillon • France

Press 4 Mix/Red

When we were searching for wines to demonstrate the most typical signs of Brettanomyces, there were a number of wines we were expecting to be 'Brett bombs' that turned out to be pretty subtle. Not so with this wine! If you want to go to the barnyard dance, this is your ticket. Bow to the horse. Bow to the cow. Twirl with the pig if you know how.

A blend of Carignan, Grenache, and Syrah from Corbières in the Languedoc, the Carignan comes from vines planted in 1905. Sage, peppercorn, and finochiona notes accompany the dark, rustic energy here. Domaine Sainte Croix was started by an English couple, Elizabeth and Jon Bowen, who worked in wineries around the world before settling in Fraissé des Corbières, just 20 minutes from the Mediterranean Sea. This gives the wines a mix of dry heat and cooling sea breeze that keeps them from getting too heavy and fatiguing.
Jonathan Kemp

Famille Brunier 'Le Pigeoulet' Vaucluse Rouge 2022

Rhone • France

Press 4 Red

If you're not familiar with the Brunier name you may be more familiar with their family's Chateauneuf du Pape label, 'Vieux Télégraphe.' There are now six generations of Bruniers that have worked this appellation, starting with Hippolyte Brunier, who helped raise the bar and bring international attention to Chateauneuf du Pape. More recently the Bruniers have been working vineyards just outside Avignon to make more approachable and affordable wines with the same commitment to organic farming and very old-fashioned winemaking.

Le Pigeoulet is a perfect example of a rustic, southern Rhone red, including the whiff of Brettanomyces that many years ago made me pour a similar Rhone wine down the drain out of fear it was spoiled. Now I really enjoy this quality, but there is something reminiscent of salmon skin or metallic brine that can be arresting if you're not used to it. The Bruniers make this wine in large old oak foudrè with no temperature control, which Brettanomyces yeasts would find very welcoming. The wine is really not that funky, however, with a smooth, luxe texture. In less careful hands this could be too rich and dense, but here it's downright quaffable. There are notes of strawberry fruit leather and black plum, overlaid with the classic peppery garrigue found in wines from this area, plus some subtle black olive. About 50% Grenache with Syrah, Carignan, and Cinsault, it's a wine that showcases the rugged terrain near Chateauneuf du Pape with finesse and approachability. Great with anything from family barbecues to lamb chops for two *Jonathan Kemp*

Stefanago 'Mischiabacche' Rosso Provincia di Pavia 2022

Lombardy • Italy

Press 4 Red

The Baruffaldi family has been in the Oltrepo Pavese region of Lombardy for several generations. Their cellar is in a 14th century castle surrounded by 135 hectares of wilderness including orchards, meadows, and 18 hectares of vines.

They've been certified organic since 1998.

'Mischiabacche' is a blend of equal parts Uva Rara, Croatina, and Merlot fermented in steel tank, unfiltered, with a minimal sulfur addition, less than 1 ppm. There's some funky Brettanomyces notes but they come across as pretty lavender and clove aromas more than anything too animalistic. It's not a heavy wine but there are some chewy tannins and some savory, herbaceous elements like sage and leather. A touch of spritz and cherry notes give it a lively edge. *Jonathan Kemp*

Cascina Degli Ulivi 'IVAG' 2021

Piedmont • Italy

Press 4 White

Thank goodness for Cortese, which is the one of the best sources for inexpensive, crisp, refreshing white wine in Northern Italy. Cortese was gaining renown as the grape behind Gavi in the middle of the 20th century, but quality went steeply downhill in the 1970s and 80s as worldwide demand was met by loosening the regional regulations around yields and borders, letting the market be flooded with industrially made plonk. Most of the Gavi I first encountered was about as exciting as a free bag of pretzels on a three hour flight. After many years of fighting with the Gavi DOC, Ulivi gave up and simply flipped the letters: hence Ivag. It might be too much for the officials trying to protect the sleek Gavi brand, but this wine may provide the best way to peer into the historic soul of this region when it had a little more edge and attitude. A light touch of Brettanomyces is reflected in the gingersnappy, nutty bite of this wine. Almond skin and horehound notes dance around the core of soft Cortese fruit. There's always a tasty tension and primal thirst-quenching quality to this wine that goes right to your soul.

Stefano Bellotti of Cascina degli Ulivi was a big advocate for the potential of Gavi and he also found a path to organic Biodynamic farming by 1985, making him one of the most visible figures in the early world of natural wine and Biodynamics. After his death in 2018 his daughter Ilaria has taken over and the wines continue to showcase wild beauty. *Jonathan Kemp*

Denavolo 'Dinavolino' Vino Bianco 2021

Emilia-Romagna • Italy

Press 4 White

With grapes from the lower slope of a plot in Emilia-Romagna, winemaker Giulio Armani crafts this snappy and characterful white with an eye towards minimal cellar intervention and maximum expressiveness of the region's traditional varieties.

‘Dinavolino’ is an unfiltered blend of Malvasia di Candia Aromatica, Marsanne, Ortugo and a yet-unidentified indigenous grape. In this section of the vineyard, vines planted to clay and limestone soils enjoy better access to nutrients and water, resulting in a younger-drinking wine with racy acidity and bright notes of blossom and citrus.

Hand-harvested — with thorough vineyard sorting — the grapes are destemmed and macerated in stainless steel for eight to nine months. Fermentation is spontaneous and lasts for 15 days without temperature control. The resulting wine is textured and full-bodied with notes of orange marmalade and apricot and a finish reminiscent of Emilia-Romagna’s famed Parmigiano Reggiano. Brettanomyces (or Brett) contributes a slight aroma of acetone, adding to the wine’s wild and hyperlocal personality. *Kate Masters*



Giulio Armani of Denavolo

La Stoppa ‘Ageno’ Vino Bianco 2020

Emilia-Romagna • Italy

Press 2

La Stoppa has a long and rich history in the Emilia-Romagna region in Northern Italy. Founded over a century ago, Elena Pantaleoni began to lead the winery in the mid 90’s that her family acquired in 1973. She has made La Stoppa into one of the most well-respected natural wine labels in the world. The current winemaker is Giulio Armani, whose personal project Denavolo is also featured this month.

‘Ageno’ is the only dry white wine of the estate. 100% Malvasia di Candia Aromatica, macerated on skins for 4 months in stainless steel or concrete vessels. Aged in wooden tanks and bottled without fining, filtration, or added sulfur.

When I think about Brett as a cultural and desired quality in wines, I think about the wines of Emilia-Romagna. I think of all the famous foods of the region: balsamic vinegar, cured meats, Parmigiano Reggiano, and pastas. I can't think of any better pairing than the lively, radiant, and mouth watering wines of La Stoppa.

The Ageno has the telltale aromas of a Brett natural wine from Emilia-Romagna. Think petrol, floral, orange marmalade, grapefruit seed oil, a bit of barnyard. Once you swig a few gulps you'll wish you had a full spread of Italian delicacies to pair with it. The palate is equally pleasing and dense with notes of citrus oil, orange marmalade, with salinity and tannic structure to balance the high acidity of Malvasia. Drink this one quickly, as it has zero sulfur and gets pretty funky after 30 minutes, but that shouldn't be too much of an ask.

Jeremy Hernandez

La Salada 'La Filla del Macaners' Sumoll Catalonia 2021

Catalonia • Spain

Press 2

Toni Carbo is following in the footsteps of his grandfather Toni Carbo, who worked and saved enough to purchase vineyards near the village of Parellada where nobody else wanted to plant grapes. These were limestone screes and shaded areas near the river that were difficult to work but have proved to be excellent sites for great wine, and they are now valued as such. The younger Toni and his partner Anna Serra now work 28 hectares of vines completely without chemical treatments, planting grains in between the rows.

La Filla del Maçaners is all from one vineyard of mostly Sumoll, an old drought-resistant Catalan variety that is nearly extinct after being ripped out en-masse in the 1980s for not being as high yielding as other cultivars. However it is a serious red wine grape with the depth and grip of Nebbiolo, and has had a growing renaissance due to people like Toni and Anna. After an aging farmer could no longer maintain his 100 year-old plot of Sumoll, he let Toni and Anna take cuttings, from which they propagated a new vineyard. The wine is foot stomped and fermented whole cluster in open top amphora, then aged in amphora for six months. It's an intensely rustic wine, with Brettanomyces, of course. Smells like a hippie store with a haze of Nag Champa incense. There's also bee propolis, apple skin, cinnamon, nutmeg, cedar, and some jerky in the mix. It's grippy and textural but there is finesse and soulful intention to the wine that tames a bit of the feral, gnarly energy. Age it for a few years or drink now with some pork sausages or duck confit. *Jonathan Kemp*



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