



THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

In This Issue:

One Winedrinker's Opinion	85
1978 Bordeaux	88
1978 Rhônes	93
More 1978 Red Burgundies	97
Selected Tasting Notes	102
Coming Attractions	104



ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

Wine Prices: Who's Kidding Whom?

Burgundy prices are ridiculous. Champagne prices have escalated to dizzy heights. The supply of these wines is small and world-wide demand is high. Fine, everything is going up. Nonetheless, for the past few years Bordeaux prices have seemed quite reasonable. Oh, maybe not cheap like many of the 1970's during the severe 1974-75 recession, but fairly priced. A couple of years ago, it wasn't unusual to find really good 1975's at \$12-15 per bottle. First growths were higher, but some were available for \$25 or so. Then came the 1976's at about the same prices. (Yes, even 1976 Lafite and 1976 Pétrus retailed for under \$300 per case.) Then the 1977's. Well, forget the 1977's (it's not much of a vintage and the wines are too expensive for what they are). Now the 1978's. Well, the 1978 prices are high. Why? Increased demand to be sure. But a major reason is that the chateau owners are

finally getting a decent price. Most people are not really aware of the price the major châteaux receive for their wine. Consider the following case prices. In 1975, Ducru-Beaucaillou received \$51, Léoville-Las-Cases \$53, La Mission-Haut-Brion \$90, Lafite and Pétrus \$133. In 1976 prices were similar. Ducru-Beaucaillou received \$51, Léoville-Las-Cases \$51, La Mission-Haut-Brion \$90, Lafite, Mouton, and Pétrus approximately \$133. In 1978, these prices rose to \$99 for Ducru-Beaucaillou, \$116 for Léoville-Las-Cases, \$158 for La Mission-Haut-Brion, \$210 for Lafite, and \$219 for Pétrus. To these prices the consumer must pay 10% or so to the négociant, interest costs for two years to the importer plus a standard 25% profit, a few dollars per case for shipping, a wholesaler's mark-up (if the importer is not the wholesaler) of 10-20%, and a retail mark-up which can be as high as 50%. In

addition, there is the matter of currency fluctuations, and weak dollar vs. the French franc adds to the cost. Up until just recently this has generally been the case. By the time the wines reach the consumer, the wine may have more than doubled in price. Even so, by being selective, and acting quickly when the wines were first offered, the consumer was able to buy very good 1978's for \$15-17 per bottle and first growths for \$25 or so per bottle (more for Lafite and much more for Pétrus which has escalated in popularity and price, although on a relative basis the price to the château has increased much less). Now that the wines are arriving in the U.S., the prices have moved higher; absurdly high for some first growths. So that's the complete truth on Bordeaux prices. What's fair? That's a tough question. For now, is there anyone who would begrudge Ducru a little over \$8 per bottle for its new wine, \$13 per bottle to La Mission, \$16 per bottle for Lafite, or even \$18 per bottle for Pétrus? After all, these are some of the finest red wines in the world with centuries of production history. Even so, should the consumer now be asked to pay 3-4 times the producer price for 1978 Lafite? The price seems high. Speculators may have to lower prices if the wines don't sell.

Now consider the price of California Cabernets, most of which are too new to have anyone know for sure what they will be like. The price of many California Cabernets is also high. The more expensive \$20-35 bottles are priced as high or higher than most Bordeaux with the exception of a few first growths. Let's see what California producers are getting: 1976 Heitz Cellars "Martha's Vineyard" \$280-378 (depending on whether the wine is sold to retailers or at retail from the winery), 1976 Sterling Vineyards "Reserve" \$212, 1977 Clos du Val "Reserve" \$172, 1977 Kenwood "Artists Series" \$120, 1978 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Stag's Leap Vineyard" \$108, 1978 Chateau Chevalier \$96, 1978 Spring Mountain \$96, 1978 Sanford & Benedict \$96. For wines a few years older consider 1974 Heitz Cellars "Martha's Vineyard" \$400-540, 1974 Robert Mondavi "Reserve" \$280, 1974 BV "Private Reserve" \$280, 1974 Simi "Reserve Vintage" \$144, or 1974 Sebastiani "Proprietor's Reserve" \$68. Here price has no relationship to quality. Some of these wines are poor, no bargain at any price, such as 1978 Sanford & Benedict. At the same price 1978 Chateau Chevalier and 1978 Spring Mountain are hardly great wines. Stag's Leap Wine Cellars has a well-deserved reputation for producing fine Cabernet, yet 1978 is only the winery's 6th vintage. However, all these wineries are receiving a price roughly equivalent to that paid Ducru-Beaucaillou for the same vintage. Ducru-Beaucaillou has a history for producing fine wine for over a century! Other older California wines held back for a

year or two additional bottle age at the winery are very expensive indeed. Consider: 1976 Sterling "Reserve" at a price higher than 1978 Lafite, 1976 Heitz Cellars "Martha's Vineyard" at a price no first growth is even close to, 1977 Clos du Val "Reserve" at a price higher than La Mission-Haut-Brion. And so it goes. Even allowing for the time value of money, it is hard to justify the prices. Then there is the matter of quality. Yet the wines seem to sell. So far at least, the mania of California winedrinkers has pushed Cabernet prices higher and higher. An unsuspecting, unknowing, or uncaring buyer/collector may have no knowledge of what the wine will be like in 5-10-15 years when it's ready to drink. It seems hard to believe that most of this wine is being consumed. And unless it is being drunk up, these buyer-collectors will find that if the wine is not good, the money has been poorly invested. For one thing is a certainty - over the long term we will know which are California's best Cabernets. All the while, as readers of our continuing Cabernet Sauvignon series know, production is increasing at an alarming pace. How much Cabernet can be sold at higher and higher prices? What effect will this have on the prices of older Cabernets? The answer will undoubtedly resolve around how the wine improves and develops. We suspect there will be many disappointments. It also seems a safe bet that very few will pay large sums for older wines from producers who are making mediocre to poor wine. The better wines such as "Martha's Vineyard" will almost surely increase in value if they don't lapse into early senility (after all the oldest "Martha's Vineyard" is only 1966 and 1966 Bordeaux are just now coming into maturity, with many first growths yet years away). With respect to the better Bordeaux classified growths from a very good year, the buyer knows pretty well how the wines will age.

So there's the case for Bordeaux vs. California Cabernet Sauvignon wine prices. Everyone can draw their own conclusions. Consumers would like the lowest prices possible. Producers would like a high price. Importers, wholesalers, and retailers deserve a fair return. Yet prices seem destined to reach a correction if this crazy "my wine is better than your wine" pricing policy continues. After all it's easy to raise prices, but once consumer resistance blocks further escalation, it's pretty tough for the producer to bite the bullet and lower prices on unsold inventory. Nonetheless, many California Cabernet producers may be faced with doing just that. Bordeaux producers have no such worries. Older vintages are sold. They may have received less than they could receive for the same wine today, but it is sold. They have only to worry about the 1980's. It is the intermediaries who may have excess inventory who

bear the risk. Many California wineries not only have a large amount of 1980 Cabernet, but 1979, 1978, 1977, 1976, and older. This could be a much bigger problem, particularly as production continues to increase. Up until now, California Cabernet producers have enjoyed a great advantage. The market was big enough and the supply small enough that the product could be sold at a much lower retail price than a

comparable Bordeaux, yet the winery could get as much or more for the product. Greed could severely damage this relationship. Already many producers (even the smallest boutiques) are scrambling to sell their product out of state or even out of the country. The market is saying something. We hope someone listens.

John Tilson
Editor



ABOUT OUR RATING SCALE & QUOTED PRICES

18-20 Outstanding 15-17 Very Good 12-14 Good Under 12 Below Average

Wines are ranked on a 20 point system on the basis of relative merit. Wines with identical rankings are listed in alphabetical order. Rankings are usually made only after several tastings of any particular wine. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are the approximate California suggested retail prices.

The Underground Wineletter (ISSN 0279-6880) is published bi-monthly by Underground Wine Enterprises, Inc., 4157 Banyan, Seal Beach, California 90740. Available only by mail subscription at \$20 per year, foreign air mail subscription \$30 per year. Address correspondence and subscription requests to: P.O. Box 663, Seal Beach, CA 90740. Telephone (213) 430-2284. John Tilson, Editor; Edward Lazarus, West Coast Associate Editor; Geoffrey Troy, East Coast Associate Editor; George Buehler, Bipin Desai, Greg Doerschlag, Brad Klein, Ted Swinnerton, Consultants; Laurie Tilson, Editorial Assistant; Linda Scott, Secretary; Dave Chapman, Founder. Second-class postage paid at Seal Beach, California.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Underground Wineletter*, P.O. Box 663, Seal Beach, CA 90740.

©1981 *The Underground Wineletter*. April-May 1981. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form, including office copying machines, in whole or part, without written permission is prohibited by law. News media may quote, provided *The Underground Wineletter* is credited.

1978 BORDEAUX

"... the real story of the 1978's is the first growths."

While the 1978 Bordeaux vintage may be hailed by some as another "Vintage of the Century" (the eighth in just the last 20 years with still 20 years to go), it is certainly one of the most miraculous vintages. What looked like another successive year of gloom and despair, quite unexpectedly turned into a vintage of considerable quality for a number of châteaux, and outstanding quality for a select few. The spring weather was wet and cold, causing the vines to flower two weeks later than normal. Coupled with this late flowering, the weather continued cool and cloudy through the middle of August, which is a tell-tale sign of a late and risky vintage. Fortunately, the inclement weather turned to hot, sunny weather and remained that way through the entire month of October. This in itself is a minor miracle, for October tends to be one of the wettest months of the entire year. In fact, while the average rainfall for the last 25 years in October was 77 millimeters, only 5mm fell in 1978. Further, the total rainfall during the critical months of August and September was 51mm, the second driest period in a quarter century (only 1961 had less – 36mm). Thus, picking began October 9th under ideal conditions. The total appellation contrôlée red was larger than expected, 2.25 million hl. compared to 1.7 million hl. in 1975 and 550,000 hl. in 1961.

While no vintage is exactly the same, the quality of the 1978 vintage seems similar to that of 1971, although the Médoc wines in particular seem to have more fruit. The 1978's are characterized by excellent color with lots of fruit and good body. There is a firm backbone and a nice, fruit/tannin balance which should give the wines a long life. Yet, 1978 is an uneven vintage. With a few notable exceptions, it is much more successful for the Médocs than for the St.-Émilions and Pomerols. Most of the latter should be avoided. Since early indications are that the 1979 St.-Émilions and Pomerols are more successful, it won't be too long a wait. However, the real story of the 1978's is the first growths. It is hard to remember when the first growths were all positioned at the top as they are in 1978. The only exception seems to be Cheval-Blanc. Otherwise, Mouton, Latour, Haut-Brion, Lafite-Rothschild, and Pétrus have made excellent true-to-form wines. And, Margaux and Ausone also have rejoined the top rank. It's been a long time since they have made such good wines and one can only hope that the success of 1978 will be repeated in subsequent vintages.

Below is an assessment of a great number of the 1978 Bordeaux, including all the first growths. To our knowledge, this is the most complete assessment of

the vintage attempted in the U.S. Several of the wines have not yet arrived to U.S. shores in quantity, but should be here by summer or early fall. These wines are designated by an estimated price.

Outstanding

Margaux. This wine is an answer. What a great thrill it is to see Margaux once again making superb wine. For many years this château has languished in mediocrity. With this 1978, the Queen of Bordeaux returns to the throne. Indeed, this seems to be the wine of the vintage. The color is very dark and the nose is simply incredible – deeply perfumed with a cassis/sandalwood complexity. In the mouth the wine is rich, full, and very flavorful. There is an impeccable balance of tannin and acid and the flavors are long lasting. Already an experience to drink, this Margaux is destined for long life and should continue to improve for a minimum of 10-15 years – an absolute classic (18½). \$43 (estimated)

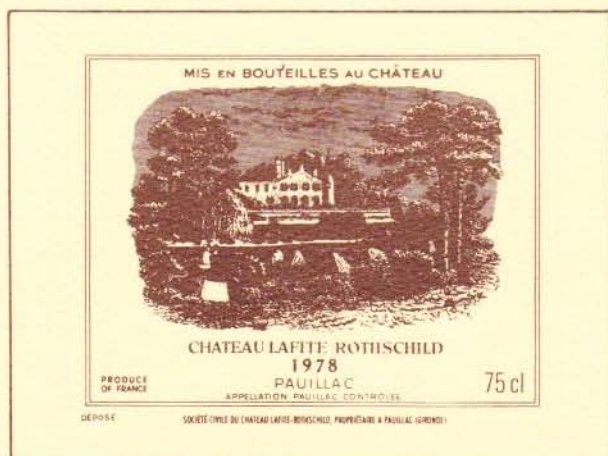
Ausone. Miracles do happen. Unlike all the false stories of the last 20 years, this time it's true – Ausone's back! This is an outstanding wine. The color is dark and the nose is deeply perfumed with an earthy/cassis quality – very Graves-like. Loaded with fruit, the wine is full, rich, and complete with an earthy complexity. Backed by firm acid and a good amount of tannin, 10 or more years should yield a magnificent bottle (18). \$60 (estimated)



Haut-Brion. This is a classic Haut-Brion. Similar to the 1966 and 1953, it is accessible now, but undoubtedly will improve for 10-15 years and keep for many more. The color is dark and the wine has a deeply perfumed, fruity/earthy nose with a tinge of vanilla – very complex. One of the fullest, richest wines of the vintage, it has good depth and the characteristic, fruity/earthy flavor. Very long on the palate, round and supple, yet with tannin and acid to lose, this is Haut-Brion at its finest (18). \$55



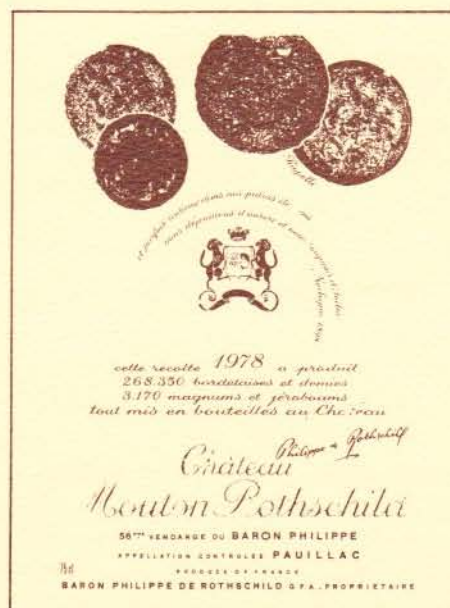
Lafite-Rothschild. Wow! This is another classic Lafite with the same quality of the 1975 and 1976 vintages. The color is dark with the characteristic, deeply fruity/coconut nose immediately attractive. The wine is lovely – elegant, luscious, ripe, long on the palate, exquisitely balanced, delicious. Time will only improve this great wine (18). \$46



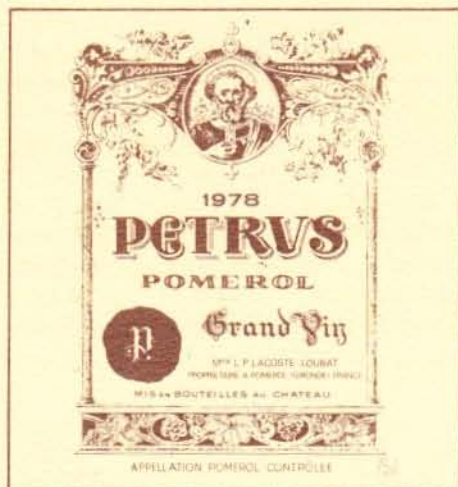
Latour. Ah, Latour, there is nothing quite like it. This wine is unmistakable. The color is dark (what else?) and the nose is fruity and cedary with a hint of vanilla. Deep, rich, full, loaded with fruit, tannic, here is another classic Latour to lay away for 15-20 years (18). \$67 (estimated)



Mouton-Rothschild. There are reports that there are two different labels for 1978 Mouton so don't be surprised if this label doesn't match the wine you're buying. As for the wine, there is a promise of greatness, but just now it is backward. The color is dark and the nose has a subdued, fruity quality with a hint of mint. The wine is rich and full, but it is awkward and tannic just now. Not to worry, in 10 years time this will be great Mouton (18). \$44 (estimated)



Pétras. Again, Pétras has made a superb wine. This vintage is almost Burgundian. Indeed, it recalls to mind 1961 La Lagune and 1929 Cheval-Blanc in this respect. The color is medium dark and the nose is very deep with a fruity, sappy, spicy, almost Burgundian quality. There is lots of fruit with good depth and ripe, fruity flavors. Already lovely to drink, this should, nonetheless, improve for many, many years (18). \$90 (estimated)



Pichon Lalande. This is a classic Pauillac from a château that has produced superb wine in every good vintage since 1966. The color is dark and the nose has a deeply perfumed, fruity/cedary quality. The wine is loaded with fruit. It is rich, full, and mouth filling with excellent tannin/acid balance and great length on the palate. Lay this away for 8-10 years and it will be magnificent (18). \$21



Very Good

Ducru-Beaucaillou. Here is yet another success from this outstanding property. The color is dark and there is a deeply perfumed, cassis-like nose that is seductive. Expansive on the palate, the fruity/cedary flavors are backed by firm acidity and good tannin. Racy in style, this will be supple and elegant in 8-10 years (17½). \$27 (estimated)

Léoville-Las-Cases. For the past 20 years, this château has been producing excellent wine. This 1978 is another resounding success. The color is dark and the nose is very fruity with a cedary/cherry-like complexity. There are deeply imbedded flavors, loads of fruit, and excellent tannin and acid balance. Give this wine 10 years to develop (17½). \$21

La Mission-Haut-Brion. This may be the most backward, tannic wine of the vintage. It will require many, many years to develop. The color is dark and there is the characteristic, fruity/earthy nose. There is lots of fruit, backed by firm acidity and masses of tannin. Hopefully, the wine will retain fruit as it sheds the tannin. If so, this will be very fine (17). \$36 (estimated)

Léoville-Poyferré. This second growth St.-Julien, which in recent years has consistently been overshadowed by neighboring Las-Cases, has made a lovely 1978. The wine has a dark color and a deep, ripe, fruity/cedary nose. There is lots of fruit and ripe, rich flavors with the necessary tannin/acid balance to carry it for many years – a gorgeous wine (17). \$20

Palmer. Not as rich and concentrated as the classic wines of 1966, 1970, and 1975, Palmer seems to make a statement on what the 1978 vintage is all about. The color is dark and the nose shows a deep, fruity, somewhat cedary, slightly minty quality. The wine has lots of fruit, but is firm, lean, and somewhat backward. With tannin and acid to lose, this holds a promise of great elegance in 10 years time (17). \$25 New York

Trotanoy. Year-in and year-out, Trotanoy makes one of the very best Pomerols. This is another winner. A big wine with a dark color and a deeply perfumed, ripe, fruit nose, there is loads of fruit on the palate with a good, tannin/acid balance. This should be ready to drink in 6-8 years and keep for many, many years thereafter (17). \$24

Best Buy

Branair-Ducru. Here's a wine to buy at a relatively inexpensive price. The color is dark and the nose has a deep, fruity/cedary/cherry-like quality with a hint of vanilla – very complex. There is lots of fruit and good depth with tannin and acid to lose. Keep this for 6-8 years. It will be a lovely bottle (16½). \$15

Cheval-Blanc. This is a very nice wine, but, alas, it is not destined to be a great classic. The color is dark with just a hint of amber at the edge. The nose has good complexity – fruity/spicy/cedary. There is good fruit and flavor and nice balance, but the wine doesn't deliver any real excitement and finishes just a little short. Nonetheless, 6-8 years age should yield a lovely bottle (16½). \$44

Cos d'Estournel. This is a very successful vintage for Cos. The wine has a dark color and a deep, plummy/cedary nose – very complex. It is firm with round, ripe, fruit flavors and a good, acid/tannin balance. With 6-8 years bottle age, this should be lovely and no doubt the wine will keep for 15 or more years (16½). \$21

Lynch-Bages. The poor man's Mouton can occasionally make outstanding wine (1953, 1959, 1961, and 1970 are examples). This isn't outstanding, but it's very, very good and destined to improve for many, many years. Surely, this château is deserving of second growth status and, indeed, it is priced accordingly. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity/cedary/cassis nose. The wine is lean, but has good fruit, flavor, and depth with tannin and acid to lose – keep this one 10 years (16½). \$23

Montrose. Although this is not a big, tannic wine, it is typical Montrose in the sense that the lean style and firm tannin will need at least 10 years to soften. Like Latour, lovers of Montrose must be patient. This vintage has a dark color and a fruity/spicy/oaky nose. There is good fruit, flavor, and concentration with a noticeable amount of oak showing through. In time, this should make a very fine bottle (16½). \$20

Beychevelle. This is a very nice wine but not a great Beychevelle. It lacks the depth of flavor and elegance this château can often exhibit. The color is dark and the nose is fruity, with an underlying cedary quality. The wine has fruit and pleasant flavors in a medium-bodied style, but is quite backward. Lean and quite tannic, this will take many years to develop (16). \$22

Figeac. This is one of the most successful St.-Émilion of the vintage as, indeed, it is most often. The color is dark with just a trace of amber at the edge. The nose is really lovely with a fruity/cedary quality. Just now the wine is hard and tannic, but there seems to be fruit showing through. Very backward, this should open up a bit with a few more years age – should be tasted again at that time (16). \$21

Haut-Bages-Libéral. In recent years this fifth growth Pauillac has been making very good wine. This is no exception. The wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/berry-like nose with a hint of cedar. The wine is firm and lean, but has lots of fruit and a nice, tannin/acid balance. With 7-9 years bottle age, this should make a lovely bottle (16). \$19

Pontet-Canet. This Pauillac has a medium dark color and a fruity/cedary/slightly earthy nose. There are fruity/cedary flavors with good acid/tannin balance for 6-8 years aging (16). \$24

Prieuré-Lichine. This fourth growth Margaux is a nice wine. It has a dark color and a deep, fruity/grapy/oaky nose (not dissimilar from a California Cabernet). There is good fruit nicely balanced by tannin and acid. Not terribly complex, but 5-6 years age should yield a lovely, elegant wine (16). \$20

Batailley. Batailley is another fifth growth Pauillac that has been making very good wine in recent years. This wine has a dark color with a fruity/cedary/mushroom nose – very interesting. There is good fruit and richness with a chocolate flavor component. Just now quite tannic, give this one 10 years (15½). \$17

Duhart-Milon-Rothschild. In recent years this property has been characterized by a deeply perfumed nose. So it is in 1978. This is a wine of good fruit, flavor, and nice balance. It should make a nice bottle in 4-6 years (15½). \$19

Gazin. The best piece of this property was sold to Pétrus. After several recent disappointing wines, this vintage shows an improvement. The wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, fruity/cedary nose. On the palate, there is good fruit, tannin, and richness with a nice finish. Slightly forward, but a few more years bottle age should yield a velvety wine (15½). \$17 New York

Grand-Puy-Ducasse. This Pauillac is not terribly complex, but it is a very nice, sound wine. The color is medium dark and the nose exhibits an attractive, fruity/cherry quality. The wine has good fruit and balance, and should develop well for at least 6-8 years (15½). \$17

Pichon-Longueville-Baron. This is a substantial wine with a dark color and a ripe, fruity, slightly closed-in nose. There is lots of fruit backed by a good amount of tannin. Characteristically, this Pauillac will need 10 or more years to develop (15½). \$33

Lafon-Rochet. This St.-Estèphe has a medium dark color and a ripe/fruity/cedary nose. The wine is very lean and quite hard just now. There seems to be fruit behind the tannin and firm acidity. This is one to try again in perhaps 5 years time (15). \$17.50

Mouton-Baron-Philippe. This wine has a medium dark color and a subdued, fruity/cedary nose. There is good fruit and a nice, tannin/acid balance. With 8-10 years bottle age, this should be quite nice (15). \$22.50

Pavie. This Premier Cru St.-Émilion usually produces sound, pleasant, reliable wines. This is a very good effort. Not a big wine, but well-made and very pleasant. The color is medium and the nose exhibits fruit and vanilla. The wine is forward with nice fruit and flavor that finishes a little short (15). \$17

Good

Gloria. This is a pleasant wine, but it lacks the fullness associated with recent vintages. The color is medium dark and the nose is lovely with a fruity/cedary quality. The wine is light in style with a nice, fruity/cedary flavor. It should improve for a few years, but is not likely to be memorable (14½). \$14

Clos Fournet. This Premier Grand Cru St.-Émilion has a dark color, just amber at the edge, and a deep, ripe, fruity/cassis nose. It has good fruit and flavor, but is rather flat and tannic. This wine could use several years bottle age, but seems to be lacking in structure (14). \$14

Domaine de l'Église. This Pomerol has a medium dark color and a simple, fruity nose. The wine has good fruit and tannin with a noticeable amount of oak showing through and an acidic finish. A bit awkward now and lacking in depth, there seems to be potential for 3-5 years aging (14). \$14 New York

Haut-Bailly. This Graves seems to be lacking in fruit. However, wines from this château are slow developers, so a few years bottle age should be helpful. Just now the medium color and fruity nose are not much to get excited about and the austere style doesn't provide much flavor interest – not bad, just not much to it (14). \$25

La Gaffelière. This is consistently one of the better St.-Émilions. Unfortunately, this wine misses the mark. The major flaw is a slight herbaceousness in the taste. Otherwise, it is fruity and simple. Pleasant, but it is hardly anything to write home about (14). \$23

La Pointe. This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity nose. There is some fruit in a light, pleasant, easy-to-drink style. Just a bit of tannin should round out nicely in 2-3 years (14). \$14

Magdelaine. This Premier Cru St.-Émilion can make very fine wine. Like so many of the 1978 St.-Émilions, this is not one of the château's better efforts. The color is medium dark and the nose is very perfumed with a lovely, fruity/cherry quality. The wine has fruit but it is light, thin, and a bit watery (14). \$23

Troplong-Mondot. This Grand Cru St.-Émilion rarely produces really exciting wine. This is a typical example. The color is medium dark and the nose shows a lovely, fruity/cassis nose. There are simple, fruity flavors, but the wine lacks complexity and depth (14). \$17.50

Lascombes. This second growth Margaux can make a lovely wine, but this tastes as if the grapes were not quite ripe. The color is dark with just a touch of amber at the edge. The nose shows fruit and vanilla with a stemmy/green quality. The wine has fruit, but it is stemmy and tannic (13½). \$32

Lafleur-Pétrus. This wine is characterized by an unusual, oaky/hay-like nose and a herbaceous/fruity flavor. It lacks structure as well (13). \$21

Pape-Clément. This is a strange wine. The color is dark, but the nose has a mustiness that overpowers the characteristic Graves earthiness. The wine has fruit, but is hard with a curious, metallic flavor. Perhaps time will help, but this is not likely to be memorable (13). \$24

Petit-Village. Another unremarkable Pomerol, this wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/stemmy/vanilla nose. The wine has fruit, but it is flat and dull without any flavor interest (13). \$17

Trottevieille. This surely is one of the least known St.-Émilion Premier Crus. This wine is not likely to do much to change that. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity nose with light, fruity/herbaceous flavors (13). \$18

Vieux-Château-Certan. This is yet another disappointing Pomerol. The wine has a dark color and a ripe, somewhat musty nose. There are ripe, fruity flavors, but the wine is rather flat, lacks depth, and finishes short (13). \$20

Clos René. In recent years this property has been a consistent disappointment. Unfortunately, 1978 is a continuation of the trend. The wine has a light color and is thin and short on flavor with a slight stemminess (12½). \$13 New York



1978 RHÔNES

"These are certainly the greatest values in today's wine market."

In considering any Rhône vintage, it must be remembered that the Côtes du Rhône consists of at least two distinct growing areas. The great red wines of the Northern Rhône, such as Côte Rôtie and Hermitage, are made from nearly 100% Syrah grapes. The most renowned red wine of the Southern Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, lying over 100 miles south of Côte Rôtie, has a quite different soil composition, and is normally a blend of many different grapes, with the Grenache predominating. The vintage conditions in the two sections are therefore seldom, if ever, identical.

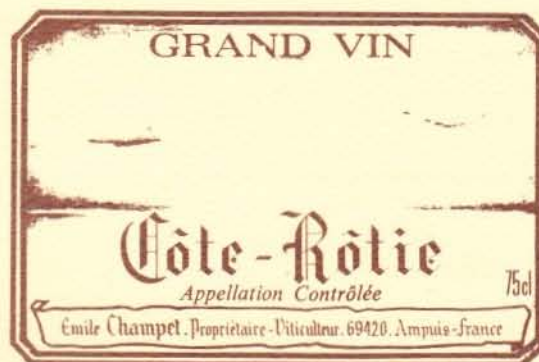
As elsewhere in France in 1978, cool and damp weather early in the growing season retarded the development of the vines throughout the Rhône, with the growing cycle beginning about two weeks late in the north and three weeks late in the south. The summer and early fall were generally too dry, with a timely September rainfall saving many vineyards.

By the time of harvest, the grapes were rich, ripe, and extremely healthy. In the south large quantities of excellent wines were produced. In the north the quantity was rather short, but the wines have the fullness and concentration to make 1978 one of the truly great vintages for the Northern Rhône.

But there's more good news. Not only is 1978 a great vintage, but even the very best wines are quite attractively priced. Indeed, many seem downright cheap. In addition to the outstanding wines, there are numerous other very good quality wines for \$4-6 per bottle. These "Côte du Rhône" are not well-known, hence prices are low. The better ones range from delicious, fruity wines to wines with balance, depth, and concentration. The best Côte Rôties and Hermitages are fabulous. Here again, compared with French Burgundy or even the better California Reds, the wines are great bargains. However, we would caution that production of the latter two areas is quite small – about 16,000 cases for Côte Rôtie and 25,000 cases for the red wines of Hermitage. Hence, the wines can be difficult to find. Nonetheless, they're great wines worthy of a diligent search. All in all the 1978 Rhône offer something for every winedrinker – from delicious, inexpensive wines to even more delicious wines of great character, depth, and breed. These are certainly the greatest values in today's wine market.

Outstanding

Côte Rôtie (Champet). No words can really adequately describe this wine. It is an absolute masterpiece, a great wine by any measure. The color is very dark. From here it is more difficult. The nose is unbelievably complex, very perfumed, almost an essence. Black currants, vanilla, pepper, and a hint of bacon all compete to challenge the sense of smell. The flavors are deeply chisled. Fruity, cherry-like, earthy, hint of pepper, again the wine makes an assault. Long on the palate, marvelous acid/tannin balance, this should be a magnificent, rich, velvety wine of complexity and depth in 10-15 years. A GREAT bargain (18½). \$14



Côte Rôtie "Côte Brune" (Gentaz-Dervieux).

This is a superb wine. With a very dark color, and a deep, berry/violet/vanilla nose showing a touch of peanut butter, complex seems an inadequate adjective. The flavor is rich with a ripe, fruity/cedary/earthy complexity. Long on the palate and with great balance, this is a wine to lay away for 10 or more years. Surely it will be a cellar treasure (18). \$15



Hermitage "La Chapelle" (Jaboulet Aîné). This is a marvelous wine with a dark color and a deep, earthy/berry/vanilla nose. There is loads of fruit and very rich flavors with good tannin and acid balance. Long on the palate, this wine will develop for 10 years at least (18). \$20



Very Good

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Domaine de Beaurand" (Coulon). If there was such a thing as a pretty wine, this would be it. A lovely, medium dark color radiates light like a jewel. A very perfumed, raspberry nose is seductive. The wine is fruity and delicious with an underlying softness and a lingering, cherry-like aftertaste. It is a really exceptional, young, fruity wine – delicious. With a slight chill (i.e. 55-60°) this is absolutely irresistible with light fowl (17). \$12

Crozes-Hermitage "Thalabert" (Jaboulet Aîné). This wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/woody/peppery nose. It is firm and lean in style, but has good fruit and a complex, peppery/fruity/woody flavor with a lasting finish and good balance. This should develop well (17). \$15

Big Wine – Small Price

Gigondas (G. Faraud & Fils). Gigondas is a relatively new appellation contrôlée, taking its name from the village of this name northeast of Avignon. This is certainly one of the biggest, most substantial Gigondas available. The wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/spicy/earthy nose with a hint of volatile acidity – very attractive. The flavors are big and rich showing deep, fruity/spicy/earthy complexity. The wine has plenty of stuffing backed by the necessary tannin and acid for long term aging (17). \$7.50

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "La Petite Bastide" (D. Rémy). This is a lovely wine with a dark color and a deep, fruity/berry nose showing a spicy/earthy complexity. There is loads of fruit with a good, acid/tannin balance. Already showing complex flavors, this should be very nice in 3-4 years (16½). \$11

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Les Cedres" (Jaboulet Aîné). This wine has a dark color and a lovely, ripe, fruity, almost port-like nose. It is a big wine with lots of fruit and berry-like/cedary flavors. Firm with tannin and acid to lose, this should age well (16½). \$16

Côte Rôtie (Rostaing). This wine has a dark color and a fruity/berry/toasty/vanilla nose. It has good, ripe, fruit flavors with a toasty, earthy quality. With good, acid/tannin balance, this should develop well (16½). \$20

Côte Rôtie "Les Jumelles" (Jaboulet Aîné). This wine has a dark color and a deeply perfumed, berry nose with herbal nuances. It has deep, fruity, earthy flavors and is long on the palate. Balanced just a bit to acid, there is tannin to lose. This should age well (16½). \$20

Gigondas (J. Vidal Fleury). This is a gorgeous wine that might be best described as a dry, berry essence wine. It has a medium dark color and a deep, raspberry/vanilla nose of almost unbelievable perfume. The flavors are deep with the berry quality predominating, backed by an attractive spiciness. Medium-bodied with a nice, acid balance, this is a great food wine that should continue to improve for several years (16½). \$13 New York

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Cuvée Clément V" (Peyrouse). This is a nice wine that is pleasant to drink now. It has a medium dark color and a spicy/vanilla/berry/earthy nose. In a medium-bodied style, the wine has nice fruit and flavor with a toasty quality adding complexity (16). \$12

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Domaine de la Roquette" (Laugier). This is a keeper. The color is dark and there is a deep, berry/spicy/earthy nose. Lots of depth and a fruity/earthy flavor are backed by firm acidity and a tannic finish – a strong wine that should improve for 8-10 years at least (16). \$12 New York

Great Buy

Côtes du Rhône (E. Guigal). If this wine is any indication, this producer's other wines should really be something. Watch for them later this year. In the meantime, this is a GREAT bargain in a bigger, fuller style Côtes du Rhône. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge. One hour in a decanter will allow the initially subdued nose to develop revealing a perfumed, earthy/black cherry quality. The wine is mouthfilling with good fruit and tannin and acid to lose. It will benefit greatly from a few years bottle age (16). \$5.75

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Château de Beaucastel" (Perrin). This wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/berry/spicy/earthy nose. It is firm with good fruit and noticeable acidity with a tannic finish – taste again in 3-4 years (15½). \$15

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Domaine du Haut des Terres Blanches" (D. Rémy). Certainly this is one of the best values in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/earthy nose with a curious, slightly metallic quality. In a medium-bodied style, there is good fruit with tannin and acid to lose – keep 5-6 years at least (15½). \$7

Best Buys

Côtes du Rhône (Château D'Aigueville). What a great bargain! This wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a ripe, berry-like nose showing a hint of vanilla. It has a fresh, fruity/spicy/vanilla-tinged flavor with just a hint of earthiness adding more complexity. With a clean, soft finish, this is a lovely light to medium-bodied wine that drinks beautifully now; delicious (15½). \$4.75

Côtes du Rhône "Rasteau" (Château du Trignon). This is a really lovely wine and another great bargain at \$5. It has a medium dark color with a slight amber edge. The nose is really lovely – a perfumed, raspberry/vanilla/spice essence. The wine is clean, fresh, light, and fruity with balance – delicious (15½).

Hermitage (Chave). Chave is one of the great producers of Hermitage, many say the greatest. Maybe there's something in this wine, but it's difficult to find now. Even hours of air don't help much. It has a dark color and a subdued, fruity nose. The wine has fruit, but is hard and rather dry. Give it 5 years before trying it again (15½). \$15

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (B & G). This is a light, pleasant wine that should improve for a few years. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, raspberry/vanilla nose. There are nice, fruity/berry flavors with a hint of vanilla. Just a little more depth would be desirable (15). \$10

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (Bouchard). Initially this wine is marred by a mustiness that leaves with a few minutes of air. Underneath there is a fruity/earthy nose and deep, fruity/earthy flavors. With tannin and acid to lose, this should improve for 4-6 years (15). \$11

Côtes du Rhône (Château du Trignon). At \$4 this is surely the biggest red wine bargain available today. The wine has a medium dark color with a slight amber edge and a fruity/earthy/spicy/tobacco nose. It has nice fruit, depth, and complexity in a light to medium-bodied style (15).

Côtes du Rhône "Clos Saint Bertrand" (Gautier). This is a lovely, clean, fresh wine at a bargain price. It has a medium dark color and a deep, fruity/berry nose tinged with vanilla. There are nicely balanced, fruity flavors with a zesty, youthful appeal (15). \$4.50 New York

Côtes du Rhône "Parallèle '45'" (Jaboulet Aîné). This is a very nice medium-bodied wine for consumption over the next 1-2 years. It is also attractively priced. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The wine has a fruity/earthy/spicy quality. There is good depth on the palate with fruity/earthy flavors showing a hint of spice. With good balance, the wine is nice to drink now, but should soften and become more elegant with a little more time in the bottle (15). \$6.25

Côtes du Rhône "Vacqueyras" (Domaine le Couroulu-Ricard). This wine has a medium dark color and an earthy/cherry-like nose. It has good fruit and nice flavor. Not a big wine, but pleasant and very nice to drink now and for the next few years (15). \$6

Good

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (Durosier). With a dark color and a deep, fruity/earthy nose showing a hint of volatile acidity, this wine is balanced to acid with fruity/spicy flavors. A minimum 3-5 years will be needed for the wine to soften (14½). \$9 New York

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (J. Vidal-Fleury). This wine seems to be prematurely aged. It has a dark color and a toasty/fruity nose. The wine is firm with some tannin and an acidic finish. The flavors have a nice, fruity/spicy/earthy quality, but the toasty quality so evident in the nose raises questions about the wine's longevity (14½). \$13 New York

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "La Bernardine" (Chapoutier). This is a featherbed of a wine. It has a dark color and a candy-like nose. It is fruity, soft, round, slightly sweet, pleasant, and contrived (14½). \$13.50

Côte Rôtie (J. Vidal-Fleury). This wine is characterized by an unusual, fruity, green pepper nose. It is firm and tannic with good fruit for many years aging. If the wine develops bouquet without the strong, green pepper quality it will be more attractive (14½). \$13 New York

Côtes du Rhône "Marquis de Simiane" (Union des Vignerons de l'Enclave des Papes A Valreas). Wow! Can't someone convince this co-op to shorten the name? Fortunately, the wine is quite nice with a medium color just showing amber at the edge. The nose is fruity with a spicy/toasty complexity and a slight, alcoholic quality. The flavors show nice fruit in a medium-bodied style – not complex, but pleasant (14½). \$4.65

Côtes du Rhône "Saint-Alimant" (Rey). Here is yet another bargain. The wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/berry/earthy nose. There is nice fruit with a cedary flavor component. A lighter-bodied wine, but very pleasant (14½). \$4

Côtes du Rhône "Seguret" (Brotte et Armenier). This wine is not terribly complex, but very pleasant. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity/earthy/berry nose. Medium-bodied with good fruit and a nice flavor, it is balanced to acid (14½). \$6

Crozes-Hermitage "Les Picaudieres" (Roure). This wine has a dark color with an amber edge. It has a fruity/volatile/alcoholic nose. A big, grapy, alcoholic wine that has lots of ripe, fruit flavors, it is cumbersome and is not likely to age gracefully (14½). \$10

Gigondas (Château du Trignon). This wine has a dark color and a lovely, berry nose. There is ripe, berry-like fruit flavors, but the wine is quite astringent. Several years bottle age are required to see if there is enough fruit to carry the acid (14½). \$6

Coteaux du Tricastin "Cuvée Saint André" (Union des Vignerons de l'Enclave des Papes A Valreas). This is another excellent value. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a deep, earthy/raspberry nose. It has nice fruit with an earthy/spicy complexity in a medium-bodied style. Slightly acidic finish, but very pleasant (14). \$3.50

Côtes du Rhône "Domaine Saint-Apollinaire-Reserve Du Domaine" (Daumas). This is a very fruity wine with a medium dark color and a deep, olallieberry nose. It is medium-bodied with fresh, clean, fruit flavors that are balanced to acid (14). \$4.50

Gigondas (A. Peyrouse). This wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/earthy/toasty nose. The wine has earthy, fruity flavors but is tart and a little thin (14). \$9

Saint-Joseph (Ets Brotte et Armenier). Saint-Joseph is located opposite Hermitage on the west bank of the Rhône. The wines are not often seen in the U.S. This one has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/earthy/spicy nose. There are spicy/berry flavors in a medium-bodied style – sound, but not exciting (14). \$8

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (Prosper Maufoux). This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/earthy nose. It is light, simple, and fruity with a short finish (13½). \$11 New York

Côtes du Rhône "Cuvée D'Apilline" (Daumas). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a volatile, fruity/earthy nose. There are ripe, fruity/earthy flavors in a medium-bodied style. The wine finishes slightly acidic and it could use a few years bottle age, but the amount of volatility is a little disturbing (13½). \$5

Crozes-Hermitage (Thierry). This wine is marred by too much volatility. Otherwise, it has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/cedary/volatile nose. It has good depth and fruit, but shows a hint of acescence – drink now (13½). \$5.50

Côtes du Rhône "Beaumes-de-Venise" (Cave des Vignerons de Beaumes-de-Venise). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a subdued, fruity/earthy/spicy nose. There is a fruity/earthy flavor, but the wine is a little thin with a short, acidic finish (13). \$4.79

Côtes du Rhône "Cuvée de l'Abbaye Grand Réserve" (Cellier des Dauphins). O.K., the wine is no world beater, but for \$3? It has a medium reddish orange color and a ripe, fruity nose. Clean, pleasant, simple, fruity flavors – drink now (13). \$6

Côtes du Ventoux (Jaboulet Aîné). Interestingly, the 1979 vintage of this wine has more depth. This wine has a light medium color with an amber edge and a subdued, fruity nose. There is fruit, but the wine is acidic and finishes short (13). \$6

Côtes du Rhône "Domaine La Sèraphine" (Peyrouse). This wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a toasty/coffee bean nose with simple, thin, fruity/earthy flavors and an acidic finish (12½). \$4.75

Côtes du Rhône (J.C. Boisset). This wine has no future and its past is not much to speak of either. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a creosote nose. There is some fruit, but the wine is flat with an unattractive, floral-like nose (12). \$3.50

Côtes du Rhône (Gabet et Fils). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a musty nose. Beyond this, it is thin, tart, and acidic with little flavor interest (12). \$3.29

Lirac (Berard Père & Fils). This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a musty/earthy/sulphur nose. There is good fruit with a roasted flavor showing through. Nicely balanced, but marred by the unpleasant nose that, unfortunately, does not improve with air (12). \$5

Below Average

Châteauneuf-du-Pape (Jaboulet-Vercherre). This is a poor wine with a dark color and an earthy/potato-like nose. There is a fruity/earthy/gritty flavor, but the wine is acidic without depth (11½). \$11

Crozes-Hermitage (Peyrouse). Ugh! This wine has a medium dark color and not much else that's good. The nose has a skunky/rubbery quality. The wine is soft in a light style, but it tastes like cooked cabbage (9). \$8



MORE 1978 RED BURGUNDIES

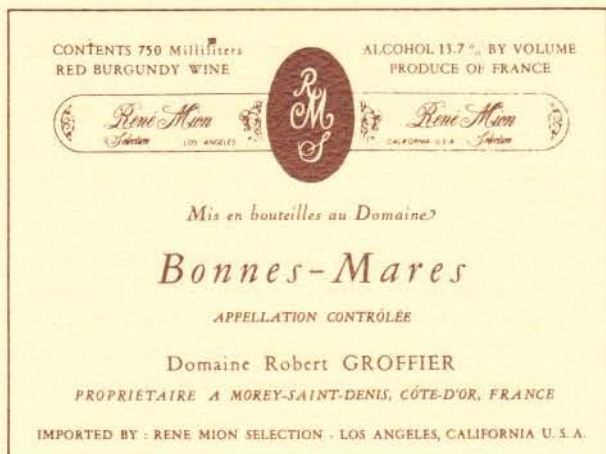
"... This series has more ups and downs than a rollercoaster."

This is the third in our series of articles on 1978 Red Burgundies (see Volume II, Numbers 3 and 4). So far over 200 different wines from this vintage have been evaluated. Since many have not yet arrived, it is likely that several more such articles will be forthcoming. (Most likely the most comprehensive series ever done on 1978 Burgundies!) In this respect, this series has more ups and downs than a rollercoaster. Labels don't mean a thing. (Nowhere is this more perplexing than with the Richebourg of Labouré-Roi). Neither does price, except that nearly everything is horribly

expensive. Such is the nature of Burgundy. However, a few things bear repeating. First, 1978 is clearly fertile ground. There are some great Burgundies. There are just not as many as might have been expected from such a highly touted year. Second, there are some really mediocre ones. Particularly some shippers' wines. This only serves to arouse suspicions that what is on the label may not necessarily be what's in the bottle. Third, supplies are very small. Prices are high. Selectivity is an absolute must. Nonetheless, the best wines are worth EVERYTHING!

Outstanding

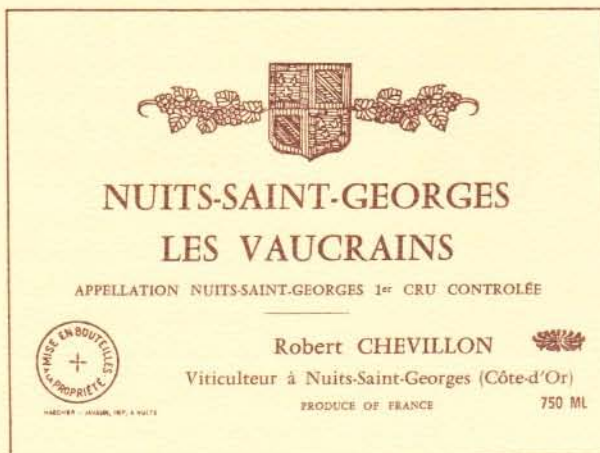
Bonnes Mares (R. Groffier). Wines like this are what Burgundy is all about! A dark color, just amber at the edge, and a very perfumed, fruity/spicy/bacon-like nose give the promise of greatness to come. The follow through on the palate could not be more consistent – rich, concentrated, superb structure, long on the palate. This is a positively classic Burgundy that holds the promise of long life and a memorable experience – expensive, to be sure, but worth it for lovers of great Burgundy (18½). \$54



Chambolle-Musigny "Amoureuses" (R. Groffier). If not quite as rich as this producer's superb Bonnes Mares, this is, nonetheless, outstanding. The wine has a dark color, and a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy nose with a bacon-like component. The fruity/spicy flavors show great depth and, although the wine has a softness, there is a firm, tannin/acid backbone to carry this wine through a very long period of développement (18). \$47



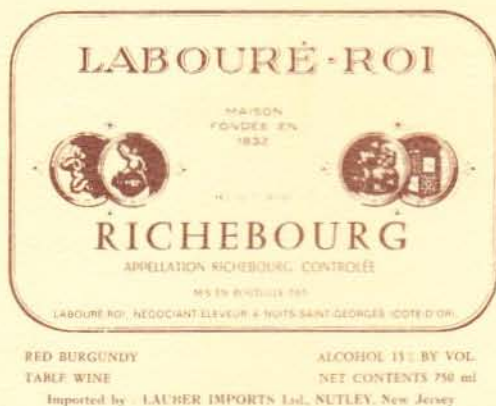
Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Vaucrains" (R. Chevillon). Oh my, what a Burgundy! The wine has a dark color and a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy/bacon-like nose. There is loads of ripe fruit on the palate, and a very flavorful, spicy/bacon complexity. Full and rich with a firm backbone and acid and tannin to lose, the impressive finish will make this truly memorable in 8-10 years time (18). \$24



Pommard "Grand Clos des Epenots" (Madame Courcel). This is a fabulous Burgundy and one of the finest Pommards ever. It has a medium dark color with a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy nose – incredible. The wine is brimming with fruit and deep, fruity/spicy flavors that are mouthfilling. A delicious Burgundy with great balance and a long life ahead, this is worth a search (18). \$33



Richebourg (Labouré-Roi). This is an outstanding Burgundy. But all 1978 Richebourg (Labouré-Roi) is not the same (see page 101). This is the wine available on the East Coast. It has a dark color and a deeply perfumed, fruity nose. There is lots of depth and concentration with massive fruit and good, tannin/acid balance. Long on the palate, this wine will take 8-10 years to develop (18). \$45



Very Good

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze (R. Groffier). If just a shade less intense than Groffier's Chambolle-Musigny "Amoureuses," this is, nonetheless, an aristocratic wine that will develop magnificently for 10 or more years. The color is medium dark and the nose has the familiar, fruity/spicy/bacon-like quality. There is loads of ripe, fruity flavors, lovely balance, and a lingering finish – a wine worthy of the label (17½). \$68

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Cailles" (R. Chevillon). Here is another marvelous Burgundy from Chevillon. Just a shade less intense than the "Les Vaucraains," but with a promise of great elegance, the wine has a dark color and a fruity/spicy nose with just a hint of bacon. There is good fruit with spicy/bacon-like complexity. A very firm wine with acid and tannin to lose, this should develop over many, many years (17½). \$20

Clos de Vougeot (Mongead-Mugneret). This is a substantial Burgundy with a medium dark color showing just a trace of amber at the edge. The nose has a deep, fruity/bacon-like character and the flavors are rich, ripe, and long on the palate. There is sufficient tannin/acid balance to warrant many years of development. This will surely be one of the finest wines of the vintage from this famed, once great property which has been so often disappointing in recent years (17). \$50

Corton "Hospices de Beaune-Cuvée Charlotte-Dumay" (Labouré-Roi). This wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/berry/spicy nose. It is loaded with fruit and shows good structure with firm, acid/tannin balance. This should develop beautifully over 8-10 years (17). \$57

Échezeaux (Mongead-Mugneret). This is a very nice Burgundy with a medium color showing just a bit of amber at the edge. It has a ripe, fruity, bacon-like nose with good, ripe, fruit flavors showing good depth and balance. With 5-7 years more bottle age, this should be silky (17). \$41

Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos St. Jacques" (Latour). This is a nice wine, but at the \$54 price it can hardly be called a bargain. It has a medium dark color and a ripe, berry/spicy nose. The wine is firm with lots of fruit and deep flavors. It will require at least 6-8 years to develop into the silky, elegant wine it promises to be (17).

Grands-Échezeaux (Mongead-Mugneret). This is a big Burgundy with a medium dark color just amber at the edge. The wine has a lovely, fruity/spicy/earthy nose and very rich, ripe, fruity flavors. There is good depth on the palate and tannin and acid to lose. This should develop for 6-8 years and make a lovely wine (17). \$50

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Perrières" (R. Chevillon). Perhaps the softest of Chevillon's wines at this early stage, this too is an impressive Burgundy. The color is dark and the nose has a ripe, fruity/spicy quality with a hint of bacon. Similar flavors follow through on the palate and, although soft, there is some acid and tannin to lose. Another 4-5 years in the bottle will be well worth waiting for (17). \$20

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Saint-Georges" (R. Chevillon). Seemingly the lightest of the Chevillon wines, this is, nonetheless, typical with the same impressive fruit, flavor, and complexity. Time should yield a lovely Burgundy – perhaps 6-8 years (17). \$20

Chambolle-Musigny (M. Clerget). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with a slight amber edge. The nose has a lovely, fruity/spicy quality and the flavors have good depth. Just now the wine is rather harsh, even rough, but there seems to be enough fruit and acidity to balance the high tannin – a keeper, try again in 5 years (16½). \$28

Chambolle-Musigny "Les Amoureuses" (Drouhin). This is a nice Burgundy with a medium dark color and a subdued, fruity nose. There is good fruit and depth backed by a firm backbone. A bit rough just now at the edges, but 6-8 years bottle age should yield a lovely wine (16½). \$53

Clos de la Roche (Labouré-Roi). This is a hard, young Burgundy. With a dark color and a fruity/earthy nose, the wine is firm and tannic. Very closed-up, but there seems to be underlying fruit. Nice flavors are beginning to show through which offer promise for the future. This is a keeper, try again in 5 years (16½). \$33

Clos de Tart (Mommessin). This is a nice, medium-bodied Burgundy with a medium dark color showing just a bit of amber at the edge. It has a lovely, fruity/vanilla/almost floral nose – very attractive. The flavors have a soft, fruity/vanilla-tinged quality and the wine is nicely balanced with a long finish. Look for it to improve for at least 4-5 years (16½). \$46

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Château Gris” (Lupe-Cholet). This is a very fine Burgundy that will require substantial time to develop. It has a medium dark color and a very fruity/spicy nose. The wine has good fruit, depth, and flavor, but is lean and rather hard just now. Lay it away. Patience will be rewarded (16½). \$38

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Clos Saint-Marc” (C. Viénot). Viénot's 1978 Burgundies are very nice wines. This is a typical example. It has a medium dark color and a deep, fruity/spicy nose. There are plenty of ripe, fruit flavors backed by a spicy complexity. Youthfully tannic, but nicely balanced for 6-8 years aging (16½). \$25

Beaune “Clos de Mouches” (Drouhin). This is a lovely medium style Burgundy with a medium dark color showing an amber edge and a fruity/berry nose. There are good berry flavors with a spicy complexity and tannin and acid to lose. This wine should develop well for 4-6 years (16). \$30

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze (Drouhin). This is a nice Burgundy, but given the exalted label and even more exalted price, the wine hardly lives up to expectations. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. There are fruity/berry flavors and the wine is clean and fresh. Balanced a bit to acid, the wine should develop for a few years, but more depth should be forthcoming for a Burgundy of this pedigree (16). \$77

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Les Allots” (H. Remariquet). This is a big Burgundy with a dark color and a deep, fruity/earthy nose. The flavors are rich with a fruity/earthy/spicy component. Firm with good tannin/acid balance, this will take a minimum of 6-8 years to develop (16). \$29

Grands-Échezeaux (Labouré-Roi). With a medium dark color and a fruity/earthy nose, this wine has fruit, but is rather harsh and firm with noticeable acidity. A few years bottle age should show some softening. Seemingly, there is enough fruit to carry this wine for the many years it will need to develop (15½). \$37

Nuits-Saint-Georges (Labouré-Roi). With a medium dark color and a deeply perfumed, berry-like nose, this wine has a good fruit flavor and nice balance. Not terribly complex, but a nice drinking Burgundy for intermediate term consumption (15½). \$23

Pommard-Epenots (Latour). This is a pleasant enough wine, but \$52? Incredible. It has a medium dark color with a deep, fruity/spicy nose and good, ripe, fruit flavors backed by firm acidity and a tart finish. A few years bottle age should yield a considerably softer wine (15½).

Chassagne-Montrachet “Clos Saint-Jean” (P. Pillot). This is a pleasant Burgundy. Not terribly complex, but showing a lovely, fruity/berry-like/vanilla nose and round, soft, fruity flavors (15). \$22

Corton-Perrières (Labouré-Roi). This wine has a dark color with a slight amber edge and a berry-like/vanilla nose. It has nice fruit and good balance. Not yet showing much complexity and lacking just a bit in flavor, the wine should, nonetheless, develop well for the next 4-5 years (15). \$29

Échezeaux (Latour). This wine has a medium color and a fruity/spicy nose with grapy/fruity flavors that are pleasant, if not complex (15). \$45

Gevrey-Chambertin (R. Groffier). A lot less money than Groffier's other wines and a lot less wine, this is still pleasant. The color is medium and the nose has a plummy/fruity quality. It has nice fruit and flavor in a lean style with tannin and acid to lose. A few years bottle age will soften the wine considerably (15). \$28

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Les Poulettes” (Dufouleur). This is a big Burgundy with a dark color and a deep, berry nose. The wine has toasty/earthy/berry flavors and is firm, almost austere, with tannin and acid to lose. This needs 5-7 years to develop (15). \$23

Santenay (Noel-Gagnard). This wine has a medium dark color and a ripe, fruity/spicy nose. The wine has good, ripe, fruit flavors with acid and tannin to lose. A little short on the palate, otherwise very nice (15). \$20

Best Buys

Beaune "Les Paules" (M. Morey). OK, this Burgundy is a lighter style. And, yes, there is that hint of sweetness. However, it is lovely and delicious to drink and doesn't cost a fortune. With a medium color and an amber edge, the nose is full of ripe, fruity/spicy nuances. There is good fruit and complexity. Not a keeper, but very nice for consumption in the next 3-4 years (15½). \$14



Côte de Beaune "Monthelie" (Coche-Dury). This is a fairly big Côte de Beaune. It has a dark color and a fruity/grapy, slightly volatile nose. The flavors are fruity with a toasty/earthy complexity. Quite tannic, this wine needs age and should show improvement for 5-6 years (15½). \$15

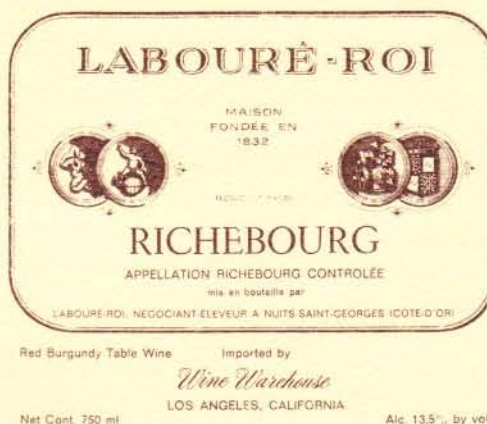
Bourgogne-Passe-Tout-Grains (R. Chevillon). Are you kidding? Nobody buys this stuff. Wrong. These wines are as good as the integrity of the producer. In this case, it is very high indeed. Tasted with Cheillon's four Nuits-Saint-Georges, this is amazingly similar with the same fruity/spicy/bacon-like nose and flavor. Just a bit less flavor and a slightly harsh finish not balanced by enough fruit to warrant long term aging, still a very nice wine for consumption now and over the next 2-3 years (15½). \$9

Rully "Les Clouds" (Jacqueson). This is a lovely, lighter style Burgundy. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity/spicy/berry-like nose. There is nice, berry-like fruit tinged with vanilla. With honest Pinot Noir character, light, but not overly sweet, this wine should improve for a few years (15½). \$12.50

Good

Charmes-Chambertin (Latour). This is rather pleasant, but the price is mind boggling. Who needs it? It has a medium red color and a briary/raspberry nose with berry-like flavors. It is soft and fruity without much depth or character (14½). \$54

Richebourg (Labouré-Roi). Despite the label, this is not an outstanding Burgundy. It is, however, what is masquerading as the wine on the West Coast. Caveat Emptor. The wine has a dark color and a coffee bean nose. There is good structure, but the flavor also shows a coffee bean component. Was this wine damaged in shipment? Or is it a different batch? Who knows?? At \$48 per bottle, it's easy to pass on this (14).



Gevrey-Chambertin (Geoffroy). This wine has a medium dark color with an over-ripe, plum nose. The wine has fruit but shows a slight stemminess and a touch of acescence. Not unpleasant, but not likely to improve much either (13½). \$28

Pommard "Premier Cru" (Bouchard). This is a perfect example of what is wrong with Burgundy. The general public recognizes the name Pommard. If the public doesn't know the difference, price the wine high. And so it goes. This Pommard has a medium red color and a fruity, SO₂ nose. It has some fruit, but is thin, tart, and acidic with a short finish. At \$38 who needs it (13½).

Clos de Vougeot (Latour). Another big label, big price, and ordinary wine. This bears no resemblance to really good Burgundy. It has a medium dark color with a fruity, coffee bean nose and simple, tart, acidic flavors (13). \$51

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Perdrix" (Mugneret-Gouachon). This is unusual juice. The color is dark with only a slight amber at the edge, but the nose has a roasted/coffee bean/apple cider quality. The flavors are rich and grapy with a noticeable roasted component. Only time will tell how this will develop, but substantial improvement is doubtful (13). \$35

Pommard "Les Premiers" (Rodet). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/vanilla nose. It is light, thin, clean, and much like a simple Beaujolais (13). \$30

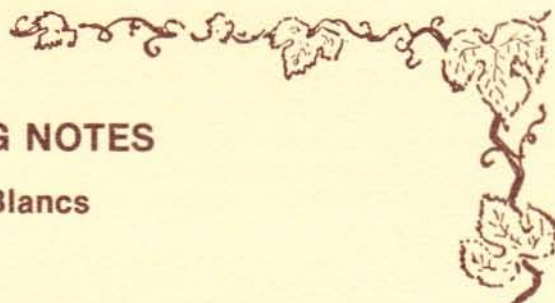
Savigny-les-Beaune (P. Ponnelle). One shouldn't expect much of this wine and that's exactly what one will get – not much. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a subdued, fruity nose. There is some fruit, but the wine is thin and watery without depth or structure (13). \$12.50

Beaune "Clos des Mouches" (Guillemard). This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/musty/slightly volatile nose. There is little fruit and the wine is musty and short on the palate (12). \$29



SELECTED TASTING NOTES

California Chenin Blancs



After French Colombard (a grape of little distinction that is properly best used for blending in generic wines), Chenin Blanc is the most widely planted white grape variety in California. It is grown from the northernmost to the southernmost areas of the state. It is also made in many different styles from very sweet to dry, from no oak to heavy oak, and from light and crisp to full-bodied and rich. Therefore, unless one knows for certain the style of the wine (unfortunately this is most often not available by reading the label), it is not likely that the wine will be served to show at its best. Likewise, random "wine tastings" of Chenin Blanc are a useless exercise. To serve a dry, oaky style, with a sweet, fruity style, and constantly shift back and forth through several groups of wines serves absolutely no purpose, except perhaps to educate the tasters as to the style of each particular wine. The sweeter wines such as Beringer, Krug, or Mondavi are most suitable as well chilled quaffing wines. They can also serve as apéritifs, but most experienced wine drinkers will find them too sweet for most foods. On

the other hand, wines such as Burgess, in an oaky, dry style, make good food wines and not so good quaffers. In between, wines such as Dry Creek can be quite versatile – suitable with many types of food, as an apéritif, quaffer, whatever. Chenin Blancs are, for the most part, not expensive and most are best consumed as young as possible while they still have freshness and fruit. Listed below are selected tasting notes on a representative sampling of currently available California Chenin Blancs:

Very Good

Best Buy

1979 Beringer "Knights Valley Estate."

This Sonoma Chenin Blanc has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/apricot nose. It has good fruit, flavor, depth, and balance. Slightly sweet, it's an attractive wine at an attractive price (15). \$4

1979 Beringer "Napa Valley." Not quite as fruity as the "Knights Valley Estate" bottling, and with a more pronounced grassy, varietal character, this is a nice Chenin Blanc. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/slightly grassy nose. There is good, ripe, fruit flavors with nice balance in a slightly sweet style (15). \$4.50

1979 Burgess Cellars "Napa Valley." This wine is designated Dry on the label and so it is. As such, it is a very pleasant food wine, better with fish dishes than the Charles Krug, but not as pleasant as a sipping wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. There are nice, fruity/oaky flavors with just a touch of a herbal character. The wine has nice balance, not rich, but very pleasant and a good occasional substitute for Chardonnay. However, this doesn't have the depth to age like Chardonnay, drink it over the next year (15). \$6.50

1980 Dry Creek "Sonoma County." This is a very nice Chenin Blanc in a fruity style with just a hint of sweetness. It has a pale yellow color and a fruity/citric/slightly grassy nose. It is clean, fresh, and crisp with a fruity/citric flavor and a pleasant finish. This wine will go nice with lighter dishes, fish, cold luncheons, etc. (15). \$5.50

NV Charles Krug "Napa Valley." In the sweeter style, Krug has a way with Chenin Blanc. The problem is that the NV designation doesn't allow the consumer to differentiate between bottlings and they do differ. However, the newest batch comes in a light colored blue green bottle as opposed to the traditional dark green bottle. It has a pale yellow color and a fruity/grapefruit/eucalyptus nose – clean, fresh, and attractive. The wine is fruity and crisp with a slight varietal grassiness. It is sweet, but is balanced by a firm backbone (15). \$6 (Incidentally, the same wine in the green bottle has a more pronounced grassy character and is not as fresh, although still very nice.)

1980 Robert Mondavi "Napa Valley." Made in the same mold as the Charles Krug (one could say it runs in the family), this wine is richer with a similar degree of sweetness. The color is pale yellow and the nose has a fresh, fruity, pineapple character with just a hint of varietal grassiness. The taste is fruity with a citrus-like character and a slight pétillance. The wine is sweet and well-balanced – a good afternoon quaffer or a nice food wine with something like a roast loin of pork (15). \$6.50

Good

1979 Alexander Valley Vineyards "Alexander Valley." This estate bottled wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/peachy nose with a hint of vanilla. It has good fruity/oaky flavors with a short finish (14). \$6

1980 Fetzer "North Coast." This is a nice quaffing wine. It has a fresh, fruity, pineapple nose and clean, fresh, crisp, grapy, sweet flavors (14). \$4.75

1980 Shown "Napa Valley." This wine is labeled Dry. Actually, it's slightly sweet. It has a pale yellow color and a fruity/grapefruit nose. It is crisp and clean with a slight pétillance and a grapefruit-like flavor (14). \$5.50

1980 Flora Springs "Napa Valley." This wine is marred by a touch too much SO₂ which blows off with air. Otherwise, it has a pale green yellow color and is clean, fresh, dry, tart – an acceptable food wine (13½). \$5.50

1979 San Marin "San Luis Obispo County." This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/slightly herbaceous nose. It is fruity, clean, soft, sweet, and pleasant (13½). \$4

Which Island?

1979 Bogle Vineyards "Merritt Island, Yolo County." This won't Bogle the islands of your mind, but don't blame yo-local wine merchant if he thinks it Merritts your attention. The wine is simple and pleasant with a slight pétillance. The nose has an earthy/fruity/grapy character and the flavors are fruity, grapy, and sweet (13). \$4.75

1979 Chappellet "Napa Valley." At \$7.50 this is pricey for Chenin Blanc. The wine has a light yellow color and a fruity/spicy/grassy nose. It is light, dry, and lacking in depth (13).

1979 HMR "Central Coast Counties." Labeled Demi-Sec, this wine has a light yellow color and a fruity/grassy nose. It is clean, fresh, simple, slightly sweet, and lacks a bit in flavor (13). \$6

1979 Landmark "California." This is a pleasant food wine. The major fault is a lack of varietal character. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla-tinged character. The wine is round with nice fruit and flavor, but is slightly pétillant and finishes short (13). \$5

1979 J. Lohr "Northern California." This is a wine to drink now as a pleasant quaffing wine. It has a light yellow gold color, a grapy/raisiny nose, and ripe, fruity, sweet, slightly pétillant flavors (13). \$4.75

1979 Sterling Vineyards "Napa Valley." This estate bottled wine has a pale yellow color and a fresh, fruity, pineapple, slightly grassy nose – very attractive. It is clean, fresh, and dry, but lacks fruit, flavor, and depth (13). \$6.50

1978 The Monterey Vineyard "Monterey County." This was probably better a year or two ago, yet this is apparently the most current vintage on the market. The wine has a light yellow color and a floral sweet pea nose with a pronounced vegetative overtone. In the mouth, it is flat, sweet, and simple (12). \$5.75

1979 Parducci "Mendocino County." This wine has a light yellow color, an unusual, musty/cheesy/fruity nose. It is clean, fresh, fruity, crisp, and slightly sweet. Were it not for the off nose, this would be quite nice (12). \$4.25



Below Average

1979 Ventana Vineyards "Monterey County."

This estate bottled wine is labeled Dry. Ventana should be able to do an excellent job with Chenin Blanc, but this wine is marred by an overabundance of free sulphur. Given enough air it will blow off, but the nose still is not attractive with a musty, tanky character. Otherwise, the wine has fruit and pleasant flavor in a dry style (11). \$6.50

1979 Callaway "Temecula." This estate bottled wine from Southern California is labeled Dry. So much for the label. It is characterized by the most foul nose imaginable – a nauseating, skunky, rotten potato smell. In the mouth, it has a moldy, rotten fruit character. It gets points only because it looks like wine (5). \$6

COMING ATTRACTIONS

1975 Sauternes • More 1978 Red Burgundies • California Cabernet Sauvignons •
1976 Sauternes • Selected Tasting Notes • California Chardonnays • Barrels and
Bottles • Cellar Notes