



THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

The Absurdity of Classifying American Cabernet Sauvignon

It was bound to happen. Someone's trying to "Classify" Cabernet Sauvignon. From Jason Publishing Corporation, Ronald A. Kapon, "Correspondent at Large, *Liquor Store Magazine*, and Senior Editor *Les Amis du Vin Magazine* polled "Thirty-nine of the finest retail and restaurant American wine enthusiasts (including four 'interested parties')." Respondents were asked to vote for no more than eight First Growths, fourteen Second Growths, fourteen Third Growths, ten Fourth Growths, and seventeen Fifth Growths. Oh yes, the classification is approximately the same as that of the 1855 classification of Bordeaux. We're told that plans are to revise the classification "at least every other year".

Super. Just what we need. A re-classification every year or two. Presumably, any wines that go over the hill during the interim period would be declassified or

at least scaled down a notch or two. Also, with the rate that new wineries are springing up, it would allow for a hot new winery to jump to the top of the list. Armed with "First Growth" status, the price could then be placed on a parity with Lafite, Latour, etc. For now, we're told Beaulieu "Private Reserve", Chappellet, Chateau Montelena, Heitz "Martha's Vineyard", Mayacamas, Robert Mondavi "Reserve", Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, and Sterling "Reserve" are "First Growths". Why? Who knows? Of these only Beaulieu "Private Reserve" has been making wine for longer than 15 years. Of the rest, Heitz "Martha's Vineyard" dates to 1966, Chappellet to 1968, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars to 1972, Sterling "Reserve" to 1973, Robert Mondavi "Reserve" also 1973 (other lots of wine designated "unfined", "unfiltered", etc. were produced prior, but even so, the first Cabernet was 1966). The other two, Mayacamas and Chateau Montelena, although they have Cabernet vineyards planted, have

to date, primarily relied on grapes purchased from different sources for their wines. Under present ownership Mayacamas dates back to 1968 and Chateau Montelena about 1972. How can anything be determined in so short a period? Consider poor Bob Travers, the owner/winemaker of Mayacamas. I'm sure he's happy to know that he has "First Growth" status, but he has no Cabernet to drink because none of it is mature; and, early on, his wines tend to be very tannic. Most of the wines from the other producers also are not mature. Only BV "Private Reserve" has stood the test of time for more than a few vintages. Even here, there is a very real question as to the quality of the wine before the 1970 vintage and after. And what about Inglenook, now under the same corporate ownership as BV? The best of the Inglenooks may be the best Cabernet ever made in California – wines like the superlative 1949, still a great wine. Trouble is the best, like the 1949, were from years ago; few have tasted them and few exist today. And, alas, today the wine is very different. For its past efforts Inglenook is not even mentioned, the "Cask" is a "Fourth Growth". What about the other "Classified Growths"? Jordan is a "Second Growth" with only its

third vintage coming to market. Duckhorn is a "Third Growth". It will release its second Cabernet next spring. Nice going, Dan. On the other side of the ledger, Spring Mountain is a "Second Growth" despite having produced some very mediocre to poor wines in otherwise good to great years, e.g. 1973 and 1974. Ditto for Freemark Abbey, a "Third Growth". We could go on and on. And talk about inconsistencies, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars is a "First Growth", but its best lot of wine, Cask 23, produced from what owner/winemaker Warren Winiarski believes is his best plot of vineyard, is only a "Fifth Growth", in there with Chateau Chevalier, Clos du Bois, and Cuvaion, to name a few. Back to the drawing board, Warren! Maybe Cask 63 would be better.

But why be too critical. By revising such a list every year or two, we should have something meaningful in maybe another 20-30 years. By then such a list will be very different from that today. At least I certainly hope it will!

John Tilson
Editor



COMING ATTRACTIONS

1979 Bordeaux • California Cabernet Sauvignons • California Chardonnays • Distinctive New Wines • Italian Red Wines • Barrels and Bottles • Selected Tasting Notes • Cork Poppers • Cellar Notes •

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. Wines rated Very Good or better will also be ranked on a six star system corresponding from 15-20 on a 20-point scale. Wines with a 1/2 ranking will receive a + designation. Stars in () indicate potential. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are the approximate California suggested retail prices.

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MORE 1979 RED BURGUNDIES

As we taste more and more of the 1979 Red Burgundies, we are increasingly convinced of the accuracy of our initial assessment (see Volume III, Page 61). Normally, as with most very large vintages, there is a great deal of variability. Those areas which were impacted by hail storms in June and July, when able to produce wine at all, made wine of more depth and concentration than is generally true for the vintage. These areas include Nuits-Saint-Georges, Vosne Romanée, Gevrey-Chambertin. From these areas the wines of Cheillon, Jayer, Maume, Ponsot, Rossignol and Roty have been stand outs so far. However, the great majority of the 1979's suffer from lack of depth. They will be early maturing. At the inflated prices, most are not worth the money. Reflecting this fact, our tastings of the 1979 vintage will not approach the exhaustive review of the 1978 vintage.

Outstanding

★★★★+

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Perrières" (Cheillon). With a dark color this Burgundy has a lovely, deeply perfumed, spicy/smoky/bacon nose. There are deep flavors with hints of cherries and vanilla with an underlying spicy/smoky quality. Long on the palate, this is simply a delicious wine that should improve for 3-4 years and keep well beyond that (18½). \$27.95

★★★★

Gevrey-Chambertin "Lavaux Saint-Jacques" (Maume). This wine has a dark color with an intensely perfumed, deep nose – fruity/berry/oriental spice/hints of coconut and vanilla. There are deep, berry/spicy flavors with a hint of coconut. This is a firm, tight wine with acid and tannin to lose. Delicious, and very long on the palate this should keep for 4-5 years and should be nectar (18). \$29.95



Mazis-Chambertin (Maume). This Burgundy has a very dark color with a subdued, berry/hint of spice nose. There is a terrific, full, deep, rich flavor with loads of fruit. Mouthfilling with tannin and acid to lose, this wine is tight, long on the palate, showing some oak, and has lots of stuffing (18). \$57.75



Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Vaucrains" (Cheillon). This wine has a dark color and an opulent, cherry/spicy nose with a hint of bacon. It is delicious with ripe, round, fruity/spicy flavors. The most showy and stylistic of the 1979 Cheillons, this wine has layers of flavor and impeccable balance – nectar in 3-4 years (18). \$27.95

Very Good

★★★

Charmes-Chambertin (Maume). With a dark color there is an intriguing, complex, fruity/chocolate/hint of mint and spice nose with a very slight hint of coconut. There are fruity/plummy/slightly chocolate flavors with a hint of green olives – an unusual combination but very attractive. Firm, complex, with some tannin, there is a good finish with acid to lose (17). \$49.95

Clos de la Roche (Ponsot). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, deep, perfumed, plummy/spicy nose. There is a plummy/spicy/smoky flavor in a medium-bodied style. Very nice with acid and some tannin to lose, this needs a few years and is likely to be early maturing. Note, if you purchase this wine leave it standing a day or two before you drink it. Otherwise, the wine is likely to be a little cloudy (17). \$27.50

Gevrey-Chambertin "Pallut" (Maume). This Burgundy has a very dark color with a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. With great flavor which is deep and rich, there is good fruit. Tannic, just now a little backward, this wine needs time to round out and develop complexity – hopefully there's enough fruit (17). \$27.50

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Cailles" (Chevillon). This Burgundy has a dark color with a deeply perfumed, fruity nose showing hints of cinnamon, cloves, and rose petal. Quite different than Chevillon's other wines and without the flavor complexities of Chevillon's Perrière and Vaucrains, it is still delicious and fruity with good balance and length on the palate. If the complexity develops with time, it will be outstanding (17). \$24.95

Volnay "Clos de la Bousse D'Or (La Pousse D'Or). This seems clearly the best of the 1979 Pousse D'Or wines. It has a medium dark color and a deeply perfumed, plummy/spicy nose. There are elegant, round, spicy/plummy/cedary flavors. Ripe and nicely balanced, yet with tannin and acid to lose, it should be ready in 3-4 years (17). \$32

★ ★ +

Volnay "Clos des Ducs" (D'Angerville). This Burgundy has a medium dark color and a nice, cherry/spicy nose with cherry/spicy flavors. It is pleasant, round, and light, but quite delicious with nice balance (16½). \$30

★ ★

Beaune-Greves (Tollot-Beaut). With a medium dark color this wine has a big, deep, intense, plummy/spicy nose. There are full, plummy/spicy flavors with tannin to lose. With nice balance and a good finish this will be early maturing (16). \$28

Gevrey-Chambertin (Maume). This wine has a dark color with a nicely perfumed, smoky/fruity/spicy nose and a nice, berry flavor with a smoky/spicy complexity. Straightforward with tannin and acid to lose there is a nice finish (16). \$24.95

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Chaillots" (Dubois). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge. It has a full, ripe fruit, somewhat jammy/vanilla-tinged extract. Give it 3-4 years to develop (16). \$26.95

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les St. Georges" (Chevillon). This wine has a dark color with a ripe fruit nose and a hint of spice. There are very ripe fruit flavors in a full, rich style with good fruit and some tannin (16). \$21.50

Volnay "Champans" (D'Angerville). With a medium dark color and amber edges this wine has a perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. With fruity/spicy flavors matching the nose there is nice balance in a light style. It is youthfully appealing (16). \$14.95

★ +

Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" (de Marcilly). With a dark color and an amber edge, this wine has a subdued, plummy, slightly smoky/earthy nose. There are nice, rich, plummy flavors with acid and tannin to lose. Just now it is slightly bitter and needs a few years but should be very good with time (15½). \$18

Mazis-Chambertin (Dupont-Tisserandot). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with orange/amber edges and a nice, fruity/spicy nose. There is good fruit with some tannin and acid to lose – on the lighter side, but quite nice (15½). \$37

Pommard "Le Clos Blanc" (Machard de Gramont). This wine has a medium dark color and an amber edge. There is an intense, ripe fruit nose with a hint of spice. Similar ripe fruit/spicy flavors are in evidence backed by some tannin. This wine is very flavorful but lacking a bit in substance. Give it 2-3 years (15½). \$24.99

Pommard "Rugiens" (Courcel). This wine has a medium dark color with orange/amber edges. It has a lovely, fresh, plummy/spicy flavor with good fruit and spice with a slight smokiness. Balanced a bit to acid, and on the light side, this should be early maturing (15½). \$33

Santenay "Grand Clos Rousseau" (A. Morey). With a medium color and amber edge, this wine has a lovely, spicy/fruity/smoky nose. Slightly volatile, but with a lovely flavor – fruity/spicy/smoky. Just a little thin and slightly bitter but it's still very attractive for early consumption (15½). \$20

Volnay "Clos D'Audignac" (La Pousse D'Or). The color is medium dark and the wine has a plummy/fruity/vanilla nose. There is a nice, fruity/spicy/vanilla quality on the palate. The wine is light, but pleasing with a slightly acidic finish. It should be early maturing (15½). \$24



Bonnes Mares (Clair-Daü). This Burgundy has a medium light color with an amber edge and a perfumed, berry-like nose with a hint of spice and smoke. With medium body there is a berry/spicy flavor and tannin and acid to lose. Rather short, this will be early maturing (15). \$29

Chassagne-Montrachet (de Marcilly). With a medium dark color and an amber edge this wine has a fruity/earthy/almond extract nose. There are plummy/almond extract flavors with nice balance. Light and balanced a bit to acid, this wine is unusual, but nice (15). \$14

Clos de Vougeot (G. Rommier). This Burgundy has a medium dark color and an amber edge. There is a subdued, fruity/spicy nose and good fruit and flavor—spice and vanilla. A little simple, a sad commentary for so noble a property (15). \$45

Fixin "Clos du Chapitre" (Gelin and Molin). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a plummy/spicy/vanilla nose. There are plummy/spicy flavors with good extract and a balance to acid (15). \$21

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Roncières" (Chevilon). This has a dark color with a nice, fruity/spicy/smoky nose. With good fruit, it is round, somewhat simple, and early maturing (15). \$22.50

Pernand-Vergelesses "Les Vergelesses" (Laleure-Plot). This wine has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a subdued, fruity/vanilla/spicy nose. There are fruity/spicy/slightly earthy flavors with a slightly sharp finish. A little thin, but pleasing (15). \$19.99

Pommard "Les Jarollières" (La Pousse D'Or). This wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. There is good fruit and a nice, fruity/spicy flavor with good balance. Lacking a bit in complexity, but very nice in a lighter style (15). \$30

Pommard "Rugiens" (J. Guillemand). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/vanilla/spicy nose. There is nice fruit with a hint of vanilla and spice. With medium body, it is tight and balanced just a bit to acid (15). \$31

Santenay "Les Gravières" (La Pousse D'Or). With a medium color this wine has a subdued, cherry/vanilla nose with a hint of spice. There is a nice, fruity/vanilla/spicy flavor. Balanced to acid, it is a little tart and thin but still pleasing (15). \$19.99

Volnay "Les Caillerets, Clos Des 60 Ouvrees" (La Pousse D'Or). With a medium dark color, there is a subdued, cherry/spicy nose. Again, this is a very pleasant, lighter style wine with a cherry/spicy flavor with some tannin and acid to lose (15). \$29

Good

Chambolle-Musigny (G. Roumier). This Burgundy has a medium color and an amber edge. There is a nice, cherry-like nose with a hint of spice. It is light, but very pleasant, with fruity/spicy flavors. Balanced a bit to acid, this is clean, firm, but a bit short (14½). \$28

Clos de Vougeot (Clair-Daü). This wine has a medium color with an orange/amber edge and a cherry/spicy nose. There are pleasant, cherry/spicy flavors. It's a little thin with honest flavor but lacking in depth. Yet another disappointing Clos de Vougeot (14½). \$36

Pommard "Epenots" (Courcel). This Burgundy has a dark color and an amber edge with a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. Nicely balanced, a bit sweet, and rather forward, it has a candy-like flavor with a hint of spice—not real exciting, but nice (14½). \$33

Pommard "Epenots" (J. Guillemand). With a dark color and an amber edge, this wine has a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. With medium body, there is a rather good flavor, but the wine is a little harsh with a balance to acid (14½). \$31

Volnay "Les Caillerets" (La Pousse D'Or). This wine has a medium dark color and a cherry/spicy/slightly earthy nose. There are simple, fruity/cherry/spicy flavors. Nicely balanced, this is pleasant, if not terribly exciting (14½). \$24

What a Difference a Year Makes

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze (P. Gelin). This Burgundy has a medium color and an orange/amber edge. There is a ripe fruit/spicy nose with ripe fruit/spicy flavors. Rather a simple wine, it is pleasant, but with no depth. A great disappointment as compared with the 1978—in fact, hardly recognizable as being from the same property and producer (14). \$47

Charmes-Chambertin (Dupont-Tisserandot). This wine has a medium dark color and an amber edge with an earthy/fruity/spicy nose. It is fruity, with a hint of herbaceousness showing good depth and a tannic finish (14). \$36

Fixin (P. Gelin). This Burgundy has a medium dark color and an earthy/fruity/spicy nose with a hint of caramel. There is a good, ripe fruit flavor with a hint of spice and earth. Very slightly sweet, the wine is balanced, but short on the finish (14). \$18

Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos St. Jacques" (Clair-Daü). With a light color and an amber edge, there is a nicely perfumed nose – fruity/spicy/smoky. With a berry-like flavor with a hint of spice, this wine is light, thin, slightly stemmy, and lacking in depth (14). \$24

Mazis-Chambertin (P. Gelin). This wine has a medium color with orange/amber edges. There is a minty, fruity/spicy nose showing a hint of spice. It is slightly bitter and backward, and needs a few years. Is there enough fruit (14)? \$37

Chambolle-Musigny (Clair-Daü). With a light medium color and orange/amber tones, this wine has a fruity/woody/almond-like/spicy nose. Thin and tart with noticeable oak there is some fruit – honest but weak (13½). \$22

Fixin "Clos Napoleon" (P. Gelin). This wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge. There is a ripe fruit and spice nose with good, fruity/spicy flavors that are balanced a bit to acid (13½). \$19

Gevrey-Chambertin (Dupont-Tisserandot). This Burgundy has a medium color with an orange/amber edge. There is a subdued, spicy/fruity nose with a slight mintiness. It is rather simple, thin, and balanced to acid (13½). \$22

Clos des Lambrays. This monopole vineyard wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge. There is a fruity/vanilla nose with a hint of spice. With a slight sweetness, the vanilla flavors have a hint of spice, but the oak overpowers the rather meager underlying fruit (13). \$37

Beaune-Greves (de Marcilly). This wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge and an unusual, peanut butter/earthy nose. It is soft and rather flabby with an herbaceous flavor (12). \$21

Chambolle-Musigny (S. Groffier). With a medium dark color there is an off nose like rubber tires with a hint of caramel. This cleans up with air, but never completely goes away. There is good depth with nice fruit, some sweetness, and a hint of spice. This is a wine with problems. How well will it age (12)? \$18

Chorey-Cote de Beaune (Tollot-Beaut). This Burgundy has a medium color with an orange/amber edge. There is an oaky/fruity/slightly stemmy/floral nose and light, stemmy/fruity flavors. Beyond this, it is thin and acidic (12). \$17

How Low for Clos Vougeot?

Clos de Vougeot (J. Grivot). This wine has a medium color and an orange/amber edge with a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. It is rather thin and sharp, lacking finesse, breed, and style. How sad it is. A prime example of a mediocre wine selling at a high price simply because of the label (12). \$43

The Cheillon and Maume Burgundies are imported by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant in Albany, CA. They are available in very limited quantities. The Maume wines were "discovered" after most of the '79 vintage was already sold to shippers. They are wines to look for in future vintages.



CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

Selectivity continues to be the key.

As we taste new Cabernet releases, we continue to be disturbed by the value/quality relationship. Simply put, most new Cabernets fall short in this regard. As we have repeatedly said, there is no shortage of Cabernet. Be patient. Retailers are starting to discount the prices sharply in an effort to turn inventory more rapidly. This may force many producers to offer wine at lower prices.

Meanwhile, there are many very good-outstanding wines from the 1978-80 vintages yet to be released. In an upcoming issue we will review many of them in Barrels and Bottles. In short, it's time for consumers to continue to be selective. This strategy will pay dividends in value and quality.

Very Good

★ ★ ★

1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Backus Vineyard". This Cabernet has a very dark color with a very perfumed, berry/chocolate/spicy nose. There are deep, full, rich very fruity/chocolate flavors with nice balance. This wine has some tannin to lose and is long on the palate (17). \$17.50

★ ★

1979 Durney Vineyard "Carmel Valley-Monterey Valley". This estate bottled wine has a dark color and a big, deep, cedary/pruny nose. There are deep, fruity/pruny/cedary flavors with chocolate overtones. It is full, rich, and quite tannic. Time is needed for the wine to soften. Try again in 2-3 years (16). \$12

★ +

1979 Dehlinger "Sonoma County". This Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/berry/oaky nose with a hint of mint. There are lovely, fruity/cherry/oaky flavors. With tannin to lose and a nice finish, the wine needs a few years to develop (15½). \$7.50

★

1978 Inglenook "Napa Valley". This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge and a minty, perfumed, fruity/berry/oaky nose. There is a good balance and nice flavors with some tannin and acid to lose (15). \$8

Best Buy

1978 M. Marion "Jackson Vineyard". This Lake County wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, perfumed, cherry/grapy/candy-like/vanilla nose. There are round, fruity/cherry/vanilla flavors with a slight herbaceousness. Nicely balanced with moderate tannin and acid to lose, this is a very nice, early maturing wine at a great price (15). \$4

1980 Sarah's Vineyard "San Luis Obispo". This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a berry/spicy/bacon/slightly herbaceous nose. There is a nice, fresh, fruity flavor with nice balance (15). \$12

Good

1979 Roudon-Smith "Steiner Vineyard". This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color and a big, fruity, port-like, ripe/cedary nose. There are big, full, ripe fruit flavors with a hint of chocolate. With tannin to lose, this is very flavorful with good balance. It needs time (14½). \$12.50

1979 Spring Mountain "Napa Valley". This is one of Spring Mountain's better recent efforts, but the \$13.50 price is no bargain. It has a dark color with amber edges and a nice, fruity/oaky nose. There is a good, fruity/oaky flavor with a hint of chocolate. The wine is well-balanced, but there is some tannin to lose. Pleasant, and with room to improve for several years, more complexity would be welcomed (14½).

1978 Zaca Mesa "Special Selection". This estate bottled wine is bigger than the 1979 "Estate" but costs twice as much. The differences aren't that great. It has a dark color with a perfumed, ripe, oaky/fruity nose. With rich, round flavors, the wine has fruity/oaky/chocolate flavors, but is slightly bitter and herbaceous (14½). \$12.50

1978 Berkeley Wine Cellars "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color and an oaky/fruity/slightly peppery nose. There is an oaky/fruity/spicy quality with good depth and some tannin to lose (14). \$6.25

1979 Burgess Cellars "Napa Valley". This Cabernet has a dark color with an oaky/chocolate/ripe fruit nose. With oaky/fruity flavor, it is full with a slightly bitter, tannic finish (14). \$9

1979 BV "Beautour". This Napa Valley wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/oaky/slightly minty nose. There is a fruity/oaky flavor. Light, pleasant, rather one-dimensional, there is some tannin to lose (14). \$5

1979 Raymond "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity/berry nose. There are nice, oaky/berry flavors with a tannic, bitter finish. This is a nice wine flawed by bitterness (14). \$11

1976 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Stag's Leap Vineyards, Lot 2". This Cabernet has a dark color with a perfumed, over-ripe, fruity/oaky nose with a hint of spice and fruity/oaky/slightly spicy/peppery flavors. Quite tannic, with a dry, slightly bitter finish, is there enough fruit (14)? \$25

1978 Sterling "Napa Valley". This estate bottled wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge. There is a ripe fruit/papaya/vanilla nose with a hint of herbaceousness. There are fruity/oaky flavors which are slightly bitter (14). \$12

1979 Tyland Vineyards "Mendocino County". With a dark color and an amber edge, this wine exhibits a deep, ripe fruit/oaky nose which is slightly alcoholic. With good fruit there is some oak and a slight volatile quality. Pleasant, but not a keeper (14). \$7.75

1979 Zaca Mesa "Estate". This Cabernet has a dark color and amber edges. There is a clean, fresh, fruity/oaky nose with fresh, berry/oaky flavors showing a slight herbaceousness (14). \$6.25

1978 Stephen Zellerbach Vineyard "Alexander Valley". This Cabernet has a dark color and an amber edge with an oaky/fruity nose. The pleasant, oaky/fruity flavors are one-dimensional. And the wine is slightly tannic with a bitter finish (14). \$8

1977 BV "Private Reserve". This wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge and an oaky/fruity nose. There is an oaky flavor but the wine is lacking fruit and has a slightly bitter finish. The 1979 BV "Beautour" at \$5 is a good buy and a better wine than this 1977 "Private Reserve" at \$16! How sad it is (13½). \$10

1979 Chateau Chevalier "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color and a fresh, perfumed, fruity/oaky nose with good, fruity/oaky flavors. There is a very nice flavor with a bitter finish. Tannic with good fruit, the bitterness flaws the wine (13½). \$10

1978 Franciscan Vineyard "Alexander Valley". This Cabernet has a medium color with orange/amber tones and a lovely, strawberry, candy-like nose. There are light, fruity/oaky flavors with some tannin. A little bitter, this is not varietal but pleasant (13½). \$6.50

1979 Santino "El Dorado County". With a medium dark color and amber edge this wine has a toasty/fruity/oaky nose. Oaky/fruity/toasty flavors are ripe and pleasant and backed by ample tannin (13½). \$8

1979 Sycamore Creek "San Luis Obispo". This Cabernet has a medium dark color and an amber edge with a fruity/weedy nose. There are pleasant, fruity/oaky flavors that are marred by a slightly bitter finish (13½). \$7.50

NV McLester "California". This wine has a medium color with an orange/amber edge. There is a briary/oaky/berry nose with oaky/berry/spicy/briary flavors. It is ripe, fruity, pleasant, but with not much varietal character, more like Zinfandel (13). \$7.50

1978 Pedregal "Napa Valley". This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a subdued, fruity/oaky nose. It is full, rich, and powerful with fruity/oaky flavors, but is very tannic and quite bitter. Will time help (13)? \$7

1977 Silver Oak "Alexander Valley". This wine has a medium dark color with orange/amber tones and a raisin/vanilla nose. There are round, soft, raisiny flavors showing considerable vanilla. While it may appeal to those seeking a mature, ready-to-drink wine, the raisiny flavors are hardly classic Cabernet (13). \$14

1979 Sunrise "Santa Cruz Mountains, Arata Vineyard". This wine has a dark color and an oaky/fruity/slightly earthy/weedy/peppery nose. In the mouth it has a fruity/oaky/slightly peppery flavor with a dry, tannic finish (13). \$9

1979 Ventana Vineyards "Monterey County". This estate bottled wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a toasty/oaky/vanilla/fruity nose. There are one-dimensional, fruity/oaky flavors with a slightly tannic finish (13). \$10

1978 Wilson Daniels "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity nose. The oaky/fruity flavors are one-dimensional. Again, the wine finishes bitter and tannic (13). \$10

1977 Cuvalson "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color with a berry/fruity nose. There is a V/A, oaky/cherry/woody flavor. Overpowering, this wine is very tannic and suffers from a definite lack of fruit and balance (12½). \$10

Liberty School, Lot 8 "California". Sold by Caymus, this is not one of their better batches. It has a dark color with an amber edge. Beyond this, there is a minty/slightly vegetative nose with thin, minty/fruity/vegetative flavors that finish short (12). \$5

1978 Michtom Vineyards "Alexander Valley". This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge. There is a minty/oaky/fruity nose and fruity/oaky/briary flavors. There is not much varietal character and the wine finishes short (12). \$5.50

1979 Montevina. This Amador Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, blackberry/oaky nose. There is a fruity/oaky flavor, but the wine has a bitter, tannic finish (12). \$6.50

1979 Parducci "Mendocino County". This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a subdued, floral/oaky nose. It is one-dimensional and lacking in flavor without varietal character (12). \$7

1979 Pedroncelli "Sonoma County". This Cabernet has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge. There is a slightly caramelized, fruity nose and oaky/berry flavors with a slightly bitter finish (12). \$5.50

1979 Pommerale Vineyards "Sonoma". With a dark color and amber edge, this wine has a ripe, pruny, oxidized, slightly grassy nose. Ripe, pruny/oaky flavors are followed by a slightly hot finish (12). \$8.25

Below Average

1979 Boeger "El Dorado County". This estate bottled wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity/slightly petroleum nose. There are oaky/fruity flavors but the wine is lacking fruit, is tannic, and one-dimensional in a medium-bodied style (11). \$8

1979 Grand Cru Vineyards "Cooks Delta, Yolo County". This Cabernet has a dark color and amber edge with a ripe, pruny/minty nose. There are ripe, fruity/oaky flavors which are round, sweet, and port-like – strange stuff this Yolo juice (11)! \$6.50

1979 H & S "Sonoma County". This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and an H₂S nose. There are fruity/oaky flavors which are simple and straightforward. Does H & S stand for Hydrogen Sulfide (10)? \$11.25

1975 Lost Hills "Napa Valley". This wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge and a coffee bean nose. In the mouth the wine is dried out and devoid of fruit. A bad wine is a bad wine. The \$3 price is not a bargain (10).

1979 Sotoyome "Sonoma, Dry Creek". This Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an oxidized, ripe, fruity nose. There are ripe fruit/chocolate/vanilla flavors that finish slightly sweet and bitter – already over the hill (9). \$8.25

1979 Santa Barbara Winery "Reserve, Santa Ynez Valley". This estate bottled wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge and a vegetative/bell pepper/green bean nose with a vegetative/green bean flavor. With a tannic finish, this is a poor wine – a green grocer special (8). \$6



MORE 1978 BORDEAUX

"... 1978 is certainly a vintage to be well represented in the cellar of every Bordeaux lover."

In Volume II, Number 5 we first reviewed 1978 Bordeaux, including all the first growths. At that time many of these wines had not yet arrived in the U.S. This article deals with wines not reviewed previously. Our conclusions remain valid. The first growths are the real story. Yet behind this, the consistency of the classified growths of the Médoc is remarkable. Most made very good wines. Across the river, the vintage was less successful, although there are a few real surprises such as Certan-Giraud and Certan-de-May. With the 1979's coming to market, prices of the 1978's are being pushed down. In fact, most of the prices listed here have fallen sharply in the last few months. (Wines reviewed were mostly purchased in late 1981.) For instance, 1979 Clerc-Milon was recently offered at only \$10 per bottle in San Francisco! Selectivity is the key. Wisely purchased, 1978 is certainly a vintage to

be well represented in the cellar of every Bordeaux lover.

Very Good

★★★★+

Certan-Giraud. This rather obscure Pomerol produces only slightly more than 1000 cases of wine in an average year. If you can find this 1978 it's an excellent buy. The color is medium dark and the wine has a lovely, clean, ripe fruit/cassis/cedar nose. There are seductive flavors – soft, round, luscious, yet with an underlying firmness and a nice finish (17½). \$18 New York

★ ★ ★

Certan-de-May. Not inexpensive, but this is one of the best Pomerols of the vintage. Not quite as much early appeal as the Certan-Giraud, but perhaps more depth and staying power. The color is dark and the nose exhibits a big, fruity/cedary quality with a hint of peanut butter. Big, fruity/grapy flavors show a hint of cedar. Full-bodied, yet slightly dry on the finish, this is a wine to monitor over the next several years (17). \$30 New York

Clerc-Milon. This Château, under the ownership of the Baron Philippe de Rothschild, has been showing consistent improvement. This is certainly one of the "sleepers" of the vintage. The color is dark with an amber edge. The nose is somewhat subdued, but with air opens up to show an impressive array of black cherries, fruit, and cedar. It is a lovely wine with a complex taste matching the nose—black cherries, cedar, and a hint of vanilla. Supple, with a good underlying balance of tannin and acid, with time it could be outstanding (17). \$19

La Lagune. This third growth has been making fine wine in most recent vintages. This is a lovely bottle that should improve for 8-10 years. The color is dark and the nose is subdued at first, but with air shows a lovely, fresh, clean quality with nuances of berries and cedar. The wine is full, tannic on the finish, but yet supple, with fruity/cedary flavors (17). \$18

Rausan-Ségla. This is surely one of the top Margaux of the vintage. The color is dark with some amber at the rim. There is a lovely nose redolent of fruit/cassis/cedar and violets. The flavors are likewise appealing with a nice tannin/acid balance and a nice finish (17). \$20

★ ★ +

Giscours. In recent years one of the fullest bodied wines of the Médoc, this Margaux has been consistently successful. This 1978 is a wine to lay away for 7-8 years. The color is dark and the nose has a deep, ripe fruit/cedar quality. It has good fruit, flavor, and balance with a long, tannic finish (16½). \$19

l'Évangile. This Pomerol has a dark color and an intense, fruity/cassis/cedary/coconut nose. The flavors exhibit similar complexity. Not a big wine, but complex and flavorful with a nice balance, this should be ready in 2-3 years (16½). \$25 Chicago.

Best Buy

Les Ormes-de-Pez. In a big, full-bodied style, this Saint-Estéphe consistently produces one of the best values of the vintage. The 1978 is true to form. The color is dark and the nose is complex with a ripe, fruity/cassis/vanilla/cedar/candy-like nose. It has loads of fruit with a cedary/cassis flavor. Just now quite tannic and a little rough, this wine is definitely worth laying away for at least 6-7 years (16½). \$12

Talbot. The firm of Cordier owns this fourth growth property in Saint-Julien as well as the second growth Gruaud-Larose. Rarely does Talbot produce better wine. However, this 1978 is a great success. It has a dark color and a lovely, fruity/berry/cedary nose. Atypically, it is already elegant with lovely, fruity/cedary flavor and balance. A lovely wine that seems destined to improve for many years, this is very nice indeed (16½). \$18

★ ★

Canon-la-Gaffelière. Not to be confused with the Premier Grand Cru Saint-Émilion, la Gaffelière, this is usually the lesser wine. Usually, but seemingly not so in 1978. This year the wine has a youthful appeal with a dark color and generous, fruity/cedary flavors in the nose and taste. Well-balanced, with just a little tannin in the finish, this should improve for a year or two (16). \$16 Chicago

Grand-Puy-Lacoste. This fifth growth Pauillac has a dark color with an amber edge and a deep, fruity/cedary nose. It is lean, but has good fruit and cedary nuances on the palate backed by a long tannic finish. This is a wine to keep for 7-8 years (16). \$18

Gruaud-Larose. This second growth Saint-Julien produces very good to outstanding wines consistently. This 1978 has a dark color and a lovely, fruity/cedary/berry nose. It has good fruit backed by firm acidity and tannin. Several years will be needed for the wine to begin to show its ultimate potential (16). \$20

La Conseillante. Typical for this well-known Pomerol, this wine has an underlying leanness that will be resolved into an elegant maturity. The color is dark with a lovely, deep, ripe fruit/cassis nose. The flavors are likewise deeply imbedded and nicely balanced by tannin and firm acidity (16). \$27

La Tour-Figeac. This is a successful Grand Cru Saint-Émilion with a youthful appeal. The color is dark with an amber edge and the nose has a luscious, cassis/berry quality. It has a ripe, fruity/berry/cedary/cassis flavor. With just a little tannin to lose, expect this wine to improve for a few years (16). \$19 New York

La Tour-Haut-Brion. Not as powerful as La Mission, but this vintage yields an aristocratic wine of great charm. The color is dark and the nose has a lovely perfume of candied fruit and cedar. A lean style with fruity/earthy/cedary flavors, the wine is just a little dry on the finish. Still this is a bottle to lay away for 3-4 years (16). \$21.50

Moulin-des-Carruades. This is Lafite's "second" wine. It is not Lafite, but it does show an uncanny Lafite quality. The color is dark with some amber at the edge. The nose has a lovely, perfumed, fruity quality with a hint of cedar. It is supple and nicely balanced with good flavor and a nice finish. Early maturing and forward, this is a wine to drink over the next several years (16). \$23

★ +

Brane-Cantenac. Just when it seemed that this property had forgotten how to make good wine, this 1978 seems to be back headed in the right direction. The color is dark and the nose has a lovely, fruity nose with just a slight underlying herbaceousness. In the mouth, the wine is well-structured and flavory with a clean, fresh, berry-like quality and good tannin/acid balance (15½). \$17

★

Belair. This Premier Cru Saint-Émilion is a little on the light side, but it has youthful appeal. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose is really lovely with a fruity/candy-like perfume. A supple wine with good flavor, it could improve for a few years, but should not be kept too long (15). \$18 Chicago

St. Pierre. Recent vintages of this fourth growth Saint-Julien have been quite good. This wine has good fruit, nice flavors that need 5-6 years to soften, and gain elegance. The color is dark and the nose has a fruity/cassis-like nose. In the mouth, the wine is supple, yet with the underlying tannin and acid for longevity (16). \$15

Boyd-Cantenac. Perhaps a little thin, otherwise this is quite a nice wine. The color is medium dark and the nose exhibits an attractive, fruity/berry/vanilla quality. The wine has clean, fresh, fruity/cedary flavors with good acid and some tannin. Give it 4-5 years age (15). \$15

Clos La Madeleine. This is a nice, early maturing Grand Cru Saint-Émilion. The color is medium dark and the nose exhibits a lovely, fruity/cassis quality. It is soft and fruity with a hint of cedar. Elegant, but with just a trace of underlying tannin, expect this to improve for 2-3 years (15). \$15

D'Angludet. This Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel has produced a 1978 better than some classified growths. The color is dark and the wine exhibits a ripe, fruity/cedary nose. There is good fruit and depth with some tannin and acid to lose. Lovely flavor, lacking just a bit in complexity and just a little short, otherwise very nice (15). \$11.49

Best Buy

Fourcas-Dupré. This minor growth of the Haut-Médoc has been making very good wines for many years. This is a wine of substance with a dark color and a fruity/cedary nose. There is good fruit, but the wine is presently rather harsh and tannic. Lay it away for a few years. The price makes it relatively painless (15). \$8

Haut-Beychevelle-Gloria. From the vineyards of Château Gloria, this wine seems to be very similar. If anything, it seems to have more fruitiness and complexity than Gloria. The two wines make an interesting side by side comparison. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose has a lovely, berry/vanilla/coconut nose and just a trace of stemminess. It has a medium body with a fruity/cherry flavor showing a hint of cedar. Presently quite forward and supple, but with enough tannin and acid to warrant cellar-ing a few years (15). \$12

Lagrange. This often disappointing third growth Saint-Julien has produced a wine that at least is charming with an irresistible, early charm. Make no mistake, it is light, but it is also a delightful beverage. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose has a lovely, fruity/cherry quality with a hint of cedar and mint. The wine has a clean, fresh, fruity/berry flavor. Lacking in backbone, otherwise it is very nice (15). \$13.50 Chicago

Le Gay. This Pomerol has a dark color with an amber edge. The nose has a fruity/earthy/cedary quality which follows through on the palate. Just now a little backward with some tannin and acid to lose, this is a wine to lay away for 3-4 years (15). \$16 Chicago

Léoville-Barton. With a dark color and an amber edge, this wine has a fruity, somewhat earthy/woody nose. It has good, berry-like flavors and a slightly herbaceous undertone. With good body and firm acidity, it should develop well and make a very good bottle (15). \$17

Meyney. This sturdy Bourgeois Exceptionnel Saint-Estèphe is a wine that will need quite a few years to come around. The color is dark and the nose quite subdued showing some fruit and cedar. There is good fruit and depth, but the wine is closed and youthfully tannic. Lay this one away for 5-6 years (15). \$17

Smith-Haut-Lafitte. Seemingly never a terribly exciting wine, this classified Graves is reasonably successful in 1978. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose has a fruity/earthy/slightly herbaceous quality. It has clean, berry-like fruit with a nice flavor. Balanced just a little to acid, lay this wine away for a few years (15). \$17

Good

Bouscaut. This is the only classified wine of the commune Cadaujac in Graves. It has a dark color with an amber edge. There is a fruity/earthy quality in the nose and some mustiness. The wine has fruit and depth with good flavors, but is quite tannic and finishes quite dry. Give it a few years to develop (14½). \$11

Calon-Ségur. Seemingly this is not destined to be a wonderful wine. The color is medium dark and the nose has a subdued, fruity/cedary nose. It has some fruit, but is rather dry and quite backward. A wine to lay away for a few years to see how it will develop, nonetheless, for the money, many others are much better (14½). \$20 Chicago

Malescot-Saint-Exupéry. Malescot is a very long-lived wine. It can be superb. This is not one of the property's best efforts. The color is dark and the nose has a fruity/cedary/minty quality. It has some fruit, but is backward and short on the palate. Knowing how backward Malescot can be in its youth, this may very well improve. Even so, it's a gamble (14½). \$18

Rauzan-Gassies. This property usually finishes second as compared against its neighbor Rauzan-Ségla. Both are second growths of Margaux, but there the similarity ends. This 1978 has a medium dark color with an amber edge. The nose is lovely—brimming with fruit and cedar. The flavors have a similar quality, but the wine is a little thin and lacks depth and balance (14½). \$17.50

Croizet-Bages. This fifth growth Pauillac seems to show a wide degree of variability from vintage to vintage. This is not one of the property's better efforts. The color is dark with an amber edge. The nose is subdued with a fruity/cedary quality. There is some fruit, but the wine is thin with a slightly short finish (14). \$13 Chicago

Bordeaux Trivia

Ferrière. Of the classified growth Médocs which has the smallest production? You guessed it—this property, Ferrière, a third growth Margaux with an annual production of only about 1500 cases per year. If you've never heard of or tasted it, don't worry. Judging from this vintage you haven't missed much. The color is medium dark and the nose has a fruity, slightly herbal quality. It is clean and pleasant, but without much depth or complexity (14). \$15 New York

Greysac. This minor growth Médoc is widely available in the U.S. and can offer good value. This vintage has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/cherry nose showing hints of earthiness and herbaceousness. It has nice fruit and balance in a nice, easy-to-drink style (14). \$6

Lagrange. This rather obscure Pomerol has a medium dark color and a nice, fruity nose with hints of cedar and coconut. It is clean, fruity, and pleasant, but is a little thin and finishes short (14). \$16 Chicago

La Tour-Martillac. This Grand Cru Graves has a medium color and a nice, fruity, earthy/cedary/slightly herbal nose. It is clean and pleasant with some fruit and a short finish (14). \$10 Chicago

Nenin. Although generally ranked one of the top 10 Pomerols, Nenin is most often disappointing. This wine has a medium dark color and a subdued, fruity/cedary/slightly stemmy nose. There are thin, fruity/cedary flavors with a balance toward acid (14). \$22 New York

Pipeau. This Grand Cru Saint-Émilion has a medium dark color and a fruity/cedary nose with a hint of earthiness. It has a fruity/earthy/slightly metallic flavor. On the thin side, this will be early maturing (14). \$10

Larose-Trintaudon. This minor growth of the Haut-Médoc is a large estate comprising nearly 400 acres. It is widely available in the U.S. Some have proclaimed certain vintages better than first growths of the same vintage. While it can be very pleasant and usually is inexpensive, contrary to certain commentary it is not great. This 1978 has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity, slightly stemmy nose. It has clean, fruity flavors with a little nuttiness – simple, but pleasant (13½). \$6

La Pointe. Not unpleasant, but not great, this wine follows the course of many Pomerols of this vintage. The color is dark and the nose has a fruity/stemmy quality. The wine has fruit, but is flat and rather harsh (13). \$16.50 New York

Carbonnieux. A classified Graves, this wine has a dark color and a fruity/earthy/vanilla nose. There is noticeable volatile acidity behind the fruit and this character carries through on the palate giving the wine a slight “pickled” quality. Not unpleasant, but not a wine to keep – drink up (12). \$13 New York

Below Average

l'Angélus. This well-known Grand Cru from Saint-Émilion will surely not please anyone who first smells the musty, sulphurous nose. The color is dark, but other than the off nose, the wine has metallic flavors, is thin, and lacks fruit (11). \$20 New York



CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS

Very Good



1980 Napa Cellars “Alexander Valley-Black Mountain Vineyard”. This wine was barrel fermented. It has a light yellow gold color with a lovely, fruity/vanilla/spicy nose showing a hint of oranges and papaya. It is rich, full in the mouth, delicious, and long on the palate. Lovely to drink, but it may keep for a few years (17). \$11.50



1980 Chateau St. Jean “Jimtown Ranch”. This Chardonnay has a pale yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/vanilla, apple-like nose showing a slightly herbal nuance. The flavors are fresh, clean, elegant, well balanced, and youthfully appealing (16). \$14

1980 Sunrise “Sonoma County”. This Chardonnay is made in a crisp style that is somewhat reminiscent of White Burgundy. It has a light yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose with a slight floral undertone. It has clean, fresh, crisp, fruity/spicy flavors and a clean finish. With good acid, it should develop for a year or two, but has youthful appeal (16). \$10



1980 Chateau St. Jean “Hunter Ranch”. With a light yellow color this wine has an earthy/fruity/vanilla nose. Lovely, round, fresh, fruity/vanilla-tinged flavors are delicate and show good fruit with a slightly citric finish. Like the “Jimtown Ranch” bottling, this wine has youthful appeal (15½). \$14



1980 Raymond “Napa Valley”. This estate bottled wine has a light yellow gold color with a fruity/vanilla nose. There is good richness and balance with full flavors – fruity/oaky/spicy/vanilla (15). \$12

1980 Shafer “Napa Valley”. This wine has a light yellow gold color with a fruity/vanilla/citric/slightly herbal nose. This is a good, firm wine in the mouth with fruity/vanilla flavor and a citric undertone. Clean and fresh, it is youthfully appealing (15). \$12

1980 Zaca Mesa “American Estate”. This Santa Ynez Valley wine has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/spicy nose. It is full and rich, with oaky/spicy/fruity flavor – a big style wine, but balanced and flavorful (15). \$12.50

Good

1980 Balverne "Deer Hill Vineyard". This Sonoma County Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color with a fruity/oaky nose and a hint of spice. It is clean with a fruity/oaky flavor and a ripe, almost sweet finish. With good balance, this is very nice but not terribly complex (14). \$12

1980 Cartlidge & Brown "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/slightly spicy nose. There are fruity/vanilla/citric flavors with nice balance and a slightly short finish (14). \$10

1980 Chateau St. Jean "Belle Terre". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/earthy/oaky nose and fruity/oaky flavors. It is pleasant, but a little short on flavor (14). \$15

1980 Sequoia Grove "Sonoma-Cutrer". This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/pineapple/spicy nose. There are fresh, fruity, spicy, lovely, elegant, slightly petillant flavors. The wine is marred by an impression of sweetness and a hint of bitterness in the finish (14). \$10

1980 Spring Mountain "Napa Valley". This wine has a pale yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/peachy/vanilla nose. There is nice flavor – fruity/vanilla/hint of peaches, but a disturbing bitterness mars the finish (14). \$15

1980 Stonegate "Sonoma". This Chardonnay has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/eucalyptus/spicy/slightly chemical nose. There is nice, if unusual, fruity/eucalyptus flavor and the wine is light and pleasant (14). \$10.50

1980 Beringer "Napa Valley, Gamble Vineyard". This estate bottled wine was barrel fermented. It has a light yellow gold color with a fruity/vanilla nose showing a hint of SO₂. With air, the SO₂ dissipates. There is some fruit, but the wine is a little thin and lacks flavor interest (13½). \$11.50

\$21 For the Label or the Wine?

1980 Clos du Bois "Alexander Valley". This barrel fermented wine has a light yellow gold color and a citric/fruity/vanilla nose with an underlying hint of charcoal. The fruity/vanilla/citric flavors are pleasant, but the wine lacks depth and character. For the \$21 price you get a label with a "Barrel Fermented" overlay, but not much in the bottle (13½). \$14

1980 Sequoia Grove "Napa Valley". With a light gold yellow color this wine has an oaky/fruity nose and vanilla/oaky/fruity flavors. On the palate, it is flat and suffers from a lack of complexity (13½). \$14

1979 Freemark Abbey "Napa Valley". This Chardonnay has a light golden yellow color and an oaky/apricot nose. With an oaky flavor, there is a trace of bitterness and it is rather flat (13). \$13

1980 Martin Ray "Winery Lake". This Napa Valley wine has a medium yellow gold color and a toasty/ripe fruit/spicy/smoky nose. With full texture, there are toasty/smoky flavors with some citric quality in the finish (13). \$18.00

1980 Robert Pecota "Alexander Valley, Canepa Vineyard". This wine has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/toasty/spicy nose. There are full, rich, ripe fruit flavors which are loaded with vanilla and an impression of sweetness (12½). \$13.50

1980 Chamisal "Edna Valley". This Chardonnay has a light golden color with a pink tinge and an oaky/vanilla/slightly banana nose. Out of balance, it is oaky with a hot, slightly bitter finish (12). \$11.50

1980 Monticello Cellars "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a tarry nose with tarry flavor obscuring a ripe fruit undertone – very unusual (12). \$11



MORE 1979 WHITE BURGUNDIES

Very Good

★★★

Meursault-Perrières (Michelot-Buisson). This Burgundy has a pale yellow gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose with a hint of fresh baked bread. There is a lovely, ripe fruit flavor with a hint of spice/pineapple quality. Very harmonious, the wine has good acid, fruit, balance, and a nice finish (17). \$20

★★+

Chassagne-Montrachet "La Romanée" (Pillot). With a pale yellow gold color this wine has a fruity/spicy nose. There are delicious, fruity/spicy flavors with nice balance and nice length on the palate (16½). \$21.99

Meursault "Clos Saint-Felix" (Michelot-Garnier). This Burgundy has a pale yellow gold color and a nice nose – fruity/spicy/hint of earth. There is good fruit and a nice flavor with a hint of spice. The wine has good acid and a nice finish (16½). \$14.95

★★

Meursault (M. Lafarge). This wine has a pale yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/pineapple/spicy nose. There is a nice, fruity/pineapple/spicy flavor. Light, but balanced, it has some acid to lose – very nice (16). \$12.50

★+

Meursault "Les Chevalières" (R. Monnier). This Burgundy has a pale yellow gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/earthy/spicy nose. It has a good fruit flavor with a hint of spice. Clean and fresh with a slightly acidic finish, this wine needs a few years (15½). \$16.98

★

Meursault-Perrières (P. Morey). With a pale yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity, perfumed, spicy, slightly toasty nose, this wine has a nice flavor showing good fruit and spice, but is balanced a bit to acid – still it is quite nice (15). \$19.99

Meursault "Les Charmes" (J. Monnier). With a pale yellow gold color this wine has a nice, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. There are fruity/spicy flavors in a light style balanced just a bit to acid (15). \$14.95

Good

Chassagne-Montrachet "Abbaye de Morgeot" (Duc de Magenta). This wine has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/slightly grassy nose – quite unusual. With fruity/spicy flavors it is balanced a bit to acid and is crisp with a good finish (14½). \$19.90

Meursault (Cellier de Bourgogne). With a pale yellow gold color this wine has a nice, fruity/lemony/spicy nose and a lemony/fruity/spicy flavor. Balanced to acid, it is light and pleasant (14½). \$12.99

Meursault "Les Genevrières" (J. Monnier). This Burgundy has a pale yellow gold color and a perfumed, slightly floral, quite spicy nose. There are fruity/floral/spicy flavors – pleasant, but a little flat (14½). \$20

Meursault "Les Tillets" (G. Michelot). This wine has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/slightly musty nose. There is some fruit but it is not balanced and is oak and a bit acidic (14). \$13.95

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Champs Gains" (P. Bouzereau). With a pale yellow gold color this wine has a fruity/spicy nose. There are nice, fruity/spicy flavors, but it is balanced to acid without much depth or complexity (13½). \$20

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Corvées des Vignes" (J. Monnier). This Burgundy has a pale yellow gold color and a fresh, fruity/spicy nose. There are earthy/citric/fruity flavors, but the wine is light and somewhat watery (13½). \$15

Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Caillerets" (Gagnard). This wine has a pale yellow gold color and a tarry/steely nose with spicy/ripe fruit/charcoal flavors – an over-oaked wine (13). \$22

Meursault-Charmes (Bouzereau). With a light yellow gold color, this wine has a musty nose. Beyond this the fruity/spicy flavors are balanced a bit to acid (13). \$20.75

Below Average

Chassagne-Montrachet "La Romanée" (Coffinet). This Burgundy has a slightly cloudy light yellow gold color and an oaky/spicy nose. There are oaky/spicy flavors that are a little flat and a slight sourness – if you own it drink it up, if you don't forget it (11). \$21



DISTINCTIVE NEW WINES



1980 Condrieu "Château du Rozay" (P. Multier). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a very distinctive, intensely perfumed nose – orange blossoms/sandalwood, and exotic spices. Clean, fresh, with fruity/floral/citric/sandalwood flavors there is nice fruit and good acid. Well-balanced, this is a very finessful wine (17). \$19.95



1981 St. Clement Sauvignon Blanc "Napa Valley". This lovely Sauvignon Blanc is representative of a "new" California style toward a lighter, fresher, easier to drink wine. As such, it represents probably the best Sauvignon Blanc yet made here. The color is very pale yellow gold. The wine has a lovely, clean, fruity, very slightly grassy nose showing just a hint of vanilla. It is delicate in the mouth with a light, delicate balance showing a fruity, slightly grassy flavor with just a faint kiss of vanilla for complexity. Crisp, with a clean, fresh fruit, this is the ideal wine for spring and summer consumption with fresh seafood dishes (17). \$9



Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes" (J. Prieur). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a roasted/caramelized nose. There are toasty/caramelized flavors. Prematurely aged, here is a case of poor wine-making, poor storage, or both (11)! \$27



1981 Gamay Touraine (Domaine de la Charmoise). This wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed, cherry nose with a hint of spice and vanilla. It is light and fresh with cherry/fruity/spicy/herbal flavors. There is a very slight bitterness in the finish but it is still delicious. Served with a slight chill, this will convert even the hardest core white wine drinker. Highly recommended (16). \$4.95



1981 Sauvignon Touraine (Domaine de la Charmoise). With a pale yellow gold color there is a herbaceous/grassy/fruity nose and clean, fresh, fruity/herbaceous/grassy slightly petillant/slightly citric flavors. This is very nice and an excellent food wine. Oh yes, the price is 20-30% less than most "big name" California Sauvignon Blancs (16). \$5.95

1981 Bonny Doon Vineyard Vin Gris de Pinot Noir "Sonoma County". Call this a rose for serious wine drinkers. It is dry. Made in a very small quantity from 100% Pinot Noir grapes, it is an example of what can be done to make a Rosé wine that is not sweet and suited to consumption with food. (Try it with grilled

quail. It's delicious). The color is dark reddish pink. The nose has an intensely perfumed, grapy/fruity nose with just a hint of vanilla. In the mouth the wine is clean and fresh with a grapy/fruity flavor showing just a touch of a floral quality. The slight CO₂ adds a slight petillance that contributes to the wine's early appeal. Buy it to enjoy this spring or summer (16). \$6



MORE 1979 RHÔNES

Outstanding

★★★★

Côte Rôtie (Champet). Lighter than Champet's 1978, but no less delicious, this wine has a medium dark color with a slight amber edge. The nose is deep and complex with a plummy/spicy/smoky/earthy/green olive quality—something for everyone! The flavors are equally complex—fruity/smoky/green olive/earthy/spicy. By no means a lightweight, this should improve for at least 4-5 years (18). \$17.95

Côte Rôtie (R. Rostaing). This Rhône has a dark color and a deeply perfumed, cherry/spicy/earthy/peppery/vanilla nose. There is deep flavor which is delicious—cherries/earth/spice. Long on the finish, it is delicious to drink now, but there is a trace of tannin and probably will be at a peak in 3-4 years (18). \$14.95

Very Good

★★+

Côte Rôtie "Côte Brune" (Gentaz-Dervieux). This Rhône has a dark color and a subdued, fruity/spicy/earthy nose. There is good fruit and good body and depth. It is rich, tannic, and slightly bitter. Given time this could be outstanding (16½). \$17.95

★+

Crozes-Hermitage (J. Marsanne). This wine has a medium dark color and a nice, but subdued, fruity/earthy/spicy nose. There are similar flavors and a slightly tart finish. There is some tannin to lose and the wine should be laid away for a few years (15½). \$6.95

★

Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Domaine de Beaurénard" (P. Coulon). This Rhône has a dark color and a heady, perfumed, fruity/cherry/earthy/spicy nose. There is nice, cherry-like fruit with an earthy/spicy complexity. Unfortunately, the wine is marred by a stemmy, bitter finish. Here is a case where the 1978 is clearly a superior wine (15). \$15



Best Buy

Côtes du Rhône "Château du Trignon".

With a medium dark color, the wine has a lovely, deep, fresh, fruity/raspberry/spicy/slightly earthy nose. There are raspberry/cherry flavors with a hint of spice and earth. It is light and balanced to acid, but has a lovely flavor – a great bargain at \$3.99 (15).

Saint-Joseph (J. Marsanne). This wine has a dark color with a subdued, fruity/earthy/toasty nose. It is medium bodied with fruity/earthy flavors. With some tannin and acid to lose, this is very nice (15). \$6.50

Good

Côtes du Rhône (Domaine Saint Antoine). With a medium dark color and an amber edge, this wine

has a lovely, perfumed, berry/earthy/spicy/vanilla nose. There is nice balance with good, berry-like flavors and a hint of spice and oak. The wine has some tannin with a medium body and a nice finish. There is a trace of bitterness but it's still a very nice wine and can you believe the price – \$2.39 (14½)!

Côtes du Rhône (Château de Saint Jean). With a medium dark color and an amber edge, this wine has a nice, fruity/oaky/spicy nose. The wine is clean with fruity/spicy flavors and nice balance. Just a little thin, still it is quite nice (14). \$2.89

Domaine Sainte Anne – Côte du Rhône Villages (Domaine Sainte Anne). This Rhône has a medium dark color with a nicely perfumed nose – woody/fruity. There are clean, fruity/peppery/woody flavors with nice balance. It is easy to drink but with a slightly bitter finish (14). \$5

The Champet and Rostaing Côte Rôtie's are imported by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant in Albany, CA.



CORK POPPERS

Our Version of T and A: Double T and A (Timeliness, Tastings, and All Answered)

I have just renewed my subscription for 3 years, so I do enjoy your efforts. I also realize you cannot publish articles on every type of wine. Starting in Volume #1 issue #5 you have listed a review for '75 Sauternes which was updated in Volume #2 issue #2 to include '75 and '76 Sauternes. Not only am I still waiting for such an article on both years but such an article is becoming moot. This may sound like a letter from a rabid Sauternes fanatic but that isn't true. The truth is that the bay area (I live in Sacramento) is one of the top Sauternes consuming areas in the U.S. It is fall 1981 and the '75 and '76 Sauternes are out and have been for some time. Do not allow your publication to report on wines no longer available. An article on Sauternes was first mentioned in Volume #1 issue #5 in April 1980, a year and a half ago. Such an article is probably too late even now though I would welcome it anyway. Your latest issue lists Sauternes last in the Coming Attractions.

I know I have stressed Sauternes but if you don't hear

from your readers how will you know? One cannot report on every new wine release, that is impossible. It is pleasant to read about tastings of Petrus and Romanee-Conti and a balance is needed and for the most part you do well. It may be a subtle point but in such articles as the two mentioned it was not until I read the masthead that I realized that Desai, Klein, Troy and Lazarus were even associated with Underground. I got the impression that nobody from your publication tasted the wines and that the notes came from some anonymous writer who was extremely fortunate to taste these inaccessible wines and somehow share the notes with you.

A comment could be made under Cork Poppers on your tastings. Who tastes the wines? How many people taste them? Can subscribers join too? Are they tasted blind? Whose tasting notes are we reading? Do you receive wines from wineries for free? These comments are not meant to arouse anger. A brief statement of the tastings might be useful to your readers.

I do think your efforts to make the **Underground Wineletter** better are great, that is why I wrote this letter.

David Silberman
Sacramento, California

P.S. I have already seen some 78 and 79 Sauternes for sale!

Guilty! The delay in including a Sauternes article is inexcusable. Frankly, the problem has been that with a greatly expanded content, we simply ran out of room to include it. In most of the past issues something has had to be cut. However, the 1975 and the 1976 articles finally made it. So did this letter. The 1978's and 1979's will also be reviewed as more arrive. Believe me, we have no intention of becoming yesterday's newspaper. We work extremely hard to be timely. In fact, the Sauternes articles were passed for more timely articles. I'm sure you recognize many instances where we are clearly months or even years ahead of anyone else in reporting on outstanding wines. Also, we report on far more wines than any other publication. We're all fanatical. By the way, such is the unfortunate state of Sauternes that 1975's and 1976's are still available in most major U.S. markets.

Now as to how the wines are tasted. All tastings are done blind. No one knows the identity of each wine until they have been tasted, discussed, evaluated, and scored. Tastings involve as few as two or as many as 15-20 people. Other connoisseurs, collectors, or just interested wine buffs participate. The scores are those of members of **The Underground Wineletter** staff (Desai, Klein, Troy, Lazarus, et al) supported by the consensus of other tasters. Many wines are tasted more than once, often by different groups with bottles purchased from different sources where necessary. For the most part, the tasting notes are mine. However, the published tasting notes reflect the collective notes of the members of **The Underground Wineletter** staff who participated in the particular tasting or tastings. We buy the great majority of the wines we taste. However, some wineries, importers, and agents do occasionally send samples. These are evaluated in the same manner as purchased wines. Whether or not the wine was purchased or shows up on our doorstep has absolutely no bearing in the rating. We have no ties with any winery. We are consumers, pure and simple. All of us are employed full time in other professions where we earn a living - Ed Lazarus is an attorney, Brad Klein is an MD, Bipin Desai is a physics professor, Geoffrey Troy is a business executive, I am a securities analyst, etc. We all share one common interest - an avid and consuming interest in wine.

- Editor

Still Crazy and Pretentious After All these Years?

... I think you have gone crazy. Stars? What for? A wine is listed 19/20, ★★★★★, "Outstanding": Why not also give it an "A" and add bottle symbols or grape bunches. I appreciate the value of parentheses which indicate how far a wine is from its peak, but why not (3-5 yrs) for example. Congratulations on achieving 20/20 6 stars "outstanding" for pretentiousness.

Also, one would think that 20 levels of excellence are sufficient to grade wine. Poor Finegan uses 4 levels, the Connoisseur's Guide 5, Broadbent 6, and, O.K. you need 20. But lately with your half points you have 40 levels. Inane. The trouble is that you bunch up at the top of the scale. Those who make vintage charts from, say, 1-10 never seem to give less than 5, so all rankings tend to bunch up around 8 - but they want (usually) to sell wine, even in bad years. Why do you do it? A typical "10" for you reads, "Here's one to forget." A "9" tastes "like cooked cabbage." Does good cole slaw rate a "9½"? Several "8's" are described as "awful." I found a "5" - "Most foul nose imaginable/moldy rotten fruit character/points for looking like wine." On that basis camel piss would qualify for some points.

From a reader who respects your love of and knowledge of wine: please drop stars and written categories, please drop half points, and please rethink your levels - if you condense everything between "foul" and "awful" from 0-2, and "cooked cabbage" and "forgettable" from 3-4 you will have plenty of room at the top. Then, a "very attractive" white riesling won't be up there with the grand crus.

Robert Shapiro
New York, New York

I must say that you don't mince words. Would you like to consider a staff position with this letter? The pay is non-existent, but you would have an opportunity to spend several thousands of dollars of stagnant funds helping us taste wines! Crazy are we? I think you're right! In fact, I think we are all crazy to have even started **The Underground Wineletter**! However, may I say that my original objective, supported by a group of extremely dedicated wine lovers, was to make this the best, most timely, most comprehensive, and, importantly, unbiased and objective wineletter in the world. I feel we have moved rapidly toward this goal. Your well stated criticism of our scoring system is an area where we're trying to improve. This is from two perspectives: (1) To make the system as accurate

as humanly possible; and (2) To make the layout readable and easily understood. Let me offer a few thoughts. The 20 point scale is the easiest scale to use for blind tastings simply because it offers more room at the top, i.e. from 18-20 vs. 9-10 on a 10 point scale. Wines under 12 are of little interest. Whether camel piss would qualify for points under this system is an interesting academic question. Probably, but unless somebody bottles this stuff to sell as Chardonnay or whatever, I, for one, will not solicit camels to collect samples to test the thesis! At any rate, the 20 point system is easy to use. The trouble is that when the wines are rated and listed in the letter with the numerical score in () and a heading such as "Outstanding", "Very Good", etc., the different wines e.g. 15-17 tend to run together. Many readers wrote asking that we please break up the text and most suggested using stars. Hence, we instituted a 6 star system based on the top of the 20 point scale, i.e. 15-20. Since 1/2 points are a regular part of the 20 point system, we substituted a + to use with the stars. The result is that the text is certainly easier to read, but, as you so correctly point out, we now seem to be suffering from overkill. All of us involved with the letter have gone over this many times. We're still wrestling with it. As soon as all of us can come to some consensus our format will be changed. Should you or any other readers have any specific suggestions, please let us hear from you. We want to be as accurate and concise as possible, yet also make the letter as readable as possible. We'll continue to try to improve and earn your continued support, Mr. Shapiro. In the meantime, thanks for ranking us 20/20 6 stars "Outstanding" for pretentiousness. It's not what we'd most like to be rated 20/20 6 stars "Outstanding" or whatever for, but at least it's a start! - Editor

MAYBE WE'RE ALL "MAD AS HELL", IF SO WE SHOULD ALSO GET "TIGHT AS HELL"

This is my first "Letter to the Editor". The reason is best expressed by Robert Finch's line in "Network" . . . "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

The pricing game has finally reached a zenith. All know of the Heitz-Mondavi effort to out do the other. What has really gotten to me hasn't had enough press space to wad a shotgun. What I'm referring to is Paul Draper's ridiculous assault on all of his loyal fans pocketbook. Going backwards, his lovely '75 Montebello Cabernet was released at \$10 . . . his '76 Montebello must have been twice as good as he released it at

a staggering \$20 . . . Now the kicker . . . His '77 Montebello at \$40!!! Surely this is a figment of my imagination. I know I'll awaken tomorrow and discover it is a hoax my devious mind is playing on me.

I for one intend to stop buying any wines that bear the Ridge label . . . I also intend to stop my subscription to any wine publication that reviews this wine without appropriate criticism of the price. Gentlemen, this has to stop! I hope every wholesaler who buys this wine ends up eating it and every retailer has it spoil on his shelf. If you publish this tirade, PLEASE use my name.

Verne Batchelor
Denver, Colorado

I must say that I agree with your thoughts. **The Underground Wineletter** has repeatedly discussed what we feel is the insane pricing of California Cabernet Sauvignon. We think the market is headed for a bust. In the case of the Ridge Monte Bello the pricing of the 1977 reflects a very short crop, the shortest on record, and what the winery feels is potentially the best of all the Monte Bello Cabs. We all know there have been many of these. Also, Ridge believes the Monte Bello Cabs are as good as any and intends to continue to price them with the highest priced wines from Napa. We reviewed the 1977 in Volume III, Page 54 scoring the wine a 16 1/2. Perhaps in time it will be better than our initial evaluation. Maybe not. The \$40 price is stiff - no question. If consumers believe our valuation, we believe few people would buy the wine. In the last analysis, consumers must vote with their pocketbook if they think it's worth it. Your response is correct. If you think a wine is too expensive, don't buy it. If enough people agree with you the price will come down.

In California the producer takes the risk to sell his wine. In Bordeaux, the producer sells early to a broker who must distribute the wine to the world. Once purchased, the broker is at risk, not the producer. If the price on California Cabernet breaks, many wineries will be in serious trouble. Some already are. While 1977 Ridge Monte Bello may be in short supply, Cabernets aren't. Collectively all the "reserves", special vineyard designations, etc. amount to a tremendous amount of wine. They're not all going to sell at higher and higher prices. To paraphrase the line you quoted from "Network", many consumers are mad as hell about Cabernet prices and many are not going to buy it anymore. - Editor

