



THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

Napamedoc = Auction Fever = Publicity

It was a hot summer day in Napa. Some 300 people gathered for a charitable auction to benefit two local hospitals and call attention to Napa Valley wines. When it was all over Charles F. Mara, a Syracuse, NY, wine and liquor merchant, had paid \$24,000 for a case of young wine still in the barrel. Sure they may have found gold in the Napa Valley, but did they find a way to make gold into wine? Not exactly. But the 1979 Cabernet Sauvignon designated "Napamedoc" was produced as a joint effort of Robert Mondavi and the Baron Philippe de Rothschild. Certainly this has to be one of the most formidable pair of enological alchemists on this planet. Amazingly, bidders were not allowed to taste the juice. Robert Mondavi said, "Anybody who would buy a wine without tasting has got to be crazy". So why have the auction unless only crazy people were to attend? Maybe everyone was crazy. Maybe they got heat stroke. Auction fever at the

least. But maybe it was none of the above. Consider the \$24,000 price for the wine:

- 1) The absurdity of the price created natural publicity for the successful "crazy" bidder.
- 2) The price was tax deductible to the "crazy" bidder. This could reduce the price by 1/2 or more.
- 3) When the wine is consumed it will undoubtedly create more publicity for the "crazy" bidder.
- 4) To get an equivalent amount of publicity and pay for it would cost the "crazy" bidder hundreds of thousands of dollars.

So auction fever or not, maybe Mara's not so "crazy" after all. It adds up to lots of very cheap publicity. However, there was at least one sign that the heat may have overcome the successful bidder. Mr. Mara, when asked what he plans to do with the wine stated, "Maybe I'll hold it for 10 years and sell it back to the

auction for 10 times what I paid today". Yeah, and if so, bread will cost \$500 a loaf!!

But what about the wine? Actually, none of the bidders probably gave a damn anyway. It might as well have been Welch's grape juice. The top bidders were interested only in the first case. Reportedly, they did

not bid on any of the other 19 cases of the same wine which went for much lower prices. Had someone really cared about the intrinsic worth of the wine, an attempt would have been made to acquire some at the best price. There is, after all, no additional worth to the first case sold. It all will come from the same barrel!

First Report on the 1979 Napamedoc?

Well, publicity seekers may not care what the wine tastes like, but we do. And, guess what? Even though an agreement of Mr. Mondavi's and the Baron has precluded any advance tastings of the wine, we have received tasting notes on what is reported to be the "1979 Napamedoc" from a source who requests anonymity for fear of losing his tastevin cup. Here they are: "Good dark color, pleasant, berry-like Cabernet nose, nice fruit, good style, nice balance, some tannin and acid to lose—a nice wine, well-made, no real faults, but not much different from other good Mondavi Cabernets". So there you have it—a description of the wine that apparently even \$24,000 couldn't buy. Could such a wine be worth \$24,000 for a case? Absolutely not if you have to drink it—ex the publicity associated with the purchase there are perhaps only

two or three wines in the world which could approach being worth that price and they're over 100 years old. What might the 1979 Napamedoc be worth? Who knows? However, knowing the publicity behind the wine it certainly won't be cheap. There have been rumors of \$50 per bottle. Considering \$35 per bottle for the current "Reserve" selection Cabernet Sauvignon from Mondavi (interestingly a price that matches the current Heitz Martha's Vineyard Cabernet price), it's unlikely that when released in 1983 that the juice will be much less than \$50 per bottle. So if it's not worth \$2,000 a bottle as a wine, how about a modest 2½% of that price or \$50 per bottle. A veritable steal? Nope. Unless every buyer is entitled to get their name in the local paper, it probably isn't worth that either!

John Tilson
Editor

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Cellar Notes • Distinctive New Wines • Selected Tasting Notes • California Chardonnays • California Cabernet Sauvignons • Champagne & Sparkling Wines • More 1978 Red Burgundies • Barrels and Bottles • More 1978 Bordeaux • Sauternes

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 ½ 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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1979 WHITE BURGUNDIES

"Generally the quality is surprisingly good, but the wines tend to be quite variable."

Generally favorable growing conditions existed throughout the white wine growing areas of Burgundy in 1979. The large, and in some instances huge, crop produced wines which have been described as "forward", "elegant", "fruity", "supple", and in general lacking the body and depth of the excellent 1978's.

Generally the quality is surprisingly good, but the wines tend to be quite variable. This is particularly true in those areas where the harvest was particularly large. Here the result was thin, diluted wines.

Despite the quantity produced, prices of 1979 White Burgundies have not declined from the lofty levels of the 1978's. Thus, although some very fine wines were made, there are certainly no bargains to be found among the "name" growths. On the other hand, a great deal of rather mediocre wine is being offered at prices which have no relation to their quality. Selectivity and care are therefore of utmost importance in the selection of 1979 White Burgundies for purchase.

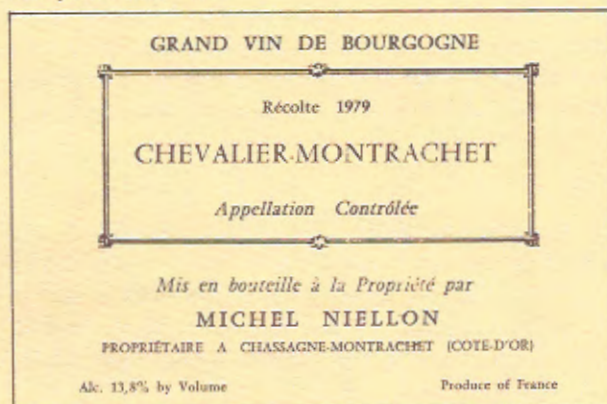
Outstanding

★★★★+

Criots Bâtard-Montrachet (Delagrange-Bachellet). This producer is consistently amongst the very best. This wine is superb. It has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It is very long on the palate with deep, fruity/spicy flavors. The underlying acidity should make this wine a keeper with peak drinkability probably 5 or more years away (18½). \$37

★★★★

Chevalier-Montrachet (Niellon). This is a lovely, elegant wine of great breed and style. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/peachy/spicy nose. Loaded with fruit showing a spicy complexity, the wine is full and long on the palate. Probably not for long cellaring, but delicious for drinking over the next few years (18). \$37



Chevalier-Montrachet "Les Demoiselles" (Jadot). Consistently, this is one of the finest White Burgundies made. The 1978 was an all-time classic (see Volume II, Page 18). The 1979 lacks a shade of the 1978's flavor and intensity, but shows the same great style, breed, and incredible balance. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/hint of orange peel nose. Lovely, elegant, nice flavor, long on the palate, words are hardly adequate (18). \$45 Chicago



Criots Bâtard-Montrachet (Gagnard-Delagrange). With a light yellow gold color, this wine has a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. It is full and rich with good fruit and a nice spiciness. Long on the palate and backed by enough acidity to warrant aging for at least 2-3 years (18). \$37

Meursault "Les Casse-Tête" (J.F. Coche-Dury). Different from the other Coche-Dury Meursaults, yet classically appealing. The color is light yellow gold and the nose intensely perfumed with a spicy/peach-like/vanilla nose - extremely attractive. It is rich, full, and nicely balanced with a peachy/vanilla-tinged flavor (18). \$16



Meursault-Charmes (Jobard). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, deep, spicy/fruity/vanilla/buttery nose. Delicious, forward, fruity/spicy/vanilla-tinged flavors follow through on the palate. Elegant, exquisitely balanced, this wine is lovely to drink now and for the next 3-4 years (18). \$20



Meursault-Perrières (J.F. Coche-Dury). This is a classically styled Meursault with a promise of great elegance in 3-4 more years. It has a light yellow gold color, and full, fruity/spicy nose. The flavors are deeply chiseled – fruity/spicy and backed by firm acidity (18). \$20

Very Good

★★★★

Bâtard-Montrachet (Delagrang-Bachelet). This is a lovely, rich wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla/apricot nose – quite unusual, but very attractive. Again, the taste shows the same fruity/vanilla/apricot flavors. Probably not a wine to cellar too long, but very nice to drink for the next few years (17½). \$37

Bâtard-Montrachet (Jadot). This wine has just a little SO₂ that blows off with air. Otherwise, it is exquisite. The color is light yellow and the nose has a lovely, fruity/spicy/vanilla quality. With nice fruit, good depth, lovely balance, and a spicy complexity, this should improve for 2-3 years (17½). \$38 Chicago

Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet (Le Flave). This is a lovely bottle. At \$40 (Chicago) it may not be underpriced, but looks like a bargain compared with the terribly overpriced \$37 Puligny-Montrachets from this producer (see page 8). The color is a light yellow. There is a hint of free sulphur that blows off with air leaving a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy/orange blossom nose. There is good fruit, balance, and style with a good backbone for a few years aging (17½).

Corton-Charlemagne (Bitouzet). This wine should be outstanding in 3-4 years and keep for many more. It has a light yellow gold color and a complex, fruity/floral/spicy/vanilla nose of great intensity. There is good fruit with a spicy/vanilla flavor, good depth, and a firm backbone. This is the kind of wine many California winemakers dream about making – good fruit, nice oaky balance, and firm acidity for long life (17½). \$31 New York

Corton-Charlemagne (Latour). Compare this with the same wine on the West Coast (see pg. 8) which also costs nearly 30% more! This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, deep, fruity/spicy/earthy nose. It is clean, full, rich, and complex with fruity/spicy/vanilla/earthy flavors. Long on the palate with some acid to lose, this could be outstanding in a few years (17½). \$38 Chicago

Meursault-Genevrières (Jobard). This is a lovely wine with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose showing a hint of vanilla. It is delicate with good flavor and acidity. Long on the palate with a spicy complexity, in a few years this wine could be outstanding (17½). \$17.50

★★★

Bâtard-Montrachet (Morey). This wine is really exquisite. However, it fades in the glass and is most attractive when first poured. Probably not a keeper, but the definition of finesse and elegance for near term consumption. The color is light yellow and the nose very perfumed with fruity/floral/spicy/vanilla nuances. Long on the palate and very easy to drink, there seems to be no real reason to keep this. Enjoy (17). \$28

Chassagne-Montrachet "Caillerets" (Delagrang-Bachelet). With some acid to lose, this wine should develop for 3-4 years. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. It has full, rich flavors with a fruity/spicy complexity (17). \$20

Chevalier-Montrachet (Deleger). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose that carries through in the flavor. An elegant wine with class and style, it needs a few years to round out (17). \$37

Le Montrachet (Jadot). This is a lovely wine. It has a light yellow color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. The flavors show good depth with a fruity/spicy/vanilla quality. There is a nice balance of fruit and acid and a very long finish – should improve for 3-4 years (17). \$55 Chicago

Meursault-Charmes (J.F. Coche-Dury). This is an immediately appealing wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/very slightly toasty nose. It is rich, full, and buttery with the same fruity/spicy character on the palate. A very flavorful wine with good underlying acidity that should carry it for a few years (17). \$20

Montrachet (Morey). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/vanilla nose with a hint of mace – very attractive. It is rich, full, buttery, and long on the palate. A little more flavor complexity to match the nose would make this near perfection – maybe time will help. Take out a mortgage on the ranch and give it a whirl (17)! \$60

★ ★ +

Bâtard-Montrachet (Gagnard-Delagrange). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/lemony/vanilla nose. It has lots of fruit with good underlying acid. This is one to keep for a few years (16½). \$37

Bâtard-Montrachet (Latour). This wine sells for \$40 in Chicago. Again, it is completely different from the wine sold for \$50 in Los Angeles (See page 8). However, it does have a slight degree of toastiness in the nose and taste and is very forward. Still very appealing with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/toasty nose. The flavors are similar with a full, rich quality, and good length on the palate. Some acid to lose, but not likely to be long lived (16½).

Bâtard-Montrachet (Niellon). This wine is marred by a high degree of free sulphur. With 15 minutes air, it blows off leaving a subdued, spicy/fruity nose. The wine is lean with a firm acidity and fruity/spicy flavors. It will require at least 3-4 years bottle age to develop (16½). \$37

Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet (Sauzet). This wine has a light yellow color. There is some free sulphur in the nose which blows off with air. Underneath a fruity/spicy quality shows through. Round, rich, and flavorful with good depth and a nice fruit/acid balance, this wine should improve for a few years (16½). \$32 New York

Chassagne-Montrachet (Colin). Elegance and style are the key words to describe this wine. It has a pale yellow color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/orange blossom/orange peel nose – really gorgeous. Light, delicate flavor with a hint of spice, good fruit, and lovely balance make this a very appealing wine for early consumption (16½). \$12.50

Chassagne-Montrachet (Niellon). With a pale yellow color, this wine has a beautiful, perfumed, fruity/vanilla nose showing a hint of honeysuckle. It is light and delicate with a subtle, vanilla-tinged flavor. Drink now and for the next few years with delicate, mildly flavored foods (16½). \$17

Clos de Mouches (Drouhin). Drouhin's Clos de Mouches are usually light, elegant, lovely wines. So it is with this wine. The color is light yellow. There is some initial free sulphur that dissipates rapidly leaving a subdued, fruity/vanilla nose. It is soft and fruity with vanilla-tinged flavors. Light, yet with an infectious early appeal (16½). \$24 New York

Meursault "Poruzot" (Jobard). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose with a hint of vanilla. It has nice fruit with a spicy complexity. Firm with good acid, yet light, delicate, and flavorful, it should age well and be better in 2-3 years (16½). \$16

Meursault-Genévrières. This is a very attractive wine with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/vanilla/slightly floral nose. It has nice fruit with a hint of spice in an elegant, nicely balanced style (16½). \$27.50

Puligny-Montrachet (Jadot). This is a very attractive wine. Maybe a little low in acid for long cellaring, but lovely to drink for the next several years. The color is light yellow gold with a fruity/spicy nose. There are nice, fruity/spicy flavors that follow through with good length on the palate (16½). \$25

★ ★

Bâtard-Montrachet (Bachelet-Ramonet). This wine is very nice. It has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. With good fruit, spicy complexity, lovely balance and depth, this should improve for 2-3 years (16). \$33 New York

Chassagne-Montrachet "La Boudriotte" (Blain-Gagnard). With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/toasty/buttery nose, this wine has nice flavors and a buttery texture. However, it is a little flat and finishes a little short – otherwise very attractive (16). \$20

Chevalier-Montrachet "Les Demoiselles" (Latour). This wine is prematurely aged. Not yet excessive like many of the other Latour wines (see page 8), but far too advanced for 2 year old wine! The color is light yellow gold and the nose is fruity/spicy, and quite toasty. The flavors have a fruity/spicy/toasty quality with a long finish backed by firm acidity. A lovely wine, but not a keeper (16). \$42 Chicago

Corton-Charlemagne (Du Martray). This is a full-flavored wine with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/earthy/spicy nose. It has good fruit and good flavor with a spicy nuance. With some acid to lose, this wine is very nice and should improve for a few years, but lacks the fullness and intensity of the classic vintages such as 1971 and 1978 (16). \$37

Best Buy

Meursault (Jobard). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. It is clean with good fruit and a fruity/spicy flavor. Elegant with firm acidity, a few years bottle age should be well rewarded (16). \$10

Meursault "Santenots" (D'Angerville). This is a nice, lighter style wine. It has a pale yellow gold color and a very attractive, fruity/lemony/vanilla nose. There are nice, spicy/fruity/vanilla flavors backed by firm acidity. With 3-4 years bottle age, this should make a lovely bottle (16). \$19

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes" (Jadot). This is another very nice wine from Jadot (1/3 the price of the same wine from Le Flave and much better). It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. There is nice fruit and flavor with a spicy aftertaste. Good depth, but balanced a bit to acid, 2-3 years age should yield a lovely bottle (16). \$25 Chicago

Montrachet (Bouchard). This wine is very flavorful, but balanced to acid. Just now it is harsh, but a few years in the bottle should be most helpful. The color is light yellow and the nose has a fruity/spicy/citric quality. The taste is similar - fruity/spicy/slightly citric. The price is painful (16). \$72 New York

Montrachet (Latour). Again, this wine seems prematurely aged. It has a light yellow color and a fruity/spicy/toasty nose. There is good fruit and a nice flavor with a firm backbone, but the wine is likely to mature very quickly and is definitely not worth the lofty price (16). \$65 Chicago

Montrachet (Thevenin). This wine is not likely to be long lived. However, the price is to be remembered. The color is light yellow and the nose has a fruity/spicy/toasty quality. There is good fruit and a spicy complexity. The wine is rich, full, and long on the palate, but a little flabby (16). \$74 New York

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Clavoillons" (Arnoul). Supposedly, this is a private label from Ponnelle. If so, it may turn up elsewhere under other labels. The wine is lovely and a great value at \$13 (Chicago). It has a light yellow color and a very nice, fruity/spicy nose. The wine is clean with good fruit, nice depth, flavor, balance, and style (16).

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Demoiselles" (Colin). Were it not for a persistent, match stick, free sulphur quality in the nose, this wine would be scored 1-2 points higher. However, this should eventually dissipate and, indeed, after a few hours was gone. So if you're willing to subject the wine to prolonged aeration, expect a much better wine. In the mouth, the wine is hard to fault. It has good fruit, a hint of spice, complexity, depth, style, balance, and flavor (16). \$20

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Folatieres" (Monnier). This is an attractive wine for early consumption. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/slightly toasty nose. With good fruit and a spicy complexity, there is a fullness on the palate that carries through on the finish (16). \$23

★ +

Bâtard-Montrachet (Sauzet). This wine has a light yellow color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. It has good fruit and flavor. Elegant, supple, and forward, this is a wine for early consumption (15½). \$32 New York

Beaune "Clos des Mouches" (Billard-Gonet). This small producer has made a very fine Clos des Mouches. With a light yellow gold color, it possesses an intriguing nose of tropical fruit. On the palate, there is a nice balance of fruit and acid, making this a very attractive wine for early consumption (15½). \$20 Chicago

Best Buy

Bourgogne "Les Clous" (Villaine). Yes, this estate bottled wine is from the property of the well-known co-owner of Romanée-Conti. It is a lovely White Burgundy with the style and flavor of wines from the best properties. The color is light yellow and the nose is somewhat subdued with a fruity/spicy quality. It has nice fruit, good flavor, and a firm backbone with a balance to acid. The wine should improve for a few years, but is also lovely to drink now (15½). \$7.50

Chassagne-Montrachet (Drouhin). This wine has a medium yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity nose with a hint of spice. The flavor is nice, but is thin and finishes short (15½). \$27

Chassagne-Montrachet (Morey). Having a light gold color, this wine is very forward. The nose has lots of candy-like fruit. The palate impression is excellent for the wine has a nice balance with a slight toasted coconut quality. This wine will be a quick maturer but represents a very good value (15½). \$15 Chicago

Chassagne-Montrachet "Clos de la Chapelle" (Duc de Magenta). This monopole (one owner) vineyard needs time to develop. It has a light yellow color with a fruity/spicy nose. The flavors have a similar fruity/spicy quality with good depth, but the finish is quite acidic – a keeper. Try again in 2-3 years (15½). \$25 New York

Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Ruchottes" (Bachelet-Ramonet). This is an elegant wine with a pale yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. There is nice fruit and flavor with a spicy complexity and nice balance (15½). \$19 New York

Chevalier-Montrachet (Bouchard). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. It has nice fruit with a spicy complexity. Crisp and balanced to acid, this needs a few more years bottle age to come together (15½). \$43 New York

Meursault "Les Tessons" (Morey). This is quite a nice wine with a light yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/spicy nose. It has good fruit with a spicy complexity (15½). \$19

Meursault "Les Meix Chavaux" (Roulot). This is a nice wine at a fair price. The color is light yellow and the nose complex with a fruity/peachy/spicy/vanilla quality. It is clean, fruity, and delicate. It is lovely to drink (15½). \$15 New York

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Champs Gains" (Bouzeau). Balanced a bit to acid, this wine has an elegant style that needs a few more years bottle age to fully develop. The color is pale yellow gold with a fruity/spicy nose. There are nice, fruity/spicy flavors (15½).

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes (Sauzet). This is a very nice wine with enough acid and fruit to warrant a few years aging. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. There is good depth and fruit with a spicy quality in the finish (15½). \$22 New York

★

Chassagne-Montrachet "Caillerets" (Bachelet-Ramonet). This wine has a pale yellow gold color. It has a perfumed, fruity/floral/spicy nose. There is a nice balance of fruit and acid in a light, easy-to-drink style (15). \$19 New York

Chassagne-Montrachet "Chenevottes" (Deleger). This wine has a pale yellow gold color with a spicy/lemony/mealy nose. It has light, spicy/grapefruit-like flavors. Pleasant and easy to drink, but maybe a little low in acid (15). \$19

Chassagne-Montrachet "La Romanée" (Coffinet). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. There are ripe, fruity/cinnamon-tinged flavors backed by good acidity. It needs 2-3 years to develop (15).

Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" (Bachelet). This wine has a light yellow color with a pronounced fruity nose reminiscent of apples. Balanced a bit to acid, but with enough fruit and substance to warrant a few years aging (15). \$17 Chicago

Meursault (J.F. Coche-Dury). Balanced just a bit to acid, there seems to be enough fruit to carry this wine for quite a few years. It is very nice with a fruity/spicy nose and fruity/spicy flavors that finish just a little short (15). \$12

Meursault "Blagny" (Jobard). With a light yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity/spicy/yeasty nose, this wine is clean, fresh, and crisp with good fruit and nice flavor. Balanced to acid in a lighter style, it should be lovely in a few years (15). \$13

Meursault "Charmes" (Morey). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has nice fruit and is clean, with straightforward flavors (15). \$23

Meursault-Genevrières (Latour). This is a nice wine, but it finishes a little short. Otherwise, a light yellow gold color, fruity/spicy nose, and fruity/spicy flavors are attractive (15). \$31

Montrachet (Saint-Aubin). Big label. Big price. No excitement. For \$68 (New York) this is definitely not worth buying. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a subdued, spicy/fruity/vanilla quality. The wine has good fruit and is elegant, light, and forward (15).

Puligny-Montrachet (Drouhin). This wine has a light yellow gold color with a subdued, fruity nose. It is straightforward and pleasant (15). \$27

Puligny-Montrachet "Clos de la Garenne" (Duc de Magenta). This wine has a light yellow color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. A light style, elegant, easy to drink, fruity/basil-tinged flavors, attractive; this will be early maturing (15). \$25 New York

Good

Meursault (Jadot). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has some fruit with a spicy complexity and is balanced to acid. Give it another few years to develop (14½). \$18

Meursault "Les Casse-Tête" (Thevenin). This is a nice, lighter style wine, balanced a bit to acid. The color is light yellow and the nose subdued. There is fruit and vanilla-tinged flavors (14½). \$13 New York

Puligny-Montrachet (Le Flaive). Frankly, this wine is not much different from the more expensive "Les Combettes" and "Les Pucelles". It has a light yellow color and a subdued, fruity/vanilla nose. Nice fruit, light, yet some depth, and has a balance to acid. May be better in 2-3 years (14½). \$28 Chicago

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes" (Le Flaive). The price of this wine is painful; the wine disappointing. Not bad, but hardly great either. The color is light yellow and the nose quite subdued. A light style with fruity/spicy flavors, there is not much depth, but quite a bit of acid. Ah, for the good old days. The 1969 retailed for \$5 and was infinitely better. Now Le Flaive is a "big" name and the price has risen almost beyond belief (14½). \$37 Chicago

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Pucelles" (Le Flaive). This is very similar to the "Les Combettes" and with a similarly outrageous price. The color is light yellow and the nose subdued. A light style with fruity/spicy flavors, it is balanced to acid (14½). \$37 Chicago

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Referts" (Arnoul). This wine has a light yellow color and a subdued, fruity/spicy/licorice nose. It is fresh, clean, crisp, balanced to acid, but a nice fruit wine (14½). \$13 Chicago

Save \$50

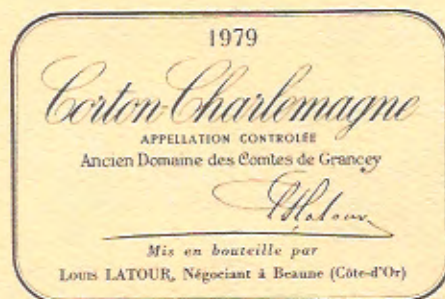
Bâtard-Montrachet (Latour). What an aggravation to spend a very large sum and get oxidized wine. Two bottles yielded the same result, one slightly more oxidized than the other. One light yellow gold, the other a yellow gold. Both with a pronounced, fruity/spicy/caramelized/butterscotch/oxidized quality. Caveat emptor! (14).

Save \$47

Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet (Latour). Again, almost a carbon copy of the Latour Bâtard-Montrachet. Two bottles tasted with identical degrees of oxidation. Caveat emptor!! (14).

Save Another \$50

Corton-Charlemagne (Latour). Again, two separate bottles showed the same degree of oxidation; yellow gold color, toasty/spicy/butterscotch/oxidized nose, fresh flat, fruity/butterscotch flavors. Caveat emptor!!! (14).



Chassagne-Montrachet "La Romanée" (Bachelet). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has some fruit, but is balanced to acid and finishes short (14). \$19

Meursault (Drouhin). With a light yellow gold color, the wine shows some free sulphur in the nose. There is fruit on the palate, but the balance is to acid with a short finish (14). \$22

Meursault (Latour). This is a pleasant wine in a tart style, but there's just not much to it. A light yellow gold color, a fruity/spicy nose, some fruit, short finish, that's it (14). \$20

Meursault "Perrières" (Morey). This wine shows some free sulphur in the nose. It has a light yellow gold color and fruity/spicy flavors balanced to acid (14). \$23

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Folatieres" (Drouhin). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. It is rather simple and straightforward and lacks structure (14). \$31

Puligny-Montrachet (Bouzeureau). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a slightly musty nose. It has some fruit, but is acidic and rather short on the palate (13½). \$23

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Perrieres" (Sauzet). This is an unusual wine. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a musty/mushroom quality. There is some fruit with a spiciness showing through, but there is a toastiness and high acid. Out of balance, prematurely aged, this is not a keeper (13). \$19 New York.



CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

"The consumer can now afford to be selective."

The proliferation of new wineries continues to offer more and more 1978 Cabernets. There are also bountiful crops in 1979 and 1980. The consumer can now afford to be selective. There will be no shortage of Cabernet. Many wineries may release only small amounts of wine initially, but rest assured that the warehouses are full. Indeed, a shortage of warehouse space is a real problem. Much of the wine is unsold Cabernet. To date, most wineries have been afraid to price wine below competitors for fear that the consumer would perceive the wine to be of lesser quality. This marketing strategy seems sure to be altered. There are just too many average wines labeled "special selection," "reserve," etc. at \$10 per bottle and up.

Following is a review of recently released California

Below Average

Meursault "Les Meix Chavaux" (Duc de Magenta). This wine is marred by sloppy winemaking. The color is light yellow, but the nose is sulphurous (hydrogen sulfide) and skunky. It is light and fruity with an unpleasant, musty flavor component (11). \$17 New York

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Referts" (Sauzet). "Les Referts" indeed. The skunky, hydrogen sulphide, rotten egg smell is decidedly unpleasant. Otherwise, it is soft and flabby with pineapple flavors (11). \$20

The Delagrang-Bachelet, Niellon and Gagnard-Delagrang wines were imported by Chateau & Estate Wine Company in New York. They are available in limited quantities in most major U.S. markets. The Jobard and J.F. Coche-Dury wines were imported by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant in Albany, CA. J.F. Coche-Dury is a grower who just recently began making his own wine. They are made in very small quantities. Very small amounts came to the West Coast. Availability on the East Coast is unknown. The Jadot wines are imported by Korbrand & Company in New York and are available in most major U.S. markets. The Villaine wine is also imported by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant in Albany, CA. It is also available on the East Coast. The majority of wines listed as available in New York and Chicago will also be available in other parts of the country in the next few months.

Cabernet Sauvignons. Wines that have been reviewed prior to release in Barrels and Bottles are so noted.

Very Good

★ ★ ★

1979 H. Coturri "Glen Ellen Vineyards". This is a very fine, big style Cabernet. It has a very dark color with a deep, berry/spicy/chocolate nose. Loaded with fruit, the wine is rich and full with chocolate nuances and very long on the palate. Still very youthful with much tannin and acid to lose, but clearly of superior potential, this is a wine to lay away for a few years (17). \$20

1978 Duckhorn Vineyards "Napa Valley". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 83). This is an impressive Cabernet. The color is very dark and the nose has a fruity/cherry/spicy/oaky quality. It is a big wine with loads of fruit and flavor, but the balance of tannin and acid also promises elegance in 5-7 years (17). \$12.50

1977 Heitz Cellars "Fay Vineyard". This is a supple, delicious wine. It has a dark color and a lovely, fresh, ripe, fruit nose with cedary undertones. The flavors explode with ripe fruit and are nicely balanced by a moderate amount of tannin and acid. The wine finishes long on the palate and should continue to develop for 4-5 years (17). \$18.50

1977 Joseph Phelps "Backus Vineyard". This is the first limited production offering from this Napa Valley property. The wine is available almost exclusively from the winery at \$15/bottle. This wine promises to be quite exceptional. It has a dark color and a deeply perfumed, blackberry nose showing just a hint of eucalyptus. It is a big, berry-jam kind of wine with an underlying briary quality and quite a bit of tannin (17).

1978 Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard "Santa Cruz Mountain, John Bates Ranch". (Barrels and Bottles Volume I, Number 6). This is a very concentrated wine which resembles some of the old Ridge Monte Bello Cabernets. The 8 year old vines produced their first commercial crop (1000 cases) in 1978. With 7-8 years bottle age, this could be really special. The wine has a very dark color and a deep, rich, ripe, fruit nose – not raisiny or late-harvest, but perfectly ripe. The wine has loads of fruit and is tightly knit with rich flavors and a long tannic finish – a keeper (17). \$12

1978 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Stag's Leap Vineyards". Year in and year out Stag's Leap produces fine Cabernet. This 1978 is lovely with the potential to improve for at least 5-6 years. It has a dark color and a ripe, fruity/cedary nose. There is loads of fruit, good depth, and nice flavors with a harmonious balance of tannin/acid (17). \$13.50

1978 Sunrise "Frey Vineyard". Only 120 cases of this Mendocino Cabernet were made. It has a dark color and a very rich, ripe, berry/oaky nose showing a hint of chocolate. There are rich, full, ripe flavors with a fruity/oaky quality. Already round, but with some tannin in the finish, this should be very nice in 3-5 years (17). \$9

1978 Villa Mt. Eden "Napa Valley". (Barrels and Bottles Volume I, Number 6). This should make a lovely bottle in 3-4 years. The color is dark and the nose has an attractive, cherry/berry-like quality. There are round, ripe, fruity flavors with some tannin to lose (17). \$12

★ ★ +

1978 Chappellet "Napa Valley". This is a very attractive wine and one of the best Chappellet Cabernets to date. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, deep, ripe, fruity/spicy/cedary/cherry nose. The wine is full with ripe, fruity/berry/cherry flavors and some tannin and acid to lose. There is good depth of flavor and good length on the palate – rather like a big style Pomerol. Four to six years additional age should show significant improvement and yield a lovely bottle (16½). \$12

Best Buy

1978 McDowell Valley Vineyards "Mendocino County". This estate bottled wine is a very good example of the kind of wine this area can produce. The color is dark and the nose has a deep, fruity/berry/oaky/spicy quality. There are good, round fruity flavors with an oaky complexity and a spicy finish. With 4-5 years bottle age this Cabernet should round out and hold its own against the best Napa Cabernets (16½). \$8.25

1977 Ritchie Creek "Napa Valley". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 32). Ritchie Creek produces only a few hundred cases of wine a year, but they're always distinctive. With 3-5 years bottle age this should make a lovely, flavorful Cabernet. Not as big as previous vintages, but with a lovely, fruity/spicy quality in the nose and taste (16½). \$12.50

1978 Shafer Winery "Napa Valley". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 83). This is a very nice, concentrated Cabernet that will benefit from 5-6 years bottle age. It has a very dark color and a deep, fruity/vanilla nose. There is loads of berry-like fruit and good tannin/acid balance. A very flavorful wine from yet another new California winery (16½). \$11

★ ★

1978 Ahlgren Vineyard "Napa Valley". This is a full-flavored Cabernet, yet it is harmonious and balanced in a big style. The color is dark and the wine exhibits a ripe, fruity/oaky nose with an underlying, cassis/cedary quality – very complex. It has good fruit and depth with nice, tannin/acid balance. A wine to keep for 3-5 years, this should make a really fine bottle (16). \$12

1979 Gundlach-Bundschu "Olive Hill Vineyards". This Sonoma Cabernet is very full and just now quite tannic, but there seems to be ample fruit to warrant 3-4 years cellaring. It has a dark color and a fruity/berry/oaky/cedary nose. A flavorful wine that should make a very nice bottle (16). \$7.50

1978 William Hill "Mt. Veeder District, Napa Valley". This new winery debuts with a massive, high extract Cabernet produced from low yielding hillside vines. It has a very dark color and a somewhat subdued, fruity/oaky nose. The wine is loaded with fruit and has a strong, tannic backbone. Lay this away for 7-8 years at least (16). \$15

1978 Iron Horse "Alexander Valley". (Barrels and Bottle Volume II, Page 31). This is a very nice wine with a dark color and a fruity/oaky/berry nose. There are nice, ripe, berry flavors with good tannin/acid balance. This should age well for 5-6 years (16). \$12

1978 Matanzas Creek Winery "Sonoma County". This estate bottled wine was produced in limited quantity. It has a dark color and a fruity/vanilla/slightly peppery nose with a hint of V/A. It has nice, ripe, fruit flavors with just a hint of pepper. With some tannin to lose, this should improve for 3-4 years (16). \$12.50

1978 Napa Wine Cellars "Napa Valley". This is an attractive Cabernet with a dark color and a lovely, fruity/berry nose. There is loads of ripe, fruit flavors with tannin and acid to lose. This is one to lay away for 4-5 years (16). \$12.50

1978 Ridge "York Creek". This is a nice, full, rich Cabernet. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, ripe, berry/spicy/oaky nose. There are intense berry-like flavors with a tannic finish. This is one to lay away for at least 5-6 years (16). \$12

★ +

The Marketing Game

1978 Arroyo Sonoma "Special Reserve". Beginning with the 1974 vintage, this moveable winery (cellared and bottled by) has produced generally very good wine at a fair price. Beginning with this vintage there is a new label, a "special reserve" designation, a new national distributor, and more importantly a sharply higher \$14 per bottle tariff. It's the marketing game. The wine is still very good, but the value is gone. It has a dark color and a subdued, oaky/spicy/fruity nose. Firm, with fruity/oaky flavors and tannin and acid to lose, this should be very nice with 3-5 more years bottle age (15½). \$9

1977 Beringer "Private Reserve". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 82). This is a very nice drinkable, medium-bodied Cabernet. It has a dark color and a ripe/berry-like/oaky/slightly weedy nose. There are good, ripe, fruit flavors backed by some tannin and acid. It finishes slightly dry, but should develop well for a few more years (15½). \$12.50

1977 Chateau Montelena "Sonoma". This is a nice, easy-to-drink wine that should be even better in 2-3 years when the tannin softens. It has a dark color and a fruity/oaky/berry nose with a fruity/berry flavor (15½). \$12

1978 Durney Vineyards "Carmel Valley". This estate bottled wine is quite nice without the herbaceous quality of previous vintages. The color is dark and the nose has a pronounced, fruity/oaky quality. It has full, rich, ripe, fruit flavors with tannin and acid to lose. Look for the wine to improve for 3-4 years (15½). \$12

1977 San Martin "Select Vintage". This San Luis Obispo Cabernet is a nice wine with a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, ripe, fruity/oaky nose. It has nice, ripe, fruit flavors and is full and straightforward with good, tannin/acid balance. Not undrinkable now, but should improve for a few years (15½). \$11.75

1978 ZD "Napa". Grapes for this wine came from the Mt. Veeder area. The wine has a dark color and a subdued, fruity/berry nose with a hint of cedar. It is a lean, firm wine with good fruit and structure, but backward. The fruit is quite dry, but there seems to be enough fruit to carry the wine for the minimum 4-5 years it will need to open up (15½). \$9.50

★

1978 Boeger "El Dorado County". This wine is not terribly complex, but it is rich and full flavored at a nice, attractive \$6.25 price. The color is dark and the nose exhibits a fruity/oaky quality. It is loaded with oaky, ripe, fruit flavors. There is considerable tannin which should soften with another year or two in the bottle (15). \$9

1978 Burgess Cellars "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color and a fruity/somewhat herbaceous/oaky nose. It has good, fruity/oaky flavors with a hint of pepper. Youthfully tannic, the wine needs 4-5 years bottle age (15). \$9

1979 Cakebread Cellars "Napa Valley". No one would guess this to be a Cakebread Cabernet. It's a very nice wine, but atypically it is on the light side and, if anything, is a little thin – a far cry from previous, thick, chewy, intense Cakebread Cabernets. The color is dark and the wine has a very attractive, ripe, fruity, candy-like nose. It is clean, fresh, and fruity with a hint of vanilla. Nicely balanced in an easy-to-drink style, this should mature early (15). \$12

1978 Caymus "Napa Valley". This fine Napa Valley property seems to have inadvertently over-cropped in 1978. The wine lacks the intensity of previous vintages. It has a medium dark color and a nice, berry-like nose. There is a nice flavor and some fruit with a short tannic finish. Seemingly not a keeper, but it should be pleasant with 2-3 years bottle age (15). \$12

1978 Edmeades "Mendocino". This estate bottled wine captures all the berry-like fruit that exemplifies the Edmeades style. It has a dark color and a ripe, fruity, berry-like nose. The flavors have the same fruity/berry quality and the wine has a youthfully tannic finish. Not terribly complex, but very nice (15). \$9

Best Buy

1979 Fetzer "Lake County". Back to the good old days. This is a very good Cabernet at a very attractive \$4.50 price. It has a medium dark color and a perfumed, oaky/berry-like nose. There are good, oaky/berry flavors and a nice balance of acid and tannin. A few years bottle age should prove beneficial (15).

1978 Flora Springs "Napa Valley". Not terribly complex, this is a straightforward sort of a Cabernet – dark color, fruity/oaky nose, ripe, fruit flavors, some tannin and acid to lose. This wine is available only at the winery (15). \$9

1977 Freemark Abbey "Cabernet Bosché". This wine from the Bosché vineyard in Napa Valley has tended to be made in a lighter style. So it is again in 1977. Nice, but no real depth or excitement. It has a medium dark color and a very clean, fresh, berry-like nose showing a hint of oak and a very slight, underlying mintiness. There is nice fruit and the wine is soft and pleasant with some tannin and acid to lose. It should develop nicely for a few years (15). \$12

1978 Hacienda "Sonoma Valley". Not terribly complex, but very nice and quite drinkable, this Cabernet should develop well for a few years. It has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose with pleasant, fruity flavors and nice balance (15). \$10

1977 Insignia. Insignia is the proprietary name used by Joseph Phelps Vineyards to designate what the winery feels is a particularly distinctive wine. This 1977 version is made up of 50% Cabernet, 30% Merlot, and 20% Cabernet Franc. With this Boreaux-like blend, it is unusual. Unfortunately, the wine lacks depth and doesn't deliver any real flavor excitement. It has a dark color with a berry-like/slightly herbaceous/oaky nose. It has nice fruit and a berry-like, green olive-tinged flavor with some tannin and acid to lose. It will be interesting to see how this wine ages, but the stiff \$25 tariff (more than a 1978 Pichon-Lalande, for instance) argues against cellaring very much (15).

1977 Jordan Winery. (Barrels and Bottles Volume I, Number 6). As was mentioned previously in Barrels and Bottles, this wine is stylistically similar to the initial 1976 release. It is made from 85% estate grown grapes (the 1976 was made mostly from purchased grapes). It is forward and easy to drink – not dissimilar from a minor growth Bordeaux. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose has a fruity/spicy/almost green olive character. Medium-bodied, the wine is fruity and easy to drink which makes it a popular restaurant wine. Some 40,000 cases were produced; and while the \$14 price is hardly a bargain, the winery's selective distribution may create an impression of scarcity (15).

Best Buy

1978 Montevina "Amador County". This estate bottled wine has good, varietal character – unusual for Amador Cabernet. It has a dark color and a subdued, fruity/cedary nose. It has nice fruit and flavor, showing some oak in a medium-bodied style. A little dry on the finish, this wine should probably be consumed over the next several years while there's still good, forward fruit (15). \$6

1978 Mt. Veeder "Bernstein Vineyards". This is a huge Cabernet from the winery's vineyard on Mt. Veeder in Napa County. It shows the same minty/briary character of previous vintages. Presently young and raw, only time will tell how the wine will develop. If the fruit outlives the tannin, it could be nice (15). \$12.75

1978 Rutherford Ranch "Napa Valley". With some tannin to lose, this wine will require 3-4 years additional bottle age. The color is dark and the nose has an attractive, fruity/berry quality. There are good, fruity flavors with a firm, underlying structure (15).

1978 Shenandoah Vineyards "Deaver Vineyard". This will appeal to lovers of big, alcoholic wines. It has a very dark color and a deep, oaky/berry nose. There is loads of rich, fruit flavors that finish tannic and slightly hot (15). \$8

1978 Vose Vineyards "Napa Valley". This wine has a dark color and a fruity/volatile nose. It is fruity with rich, full, tannic flavors. The volatility raises questions about the long term aging potential of the wine (15). \$12

Good

1978 Cilurzo & Piconi "Temecula". At \$6.50 this is not a bad buy. The wine has a dark color and a ripe, fruity/oaky nose. It is round with fruity/oaky flavors. (14½). \$8

1977 Havelock Gordon "Alexander Valley". This wine is an attractive buy for near term consumption. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a ripe, fruity nose. The wine is soft and flavorful in a pruny/over-ripe style (14½). \$6.25

1978 Kenwood "Sonoma Valley". This Cabernet is blended with 37% Merlot. Still it needs several years bottle age to soften. The color is dark and the nose has a fruity/oaky/spicy quality. There are big, grapy flavors with a slightly bitter, tannic finish (14½). \$9

1978 Lambert Bridge "Sonoma County". This is a lighter style wine that is very nearly ready to drink. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose has a fruity/pruny quality which carries through in the taste (14½). \$8.50

1978 Parducci Cabernet-Merlot "Cellar Master's Selection". Aside from a weedy/herbaceous nose, this wine is quite attractive with soft, ripe, rich, olallieberry-like flavors showing just a little briariness (14½). \$10.50

1978 Ridge "Santa Cruz, Jimsomare Vineyard". This is one of the most massively tannic Cabernets of recent memory. Moreover, the high alcohol (15.3%) and raisiny quality may make the wine no more than a cellar curiosity in a few years. The wine has an abundance of everything—color, fruit, extract, and tannin (14½). \$10

1978 Shown & Sons "Napa Valley". This estate bottled wine has a fruity/slightly weedy nose. It has good, ripe, fruit flavors and a slightly bitter finish (14½). \$8.50

1978 Clos du Val "Napa Valley". This wine is quite unusual. It has a dark color and a fruity/oaky/tarry/weedy nose. There are fruity, slightly weedy flavors with quite a bit of tannin. Don't count on this becoming wonderful, but hopefully time will help moderate the strong, weedy quality (14). \$12.50

1977 The Firestone Vineyard "Reserve". This wine has a dark color and a very ripe, fruity/oaky/slightly stemmy nose. It is full, rich, round, and fruity with a stemmy/herbaceous finish. Probably at its best now for the rich, ripe, fruity quality (14). \$12.75

1978 Kenwood "Jack London Vineyard". This is a massive Sonoma County Cabernet. However, it is so bitterly tannic it is nearly impossible to drink. Only time will tell if this bitter tannin will soften. Just now the wine also has an oaky/fruity nose and straightforward, oaky/fruity flavors (14). \$10

1978 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Napa Valley". This Cabernet has a pronounced, herbaceous quality in the nose. It has a dark color, and a ripe, fruity flavor with a bitter, tannic finish. Several years bottle age are needed for the tannin to soften (14). \$11.25

1978 Pine Ridge "Napa Valley, Rutherford District". This wine, like the Chardonnay, seems to suffer from too much new oak. It has a dark color and an oaky/fruity nose. The wine has fruit with a weedy/oaky flavor component. Youthfully tannic, this wine needs several years to develop (14). \$8

1978 River Bend "Sonoma". This is a secondary label of Davis Bynum. The wine is dark in color with a pungent, oaky/fruity nose. It is robust with full, oaky, ripe, fruit flavors. The ripeness leaves an impression of slight sweetness as there is a little heat in the finish (14). \$5.49

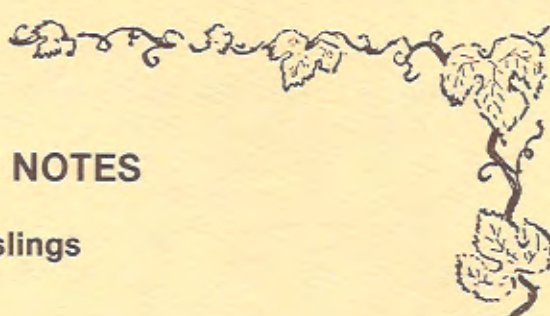
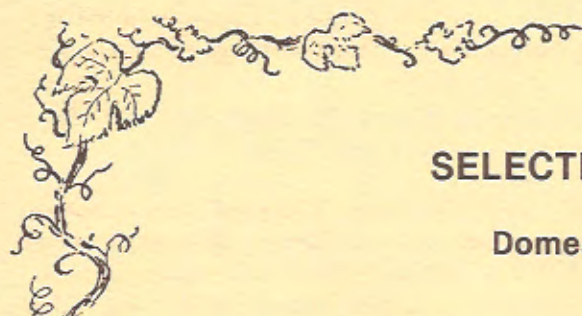
1979 Roddis Cellars "Napa Valley". This new winery on Diamond Mountain seeks to make full-flavored wines. This 1979 is that all right, but it is also massively tannic and nearly impossible to drink at this early stage of its development. Frankly, it's hard to tell what will happen to this wine in the 10 years or more it will need to soften. It is very dark in color. Initially the nose is marred by a bit of sulphur which cleans up with air. However, even after many hours of air, the wine is locked-up, hard, and unyielding. Is there enough fruit to carry the wine? Only time will tell. If the fruit outlives the tannin, this could be very good indeed, but it will be a very long wait (14). \$12

1978 Domaine Laurier "Sonoma County". This wine is balanced to acid and is a little thin. It has a dark color and a fruity/minty/chemical nose. It has clean, fruity flavors, but not much else (13). \$10

1978 Field Stone "Alexander Valley". This wine has a dark color and a ripe, fruity/vanilla nose. With air, there is a distinct hint of bananas. It has clean, ripe, fruity flavors with a slight sweetness. Not unpleasant to drink, but it's not a wine to keep (13). \$7.50

1978 HMR "Central Coast Counties". This wine has a dark color and a fruity/herbaceous nose. The flavors have a fruity/weedy character and lack depth (13). \$7.50

1978 Raymond "Napa Valley". This estate bottled wine is herbaceous in the nose and taste. It has fruity flavors with a slightly bitter finish (12½). \$10



SELECTED TASTING NOTES

Domestic White Rieslings

Most White Rieslings are sold under the name *Johannisberg Riesling*. Why? Because the name *Johannisberg* was originally used to introduce a new domestic wine to a wine buying public familiar with an imported wine. In this case, *Johannisberg*, a very famous village in Rheingau, Germany, was affixed because of its world-wide reputation. It's about time domestic producers grow up and start calling the wine by its proper varietal designation. A few small producers are already doing this. Bravo. Most of the larger producers probably will not change until the name becomes popular with the public. Once again, the small producer is afforded a major opportunity to segment his product. But this will only work if the wine is distinctive. The fact of the matter is that historically most domestic Rieslings have not been good food wines. They have been heavy and too sweet, lacking the proper acid and Ph which makes the German Rieslings of the Rhine and Mosel so attractive. The reason is simple. Most domestic White Riesling was planted in the wrong area. The acid is too low. A high residual sugar masks the imbalance of the wine. Yet today a quiet revolution is taking place. Many producers have set out to produce Rieslings that make good food wines. They seek wine with better acid and less sugar. The 1980 vintage was generally perfect for producing such wine.

The result is very good wines. They're at their best young. Generally, they don't age well. In fact, if the truth be known, the reason why a lot of wineries don't have 1980's on the market is because they still have 1979's to sell. The wines are good with appetizers at the beginning of a meal or as an afternoon sipping wine with assorted tidbits. But also try them with Chinese food (the not so spicy dishes), stir-fry vegetable dishes (with or without pork or chicken), or just plain roast loin of pork cooked to a moist, pink succulence on the bar-b-que or in the oven. (A favorite recipe of the editor is to rub a center loin of pork with Teriyaki and then rub with sesame oil. Baste once or twice with sesame oil while cooking in a covered bar-b-que. Do not overcook.) Remember, serving the wine ice cold will enhance the fruity crispness of the best wines. This seems most appropriate with White Rieslings.

The problem with buying White Rieslings is that many labels carry no indication of sweetness. Wines in this review are generally from ½-2½% residual sugar. The degree of sweetness is determined by the fruit, acid, and Ph. Just because a wine has more residual sugar doesn't mean it is sweeter. However, nearly all have some sweetness and generally should be considered semi-dry.

Very Good

★ ★ +

Best Buy

1980 Santa Ynez Valley Winery White Riesling "California". This is a very attractive wine at a very attractive price. The color is very pale yellow with a perfumed, fruity/coconut/pineapple nose. It is clean, fresh, slightly pétillant, lovely, fruity with balanced sweetness and a very nice finish—absolutely delicious wine, drink it up while it's fresh (16½). \$5.25

★ ★

1980 Haywood White Riesling "Sonoma". This estate bottled Riesling is lovely. It has a light yellow color and a very perfumed, fruity/pineapple/floral nose. It is full, fruity, and crisp with a nicely balanced sweetness (16). \$6

1980 Jekel Vineyard Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey County". Jekel usually makes a superior Riesling. This is one of the best. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/steely/pineapple nose. There is good fruit and the wine is clean, fresh, and lively with a sweet finish (16). \$6.75

★ +

1980 Chateau St. Jean Johannisberg Riesling "Robert Young Vineyard". This is a very nice wine with a pale yellow color and a fruity nose. It has nice fruit and depth with nicely balanced sweetness and a slight pétillance (CO₂) that dissipates after a few minutes air (15½). \$7.75

1980 Concannon Vineyard Johannisberg Riesling "Livermore Valley". This wine has a fruity/ripe apricot nose with a floral undertone. It has good fruit and a nicely balanced sweetness (15½). \$6

1980 Robert Mondavi Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". This is a nice wine with a pale yellow color and a grapy/fruity/pineapple nose with a slight steeliness. The wine is fruity and clean with a nicely balanced sweetness (15½). \$7.25

1980 Obester Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey County". The grapes for this wine came from Ventana Vineyard. The wine is lovely. The color is light yellow gold. The nose is perfumed with a pineapple/apricot quality. Good follow through on the palate with similar pineapple/apricot flavors and a nice, sweet finish make this a delightful sipping wine (15½). \$6.25

1980 Ste. Chapelle Vineyards Johannisberg Riesling "Synns Family Vineyard, Idaho". This wine is noticeably sweet, but nicely balanced with a fresh, grapy crispness that is quite attractive. The color is pale yellow and the nose has a fruity/pineapple/floral perfume. All in all, it is very nice (15½). \$6.90

1979 Sonoma Vineyards Johannisberg Riesling "Northern California". With a light yellow gold color and a ripe, fruity/apricot nose this wine has retained a nice freshness. It has nice, fruity flavor with good depth. It is pleasant with a balanced sweetness (15½). \$6.65

1980 Trefethen Vineyards White Riesling "Napa Valley". This is a very nice, fresh wine with just a little sweetness. It has a pale yellow color and a fruity/pineapple/lemony nose. It is clean, fresh, crisp, and fruity, but just a little short in the finish (15½). \$6.50

★

1980 Chateau Ste. Michelle Johannisberg Riesling "Washington State". This is a pleasant wine with a light yellow gold color and a subdued, pineapple/apricot nose. It is clean, fresh, and fruity with some sweetness (15). \$5.75

1980 The Firestone Vineyard Johannisberg Riesling "Santa Ynez Valley". With a light yellow color this is a pleasant wine. It has a nice, fruity/pineapple nose. It is light, fruity, crisp, and sweet. Just a little more depth of flavor would greatly improve the wine (15). \$5.50

1980 Greenwood Ridge Vineyards White Riesling "Mendocino County". This is a very good food wine with some sweetness. It has a light yellow color and a fruity nose. The flavors are clean, fresh, and fruity with nice balance (15). \$7

1979 Grgich Hills Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/steely nose. It is clean, fresh, fruity, and crisp with a sweet finish (15). \$6.50

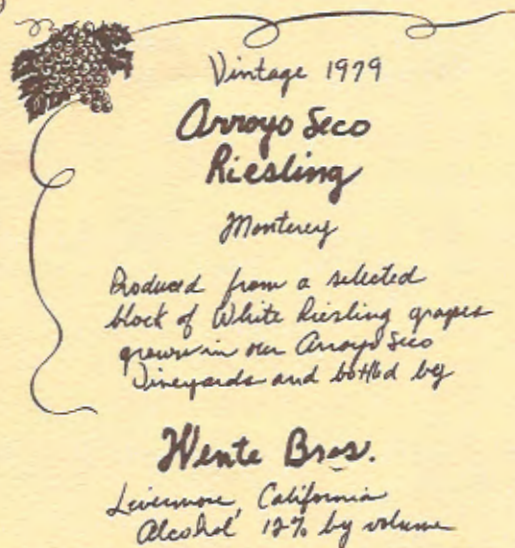
1980 Hagafen Cellars Johannisberg Riesling "Winery Lake Vineyards". This wine is sweet and quite attractive. It is also kosher. Why not? We have just about everything else. The color is light yellow gold with a fruity/ripe apricot nose. The sweetness is very noticeable, but there is lots of fresh fruit and good balance (15). \$8

1979 Kenwood Johannisberg Riesling "Sonoma Valley". This wine seems a little low in acid. Otherwise, it is very nice with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/steely/pineapple nose. It has good fruit with clean, apricot flavors and some sweetness (15). \$6.50

1979 Napa Wine Cellars Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". Lacking just a bit in depth, otherwise this is a nice wine. The color is light yellow gold with a subdued, fruity/floral nose showing citric undertones. It has nice, fresh, clean, fruity/grapy, slightly citric flavors with some sweetness (15). \$5.50

"What's This?"

1979 Wente Bros. Arroyo Seco Riesling. If you're familiar with Wente's wines, you'd know this is a sweet, botrytis Riesling. If you're not, you'd never know from the label. There's no indication of sweetness, yet it is definitely a dessert wine. No wonder the consumer is confused! Actually, it is quite nice for dessert with a light yellow gold color and a heavy botrytis apricot nose. It is very rich, full, and sweet with apricot flavors. Seemingly lacking in acid, but very flavorful for near term consumption (15). \$9



1980 Zaca Mesa Johannisberg Riesling "Santa Ynez Valley". This is a very nice wine and a good value. It has a very pale yellow color, a lovely, fruity/floral nose, and a fruity, fresh, crisp, sweet flavor (15). \$5.75

Good

Best Buy

Ernest and Julio Gallo Johannisberg Riesling. This is one of the best Gallo varietals. The problem is that with no vintage designation, it is difficult to know exactly how old the wine is. As a result, it is best to buy the wine from a retailer who sells a lot of wine and is always buying the latest releases. The wine has a very pale yellow color and a fruity nose. It is clean, fresh, fruity, and slightly sweet. A very pleasant wine at a very low price (14½). \$3

1980 Raymond Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". This estate bottled wine is nice, but lacks crispness. It has a light yellow gold color and a ripe, fruity nose with a fruity/apricot flavor. It is sweet with a nice finish (14½). \$6.50

1980 Beringer Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity nose. It is clean, fruity, soft, sweet, and pleasant (14). \$6

1979 Estrella River Vineyards Johannisberg Riesling "Central Coast Counties". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a ripe, fruity/steely nose. Ripe, fruity flavors are pleasant with some sweetness (14). \$5.50

1979 Charles Krug "Napa Valley" Johannisberg Riesling. This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/steely/pineapple nose. There are fruity/grapy flavors and sweetness with a slightly bitter finish (14). \$6

1979 Mirassou Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/steely nose. It is clean, fruity and sweet with a short finish (14). \$6.25

1980 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Early Harvest". This is a simple wine. It is clean and fresh with some fruit and a slight sweetness (14). \$7

1980 Sycamore Creek Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey County". This wine is probably too sweet for most foods, even a bit cloying, but well-chilled it is a nice quaffer. It has a light yellow gold color and a peachy nose with ripe, fruity/peachy flavors (14). \$7

1979 Clos du Bois Johannisberg Riesling "Selected Harvest". This "Selected Harvest" is sweeter than the "Early Harvest" but it is flat and finishes short. The color is light gold with a floral nose and ripe, fruity flavors with a hint of apricots (13½). \$7.50

1980 Geyser Peak Soft Johannisberg Riesling "Kiser Ranch". In this case, soft also means sweet. The wine has a pale yellow color and a perfumed, fruity/bubble gum nose. It is sweet, clean, and one-dimensional—a quaffing wine for those who want something that is very sweet (13). \$5.35

1979 Johnson's Alexander Valley Johannisberg Riesling. This estate bottled wine is only slightly sweet, but it has an unusual tarry nose, a steely component in the taste, combined with a molasses quality, and a slightly bitter finish. Drink it up while there's still a little fruit (13). \$5

1979 Landmark Johannisberg Riesling "Sonoma County". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a steely/fruity nose. It is clean, fruity, flat, and slightly sweet with a short finish. (13). \$5.60

1979 J. Lohr Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, floral/steely nose. It has a very floral quality in the taste – an unusual flower-like wine with some sweetness (13). \$6

1979 J. Pedroncelli Johannisberg Riesling "Sonoma County". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a musty nose. It has a fruity flavor, but is flat and lacks freshness (13). \$4.50

1979 Clos du Bois Johannisberg Riesling "Early Harvest." This Alexander Valley wine has seen better days. It has a yellow gold color, a steely, slightly tarry nose, and clean, thin, slightly sweet flavors (12½). \$5

1979 Callaway Vineyard and Winery White Riesling-Dry. OK, the wine does finish dry, or at least almost dry, but the wine has some oxidation and is flat – drink up (12). \$6.25

1979 Domaine Laurier Johannisberg Riesling "Sonoma Valley". This wine has seen better days. It has a light yellow color and a slightly oxidized, caramel/cinnamon quality. It is fruity, grapy, and sweet (12). \$7



DISTINCTIVE NEW WINES

★ ★ +

1979 Santa Ynez Valley Winery Cabernet Franc "La Marque". This is unique for two reasons. First, there are very few varietal Cabernet Francs. Second, the Santa Ynez Valley has been plagued with a pronounced, herbaceous/grassy quality in many of its red wines. This wine was produced in a very small 50 case quantity (there is only 1 acre of vines). It is an experiment. The results are very pleasing and much better than previous Santa Ynez Valley Winery Cabernet Sauvignon. While the tiny quantity will preclude many from tasting it, perhaps favorable commentary will prompt other vineyards and wineries in the area to conduct similar experiments. There is no trace of herbaceousness or grassiness. The color is dark and the nose has a marvelous perfume of blackberries with a briary/oaky undertone. It is rich, full, and very flavorful with a consistent, blackberry taste backed by a briary/oaky component. Quite

1980 Flora Springs Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". This very pale yellow wine tastes much better than it smells. It smells like tar or creosote. Yet it is fruity, clean, and slightly sweet. Quite pleasant if you can get past the nose (12). \$6

1980 Wente Bros. Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey". Too bad. This is a nice, pleasant wine spoiled by a dirty, sulphurous nose. Otherwise, it is fruity, full, and sweet (12). \$4.50

Below Average

1980 Buehler Vineyards Johannisberg Riesling "Napa Valley". Something went wrong here. The wine doesn't have a future. It has a pale yellow color and an oxidized, banana peel nose. It is sweet, grapy, and musty (11). \$7

1979 Sebastiani Johannisberg Riesling "Northern California". This wine has a light yellow color and an unusual, pungent nose. It is a heavy, flat wine with some fruit and sweetness (11). \$5.25

1980 The Monterey Vineyard Johannisberg Riesling "Monterey County". This wine has a pale yellow color. It's downhill from there. The nose has a musty/spoiled fruit quality. It is flat, sweet, dull, and lacking in flavor (10). \$6.25

tannic, but it is loaded with fruit. How will it age? Who knows, but it will be interesting to monitor (16½). \$9.50

★ ★

1979 Chateau-Grillet. Chateau-Grillet is a tiny five acre vineyard and the smallest property having its own Appellation Controlée. The property is on the west bank of the Rhône River south of Lyon. Production is generally under 600 cases a year. It is a unique wine, best consumed young, with a light delicacy that has to be tasted to be believed. This vintage is light even for Grillet. With a light yellow color, a delicately perfumed nose showing a barely perceptible "gout de terroir" and soft, delicate, fruity flavor with subtle, citric undertones, this is a wine to be savored with lightly flavored foods such as sauteed veal or a simple roast loin of pork. To maximize the flavor don't overchill – cellar temperature (55°) seems just about right (16). \$30

★★★

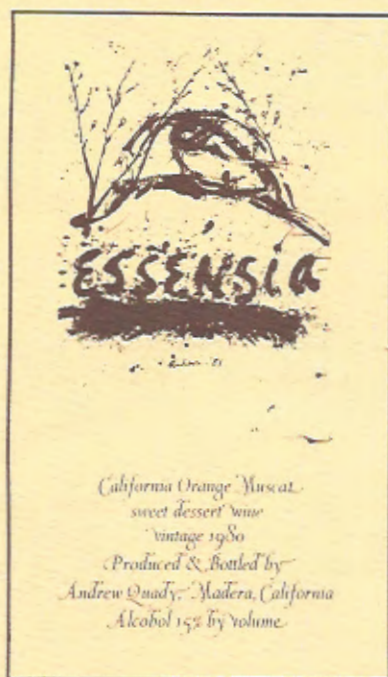
1980 Long Vineyards Johannisberg Riesling. (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 122). This is a lovely sweet dessert wine – the best of its type currently available. It has a light yellow gold color and a clean, fresh, fruity/pineapple nose. It is clean, fresh, sweet, and crisp. A slight pétillance adds to the youthful appeal. Long on the palate, this goes particularly well with fresh melon (17). \$9.50

★★

1979 St. Francis Merlot "Sonoma Valley". This is a very engaging, full-flavored wine. It has a dark color and a ripe, fruit nose with oak/bay leaf/menthol undertones – unusual, but very nice. The wine is intense with ripe, fruit flavors backed by noticeable tannin. Not for long term cellaring, but it should make lovely drinking in 1-2 years as the wine softens (16). \$12.50

★★★

1980 Andrew Quady "Essensia". This is the first commercial bottling in California of an Orange Muscat wine. It is found in France under the name "Fleur d'Orange" (orange blossom) and in Italy it is called "Moscato Fior d'Orancio". The variety is not widely planted in California because of a low yield. This is a smashing wine with a smashing label. The wine has a light gold color and the nose has a lovely, fig-like, dried fruit, orange blossom perfume – very attractive. It has a similar taste – clean, fresh, sweet, fig-like, dried fruit, orange flavors. There is a little heat in the finish, but this in no way detracts from the exquisite, delicate flavors. The wine is delicious chilled and equally delicious at room temperature. An absolutely stunning dessert wine, that, unfortunately, is available in only a very limited quantity (17). \$8.50



★★+

1980 St. Clement Sauvignon Blanc "Napa Valley". This winery produces consistently top quality wines. So it's no surprise to see this at the very top amongst the currently available Sauvignon Blancs. It has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/slightly grassy/vanilla-tinged nose – very attractive. The fruit, oak, and varietal character are all in harmonious balance. It is fruity, crisp, and clean with a slight grassiness and a nice, flavorful, dry finish (16½). \$8.50

★★★★★

1978 Montrachet (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). The DRC Montrachets are consistently amongst the finest dry white wines in the world. Well they should be. This wine is expected to retail for \$250 per bottle when it arrives this fall. Moreover, even at the astronomical price, it will be exceedingly scarce. But, perfection is worth pursuing and the wine is near perfection – one of the best wines ever from this outstanding property. The color is light yellow and the nose is exceedingly complex – fruity/spicy/hint of orange peel and licorice. The flavors are incredibly rich, yet the wine is elegant and harmonious. Long on the palate, with an exquisite balance of fruit and acid, this should improve for at least 4-5 years and become an all-time classic (19).



The Chateau Grillet is imported on the West Coast by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, Albany, CA. We're told it's also available on the East Coast. The 1978 Montrachet (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti) will be available in limited quantities in most major U.S. markets (New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco).

successors of Monsieur Ouvrard sold Romanée-Conti to Monsieur Duvaut-Bloch, a well-known vineyard owner and négociant, in Santenay, in 1869. It was Monsieur Duvaut-Bloch who built the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti into what it is today by adding to Romanée-Conti La Tâche, Richebourg, Grands-Échézeaux, and Échézeaux.

The Domaine today belongs, through inheritance, to the families de Villaine and Leroy who have enlarged the Domaine by adding small sections of Montrachet (in 1964, 1966, and 1980) and 13 acres of Romanée-Saint-Vivant of the Domaine Marey-Monge which the Domaine has managed by lease since 1966. Presently the management of the Domaine is confided to Madame Bize-Leroy and Monsieur Aubert de Villaine.

Romanée-Conti was the last vineyard in Burgundy to succumb to phylloxera. The vineyard had been preserved with original root stock despite the existence of phylloxera. This required a treatment of carbon sulfide each year. During the war years, 1939-1945, carbon sulfide was difficult to obtain and this led to a progressive anemia of the vines. The strong frost of 1945 delivered the coup de grâce. The harvest that year was only 608 bottles! The graftings necessary for reconstitution of Romanée-Conti in 1946 were taken from the original non-grafted French root stock before they were pulled out. There was no Romanée-Conti in 1946-1951. This was a particularly unfortunate circumstance for, in all probability, the 1947 and 1949 would have been superlative. Some claim to know of the existence of a 1947. However, such a wine is a fraud.

The harvest at Romanée-Conti usually begins well into mid-October. A late harvest carefully picked and sorted by hand yields full, tannic juices, rich in natural sugar and spices. Then, according to old Burgundian tradition, there takes place a very long fermentation of 3 weeks to a month that allows the must to be nourished fully with all the elements of body and bouquet grown by the stems and skins. Following fermentation, the wine is racked and placed in small 60 gallon barrels where it develops and matures for a period of 18 months to two years. New French Tronçais oak barrels are used every year, as the fresh wood releases certain essential flavor in the newly made wine. Just before bottling, the wine is gently egg white fined. This completes the harvest and vinification. There is no secret vinification as some have rumored. The process is classically traditional. If there is a "secret" it rests in several factors. The particular nature of the subsoil at Romanée-Conti is the first factor in the magic quality of the wine. The underground is full of secrets that cannot be explained. In spite of scientific knowledge, the

mysteries of the "Appellations" remain intact. There is also the matter of vineyard location described earlier. In addition, the clone of Pinot Noir at Romanée-Conti produces especially fine grapes of a very small yield. Through use of grafted-fused shoots of the original Romanée-Conti vines, the vineyard has consisted of this clone of unknown origin for centuries. All of these factors continue to make Romanée-Conti one of the finest wines produced in the world.

In April, 1981, a tasting was held in Los Angeles consisting of 32 vintages of Romanée-Conti from 1915-1978. Arranged by Ed Lazarus with major contributions by Bipin Desai, Brad Klein, and Geoffrey Troy, it is thought to be the most comprehensive tasting of Romanée-Conti wines ever held. Many of the wines are no longer available at the Domaine (the oldest bottle there is 1911). It took four years of diligent searching all over the world to put the tasting together. All bottles were of excellent fill, condition, and appearance. Conducted over a two day period, the rarity of many of the bottles makes it an event unlikely to be duplicated. Listed below are the notes from this tasting with postscripts indicating variances, if any, of the particular wines in this tasting as compared with bottles from the same vintage tasted on previous occasions. Also included are production figures for each vintage. From 1953 on the number of bottles produced has appeared on the label. Prior to 1953 there was no such listing. Unfortunately, the records for pre-1945 vintages were very nearly completely destroyed during the German occupation in World War II. Hence, production figures are available for only four of the pre-1945 vintages.

1915

Medium reddish orange color. Musty/spicy/dead leaves nose. Sharp. Not much fruit. Short finish. Still tastes like Burgundy. Drinkable. No previous tasting notes.

1919

Pale orange/amber color. Sharp, musty/vinegary nose. Sharp, tart, caramelized flavors. Almost vinegar. Not drinkable. Total production 5,624 bottles including wine sold in barrel. No previous tasting notes.

1919 (Barolet)

From 1929 all Romanée-Conti was bottled at the Domaine. In earlier years, small amounts were sold by the barrel. This bottle was from one such lot bottled by Barolet. Medium dark reddish orange color. Spicy/coffee bean nose. Some fruit. Spicy/coffee bean flavor. Quite drinkable. Possibly fortified with cognac? No previous tasting notes.

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1925

★★★

From a vintage of no repute, an amazing wine. Still showing great youth for its age. Medium reddish orange color. Light, fruity/tea leaves nose. Lovely, fruity/tea leaves flavor. Delicate. Sweet. Ripe. Long on the palate. 4,712 bottles produced. No previous tasting notes.

1926

Medium reddish orange color. Dead leaves/coffee bean nose. Coffee flavor. Tinged with fruit. Sweet. Old, but still alive in the taste. No previous tasting notes.

1928

★★★

Medium reddish orange amber color. Volatile pickling spice nose. Unusual, but quite attractive. Sweet. Nice flavor. Soft. Nice balance. Some fruit. Good length on the palate. Very nice. No previous tasting notes.

1929

★★★

Medium reddish orange color. Spicy/slightly coffee bean nose. Soft, fruity/spicy/toffee flavor. Sweet. Round. Elegant. Lovely. This must have been truly extraordinary 20-30 years ago. The wine is legendary and has always been extremely expensive. In the midst of the Depression in 1932, the wine sold for \$15 per bottle (those were 1932 dollars) whereas 1929 first growth Bordeaux sold for less than \$2 per bottle. Now in decline, but altogether extraordinary considering its age. 7,144 bottles produced. Tasted twice. Similar tasting notes.

1931

Medium dark reddish orange color. Butterscotch/coffee bean nose. Tart. Cedary lacking fruit. Barely drinkable. 6,460 bottles produced. No previous tasting notes.

1933

Medium dark color, orange tones. Carmel/butterscotch nose. Sweet/sour flavors. Barely drinkable. No previous tasting notes.

1934

★

Medium dark color. Amazing color. Just amber at the edge. Paradoxical coffee bean/tea leaf nose. Some fruit. Tart. Spicy flavor. Nice fruit. Tasted once before ★★★.

1937

Medium reddish orange color. Spicy/coffee bean nose. Rather acidic. Still some fruit, but quite tart. Tasted once before ★★★.

1940

Medium reddish orange color. Carmel/toffee nose. Not much fruit. Carmel flavor. Hint of sweetness. Not exciting, but quite drinkable. Tasted once before ★.

1942

Reddish brown color, very amber/orange edge. Maderized nose and flavor. Still some sweetness. Barely drinkable. Tasted once before ★★★.

1943

★★

Medium reddish orange color. Subdued, fruity/spicy/slightly minty nose. Lovely, old, delicate flavor. Still fruity with a tea leaves quality. Soft. Very nice. No previous tasting notes.

1945

★★(★★)

Exceedingly rare. Contrary to the generally accepted production figure of 1200 bottles, in actuality only 608 bottles produced. Medium dark color. Reddish/amber/orange tones. Spicy/tea leaf nose. Hint of black pepper. Some fruit underneath. Firm tannin and acid. Good body. Still has fruit. Nice flavors. Still seems to have development potential. A rather moot point considering the wine's virtual non-existence. No previous tasting notes.

1952

★★★★★

The first vintage after the reconstitution of the vineyard in 1946. An altogether extraordinary wine. Medium red color, orange tinges. Plummy/oriental spice nose. Hint of volatility. Deep flavors. Very complex. Fruity/spicy. Rich, yet delicate. Long on the palate. Classic. Outstanding. 5,776 bottles produced. Tasted three times. Similar tasting notes.

1953

★★★

Medium reddish orange amber color. Fruity/spicy nose. Good depth. Fruity/spicy flavor. Long on the palate. Expansive. Slight stemminess. 6,992 bottles produced. Tasted twice. Similar tasting notes.

1954

★

An unusual wine and quite a surprise. Medium reddish orange amber color. Slight coffee bean/carmel nose. Definitely old, yet with a sweet flavor. Some fruit showing through. Quite pleasant. 7,144 bottles produced. No previous tasting notes. Other bottles probably better since the Domaine considers this one of the nine best wines of the 1924-78 period.

1955

★★★

Medium reddish orange, amber edge. Subdued, fruity/spicy nose. Delicate. Soft. Fruity/spicy/plummy/tea leaves flavor. Nice finish. 7,144 bottles produced. Tasted three times. Similar tasting notes.

1957

★★

Medium dark color, orange tones, orange/amber rim. Nice, fruity/spicy/tea leaves nose. Nice fruit. Firm. Balanced to acid. Some spiciness. Some sweetness. Probably will keep for many years. 6,536 bottles produced. Tasted twice. Similar tasting notes.

1959

★★★

Dark color, orange tones with orange amber rim. Carmel/spice/fruity/toffee nose. Nice fruit. Round. Soft. Rich. Full. Spicy. Long on the palate. Showing signs of age, yet still lovely. 9,627 bottles produced (the largest of record). Tasted three times. Can be ★★★★★.

1961

★★★★ (★)

Dark color, amber edge. Deep, fruity/oriental spice nose. Some volatility. Deep, fruity/spicy/plummy flavors. Hint of smokiness. Rich. Full. Packed with fruit. A touch volatile in the taste. Good backbone. With air the wine softens, volatility diminishes. Youthful. A short crop, 6,080 bottles produced. Tasted three times. Can be ★★★★★ (★). A great wine with a great future.

1962

★★★

Medium dark color, orange edge, deep, fruity/berry/oriental spice nose. Very slight volatility. Very flavory. Fruity/spicy/plummy tastes. Long on the palate. Would be ★★★★★ except for a very slight pétillance. 8,512 bottles produced. Tasted six times. Can be ★★★★★.

1963

Medium reddish orange color. Fruity/slightly musty nose. Hints of carmel and butterscotch. Fruity, sweet, candy-like flavors. Quite chapitalized. Pleasant, but old and tired. 8,422 bottles produced. Tasted twice. Similar tasting notes.

1964

Medium reddish/orange/amber color. Toasty, burnt almond nose. Some volatility. Rather dry. Still some fruity/spicy flavors, but past its prime. 9,145 bottles produced. Tasted six times. Variable. Can be up to ★★★★★.

1966

★

Medium dark reddish orange. Deep, fruity/spicy nose, slight coffee bean quality. Nice fruity/spicy flavors. Elegant. Nice flavor and finish. 8,424 bottles produced. Tasted four times. This appears to have been a prematurely aged bottle. The wine is variable. Other bottles have been ★★★★★. Some only ★★. The wine can be exquisite, but is not likely to be extremely long-lived.

1967

Medium reddish orange color. Fruity/spicy/musty/slightly coffee bean nose. Fruity/spicy flavors. Soft. Rather flat. Tired. Fades rapidly in the glass. 7,220 bottles produced. Tasted three times. Similar tasting notes.

1969

★★

Medium reddish orange color. Lovely, deep, fruity/oriental spice nose. Nice, spicy/fruity flavor, yet a little thin. Ready to drink. 7,220 bottles produced. Tasted three times. Similar tasting notes.

1970

Medium reddish orange color. Fruity/spicy/coffee bean nose. Rather dry. Lacks fruit. Pleasant, but lacking depth. Showing senility at an early age. Not a wine to keep. 9,626 bottles produced. Tasted twice. Similar tasting notes.

1971

★★★★★ (★)

An all time classic. This wine is nectar of the gods. Medium dark color, orange/amber tones. Deeply perfumed, fruity/oriental spice nose. Lovely, deep, spicy/berry flavors. Full, yet elegant. Exquisite balance. Very long on the palate. Delicious to drink, yet should hold for many years. 5,294 bottles produced (the smallest post-phyloxera vintage to date). Tasted five times. Some bottles darker and less drinkable, but with the same magnificence.

1972

★★★ (★)

A bigger wine than the 1976. Dark color, amber edge, fruity/spicy/almost buttery nose. Rich, full, fruity flavors. Subdued spiciness. Still hard, firm acid. Needs 5 more years at least. Should be outstanding. 9,626 bottles produced. Tasted five times. Nearly identical tasting notes.

1976

★★(★)

Not a big wine, but flavorful and elegant. Dark color, amber edge, nicely perfumed, fruity/berry/oriental spice nose. Good fruit, rather subdued spiciness. Nice balance. Short finish. Early maturing, nearly ready to drink. 9,120 bottles produced. Tasted four times. Nearly identical tasting notes.

1978

★★★★(★)

This is potentially a very great wine. Dark color. Locked-up. Needs an hour or two air. Deeply perfumed, fruity/berry/oriental spice nose. Good depth of flavor. Fruity/oriental spice taste. Just now a little harsh. Should be nectar in 7-8 years. 6,535 bottles produced. Tasted twice. Once without air and very backward ★★(★★★).

All in all, the Romanée-Conti tasting just described is probably the most unique of all time. As the most exalted of all Burgundies, the wine has been in great demand for centuries. Yet, production never is much over 9,000 bottles making many vintages exceedingly rare. This tasting consisted of every good vintage for the past 65 years. Only the 1924 was missing. Unfor-

unate, for it is considered by the Domaine to be one of the nine top wines of the 1924-78 period (the others being 1978, 1971, 1966, 1962, 1961, 1954, 1952, and 1929). Nonetheless, to be missing only one bottle of real significance in such a tasting of rare wines is an utterly remarkable achievement. Of the 33 bottles tasted, 20 were ranked ★ or better. Not bad for a range of vintages going back over six decades. Moreover, there were a few bottles, most notably the 1934 and 1937, where the bottles were decidedly less good than the wine is known to have been on other occasions. This is the luck of the draw. It should also be remembered that the past history of the bottles is virtually impossible to ascertain. Many of the younger wines have been resting in private cellars for years. Conversely, many of the older bottles were purchased in recent years. Therefore, while the outward appearance of all was very good to outstanding, a definitive statement cannot be made based on one bottle. Hence, in those cases where there is no previous experience with the wine, it is impossible to know how much better or worse it might be. Moreover, it is unlikely that some of these vintages will ever be tasted again. Some may not even exist. Who knows? This definitive work may be one day as highly valued as a bottle of Romanée-Conti!

CORK POPPERS

"First Wave of Readers Speak Out."

This is a new feature which will appear on an irregular basis. Of the many letters received there were many worthwhile comments. Many asked why not use the ★ system for all wines. So with this issue all wines rated Very Good or better will receive stars. It's very simple: One ★ for each number from 15-20, e.g. 15 = ★, 16 = ★★, 17 = ★★★, etc. The numerical scores will remain as well. Wines with 1/2 rankings will have a star + designation, e.g., ★+ = 15½, ★★+ = 16½, etc. Other readers asked why not list where to buy the wine. This we've wrestled with many times. It's just not practical to list retailers. Across the country there are scores of retailers who may carry a particular wine. However, we will list the importer for Outstanding imported wines and other imported wines listed as Best Buys or Distinctive Wines. For California wines, ask your retailer about availability or contact the winery direct. (If you would like a list of California winery's names, addresses, and telephone numbers, let us know and we'll provide you with the names and publishers of books that contain such a list.) Finally, some readers said they find "letters to the editor" worthless. We'll leave that to you to decide in this and upcoming issues. For now we'll publish letters we think

are of interest whether they're complimentary or uncomplimentary to us or any other wine or wine related subject. — Editor

Bottle Variation Explained?

Perhaps I can shed some light on the question raised by you about the 1978 Richebourg (Labouré-Roi) in Volume II, Number 5.

I remember tasting this particular wine several times at the Underground Wineletter tastings. I further recall that there was much discussion about the differences between the bottles available here on the West Coast and those of the same wine (supposedly) which we brought in from the East. My reactions and perceptions to tasting these bottles were quite similar to yours. I'll quote from my notes:

2-5-81: Richebourg (Labouré-Roi), 1978 (West Coast) Dark; skunky-polecat nose; possible bad bottle?

2-28-81 Richebourg (Labouré-Roi), 1978 (West Coast) Dark; coffee-bean nose & a bit of free sulphur.

2-28-81 Richebourg (Labouré-Roi), 1978 (East Coast) Dark; restrained nose which opened to show fruity perfume quality; full & rich flavor similar to #11 (West Coast) but no coffee-bean quality.

My notes were made prior to rating by the group and prior to unbagging the wines.

At first, like you, I assumed that some damage had been done to the wine in transit to the West Coast although a wine shipped in the winter is not likely to have been subjected to excessive heat. Also, the wine didn't seem to be "bottle sick" from traveling. The more I thought about it, the more I came to believe that the fault lies either in vinification or the bottling process.

Whatever the reason(s) for the difference in bottles of what is supposed to be the same wine, perhaps a clue to the mystery lies in the pages of *The Underground Wineletter*. For some reason, you reproduced the labels of both East Coast and West Coast bottles. At first, with the exception of the two different importer's names, the labels appear to be exactly the same.

But, they're not! The name of the wine, "RICHEBOURG," is spaced differently in each case. The legend "mis en bouteille par" is in lower case lettering on the West Coast bottle and upper case lettering on the East Coast bottle. The West Coast label specifies an alcoholic content of 13.5% while the East Coast label lists 13%.

Whether or not the discrepancy in labels has anything to do with the differences in quality that we all perceived is beyond my limited ability to discover. It is quite possible that the wine was made from grapes picked at different times from the same vineyard or vinified in different barrels. There are numerous other possibilities, most of which would not invite suspicion. However, I do hope that this is not another instance in which an inferior lot of supposedly top quality wine is foisted off on us ignoramuses on the West Coast because "we don't know any better, anyhow."

In any event, keep up the good work. *The Underground Wineletter* is the best in the West or, anywhere else, for that matter.

Bob Justman
Los Angeles, California

The question of bad or inferior bottles of Burgundy continues to be perplexing (see notes on some of the 1979 Louis Latour White Burgundies in this issue). There's a limit as to how much tasting and retasting can be done. George Buehler, our East Coast consultant in Boston provided additional tasting notes on the East Coast wine which confirmed our results. Here Bob (Sherlock) Justman has done a real piece of detective work which adds a new dimension. Maybe one day we'll have an answer. — Editor

Who Needs The Underground Wineletter?

It's really difficult to understand how any wine-lover could fail to subscribe to *The Underground Wineletter*!!

Again and again you have helped me to avoid purchases in which I would almost certainly have been disappointed, and alerted me to wines I might otherwise have missed.

The 1978 Mayer Burgundies are a perfect example. I had never heard of Mayer before, but by acting promptly on your reviews in *The Underground Wineletter* I was able to buy several cases while the original (best) shipment was still available. Since repeated blind tastings confirm that these Mayer wines are indeed significantly better than the most world-famed Burgundies of them all, prices have more than doubled, and will no doubt continue to rise. Thus on just those 3 cases of Mayer I have already saved more than twenty-seven times the cost of an annual subscription!

But what of the more casual wine-drinker, who buys only 2 bottles per week instead of several cases per month? Well, 2 bottles per week is still 104 bottles per year, and if we assume the fairly modest price of \$5 per bottle, that's an investment of \$520. If *The Underground Wineletter* can eliminate the least satisfactory 15% of purchases, and replace them with the 15% which are most rewarding, that's 30% of \$520, or \$156. So even this occasional drinker of medium-priced wines can save over SEVEN TIMES the cost of his or her subscription, in addition to the great increase in both knowledge and pleasure!!

Of course to be fair, I should mention the person who does NOT need your publication. He reads the labels very carefully in the store and holds the bottle up to the light, by which procedure he apparently is able to judge precisely the quality of wine contained therein. Next time you see that guy wandering up and down the aisles, ask him to phone me, I'd like to learn his secret!

Till then, I remain your well-rewarded subscriber,
John H. Cone
Pasadena, California

Indeed, this seems to state the economic rationale of a consumer wine-letter. Also, even though wines may be limited in availability, it brings readers in contact with many wines they otherwise would not know existed. Through diligent searching even the rarest of wines can usually be found as Mr. Cone indicates. Finally, I must admit I often examine bottles in the way Mr. Cone's letter describes. I wonder if that is prejudicing our results? P.S. Thanks to Mr. Cone for his suggestion for this feature "Popped Corks" which we have turned around to "Cork Poppers". As a source for our inspiration, we're happy to send along a free 1 year subscription which will save Mr. Cone even more money! — Editor