

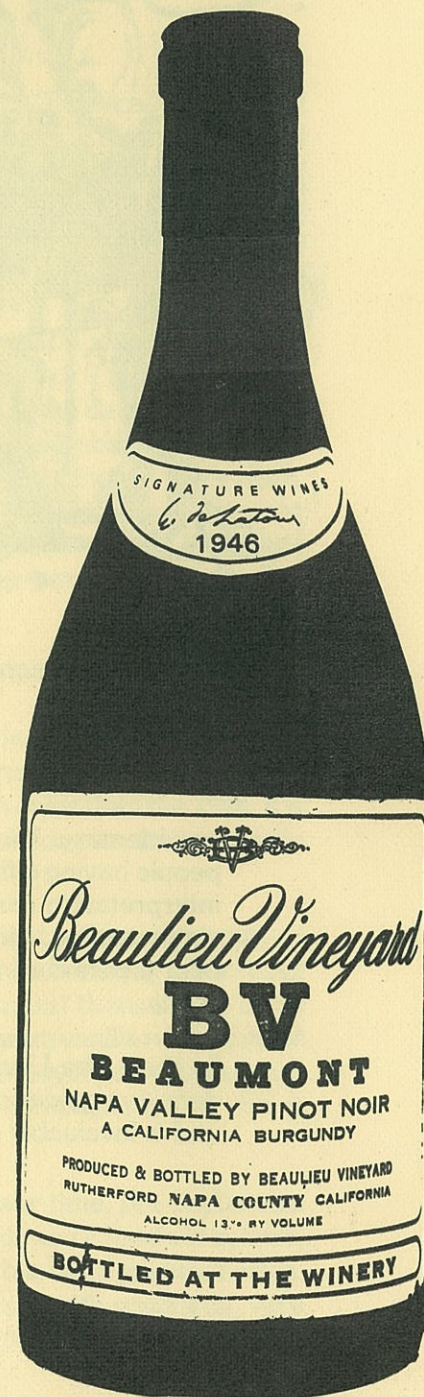


THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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ONE WINEDRINKERS OPINION

The Need for The Underground Wineletter



It's tough to taste everything!

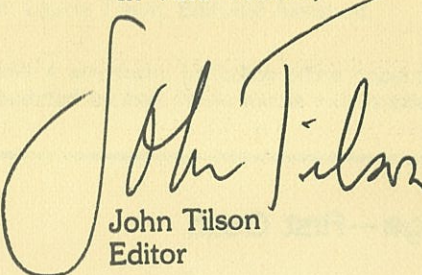
Over the years many of us have decried the often commercial, many times self-serving or inaccurate information available about wine. An obvious solution would be to publish our own subscription letter. Some of the most experienced and knowledgeable wine tasters/collectors/and consumers have joined together to publish what we plan to be the most candid and comprehensive commentary available on fine wine anywhere.

We have no commercial interests to promote. Our only purpose is to provide timely and accurate information and opinion. The more educated we are as consumers, the more rational and effective buying decisions we can make. In the case of wine, it is a process of maximizing enjoyment. As sincere and honest as most people in the wine industry are, many exaggerations, distortions and occasional untruths appear. How often have you been told "this is the best _____ since _____," only to purchase the wine and be disappointed. In actuality, the wine consumer can only really decide the best wine after tasting everything, but most people would like to find the best wines available without tasting hundreds of often expensive, and sometimes mediocre, wines. The Underground Wineletter is designed to allow you to do just that. We will advise you of the existence of great wines before they are released and sold out. We are conscious of world-wide price trends and will make this an integral part of our

commentary. We reject the validity of most wine tastings; since, with a diverse group of people having different levels of wine experience, everything is averaged out. Even statistical interpretation cannot correct this inherent inaccuracy. Rarely are our opinions based on a single tasting. Most often these opinions have been formed from tastings and discussions over a period of time. This process tends to eliminate most distortions caused by an "off" bottle.

In short, the Underground Wineletter was created out of need—the need for an unbiased, definitive guide to fine wines. It is designed for the discriminating consumer. We know you'll find it invaluable and look forward to welcoming you as a subscriber.

In Vino Veritas,


John Tilson
Editor

OLD PINOT NOIR VS. BURGUNDY

"The Results Are Quite Startling"

As more and more great young Pinot Noir is made, the inevitable question of aging potential will arise. California Pinot Noirs from the 1940's and early 1950's are great rarities, but they are of more than historical interest. Some are extremely good and, amazingly, show no signs of being in decline, despite some three decades of age. Unlike most modern day Burgundy that is made for early consumption, many Burgundies from the 1940's and early 1950's are also outstanding wines today. If some of California's best old Pinot Noirs are matched against the wines of a top Burgundy producer like Domaine de la Romanee-Conti, the results are quite startling. The older California wines age as well, if not better than their French counterparts. A recent tasting confirmed earlier tastings of the wines and produced the following results:

Outstanding

1946 BV Pinot Noir. The legendary Pinot Noir of BV, which Andre Tchelistcheff has called the finest he ever made, is indeed worth all the praise. The color is very dark with just the slightest trace of amber around the edge. The nose is really intense with a dried fruit/prune-like quality, not dissimilar from an older BV Private Reserve Cabernet. The taste is very rich and complex with great fruit, a touch of sweetness, and a lingering finish. Having stood the test of time and displaying all the character of great wine, surely this would have to be called the finest mature California Pinot Noir that one could drink. Rarely available, it last sold at the Heublein auction in 1977 for \$125 per bottle. Seemingly, the wine still has a long life ahead of it, although it is doubtful that it will improve (18).

1952 Grands Echezeaux (Domaine de la Romanee-Conti). This wine is the definition of what great Burgundy is all about! It is absolutely stunning! Stylistically, it bears no resemblance to the BV, being more elegant and captivating. The color is medium red with a perfumed Oriental spice nose, also exhibiting the unmistakable hint of green olives often found in old Burgundies. A wine of great fruit and impeccable balance, it is very alive, with an exceedingly long, expansive finish. In today's market the wine could be expected to command a price of about \$100 per bottle (18).

Very Good

1942 BV Pinot Noir. Who would think that this wine would challenge the legendary 1946? It does, although not quite as complete or as well balanced. The unmistakable BV prune-like nose is followed by a good flavor of ripe fruit. Not as lingering on the palate and a bit lighter in color than the 1946, it is still a very fine wine after 37 years. In the 1978 Heublein Auction, the wine sold for over \$60 per bottle (17).

1951 Martin Ray Pinot Noir. Considering how unusual, and often downright unpleasing, many of the old Martin Ray wines can be, it's a real thrill to find a good one. Many of the wines may live forever as a result of very high acidity. This 1951 undoubtedly has a long way to go, but there seems to be enough fruit. The wine has a dark color and an absolutely stupendous coconut/vanilla nose of great perfume and concentration (a welcome change from the green bean nose of many Martin Ray wines). Yes, it does have high acid, but with amazingly good flavor. Bottled in a champagne bottle, this is certainly one of California's more esoteric old wines (16).

1943 Romanee-Conti (Domaine de la Romanee-Conti). Some of the war-time, pre-phylloxera Domaine wines can be outstanding. This particular bottle, somewhat ullaged, was a tired old soldier, but still possessed style and grace. The wine had a medium brick color with a definite amber edge. The nose was vinegar-like, almost sauerkraut. Definitely past its prime, but still with good fruit, very rich and warm and gentle flavors. The wine has been better than this bottle, but any old bottle can be chancey, particularly at \$125 (15½).

1947 Grands Echezeaux (Domaine de la Romanee-Conti). The year 1947 is a highly ranked one from Burgundy. Many bottles are still fabulous today. This was the least pleasing of the three Domaine wines—in decline, but still nice. The color was dark with just a hint of amber at the edge, and the nose had a spicey-vinegar like character. The taste was very rich, but with a hint of burnt-carmel. An elegant wine, but not at its best. If at the top of its form, the wine can be outstanding. Recent asking prices have been near \$150 per bottle (15).

Good

1949 Inglenook Pinot Noir. This wine really shouldn't be expected to be great wine; it never has been. The color of the wine is quite dark, but the nose has an oxidized coffee-bean character. In the mouth it is flat and, although still fruity, is a bit dried out. In short, it's a sound old wine, but not exciting. In 1978 the wine sold for over \$40 per bottle at the Heublein auction, more a reflection of scarcity value than anything else (14).

Not Rated

1943 Wente Red Table Wine "Pinot Grape". This is the kind of thing that turns up in the corner of the cellar once in a while. No one remembers it, and no one else is likely to have it, (it was, in fact, the last bottle from an old cellar). This wine, with a hand-written label, was made for the consumption of the Wente family and was never sold commercially. The color was an unbelievable purple-black without a trace of orange, amber, or brown; but, oh my, what a foul nose—like the inside of an old mothball-filled trunk! The taste was grapey, but very stale. Interesting only because it serves as an illustration of the folly of trying to judge an old wine by its color!

Many such tastings as this are likely to be done in future years. How will the Pinot Noirs of Chalone, Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Swan, etc., hold up against their Burgundian counterparts? Only time will tell, but don't bet against the results being too dissimilar from those already experienced.



CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIRS: SELECTED WINES FROM RECENT VINTAGES

"The Ugly Duckling Transformation Begins"

In recent years much has been said about the great potential of California Pinot Noir. Unfortunately, saying and doing remain two distinctly different things. However, looking at today's escalating Burgundy prices, even those who have only remote affection for the "noble" grape can certainly hope this potential will be realized.

Pioneering efforts by such wineries as BV, Hanzell, and even Martin Ray, met many challenges and only a few successes. Yet a few of the successes were notable (particularly the great 1946 BV), and in the mid-1960's Chalone began the quest to produce great Pinot Noir. The 1969 is a very fine example. This was followed by a good 1973 and a fair 1974. Unfortunately, during the late 1960's and early 1970's BV and Hanzell did not fare as well. The 1968 vintage was probably the best for both and even these were good, rather than spectacular.

A few years ago, spurred by the explosion of interest of wine in general, and California wine in particular, a proliferation of new Pinot Noirs began to appear. Some of the increased Pinot Noir production was by large wineries who apparently felt consumer recognition of the Pinot Noir name would be enough to sell a dull, insipid wine. As more and more of this abominable product was produced, critics increasingly decried the plight of the lowly Pinot Noir. Meanwhile, a small group of dedicated, perhaps even masochistic, souls set about to prove the critics wrong.


Joseph Swan Vineyards and ZD were two of the first of this new wave of producers. Joe Swan concentrated on big, black high alcohol wine made from Sonoma grapes in extremely small quantities. The wines were unlike the conventional California Pinot Noir and received widespread acclaim. Likewise, ZD joined BV and others in making Pinot Noir from grapes grown in the Carneros District of Napa Valley. Again, the emphasis was on a big, rich style Pinot Noir made in relatively small quantities. Despite some early vinification problems, small quantities of some good wines were made, the best of which was probably the Corti Brothers single cask selection of ZD's 1974 St. Clair Vineyards Pinot Noir. Mt. Eden Vineyards also received a lot of notoriety with their Pinot Noirs, particularly the 1973 and 1974. However, the wines are hard, tannic, stemmy, and woody. The potential is there and, hopefully, better offerings will be forthcoming. Thus, a swan song was averted and the launching of Pinot Noir's ugly duckling transformation began. Although it is yet premature to declare the operation a success, many good Pinot Noirs are being produced. In fact, with all due respect to our Burgundian friends, some are scandalously good. Selected examples of each vintage from 1975 through 1977 are reviewed below.

1975

Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard

Santa Cruz Mountains

Estate Bottled *Pinot Noir* 1975 Vintage




Produced and bottled by Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard
2300 Jervier Rd., Santa Cruz, Ca. 95065—K. D. BURNAP, Proprietor

NOTE: This wine has not been filtered or fined, and will throw a considerable amount of sediment. Before serving, it must stand for several days and be carefully decanted.

Variety 100% Pinot Noir
Picking completed 10/1/75
Vineyard Rider Ridge
Must
Sugar 25-1/4° Brix
Acid 0.91 Gr./100 Ml.
pH 3.3
Wine
Residual sugar 0.1° Brix
Acid 0.69 Gr./100 Ml.
pH 3.4
Alcohol 14-1/2% by Vol.

Alcohol
14 1/2% by Vol.



The year 1975 has received acclaim for Pinot Noir principally as a result of the debut of offerings from two new wineries—Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard and Hoffman Mountain Ranch.

Outstanding

Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard. This winery premiered with a Pinot Noir ranking amongst the best California has produced. Unfortunately, few will ever taste the 1975 Pinot Noir, since under 100 cases were produced from mountain vineyards originally planted by Dr. David Bruce. Released at \$12, the wine was sold almost exclusively from the winery and was virtually sold-out before release. There were actually two lots produced, one aged in American Oak, the other in French Limousin Oak (a fact that will be up to your palate to discern since the different lots are not designated on the label). The wine aged in American Oak has a very dark color, a complex/minty nose, and possesses tremendous fruit and flavor. It is tannic, but is balanced with acid and fruit and exhibits a lengthy after taste that, amazingly, does not have the hotness that might be expected from a wine with 14½% alcohol. This lot is a really superb Pinot Noir. The lot aged in French Oak is even better. The wine has

a very dark color and an intense plum-like nose still showing the youthful aromas of the oak. In the mouth, the wine is very rich, slightly spicy, and complex with a full body and lengthy finish. Again, the finish does not have the heat you might expect with the relatively high alcohol. This wine is very much like powerful young Burgundy at this stage and seems destined to improve with five or more years bottle age. Some have suggested that it doesn't taste like California Pinot Noir. Well, perhaps; but few Burgundies taste like Burgundies either. The real, robust Burgundies that occasionally do come along deserve great praise. Likewise for this classic Pinot Noir (18½).

Very Good

Joseph Swan Vineyards. The 1975 Pinot Noir is one of the best this winery has produced. As usual, the wine is very dark, almost black, with an intense berry-like nose further enhanced by a certain amount of volatility. The flavors are rich and the structure of the wine is most impressive with considerable varietal character. A very good wine whose price is academic since what little wine was produced has long since been gobbled up by Joe's mailing list (17).

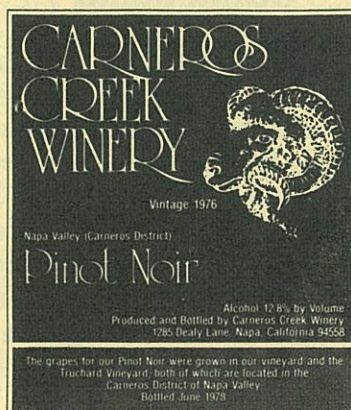
Hoffman Mountain Ranch. They have also received wide-spread acclaim for their 1975 Pinot Noir. Produced from grapes grown in their vineyards in the mountains near Paso Robles, the style is reminiscent of BV Pinot Noir made by Andre Tchelistcheff—not surprising since Andre is employed as consulting enologist. The wine has a medium dark color with a prune-like, dried fruit nose. It is the nose that brings the BV wines of Tchelistcheff immediately to mind. The taste is slightly sweet, with good fruit and balance. About 1,000 cases were produced, but even at the \$15 price, the wine is difficult to find (16).

Chalone Vineyard. The 1975 Pinot Noir is one of the winery's better efforts, surpassing both the 1973 and 1974. The color is medium red with a subdued fruity Pinot Noir nose overlaid by the oak. It's not a big wine, but displays varietal character with good fruit and flavor in a soft, delicate style. Priced at \$13.50, the wine is difficult to find (16).

Further commentary on 1975 Pinot Noirs is hardly necessary. There are a few more that are reasonably good (e.g. David Bruce made a volatile Burgundian style wine of some interest), but for the most part the wines are no longer available and this can hardly be considered a great loss.

1976

The year 1976 can be considered a very good year for Pinot Noir, particularly in the Napa Valley. Due largely to climatic conditions, there are some notable successes (Carneros Creek) and, unfortunately, some notable failures (Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard will have no 1976 Pinot Noir).



Outstanding

Carneros Creek. Made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes grown in the Carneros district of Napa Valley, this wine displays fantastic varietal character and is destined to become a classic Napa Valley Pinot Noir. The wine exhibits a beautiful dark garnet color, a very perfumed spicey/vanilla nose, good fruit with a rich, fresh prune-like quality and very good depth of flavor. It is rich and expansive on the palate and is well balanced in tannin and acid with the youthful tannin leaving a trace of bitterness in the aftertaste. This wine promises to be a real keeper and may need 10 years to reach its full potential. Only a small quantity of the wine was made, and it will be difficult to find at this date. Nonetheless, it is worth a diligent search. Pinot Noir like this doesn't come along too often, and at the \$10 release price, it is an excellent value (18).

Very Good

Villa Mt. Eden. This wine is made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes grown on the estate in the heart of the Napa Valley. How this property can produce such consistently high quality Cabernet, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir, not to mention a few other varietals, is a constant amazement. It's not unusual for a large number of varieties to be planted together in California vineyard (in fact, defying logic, it is the rule rather than the exception). However, it is unusual for so many of them to be so good so much of the time as is the case with Villa Mt. Eden—especially considering the young age of the vines. At any rate, this Pinot Noir is absolutely stunning. The beautiful dark color and complex fruity/spicey nose is followed on the palate by great texture and softness with firm acidity and tannin to give structure. The flavor is again complex with a plum-like character and a very lengthy palate impression. This wine should prove ready to drink earlier than the Carneros Creek (perhaps 5 years), and will prove a memorable experience. Produced in small quantity and priced at about \$9, it's worth seeking out (17).

Caymus. Caymus is another Napa Valley property that is producing a wide range of consistently superb wines from grapes grown on their estate, only a stone's throw from Villa Mt. Eden. The 1976 Pinot Noir is a substantial wine exhibiting a medium color, an oaky/vanilla nose, and has very good fruit and nice balance. There is perhaps a bit too much oak, but the fruit makes the wine very attractive. A good value at about \$7 (15½).

Hoffman Mountain Ranch. This family-owned winery near Paso Robles has followed the good 1975 with a 1976 that is very pleasing. The dried fruit quality of the 1975 is not present in the 1976. The 1976 also doesn't have the sweetness of the 1975. Rather it has a medium red color, a nice, clean fruity nose and exhibits good fruit and a nice oak balance. The chief attributes of the wine are the fruitiness and honest Pinot Noir flavors. It's not a big wine, but is stylistically similar to a good Volnay. The wine is not yet released, but if not too expensive is worth trying (15).

Good

Tulocay. Tulocay is one of the tiny new wineries that seem to be springing up all over California. The 1976 Pinot Noir is a successful wine, and the attempt at making a Burgundian style is very evident. Made from Pinot Noir grapes grown in the Carneros region of the Napa Valley, it is a lighter style wine with good varietal character. The color is medium red, and the fruitiness in the nose shows a significant degree of volatility. It has good fruit and exhibits a spicey, Burgundy-like flavor with a slightly sweet/sour sensation on the palate. Although less oaky, this wine is reminiscent of some of the earlier ZD Pinot Noirs. At the \$7.50 price, it is worth trying and enjoying for the honest Pinot Noir flavors (14½).

Burgess "Winery Lake Vineyards." Another wine made from Carneros grapes, this one exhibits a dried fruit nose, and good fruit flavors, but lacks style and concentration (14). It is, nonetheless, much better than the "Draper Vineyard" bottling, which suffers from an overabundance of oak (12).

ZD St. Clair Vineyards. This is another of the Carneros Pinot Noirs. It shows a dark color, a woody/raspberry-like nose, and is very full bodied with lots of fruit and oak. There is a massive amount of tannin and the wine finishes hot. The wine is really overpowering and the oak dominates. If it ever comes around, it will take many years. It may be an interesting cellar curiosity, but at about \$9.50 it's a gamble (14).

Beaulieu Vineyards. This 1976 BV Pinot Noir is again from Carneros grapes. BV was an early pioneer in making Pinot Noir from Carneros, but for many years the wines have lacked style and definition. The as yet unreleased 1976 is being touted as "the best since 1946." Given the few really outstanding BV Pinot Noirs in recent years, that may not be great praise. Stylistically, it bears no resemblance to the 1946. Nonetheless, this is clearly one of BV's best Pinot Noirs of the last two decades, exhibiting a medium color and a clean fruity nose with good flavor and style. At the auction fever prices of the 1978 Heublein auction, this wine sold for \$20 per bottle. About 1/3 of that price is more realistic (13).

Gundlach-Bundschu. This Sonoma Valley winery's 1976 Pinot Noir exhibits more fruit and varietal character than the great majority of California Pinot Noirs. A wine of good color and flavor, it shows considerable richness without off-flavors. If still available, it is a good value at \$5 (13).

Chalone Vineyard. The year 1976 will not go down as a great one for this winery located on Mount Chalone in the Gavilan Mountains, above Soledad, in Monterey County. Nonetheless, Chalone managed to make a respectable, light, early maturing Pinot Noir. The wine has a light red color (washed out due to rains), but is clean, fresh, and fruity, with a spicy Burgundian character. The body is very thin, but will be pleasant drinking for a year or so. At \$6.50 it can't be considered a bargain, but does offer a glimpse of the character of Chalone Pinot Noirs (12 1/2).

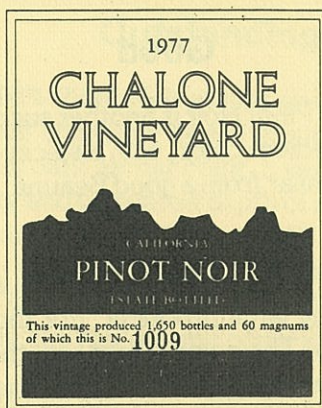
Sanford & Benedict. This wine was eagerly received by enophiles anxious to taste Pinot Noir grown in Santa Barbara county. This area is expected to be particularly suited to grape varieties that require a cool growing season like Pinot Noir. The wine shows a medium dark color, an oak/fruit nose, with good fruit and a slightly herbaceous/vegetative flavor, yet is soft and elegant. It doesn't require extensive bottle aging and should be at its best in a year or so. It's an admirable first effort, but a bit over-priced at \$7.50 (12 1/2).

Robert Mondavi Winery. At Mondavi, winemaker Zelma Long is experimenting with vinification techniques in making Pinot Noir. The 1976 is made in a light easy to drink style that many will find pleasing. It is medium in color and has a good fruity nose with just a bit of mustiness. It has good clean light flavors, but is slightly bitter in the finish. It is the type of wine best enjoyed now for its freshness, but overpriced at \$6.50 (12).

Sonoma Vineyards (Estate Bottled). Winemaker Rod Strong is also experimenting with vinifying Pinot Noir. The 1974 Estate Bottling was a very successful, lighter styled Pinot Noir that has now lost the fresh character that made it so attractive a year or so ago. The 1976 is a much more forceful wine. The color is dark, with an almost strawberry-like nose with a very concentrated, oaky flavor and lots of tannin. The wine is very raw and young, but will probably come around in the next year or so. Not yet released, it should be priced in the \$5-\$6 area (12).

1977

In 1977 there will be some stunning successes! While very few have been released yet, early tastings of several promise to make 1977 one of the best years ever for Pinot Noir in California.



Outstanding

Chalone Vineyards. Here Chalone has produced a wine that promises to be the best this property has produced, surpassing the legendary 1969. The color is very dark, and the nose shows an overpowering, room-filling, perfume of fruit, oak, and berries with floral overtones. This really has to be experienced to be believed. The taste follows through with great fruit, intensity, and complexity, and a flavor reminiscent of blackberry preserves—INCREDIBLE! The wine is balanced on the palate with good body, tannin and acid. The wine will be a keeper and should be cellared for 5-10 years—a masterpiece (18)!

Very Good

Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard. Ken Burnap might not yet be walking on water after making this marvelous wine, but he certainly has produced a worthy successor to the 1975. The 1977 shows more elegance without the sacrifice in flavor that this often implies. It has a dark color with a spicy-berry nose and great fruit overlaid with a nice balance of complexity from the French oak. A superb wine (17)!

Kenwood Vineyards. Kenwood has from time to time produced very good Pinot Noir. The 1977 Jack London Vineyard Pinot Noir is the best yet. From grapes grown on a non-irrigated hillside vineyard in Glen Ellen, the small crop of only $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ tons per acre produced a wine of great intensity. The color is dark red with a most appealing cherry-vanilla nose. The wine has very good fruit and structure with great richness and depth of flavor followed by oak complexities and tannin. It is not particularly Burgundian in style, but is very nice. The wine is expected to be released in September at \$10 per bottle (16).

Sanford & Benedict. This is not likely to be everyone's favorite style of Pinot Noir and, indeed, it is possible that the high alcohol will overpower the wine by the time it is released. However, at this very youthful stage the wine is most impressive. In Santa Barbara County the weather was hot during the growing season and the grapes were very ripe. The resultant wine has a very dark color with a pronounced black cherry nose and alcohol overtones. It is intense, rich, and high in extract—not unlike Petite Sirah, except softer, with a luscious texture and good balance. This is one to try (16).

Chaparral. Here is one of the first 1977 Pinot Noirs to be released. Produced and bottled by Chalone Vineyards from grapes grown in the Edna Valley Vineyard in San Luis Obispo, the wine is definitely in the Chalone style. The color is medium red, with a volatile, intense Burgundian/spice nose. The taste follows through with very rich fruit, nice complexity and an abundance of varietal character. The aftertaste leaves a slight sweet/sour impression and the finish is just a bit hot owing to the high alcohol (13.5%). Chaparral is a private label used by a group of California retailers. About 400 cases are available, and at \$8.50 the wine is a fair value (15).

Good

Villa Mt. Eden. Villa Mt. Eden's 1977 Pinot Noir is another success, although not as concentrated or flavorful as the 1976. It has a good medium color, with a spicy-Burgundian nose and good fruit and elegance. It is a lighter wine, not dissimilar from a good Beaune, and should be released later this year (14½).

Robert Mondavi Winery. While not in the class of the above wines, the 1977 Mondavi promises to be an admirable effort from a relatively large producer. For those who value light, elegant, early to mature wine, this will fill the bill nicely. The color is light red, the nose is very fruity, and the flavor is light with good fruit and a spicy complexity which makes the wine quite attractive (14).

Below Average

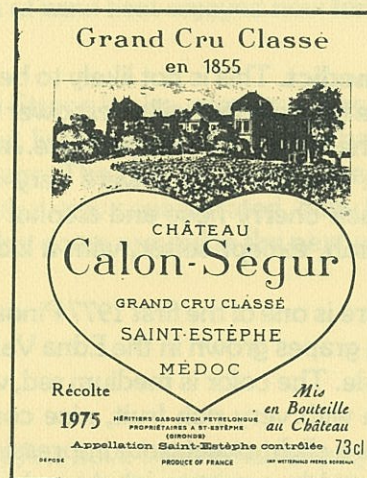
Gundlach-Bundschu. Unfortunately, the 1977 Pinot Noir bears little resemblance to the successful 1976. Yet to be released, the wine has a medium red color and a fruity, cherry-like nose. However, the taste does not follow through. It has a stemmy, bitter quality and is a bit harsh and out of balance (11).

With a very good 1978 vintage for most of California, it seems probable that several more really excellent Pinot Noirs will soon appear. One thing is certain: given the dedication, effort, and skill of an increasing number of California winemakers, tasting Pinot Noirs is likely to become an increasingly pleasurable experience. And, yes Virginia, the ugly duckling may yet become a swan.



1975 BORDEAUX

**"Rarely Does a Vintage Produce Truly Great Wines . . .
1975 Is Such a Vintage"**



The 1975 vintage for Bordeaux has arrived with the usual fanfare. Do the widely touted claims such as "vintage of the century," "the best since 1961," "as good as 1961," etc., have validity? The fact is, there are only a handful of wines that deserve such exalted praise. But, oh what wines they are! Some of the finest wines the current wine drinking generation has experienced at so early an age are from 1975. Beyond this, there are another handful of excellent wines, a great number of very good wines, and only a few mediocre wines. Overall, it is a very good vintage that should rank at least as good as 1966 and 1970, but not up to the exalted level of the superlative 1961 vintage.

Many wine drinkers fret that they did not purchase enough 1975's when prices were low. Perhaps, but the few remaining 1970's and 1966's have been, on balance, better buys over the last several months. Those who haven't purchased as many 1975's as they would like, can now selectively do so whenever favorite wines turn up at reasonable prices. While certain wines like the 1975 Petrus and 1975 Lafite have shot up to an almost unbelievable \$1,000 per case, wines such as Calon-Segur, Leoville Las Cases, and Pichon Lalande can still be found for \$200 per case or so, and Palmer and La Mission Haut Brion have recently sold in the vicinity of \$300 per case. These latter wines are the ones which should be acquired. Mouton, Latour, Haut Brion, and Cheval Blanc have also gotten very expensive, commanding prices of \$400-\$600 per case. However, excellent wines such as Trotanoy, Gruaud-Larose, Leoville Las Cases, Montrose, and Pichon Lalande sell for \$130-\$200 per case. Most other non-first growths likewise sell generally under \$200 per case, with some in the \$100-\$150 range. Carefully selected, these too can be good buys at the lower price range. Don't be fooled. Consumers make prices. If they don't buy, sooner or later the wholesalers and distributors will sell at prices designed more to move inventory than to create cocktail conversation. Most of the time there is little price differentiation between similarly classed wines, even though some are significantly better (e.g. Leoville Las Cases is a stand-out among second growths). Finally, all the 1975's have not been sold to Belgium, Switzerland, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, South Africa, or wherever. Be patient. If temporarily unavailable, most of the 1975's will again turn up. Here then is a shopping list.

Outstanding

La Mission Haut Brion. Although it is a difficult choice, this wine has to be voted THE wine of the vintage. Without question, the finest La Mission since the incredible 1947. This is no faint praise considering the outstanding success of this property in 1970, 1966, 1961, 1959, 1955, 1953, 1952, 1949, and 1948, plus notable successes in other lesser vintages. It could very well go on to rival the legendary 1929 making it one of the top three La Missions of this century! O.K. What's so great about this wine? Everything! The color is a very dark purple/black, the nose is intensely perfumed with a beautiful, rich ripe fruit smell overlayed with hints of vanilla and spice. In the mouth it is rich, complex, and round with superlative tannin/acid balance, and finishes with a lasting sweet flavor despite the tannin. A superlative wine that will not approach maturity until the turn of the century. In a word, the wine is delicious. In two words, it is absolute perfection. In three words . . . This could go on and on. Don't miss this one (19½)!!!

Palmer. Again, a superlative wine from a property consistently making superior wine. The 1975 Palmer certainly will rival the other two great Palmers of this century, 1928 and 1961. Like the other two great vintages, it is not what might be considered a typical Margaux. It is too big, too rich, and too tannic for a Margaux, but it is magnificent. The wine is very dark with a huge, intense fruity nose that is unbelievably complex with hints of toffee, chocolate, vanilla and cassis. The taste is very rich and concentrated, reminiscent of the 1961 with the very pronounced flavor of ripe plums. At this youthful stage, the wine is very tannic, but all elements of the wine are harmonious promising great elegance in the 20 or so years it will take this wine to mature (19).

Calon Segur. Calon Segur is another property that has made a 1975 to rival the best wines it has produced this century. The 1975 is on a par with the 1959 and 1953 and perhaps as good as the magnificent 1949. The wine has a dark color, an intense fruity/perfumed nose, and delicious flavor. It has the sweetness of very ripe fruit and is perfectly balanced in acid and tannin, which should bring the wine to maturity in 10-15 years, although it will undoubtedly hold for decades. Calon Segur can be one of the longest lived of all Bordeaux, and this wine is not to be missed (18½).

Lafite Rothschild. With the 1975, it is a pleasure to welcome Lafite back to its rightful position representing the quintessence of elegant claret. The 1975 has the depth of flavor and the structure that recent vintages have lacked. It is, arguably, the finest Lafite since the spectacular 1959. The wine has a medium dark color, the nose is unbelievable perfumed, like candy, and, in the mouth, it is sweet and rich with a lingering finish, great depth of flavor and perfect balance. A fantastic wine that should be at its best in 10-12 years (18½).

Latour. This is the first time in recent memory that Latour would not be the most concentrated wine of the vintage. This was true in 1971, 1970, 1966, 1964, 1962, 1961, 1959, etc. Actually, the 1975 Latour is really marvelous wine, but it in no way rivals the great classic Latours such as 1961, 1945, and 1929. Even so, it is a very fine wine with a very dark color, and a locked-up nose only hinting at cedary nuances. The wine has very good fruit and flavor and is tannic, but not impossibly so. It might be similar to the 1955 and should take about 15 years to reach maturity (18).

Leoville Las Cases. In recent vintages this Chateau has made some spectacular wine. It is consistently one of the best values on the Bordeaux market. The 1975 is on a par with the 1961, the finest post-war Leoville. The color is very dark, almost black, but the nose is still closed-in, offering only a hint of the magnificent cedary perfume that will develop with bottle age. The flavor is rich and concentrated with good tannin and acid balance and a delicious, sweet taste that lingers on and on. This may take 15 years or more to fully develop, but, oh what a wine it will be (18).

Petrus. Without question, the 1975 Petrus is great wine. The question is how great and at what cost? Petrus now commands the highest price of all Bordeaux wines. Part of this reflects quality, but a greater factor is scarcity, since Petrus will produce only a fraction of the wine of, say, Lafite in a particular year. Like the Lafite, it has ultimate snob appeal, making it THE wine for rock stars and the like. It's probably too good for them, but where Petrus is concerned lesser mortals will simply pay more or drink less. The 1975 Petrus has a dark color and the intense, opulent, Oriental spice nose that is almost unique. The flavor is rich with great depth, and the softness makes it attractive at an early age. It is a bigger wine than the 1970, although less concentrated than the 1971. Although Christian Moueix is reported to have called this the best Petrus since 1947, the 1961 and 1971 will likely prove better in the long run. Nonetheless, the 1975 is a superb wine (18).

Pichon Lalande. Pichon Lalande might be referred to as the poor man's Lafite. In recent years, the resemblance is uncanny. Reportedly, both Pichon Lalande and Lafite have new winemakers, but twins? The 1975 Pichon Lalande is particularly close to Lafite in style—dark color, perfumed fragrant nose, with a good flavor; soft and elegant, yet possessing the fruit, acid, and tannin to age for the 10 years or so it will take for the wine to reach maturity. Not quite the depth of flavor of Lafite, and perhaps just a shade less balanced, Pichon Lalande must be considered a best buy, considering the price differential—Lafite is approximately 3 times the price (18).

Very Good

Latour Haut Brion. This is the "second wine" of La Mission. In 1975, being "second" to the fabulous La Mission is deserving of high marks indeed. The color is very, very dark (almost black). The nose is intensely perfumed, not as complex as the La Mission and with a more pronounced Graves character. At this stage, the wine is very tannic and very powerful, even more so than La Mission. Underlying the massive, tannic structure, the fruit is obscured, yet the youthful flavor seems suggestive of a great future. Definitely, this is a wine to lay away for several decades. In time, the wine could be a masterpiece (17½).

Trotanoy. Trotanoy is to Petrus what Pichon Lalande is to Lafite. That is to say, it is consistently a marvelous wine of great breed. The 1975 is no exception. It has a medium dark color, a perfumed candy-like nose, with a soft, gentle, flowing style, exhibiting great fruit and a lasting finish. The 1975 is similar in style to the 1971, but much better. It lacks the concentration of the classic 1970 and should be ready relatively soon, perhaps 6-7 years (17½).

Cheval Blanc. Cheval Blanc is vintage after vintage the class of the St. Emilions. Ausone's reputed comeback still leaves something to be desired, although the 1975 is again reported to be first rate. It will have to be tasted to be believed. The 1975 Cheval Blanc, like Petrus, does not have the intensity of the 1971, and stylistically resembles the 1970 though perhaps a bit richer. It has a dark color with a good fruity nose and good fruit, flavor, and balance. A classy wine that should drink very well in about 10 years, but is not likely to be remembered as a classic Cheval, vis a vis the 1947 (17).

Gruaud-Larose. This Chateau has produced one of the finest St. Juliens in each good vintage since 1959. The 1975 is true to form and it took a superlative effort from Leoville Las Cases to surpass it. The wine has a very dark color and an intense blackcurrent nose. It is rich, fruity, well structured, and tannic. The wine is destined for long life and should peak in about 15 years (17).

Haut Brion. Alas, poor Haut Brion. The Chateau has produced a really good 1975, only to be outclassed by the upstart across the road. As a matter of fact, except for 1959, such has been the case for the past several decades; yet Haut Brion produces consistently fine wine that is less rich, less concentrated, often less balanced (tending to be too acidic in such years as 1949), and generally shorter lived than La Mission. The 1975 is true to form. The wine has a medium dark color and a very attractive fruity nose. In the mouth the earthy taste of Graves dominates the good fruit flavors. It is balanced and finishes well. A very appealing wine that should be ready relatively soon, say 8-10 years (17).

Montrose. This Chateau consistently produces one of the biggest, most concentrated, longest lived of all Medoc Wines. Undoubtedly, this 1975 will take 15-20 years to come around as well, but it does not seem as concentrated or tannic as other great Montroses, such as the 1970 or 1961. It also lacks the intensity of the latter wines, but is still relatively big for a 1975. The wine has a dark color and an intense fruity nose that is unusual for a young Montrose. It is a big, fat wine, with good fruit and flavor (17).

Mouton Rothschild. The 1975 Mouton is an enigma. The question is whether there is enough fruit to outlive the hard, severe structure of the wine. Probably yes, but the wine's progress will need to be carefully monitored over the course of the many, many years it will take for the wine to develop. The wine has a good dark color, with the nose very locked-up and exhibiting only the slightest trace of cedar. In the mouth there seems to be underlying fruit, but the wine is hard and very tannic. At the Chateau this is felt to be a classic Mouton of great proportion. For the moment, they are perhaps the only ones in a position to really know; and realizing how superlative old Moutons can be, let's hope they're right (16½).

Ducru-Beaucaillou. Ducru is another property making consistently excellent wines. The 1975 is very good indeed. The color is dark and the nose is lovely, deep and perfumed. The structure of the wine is impressive, very full, yet with good acid and tannin and the promise of great elegance. The wine should mature in about 10 years (16).

Duhart-Milon Rothschild. This property, under the same ownership and guidance as Lafite, has been improving in recent vintages. The 1975 is the best yet. A marvelous wine with a medium dark color, a huge, scented candy-like nose with just a hint of cedar and good fruit and flavor—Lafite-like (15½).

Baron Pichon Longueville. The 1975 Baron is true to form, being much bigger and far more backward than neighboring Pichon Lalande. Yet for a Baron Pichon, it's not impossibly tannic, just very locked-up. With a dark color, a subdued nose, and good fruit, it seems that the underlying cedary complexity is there waiting to unfold with 12-15 years bottle age. Patience is required, but Baron Pichon should turn out just fine and outlive the exquisite Pichon Lalande (15).

Beychevelle. The fourth-growth Beychevelle usually ranks right up there with neighboring second growth St. Juliens—a fact reflected in the price. The 1966 and 1961 are classics. The 1975 Beychevelle is good wine, but, on a relative basis, perhaps not as good as might have been expected. It has a medium dark color, with a perfumed vanilla nose. The taste is very fruity with just a hint of herbaceousness, and the wine is quite tannic. Perhaps a few more years bottle age will render the wine more attractive, but given the success of Leoville Las Cases, Gruaud-Larose, and Ducru, one could easily forgo 1975 Beychevelle (15).

Cantemerle. Cantemerle is one of the more difficult classified growths to come across. It is very popular in Europe and, reportedly, is a favorite wine of Baron Philippe de Rothschild, the owner of Mouton. The wine is usually a lighter style, but can be very long-lived—the 1929, although dried out a bit, is fabulous. The 1975 will require 10-15 years before it reaches maturity. It has a medium dark color, a pleasant fruity nose, and good fruit and an engaging flavor. At this point it's quite acidic, but this should be resolved over time (15).

Latour-Pomerol. The 1975 Latour-Pomerol lacks the concentration of the fantastic 1970 which is one of the top two or three Pomerols of a great vintage. It has a medium garnet color, an intense fruity nose, and plum-like flavors, without great intensity. It is velvety and nicely balanced. The wine is easy to drink and doesn't require prolonged aging, although it undoubtedly will keep for an extended period (15).

Le Gay. Few Pomerols are underpriced these days, but this is one of the better values. Under the direction of Christian Moueix of Petrus and Trochanoy fame, Le Gay has been producing very good wine recently. Like most Pomerols, the 1975 is not as good as the 1970, lacking the concentration and depth of flavor. Yet it is very appealing, with a medium dark color and a perfumed candy-like nose. The flavor is good with medium body, good fruit, and nice balance. This should mature early, say 5-6 years (15).

Good

Clerc Milon. Purchased by Baron Philippe de Rothschild in 1970, this fifth growth vineyard adjoins Lafite and Mouton. The 1975 is a substantial wine with a dark color, a deep, rich flavor and lots of tannin. The nose is just a bit musty, still this should prove to be a good bottle (14½).

Gloria. One cannot help but like "good old Gloria." For year after year this Bourgeois Growth makes wine on a quality level with many classified growths. The 1975 has a dark color, a nice perfumed nose, and is rich with good flavor—not particularly distinctive, but a good wine (14½).

La Tour du Pin Figeac. Surprise! Here's a Grand Cru St. Emilion (isn't everything in St. Emilion a Grand Cru?) that has some style and breed. It has a dark color, a beautiful perfumed nose, good fruit and flavor and substantial tannin for aging. This wine should be at its best in 6-7 years and has been attractively priced at \$5-6 per bottle (14½).

Leoville Poyferre. Post World War II wines from this Chateau have been generally disappointing. In the context of the greatness of Leoville Las Cases, this statement can again be made in 1975. Nevertheless, 1975 Leoville Poyferre is a dark, substantial wine that is flawed by a hint of sulphur. The wine is fat and is vaguely reminiscent of California Cabernet with a very fruity/oaky nose (14½).

Mouton-Baronne Philippe. This Chateau, owned by Baron Philippe de Rothschild, was recently renamed from Baron-Philippe to honor the Baron's late wife. The 1975 is not as big a wine as its fifth growth brother, Clerc-Milon, but is perhaps better balanced. The wine has a medium color, a nice fruity nose, and has good flavor, tannin and acid. This will make a good bottle in 8-10 years (14½).

Nenin. One of the better known Pomerols, Nenin seldom makes fabulous wine. The 1975 is quite good with a dark color, beautiful cedar nose, and good fruit. It is a hard wine that is locked-up, exhibiting a flat, tannic quality that should be resolved with time (14½).

Cos d' Estournel. This well known second growth St. Estephe makes consistently good, sound wines. Without the particular style of Calon Segur and lacking the power of Montrose, in recent vintages Cos d' Estournel sometimes comes up short as compared to its peers. So it is in 1975. The wine has a dark color, a deep fruity nose that promises more than the wine delivers. In the mouth it is flavorful with good tannin and acid, but lacks distinction, being hard and a bit flat. Even so in 10-15 years this will be a good bottle (14).

Leoville Barton. This is the lightest of the three Leovilles. It is not disagreeable; there just isn't much to it. A medium red color and fruity nose is followed by a pleasant fruity one-dimensional flavor. This is another easy to drink, early maturing wine (14).

Lynch Bages. Lynch Bages is another Chateau that produces outstanding wines year after year. The 1970 is fabulous—one of the very best wines of the vintage. Likewise the 1961, 1959, 1955, and 1953 are magnificent. The 1975, unfortunately, isn't in this league. The wine has a medium color, a nice fruity nose, and good flavor, but it's one-dimensional and undistinguished (14).

Malescot-Saint-Exupery. Malescot is usually a substantial, firm wine. It is amongst the longest lived of all Margaux wines. The 1975 seems a bit more feminine than some recent vintages. It has a medium color, a nice, deep fruity nose, and is soft and round with good flavor and balance. It should make pleasant drinking in 8-10 years (14).

Talbot. Talbot generally is a very reliable wine, yet seldom really exciting. The 1975 is outdistanced by several other St. Juliens, yet it undoubtedly will turn out very well. The wine has a medium dark color and a fruity nose. It has good fruit and flavor, but is hard and lacks the style and definition that are so often present in great St. Juliens (14).

Cantenac-Brown. In recent vintages this third growth Margaux has produced sound wine. The 1975 has a medium color and a fruity nose. It is light in body with adequate flavor, but a bit dry and tannic and lacking in fruit. It should be ready in 8-9 years (13).

La Lagune. When La Lagune makes a wine of concentration, it can be superb. The 1961 is such a wine. The 1975 lacks this richness. It has a medium dark color, an unusual spice-like nose, with a fruity flavor backed by some tannin. It should develop in 6-7 years (13).

Pape-Clement. The 1975 Pape-Clement is a curious wine. Usually an elegant flavorful wine, this wine has an unusual musty nose. The flavor is unmistakably Graves, but the taste leaves a soft impression on the palate, followed by lots of tannin. It will require quite a bit of aging, but isn't likely to develop as well as might be expected of such a highly-ranked property (12).

Below Average

Brane Cantenac. It's hard to understand what's happening with this second growth Margaux, but both the 1970 and 1975 display the same curious weedy nose, and a vegetative flavor. It is almost as if the wine were made with Monterey County Cabernet Sauvignon! The 1975 has a medium dark color and a good fruit and richness, but is otherwise spoiled by the unusual nose and flavor (10).

Lafluer. Again this property seems to be making very curious wine. The 1970 is hard, unbalanced, and alcoholic. The 1975 is similar. A very dark wine, it is full bodied and tannic but has an unusual stemmy taste. Some bottles have also shown a definite oxidized quality as well. Only those who favor power above all else could love this wine (10).

Drinking the 1975's will indeed be a pleasure for many, many years. The reputation of the vintage will be carried by those properties that made wine to rival the greats of the century. La Mission, Palmer, Calon-Segur, and Lafite promise to be such wines. Close behind, Latour, Leoville Las Cases, Petrus, and Pichon-Lalande are also wines of great distinction. As association with 1947 immediately comes to mind where Cheval Blanc, Petrus, La Mission, and Mouton made classic wines, while most others never approached these exalted levels. Whatever the final judgment on the vintage, rarely does a vintage produce truly great wines. Let it be said that the 1975 is such a vintage.



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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. Rankings are usually made only after several tastings of any particular wine. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are the approximate California suggested retail prices.

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