



# THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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## One Winedrinker's Opinion

### **"French Wines Are Probably About as Good as They're Going to Get . . ."**

After several centuries of production the above statement should come as no revelation. Compare the upstart California wines—we have commented on the explosion of Cabernet Sauvignon plantings that occurred from 1968-1974. The same is true of other varieties as well. Only a very small number of great California wines were made in the 1930-1960 period. Why? Well, one reason is there was very little wine being produced. Compared with today, it was a veritable drop in the barrel.

Ah, but today we are awash in California wines—some excellent Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon; also, late harvest Riesling, a Pinot Noir or two, and a few other less noble varieties.

No wonder now and again an obscure California wine "wins" a tasting. While the wines are certainly good, often the tasting omits many of the best French wines. For consistency California wines are hard to beat. Comparing like vintages often is meaningless. Then there is the matter of the tasting. Wine tastings aren't infallible and often they are conducted without benefit of appropriate food. After all, wine was meant to be consumed with food and the matching of food and wine is the ultimate test.

No matter. Despite how tastings are conducted, California wines will on occasion "win" against French wines. Does this mean they are better? Of course not. They are different. They may



always be different, but one thing is for certain—they will get better! To suggest that California wines are at a peak is sheer nonsense. Many wines are being made from young vines. Many areas have been planted with the wrong grape varieties and promising areas such as San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Monterey have virtually no history. The Santa Cruz Mountains offer outstanding promise as do certain areas of Sonoma and Mendocino. Even in Napa, with a long standing history and virtually all available land planted, it is possible that the best Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard may be currently planted in French Columbard or some other lesser grape variety. Vineyard management—knowing where to plant, how to care for the vines to produce maximum quality as opposed to maximum quantity, and knowing when to pick—is an area for improvement. Then there is the matter of winemaking technology. Winemakers are still experimenting. This will probably go on for decades. There is the matter of barrel fermentation, malo-lactic fermentation, the use of sulphur, improvements in crushing, and

general winemaking techniques. We could go on and on.

Certainly, California wines may never surpass a great Domaine Romanee-Conti Montrachet, a fabulous La Tache, a great Lafite, Latour, or Mouton. To us French wines are the pinnacle of great wines. They have no equals. Can future vintages surpass a great 1929 Latour, a stupendous 1949 La Tache, a superlative 1968 Domaine Romanee-Conti Montrachet? Probably not. These wines are near perfection. Whether or not California can achieve such heights is questionable. However, California wines have a lot further to go. So to the "authority" who suggests that California wines are at their peak, we suggest the contrary. French wines are probably about as good as they're going to get; which, by the way, is the best in the world. Come to think of it, for the front runner to even acknowledge the competition is an achievement!

John Tilson  
Editor



## THE BORDEAUX VINTAGES OF 1928 AND 1929

**“... Do not be deluded into believing that simply because you are paying a lot of money for a bottle from one of the “vintages of the century,” you will be getting wonderful wine.”**

*For the wines of Bordeaux, 1928 and 1929 have long been considered the most recent of the “pairs” of back to back great vintages; prior ones being 1847-1848, 1864-1865, 1869-1870, 1874-1875, and 1899-1900.*

*The majority of the Chateaux made very fine wines in both years—though strikingly dissimilar in character. The 1928's are generally hard, tannic, and very long lived. The 1929's were drinking deliciously when young, but, with a very few notable exceptions, have now been in decline for some time.*

*In examining the current status of these vintages*

*at 50+ years of age, from a consumer's point of view, it is most important to keep in mind two vital considerations:*

*1) As with all old wines, bottles from these vintages are subject to extreme variation from bottle to bottle. Although the obvious major factor in this regard is the conditions under which a given bottle has been kept during its long slumber, it is not unusual to even find marked variations between bottles of this age which have been kept together in the same case since “birth”. It is therefore most important to avoid falling into the trap of concluding that a particular wine has certain unfavorable characteristics, based on a sampling of only one, or even two bottles, especially if they are from the same “source”.*

*The difficulty in scoring wines is never more perplexing than in dealing with these old bottles. With respect to the evaluation of wines from the 1928 and 1929 vintages, only bottles without obvious defects (poor cork, ullage, questionable history, etc.) were evaluated. Most of the wines*



were tasted on numerous occasions, often with widely differing results; such is the nature of old bottles. To average the scores doesn't seem to make any sense. Hence, the scores given are based on the **best standard sized bottle** on the theory that this best represents the potential quality of the wine. In some instances (1928 and 1929 Latour) there seems to be only minor variances. In other instances (1929 Mouton) a really outstanding bottle seems to be a great rarity. Based on the cumulative tasting of literally hundreds of 1928's and 1929's in the last year or two, this ranking is our best effort at evaluating wines from these vintages. Surely, better bottles of some of these wines do exist. No doubt these have been cared for under ideal conditions (a factor difficult to judge from the appearance of the bottle). Those who own or have consumed better bottles are indeed fortunate.

2) The current cost of acquiring a bottle of 1928 of 1929 Bordeaux of one of the better Chateaux is anywhere from \$100-\$300 or more. To pay such a substantial sum for wine which can often prove disappointing is not a pleasant experience. Unfortunately, as will be discussed more fully below, this occurs too often today with 1928's, and especially 1929's. If you are willing to gamble and take a chance, fine; but do not be deluded into believing that simply because you are paying a lot of money for a bottle from one of the "vintages of the century," you will be getting wonderful wine. This is too often not the case.

## 1928 BORDEAUX

### Outstanding



**Palmer.** This, along with 1961 and 1975, is considered to be one of the classic Palmer vintages of all time. The color is dark and the wine is intensely perfumed with rich, deep flavors. Unfortunately, many bottles are starting to turn and show a hint of sourness. Many tastings of the wine have indicated about a 1 in 3 chance of getting a really outstanding bottle. When it is truly right, the wine is a marvel, combining the opulent lushness of Palmer with the firm backbone of the 1928 vintage (19).

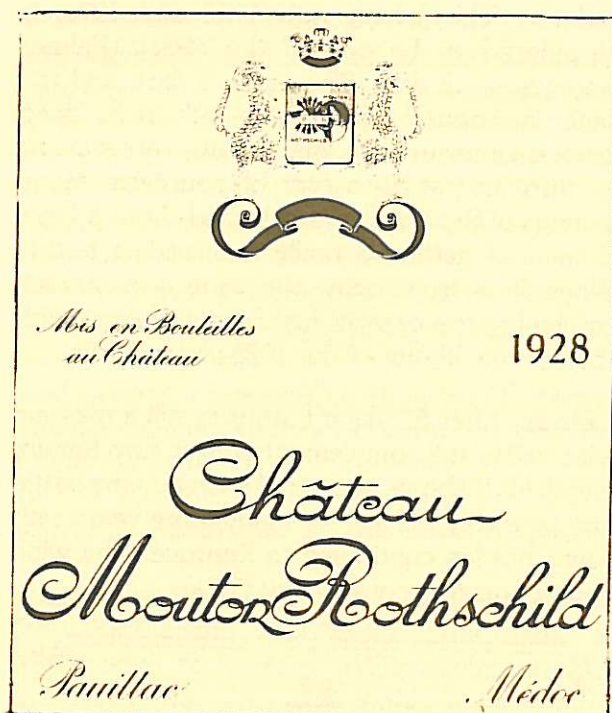
**Latour.** After 52 years Latour is still a massive wine with a full complement of fruit, firm tannin, and acid. It shows no sign of giving up the battle and probably will last for many more years with some bottles continuing to improve. The wine shows amazing consistency (18½).



**Leoville Las Cases.** When this wine is right, it can be magnificent. It is a powerful wine with lots of fruit and an intense cedary quality. No really bad bottles have been experienced, but the wine can be variable (18½).

**Mouton-Rothschild.** Not a huge wine such as Latour, Mouton is lovely, elegant, and rich. A cedary quality and a lingering palate impression make this a classic. The wine can be variable, but always seems to offer a memorable tasting experience. Seemingly no room for improvement, but the lasting power of the wine may be surprising (18).





### Very Good

**Calon Segur.** It is entirely possible that some bottles of Calon-Segur need much more time to develop. The wine is dark and rich, but shows the hard tannin so characteristic of the vintage. There seems to be plenty of fruit, so patience may yet be rewarded (17½).

**Cos D'Estournel.** This St. Estephe is holding firm; and although just a bit dry, shows good fruit, a nice balance, and good, complex flavors (17).

**Pichon Lalande.** This Pauillac is light, but still shows good fruit and flavor and an elegance not often experienced in 1928's (17).

**Gruaud-Larose-Faure.** Combined in 1934 with Gruaud-Larose-Sarget to form Gruaud-Larose, this wine is firm with a complex, fruity taste, but is just a bit dry and shows considerable tannin (16). A tasting of a single bottle of Gruaud-Larose-Sarget proved unrewarding as the wine was decidedly over-the-hill.

**Margaux.** This was a successful vintage for Chateau Margaux. The wine is firm, well balanced, and has retained more fruit than many wines of the vintage (16).

**Montrose.** This wine is just what one might expect. It has the big, licorice quality of the Chateau, along with the dry undertones and firm

structure of the vintage (16).

**Brane-Cantenac.** This wine is still vigorous with good fruit and flavor, but is a bit dried out (15).

**Desmirail.** Not an intense wine, Desmirail has a good, firm structure and good fruit (15).

**Lascombes.** Although rather brown, Lascombes has a beautiful, perfumed nose and still some fruit in front of a rather dry finish (15).

### Good

**La Mission Haut Brion.** This is not one of the better vintages for one of Bordeaux's most consistently successful wines. The wine suffers from a definite lack of fruit, and seems rather dried out (14).

**Petrus.** The wine is sound, but lacks the fruit and complexity usually associated with this Chateau (14).

**Pontet-Canet.** Although just a bit sour in the finish, this sturdy Pauillac has a dark color, a fruity/cedary nose and good fruit (14).

The following wines have been tasted on one or more occasions, but were tired and past their prime. Some have been better than others, but really good bottles would seem to be a chancy bet. (Lafite and Haut Brion, in particular were reportedly pasteurized and are devoid of interest): **Cantemerle, Domaine de Chevalier, Ducru-Beaucaillou, Haut Brion, Lafite Rothschild.**

*The 1928's have tremendous tannin, which should make them live for a very long time. In fact, some have only recently smoothed out enough to be pleasantly drinkable. The problem with them is that in many cases the wines have lost much of their fruit, making them overly dry, austere, and lacking in charm. When one comes across a '28 which has retained ample fruit, it can be one of the finest Bordeaux you will ever drink. Certain bottles of Palmer, Leoville Las Cases, Latour, and Mouton-Rothschild have reached or approached such heights. Other bottles of some of the same wines have not.*

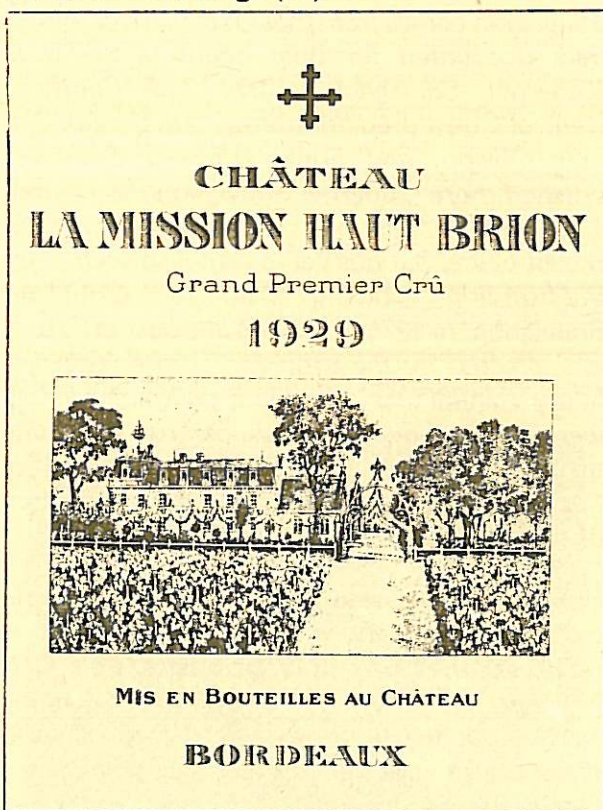


## 1929 BORDEAUX

### Outstanding

**Latour.** This wine is an experience, a revelation, a triumph! Like the 1928, it is amazingly consistent. The color is very dark and the nose has an unbelievable perfume with a chocolate-like nuance. The wine is richer, fuller, sweeter, and more rounded than the superb 1928. Showing the cedar-like component of great Pauillac, it may well be the best Bordeaux of the century. If you are willing to spend an enormous amount of money in hopes of experiencing a truly great bottle, 1929 Latour is the wine (20).

**La Mission Haut Brion.** This wine has been variable, but a good percentage are likely to be outstanding. It is a blockbuster of a wine with masses of fruit, great flavor, and an incredible round sweetness so characteristic of the best wines of the vintage (19).



**Calon-Segur.** This wine can be really magnificent, showing complexity with great fruit, and length of the palate. The wine is sweet, round, and delicious (18½).

**Mouton-Rothschild.** One of the great successes of the vintage, the wine seems to have been in decline for some time and it is rare to

come across an outstanding bottle today. However, when it's right the wine shows a characteristic cedary quality and a warm richness with a lasting palate impression (18).

### Very Good

**La Gaffeliere-Naudes.** An opulent wine with a vanilla/coconut nose underlying a perfumed plum-like fruit, this wine is soft, elegant, rich, and very fruity with no sign of fatigue (17½).

**Cheval Blanc.** This wine might be taken for a light Burgundy (not unlike 1961 La Lagune). It has a medium color and a spicy/fruity nose with sweet, light, elegant flavors (17).

**Leoville-Poyferre.** With an intriguing cedary, coffee bean nose, this wine is complex and rounded with the characteristic sweetness of so many 1929's (17).

**Petrus.** Although the nose is a bit volatile, the wine is attractive, with good fruit, a warm rich quality showing a tinge of cedar, and a lovely, sweet finish (17).

**Pichon Lalande.** With a medium color, this wine shows a complex spearmint/clove-like nose and a light, but elegantly wrought structure with good flavors (16½).

**Lafite-Rothschild.** While not the greatest Lafite of all time, the 1929 can be quite good, showing cedary, complex flavors in an elegant style. Some bottles are tart and lack charm (16½).

**Rausan-Segla.** It may be that better bottles can be found, but the wine seems to suffer from a bit of sharpness. Otherwise, it shows a beautiful, fruity/tea-like nose and cedary flavors (16).

**Cantemerle.** Though variable, the wine at its best is rather light but well balanced and flavorful (15).

**Montrose.** At one time this wine was better with the charm of the vintage cutting the usual Montrose severity. It now appears to be losing interest (15).



## Good

**Ducru-Beaucaillou.** This wine is definitely tiring, but still retains good fruit and flavors (14).

**Haut Brion.** Like so many older Haut Brions, this wine is tart and acidic. The color is very dark and the nose has a complex, earthy/coffee bean quality. Otherwise, it lacks the distinction of the better first growths (14).

**Du Terte.** This rather obscure fifth growth from the commune of Arsac-Margaux was formerly named Le Tertre. The wine is past its prime, but still has a fruity/spicy nose and dry, rather sour flavors (13).

**Pontet-Canet.** One of the real successes of the vintage, it is now difficult to find outstanding bottles. The wine tends to be oxidized, dried out, and/or sour (12). Recently tasted from

Jeroboam, the wine was dark, rich, opulent, and showing the great lusciousness of the vintage. Wine such as this would easily be ranked outstanding.

*The 1929's, when they were in their prime, are considered by many experts to be the finest Bordeaux of the century. The vast majority of them are now perhaps twenty years past their peak, displaying varying degrees of fatigue, but also often possessing glimpses of the great charm which made the wines so special. This elegy to the 1929 vintage certainly does not apply to Latour, which still gives no evidence of slipping from its position as probably the greatest Bordeaux of the century. Well cellared bottles of La Mission Haut Brion, Calon Segur, and perhaps a few others can also still be magnificent.*

## 1976 CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON

**"... Many of the best wines are years away from offering more than a glimpse of their potential."**

*The 1976 vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon may be generally characterized as the first of the drought years. State-wide Cabernet Sauvignon production declined from 39,000 tons to 34,000 tons. The decline in production is amazing since the planting boom of 1968-1974 resulted in bearing acreage increasing a phenomenal 60% to over 20,000 acres vs. under 13,000 acres in 1975. Total acreage planted remained virtually unchanged at just over 26,700 acres.*

*However, reflecting the diverse climatic conditions of the state; not every area was affected by the drought. Mendocino and Lake Counties had adequate water and a good quality, normal size crop. The drought was most severe in Napa and Sonoma Counties. Precipitation in Napa was the lightest on record. Fruit set was generally poor with small berry size. Sonoma, likewise, suffered from the drought with rainfall less than 25% of normal in many areas. However, the drought was punctuated by September rain which resulted in some bunch rot and delayed sugar development. While the great majority of premium Cabernet*

*Sauvignon comes from these Northern counties, they accounted for only about 1/2 the total Cabernet Sauvignon crush. The Southern Central Coast area (Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties) crushed more Cabernet Sauvignon than Napa. The Central Coast has been heavily planted in recent years, but has yet to establish itself as an outstanding growing area for Cabernet Sauvignon. In 1976, the Central Coast area was not affected by the drought. To the contrary, heavy rainfall was a problem and major losses were incurred due to mildew and rot. Reflecting the poor growing conditions, approximately 1/3 of the total crush was purchased under minimum price agreement term contracts.*


*Below is an assessment of 1976 California Cabernet Sauvignons. However, unlike the reviews of the 1974 and 1975 vintages (Volume 1, Number 5 and Volume 1, Number 6), many 1976's have yet to be released. When released these wines will be reviewed as part of our regular coverage of California Cabernet Sauvignon.*

## Very Good

**Ridge "Monte Bello."** This wine will rank amongst the top Cabernets produced by Ridge. The young vines were picked at maturity and the old vines were late-picked to produce this nicely




balanced wine. Possessing a dark color, and a lovely perfumed fruity/sandalwood nose, the wine has nice fruit, medium body, and acid and tannin to lose. Already showing some complexity, the wine, nonetheless, requires at least 3-4 more years to develop. Just under 1,700 cases were produced and the wine is in good supply at the winery and available in limited quantities at selected retail shops (17). \$20

 <small>76 Cabernet Sauvignon, Monte Bello, bottled Sept 78 In this excellent vintage, the young Cabernet vines on the Ridge were picked just at maturity, while the old vines were late picked. The varietal fruit of the former complemented the additional intensity of the latter to produce this full, rich wine. Although it should begin to soften enough to enjoy sooner, the 76 vintage will continue to develop if laid down for five to ten years. PD (8/78)</small>	<b>RIDGE 1976</b> <b>CALIFORNIA</b> <b>CABERNET</b> <b>SAUVIGNON</b> <b>MONTE BELLO</b>
	<small>ESTATE GROWN, 100% CABERNET SAUVIGNON SANTA CRUZ MTS ALCOHOL 12.7% BY VOLUME PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS 17100 MONTE BELLO RD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA</small>

RIDGE wine is made with an emphasis on quality and naturalness that is rarely attempted. Our grapes are grown in select vineyards (usually identified on the label), where they are left to ripen to peak maturity, often at some loss of quantity. We let the wine settle and age in small barrels, with only rare cellar treatment other than racking. Varieties are not blended unless so indicated on the label. Near Black Mountain on Monte Bello Ridge, our main vineyard is 10 miles south of Palo Alto, 15 miles inland from the ocean, and over 2000 feet in elevation. For requesting information on ordering wines or visiting the winery for tasting, please send us a note or call (408) 667-3231. DRB (1987)

### Carneros Creek Winery "Napa Valley."

Some 1,400 cases of this wine were produced from 100% Cabernet Sauvignon grown at the Oakville and Niebaum/Coppola Vineyards. It has a dark color and a big, intensely perfumed nose showing currants and spice. With big fruit and lots of flavor, the wine is a real mouthful. There is lots of tannin and a trace of youthful bitterness, but seemingly enough fruit to carry the wine for the 5-10 years it will need to develop. This one could prove to be extraordinary (16½). \$8.50



**CARNEROS CREEK WINERY**

Vintage 1976


Napa Valley

**Cabernet Sauvignon**

Alcohol 12.6% by Volume  
Produced and Bottled by Carneros Creek Winery  
1285 Dealy Lane, Napa, California 94558

The grapes for this wine were grown in old, non-irrigated vineyards in the Napa Valley. It is a deep red wine with tremendous depth and roundness.

**Felton-Empire "Beauregard-Hallcrest Vineyards."** This Cabernet from the Santa Cruz Mountains was produced in a minute quantity—only 22 cases. However, to paraphrase an old cliché "the best wines often come in small quantities" and this is no exception. The wine has a very dark color and a complex, jam-like/spicy/vanilla nose with good body and rich flavors. Already luscious, the wine, nonetheless, has acid and tannin to lose and should exhibit even more charm with 2-3 more years bottle age (16½). \$12

	<b>FELTON-EMPIRE</b> SANTA CRUZ <b>CABERNET SAUVIGNON</b> 1976 Beauregard-Hallcrest Vineyards <small>Produced and bottled by Felton-Empire Vineyards Felton, California Alcohol 13% by volume</small>	<small>This wine is 100% Cabernet from Santa Cruz County. It is 80 per cent from the first cabernet grapes harvested at the Beauregard Ranch and 20 per cent from the Hallcrest Vineyard. This wine promises to be very good and shows off the first Cabernet from Beauregard Ranch as a big wine that may be laid down for at least some 6-8 years before drinking.</small>
	<small>Visits to the winery are on Thursday and Sunday by appointment Telephone 408-335-3939</small>	

**Mount Eden Vineyards.** This estate bottled Cabernet from the Santa Cruz Mountains is a wine of gigantic proportions—dark, rich, and concentrated, but yet not excessively tannic. Make no mistake, the wine will require at least 5-10 years bottle age to develop, yet the resultant wine should be harmonious in a big style. Only 175 cases were produced and the stiff \$30 price tag is as much a reflection of quantity as quality (16½).

*Mount Eden Vineyards*

*Made entirely from berries of a selected, authentic clone of the grape variety named, this wine is grown, fermented and bottled 2000 feet above the floor of the Santa Clara Valley, on a peak of the Chaîne d'Cr. at Saratoga, California*

**CABERNET SAUVIGNON**  
**1976**  
 ESTATE BOTTLED

Produced and bottled by Mount Eden Vineyards  
Alcohol 13.9% by volume Saratoga, California



**Caymus Vineyards.** Year after year Caymus produces one of the finest Cabernets of the vintage from estate grown Napa Valley grapes. The 1976 shows the classic characteristics of the drought year wines—dark color, fruity nose, and rich, concentrated fruity/briary flavors backed by substantial tannin. The wine will need 7-10 years bottle age. Time will tell if the fruit will outlive the tannin; if so, this will be a real treat. Some 1,600 cases were produced and the wine was released in July, 1979, at \$10 per bottle. There is still a limited supply available for sale at the winery at \$15 per bottle (16).

**Diamond Creek Vineyards "Gravelly Meadow."** The drought year again produced a tiny crop on the Gravelly Meadow Vineyard with only 122 cases of wine produced. As usual, it is one of the best of the vintage with a dark color, a fruity/spicy/berry nose backed by a firm structure, good fruit, ample tannin and a nice finish. A keeper, this wine will require many years to develop and soften. The wine was originally priced at \$9 per bottle when released in September, 1978, and now is nearly impossible to find (16).

**Heitz Cellar "Fay Vineyard."** The drought resulted in only just over 1,000 cases of this wine being produced. The price is likewise significantly higher at a just released \$20 per bottle tariff. The wine is also better than the 1975 with a dark color, and a fruity/earthy/minty nose (Minty nose? Did some Martha's Vineyard get mixed in?). The flavors have a prune quality and the structure is balanced with firm acid. The wine requires 3-6 years bottle age to develop (16).

**Ritchie Creek Vineyard.** This estate bottled Napa Valley Cabernet shows the characteristics of the vintage and the vineyard. It is powerful juice with a very dark color and a perfumed, plum/spice/cedar nose. Very rich, heavy, concentrated, thick, and tannic, this wine needs at least 10 years bottle age. Lacking the alcoholic, late-picked quality of many monster Cabernets, this one could make it. With only some 200 cases produced the wine has virtually disappeared (16). \$10

**Rutherford Hill Winery.** O.K. For those of you tiring of reading about the small production wines of the vintage, here's one that's in good supply. With 5,400 cases produced there is still some 3,200 cases available at the winery.

Produced from 3 different Napa Valley Vineyards, the wine was blended with 20% Merlot. It has a dark color, a complex nose—spices, oak, licorice, cherries, something for everybody—and loads of fruit. A substantial wine with lots of body and good balance, it should improve for quite a number of years, but is youthfully attractive for the complex fruit. Without question, the best Cabernet yet from Rutherford Hill Winery and a good buy at \$9 (16).

**Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.** The wines from this Napa Valley producer consistently show a high standard of quality. The 1976 has a dark color, and a rich, ripe fruity nose with ripe, chocolate tinged flavors. A substantial wine, yet there is a tannic bitterness that will require 3-5 years bottle age to soften (16). \$10

**Villa Mt. Eden.** This estate bottled Cabernet is another success for this fine Napa Valley producer. It has a dark color and a spicy/fruity/oaky nose with lots of fruit and rich, deep flavors. A substantial wine with lots of tannin, another 4-6 years are needed for development. Some 850 cases were produced (16). \$9.50

**Burgess Cellars "Regular."** While not as big as the "Vintage Selection," this Cabernet is still a substantial wine. Just under 2,500 cases were produced from grapes grown on the Napa Valley floor. The wine is blended with 14% Merlot. A dark color and lots of fruit, backed by an ample dose of tannin, are promising for development over the next 3-5 years (15). \$8.75

**Burgess Cellars "Vintage Selection."** The Vintage Selection Burgess Cabernets are produced from Napa Valley Mountain grapes. The wine shows the characteristic intensity with a dark color, an alcoholic, blackberry/oaky nose, and concentrated ripe, prune flavors with substantial tannin. This wine may never be elegant, but it is very flavorful and should develop for many years. Just under 2,200 cases were produced (15). \$12

**Chappellet Winery.** This Napa Valley Cabernet was produced from grapes grown in the winery's mountain vineyards and blended with 15% Merlot. Characteristically Chappellet in style, the wine has a dark color, fruity nose, and big, rich, round fruity flavors backed by a tannic finish. The wine should develop for at least 4-6 years. Some 4,500 cases were produced and the



wine is still available from the winery at \$12 per bottle (15).

**Chateau St. Jean "Laurel Glen."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color, and a fruity/spicy nose. The wine has good body and fruity, attractive straightforward flavors with tannin and acid for several more years development (15). \$9

**Felton-Empire "Hallcrest."** In addition to the tiny amount of Beauregard-Hallcrest, 1976 produced the first Cabernet in a dozen years from the old Hallcrest Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains—but only 145 cases. The wine has a dark color, and a straightforward berry-like nose with simple, fruity, straightforward flavors in an elegant, soft, supple style. Seemingly not a keeper the wine is lovely to drink now (15). \$12

**Freemark Abbey Winery "Bosche."** Unlike some of the lighter Bosche Vineyard wines of recent vintages this is a rich, substantial wine. The color is dark and the nose is port-like with fruity/cedary/chocolate nuances. It is round and fruity and pleasant to drink for its youthful charm, although it should improve for a few years. Some 3,100 cases were produced. The wine is blended with 13% Merlot (15). \$12

**Jordan Winery.** This new, showplace Sonoma winery has received a veritable flood of publicity. Some 35,000 cases of this first vintage were produced with 65% of the grapes purchased from other Sonoma vineyards. The wine was blended with 8% Merlot. It has a medium dark color, a fruity nose, good fruit, and nice flavors. It is medium-bodied, supple, and soft. It is best consumed now and for the next few years. Contrary to some of the media hype, this wine lacks the depth and structure for prolonged aging. Already some bottles show amber/brown tones, and flat uninteresting flavors. Don't wait too long. Drink the wine for the lovely, youthful wine that it is and forget the nonsense about this wine "winning" a tasting against 1976 first growth Bordeaux (15). \$12

**Lefcourt Cellars.** Although few California Cabernets bear a resemblance to their French brethren, this one somehow recalls a slight similarity to a pleasant, fruity St. Emilion. It has a dark color, a fruity/cassis nose, and clean, fresh, fruity flavors. Not dissimilar from the Jordan Cabernet at less money (15). \$7.50

**Robert Mondavi Winery.** This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color, and a subdued fruity/oaky nose. Possessing good fruit and flavor, the wine has a bit of tannin to lose and should be a lovely wine in 1-2 years. It was blended with 7% Cabernet Franc and 5% Merlot (15). \$9

**Monterey Peninsula Winery "Monterey."** Produced in very limited quantity, this wine was made from grapes grown in the same vineyard that went into the 1974. The 1974 has developed a Monterey vegetable quality, even though there was no trace of this character until about a year ago. Will the 1976 have the same fate? No one knows, but presently there is no trace of those dreaded vegetables. The wine has a dark color and a fruity/oaky nose with a hint of volatile acidity. The wine is rich and substantial with blackberry jam-like flavors. Age should bring complexity and, hopefully, no vegetables (15). \$12

**Trefethen.** Some 2,000 cases of this Cabernet were produced from the Trefethen Vineyards located in the southern part of the Napa Valley. The wine has a dark color, a fruity/oaky nose, ripe Cabernet flavors, and tannin and acid to warrant 3-5 years bottle age (15). \$7.50

**Tulocay Winery "Sonoma."** Only 71 cases of this wine were produced. If you can find it, it's a good buy at \$6.50 with a dark color, an oaky/fruity nose, and huge oaky/berry-like flavors backed by substantial tannin. This wine should improve for 3-5 years (15).

## Good

**Mt. Veeder Winery "Bernstein Vineyards."** Just under 800 cases of this Napa Valley Cabernet were produced. It has a dark color with a minty nose and a lean structure. The wine is very tannic and finishes bitter. Many years will be required for the wine to reach maturity (14½). \$11

**Raymond "Napa Valley."** This estate bottled wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a perfumed fruity/oaky nose. It has lots of ripe fruit flavors tinged with vanilla and a tannic finish. A few years bottle age should yield an attractive, straightforward wine (14½). \$6

**Beringer "Estate Bottled."** This Napa Cabernet is a good value and one of the winery's



better efforts. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a prune/oaky nose. It is soft and round with ripe fruit flavors tinged with vanilla. Ready to drink now, the wine is not likely to improve (14). \$6

**BV "Napa Valley."** This is one of the better "regular" BV Cabernets of recent years. Not a complex wine, but clean, fresh, and grapy in an easy to drink style. The flavors are a bit thin, although it has the balance to improve for a year or two—a good wine at a fair price (14). \$6

**Clos du Val "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet is blended with Merlot, and has a dark color and an oaky/fruity nose. The wine has nice flavor, but is a bit thin and finishes a little short. Still youthfully tannic, it needs 3-4 years bottle age to fully develop (14). \$9

**Kenwood Vineyards "Artist Series."** This Sonoma Cabernet is a good wine with a nice label. The color is dark with an amber edge. The nose is oaky with an over-ripe cherry fruit character. A big, substantial wine with grapy flavors, it should improve for 3-5 years (14). \$8.50

**Montclair Winery.** Only 150 cases of this wine were produced from the Kreck Vineyards in Sonoma County. It is blended with 20% Merlot. Unfortunately, the wine is initially marred by an unpleasant, skunky nose. Fortunately, it dissipates with one hour of air and leaves a fruity/cedary aroma that is quite attractive. In the mouth the wine is a beauty—rich, fruity, spicy, chocolate flavors, nice balance, and well-rounded (14). \$10

**Mt. Veeder Winery "Mt. Veeder-Napa County."** Only 234 cases of this wine were produced. It was blended with 10% Merlot, but retains a strong Cabernet character. The color is dark and the nose is fruity with strong oak overtones. In the mouth the wine has fruit, but finishes short with a great deal of astringency. This is one to lay away for 4-6 years (14). \$8

**Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Napa Valley."** Despite being blended with a small amount of Merlot, this wine shows the characteristic ripe fruit and substantial tannin of the vintage. The question of fruit vs. tannin again crops up. Several years bottle age are needed for the wine to lose its youthful tannin (14). \$9.75

**Ridge "York Creek."** This Napa Valley

Cabernet was blended with 11% Merlot. The wine has a dark color and an oaky/spicy nose. It is big and substantial with fruity/spicy flavors and very tannic with a bitter finish. Lay this one away for 5-6 years, but don't be surprised if it retains plenty of tannin (14). \$12

**Sonoma Vineyards "Alexanders Crown."** This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a prune nose showing a hint of volatile acidity. It is a rich wine with prune flavors and substantial tannin. Again, the major question is whether there's enough fruit to carry the tannin for the 3-5 years this wine will need to develop (14). \$12

**Sterling Vineyards "Napa Valley."** This estate bottled wine was blended with 10% Merlot. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a berry-like nose with a hint of mint. The fruit has a briary quality and the texture is somewhat gritty. It is a tannic wine that will require 3-5 years bottle age, but more fruit would be encouraging (14). \$8.50

**Stonegate "Napa Valley."** This is a much better wine than the less expensive "Sonoma" bottling. It was blended with 14% Merlot and has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky/fruity nose. With medium body, good fruit, and flavor, it should improve for 2-3 years (14). \$9

**ZD Wines "San Luis Obispo-Rancho Tierra Rejada Vineyard."** This wine was blended with 33% Merlot. It's not particularly varietal, but shows an oaky/fruity nose and clean, pleasant flavors in a lighter style. A wine to drink now for the fruit (14). \$9.75

**Arroyo Sonoma "Sonoma County."** Some bottles of this wine are already tired and past their prime. Those that are not should be consumed now for the fruit. The latter bottles have a medium color and a fruity, slightly volatile nose with soft, flat, fruity flavors (14). \$7.50

**Callaway Vineyard & Winery.** From Temecula in Southern California comes this estate bottled, distinctly non-varietal Cabernet. It has a dark color and an oaky nose with flat, fruity flavors that are a bit sweet. There is quite a bit of tannin and 2-3 years bottle age should help (13). \$8

**Cassayre-Forni Cellars "Napa Valley."** Could it be that there are several different



**For Current Consumption:  
A Wine Drinkers Half Dozen  
Good 1976 Cabernets At An  
Even Better Price!**

**Alexander Valley Vineyards "Estate Bottled."** This Sonoma Cabernet is blended with 20% Merlot. It is a much lighter wine than the 1975 with fruity flavors showing just a hint of an herbaceous character (13). \$5.50

**Barengo "Lake County."** At \$4 this wine "cellared and bottled by Barengo is a superb value for current consumption. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge, a fruity nose, and good, clean, fruity flavors with a hint of spiciness (13).

**Liberty School, Lot 6. "Selected and bottled by Caymus Vineyards,"** this Cabernet has a dark color with a fresh, grapy, cassis-like nose—most attractive. With clean, fresh, varietal flavors this wine has a youthful, zesty quality that is attractive (13). \$4.75

**Louis M. Martini.** This is one of the better "regular" Martini Cabernets of

recent years. Some 35,000 cases were produced (about the same as Jordan!)—well below the usual production because of the drought. Blended with 10% Merlot, the wine has a dark color and a fruity/herbaceous nose, with young, fruity, grapy flavors, in an easy to drink style (13). \$4.50

**Oakville.** The Oakville label was purchased by Robert Mondavi Winery and this bottling has Robert Mondavi corks. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/berry-like nose. There is good fruit and enough tannin and acid to improve for a year or two (13). \$5

**Parducci.** This Mendocino Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy nose. It is fruity and soft with just a hint of tannin in the finish (13). \$5

**J. Pedroncelli.** Nearly always a good value, this is again, one of the best recent Cabernets from Pedroncelli. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/berry/oaky nose with fruity, briary flavors offering some complexity (13). \$4.25

batches of wine with the same label? Numerous tastings reveal significant differences, but the great majority of bottles suffer from the same major fault—an extremely bitter, tannic aftertaste. Otherwise, the wine is rich with chocolate nuances (13). \$6.50

**Chateau St. Jean "Jack London."** This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky, coffee bean nose. The wine has dusty, tannic flavors with a lack of fruit—drink it now (13). \$9

**Dry Creek Vineyard "Sonoma County-First Bottling."** This Cabernet was blended with 6% Merlot. It has a medium color and a fruity/cherry-like nose with a hint of oak. The flavors are straightforward and the wine is clean with a short finish—a wine to drink now (13). \$6.75

**Durney Vineyard "Carmel Valley, Monterey County."** From another new California wine

growing area, only time will tell if age will obscure or enhance the herbaceous, bitter quality in the wine. Otherwise, it is simple and straightforward with fruity/oaky flavors (13). \$8

**The Firestone Vineyard "Santa Ynez Valley."** This wine is an improvement over the 1975, but it still shows the regional herbaceous character in the nose and taste. The wine has fruit and substance and should be consumed for its youthful charm (13). \$6.50

**Franciscan "Napa Valley."** This wine was blended with 15% Merlot. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a pungent, oaky, slightly volatile nose. It is flavorful with ripe flavors (almost sweet) and a briary, slightly bitter finish (13). \$6.50

**Inglenook "Napa Valley."** This estate bottled Cabernet suffers from a thin body and a short finish. Otherwise it is fruity, simple, and pleasant (13). \$6.50



**Lambert Bridge "Sonoma."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color and a medicinal, cherry-like nose. The wine has simple, fruity flavors with a short finish (13). \$6

**Sommelier Winery "Sonoma."** This wine has a medium color and a volatile, prune nose. It has fruit and flavor, but shows a hint of a pickling spice quality. Drink it now while there's still fruit (13). \$6.75

**Wolfgang "Sonoma County."** What an unusual name! Produced and bottled by Sotoyome Winery (not exactly a household word either) the wine has a dark color and a curious fruity/wet oak nose. It is flavorful with good fruit and should improve for a year or two (13). \$6

**Foppiano Vineyards "Sonoma."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color and an oaky/fruity nose. It has a light body and is rather thin on the palate. Nothing really objectionable, just not much of what's there—ready to drink now (12½). \$5.50

**Charles Krug "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet has a medium dark color and a fruity/briary nose with fruity/woody flavors. The wine is rather thin and short on the palate (12½). \$5.50

**Chateau Chevalier "Napa Valley."** This Cabernet is blended with 8% Merlot. It has a dark color and an oaky/medicinal nose. It has musty/fruity flavors with a tannic, bitter finish (12). \$8.50

**Edmeades Vineyards "Precocé."** This Mendocino Cabernet is very light and without the freshness of youth. It has a light orange/red color with a fruity/musty nose and thin watery flavors. Don't wait any longer to drink this one (12). \$4.50

**Mirassou "Monterey-Unfiltered."** This wine has a dark color and a vegetative/minty nose. It has vegetative flavors and is astringent and short on the palate. Drink it now while there's some fruit (12). \$6

**Rancho Yerba Buena "California."** This wine has a medium color and a fruity/carmel nose. It is soft and ready to drink with a bit of a roasted flavor (12). \$4.25

**San Martin "California-Limited Vintage."** This label tells as much as you're likely to want to

know about the origin of this wine—7 lines are used to describe the regions, wine types, and percentages of each. This is more interesting than the wine! The wine is soft, fruity and ready to drink. It is without varietal character or flavor interest (12). \$5.50

**Sherrill Cellars "San Luis Obispo-Shell Creek Ranch."** This Cabernet has a dark color and a pungent, oaky nose with grapy, one-dimensional flavors that finish bitter (12). \$5.50

**Souverain "North Coast."** This Cabernet has a dark color and a weedy nose with fruity/weedy flavors and a short finish (12). \$6

**Stonegate "Sonoma County."** This Cabernet has a medium color and a bell pepper nose. It is soft and ready to drink with grassy flavors and a short finish (12). \$6

**Yverdon "Napa Valley."** This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and an oaky nose. It is astringent, tart, and short on the finish. The wine should keep, but there's not enough fruit to warrant taking up cellar space (12). \$6.50

### Below Average

**Bargetto "California."** This wine has a medium color and a weedy nose with weedy, acidic and slightly tannic flavors. Lacking fruit, the wine should be consumed now (11). \$5

**Vines of Napenthe "Sonoma."** This wine has a medium color and a fruity nose. It is acidic and tannic with a lack of fruit and depth (11). \$5

*For lovers of massive, intensely flavored wines, 1976 California Cabernets offer a wide variety. For the most part, the wines suffer from the "too much" syndrome—too much tannin, and too much intensity. Some may turn out to be better than this initial assessment, but for now many of the best wines are years away from offering more than a glimpse of their potential. So while there are no wines with an "Outstanding" ranking, there are still many 1976 Cabernets yet to be released. However, the great virtue of the vintage is the abundance of Good-Very Good wines. Contrasted with previous vintages, there are virtually no poor 1976 Cabernet Sauvignons and there are many excellent values. So drink the many sound, attractively priced wines and*



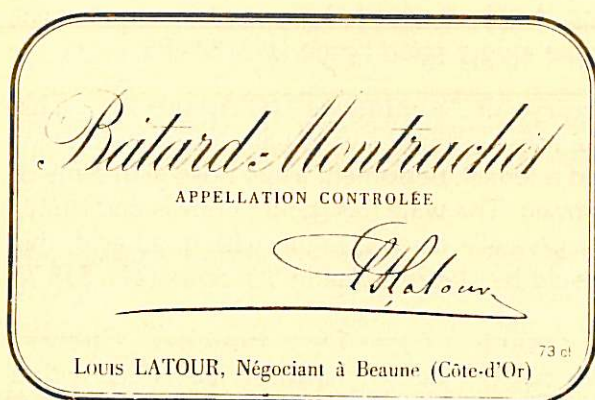
lay away a few of the more backward bottles to monitor over the next decade or two.

## 1978 WHITE BURGUNDIES

**"1978 is certainly the finest vintage for White Burgundy since 1971, and is quite possibly the best since 1966, or even 1961."**

The 1978 vintage in Burgundy began with a cold, wet spring which resulted in a late and somewhat imperfect flowering of the vines. The conditions seem to have affected the quantity of the reds more so than the whites; the production of which was only slightly below average. It was not until the middle of August that the weather finally turned sunny and warm, but these conditions then fortunately lasted into a very long, sunny autumn creating grapes of superb condition. The harvest did not begin until October 5, nearly three weeks later than normal. The resulting wines are of excellent quality and extraordinary balance which portend long life. Listed below is our initial report on the 1978 White Burgundies:

### Outstanding



**Batard-Montrachet (Latour).** This incredible wine is destined to become a classic. The color is light gold and the nose is fruity and complex with a hint of smokiness. In the mouth, the wine has complexity, fruit, depth, and balance, with a delicious flavor and a long palate impression. Just now the acid gives the wine a youthful firmness, but elegance will become a predominant feature in 5-6 years (18½). \$43.00

**Corton-Charlemagne (du Martray).** Oh my, what a wine! Destined to be another classic, this

is the finest wine in recent years from this superb producer. The color is light gold and the nose is already complex with a predominant fruity/spicy character and hints of geranium—extremely appealing. In the mouth the wine is again complex with fruity/spicy flavors and a firm structure promising great elegance. Long on the palate, this wine should be nectar in 6-7 years (18½). \$31.95

**Criots-Batard-Montrachet (Delagrange-Bachelet).** This producer seemingly can do no wrong with wines from this property. The 1978 is the finest in a string of successes. The color is gold and the nose deeply perfumed with a complex fruity/spicy/tropical fruit aroma. The taste is rich and complex with fruity/spicy flavor. It is a superbly structured wine with a lasting palate impression. With 3-5 years bottle age the wine should be a masterpiece (18½). \$35.00

**Meursault-Charmes (Michelot-Garnier).** If there is a value amongst the outstanding wines of this vintage, this is it. The wine has a light gold color and a fruity/cinnamon nose. The fruity/spicy flavors are deeply embedded with a lingering palate impression. Already showing the structure of the finest Meursault, the wine should become velvety with age. A classic Meursault, and one not to miss for superlative drinking in 4-5 years (18½). \$17.95



**Meursault "Clos St. Felix" (Michelot-Garnier).** If not so highly esteemed as the Meursault Charmes from Michelot, this wine is more forward and nearly as good at a few dollars less. It has a light gold color and a fruity/spicy nose with rich, fruity, complex flavors—a delicious wine to drink now and over the next 2-4 years (18). \$14.95





**Montrachet (de Laguiche).** With the big label and the big price, this wine is the best from this producer since 1969. It has a light gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy complex nose. Not big and powerful, but restrained and delicate with lovely, fruity flavors, and nice balance. Possessing a firm structure, the wine should improve for 5-7 years (18). \$75.00

### Very Good

**Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Vergers" (Colin).** This is a lovely wine promising great elegance. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a deeply perfumed fruity/spicy quality. It has a delicate fruity flavor with a cinnamon-like complexity. With 4-6 years bottle age this wine should be most attractive (17½). \$14.95

**Batard-Montrachet (Niellon).** This wine seems to lack just a bit in depth and flavor, but it could be just the awkwardness of youth. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose with subdued flavors in a light style. A few more years should provide greater insight into the wine's ultimate development. Even without the flavor of Latour's Batard, this wine will be silky and elegant in 5-6 years (17). \$35.00

**Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Ruchottes" (Bachelet-Ramonet).** This wine has a light gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has good fruit and flavor with a complex, fruity/earthy/spicy/flinty quality. With good acid the wine needs 4-5 years to develop softness and richness (17). \$20.69

**Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" (Delagrang-Bachelet).** The question here seems to be whether the fruit will be there to balance the acid in the 5-6 years this wine will

require. Just now the fruit seems a bit subdued but the attractive complexity suggesting raspberries is intriguing. The wine is flavorful, but much too young for current consumption (17). \$18.75



**Chevalier-Montrachet (Niellon).** This wine is very similar to the Batard. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity nose with a hint of vanilla. The flavor is light and delicate, but the firm acidic structure needs 5-6 years to develop (17). \$35.00

**Meursault "Les Charmes" (Ropiteau-Mignon).** This is an attractive Meursault with a light gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has good fruit and flavor in a rich, buttery, vanilla-tinged style. A wine to keep for 3-5 years, this will make a very good bottle (17). \$24.95

**Meursault "Santenots" (D'Angerville).** This is a most intriguing wine with a light gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity nose with hints of nutmeg. The wine has good richness and fruity/spicy/vanilla flavors. Light, with good acid, this should be elegant wine in 3-5 years (17). \$18.75

**Meursault "Clos Des Bouches Cheres" (Manuel).** This wine is rather advanced with a gold color and a fruity/coffee bean nose showing signs of oxidation. It is clean, fruity, and firm in the mouth with nice flavors. Seemingly not one to keep for too long, but attractive (16½). \$21.95

**Meursault "Les Narvaux" (Michelot-Garnier).** Not as refined, rich, or elegant as this producer's other two Meursaults, this is, nonetheless, a very good wine with a light gold color and a fruity/earthy nose. It has good fruit and pleasant, straightforward flavors in a light style (16). \$15.95

**Puligny-Montrachet "Les Pucelles" (Chavy).** This is an attractive wine with a light gold color



and a fruity/spicy nose. It is fruity with a nice flavor and good acid. The wine should improve for 3-5 years and show more complexity (16). \$17.95

**Chassagne-Montrachet (Niellon).** This wine seems a bit backward and rather straightforward, with a light gold color, a fruity nose, and light, fruity flavors tinged with vanilla. With good acid the wine should develop complexity with 4-6 years bottle age (15½). \$16.00

**Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Ruchottes" (Bachelet-Ramonet).** This wine has a light gold color and a citric/fruity/spicy nose. The flavors show fruit and some spiciness in an austere style. This wine should develop elegance with 3-5 years bottle age, but is rather short on the palate (15½). \$18.95

**Bourgogne "Les Clous" (De Villaine).** How does this little wine do in this company? Very well, thank you, and a great value besides. Possessing a light yellow gold color and a nutty/fruity/vanilla nose, the fruity, crisp, tart, fresh flavors make this a most attractive food wine. Oh, yes, for label drinkers, this is the same De Villaine from Romanee-Conti (15). \$6.95

**Chassagne-Montrachet (Colin).** This wine has a light gold color that is just a bit cloudy. It has a fruity/flinty nose and a bit of a steely quality in the flavor. A little short on the palate, this wine should improve for 3-5 years and make a pleasant bottle (15). \$12.95

**Meursault-Charmes (Matrot).** This is a strange wine—most unusual and seemingly without much aging potential. The light gold color is characteristic, but a citric/burnt sugar nose is the first sign of a strange difference—not offensive, but different. The taste is also unusual with a fruity, kiwi/raspberry flavor (15). \$16.95

## Good

**Puligny-Montrachet "Les Perrieres" (Chavy).** This wine has a light gold color and a fruity/citric nose with pleasant fruity/citric flavors that finish short on the palate (14½). \$17.95

**Corton-Charlemagne (Ponnelle).** Unlike most other 1978's, this wine is prematurely aged

and offers no room for improvement. The color is light gold, but the banana/carmel nose is a sure sign of early senility. The wine is buttery with a carmel/fruit flavor and spicy aftertaste. Drink it now before it loses what fruit it has (14). \$23.50

**Meursault "Perrieres" (Matrot).** This wine has a light gold color and a fruity/citric nose. It is clean, firm, and acidic. Time should help, but the wine is disturbingly short on the palate (14). \$16.95

**Puligny-Montrachet "Les Clavoillons" (Chavy).** This wine has a light gold color and a fruity nose with thin, acidic flavors and not much complexity (13½). \$17.95

*After evaluating a very representative sampling of the 1978 vintage the conclusion seems inescapable—1978 is certainly the finest vintage for White Burgundy since 1971, and is quite possibly the best since 1966, or even 1961. Unfortunately, as is all too often the case, the prices are also extraordinary. The combined factors of increasing demand, low growers and negociants stocks, and the short quantity of the vintage resulted in opening prices for the 1978's of nearly double the not inexpensive 1976's. Most of the very best bottlings seem to be available only in very limited quantity, so buyers wishing to acquire some of these truly classic White Burgundies will need to act fast, before initial supplies are exhausted. The prices on future arrivals will most certainly be higher. Almost irrespective of current prices, every wine lover should acquire some of these magnificent wines. Most should not be consumed before 1984 and many should develop well into the decade. The reward to the patient will be wines of breed, elegance, flavor, and style found only once or twice each decade. On this basis, some of the outstanding wines are a relative bargain at under \$20 per bottle. Without peer, wines such as these reign supreme as the finest dry white wines in the world. As more wines arrive, we will expand our coverage of this classic vintage.*

