

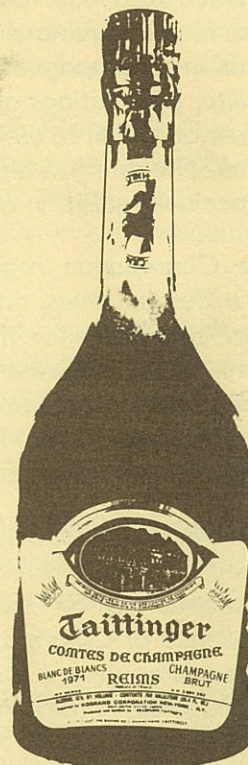


THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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WOES OF A BURGUNDY DRINKER

"Must Consumers Contend With Spoiled Wines as Well?"

With precious little Burgundy available (in a good year production is only about 10-15% of that of Bordeaux), soaring prices, and many mediocre wines, must we consumers have to contend with spoiled wines as well? Many times we're told a particular Burgundy, or Burgundies in general, drink better on their home soil than in the U.S. Some of this is media hyperbole, but in certain instances there is no question as to the truth of this statement. Without question, most modern day Burgundies are too fragile to withstand the less than ideal storage and handling to which many are subjected.

What is unsettling is that Burgundy shippers do not seem to be concerned about the care taken with wines shipped to the U.S. For instance, it is said that the Domaine of Romanee-Conti will ship their wines in Europe only during the seasons of temperate climate. However, no such policy exists with regard to their wine coming to

the U.S. In fact, some of the bottles of the 1976 Domane Romanee-Conti have shown signs of premature age. Numerous other stories could be related. Perhaps the French feel we do not know the difference and, as a result, they do not take the necessary measures to insure the condition of our wines.

Enough is enough! It is up to us to return to our wine merchants young Burgundies which, while perhaps not spoiled, are flawed from oxidation, brown color, etc. If enough resistance is generated, someone will get the message. Only then will we be insured that we're getting Burgundies that are at their best.

Edward Lazarus, West Coast
Associate Editor

CHAMPAGNE

"It Has No Peer and Nothing Else Deserves the Name"

All of the world's authentic Champagne comes from precisely delineated areas which begin approximately fifty miles east of Paris. Only the sparkling nectar produced in this region is Champagne. It has no peer, and nothing else deserves the name. The entire area comprises about 80,000 acres, 60,000 of which are currently under cultivation. The major grape varieties are Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Meunier. The various townships and vineyard areas in Champagne are rated with regard to quality, with ratings of 100% for the very finest areas, on down to 50% for some of the outlying areas. The rating determines the price which the grapes will realize in any given year.

The Champagne region has produced wine since Roman times, and its wines have enjoyed great popularity for the past several hundred years. The immense current popularity of Champagne in its native country is evidenced by the fact that over 75% of all Champagne produced is consumed in France.

Dom Perignon, who was cellar master at the Abbey of Hautvillers from 1670 to 1715, is considered to be most responsible for the excellence of Champagne as we now know it. The popular story is that it was he who first put the "bubbles" in the wine, thereupon exclaiming, "I am drinking stars!" This is but a myth. Rather he introduced the use of corks as a replacement for the wooden pegs that had been used to stop up the bottles; and, more importantly, he developed the art of blending wines from differing areas of the Champagne region, thus creating a product far superior to any of its parts. Blending continues to this day to be a very important step in the creation of truly fine and distinctive Champagne.

So, then, where did the "bubbles" come from? Natural effervescence was often present in at least some of the Champagne output. This phenomenon was apparently caused by the cold winter climate of the region which retarded the completion of the initial fermentation. A secondary or continued fermentation would occur later; usually in bottle, thereby creating the "bubbles." At some unknown point in time the procedure of adding sugar and yeast at the

time of bottling was commenced, thereby helping along this secondary fermentation and insuring standardized "bubbles."

The Champagne trade is dominated by the shippers, who manufacture the most important quantities of all the Champagne produced. There are approximately 150 shippers, about thirty of whom can be considered "major" due to either the volume produced or the lofty reputation of their respective concerns. Most of these larger houses own vineyards in the region, but well over 80% of the vineyard area of Champagne is still owned by over 15,000 independent growers who sell their grapes to the shippers or, in some cases, produce and sell their own wine.

Vintage Champagne must come from grapes mostly, but not entirely, from the named vintage year. Non-vintage or undated Champagne can be blended from as many different years as the Champagne maker sees fit, and the end result can be most satisfactory. However, in all fairness, it must be assumed that a higher percentage of the more expensive grapes from the higher rated areas end up in the vintage bottlings. In the final analysis, the quality and nature of any particular Champagne is determined by the blending skill of the Champagne maker and the philosophy of the shipper as to what style of Champagne his house wishes to produce and market. Each house generally releases several different Champagnes, differing by price and supposed quality, and also by the degree of dryness. This dryness is determined by the amount of syrup added to the wine at the time of disgorgement, when each bottle is removed of sediment, topped off and recorked. This procedure generally takes place shortly before the Champagne is to be released by the shipper. The skill and sophistication involved in the blending process cannot be overemphasized. As an example, Paul Krug's Brut Reserve is said to be comprised of 49 different wines.

The question often arises as to when Champagne is at its best age to be consumed. Aside from personal quirks of taste, it would seem that a fairly safe rule of thumb to say that the vintage Champagne currently available is at its peak for enjoyment between seven and twelve years from vintage date. As Champagne ages, at some point it usually begins to take on a maderized flavor, which some people, including

many of our British friends, find quite appealing. On occasion, one runs across an extraordinary bottle of old vintage Champagne from a great year which has been impeccably cellared. Such a bottle can be remarkably good—unmaderized, lively, and possessing a delicious creamy quality which is quite a special treat. However, such bottles are the exception rather than the rule. Certain bottles from such vintages as 1928, 1929, 1945, and 1949 can still be amazingly good. Current Champagne vintages of interest are 1966 (becoming chancey), 1969, 1970, 1971, 1973, and 1975. Some shippers release recently or late disgorged Champagnes of older vintages, which are often quite good, combining the depth and flavor of maturity with the lively sparkle of youth.

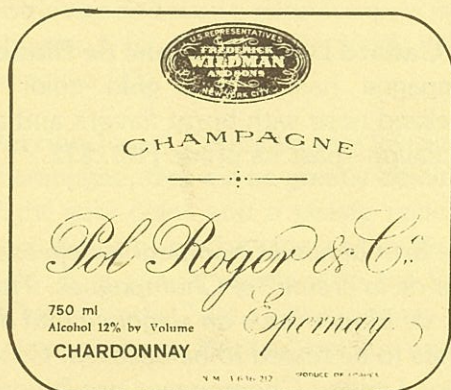
Following is a review of currently available Brut Champagnes.

BRUT VINTAGE LIMITED CHAMPAGNES

"The Creme de la Creme"

Outstanding

1971 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs. Consistently Taittinger Blanc de Blancs represents the pinnacle of elegance in Champagne. The 1971 vintage is no exception. The color is light straw gold with a yeasty nose, delicate almost creamy texture, rich flavor, and a lingering palate impression—near perfection, the standard for Blanc de Blancs Champagnes (19). \$40



1971 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs. This is a fantastic Champagne with a light gold color and a complex, yeasty nose. The taste shows great fruit and balance. Though not quite as elegant as the Taittinger, still this superb bottle is very rich with a delicious, long finish—an excellent value for one of the very best Champagnes one could hope to drink (18). \$25

Very Good

1970 Laurent Perrier Grand Siecle Blanc de Blancs. The color is light gold with a nice floral nose and a very flavorful, ripe, almost sweet taste; yet the wine is perfectly dry with beautiful balance—a unique Champagne that is consistently first rate (17). \$32

1970 Deutz L.D. Blanc de Blancs. The wine has a very light gold color with a slightly oxidized, yeasty nose. The light, delicate flavor is clean with complexity—good value (16½). \$20

1971 Piper Heidsieck Florens-Louis Blanc de Blancs. This champagne is a light yellow color, with a clean, fruity nose, and a corresponding fruity flavor with elegance and style (16½). \$27

1975 Roederer Cristal. Typically a light elegant Champagne, this bottling has a light gold color and a floral/yeasty nose with nice fruit and very good flavor, but lacking the impeccable balance of the best Cristals (16½). \$42

1971 Deutz Cuvee William Deutz. This is a nice Champagne with a light gold color and good fruit. It is rich and long on the palate with good flavor (16). \$20

1971 Moet & Chandon Dom Perignon. Despite its exalted reputation, Dom Perignon is not the answer in Champagne. This bottling is a good example with a light gold color, yeasty nose, and good flavors. The wine is rich, but a bit harsh. Given the demand, scarcity and price (why couldn't the price be \$100?), leave this to the label drinkers (16). \$44

1971 Charbaut Certificate Blanc de Blancs. This is a nice Champagne with a medium gold color, yeasty nose, and good fruit and richness. Lacking the delicacy of the better Blanc de Blancs, it is overpriced (15½). \$34

1973 Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs (250th Anniversary Bottling). This bottling doesn't seem to be as good as other vintages. It has a light gold color and a yeasty nose with a trace of oxidation. The wine is dry and elegant, but not as flavorful as might be expected (15½). \$25

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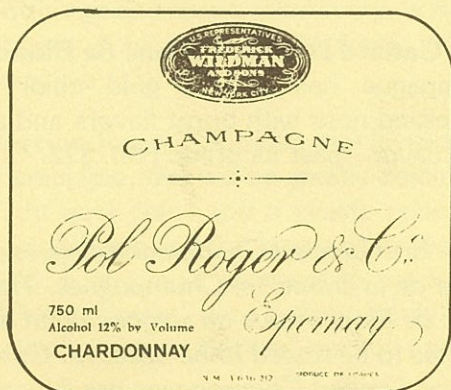
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1973 Perrier Jouet "Flower Bottle." The bottle is very pretty, but it's debatable as to whether the Champagne or the bottle is responsible for the high price. This vintage has a light gold color with a yeasty nose and good flavor. However, it is quite austere—bottle or no, it's overpriced (15½). \$42

1973 Veuve Clicquot La Grand Dame. This is another very full bodied Champagne with a gold color and a yeasty nose. There is good fruit with a slightly "earthy" flavor and a touch of sweetness in the finish (15½). \$27

1970 Bollinger R.D. The wine has a light gold color with an oxidized nose and an intense fruity/carmel-like flavor. Old Champagne fanciers will love this one (15). \$35

1971 Charbaut Blanc de Blancs. The wine has a light gold color and a nice fruity nose with very fresh, clean, crisp flavors. It is probably the best Champagne available on a dollar value basis and very nearly as good as the Charbaut Certificate which is almost three times the price (15). \$13

1969 Krug. Typically one of the most full-bodied Champagnes, it's surprising to find that 1969 is the latest vintage available. It has a medium gold color and an oxidized nose. The flavors are rich, and the wine is still fresh, but lacking the zestiness of its youth (15). \$37

Good

1971 Heidsieck Monopole Diamant Bleu. This Champagne has a light gold color and an oxidized nose, with rich flavors, but a bitter finish flaws the wine—overpriced (14½). \$35

1973 Mumms Rene Lalou. Mumms top of the line Champagne is rarely outstanding. This vintage is light gold with a slightly green tinge. It has a fresh, fruity nose with a typically austere flavor that lacks fruit (14). \$30

1971 Henriot Reserve Baron. This Champagne is light straw gold color and has a yeasty nose. However, it is a very austere, hard wine with a slightly bitter finish. Lacking the flavor of the bigger style Champagnes and devoid of elegance, the price is ludicrous. Take two barrels of crude oil instead (14). \$50

1971 Pol Roger Private Reserve. A far cry from the superb Blanc de Blancs, this Champagne has a medium gold color and a yeasty nose with good flavor. It is rich, but lacks fruit and is a bit unbalanced and too acidic (14). \$30

1973 Deutz Blanc de Blancs. This wine has a light gold color and a yeasty nose. It is fruity, but a bit flat and austere with a trace of bitterness (13). \$13

1971 Salon Le Mesnil. This is another very limited production Champagne supposedly made only in the greatest years. It's hard to understand what happened with this 1971. It has a gold color and an unusual nose. It is just a bit oxidized with an unusual medicinal flavor that is slightly bitter—not attractive and grossly overpriced (13). \$45

Below Average

1971 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses. This Champagne has a medium gold color and an oxidized nose with vegetative/off flavors that are not appealing (12). \$20

1973 Ayala Blanc de Blancs. The Ayala Blanc de Blancs is rarely outstanding. This vintage has a light gold color and a yeasty nose with good fruit, but is flat, bitter, and lacking charm (11). \$18

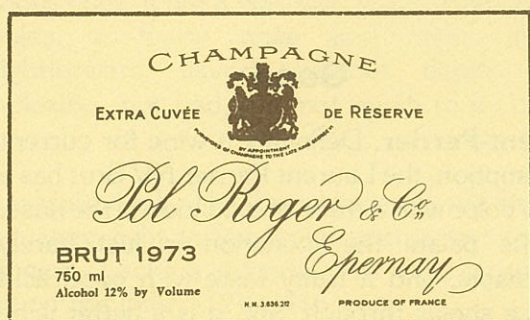
1970 Canard Duchene Blanc de Blancs. This Champagne has a light gold color and a carmelized nose with burnt flavors and a sharp citric flavor—past its prime (10). \$12

These Brut Limited Champagnes represent "the creme de la creme" of Champagnes. The finest Blanc de Blancs have an elegance and delicacy that has to be tasted to be believed. Other Brut Vintage Limited Champagnes are flavorful, but lacking the elegance and style of the finest Blanc de Blancs. With Champagne being priced like perfume, the most prestigious labels are expensive indeed. Some are grossly overpriced, yet surely something so superlative at Taittinger is worth whatever one can afford to pay.

BRUT VINTAGE CHAMPAGNES

**"Some of the Best Values in
Today's Champagne Market"
Very Good**

1973 Pol Roger. The Pol Roger Brut lacks the elegance and style of the Blanc de Blancs, yet ranks at the very top among Brut Vintage Champagnes. It has a light gold color and a big, yeasty nose. The flavors are rich with an almost creamy texture. A very lasting, complex finish is also most impressive (17). \$18



1973 Veuve Clicquot. The Veuve Clicquot shows a light gold color, a yeasty nose, medium body and nice flavors. It lacks the unusual taste of the more expensive Veuve Clicquot La Grand Dame and is much better value (15½). \$18

1970 Charles Heidsieck. The Charles Heidsieck Brut 1970 is a very good example of older Champagne. It has benefited from several years bottle age and shows good complex flavors and richness. A bit short on the finish, it is still very attractive (15). \$16

1973 Perrier Jouet. For those who favor a high acid Champagne, this will be greatly admired. It has a light gold color and a yeasty nose. The flavors are delicate and the wine is quite tart with good acid. It is almost identical to the Perrier Jouet "Flower Bottle," yet a lot less money. After all, how many "Flower Bottles" can you use? (15) \$20

Good

1973 Taittinger. The Taittinger Brut 1973 is nice Champagne that is flawed by a slightly off, oxidized quality in the nose. Otherwise, it is crisp with good flavors in a somewhat austere style (14½). \$20

1973 Billecart Salmon. The Billecart Salmon is a light gold color with a slightly sulphurous quality in the nose and a very dry, fruity, taste that finishes clean, if a bit austere (14). \$17

1973 Mumm's Cordon Rouge. The Mumm's Cordon Rouge 1973 has a light gold color and a clean yeasty nose. The flavors are clean, but the wine finishes slightly sweet and rather short (14). \$22

1975 Roederer. The wine has very light gold color, and an apple-cider like nose followed by very fresh, clean flavors (14). \$22

1973 Bollinger. This Champagne has a light gold color and a yeasty nose. The taste is rich, slightly reminiscent of butterscotch, yet there is a slightly sour character which detracts from the overall quality (13½). \$22

1973 Deutz. The Deutz Brut 1973 is a light gold color and overall is quite attractive except for a slightly burnt taste (13½). \$17

1971 Henriot. This wine is a gold color, with a slightly oxidized quality in the nose. The taste has richness, but there is an off taste that detracts from the overall good flavors (13). \$18

1973 Lanson. The 1973 Lanson has a light gold color and a yeasty nose. It is a light style Champagne with good flavors but is a bit harsh and unbalanced with a slight sweetness in the finish (13). \$20

1973 Laurent Perrier. The 1973 Laurent Perrier Brut is a light yellow gold color with a yeasty, almost smokey nose. The flavors are good, but it is a bit sweet and slightly cloying (13). \$19

1973 Mailly. This Champagne has a light gold color and a yeasty nose with good flavors in a very hard, unyielding style. It lacks complexity and finishes rather short (13). \$17

1973 Philipponat. Again, the 1973 Philipponat Brut is a hard, rather unbalanced wine with good straightforward flavors. Perhaps time will yield more elegance and complexity (13). \$16

1973 Pommery & Greno. The 1973 Pommery & Greno Brut is a light yellow color with a yeasty nose, and crisp, clean flavors, yet it is austere and unbalanced. Again, perhaps time will help (13). \$20

1973 Ayala. The 1973 Ayala Brut may be more kindly regarded by lovers of old Champagne. For most palates the heavily oxidized quality will render it relatively unattractive. It has a gold color, and a heavily oxidized nose with a slightly caramelized flavor that promises to become even more pronounced with age. Still the wine remains quite hard and lacking in charm (12). \$16

1971 Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial. The 1971 Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial is likewise very oxidized with an almost nutty, sherry-like flavor. The wine finishes sweet (12). \$22

Below Average

1973 Piper Heidsieck. This Champagne has aged prematurely and not very well. It is maderized and has a vinegary quality that makes it imminently undrinkable—very expensive wine vinegar for the ultimate in snob appeal salads! (10) \$22

Overall, none of these Brut Champagnes can be ranked outstanding; yet some of those that are very good must be considered values in today's Champagne market.

NON-VINTAGE BRUT CHAMPAGNE

"What Happened to All the Bargains?"

Very Good

Krug. The price of this bottle is on a parity with many Brut Limited Champagnes, yet it is better than most and better than the currently available 1969 Krug Brut. In the case of non-vintage Champagne, the most expensive is also the best. The Krug has a yellow color, and a yeasty nose with just a touch of mustiness. The flavors are rich and intense with an elegance that is rarely found in such full bodied Champagne (16½). \$32

Henriot. Yellow color, yeasty nose, good flavor, richness and balance, an elegant wine with just a hint of bitterness in the aftertaste, this NV Brut is an overwhelming example of why the Henriot Reserve is so over priced (15½). \$15

Moët & Chandon Imperial. Dom Perignon it's not, but many might not know the difference if they didn't read the label. Actually, this Champagne is very good and better than recent cuvees, with a light yellow color, yeasty nose, good fruit and nice flavors, but lacking the richness and complexity to be ranked higher (15). \$16

Good

Laurent-Perrier. Definitely a wine for current consumption, the Laurent Perrier NV Brut has a yellow color with a trace of oxidation in the nose. On the palate the oxidation is just barely discernable, and a fruity taste with good acid balance shows through. Still, it is a better wine than its 1973 vintage brother (14). \$15

Veuve Clicquot. This wine has a light gold color, yeasty/slightly oxidized nose, good fruit, nice flavor, and a trace of oxidation in the taste. It is spicy, slightly bitter, but still quite attractive (14). \$16

Charles Heidsieck. This Champagne has a yellow color, a slightly oxidized nose, with good fruit and flavor and a touch of oxidation in the taste (13½). \$13

Heidsieck & Co. Monopole. Yellow color, slightly oxidized nose, good fruit, clean, and a bit austere, yet, still it is not dissimilar from the Charles Heidsieck NV Brut (13½). \$15

Mumm's Cordon Rouge. This Champagne has a light yellow color, fruity nose, and is clean and fruity on the palate. It has no complexity and is extremely carbonated, still it is a pleasant Champagne (13½). \$16

Phillipponnat. The Phillipponnat NV Brut has a light yellow color, unusual chemical nose, good flavor with the complexity of older wine in a heavy style—distinctive, but flawed (13½). \$14

deVenoge Cordon Bleu. This Champagne has a light yellow color, a spicy/fruity nose, and a tart, fruity, slightly sour taste that lacks flavor (13). \$15

Mailly Cuvee des Eschansons. This is an unusual Champagne made 100% from Pinot Noir grapes from a Grand Cru rated vineyard. It has a light gold color and an oxidized nose. It is a slightly hot, unbalanced wine that is not appealing at the price (13). \$25

Taittinger La Francaise. The current La Francaise cuvee seems to lack the flavor of previous ones. It has a very light yellow color, big bubbles, a fruity nose and clean and straightforward flavors without depth or complexity—not bad, just not much to it (13). \$15

Piper Heidsieck. The Piper Heidsieck NV Brut has a very light yellow color and is tart and astringent. Lacking richness, the wine is very short on the finish (12½). \$16

Bollinger Special Cuvee. There's nothing special about this Champagne. It has a yellow color, a spicy/yeasty, somewhat oxidized nose, and a harshness and touch of oxidation on the palate spoils the fruitiness (12). \$16

Lanson Black Label. The best thing about this Champagne is the price; it recently sold as low as \$6! Beyond that, it has a yellow color, slightly oxidized nose, fruity flavors, without complexity and very straight forward (12). \$9

Perrier-Jouet Extra Brut. Strangely enough the Extra Brut designation seems to mean extra sweetness as this bottle is slightly sweeter than most NV Brut Champagnes. It has a yellow color and an unusual nose, almost like apples. It is clean and pleasant, but has no complexity, a very short finish, and the noticeable sweetness (12). \$17

Below Average

Roederer. Unfortunately, it seems certain that this Champagne was probably better some time ago. Now it's definitely past its prime with a yellow color, oxidized, coffee-bean nose, and oxidized, cooked flavors (10). \$15

Overall, the old cliché about NV Champagne being as good as vintage Champagne, better value, etc., seems no longer true. Many of the NV bottlings are too old or have been poorly stored. The consumer has no way to differentiate between a newer cuvee and one that has been around for many years, often under poor storage conditions. Until Champagne producers designate the bottling dates on the label, caveat emptor will prevail. Also, the overall availability of many of the wines seems less than might be expected. What happened to all the bargains?

THE DOMAINE DE LA ROMANEE-CONTI

"Producers of the Greatest Red and White Burgundies"

The Societe Civile du Domaine de la Romanee-Conti is the most prestigious name in Burgundy. The 4½ acre vineyard of Romanee-Conti is probably the most valuable piece of land in the world. In 1760 it was coveted by King Louis XV's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, who was outbid by the King's cousin, the Prince de Conti, whose name it still bears. The present ownership consists of the De Villaine and Leroy families, and the winemaker is Andre Noblet.

Aside from Romanee-Conti itself, the Domaine owns all 15 acres of La Tache, 8½ of the 20 acres of Richebourg, 8½ of the 23 acres of Grands-Echezeaux, 11 of the 74 acres of Echezeaux, and leases the 13½ acre Marey-Monge domaine in Romanee-St-Vivant. In 1964 the Domaine acquired 1¼ acres of Le Montrachet, thus enabling it to produce both the greatest white and red Burgundies.

The wines of the Domaine of Romanee-Conti are very special. A unique "oriental spice" quality can often be detected in their bottlings. This has led many people to believe that the Domaine employs a secret vinification technique to achieve this special quality. The Domaine vigorously denies this, claiming that their success is due to the soil and their high standards of cultivation. But one has only to taste their Montrachet, so far superior to all

others, to get the feeling that they must be doing something very right. They, of course, claim that their 1¼ acres just happens to be in the very best section of the vineyard.

Secret vinification technique or not, in most good years the Domaine of Romanee-Conti has few peers. Although, due to replanting, there was no Romanee-Conti from 1945 (except 100 cases) until 1952, the other vineyards produced superlative wines in 1945, 1947 and 1949. Other successful vintages for the wines of the Domaine are 1952, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1964, and 1966. Bottles from all of these vintages, if well cellared, can be excellent. 1967 and 1970 produced wines which are good but rather light. The only big disappointment is the 1969's. Acclaimed as a very great Burgundy vintage, the Domaine's wines, nevertheless, tend to be light, thin, and, in some cases, starting already to decline. The 1972's are better, possessing good color, more vinosity, and a goodly amount of acid which should portend longevity. The 1973's, 1974's and 1975's are unremarkable.

The 1971's, probably the best Domaine wines since the great vintages of the forties, and the 1976's, very good, but overrated, are reviewed in detail below.

Outstanding

1971 Romanee-Conti. A classic Burgundy that will rank as one of the all time greats, this 1971 Romanee-Conti is surely the nectar of the gods. It has a medium dark color and a huge, perfumed, oriental spice/cedar nose that literally fills the room. It is tremendously rich, with plum-like flavors that are mouth filling and complex. The tannin and acid provide structure for a wine that is destined for long life. The palate impression is lengthy and impressive. It is a big label that is everything one could ask for in Burgundy (19½). \$150



1971 Grands-Echezeaux. Again, the medium dark color and the big, fruity, oriental spice nose are impressive. The wine is rich and complex with great fruit, acid, and tannin. It is a wonderful, harmonious wine that needs considerable time to develop (18½). \$64

1971 La Tache. A La Tache of monumental proportions, this 1971 should rank with the very best. It has a medium dark color and a beautiful, spicey/green olive nose. It is a wine of great fruit, substance, depth and tannin that will need another 5-10 years to approach maturity (18½). \$88



1971 Richebourg. A characteristic Richebourg, not as bit as the La Tache, but it is a classic wine promising great lushness, elegance and style. It has a medium dark color and a big oriental spice nose, with good fruit, flavor and tannin (18½). \$85

1976 Grands-Echezeaux. This wine has a medium color, lighter than the 1971, but with the same intense, fruity quality. The nose shows the oriental spiciness, and is fruity, almost like boysenberry jam. The flavor carries through with an intense berry-like fruit and beautifully rendered flavors balanced by a firm structure (18). \$60

Very Good

1971 Echezeaux. With good medium color, perhaps a shade lighter than the other 1971's of the Domaine, this wine has the characteristic oriental spice nose and a very fruity earthy flavor. Already complex, the tannin and acid should carry this wine for a long, long time (17). \$48

1976 Romanee-Conti. Again, it is not as dark as the 1971, with a medium color and a very perfumed raspberry, oriental spice nose. The wine is beautifully rendered with good fruit and flavor (17). \$150

1976 Echezeaux. This wine has a medium color and a perfumed nose of spices and berries. It is fruity, cedary and already quite complex. This is a beautiful wine that will develop nicely (16½). \$43

1971 Romanee St. Vivant. A medium dark color and the characteristic oriental spice nose distinguish this wine which shows fruity, earthy flavors. It is firm and tannic and requires at least 5 more years to approach maturity (16½). \$78

1976 Richebourg. This Richebourg has a youthful harshness that should soften with age. It has a medium color and a perfumed oriental spice nose with good fruit and flavor (16). \$77

1976 La Tache. Probably the most backward of the 1976 Domaine wines, the La Tache also appears much more acidic. It has a medium color and a perfumed cherry, spice nose and fruity flavors that are cut by the acidic backbone of the wine. A keeper that needs 10 or more years to develop, the bet is whether the fruit will last (15½). \$77

1976 Romanee St. Vivant. Like the La Tache, this wine seems high in acid. It has a medium color and a rather subdued, fruity nose. The flavors show a hint of cinnamon, but the tannin and acid dominate (15½). \$67

DOMAINE DE LA ROMANEE-CONTI MONTRACHET

**"Simply the Greatest Dry White Wine
in the World"**

Who would say that Montrachet is worth the astronomical prices being asked? However, if one Montrachet generally deserves the highest price, it is that of the Domaine de la Romanee-Conti. From this tiny 1¼ acre plot only a few

hundred cases are produced in any given year. When available, the wines often command prices of \$100-\$150 per bottle, but the best of them are simply the greatest dry white wine in the world.

Outstanding

1968. This is felt by the De Villaine's to be the finest they have produced. Indeed, it's totally incredible. At 11 years of age the wine shows no sign of fatigue with a light, golden yellow color and a complex, intensely perfumed nose. The balance is impeccable and the flavors intense. A lingering aftertaste seems almost sweet, yet the wine is perfectly dry. This offers a perfect complement to the lush, buttery, yet firm texture of the wine. It is the standard by which White Burgundies are to be judged (19½).

SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE DU DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI
PROPRIÉTAIRE À VOSNE-ROMANÉE (CÔTE D'OR)



SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE DU DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI
PROPRIÉTAIRE À VOSNE-ROMANÉE (CÔTE D'OR)



1971. Another all-time classic, this superlative wine has a light gold color with a perfumed, spicy nose. It is rich and buttery, with great flavors and an aftertaste that goes on and on and on! A bit richer, a bit heavier, and a bit darker than the 1968, this too ranks as near perfection (19½).

Very Good

1969. This wine has now taken on a dark yellow gold color and shows a bit of oxidation in the nose. In the mouth, it is rich and buttery with a spicy quality and a lengthy finish (17).

1970. The 1970 once resembled the 1968, but has now lost a bit of the fruit and lushness of its youth. It has a light gold color tinged with green and has good flavor and complexity with acidity beginning to show through (17).

1965. The 1965 is a wine that seems to have an interminable life. It has a light gold color and a perfumed nose. Perhaps it has not as much fruit as some other vintages, but is rich and flavorful without the same texture and lengthy palate impression of other Romanee-Conti Montrachets (16).

Good

1976. These comments are admittedly based on tasting only a single bottle, but at \$150 there is little inclination to rush out and acquire an additional supply. A golden color and oxidized nose bring poor handling to mind as the possible culprit. However, even though the wine is rich and balanced, the flavor has an unusual creosote character (14).

1976 BURGUNDIES

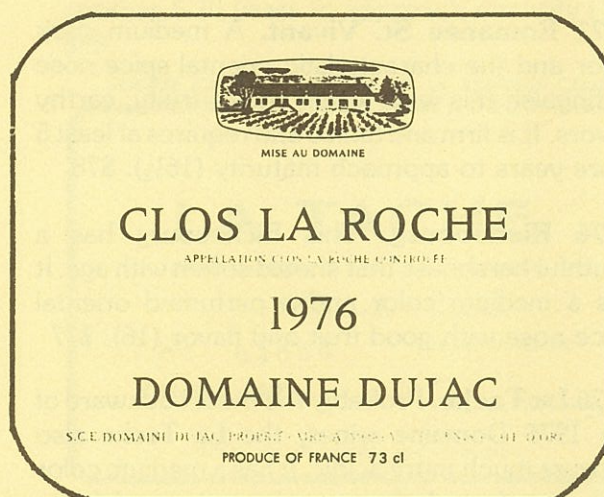
"Most are Uninspiring"

The 1976 Burgundies have been around for awhile and continue to appear in limited quantities. Despite all the fanfare and critical acclaim, the 1976 Burgundies are not outstanding. Even if the 1976 vintage is the best since 1972, this is hardly great praise in that the 1973, 1974 and 1975 vintages are mediocre to awful. So far 1971 easily ranks as the best of this decade, with 1978 yet to be evaluated. Given the prices, there are few 1976's worthy of cellaring; but the best of the Dujac wines will rival this producers' superb 1969 and 1971 vintages. Unfortunately, very small quantities of the Dujac

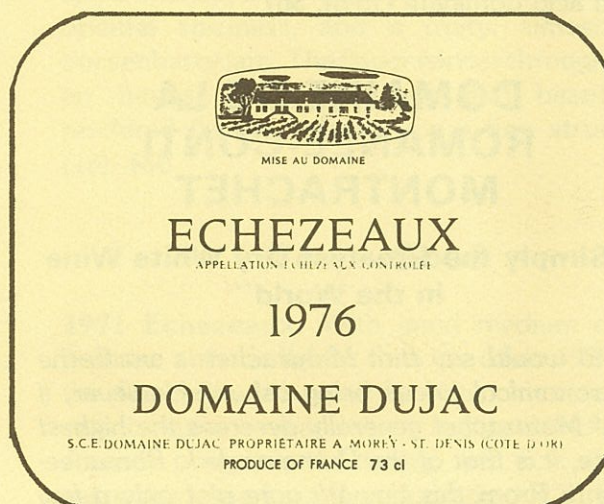
wines arrived in the U.S. Apparently, a good quantity were damaged in shipment. Most of the other 1976's are uninspiring.

Outstanding

Clos de la Roche (Dujac). This wine has a dark color, and a big, perfumed spicy nose with great fruit and depth. It is a big wine with tannin and acid to insure long life. Presently it is a bit harsh, but, oh what a wine it will be (18)! \$30



Echezeaux (Dujac). Again, this is a wine of dark color and great perfume in the nose. It has great fruit and intense flavors with an elegance that is already impressive. Still it is a wine to lay away for at least 3-5 years; a great Burgundy (18)! \$30



Very Good

Bonnes Mares (Dujac). This wine is just a shade less attractive than the Clos de la Roche and Echezeaux. It shows the Dujac style and closely resembles the Clos de la Roche. It has a dark color, a perfumed nose and big fruit. A bit more astringent than the Clos de la Roche and very powerful, it will take many years to develop (17). \$40

Chambertin (A. Rosseau). Like many modern day Chambertins, this is really not a big wine. However, it is a superior Chambertin with great style. The color is medium and the nose exhibits a berry-like fruitiness. It is rich with good flavor and has acid and tannin to make the wine a keeper (16). \$30

Charmes Chambertin "Les Mazoyeres" (Ponnelle). This estate bottling is a beautiful, aristocratic Burgundy with a medium dark color, a plum-like, spicy nose, good fruit and flavors, and has adequate tannin and acid for long life. It is dry and clean with honest Pinot Noir flavors (16). \$15

Chateau Corton Grancey (Latour). This property consistently produces very fine Burgundy and is one of the very best of the Cote de Beaunes. The 1976 is another successful wine with a medium color, a plum-like fruity nose and nice flavors with good fruit, acid, and tannin (16). \$33

Corton (Du Martray). Again, this is consistently one of the best of the Cote de Beaunes. Not surprisingly, it is very similar to the Corton Grancey with a medium dark color, a plum-like nose with a hint of spice and an elegant structure with good fruit and depth (16). \$26

Gevrey Chambertin "Aux Combottes" (Dujac). A lighter style than the Bonne Mares, but still a wine of great character and breed, this wine should be ready to drink in 2-3 years. It has a medium dark color, a perfumed, spicy nose, and nice fruit and flavor. The finish is just a bit short; otherwise it is most impressive (16). \$23

Grands-Echezeaux (Mongiard-Mugneret). This is a fine, medium bodied Burgundy with an appealing, perfumed nose. The wine can be enjoyed now, but has enough backbone to improve for the next few years (16). \$20

Bonnes Mares (Jadot). This wine has a medium color and a spicy nose with good flavor and complexity. It should be ready relatively soon (15½). \$27

Bonnes Mares (Comte de Vogue). This wine is an enigma. Certainly a huge wine of substance, it is hot and alcoholic with a dark color, a plum-like nose and big fruit and tannin. How will it develop? Probably quite well, but elegance may never appear (15). \$33

Chambertin (Remy). Unlike the big Chambertins from this producer (the 1969 is a substantial wine with great flavor), this 1976 is light. It has a medium color and a berry-like nose with good fruit and nice flavors that finish a bit short (15). \$35

Chambertin "Cuvee Heritiers Latour" (Latour). This wine is not dissimilar from the Remy Chambertin. It has a medium color, a perfumed, fruity nose and nice flavors and fruit. Still tannic, the wine needs 3-4 years to develop (15). \$45

Good

Chambertin "Clos de Beze" (A. Rosseau). This wine has a medium color and a green olive, almost bacon-like nose. It is fruity with a nice flavor and is soft and very nearly ready to drink (14½). \$30

Musigny (Comte de Vogue). Usually Comte de Vogue's Musigny is among the top Burgundies of the vintage. The 1976 misses the mark. It has a medium color and a nutty, fruity nose; and is dry and quite tannic. The fruit is obscured by the tannin and the wine lacks the depth and style of great Musigny (14½). \$37

Clos St. Denis (Dujac). This wine has a medium color, a berry-like spice nose and good fruit. However, it is balanced to acid and lacks the structure and flavor of the best Dujac wines (14). \$24

Morey St. Denis (Dujac). This wine is quite similar to the Clos St. Denis. Perhaps a shade darker in color and showing a woody nose, it is tannic and austere. If the fruit holds, it could turn out to be quite nice (14). \$17

Clos de la Vigne au Saint (Latour). This wine has a medium color and a perfumed nose, but is tart and a bit thin. It needs time, although it does not appear to have the fruit and balance to improve substantially (13½). \$22

Chambertin "Clos de Beze" (Marion). Here is a classic example of how far Chambertin can fall! This wine has a light medium color, and is thin, soft, flabby and lacking in style and flavor (13). \$26

1977 WHITE BURGUNDIES

"Not a Highly Acclaimed Vintage, but Some Really Good Bottles Can be Found"

The 1977 White Burgundies are here. Arriving without the hoopla of the 1976 vintage, the prices, nonetheless, are generally as high or higher. Early reports were not encouraging—thin, light, and acidic were the most commonly used adjectives. Surprisingly, there are some really good bottles. Most will not be wines to lay away, but laying away too much White Burgundy is a chancey proposition even in the best of years. So if it's White Burgundy you need for consumption over the next 2-3 years, some 1977's are a good bet. If you're inclined to wait for the much more highly regarded 1978's, be prepared for much higher prices.

Outstanding

Bienvenues Batard-Montrachet (Leflaive). This superb producer generally produces some of the best wines of any particular vintage and, more often than not, this will be his best wine (that is, when its available—reportedly there was no 1976 vintage because of spoilage). The 1970 and 1971 vintages were classics—the 1970 for

style and elegance, the 1971 for massive flavor. This 1977 is anything but thin. Elegant? Yes, with a light yellow color, a perfumed nose and rich, complex flavors making a near perfect match with the overall body and texture of the wine (18). \$21



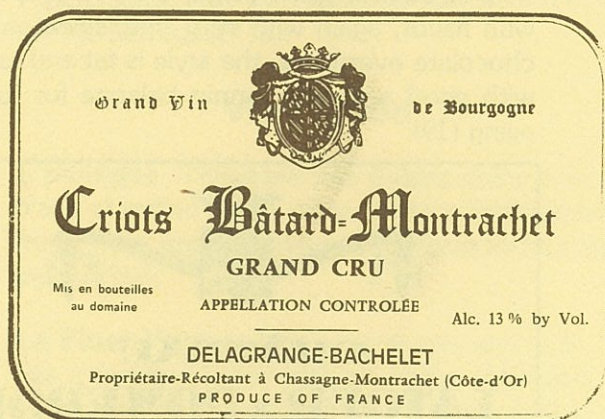
Very Good

Batard-Montrachet (Leflaive). This bottle doesn't quite have the style and elegance of the Bienvenues, but a year or two bottle age should help. It has a light yellow color, a perfumed nose and nice fruit with complexity and a clean finish (17½). \$25

Criots Batard-Montrachet (Delagrange-Bachelet). This producer is making consistently superior White Burgundies. The 1976 Criots is a superior bottle. This 1977 is very nearly as good. It has a light yellow color and an attractive nose with hints of spice and black pepper. It is a fruity wine, firm with good flavor and a lengthy finish. It is a lighter style, to be sure, but most attractive (17½). \$24

Batard-Montrachet (Delagrance-Bachelet).

This is another success. It is very similar to the Criots with a light yellow color, an attractive nose and good fruit and flavor (17). \$24



Corton-Charlemagne (Jadot). The beautiful style and elegance of this wine is very appealing. It has a light yellow color and a lovely cinnamon nose, with good flavor and fruit (16½). \$33

Batard-Montrachet (Niallon). This wine is just a touch high in acid which should balance out nicely in a couple of years. It has a light yellow color, a perfumed nose, and nice flavors with good fruit (16). \$24

Le Montrachet (Jadot). For Montrachet of recent years, this is really quite good. With the exception of the Montrachet of the Domaine de la Romanee-Conti, the ludicrously high prices of recent Montrachet are almost totally unjustified. But the name and the very small quantities will no doubt continue to assure price escalation. Frankly, Jadot's 1976 Montrachet doesn't seem much better than the 1977. Both are lighter style wines with the 1976 a bit better balanced. Both could benefit from more flavor interest. The 1977 has a light yellow color and a perfumed nose with very delicate flavor. It is a bit thin and short on the palate (16). \$48

Chevalier-Montrachet (Leflaive). Leflaive's 1977 Chevalier is an attractive wine with a light yellow color, a nice nose and a good flavor. It's main fault seems to be a lack of fruit and an austerity that may soften with a bit more bottle age (16). \$30

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Pucelles" (Leflaive). Here is one of the better Puligny-Montrachets. It has a light yellow color and a nice perfumed nose with delicate flavors and good balance and style (15½). \$20

Puligny-Montrachet "Clavoillon" (Leflaive). This wine has just a bit less flavor interest than the "Les Pucelles," but otherwise it is similar with a nice balance in a lighter style (15). \$18

Good

Chevalier-Montrachet (Deleger). This wine's label is better than the wine. It has a light yellow color and a citric nose with tart flavors, but is high in acid and short on the palate (13). \$27

Chevalier-Montrachet (Niellon). Ditto for this bottle except the nose is a bit musty. Again, an acidic impression on the palate flaws the wine (13). \$26

Corton-Charlemagne (Latour). A light yellow color and a citric nose are followed by thin, acidic flavors (13). \$35

Chevalier-Montrachet (Jadot). This wine has a light yellow color and a slightly skunky nose with thin, acidic flavors (12). \$36

Corton Charlemagne (Guyon). Again a light yellow color is followed by a citric, musty nose and tart, thin flavors (12). \$25

Below Average

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Changains" (Tremeau). This wine has a light yellow color, but an oxidized nose and burnt flavors spoil the wine (10). \$12

Bienvenues Batard-Montrachet (Latour). Again a light yellow color is followed by a grassy, oxidized nose and burnt flavors (9). \$35

Batard-Montrachet (Latour). Ditto, only this wine has pronounced oxidation (9). \$37

Outstanding

The Leflaive wines are again at the head of the class in 1977. The Delagrang-Bachelet wines are also impressive. How sad it is to see the Latour wines from such highly regarded properties be totally unfit to drink! And, the prices—the Latour wines sell at a premium to most other producers! Surely they have been poorly handled. Some of Latour's 1976's such as Batard-Montrachet are likewise terribly oxidized. Overall, the pattern is consistent with other recent White Burgundy vintages: Montrachet overpriced; Bienvenues Batard-Montrachet and Criots Batard-Montrachet producing wines to match or equal the higher priced Batard Montrachet and Chevalier Montrachet; and, Chevalier Montrachet, priced second only to Montrachet, being surpassed by many of the others.

1970 POMEROLS

"One of the Greatest Vintages Ever!"

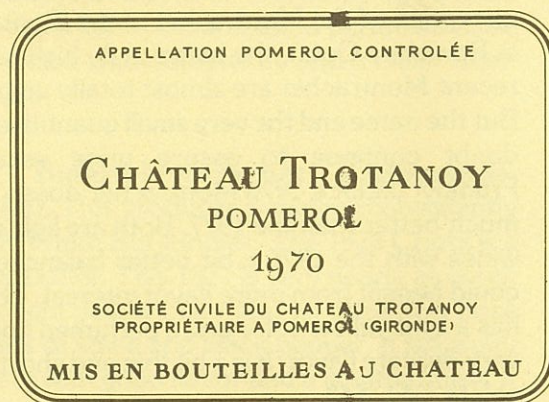
Pomerol is the smallest district in Bordeaux with only 1,500 acres of vineyard. It is also the least known. There has never been an official classification and only a few wines are exported to the U.S. Chateau Petrus is the best known and in recent years has commanded the highest price of all Bordeaux wines. A dozen or so other Chateaus are generally acknowledged as "Grand Cru" status. These wines usually command a price equal to or greater than second growths of the Medoc.

The Merlot grape constitutes about 75% of vineyard plantings. While the wines tend to mature earlier than other Bordeaux wines, they can be very long lived. The post-war period has produced four outstanding vintages—1945, 1947, 1961, and 1970. Many Pomerols from 1945 and 1947 are still beautiful wines today—the 1947 Petrus may be the best Petrus ever and challenging would be 1945 and 1961. The 1961's are likewise still youthful and many (such as Petrus) are far from maturity. The 1970's are just approaching maturity. Most are still developing and it seems certain that a number of them will enjoy great longevity.

Latour-Pomerol. It is hard to imagine a wine with more fruit than this great Latour-Pomerol. The color is very dark and is just amber at the edge. The wine is a huge cornucopia of fruit—with an intense spicy, ripe, fruity nose. Packed with flavor, again with very ripe, sweet, almost chocolate overtones, the style is fat and luscious with good acid and tannin balance for further aging (19).



Trotanoy. This is one of the most massive Trotanoy's ever produced. The wine has a very dark color with the nose just evoking hints of violets, oranges, and cedar. It is extremely concentrated with great fruit and a cedary flavor backed by a huge overlay of tannin. This wine is a keeper that surely is at least 10 years from maturity—a masterpiece (19)!



La Pointe. La Pointe is one of the larger producers in Pomerol. The 1970 is a classic. It has a dark color with an amber edge and an intense perfumed nose that is suggestive of peanut butter. The structure is firm and it is a fruity, intense wine of great style and balance (18).

Petrus. The 1970 vintage of Petrus is not as concentrated as the great 1945, 1947, and 1961. The color is medium dark with an amber edge. The nose has a fruity/spicey quality and the flavor has a certain cedar-like component. The wine finishes well with sufficient tannin and acid for further aging (18).

Very Good

L'Evangile. This wine has a dark color with a trace of amber at the edge. It has a pronounced fruity nose and is rich and very flavorful in a big style (17½).

La Fluer-Petrus. This wine drinks well now. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a spicey, candy-like nose. There is ample fruit and flavor with softness and great finesse (17).

La Conseillante. This property seems to command the highest price of any Pomerol with the exception of Petrus. The 1970 is a very fine wine that emphasizes elegance over power. It has a medium color, with just a bit of amber at the edge and exhibits a spicey, seductive nose of great charm. The fruitiness is very apparent in the mouth with complexity and nice flavor (17).

Feytit-Clinet. This obscure property deserves to be better known. The 1970 is a massive wine of great proportions. It has a dark color with amber at the edge. The nose is intensely perfumed and the flavor is fruity and cedary backed by substantial tannin and acid. More time is needed for development (16½).

Le Gay. Again, Le Gay is not a well known property, although recent vintages have produced several very good wines. The 1970 is the best. It has a dark color and an intense, fruity nose with a spicey quality. There is good fruit, a firm structure and good acid/tannin balance for further aging (15½).

Good

Clinet. This is an attractive wine that has reached maturity. It has a medium color with a trace of amber. The nose is most attractive with a floral/cedar character. There is good fruit and attractive flavor that is just a bit short on the palate (14½).

L'Eglise Clinet. This wine has a medium color and an amber edge. The nose is volatile and a bit grassey. In the mouth it is very fruity with a nice ripeness that finishes short (14).

Nenin. This is a highly ranked property that has produced many an unexciting bottle. So it is with the 1970. The color is dark with an amber edge. The nose is volatile, but attractive with a ripe fruit character. The flavor is disappointing. Rich, but with an unpleasant metallic aftertaste (13½).

Vieux Chateau Certan. Here is another property that is resting on its laurels. The 1970 is a disappointment. It is a wine of medium color and medium body, but is dull, flat, and unexciting—probably as good as it will ever be (13½).

Petit Village. Reportedly this Chateau has a smaller percentage of Merlot than other Pomerols. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a very attractive, fruity nose. In the mouth it is firm and tannic, but thin and acidic and with a disturbing lack of fruit (13).

Gazin. Gazin is another property that makes sound, if unexciting wine. The 1970 has a medium color with an amber edge. It has an attractive perfumed nose, but is thin with dull flavors (12½).

Lafluer. This wine has a very dark color, but is otherwise seriously flawed. The nose is musty with a brown sugar quality. In the mouth it is hot and alcoholic without charm or breed (12).

Below Average

Le Croix de Gay. This wine has seen better days. It has a dark color with some browning. The oxidation is pronounced in the nose and taste (10).

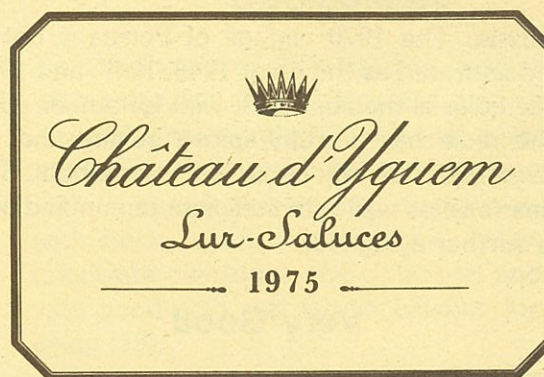
Clos Rene. Whew! What happened to this wine to cause such a foul bouquet? Never a world-beater, the insipid, dull quality has turned for the worst (9).

THE GLORIOUS 1975 CHATEAU D'YQUEM

"Maybe as Good as 1921!"

The 1975 Chateau d'Yquem has arrived, and the price is 2 - 3 times that of recent good vintages. In the past few years, we have become spoiled in obtaining really superb Sauternes at ridiculously low prices—\$20 for d'Yquem and as little as \$4 for other excellent wines, such as 1971 Rieussec.

All that has changed. The 1971 d'Yquem retails for \$60 - \$70 per bottle (still only $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the price of the best, and much rarer German Trockenbeerenauslesen); and other growths are generally in the \$10 - \$20 per bottle category. These prices more accurately reflect the high production cost to make Sauternes; but at the price of 1975 d'Yquem, how good is the wine? No superlative is really adequate—great, fantastic, unbelievable. Yes, they're all applicable. What did the great 1921, 1928, or 1929 taste like at such an early age? Who knows? But this 1975 seems like it might be in the class of the other really great d'Yquems of the century. Certainly it is the finest young d'Yquem in many a year, surpassing 1971 and 1967. The wine shows a yellow color and an intensely perfumed nose of cocoanuts and tropical fruit super-imposing the heavy botrysis character. It is delicate, perfectly balanced, and has tremendous length on the palate. This absolute nectar will only get better—19 $\frac{1}{2}$ may even be a bit stingy.



A BARGAIN IN WHITE WINE

"Buy it While the Price is Right"

White wine bargains aren't easy to find. **Moreau Blanc** is a *real* bargain, especially considering its French heritage. At under \$4 per bottle it is delightful with a light straw yellow color, a subdued fruity/cinnamon nose and a fresh, clean, crisp fruity flavor that is balanced and harmonious. It is not serious wine—rather a refreshing beverage to be served well chilled. Buy it while the price is right, but not more than you can consume in 6-12 months. It's a quaffer, not a keeper.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

1976 Bordeauxs, Cabernet Sauvignons (old and new), New releases, Wine Bargains, Outstanding Pre-Release Wines, and Commentary on World-Wide Price Trends.

About Our Rating Scale & Quoted Prices

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

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

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