



THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

In This Issue:

One Winedrinker's Opinion	57
Vintage Port	59
More 1978 Red Burgundies	64
More 1978 White Burgundies	70
California Cabernet Sauvignons	74
California Chardonnays	78
Barrels and Bottles	82
Coming Attractions	83



ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

Is There Such a Thing As Great Wine?

Great wine is an elusive item. For wine to be great, it must have time to develop in the bottle, to soften, to develop complexities and nuances that only time can bring. It is a living thing, and, like all living things, as it grows old some turn out better than others.

A great wine usually has a pedigree. Wines from California's San Joaquin Valley have no pedigree. In fact, very few California wines do. Chateau Lafite does. Why? Hundreds of years of producing wine acclaimed great by numerous generations of discriminating wine drinkers have proclaimed it so. The current generation of wine drinkers continues to make the same proclamation for superb years such as 1959. However, Lafite isn't always a great wine. Try a bottle of the 1968 or 1972 and decide for yourself. Or for that matter 1964 or 1967 — good, not great. Even the 1959 is not always

a great wine. There are many, many bottles that fall far short of being great. Poor storage? Perhaps. But even from bottles with a complete history of perfect cellaring, less than perfect bottles exist. A loose or leaky cork could be an obvious culprit, but another less obvious culprit is the wine itself. All bottles were not created equal. From the same vintage, Lafite has often taken months to bottle. Wine bottled one month from one group of barrels may not be the same as that bottled in another from another set of barrels. How is the wine drinker to know the difference from sound appearing bottles? Unfortunately, there is no way to know without pulling the cork — "El Momento de Verdad." Even then many wine drinkers don't know the difference, although many do know 1959 is "great wine." To even drink a wine such as 1959 is certainly a wonderful experience, but often I've drunk really unexciting bottles

and heard someone proclaim the bottle we're drinking to be great. Fine. Tastes do differ, but when the really great bottle of 1959 Lafite is uncorked, decanted, poured, smelled, tasted, and swallowed – Angels sing! That is the difference. From something really good to something sublime. Really old bottles become even more chancy. Many 1929's, for instance (see Volume II, Number 1), were once great, but many have now faded into something of historical interest and nothing more. How amusing to hear someone proclaim a tired, brown, acedid liquid great just because the label says 1929!

And so it is with all wines. Age plays a factor. But of perhaps even more importance is not how it was stored, but how and when it was bottled. The more wine we drink, the more bottle variances we find. Interestingly, this often occurs in wines that are in great public demand. In the case of California wines, 1974 Robert Mondavi Cabernet, 1974 BV Private Reserve Cabernet, and 1975 and 1976 Sterling Reserve Cabernets, are recent examples that have demonstrated a wide degree of bottle variation. Were there several bottlings? Who knows. We often taste several bottles of a wine before publishing our findings – particularly if it's a wine we feel outstanding. Yet there's no way we can know if other lots exist without tasting them. In the case of relatively young wines, perhaps one bottling is re-

leased one month, another the next, and so on. Again, who knows? One thing we do know is that as inexact as is the art of wine tasting, similar palates taste the wines in a similar manner. Different palates may not taste the same. Some people see better than others. Some people hear better than others. And some people taste better than others. So it can occur in a diverse group of people with dissimilar palates, and dissimilar experiences, that an inferior lot of 1974 BV Private Reserve may be proclaimed "better" by consensus vote. Some would vote for the weedy, grassy wine because it is softer to drink now. Others would vote for the ripe, fruity, rich wine even though it is not yet harmonious and developed. Place us in the latter category.

In time, many bottles of 1974 Mondavi, 1974 BV Private Reserve, and 1975 and 1976 Sterling Reserve will improve. Frankly, we doubt that any bottles of these particular wines will ever be great, but one thing we do know is that there will be many different proclamations of their worth. After all, they weren't created equal. In this respect, they're no different than 1959 Lafite. To the wine drinker who first said that there is no really great wine, only great bottles; we will toast you on the next occasion that we drink a truly great bottle of 1959 Lafite. And, with much less gusto, we'll toast you again when we have the not so great bottle!

John Tilson
Editor



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.

The Underground Wineletter is published bi-monthly by Underground Wine Enterprises, Inc., 4157 Banyan, Seal Beach, California 90740. Available only by mail subscription at \$20 per year, foreign air mail subscription \$30 per year. Address correspondence and subscription requests to: P.O. Box 663, Seal Beach, CA 90740. Telephone (213) 430-2284. John Tilson, Editor; Edward Lazarus, West Coast Associate Editor; Geoffrey Troy, East Coast Associate Editor; George Buehler, Bipin Desai, Greg Doerschlag, Brad Klein, Ted Swinnerton, Consultants; Laurie Tilson, Editorial Assistant; Dave Chapman, Founder. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at Seal Beach, California.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Underground Wineletter*, P.O. Box 663, Seal Beach, CA 90740.

©1981 *The Underground Wineletter*. February-March 1981. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form, including office copying machines, in whole or part, without written permission is prohibited by law. News media may quote, provided *The Underground Wineletter* is credited.

VINTAGE PORT

"A cross between a stroke of genius and an act of desperation. . ."

Vintage Port is one of the great wines of the world. Some would say the greatest. Surely, any winelover who has tasted one of Oportos finest would, at the very least, not put up too strong an argument. A wine such as the all-time classic 1931 Quinta Do Noval seems almost too good for mortals to savor. One factor that precludes many from drinking great port is that it takes so long for it to mature. Great vintages need a minimum of 20 years, some specific wines even longer.

True Vintage Port is declared by the various shippers only when they feel the wine is deserving of a vintage. There are no rules. However, some years are declared by more shippers than others. Even so, just because only a few shippers declare a particular vintage, there is no reason to assume the wines are of lesser quality than a more widely declared vintage. In 1931, for instance, only 6 shippers declared, yet the previously mentioned 1931 Quinta Do Noval is probably the greatest port yet produced in this century.

This method of deciding what is to become Vintage Port seems only fair. After all it was the British shippers who invented port. A cross between a stroke of genius and an act of desperation, the addition of brandy to the half fermented juice was found to be a way to make an otherwise impossibly hard, dry wine into something sweet, rich, and fabulous. So it was the sugar of the unfermented juice and the alcohol of the brandy combined to make port. But it does not become port right away, for much time is needed for the brandy and wine to blend and come together. Tasting a young port, without allowing at least several hours air, will yield an almost overpowering, alcoholic smell that can nearly deaden the senses. Likewise, the wine will taste harsh and alcoholic. Only time in the bottle lessens this character and brings all the elements of the wine into harmony. The 1977's, for instance, to be tasted now, need to be decanted and left for hours or even days, to dissipate the strong, alcoholic quality.

Below is an assessment of the Port Vintages of 1977, 1975, and 1970:

1977 VINTAGE PORT

". . . nearly all of these wines could prove to be outstanding."

The 1977 Port Vintage seems destined to be one of the all-time classic vintages, ranking with 1963, 1945, and 1927. The season was characterized by a later flowering and ripening owing to cold and wet weather. However, September was very warm and the vintage began on the 26th. Conditions remained near perfect until October 10 when heavy rains came. Three houses did not declare: Cockburn, Martinez, and Quinta Do Noval. Those that have declared generally produced wines of almost unbelievably dark color and concentration. Most will not be at their best until the turn of the century and beyond. Many should hold well

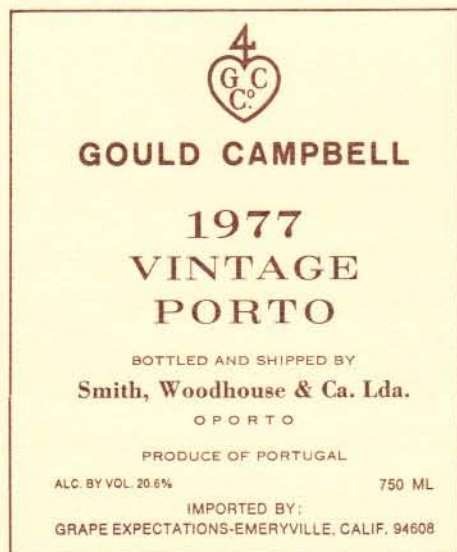
into the 21st century. While some such as Dow seem to be particular stand-outs, there are only minor differences between most of the wines. With additional bottle age (young port from such a vintage as 1977 is very hard to taste and evaluate—only after being opened several days do the wines begin to lose the alcoholic smell and taste), nearly all of these wines could prove to be outstanding. Although they are expensive for wine so far away from being ready to drink, every wine lover should definitely acquire some of these marvelous 1977's.

Outstanding

Dow. What a fantastic young port! One of the darkest colored 1977's—very, very dark almost purple. A huge, plummy aroma is followed by masses of fruit on the palate. Also, one of the firmest 1977's in structure. Tightly knit, aristocratic flavors; not quite as sweet as some such as Fonseca, but long on the palate and a sweetness balanced by fruit and structure, this should be ambrosia in 15-20 years (19). \$15

Fonseca. Again in 1977 Fonseca is a great success. This wine has a very, very dark color with just a hint of amber at the rim. It is very rich and concentrated with a lovely, black cherry fruit and good tannin balance. In 15-20 years this should be near perfection (18½). \$20

Gould Campbell. A relatively unknown port, this should prove to be one of the best of the vintage. A very, very dark almost purple color is followed by a huge, grapy aroma. The wine is rich, full of fruit flavor, very concentrated, and long on the palate with a good tannic/acid balance. If one of the best, this could prove to be one of the longest lived as well (18½). \$15



Graham. This is a concentrated port with a very dark color and a huge, plummy aroma. It is rich with ripe, fruit flavors giving a lushness to the wine despite substantial tannin. Again, give the wine at least 15-20 years to develop (18). \$16

Sandeman. This is one of the great successes from this shipper. This wine has a very dark color, barely amber at the rim. It has a huge, perfumed, black currant/plummy aroma. In the mouth there is loads of plum-like fruit, full, rich, ripe, long on the palate, tannic—superior potential, needs 2 decades (18). \$20



Taylor. Some have called this wine light. Light for Taylor, maybe. By any other standards, no. While it's true it's not the darkest, biggest, or most concentrated of the 1977's, it has a Taylor style and flavor that already shows through. The color is very dark and the spicy/plum/cedary aromas are most attractive. It is full of ripe fruit with a cedary complexity and a good backbone of tannin and acid. This probably won't be as long-lived as the 1945; but, nonetheless, will no doubt be alive and well when most of us are gone (18). \$21

Warre. If not quite as concentrated as some 1977's, this is a full wine which is harmonious and balanced. The color is very dark with a slight amber edge. The aroma of raisins with a toasted/almond complexity is most attractive. There is an abundance of plummy fruit flavors with a cedary nuance and good acid/tannin balance. In 15-20 years this should be lovely (18). \$17

Very Good

Offley Boa Vista. With a dark color, just amber at the rim, and a lovely, fruity/roasted aroma, this wine has lots of raisiny fruit. It is round, ripe, full, tannic, and concentrated and will need 15-20 years to be at its best (17). \$18

Rabello Vallente. One of the darkest colored 1977's with a very, very dark almost purple color, this wine has a ripe, toasty/fruity/plummy nose. A concentrated, berry-like nectar with a ripe sweetness and lots of tannin, this will develop through the end of the century (17). \$19

Smith Woodhouse. This is a wine of massive proportions. The color is very, very dark almost purple, one of the darkest colored 1977's. There is lots of plum-like fruit in the aroma and in the flavor. It is a strapping, big wine, more tannic and harsh than most 1977's, and will need at least two decades to develop (17). \$15

Messias "Quinta do Cachao." Not as powerful as many other 1977's, this is also softer and fatter in style. The color is very dark with an amber edge and the aromas have a grapy/berry quality. By no means light, the wine is full and has nice balance. It should be ready in 10 years or so (16). \$10

1975 VINTAGE PORT

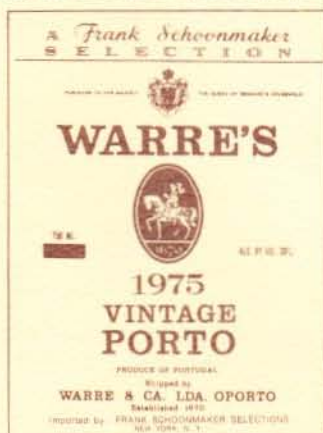
"... some are excellent buys."

The 1975 Port Vintage will be shorter lived than the 1970; for the 1975's tend to be somewhat lighter as a result of heavy rains just prior to harvest. This rain caused the grapes to swell, thus diluting the total concentration of the wine. Because of the extremely hot and dry summer, some ports have that lovely, toasted quality to them. All in all, the 1970 vintage will be the fuller-bodied vintage while the 1975 will be the lighter and more delicate one, maturing earlier and ready for drinking before the 1970, perhaps as early as 1985. It is interesting to note that more wine was produced in Portugal in 1975 compared to the 1970 vintage; however, 50% less vintage port was made. The 1975 port prices are rising partially as a result of higher prices for the 1977 vintage. Compared with the prices for the 1970's and 1977's, some are excellent buys.

Outstanding

Fonseca. This 1975 possesses excellent color and is another excellent wine from this firm. It is still backward in the nose, but has a nice prune and raisin flavor on the palate. With a long and rich finish, the wine will develop extremely well and should be ready for drinking after 1988 (18). \$15

Warre. Having excellent color, this wine is slightly more backward than the Fonseca. On the palate the wine is big, showing much tannin and lots of fruit. It finishes with lots of tannin and good fruit with a lovely, toasted quality. This is a really wonderful port that should be ready in about 10 years (18). \$12



Very Good

Dow. This is another fine port following the very successful 1970. It has a very good color with a lovely nose of raisins and spice. On the palate, the wine has a very fine balance of fruit and tannin, providing an excellent future in 1987 and beyond (17½). \$14

Graham. Although difficult to find in some parts of the country, this port is worthy of a search. It has an excellent, deep color with a wonderful, fruity nose and lovely, cherry-like flavors. The wine has a wonderful richness and is somewhat forward with a long finish. It should be ready in about 5 years (17½). \$15

Offley Boa Vista. Possessing excellent color with a big, fruity nose showing hints of toasted almonds and raisins, the wine has loads of tannin. There seems to be underlying fruit, however, so with perhaps a decade of further aging, this should be one of this firm's best (17½). \$13

Quinta Do Noval. Having a medium dark color, this wine is somewhat light on the palate. Even so, the wine has tremendous elegance with a nice balance of fruit and tannin and a good finish. Certainly the most elegant, lighter-styled wine in this vintage, it should be ready around 1985 (17). \$13

Taylor. This vintage has considerably less concentration than the superb 1970. With a medium dark color, the wine has a lovely, plummy/raisiny nose. It is extremely elegant with a very nice balance of fruit and tannin. Rather light for a Taylor, it should be ready for drinking around 1987 (17). \$12

Martinez. This wine has a light color and is very similar in many respects to the Sandeman. It is just a little more backward. It is considerably lighter than the 1970 Martinez and should be ready in a few years time (16). \$11

Butler Nephew. This wine has an excellent color with a slightly toasted nose. However, on the palate it seems to be quite light. Having some tannin, but lacking concentration, this wine will be ready for early consumption, say about 1985 (16). \$12

Rebello Valente. This wine has a very nice medium dark color, with a somewhat closed nose. It finishes with a nice, lingering sweetness and should be ready about 1985 (16). \$11

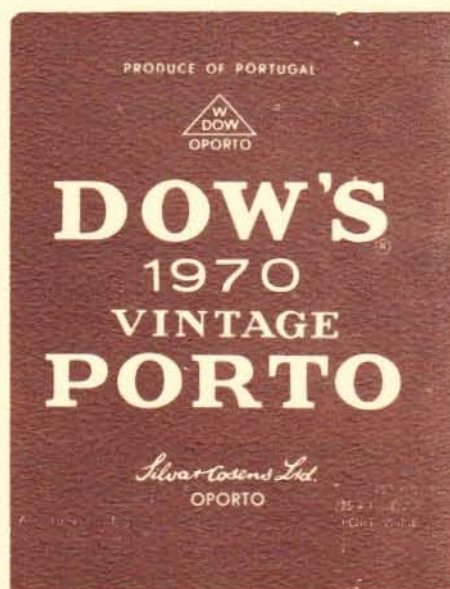
1970 VINTAGE PORT

"... the vintage was marked by perfect weather conditions."

The 1970 Port Vintage was an excellent vintage indeed. Producing wines of deep color, with much fruit and good concentration, yet possessing exquisite bouquet, the vintage was marked by perfect weather conditions. The quantity of the vintage was large and harvesting was done under ideal conditions. Because of the outstanding quality of this vintage it was declared by 23 shippers. The only possible fault is that the wines have less tannin and sheer power than some of the greatest port vintages such as 1977, 1963, and 1945. Yet most wines of this vintage will still not be at their best before 1991, and some such as the Taylor and Warre probably hold until the next century.

Outstanding

Dow. Possessing an excellent deep color all the way to the rim, this is certainly one of the best wines of the vintage. It is a plummy, well-balanced, rich, and fat wine with lots of tannin. This is one to lay down and it should not be ready until 1991 and onwards (18). \$18



Sandeman. The color is medium with some browning towards the rim. Possessing a flowery nose, this wine is particularly forward with a nice, raisiny quality. Although nicely made, it is particularly light in style and will be ready in another year or two (16). \$13

Fonseca. This firm has been consistently making one of the finest ports, deeply colored and very flavorful such as the 1948, 1963, and 1966. This 1970 is archetypical, possessing a sensationally dark color – a very deep garnet to be more precise. It has a rich, raisiny nose and is very intense on the palate. Perhaps a little less concentrated than the Taylor and Warre, it is, nonetheless, a big, mouthfilling wine that needs at least 10 more years bottle age (18). \$18

Graham. This port is from the year that the firm was acquired by the Symington group (which also owns Dow and Warre). The wine has good color – very deep and dark. It has a rich and powerful nose of raisins and plums. Big on the palate with an excellent long and harmonious finish, it is well-balanced and somewhat softer than the Taylor and Fonseca (18). \$18



Taylor. This port is one of the darkest colored 1970's. The wine is huge on the nose with heaps of raisiny fruit and a spicy/cedary complexity. In the mouth, the wine is big and fat with intense, fruity/cedary flavors. The finish is rich and very long with excellent balance. It is a keeper and will not be ready until 1991 at the earliest (18). \$20



Warre. This is the Tricentenary bottling of this famous firm. With a three hundredth anniversary, one could only expect a very special wine, as seemingly even a hundredth anniversary is to be taken seriously. And, indeed, this is truly a superb port. Possessing a deep color, superb bouquet, and good body, the balance is excellent and harmonious with a firm, youthful structure of tannin and acid. This should make for superb drinking in 1990 and beyond (18). \$16

Very Good

Cockburn. This port has excellent color and a rich, raisiny quality in the fruit. However, the wine seems to be a little lighter than past Cockburns and tends to be a little austere on the finish. Although very good, this falls short of some predecessor vintages. This should be ready in about 5 years time (17). \$15

Martinez. It is difficult to remember the last time Martinez made such an excellent wine, but this 1970 is one of their very best efforts. The wine has exquisite color, with no variation to the rim. There is excellent fruit and tannin on the palate which finishes well. It has excellent balance for such a big wine and will improve for 5-7 more years (17). \$13

Quinta Do Noval. This is a nicely colored wine with a big, fruity nose. On the palate it is big and fat with good tannin and a lovely, raisiny flavor. The only fault is that it finishes a little hot. It is a very good port, but lacks the depth to be truly great (17). \$15

Offley Boa Vista. This 1970 Offley is very good. It is not as deeply colored as usual, but is elegant and well-balanced. There is a slightly "roasted" flavor that shows through the good, fruity/spicy flavors. This should be ready in about 5 years (16½). \$11

Sandeman. This firm historically produces wine in a medium-bodied style. At its best, the wine possesses a delicate balance between fruit and tannin. This Sandeman is a typical example with a very dark color, and a flowery, perfumed nose. The wine has good fruit and a very nice richness. In an elegant style, this will make delicious drinking in a few years (16½). \$14

Smith Woodhouse. This wine has a very good color with good fruit on the nose. On the palate there is a lovely, plummy richness; although it finishes a little rough and will need another 8-10 more years to show its best (16). \$17

Croft. This 1970 has a medium color, with a perfumed nose. On the palate there is lots of sweetness; however, this sweetness is lacking tannin and wood, thus making the wine light and lacking grip. This will be ready for early consumption in 2-3 years time (15½). \$19

Rebello Valente. This port has a medium color which lightens toward the rim. It has nice fruit but lacks the intensity on the palate that so many other 1970's possess. It should be ready relatively soon (15½). \$15



MORE 1978 RED BURGUNDIES

“... it won't be surprising to find many more Burgundy scandals uncovered in the next several years.”

As our series of articles on 1978 Red Burgundies continues (see Volume II, Number 2), it is abundantly clear that the woes of a Burgundy drinker continue with respect to the red wines of this vintage. Based on wines tasted to date, there appear to be more outstanding whites than reds. Moreover, inflation and world-wide demand have pushed prices to levels few would have thought possible even a few years ago. Buying very expensive grand cru wines from the big shippers is particularly hazardous. As Burgundies from great vineyards, in a supposedly great year, too many are disappointing. The general fault is lack of extract and flavor. Surely many have been stretched to yield a maximum quantity at a maximum price to a world thirsty for Burgundy. In fact, given what seems to be happening with Red Burgundies, it won't be surprising to find many more Burgundy scandals uncovered in the next several years. Oh, many are pleasant enough

to drink, but if one wants simple wine there are plenty of wines to drink for a lot less money. It is a sad commentary that so many Burgundies have fallen into this category. However, great Burgundy is a wine of such flavor, depth, complexity, and texture that no matter how far some fall, the quest for the occasional gem is one that will forever continue. In this respect, 1978 is clearly fertile ground. The vintage offered the opportunity to make some great wine and in Burgundy this seems to occur only 3-4 times in each decade. So listed below is our second review of 1978 Red Burgundies. Like the Whites, even though prices are high, quantities are limited, and many of the wines are hard to find. But, again, many are worth a search. Don't overlook some of the very good wines with 16-17 rankings in the \$20-30 per bottle range. These are some of the best Burgundy values around.

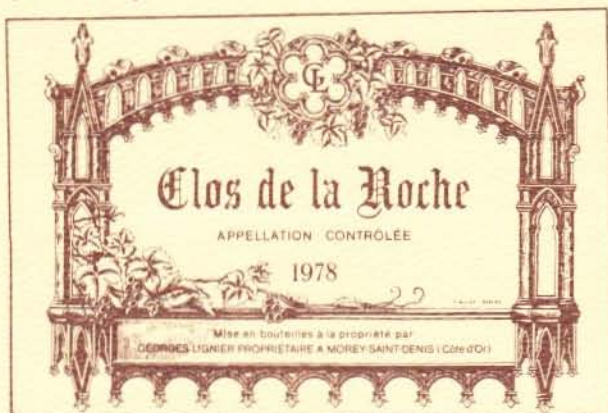
Outstanding

Chambertin “Clos De Beze” (P. Gelin). In recent vintages this has consistently been amongst the top wines. So it is again in 1978, although it is not the sheer strength and power in this wine that form an immediate impression. Rather it is the style and promise of elegance. The color is dark and the nose is deeply perfumed showing a plummy/berry/spicy quality. These are loads of berry-like fruit in a medium to full-bodied style. The flavors are deep and hints of spice promise more complexity with time. The balance is not to be faulted and with 5-6 years this should be a lovely, velvety wine of class and style (18). \$68

Chambolle-Musigny (G. Barthod-Noellat). This is a real sleeper. Not a big label, but a big wine. With a dark color and an intense, perfumed, berry/cassis aroma, it immediately stands out. True to form, the taste follows through—heaps of fruit, olallieberry flavors, deeply chisled, firm, tannic, long on the palate. This is a keeper. Not to be disturbed for several years, what a wine this should be; and, an added bonus, you don't have to mortgage the ranch to buy it (18). \$25



Clos de la Roche (Lignier). Simply put, this is a marvelous Burgundy. The color is dark with just a hint of amber at the edge. There is a huge, intense, perfumed, spicy/berry nose with a bacon-like complexity. Loaded with fruit, the wine already shows a spicy complexity with a deeply imbedded aftertaste. With excellent tannin/acid balance and a solid structure, this should develop for 8-10 years (18). \$37 (New York)



Very Good

Bonnes Mares (Lignier). This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. The wine is fruity and rich with a spicy complexity and an appealing, supple quality. Lacking just a bit on the finish, otherwise, it is first-rate and destined to improve for 5-6 years (17). \$38 (New York)

Corton (Du Martray). This is one of the most attractive Corton's of the vintage at a most attractive price. It has a dark color and a perfumed, raspberry nose with a spicy, candy-like quality—very nice. It is fruity, rich, and spicy with medium body and a nice style. This will undoubtedly improve for many, many years (17). \$35

Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos Prieur" (Geoffroy). This is a really lovely Burgundy with a medium dark color and a well-defined fruity/cherry nose. It is rich and full in the mouth with heaps of fruit and marvelous, complex flavors that linger on the palate. The wine needs 5-6 years bottle age to develop its full, silky elegance and complexity (17). \$32

Mazis-Chambertin (P. Gelin). If not quite as balanced and deep as this producer's Clos de Beze, this is still a very fine Burgundy with a significantly lower price tag. The color is dark and the nose shows a lovely, spicy/berry-like quality. It is very fruity with ripe, lush, slightly sweet flavors showing an attractive, spicy complexity. There is sufficient tannin/acid balance to carry the wine for many, many years with at least 5-6 years more time needed for development (17). \$35

Musigny "Vielles Vignes" (Remoissenet). These old vines produced a big, dark, hard, tannic wine. Presently, the wine is very locked-up and several years bottle age are needed to better assess the longer term potential. The price is painful, but there seems to be underlying fruit that could one day make this a wonderful Burgundy (17). \$56

Nuit-Saint-Georges "Les Hauts Pruliers" (de Gramont). This Burgundy has a dark color and an amber edge with a lovely, deep, fruity/woody/coconut quality—unusual but complex and attractive. There is good fruit and concentration with a firm backbone and good tannin/acid balance. This should be really nice in 5-6 years (17). \$30

Richebourg (Remoissenet). A lovely wine, this is the most expensive of the 1978 Remoissenet's and may be the best. It has a medium dark color and an intensely perfumed, spicy/fruity/vanilla nose. There is a lovely, fruity quality backed by a firm structure. This should be put away for at least 4-5 years and should prove to be a marvelously elegant Burgundy (17). \$63

Volnay "Les Caillerets" (La Pousse D'Or). Most would expect this producer's more expensive "Les Caillerets, Clos Des 60 Ouvrees" to be a fuller, richer wine. Wrong. Several bottles and tastings confirmed the same results each time with an amazing consistency. So it is. This wine has a dark color, and an intensely perfumed nose of boysenberries and spice with loads of fruit and excellent balance. In 5-6 years, this could prove to be outstanding (17). \$28

Chambolle-Musigny (H. Roumier). This is a lovely, medium-bodied Burgundy. It has a medium dark color and a fruity/spicy/plum-like nose. There is good fruit and flavor with a structure to carry the wine for the 5 years or so it will need to develop (16½). \$22

Clos Saint-Denis (Lignier). This Burgundy shows a stylistic resemblance to the Dujac Burgundies. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed, ripe fruit nose with a spicy/bacon-like complexity. The wine is very flavorful and nicely balanced with a ripe, fruity/spicy flavor showing good oak complexities. If lacking a bit of the concentration and flavor of this producer's Clos de la Roche and Bonnes Mares, it is, nonetheless, a very fine Burgundy that should develop well for 5-7 years (16½). \$35 (New York)

Corton (C. Vienot). This is a very nice Burgundy with good depth and concentration. It has a dark color with a lovely, fruity/berry nose. There is lots of fruit and nice balance in a straightforward style. Not terribly complex, but with development potential for at least 5-6 years (16½). \$24

Corton "Clos Du Roi" (P. Ponnelle). This Burgundy has a medium dark color and a lovely, intensely perfumed nose. There is nice fruit with a spicy complexity in a medium-bodied style. Not a big wine, but flavorful and nicely balanced (16½). \$32

Corton "Cuvee Dr. Peste" (Hospices de Beaune). Ouch! The \$60 tariff on this wine really hurts. The wine is nice, but . . . At any rate, a medium dark color and a beautiful, fruity/green olive nose are followed on the palate by a nice flavor that could be more intense. A firm wine with tannin and acid to lose, several years more bottle age are necessary for this to develop (16½). \$16

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Argillieres" (C. Vie-not). This is a substantial Burgundy with a dark color and a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy/cassis nose. There is lots of fruit and a rich, spicy complexity, backed by a firm acid/tannin structure. A minimum of 5-6 years additional cellaring should yield a lovely, velvety wine (16½). \$24.50

Pommard "Les Clos Blanc" (de Gramont). This is a lovely medium-bodied Burgundy that should develop well for 4-5 years. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed, spicy/fruity nose. The wine has good fruit, flavor, balance, and structure. Not terribly complex, but very attractive (16½). \$31

Richebourg (C. Vie-not). This is a big style Burgundy with a dark color and a plummy nose that has just a hint of a curious metallic quality. In the mouth there is lots of everything – fruit, flavor, extract, tannin, acid. Hopefully, time will produce an agreeable bouquet and much time will be needed for the wine to develop – 5-6 years at least (16½). \$53

Aloxe-Corton "Les Vercots-Domaine Hippolyte Thevenot" (A. Guyon). This is a nice, medium-bodied wine that should develop well for 4-5 years. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/plummy/spicy nose. There is lots of ripe fruit with a spicy complexity and good tannin/acid balance (16). \$28

Beaune-Toussaints (Monnier). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, perfumed, berry/cassis/vanilla nose. Very fruity in a medium-bodied style, there is again a hint of vanilla and sweetness on the palate. With a solid structure and good acid, this should improve for 4-5 years (16). \$20

Chambertin-Clos de Beze "Domaine Marion" (H. Audiffred). Like recent vintages of this once noble wine, this is a disappointment. There is a dark color and a fruity/spicy nose, but while fruity and flavorful, the wine lacks depth and the wonderful extract and richness that used to be a characteristic. Nonetheless, if not great, it will be lovely and elegant with 3-5 years bottle age (16). \$45

Corton "Clos du Roi" (Prince de Merode). With a medium dark color and a fruity/candy/spicy nose, this wine has lovely fruit with a round, slightly sweet, vanilla-tinged flavor. Not a keeper, but a delicious wine that should improve for a few years (16). \$37

Musigny (P. Ponnelle). This is a big wine, but the texture already shows a certain softness that should become quite apparent with only a few years bottle age. The color is dark and the nose is very perfumed with a lovely, berry quality. There is lots of fresh, ripe fruit, almost over-ripe with a hint of chocolate – a nice wine at a big price (16). \$53

Volnay "Les Caillerets, Clos Des 60 Ouvrees" (La Pousse D'Or). This wine is very nice even though it lacks the concentration and flavor of the less expensive "Les Caillerets" from this producer. The color is medium dark and the nose is very perfumed with a fruity/spicy quality. There is good fruit with a spicy complexity in an elegant, medium-bodied style. Another 3-4 years bottle age should yield a lovely Burgundy (16). \$32

Bonnes Mares (P. Ponnelle). If not terribly complex, this Burgundy has a dark color and a berry-like/spicy nose. The flavors are pleasant with a light, fruity/spicy quality. The wine has a nice balance and should develop for 3-4 years (15½). \$38

Chambertin (De Marcilly). This wine should benefit significantly from 4-5 years bottle age. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity/cassis-like/spicy nose. There is good fruit in a medium-bodied style with a balance to acid (15½). \$40 (New York)

Chambolle-Musigny (Jadot). This Burgundy has a dark color and a fruity/spicy/olive/bacon nose. There are ripe, fruity flavors in a medium style. Already drinking quite well, this should be ready relatively soon – say 2-3 years (15½). \$28

Clos de Vougeot (Jadot). This wine has a dark color with a subdued fruity/spicy nose. There is good fruit and a spicy complexity, but presently the acidic backbone shows through. Another 3-4 years bottle age should be most helpful (15½). \$40

Corton "Bressandes" (Prince de Merode). With age, this wine should develop more complexity. Just now it's rather one dimensional and straightforward. The color is dark and the wine has a lovely, fresh, berry nose with berry-like flavors in a medium-bodied style (15½). \$35

Fixin "Clos Du Chapitre" (Domaine Marion). This Burgundy should develop well for 4-5 years. It has a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy/plummy nose. There are nice flavors and good fruit and flavor, but the finish is short (15½). \$25

Pernand-Vergelesses "1er Cru" (D. Guyon). This Burgundy has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a perfumed, fruity/spicy/plummy/vanilla nose – really quite extraordinary. The wine is a light style, but it is clean, fresh, fruity, and spicy with honest Pinot Noir flavor. A very good wine at an affordable price for consumption over the next several years (15½). \$17

Perfect with Soul Food?

Pommard "Clos Des Epeneaux" (Armand). Surprisingly big for a Pommard, this wine has a dark color and an unusual mushroom/bacon/black-eyed pea nose. (Could this be the perfect accompaniment to soul food?) The flavors are deep, full, rich, and tannic with an underlying earthiness. Very unusual, but attractive with a seemingly long life ahead (15½). \$34

Pommard "Les Jarollieres" (La Pousse D'Or). This is a very nice Pommard with a medium dark color and a lovely, deep, berry-like nose. The flavors are fruity and balanced, although the finish is just a little short (15½). \$36

Volnay "Clos de la Bousse D'Or" (La Pousse D'Or). This is a nice medium-bodied Burgundy. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely raspberry nose with a spicy complexity. There are nice berry-like flavors with a spicy complexity. Already quite soft, this wine should be doing nicely in 2-3 years (15½). \$32

Beaune "Clos Des Ursules" (Jadot). This usually is quite a nice Burgundy and this 1978 is no exception, although it's too bad there isn't just a bit more extract. A medium color and a fruity/spicy/berry nose are followed by pleasant, fruity flavors showing some complexity. Already pleasant to drink, the wine will, nonetheless, develop for a few years and hold for several years thereafter (15). \$28

Chambertin (Remoissenet). Like so many modern day Chambertins, this wine lacks excitement. It has a dark color and a fruity/earthy/stemmy nose. There is a concentration and a fruity/toasty flavor, but longer term aging potential seems doubtful (15). \$55

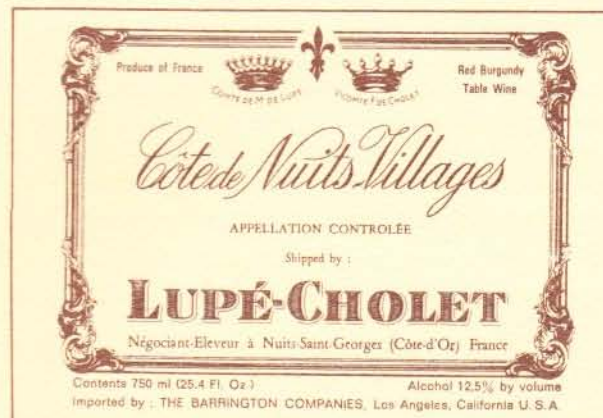
Charmes-Chambertin "Les Mazoyeres" (Domaine Ponnelle). Strangely, this wine is not much richer than the 1976. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/leathery nose showing volatile acidity. It has soft, fruity/spicy flavors, but lacks stuffing. Drink it now and for the next few years (15). \$32

Corton "Renardes" (Prince de Merode). This is a nice, medium-bodied Burgundy with a medium dark color and a lovely, berry/vanilla/toasty nose. It has nice fruit with the toasty oak quality showing through. A firm wine but 3-4 years should be allowed for development (15). \$35



BEST BUY

Cote de Nuits-Villages (Lupe-Cholet). Surprise! This is a very nice Burgundy with a dark color and a fruity/spicy/berry nose. The wine is clean and well made in a medium-bodied style with good fruit and flavor. Not a keeper, but a lovely wine to drink in a year or two and over the next several years. The price is at least affordable (15). \$13



Echezeaux (Chateau de Bligny). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/berry/spicy nose. There are ripe fruit flavors and good acid/tannin balance. It is a nice Burgundy, if not terribly exciting, that should be ready in 3-4 years (15). \$33

Echezeaux (B. Mugneret-Gouachon). This wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed, raspberry/cassis nose. It has clean, fruity/berry-like flavors, but is tart and seemingly quite high in acid. Still there seems to be enough depth to warrant aging for 3-5 years (15). \$35

Fixin "Les Hervelets" (Clemancy-Freres). This medium-bodied Burgundy is presently quite tannic and needs 4-5 years to develop. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy/cherry-like nose. There is good fruit and intensity on the palate (15). \$16

Nuits-Saint-Georges (Chateau de Bligny). This is a nice Burgundy marred by an overly volatile, pickled aroma. Otherwise, it has a medium dark color and lots of fruit with good depth, style, balance, and flavor. The volatile component makes aging potential suspect, but it is very good to drink over the near term (15). \$30

Pommard (Jadot). Shipper's wines from this well-known area are nearly always expensive and most often not very good. This one is expensive, but quite nice. It has a medium dark color and a fruity/spicy/berry-like nose. There is nice fruit, flavor, and structure with room for improvement over the next 3-4 years (15). \$29

Santenay "Les Gravieres" (La Pousse D'Or). This is a fairly good value at \$17. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/berry/spicy nose. There is good fruit in a lighter style with good balance. Just a little short on the palate, but this should be quite nice in 2-3 years (15).

Vosne-Romanee (B. Mugneret-Gouachon). This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy/slightly earthy/toasty nose. The wine has good fruit and depth, but just now it is rather harsh and severe. At least 5-6 years are needed for the wine to develop (15). \$25

Vougeot "Le Prieure" (P. Ponnelle). With a medium dark color and a fruity/berry-like nose, this wine has a fruity/vanilla-tinged flavor. It is pleasant and well made with a slight balance to acid. A few more years bottle age should be most helpful (15). \$19

Good

Chambertin (P. Remy). Alas, another weak Chambertin. This producer's 1969 is a dark, full-flavored, strapping wine. This is the antithesis. The color is a medium reddish orange. The nose is lovely and perfumed with spicy/fruity nuances. The wine has fruit and is soft, elegant, and ready to drink (14½). \$47 (New York)

Chambertin "Clos de Beze" (Rodet). The price of this wine is painful. With a dark color and an amber edge, a major fault is a slight musty/chemical quality in the nose. Air doesn't seem to help. The wine has fruit, but is rather hard and locked-up. No doubt time will soften and unlock the flavor, but the unusual chemical quality is disturbing. At the price, it's easy to leave this one on the shelf (14½). \$56

Clos de Vougeot (Domaine Ponnelle). This wine has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy/toasty nose. There is nice fruit and the wine is soft and pleasant to drink, but the lack of depth is quite noticeable (14½). \$35

Corton-Pougets (Jadot). Not a big wine and a little short on the palate, this is still quite attractive for early consumption. The color is medium dark and the nose shows a spicy/fruity/green olive character. Nice fruit and flavors are already apparent (14½). \$30

Fixin "Les Hervelets" (Crusserey). With a medium light color and a fruity, cherry/raspberry nose, the follow through on the palate exhibits the same freshness. It is a clean, fruity, charming wine in a light style – a wine to drink now and for the next year or two (14½). \$14

Gevrey-Chambertin (C. Vienot). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a curious, port-like nose with a volatile/alcoholic component. The wine is loaded with fruit and quite flavorful, but it finishes hot and is out of balance. Drink soon for the robust flavor (14½). \$20

Gebrey-Chambertin "Les Combottes" (Remoissenet). This is a pleasant enough medium-bodied wine with a medium dark color and a spicy, raspberry nose. It has fruit and a relatively high degree of acid, but finishes short. A few years bottle age should round out the light flavors (14½). \$38

Pommard (Guillermard). With a medium color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose, this is a lighter style Burgundy with a fruity/vanilla flavor. It is ready to drink, but should keep a few years (14½). \$29

Bourgogne (De Gramont). Given the success of so many of this producer's other 1978's, it is not surprising that this simple Bourgogne shows more character and breed than most. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity/raspberry nose. Not intense, but clean, lovely, fresh, Pinot Noir fruit with a nice balance that makes this wine lovely to drink now and for the next year or two (14). \$12

Fixin "Clos Napoleon" (P. Gelin). This wine has a dark color and a subdued, fruity/vanilla-tinged nose. There are nice flavors, but the wine is flat with a short, dry, tannic finish (14). \$23

Only for Well-Heeled Label Drinkers

Musigny (Jadot). A big label, but an unremarkable wine. It has a dark color and a slightly oxidized, fruity/spicy nose. There is a curious, earthy/fruity/slightly stemmy flavor with good acid/tannin balance. Where is this going? At the price, this should be avoided by all but the most devout, well-heeled label drinker (14). \$53

Pommard (Rodet). This wine has a superb nose. The rest of the wine is OK. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, perfumed, raspberry/vanilla nose. There is some fruit, but the wine is thin and lacking in depth (14). \$24

Pommard-Arvelets (Chateau De Bligny). With a medium reddish/orange/amber color, this wine has a nice volatile, fruity/vanilla-tinged nose, but the wine is simple and a little short on the palate (14). \$34

Vosne-Romanee (Drouhin). This wine has a medium dark color and a lovely, fruity/candy-like nose. It is fruity and pleasant with a noticeable sweetness. Not much depth or complexity, but still attractive. This is one to drink now for the fruit (14). \$32

Vosne-Romanee "Les Beaumonts" (Remoisenet). This wine has a dark color and a fruity/stemmy nose. It is fruity, but balanced to acid with a slightly bitter, short finish. Time should help the acidic sharpness of youth, but there is not enough depth or flavor interest (14). \$40

Gevrey-Chambertin "Lavaux Saint-Jacques" (Rodet). Again, a medium dark color shows an orange/amber edge. The nose is subdued. The wine is tart, thin, and without depth. So many of these Rodet wines have the same characteristics one has to wonder what happened (13½). \$33

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Les Boudots" (Grivot). This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/metallic nose. It has some fruit, but is quite thin and short on the palate (13½).

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Premier Cru" (Remoisenet). With a medium dark color and an amber edge, this wine has a fruity/plum-like nose. It is fruity and pleasant to drink, but lacks backbone and stuffing (13½). \$30

Pommard-Epenots (Guillemard). This Burgundy has an old, medium reddish/orange color. The nose has a berry/spicy quality, but the wine is balanced to acid and already shows a noticeable lack of fruit—drink now (13½). \$34

Pommard-Rugiens (Guillemard). Again, this wine is marked by a medium reddish/orange color. The wine has a fruity nose, but is short on the palate, lacking fruit, and quite acidic (13½). \$34

Vosne-Romanee (Jadot). Without great depth and complexity, this wine has a medium dark color, a subdued, fruity nose, and thin, simple, fruity, slightly acidic flavors (13½). \$25

Gevrey-Chambertin (Rodet). This wine has a medium dark color with an orange/amber edge. It has a fruity nose, but the wine tastes tired and lacks depth (13). \$21

Gevrey-Chambertin "Les Estournelles" (Rodet). With a medium dark color and an orange/amber edge, this wine has a nice, spicy, berry nose. Beyond this, the flavors are thin and tart (13). \$33

Below Average

Nuits-Saint-Georges "Clos des Porrets-St. Georges" (H. Gouges). Once a producer of big, "old style" Burgundies, recent vintages have been mediocre to poor in quality. This falls into the latter category with a light reddish/orange color, a fruity/toasty nose, a slight petillance, and a tart, rubbery flavor (11). \$23 (New York)



MORE 1978 WHITE BURGUNDIES

"It is hard to remember a vintage when there were so many really good wines."

This is the third in our series of articles on 1978 White Burgundies (see Volume II, Numbers 1 & 2). In all probability a fourth will follow as there are a tremendous number of wines available. The conclusions drawn earlier are still valid. Namely, 1978 is a great year for White Burgundy. There are many outstanding wines and a very large number of very good wines. It is the depth and consistency of the vintage that is amazing. It is hard to remember a vintage when there were so many really good wines. It is also certainly true that there was never a vintage with so many expensive wines. Generally, the wines have good depth of flavor backed by firm acidity and a good balance of fruit. A few drink well now, but most will benefit from at least 4-5 years bottle age and many should improve for an even longer period. It is a classic vintage, and even though the prices are high, every lover of White Burgundy should acquire a few favorites. Again, it bears repeating that quantities are often quite limited and some of the best wines are difficult to find.

Outstanding

Meursault-Genevrières (Jobard). A fabulous wine and a fabulous bargain at the \$18 price, this Meursault has everything. With a light yellow gold color, the nose is perfumed with a spicy, fruity quality showing a hint of tangerines – most attractive. There is an abundance of ripe fruit and delicious, lingering flavors that are very nearly perfectly balanced. This should be ambrosia in 4-5 years (18½).



Batard-Montrachet (Remoissenet). Surprisingly so, this is an excellent wine from this large, well-known shipper. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose with hints of apricots. It is rich and full with spicy/peach-like, fruity flavors. Already lovely to drink, this should be even better in a few years (18). \$45

Meursault-Perrieres (Michelot-Garnier). This is another classic Meursault from one of the best producers of White Burgundy. The wine is a brilliant light yellow gold. It is intensely perfumed, with peaches and spice dominating. There is lovely, concentrated fruit with hints of peaches and apricots. A delicious wine with nice balance, age should bring out even more complexity. Oh yes, the price makes this one of the bargains of the vintage (18). \$18

Meursault-Poruzot (Jobard). Another superb wine from this outstanding producer, this wine shows the classic qualities of a full, rich Meursault. It has a light yellow gold color and a gorgeous, fruity/spicy/vanilla nose. It is full of fruit with a spicy complexity and excellent balance – ready in 3-4 years, superb value (18). \$16



Very Good

Batard-Montrachet-Bienvenue (Prosper-Mau-foux). The name is rarely seen in this order (usually Bienvenue-Batard-Montrachet). Even so, the wine shows the breed associated with such a great vineyard. It has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. It is rich, fat, and long on the palate with lots of fruity/spicy flavors. Not likely to be long-lived, but very nice (17½). \$36 New York

Chevalier-Montrachet (Deleger). This is a really nice White Burgundy, but at \$50 per bottle it is hardly a bargain. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, perfumed, spicy/fruity nose. There are deep flavors with a spicy/tropical fruit complexity and nice balance (17½). \$28

Corton-Charlemagne (Remoissenet). Are all this shipper's Corton-Charlemagnes designated "Diamond Jubilee"? At any rate, this is another and a very fine bottle at that. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/mealy nose. Exquisitely balanced, the wine has lovely, spicy/fruity flavors and a very long finish. If the nose develops more complexity with time, this could really be superb (17½). \$35

Montrachet (Baron Thenard). Already lovely to drink, this wine has a light yellow gold color and an opulent, ripe, fruity/spicy/buttery nose. It has nice fruit and richness with lovely balance and a long finish (17½). \$57

Batard-Montrachet (Prosper-Maufoux). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It is fruity with firm acid and a spicy complexity. Perhaps lacking just a bit in intensity and richness; time, nonetheless, should yield a lovely bottle (17). \$36 (New York)

Optimum Pro What?

Chassagne-Montrachet (Fauconnet). The label says "Optimum Pro Elegantissimis." That's enough to disturb even a mild cynic. However, assuming this has something to do with elegance, it could be true. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. There is good fruit and flavor in a lovely, soft, elegant style (17). \$23

Batard-Montrachet (Coron). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. It has nice fruit, flavor, and structure, but lacks the richness and distinction associated with this vineyard (16½). \$47

Chassagne-Montrachet (Remoissenet). This is a lovely wine with a light yellow gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. It has good fruit and spicy complexity with fine balance (16½). \$21

Meursault (Jobard). This is another lovely Jobard Meursault; lighter than the Genevrieries and Pozurots, but elegant and stylistic. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, spicy/fruity/vanilla-tinged nose. It is light but flavorful, and nicely balanced showing finesse (16½). \$15

Meursault "Les Boucheres" (Ropiteau-Mignon). This is a lovely wine with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. It has good flavor, fruit, balance, structure, and finish (16½). \$28

Meursault-Charmes (Ropiteau-Mignon). In a lighter style, this is a lovely wine with a light yellow color and a fruity/spicy nose. There is fruit with a spicy complexity and a nice finish (16½). \$28

Meursault-Genevrieries (Michelot-Garnier). This is a lovely wine in a light, elegant style. It has a light yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. The wine has nice fruit, depth, and flavor (16½). \$18

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Chalumeaux" (Ropiteau-Mignon). This is a lovely, lighter style White Burgundy that should be ready in 2-3 years. It has a light yellow color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. The wine has nice fruit and flavor with a good acid balance (16½). \$28

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Folatieres" (Monnier). This is a very nice White Burgundy. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/apple-like/spicy nose. There is good fruit and concentration with a spicy complexity backed by a firm structure (16½). \$23

Chassagne-Montrachet (P. Pillot). This wine will be ready relatively soon. It has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, fruity/spicy nose with a toasted quality. The wine has good flavor and depth with a fruity/almond quality and nice balance (16). \$18

Chassagne-Montrachet (Rodet). Just an appellation wine, this is nonetheless, probably Rodet's best 1978 White Burgundy. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/nutmeg nose. The wine has nice fruit and flavor with a spicy complexity and nice balance (16). \$19

Meursault "Les Perrieres" (Ropiteau-Mignon). This is a very nice wine with a light yellow gold color and a very perfumed, fruity/lemony/vanilla nose. It has good body and depth with nice, fruity, vanilla-tinged flavors (16). \$28

Batard-Montrachet (Caillot). This wine is balanced to acid and needs 3-4 years to develop. It has a medium yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/earthy nose. It has good fruit with a spicy/grapefruit flavor (15½). \$29 (New York)

Chassagne-Montrachet (Niellon). This is a nice wine with a light yellow gold color, a fruity/spicy nose, and nice fruit with good acid (15½). \$22

Chassagne-Montrachet "Clos De La Chapelle" (Duc De Magenta). This wine needs 4-5 years to develop, but should be a lovely, elegant wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy nose. There is good fruit with a spicy component and nice balance (15½). \$24

Meursault "Clos Des Perrieres" (Grivault). With a light yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/oaky/spicy nose, this wine has good fruit, but is balanced to acid and will need quite a few more years age (15½). \$18 (New York)

Meursault "Les Tillets" (G. Michelot). This wine has a light yellow gold color and fruity/spicy nose with just a hint of free sulphur. It is concentrated with good flavors and nice balance (15½). \$19 (New York)

Puligny-Montrachet "Clos de la Garenne" (Duc De Magenta). This wine is lovely in a lighter style. It has a light yellow gold color and a nice, spicy/fruity nose. It is fruity and clean with a spicy complexity and a firm backbone. With 3-5 years bottle age, the wine should develop elegance (15½). \$24

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Folatieres" (Remoissenet). With a light yellow gold color, this wine has a complex, fruity/floral/smoky nose. It has ripe, fruity flavors in a straightforward style with nice balance (15½). \$25

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Reuchaux" (Chateau de Bligny). This wine has a light yellow color and a lovely, fruity/vanilla/tropical fruit nose. The wine has nice fruit and a good balance – quite flavorful (15½). \$23

Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Caillerets" (M. Colin). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a spicy/fruity/oaky nose with a hint of free sulphur. It has nice balance with fruity/spicy flavors and a nice finish (15). \$17

Corton-Charlemagne (Drouhin). This wine has a light yellow gold color and an unusual, malty/fruity nose. It has good fruit, acid, and a nice finish (15). \$35

Meursault (Rodet) This is a wine for early consumption. Again, even though just an appellation wine it is one of the best from this shipper. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/citric/spicy nose. The wine is clean, fresh, and straightforward with nice fruit (15). \$17

Meursault "Le Limozin" (G. Michelot). This is a lighter style wine that needs a few years to soften and develop. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose. There is fruit with a lemony quality and just now the acid predominates (15). \$18 (New York)

Meursault "Les Genevrieres" (Ropiteau-Mignon). Although lacking a bit in depth, this is a very nice wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/lemony nose. There is fruit in a clean, straightforward style with nice acid balance (15). \$28

Meursault "Les Poruzots" (Ropiteau-Mignon). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/toasty nose with just a hint of free sulphur. The wine has nice fruit with a spicy/lemony quality showing through. Just now there is a balance to acidity, but time should help bring the wine into better balance (15). \$28

Meursault-Blagny (Jobard). This Meursault is well made, but lacks depth. It has a light yellow gold color with a lovely, fruity/spicy/lemony nose. It has fruit with a citric, tart aftertaste. Many years will be needed for the wine to blossom and show its true form. Older vintages have shown this tendency (15). \$16

Puligny-Montrachet (Coron). With a light yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/spicy nose, this wine has nice fruit and spicy complexity. It is nicely balanced and should develop well (15). \$23

Puligny-Montrachet "Champ Gain" (Chateau de Bligny). This wine has a light yellow color and a fruity/spicy/lemony nose. A lighter style, the wine exhibits nice, fruity/spicy flavors and should be ready in 2-3 years (15). \$23

Good

Chassagne-Montrachet "Chenevottes" (Deleger). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/floral/almond nose – very complex. It has good, firm, ripe, fruit flavors that show a floral complexity. Just now the wine is sharp and a little bitter on the aftertaste. A few years bottle age should be most helpful (14½). \$23

Chassagne-Montrachet "Les Caillerets" (J. Colin). This wine exhibits a considerable amount of free sulphur in the nose. With one-half hour it blows off leaving a fruity/vanilla-tinged flavored wine that is tart and balanced to acid. There is good depth of fruit and with 3-4 years bottle age the wine should be quite nice (14½). \$16 (New York)

Corton-Charlemagne (Bichot). This wine is austere and quite acidic, needing many more years to fully develop. It has a light yellow gold color and a musty/fruity/spicy nose. Whether there is enough fruit is questionable (14½). \$35

Corton-Charlemagne (Tollot-Beaut). With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/metallic nose, this wine is clean and fresh. However, the wine is quite acidic and tart with a lack of depth and a short finish. Time should round out the rather sharp acidity, but whether there is enough fruit seems questionable (14½). \$25

Meursault "La Goutte-D'Or" (Ropiteau-Mignon). With a light yellow gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose, this wine is forward with a fruity/toasty flavor. It is nicely balanced and doesn't seem to have much potential for improvement (14½). \$28

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Combettes" (P. Matrot). This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/toasty nose. It has the same fruity/vanilla/toasty flavors with a short finish—ready for early consumption (14½). \$26

Auxey-Duresses (Duc De Magenta). Rather a simple wine, but clean, fresh, and pleasant. The color is light yellow gold and the nose shows a fruity/spicy quality. Not much depth, but still has flavor in a lighter style (14). \$15

Criots-Batard-Montrachet (Bonnetoy). This wine is already showing a hint of oxidation and is not likely to be a long term keeper. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/grassy/slightly oxidized nose. There is good fruit and richness with a toasty quality (14). \$29 (New York)

Meursault (Chary). With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/toasty nose, this wine shows fruit and rich flavors with a balance to acid (14). \$18

Meursault (Matrot). This wine has no future. The nose is slightly oxidized and the flavors already show a caramelized quality. Still it is pleasant to drink over the near term (14). \$19

Meursault "Le Limozin" (Monnier). This wine is forward and very nearly ready to drink. It has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, fruity/carmel nose. There is good fruit and flavor with a butterscotch quality (14). \$18

Meursault-Genevrières (Remoissenet). With a light yellow gold color and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose, this wine has fruit, but is thin and rather tart (14). \$20

Meursault (Coron). This wine has a light yellow color and a fruity, slightly minty, herbaceous nose. It is clean, pleasant, simple, and tart (13½). \$21

Meursault "Les Meix Chavaux" (Duc De Magenta). Not as successful as some of this producers other 1978's, this wine is tart and acidic with a lack of fruit and depth (13½). \$24

Meursault "Les Tessons" (Caillot). This wine is more like a White Bordeaux than a White Burgundy. It has a light yellow gold color and an earthy/coconut/botrytis nose. The flavors show a ripe pineapple quality backed by firm acidity and a short finish—strange (13½). \$14

Puligny-Montrachet "Les Chalumeaux" (P. Matrot). This wine is an enigma. On one hand it has a light yellow gold color, but shows a fruity/vanilla/spicy nose with hints of oxidation. On the other, it is thin, acidic, and citric without enough fruit for long term aging (13½). \$26

Corton-Charlemagne (Guyon). At \$47 per bottle this wine is grossly overpriced. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/grassy/spicy nose. The fruit is subdued and the wine is thin with a short finish (13).

Below Average

Corton-Charlemagne (Rodet). It's very hard to tell what happened to this wine—certainly nothing very good. It has a light yellow gold color and a stinky, rancid, peanut oil nose. It is tart with a peanut flavor. Maybe somebody should send a case to Jimmy Carter (10½). \$31



CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

"In view of all the wine, it is hard to see how prices can continue to increase at the rate of recent years."

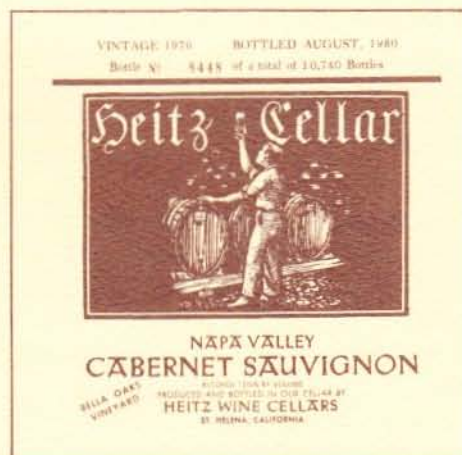
In the past several months many 1978 California Cabernet Sauvignons have been released for sale. In addition 1976 and 1977's continue to proliferate with a few late released 1976's (such as Sterling "Reserve" and Heitz) just now becoming available. Whereas, in the past, Cabernets have been assessed by vintage (1974-77 in previous issues), beginning with this issue they will be reviewed as they come to market.

However, given the appearance of some 1978's, a review of the vintage seems in order. Coming after the two drought years of 1976-77, the 1978 vintage was bountiful. Total production increased 43% to 80,943 tons. Moreover, most of this increased production came from the prime areas of Napa and Sonoma. Napa's production was up 40%, Sonoma's up 68%, and the heavily planted Southern Central Coast area was up a lesser 29%. Total acreage planted increased only slightly from 26,871 acres to 26,883 acres. Napa and Sonoma showed increases of 6% and 11%, respectively, while the huge increases in plantings in Monterey finally turned around in 1978 with acreage actually declining by about 5%.

Most winemakers have been very enthusiastic about their 1978 Cabernets. However, it is not universally great. The large production caught many quality-conscious producers by surprise. Consequently, even some of these producers have wines that are light and lacking in concentration. Needless to say, many of the volume producers were literally awash in Cabernet. From a consumers standpoint, 1978 is a year to be selective, but also a year where many fine wines will be produced. In total, it would not be surprising to see 400-500 different wines from the vintage. In view of all the wine, it is hard to see how prices can continue to increase at the rate of recent years. Still producers such as Heitz and Mondavi are certainly not bashful about increasing prices. As a matter of fact, they seem to be locked in a battle to see who can produce the most expensive Cabernet. This sets the stage for others such as Clos Du Val and Sterling to boost their prices into the same lofty price categories. Just how much young Cabernet can be sold at prices of \$20-35 per bottle will be tested over the next several years. In the interim, there should be a lot of very good-excellent wine at prices 1/3-1/2 less.

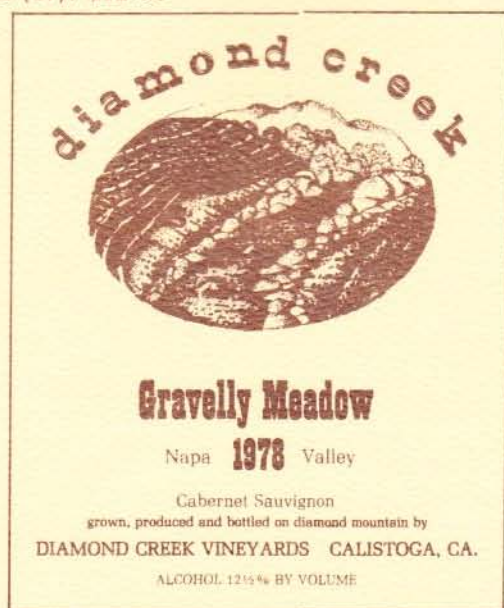
Very Good

1976 Heitz Cellar "Bella Oaks Vineyards." This is a new vineyard designation for Heitz. When it comes to Cabernet, Heitz on the label most always means a lofty price tag and at \$35 per bottle "Belle Oaks" is no exception. However, it is a very fine wine - probably the best 1976. It has a dark color and initially shows very little aroma. With air a fruity/berry nose develops showing a hint of eucalyptus. The wine is loaded with ripe fruit flavors exhibiting a chocolate quality. It is marvelously balanced with a long, lingering palate impression. With 4-5 years bottle age, the wine should be approaching maturity (17½).



1978 Buehler Vineyards "Napa Valley." Greetings to yet another new California winery. Indeed, this estate bottled Cabernet has created quite a stir amongst Cabernet fanciers, and deservedly so. For there is no doubt that it's a very fine Cabernet, but the ripe, late harvest style and volatile aromas raise doubt as to its aging potential. Nonetheless, it is not unpleasant now with a dark color and a volatile, oaky/fruity/berry-like nose. The wine has rich, ripe fruit flavors and lovely balance. Long on the palate, there is some tannin which should soften with another year or two of bottle age (17). \$8.50

1978 Diamond Creek Vineyards "Gravelly Meadow." Again, the Gravelly Meadow is the most complex of the Diamond Creek Cabernets. This wine seems to have more fruit than the 1975 and is in the style of the 1974, although it may be earlier maturing. It has a dark color and a perfumed, spicy/sandalwood/cigar box nose. The wine has lots of fruit with a firm, lean backbone and good tannin/acid balance. Just now the "gout de terroir" present in this wine before bottling is obscured. Time should yield more complexity and the wine should age well for many years (17). \$12.50



1978 Diamond Creek Vineyards "Volcanic Hill." As we indicated in our barrel sampling (see Volume I, Number 6), this is again the biggest of the Diamond Creek Cabernets. It is full of fruit and has a firm structure with a good acid/tannin balance. Some bottles suffer from a bit of free sulphur; but not to worry, with 10-20 minutes air this blows away leaving a very fruity/cedary nose. Lay this one away for 3-5 years before retasting (17). \$12.50

1976 Heitz Cellar "Martha's Vineyard." At an initial release price of \$35 per bottle, this is one of the most expensive Cabernets ever. Given a greatly reduced quantity in the 1976 drought year (about 1/3 of normal), part of the pricing strategy no doubt has to do with the small amount of wine available. It is doubtful that at this early stage many would pick this wine as "Martha's Vineyard." It has a dark color and a fruity/cardamom/mace nose—very unusual. The wine is immense—big fruit and loaded with tannin. In fact, presently it's rather coarse and harsh, although there are complexities of flavor to give the wine interest. With air a hint of the characteristic "Martha's Vineyard" mint quality begins to come through. This wine probably won't be ready to drink for 10 years and only time will tell if the fruit outlives the tannin (16 1/2).

1978 Ravenswood "Olive Hill Ranch." This Sonoma Cabernet has a dark color and a spicy/oaky/fruity/cassis nose. The wine is loaded with fruit with good flavors and nice tannin/acid balance. This will surely be one of the best 1978 Sonoma Cabernets and should make a very nice bottle in 3-5 years (16 1/2). \$10

1978 St. Clement "Napa Valley." Somewhat atypical of this vintage, this seems to be the lightest of St. Clement's three Cabernets. It has a dark color and a cherry/berry/vanilla nose with nice fruit and lovely balance. Made in a medium-bodied style with soft tannin, the wine should develop in 2-3 years and make a lovely bottle (16 1/2). \$12

1976 Sterling Vineyards "Reserve." Like the 1975 "Reserve" (see Volume I, Number 6), this 1976 "Reserve" suffers from substantial bottle variation. Some bottles have an unpleasant, musty/skunky nose and raisiny flavors. Other have a fruity/currant/spicy nose and loads of fruit in a big style, but with good tannin/acid balance. At \$25 per bottle, the consumer has a right to more consistency. Bottles purchased unknowingly and layed away for the many years it will take this wine to mature may never be very good. Caveat emptor! The wine can be good to very good and it is highly advisable to try a bottle and then purchase additional bottles from the same case if possible. This ranking is for the best bottles (16 1/2).

1978 Cakebread Cellars "Napa Valley, JT-L1." Better balanced than the "Napa Valley," this wine has a dark color and a fruity/minty nose with good fruit and flavor. It does lack a bit of the depth of the "Napa Valley" as well and is less tannic. With 2-3 years bottle age, it should be quite nice (16). \$12

1978 Diamond Creek Vineyards "Red Rock Terrace." This is a big Cabernet that shows an intense, youthful grapiness. Tasted from the barrel (see Volume I, Number 6), the wine was similar. Just now the wine is rather straightforward masking the complexity that will surely come with bottle age. This should keep for many years, but another 2-3 years will yield a better glimpse of the wine's complexity (16). \$12.50

1978 Roudon-Smith Vineyards "California." Produced in a small quantity from old vineyards in Saratoga, this could be labeled a poor man's Martha's Vineyard. It has a dark color and a minty/fruity nose with a hint of volatile acidity. With nice, grapy/fruity flavors and some tannin, the wine should be ready in 2-3 years. It is sold only from the winery (16). \$12

1978 Cassayre-Forni Cellars "Napa Valley." This is a nice Cabernet with a dark color and a fruity/slightly weedy nose. The wine has nice fruit and balance with tannin and acid to lose (15½). \$8.50

1978 Cakebread Cellars "Napa Valley." This wine is similar to the JT-L1" bottling, but it is bigger, more tannic, and lacks the mint quality in the nose. If the severe tannin softens, it could ultimately be a better wine. However, the two wines blended together seemed to make a better wine with a minty nose, good depth, and less tannin. These will be interesting to watch develop (15). \$12

1978 Carneros Creek Winery "Turnbull/Fay Vineyards." This Napa Valley Cabernet has a dark color and an over-ripe, fruity/fennel-like nose. There is good fruit with a nice flavor and an oak complexity. The wine is presently tannic, slightly bitter, and needs 3-5 years to develop (15). \$8.50

1978 Dehlinger Winery "Sonoma." This Cabernet is a reasonably good value at \$8. It has a dark color and a fruity/grapy/oaky nose. There are fruity/grapy flavors with some tannin. Not a big wine, but a few years bottle age should yield a nice drinking Cabernet (15).

1977 Jekel Vineyards "Monterey County." Made from estate grown grapes, this is Jekel's first Cabernet. They must share the dislike of vegetables and bell peppers in Cabernet because neither of these flavor components or the similar strong herbal quality is discernable in this wine. It has a dark color and a fruity/oaky/cassis nose with a hint of chocolate. The wine is fruity with good balance and will develop early – say 2 years or so (15). \$8.75

1978 Keenan "Napa Valley." This wine has a dark color and a grapy nose. Loaded with fruit, the wine is thick and grapy. Much too young to drink, it will need many years to develop (15). \$10

1977 Ravenswood "El Dorado County." This Cabernet from Madrona Vineyard is a huge wine. Despite some difficulty in identifying varietal fruit, lovers of big style Cabernets will love this. It has a dark color and a volatile/spicy/fruity/vanilla nose. There is loads of ripe fruit backed by lots of tannin and acid. Despite the bigness of the wine, it has delicious fruit and could develop surprisingly well (15). \$8.50

1978 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Napa Valley." This is a nice Cabernet with a dark color and a fruity/oaky/chocolaty/slightly herbaceous nose. It is a firm wine with good fruit and structure and a hint of weediness. It should make a nice bottle in 2-3 years (15). \$12

Good

1977 Clos Du Val "Reserve." Frankly, this wine doesn't seem as good as the regular 1977 Clos Du Val or the 1977 second label (Granval) for that matter. However, it does cost a lot more and at \$20 is grossly overpriced. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/berry/slightly stemmy nose. It has a medium body with fruity/slightly herbaceous flavors (14½).

1978 Harbor Winery "Napa Valley." This unfiltered Cabernet has a dark color and a fruity/grassy nose. It has good fruit and flavor with a plum-like quality. Needing a few more years bottle age, this could be quite nice (14½). \$9

1976 Inglenook "Cask 59." Over the years there has been very little, if any, difference between the variously numbered Cask bottlings in any given vintage. This wine is quite nice in a lighter style. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a lovely, fruity/berry nose. The wine has nice fruit and flavor with just a bit of acidity in the finish. It should be ready in another 1-2 years (14½). \$10

1977 Mt. Veeder Winery "Niebaum-Coppola." This Napa Valley Cabernet from old vines which were part of the Inglenook estate will appeal to mint lovers. It has a very dark color and the minty nose so characteristic of a few Napa Valley wines (Martha's Vineyard being the prime example). There are grapy/slightly herbaceous flavors and the wine finishes dry and tannic. Perhaps time will help (14½). \$9.75

1974 Sebastiani "Proprietor's Reserve." At \$8.50 this is a good value for an aged wine. It has a medium dark color with orange/amber tones. The nose shows fruit and oak and the wine has oak/fruity flavors. Medium-bodied, this wine is very pleasant and ready to drink (14½).

1978 Dry Creek Vineyard "Sonoma." This wine should improve for several years. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a grapy/fruity/oaky nose. There is lots of fruit and a slight stemmy/herbaceous quality in the flavor with a firm, tannic finish (14). \$7.25

1977 Dry Creek Vineyard "Vintner's Selection."

This Sonoma Cabernet is soft and should be ready in a few years. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/grapy/berry/oaky nose. The flavors have a berry/oaky/herbaceous quality (14). \$10

1977 Kenwood "Artist Series." The busy label is nice, the wine OK except for the stiff \$15 price. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/medicinal nose. The wine has good fruit and oaky/grapy flavors in a straightforward style. It should be ready in a few years (14).

1978 Round Hill Vineyards "Napa Valley." This wine has a dark color and an oaky/fruity nose. The wine is loaded with fruit, but it is presently overpowered by a slightly bitter tannin. Lay this away for 3-4 years, it should make a good bottle (14). \$7.50

1976 Silver Oak "Alexander Valley." Given the concentration of most 1976's, this wine is difficult to understand. It is a light wine with a medium, amber-tinged color. There is an oaky/berry quality in the nose and taste, but the wine is rather simple. Seemingly there is enough acid to carry the wine for a few years, but there is no depth and no real flavor interest (14). \$11.75

1974 Simi "Reserve Vintage." Age doesn't make a wine great and this is a good example. One of the last 1974's to be released, the price is three times what it would have probably been several years ago. The wine is soft and ready to drink, but it doesn't deliver any real excitement. The color is dark with an amber edge and the nose has a fruity/herbal quality. It is fruity and a little stemmy in a soft, easy-to-drink style (14). \$18

1978 Tulocay Winery "Napa." This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/minty/musty nose. The wine is fruity and grapy with pleasant, straightforward flavors (14). \$8.25

1978 Chateau Chevalier "Napa." This is probably Chateau Chevalier's best Cabernet to date which, unfortunately, isn't saying much. The color is very dark and the nose is fruity/oaky, and leathery. The wine has ripe, grapy, slightly sweet flavors with a raw, bitter, tannic finish. Some bottles seem to have a slight amount of CO₂ as well. Only time will tell how this wine will develop, but given previous vintages it seems a chancy bet (13½). \$12

1978 Spring Mountain "Napa Valley." At \$12 per bottle this is hardly a bargain. The wine has a dark color with an amber edge. The nose is slightly musty with an underlying fruity/oaky component. In the mouth there is fruit and oak flavors with a slight bitterness and a short finish (13½).

1978 Alexander Valley Vineyards "Sonoma." This estate bottled Cabernet is simple and fruity with a slightly herbaceous nose and flavor (13). \$6.50

1978 Clos Du Bois "Alexander Valley." Made with 25% Merlot, this wine is soft, flat, ripe, and forward. The nose exhibits an over-ripe vanilla quality (13). \$7.50

1978 Felton-Empire "Hallcrest." The old Hallcrest vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains often have trouble ripening. This 1978 seems to have fruit, but it is light, simple, and exhibits a dry finish – hardly worth the lofty \$16 tag (13).

1978 Felton-Empire "Hallcrest-Beauregard." This wine has a dark color and a volatile, fruity, slightly skunky nose. There is fruit, but the wine lacks structure and is flat and tannic (13). \$12

Below Average

1978 Santa Ynez Valley Winery "California." This wine has a dark color with an unusual herbal/hay-like nose. It is fruity, but rather flat with herbal flavors and a hot finish (11). \$5.75

1979 Lawrence Winery "San Luis Obispo." A 1979 Lawrence Winery "San Luis Obispo" Cabernet won a gold medal at the 1980 LA County Fair. So far there doesn't appear to be any bottles available for sale that even remotely resemble a medal winner of any sort in any competition. The wine is, in a word, Awful and not as good as a mid-grade jug wine. It has a medium dark color and a grassy nose. In the mouth, the wine is flat and slightly sweet with Kool-Aid flavors and a bitter finish (8). \$9

1978 Sanford & Benedict Vineyards "Santa Ynez Valley." Give this wine points for color and not much else. It has a grassy/stemmy nose and ripe, herbaceous/vegetative, late harvest flavors (8). \$10



CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS

"... as more wines are becoming available distribution of the best wines is increasing outside California."

As many 1979 California Chardonnays come to market it is quite clear that 1979 will produce many fine wines. Generally not as rich and alcoholic as the 1978's, the wines may ultimately prove to be more graceful and charming. Nonetheless, the 1978's such as Hanzell, Chalone, Matanzas Creek, etc. are classically flavorful Chardonnays in the distinct California style. As has been pointed out (see Volume II, Number 2), even with ever increasing prices some appear to be relative bargains. As an added plus, nearly every year produces some outstanding Chardonnay. With more and more wines coming to market, the consumer has many choices. Moreover, as more wines are becoming available, distribution of the best wines is increasing outside California. For example, see the comments on 1979 Chalone which is available in New York, but not in California. Below is an assessment of some currently available California Chardonnays:

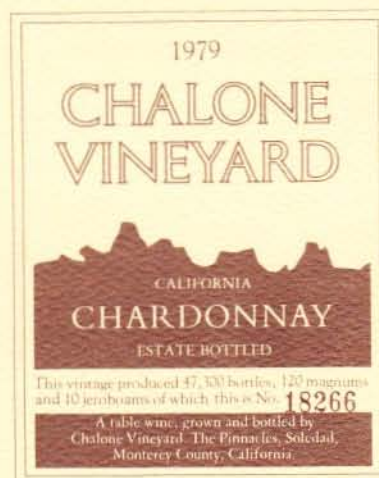
Outstanding

1978 Hanzell Vineyards "Sonoma." Again in 1978 Hanzell has produced a rich, flavorful wine; and, despite being relatively high in alcohol, there is no harshness. It has a light yellow gold color and an intense, rich, oaky/pineapple nose with just a hint of anise - very intriguing. The flavors are rich and deeply imbedded and the wine is loaded with ripe fruit. A mouthful of complex flavors, the wine already drinks well, but should round out and show improvement for several more years (18). \$13



Very Good

1979 Chalone Vineyard. Here's a switch. This wine was released to the East Coast a month or two ago, but apparently has not yet been sold on the West Coast. Like most Chalone Chardonnays, it is a very good wine in a big, rich style. With a light yellow gold color and a fruity, oaky, pineapple nose, there is nice fruit and loads of flavor. Already pleasant to drink, further complexity should develop with a few years bottle age. The approximate 48,000 bottle production represents a bumper crop for Chalone and the wine lacks just a bit of depth of the marvelous 1978 (17). \$18



1979 La Crema Vinera "Ventana." Of the many 1979 Chardonnays made from Ventana Vineyard grapes, this seems the best to date. It has a yellow gold color and a perfumed, vanilla, tropical fruit nose. There is good fruit and a nice flavor backed by a solid backbone. Given a few years bottle age, this could develop more complexity and prove to be outstanding (17). \$12.50

1978 Stony Hill "Napa Valley." Like nearly all Stony Hill Chardonnays, this wine will need at least 6-7 years to develop. In time, it should be one of the winery's best. The color is light yellow gold and the nose exhibits a fruity/spicy/mealy quality (not unlike some Corton-Charlemagnes). There is lots of fruit and the wine is firm with good balance (17). \$10

1979 Acacia "Winery Lake." This Napa Valley Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color with a fruity/floral/apple-like nose with a fruity flavor and an oaky complexity. It is a firm wine with good acid. Time is needed for it to come together, but in 2-3 years time this should make a really good bottle (16½). \$14

1979 Carneros Creek Winery "California." Here is one of the best Chardonnays values currently available. The wine has a light gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/oaky/spicy nose. It has good fruit, rich flavors, and good balance. With 2-3 years more bottle age, it should develop nicely (16). \$8

1979 MEV "Ventana Vineyard." This is a very nice Chardonnay with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/oaky/lemony nose. There is good fruit and a nice, firm structure. This should age very well for 3-5 years and make a lovely bottle (16). \$10.50

1979 Roudon-Smith Vineyards "California." This Chardonnay from Edna Valley in San Luis Obispo is very flavorful. It has a yellow gold color and a woody/spicy/buttery/apricot nose with rich, ripe, fruit flavors. A big style Chardonnay that should improve for another year or two; the price is likewise attractive (16). \$19

1978 Clos Du Bois "Proprietors Reserve." The label says to keep this Alexander Valley Chardonnay for 8-10 years. Good luck! It is a very nice wine, but it is unlikely to improve after 4-5 years at the most. With a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/oaky/spicy nose, there is good fruit and flavor (15½). \$12

1978 Heitz Cellar "Napa Valley." Not as rich as some previous Heitz Chardonnays, this may be a reflection of the grape source as well as anything else. Nonetheless, it is a nice wine with a yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. There is nice fruit and flavor backed by a firmness that should allow for development over the next 3-5 years (15½). \$9.75

1979 St. Francis Vineyards "Sonoma Valley." This estate bottled wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/spicy/mealy nose. Except for more oakiness, the nose is reminiscent of Corton-Charlemagne. The wine has fruity flavors with oaky nuances and an allspice complexity. It is clear and crisp, but finishes just a little short. However, it is a nice wine leaning toward White Burgundy in style and an excellent value at \$8.50 (15½).

1979 Chaparral "California." This wine was produced and bottled by Chalone Vineyard from the Edna Valley Vineyard in San Luis Obispo. It has a light yellow gold color and a perfumed, fruity/oaky nose. It is full, rich, and mouthfilling with ripe, fruity, spicy flavors (15). \$9.50

1979 Fenestra "Livermore Valley." Although made in an oaky style, this Chardonnay is clean and without the regional grassy/herbaceousness often found in Chardonnays from this area. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. In the mouth the flavors are rich and ripe with lots of fruit and oak. This should round out nicely in a few years – good value (15). \$8.50

1979 Flora Springs "Napa Valley." This new winery produced only a very small quantity of this wine. It has won critical acclaim causing some retailers to double the \$9 price (that is, if you can find it). It is a very nice wine at \$9 and a terribly over-priced one at \$18. With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose, there is good fruit and a nice oak balance (15).

1979 Iron Horse Vineyards "Sonoma." This estate bottled Chardonnay needs several more years to develop and come together. It has a light yellow gold color and a subdued nose with a fruity/spicy/buttery quality. Although crisp at this early stage, there is fruit with a spicy complexity – good value (15). \$8

1979 Napa Wine Cellars "Napa Valley." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. When first poured the wine is slightly petillant, but this leaves with a few minutes air. It has nice, ripe, fruit flavors and is round and balanced on the palate. Strangely, there is a lack of follow through on the aftertaste. With a few years bottle age, this should show improvement (15). \$9.75

Good

1979 Santa Ynez Valley Winery "Reserve De Cave." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/apple-like, oaky nose. The wine has a good balance of fruit and oak with good depth of flavor. However, it is slightly petillant (probably CO₂ since it seems to dissipate with time) (14½). \$11

1979 Sarah's Vineyard "Ventana Vineyards." This Monterey County Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. It is fruity, crisp, and pleasant, but overpriced at \$12 (14½).

1979 Acacia "Santa Barbara-Tepesquet Vineyard." This is an unusual wine. It has a light gold color and a lovely, fruity/floral nose – bananas and gardenias. Likewise, in the mouth it has a fruity/floral flavor, almost as if someone had added crushed gardenias. The wine is nicely balanced and almost sweet (14). \$9

1979 Inglenook "Napa Valley." With a light yellow gold color and a fruity/citric/vanilla nose, this wine has nice fruit and an oaky complexity. A little thin and short on the palate, but clean, pleasant, and imminently drinkable (14)^{1/2}

1978 Mill Creek Vineyards "Sonoma." With a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose, this wine is clean and pleasant, although a bit austere (14). \$8



BEST BUY

1979 J. Pedroncelli "Sonoma County." Looking for a decent Chardonnay at a modest price? This is it. With a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity nose with oaky nuances, the wine is clean, fresh, and very drinkable. Oh yes, unlike many lower-priced "Chardonnays," this one has some varietal character (14). \$5.50



1979 Round Hill Vineyards "Napa Valley." This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity nose. The flavor is rather subdued, but there is some fruit and the wine is clean and pleasant, if lacking in complexity (14). \$8.50

1979 Tulocay Winery "Napa Valley." This is a very oaky style Chardonnay. It has a medium yellow gold color with an oaky/fruity nose showing just a hint of bananas. It has very oaky flavors in a heavy style. A few years bottle age are needed to bring the wine together, but oak is likely to be the dominant factor (14). \$8

1979 ZD Wines "Sonoma." This is a medium-bodied Chardonnay with a lot of oak. It has a yellow gold color and an oaky/vanilla nose. There are nice fruity/oaky flavors that should develop complexity over the next year or two (14). \$10

1978 David Bruce "San Luis Obispo." Dr. David believes this is one of his best Chardonnays. Well . . . it is definitely the Bruce style, but an underlying grassy regional character is a detraction. It has a light amber gold color and a buttery/herbaceous, slightly toasted nose with an almost botrytis-like complexity. The wine is rich, ripe, buttery, grassy, and slightly petillant – again, a most unusual wine from the master of the art (13^{1/2}). \$12

1979 BV "Beaufort-Napa Valley." This Chardonnay is loaded with oak (probably American oak). Maybe this is BV's attempt at a "bigger" style since so many previous vintages have been thin and uninteresting. Well, this lacks fruit, but it is intriguing for an oaky/spicy/fruity/red licorice nose. In the mouth the wine is clean, tart, and oaky (13^{1/2}). \$7

1978 Chateau St. Jean "Les Pierres Vineyards." Frankly, this is one of this winery's least attractive Chardonnays in recent memory. Some bottles have a musty nose and flavor. Others have oaky/fruity flavors, but are lacking style and definition (13^{1/2}). \$13.75

1979 Hacienda "Claire de Lune." This Sonoma Chardonnay is a heavier style than previously. It has a light gold color and a fruity/apricot/oaky nose. There is a strong flavor, but the wine is rather harsh and finished slightly hot. Time may help bring the wine together (13^{1/2}). \$9

1978 Landmark "Sonoma County." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and an oaky nose showing only subdued fruit. It has a fruity/oaky flavor and is straightforward, although a bit harsh and short on the palate (13½). \$9.50

1979 Santa Ynez Valley Winery "California." This is a much simpler wine than the "Reserve De Cave." It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/floral/oaky nose. It has a fruity, somewhat oaky flavor, but is tart and rather short on the palate (13½). \$7.50

1979 Stonegate "Vail Vista Vineyard." This Alexander Valley Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/grassy/herbaceous nose. It has a ripe, fruity/oaky character with a spicy complexity tinged with herbaceousness. It is a rich wine that should develop for another few years (13½). \$10

1979 ZD Wines "Santa Barbara." This Chardonnay has a yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla/herbal nose. The flavors are fruity and slightly herbal with an underlying bitterness. Time may help, but at \$12 the wine is hardly a value (13½). \$7

1979 Boeger "El Dorado County." There isn't a lot of El Dorado County Chardonnay and it is unlikely there ever will be. It's not the right area. This wine is well made, but lacks distinction. The color is yellow gold and the nose has an herbal/vanilla quality. There are fruity/citric flavors that are clean and crisp if not particularly varietal (13). \$7

1979 Conn Creek "Chateau Maja." This is Conn Creek's second label made from North Coast grapes. It is not particularly varietal with a pungent oaky/grassy nose and strong, oaky/grassy/fruity/herbal flavors (13). \$7

1979 Dry Creek Vineyard "Sonoma County." This Chardonnay has a light gold color and a fruity/oaky/anise nose. It is rather austere with a flat, oaky/fruity flavor and a tart finish (13). \$9.75

1979 La Crema Vinera "Winery Lake." Unlike the very good "Ventana" bottling, something went wrong here. The wine is very flavorful in a big, oaky style, but it is also a cloudy, yellow gold color. The aging potential seems doubtful. So even though the wine is rather raw and undeveloped at this stage, it is best consumed now (13). \$12.50

1979 River Oaks Vineyards "Alexander Valley." This is a good buy at \$6. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/apple-like nose. There are fruity/citric flavors that are clean, simple, and pleasant (13).

1979 Devlin "Monterey County." This wine has a light yellow gold color and a floral/spicy nose. It has ripe fruit flavors that show a hint of sweetness and there is a bit of petillance (12½). \$8

1978 Thomas Kruse "California." Here is another strange Chardonnay. With a light gold color and an oaky/vanilla/pineapple nose, the wine has ripe, almost sweet, burnt flavors. It is rich, thick, concentrated, and slightly petillant. For once, something this unusual is at least priced in a moderate range (12½). \$6

1979 Pannonia Winery "Napa Valley." This estate bottled Chardonnay is an unusual wine in an unusual clear glass bottle. It has a light gold color and a musty (clears up with ½-hour air), oaky, banana-like nose. The wine has very oaky flavors with good balance and a short finish (12½). \$8.50

1979 Stony Ridge Winery "Livermore Valley." This Chardonnay has a light gold color and a ripe, fruity/oaky/cinnamon nose. It has a very oaky flavor and is flat with a spicy/herbaceous quality. Lacking structure, the wine has no real future (12½). \$10

1979 Dehlinger Winery "Sonoma County." Dehlinger usually produces a fine, oaky-styled Chardonnay. This 1979 falls short of previous vintages. The nose is marred by a sulphurous/skunky quality and the wine is fruity, thin, and simple with a short finish (12). \$8.50

1979 Kalin Cellars "Sonoma." This wine smells bad and tastes OK. The nose is grassy and skunky. The taste is fruity and tinged with vanilla, although there is very little depth (12).

Below Average

1979 Parducci "Mendocino County." Something went wrong here. The wine has a skunky/grassy/floral nose and flat, one-dimensional flavors with a slight petillance (11). \$6

1979 Martin Ray "Dutton Ranch." This property has produced many memorable Chardonnays including 1976 Burgess, 1978 Matanzas Creek, and 1979 Kistler. This wine is a total waste of the grapes. Frankly, it's hard to understand how any wine merchant who tasted the wine would buy it at any price, much less the absurd \$18 retail tag. It has a light yellow gold color and a sulphurous nose. There are oaky/fruity flavors with a curious petroleum distillate/airplane glue aftertaste. Only glue sniffers are likely to love this wine (10).



1978 Sanford & Benedict Vineyards "California." The \$13.75 price for this poor wine is outrageous. Is this winery becoming the Martin Ray of Santa Ynez? The color is medium gold and the nose is oxidized, grassy, and dank. Not pleasant to drink, it has the same oxidized, grassy, musty flavor with an added tartness (10).

BARRELS AND BOTTLES

"A Guide to Some of the Best Pre-Release California Wines"

Beringer Vineyards

1977 Cabernet Sauvignon "Private Reserve." This is one of the best Beringer wines in recent memory. It has a dark color and a lovely, berry-like cassis nose with a hint of cedar. Not a big wine, but medium-bodied with nice flavors and balance. This will probably be released later this year.

Bodegas de Santo Tomas (Baja California, Mexico)

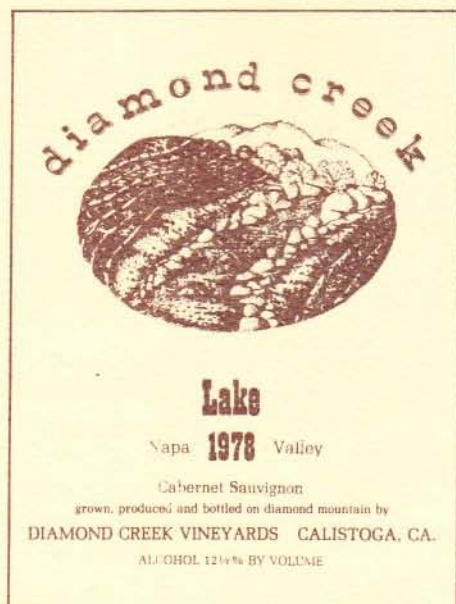
Perhaps surprisingly, it appears that some nice wines could be forthcoming from this relatively unknown winery.

1977 Cabernet Sauvignon. With a medium color and an appealing berry-like aroma, this medium-bodied wine has a firm structure with good fruit/acid balance which should portend good aging potential. It is scheduled for release later this year. **1979 Cabernet Sauvignon.** Still in large holding barrels, this medium-bodied wine possesses a good balance of fruit, acid, and tannin and should prove a most successful bottling if given judicious amounts of wood. It is scheduled for release in 1983.

Diamond Creek Vineyards

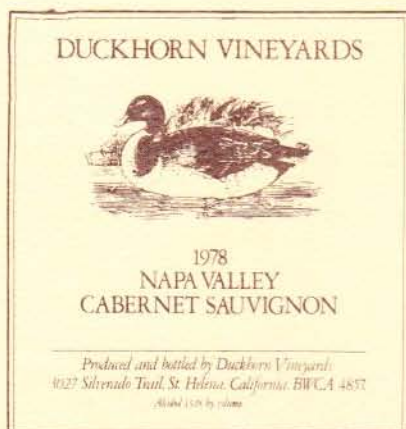
The 1978 Cabernets from Diamond Creek were first mentioned in Barrels and Bottles, Volume I, Number 6. They were most impressive out of barrel. Now that they are in bottle, three have been released for sale and are reviewed in the Cabernet article in this issue. All three are very fine wines. However, for the first time, a small amount (25 cases) of the Lake Vineyard was bottled separately. The production of this small plot is usually blended into Gravelly Meadow. Owner Al Brounstein said he was so impressed by our enthusiasm over this particular lot of wine that he decided on the separate bottling. It has not been sold, but eventually will be available in limited quantities at the winery. As fate would have it, at this early stage, the Lake seems the best of the 1978 Diamond Creek Cabernets. In blind tastings on two occasions, the 1978 Lake bested all the Cabernets reviewed in this issue and was the only wine to be rated outstanding. So it is with mixed emotions, that we review the wine here. On the one hand, it is most unfortunate that so little wine exists and that so few will be able to taste it. While we usually can't take responsibility for the small quantity produced of some really great wines, this is the exception. For this, we are to be either loved or hated. Under either circumstance, tasting notes on the wine follow.

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Lake." With a dark color and a deeply perfumed, ripe, fruity/cedary/sandalwood nose, this wine has loads of fruit with great depth of flavor. It is already showing some cedary flavor complexities and is beautifully balanced and very long on the palate.



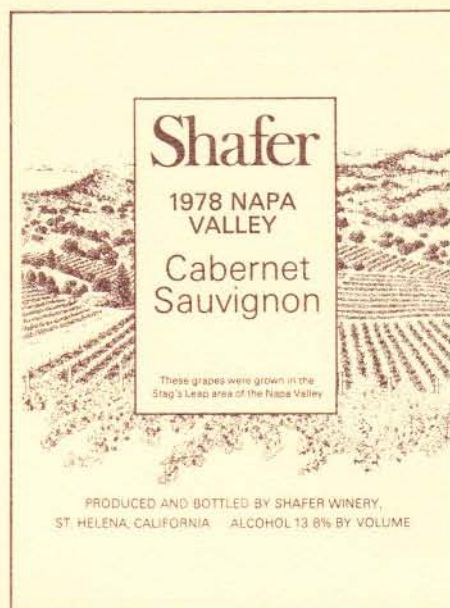
Duckhorn Vineyards

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Napa Valley." This new winery's Merlot has created quite a stir, but this Cabernet is even better. It has a very dark color and a fruity/cherry/oaky/spicy nose – very attractive. A big wine with loads of fruit and flavor, the balance promises elegance in 5-7 years. This will surely be one of the best 1978's and is not to be missed. Watch for a March 1 release at \$11 per bottle.



Shafer Winery

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon. This is the first Cabernet from yet another of California's new wineries. Produced from estate grown grapes in the Stag's Leap area of Napa Valley, it promises to be a lovely Cabernet—very much in the style of the Cabernets of neighboring Stag's Leap Winery. The color is very dark and the wine has a lovely, vanilla/berry nose. There is lots of fruit, good concentration, and a very nice balance. This wine will be released April 1 at \$11 per bottle.



Zaca Mesa Winery

1979 Chardonnay "Special Select." Tasted from the bottle this is a lovely, rich Chardonnay. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/floral nose with an underlying spiciness. The flavors already show a complexity and there is a nice fruit/acid balance. This should be released later this year.





Rest assured that our findings are not a mere flash in the pan!

COMING ATTRACTIONS

California Chardonnays • 1978 Bordeaux • More 1978 Red Burgundies • More 1978 White Burgundies • California Cabernet Sauvignons • 1975 and 1976 Sauternes • 1978 Rhones • Barrels and Bottles • Cellar Notes (comprehensive new feature on older wines including 1920-1976 Petrus, 1962 Bordeaux, 1961 Bordeaux, older Cabernet Sauvignons, etc.) • Plus even more new features