In recent years many devotees of fine Bordeaux wine have become involved in purchasing wine futures. However, before making a decision to buy futures, one ought to consider a few of the following aspects of such a purchase. Of great importance is the value which you assign to your money. In the case of buying wine futures most retailers require payment in full at the time of the order. Thus, the important question to ask is: At the time of delivery will you own a commodity with a value equal to your investment plus what you might have earned if the same amount of money had been placed in an alternate investment? Considering that the waiting period for delivery can be up to two years, it may be wiser to avoid taking a futures position. While it may sound like it requires some crystal ball wizardry to determine whether to purchase a futures contract, there are facts available to you to make just such a decision. An overview of the wine market is a good place to begin. Ask yourself how many good vintages have there been in recent years? At present the 1975, 1976, 1978, and 1979 come to mind with three of these being of record quantity. The size of the vintage is of significant importance. Generally, it is wise to avoid large vintages (such as 1976, 1978, 1979), for these vintages simply place too much wine on the market. This is a simple case of supply and demand. Also avoid the younger vintage of twins (such as 1962, 1967, 1971, 1976, 1979). Here again we are dealing with an excessive amount of wine which can create a glut. Next buy futures from only the best vintages such as 1961 or 1975. Avoid poor, mediocre, and good vintages, for
these do not make sound investments. And, lastly, buy the “Blue Chips” such as the First Growths, and a selected group of other consistent great growths such as Ducru-Beaucaillou, Leoville-Las-Cases, La Mission-Haut-Brion, Palmer, and Trotanoy.

If you are considering purchasing 1979 futures think carefully for there are a number of things that might discourage you. What will be needed to firm up the current sag in wine prices and make the 1979’s a good investment are some more mediocre vintages. Certainly a “Vintage of the Century” is not needed at this point! Secondly, interest rates are at or near record levels making interest earning investments attractive. Thirdly, the dollar is very strong against the franc which could exert downward pressure on prices. Finally, the sharply declining trend of most commodities should be noted. Wine (at least most wines) may be more attractive than pork bellies, but it is still, after all, just a commodity.

However, whether you are in the wine game for pleasure or profit, the one thing that remains a certainty is that no matter if prices go up or down, you can always “liquidate” your investment by drinking your “stock”. And, almost no matter what you buy will probably taste a lot better than pork bellies!

Geoffrey Troy
East Coast Associate Editor

COMING ATTRACTIONS
1975 Sauternes • Cellar Notes • Distinctive New Wines • Selected Tasting Notes • California Chardonnays • California Cabernet Sauvignons • Champagne & Sparkling Wines • More 1978 Red Burgundies • 1979 White Burgundies • Barrels and Bottles • More 1978 Bordeaux

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. Wines listed under Cellar Notes are ranked on a six star system corresponding from 15-20 on a 20 point scale. Stars in ( ) indicate potential.

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MORE 1978 RED BURGUNDIES

"...approximately 250 different wines have now been evaluated and the number should ultimately reach nearly 300."

Continuing our series on 1978 Red Burgundies, approximately 250 different wines have now been evaluated and the number should ultimately reach nearly 300. The basic premise is unchanged: While the vintage is variable, there are many great wines. And, while many are almost unbelievably expensive, no Burgundy lover should miss cellaring at least a few favorites. Many of the wines in this issue have not yet arrived in the U.S. They are expected this fall and are designated with an estimated price. Of these, the wines of the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti are the real story. Make no mistake about it, the wines of this most prestigious of all Burgundy estates are fantastic and will carry fantastically high prices. Whether they will reach the heights of many of this estate's 1971's (see Volume I, Number 3) remains a question. However, it should be remembered that the 1971's were very late in arriving to the U.S. These wines were not evaluated until eight years after the vintage. They had more time to soften and develop bottle bouquet. Contrariwise, the 1978's are being evaluated only three years after the vintage. Listed below is our assessment of more 1978 Red Burgundies including those from Comte de Voguë, Dujac, A. Rousseau, and the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. To our knowledge this is the first such assessment of these wines in the U.S.

Outstanding

Richebourg (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). This is surely one of the finest of all the 1978 Red Burgundies. The wine is classically Richebourg—"an iron fist in a velvet glove". The color is dark and the nose is deeply perfumed with a fruity/oriental spice quality backed by an intriguing, smoky complexity. The flavors are deep and full with a rich, spicy fruitiness. Very long on the palate, the wine already shows elegance, but there is an underlying firmness and tannin and acid to lose. In 10 years this should be a masterpiece (18½). $150 (estimated)

Clos Saint-Denis (Domaine Dujac). Ah, Dujac. This Clos Saint-Denis is one of Dujac's best from this property. The color is dark and there is a deep, fruity/spicy perfume in the nose. Deeply chisled flavors show the same fruity/spicy quality. A substantial wine with tannin and acid to lose, this should be kept for 8-10 years and should be marvelous (18). $35 (estimated)

Échézeaux (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). Except for being a shade lighter in color, this wine is virtually indistinguishable from the Grands-Échézeaux. It has a medium dark color and a deeply perfumed, fruity/spicy/smoky nose. It is full of flavor with lots of fruit, spice, and a pronounced smoky quality. At this juncture, the wine is quite tannic. Give it 8-10 years and it should be approaching maturity (18). $82. (estimated)
Grands-Échézeaux (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). This wine has the unmistakable Domaine de la Romanée-Conti quality. The color is dark and the nose has a deep perfume of fruit, oriental spice, and a slightly smoky quality. It is a big, full, firm, rich, flavorful wine. Just now it is quite tannic, but should be marvelous in 8-10 years. Maybe just a shade richer than the Échézeaux, it is also a little darker in color, but otherwise very similar (18). $120 (estimated)

Musigny (Comte de Vogüé). This should prove to be a really outstanding Burgundy in 8-10 years. The color is dark and there is a deep, plummy/spicy nose. Loads of ripe, plummy/spicy flavors are backed by a long, long aftertaste. A sappy wine with tannin and acid to lose, this is worth waiting for (18). $90 (estimated)

La Tâche (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). This should be a marvelous wine in 8-10 years. It has a dark color and a deep, fruity/oriental spice/smoky nose. There is loads of ripe, fruit flavors and a marvelous, spicy complexity in the aftertaste. Long on the palate, showing a promise of elegance behind the youthful tannin and acid, this will be classic La Tâche (18). $150 (estimated)

Romanée-Conti (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). Already this wine shows an undeniable style and elegance, but it does need an hour or two to open up. The color is dark and the nose has a deeply perfumed, fruity/berry/oriental spice quality. There are deep, fruity/spicy flavors and the wine finishes with a taste that goes on and on. Still youthfully harsh, this should be nectar in 7-8 years and, for the lofty price, it should be (18). $275 (estimated)
Romanée-Saint-Vivant (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti). This wine seems to be the most forward of all the 1978 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's. While it is not as full as many of the other wines, the overwhelming perfume and lovely flavors suggest the wine will peak relatively early, say 3-5 years. Moreover, the dryness in the finish may be an indication of a lack of fruit to carry the wine through a period of prolonged aging. Even so, it is at this stage an undeniably outstanding Burgundy. The color is dark and the nose shows an incredible perfume—berries and oriental spice. It has lovely, ripe, fruity/spicy flavors and an impressive carry through on the palate—absolutely delicious. Just a little dry on the finish and with some tannin to lose, otherwise almost perfect (18). $135 (estimated)

Very Good

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze (Domaine A. Rousseau). This is a very fine wine. The color is medium dark with just a bit of amber at the edge. The nose shows a perfumed, fruity/spicy quality which carries through in the flavor. It has good depth, richness, and extract and finishes well with some tannin and acid to lose. In 6-8 years the wine should be silky (17½). $60 (estimated)

Clos de la Roche (Domaine Ponsot). This is a big style Burgundy that should show improvement for at least 10 years. The wine has a very dark color and a deep, fruity/spicy/earthy/coconut nose—very complex. It has deep flavors and is ripe and rich with some tannin and firm acidity (17½). $40

Latricières-Chambertin (Domaine Ponsot). This wine also has a very dark color and a ripe, fruity, berry/spicy nose. It is sappy and rich with good, fruity/spicy flavors. Long on the palate, and with tannin and acid to lose, this should be lovely in 7-8 years (17½). $40

Richebourg (J. Gros). This wine again shows the unmistakable quality of Richebourg—soft, yet with an inner core of steel. The color is dark and the nose has a deep, fruity/spicy quality. The wine is full of extract and flavor and is long on the palate with a spicy finish. Rather harsh just now, with 7-8 years age it could be outstanding (17½). $53

Chambolle-Musigny "Les Amoureuses" (Comte de Vogüé). If not quite as rich and flavorful as de Vogüé's Musigny this shows a similar style. The color is medium dark and the nose has a fruity/plummy/spicy quality. Already showing elegance, there are plummy/spicy flavors in a lighter style. This wine should improve for at least 5-6 years and make a lovely bottle. (17). $67.50 (estimated)

Pommard "Les Rugiens" (H. Boillot). This is a lovely Burgundy. The color is dark and the nose shows a captivating, fruity/berry/vanilla quality. It has very nice berry-like fruit and is clean with great flavor, balance, and depth. Given a few years to develop, this should make a really fine bottle (17). $24

Vosne-Romanée “Clos des Reas” (J. Gros). This monopole vineyard usually produces fine wine. So it is in 1978. There is a dark color and a deep, fruity/spicy/chutney-like nose backed by ripe, spicy/fruity flavors. With tannin and acid to lose, this should be ready in about 6-7 years (17). $40

Bonnes Mares (Comte de Vogüé). This medium-bodied wine is unmistakably de Vogüé. The color is medium dark and the nose has a perfumed, plummy/spicy quality. There are plummy/spicy flavors with tannin and acid to lose. Not a big wine, but flavory with a good future (16½). $83. (estimated)

Chapelle-Chambertin (L. Trapet). This is quite a nice Burgundy with an underlying acidity that will take a few years to soften. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, plummy/spicy/earthy nose. In the mouth there are plummy/fruity/spicy flavors balanced a bit to acid with some tannin. Give this 4-5 years (16½). $46

Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" (Jean-Noël Gagnard). If there's enough fruit to carry this wine for the 6-7 years it will take for the astringency to mellow, this wine could be very special indeed. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, plummy/spicy nose. The flavors are complex—fruity/plummy/spicy/hints of coconut. Just now the wine is hard and acidic, but it is definitely worth cellaring (16½). $38. (estimated)
Gevrey-Chambertin (Domaine Pernot-Fourrier).  
This is one of the best township wines of the vintage. As such it is a good value. The color is dark and the nose has a very fruity/plummy quality. There are masses of ripe, plummy fruit showing a vanilla complexity. A firm wine with tannin and acid to lose, this should be very nice in 5-6 years (16½). $20

Pommard “Les Bertins” (de Gramont).  
This is a nice Burgundy with a medium dark color and a fruity/spicy/candy-like nose. There are lovely, fruity/spicy flavors in a medium-bodied style (16½). $26

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**Throw Away the Book**

Chambertin (L. Trapet).  
This wine is a perfect example of why one throws away the book when it comes to Burgundy. Lichine’s book *Wines of France* (5th edition, 1973) calls Trapet “probably the most skillful winemaker producing Chambertin today”. Well, if it was ever true, it doesn’t seem so today. This wine is quite nice, but from such an exalted vineyard it is forward and lacking in depth. The color is medium dark with an orange tinge and the nose is perfumed with a fruity/spicy quality. It has nice, ripe, fruity/spicy flavors and is forward with a softness already apparent behind the underlying acidity. Not a wine for prolonged aging and very pricy (16). $61

Charmes-Chambertin (Domaine A. Rousseau).  
This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a cherry-like/spicy nose. There are good fruity/spicy flavors and tannin and acid to lose. Give the wine 5-7 years to develop (16). $37.50 (estimated)

Clos de Vougeot (J. Gros).  
This wine has a dark color and an unusual, earthy, ripe fruit, spicy nose. It is a very full wine – rich and quite tannic. Time is needed to monitor its development including the pronounced earthiness (16). $38

Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos St. Jacques” (Domaine A. Rousseau).  
This is a lighter style Burgundy with a medium color and a lovely, deep, spicy/berry nose. There are lovely, ripe, fruity/spicy/berry flavors with a balance toward acidity. Keep for 5-6 years (16). $42 (estimated)

Beaune “Cent-Vignes” (R. Monnier).  
With a medium dark color showing just a trace of amber at the edge, this wine is quite nice. It has a fruity/spicy nose and nice, fruity/spicy flavors. A little on the light side and balanced a bit to acid, but it should round out nicely in 3-4 years (15½). $19

Clos de la Roche (Domaine A. Rousseau).  
Maybe time will help. Just now this wine shows quite high acid. It is a lighter style Burgundy with a medium color and a nice, cherry-like nose. There are plummy/spicy flavors and nice fruit in the finish (15½). $41, (estimated)

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Les Damoses” (de Gramont).  
This is a nice lighter style Burgundy. The color is medium dark and the nose has a fruity/berry/spicy/candy-like quality – quite attractive. There are fruity/spicy/berry-like flavors and some acid to lose (15½). $25

Chambolle-Musigny (Lignier).  
This wine has an unusual, earthy flavor. Otherwise, the color is medium dark and the nose has a subdued, fruity/spicy quality. Rather harsh just now, 4-5 years will be needed for the wine to soften (15). $24 New York

Chassagne-Montrachet (Jean-Noël Gagnard).  
Lacking the fruit and depth of this producer’s premier cru, this is otherwise similar. The color is medium dark and the nose has a subdued, fruity/spicy quality. There are spicy/fruity flavors, but the wine is dry and astringent. A few years are needed to assess the wine’s longer term potential (15). $30 (estimated)

Gevrey-Chambertin “Les Cazetiers” (Domaine A. Rousseau).  
This wine has a medium color and a spicy/plummy nose. There are nice, plummy/fruity flavors. but the wine finishes quite acidic and will need 4-5 years to soften (15). $30 (estimated)

Latricières-Chambertin (L. Trapet).  
This wine has a medium color with an amber edge. The nose has a nice, fruity/spicy quality which follows through in the taste. A pleasant wine, some tannin and acid to lose, no real faults, but not terribly exciting (15). $45

Pommard (J. Drouhin).  
This wine has a medium dark color and a deep, fruity/spicy, slightly volatile nose. It is very fruity with a slight volatile quality and has tannin and acid to lose. The volatility raises questions about the aging potential, otherwise the wine is quite pleasant (15). $33

Ruchottes-Chambertin “Clos de Ruchottes” (Domaine A. Rousseau).  
Like so many of the 1978 Rousseau Burgundies, this wine lacks a bit in depth and concentration. It has a medium color and a lovely, fruity/spicy nose that carries through in the flavor. With some acid to lose this should be ready in 4-5 years (15). $45 (estimated)
**Best Buy**

Santenay-Gravères “Domaine de l’Abbaye de Santenay” (L. Clair). This is a nice wine for early consumption. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a fruity/plummy/spicy nose. It has nice fruit and is flavorful in a light style. Balanced a bit to acid; a few years bottle age should prove beneficial (15). $15

**Good**

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Les Pruliers” (H. Gouges). Another not so wonderful wine from this once great producer. How sad it is to see the wines lapse into mediocrity. This wine has a medium dark color and a fruity/spicy/musty nose. Not much depth, but there is some fruit and a slightly stemmy quality (14). $25 New York

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**CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS**

“As things presently stand any very good Chardonnay at under $9-10 per bottle is worth buying. Unfortunately, they seem to be an endangered species.”

Lest there be any doubt about Chardonnay’s popularity, just try to find some of the better, more well-known names after they have been on the market a few months. Indeed, since it has now been two issues since Chardonnays were reviewed, some of the better ones have now gotten very tough to find. However, one way to stay ahead is to keep informed as to what is about to be released and place orders well in advance. Many of these are reviewed prior to release in Barrels and Bottles. Beginning with this issue these wines will be designated as Barrels and Bottles selections when they are reviewed (e.g. 1979 Chateau St. Jean “Robert Young Vineyards” and 1979 Lambert Bridge). It should be remembered that unreleased wines thought to be of very good-outstanding quality are noted in Barrels and Bottles. Later, when these same wines are released they are placed in our series of blind tastings and evaluated with other currently available wines of the same variety.

As is noted in the Barrels and Bottles feature in this issue, 1980 should be gangbusters for Chardonnay (in fact for most red and whites). One good buying strategy would be to take a bead on the best of the 1980’s and cut back on purchases of most of the 1978’s and 1979’s currently available. However, don’t expect the 1980’s to be less expensive than current vintages. So long as the market continues to suck up everything in sight, prices will go higher. As things presently stand, any very good Chardonnay at under $9-10 per bottle is worth buying. Unfortunately, they seem to be an endangered species. Listed below is a review of recently released California Chardonnays:

**Very Good**

1979 Chateau St. Jean “Robert Young Vineyards”. (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 30). Although this wine is expensive and now difficult to find after only a few months on the market, it remains a wonderful Chardonnay that should prove to be outstanding with 2-3 years more bottle age. It exhibits a light yellow color and a perfumed, fruity, vanilla/spice/tropical fruit nose. It has nice fruit and flavor with a good, firm structure and lingering aftertaste. With age the wine should develop a round, buttery texture and even more complexity. Shame on you if you haven’t already laid some away (17½). $17

1979 Lambert Bridge. (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 31). This winery is developing quite a reputation for lovers of big, chewy, buttery Chardonnays. Indeed, the Chardonnay tends to sell out very quickly on release and this wine is difficult to find. It has a light yellow gold color and a rich, ripe, fruit/vanilla nose. It is rich, buttery, and flavorful. Another year or two in the bottle should marry the flavors producing a rich, harmonious, complex wine (17). $11
1979 Smith-Madrone “Napa Valley.” Nearly every day one reads somewhere that such and such’s Chardonnay is “Montrachet-like” (a sure hype) or “French-like.” Frankly, most of this seems to come from people who either don’t know or have forgotten what French White Burgundy tastes like. Well, with that out of the way, this wine does have a certain French quality. More importantly, it’s a very attractive wine. Unfortunately, the winery’s policy of selling mostly to restaurants in California makes it exceedingly difficult to buy for home consumption. Out of state, the wine seems to show up in quite a few retail shops. Whatever, it is worth a search. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/somewhat toasty nose. In the mouth it is fruity, spicy, elegant, and almost sweet, with a roundness that gives the wine youthful appeal. Given the toastiness, this wine probably shouldn’t be kept too long. Indeed, it’s hard to see how anyone could resist the elegance and charm the wine displays right now (maybe this is one reason why so much goes to restaurants) (17). $12

1979 Zaca Mesa “Special Select”. (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 83). This is a very nice Chardonnay. Just a shade less rich than the 1978 “Barrel Fermented” (this wine is also barrel fermented and sports a jazzy new label), but very appealing. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/peachy/vanilla/floral nose. There are nice, ripe, fruit/vanilla flavors and nice balance. The wine has a long finish and a firm, underlying acidity to warrant 3-4 years further development (16). $15

1978 Mayacamas “California”. It is a rare vintage that Mayacamas doesn’t produce one of the finest Chardonnays. This is a very nice wine, but lacks the early appeal of the 1977. The winery says it is similar to the 1974, but the 1974 seemed richer and rounder at this stage. No matter, this vintage needs 2-3 years to develop and time could prove it better than this early assessment. It has a light yellow gold color and a ripe/fruity/oaky/apple-like nose. It is quite flavorful with fruity/spicy/oaky flavors and nice balance (16½). $13.50

1979 Beringer “Gamble Vineyard”. This barrel fermented Chardonnay is the best ever from Beringer. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. There is good fruit and flavor with an underlying firmness and good depth on the palate. Another 1-2 years bottle age should make a very nice wine (16). $10

1979 Chateau Montelena. “California.” This is a very nice Chardonnay in the elegant, easy-to-drink Montelena style. It has a light yellow color and a fruity/oaky/spicy/ slightly floral/slightly herbeaceous nose. The wine has ripe, fruity flavors with a spicy/floral quality. It is attractive for consumption over the next 2-3 years (16). $12

1979 Chateau St. Jean “Hunter Farms.” This Chardonnay shows quite a bit of oak. It has a light yellow color and a lovely, deep, fruity/oaky/vanilla nose. There is good depth and flavor with an oaky/fruity/spicy complexity. This should develop well for 2-3 years (16). $15

1979 Fisher Vineyards “Napa-Sonoma.” This new winery has made a very nice wine. Not up to a lot of the recent hype it has received, but very nice. The color is light yellow gold and it has a nice, fruity/oak/spicy nose. Some bottles have noticeable SO₂, but it blows off with a few minutes air. The wine has clean, fruity/oaky flavors with a spicy complexity and good acid. Give it 1-2 years to develop (16). $12

1979 J.W. Morris “Black Mountain Vineyard.” (Barrels and Bottles Volume I, Number 6.) This wine was produced in a very limited 300 case quantity. Almost the entire production was sold to restaurants. If not snapped up when first released, finding it now is a long shot. Nonetheless, it is a very nice wine with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. There are full, rich, fruity flavors showing a spicy complexity and buttery richness (16). $10

Best Buy
1979 Alexander Valley Vineyards. This is a very good Chardonnay and the $8.75 price tag makes it one of today’s better values. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a deep, fruity/oaky nose. It has good fruit, depth, and richness with noticeable oak and the proper balance to develop for 2-3 years (16). $11

1979 Page Mill Winery “Napa Valley.” Only 320 cases of this wine were made so it will be very difficult to find. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/ oaky nose. There is nice fruit and flavor with good, underlying acidity. Despite being relatively high in alcohol (14.2%), this wine should come together nicely in 2-3 years (16). $11
1979 Parducci "Cellar Master Selection." Yeah for the cellar master! Now we know he can pick the best barrels, but the 1979 regular just isn't much of a wine (see Volume II, Page 81). Did all the good stuff go in here? This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/oaky nose. It has very nice fruity/oaky flavors and good balance and richness. Just a slight pétillance seems to dissipate with air, but it might be a good idea not to keep this around too long. One could only wish that the wine were $1-2 per bottle cheaper (16). $10.50

1979 Raymond "Napa Valley." This estate bottled wine is very nice. It has a light yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/oaky/lemon nose. There are nice fruit and oak flavors with a spicy complexity. Showing good depth and balance this Chardonnay should show further development for 2-3 years (16). $10.50

1979 Sonoma Hess "Napa Valley," "Edna Valley." This is a very nice, if pricey, Napa Chardonnay. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose. The flavors have a rich, ripe, oak quality - quite nice. Nicely balanced. 3-4 years bottle age should be well rewarded (16). $13

1979 Stonegate "Spaulding Vineyard." This is a very nice, if pricey, Napa Chardonnay. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. The flavors have a rich, ripe, fruity, vanilla quality with good depth. This wine should improve for a few years (16). $15

1979 Chalone Vineyard "Young Vines." This is a nice Chardonnay. Not as much flavor as the regular bottling, but still attractive. It has a light yellow color and a fruity/spicy/oaky nose. It has good fruit with a spicy complexity and nice flavor. Another 2-3 years bottle age should yield an elegant wine (15½). $10

1979 Chateau St. Jean "Belle Terre Vineyards." This Chardonnay has a crispness that gives it an early appeal. There is also a slight pétillance that adds to the crisp quality, but may prove to be less attractive as the wine ages. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/pineapple/grapefruit nose. There is just a kiss of oak in the flavor and the wine has a lovely, crisp, fruity quality (15½). $12

1979 Gundlach-Bundschu "Special Selection." This is a nice wine to drink now and for a year or two. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/peachy/oaky nose. It has a nice, fruity/floral flavor with a hint of oak. It is a delicate wine that may not stand prolonged aging (15½). $12

1979 Markham "Napa Valley." This is another nice Chardonnay from yet another new winery. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. The wine has ripe, rich, full flavors. It is very forward with early appeal (15½). $9.75

1979 Spring Mountain "Napa Valley." This appears to be one of Spring Mountain's better recent Chardonnays. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/oaky nose. There are generous, fruity/oaky flavors backed by a nice balance. A few years bottle age should bring the wine together (15½). $14

1979 Zaca Mesa "Estate Grown." This is a nice wine to drink now and for a year or two. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. The wine has ripe, rich, full flavors. It is very forward with early appeal (15½). $9.75

1979 Buena Vista "Mendocino." This winery has been making some pretty good Chardonnay and the price is relatively attractive. This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/apple-like nose. It has nice fruit and clean, pleasant, simple flavors with nice balance. Oak fans may not like this, but it's a nice wine just the same (15). $7.50

1979 Burgess Cellars "Napa Valley." This is quite nice and the $9 price makes it worth buying. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/floral/cinnamon/oaky nose. It has good, fruity/oaky flavors with a spicy complexity. Drink it now or keep 2-3 years (15½).

1979 Chamisal Vineyard "Edna Valley." This Santa Ynez Valley Chardonnay is quite nice and the $9 price makes it worth buying. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/floral/cinnamon/oaky nose. It has good, fruity/oaky flavors with a spicy complexity. Drink it now or keep 2-3 years (15½).
1979 Cuvaison "Napa Valley." This is a clean, fresh, crisp, lighter style Chardonnay. It has a light yellow color and an attractive, fruity/lemony/vanilla nose. There is a nice fruity flavor that should gain complexity with a few years bottle age (15). $10

1979 Estrella River "San Luis Obispo County." In an oaky style this Chardonnay is a good value at $8. It has a light gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. The flavors show a hint of spiciness behind the fruit and oak and there is nice fruit in the finish. This wine is attractive to drink over the next few years (15).

1978 Havelock Gordon "Maritime Counties." This is an altogether pleasant Chardonnay at a reasonable price. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/slightly herbal nose. There are nice, fruity/oaky flavors showing a nice balance. This is a wine to consume now and for the next year or two (15). $8

1979 Robert Mondavi "Napa Valley." This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose. It has fruity/oaky flavors and just now finishes just a little harsh. In another year or two this wine should round out nicely (15). $12.75

1979 Pine Ridge "Napa Valley." This new winery's initial release suffers from too much oak. Otherwise, it is quite nice with a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. The oak dominates the flavors, but there is structure and seemingly enough fruit to allow the wine to come together with another year's bottle age (15). $9.50

1979 Sonoma Vineyards "River West." This is a pleasant Chardonnay to drink now and for the next 1-2 years. It has a light gold color, a fruity/apricot nose showing considerable oak, and pleasant, straightforward, ripe,fruity/oaky flavors (15). $9

1979 Fetzer "Special Reserve." If not terribly complex, this is a pleasant, straightforward, fruity wine. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity nose. It is clean, pleasant, and fruity (14½). $8.50

1979 Sonoma Vineyards "Chalk Hill Vineyard." This wine is a bit more austere than the "River West" bottling. The color is light gold and the nose has a fruity/vanilla quality. It is pleasant with nice flavors showing a steely, Chablis-like characteristic. Another year in the bottle should soften the wine considerably (14½). $8.50

1979 David Bruce "Estate Bottled." While the estate Chardonnays from the good doctor are always unusual, some fall off into the Twilight Zone. That seems to be where this wine is headed and the nose leads the way. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a varnish-like component. The wine is ripe, rich, and buttery with lots of oak. Maybe time will help, but more likely it won't. This score may be generous in a year or two (14). $15

1979 Jekel Vineyards "Monterey County." This wine has a light yellow color and a subdued, fruity/floral nose. It has fruity, crisp, cinnamon flavors with a decided cinnamon aftertaste - unusual, but pleasant (14). $9.50

1980 Le Bay "Alexander Valley." That's right, this is 1980 - nouveau style. Not like Chardonnay, but not unpleasant as Sauvignon Blanc. If this is not enough to totally confuse the occasional Chardonnay drinker nothing will. It has a light yellow color and a fruity/floral/grassy nose - totally unlike Chardonnay. It is clean, fresh, and crisp with a fruity/herbaceous flavor. How to score such a strange duck is perplexing. After much thought the answer is (14) as a wine (which puts it here in this listing) and (11) as Chardonnay. Don't buy this if you want Chardonnay. Buy this if you want Sauvignon Blanc. $7.50

1980 Parsons Creek "Mendocino." The novice may find this wine very appealing, but most wine drinkers will find the sweetness a flaw. For early consumption, probably best suited as a sipping wine, it is quite nice to drink. The color is light yellow gold with an unusual peaches 'n cream nose showing a hint of vanilla. The wine has a ripe, fruity/peachy flavor with a slight pétillance. It is round, soft, and slightly sweet (14). $8

-114-
1979 Pendleton "Monterey." This wine shows an abundance of oak without the complexity or buttery texture of the 1978. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. It has an oaky flavor with the fruit masked. The underlying structure seems quite nice, but there is little flavor excitement. (14). $9

1979 Quail Ridge "Napa Valley." While both the 1978 Quail Ridge Chardonnays were lush and quite forward, this wine is backward and suffers from far too much oak. It has a light yellow gold color and a damp oak nose with some underlying fruit. The oak also overpowers the taste and lemony/fruity/spicy flavors lurk in the background. The wine seems to have enough fruit and acid to warrant further bottle aging. It is not flabby at all, but also lacks the buttery/ richness wines in this style often exhibit. Perhaps time will help, but the price doesn't warrant cellaring large quantities (14). $16

1979 San Martin "California." This is not a bad buy for $5. If you don't believe it keep reading down the page! Oh, it's not great, but it is recognizable Chardonnay with a light yellow color, a fruity/oaky nose and oaky/fruity flavors. On the other side of the ledger, it's a little flat and finishes short. This balances the $5 price (14).

1979 Smothers "Les Petits Grains." This is a pleasant enough wine with a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/cinnamon nose. There are good, oaky/fruity flavors and, if a bit harsh, (there is a little temptation to say granny), it's still good (14). $12

1979 Stonegate "Cutrer Vineyard." Kistler made a very nice 1979 Chardonnay from this Sonoma property. This wine is less interesting. It has a light yellow color and an oaky/citric nose. It is clean, fresh, and slightly tart with a fruity/citrus flavor (14). $10

1979 Villa Mt. Eden "Napa Valley." This estate can make outstanding Chardonnay, but this 1979 misses the mark. Like the 1979 Quail Ridge, it is simply too oaky. The color is light yellow gold and the nose is completely dominated by oak. The oak also dominates the flavor. The wine is rich and round and seems to have some fruit underneath the oak, but also seems to lack the fruit for aging much more than a year or two (14). $13.75

1979 Clos du Val "Napa Valley." Like the 1978, this wine is light. However, this wine lacks the charm and elegance of the 1978. The color is light yellow and the nose shows a subdued, fruity/vanilla quality. It is pleasant, straightforward, and fruity—nothing really wrong, just not much there (13½). $12

1979 Domaine Laurier "Sonoma County." This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/banana/vanilla nose. It has lots of oak balanced by some fruit (13½). $9

**Pink Chardonnay**

1980 Callaway Vineyard & Winery. Wines from this Temecula estate are often unusual, but pink Chardonnay is a new one! (Actually it's not all that new—the now famous 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay that won the Paris tasting turned pink after it was bottled, causing the fledgling young winery no end of distress. Later, the wine cleared up and ultimately put Chateau Montelena in the pink!!). Actually, this wine isn't really pink, more a light salmon. Therefore, it's unlikely to win a Paris tasting. Aside from this, it has a fruity, floral, oaky nose and, as you might expect, fruity/floral/oaky flavors (13). $8

1979 Callaway Vineyard & Winery “French Oak Reserve.” This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky nose. It has thin, oaky flavors without much interest or complexity (13). $9

1979 The Firestone Vineyard "Santa Ynez Valley." This wine is rather oaky and cumbersome. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose showing a hint of bananas. It has fruity/oaky flavors and seems to lack structure—not bad, just not real interesting (13). $9

**“Limited Flavor”**

Ernest & Julio Gallo “California”. This long awaited Chardonnay from Gallo carries a "Limited Release" designation. This is quite amusing since the "Limited Release" probably exceeds the total production of every Chardonnay reviewed here a zillion times over. It will probably be available in nearly every nook and cranny of the U.S. from Maine to California. Frankly, the wine is not much different than what should be expected from a mass produced wine. A "Limited Flavor" designation is appropriate. It's clean and light with a fruity character that approximates Chardonnay, although varietal character is not a strong point. It does have some noticeable oak in the nose and taste. Just how it got there is an interesting question. But, overall, it is a good, decent glass of wine (12½).

1979 Wine Discovery “Santa Barbara.” Except for the price, this wine is not much of a discovery, but for $4 one shouldn't expect much either. Seems like a fair trade-off. The wine is at least clean—light yellow color, fruity/lemony nose, clean, fresh, tart, fruity flavors (12½).
1979 Alta Vineyard “North Coast.” This is a terribly overpriced wine at $13.50 – even one-half the price would make it no bargain. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a musty/banana-like quality. It is ripe, fruity, and oaky, but awkward with a short finish. It’s too big and not too good (12).

Where Did the Deer Go?
1979 Deer Park “San Luis Obispo.” Someone said the deer must have wandered into the winery. Maybe. Who knows, but this is strange stuff. The color is light yellow gold and there is a fruity/cheesy/herbal nose. The wine has fruit, but also a slight spritz. Not awful, but not much either (12). $8.50

Below Average
1979 Grand Pacific Vineyard Company “Jack Long Vineyard”. This Sonoma County Chardonnay is already oxidized and well over the hill. The color is gold, the nose is oxidized, and there is a pronounced oxidation in the taste. Otherwise, the flavors are rich, ripe, and oaky with a slight herbaceousness. Given no other choice, it is currently drinkable, but this may cease to be an option in a few months time (11). $7

1979 Louis M. Martini “California.” Whoops, here it is again, just a hint of pink. But there’s something else wrong. The nose is grassy and oxidized. The wine lacks fruit, is flat, and finishes short (10). $6.50

1979 Rutherford Hill “Napa Valley.” What went wrong here? The wine has a light yellow color, but the fruitiness in the nose is marred by an over-ripe cheese quality. The taste also is marred by a musty, petrol-eum-like component. Save for cheese loving oil barons, few will find this wine attractive (10). $10

SELECTED TASTING NOTES

California Sauvignon Blancs

Sauvignon Blanc or Fumé Blanc (the name adopted by Robert Mondavi to make the wine more saleable), probably is California’s second best white grape variety after Chardonnay. Typically, about one half as much Sauvignon Blanc as Chardonnay is produced. It is a wine that is well suited to food. Fish, pork, veal, or chicken in white sauce seem to be particularly good accompaniments. As California learns how to deal with the grape, the wines should show a marked improvement. By itself the Sauvignon Blanc grape can be overpowering with a strong, grassy/herbal quality.

This characteristic is particularly enhanced in certain growing areas and in certain vintages. The challenge is to tone down this quality through blending (Sémillon seems best), yet still retain the varietal character and crisp, fruity quality that makes Sauvignon Blanc appealing.

The growing conditions of 1980 seem to have been well suited to Napa and Sonoma Sauvignon Blancs. Some of these wines are just coming to market and they are lovely to drink right now. Generally,
Sauvignon Blanc doesn't benefit much from aging. Some are probably best consumed when first released for their fresh, crisp, fruity qualities. However, beyond this 1-2 years from the vintage date is usually a good time to consume the wines. Listed below are selected tasting notes on a representative sampling of currently available California Sauvignon Blancs:

**Very Good**

1980 Chateau St. Jean Fumé Blanc "Napa Valley." This is a very nice wine that is distinctly varietal, but not overly so. It has a pale yellow color and a spicy/fruity/pineapple/grassy/herbaceous nose. There is nice fruit and balance in a clean, crisp, dry style (16). $8

1980 Iron Horse "Alexander Valley" Fumé Blanc. This estate grown wine has an engaging youthful zest and appeal. It has a light yellow gold color, a fruity/grassy nose, and clean, crisp, fruity/grapefruit flavors with a nice fruit/acid balance (16). $7.50

1979 Robert Mondavi Fumé Blanc "Napa Valley." Robert Mondavi consistently makes a very nice Fumé Blanc. The winery has adopted a style which seeks to soften the strong, assertive qualities of the grape. This wine is one of the winery's best efforts. It has a light yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/vanilla/pineapple nose with hints of grassiness and green pepper. There is good fruit with a pineapple flavor showing just a hint of grassiness. The wine retains varietal character with a clean, crisp style, and nice balance (16). $9

1980 Stonegate Sauvignon Blanc "California". This is quite an attractive wine for early consumption. The slight pétillance gives it a youthful, zesty quality. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a complex, fruity/herbaceous/grassy/dill quality. It is crisp and clean with ripe fruit/herbaceous/dill-like flavors (16).

1980 Brander Sauvignon Blanc "California." Very varietal, this wine has a pale yellow color and a fruity/floral/grassy nose. Clean, fresh, fruity, and crisp, it is ideal for current consumption (15½). $8

1979 BV Sauvignon Blanc "Napa Valley". A year in the bottle has helped this wine. It still has a fruity/herbaceous quality in the smell and taste, but it has also rounded out and the aggressive herbaceous quality has mellowed out and become more subdued. A nice wine to drink now, it shouldn't be kept too much longer (15½). $6

1978 Robert Mondavi Fumé Blanc "Reserve." At $15 this wine is more like Chardonnay. For a lot less money you can get a very good Chardonnay. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a ripe, rich, fruity/peachy/apricot, almost botrytis-like nose. There is good, ripe, fruit flavors with a slight herbal quality (15½).

1979 Sterling Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc "Napa Valley." This is a nice wine with a pale yellow color and a fruity/vanilla nose showing a hint of grassiness. It has good fruit and flavor in a clean, fresh, fruity style (15½). $8.50

1980 Sterling Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc "Napa Valley". Sterling seems to do a consistently good job with this variety. Stylistically this is similar to their 1979. It has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/grassy/lemony nose. It is clean, fresh, fruity, and crisp. There are nice, fruity flavors showing a hint of grassiness. All in all, it is a very nice wine. The $9.50 tariff makes it the most expensive 1980 Sauvignon Blanc to date (15½).

1979 Ahearn Sauvignon Blanc "California." This wine has quite a bit of oak, but still manages to retain some varietal character. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/herbal nose. The fruity/oaky/slightly herbaceous flavors show good depth and follow through on the palate (15). $7.50

1980 Cakebread Cellars Sauvignon Blanc "Napa Valley". Just now the strong, varietal character is a bit too aggressive, but this should moderate in 6-12 months. The wine has good depth and body and should benefit greatly from the additional bottle age. The color is light yellow and the nose shows a herbaceous/bell pepper/fruity quality. The wine has fruity/herbaceous/grassy flavors and is clean and crisp with a nice finish (15). $8.95

1980 Carneros Creek Sauvignon Blanc "California." This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/floral/slightly grassy nose. It has ripe, fruity flavors with a hint of grassiness (15). $7

1980 Dry Creek Fumé Blanc "Sonoma County". Very varietal, this wine has a light yellow color and a fruity/herbaceous/oaky nose with a hint of vanilla. It has good, fruity/herbaceous flavors with nice flavor, good acid, and a clean finish (15).

1980 McDowell Valley Vineyards Fumé Blanc "Mendocino County". This estate bottled wine is clean and pleasant. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/herbaceous/pineapple nose. There are fruity/herbaceous flavors with good acid (15). $6.75
1978 Robert Mondavi Fumé Blanc “Napa Valley.” At $11 this is hardly a bargain. It is richer than the 1979, but richer is not better. The wine has a light gold color, and a ripe, fruity/oaky nose. It is full, rich, and concentrated with ripe, fruity/oaky/grassy flavors (15).

1980 Napa Wine Cellars Sauvignon Blanc “Napa Valley.” This wine has a pale yellow color and a fruity/grassy nose. It has clean, crisp, fruity/grassy flavors (15). $7.50

1979 Preston Sauvignon Blanc “Sonoma County.” This estate bottled wine has a light yellow gold color and a ripe, fruity/grassy, green pepper nose. It is clean with full, grassy/fruity flavors (15). $7.50

1979 Fetzer Fumé Blanc “Mendocino.” This wine has a medium light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/grassy nose. The flavors have an oaky/fruity/slightly herbaceous quality (14). $6

1979 Mayacamas Sauvignon Blanc “California.” Except for a slight lack of fruit, there’s really nothing wrong with this wine, but there’s really nothing exciting about it either. The color is light yellow and the nose shows an oaky/fruity/slightly herbaceous quality. The flavors show noticeable oak and it is clean, fresh, and tart with some fruitiness (14). $8

1980 Montevina Sauvignon Blanc “Amador County.” This estate bottled wine shows a ripe grape quality in the nose and finish. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/slightly alcoholic nose. It is rich, full, and loaded with fruity/oaky flavors, but the finish is hot reflecting a slight alcoholic quality (14). $8.50

1979 Beringer Fumé Blanc “Sonoma.” This wine has a pale yellow color, a fruity/vanilla, slightly floral nose, and clean, soft, simple flavors (14½). $6

1980 Caymus Vineyards Fumé Blanc “Napa Valley.” This wine suffers from a little too much oak, but is quite flavorful. It has a light yellow gold color and a grassy/oaky/fruity nose. The flavor is dominated by oak with a grassy/fruity undertone (14½). $8.50

1980 Cordtz Brothers Cellars Sauvignon Blanc “Upper Alexander Valley.” This is a nicely made wine, but very strong and aggressive. It has a pale yellow color and a very grassy/herbaceous nose. It is clean and crisp with a fruity/grassy flavor (14½). $6.75

1980 Santa Ynez Valley Winery “California” Sauvignon Blanc. While this wine is very aggressive, the fresh, clean qualities make it a nice food wine for near term consumption. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a pronounced grassy/herbaceous/vanilla quality. The flavors are fruity and crisp with a hint of herbaceousness (14½). $7.95

1979 Chateau St. Jean Fumé Blanc “Forrest Crimmins Ranch.” This wine is very well made, but the overpowering nose is out of character with the wine’s texture and flavors. Here is a perfect example of where judicious blending would soften the aggressive character. The color is light yellow and the nose has a strong, weedy/green pepper/herbaceous/cucumber quality. There is nice fruit with a grassy/vanilla tinge and a nice acid balance. Thank goodness it doesn’t taste like it smells (14). $8

1979 Joseph Phelps Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc “California.” This wine has a light yellow gold color, and a fruity/oaky/steely nose. It shows fruity/oaky/slightly grassy flavors, but is flat and lacks backbone (13½). $7.50

1979 Congress Springs Fumé Blanc “Santa Cruz Mountains.” This wine has a light yellow gold color and a pineapple/herbaceous/oaky nose. It has good depth of flavor with noticeable oakiness and a slight bitterness in the finish (13). $6.50

1979 Spring Mountain Sauvignon Blanc “Napa Valley.” There’s really nothing much wrong with this wine except that the oak completely dominates the nose and taste. It has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity/earthy nose. It has an oaky/fruity flavor and is rather flat without enough balancing acidity or follow through on the palate (13). $8

1979 Stonegate Sauvignon Blanc “Shasta County.” This wine has a fruity/herbaceous nose. It has a fruity/grassy/slightly musty flavor with just a hint of sweetness (13). $7.50

1979 Callaway “Sauvignon Blanc-Dry.” This estate bottled wine, like so many other Callaway wines, is most unusual. It has a light yellow color with a green tinge. The nose has a grassy/vanilla/hay-like/mushroom quality. In the mouth there is fruit with a grassy overtone. It is crisp and slightly pétillant (12). $6.50
1979 Stonegate Sauvignon Blanc “Napa Valley.”
This estate bottled wine has a light yellow gold color and a varnish-like nose. It has ripe, fruity flavors, but is flat and lacks character (12). $7.50

Below Average
1979 Napa Vintners Sauvignon Blanc “Lake County.” This Napa winery evidently decided the grapes were riper across the Lake. They may have been, but the boat must have sunk on the way back. The wine has a light yellow color, and a musty/skunky nose. The flavors are ripe and fruity without much character (11). $6.75

BARRELS AND BOTTLES
“A Guide to Some of the Best Pre-Release California Wines”

Tasting so many of the 1980 vintage wines from barrel it is already obvious that in Napa-Sonoma 1980 was an excellent vintage. How interesting it was to watch the year develop. In the spring and summer most wineries were complaining about the cool temperature and slow ripening. Then the weather turned warm and the grapes came in with an excellent balance of sugar, acid, and ph. The year afforded an opportunity to make wines with slightly lower sugars and higher acid. Indeed, this now seems to be a trend. Thank goodness for the 1980 vintage. This is long overdue. Generally, the fault of many California wines is the too much syndrome—too much fruit, often over-ripe or late-picked, too much tannin, too little acid, straight-forward blockbusters, lacking style, complexity, and finesse; and most importantly drinkability. The 1980’s will show a new kind of California wine. Some Chardonnays will have very high acids—they should keep and develop for 6-8 years much like a great White Burgundy. Some Cabernets will have a Bordeaux quality—less fat, less rich, but lean and fruity in style. Again, many should be long lived and show finesse and complexity. All in all there will be many very fine wines—Sauvignon Blancs, fruity and crisp; Zinfandels, fruity and nicely balanced; delicate low alcohol Rieslings and Gewurztraminers; some nice Pinot Noir, lovely, rich flavorful. Interestingly, some of the very best wine will be coming from obscure, even unknown, small wineries. Wineries where the skill and dedication of a few is devoted to making wines by traditional methods. This is what is exciting about California wine. Vineyards are maturing, vineyard owners are beginning to sell more and more of the best quality grapes to small wineries where truly distinctive wines are being made. The 1980 vintage is a showcase for many of them. In fact, given the quality of the 1980 vintage, the consumer would be well advised to be very selective with 1978’s and 1979’s. Below are tasting notes on some of the best unreleased California wines from the 1976-80 vintages.

Acacia

This new winery produced some very nice 1979 Chardonnays (see Volume II, Page 79). The intent is to make Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the French style. Grapes are primarily from the Carneros region of Napa Valley. Wines are being made from several vineyards. Previously most or all of the production of these properties has gone to large wineries such as Robert Mondavi. Later, as the vines mature, there will be wine from Acacia’s own vineyards. The first wines show good potential.
1979 Pinot Noir “Iund Vineyard”. From 8 year old vines yielding 4-5 tons/acre, this is a nice Pinot Noir with a medium color, a berry/oaky nose and good fruit, flavor, and balance. With a production of 1000 cases, look for a September release. 1979 Pinot Noir “Lee Vineyards”. This vineyard is about 8 years old and yields 3 tons/acre. The wine shows a fruity/berry/spicy/minty nose and good, spicy/fruity flavors. There were 1000 cases produced and they should be released in September. 1979 Pinot Noir “St. Clair Vineyard.” This 10 year old vineyard yields only about 2 tons/acre. Curiously, this seems less intense than the higher yielding “Lee” and “Iund” bottlings. A gentle style wine with a medium color and a minty/berry nose, this Pinot Noir is lovely with honest varietal character. Due to be released in September with 1000 cases produced. The 1980’s show a similar style with a bit more concentration. Tasted from barrel they show promise for further development and will be interesting to taste after bottling. 1980 Pinot Noir “Iund Vineyard”. The concentration in this low yielding vineyard really shows through. The color is dark. The wine has good depth, flavor and balance. Following the successful 1979 Chardonnays, from the barrel the 1980’s promise to be even better. 1980 Chardonnay “Carneros”. This wine is unusual for Napa Chardonnay in that the acid will not need to be adjusted. As is so often the case in 1980, the grapes came in with high acid (1.2), good sugar (24°), and a nice ph balance (3.2). It is fruity with a pineapple flavor and good, firm, balancing acid—this should make an attractive wine. 1980 Chardonnay “Napa Valley.” Unlike the “Carneros,” this wine will be adjusted for acidity. Tasted before the adjustment it is fat, rich, and oaky. It should turn out well. 1980 Chardonnay “Winery Lake”. Harvested with slightly more sugar and lower acid than the “Carneros,” the intense flavors of the particular vineyard are already evident. The wine is very rich, loaded with fruit, and backed by firm acidity. This should be a real winner.

Chateau Montelena

The real story at Chateau Montelena is Cabernet Sauvignon. Yes, that’s right, Cabernet Sauvignon. Everyone knows the winery for a consistently good Chardonnay, but few know that beginning with the 1978 vintage there is on estate grown Cabernet.

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon “Estate Grown, Napa Valley.” This wine will not be released for over a year. Pity we have to wait so long, but patience will be rewarded. The wine is a winner. The color is very dark and the nose has a deep, fruity/berry/chocolate quality. Full of berry-like fruit, the wine is rich and round with lots of depth and nice balance—a marvelous wine. 1979 Cabernet Sauvignon “Estate Grown, Napa Valley.” Again here is a wine loaded with fruit showing style and balance. The color is very dark, the nose has a deep, ollieberry perfume, very fruity, tannic finish, superb potential.

Diamond Creek Vineyards

Tasted from barrel the 1979 Diamond Creek Cabernets again appear to be excellent wines—maybe as good as the 1978s. In both 1979 and 1980 yields were 30% below 1978.

1979 “Gravelly Meadow.” This vineyard consistently produces superior Cabernet and 1979 again promises to be one of the best. The color is very dark with a deep, spicy/current-like nose. The wine is loaded with fruit with great flavor and texture. In 1979 and 1980 the small quantity of “Lake” was not kept separate but added directly to the “Gravelly Meadow.”

1979 “Red Rock Terrace.” Not as big and full as the other two Diamond Creek Cabernets, but attractive—very dark color, big, fruity nose, lots of fruit, medium/heavy body, tannic finish. The second pick from a lower portion of the vineyard shows a little stemminess. 1979 “Volcanic Hill.” This wine should be a real winner. The color is very dark and the nose exhibits a deep, fruity/berry quality with a hint of chocolate. It is big, full, and rich with a tannic aftertaste consistent with the massive fruit. The second pick, again from a different portion of the vineyard, is not as well-balanced—leaner, more tannin. There could be a special bottling of the first pick. If so, it should be extraordinary. Still the blended “Volcanic Hill” should be quite a wine with the full fruit of the first pick balancing the austere tannin of the second pick. Owner Al Brounstein is to be congratulated for keeping the three distinctly different vineyards separate and even taking it a step further by keeping picks from different parts of the vineyard separate. Through such painstaking efforts California’s finest wines will be isolated and identified.
Duckhorn Vineyards

Here is a winery to watch. Both the 1978 releases, a Merlot and a Cabernet, were winners. Upcoming releases will further enhance the winery's growing reputation.

1979 Merlot “Napa Valley.” Made with 30% Cabernet and Merlot from three Napa vineyards this promises to be very special. The color is dark and the wine exhibits a lovely, black cherry nose. It is flavorful and rich with a ripe, fruity/cedar quality and nice balance. Watch for a September release with 1720 cases produced. 1980 Merlot “Disney Vineyard.” This wine is intensely fruity—deep, berry nose, loads of fruit, rich, great promise. 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon “Veeder Hills Vineyard.” This will likely be blended with Merlot before bottling. Out of barrel one could hardly ask for more—FANTASTIC potential. The color is very dark with an intensely deep, fruity/olallieberry/cassis nose. Very rich, deep, full flavors, already showing signs of elegance, youthfully tannic, long, long finish, this balanced with some Merlot should be really spectacular.

Forman Winery

If there is one winery that exemplifies a dedication to making California wine in a more European style it is Forman. In fact, you could call winemaker Ric Forman’s (formerly with Sterling Vineyards) dedication near insanity. Funny thing, we’ll bet this ultimately will become one of the most successful of all California wineries. Consider: 520 acres of mountainous property in the Spring Mountain area of Napa; 60 acres of 2 year old vines - 4 different vineyards; production dedicated to two varieties in a red and white Bordeaux style; Cabernet Sauvignon from the “Martha’s Vineyard” clone; plantings consisting of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, and 20% Merlot for the red and 60% Sauvignon Blanc and 40% Sémillon for the white; a dedication to a classical style with traditional techniques being applied by one of California’s best winemakers. Even though the wines will yield only their first crop this year, this already looks and feels like a winner. The potential can be seen in a few 1980 barrel samples made from purchased grapes.

1980 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa.” Made with the 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Merlot blend, this wine has a very dark color and a deep, fruity/berry nose. It has lovely, fruity/berry flavors and is youthfully astringent and tannic. 1980 Sauvignon Blanc “Napa.” Blended with 20% Sémillon, this wine has a fruity/vanilla nose and clean, fruity, citrus/vanilla flavors. 1980 Merlot “Rutherford.” With good fruit, berry-like nose and flavor, this should make a nice bottle.

Kistler Vineyards

This winery’s 1979 Chardonnays created quite a stir. Barrel fermentation and malolactic fermentation techniques are employed. Everything goes into French oak – Pinot Noir, Cabernet, and Chardonnay. Isolated (an understatement) in the hills of Glen Ellen in Sonoma, this winery is one to watch. A 1979 Pinot Noir, two 1979 Cabernets, and three 1980 Chardonnays will be released November 1.

Tasted from barrel the 1980 Chardonnay “Dutton Ranch” promises to be a real winner – fruity/spicy/toasty nose, spicy/fruity flavor, rich, full of flavor, long on the palate, very similar to the 1979 with 0.72 acid vs. 0.70 in the 1979.

La Crema Vinera

This is a prime example of the high quality of small California wineries. These days there are many small wineries, but a few stand out. La Crema Vinera is one to watch. Presently located in an industrial park in Petaluma, the winery looks to an annual production of 6-7,000 cases and there are ambitious plans for a new winery and vineyard plantings in the long dormant Petaluma area just north of San Francisco. The winery is concentrating on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Grapes are purchased from some of California’s finest vineyards and unified in classical French style. The first wines show impressive potential.

1979 Pinot Noir “Ventana Vineyard.” This should be one of the better Monterey Pinots. The wine is light, but it has good varietal character with a Burgundian, fruity/spicy/smoky/bacon-like quality in the nose and taste. There were 325 cases produced. 1979 Pinot Noir “Winery Lake.” This Napa Valley wine will also show good varietal character with good fruit and depth. Again, a pronounced Burgundian, spicy quality is quite evident with a hint of smokiness. There were 170 cases produced with the wine being released this summer. 1980 Chardonnay “Ventana.” From the barrel, this wine has marvelous potential with the same fruit and style of the 1979 (see Volume II, Page 78). The color is light yellow gold with a lovely, fruity nose and ripe, fruity flavors showing richness and balanced by good acidity. 1980 Chardonnay “Winery Lake.” Again from the barrel, this is as good a Chardonnay as one could possibly hope to taste. The color is light yellow gold and the nose is intensely perfumed – fruity/peachy/vanilla quality. In the mouth it is full, rich, round, very flavorful, and beautifully balanced. This should make an incredible bottle. 1979 Cabernet Sauvignon “Steiner Vineyard.” Only 65 cases of this Sonoma
Cabernet were made and it will be sold under the Petaluma Cellars label. It promises to be very fine with a dark color and a deep, fruity nose and flavor. There are also several lots of 1980 Pinot Noir from Ventana Vineyard, Winery Lake and Arrendell Vineyard in Sonoma. Again, the Ventana showing a very Burgundy, spicy/smoky complexity. Different lots of the Winery Lake (different amount of skin contacts, different yeasts, etc.) also show a very spicy, Burgundy character in a plummy style. The Lot 1 from wild yeast is particularly plummy and intriguing. Wild yeast may yet prove to have a lot to do with the ultimate character of Pinot Noir. Save for Ken Burnap at Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, very few wineries are willing to risk the potential problems. The Arrendell Vineyard bottling is more California in style with a raisiny quality.

Long Vineyards

1979 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa Valley.” There are only a few barrels of this wine made from grapes grown on the UC Davis Vineyard located between Mondavi’s Block P and Martha’s Vineyard. Interestingly, out of barrel it doesn’t show the mint associated with the other two vineyards. It has a deep, berry nose and nice fruit and depth with berry-like flavors and good acid/tannin balance. 1980 Chardonnay. In 1980 Long experimented with a combination of Cognac and Burgundy barrels. The sample from Cognac barrels is showing more oakiness than that in the Burgundy barrel. Like so many 1980’s, the acid in the wine is high (0.9), but the wine is rich, full, and flavorful. This barrel-fermented Chardonnay should be a real winner. 1980 Johannisberg Riesling. This is a lovely Riesling—very fruity, pineapple quality, ripe, sweet, balanced by firm acidity.

Robert Mondavi Winery

1976 Cabernet Sauvignon “Reserve.” Unlike so many other 1976’s which seem so impossibly tannic, this wine exhibits the fruit and concentration of the vintage in a better balanced style. It has a medium dark color and an attractive, fruity/berry/cassis nose. The wine has a medium body with lots of fruit backed by tannin and a firm backbone. It will need quite a few years to develop. It should be released in October. 1979 Chardonnay “Reserve.” This wine reflects the Mondavi Chardonnay style of recent vintages which is more intensity and depth. It had 13 hours of skin contact and was 92% barrel fermented. The color is light yellow gold and it shows a ripe, fruity, slightly toasty nose. Good fruit and depth are backed by firm acidity. Look for a release date in 1982. 1979 Fumé Blanc “Reserve.” This wine is the typical Mondavi style which is to tone down the strong, assertive, grassy character of the Sauvignon Blanc grape. It is blended with 8% Sémillon. The nose has a complex, fruity/peachy/vanilla quality with just a hint of grassiness. It has good fruit in a crisp, clean style. It should be released in 1982.

Ritchie Creek Vineyard

One day this winery will be better known. While quantities are very small, the winery has produced very fine Cabernet since the first vintage in 1974.

The 1978 Cabernet Sauvignon seems to be the best yet. It is blended with 8% Merlot representing the first crop off the young vines. The color is very dark with a fruity/oaky/spicy nose—very characteristic. The wine has a lovely, fruity/spicy flavor and shows style and balance. Even though there are less than 300 cases, this wine is not to be missed. Watch for a fall release.

Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard

This winery has made a reputation for producing some of the best Pinot Noirs in California, but the Bates Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon from the Santa Cruz Mountains should establish a wide reputation for this variety as well. The 1978 has just been released and was previously reviewed in Barrels and Bottles Volume I, Number 6. Subsequent vintages show a stylistic similarity.

1979 Bates Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon. This wine may be a little more forward than the 1978 at a similar stage, with a deep, fruity nose and a delicious, fruity flavor backed by nice tannin/acid balance. 1980 Bates Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon. Perhaps the fullest and richest of the three vintages, this wine is loaded with fruit in the nose and taste. The Pinot Noirs are also coming along nicely. 1979 Pinot Noir “Estate Grown.” This may be the winery’s best Pinot Noir yet. Very dark with a fruity/spicy/earthy nose. There is loads of fruit and ripe, spicy, rich flavors in a harmonious balance. 1980 Pinot Noir “Estate Grown.” A big wine is an understatement. Very dark color, concentrated, spicy, rich, tannic, not harsh, this should develop well and should really be a taste experience in a few years.
Shafer Winery

This new winery's 1978 Cabernet Sauvignon is a very nice wine (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 83).

1979 Cabernet Sauvignon. This promises to be as good or better than the 1978. It has a very dark color and a deep, ripe, fruity nose showing a complex, berry-like quality. The flavors are very deep and full - fruity with a chocolate nuance. With good acid/tannin balance and a long aftertaste, this is one to watch for next year.

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon "Cask 23." Tasted from barrel (see Volume I, Number 6), this wine is now in bottle and is no less impressive. The color is dark and the nose shows the lovely, deep, fruity/cassis/violet quality. It is supple, rich, and long on the palate. Now scheduled for release in late 1982, this is one to watch for. 1979 Cabernet Sauvignon "Cask 23." From barrel this shows a similar nose and flavor to the 1978, but is not as supple and just now shows quite a bit of tannin. It should round out nicely and make a fine bottle.

Villa Mt. Eden

1980 Chardonnay. This should make a very fine Chardonnay and shows the characteristic high acid character of the vintage. The color is light yellow gold and the nose is very attractive - fruity/peachy/oaky. The flavors exhibit a rich, ripe, fruity quality backed by firm acidity.

DISTINCTIVE NEW WINES

Best Buy

1980 Robert Pecota "Napa Valley" French Colombard. At $4.75 this is an unbeatable wine for summer picnics and the like. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity nose with a little spicy, pineapple complexity. It is very fruity, clean, fresh, and nicely balanced. This may not taste like French Colombard, but who cares? It's delicious (16)

1980 Robert Pecota "Muscato di Andrea". This is an almost perfect after dinner sipping wine. Serve it ice cold, it is absolutely delicious. The color is pale yellow and the nose has a lovely, perfumed, muscat grape quality (what else?) with a lemony nuance. It is clean, light, sweet, crisp, fresh, and grapy. Drink it up before summer's end to savor the youthful charm. (17)
1978 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Petite Syrah. If most California Petite Syrah is too heavy and too tannic, this wine retains all the flavor without the heavy, tannic qualities. It has a dark color and a fruity/spicy/vanilla/peppery nose—very attractive. It has good fruit with a hint of black pepper and nice depth, richness, and balance. Drink now for the youthful zest and fruit or lay it away for 4-5 years (16½). $8

1980 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Napa Valley" White Riesling. Here's another absolutely irresistible wine for summer drinking. Not heavy and ponderous like many California Rieslings, but light and elegant. The color is very pale with only a slight yellow blush. The nose is intensely fruity with pineapple and apricots. It is fruity, soft, light, slightly sweet and delicious (16½). $7

Good Buy

1978 A. Rafanelli "Sonoma County" Zinfandel. This unfiltered wine from Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley may be the best value available today in a robust, red wine (E. Guigas's 1978 Côtes du Rhône, Volume II, Page 95 is another). However, it is not easy to find. The color is medium dark and the nose has a tremendous complexity—berry/cigar box/anise/oak/cedar. It is medium-bodied with good fruit and spicy/briary/berry-like/vanilla-tinged flavors. The wine is nicely balanced and drinks well today, but has the necessary tannin/acid balance to lay away for a few years (16½). $5.75

1979 Ridge "Santa Cruz Mountains-Jimsomare Zinfandel." (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 31). This wine is available almost exclusively from the winery. Not a big, tannic monster, but very fruity and flavorful. The color is medium and the nose has a berry-like, spicy/oaky quality. It has clean, fruity/briary, Zinfandel flavors backed by firm acidity. The acid should carry the wine for quite a few years (16½). $7.50
Cellar Notes
“A guide to older wines and vintages.”

CHÂTEAU PÉTRUS

Château Pétrus is arguably the finest Bordeaux of all. Certainly in the past half century Pétrus has consistently made one of the finest wines in each vintage. Indeed, in many vintages, it has made the best wine. As its reputation has grown so has the price. In recent years, it has become the most expensive of all Bordeaux wines with a price that often exceeds other first growths by a staggering amount (for instance, in 1978 the price of Pétrus is nearly double that of Lafite). This fact is accounted for by quality and quantity. For in an average year, the production of Pétrus will be under 4,000 cases. As a comparison, Lafite is much larger with average production of 22,000 cases. In addition, Pétrus has another important advantage. Because it is made from Merlot grapes, it is softer and ready to drink much earlier than wines from the Médoc. This adds to the appeal for those who want instant gratification. Pétrus has then become the superstar of Bordeaux; and, as is often the case, success begets success. That is to say, as the price and reputation have grown those with deep wallets have become attracted to it. It is the ultimate status symbol of the Bordeaux wine world. To certain people, the more a wine costs the better it is. Hence the stories about rock stars and assorted Hollywood types buying Pétrus by the carload (that is when there is a carload to buy) and serving it over ice, at cocktail parties, whatever. “Forget the vintage, get us Pétrus” has become the cry. “If there isn’t enough Pétrus, we’ll take Lafite or Margaux – anything that people will recognize.” Indeed, given the mania of some of the super rich it is surprising that there is any Pétrus left at any price. Fortunately, this was not always the case. The 1952 and 1953 vintages sold for $35 per dozen, and as recently as the 1975 vintage, the wine was under $20 per bottle. Today, the 1952 and 1953 vintages are several hundred dollars per bottle and the 1975 can easily cost $100 per bottle.

Interestingly, Pétrus itself is a rather modest property. Consisting of 30 acres, the vineyards are nearly 100% Merlot. However, the wine has a depth, structure, and distinctive flavor that sets it apart. Rarely can any other Pomerol approach the character of Pétrus. And,
because of the wine's structure, Pétrus ages amazingly well. Certainly it's no Latour in this respect, but 30-40 years in a great vintage is a reasonable expectation. Nineteenth century Pétrus is exceedingly rare. Whether or not any exists today is questionable. Yet the wine was held in high esteem in the past century as evidenced by the gold medals the wine received in the Paris Expositions of 1878 and 1889. Perhaps the wine was consumed because it seemed ready to drink, whereas many Médocs remained hard and demanded additional age. Also, the proprietors of Pétrus were evidently not laying away vast reserves such as those at Mouton and Lafite. Hence, in the hands of private collectors, it seems likely that the nineteenth century vintages were consumed long ago. At any rate, it seems doubtful that any 100 year old Pétrus would be at the top of its form today. Indeed, the wines from the 1920's, like many of their Médoc counterparts, seem to now be in decline. And what a shame to wait too long for such a marvelous wine. It would be hard to blame someone today for drinking up every last bottle of the 1947, even though the wine seems destined to live for many more years.

To those not fortunate enough to have older Pétrus laid away, we can only say that to do so today will be a very dear proposition indeed. However, rising prices do offer one consolation. As prices rise, those wine-lovers and collectors who cellared the wines seem more reluctant to pop the cork for Saturday night dinner. Hence, the wines tend to be put together in tastings with other vintages. Also, many who own Pétrus are tempted to convert the precious liquid to cash via auctions in the U.S. and Europe. This affords others a chance to acquire wine that otherwise might not be available. So it is that several Pétrus tastings consisting of many fine vintages have been conducted in the past few years. One notable such tasting consisting of fourteen vintages from 1920-62 was arranged by Bipin Desai, Brad Klein, and Ed Lazarus and held April 9, 1978, in Los Angeles. Another tasting was held in April, 1980, by Chateau & Estate Wines Company in New York with the winemaker, Christian Moueix, in attendance. The wines tasted on this occasion included eleven vintages from 1950-76. Most recently another comprehensive event encompassing vintages from 1920-76 was organized by Geoffrey Troy and held in November, 1980, in New York. From these tastings and consumption of scores of other bottles on different occasions in the past 2-3 years, we offer the following definitive assessment of thirty vintages of Pétrus from 1920-78. To the best of our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive evaluation ever done on the wines of this great château.

1920

1928

1929

1945
**

1947

1948

Dark color, just amber at the rim. Lovely nose, fruity/cedary/spicy, very complex. Firm, good fruit, nice flavor, sweet, ripe, lovely finish. Lacking the concentration of the 1947, but very fine. At a peak, but showing no signs of being in decline. Tasted twice, once from magnum. Most recently from magnum in April, 1978.
1949

Very dark color, slightly amber at the rim. Huge, perfumed, fruity nose, cedary/spicy/ripe. Loads of fruit, concentrated, tannic, needs time. At least 5-10 years from being ready. If the fruit outlives the tannin this will be exquisite. Tasted twice. Most recently in April, 1978.

1950

Medium dark color, amber edge. Lovely, fruity nose. Nice fruit and flavor, sweet. Ready to drink, holding well. Tasted four times. Most recently in November, 1980, from magnum. The magnum was better.

1952


1953

Medium dark color, amber edge. Lovely, perfumed, fruity/cassis nose, hint of cedar. Lovely, soft, fruity, elegant, long on the palate, not as concentrated as the 1952. At a peak. Drink now. Tasted three times. Most recently from magnum at a 1953 first growth magnum dinner in January, 1981.

1955

Curiously, this wine seems to need more age – say 5 years or so. Dark color, complex, fruity/spicy nose showing just a hint of mint. Rich, concentrated, fruity, tannic. Not yet fully developed. Tasted three times. Most recently in November, 1980.

1957

The first wine after the disastrous 1956 frost (no Pétrus was made in 1956). Medium red color, amber edge, well-defined, fruity nose. Dry and austere on the palate, lacking fruit. Drink now. Tasted once in October, 1979.

1959


1960


1961


1962


1964


1966


1967


1968

1969

1970
★★★★ (★)

1971
★★★★ (★)

1972

1973
(★)

1974
★ (★)

1975
★★★★ (★★)

1976
★★ (★★)

1977
★★★★ (★★) At the risk of being damned with faint praise, surely one of the best of the 1977’s. Medium dark color. Lovely, deeply perfumed, cassis nose. Nice fruit. Some depth. Already soft, but a little tannin and acid to lose. Lovely, light/medium-bodied wine. Drink now, but should improve for 3-4 years and hold for awhile thereafter. Tasted once in June, 1981.

1978
★★★★ (★★)

Cellar Notes Six Star System
★★★★★★ 20 Absolutely magnificent. A classic wine
★★★★★ 19 Clearly outstanding
★★★★ 18 Outstanding
★★★ 17 Very good, not quite outstanding
★★ 16 Very good wine of clearly superior quality
★ 15 Very good
Stars in ( ) indicate potential