



THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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ONE WINEDRINKER'S OPINION

California Wine vs. French Wine: Who Cares?

Americans have a way of becoming intensely interested in things. Whatever we do we tend to do in a big, grand style. Good for us. So it is that we are in the midst of a wine boom. There's really nothing startling about that. And, yes, there are those who attack the subject in different ways with different degrees of intensity. In California many people drink only California wines. There are a number of so-called wine "experts" in this category. They could care less about French wines. After all, there are many new devotees that have been drawn into the fold based on all the publicity and hoopla about such and such California wine besting such and such French wine. So, armed with irrefutable evidence, there is no need to know anything about anything else.

Were the French duped into these widely publicized tastings? Not likely, but many Frenchmen know very little about California wine. Indeed after hundreds of

years of production history, many have settled into a comfortable niche of familiarity. Others are rather bored with the whole thing. Wine is a commodity. What's the big deal? Some juice in a bottle. No more romance than beans in a can. What is more, many Burgundian producers could care less about Bordeaux and vice versa. It's just not that important. Some don't even drink much wine, even though they may produce a wine of world-wide reputation.

So it is. Viva la difference. California wine vs. French wine: who cares? We do. Not to compare one with the other necessarily. They are distinctly different. Very few California wines taste French and certainly there are few, if any, Frenchmen dedicated to emulating California wines. Who wants French Zinfandel? French wines are the standard for the world and while California wines have come a long way in 10 years, they still have a long way to go. Frank Prial, the former

wine writer for the *New York Times*, spent several years learning and writing about California wines. He wrote some glowing reviews. Now he says he was only "among those who were consistently trying to write something perceptive and flattering about California wines". From this description one might think he was subjected to some sort of Chinese water torture. Then, a few years ago, he is transferred to Paris. Guess what? The exposure to French wines increases and now comes a slap at California wines in a recent *New York Times* article entitled, "A Dissenter's View of California Wines". Dissent indeed. The wheel is reinvented for the upteenth zillion time since man evolved from the apes. The article pokes fun at the intensity of the American consumer. It seems that while U.S. consumption has gone up, the number of people who drink wine has not. Ah yes, there are just a few of us supporting the wine boom. Further, we're told that one day we may wake up and say, "I don't have to drink wine either, or listen to — or read — people who do." No doubt this trend is further along in France, but it took a few hundred years. Along the way no doubt many livers were lost. Looks to us that we still have a ways to go here before mass boredom engulfs us or we suffer a mass epidemic of liver failure. After all, we have the best of both worlds — French and California. If we become bored with one we can shift to another. This could add another few hundred years. No doubt medical science will improve also, so we won't have to worry so much about our livers.

Then there's the matter of wine tastings. Mr. Prial suggests a label for California wines stating, "This wine was designed for competition and is not to be used for family dining." Sort of like not having a street legal GT Ferrari to drive to the supermarket. While it's true that many California wines suffer from the "too much" syndrome, there are a dedicated few who have begun to make wine in a different style — picking at lower sugars, achieving better balance and firm acidity.

Consumers are maturing. They're finding out that biggest isn't necessarily best, but that drinkability is important. Ask any die hard California aficionado who has been collecting wines for a few years, how the late harvest Zinfandels are coming along? Or for that matter many Chardonnays more than a few years old. As for Cabernet, it's a different story all together. No one really knows how some will age. Some may need 2 decades. Some of the greatest wines of France need decades to mature. Does anyone really want to drink 1978 Latour today? Did anyone consume the 1945 Latour in 1948 and find it pleasant drinking? Here the difference is a knowledge based on hundreds of years of production from the same vineyard that, if stored properly, the wine will be excellent in the year 2000. To our knowledge, there is no 1978 California Cabernet that can make that statement, although undoubtedly some will prove to be excellent wines at the turn of the century. Maturity in wine, as in people, is important for truly definitive evaluations. In the interim, we shall continue to monitor through comparative tastings the progress of individual bottles. In the last analysis, it is the only learning method available. Corks have to be pulled to taste the wine. Short of that there would be no knowledge and nothing for Mr. Prial or us to write about.

So, as provincial and crude as we are, some of us in California will plod along trying to "Out Chardonnay any kid on the block," as Mr. Prial says. Along the way we will taste, drink, and enjoy thousands of bottles of White Burgundy and Chardonnay. We'll do the same for Cabernet and Bordeaux (see Cellar Notes in this issue). And yes, even for Pinot Noir and Burgundy. We don't have to out do anyone. There's plenty of room for France and California to coexist peacefully in the world of wine. But, don't be surprised, if along the way, California makes some stunning wines that even dissenters will love!

John Tilson
Editor

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DISTINCTIVE NEW WINES

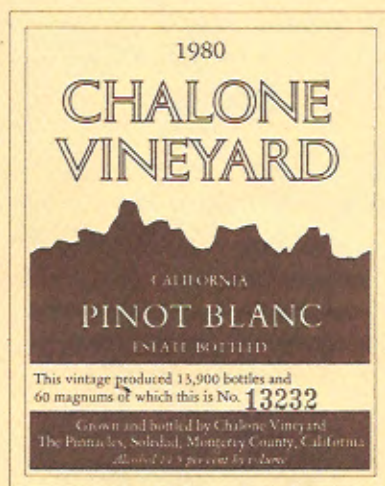
★★★★★

1978 Châteauneuf-du-Pape (Vieux Télégraphe).

Simply put, this is an incredible wine and a fantastic bargain. It is one of the finest Châteauneuf-du-Pape's anyone could ever want to drink and one of the very best wines of the great 1978 Rhône vintage. The color is dark and the nose is simply overwhelming – plums, cherries, vanilla, even tropical fruit! The wine is intense with cherry/plum/vanilla flavors and a hint of earthiness. It is tight, deep, long on the palate, and marvelously balanced. There is a great deal of youthful tannin that will take 6-8 years to soften, but the texture of the wine already shows the velvet quality that will emerge as it ages (19). \$10

★★★★★

1980 Chalone Pinot Blanc. This is consistently one of the best Chardonnays in California. That's right, Chardonnay. It is virtually impossible to distinguish between Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc when made in the Chalone style. Moreover, at \$10 per bottle it's a great buy! This wine is luscious and destined to get better with a few years bottle age. It has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/spicy/vanilla/slightly earthy nose. Rich, round, full, with an abundance of fruit and spicy/vanilla flavors, and firm acidity, this is a wine to buy and serve with most any dish accompanied by a white sauce. The flavors marry beautifully and, yes, it is a wine that definitely goes well with food. (18)



★★★

1980 Chateau St. Jean Fumé Blanc "La Petite Etoile". Chateau St. Jean consistently produces some of the state's best white wines. This is one of the nicest wines of this variety yet produced in California. The color is pale yellow and the nose has a lovely, perfumed, varietal, fruity/grassy quality. The wine is crisp, fresh, and fruity with a grapy quality showing just a hint of grassiness. Very nicely balanced and flavorful, it is most attractive (17). \$9



★★★

Muscat De Beaumes-de-Venise (Prosper Maufoux). This is an exquisite dessert wine. The color is light salmon and the nose is very perfumed with a fruity/peachy/fig-like quality. It has intense, fruity/grapy/somewhat fig-like flavors with exquisite balance. Not unlike light syrup, this is an elixir to be sipped in small quantities (17). \$13 New York

The Vieux Télégraphe Châteauneuf-du-Pape is imported by Barry Bassin in New York and Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant in Albany, CA. The Prosper Maufoux Muscat De Beaumes-de-Venise is imported by the House of Burgundy in New York. Availability on the West Coast is unknown.

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. Wines rated Very Good or better will also be ranked on a six star system corresponding from 15-20 on a 20-point scale. Wines with a 1/2 ranking will receive a + designation. Stars in () indicate potential. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are the approximate California suggested retail prices.

CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS

"... even if higher prices are forthcoming, it seems inadvisable to cellar large quantities of Chardonnay."

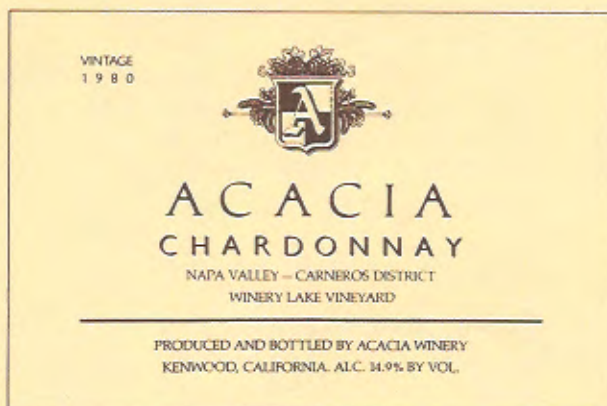
Some of the newly released Chardonnays are stunning. They are wonderful, flavorful wines possessing depth and elegance. In particular, the first of the 1980's show the great promise of this vintage. There are also a great number of very good wines in an abundance of styles. However, as was recently pointed out (see Volume II, page 111), the prices have continued to escalate. Even so, the alternative, White Burgundies, are generally more expensive. In fact, this price disparity seems to be the basis for some California wineries pricing policies. However, even if higher prices are forthcoming, it seems inadvisable to cellar large quantities of Chardonnay. There are several reasons. First, the aging potential of many of the wines seems questionable. Many peak within a year or two and some are in decline a year or two after. Second, there is a tremendous quantity of product coming to market. Indeed there are literally hundreds of new wines and every year seems to produce a number of really fine bottles. Finally, the wines are improving. We are learning which vineyards produce the best wines and what techniques are necessary to extract the best balance. Hence, it is likely that future wines will be even better than those available today. As a result, consumers with cellars full of Chardonnay are likely to be disappointed on several counts. Incurable collectors should turn elsewhere. With few exceptions, buy Chardonnay to drink within a few years after the vintage. As can be seen from the following notes, the choices are numerous.

Outstanding

★★★★

1980 Acacia "Winery Lake". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 120). The 1980 Acacia Chardonnays are stunning. The "Winery Lake" is a classic wine from this property. However, no confusing it for White Burgundy, it is distinctly California in style and more likely to be preferred by California Chardonnay fanciers than lovers of White Burgundy. The color is a light yellow gold and the nose shows a perfumed, fruity/vanilla/tropical fruit quality. The wine is elegant, flavorful, and buttery. Full, intense flavors exhibit an abundance of ripe fruit and vanilla. While high in alcohol, the rich texture is a nice balance. Long

on the palate, this wine has youthful appeal and is probably best consumed over the next year or two (18). \$18

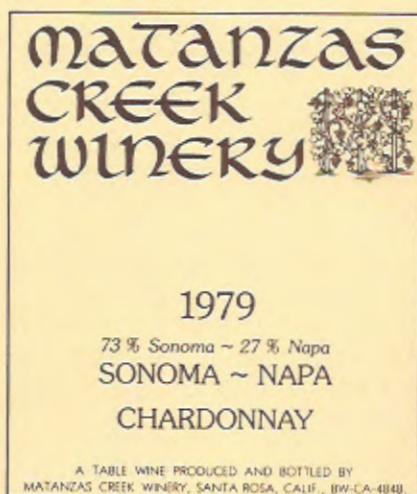


1979 Hanzell "Sonoma". Year-in and year-out the Hanzell estate produces one of the finest Chardonnays. 1979 is no exception. Even though the wines typically are around 14% alcohol, they show a great elegance. Available in only a very few retail stores, most of Hanzell's small production is sold direct from the winery. This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/oaky/peachy/tropical fruit nose. It is full and flavorful, yet shows a silky texture and a great elegance. Maybe just a little disjointed in flavor components, but another year or two bottle age will resolve this nicely. Long on the palate, this is first-rate Chardonnay in a style that represents the best of California (18). \$16

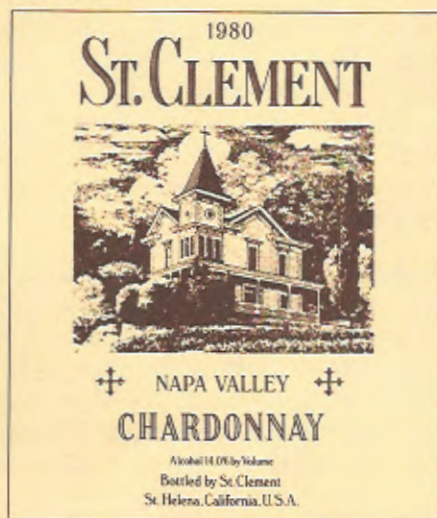


1979 Matanzas Creek. The 1978 Matanzas Creek Chardonnay was outstanding. So is the 1979, but they're completely different. The grapes came from different vineyards. This is 73% Sonoma and 27%

Napa. Whereas, the 1978 was rich and buttery, this wine is leaner and seems more Burgundian. The color is light yellow gold. The nose is already very complex and unique with a fruity/spicy/slightly minty quality. The wine is firm with good acid and has intense, fruity/spicy/vanilla flavors. It seems to have all the components to age well and should be exquisite in 3-4 years. Some bottles have a slight amount of CO₂ that dissipates with air (18). \$14.50



1980 St. Clement "Napa Valley". Each year this small Napa Valley winery produces superb Chardonnay. This Chardonnay seems to be the best yet. Grapes came from Carneros, Yountville, and St. Helena. Selectivity and blending seem to be the keys to success. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a lovely, fruity/peachy/apple-like quality with a hint of vanilla. In the mouth, it is supple and elegant. The flavors are at once fruity and spicy with a slight nuance of oranges, peaches, and vanilla. Nicely balanced with a firm underlying acidity, this wine should continue to improve for at least 2-3 years. Here is a classic Napa Valley Chardonnay. With 4000 cases produced, it shouldn't be too difficult to find. But don't wait too long (18). \$13



Very Good

★★★

1980 Acacia "Carneros". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 120). Rivaling the "Winery Lake" in intensity, this wine has a rich, buttery character backed by lots of fruit showing a spicy, vanilla complexity. There is an oaky quality that shows through and just now the wine seems to need a little while to come together. Wait a year or two and this should prove to be the best of the 1980 Acacia Chardonnays (17). \$16

1980 Acacia "Napa Valley". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 120). As compared with the other Acacia "Carneros" this "Napa Valley" bottling has more floral perfume and a more pronounced pineapple quality. Stylistically a little different, yet similar in appeal. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a lovely, fruity/floral/vanilla perfume. The wine has lots of fruit with a pineapple flavor showing a hint of vanilla and spice. Expansive on the palate with a very nice balance, this drinks very well now, but should improve for a few years (17). \$14

1979 Chateau St. Jean "Gauer Ranch". This Alexander Valley Chardonnay seems reminiscent of the Stony Hill wines from Spring Mountain in Napa. Maybe a little more forward than Stony Hill and only time will tell how it will age, but stylistically this is a lovely wine. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a lovely, fruity-apple-like quality. The fruity flavors are very attractive—clean, crisp, kiss of oak, long on the palate. Elegance should be a primary virtue with a few years bottle age (17). \$14

1980 Flora Springs "Napa Valley". This is a very nice wine with a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/citric/spicy/oaky nose. The wine has good depth of flavor and a nice balance of fruit, acid, and oak. Already expansive on the palate, a few years bottle age should yield further complexity (17). \$11

1979 William Hill "Napa Valley-Mt. Veeder District". Only about 100 cases of this wine were made. It is well nigh impossible to find. However, if found it should be snapped up. Hopefully someone will keep this wine for the 4-5 years it will need to develop. It will probably still be developing nicely after many 1979's have started to decline. The wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/apple-like/minty/cinnamon nose. It has a good intensity of fruit with a spicy/oaky quality. Not possessing the same perfume of so many California Chardonnays, it is a potentially outstanding Burgundian-style wine needing only time to develop (17). \$15

1979 Stony Hill "Napa Valley". This is one of the few California Chardonnays that has a track record. The wines are slow to develop and age very well. Most take 7-8 years to start to come around. They are sold almost exclusively from the winery. This 1979 seems to be very similar to the 1978. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a fruity/apple-like quality and a touch of steeliness. It has lovely fruit and good acid. Time should yield more complexity (17). \$12

★ ★ +

1980 Acacia "California". The least expensive of the Acacia wines at \$9.50, this represents an excellent value. The color is light yellow gold and the nose is intensely perfumed - fruity/spicy/vanilla/lemony-orange/slightly herb-like - very complex. The wine has good extract and rich flavors showing lots of fruit, a nice oak balance, and herbal nuances. The slight herbal qualities develop only with air, still it is a very attractive, forward wine (16½). \$12

1980 Chalone Vineyard "Edna Valley". This is a blockbuster Chardonnay. Too intense for some, perfect for others. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has an intense, fruity/buttery quality backed by just a hint of toastiness. The wine is concentrated - rich, fruity, oaky, buttery, oily. Not flabby, but it probably is not one to keep too long (16½), \$12

1980 deLoach Vineyards "Sonoma County". This wine has a light yellow gold color and the nose has a lovely, perfumed, fruity/citric/vanilla/oaky quality. In the mouth fruity/lemony flavors show hints of vanilla and spice. Another year or two bottle age should yield a lovely bottle (16½). \$10

1979 Mill Creek "Sonoma". At \$9 this wine is a very good value. Not a blockbuster, but very clean and flavorful with elegance and style, this is an easy wine to drink. The nose has a fruity/spicy/oaky quality and this carries through to an apple-like/vanilla flavor. Light and nicely balanced, there is an underlying acidity that should hold the wine for a few years (16½).

1979 Chateau Montelena "Napa Valley". Just now this wine is a little subdued, but with 2-3 years bottle age it should open up and show elegance and complexity. The color is a light yellow gold and the nose has a nice, fruity/vanilla quality. With good fruit and vanilla undertones, the wine is nicely structured with an appealing style (16½). \$16

1980 Smothers "California". Only 225 cases of this wine were made. If it can be found it's worth buying. The color is light yellow gold and the nose exhibits a lovely, fruity/floral/vanilla/pineapple nose. It is clean, fresh, and lovely with fruity/vanilla flavors (16½). \$10.50

1979 Trefethen Vineyards "Napa Valley". Priced 20% higher than the 1978, this is no longer the value it was a year ago, but the wine rivals last years. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a perfumed, fruity/oaky/apple-like quality with a hint of citrus. It has good fruit with a nice balance of oak and acid. Given another year or two this should be lovely (16½). \$12

★ ★

1980 Ahern "MacGregor Vineyard". This Edna Valley wine is quite unusual, but has a fresh, youthful appeal. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a fruity/oaky/vanilla/citric/lime quality. The wine is rich with a fruity/vanilla/fresh lime flavor (16). \$11

1979 Chateau St. Jean "McCreary Vineyards". This is a firm wine with good underlying acidity that should carry it for quite a few years. The color is medium yellow gold and the nose has a fruity/apple-like/oaky quality. There are fruity/oaky flavors showing good depth. It is available only from the winery (16). \$14

1980 Filsinger Vineyards & Winery "Temecula". Only 300 cases of this estate bottled wine were made. Too bad because it may be the best wine yet to come from this Southern California area. At \$7.50 the wine is an excellent value. The color is pale yellow gold. The nose has a lovely, fruity, apple-like quality with a kiss of oak. It is very engaging with a lovely, light, fruity flavor, showing just a kiss of oak. Definitely a lighter style, but well-balanced, clean, and very well made (16).

1980 Iron Horse "Sonoma". This estate bottled wine is a good value at \$10. It has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/oaky/buttery nose showing just a hint of anise. There is a nice balance of fruit and acid with nice fruit and an oaky/vanilla complexity. This wine should age quite well and improve for at least 2-3 years (16).

1980 Leeward Winery "MacGregor Vineyard". Quite unlike the Ahern bottling from this same property, this wine shows the intense, fruity/buttery quality associated with so many Chardonnays from the San Luis Obispo area. Not terribly complex, but good depth, intensity, and texture give this wine a youthful appeal (16). \$11

1980 Monterey Peninsula "Arroyo Seco". Typical for Monterey Peninsula's wines from this property, this is big, intense wine. The color is light gold and the nose has a buttery/apricot quality. The wine is full, rich, and intense with loads of fruit. Maybe a little low in acidity for prolonged aging, but attractive for early consumption with very intensely flavored foods (16). \$12

1979 Chateau St. Jean "Frank Johnson Vineyards". This Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a forward, fruity nose. It has a fruity, vanilla-tinged flavor showing an intriguing, sesame-like complexity. Quite unusual, but very nice and youthfully attractive. It is available only from the winery (15½). \$13.50

1979 Hacienda "Reserve". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/apple-like/vanilla nose. The flavors show a good fruitiness with spicy/oaky nuances—very pleasant for current consumption (15½). \$16

1979 Kenwood "Beltane Ranch". This Sonoma Valley Chardonnay has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/floral/oaky/slightly herbaceous nose. It has full, rich, ripe flavors. Intense and slightly toasty, this is a wine to drink soon (15½). \$12

1980 Lake Spring "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lovely, fruity/grapefruit/spicy/vanilla nose. It is clean, fresh, and fruity with a citrus quality that is quite appealing (15½). \$10.25

1980 Lake Spring "Winery Lake". This wine has a light yellow gold color and an intensely perfumed, floral/fruity/vanilla nose showing a hint of bananas. It has fruity/vanilla flavors with good richness. Maybe low in acid, but youthfully appealing in an intense style (15½). \$14

1980 Chateau St. Jean "Sonoma County". Showing a fresh, fruity crispness, this wine is attractive for current consumption. The color is light yellow gold and the nose exhibits a fruity/oaky/slightly herbaceous quality. It is clean and fruity with some oak complexity (15). \$10

1980 Dry Creek "Sonoma County". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a nice, fruity/spicy/oaky nose. It is clean with an oaky/fruity flavor. Very pleasant, but not terribly complex (15). \$10

1979 Grgich Hills "Napa Valley". This wine has a pale yellow gold color and a subdued, floral/fruity/vanilla nose. It has fruity/oaky flavors and is pleasant, if not terribly complex (15). \$16

1980 Hacienda "Clair de Lune". This is usually a clean, pleasant wine. The 1980 is true to form. The color is medium yellow gold and the nose has a very fruity/slightly nutty quality. It is fruity and easy to drink—not complex, but no real faults either (15). \$11

1980 Keenan "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a clean, fruity, apple-like nose. It has a clean, fruity flavor with a hint of vanilla. A little austere presently, but a year or two bottle age should be beneficial (15). \$14

1980 La Crema Vinera "Winery Lake". (Barrels and Bottles Volume II, Page 121). From the barrel this wine had great promise. Now in the bottle, it seems to be suffering from the "too much" syndrome. The color is medium yellow gold and the nose is very toasty, somewhat burnt, almost bordering on a coffee bean quality. It is full, intense, very flavorful, and fruity, but very smoky and toasty. Undoubtedly this style will appeal greatly to some, but a little more fruit and freshness would be desirable in so young a wine. Even though there's good acidity, the extreme toastiness raises serious questions about aging potential (15). \$12

1980 Leeward Winery "Ventana Vineyard". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/lemony/oaky nose. There are oaky/fruity flavors with a hint of herbaceousness (15). \$12.50

1980 St. Andrews Vineyard "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/vanilla nose with a hint of eucalyptus. There is fruit and oak, but the wine is rather backward just now—give it a few years (15). \$12.50

1979 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Haynes Vineyard". This is a nice, lighter style Chardonnay. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a fruity/oaky/slightly peachy nose. It is fruity with some oak in evidence and a hint of pepper and cinnamon. A little short, otherwise it's very nice and easy to drink (15). \$12.50

1979 Joseph Swan "Sonoma". Sold in small quantities to a mailing list that reportedly takes years to join, this wine is a rarity not likely found outside private cellars. It is intensely flavored and quite unusual, a cellar curiosity to be sure! The color is light yellow gold and the nose has an oaky/spicy/butterscotch candy quality. It is rich, full, and intensely flavored with oaky/spicy/fruity/butterscotch candy flavors (15). \$12

1980 Ventana Vineyards "Monterey County". The 1979 Ventana blossomed about 6 months after it was released. Whether this wine will develop as well remains to be seen. Just now the nose has an unusual, celery-like quality. Typical for the wine, the texture is appealing—very soft and velvety. There is lots of ripe, fruit flavors and the wine seems to have a slight sweetness in the finish (15). \$12

Good

1979 Joseph Phelps Vineyards "Napa Valley".

This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/vanilla nose. It has good, oaky/fruity flavors. Lacking in complexity, but quite pleasant (14½). \$12

1980 Pommerale Vineyards "Sonoma County".

This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/spicy/vanilla/oaky nose. There are clean, fruity/oaky/vanilla flavors that finish slightly short (14½). \$9.60

1979 River Bend "Sonoma". This is a second label of Davis Bynum Winery. At under \$6 the wine is a great bargain. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a clean, oaky/fruity quality. Not terribly complex, but the oaky/fruity flavors have good depth and richness (14½).

An Over-priced New Label

1979 Calcaire. This is the new vineyard designated label being used by Clos du Bois. The wine is from Alexander Valley. The label seems designed to support a lofty price. The wine is not worth \$16 per bottle. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has an oaky/fruity/slightly vegetative nose. It has simple, fruity/oaky flavors. Seemingly low in acid for much improvement, if already purchased this is a wine to drink up. If not, this is one to pass (14).

1980 Chateau Chevalier "California". Made from Edna Valley grapes, this wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/slightly herbaceous nose. It is crisp and fruity with some oak. Not badly flavored, but not much varietal character either (14). \$13.50

1978 Clos du Bois "Proprietors Reserve". This wine has a light yellow gold color and an oaky/fruity nose showing a hint of bananas. It has fruity/oaky flavor. Full, but rather flat and slightly harsh in the finish, this wine is not likely to improve (14). \$12.50

1980 Far Niente "Napa Valley". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a floral, fruity/eucalyptus nose with a hint of vanilla. It is full in the mouth, but the fruity/vanilla flavors have a slight vegetative component and the wine finishes short. At the \$16.50 price this wine is easy to forget (14).

1980 Fetzer "Barrel Aged". This wine has a little more depth than the regular "Mendocino". It also has a floral/vanilla quality in the nose and taste, but lacks the fresh, crisp quality of the regular bottling (14). \$7.50

1980 Fetzer "Mendocino". This is a light, pleasant wine for early consumption. The color is light yellow gold. The nose has a fruity/lemony quality which carries through in the flavor. It is fresh, crisp, and easy to drink (14). \$6

1980 MEV "Ventana Vineyard". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a fruity/oaky/buttery/mead-like nose. It is rich and buttery with a slight herbaceous quality – an unusual, intense wine (14). \$12

1980 Milano "Lolonis Vineyard". At \$14 this is hardly a bargain. It is unusual. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has a perfumed, oaky/vanilla/buttery quality with a hint of bananas. It is full, rich, and intensely flavored with a tangy, sweet/sour finish (14).

1980 Parducci "Mendocino County". This is a light, pleasant wine that's a good buy at \$6.50. The color is pale yellow gold and the nose has a fresh, clean, fruity/floral/vanilla nose. The flavors are similar and the wine finishes clean (14).

1979 San Martin "Select 1979 Vintage". Made from Santa Barbara County grapes, the label says this wine is "completely dry". Interesting because it tastes slightly sweet. The color is medium yellow gold and the nose has a fruity/honeyed/oaky quality. There are ripe fruit flavors backed by some oak and a rich, honey-like quality that leaves the impression of sweetness – unusual (14). \$9.75

1980 Souverain "North Coast". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a floral/fruity/oaky nose. It has fruit with a vanilla-tinged complexity (14). \$7

Ready for a Weird Experience?

1979 Cygnet Cellars "Edna Valley". This is strange juice! Don't even consider buying it unless you are ready for a really weird experience. To rank the wine "Good" is a strongly individualistic taste preference. Technically, the wine is seriously flawed, but underneath it has flavors that some will find appealing. The color is light yellow gold and the nose has an intensely, oaky, fruity/vanilla quality with alcohol and volatile acidity showing through. The wine is dense, thick, and very flavorful with a pickling spice quality. Not a wine to keep and only suitable for consumption with intensely flavored foods, this surely is controversial if nothing else (13). \$9

1979 Sunrise "San Luis Obispo". This is a pleasant, simple, oaky/fruity wine. It is clean, but finishes rather short (13). \$8

1979 Bacigalupi. At \$15 the price of this wine is ridiculous. Bacigalupi is the name of a vineyard in Sonoma. This was bottled by Belvedere Wine Company and is an obvious attempt to play off a fairly well-known name. The wine has a pale yellow gold color and a fruity/swampy nose. There is some fruit, but it is thin and lacking in flavor (12½).

1980 Louis M. Martini "California". This wine has a pale yellow gold color and an unusual, chemical, permanent wave lotion quality behind the fruity aromas. It is fruity and slightly herbaceous – more like Chenin Blanc than Chardonnay (12½). \$6

1979 Navarro Vineyards "Mendocino". This wine has a light yellow gold color and a lactic, slightly musty nose. It has big, oaky/ripe fruit flavors. Drinkable, but undistinguished (12½). \$12

1979 Kenworthy Vineyards "Monterey County". Talk about lots of oak. Here's a wine for oak lovers. The color is light gold. The nose has an oaky/toasty quality. A big wine, but flat, and oh so oaky (12). \$8.50

1979 Tyland Vineyards "Mendocino". This estate bottled wine is inexpensive at \$6, but it's also terribly over-oaked. The fruit is completely obscured. Not undrinkable, but flat and lacking in depth (12).

Below Average

1979 Clos du Bois. This wine has a medium yellow gold color and an oaky nose and flavor. It is lacking fruit and already past its prime (11). \$7.50

1979 Veedercrest "Sonoma County". This wine has seen better days (maybe). The color is light yellow gold and the wine smells like shellac. There is some fruit, but not much (11). \$9

1979 Veedercrest "Winery Lake". Will the magic "Winery Lake" designation sell any wine? Here's the test. The color is pale yellow gold and the nose smells like sauerkraut. Fortunately, there is more fruit than sauerkraut in the taste. Not very attractive, but maybe the ultimate wine for a Reuben sandwich (11). \$9.50

1979 H. Cotturi "Sonoma Valley". This winery is using wild yeast for fermentation. Seems like there was some really wild stuff that got in this batch! The color is cloudy and light yellow gold. The nose is

foul – like dirty gym socks. There are roasty/toasty/butterscotch flavors in case anyone cares. The \$20 price is a joke (9).

1980 Felton-Empire "Maritime Series". Made from Sonoma and Santa Barbara grapes, this wine's chief attribute is a short finish. It is cloudy with a vinegary, rotten egg nose, and thin, tart, acidic flavors (9). \$7

A TIMELY REVIEW OF WINE BEFORE ITS TIME?

Last year marked the debut of **Kistler Vineyards** with some very fine Chardonnays which were reviewed early just as they were being released (see Volume II, Pages 24 and 25). The 1980's have been widely anticipated. Indeed from the barrel the 1980 Dutton Ranch bottling was most impressive (see Volume II, Page 121). However, the three 1980 Chardonnays now reaching retailer's shelves seem to be bottle sick and suffer from fermentation aromas and some SO₂. Owing to the vintage condition, the 1980's took longer to ferment. Hence, they were bottled later than the 1979's. Ideally, the winery probably should have waited a few more months before selling these wines. Consumers buying them should be advised that many hours air are needed for the wines to start to clean up. As "finished" wines they're obviously flawed. Those who like the flavors of the wines may not care what they smell like. Those who don't like the smell may not like the wine no matter how good the flavor. As consumers we'll fall into the latter camp. The wines are not ready to drink. Some time is necessary to see what will develop. At a later date we'll evaluate them. For now we'll offer only tasting notes: **1980 Dutton Ranch.** Light yellow gold color. Fermentation aromas – musty, tanky, some SO₂. Underneath fruity/spicy/slightly smoky and toasty. Good fruit in the mouth. Full. Nice balance. Spicy/vanilla complexity. Long finish. \$16. **1980 Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyard-ABC Farms.** Light yellow gold color. Fermentation aromas – musty, tanky, slight SO₂. Fruity/spicy flavor. Not as much depth as the other two bottlings, but nicely structured. \$16. **1980 Winery Lake.** Medium yellow gold color. Seemingly less fermentation aromas than the other two bottlings, but noticeable SO₂. Underneath is an intense fruit/spice and vanilla with a smoky/toasty quality. Very rich, full, intense wine. Good balance. Firm acidity. \$18. So there it is. For now, suffice to say, these wines are expensive and controversial.

MORE 1978 RED BURGUNDIES

"Over 300 wines have now been evaluated and selectivity cannot be overemphasized."

Over the course of the past 10 months we have attempted to evaluate every 1978 Burgundy available in the U.S. Many of these were reviewed prior to their arrival on our shores. This endeavor has encompassed a great deal of time, effort, and expense. It is not likely to be duplicated. Now we reach what is likely to be the final chapter of the saga. Over 300 wines have now been evaluated and selectivity cannot be overemphasized. Only some 26 wines were ranked "Outstanding". There were scores of "Very Good" wines, but alas there were many very expensive wines that could only be ranked "Good" — passable, but having major faults. And, yes, there were a few really terrible bottles. Generally speaking, these wines ranged in price from \$15-250 per bottle making them the most expensive young wines available.

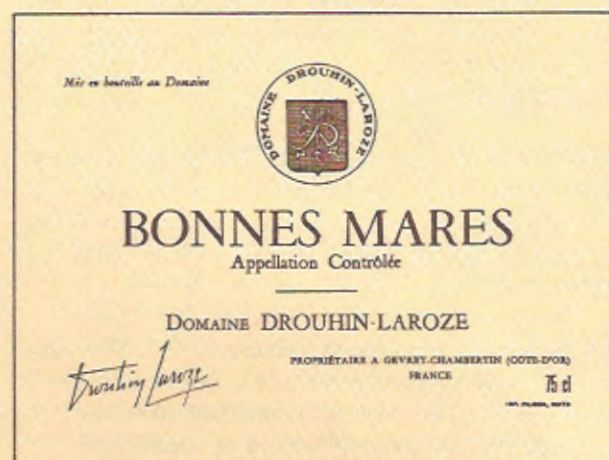
Why go to all the trouble. Simple. At its best Red Burgundy is sublime. A great wine that is at once seductive, supple, and glorious. Unfortunately, the great wines come few and far between even in a potentially great year such as 1978. Some shippers have put forth so much mediocre wine that Burgundy's reputation has suffered. However, it is precisely for this reason that many growers have elected to begin making their own wine. Hence, with even less of the best quality grapes for their blends it doesn't seem likely that much improvement can be expected from the big name shippers. On the other hand, there should be more glorious bottlings from small producers. Certainly THE story of the 1978 vintage is the superb wines of Henri Jayer (See Volume II, Number 3).

Finally, great Burgundy will never be available in large quantity. There just aren't enough great parcels of land in Burgundy to produce immense quantities of great wine. Historically, Burgundy has been relatively expensive. This is also unlikely to change. But U.S. consumers should not be misled. Contrary to the widely quoted statement that the best Burgundy doesn't come to the U.S., this just doesn't seem to be true. It does come here, but only in small quantities. Hence, some very great wines are known only to a handful of people. So it is. Still identifying great producers is worthwhile even if all the current vintage wine is sold out. After all, hopefully there will be future great vintages to anticipate. Knowing which producers have made the best wine should be invaluable to consumers and merchants in making buying decisions for future vintages.

Outstanding

★★★★

Bonnes Mares (Drouhin-Laroze). This is a delicious Burgundy that should be nectar in 5-6 years. It has a medium color with an amber edge and a rich, perfumed, ripe, fruity/berry/spicy nose. Loaded with fruit, very full, supple, and with impressive depth of flavor, there is some tannin and acid yet to lose (18). \$50 Chicago



Chambertin (Leroy). At last it's really true. Here's a big, classic, old style Burgundy. The color is very dark, nearly opaque. The nose shows a deep, earthy/fruity/spicy quality. Immense with full, powerful, deep flavors that are backed by firm tannin and acid, the wine has a roundness and intensity that are most impressive. There is ample fruit to carry the wine for the 10-15 years it will take to develop. Superb achievement. Lovers of big, old style Burgundies will surely want to hock the family jewels for this one (18). \$74 New York



Very Good

★ ★ ★ +

Chambertin (A. Rousseau). This wine shows great breed and style. The color is medium dark and the nose has a lovely, spicy/fruity/smoky perfume. Medium-bodied, with good intensity of flavor and spicy/fruity/smoky flavors, this wine should develop in 4-5 years and make for superb drinking (17½). \$60 (estimated)

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze (Drouhin-Laroze). This is another very fine Burgundy from Drouhin-Laroze who achieved great success in 1978. The wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge. It has a deep, fruity/spicy nose and a lovely, deep, fruity/spicy flavor. Rich, full, long on the palate, this could be outstanding in 4-5 years (17½). \$50 Chicago

★ ★ ★

Chambertin (Bourée). This is a big Burgundy—backward, full of extract and tannic. The color is medium dark and the nose has a fruity/spicy/earthy character. Rather harsh just now, but it has some fruit, and good depth. If there is enough fruit, this could be outstanding. However, it will take many years to develop and maturity is probably at least a decade away (17). \$54 New York

Clos de Vougeot (Drouhin-Laroze). This is a lovely, elegant wine that should mature in about 3-4 years. It has a medium dark color and a lovely, perfumed, spicy/fruity nose. Supple, medium-bodied, and flavorful, this will make a very nice bottle (17). \$50 Chicago

Corton Clos du Roi (Domaine Briailles). This is a lovely, firm, tightly knit Burgundy. The color is dark and there is an intense, fruity/spicy nose. The flavors are deep and full with a fruity/spicy quality. Delicious, long on the palate, supple, yet with tannin and acid to lose, in 5-6 years this could be outstanding (17). \$27

Corton-Vergennes (Allexant). This is a really lovely Burgundy to drink now and for the next 5-6 years. Lacking just a bit in intensity, but elegant with great style, its youthful appeal is readily apparent from the initial impression of intense fruit with a candy-like perfume. The flavors are fruity and spicy with some acid and tannin to carry the wine (17). \$25

Gevrey-Chambertin "Aux Combottes" (Dujac). This is a substantial Burgundy with a dark color and a spicy/fruity/green olive nose. The flavors have a fruity/spicy/smoky quality. The wine is full, rich, and long on the palate. With tannin and acid to lose, another 6-7 years should yield a very fine bottle (17). \$35 (estimated)

Best Buy

Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos de la Justice" (Bourée). Bourée is the sole owner of this rather obscure vineyard. The wine is very good and in time could be outstanding. At \$20 it is also a very good buy. The color is dark with just a little amber at the edge. It has a deeply perfumed, fruity/berry/earthy nose and deeply chiseled, fruity/spicy/earthy/smoky flavors. Long on the palate, but with substantial, youthful tannin and acid, this is a wine to lay away for at least 7-8 years (17). New York

Grands-Échezeaux (Lamarche). This wine has a dark color with an amber edge and a deeply perfumed, fruity/plummy/spicy/vanilla/raspberry nose—very complex. It has good, plummy flavors with a hint of vanilla and spice. With some acid and tannin to lose, this should be lovely in 3-4 years (17). \$43 New York

★ ★ +

Bonnes Mares (Clair-Daü). This is a fine Burgundy with a medium dark color showing just a little amber at the edge. It has a lovely, perfumed, fruity/berry/spicy nose and nice, fruity/berry flavors. With nice depth and flavor, there is tannin and acid yet to lose. In 5-6 years this should be lovely (16½). \$40 (estimated)

Clos de Vougeot (Lamarche). This wine has a dark color and a deep, fruity/berry/cherry/vanilla nose—most attractive. It has good depth with berry-like flavors tinged with vanilla. With some tannin and acid to lose it should yield a lovely, elegant bottle in 3-4 years (16½). \$40 New York

Clos de la Roche (Dujac). This is a powerful wine. The color is dark and the nose shows an earthy/spicy/fruity/smoky quality. There are full, rich flavors with a spicy/fruity/smoky quality. Very tannic just now and slightly coarse, at least 6-8 years of development seem warranted. With time, the wine could be outstanding, for now (16½). \$45 (estimated)

Corton Clos du Roi (Dubreuil-Fontaine). This is a very nice Burgundy with a medium dark color and a perfumed, fruity/berry/spicy nose. The flavors show the same fruity/berry/spicy quality. With some tannin and acid to lose, this will make a lovely, elegant bottle in 4-5 years (16½). \$32

Corton-Bressandes (Domaine Briailles). This wine has a dark color with an intriguing, spicy/fruity nose showing an undertone of peanut butter – unusual, but attractive. There is a very flavorful, ripe/fruity/spicy quality backed by a nice balance of tannin and acid. A wine with good development potential for 4-5 years (16½). \$27

Corton-Bressandes (Dubreuil-Fontaine). This wine has a medium color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy/plummy/candy-like nose. In a medium-bodied style, there are lovely, supple, plummy/spicy flavors with some tannin and acid showing through. It needs some time to develop and in 5-6 years should be exquisite (16½). \$35

Gevrey-Chambertin “Cazetiers” (Clair-Daü). This seems to be the best of the Clair-Daü Gevrey Chambertins. It has a medium color and a subdued, fruity/berries/spicy nose with similar flavors. With air, the wine develops a lovely, candy-like nose and shows good fruit, depth, and balance. Not a big wine, but it should be lovely in 4-5 years (16½). \$30 (estimated)

Nuits-Saint-Georges “Cuvee Mignotte” (Labouré-Roi). This wine has a medium dark color and a deep, fruity/berry/spicy/earthy nose. It is very complex and tightly knit with berry/fruity/spicy flavors. Just now the acid shows through on the finish, but there is enough depth and body to carry the wine. Keep this for 7-8 years, it should make a lovely, flavorful bottle (16½). \$45 New York

Vosne-Romanée “La Grand Rue” (Lamarche). Lamarche is the sole owner of this tiny 3.3 acre vineyard barely the width of a road running alongside Romanée-Conti. While the wine is very nice, it should be better. The color is dark with an amber edge and the nose exhibits a fruity/spicy/berry quality. The wine has good fruit and vanilla-tinged flavor in a medium-bodied style with some tannin and acid to lose. With a few years bottle age, it should improve, but there is not enough intensity for the wine to be great (16½). \$50 New York

★★

Beaune “Les Teurins” (Germaine). This is an attractive, early maturing Burgundy. It has a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/berry/spicy/vanilla nose. It is elegant with the same fruity/berry/spicy/vanilla flavors following through on the palate. With medium body and some tannin and acid to lose, this should develop well for 2-3 years (16). \$27

Clos de la Roche (Amiot). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge. It has a lovely, fruity/berry/spicy nose and similar flavors. With some acid, it needs 4-5 years and should make a very nice bottle (16). \$30

Clos de la Roche (Bourée). Typical of wine from this producer, presently it is backward and closed-in. The color is medium dark with a subdued, spicy/fruity nose. Full, with nice fruit and flavor, there is acid and tannin to lose which gives the wine a youthful harshness just now. This is a keeper that will need many years to develop (16). \$35 New York

Clos de Vougeot (De Gramont). This is an appealing, lighter style Burgundy. The color is medium dark with a spicy/smoky/fruity/vanilla nose showing a hint of volatile acidity. There are fruity, vanilla-tinged flavors. Firm, with some tannin and acid to lose, this is a wine to lay away for 4-5 years (16). \$40

Latricières-Chambertin (Bourée). This is the most forward of the Bourée wines. It is also one of the lightest. The color is medium dark and the nose has a ripe, fruit, candy-like quality. There are lovely, ripe, fruity flavors with some tannin and acid showing through (16). \$40 New York

Nuits-Saint-Georges “1er Cru” (Bourée). This is another backward wine – so typical of the Bourée style. It has a dark color and a subdued, fruity/berry/spicy nose. A full Burgundy with a cherry-like flavor and an underlying spiciness, it is full and tannic and will need at least 7-8 years to develop (16). \$30 New York

Vosne-Romanée “Malconsorts” (Lamarche). This wine has a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/berry/cherry/spicy nose. It is quite nice with a lovely, fruity/cherry flavor. Balanced a bit to acid and lacking the depth and richness to be truly great, a few years bottle age should yield a very nice wine (16). \$35 New York

Beaune "Les Chouacheaux" (De Gramont). This is a very nice wine lacking just a bit in intensity. The color is medium dark with an amber edge and a really lovely, fruity/vanilla/candy-like nose. It has nice fruit in a medium-bodied style with some tannin and acid to lose. It should mature in 3-4 years (15½). \$13

Charmes-Chambertin (Bourée). Like the other Bourée wines, this should take many years to develop. Presently, it is quite backward. The color is medium dark and the nose exhibits a fruity/earthy/spicy quality. It has fruit with an earthy/spicy complexity. With firm acidity and noticeable tannin, a few years more bottle age should give a better glimpse of the wine's ultimate development potential (15½). \$35 New York

Chassagne-Montrachet (Boisset). This wine is not a keeper, but is lovely to drink now. It has a dark color and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/spicy nose. There is good fruit and flavor. The wine is soft and pleasant with just a trace of tannin and acid yet to lose (15½). \$17

Gevrey-Chambertin (A. Rousseau). This is a nice, lighter style Burgundy. It has a medium color and a lovely, fruity/spicy/smoky nose. With nice fruit showing and spicy complexity, the wine is soft with just a trace of tannin and acid to lose. It should be early maturing (15½). \$30 (estimated)

Le Corton (Bouchard). This wine has a dark color with an amber edge. It has a lovely, fruity/spicy/smoky/vanilla nose. Medium-bodied, with nice fruit showing spicy nuances, there is a slight balance to acid that needs a few years to round out (15½). \$35

Best Buy

Mercurey "Chateau de Chamires" (Jouennes d' Herville). Typically, this is a lighter style Burgundy. Nonetheless, it is lovely and should develop well for 4-5 years. At the \$16 tariff it represents good value in today's inflated Burgundy market. The color is medium dark and the wine exhibits a very spicy/fruity nose. Firm, with a good tannin/acid balance, the fruity/spicy flavors exhibit good intensity (15½).

Pommard (Clerget). Surprisingly, this seems to be the best of the Clerget Burgundies tasted. The rest are terribly mediocre. It has a medium dark color and a

fruity/berry/spicy/vanilla nose. Clean, with a fresh, berry flavor showing a hint of spice, the wine has good depth. Balanced a little to acid, but still quite pleasing with room to improve for a few years (15½). \$30 (estimated)

Vosne-Romanée (J. Gros). This wine shows noticeable chaptalisation, but is still very nice. The color is dark with a lovely, fruity/vanilla nose. The flavors have a fruity/spicy quality backed by a modest amount of tannin, acid, and a sweet finish (15½). \$25

Vosne-Romanée "Suchots" (Lamarche). This Burgundy has a medium color with an amber edge and a subdued, fruity/berry/spicy nose. It has similar flavors with a slight balance to acid. It should mature early (15½). \$25 New York



Chambolle-Musigny (Bourée). Here is yet another backward Bourée Burgundy with a dark color with an amber edge and a subdued, earthy nose. There is good extract, but the wine is backward and tannic, a big style wine that will need many years age. If there is enough fruit, this could be very fine (15). \$20 New York

Chapelle-Chambertin (Clair-Daü). Like so many Clair-Daü's this is a pleasant Burgundy, but very light. The color is medium light with an amber edge - rather washed-out. There is a fruity/candy-like nose and nice, fruity/berry/spicy flavors. Pleasant, easy to drink, early maturing, it is ready to drink (15). \$30 (estimated)

Corton-Perrières (Dubreuil-Fontaine). This wine probably doesn't have enough fruit for long term development. The color is medium dark and the nose is subdued with an underlying fruit and spiciness. A full-bodied wine, but quite dry, it is presently rather closed and backward. Time will tell if there is enough fruit (15). \$27

Gevrey-Chambertin (Vienot). This wine has a medium dark color with a pruny/fruity/spicy nose. There is good fruit with an over-ripe quality and spicy complexity. Balanced to acid, but with a nice flavor, this is a nice wine that needs 4-5 years to develop (15). \$18

Gevrey-Chambertin "Combe aux Moines" (Clair-Daü). Again, a typical Clair-Daü Burgundy with a medium color showing amber at the edge and a subdued, fruity/spicy nose. It is very pleasant with a fruity/spicy flavor and a balance to acid (15). \$30 (estimated)

Gevrey-Chambertin "Estoumeles St. Jacques" (Clair-Daü). This wine has a medium color, with an amber edge and a lovely, perfumed, fruity/berry/spicy nose. It is clean with a similar, fruity/berry/spicy flavor. Balanced to acid, a few years bottle age should be beneficial (15). \$30 (estimated)

Pernand le des Vergelesses (Dubreuil-Fontaine). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/spicy nose. There is a berry-like flavor with a spicy complexity in a light, but very pleasant style (15). \$23

Santenay "Gravieres" (Bourée). This is a full flavored Burgundy. It has a dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/smoky nose showing some spice. There are fruity/spicy/green olive flavors with a balance to acid and some underlying tannin. This wine needs time, say 5-6 years (15). \$16 New York

Good

Aloxe-Corton (Drouhin). Although this wine will undoubtedly continue to develop for a few years, it is attractive to drink now for the fruit. The color is medium dark. The nose is attractive with a fruity/berry/spicy quality. The wine is clean and fresh with a berry-like flavor showing a hint of spice. Balanced to acid and rather short on the finish, but it's still a pleasant Burgundy (14½). \$20

Gevrey-Chambertin "1er Cru" (Bourée). Again, this is a big, backward wine. The color is dark and the nose has a pronounced, oaky/toasty quality. Heavy and tannic with firm acidity, the wine has a bitter finish. There seems to be underlying fruit, but who knows how it will develop? An expensive gamble to be sure (14½). \$35 New York

Gevrey-Chambertin "Petite Chapelle" (Trapet). This is a pleasant, lighter style Burgundy that lacks depth. The color is medium dark and the nose has a very fruity/plummy quality with a hint of spice. There are simple, fruity flavors with a balance to acid (14½). \$31

Richebourg (F. Gros). Not to be confused with the much better Richebourg from J. Gros (see Volume II, page 109), this is a poor excuse for Richebourg. It has a medium dark color with an amber edge and a fruity/butterscotch, slightly oxidized nose. It is pleasant with ripe, fruity/spicy flavors, yet totally lacking in breed and style and prematurely aged. This is one not to buy (14½). \$45 (estimated)

Vosne-Romanée (Lamarche). This Burgundy has a medium dark color and a nice, fruity/berry/spicy nose. It has nice, fruity/spicy flavors in a light style with a balance to acid – still very pleasant (14½). \$20 (estimated)

Chambolle-Musigny "1er Cru" (Dujac). This is not a very successful wine. It has a dark color, but the nose has SO₂ and a hint of oxidation. There is good fruit, flavor, and balance with a slight stemminess. It tastes better than it smells, but is not likely to improve (14). \$35 (estimated)

Côte de Beaune "La Grande Chatelaine" (De Gramont). This wine has a medium color with an amber edge. It has a fruity/spicy/earthy nose and fruity/earthy/spicy flavors. A little thin with a dry, slightly bitter finish, otherwise it is quite nice (14). \$13

Gevrey-Chambertin (Clerget). With a medium dark color and a plummy/spicy nose, this wine is clean and balanced to acid with similar fruity/plummy flavors (14). \$20 (estimated)

Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos Du Fonteny" (Clair-Daü). This wine has a medium color with a subdued, spicy/fruity nose. It has similar flavors, but is balanced to acid without much stuffing. Pleasant and early maturing, but this is not an exciting Burgundy (14). \$30 (estimated)

Beaune "Vigne de l'Enfant Jesus" (Bourchard). This is a monopole vineyard that has produced very fine wine in years past. This wine misses the mark. It has a medium dark color, but the nose has a slight mustiness. There is some fruit, but the wine is thin and lacking depth with a balance to acid. With air, more fruit shows through, but the wine is still thin (14). \$40

Nuits-Saint-Georges (Clerget). This wine has a medium color, amber edge, and a ripe, fruity/spicy nose. It is light, balanced to acid, and has a ripe, fruity flavor. A pleasant wine that lacks depth and will be early maturing (13½). \$30 (estimated)

Vosne-Romanée (Clerget). This wine has a medium color and a fruity/spicy, slightly stemmy nose. It is clean and fresh with an earthy/plum-like flavor. Dry and balanced to acid, the wine could use more fruit (13½). \$25 (estimated)

Vosne-Romanée (Engel). This is a very light Burgundy. Easy to drink and early maturing with a light color and pleasant, fruity flavors, there just isn't much here one way or the other (13). \$20 (estimated)

Aloxe-Corton (Clerget). This wine has a medium dark color with an amber edge. It has a subdued, plummy nose with a hint of spice. Pleasant, but not much of a Burgundy – clean, some flavor, some fruit, balanced to acid, short finish. Drink it now for the fruit (12½). \$20 (estimated)

Below Average

Clos de Vougeot (F. Gros). While this wine is not undrinkable, it is totally unlike Burgundy. Caveat emptor. Who knows what's in here? The color is medium light with an amber edge and a fruity/tarry nose. This wine is light with a creosote flavor. Visions

of this in a retail store with a big sign saying, "classic, big style Burgundy from a great year" are easy to imagine (11)! \$35 (estimated)

Gevrey-Chambertin (Drouhin). Whew. This wine has a medium dark color and then . . . Pow, a volatile, shellac-like nose. This will clear out your nasal passages! Some fruit, yet it is somewhat sharp and volatile. Drinkable, but better yet it could be a classy decongestant (11). \$27

The Drouhin-Laroze wines are imported by Consolidated Distilled Products in Chicago and the Leroy Chambertin is imported by de Villaine and Leroy Imports in New York.



1975 SAUTERNES

"... the quality of the overall 1975 vintage cannot be called great"

Sauternes was originally a tiny French village to which a district some 30 miles south of Bordeaux affixed its name. It is this district that produces the greatest sweet wines of France. The area of Sauternes actually encompasses five townships: Bommes, Fargues, Preignac, Barsac, and Sauternes itself. Barsac, at the northern end of the district, is often referred to separately and, after Sauternes itself, is probably the most famous township. There are well over 500 separate vineyards in Sauternes. Yet of this amount there is only one first great growth, Château d'Yquem. Its position has been unchallenged for the entire history of the 1855 classification. Following d'Yquem are eleven first growths and thirteen second growths. In total, these 25 properties account for some 25% of

the total annual Sauternes production of approximately 350,000 cases. Very few of the minor growths are seen in the United States. Location of the vineyards is obviously very important to the quality of wine produced, but the care and expense necessary to produce Sauternes no doubt results in much less attention being paid to minor growths. Actually it's a chicken/egg phenomenon. More care and attention before, after, and during harvest would probably result in better wine. Yet with a minor growth status, the price received for the wine would probably not recognize the added costs of production. Indeed, for all but d'Yquem, this is a major problem. Such is the state of Sauternes today.

In 1975, Sauternes was blessed with nearly ideal weather conditions. A spring frost was followed by very dry, hot weather throughout the summer. The weather remained warm with the necessary balancing humidity throughout autumn insuring favorable conditions for the beneficial botrytis cinerea mold. The grapes were of very good quality, but yields were below average with some individual vineyards production off by as much as 30%. However, d'Yquem production was more normal—106,000 bottles compared with 110,000 bottles in the trouble free year of 1967. The difference was that the harvest began on September 29 and ended on November 17 in 1975 after six pickings as compared with only three pickings from September 26 to October 15 in 1967.

Truly 1975 was an extraordinary year. Unfortunately, the quality of individual châteaux varies considerably. As we reported earlier (see Volume I, Number 3), d'Yquem is absolutely outstanding—a classic. It is clearly the outstanding wine of the vintage. Of the others, only Climens is outstanding. Undoubtedly, this has something to do with the extremely high cost of production for Sauternes and lackluster world demand reflected in relatively low prices (albeit much improvement from the mid 1970's when the retail price of such excellent wines as 1971 Rieussec was under \$4 per bottle!). Hence many Sauternes owners, through economic necessity, are forced to limit the number of times they will harvest the vines for the select, ripe clusters of botrytis infected grapes. To produce the finest quality wine this process can take as many as a dozen separate pickings. However, many vineyards are picked only once or twice. This results in bunches of grapes with varying degrees of ripeness, thus lowering the amount of natural sugar and concentration.

Hence, despite the exceptional weather, the quality of the overall 1975 vintage cannot be called great—very good perhaps, but not great. What a sad situation for the great wines of Sauternes. Pity that more people haven't discovered the match of foie gras or pâté with Sauternes as an appetizer course. Here is the perfect service for this great wine. Often at the end of a meal, Sauternes can be too much—too strong, too heavy, or too sweet. But at the beginning, well chilled, with the perfect flavor balance of foie gras or pâté, it is superb. So while Sauternes prices have increased in the past few years, they still remain great bargains. In many cases, the price is probably well below the level of profitability. So it is to be torn between two persuasions. On the one hand, consumers would like low prices. On the other, if prices are too low there may eventually be no Sauternes at all. Hopefully, there will be an agreeable compromise.

Our assessment of 1975 Sauternes follows:

Outstanding

★★★★★+

d'Yquem. Clearly 1975 d'Yquem is one of the great d'Yquems of the century. As good as 1921, 1928, or 1929? Who knows? But clearly great. The wine has a medium yellow/gold color and an intensely perfumed nose of coconuts and tropical fruit overlaying the heavy botrytis character. It is rich, yet delicate. Heavy but not cumbersome—very nicely balanced with an aftertaste that stays and stays and stays. This is an absolute nectar that will only get better. Expect this d'Yquem to improve for 40 or more years (19½). \$80 P.S. The 1976 d'Yquem is also fabulous—lighter, more delicate, but lovely, harmonious, and delicious. Some may even prefer it to the 1975. But why make a choice? Hock the family jewels and buy both!



★★★★

Climens. The 1975 Climens is a great Sauternes. Not as rich as d'Yquem, but lovely, delicate, flavorful. The color is a light yellow with just the slightest tinge of green. The nose is incredible—honey and pineapple with a steely, botrytis quality. In the mouth the wine is firm, yet delicate. Very flavorful with great style and class, this is a magnificent wine that should improve for 20-30 years at least. Stylistically, more like the 1976 d'Yquem than the 1975 d'Yquem and much less expensive than either (18). \$28



Very Good

★ ★ ★ +

De Fargues. Owned by the Lur-Saluces family (owners of d'Yquem), this relatively small vineyard has been producing very fine wines in recent years. Certainly without the depth and richness of d'Yquem, it is, nonetheless, a very successful wine in 1975. The color is medium gold with a fruity, honey, botrytis nose. The wine is rich, sweet, and flavorful with good acidity. It should improve for at least 20 years (17½). \$32

★ ★ ★

Coutet. Along with Climens, Coutet is year-in and year-out the best of the Barsacs. This may lack the really extraordinary balance of Climens, but it is very nice. The color is gold and the nose shows an interesting, steely, penetrating, botrytis quality so typical of the finest Barsacs. The taste follows through with rich, fruity flavors balanced by acidity and a firm sweetness. This is one of the real values of the vintage. It should develop well for 15-20 years (17). \$14 New York

Rabaud-Sigalas. This property in the commune of Bommès is comprised of 90% Sémillon and 10% Sauvignon. The 1975 is very fine with a light yellow color and a wonderful, ripe, rich, fruity, botrytis nose. The wine has great viscosity with a beautiful balance of tropical fruit and firm acidity. It should age very well for 15-20 years at least (17). \$12

Rieussec. Situated in the commune of Fargues, Rieussec has been producing consistently good wine in recent years. The color is a deep gold, unusual for such a young Sauternes. The nose is intensely perfumed with a botrytis quality showing hints of roses and honeysuckle – very nice. On the palate, the wine is rich with luscious, complex, sweet flavors and a long finish. Another 5-10 years bottle age should yield even more complexity (17). \$19

★ ★

Doisy-Daëne. This small property in Barsac is comprised of 100% Sémillon. This wine has a pale yellow color and a nice, fruity, botrytis nose with some SO₂ that will dissipate with time. On the palate, there is a ripe, fruity, peach-like sweetness balanced by good depth and backbone. This should develop well for many years (16). \$10 New York

Lafaurie-Peyraguey. This property lies in the commune of Bommès. In 1975 the quantity produced was about 30% less than the average yield of the past

10 years. The color is a light straw yellow. The wine has a very fruity, botrytis nose and a lovely, delicate balance of fruit, sweetness, and acidity. Quite forward for such a young wine, but very nice (16). \$13 New York

★ +

d'Arche. This wine has a pale gold color and a fruity, botrytis nose. A medium-bodied wine with good fruit/acid balance, this should develop well for 10 or more years (15½). \$13 New York

Rayne-Vigneau. This wine from the commune of Bommès is comprised of 60% Sémillon, 35% Sauvignon, and 5% Muscadelle. The color is pale straw yellow with a fine, honeyed, botrytis nose. The wine is rich, sweet, and just a bit flabby. It should improve for several years, but may lack the acid balance for long term aging (15½). \$12

Suduiraut. This vineyard in the district of Preignac has made some memorable wines – 1959 and 1967 are stand-outs, 1962 is also very nice. Unusual for Suduiraut, this 1975 seems to lack richness. It has a light gold color and a nice, fruity, botrytis nose; but while possessing good fruit and acidity, there is a harsh, hot finish that rather overpowers the other flavors. Another 5-10 years bottle age should help, although this is not likely to be memorable Suduiraut (15½). \$17

Good

Filhot. This property usually produces a somewhat drier Sauternes. This wine is typical in that respect, but it has a grassy, tart flavor component that is decidedly atypical. Pleasant, but unexciting (14). \$11

Doisy-Védrines. This Barsac has a light straw color with a green tinge. The nose is somewhat closed. The wine lacks charm and flavor, finishes hot, and is somewhat out-of-balance (13). \$10 New York

La Tour-Blanche. This wine can only be labeled a gross disappointment. It has a light straw yellow color and a fruity/botrytis/sulphur nose. There is some fruit, but there is so much sulphur it literally burns the palate. No doubt the sulphur will preserve the wine, but the end result is not likely to be worth the cellar space (12). \$14 New York

Château d'Yquem is generally available in most major U.S. markets. Château Climens is imported on the West Coast by Connoisseur Wine Imports in San Francisco. Availability in other parts of the country is unknown.

Cellar Notes

1970 Bordeaux vs. 1970 California Cabernet Sauvignon: The Ultimate Match?

Much has been said of the quality of French wines vs. California wines. And, there will be more. This article and our editorial in the current issue are *prima facie* evidence. The tasting of French vs. California wines will continue to be done because it's fun and it's interesting. Unfortunately, most French vs. California tastings are done with young wines. Why? Because it's easiest and they're more readily available. However, the fairest match is of wines at or approaching maturity — wines with some bottle age. However, the problem is finding a vintage of comparable quality. In so far as Bordeaux and Cabernet are concerned, a good year for California may not be for France, examples being 1968 and 1974. 1978 is a possibility, but the wines are yet too young. Going further back, it is more difficult yet. Definitely out are 1951 and 1958, excellent in California, but terrible in France. Likewise, 1966 isn't too good because the best Bordeaux are awkward just now and far from maturity, whereas the few really good 1966 Cabernets are generally fading. A perfect match is perhaps 1949, but here there were few California wines produced and they are exceedingly difficult to find. But, not to despair, there is an almost perfect year for comparison, 1970. It was outstanding for both Bordeaux and Cabernet. Moreover, the wines from both origins seem destined for long life. Thus the matching of 1970 Bordeaux vs. 1970 Cabernet is, and likely will be for many years, the ultimate match.

Recently, Steve McAnlis, the chapter director for the Newport Beach, California, chapter of Les Amis du Vin, arranged a tasting of 20 1970 Bordeaux and Cabernets. There were 12 Bordeaux and 8 Cabernets, including the wines generally considered to be among the top from Bordeaux and California. The tasting was done single blind with the identity of the wines in the tasting known to the tasters, but not the order of service (a standard procedure for nearly all of the tastings done for this publication, by the way). The wines were decanted away from the presence of the tasters just prior to serving and all 20 wines were poured at once. In order of preference, tasting notes on the 20 wines follows along with commentary on previous tastings of each wine:

★★★★ (★)

Latour. Dark color. Rather closed-in nose. Fruity/cedary nuances. Developed with air. Rich, concentrated flavors. Loads of fruit. Really delicious. Long on the palate. An abundance of tannin. Good acid. Harmonious balance. Superior potential. Tasted on 10 previous occasions. Similar notes. Amazing consistency. Great wine.

★★★★ (★)

Lynch-Bages. Dark color, amber edge. Intense, fruity/cedary/mint bouquet. Really stunning. Big fruit. Full, rich. Great depth and balance. Tannin and acid to lose. Long on the palate. Great potential. Superb wine. Tasted 10 times previously. Amazingly consistent. One of the finest of the great 1970 Bordeaux. Maybe the best.

★★★★ (★)

Palmer. Dark color, amber edge. Deep, luscious, fruity, candy-like nose. Cassis and cedar nuances. Really superb. Deep, fruity/cherry/candy-like flavors. Hint of cedar. Great concentration. Luscious. Full. Round. A trace of tannin left. Should improve, but drinking very well. Previously tasted 6 times. Has seemed rather backward and closed-up ★★★ (★).

★★★★

Ducru-Beaucaillou. Dark color, amber edge. Very perfumed, fruity/cassis bouquet. Hint of cedar. Lots of fruit. Cedary nuances. Good structure. Elegant. Very flavorful. A superior wine that is drinking beautifully. Previously tasted 3 times. Not as mature as this bottle, but clearly outstanding potential ★★★ (★).

★★★★ (★★)

Mayacamas "Napa". Very dark color. Nearly opaque. Deep, fruity/minty nose. Loads of fruit. Great depth. Superb flavor. Long on the palate. Great structure. Firm, tannic. Good acid. Needs lots of time. No where near ready to drink. Clearly outstanding potential. Previously tasted 7 times. Very consistent tasting notes. Given 10-20 more years this could be one of the greatest California Cabernets of all time. How about Mayacamas vs. Latour in 1995?

★★★ (★)

BV "Private Reserve". Dark color. Ripe, fruity/pruny, almost port-like nose. Very characteristic of the old Private Reserves. Ripe, pruny/fruity flavor. Great depth. Firm structure. Long on the palate. Tannin to lose. Still needs time. Previously tasted 16 times. Very similar tasting notes. Always showing outstanding potential. Distinctive. Nearly always instantly recognizable.

★★★ (★)

Heitz Cellar "Martha's Vineyard". Dark color, amber edge. Very intense, minty/fruity nose. Very recognizable. Good fruit and depth. Minty nuances in the flavor. Intense, firmly packed wine. Core of iron. Tannin and acid to lose. A keeper. Needs many years yet. Previously tasted 5 times. Amazingly consistent.

★★★ (★)

Lafite-Rothschild. Dark color, amber edge. Fruity/berry/cedar nose. Nice fruit and flavor. Cedary nuances. Almost sweet. Ripe. Lovely wine. Good length on the palate. Still some tannin to lose. Will develop. Previously tasted 3 times. Showing better now than previously when it rated ★★ (★)

★★★ (★)

Léoville-Las-Cases. Medium dark color, very fruity/cassis-like nose. Hint of cedar and spice. Enormously attractive. Lovely, fruity/cedary flavor. Delicious. Long on the palate. Some tannin and acid to lose. Needs a few more years. Should be outstanding. Previously tasted 3 times. Two years ago lovely nose and flavor, but still quite a lot of tannin. Developing well.

★★★ (★)

Mouton-Rothschild. Dark color, amber edge. Lovely, perfumed fruity/vanilla/cedar nose. Slight hint of mint. Lovely flavor. Tannin and acid to lose. Promise of elegance. Not much middle fat, on the lean side. A keeper. Patience will be rewarded. Previously tasted 5 times. Has tasted fuller, but always flavorful. Once ★★★★★ (★). Destined to be a classic Mouton.

★★★ (★)

Pétrus. Medium dark color, subdued, fruity nose. Hint of cedar and vanilla. Lots of fruit. Ripe, fruity/vanilla flavor. Round. Full. Some tannin and acid to lose. Lovely. Long finish. Tasted 4 times previously. Has scored higher ★★★★★ (★). Similar notes. Maybe on this occasion slightly over-looked in this company of giants.

★★★ (★)

Ridge "Monte Bello". Very dark color. Almost opaque. Subdued, berry nose/oaky overtones. Big, ripe, fruit flavor. Massive. Lots of tannin. Very flavorful. Lip-smacking good, but intense. A keeper. Previously tasted 4 times. Similar notes. Way too young to drink.

★★★ (★)

Trotanoy. Dark color, subdued, fruity/cherry nose. Hint of cedar. Rich, full, concentrated flavor. Very classy. Some tannin. Full. Tannin to lose. A keeper. Previously tasted 5 times. Has shown more complexity, but always great depth ★★★★★ (★).

★★ (★)

Chappellet "Napa Valley". Dark color. Deep, cedary/fruity/hint of mint bouquet. Big fruit. Very flavorful. Tannic. Needs time. Should develop complexity. Previously tasted 3 times. Similar notes.

★★

Beychevelle. Dark color, amber edge, fruity, slightly toasty nose. Nice, fruity/cedary flavor. A little dry. Slightly toasty. Maybe a prematurely aged bottle – poor storage? Previously tasted 3 times. Has been better ★★★★★ (★). Should be retasted.

★★

Robert Mondavi "Unfiltered". Dark color, lovely, ripe, fruity/almost pruny bouquet. Hint of weediness and mint. Nice, ripe, fruity/pruny flavor. Hint of cedar. Good balance. Nice finish. Ready to drink. Previously tasted 6 times. Has been drinking well for a few years. Tasting notes very consistent.

★ (★)

La Mission-Haut-Brion. Dark color, amber edge. Fruity, earthy nose. Hint of volatility. Big wine. Lots of fruit. Earthy/cedary flavor nuances. Long on the palate. Much tannin to lose. Good acid. A slightly pickled taste on the finish – too volatile? Needs time, but volatility is disturbing. Previously tasted 5 times. Has been much better ★★★★★ (★) at least. This bottle not representative of the wine.

★

Freemark Abbey "Bosche". Dark color, amber edge, fruity/weedy nose. Ripe, fruity/weedy/vanilla-tinged flavor. Some tannin and acid to lose. Maybe lacking fruit for much more aging. Could dry out. Previously tasted twice. Similar notes. This wine was made in a small quantity and has become a legend of sorts. However, previous bottles have been similar. Hardly memorable and over-rated by many.

Lafleur-Pétrus. Medium dark color. Slightly musty nose. Some fruit. Noticeable volatile acidity. Some fruit, but rather harsh. Tannic finish. Out of balance. Previously tasted 4 times. This bottle inconsistent with previous bottles which were fruity, well-balanced, and forward ★★★★★.

Spring Mountain "Napa Valley". Dark color. Ripe, fruit, almost pruny nose. Berry-like flavors. Astringent. Sweet/sour sensation on the finish. Unusual. Previously tasted 3 times. Never a favorite. Drink up.

So what did the tasting prove? Well, at least for my palate, there are a number of points that can be made with reference to 1970 Bordeaux and 1970 Cabernet Sauvignons:

- Of the 20 wines tasted, 13 were outstanding. Even though pre-selected, this is phenomenal and attests to the quality of the vintage. Of the 13 outstanding wines, 8 were Bordeaux, 5 were Cabernets. Of the 5 wines ranked at the very top, 4 were Bordeaux, and 1 was Cabernet.
- Of the 20 wines tasted, 18 were very good. Of the 2 that were less than very good, 1 was a Bordeaux, the other a Cabernet. The Bordeaux has been better, the Cabernet hasn't.
- The differentiation of Bordeaux vs. Cabernet was not difficult. I picked 18 of the 20 correctly by smell without ever tasting the wine. Interestingly, the 2 incorrectly identified were Chappellet and Pétrus. In retrospect, looking over my notes I'm surprised I didn't identify the origin of these two as well.
- Part of the scoring is based on potential. A similar tasting in the future may not yield the same results. Again, the pairing of the Mayacamas and Latour around 1995 should be intensely interesting.
- I identified 7 of the wines correctly: BV, Mayacamas, Ridge, Heitz, Spring Mountain, Lynch-Bages, and La Mission-Haut-Brion. Thus, I correctly identified 5 of the 8 California wines, confusing the somewhat similar Mondavi and Freemark wines, but being totally baffled by the Chappellet whose origin I didn't even get right. As for the Bordeaux, I was pathetic, identifying only 2 of 12 wines and making such mistakes as confusing Mouton with Ducru, Lafite with Léoville-Las-Cases, and worse yet Latour with Trotanoy. Some of the other Bordeaux I didn't even attempt to guess.
- After the tasting, the remainder of the wine in the glasses was consumed with dinner. In this case, a nice cut of rare beef. The better Bordeaux and Cabernets went equally well with the food. For instance, while the Palmer was more drinkable,

the flavors of the Latour and Mayacamas were marvelous even though they clearly are much more tannic. The pairing of food and wine is the ultimate test. Tastings are fine, but wines such as these are meant to be consumed with food.

So that's how I found these particular wines on one evening in a blind tasting. All in all, it was pretty consistent with previous experiences with each of the wines. Still there are many questions that can be asked in analyzing the results. One of the foremost seems to be to what extent one is prejudiced by wines that are recognizable. My scoring on this tasting might lead some to concur that I have a "California palate"; although I disagree, and readily admit having a preference for Bordeaux, finding them more elegant, finessful and complex. However, maybe I just don't taste as well when it comes to Bordeaux. It's certainly not from a lack of tasting them. I drink far more Bordeaux than Cabernet. But maybe it is that the differences in Bordeaux are more subtle, whereas the differences in Cabernet are obvious. Personally, I opt for the latter. After all, it's the integrity of my palate that I'm defending here! At any rate, the point is were my scores prejudiced by recognizing some of the wines? Oh, with the exception of a few that jumped right out of the glass as recognizable just from the smell (which was, by the way, the case for 5 of the 7 that I correctly identified), I tried not to play the "guessing game" until the wines were evaluated and scored. Nonetheless, the fact that I am very fond of these particular BV, Heitz, Mayacamas, Ridge, and Lynch-Bages bottlings, and that I am usually able to identify them, undoubtedly influenced my scores. But, would the results be more valid if someone who had never tasted the wines and had no idea what they were evaluated them and scored them higher or lower. Except for that taster, I think not, but then again that's a personal prejudice. In the last analysis that's what this whole thing of wine tasting is about. Each of us is trying to find something we really like. By reading about and participating in tastings such as these we move yet another step forward in the never ending quest to educate our palates. Having once moved forward, it's nice to be able to then confirm what we've learned by making a correct identification. Education is prejudice. — **John Tilson, Editor**

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