

Paul Cudone's Bordeaux Report for 2009

Hello everyone. As many of you know, I was in Bordeaux for a week tasting the 09 vintage from the barrel. Let me cut to the chase and say that it will definitely be a great vintage. However, it is my opinion that some appellations did better than others and not all of the wines in specific appellations will be great. I feel that both the 00 and 05 are greater vintages across the board although each vintage is very different stylistically. The 2000's were lower in acidity and were more opulent and fleshier while the 05's had dense fruit with more aggressive tannins and acidity that gave the wines more structure. The 09 is however, a very unique vintage for many reasons that I will discuss shortly. The Wine Spectator's, James Suckling's reviews were already out while we were still tasting this past week, giving many wines high marks, some of which were right on but many that were not. There has also been a lot of talk on Parker's Chat room, both pros and cons about the vintage. It should be mentioned now that not everybody tastes the same samples and everyone's palate is different. I have been tasting young Bordeaux for nearly 10 years and my host, Chris Lano (owner of the import company, Stacole for whom I have the utmost respect for) has been tasting Bordeaux since the 1982 vintage. We both agreed that the 05 vintage is better across the board but also thought that this is a fabulous vintage. Bob Parker's issue is due out in the mail on the 27th of April. I am asking everyone at that time to please give me your "WISH LIST". I do not expect the top Chateau owners to open as they did last year, which was before Bob's issue. Nor do I expect them to go down in price but instead, go up in prices, quite a bit. This will be one of the tricky scenarios to play out this year, given the worldwide economy, how high can and will they go? There was much talk and speculation about the First Growths possibly going up to the 05 prices which could turn out to be a big mistake. We will simply have to wait and see. The biggest single factor affecting the pricing of this vintage will be the Asian market. It reminds me of the 70's and early 80's when Japan was trying to buy everything (not just wine, but land, building etc.) and drove the prices up everywhere only to have much of it crash in the mid 80's. Whether this will be the case with China, time will tell. What I can say is that having spoken to many Chateau owners, China has become a very important and lucrative market for them. I can tell you for certain, that properties such as Lafite

and Latour are only releasing half of their production, 5000 cases for the world of which 1-2000 cases will be first tranche. So, what does this mean? Simply that 2000 cases for 50 or so markets translates into very small amounts for each market. The top properties clearly know what their quality level is and will certainly push the envelope in regards to pricing. Some lesser properties have already opened and their prices are up about 10-15% over last year. Before I begin talking about the different appellations, let me first speak briefly about the weather conditions that helped shaped what will be a vintage for the record books as far as sugar levels, alcohol levels and concentration of fruit are concerned.

WEATHER

This, the final vintage of the decade, has turned out to be the most concentrated vintage of all. It was not the driest, (that was 05) nor the hottest, that was 03. In 2009, there were no extremes, just good regular heat at the right times with ample amount of rain when needed. Flowering took place around the first week in June with plenty of sunshine and very little rainfall. Through the rest of the summer, the hot but not scorching days were followed by cool nights. With moderate vine stress due to the lack of rain, it enabled the vines to ripen slowly and evenly, creating sugar levels never before seen in Bordeaux (the closest vintage on record would be the 47 vintage) as well as a build up of massive but gentle tannins. I personally have never tasted wines with such ripe and polished tannins. But make no mistake, the tannin levels are very high and many of the top wines will require considerable cellaring before they are ready to start drinking. There were also some properties that picked late and had very high alcohol and over ripe fruit. In short, out of balance wines. Some properties also got carried away with their maceration, extracting too much tannin and still other fermented at higher than normal temperature resulting in far too much alcohol. Merlots were harvested mid-late Sept. and Cabernets early Oct. to around the 14th. Merlots came in at around 14% on the Left Bank and 15% of the Right bank while Cabernets came in at 13% on the Left Bank and 14% on the Right bank. These alcohol levels are somewhat high by Bordeaux standards, but we said that in both the 03 and 05 vintage. These levels will

certainly be the main defining feature of this vintage. Yet, there is so much more in the 09's than just alcohol, the acidity levels (not quite as high as 05), the density of fruit together with the high yet ripe tannins makes for a perfect vintage for many producers and for some not such a perfect vintage because they over-extracted and were far too high in alcohol. For me, the single overriding feature I was looking for was "balance". In this report I will focus mainly on the top wines rather than the wines that were somewhat out of balance and overripe. But trust me when I tell you that there will be plenty of great wines to be had in this vintage. In summary, once again, the weather has blessed the region and has given most of the Bordalais yet another year to produce stellar wines or in many cases, not so stellar wines. It was clearly a winemaker's vintage.

APPELLATIONS

HAUT MEDOC, BORDEAUX SUPERIOR, COTES DE CASTILLON AND PETITE CHATEAU'S

I want to discuss these appellations first as there will be a vast amount of fabulous values to be had in this vintage, much like the 00 and 05 vintage. I think Parker would be able to devote an entire issue dedicated to the so called "sleeper's of the vintage". I should mention that the price range for these sleepers will be in the 12.00 to 30.00 per bt. price point. As we made our way around the tasting circuit, I came across a bevy of wines that will represent values in what may otherwise be a very expensive vintage. A large amount of the Haut-Medoc and Cotes de Castillon properties are mainly Merlot which are planted in heavy clay soils. Many of lesser properties exhibited very dark colors with sweet dense fruit with very good structure. Many will be approachable upon release and other will benefit from 2-3 years in the cellar. One wine, (it should be my first offering in about two weeks) Brisson which I score 89-91 pts on 3 occasions, was simply a fabulous wine which should sell for under 15.00 per bt. You would be so hard pressed to find anything remotely close in quality for this price from California. Here is a small list of properties to look for this year if you are looking for values: Rolland de By 89-90, Potensac 89-

91, Bernadotte 90-92, Montpezat 90-91 , Brondeau 90-92 and Courteillac 90-92, (both coming from the same owner) were fabulous and again should be under 15.00 per bt., Chasse Spleen 91-93, La Croix Lartigue 92-94, La Prade 90-92, Le Pin Beausoleil 89-91, Les Cruzelles 90-92, Phelan Segur 90-93, Tronquoy Lalande 90-92, Moulin Haut Laroque 90-92, Lilian Ladouys 89-91, Poujeaux 90-93, Sociando Mallet 92-94 (killer good), Cantemerle 91-93, Joanin Becot 90-93, Fombrauge 92-94, La Conseiller 90-91, D'Aiguilhe 90-93, Tour St. Bonnet 89-90, Grand Chenes 90-92, La Tour Canet 91-92, Citran 90-91, Patache d'Aux 89-91, La Dame de Montrose 90-91 (absolutely stellar), Marjosse 90-91, Reignac 91-93, Charmail 90-92, Haut Bergey 92-94, Mirambeau 90-91, Clos Chaumont 90-92 and Monbrison 91-94, Domaine d' I A 90-92, Marsau 89-90, Caps de Faugeres 90-92 and Puy Arnaud 90-92. There are many more but this is a good starting place for wines that I will be offered and should not have problems getting. If you are bargain hunter, these clearly are the wines to look out for.

THE LEFT BANK

GRAVES

I will save the First Growths and other high scoring wines for last. The Graves appellation was somewhat perplexing for me. I found the reds to be a little uneven and many of the whites did not show well at all. One negociant claimed that two weeks prior the white were stellar and the poor showing on this day was due to the lunar influence that affected the ocean tides, the energy fields and so on. I have a very difficult time subscribing to that train of thought. Anyhow, the whites seemed very one dimensional, with very little aromatic complexity, a lack of acidity which in the 05's were very present and added freshness and brightness to the wines. In addition, many seemed to lack depth and a real sense of palate presence. It is unfortunate that I only had one opportunity to taste these wines. The top white wines for me were Pape Clement 93-96, Smith Haut Lafite 92-94, Malartic La Graviere 91-92, Latour Martillac 90-91, Dom. de Chevalier 93-95, Haut Bergey 90-92, and Carbonnieux 90-92. Perhaps Bob's report will shed a more favorable

review, but for me, the 05 vintage was clearly better at this stage of their life. Now for the reds. The reds were a totally different story. Very dark in color, the best wines were full-bodied, extremely concentrated, had great purity of fruit, powerful and had long finishes while others were lacking a good mid-palate and seemed a little angular at present. My favorites were Branon 94-96 (tasted once) which is made by Helene Garçin who also makes Haut Bergey. Black/purple in color, this big, rich concentrated wine was very impressive with superb texture and freshness. The sad news is that there are only 50 cases made. Ape Clement 94-96+ super wine with excellent texture and concentration, (tasted twice) , Haut Bailey 94-96, powerful, rich and dense, (tasted three times), Dom. de Chevalier 92-95 which had very forward aromas, deep color and a lovely finish which showed super elegance and finesse and Smith Haut Lafite 93-95, tasted three separate times, one again demonstrated power married with elegance. Other wines to consider that will be far less expensive should be Carbonnieux 90-93, (tasted once) De Fieuzal 91-94 (tasted twice), Haut Bergey 92-94 (tasted 3 times), Malartic La Graviere (tasted once), 90-93, La Louviere 91-92 and Les Carmes Haut Brion 93-95 (both tasted once). All in all, a better showing for the reds more so than the whites.

MARGAUX

Once again, for me just a little uneven but there were certainly plenty of fabulous wines. Many of the wines exhibited very deep colors and high tannins, some being ripe and other not so ripe. And in the case of Malescot and Lascombes, they were definitely made in a new world style and seemed to lack the elegance one would expect from this appellation. Great wines, no question, just not very Margaux like for me. Now for the top wines. Giscours 92-95 (tasted twice) was wonderful, deeply color with a lovely opulent texture, concentrated and a powerful finish. Everything was in balance here. Lascombes 93-96 (twice 3 times) I expected a more extracted style but that was not to be found. It was very rich, with very pure sweet fruit and a very long finish. But as I stated earlier, not very Margaux like for me. Monbrison 90-92 (tasted twice) should be one of the buys of this appellation. Opaque/purple in color it had what one would

expect from this appellation, very good concentration of fruit in a highly elegant and finesse style. It should be priced around the 300-375.00 per case range. Dauzac 90-92 (tasted twice) again should be another excellent buy. Very pure and well balanced. Brane Cantenac 93-95 (tasted 3 times) had rich dark fruit, silky like tannins, excellent texture and a lovely long balanced finish. Along with Giscours, a must buy in this vintage. Rausan Segla 93--96 (tasted 3 times) was a big powerful wine with super purity (much like the 05) good freshness and a long finish. For the money Rausan Gassis 91-94 (tasted twice) should be a great buy. It is owned and made by the same people that make R. Segla, the Chanel empire. Yes, that is the French perfume company. Lots of money here. Almost black in color, this powerful effort boasted loads of chewy ripe fruit. Malescot St. Exupery 94-96+ (tasted once) was given 97-100 from James Suckling. While a great wine, I did not get 97-100 out of the sample I had. Sporting a blockbuster nose of rich black and red fruits, it was so ripe and powerful with very good focus and gripping tannins in its finish, one would be hard pressed to say it was from the Margaux appellation. None the less, it is a great wine and with Suckling's score it will probably be hard to obtain and fairly high priced. Kirwan 92-94 (tasted once) was once again excellent. Big, powerful and dense, this full-bodied yet elegant wine will require some time in the cellar. Other wines worth consideration will be Ferriere 90-92, Prieure Lichine 90-92, D'Issan 90-93, Boyd Cantanac 90-92, D'Angludet 90-92, La Tour De Mons 90-92 and Alter Ego 89-91. Much like the 05 vintage, this should be an area that peaks interest for two reasons: First, the prices for many of the wines should be under 50.00 per bt. and second: The quality for many of the wines is superb.

ST. JULIEN

Without question, one of my favorite appellations. Both St. Julien and Pauillac had very healthy Cabernet grapes this year. The wines here were superb. Everything one would want in a great wine can be found here, complexity, richness, flavor profile, power and elegance. Clearly, wines that are meant to be cellared for 5-10 years before they will really begin to show their true potential. Starting off with Beychevelle 90-93 (tasted once) was beautifully balance with good

richness, ripe tannins and acidity and should be reasonable priced. Branaire Ducru 92-95 (tasted once) was deeply colored with ripe tannins and excellent purity of fruit. Gruaud Larose 92-95 (tasted once) may be the best Gruaud since their 2000. Big and rich with sweet dark fruit, high but ripe tannins and a long finish. This wine will require patience. La Grange 92-94+ (tasted twice) was opaque/purple in color with loads of black and red fruits, powerful yet ripe tannins and super finish. Everything was in balance here but again you will have to wait 10 years to pull the cork on a bottle of this. Langoa Barton 91-94 (tasted once) made by the wine making team that produces Leoville Barton, has fashioned a beautifully pure, fresh and big wine with lots of currant and blackberry fruit, high but ripe tannins and a long finish. The best Langoa since their 05 and 2000. Leoville Barton 92-95 (tasted twice) is once again superb. While I still give the edge to the 05, their 09 is opaque/purple in color with pure notes of cassis, minerals and licorice, with very fine tannins and a structured finish. Leoville Poyferre 93-96 (tasted once) was excellent. Tons of sweet ripe fruit, this classic Poyferre will certainly rank along side its other classic vintages (90, 96, 00 and 05) except the 03 which I believe is the finest Poyferre I have ever tasted. Other wines of merit will be Talbot 90-92, Gloria 90-92, this should be a great buy and Croix de Beaucaillou 90-92 the second wine of Ducru.

PAUILLAC

Wow, this appellation was fantastic. First the bad news, we did not get a chance to taste Pontet Canet which along with Montrose will be the two best buys of the vintage for quality/price ratio. Let me first start with Pichon Lalande 94-96+ (tasted twice, 75% Cab. 20% Merlot 5% Petit Verdot). One half of the controlling interest was sold to the firm of Louis Roederer in 07. Their 09 is nothing short of fantastic. Only 37% of the total production went into their Grand Vin. A very, very polished wine that has a gorgeous texture, wonderful purity of fruit, excellent concentrated blue and black fruits and a opulent smooth as silk finish. Having had the 82 on several occasions, this is the closest wine stylistically to the 82. PS, Pichon's second wine, Res. de la Comtesse 89-91 was quite good, which represents 53% of the total production. Lynch Bages 93-96+, (tasted

twice) is simply the best Lynch since their 2000 or 89. It has more in common with the 89 than the 00. Super concentrated, this full-bodied wine had great texture, silky tannins, and fabulous overall balance. In a word, fantastic. Pichon Baron 93-96+ (tasted once) was just the opposite of Lalande (and they are across the street from one another) big, dense and powerful, it is loaded with rich concentrated fruit and does not have the smooth finish that Lalande or Lynch Bages has. None the less, it is a classic Pauillac that will last 20-30 years. Grand Puy Lacoste 92-95+ (tasted once) was deep ruby/purple in color with sweet blue and red fruits, polished tannins and a somewhat powerful finish. This should be on par with their 90, 96, 00 and 05. This is owned by Xavier Borie who is the brother of Bruno Borie from Ducru Beaucaillou. Impressive wine. Other wines worth mentioning are Bellegrave 90-93, Haut Bages Liberal 90-92, Haut Batailley 92-94. It should be noted that all of the properties made by Lafite, Latour and Mouton will be discussed when I review the First Growths, ie Duhart Milon, D'Armailhac, Forts de Latour etc.

ST. ESTEPHE

This appellation has created alot talk, specifically, Cos D' Estournel 96-98 (tasted once). To be honest with everyone, I am not quite sure what direction this property is headed in. I much prefer the wine made at this property during the 80's and mid-nineties. In any event, their 09 is nothing short of great. 56% of the total production went into making this wine which is 65% Cab. 33% Merlot and 2% Petit Verdot and tips the scales at 14.5% alcohol. An absolutely massive wine, it is black/purple in color with an incredible presence on the palate. Because of the Merlot (planting on clay soils) the fruit is very dense and rich, masking the alcohol quite well. The tannins are huge but polished. This will be a fascinating wine to follow over the next 20 or so years. Next is the wine I definitely feel will be one of the top wines of the vintage and hopefully one of the best buys for the money, Chateau Montrose 97-100 (tasted once) . Jean Delmas, (formally from Haut Brion) came out of retirement and has been at the helm now since the 06 vintage. Simply put, off the charts great. This was a real WOW wine for me and I feel it is the best Montrose since their other worldly 1990. Opaque/purple in color, this was a wine of power and elegance combined

with massive fruit extract, big but silky tannins and great over-all balance. 72% of the total production went into this wine that is made from 65% Cab. 29% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. Take a number for this one as it is sure to be in big demand. PS, their second wine, La Dame De Montrose 90-91 was very good as well. One other wine they are responsible for is Tronquoy-Lalande which was mentioned in the first section as a value wine. Calon Segur 93-96+ (tasted once) is 90% Cab.and the rest Merlot and Petit Verdot. This densely colored wine had loads of black fruit aromas, was full-bodied with layered fruit, fresh acidity and a long finish. A classic Calon Segur that will require cellaring for at last 7-10 years. Two wines that were definite stand outs that should be reasonable priced will be Lafon Rochet 90-93 (tasted once) and Phelan Segur 90-93 (tasted once). Lafon Rochet was a big hit for me and may be the best wine they have ever made. Full-bodied with lots of cassis and other black fruits, it exhibited excellent purity and good grip. My notes read " very very good wine". The 09 Phelan Segur is the best wine I have tasted from them. Here are some other gems from this highly successful appellation that are well worth considering. Pagodes de Cos 90-92 the second wine of Cos d' Estournel, Les Ormes de Pez 90-92, Chateau de Pez 89-91, Petit Bosq 90-91 and Haut Marbuzet 89-92.

RIGHT BANK

POMEROL

This appellation proved to have some of the most elegant and seductive wines for me. I really like the Burgundian style here. Many of the top wines caressed the palate with lovely lush fruit, never feeling heavy on the palate but oh, so intense in flavor. I should mention that we did not get a chance to taste the wines from Christian Moueix, ie, Petrus, Trotanoy, La Fleur Petrus and Hosanna. It is hard for me to pick a favorite but one wine that really surprised me (first time I have tasted the wine) was La Violette 93-95 (tasted once). This property is only 1.8 hectares or 4 acres that is situated between Le Pin and Trotanoy. Very floral on the nose, this pure, elegant

wine was medium -full bodied with good density, ripe tannins and a very long complex finish. It will not be cheap, but well worth seeking out. Veieux Chateau Certan 94-97+ (tasted once) was fantastic. 84% Merlot, 8% Cab. Sav. and Cab. Franc. I may have underrated this wine. Rich, sweet and powerful, this is a wine of class and elegance. The tannins were so ripe and the texture was pure perfection in the mouth. Alexandre Thienpont compares this wine to the properties 1950 and 2000. This is certainly one of the wines to buy in this vintage. After leaving there we headed to a property run by his cousin and a wine I have never tasted before, Le Pin 95-97 (tasted once). There are only 725 cases of this wine which comes from a small 5 acre plot. I know because while we were tasting the wine directly out of the barrel and all of us seemed to be counting the number of barrels. This highly finessed wine was rich, very layered but with excellent freshness, soft but ripe tannins and a very long complex finish. My notes say " absolutely great wine". L'Evangile 94-97 (tasted once) was spectacular. 95% Merlot and 5% Cab. Franc, this wine was very well balanced with tons of densely pack dark fruit on the palate, very polished and refined tannins and a long powerful finish. This may be better than their fabulous 08. 80% of the production went into this wine or 3000 cases. La Conseillante 94-96 (tasted once) was another beautiful wine to taste. Already showing a complex nose, it had such a silky texture with sweet rich fruit, this one was hard to spit out. The finish was long, elegant and refined. I should mention at this stage of the game, the high alcohols (which no one seem say how high they were) were not present at all in any of these wines, nor the remaining wines I will discuss shortly. As I mentioned in the beginning of the article, over all balance was what I was looking for. Since 98, Denis Durantou has taken L'Eglise Clinet's 95-97+ (tasted twice) 15 acre vineyard to new heights. While I think the 05 is slightly better, his 09 is nothing short of fantastic. Blue/purple in color, the nose is so pure and dense. The fruit is so rich and massive (without being overdone) it is a wine that must be tasted to be believed. The tannins are high but smooth. It is made from 85% Merlot and 15% Cab. Franc. Lucky for me a bought a fair amount last year so I should have a good allocation this year. He made just over 1000 cases. Clinet 94-96(tasted once) was superb. Perhaps the best Clinet since their 89 and 90. Dense, opulent with ripe tannins, this may get a higher score in a few years after bottling. Croix St. George 93-96 (tasted

twice) should represent a good buy in Pomerol this vintage, (should be around 50-60 per bt.).

Made by

Jean-Philippe Janoueix, this 11 acre estate is planted in 100% Merlot. The 09 is black/purple in color with dense red and black fruit, good acidity, high but ripe tannins. The finish was pure and long. I have many other properties to talk about but in order to save space I will list them instead.

La Gay 94-96 (tasted twice), Bon Pasteur 93-96 (tasted once), Petit Village 93-94+ (tasted once), a real surprise here. Gazin 92-95 (tasted once), La Croix de Gay 92-94 (tasted once), Nenin 92-95 (tasted once), La Pointe 91-93 (tasted once) and Clos L'Eglise 94-96 (tasted once) was just a little extracted.

ST. EMILION

This appellation was somewhat uneven for me. While some properties made awesome wines, others produced wines that were overripe (a function of picking late) or over-extracted. I will not discuss the latter two but instead will focus on the better wines. Once again, I was looking for that magic word "balance". I will talk about Ausone and Cheval Blanc in the next section with the First Growths. There was a lot of buzz about Figac this year. The Wine Spectator scored it 97-100 and the Decanter Magazine scored it 18.5 out of 20. I tasted Figac 94-96 (tasted once) late in the afternoon. Usually by that time, my mouth is ripped apart by the aggressive tannins I normally experience when tasting on the Right Bank. That was not the case this year. This is the finest Figac I have tasted since their 1990. Dense in color, it had wonderfully pure dark fruit as well as over-all precision and focus. Fabulous effort. Angelus 94-96+ (tasted once) has again made a great wine. Hubert Bouard seems to be on a hot streak. Very dark in color, this 09 was intensely concentrated with red and black fruits and very powerful, yet ripe tannins. There was a real sense of elegance here that I have only found in the best years of Angelus. A very impressive wine. Troplong Mondot 95-97+ (tasted once) was awesome. Christine Valette has produced yet another great wine in 09. Blue/black in color, this full-bodied effort boast lots of sweet fruit, fantastic intensity and a very long finish. The final blend was 80% Merlot, 10% Petit Verdot and

10% Cab. Franc. Pavie Macquin 94-96 (tasted once) has one of the finest vineyards sites in St. Emilion. It sits atop the hill between Pavie and Troplong Mondot. Their 09 was opaque/purple in color with rich, sweet opulent fruit, excellent purity and a long balanced finish. Great texture here. Stephane Derenoncourt has been producing this wine for the last several years and has continued to push the quality level up every year. A huge surprise for me this year and is Derenoncourt's first year making the wine, was Beausejour Duffau 94-96+ (tasted once). This is without question the finest wine to date since their 1990, which for me may be one of the single greatest Bordeaux's I have ever tasted. The 09 was deeply colored, full-bodied with superb complexity and texture. It had great depth of fruit along with sweet and ripe tannins. This was absolutely a fabulous wine and may be one of the better buys of the vintage. Another property that has undergone a resurrection is Larcis Ducasse 94-96+ (tasted once). Starting in 02, Nicholas Thienpont and Stephane Derenoncourt took over the 26 acre vineyard. The vines are planted in calcareous clay and abutt Pavie. Their 09 much like their 05 is a WOW wine for me. Dense opaque/purple in color, it had a big creamy-like nose. On the palate, it was very rich, with lots of intense black fruits and a powerful yet balanced finish. Great stuff here. Clos Fourtet 93-96 (tasted once) was somewhat modern in style but not over done at all. It is very ripe without being jammy with a lovely texture and polished tannins. This should be a real crowd pleaser. Comtes von Neipperg has fashioned two fabulous wines this year. The first is Cannon La Gaffeliere 93-96 (tasted twice) and La Mondotte 94-96+ (tasted once). Cannon La Gaffeliere, 55% Merlot, 35% Cab. Franc and 10% Cab. Sav. may be his finest wine to date. With yields of only 34 hl/ha, this elegant and harmonious wine was beautifully made and showed fine structure in it's long finish. La Mondotte, 80% Merlot and 20% Cab. Franc had yields of just 17 hl/ha. Production is always small as the vineyard is only 11 acres. Maybe just a tad overripe. Big, rich and with lots of sweet fruit, this velvety wine showed considerable balance for as big as it was. The finish was very long. Sure to have mixed reviews from the critics. Cannon 94-96 (tasted once) was stunning. This property is also owned by the Chanel Company and has produced what may be one of their finest efforts since the 50's. Gorgeous wine here, one of class and elegance. Loads of pure sweet red fruits with very silky tannins and a long velvety finish. A very opulent wine that begs to be drunk

now. Only 3000 cases produced and the final blend was 75% Merlot and 25% Cab. Franc. In order that I may save space, I will list the remaining wines: Peby Faugeres 94-96 (tasted once) a bit extracted, Lynsolence 92-93, La Couspaude 91-94, really creamy texture and they toned the toasted oak down, Grande Mayne 90-91, La Gaffliere 92-95, La Dominique 91-93, Beausejour Becot 93-96, Faugeres 90-91, Moulin St. George 92-94, Bellevue 92-94, La Gomere 92-95, Gracia 92-95, Luca 93-95, Croix de Labrie, 94-96? somewhat extracted, Grand Pontet 91-93, La Larmande 92-94, L'Arrosee 92-94, Clos St. Martin 94-95, big, rich and extracted, Fleur Cardinale 92-94. All in all, a very compelling appellation with many profound wines.

THE BIG BOYS

Ok, now on to the wines that, for me, were among the most amazing wines not just of this vintage, but perhaps the finest examples I have ever tasted from these domaines. I will start with the Right Bank wines first and then do the Left Bank wines.

CHEVAL BLANC 95-97+ (tasted once) 60% Merlot and 40% Cab. Franc. Deep purple in color, this wine is totally in balance. Big and rich with layers of fruit, superb texture, very ripe and subtle tannins and enough acidity to give it some structure. It is so refined and elegant, it will be hard to resist this wine young but is sure to improve with some bottle age. A classic Cheval. Their second wine, La Petit Cheval 91-94 is like a "baby Cheval Blanc" and should be a fraction the cost of Cheval Blanc. I should mention that while at Cheval Blanc we had a chance to taste Chateau D'Yquem 09 97-100. In a word, mind-blowing. Perhaps as great as their 01.

AUSONE 96-98+ (tasted once): Sadly, there were only 1250 cases of this wine produced. Since 98, Alain Vauthier has propelled this property into one of the finest wines made anywhere in the world. It sits atop a plateau of solid limestone over-looking the city of St. Emilion. An amazing floral nose is followed by a very dense and rich palate (big but delicate, never heavy on the palate). The freshness, which no doubt comes from the limestone, seems to give the wine plenty

of focus. The tannins are ultra fine and the finish is very, very long. Beautiful balance and harmony here. It must be tasted to be believed. I still give the edge to the 05 at this stage but this is a surreal wine that is a must purchase for the true collector if you can afford it. Their second wine, Chapelle D' Ausone 92-95 is even more difficult to come by and is a lot cheaper. It was clearly classified growth quality.

PAVIE 95-98 (tasted once): This is a Pavie to lay down for a long time. Black/purple in color, this dense, super concentrated wine was packed with fruit but oh so tight and powerful. The tannins are very high and ripe but not silky like many of the other wines. For those critics that cry over-extracted, this is not the case at all. Patience will be required. The yields were a mere 28 hl/ha and the blend was 70% Merlot and 30% Cab. Franc.

PAVIE DECESSE 95-97 (tasted once): 90% Merlot and 10% Cab. Franc. Blue/purple in color, this is also a powerful wine but seems to have more opulent fruit than Pavie. It is a very intense, pure wine that is full-bodied with fabulous concentration and a long mineral finish, no doubt from the limestone soils. I should mention that this property sits directly next to Pavie. Both are great wines but very different. Yields were 26 hl/ha.

BELLEVUE MONDOTTE 96-98+ (tasted once): This may be the best wine of Perse's 09's. Almost inky black in color, this blockbuster was sure rich, pure and concentrated it was on the verge of being syrupy but had just enough acidity and freshness to balance out the wine. Unlike Pavie, the tannins, while big were more on the velvety side. Great wine here. Yields were 22 hl/ha and it was 90% Merlot and 10% Cab Franc. There are less than 400 cases of this wine.

LEOVILLE LAS CASES 96-98+ (tasted once): Oh my god, this may be the finest Leoville Las Cases I have ever tasted. I have been lucky enough to have tasted the 82, 85, 86, 89, 90, 96, 00 thru 09 and this clearly ranks among the best I have had. Everything is there. Concentration, purity and ripeness of fruit and complexity. The wines depth is stunning along with its amazing

harmony and over-all balance and elegance. Clearly First Growth status and it will probably not be cheap this year but well worth buying. Simply a profound Leoville Las Cases. Will probably be a 100 pointer. Yields were only 38 hl/ha and the cepage was 76% Cab. Sav., 15% Merlot and 9% Cab. Franc.

DUCRU BEAUCAILLOU 95-98+ (tasted once): Wow, another classic Ducru for the ages. Bruno Borie has made some major changes since 03, by reducing the Grand Vin production from 15-20,000 cases to just 9-11,000 cases. The remaining wine now goes into his second wine. The 09 has a spectacular nose of pure red and black fruits, cassis and licorice. Super-concentrated with loads of sweet fruit, powerful but ripe tannins and a very long finish. Everything is in balance here with lots of energy and focus. This is certainly a classic Ducru that manages to reign in his new world influence. 45 hl/ha and is made from 85% Cab. Sav. and 15% Merlot. Great wine.

PALMER 95-97+ (tasted once): 52% Merlot and 41% Cab. Sav. and the rest Petit Verdot. The words that come to mind nearly every year I taste this wine are, lovely floral nose, finesse, elegant and satiny smooth. It is every bit that and more. Full-bodied but not heavy, it caresses the palate with layers of ripe fruit, minerals and silky tannins. Absolutely beautiful wine of immense class and elegance. Very seductive and everything one would expect of this great Margaux.

MARGAUX 96-99+ (tasted once) 87% Cab. Sav., 9% Merlot and 2% Cab. Franc and Petit Verdot. I thought Palmer was great until we arrive at our next stop, Chateau Margaux. This wine may eclipse their 00 and 05 as the single greatest wine made at this property. Very dense fruit, deep color, expressive aromatics, amazing texture and purity, ultra fine tannins and a very long complex finish. I thought I died and went to wine after-world. It is that great a wine. No telling where the First Growths will be priced this year with quality like this. Stunning wine. There are only 10,000 cases made and they are holding at least 5000 cases back to be released at a later time. Their second wine, Pavillon Rouge 91-94 pts. is should be a steal and again is perhaps the

best Pavillon Rouge to date. I know I sound like a broken record, but if and when some of you have a chance to taste these wines, you will understand where I am coming from.

LATOUR 97-100 (tasted once): 91.3% Cab. Sav. and 8.7% Merlot. When we visited the property, Frederic Engerer was somewhat subdued. He knew this was a Latour of epic proportions. He employed 3 teams of pickers and three sorting lines which enable them to harvest all of the Cab. in just 6 days. I have been very lucky to have tasted the last 10 or so years of Latour and I will say that this may be the best of them all. A classic floral nose of with loads of black Cab. fruit (cassis, dark cherries and blueberries) stunning purity and texture, amazing depth of fruit on the palate with excellent freshness and serious but polished tannins on the finish. Frederic told us that this wine had more density than the 05. As big as it is, there is a real sense of class and elegance here. This may be the "wine of the vintage". I wish everyone who says, Bordeaux is just ok, were able to taste this. This wine would not doubt change their mind in a heart beat. Simply mind-blowing wine. PS, only 38% of the production went into their Grand Vin (10,000 cases).

Latour's second and third wines were also fabulous. Pauillac 90-92 (tasted once) is their third wine and would rival many 4 and 5 Growth wines today. Deeply colored, with notes of violets and black fruits, there is impressive depth here in a very open knit style. If I were trying Bordeaux for my first time, this would be the wine I would most likely choose. Lovely complex flavors that shows well now over the next 10 or so years.

LES FORTS DE LATOUR 92-95 (tasted once) is Latour's second label. No doubt the finest Forts de Latour produced. 45% of the production went into this wine. A "baby Latour", it had a very expressive floral nose with excellent depth of fruit, ripeness and polished tannins. This could pass for a 3rd or even 2nd Growth wine. Fantastic stuff.

MOUTON 96-98+ (tasted once) 88% Cab. Sav. 12% Merlot. Having had their 82, 86, 00, 06 and 05, I feel this is the finest Mouton made since their 82. I left the property shaking my head

thinking how lucky I am to be tasting such great wine. This Mouton is like no other Mouton I have ever tasted. Since Philippe Dallhuin has been at the property, he has been given carte blanche to do whatever is needed put Mouton at the top of the First Growth status. Almost black in color, it offered up such pure aromatics of blueberries, cassis, flowers and spice. On the palate, it is very dense in fruit but elegant and fills the mouth with incredible complex flavors. The tannins are so ripe and refined, I could have sat down and consumed the entire bottle over lunch. Very well balance wine. A wine of immense class but make no mistake, this wine will need considerable time in the cellar. Only 48% of the production made it into this profound Mouton. This is a definite buy in this vintage. PS, while at the property, I had a chance to meet the Baroness, she is quite a pistol.

D'ARMAILHAC 92-94 (tasted twice) 60% Cab. Sav., 24% Merlot, 14% Cab. Franc and 2% Petit Verdot. I actually preferred this over the Clerc Milon. Ruby/purple in color, very floral with pure red and black fruit aromas along with fine silky tannins, lovely texture and a long finish. A very impressive Pauillac that should be a relative bargain.

CLERC MILON 92-94 (tasted twice) 50% Cab. Sav., 44% Merlot, 4% Petit Verdot and 1% Carmenere and Petit Verdot. Deep purple in color, this full-bodied wine seems to lack the over-all refinement that D'Armailhac had but none the less a very impressive Clerc Milon with dense black fruits (plums and blackberries), ripe tannins and long finish.

HAUT BRION 96-97+ (tasted once) 46% Merlot, 40% Cab. Sav. and 14% Cab. Franc. While our sample did not seem up to the level of the other First Growths, it was still a stunning wine. Black/purple to the rim, this massive yet elegant wine is even better than the 05 according to Jean-Philippe Delmas and only 57% of the production went into this wine. Rich and sweet with superb density, the wine dances across the palate with considerable grace and elegance masking the 14% alcohol. The tannins are very ripe but not as caressing as the other First

Growths. It is already very complex and a beautifully balanced wine that has a long live ahead of it. Great stuff here

HAUT BRION BLANC 95-97 (tasted once) 38% Semillon and 62% Sav. Blanc. Just under 500 cases made from a 6 acre plot.

LA MISSION HAUT BRION 94-96+ (tasted once) 47% Merlot, 47% Cab. Sav., 6% Cab. Franc. Only 50% of the production went into La Miss. Opaque/purple in color, this dense, super-ripe La Mission was somewhat more intense and focused than Haut Brion. Showing more structure and power, it had huge ripe tannins and 14.7% alcohol that was no-where to be seen in this monster of a wine that still maintain finesse and over-all balance. A magnificent La Mission.

LAFITE 98-99+ (tasted once) 82.5% Cab. Sav., 17% Merlot and .05% Petit Verdot. Only 43% of the production went into the Grand Vin. Well well, pretty amazing wine here. Opaque/purple in color, it really needed some coaxing to begin to show aromatically. Much like Latour, a true masterpiece of a wine. A very intense wine of immense class and harmony. It was so complex on the palate it was simply sublime. Layers of pure black fruits, minerals, cedar and graphite, together with a seamless texture, wonderfully ripe and polished tannins and a long powerful finish that lasted for over one minute. This was a definite Wow wine for me and should go down as one of the greatest Lafites ever. Great balance and elegance here. Not to be missed.

CARRUADES DE LAFITE 90-92 (tasted once) 50% Cab. Sav., 42% Merlot, 5% Cab. Franc and 2% Petit Verdot. Very good wine but not up to the level of some of the other Second wines from other properties. Will probably be way over priced as well

DUHART MILON 92-94 (tasted once) 63% Cab. Sav. and 37% Merlot. I liked this wine much better than Carruades and it should be much less expensive as well. A beautifully made wine, it

had a lovely, almost creamy texture to it with plenty of ripe fruit, smooth as silk tannins and a polished finish. It should drink well young and age for 15 or so years. Such elegance here.

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