

## **VINTAGE OF THE CENTURY?**

**By: Jerome L. Prager**

Will the 2009 vintage of Bordeaux wines be the third vintage of the century this decade (after 2000 and 2005)? I had the privilege and pleasure of attending the barrel tastings of vintage 2009 Bordeaux wines in Bordeaux, France, during *en primeur* held annually in the spring following the harvest each year. I was fortunate to be accompanied by knowledgeable representatives of both a local wholesaler and a local retailer.

Each year many winemakers and chateaux hype their wines and release announcements touting how wonderful their wines will be of this vintage. We have learned to accept with a grain of salt many of these claims, which are often exaggerated. The '09s may be the real McCoy.

The 2009 vintage of Bordeaux wines has been promoted vigorously and consistently by virtually everyone who has been involved in the '09 harvest. Throughout the growing season, the weather was ideal, just the right amount of sunshine and rain. Many of the chateaux have availed themselves of the latest technology in the wineries and have adopted modern vineyard management, including some organic and biodynamic farming.

So, with no trepidations whatsoever, I am dictating this report in April before the well-respected wine critics release their evaluations and comments. I go on record as endorsing the '09 vintage as one of the greatest Bordeaux vintages during the last fifty (50) years, comparable to 1961, 1982, 2000, and 2005. Generally, the wines are extracted, concentrated, and totally charming. Most of the futures prices will be released in June, 2010. I am very eager to learn if the prices will be through the roof or will only represent a small increase from the previous year. The wine glut on the world market is still a factor. Inventories of recent vintages are still in the

cellars of wineries. If the prices escalate greatly, many of the chateaux will not find buyers for their inventory. Some wholesalers and retailers are still sitting on inventories of recent Bordeaux vintages as the general economy has taken its toll on premium wines. Value wines from other countries continue to increase market share at the expense of premium wines.

My group was fortunate to have private tasting appointments with all of the Premier Grand Crus, as well as with the top right bank chateaux. I have rated many of the chateaux, including all of the Premier Grand Crus, as classic (95 to 100 points on the 100 point scale). The most impressive of the Grand Crus was Chateau Latour (98-100). It was greatly extracted, powerful, precise, and every bit the aristocratic patrician wine that lived up to its sterling reputation.

Chateau Lafite Rothschild (96-98) and Chateau Mouton Rothschild (96-98) were surprisingly less extracted, lighter density, but both were extremely elegant and somewhat restrained. Lafite is a wine of great finesse, with its typical room-filling aroma of violets and blackcurrant, and succulent blackberry flavors. Mouton is also a complex wine with layers of black fruit and pencil lead flavors wrapped around sweet, ripe tannins. Mouton has a graphite nose and a long, lingering mouth feel.

Chateau Margaux (95-97) was highly aromatic with oriental spice and blackberry aromas. The wine had a slightly soft mouth feel with streaks of boysenberry and hoisin.

Chateau Haut Brion (97-99) was a huge precise wine with a wonderful bouquet and a core of black fruit and being cloaked in an earthy and oaky shell. Haut Brion is already a wonderfully balanced wine.

Of the Medoc wines, other than Premier Grand Crus, the blockbuster to end all blockbusters was the Chateau Cos d'Estournel (96-99). Cos is truly a massive wine with ripe tannins, inky black color, and an exotic, perfumed nose. This huge wine will last for decades.

Two other outstanding wines that should be rated classic are Chateau Pontet Canet (96-98), which was a complete wine, beautifully crafted, with blackberry and blackcurrant flavors; and Chateau Palmer (95-98) which was exceptional with great depth and concentrated streaks of blackberry, raspberry, and mocha. Palmer has an oaky nose with hints of wild berry throughout.

On the right bank, there were many superlative wines which will be highly rated. It is difficult to pick only one or two, however, I rate Chateau Petrus (98-100) along with Latour as the wines of the vintage. Petrus is liquid poetry, with a complex burst of fruit flavors on the palate and fully integrated silky tannins already. Petrus is an opulent wine, showing multiple layers of complex flavors of blackberry, chocolate, plum, and mocha, with an incredibly sweet mouth feel.

Equally complex and probably impossible to obtain is LePin (97-99), which was very rich and intense with lush, firm, sweet tannins and layers of black fruit, ripe plum, and blueberry flavors.

In one incredible afternoon, in addition to Petrus and LePin, we tasted the voluptuous Vieux Chateau Certan (97-99), Chateau Ausone (96-98), and Chateau Cheval Blanc (95-97). The VCC was dense and exquisite with flavors of anise, blackcurrant and exhibited great length. Ausone had flavors of cassis, blackberry, and refined, polished tannins that made the wine surprisingly harmonious for being so young. Cheval Blanc exhibited black cherry, licorice, and coffee notes and was very concentrated.

Many of the chateaux mentioned above had outstanding second label wines, which hopefully will be much more reasonably priced and affordable. The '09 vintage is the perfect time to sample some of these second labels.

Special mention should also be noted for Chateau Pavie Macquin (95-97). This wine had a huge oaky nose, very dark color with great extraction and flavors of boysenberry, hoisin, macerated plum and currant. Pavie Macquin is a most seductive wine.

The outstanding white Bordeaux we tasted, by far, was Chateau Haut Brion Blanc (97-99) which is a full-flavored, refined wine with flavors of crème broulée and egg custard, mineral, and green apple notes. Other notable white Bordeaux we tasted were Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc (92-94) and Chateau Margaux Blanc (94-96).

These wines will not be bottled for another year and a half, so they will not be available at wine shops or package stores until late summer or fall of 2012.

I will mention a number of other chateaux we tasted that had impressive ratings:

<p><u>St. Estèphe</u></p> <p>Chateau Montrose (92-94) Chateau Haut Marbuzet (89-91) Chateau Goulée (90-92) Chateau Calon Ségur (87-89) Chateau Tronquoy Lalande (87-89)</p> <p><u>Pauillac</u></p> <p>Chateau Pichon Lalande (91-93) Chateau Grand Puy Lacoste (90-92) Chateau Pichon Baron (92-95) Chateau Lynch-Bages (90-92) Chateau Batailley (91-93) Chateau Duhart Milon (91-93) Chateau d'Armailhac (90-92)</p> <p><u>St. Julien</u></p> <p>Chateau Saint Pierre (90-92) Chateau Branaire Ducru (90-93) Chateau Leoville Poyferre (92-95) Chateau Leoville Las Cases (92-94) Chateau Leoville Barton (91-93) Chateau Langoa Barton (91-93) Chateau Ducru Beaucaillou (93-96) Chateau Lagrange (90-92)</p>	<p><u>Margaux</u></p> <p>Chateau Giscours (92-94) Chateau du Tertre (90-92) Chateau D'Issan (89-91) Chateau Malescot St. Exupery (87-89)</p> <p><u>St. Emilion</u></p> <p>Chateau Larcis Ducasse (93-95) Clos des Jacobins (90-92) Chateau Canon La Gaffeliere (92-94) Chateau La Mondotte (95-97) Chateau Rol Valentine (92-94) Chateau Barde Haut (88-90) Chateau Angélus (93-95)</p> <p><u>Pomerol</u></p> <p>Chateau Nenin (88-90) Chateau Le Pointe (89-91) Chateau La Fleur de Gay (86-88)</p> <p><u>Pessac-Leognan</u></p> <p>Chateau La Mission Haut Brion (93-95) Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge (90-93) Chateau Carbonnieux (90-92) Chateau Bouscaut (90-92) Chateau Cantegrieve (87-89) Chateau de Fieuzel (88-90) Chateau Haut Bailly (89-91)</p>
--	---

*A Votre Santé!*