

A Bordeaux Fantasy

ALTHOUGH I PREVIOUSLY WROTE an article on Bordeaux for *QB* (March/April 2007), I recently had an extraordinary opportunity to taste two different vintages of all five of the Premier Crus Classés-1855 (First Growth Bordeaux). The occasion took place at the New York Wine Experience on Oct. 22. This was my 27th Wine Experience sponsored by the Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. These occasions present attendees with the greatest learning about the wine world. Just imagine the world's greatest 262 wineries represented by the winery owners and winemakers pouring one of their best wines over a 3 1/2 hour session filled with extensive wine seminars. If food grabs your attention more than wine, think about a pre-luncheon featuring four masterful works of art on a single plate by Charlie Trotter, Daniel Boulud, Emeril Lagasse, and José Andrés accompanied by eight wines for the offering, each chosen to highlight each of the four masterpieces.

While the overall quality of the experience can

only be appreciated by those thousand or so individuals who are seriously committed to spend the time and money to further their education, the finalé on Saturday was the vertical tasting of the First Growth Bordeaux.

According to Prince Robert of Luxembourg, owner of Chateau Haut-Brion, this was only the third time that all the owners of the First Growths had done such a tasting together. I have experienced the rare pleasure of having had extensive vertical tastings of each of the First Growths presented by the owners throughout the past quarter century, but each First Growth by itself. Rarely does one have a chance to taste a First Growth alongside a different First Growth. The wines tasted were grouped as follows with salient descriptions, below, provided by the producers.

Chateau Latour 2008 🍷 A classic, pure, well-defined vintage. Grand Vin, which is severe, but also rich and intense. A great deal of class and nobility in this wine.

Chateau Mouton Rothschild 2006 🍷 Expresses a complex range of red berry fruit, wild blackberry and raspberry aromas with touches of spice, white pepper and vanilla, plus some roasted, toasted notes of judicious oak. Elegant and well structured, notes of incense and jammy fruit, richly flavored tannins, full in the mouth, creamy and powerful ... classic. Remarkable for its harmony, perfect balance and extreme elegance. A great wine to lay down and keep.

Chateau Haut Brion 2005 🍷 Similar vintage conditions to the legendary vintage of 1949. Extraordinary concentration, color seems black, complex notes of smoke, of cigar and roasted coffee grains ... wine startles with its density, long in the mouth plus creamy, big, powerful and fresh. It takes hold of you and penetrates your senses. Power, harmony and aromatic persistence is incredibly long. A perfectly balanced wine.

Chateau Latour 2004 🍷 Powerful, fresh, lively style and a solid, precise structure. Very concentrated fruit, imposing structure, showing great purity and a rare level of energy. The finish is long

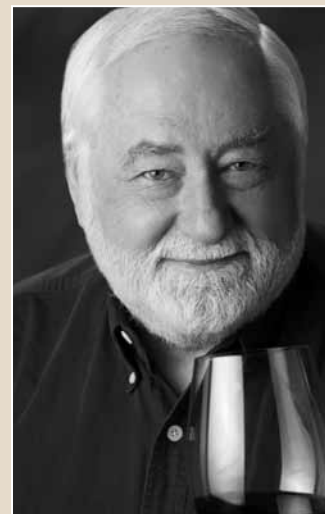
and very silky, supported by very well-integrated tannins.

Chateau Lafite Rothschild 2003 🍷 Little berries with less yield, magnificent color, expressive aromas, impressive powerful wine with extremely noble tannins and superb length and finesse.

Chateau Haut Brion 1998 🍷 Very classic, deep, dense color. A handsome complexity and immense richness. A mixture of the suaveness and inky depth of a seasoned Porto comes to mind, a hint of wood roasted coffee and cacao, tannin is superb and still dense ... rich promise of intensity to come.

Chateau Margaux 1996 🍷 Classic and pure wine. Cabernet Sauvignon has seldom achieved such perfect style and balance. Rare purity of its fruit and density of its structure and the harmony of its shape. A dream of a Margaux.

Chateau Lafite Rothschild 1995 🍷 Particularly fine tannins. It offers a great nose of cedar, black cherries, earth and black olive scents. The wine is sophisticated, powerful, and elegant with classy fruit and a long, long finish.



Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

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Chateau Margaux 1989 🍷 Richness, complexity and opulence characterize this outstanding wine. The dream year (weather-wise) produced a wine lovely to drink immediately based on the great ripeness of the grapes.

Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1986 🍷 Intense, dark color with lovely ruby highlights and an ample nose, powerful and substantial, on aromas of nut, kirsch, prune, caramel, spice and mocha. Refined oak in perfect harmony with generous fruit...dense on the palate, forward, compact tannins combine with generous flavors of jammy fruit, blackcurrant liqueur, toast, vanilla and chocolate. Opulent, succulent finish that marries creamy tannins with great richness of flavour.

All of these wines were in pristine condition, having been recently shipped directly from the chateaux. They were all near perfect examples of just how great wines can be made from the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes along with small amounts of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. (The Chateau Margaux 1989 provided one of the greatest olfactory experiences I've ever found in a Bordeaux and the Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1986 once again proved to be one of the greatest Bordeaux I have ever had. It should drink well from 2030 to 2080.)

Due to the demand for First Growth Bordeaux in Japan, China, and Singapore, most of us can no longer afford these rarities. However, some of the people who will read this may have these or other vintages of same in their cellars and might enjoy this recap.

In the final analysis, most of us cannot live our lives centered around a Rolls-Royce, a Maserati, or the Ritz-Carlton or Four Seasons, but we can read, fantasize, lease or rent them and gain memories for a long time. While the consumption time is brief, enjoying a First Growth Bordeaux can provide one with a memory of a lifetime. I place it in a small group of life events akin to falling in love, the birth of a child, or dining at the French Laundry. Santé! 🍷

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An archive of Jim Bryant's wine articles online at www.qbarrington.com.



Going .. Going ... Cellar Treasures at Auction

BY MARC SMOLER

Wine auctions offer a unique opportunity for both novice collectors and seasoned oenophiles to acquire some of the best wines in the world. For bidders in search of rare vintages, investment wines, or great wines at bargain prices, auctions are the primary buying source. Auction buyers have the opportunity to purchase hard-to-find collectibles such as vintage First Growth Bordeaux and cult California Cabernets.

Hart Davis Hart Wine Co. (HDH), the largest wine auction house in America, holds seven live auctions each year, all in downtown Chicago. The auctioneers move quickly, sometimes getting through as many as 150 lots in one hour. Beautiful catalogs provide bidders with detailed descriptions, tasting notes, and scores from top wine critics including Robert Parker.

Over time, HDH has built relationships with the world's most avid collectors, and it is from the cellars of these friends that HDH sources its auction wines. Collectors sell their wines for many reasons. They may want to make space in the cellar, shift their collecting interests, or simply take advantage of the value their wines have gained.

Although some wines achieve stratospheric prices, there are also bargains for all buyers and collectors. The highest prices often go to wines sold in their original wooden cases, but many wines are also sold in smaller quantities and mixed cases; Paul Hart, CEO of HDH, suggests looking at these mixed lots for excellent values and the opportunity to sample a variety of wines.

Sample a Hart Davis Hart Wine Auction

On Sat., Feb. 4, Hart Davis Hart will hold an exciting auction at Tru restaurant in Chicago. On the block will be about 1,000 lots including top wines from around the world. Attend the 9 a.m. auction in



Tru's art-filled, 80-seat dining room for free – although pre-registration is required.

Wine tastings are offered throughout the day at no cost to registered bidders, and an elegant buffet lunch, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., is available for \$75. For more information, or to register for the event, call Hart Davis Hart Wine Co. at 312-482-9996.

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Marc Smoler works for Hart Davis Dart Wine Co. in Chicago.