

PHOTOS: JIM BRYANT



Bordeaux, *the* Right Bank

THE LAST TWO ISSUES OF Quintessential Barrington gave details of our visit to three of the most famous wineries on the left bank of Bordeaux. On Saturday, May 19, we left our ship at 9 a.m. for a visit to a lesser-known chateau in Saint-Émilion – Château Coutet. Alas, the best made plans go awry. On the way off the quai, no more than 50 feet from the ship, as our van driver turned right, multiple retractable posts used to form a barrier to entry suddenly pushed upward just as the front of the van was directly over them. As the oil poured from the ruptured oil pan, we contemplated our options. The driver called for a back-up van which arrived in about one hour. In the meantime, the police came, cordoned off the road, and the green police made much ado about the spill.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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.

Xavier showed us with great pride the oldest known bottle of Bordeaux, one discovered in the cellar during a 'dig,' dating back some 250 years, replete with a glass stopper.

We boarded the new van and headed for Saint-Émilion. Originally, I had made reservations with a famous château for a tasting and lunch, but the owner had to leave the country unexpectedly and the only employee he trusted with our group suddenly resigned. At the last moment, I called a local distributor friend and asked him to help. His onsite Bordeaux representative enthusiastically recommended a Saint-Émilion Grand Cru named Château Coutet (not related to a Barsac property of the same name).

We arrived just as the owner, Xavier-David Beaulieu, was about to give us up for lost. Little did we know that we were in for a special treat. Xavier had been an IT professional, but finally gave in to his heart versus his brain and had so much enthusiasm for his winery that he was contagious. Even though his property's pedigree paled by comparison to the previous day's visits, he won over the group immediately.

The fifteen hectare property has been in his family for more than four centuries and is one of the few Bordeaux producers that is organic. In fact, pesticides have never been used on the estate. Although surrounded by famous properties, it looks as if it must have for many centuries, since the Roman occupation. We tasted both the 2008 and the 2009 Château Coutet and we were quite impressed with our new discovery. The 2009 was our favorite, with a soft smell of black and red fruits, it was brighter and capable of longer life than the 2008, which was somewhat 'rougher' at this time.

The cellar tour was most impressive, although small and rustic. Xavier showed us, with great pride, the oldest known bottle of Bordeaux, one discovered in the cellar during a 'dig,' dating back some 250 years, replete with a glass stopper. Xavier signed bottles for our purchases including large format bottles. Crystal Symphony's sommelier, who accompanied us, thought Coutet was the best Bordeaux value he

had found. We left the estate for the highest recommended restaurant in Saint-Émilion as Xavier signed our purchased bottles with a flourish, promising to bring them to us, along with a 3.0 liter (double magnum of the 2009).

We walked briskly through the town of Saint-Émilion (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) to L'Envers du Décor, and were truly in for a great treat. Xavier arrived just in the nick of time, as we had been without wine for about 30 minutes since we left him. The three-course lunch was very good and there was no shortage of wine. By the time we finished lunch we had laughed, eaten, and drunk to an excess and we piled into the laugh wagon (van) and headed for a famous property in Pomerol, Château Clinet.

We were met by the owner's son, Ronan

A CHATEAU CLINET WINE TASTING WITH RONAN LABORDE (STANDING), GREG PEARSON (ON RIGHT) AND BARB AND FRANK ROSS.



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TOP: THE OLDEST KNOWN BOTTLE OF BORDEAUX, WITH A GLASS STOPPER, WAS DISCOVERED IN THE CELLAR DURING A 'DIG,' DATES BACK SOME 250 YEARS.

LEFT: A 1962 VINTAGE IN THE COUTET CELLARS.



LaBorde, whose father Jean-Louis Laborde purchased Clinet in 1988. The château produced two historic wines, 1989 and 1990, and has recently surged again in quality. The 2009 was rated a perfect wine (100 points) by Robert Parker. The nine hectare vineyard is planted with 85 percent Merlot, 10 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5 percent Cabernet Franc. After fermentation and maceration, the wine is put into 100 percent new oak and bottled 24 months later without fining or filtering.

Production of the Grand Vin is only 3000 cases with the second wine, Fleur de Clinet, producing only 500 cases. After touring the winery, we tasted the 2008 Grand Vin, which was superb with great structure, dark fruits and ripe tannins. Although certainly capable of aging well, it is soft and supple enough to enjoy now. Ronan is a person of passion. He is a marathoner, and professional race car driver, but has subordinated these loves to

focus adroitly, with advice from the famous wine consultant, Michel Rolland, on making Château Clinet one of the premier properties in Pomerol and in all of Bordeaux.

We left Pomerol and motored back to Bordeaux. After boarding the ship, we dressed for dinner and were guests of one of our group in the largest penthouse on the ship. As it was on the port side, we spent the next two hours passing by many of the great Medoc properties on the Gironde River as we exited to the Atlantic.

What a fitting finale to two of the greatest days possible in Bordeaux. Thanks again to our hosts and owners of Châteaux Margaux, Lynch-Bages, Pontet-Canet, Coutet (Saint-Émilion) and Clinet for such warm hospitality in providing us with memories for a lifetime. Au revoir, Bordeaux. A votre Santé! 