

VINTAGE TASTINGS - La Paulee 2007 Part One

After a year hiatus in Aspen, Daniel Johnnes brought the glory of La Paulee back to where it belongs in New York City, and over 500 hundred of the country's most eager and avid collectors descended upon Manhattan like phylloxera to old vines for a celebration of what many feel are the world's most desirable wines, Burgundy.

The actual Paulee was Saturday, but Friday night was a special dinner featuring the wines of Bonneau du Martray and Domaine de la Romanee Conti, and Aubert de Villaine was in the houuuuse. The event was hosted in Bouley's new test kitchen, which seemed half test kitchen and half bachelor pad. Not only was David on hand cooking, but so were Daniel Boulud and Michel Troisgros, and a who's who of the country's top sommeliers, including Robert Bohr, Paul Roberts, Rajat Parr, Richard Betts (and others - don't take it personal if I forgot you) were leading the service of the esteemed selections on hand.

Some **1996 Salon** greeted us, and it is still the best Champagne I have had from this spectacular vintage (**97+**).

We took our seats and worked our way through the whites, beginning with a **1996 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne**. The nose was toasty and nice, reserved yet with style. Light coconut and rainwater aromas graced the nose. Tom thought the wine was served too cold, and it was a bit muted, but it was chock full of flavors. A veritable spice box city, the wine was long, smooth and lush with great minerals and slate on its finish. Pure yellow fruits and stone cold flavors made this exquisite wine very enjoyable, although I was looking for a pinch more acidity in my 1996 (**94**).

The **1992 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne** had a honeyed, sweet nose which reminded me of buttered, brown sugared bacon. Sweet and candied, the palate had a kiss of morning mouth that signaled to me the wine was starting to decline, and Tom even questioned whether it was oxidized. I didn't think it was oxidized; it was just 1992 and not one of the best examples of the vintage yet still round and tasty but definitely drink up (**90**).

The **1979 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne** was the biggest DQ I have ever had, like corked to the nth power with a healthy side of rotten vegetables (**DQ**).

The next flight began with a **1983 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne**, which had this Asian glaze, almost like a sweet and sour pork. Lemon rind and tang were quite prevalent as well. The palate was very tangy with excellent pinch and zest, full of pitch and spine, again just short of outstanding but certainly delicious (**94**).

The **1986 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne** was similar to the 1992 with that touch of sweetness, but it had more butter, more center and much better acidity despite being six years older. Its nutty flavors and excellent spice made the palate stand out, and its finish had great lift, resulting in my favorite wine so far **(95)**.

Lastly, the **1976 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne** was a bit yeasty and perhaps slightly oxidized, possessing morning mouth and average at best **(85)**.

Ok, enough of those whites, it was time for the reds, and we started with a **1979 DRC La Tache** out of Jeroboam. Worcestershire and a noticeable whiff of oak were the first things that came to my nose, and while there was just enough cherry and tomato behind those to make the bloody mary, the oak was a bit intrusive. The palate was spiny with lots of acidity, very hearty, edgy and spiny, a bit over the top in that regard. Tom noted "a short attack and a lot of tannin," and that summed it up. Now I have had some great 1979 DRC experiences out of large format, but this was not at the top of that pyramid, which just goes to show that those big bottles have variation, too. It was still very good **(92+J)**.

The **1980 DRC La Tache** got a quick 19/20 from Tom, and it had that great old tomato sex appeal. Yes, only in wine can old tomatoes have sex appeal, I know. The nose had a lot of other things going on, including cherry, rust, spice, spine and that unmistakable La Tache terroir, all very balanced and round. There was great finesse and balance to the mouth with touches of spice and spine. It might not ever be better, but it was still outstanding, although Rob had to put it "right on the bottom of 5 stars," indicating that he definitely thought it wouldn't get any better **(95)**.

A couple of 1990s interrupted the La Tache procession, beginning with a **1990 DRC Echezeaux**. The Ech was wound up with lots of tannin in the nose along with good wood. Popcorn was there as well. Smooth, supple and with cedar, Rob G. found it "charred and a bit singed" **(91)**.

The **1990 DRC Romanee St. Vivant** had a little bread to the nose, more crust along with white smoke. With more structure and vim, the RSV still had nice balance to go with its vigor. It was similar to the Ech but had more expression both aromatically and flavorodically. Ok, I made that one up "some one give me an adverb to describe flavors" **(93)!**

Big Boy was starting to get antcy, as the dinner was a long affair, so my notes were a bit brief on the next flight of two as we grabbed our tastes in the back as Big Boy needed to circulate his legs and blood flow. The **1991 DRC La Tache** was smoky and seductive with good cedar, tannin and sweet soy. It had a nutty kink and delivered an excellent experience **(94)**.

The **1990 DRC La Tache** was big, long and cedary, a touch woody but not excessively so. I have had a lot of variation with degrees of wood and my 1990 La Taches, and this one was in the middle, still indubitably outstanding. However, I hate to be a member of the "No Joy, No Luck Club," but I have had near perfect bottles, not to say this was off, just variably not as spectacular (**96**).

The next two wines I had to tell Big Boy to slow down, as it was a flight of 1978 and 1971. As a trade off, we missed the last two wines including a 1982 DRC Montrachet, but at least I got to take some decent notes for these two, starting with the **1978 DRC La Tache**. The '78 had an incredible nose and was everything it should have been, full of menthol, beef, cedar, spine and bouillon. It had a rich, mentholy palate and was smooth and balanced, seemingly on a plateau, "not going to get any better but not flat," as Big Boy put it. Yes, the 1978 La Tache may be on a plateau, but it sure is a nice place to be right now (**95**).

The **1971 DRC La Tache** had candy to the nose, silky smooth in its style, also possessing iodine, iron, perfume and a kinky floral edge. Smooth and balanced, there was tomato, spice, Worcestershire and beefy flavors but "no secondary" ones, as Rob observed. This should be a 98-point wine but was a "mere" 95-point one. The wine was reconditioned at the Domaine in 1996, a practice that Aubert refuses to do anymore, but he unfortunately did in the past on a few occasions before he knew better per his own admission. It is ironic how all these "direct from the Chateau" bottles get obscene premiums due to the "provenance" when most of them are often less complex wines because they have been reconditioned. For the record, reconditioned wines can be great but will never achieve the heights of a well-stored original bottling. I suppose it is better to have a sure thing that is an A or A- than a possible A+, but once you have had the A+, you sure do want it again (**95**).

Big Boy and I slid over to Cru and started the after party early. The **1978 Vogue Musigny Vieilles Vignes** had "cherries," according to Gil, and a barnyard edge with grass, wheat and earth. Gil added "young goat dunked in the petting trough" and "dried cherry skin." Yes, the Gilmeister was in the house, straight from Las Vegas where he probably hadn't slept for three weeks. Bob added "goat milk." It had that old, dried Barolo cherry and was very good but not a great Vogue (**92**).

A **1959 DRC Grands Echezeaux** had "massive olives" (Gil) but was also oxidized a touch, still meaty and tasty but affected. It still had light rust and spine (**91A**).

Eric bought a **1985 Henri Mayer Vosne Romanee "Les Brulees"** off the list, and it had that deep, dark Mayer action. Bob called it a "raspberry milkshake." It was rich with a grape seed and skin edge and a nice, lip-smacking finish (**93**).

Since we did miss the last two or three courses at the original dinner and were drinking quite a bit more, we were eating again as we needed to soak up the poison and still a bit hungry. It was right about now that Daniel strolled in to hang out a bit, and he seemed a bit perplexed that we were chowing down again. Daniel, it wasn't personal !!!

It was time for some bubbly, and a magnum of **1959 Pommery** was incredible. Honey, butterscotch, white chocolate and a "caramel toffee extravaganza" per Gil, the 1959 Pommery was spectacular and practically a sexual experience (**96M**).

My notes from here on out are practically illegible, but I did have two more outstanding reds and one of the greatest Champagnes I have ever had. A **1959 Clair Dau Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques** was delicious, outstanding and 1959 all the way with its big Gevrey personality and "hot"-tempered palate (**95**). A **1971 Faiveley Musigny** was extraordinary, smooth, soft and satiny, gaining in the glass unsuspectingly with the grace of a boa constrictor, its acidity squeezing life into the glass while idle chatter filled the air (**96**). And the last wine of the night was a Champagne, out of magnum, of course. All I remember is after having some of it, I didn't want to drink anything else for the rest of the night. I must have had three or four glasses of it; it was that good. Similar to the Pommery but with more substance and length, the **1959 Louis Roederer Brut** was not Cristal, but it didn't have to be (**98+M**).

That was enough for the "warmup" night. Tomorrow was the main event.

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