

VINTAGE TASTINGS - La Paulee 2008, Part II

Thursday night saw the official beginning to La Paulee weekend, and we celebrated the great whites of Dominique Lafon and more reds from Eric Rousseau. Michael Mina was again the place, closed down for this historic event.

We began with a trio of Genevrieres, and the **2001 Lafon Meursault Genevrieres** was clean and fresh with great citrus, dust and spice in its nose, along with excellent minerality and citricity. It had that beefy 2001 edge but was still cut. The palate was round and softer than I expected, still pleasant but easy. There was good hidden acidity here (**91**).

The **2000 Lafon Meursault Genevrieres** had a touch of mildew or mold in the nose, that back alley edge to which I often refer. There was some corn, yeast and citrus behind that, and the palate was clean, but again simple. Mark concurred. There was a touch of tea-like quality and mild acidity in this disappointing 2000 (**89**).

The **1999 Lafon Meursault Genevrieres** had 'high acid' per Eddie. It was the biggest nose of the three, showing citrus and fir spice, almost cedar, and snow-capped white fruits. The palate was beefy and more concentrated, longer, big and brawny yet still round (**93**).

A fascinating duo of Montrachet was next, beginning with a **1997 Lafon Montrachet**. The '97 had a touch of toast to its nose, followed by butter, kindling, corn and sweet musk. Clean and elegant, there was still substance in that sensuous 1997 way. The palate was polished, clean and buttery with excellent spice on its finish. The wine was absolutely delicious, and the nose stayed spicy and vibrant. Wilf hailed it as 'great,' and it was (**95**).

The **1996 Lafon Montrachet** was unfortunately a touch oxidized, showing a yeasty, tropical, funky and creamy personality, still enjoyable but a bit on the tutti-frutti side. The palate was confused, stewed in its fruit and flavors, gamy and softer than it should have been. It still had body, and its acidity came out more and more in the glass, and a touch of candle wax flavors rounded out this affected wine (**92A**).

When discussing the hot topic of premature oxidation of white Burgundies, Wilf shared with me an ominous yet candid prediction, one that I hope does not come true. He said that reds might come under the gun as well, because 'the genotype is the same, but the phenotype has not been expressed yet. In ten or fifteen years, we might be talking about the premature oxidation in some reds. The silicon treatment of the cork, combined with less SO₂ (will lead to) premature oxidation, (whether white or red).'

On that note, we moved on to the reds and a flight of Clos St. Jacques, beginning with the **1988 Rousseau Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques**. The nose was nutty and deep, oily and rich, beefy and hearty, and with a touch of maple syrup goodness. It had tasty, good fruit,

but still ‘hard tannins,’ per Eric. Its red cherry flavors were delicious, and it was rock solid despite ‘a touch of vegetal,’ per Todd. Eddie wasn’t minding it, which is about as good a compliment that you will get out of him for a Premier Cru lol. Mark was looking for more complexity, but I liked the wine a lot and its lumber flavors and personality (93).

The **1983 Rousseau Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques** had a minty, intense nose that was very rusty and still vibrant. In the mouth, there were tasty strawberry and earth flavors to go with lots of acidity and its overall minty personality. Most preferred the ’83 to the ’88, but I found them both excellent and qualitatively equal despite their stylistic differences (93).

The **1978 Rousseau Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques** stood out from the pack with its super intense nose. Dark and nutty with brown leather and vitamin aromas, the ’78 was taut, wound and spiny. Its palate was beefy with that Worcestershire tang. Sturdy, big and muscular, it was fearless in the glass, although Wilf thought there was a slight ‘potassium issue.’ Rose hip flavors and a hint of vitamin C graced its long palate, which Eric found ‘pure and sharp,’ and that was quite accurate. It was a great flight (95).

A trio of Chambertins followed, beginning with the **1983 Rousseau Chambertin**, the second night in a row I was blessed with this wine. I love it when that happens. We later found out that this was Eric’s first vintage of Rousseau, officially, that is. This 1983 was big and minty again like the Clos St. Jacques, possessing more cherry oil in its nose in a sweet and spicy way. There was big acidity here, and this bottle was rusty, earthy, wintry and gritty. It was really sturdy. Wilf found it ‘tart’ and Eddie ‘petroly,’ but they both preferred the Clos St. Jacques. It was definitely on the other side of the coin of the 1980 that would follow, showing earth and rust versus the fruit that was coming (93).

The **1980 Rousseau Chambertin** was served out of jeroboam. I love it when that happens, too! The nose was big and woody at first, full of spearmint, coiled and thick. With some air, it became sweeter and full of cherry fruit, a trend that would continue. The palate was screechy at first, tight out of jero, but opened up to reveal tender fruit. Despite its fruitier nature, it was still fresh, complex and seductive (93J).

The **1976 Rousseau Chambertin** was a bit of an afterthought, earthy, nutty and beefy but a bit two-dimensional and lacking enough fruit to carry through its structural components (89).

Something then came off the menu for our table, generously opened courtesy of Big Boy. It was a jeroboam of **1949 Rousseau Chambertin**. The bottle looked like it came out of a tomb, crusty and hand-blown, a true antique. Unfortunately, the wine had leaked and had a lower fill, so what better thing to do than drink it? The wine was clearly a touch oxidized but still delicious, lush and sturdy. Rich chocolate and kinky purple fruit aromas were present. Mark noted ‘sweet, sappy fruit; quite concentrated,’ and added, ‘great grip and length.’ It was rich and lingered long time :). Rob felt, ‘if it wasn’t oxidized, it would be 98 or 99 points,’ and he had a good point. It was thick and long, but still affected (94A-J).

The **1966 Rousseau Chambertin** had a fabulous nose of sweet cherry oil essence, bread crumbs and herbs both soaked in butter. Very kinky, its palate was rich, saucy and long, possessing cherry oil and dust flavors, good spine and a smooth and buttery finish (**94**).

The **1964 Rousseau Chambertin** was a tale of two bottles. The first was oxidized besides a rich and creamy edge. Rudy chimed in, 'that's the problem with '64; too many are oxidized.' The second bottle had a rusty intensity and deep forest oil of cedar and mahogany; it was linearly solid. Eric noted a 'huge difference' between the two bottles (**94**).

A **1982 Lafon Montrachet** was the second-to-last official wine served on this incredible evening, and it was the perfect spot for this spectacular white. It reminded me how a bottle (or flight) of Champagne or even white wine can be a welcome intermezzo/cleanser in order to march onwards with the reds. This was a perfect example of that, and Eddie was all over it immediately, citing 'now this is '82 white Burgundy.' It had a big, buttery nose full of almond paste and great bread oil. It was sexy and delicious, super rich and buttery as well as nutty. It was Eddie's 'wine of the night,' and up to that point it was, but it would prove to be a short-lived statement (**96**).

A **1990 Rousseau Chambertin** lived up to that sentiment with its deep, regal nose, a veritable symphony of red fruit oils. It was serious stuff, but still just a baby. Vitamins and catnip were a welcome combination of sex appeal, and Mark found it 'just starting to spring.' This wine will probably outlive me, I thought. Welcome to Chambertin (**96**).

The dinner was over, but the party was just beginning. Apologies in advance for any short notes. You know how that goes. Big boy was feeling good, and he wanted to let everyone know that the East was in the house. Eight more wines would follow, four from his cellar.

A magnum of **1966 DRC Grands Echezeaux** welcomed us in stellar fashion. It had a deep nose full of rose, rust and caramel. Thick and rich, there were also bouillon and garden flavors. Yum (**95M**).

A **1978 Drouhin Chambertin** had a baked nose of peanut brittle, but was creamy, smooth, satiny, luscious and delicious with solid iron flavors (**94**).

A perfect bottle of **1966 Joseph Drouhin Montrachet Marquis de Laguiche** was so rich and buttery, smoked and buttered like a bagel with the whitefish yet somehow without the fish. It was so rich and concentrated and had garden, earth, pine and buttery flavors. Wow (**96+**).

Wow took on a more significant meaning with this next magnum of **1971 DRC La Tache**. Its thick, long and intense nose of rose, oil and menthol unfolded into an exotic garden of hedonistic Burgundy. Its palate was unreal, spiny and intense like hot sex with a rusty and

mineral vigor rarely matched. It was absolutely, lip-smackingly delicious, as ever, still one of the greatest wines ever made **(98+M)**.

Feeling empty handed, I scored a magnum of **1982 Cristal** off the list at Mina's. It was super toasty, nutty, firm, thick, rich, long and spiny. The palate was super-duper long and intense. This magnum was about as good as this can get **(96M)**.

Jeff came through with a fantastic magnum of **1990 Ramonet Batard Montrachet**. It was another killer magnum, one of the best Ramonets I have ever had, a 95 mph curve. The magnum apparently came straight from Ramonet, and Jeff found it 'screamin.' Even Fritz got into the act with 'lime blossom cream' or something to that extent, but I can't really read my writing. Daniel Boulud admired its 'pitch' **(97M)**.

The last red wine of my evening would be a **1962 Rousseau Chambertin Clos de Beze**, which was absolutely humungous. One sip put me all on ten of my toes instantly, its super spicy and spiny palate delivering a climactic finish on this night. Muscular, cut, agile yet graceful, this '62 Rousseau was another magical magnum. All three magnums of red for the after party were courtesy of Big Boy, whose cellar once again delivered the knockout blow to an incredible evening of fine and rare wine **(98)**.

Make that three magnums and one half-bottle. A half of **1947 Bollinger** was delicious, albeit wine-like with its texture and personality, yeasty and old but still with that vanilla sex pop. That's all I got :) **(94H)**.

I ran for my life somewhere shortly after that. It was either know when to say when or never say never. I chose the former. There was work to do tomorrow, and Eddie and Wilf were having their own Paulee Friday night.

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