

VINTAGE TASTINGS - La Paulee 2008, Part III

Ok, where was I again? Sorry for the delay, but making four auctions simultaneously over these past couple of weeks has been a bit challenging. Let's see, there are two single cellar sales, one in April and one in May, then there is the 'regular' May auction, and finally our first auction in Hong Kong, all totaling about \$15 million in sales. I can honestly say that I can't wait for you to see them all. Extraordinary stuff!

That's right, I was still in San Francisco, halfway through my epic four-day journey through the great wines of Burgundy. There was actually a prelude to La Paulee 2008, Part III, an auction on Friday afternoon, and somehow I found myself there doing a little market research. Michael Mina's was the familiar setting, and I was thirsty.

Kutch was on the scene and starting early with a **1979 Gosset Vintage Champagne**. Its nose was yeasty, toasty and nutty with hints of game, nutmeg and dry caramel. There was great sweetness present, balanced well by a lemony streak. It was starting to become wine-like in character, with tangy apple butter flavors and still light spritz, as well as good acidity. Good show (**93**).

I countered with a **1979 Billecart Salmon Cuvee Nicolas Francois**, again off the incredible Champagne list at Mina's. The Billecart was more pungent, with prominent grass and hay edges, and a baked granulated sugar core behind them. Long toast, rich seltzer and hay flavors all came out on its desert-like finish. Its youthful character and searing acidity were impressive, although I felt it was short a few nuances of outstanding status, at least at this stage (**94+**).

A **1998 Roumier Bonnes Mares** was a pleasant segue to the reds with its sappy nose of sweet raspberry fruit. Its nose was also oily to a degree and had that whiff of Roumier interior, ie, expensive wood. The palate was rich yet soft, still sappy, solid overall with its deep, caressing fruit. It was a very enjoyable wine, and it made me think that the '98s are starting to blossom at age ten (**93**).

There was actually another Champagne, a **1961 Gosset**, courtesy of Big Boy this time. Things were a bit chaotic and random; there really wasn't any method to our madness on this busy afternoon. One could see the same style of Gosset expressed in the '79. Rich, bready, smooth and toasty with buttery vanilla sugar and spice flavors, the '61 was long and delicious (**95**).

A **2005 Niellon Chevalier Montrachet** was very forward and buttery, yet still reticent, and my first significant 2005 white Burg. Still minerally and dusty, it had nice citrus flavors and retained its buttery qualities on the palate, yet it remained clean and light on its feet, perhaps

a function of its youth. One could still see that this was serious wine despite its pre-adolescence, as it had a big, brooding nature and white fruit flavors (94).

The last wine on this afternoon was a magnum of **1993 Vogue Musigny Vieilles Vignes**. A deep, concentrated nose unveiled great spice and a rich sexgasm of citrus and red fruits. It was atypically sweet for a '93, so decadent yet still so firm. Andy, who treated us to this magnum, admired its 'velvet' qualities. While the wine was not tight, per se, it still gave me a coiled impression. Its rust and spice flavors were great, and the wine was delicious, long, balanced and firm (96M).

And that was my Friday afternoon on day three of La Paulee. Friday night would prove to be legendary.

Wilf and Eddie brought together coasts East and West for their own minor La Paulee on Friday night at Acquarello, but the wines were nothing short of major. There would be thirty-five wines sampled before this night was through.

It started with a magnum of **1981 Krug Collection** that was yeasty, bready yet sweet. There were great aromas of vanilla cream, that Krug signature that I adore. There were also pinches of horse and wool, but not in an offensive way. The palate was big, rich and long, and Chris observed how it was 'drinking great right now,' and it was singing. Caramel flavors on its finish rounded out this beauty. It was just a warm-up from the greatest collection of Champagne in the world that I know of... Big Boy Style, aka Robert A. Rosania (95M).

A stellar bottle of **1990 Coche-Dury Meursault Perrieres** was the first white on the agenda thanks to Neil. Eric was all over it immediately, citing its greatness. It was a superb bottle, full of aromas of minerals, dust, spice, lime green and that Coche signature nut and kernel. Its texture was nice and buttery, and its finish earthy. Light toast flavors were balanced by excellent acidity. While it was probably peaking, the view was still spectacular (96).

A rare magnum of **1999 Carillon Bienvenues Batard Montrachet** came our way via Robert Bohr, whose omnipresence at great wine events is always a most welcome sight for sore taste buds. Wound and steely, there was an initial touch of Windex as the wine opened, or needed to open, I should say. It unfolded into a great combination of smoke and minerality, getting more and more focused with air, as well as more smoky. It was full of crystal white fruit flavors that danced delicately across the palate, and its finish had great white brick flavors. After recently having an also delicious 2001 of this white, this beautiful 1999 has made this a new pet white of mine (94M).

A **2000 Lafon Montrachet** was yeasty and a bit stewed in the nose, possessing aromas of creamed corn, coffee grinds and almost a szechuan beefy edge. It still came across oily and a bit syrupy, atypical for 2000, and had pinches of animal as well. Overall, the nose was very

exotic. The palate was rich and concentrated with nice texture, oily again, also with good body and garden flavors. Although also kinky and wild on the palate, it was still shorter than I wanted it to be (93).

A duo of top '83s were next courtesy of Tom and the Don, beginning with a **1983 Sauzet Batard Montrachet**. As '83 whites are prone to be, even the typically austere Sauzet was aromatically sweet, possessing this white BBQ and grilled endive aromas. Smoky, musky and misty, there were also aromas of corn oil and sweet butter. Nice, light flavors of butter and hints of signature anise graced the palate. Its minerality and acidity were still solid (94).

The **1983 DRC Montrachet** was out of magnum and had more 'rot' in its nose, similar to the Sauzet with its sweeter nature, but it possessed more alley, bread and yeast. Wilder than the Sauzet, it was extremely bready and had this ocean air quality, complete with the langoustine. The second I wrote down 'langoustine,' Big Boy came up at the other end of the table with 'briny lobster.' It is always nice to see a pupil blossoming lol. The palate was great; buttery, round, polished and smooth yet full of flavors and delicious. It was many people's favorite white of the night (94M).

There were two more whites to go, beginning with a **1996 Drouhin Montrachet Marquis de Laguiche**, whose super serious nose had both power and grace as well as that 1996 centerpoint, that eye of the acidic storm, wound and full of alcohol and acidity. It was still buttery with clean white fruits and minerals, and a nice balance of sweetness and nuttiness. The palate was a bit softer than expected at first, really more muted than anything else, but it really unwound and kicked into overdrive with some air. Its acidity was something special, and the benchmark quality of 1996 asserted itself once again (95+).

Our last white was a pleasant **1997 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne**, another 1997 white drinking beautifully. Its nose was clean, with aromas of fire kindling, a touch of forest and sweet oyster shell fruit. White and yellow fruits intermingled playfully, and its palate was clean with excellent acidity yet simple fruit, but this actually might have a ways to go still (92+).

The first red was a magnum of **1989 Arnoux Romanee St. Vivant**. The nose gave me that initial 'ahhhhh, red' impression. The nose was sturdy and stemmy with a great center. Nutty, sweet, black cherry fruit came out, and its nose had a great balance of fruit and finish. The palate was a touch shier, singular in its personality, focused around solid earth and stem flavors. I liked it (93M).

A **1990 Leroy Vosne Romanee Les Brulees** was one of the better 1990 Leroy's that I have had recently. Lots of stems and great Asian perfume, that jasmine, graced its nose. There was enormous musk here, bringing a tiger hunt in India to mind. The palate was rusty with big acidity and sturdy, featuring distinguished flavors of earth, rust and leather (93).

A **1959 Vogue Musigny Vieilles Vignes** was one of the few controversial wines of the weekend. Its nose was very sweet, nutty, gamy and oily with exotic, date-like and tutti frutti aromas. Rich, gamy and mature, its palate was saucy and oily, lush and on a plateau, but it seemed affected and a bit stewed overall, quality yet questionable, and definitely a bit too sweet (**92A**).

A magnum of **1993 Jayer Vosne Romanee Cros Parantoux** came, and what a magnum it was. The Golden Cellar was in the house. It was even better than the great magnum we had together in New York four months prior. Its nose was killer, wound and coiled like a king Cobra. Incredible purple fruits and a wicked, enchanted forest combined for a most complex nose, which also had great spice and sexy musk. While still an infant, especially out of magnum, its acidity was by far the best of the night up until this point, and the wine needed way more time. Chris remarked that it 'had no business being open,' as it was so young, but he still appreciated its greatness. Very '93 with its earth and vitamin qualities, this was super serious stuff (**97+M**).

A **1993 Dujac Clos de la Roche** was excellent in its own right, but no match for the Jayer. A touch milky at first, it aired out to be stemmy and cinnamony. Cherry dust and oil crept in slowly but surely. Its palate was very closed, yet it showed a little skin, dust and spine. A touch of sweet game tried to emerge, but overall the Dujac felt like it had a chastity belt on, shy and closed. I have had better experiences with this wine. I think part of the problem was that the Jayer was that good (**93+**).

A trio of 'Vieilles Vignes' cuvees followed, except these were no regular VV's. These were Mugnier and Roumier, made only in the late '80s, three times by Mugnier and only once by Roumier, I believe. I brought the Mugniers, and the Don the magnum of Roumier. These were special territory, indeed.

The **1988 Mugnier Musigny Vieilles Vignes** had a super nose, possessing 'insane' spice and thick, sappy, sweet red cherry aromas, as well as wintry spice. It had this brothy edge to it that made me think, 'wine is good food.' The palate was 'off the charts' good; delicious and rich, perhaps possessing a slight hole in its middle, but outstanding nonetheless. It was liplickingly good (**95**).

The **1989 Mugnier Musigny Vieilles Vignes** was deeper and very musky in its nose, displaying more purple and animal aromas and flavors to match. Rich, velvety and round, it had that positive verve of the forgotten '89 vintage in grand slam fashion (**96**).

The **1988 Roumier Bonnes Mares Vieilles Vignes**, out of magnum no less, took things up another notch. Its deep, intense nose had fabulous spice box and crazy vitamin aromas. A purple rainbow of aromas and flavors was complemented by earth, rust and minerals. This was a majestic wine made all the more so out of magnum, and its regal personality had Big Boy giving it early 'wine of the night' status (**97+M**).

A **1990 Roumier Bonnes Mares** was no slouch on its own, but almost seemed so after the Vieilles Vignes. I did get a mere swallow, I should note, but I got enough to note earth, musk and stems in the nose. Foresty and woody flavors were dominant in this dark and brooding wine (**95**).

The **1990 Ponsot Clos de la Roche Vieilles Vignes** had an anaconda of a nose, mega and deep, beefy... more like proscuitto actually, liqueur-like yet still wine-like at the same time. It was massively concentrated yet somehow light on its feet and had this incredible rock-like quality, one that felt like it had a diamond, a really big diamond in the middle of it. Someone called it 'indestructible' (**98**).

A **1985 Henri Mayer Nuits Meurgers** had a clean nose and a fresh palate, another delicious Mayer red, and one whose structure was also enormous, standing up well to the Ponsot. Enormous and huge kept popping up in my notes over again, as did power, and a (**96**) rating as well.

1993 and Leroy are usually a good combination, especially when a **1993 Leroy Richebourg**. The nose was musky, stemmy, long and woody, and the palate was foresty to match. It had noticeable wood without being woody. Big, long and a bit bruising, the Leroy lingered nearly a minute after it was gone (**95+**).

As you can see, there weren't many duds on this fine evening, and the **1953 Leroy La Romanee** was about as close as we came. It was an interesting follow-up to the '93 and had sappy, sexy old fruit, but the wine was also still young. A bit soupy, it left an unpure impression, although still a good one overall. It was just outclassed by most of the competition, and at \$1500 a bottle, it shouldn't be (**92**).

A **1961 Ponelle Latricieres Chambertin** had lots of animal in its sweet 'n sour cherry nose, also possessing earth, minerals and cedar. It had an intense, barny complexity to it that I liked; lush, tasty and earthy, this was excellent stuff, and Ponelle remains one of the better inside secrets from the '50s and '60s (**93**).

A magnum of **1990 Dujac Echezeaux**, his rarest grand cru, was tight and very wound with light cherry oil aromas. Sweet, tasty, round and balanced, it was nicer on the palate and nice stuff overall. Neil admired its 'dusty tannins' (**93M**).

The next magnum was a show-stopper: a **1971 Rousseau Chambertin Clos de Beze**, courtesy of Mr. Robert A. Rosania. It had a spectacular nose that was long, dusty, spiny and full of cherry fruit. It also had this herbal liqueur-like complexity, in only the best way possible. The palate was rich and citrusy, slaty with enormous acidity and what seemed like a 90 second finish! It was so flavorful and tangy, full of zest, zip, vim and vigor... what a wine... Big Boy Style (**98M**).

It was getting more and more serious, and a killer mag of **1978 DRC La Tache** was next courtesy of Todd or Eddie; I never know who brings what with these two but I know they both always bring the lumber! This magnum of LT was about as good as '78 gets for DRC. The writing skills were starting to wane on wine number 23, but 'intense, serious and great' still made their way onto the paper. 'Killer, stellar and awesome' about summed it up. Hiccup (**97M**).

A magnum of **1945 Vogue Musigny Vieilles Vignes**, however, quickly set a new bar for the evening. Big Boy's unparalleled generosity continued in the finest of fashion, and both Eric and Rob were all over the 'wine of the night' honors immediately, and I agreed. The wine was 'crushin' it' lol. That backbone of acidity was still so upright, and its combination of rich fruit, citrus, spice, dust, rust and spine were spectacular. Deliciously vibrant, yet still with mature, warm notes of autumn and bouillon, this magnum of Vogue was spectacular stuff, heavy lumber, indeed. What was most ironic about this magnum is that it had a blank cork, and if given to me for resale, I probably would have refused it, as most Vogues have branded corks. However, this was a Nicolas bottle, recorked at some time, and the cork happened to be blank; just another example of how maddening it can be to authenticate very old wines. But there would be no doubting the authenticity of this magnum; one sip was all anyone in that room needed to have to know this was true greatness, and it was about as experienced a group as one could ever hope to have (**98+M**).

I got a last sip of **1971 Pousse d'Or Santenay Gravieres**, a bit tired and overwhelmed by its company, but still impressive, especially given what the wine was and how old it was (**90M**).

A magnum of **1985 Dujac Clos St. Denis** was 'super-duper delicious,' always a quality I look for in my wine lol. Practically perfect for what it could be, it was full of cherry and strawberry fruit, both wintry and minty in style. Thick, hearty and long, it stayed delicious and felt nutritious (**96M**).

I marched onwards with a glass of **1952 Ponsot Clos de la Roche Vieilles Vignes**, a rich mouthful of a wine with that '52 acidity that's so great, and also that trademark Ponsot chocolaty-ness that makes Ponsot so cherished by the most knowledgeable of wine collectors. Thick and long, it was a stellar wine (**95**).

I actually had a second glass of **1978 DRC La Tache** and somehow found the strength to take some better notes this time around. This was a perfect magnum of this sometimes maligned La Tache. There is no doubt in my mind that when this wine is on, it is as good as almost any vintage of La Tache... ever. This was just superb, dripping with succulent, oily, black cherry fruit. It had that earthy foundation that only La Tache can claim. Sturdy and still quite youthful out of magnum, this was a wine that made me stand at attention with its intense and gripping character, yet there was still a core of tenderness and elegance that is what we call Burgundy. Special stuff and still (**97M**).

I have long documented Mr. Rosania's generosity and the hundreds of great, old bottles that I have personally had from his magnificent collection. You'll be reading more about his cellar in the coming weeks, as on Friday night, April 25th, at CRU of course, we will be offering an important selection from his collection, one of America's most significant, including the most important offering of vintage Champagne ever seen.

Big Boy Style.

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