

TOP 100+ WINES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The event that was two years in the making and 48 hours in the experiencing finally came to fruition the weekend of October 29-31. Sixty-two people in total gathered for the event, with a majority attending all four sessions. It was an amazing mix of cast and crew as four of New York's finest restaurants were up for Best Supporting nominations: Daniel, Cru, Per Se and Veritas. Months of anticipation were over, and it was time to eat, drink and be merry.

The weekend started off Friday night at Daniel. Daniel himself was in the restaurant, coming out in advance to make sure everything was going smoothly. After he noticed a couple of things to his dislike, he barked some orders to a few of his staff. "It's good to have him back around," smiled his events director Anthony Francis, another professional appreciating professionalism. I guess Daniel has been on the road a bit. Unfortunately, the night ran on so long that Daniel was gone before we could talk him into coming out and saying hello. C'est la vie, but his presence was certainly felt by all those in attendance. Over a thousand empty glasses were lined up and individually labeled on the side of the private room, like an army ready to do battle. Jean-Luc Le Du was in the back opening and decanting each of the wines with his expert care and attention. He had been instructed by myself to serve every wine, even the few that had faults. Every wine came from two bottles or a magnum. The bottles were marked by either a red or a blue sticker, so we could differentiate at the table for bottle variation. At the table, we alternated seating based on blue and red pours, which worked out very well in the case of a faulty bottle, as the group assembled was very generous in letting a neighbor sample a wine where one bottle was off. It was very rare that both bottles were off; in fact, I can only remember one – the 1978 DRC Montrachet, unfortunately. Ironically, those DRCs came from two different cellars, and the wine is certainly one of the greatest whites that both I and others have ever had when in good condition. There were so many great wines that no one really cared, and the experience of the group was so great that everyone fully understood that these things happen.

After some hors d'oeuvres and plenty of the great 1996 Cristal (we polished off a case), we sat down at 7:15pm for the meal...well, almost all of us. One gentleman was a little late, to no one's surprise that knew him! A brief introduction was in order, so I broke the ice thanking everyone for coming together in the greatest celebration of fine wine that the world has ever seen. I gave special thanks to Riedel glassware for donating all of the glassware for the event. They continue to be the finest stemware in the world. I also gave very special thanks to three collectors who were very helpful in the pre-pre-pre-stages of the event: Wolfgang, Frank and my head of research and development, Rudy. Of course, I had to thank most of all Bipin, the great Bipin Desai. Not only did Bipin provide wines from his personal cellar that have been aging for decades, but he also spent week after week going over detail after detail with me. His advice, input and nurturing were invaluable to the event, and without him none of this would have been possible. He has been a true 'sensei' and friend. This was Bipin's first trip to New York in eight years

– now I know what it takes to get him to pay a visit! Bipin came in a few days early, in fact, to do some culinary catch-up and dined at Le Bernadin, Masa, Tabla and one of two other places before disappearing back to LA, leaving only a trail of breadcrumbs behind. There was one last thing I asked of everyone: NO POLITICS! It was four days before the election, and we wanted no ideological differences coming between the reasons we were all here in the first place: food and wine.

The first flight was ready. The **1978 Domaine Leflaive Chevalier Montrachet** came from a magnum, so there was no bottle variation here! The nose was fabulous at first, very bready and milky, with a deliciously yeasty quality. Yes, yeast can be a good thing. Sweet corn was another dominant aroma, with a touch of light citrus dust and good dry corn flavors. The wine was beautifully mature and still plateau-ing, although someone felt it was ‘good but not spectacular.’ Yes, the ‘No Joy, No Luck Club’ had quickly made its way into the event, and most of the members happen to be my closest friends. You know the type – no matter how good something is, they always bring up a negative point rather than a positive one when the opportunity arrives. I am sure everyone who tastes fine wine regularly with others knows some prospective members. ☺ I found the wine to be excellent, but just short of outstanding (94). It was at this moment that Tom, sitting at my table for this session, guaranteed that someone would spill at least one glass tonight due to the fact that there were already sixty glasses on our table. Enter Don, our late friend who was also sitting at our table. As he reached out his hand to say hello to me, over went my glass of 1978 Leflaive! Thankfully, that was the one and only spiller of the night for us, but it was quite amusing to have Don come in on cue like that after Tom’s prediction. Tom is currently working on his 2005 vintage predictions. Next up was the **1982 Leflaive Chevalier Montrachet**, which was the wine of the flight for many. My bottle (red) had a slight must to the nose at first, but was very fresh behind it. I had a tough time getting a grip on the flavors due to that very same must. The nose had corn, minerals and light butter. After Wolfgang spoke about the flight (we had one speaker per flight) and called it his favorite of the flight,’ I gracefully negotiated a sip out of Don’s glass as payback for the 1978. The blue bottle was pure, fine, racy and refined, still young and ascending. It was outstanding, but since I only had a small taste of the better bottle, my notes and evaluation could not be as thorough (96). The **1986 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne** had some bottle variation as well, one bottle showing more maturely than the other. They were both great, but one seemed literally ten-to-fifteen years older than the other bottle. I had the older one, which had a distinct 1986 overripe and sweet-stewed character, with lots of sweet buttery corn and powerful caramel aromas. There was a pinch of anise and menthol, just a kinky touch. The blue bottle was incredibly fresh by comparison, and most felt it far superior. Due to the fact that I was already playing catch-up on the flight, I only got a quick shot of the blue 1986, but not really enough to fully evaluate. It was certainly outstanding, with the potential for being more (96+). The **1989 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne** followed, and it had an incredible nose that was racy and fresh. It had that perfectly-toasted kernel, Coche signature style and was very nutty, pure and clean. There was a great balance of minerals and beautiful citrus fruit hiding behind. It was great, still young, with great acid left and deliciously nutty flavors. Hubba hubba. Doug of the ‘No Joy, No Luck Club’ forewarned that those great acids were not universal for all 1989 whites when I asked him

about his experience with the vintage in general (97). The **1990 Lafon Montrachet** had a sexy, buttery nose that was fat, meaty and still honeyed. It definitely gave off a more modern impression, and Ray and Rudy, co-presidents of the No Joy, No Luck club (ok I think I have gotten that point across), were already moaning and frowning. Ray even went so far as to say that it was ‘too sweet and candied, like a pumped-up Kistler.’ Ouch. I, however, saw more positives in the wine. It had a nice touch of grit and dust to its finish, but the mid-palate was lacking a little of the fatness in the nose. The wine was more one-dimensional than the previous four, but it was still a nice drink, although perhaps not Top-100 worthy. When creating the list, we felt it was important to represent certain producers who were consistently held in high-regard and demand like Lafon. Perhaps a different vintage would have shown better (92). The last wine in this first flight was the **1992 Leflaive Montrachet**. Only her second vintage of Montrachet, the wine had a fabulous nose that was very wound and minty with aromas of white flowers, cane sugar and nice spice. The palate was pretty but ironically lacking stuffing, perhaps in a dumb spot right now. Wolf called it a ‘work in progress, pretty and floral.’ The softer qualities of the 1992 vintage were evident, but there were nice earth and minerals on the palate (93+?).

Flight number two was ready to go, and we started with a **1970 Drouhin Montrachet, Marquis de Laguiche**, which was a gain more of a political selection than the fact that so many people have had the 1970 and found it to be outstanding. I thought that there should be a Laguiche in the event, and this is what I could get my hands on. The nose was shy and unusual, still very youthful and a touch of anise. Rudy hit it on the head when he noted ‘beeswax – so Rhone Blanc.’ There was a lot of wax and alcohol on the palate and not a lot of fruit, but the wine was still very good (92). The **1970 DRC Montrachet** followed and was ‘very clean.’ It was classic DRC Montrachet – clean with nice butter and drops of honey and citrus. The palate was rich, meaty and oily with good heat on the finish still. I loved the wine and found it pure and classy. Someone noted ‘mouthfilling and long.’ The wine got meatier, oilier, richer, creamier and stronger in the glass (95). The **1971**, served out of magnum, was one of the session’s most controversial wines. Tom found it ‘a little dirty,’ and eyebrows quickly raised themselves in near unison around the table. It was a little unpure, but it had nice toasty and exotic fruit, with some glue and paint flavors. There was more than one ‘shot’ or ‘over the hill’ comment. Bipin, however, loved the wine and found it incredible. I did not think it was shot, but I did not find it as exciting as others like Bipin (93). The **1978 DRC Montrachet** unfortunately was a double dose of maderized bottles (DQ). Three **Ramonet Montrachets** were the last selections of white Burgundy to sample and after tasting through them, we had a winner. The **1978** had a fabulous nose that was intense and young, almost tannic and certainly possessing a lot of alcohol. It was incredibly complex and had a touch of everything in the nose – citrus, butter, corn and that Ramonet signature pinch of mint. The minerals and alcohol did dominate the nose, though – make no mistake about it. Despite loads of alcohol, the palate was still refined, dusty and long. Rudy called it ‘more intense’ and John found it ‘more astringent’ – that was it, the wine was just ‘more,’ although it did lose a little focus in the glass (95). The **1979** was much more forward with a lot more butter in the nose, accompanied by smoke, toast and ‘more clarity,’ as Rudy put it. The wine was fat on the palate, sweet, honeyed and toasty with

incredibly long acids and a great floral edge (97). The 1982 was very yeasty, leaving John scratching his head and finding it a little 'unusual.' There were petrol (Brad called it diesel) and vitamin aromas there. The palate was wound, minerally, and very long with lots of vitamins. The wine held really well and kept opening up more and more (96). All three Ramonets were spectacular, and it would be tough not to name him the king of White Burgundy based on this flight, although Coche definitely is challenging the crown.

We segued into the Rhone valley in the third flight, starting with three vintages of **Chateau Rayas**: 1969, 1971 and 1978. The 1969 had a gorgeous nose with nice 'strawberry fruit,' as Ray pegged. It was like an overripe, Frozfruit strawberry though, I pointed out to him. Rudy got 'a touch of menthol' which was correct. There was good earth and dust to the palate with great alcohol and intensity. The wine had lots of dry tannins but was lacking a bit in the fruit on the palate, although there were light red fruits to go with its great earth flavors. The wine was fat, lush and dusty texturally, although Rudy found it 'clumsy.' Don agreed with me that it was 'real pretty, and I like it right now.' Bob noted 'a touch of dirt. The wine is fading but with a quiet persistence.' It did not hold that long in the glass that long (93). The 1971 was super-ripe and sexy (see my previous notes I wrote lazily, as this was from the same case that I had previously and very consistent). The fruit was luscious and just right in its level of sweetness with a long, thick finish, make that a long, long, long, thick finish. Flavors of strawberry, tobacco and catnip rounded out this beauty (97). {Previous note taken 10/6/2003: *"Incredible nose of cherry and strawberry fruit with sexy, creamy/spice - the hot pants, tank top and skin in the middle...white chocolate and alcohol without the "ic"...sweet and ripe fruit...did I say sweet and sexy? Truffly as well - delicious, heavenly...a wine everyone dropped their jaws and drawers for, and we had a lot of cynics with us that evening...round, long and fully erect at age thirty-two (97)."*} My 1978 was an off bottle unfortunately, and since I was playing catch up (since I was trying to take detailed notes), I did not get a swig of the good bottle (DQ), although Bob likened it to 'Pam Anderson' while the 1971 was 'Catherine Deneuve.' {Previous note taken 3/23/2003: *"Divine nose - kirsch and grilled meats dominate...very seductive...t 'n a there but secondary...ripe and exotic with saucy cherry and truffle liqueur aromas as well...did I mention divine? Great palate - still young and coy but some leathery fruit definition...long, tannic finish...the nose was 98+, but the palate was only 95 (only), and in the true auction tradition, I rounded down (96)."*} I put the 1971 and 1976 Grange with the Rayases in this flight because...well, it just seemed like the only spot to put them, to be honest. The 1971 I put 'see last night' as it was the same impression and a great one. {Note taken from previous night from a blind assortment of six wines sampled at Cru: *"Very exotic with lots of old and creamy aromas, and Rob noted a 'touch of underbrush.'* Gary found 'mint' and some were guessing Rhone, and it did give me a Rayas impression but seemed a bit large for an old Chateauneuf. There were rich cherry flavors to its spicy palate, and a pinch of 'orange at the end' Robert chimed in (95)."} The 1976 Bob likened to 'perfection' - it was black raspberry jam city, smuckers to be exact, with hints of dark chocolate. The wine was still wound with loads of alcohol and was rich, meaty and long (95). Eric mentioned that he thought the 1966 and 1969 Granges were better.

We traveled to the Northern Rhone next, starting with the legendary **1976 Guigal Cote Rotie, La Mouline** that lived up to expectations and then some. The 1976 had a fabulous nose with lots of wows around the table and ‘violets’ David remarked. There was incredible breed to the wine, with lots of tannins and alcohol, a touch of fig and the most expensive minerals in the world on both the nose and palate. The wine was still refined and long and longer, meaty and rich in fruit. Dave rounded out the comments by calling it the ‘perfect Mexican food wine.’ Obviously he eats damn good Mexican (97). The **1978 La Mouline** was another tale of bottle variation, with one bottle being ‘infinitely better’ than the other according to Doug, and that was not my bottle. Since I had just had the wine last week, I moved on to the La Chapelles. {Previous note also taken 3/23/03: *“Roasted, alcoholic, prune nose...leathery spice...gamey and a touch stemmy, but not in a negative way...penetrating, sinus-clearing alcohol...palate identical to the nose...big licorice and liqueur flavors with a hint of Madeira...finish gets bigger, figs come in...dust, tar, and leather there - the most Italian of the Rhônes (97+).”* } The **1949 Jaboulet Hermitage La Chapelle** had a fabulous nose that was classic and all it should have been. There was nut, fig, cassis and grape. The wine was super smooth, fleshy, rich, round, elegant and lingering. High class, indeed (95). The **1959 La Chapelle** had more brown sugar to its forward nose with lots of earth, oat and nut. There was still lots of t ‘n a, although the wine was a touch mature (bottle most likely). There were flavors of leather and earth. The wine was very good but not great (91+?) One of the **1961 La Chapelles** were corked, and again the bottle was mine. The second bottle was magnificent, but since I only got a swig, I again defer to my notes of two weeks prior, which I couldn’t find so easily so you’ll have to take my word that it was the best bottle of it that I ever had, and it was drunk at Cru, and it was 98 points. The 1961 is another wine where there are a lot of fake bottles and less than spectacular ones as well, so it was nice to have finally had a great one at Cru after many failed attempts, including this night’s. The **1971 Chave** got panned by Eric and Tom, but I saw its inner beauty. There were nice rose aromas and a good citrus spine, with nice earth, truffle and a touch of chocolate. Don found it ‘pretty,’ but Ray said it was ‘outclassed,’ and Don did agree. The wine had a nice finish and lots of citrus flavors. It was an excellent drink with good spine and vigor (93).

The fifth flight was comprised of younger wines, starting with an amazing magnum of **1989 Beaucastel Chateauneuf du Pape Hommage a Jacques Perrin**. It was a lot of our ‘wine of the night.’ It was so young, ‘tighter than a nun’s knees’ as Bob likes to say. There were loads of t ‘n a with so much alcohol it’s scary, especially considering how reined in it is. I say reined in, kind of like King Kong chained up and on display, reined in in that ‘I will crush you’ kind of way. The palate was amazing with enough definition, balance and length to last for decades and make up for any other wine in the room that needed some help. Mark noted its ‘pencil, lead and tar,’ and Don kicked in, ‘As tight as it is, it still gives you a hell of a lot.’ Rudy said it has ‘all the components for greatness.’ (98) The **1990 Bonneau Chateauneuf du Pape Reserve des Celestins** had another amazing nose, but it was more overripe than the Perrin, with a sexy chocolate and raisin surmaturite. The palate was rich with a scary amount of alcohol. The finish was long, hot and actually mean. The palate was tight and enormous, bordering on undrinkable with traces of menthol. This is a wine to open up the day before you want to drink it

(95+). The **1990 Chave Hermitage Cuvee Cathelin** had the Cathelin kink right there – the meaty, inky and peppery nose with loads of violets, bacon fat and menthol. It was rich and meaty with good alcohol and spine – rock solid and outstanding (96). We segued back to Australia with the **1993 Three Rivers Shiraz**, another nominee for most controversial wine of the evening. Bipin called it ‘disgusting.’ Yikes! I, and others, thoroughly enjoyed it, however. It had that hedonistic, saucy Aussie fruit, super-ripe and thick with a motor oil viscosity and ripe cherries bursting out of its pants, uh, I mean glass. Mark called it ‘port-like and candied.’ The wine was incredibly rich and extracted, super exotic, musky, hedonistic and sexy. The structure was huge with loads of alcohol. Dave ‘liked it’ but Rudy found it ‘all wood.’ It held its own a lot better than the cult Cabs did on the whole however (95). A magnum of **1995 Pingus** was last in this flight and somehow survived the fruit bomb just detonated before it to reveal a wound and stylish character with lots of leather, earth, tar and leather. Rudy saw the ‘Rhone’ in it while I saw the ‘Italian.’ There was lost of refined structure with very tight and dusty leather and sandpaper flavors (96).

The last flight of dry wines was reserved for the California cults. In retrospective, I should have switched the Italian flights from Saturday night with the Cult Calis and other cults today, but hindsight is 20/20. Why do I say that? First of all, let me say that I love California Cabernets. They are real ‘turn ons’ and delicious wines, and I often find the best wines in the 95-7 point category, a couple of rare occasions exceeding even that. However, on this night, after all these other world class wines, the acidity of the Cult California wines seemed a notch below and they suffered as a result, seeming less complicated than they really were. Anyway, we started off with the **1991 Dalla Valle Maya**, which had a great nose, full of black n’ blue fruits with a dry, mild peanut brittle edge. There was earth, tobacco, lavender and a rainforest/wet stone purity there. However, the wine was completely un-judgable for me on the palate – I got nothing outside of some good length. Was it me? The timing of the wines? I don’t know, but I refused to judge this wine in this context (and two others in the flight as you will see) (NJ) I.E., no judgment. The **1992 Screaming Eagle**, served out of magnum, was fabulous though. The nose was rich and seductive (my favorite combination), full of sweet chocolate, caramel and cassis. It was the classic cult Cali Cabernet nose – everything one could want. It was rich, meaty and long with great flavors of cassis and chocolate with nice minerals, and although Dave found it ‘loosely knit,’ I found it held up quite well (97). The **1994 Colgin** was also outstanding, but it did not show as well as it did in our blind 1994 Cult Cali tasting, which probably reflects the company factor I alluded to earlier. Rudy and Ray caught traces of dill which I saw; Dave likened it to ‘Gardenia.’ There was great fruit and spice behind it, with that intense, showboat banana split fruit, accompanied by sexy red fruits and lots of heat on its spicy and stern finish. It seemed more on the closed side then when I last had it, but also it was in different company (95+). The **1995 Araujo Estate ‘Eisele Vineyard’** had a nice nose with caramel, musk, tobacco leaf, cedar and earth. It was dry with good cedar flavors, and Dave’s favorite of the flight (94+). I think I would rate it higher under different circumstances. In fact, that could be true for a majority of the wines. The context and company under which these wines were judged were at such a high level that many wines might have scored lower than they would have in the context of two, four or even ten

other wines. I noticed when reviewing my reviews compared to the ones I had had prior, that my scores seemed consistently one or two points lower at this event, and that was the context of the competition. The **1996 Bryant (NJ)** and **1997 Harlan (NJ)** I just could not get myself into enough to judge. It was me not them! I had nothing left.

We had two wines for dessert, the incredibly sweet, thick and honeyed **1959 Steinberger TBA (97)** and the **1997 Dal Forno Amarone (NJ)**, which I made the mistake of serving after the TBA. The TBA was so sweet and rich that it made the Dal Forno look like some ordinary Ripasso wine. Oops. Time to go home. The next session was only eleven hours away.

SATURDAY LUNCH AT CRU

After some 1990 Krug to reawaken our senses, we jumped into our afternoon of red Burgundy with a couple of whites we felt needed to be represented. The first, an outstanding **1990 Trimbach Riesling 'Clos Ste. Hune,'** had a fabulous nose full of flowers, petrol, forest wood and floor. It was very aromatic with a nice balance of citrus and minerals to the nose, while the palate was very minerally as well with lots of fine, expansive acids. There were good citrus and stone flavors with an earthy burn to the finish. The wine was still a touch young, brooding and shy. An exotic mango developed in this charming, seductive white. There is no doubt this is one of the world's great white wines. Manny gave it '19.5+' and noted its 'exquisite acidity' (**95**). A magnum of **1983 Chave Hermitage Blanc** was excellent as well, but not as exciting as a bottle I had of this same wine a couple years prior. The nose was fantastic, full of orange blossom, honeycomb, citrus and a touch of signature glue (signature for white Hermitage, I find). The wine was very fragrant and musky, full of iced white minerals. The nose had great spine, but the palate was shy, although still rich and oily with some unsweetened, sun-dried yellow fruit flavors. I think out of magnum the wine needed more time, as Manny pointed out as well. He called Chave's Hermitage Blanc in general 'underplayed and undersung.' (**93+**).

Now it was time to get serious, and there were no bones about it since the first wine served was a **1934 Rousseau Chambertin**, courtesy of the renowned Doris Duke collection. The nose was knock-out fabulous, full of Chinese tea spice, leather, barbeque and a touch of fir tree without too much fir. Bob noted 'szechuan' and Dave picked up on 'soy.' There was still nice vim to the wine, with great earth and autumnal flavors and a nice citric dust to its finish. The wine was smooth, polished, beautiful and round (**96**). Remember how I grade my beloved Burgundies: a 96 points in Burgundy is more weighted than any other wine; ie, that 96 points means more than other wine types as it is so much harder to make great Burgundy. We followed the Rousseau with a **1937 Leroy Richebourg**, which did not show nearly as well as when I had it with Rudy ten months ago in Los Angeles, which I believe I rated 97 points. This bottle still had great youth to it, with that nutty Leroy signature vanilla and lots of plum and cassis behind it. The finish was huge with lots of tannins and alcohol, and cocoa flavors and minerals to its finish. The palate was abnormally dry, however, and it came across very hard, especially

after the finesse and style of the Rousseau (93+). The **1937 Clos des Lambrays** had a dirty nose with some sweet red fruit behind its very earthy, dirty nose. It almost smelled like mud it was so dirty, and it was also chalky and weedy. The blue bottle was better, fresher and more chocolaty with dry fruits but not a lot of depth there, still overshadowed by its sibling, the 1947 (90). The **1947 Clos des Lambrays** was served out of magnum and was very fresh and young; it had the intensity of a 1990s wine but still the fatness of fruit that comes with age (just like us guys). There was lots of bacon, pleasant earth, nut, and dry tall brown grass. The wine was rich and meaty with huge structure, length and spice. Doug noted its 'licorice and high alcohol' and called it the 'wine of the flight with great game and spice.' (95) The **1955 Leroy Chambertin**, although still flirting with an outstanding score, was again not the bottle I had at the same event mentioned previously, where it was near-perfect, one the few 99 point scores I have ever handed out. This bottle had a mintier nose, mint jelly in fact, so much so that I wanted lamb. The wine was fresh and long but the palate was the same, kinky but different and atypical. Joe called it 'steely and hard,' and Ray and Bipin thought the wine was a touch cooked, which made sense. Both Leroys hinted at greatness, but neither were as great as they could be (94+).

The next flight included a mini-vertical of Vogue Musigny, 1945, 1949 and 1952. The **1945 Vogue Musigny V.V.** was served out of magnum and was a spectacular bottle. It was very fresh with aromas of fabulous red fruits, spice, t 'n a, leather, more spice, earth, dust, minerals, rose and a cherry on top. There were great rose, cherry and mineral flavors with smoke and loads of tannins buried in its huge finish. There was a touch of citrus and 'old book' rounding it out (97). The **1949** had a fatter nose with sweeter fruit and a touch more earth and brown sugar up front. There were beautiful, fat citrus aromas, lemon-lime, and even a drop of unsweetened pineapple with a touch of chocolate. It was a big wine on the palate with lots of alcohol and citrus flavors. It had outstanding spine and length (96). The **1952** was also served out of magnum. The nose was meaty and earthy with oatmeal, mint, cream, chocolate and exotic wax, bikini perhaps? It was also a very fat wine but was a touch maderized, but the texture was still so rich and fat that you could see its greatness behind that. It was long, big and long (96+). Jim found all three wines 'signature Vogue' with the 'cherry, rose and game.' The **1959 Marey-Monge Romanee St. Vivant** (basically DRC) was an **Avery's bottling**, which I have had good successes with prior, so I let this 'negociant' bottle slide in. It had that milk chocolate, Easter bunny nose and a touch of must to the palate unfortunately. The palate was otherwise big with lots of earth, a touch of must, being very sandy and dirty but still maintaining good structure. Overall, though, the wine seemed a bit manipulated and unpure (90+?). 'Atypical Jayer,' Wolf mused about the **1959 H. Jayer Richebourg**. I found the nose great with loads of black and purple fruits (plum and black cherry), vanilla, earth and a drop of licorice. There was great, long, dry structure with incredible length on the finish. The wine was hot and dry like the Sahara and the fruits were dry on the palate, but I found it still outstanding, although again I had had a near-perfect bottle of this before (96).

The **1978 Dujac Clos de la Roche** was spectacular. There were loads of menthol, spice, alcohol, game, minerals, wet stones and hints of citrus. The nose was 'perfect' for Wolf,

and it had an incredible spine to it with hints of citrus and bread. The flavors were deliciously gamy, and the finish was massive, with lots of earth, ink and leather flavors. The wine also had this complex wintry impression of mint and menthol flavors, a la Cheval Blanc. It was stupendous and well worth an effort to acquire. Eric gave it '100' and called it 'quintessential Dujac' (98). Next up were three of a kind, ordinarily a good hand but since they were three 1978 Mayer wines, it was better than a royal flush. I have been fortunate to have these 1978s an assorted dozen times, and they are clearly some of the best Burgundies ever made...ever. The **1978 H. Mayer Echezeaux** had a fabulous nose full of sexy perfume, pure black and red fruits, chocolate, honey, citrus and cherry. It was so rich and meaty that you had to chew it; huge, saucy, tannic, long, clean with enormous concentration of vitamins and alcoholic power (98). The **1978 Richebourg** was incredible, consistent with the Echezeaux except there was more earth here and a touch of toll house sweetness. The t 'n a were huge yet fine, and the palate was more amazing than Spider Man with its huge, massive, intense and awesome impression. Flavors of vitamin, game, musk and the richest, most luscious fruits blessed our palates. I wrote 'wow,' and noted its huge and massive qualities again. It felt like the Terminator had showed up, because it was going to be tough for anything to top this. It was another Eric '100' (99). The **1978 Vosne Romanee Cros Parantoux** was fabulous as well, more sensual and loving, and the nose would get any Burgundy lover horny. The fruit was so sexy with its plum, black cherry, blackcurrant, minerals and vanilla lacing its finish. The only negative here was that the Cros Parantoux did not hold as well as the others in the glass, but that could have been bottle variation or just me in a blind spot (96+).

The fifth and sixth flights were devoted exclusively to the wines of **Domaine de la Romanee Conti**. The **1929 Romanee Conti** had a decent nose with a touch of tomato, horseradish, meat and oxidization. One of the bottles was shot, although some found it still beautiful, but I felt that I couldn't really judge it, and some thought it had received too much aeration unfortunately, as it was opened prior to 'schedule.' (DQ) The **1929 Vosne Romanee Les Gaudichots** was gorgeous, also from the Doris Duke collection. Its nose had lots of red fruits but was also subtle, wrapped around its alcohol, leather, earth and musky, sexy spice. The flavors were mature, brown and rich in a bouillon meets brown sugar stewed way. The wine was pure and outstanding (95). The **1942 La Tache** had a gorgeous nose as well, nutty, earthy and with an exotic horse saddle sweat quality. The wine was rich, earthy and meaty and had good maple flavors. Long and smooth was the finish (95). The **1949 La Tache** was controversial, with some bottle variation. It bowled me over with its deep and expansive nose with that Chinese tea thing that reminded me of the Rousseau. There was also lots of brown sugar and tobacco to its rich, long and meaty palate and mature flavors, flavors of tea, tobacco and light brown sugar. The wine was long and fine (97).

The sixth flight continued with four wines from two vintages, 1962 and 1971, La Tache and Romanee Conti, of course. The **1962 La Tache** was another fabulous wine with a great nose full of wintry spice and cinnamon toast without the sugar. The wine was pure and fine with sexy red fruit flavors. It was stony, stoned and stone-aged with its magnificent stone flavors (96). Not to sound like one from the No Joy, No Luck Club, but I have had a near-perfect bottle of this wine as well. The **1971 La Tache** was

spectacular, as always – well, I think it helps that six out of the eight bottles that I have had come from the same magnificent case tucked away in Cru’s cellars. There was great depth and complexity in its game, grass, earth, mint, toothpick and spice aromas. There was fabulous length, spice, tea and exotic flavors. This is one of the great all-time Burgundies, for sure (98+). The **1962 Romanee Conti** was served out of magnum, and what a magnum it was. The nose was incredibly exotic with loads of cherry fruit, kinky spice, meat, sweet caramel edges, a pinch of mint, earth and a touch of interior freshness. Flavors of tea, old book and rose came along for the ride on its long and fine palate. ‘Great’ and ‘fabulous’ kept appearing over and over in my tasting notes (98). The **1971 Romanee Conti** was no slouch either, with a great nose full of mint, weed and earth – the wine reminded me of the 1978 Dujac in many ways. There were more fig flavors here on its rich and spicy palate, long with the heat of alcohol (96+).

It was time for the ‘Young Bucks’ flight, a flight that would make the G-Unit proud. The only disappointing wine for many was the **1985 Leroy Mazis Chambertin, Hospices de Beaune, Cuvee Madeleine Collignon**. It was very tight and shy with lots of earth, sandpaper and leather to the nose and a tight, dusty and leathery palate to match. It was ‘very alcoholic’ to many, and it was tough to get a lot out of it (92). The **1985 Meo Camuzet Richebourg** was spectacular, a monument again to Henri Mayer and his winemaking skills. The wine was massive with loads of weeds, menthol, dust, earth, spice, brick and pungent alcohol crammed into the nose. The wine was meaty and pungent on the palate about as perfectly as it can be in a twenty year-old Burgundy. There was enormous alcohol and massive power to the wine, which still seemed like an infant, and its citric spine was, well, one to make any mere mortal tingle (98). A wine that blew me away before was the **1990 Roumier Musigny**, and it showed in an outstanding manner again, but with a little less of a lasting impression. I should again probably note that in the context of the weekend, every wine probably deserves a point or two more due to the incredible context within which every wine was tasted. If I opened any of these wines by themselves or with three or four other wines, I might be more generous with my scores, but in the context of forty wines a session and 150 wines in 48 hours, it took more to stand out. Back to the Musigny: its nose was dark, dank and brooding with a touch of noticeable oak that was integrated within its mineral components. It had a uniquely exotic, mahogany character with rich and meaty flavors. There were lots of iron flavors in its powerful and youthful profile (95+). The **1990 Ponsot Clos de la Roche V.V.** lived up to my expectations again and proved to be one of the greatest wines of the 1990 vintage. The nose was intoxicatingly complex: dark, dank, meaty and rich. The palate was huge with enormous alcohol and massive length. The palate was consistently meaty and rich with sexy on the beach flavors of plum, cola, minerals and a touch of diesel. I noted palate fatigue relating to my score (?), as I have rated this wine 98 points twice, which is also what I was alluding to on the Roumier Musigny (97). Bob loved the **1990 C. Dugat Griottes Chambertin**, which had a subtle, shy and alluring nose with a mélange of red and purple fruits; it was shy without being tight, though. The palate was very rich - meaty, vitaminy and spicy with a long, huge finish. There were lots of iron and vitamin flavors to go with its intense alcohol; Chet called it ‘Rhône-like in its roasted quality,’ and the wine was very rich, full of red fruits and much better on the palate than the nose led one to believe (96). I disqualified the

1990 La Tache, as I thought my bottle was not right, and at this point I wasn't losing any sleep over it or trying to put together a tasting note out of other's glasses. There will be another day soon, I'm sure (**DQ**). Last at the Headbanger's Ball, so to speak, was a **1993 Leroy Chambertin**, which also had a fabulous nose (sensing a trend?) There were more black fruits here (as always with young Leroy) along with cola, geyser, menthol, earth, spice, spine and vanilla bean. The wine was hearty, leathery, very dry and still very young (**95+**).

There was actually a dessert flight of **1921 Bredif Vouvray**, **1947 Huet Vouvray 'Le Haut Lieu'** and a **1989 Trmibach Riesling Clos Ste. Hune, Hors Choix**, but believe it or not I forgot to try them as I was busy out and about socializing and never quite got back to my seat to try them. Oops. I had to get everyone moving as dinner was only three hours away, and I had a feeling that some nap time was in order for many, although a small group of attendees actually went to L'Impero to have pasta and truffles in between meals. Now that is dedication, and hats off to the Good Doctor, Good Lawyer and Tom Terrific from Tennessee for never letting the party stop, although judging by Tom's antics at dinner, perhaps a nap would have done everyone some good!

SATURDAY DINNER AT PER SE

Classic California, Spain, Italy and Port were our version of a Saturday night special, and Per Se was the location. The evening got off to a slow start due to lunch lag, but once we got through the second course we started rolling. Unfortunately, it was 10:30pm by this time! Anyway, back to the beginning.

The Champagne for this session was **1996 Bollinger 'Grande Annee,'** and its purpose was more akin to mouthwash after Saturday's spectacular lunch. The wines from California got me tuned in rather quickly, though. First up was the **1935 Simi Cabernet Sauvignon**, which had a great nose with lots of meaty dust (with a touch of saw there as well) and some plum, cassis and stewed fruit. The wine was still fresh and long with some leathery tang to it. It was an excellent wine, but it started to lose its focus quickly, costing it a point (**93**). The **1941 Inglenook** was an amazing wine, one of the best I have ever had from California. I had long heard stories of its greatness, and now I can officially say that I am a believer. The nose was incredible, full of cassis, cedar, mature straw, minerals, a little coconut, and loads of chocolate and coffee. The finish was long, sturdy and gravelly. The palate was full of chocolate macaroon flavors and desert qualities (heat, sandy, dry). It had great balance and held in the glass for at least three hours (**98**). The **1951 B.V. Private Reserve Cabernet** was all about the chocolate – its nose was full of it. The wine was rich, meaty and oily with lots of vanilla flavors, chalk, leather and heat. There was great spine and structure with lots of vigor still (**95**). Its sibling, the **1968**, came close to the legendary 1951 but was a step behind. There was more of a honeyed sweetness to its nose with cassis, plum, wet stone and chocolate. The palate was cedary, minerally and long with a sandpapery finish. The wine was sturdy and fine despite a touch of must that crept out (**94**). Tom called it a toss-up between the two 1968s, the second being a **1968 Heitz Martha's Vineyard**. It was 'another great nose,' I

wrote, with lots of cedar, coffee and vanilla to the nose, and length and grit to the palate. The palate was long, dry and full of cedar (94).

The next flight was all about Ridge with a 1974 Heitz for reference. The first wine was a **1968 Ridge ‘Montebello’** out of magnum, and it was a hell of a wine, clearly taking the cake for wine of the vintage, at least here in this mini-challenge that we assembled. The magnum factor might have helped, handicapping the other two wines perhaps, but shit happens. The 1968 had a fabulous nose (geez, how many times have I said that so far?) with great slate and minerals to go with its chocolaty fruit, plummy core and firm alcohol. The palate was huge and outstanding with an immense finish and spine. The tannins and alcohol were huge and the volatility of the acidity was noticeable but in a good way. The flavors were similar to the nose with the slate, mineral and chocolate. The wine got drier and drier in the glass, dropping it a point, but it was still outstanding (96). The **1970 Ridge ‘Montebello,’** one of my previous all-time Cali greats out of magnum, was more controversial even though I found it to be outstanding. The nose was stony and wound, slaty with light nut, chocolate and cola. There were some secondary grape fruit aromas that emerged along with a little fig, date and nut. The finish was massive again with tremendous alcohol, although Bob found it ‘a little Bayonne, New Jersey funky.’ Having worked in Bayonne for three years, I can say although I saw what he was referring too (and he had a different bottle), it was an overstatement! The tannins were rugged, and its length was awesome, with a healthy dose of volatile acidity as well (95+). The **1971 Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon ‘Eisele Vineyard’** was another wine with great aromatics, classic in its balance of cedar and cassis. It also had that sweet chocolate, plum and slate, similar to the previous two and enough to make me write that I was starting to see a signature Ridge style here. The Eisele was sweeter than the Montebellos, riper on the palate with rich grape and grape seed flavors and a sandpapery finish. The wine was gritty, long and spicy, and it had so much rich fruit the 1968 seemed dried out by comparison! It was a big, bold and beautiful wine, but definitely on the grapy side (97). The **1974 Heitz Martha’s Vineyard**, one of classic California’s true legendary wines, showed well out of magnum. It was classic Heitz with the three-way of mint, eucalyptus and cassis, and pinches of nut and menthol. The palate was rich and huge again with big alcohol and meaty fruit. Bob felt that the 1968 ‘smoked’ the 1974, but I preferred the 1974 slightly, enjoying its long, gravelly finish and secondary flavors of tea and oak (95).

It was here when Tom started with his ‘USA’ chants a la Sgt. Slaughter or Hacksaw Jim Duggan in the face of the Iron Sheik, and we weren’t sitting at the same table, either! Those chants were mild by comparison to his rendition of numerous songs later, of which I will spare you the details. It was all in good fun. The last flight of California wines did not stack up to the previous two, and we started with a **1975 Joseph Phelps ‘Eisele Vineyard.’** The wine was aromatic and earthy with cassis, nut and vanilla aromas and solid yet subtle tannins. The palate was excellent with a sandpapery finish, good gravel and length, though a touch burnt on its flavor profile (93). The **1978 Diamond Creek ‘Lake,’** an impossible wine to find, was not worth the extra effort, although still very good but far from the \$1000 a bottle price tag! The nose was different with nut, cola, blackcurrant and berry aromas, and a lot of cola and grape as well. The flavors were oily

with dried grape, grape seed and grape seed oil flavors, more one-dimensional in its flavor profile. The tannins were still good (91). The first vintage of **Dunn**, the 1979 '**Howell Mountain**,' was next on our list and an excellent wine, very fresh and mountainous with lots of tannins and alcohol, purple flowers, grape and cassis aromas. The tannins were long and dry in this excellent wine (93). The 1987 **Chateau Montelena** was the wine of this flight for me, although Mike 'didn't get it,' calling it 'too tannic' for him. I found the nose classy with lots of cedar, slate and fruit. It gave a rich and mountainous, claret-like impression on the palate and was long, slaty and dry. Joe said that this wine would 'never come around,' and Bob also noted its 'tannic' quality (96).

It was Spain's turn to lay its claim to world-class status, although there were four Unicos and only one Rioja, so it was not the largest cross-representation. My bottle of the 1925 **Marques de Riscal Rioja Reserva** was maderized, although the blue bottle was 'spectacular.' I have reviewed this wine before from another spectacular bottle, but tonight it was a (DQ). {*Previous note taken 9/19/2003: "This was the third time I had had this wine in the past year, and it was the best showing yet. Killer espresso milkshake of a nose with a side of buttery baked croissants...rich, hearty, drier palate...heavenly nose with grilled nuts and toast emerging along with mocha and cassis...good grip and grit - the most balanced wine so far (95)."*} I will say that old Riojas, ie forty years or older, have been some of the greatest older wines that I have had, at a price far less than their French counterparts. In fact, they tend to converge towards old claret in their style, while still maintaining their unique, leathery Spanish flavors. The 1922 **Vega Sicilia Unico** was outstanding, although only for very mature fine wine lovers at this stage. There was good penetration by the nose, which was sweet, perfumed, forward and fragrant with nice nut and vanilla aromas along with that sexy Spanish, leathery spice. There was wheat and oat as well, and Joe called it 'amazing at age 82.' The wine was very fresh for its age with a chocolaty and woody palate with sprinkles of cherry dust and a long, hearty finish (95). The 1941 **Unico** had a nutty, chocolaty nose as well with a pinch of maderized sherry that seems to work more for this wine than any other wine type. The palate was rich, meaty and chocolaty with a lot of alcohol to it, accompanied by figgy flavors and that sherry glaze (95+). The 1953 **Unico** proved consistent with the other three or four times I have had it, revealing an espresso milk shake of a nose with a distinguished potato/root vegetable quality. There was coffee bean and an exotic milky edge that reminded me of 1928 Haut Brion. The wine was rich, tasty and delicious, the most delicious of the flight, in fact. The acids and length were world-class, and its finish was long and hearty (96). The 1968 **Unico** was served out of magnum, and was so young by comparison, it was almost impossible to evaluate. Caramel, oatmeal and chocolate soda were present in this sleeping giant, which was incredibly shy on the nose and palate, but what a palate it was. There was amazing length, style, grace and length to it, but we should have opened it up at the first session of the day and let it breathe about ten hours (97+).

My notes from here on out started to become a little less detailed, as the day had started to catch up to me. I did get a thirty minute massage in between sessions, but that was all for which there was time. We had two flights of Italians to taste, and we started with the

oldest wine, a **1947 G. Conterno Barolo Monfortino Riserva**. Barolos and Italians in general can be chancier than most wines when you start to get in that thirty-to-forty year zone, and the 1947 had a pale, sickly color and a weird nose but was actually quite drinkable, if you like paint. I could see some remnants of greatness but this bottle had seem better days **(DQ)**. The **1955 Monfortino** out of magnum was amazing, still very young with loads of spice, tannins and alcohol in its incredible nose. There was tar, leather and rose as well – all the components to stamp a ‘classic’ on it. The acids were great, as was its long and spiny finish **(96+)**. It crushed the other 1955 wine on the table, a **1955 Biondi Santi Brunello di Montalcino Riserva**. The Biondi Santi smelled decently, but where was the Brunello? It really lacked the character of the region and had no terroir. There was some length on the finish but the wine was one-dimensional **(88)**. Thankfully, we went straight back to Piedmont with a winegasmic **1961 B. Giacosa Barbaresco Santo Stefano Riserva**. When it comes to Italian wines, Tuscany can’t compete with the wines of Piedmont on a world-class level. There, I said it. Don’t get me wrong, there are a lot of tasty wines coming out of Tuscany, and many with character. However, when it comes to the being on the level that the best of the world has to offer, I am not sure if Tuscany yet belongs. The nose had layers of complexity, bursting with anise, alcohol, tannins, more alcohol, mushroom, meat, and the almost indescribable ‘autumnal floor action.’ The wine was rich, meaty, long and intense with mountainous length **(97)**. There were two other wines in this flight, **both Monfortinos**. First was the **1971**, of which the red bottle was corked. The **1978** was great, but I seemed too tired at the time to take notes. They are both stupendous Monfortinos, and if you get a great bottle there is no doubt about the fact that this is Italy’s greatest Barolo in the context of the 20th century and one of the world’s greatest wines. {Previous notes taken on 3/28/2003 (1971) and 3/23/2003 (1978) respectively: *“This wine had left one of the all-time great impressions of Italian wine on me 3-4 years ago, and it was nice to see lightning strike twice...fabulous nose - actually some fruit in there (that was a joke for those who think Italian wines have no fruit), and the fruit was black, of course, and yes, there was tar and leather as well...the plum and cassis undercurrent is so seductive, and it playfully dances around the fig/raisin thing, even more so on the palate...pinch of anise both on the nose and the palate...great finish with plush and vigorous tannins...has the best balance of fruit and finish that I have ever had in an old Italian wine ever, outside of maybe the 1961 Gaja (95+).” “Decidedly different - more fragrant and singular in its personality aromatically...great spice (leather and tar, of course)...BBQ, charcoal, a touch of ripe plums, baked brown sugar...nice t 'n a...hint of anise...huge finish that remains integrated...wine still has a long future...blacker, nuttier flavors (96).”*}

The relatively modern legends of Italy took the stage in flight #6, and the **1978 Giacosa Barbaresco Santo Stefano Riserva** delivered as always. It had an amazing nose full of leather, tar, bacon, earth, truffle and smoke. The wine was huge on the palate with bacon fat – so much so I had a Cuvee Cathelin flashback. Dave noted its ‘bouillon’ quality **(96)**. The **1982 Gaja Barbaresco Sori Tildin** was another fabulous nose – incredibly complex with rose, perfume, tar, smoke and spice and an awesome palate with great spine **(95)**. The **1985 Sassicaia** got lost in the shuffle of the greatness of Piedmont in this flight, so I put ‘see Thursday night,’ as Rudy and I had had one two nights prior which had a better showing in its context, although it could have been the bottle **(DQ)**. Sorry, I

am too lazy to dig that one up too, but I rated it 96 points, and again it was the best bottle of this that I have had, and again I had it at Cru (sensing a theme?) 1985 Sassicaia is another hit or miss wine, so it was fitting that one bottle hit and one missed. I missed the **1990 Sandrone Cannubi** somehow, which has always been one of my all-time favorite Barolos, although I did note that someone said Barolo was 'God's pizza wine.'

{Previous note taken 11/10/02: *"Incredible nose...showed A++ at the pre-auction tasting in LA and was the wine of the night there as well...nose is leaving me almost speechless - huge t'n a, incredible Barolo spice - leather, tar, roses in full bloom, black olives, slate, plums...on the palate there were good acids and flavors to match the nose's profile...a touch of olive oil...good grip and length with a long finish...peppery, almost a crushed red pepper...great spice - what Marco Polo must have been looking for...as Dick Vitale would put it, 'Awesome, baby!' (98+) "*}

The Port flight was staggering, and anyone still left standing needed medical assistance. It was an awe-inspiring assortment that delivered a knockout blow. The **1927 Taylor** was gorgeous, outstanding and maybe just starting to plateau, although Peter, our Port expert, claimed to have had bottles that were 'stronger.' I still found it outstanding (**95**). The **1935 Taylor** was peppery and more intense than the '27, better than outstanding and stellar (**97**). The **1945 Taylor** was actually served out of a magnum and was beauty and the beast rolled into one. It was massive and amazing (**98**). The **1963 Quinta do Noval Nacional** I wrote 'see Nashville' about as I had done a vertical back in February and got lazy, I suppose. Finally, the **1931 Quinta do Noval** crushed everything, with a weight, alcohol level and length unseen. It is the greatest Port ever made (**99**).

I think it was 1AM already, and we were in a familiar territory: 11 hours until lunch, except this time it was the grand finale and the wines of Bordeaux.

SUNDAY LUNCH AT VERITAS

Sunday's lunch was at Veritas, as fitting a locale for the greatest wines of Bordeaux as the Chateaux themselves. We freshened up with some 1996 Dom Perignon, and started with a magnum of perhaps the century's most renowned Bordeaux, the **1900 Margaux**. Whenever the words '1900 Margaux' and 'magnum' are in the same sentence, eyebrows raise themselves and doubters start the naysaying. I found this magnum to be authentic, although I think the 1900 Margaux, at least the four or five times I have had it, is a wine past its prime. It was still excellent, but no longer at the celestial levels of years past. The magnum was fresh, definitely reconditioned, with black cherry fruit, Margaux dust, perfume, sweet tobacco edges and a pinch of chocolate. You could taste the Margaux character and earth. There was beautiful gravel and dust on the finish with a touch of fig (**94**). The **1921 Cheval Blanc** was also out of magnum, but this magnum was nowhere close to the incredible bottle of this I had one month prior. It was herbal and woodsy with lots of medicine, slightly corked, and I had my doubts (**DQ**). The bottle I had previously from a 'magic cellar' with 12 Angry Men was rated 99 points by myself and pretty much everyone in attendance. The magnum onslaught continued with a **1926 Haut Brion**, which was very good but probably not deserving of its company. The wine was fat and rich in the nose with molasses and tobacco, but also had a sweet 'n sour,

oxidized edge about which Rudy said, 'That's '26.' It was fully mature, i.e. drink up! There was a lot of coffee on the palate and a gravelly spice developed. The wine is at its peak at the minimum (91). The **1928 Latour** had a beautiful nose but was reconditioned as well. It was outstanding in its own right but missed the heights that an original bottle would achieve. There was lots of fresh, plummy fruit, walnuts and pencil with great cedar and pencil flavors. There was lots of gritty earth and excellent length still, as good as a reconditioned bottle can get, I suppose (95). The **1929 Latour** had a rich, meaty and oily nose. There was a pinch of worchestshire kink to its musky and meaty profile, and the meat was lightly marinated and grilled. The wine still had good richness, but its flavors were dominated by tobacco and old oak, and its body said 'I'm ready,' at least for this bottle (93). The **1929 Ausone**, another magnum which came directly from Pascal Delbeck formerly of Ausone, and it was very controversial, with some adoring it and others not interested. It had a great nose with dust, red fruits, soft earth, gravel and lots of dry tannins. The wine was very dry on the palate and had tea-like flavors. I forgot to give the wine a score; c'est la vie. The last wine of this flight, a magnum of **1929 Cheval Blanc**, was unfortunately corked, too much to get a read on (DQ). All things considered, this flight was a bit of a disappointment; however, the next four flights more than made up for it.

The second flight started with a **1945 Haut Brion**. The wine had a great nose full of breed, tobacco, sweet caramel fruit and smoke. It was rich, tasty, long and smooth with great length and breed. There were nice dust, earth, sand and leather flavors on the finish, and it was an outstanding bottle but a still a step or two short of the one I had last May at Le Cirque – and the bottles came from the same case! (97) The **1945 Mouton Rothschild** was spectacular. My notes started, 'Mmmmm – what a wine.' There was rich, sweet fruit in the nose with great menthol supplements. The wine was rich and meaty with caramel, forest, and nut. 'Rich, rich, long, huge – awesome,' kind of sums it up. The wine held in the glass quite well (99). The **1947 Cheval Blanc** had the 'tough act to follow' spot in the lineup but did quite well on its own. Ray called it 'the best '47 Cheval I've ever had,' which struck me as funny since we had one together on New Year's Eve in 1999 which remains the best I've ever had! There were lots of olives and rich, sweet cherry fruit in the nose with that motor oil quality and sweet sprinkles of sugar and plum. The wine was delicious, smooth and lush with great balance but it just lacked the extra-dimension of weight I have had in those couple of 99-pointers I have had (97). The magnum of **1947 Lafleur** was not real unfortunately – as Andy put it, 'this is the best wine I have ever had and this ain't it.' (DQ). The **1947 Petrus**, on the other hand, was superlative. Rudy called it 'classic.' The wine was beautiful with incredible breed and aromas of mocha, plum, cassis and bread crusts. The mouth feel was super-rich and velvety, and the flavors were full of sugarplums, vanilla, olives and earth. It was Pomerol bliss, and the length and balance were near-perfect (99+). The **1947 Vieux Chateau Certan** was no slouch either, with voluptuous, lovely fruit. It was classic VCC with the mocha, earth, mineral and animal aromas and flavors, with a long, fine finish. The plum and mocha flavors were pure, and the wine was beautiful (96).

The third flight was all out of magnum, starting with a **1949 L'Eglise Clinet**. The nose was beautifully plummy with fabulous fruit – plums, minerals and a drop of anise. There

was great depth to the fruit and mineral qualities. The palate was dry with plum and gravel there but a bit of a drier expression with lots of minerals and earth to the finish **(95)**. The **1950 Latour a Pomerol** was incredible, garnering the attention and affection of Ray, who gave it 99+. The nose was incredible, consistent with the bottle we had way back in April six months prior. It was meaty and kinky with that triple threat of plum, mocha and minerals that only Pomerol can produce. The wine was so rich and lush, or as Rudy put it, 'a hussy.' The wine had a great nose, great attack and a great finish; hence, it was great **(97)**. There was a lot of fabulousness going around this weekend, and it continued with the **1953 Lafite Rothschild**. It was classic and quintessential Lafite with the cedar and cassis, mature chocolate, pencil, chalk and soda. It remains beautifully mature, where many claim it has been for thirty years **(95)**. The magnum of **1953 Margaux** was a bit funky, a little weedier than usual with some dirt and barn in the nose yet still lots of power in the finish. The wine was affected somehow and a little too wild and weedy with a touch of tea **(DQ)**.

The magnum of **1955 La Mission Haut Brion** had a great nose full of gravel, iron, mineral, earth and a touch of paint even. The palate was gravelly as well, earthy and long with a touch of black cherry fruit and band-aids on its flavor profile. It was outstanding but a bit gravelly compared to others I have had **(95)**. The **1955 L'Evangile** bottle that I had was oxidized; it came from the same case as the following note, however, which is sure to make readers dizzy. {Previous note taken 10/10/2003: *"Every time I have talked to Eric for the last six months, he has told me about this wine, so I relished the opportunity to get to know it first-hand. Incredible nose of ripe plums, feta, mocha, and hedonistic Pomerol fruit...thick, creamy and ripe...served a little cold but still delicious...tannins start to creep out in a delicate way and get firmer and firmer...delicious wine...gets more seductive as time goes by...fleshy and forward...purple fruits and boysenberry flavors (96)."*} The magnum of **1959 Haut Brion** 'was about as real as a \$7 bill – even Helen Keller could see that,' Bob chipped in **(DQ)**. {Previous note taken 7/30/03: *"The best bottle of this wine that I have ever had...I have had some previous bad luck with this wine. Seductive, rich, grape- and cassis-laden nose with just a pinch of gravel...very chocolatey...seductive, breadly spice as well...round, rich, and ooh la la on the palate...so young, ripe, and fresh...more gravel and slate on the palate with excellent grip still, and a long, lingering finish with very fresh acids...delicious, dry, milk-chocolate flavors and a great, dusty, balanced, and seductively firm finish...very meaty...more rich and saucy and brute strength than the '59 Mouton served beside it...the alcohol and gravel really come out more with food...I vacillated between 97 and 98 points (97)."*} The **1959 Lafite** was also out of magnum and provided a lot of signature, rich and classic Lafite aromas but was also a little stinky in the nose. There were cedar, mineral and pencil flavors with dark, sturdy fruit, but it seemed to lack the extra dimension one would expect out of this wine. I have experienced a lot of bottle variation in this wine over the years, I should note **(94)**. The **1959 Mouton Rothschild** was wine of this flight, revealing a fabulous nose of sweet cassis fruit, tobacco, chocolate and a touch of port. It was smooth and satiny and a great bottle of '59 **(96)**.

The flight of 1961s was worth the price of admission alone and reinvigorated me to take more detailed notes again, although it seemed to take what was left of my prose for the remainder of the afternoon, as you will see shortly. The flight prompted someone to call 1961 ‘the vintage of the century,’ and it was tough to argue. We started with a **1961 Latour**, which showed a touch of port to its massive nose. There were lots of tannins and alcohol in the nose still, accompanied by minerals, smoke, cassis and plum with its fruits having a blacker shade. ‘Wow,’ my note continued, and that was in response to the first sip – it had a long, great finish that was gritty and cedary. Flavors of vanilla rounded out its profile, although after the Palmer, those vanilla flavors seemed a little more old oak than vanilla, costing it a point relative to the Palmer. On its own, I did initially score it a 98, so that is the theory of relativity applied to wine again **(97)**. The **1961 La Mission Haut Brion** was again on the gravelly side, with a smoky edge but also more deep and nutty fruit compared to the ’55. The palate was long, smoky and fine **(96)**. The **1961 Palmer** took Left Bank honors this day, far from a long shot but a surprise nonetheless! It had a great nose that was very supple with flashes of grape, cassis and blackcurrant fruit, and nice supplementary aromas of minerals and gravel. The pinch of chocolate was perfect on its meaty palate, and like I mentioned previously, it made the Latour look worse, for lack of a better word. The wine was delicious, long and still young **(98)**. Across the river we went to Pomerol for a fantastic four of wines. I still think that 1961 Pomerols might be the best wines ever made, and this flight backed that theory up again. We started with the **1961 Lafleur**, which was so exotic and full of sexy Pomerol fruit with the plum, game, motor oil and Sambuca. The wine was thick, meaty and just plain awesome. The palate was massive with thick, rich and heavy fruit and lots of minerals and length. The wine was incredible, but this bottle had a shred less fruit than two previous 99-pointers, so it had to settle for a mere 98 points **(98)**. The **1961 Latour a Pomerol** lived up to its reputation on this day. ‘Wow’ started off my note again. The wine was so sweet and thick in the nose, it reminded me of Amarone with its raisins and chocolate. There was a glorious depth of perfume and such sexy aromatics that time seemed to stop while one’s nose was in the glass. The palate held up to the nose and was amazing with gorgeous grape and fig flavors and long tannins **(99)**. The **1961 Petrus** followed out of magnum and actually had the best structure components in the nose of the three Pomerols so far, perhaps the magnum factor. There was lots of anise and tannin present, with great plum, mocha, mineral, alcohol and earth. It was Rudy’s favorite, and tight out of magnum. It was powerful, restrained and still opening up, almost ready for college **(98+)**. Last up in this spectacular flight was the **1961 Trotanoy**, which was also gorgeous. Chocolate, mocha, plum, slate, tannins, alcohol, caramel, meat and smoke were the profiles. It was rich and long with a big finish – more greatness in the glass **(98)**.

The next flight I really did not take any notes, so this paragraph will be brief. The **1975 Petrus** had a great nose and was classic 1975 Petrus. I continue, ‘See previous notes – I’m too tired.’ The **1982 Lafleur** was the only wine for which I scraped a note together, oozing its overripe and kinky aromas that make a classic Lafleur. It was a sexy and opulent wine loaded with black and purple fruits, with meaty and gamy flavors and hints of olive. It was an over the top, hedonistic wine **(97)**. There was no helping a cooked magnum of **1982 Le Pin (DQ)**. The **1982 Mouton Rothschild** I put, ‘See me another

tasting,’ and the **1989 Haut Brion** I wrote ‘great but too tired to write.’ The **1990 Margaux** got an uninspired ‘great but who cares at this point,’ and I think that was true – this flight was a bit anti-climactic and tough to get into after those ‘61s.

The four Yquems were incredible and a fitting end to the weekend. The **1921 Yquem** had an amazing nose, so complex with its coconut, caramel, baked honey, crème brulee and spice. It was still divinely sweet and youthful (**98**). The **1928** was waxy and sturdy, showing similar profiles to the 1921 and also incredible (**97**). The **1937** was simply amazing – nothing more needs to be said (**99**). The **1949** was also great, a complete wine as well, but the least of the best in this case (**96**).

That’s all folks. Next year we’re hopefully going to do the top 75 wines that could have been here but didn’t make it, based on attendees’ votes. October 21st-23rd I think - and only three sessions this time too! I am happy to take feedback on potential selections from any and all.

John Kapon,
Acker Merrall & Condit