

Top 100 Weekend, Year II, 2005

About a month ago over forty people gathered in New York City for a spectacular celebration of the finest wine and food that the world has to offer. Many of this year's attendees were satisfied customers from year one, but we also had a few new guests to spice up the festivities.

We changed a few things in year two after the experience of year one. First of all, there were only three sessions instead of four. Secondly, we limited the number of pours to thirty-five instead of forty. The third thing we did differently was limit the weekend to wines from France. No offense to the rest of the winemaking world, but *c'est la vie*. Lastly, we added two new restaurants, Bouley and Le Bernadin, to the only holdover from last year, the one, the only, CRU.

There were over forty people in attendance because there were about ten shared pours, which allows couples to come together, or friends to absorb the five figure price tag for the weekend a little bit better.

We started with a Friday night session at Le Bernadin and two vintages of Cristal, the 1973, and the 1985 out of magnum. We had an auspicious beginning with a bad batch of the 1973; thankfully Bernadin came to the rescue with some 1996, although it was a mix of Rose and regular Cristal. The 1985 out of magnum was very nice, more subtle than I expected, almost shut down, but very elegant and stylish (93), while the 1996 was its usual outstanding self, snapping, crackling and popping its way down everyone's hatches (95).

The first official flight was one of 1996 Grand Cru White Burgundies, although we started with a 1996 Lafon Meursault 'Perrieres,' which is technically not Grand Cru, although many feel that 'Perrieres' is a vineyard in Burgundy that delivers Grand Cru quality. It was an honorary ambassador of sorts and held up its part of the bargain with a fabulous nose full of that 1996 acidity, light citrus and wax, nice butter, candy apple, minerals and steel. Eric found it 'a little alcoholic' but still enjoyed it; its palate was deliciously toasty, racy, pure and tasty, and there was no doubt that it belonged in this flight afterwards (95).

The flight continued with an unbelievably good 1996 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne. Showing even better than it did upon release, the Coche had an unreal nose that was so pure, toasty, balanced and elegant that it felt like a dream, a very good dream. The acidity, purity and length in the nose were divine - there was perfect harmony of the nut, mineral and smoke components. It was as close to perfect as a white Burgundy could be. The palate was no disappointment with its great flavors and acidity, its big, long finish and its classic profile. Sandra, a self-proclaimed foodie first, was caught up in its oily texture. What a wine (98)!

Unfortunately, the two bottles of 1996 Ramonet Bienvenues Batard Montrachet were cooked (DQ). These were last-second emergency replacement bottles that were sourced

off the internet since the original source could not find his. I guess that's what happens when you pick up the next available bottle online, although the debate did come up whether the wine was oxidized due to the cork treatment or due to poor storage. This is a huge debate at the moment, as in 1996 a new peroxide treatment was used by many producers in Burgundy to clean their corks, and apparently this treatment oxidized many of their wines. Keep in mind this was not every producer, but Ramonet apparently was one of them. Regardless, these particular bottles were no good one way or the other. You might ask why is the Bienvenues Batard even in this flight? Well, I wanted to have one wine from each of the major Grand Crus, as well as one wine from each of white Burgundy's so-called 'top dogs.'

The next wine elicited more than a few 'arf arfs.' The 1996 Niellon Batard Montrachet had an exotic and floral nose, uniquely sweet with Asian, jasmine and wildflower aromas. It was oilier and more buttery than the flight's previous whites and also more tropical. The palate was more classically rendered than the nose with a full body and a long finish, delivering flavors that were more waxy and yeasty (96).

The 1996 Domaine Leflaive Chevalier Montrachet had the tightest nose so far, incredibly wound with a lot of kernel, slate, minerals and acid. Butter and dried corn aromas were buried underneath. The acidity on the palate jumped out immediately and was clearly the most superior so far in that regard. The palate was wound, coy and long, and this wine was most certainly still an infant. Eric noted how the 1996 Leflaive Montrachet was the greatest Montrachet ever made. Mental note for Year III (97+)!

The final wine of the weekend's first flight was a spectacular 1996 DRC Montrachet. While the red bottle was a little corky, the blue bottle was amazingly thick, meaty and rich. Each wine was either served out of two bottles or a magnum; when two bottles were served we stickered which bottle was which. Honeyed, musky, white meaty and large, the DRC was so buttery, rich and creamy and many people's favorite wine of the flight. Its palate was smooth and long yet still big and with long acidity. It was very, very special (97).

We were off to a good start as we eased into flight number two, a flight of the 1971 DRCs. All except the Romanee Conti were served out of magnum. We started with a 1971 DRC Echezeaux, which had a very fresh nose, garden fresh with some stewed red fruits, and also gamy with dashes of sweet brown sugar sprinkled on top of oatmeal. Someone found 'mushrooms on a grill,' and its nose was indeed earthy and foresty. The palate had less fruit than the nose and more citric tang but was still long with good acidity. Overall on the palate, though, the wine was a bit square and dried in its fruit, more earthy than anything else (91).

The 1971 DRC Grands Echezeaux 'feels more resolved,' someone keenly observed. The nose was long and deep, shy and subtle yet beautiful. Aromas of rose, vitamins, a touch of stems and gorgeous raspberry and strawberry fruit dripped from its long nose. The palate was great, spicy with nice alcohol and good, stemmy flavors. The Grands Echezeaux is probably the best value in the whole DRC portfolio, always seeming to

deliver an enjoyable experience although never reaching the heights of La Tache or Romanee Conti (94).

The 1971 DRC Romanee St. Vivant had a beautiful nose as well, full of strawberry fruit, ice cream kisses and a vanilla creaminess. Rich, long, seductive and sexy, the RSV was unbelievably tasty and long, with the best acidity so far and a tasty minerality (95).

The 1971 DRC Richebourg had an incredibly complex nose as the wines continued to build in dramatic fashion. Rose, earth, leather, stems and tobacco were all present. Its palate was long, and there were nice flavors of earth and leather, but what really set this wine apart was its extraordinary acidity and how the wine kept gaining in the glass (96+).

The 1971 La Tache was next, and while it was still close to an outstanding wine, it was less than what it should have been. This is one of the great wines of the century and almost always a 98 point experience, and this magnum did not deliver that. Eric found it 'stripped' while Rudy found it 'gorgeous, pure and long.' I was leaning more on Eric's side, but Eric still gave it 97 points! Man, why weren't you part of the faculty in high school? There was a lot of innate beauty in the wine and nice earth flavors, but I found it to be disappointing nonetheless (94A).

The 1971 Romanee Conti also had issues, for it was a touch stewed and advanced in the nose with more beefy, aggressive aromas. Its texture and length on the palate were amazing, the types that only Romanee Conti the vineyard itself can yield. It was clearly the longest wine of the flight and also had the best structure, but it still was marked by that advanced, beefy quality (95A+).

Despite an anti-climactic finish to the second flight, we were unfazed and moved forward with an incredibly rare flight of Rousseau Chambertin. The 1923 Rousseau Chambertin had a meaty, long and gorgeous nose, a touch earthy and with a hint of band-aid, but most importantly with divine fruit for age 82. The bottle was incredibly fresh. The palate was pure, long and classic. Despite a kiss of stewed flavors that is to be expected for a wine this old, the wine was excellent, bordering on outstanding but perhaps a bit past its optimum drinking window (94).

The 1928 Rousseau Chambertin had another amazing nose, similar to the 1923 with its band-aids, but also with earth, honey, caramel and a touch of benevolent stew. The palate was absolutely gorgeous; pure, smooth and long, the 1928 was richer, meatier and larger than the 1923 yet still smooth, and its acidity was still singing quite loudly (96).

The 1929, the Burghound's favorite vintage of 'Burgundy's best decade,' was also outstanding. Possessing an amazing nose, the 1929 was the freshest of the flight with a nose full of cherry, dust and earth. The palate was long, rich and smooth with great earth and tang flavors but ultimately a step behind the 1928 for me (95). All in all, the Rousseau flight was a testament to the ageability of great Burgundy, although it would be easy for a naysayer to claim that they might have been better a decade or two prior.

Next up were the 'over extracted' Ponsots, as someone insisted, a horizontal of 1985s to be precise. The 1985 Ponsot Latricieres Chambertin was a bit outclassed with its light earth and basically garbage aromas. It was better than garbage but in that direction, for sure. There were some molasses and ginger in this smooth and easy wine. Its palate was simple and nice, but this wine certainly did not belong with the esteemed company of the weekend (88).

The 1985 Ponsot Griottes Chambertin restored a little faith in the Ponsot reputation with its hedonistically saturated nose of jammy cherries. It was rich with a touch of fig and full of long alcohol. Its palate was spicy, jammy and meaty with a long finish, leather to its spice and 'great density' as Marc observed. It was an outstanding wine despite being more jazz than classical (95).

The 1985 Ponsot Clos de la Roche V.V. had the most openly aggressive nose of this flight and the most classically Ponsot. It was concentrated, long and full of gamy flavors, somewhat smooth but still lingering and with upside (95+)

In case you haven't noticed, my notes were waning a bit now, as the pressure and buildup for the weekend were a bit exhausting, I must confess. I had just finished making the November catalog the day before, so I was still in a bit of a state of shock. The next flight was one of all the 1959 First Growths out of magnum, and it ended up being the center of controversy for the evening. Let me explain why. Four out of the five magnums came from one of Florida's premier collectors, a fanatic about provenance and storage, and we danced back and forth for months about how to get the wines up North due to the excessively hot weather. I almost flew someone down to pick it up, but that never quite materialized. As the event grew closer, this collector decided that he would hand-carry the magnums up with him to New York. This collector was a firm believer in decanting wines no matter how old, and decanting them early, and he insisted on opening the wines before he left, decanting them, putting them back in the rinsed out bottles, adding sterile marbles to the bottles to fill the levels up to the rim, so to speak, and recorking them before leaving. Now, I had heard him swear by this theory over and over again, never to experience it firsthand or have the courage to try it. He insisted that the wines would be all the better, and based on his experience as a collector and the fact that he had the bottles, I acquiesced after asking him a couple more times if he was sure. First off, let me say that the bottles were great bottles. The Mouton was corked, so nothing could be done about that, but the Margaux, Lafite and Latour were all great bottles. The Huat Brion, which was reconditioned, came from another cellar. However, all these wines were much softer than they normally would have been - not shot, not tired, but noticeably softer. The early aeration and decanting had made these wines become quite polished, and not everyone appreciated them accordingly. There were a few 'what were you thinkings' directed my way, but to be honest, even though I found the wines to be less intense than I was accustomed, I still found a lot of character and style out of the wines, although I do think they would have been better if handled like the rest of the bottles. I could see someone appreciating the softer style more, and it came down to that individual's preference, but I found out that that was definitively a minority opinion. As one

understanding collector put it, 'you live and you learn.' Thankfully, there were no death threats on my cell phone in the morning.

Back to those 1959s...I thought the 1959 Margaux had a gorgeous nose with its dust, cassis, meat, sandalwood, spice and tobacco aromas. This has always been a bit of a sleeper for the vintage, and this was the third or fourth time I have had a good experience with it. The palate was smooth, soft and supple, but I did not have much more to say about it than that (93). One could argue that every wine in this flight besides the Haut Brion could be rated with an 'A' for 'affected,' but I have decided to leave that concept alone except for one.

The 1959 Haut Brion was noticeably more intense with its classically rich and meaty nose. Intense and long in every which way, it was full of smoke, tobacco, earth and gravel. As previously mentioned, it was reconditioned, and while this magnum was still outstanding, it did not reach the heights of original bottles that I have previously had, which is often the case with reconditioned bottles (95).

The 1959 Lafite Rothschild, despite the handicap of being opened about 12 hours prior, was still the class of the flight to me. It was rich and honeyed in its cassis qualities and clearly had the best acidity of any wine in the flight. It was still big and round despite its smoother and suppler overall character, and it was indubitably a great magnum (96).

Like I said, the 1959 Mouton Rothschild was corked (DQ), but the 1959 Latour was not. It was a sexy wine but seemed more like a 1955 or 1953 in character than a 1959. This is one wine that I have had enough times to give it that 'A' (93A).

There was one flight left, not counting an '88 Yquem for dessert, and it was a trio of '88s from Guigal. The 1988 'La Mouline' was the class of the flight (what else is new?). It had a beefy, roasted, earthy and gamy nose full of t'n a. Its palate was great; rich, long and hearty with lots of game, garden and earth flavors. Long and tasty with lots of vigor on its finish, the La Mouline was still silky smooth (96).

The 1988 'La Landonne' was much more wound up yet a lot less vigorous. Smooth and supple, it was a lot less complex than the La Mouline and should have been served first in retrospect. It was still an excellent wine, but just not that exciting after the La Mouline (93).

The 1988 'La Turque' was 'all coffee,' Marc observed, and it was much more kinky in style than the previous two wines in that uniquely La Turque way. Rich, long and chunky, the bottle was outstanding, and the wine was much mightier than my pen by this point (95).

As mentioned, there was a 1988 Yquem, but I skipped dessert.

SECOND SESSION SATURDAY LUNCH AT CRU

As I wrote up in my last email, a bunch of us ended up at CRU the night before after the Le Bernadin session, and we were right back where we ended about ten hours later for lunch.

After some 1973 Dom Perignon 'Oenotheque' and some 1996 (another substitute for some tired 1964s), we began with two mini verticals of Niellon. I did not have time to take notes on the Champagne, sorry.

The 1996 Niellon Chevalier Montrachet had a razor sharp nose with some stewed corn, buttered fruit, a touch of candle wax, minerals and nice acidity. Its palate was long and balanced but had a little less 'oomph' than I expected. There were a lot of exotic white floral flavors but breadier ones as well. The other bottle was much better than the one I had, and my score reflects a combination of the two. Twelve hours later, that other bottle was singing, though, but I will get to that in a bit, so that is where the 'plus' comes into play (95+).

The 1995 Niellon Chevalier Montrachet was quite wound with flashes of anise to its mineral and acid-laden personality. Surprisingly, there was more acidity to the '95 than the '96 for these two particular bottles, and the wine was quite coiled on the palate with its stony fruit. While not as open as the 1996, it reeked of more potential (95+).

The 1990 Niellon Chevalier Montrachet had a toastier nose and had a more mature quality with its bready style. There was a slight pop of sulfur to the usual minerality. The nose was very meaty and flavorful, as was the palate with its mature and toasty flavors of corn. Its length and acidity were phenomenal, and the 1990 was in a great spot now with upside still left (96).

The 1989 Niellon Chevalier Montrachet alternated back to the anise side of things and was a lot cleaner, dominated more by its minerals and acidity in the nose. There were also toast, nut and butter behind those and a pinch of caramel. Bob found it had 'no smell,' but Rudy was loving it and found it 'true to what it is.' Rudy's complaint about Niellon and his wines in general are that he felt they are more winemaker than terroir, and he felt the 1989 was an exception. Its flavors were shy, more on the butter and hard caramel candy side. The 1989 had the longest acidity of any of the Chevaliers, but its fruit tasted past the point where it might be able to catch up. However, one could not ignore its acidity, and the wine continued to get racier and racier. The 1989 was outstanding for now and seemed like a sibling to the 1995, while the 1990 and 1996 also could be considered a pair (95+).

We switched to Batard with a 1985 Niellon Batard Montrachet. Its nose was pure yet on the shy side, and there was great balance between its minerals, toast, butter, nut and corn. All were in reserve yet there. The palate was flat out great with a lot of acidity and nice expression of mineral flavors. Its acidity lingered the longest in the belly, and the wine continued to get more exotic and floral in the nose, and meatier on the palate. It was a great bottle (96).

The 1983 Niellon Batard Montrachet was clearly the most mature and advanced wine of the flight. Its nose was honeyed, bready, stewed and with orange fruits, jasmine and white cola. Its flavors were sweet and honeyed while its structure was big and brawny. The wine was a bit clumsy although certainly expressive and tasty. A bit of a bruiser and with a stewed personality overall, the 1983 was a wine on the decline, although it was still exotic and very good at this stage (92).

The most amazing thing about the Niellons were that 12 hours later, after that other dinner at CRU which I wrote up last week, they were all singing outside of the 1983, which still held in its own way. I could not believe how fresh and alive they were, especially since there were only a few swallows of any given wine left in the bottles. I couldn't help but wonder if we should have treated these Niellons more like a red wine when serving them, and if more than one person missed their boat accordingly.

The next flight was a special one, three 1962 Burgundies in magnum, beginning with a 1962 Roumier Bonnes Mares. There was a touch of mature stew to the nose, and mature fruit to match with aromas of rose, sweet cherry, Worcestershire and a touch of sherry. Its palate was smooth and lush with kisses of earth and cedar and additional flavors of stems and band-aids. Allen picked up on some volatile acidity, Bipin loved the wine, and I thought it was excellent but a touch more mature than I would have liked (93A).

The 1962 Ponsot Clos de la Roche had the tell tale Clos de la Roche chocolate in its rich and meaty nose. Exotic and aromatic, it had a meat dripping in oil quality and a firm edge in its nose of slate, nut and chocolate blending together. Rich, long and tasty, there was just a pinch of minerals. Coffee, earth and wild herbs rounded out this complex wine (95).

The 1962 La Tache was the wine of the flight, as practice followed theory in this example. Its nose was richer, thicker and broader than the previous two, and its nose was a symphony of meat, rose garden and Worcestershire. Its palate was meaty and oily, and its acidity really stood out after some food. It was a real crowd pleaser (97).

It was Mayer's time to shine, and this year it was with a trio of 1985s. Last year's flight of 1978s was more extraordinary than words could describe, and the 1985s respectfully lived up to the challenge, although they did not equal the heights of the 1978s. The 1985 H. Mayer Echezeaux had an amazing nose full of acidic vigor and a pinch of cat's pee, slate and almost cedar. Rose and black cherry fruit lurked underneath, and the palate was long with a great tension of cedary spice to go with its cherry fruit flavors. Someone called it the 'freshest Mayer I have ever had,' but it seemed to get clumsier in the glass as more wood flavors emerged (94).

The 1985 H. Mayer Vosne Romanee 'Cros Parantoux' had a shy and shut down nose at first, slowly opening to reveal game, forest, mushroom, cedar, mahogany and plummy fruit. While its nose was smooth and satiny, its palate had the cat's pee pungency, too. Long, chalky and a bit square at first, the Cros Parantoux had excellent ceramic and slate flavors, and more citric tension and flavors came out with aeration. The wine kept

gaining in the glass and surpassed the Echezeaux. A pungent wine, it might not be for everyone, but I found it just making the outstanding grade (95).

As always, the 1985 H. Mayer Richebourg shattered the rest of the wines around it. The Richebourg was stylistically similar to both of the first two wines but had more elegance and breed. The nose had the most finesse and style by far, possessing great earth and leathery tension. The acidity was spectacular and miles ahead of the other Mayers in that regard, and its richness, weight and length in the mouth were something extra special. An intense wine, the Richebourg also had some pungent cat action, but in a Halle Berry kind of way. Meow (97). Allen had an interesting side comment about Henri Mayer. He once asked him 'Any regrets?' Mayer replied, 'Yes, that I never made Romanee Conti.' 'Nuff said.

A flight of Petrus was next, which Rudy felt was 'so tough after Burgundy.' Well, someone had to do it, and we all ended up obliging with the 1959 Petrus first. The 1959 had a chocolaty nose, oh so rich and meaty and a left turn from the earlier Burgundies with its plummy, oily, thick, rich nose. The chocolate morphed into mocha, and it subtle and underlying t'n a blended into its minerals quite well as a coconut-like exoticness emerged. The palate was rich, meaty and long with great chocolate and cedar flavors. Smooth and balanced, the 1959 was a keeper (95).

The 1955 Petrus, on the other hand, was a big disappointment for me after having a stratospheric bottle earlier in the year. This bottle had a melange of subtle wood aromas, including sandal, balsam and cedar. There was still the mocha, plum and touch of coconut found in the 1959, but the palate was a lot thinner and almost diluted with drier flavors. The other bottle was a little richer with more vim to its finish, but it was still only very good as well (90/92). (Each score was for a different bottle).

The surprise of the flight, the veritable flight stealer, was the 1952 Petrus. The '52 had great pinch in the nose and the most spine of the flight. Chocolaty, plummy and stony, it was also decadently creamy. It had a rich palate, super long and with great acidity, a plummy richness and kisses of brick and cedar. It was flat out beautiful and my favorite of the flight. Someone remarked that it did not have the concentration of the 1950, but it didn't have to (97).

The 1950 Petrus had the most exotic fruit of the flight, luscious and sweet, another version of chocolate sex. There was also gingerbread and heavy cream to its incredibly exotic nose. The palate was good but not as extraordinary as the nose indicated it could be; there were pleasant flavors of old wood and carob, but it lacked the craziness happening in the nose (93).

It was Lafleur's turn at bat, and the theme for this flight was 'on the fives,' or vintages ending in five. The 1995 Lafleur was such a baby compared to all the other wines we had had. It had plummy fruit and a counterbalance of minerals, nuts and stones. It was a pure, classic, Lafleur nose. Big, rich and long, its palate had a great expression of minerality

with lots of iron on its finish. Again classic and again a baby, I think the next time this will make the Top 100 will be for Year XXXII (95).

The 1985 Lafleur had a very shy nose at first but really opened up in the glass. Rob found it 'so exotic,' and it was meaty, rich, long and with great breed. The usual plums and chocolate were second fiddle, but Rome was still burning. There was a lot of t'n a to this wine, which had a huge finish but somehow remained balanced. There is atypically more alcohol and acidity than any other wine in Bordeaux from this vintage; come to think of it, I think this is the wine of the vintage. Rudy remarked that the 1985 'will be like the 1955.' Since I once had a near-perfect experience with a 1955, that was high praise indeed! The 1985 Lafleur remains undervalued and is a truly great wine (96+).

The 1975 Lafleur had some slight must to its nose at first but divine fruit behind it, purple with kisses of rain and blue. It was long and subtle in the nose, more so than I expected, so shy yet still nutty, grapy, musky and sexy. Its finish was massive with loads of cedar, tannins and acidity. Rudy keenly observed that 'Lafleur is already more tannic than most, so in a year like 1975, it really stands out.' He went on to site the '85 and how concentrated it was in a lighter vintage. Nuts and olives came out in its secondary profiles, and the wine was incredibly extracted and still backwards (97).

The 1955 Lafleur had a plummy, sweet and expansive nose, yet its tannins and alcohol were still in charge, more so than I expected or remembered. There was still the usual nut and chocolate with some fig added to the mix. Fleshy, rich and meaty, its palate had a touch of sweet soy and beef, but its palate was more tired than its nose with drier carob flavors. There was still flesh there, but in this particular bottle, the palate was a step behind. As it so happened, I neglected to rate this particular bottle. At a 1955 dinner that I did earlier this year and as I alluded to before, I had as good a bottle as one can have of this wine, rating it 99 points. Obviously, this bottle was not in that category.

We traveled east to the Rhone valley, where the last two flights were a head-to-head contest between the 1989 and 1990 vintages in Chateauneuf du Pape. Rayas set the tone quickly, beginning with the 1989. The 1989 Rayas had an incredible nose of sweet fruit kirsch, game, grilled meat and raisin all danced around its dessert-like, flambe-styled nose. The palate was huge and long with similar flavors and kisses of leather. Rudy grumbled that he was 'not sure if it will ever be balanced.' The wine was definitely finish heavy with a huge kick to it, but if you love rock n' roll, then put a dime in this jukebox, baby (96+).

The 1990 Rayas, reputed to be the greatest Rayas ever made, was outstanding but not as good as the 1989 to me on this day. Bob thought it was 'the best nose all day' and continued that it always reminded him of 1990 Ponsot Clos de la Roche. The nose had great structure and sweet kirsch along with jammy raspberries and strawberries, but the palate was very smooth, more polished than I wanted it to be, still decadent and with some vim, but since it did not outshow the 1989, it felt like a letdown (95).

The next pair were two Marcoux 'Vieilles Vignes,' and after having them, I must confess that I was a bit perplexed at their high ratings. The 1989 Marcoux 'V.V.' was a stark contrast to the Rayas with its wound and reserved nose. It was so spiny and alcoholic that there was barely any fruit aside from some faint fig. It was all acid, but one guest was defending it. It had length but nothing else besides that this unpleasant figgy flavor and seemed a bit artificial (87+?)

The 1990 Marcoux V.V. was considerably better, as it had more musk, nice spice, and smooth and supple fruit aromas of boysenberry, fig and rose followed by game, earth and t'n a. Its palate, though, also had this artificial edge that really bothered me, and even though it was better than the 1989, it was still closed and unyielding. I don't think it necessarily ever will open up and blossom (90+?)

It was getting to the point where word were starting to elude me, and we had four knockouts up next, two Hommages and two Celestins. I will sum up this flight in one paragraph. The 1989 'Hommage a Jacques Perrin' was extraordinary, as always. So wound and with amazing structure, the wine still managed to stay impeccably balanced. It is clearly pulling away from the 1990 (98). The 1990 'Hommage a Jacques Perrin' was no slouch but was beefier, more forward and weedier with more garden and earth characteristics. It still had a long finish and great acidity; it's just that the '89 smoked it (95). Unfortunately, those Hommages took the last wind out of my sails, and I felt inadequate to judge the Celestins. I will take some snippets of observations: 'Exactly how they should be'... 'never had one that's ready'... 'only the '90 is better than the '89.' Take them for what they're worth, and sorry for the lack of personal comments about the Celestins. Oh yeah, there was a 1975 Yquem as well, but I skipped dessert again.

THIRD SESSION SUNDAY LUNCH AT BOULEY

As good as the first two sessions were, the final session to the weekend was extraterrestrial. It was one of the most extraordinary sessions that I have ever had tasting wine.

I took some brief notes regarding the head-to-head matchup of 1959 versus 1961 Krug Collection in magnums. The 1959 won. It had more vigor and was longer and just gorgeous (96), while the 1961 was still excellent, sweeter in its fruit but with less acidity (94).

Bipin was uncharacteristically late, having told a cab driver '120th and Broadway' instead of 120 West Broadway. For those of you that know New York, that's a big difference! Fortunately, he did not get out of the cab and start to walk around, and he arrived just in time for the flight of Ramonet Montrachets. We started with a 1990 Ramonet Montrachet out of magnum. The 1990 had an amazing nose full of vigor; it was classic Ramonet all the way. The nose was full of butter, cream and sweet corn combined with the perfect toast, and a perfect minerality. It was sexxy juice. The palate was rich, long and fabulous and also smooth, tasty and classic. If anything negative could be said about the

wine, it would be that it was more ready to drink than I would have thought out of magnum. Brian liked the 1990 and found it 'crisp and clean, as it should be' (96+).

The 1989 Ramonet Montrachet was more waxy and buttery in the nose with an exotic, dry caramel quality along with honeycomb, wax and grilled white meat. The 1989 seemed more mature than it should have been, nutty and waxy on the palate, smoother and suppler and probably a touch advanced. The acidity lingered well, but I felt that my bottle was a touch cooked and did not get around to trying the other (94A).

The 1986 Ramonet Montrachet had a spiny and fresh nose that was quite vibrant and minerally. While it was racy, long and young, it was also quite tasty. Although classic, it seemed approachable, but it was still incredibly wound with a belly full of acid. Smooth and long, the nose got more spiny and continued to crackle. This bottle seemed atypical for an '86 since many '86s are quite mature by now (96).

The 1985 Ramonet Montrachet by contrast had a meatier, richer and chewier nose. In the mouth, the wine was rich, fleshy and tasty, full of white meat, corn and bread flavors. The wine became very Asian in a grilled way yet retained its length. I liked its more mature personality, but Brian was not so excited over it (94).

The 1983 Ramonet Montrachet was another intense nose full of spine and wax. It was the most pungent of the flight and very youthful. Its intensity was beautiful like an Aurora Borealis, and its acidity was the most superior of the flight (96+).

It was time for the flight of a lifetime, a flight whose three bottles cost more than double the admission price for the entire weekend: 1923, 1937 and 1945 DRC Romanee Conti. It was a flight that arguably exceeded expectations. The 1923 DRC Romanee Conti had an amazing nose that was incredibly musky and rich and about as sexy as something 82 years old could be. It was unbelievably great, '6 star wine' as Rudy would say. It had so much fruit to it still, yet it was also elegant, reserved, balanced and amazingly pure. Spice, dust, minerals and a youthful acidity all remained in the nose. Its palate was rich, long and pure, still possessing spice and vim. Delicious, smooth and round, the 1923 had a kick of cedar on its finish, and its acids held well (97).

The 1937 DRC Romanee Conti was a tale of two bottles, and even though I initially had the lesser of the two, I will start with the better of the two, which I was fortunate enough to finagle. The blue bottle was consistent with the 1923 with its rich nose full of beef, leather, spice, earth and a pinch of citric tang. Its palate was even sweeter than the '23 despite the fact that 1923 was a warmer and riper vintage. Brian remarked that 1937 was 'a tannic year,' which seemed to prove true on the palate, which was much more tannic and vigorous on its finish. Its acidity was stronger as well, and it was a stunning wine (98). I wondered if the 1934 Romanee Conti that I had the night prior would still show on the 99 point level if it was paired next to the 1937. Oh well, I guess we'll have to do a side by side soon! The context of community always plays a role in the ratings game, which is why it is good to do comparative tastings as much as you can, although the alternate argument is that greatness can get taken for granted in these settings, too, as

people nitpick more. The red bottle of '37 was still outstanding, but it was a touch musty and had older red fruits to it, along with cedar, vanilla and that classic, old RC tomato. A bit stewed and a bit corked, it was definitely an affected bottle in more ways than one but still impressive and able to overcome both handicaps, but one sip of the other bottle proved to be enough to 'fugghedaboutit.'

The 1945 DRC Romanee Conti lived up to the claim of being the 'best wine that I ever had.' 'WOW,' started my notes, 'AMAZING AGAIN!' Both the 1923 and the 1945 were warm and ripe vintages, and the 1945 even took the intensity of the tannic 1937 up a notch; there was more meat, more earth, more leather, more soy...more everything. The palate was unbelievably long, lingering like what I would imagine to be a multiple orgasm. Beefy, rich, intense and hearty, the 1945 Romanee Conti is still the best wine that I have ever had. (99+).

The Burghound got up and shared some wisdom with us, as he could not stay in his chair after this flight! Allen joked that while 'only 608 bottles of this wine were made, over 40,000 have probably been drunk.' That got quite a laugh, and he continued on that while 'La Tache comes to you and seduces you, Romanee Conti makes you come to it; it doesn't care. All (wines in this flight) are great vintages; all are pre-phyloxerra vines, and note the texture (accordingly).'

A flight of 1978 Dujacs had the dubious distinction of following up this incredible flight, but they held their own quite well. Everyone was so deliriously giddy by this point that I think a California Pinot Noir would have done the trick...NOT! The 1978 Dujac Charmes Chambertin had a great nose in its own right. Long, brooding and deep, its nose had a fabulous balance between its t'n a and its black and purple fruits. Brian called it 'singing,' and it seemed to have amazing vigor. There were tons of citric tang, depth and super long acidity. The wine was definitely backside on the palate but still great, with just a kiss of brown sugared maturity. However, the Charmes faded quickly in the glass, going from outstanding to just excellent in a short period of time. With more time, it might have dropped even further, but it was even better than my score indicates for at least twenty or thirty minutes (93).

The 1978 Dujac Echezeaux had another gorgeous nose with more black fruits, game and sauce than the Charmes. It also had beautiful earth aromas and a nice pinch to it. The palate was a bit softer with more earth, garden and game flavors. Soft, easy and beautiful, the Echezeaux was more classically 'gamy like '78,' someone remarked, while another called it 'the best Echezeaux Dujac ever made.' I think he only made one barrel if memory serves me correctly (94).

The flight kept building with the 1978 Dujac Clos St. Denis. The Clos St. Denis was almost a bridge between the first two Dujacs, though more reserved and restrained. There was nice underlying t'n a, and the wine was much more feminine in style. The nose had great earth, nut and spine (most spiny so far), but it was not about the 'oomph,' and that was just fine by me. The palate was beautifully pure; classic, restrained and long (95).

The 1978 Dujac Clos de la Roche, which was at last year's event and showed spectacularly, gave an encore performance worthy of many 'Bravos!' It had an amazing nose with great depth. Its black cherry fruit was perfectly balanced by the vigor of its cedar, earth and t'n a. Its power on the palate was only matched briefly by the Charmes, but the Clos de la Roche had a level of silk and finesse unmatched by any other wine in this flight. I think I gave this wine 98 points last year. Chalk the one less point to the Romanee Contis (97)!

The 1978 Dujac Bonnes Mares was an anti-climactic finish to the flight, although it was an excellent wine. The nose had more musk than any other Dujac, possessing a lot of sex appeal and a sweet perfume. Rich, creamy and delicately playful with its red cherry bing twinge, the palate was soft, smooth and supple, easy like Sunday morning and quite nice; just anti-climactic (93).

Did someone say Roumier? The 1993 Roumier Bonnes Mares was a gorgeous example of 1993 but also actually rich in fruit, even more so than the bottle I had four days prior at CRU with Allen at a Roumier dinner (who's in charge of scheduling??? Oops, that's me). The nose was full of rich, red, vitaminy fruit; make that a symphony of red, purple and black fruits. Vibrant, fresh and long, its nose was incredible and had secondary earth aromas. The palate was so 1993 with its wave of t'n a, cedar, leather and earth. It was still a baby, but what a baby, oh, baby...I better stop (96).

The 1988 Roumier Bonnes Mares 'Vieilles Vignes' was the only time Roumier ever crafted a Vieilles Vignes cuvee. It was another 'wow' nose, gorgeous with its sweet and taut red fruits, musk, earth, leather and light vitamins. Its nose was stunning and kept gaining. The palate had deep, deep fruit, and the vitamins shifted into second gear and took over the flavor profile. Pure, shy and with long, long acidity, the 1988 is most likely wine of the vintage (96+).

The 1985 Roumier Bonnes Mares was much gamier and had more animal to it. There was a lot of barnyard and horse with some fruit and depth underneath. The palate was long and classic with its citric flavors, vitamin tension and game. The palate was a lot better than the nose and had nice acidity, but having had this wine three times over the past month, I can safely say that it is not one of Roumier's greatest efforts and might be heading south for the winter sooner than one might expect (93).

The 1978 Roumier Bonnes Mares was beautiful. Gorgeous, classic and pure, there was great earth there. It was long and sexy (95).

The 1971 Roumier Bonnes Mares was heralded as Christophe's father's greatest vintage. Its nose was nutty, figgy and also sexy, just in a different way. I think all this great wine was getting me horny, or maybe it was&never mind. The nose was sweet and dripping with ripe plums, gamy and rich in all of the above ways. Long and tasty with great acidity, the 1971's fruit was a bit browned but still tasty and with nice earth flavors (95).

As if that weren't enough, it was time for two flights of 1945 Bordeaux. The first wine was a 1945 Gruaud Larose out of magnum. It had a classic nose with cedar, leather, tobacco, iron and lots of vigor. There were also nuts, underlying yet broad plummy fruit, chocolate kisses and nice t 'n a in the nose. The palate had flavors of cedar, old wood, black fruits and carob. The Gruaud was long and round with a nice, dusty finish (94).

The 1945 Palmer was also out of magnum and had a great nose, turning out to be my second favorite wine from 1945. Its fruit was much meatier than the Gruaud's, and it was dripping with fat and rich, black fruits. It had a 'great Margaux nose,' someone remarked, and it was nutty, chocolaty, creamy, rich and long with great spice, earth, minerals and length. The palate was rich and long with a shockingly enormous finish and huge t 'n a. There were great flavors of cedar, carob, plum and tobacco. 'So large for a Palmer,' I mused. Maybe they all need sixty years?!? Its finish was dusty, intense and lingering (97).

The magnum of 1945 La Mission Haut Brion had a much more gravelly nose but still a great pinch of cedar, lots of interior vigor, minerals, tobacco and that Graves smokiness. There was rich, caroby fruit underneath. The palate was long and gravelly, outstanding with its great structure and smooth finish. The wine was a bit on the gravelly side; there are two types of La Missions: the gravelly bottles and the rich, chocolaty and plummy ones — even for bottles from the same vintage, I swear! I much prefer the latter style, but this magnum happened to be the former (95).

The last wine of the first flight of 1945s was again out of magnum, and it was a 1945 Haut Brion. This particular magnum was very hedonistic; it was what I called 'caramel city.' Rich and luscious, I couldn't help but wonder if this magnum was reconditioned as it tasted a bit 'topped off.' It still had great balance, finish and length and was so hedonistic with its caramel and nut qualities. It was definitely outstanding, but it did not achieve the heights that the bottles we had sourced for last year's event reached (96).

This is where the next flight officially begun, and it was with a 1945 Latour, our first 1945 not served from magnum. Its nose was meaty, rich, saucy and complex. It had that smell of sweet nuts that you get from the carts on the streets of New York, and great spice to match. Its nose was incredible, and its palate beat to the same drum (96+).

The 1945 Mouton Rothschild was next, and it was very controversial. One of the bottles were slightly musty, and one of the bottles Rudy was convinced was 1974 Heitz 'Martha's Vineyard,' which would be an excellent choice if someone were to fake a 1945 Mouton. By that point in the afternoon, I didn't quite have all my senses still with me, and I wasn't sure which bottle was which anymore, but one of them was pretty f'ing good, even if it was Heitz. Hence, there was no official tasting note.

The 1945 Cheval Blanc was out of magnum, and it was a bit sterile by comparison to the other '45s. Shy and funky with some dried out flavors, I decided to (DQ) it.

The 1945 Latour a Pomerol had gorgeous fruit in its nose, full of plum, mint, caramel and candy corn. With its long acids and decadently rich Pomerol flavors, the L to the P was quite tasty and had a minerally finish (95).

We saved the best for last, and it was the 1945 Petrus. I wrote 'gorgeous' three times in the course of my notes. Its nose was exotic, chocolaty and smooth with an underlying pinch of minerals and smoke. The palate was rich and long, spicy and big with flavors of tobacco, slate and chocolate. Superlatives like 'phenomenal, classy, and unadulterated' rounded out my notes&.those and its long, long finish, that is. It was a fitting end to another magical weekend (98).

The 1945 Yquem was really good, too. I tasted that one, but no notes, sorry.

Here's to looking forward to Year III,

JK

FIN