

TOP 100 WINES OF THE CENTURY III

I'm back.

This past October I decided to schedule year three of our 'Top 100 Wines of the Century' weekend the same weekend as 'THE Cellar II' auction. I figured that there was some great potential energy for the weekend, not keeping my own personal energy in mind. The combined attractions certainly resulted in the most significant wine weekend in modern history.

Thursday night's pre-auction VIP dinner, which I have already written up, was 'Top 100' worthy as well, so this marathon of a weekend had an early start for many of us. After an exciting first session at the auction Friday afternoon, I slithered upstairs to Per Se from Café Gray for the official first session of our Top 100 weekend.

We had an auspicious beginning with a bad batch of **1976 Salon (DQ)**.

A flight of Coche-Durys hence began the festivities, beginning with the **1996 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne**. The nose was very fresh with great spice and was signature Coche all the way. Its great aromatics of white toast, kernel and sweet buttery fruit were perfectly balanced by its superb minerality on the palate. Beautiful, pretty, long and smooth, I found it to be outstanding, despite a touch of shyness in the mouth. Mark noted 'a lot of smoky, toasty Coche qualities...a little closed and needs time, at a bit of an awkward stage' **(96)**.

The **1995 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne** was similar to the '96 in its 'Coche' qualities but more forward, quite perfumed with more white floral components. Its flavors were floral as well, snow white ones that were supported by minerals. The '95 was fatter in the mouth but a hair clumsier, but not enough not to be the categorical equivalent of the 1996. Its more forward qualities, led by smoke and minerals in the mouth, made up for the fact that it had less manners than the 1996. If the 1996 was a wide receiver, then the 1995 was a linebacker. Mark found it 'fabulous' accordingly **(96)**.

The bottle of **1992 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne** was noticeably sweeter in the nose with a touch of sugar there. The nose seemed looser and not as well-knit as the previous two wines, as if it was starting to crack up a bit. There were also hints of vegetable and what I call 'alley' to it, but it still had the class of Coche as well. Sometimes even the classiest of people find themselves in the wrong part of town! I found the 1992 to be a lesser wine than the 1995 or 6 and less thrilling than previous bottles I have had of this wine in years past, which could have been the bottle or the fact that this was a wine/vintage that was better a couple/few years ago. Still smooth and satiny, the 1992 was holding onto excellence but lacked the character of the other vintages for me, although its nose was called 'spectacular and tropical' by Mark, who cited 'Chevalier character' **(93)**.

Last in this flight of four was the **1990 Coche-Dury Corton Charlemagne**. Mark found it 'a bit disappointing and lacking,' but I was enamored with its beautiful, pure, long and smooth nose. Nutty with a touch of minerals, I saw what he meant by 'lacking' when comparing to the others, but I found its style to be very balanced, elegant and pure. Dried corn and white smoke flavors prevailed in this distinguished white, which had nice minerality and hidden acidity on its finish **(95)**.

The introductions were over, and it was time for some reds. A flight of Meo Richebourgs was next, beginning with the **1993 Meo-Camuzet Richebourg**. 'Great nose,' I wrote. There was fabulous perfume, mint, spice, spine, menthol and pure Richebourg fruit behind it. Still taut and with loads of t'n a, it had 'mouth-searing acidity,' as Ray pointed out. The palate was still a baby with lots of taut tannin, edge and earth but still excellent fruit. Someone noted its 'dense black fruit and great acidity' but found it 'not expressive.' It did need more time, but I still feel that there is one way to sum up the 1993 vintage in Burgundy: 'Buy' **(96+)**.

The curse of Allen Meadows seemed to haunt the bottle of **1990 Meo-Camuzet Richebourg**. For those of you that do not know, that curse is Allen's opinion that the 1990 vintage is not as universally great as many perceive, a touch overripe with many wines starting to crack up. I am in the middle of the debate, finding that there are still many superlative 1990s; but indeed, there are many wines that are starting to fade and showing stewed qualities. Anyway, this 1990 was remarkably more forward than the 1993, exotic and a bit wild by comparison, open with its mélange of black and crushed red fruits. Oily and saucy, the 1990 also had blackboard and earth to its nose. There was even more fruit in the mouth but less balance. Its backside had good acidity but was a bit disjointed and a touch roasted in its flavors, 'roasted and overripe' to one. There were a lot of both positives and negatives in this Dr. Jekyll of a wine, but the fact that it lacked a bridge and mid-palate in the mouth did not give me the indication that this wine will improve **(92)**.

The **1985 Meo-Camuzet Richebourg** is one of the truly profound wines made in Burgundy in the last quarter-century.

This particular bottle had a shred of ullage and a touch of seepage around the capsule, so I think it was a bit affected but outstanding nonetheless. It was very gamy and stinky in the nose, 'wild horses' as Mick Jagger might say. Aromas of olive and 'espresso' (Ray) emerged in its almost Cote Rotie-like nose, and Ray admired its 'great fruit, acidity and balance.' It did come together well, and its stink blew off, but this should be a 98 or 99 point wine and was a mere (95A), hence the 'A' for 'Affected.'

It was time to get serious. A **1969 Rousseau Chambertin** was laid out before us, and everyone's attention seemed to go up a notch. It was a superlative bottle; the nose was incredibly fresh with amazing rose, earth, and a touch of typical '69 rust but also with dank and meaty fruit not so typical for '69. With a little air, a hint of maturity emerged in its fruit, but its rose and oak qualities were still oh so fresh. There were great oak flavors, citric twists and dust to this long, lingering wine. The '69 got more pungent and oaky in the glass and delivered an outstanding experience (95).

The **1966 Rousseau Chambertin** was much more seductive and sweet; pure, fragrant, rich, sweet and luscious, it had a great cherry core of fruit. It was very '66 with its seductive fruit. The palate had a similar kiss of mature fruit, as it should, along with nice oak flavors. While more delicate in the mouth, the palate was still outstanding in its own way. 'Aromatic, really pleasing persistence and length' admired Bryan (95).

The **1964 Rousseau Chambertin** was very fresh, possessing the most tannin so far in this flight, as well as garden aromas. Tobacco, rose, meat and a pinch of caramel graced my nose and palate. The 1964 had the most power and lots of acidity and was also an outstanding, fresh bottle (95).

Lastly, the **1962 Rousseau Chambertin** possessed the deepest and most complex nose. It was dripping with fruit, meaty, rich, cherry fruit, along with garden and pinches of menthol, olive and caramel. Possessing great acidity and spine, the palate was a touch drier and more citric but still very special. It was most people's favorite of the flight (97).

What a flight. Each wine showed exactly as it and the vintage should have. As Bryan summed it up, 'If you don't like this, you don't like Burgundy.'

It was time to get on the metro and head to Bordeaux. A trio of Calons Segurs were next, from an era when Calon was considered to be close to First Growth quality. The **1953 Calon Segur** was served out of magnum (M) and had a fabulous nose. Classic aromas of sweet, nutty oak permeated out of its vigorous aromatics. Its palate was rich, smooth, dusty and sturdy, long and with oak and pencil flavors. Incredibly round, it kept gaining in the glass, and Greg agreed. Bob thought it had the best nose of the flight, and this 1953 proved to be another charming '53, a vintage that has been pleasurable from the word 'go' according to those that know like Bipin (95M).

The **1947 Calon Segur** also had a gorgeous nose, more open and expressive, perhaps due to the bottle versus magnum format. It still had that same nutty feel, with more caramel as well as aromas of dust and old oak. In the mouth it had great texture and balance, both elegant and rich at the same time. Someone found it 'Pomreolesque,' and it was indeed plummy and chocolaty along those lines. The 1947 seemed much more naturally mature out of bottle than the '53 or '45 that followed it out of magnum; sometimes the youthful qualities that come with a magnum format are not necessarily better than the natural complexity that one can get out of a regular sized bottle, although Bob did find the 1947 'more two-dimensional' (96).

The **1945 Calon Segur**, as mentioned, was also out of magnum and more pungent, but 'you can tell the lineage of these wines on the nose,' Greg keenly observed. Chalkier, stonier and stonier, the '45 was the least approachable and had the biggest finish. It was much more wound up with lots of cedar; long long long and dry dry dry. Although it was the least pleasant and enjoyable wine of the flight on this night, one could see the potential for the longest evolution and another thirty or forty years of longevity easily. However, that dryness may never integrate either (94+M).

A flight of 1929 Bordeaux was next. The reputation of the 1929 vintage seems to have crashed in the eyes of many worse than the stock market that year. I strongly disagree, and this flight was a testament to that. For decades, the 1929s overshadowed the monstrously tannic and tight '28s, but once the '28s emerged from that shell, their inherent vigor seemed to win people over. However, I do not think that the best '29s have lost their seductive quality and is a vintage along the lines of 1953 that always had it and always will.

The first wine was the only to be served out of magnum, a **1929 Haut Brion**. It was a great magnum that I acquired in Europe that had a phenomenal nose. It was still dripping with cassis fruit, and the combination of its natural maturity yet incredible freshness was awe-inspiring. Mesquite, caramel, mint, tobacco, fruit, earth, gravel, old wood, old oak and some baby back ribs all graced this outstanding wine's nose and palate, although the palate had less fruit in it than the nose (95M).

The **1929 La Mission Haut Brion** was from the Doris Duke cellar and accordingly very fresh as well, possessing more

grape than tobacco, caramel, a touch of fig, smoke, cedar and gravel. Long, cedary and gravelly, the '29 was classic La Miss, and its clarity, precision and length were quite admirable (96).

The **1929 Latour** had a 'Grade A+' nose. Its walnuts, cedar and caramel twists resulted in a climax of aromatics. It was absolutely delicious with the signature, brooding Latour style, full of minerals and iron, great acidity and extraordinary balance and power (98).

The **1929 Mouton Rothschild** was a bit anti-climactic after the winegasm of the Latour, but it still had an enticing nose. I had actually had the last three wines the week before (I told you I haven't stopped tasting!!). After the Latour, however, the Mouton was a bit more two-dimensional. Simpler up front with aromas of cigar, it had a nice, round mouthfeel and was long, smooth and easy (93).

'What a flight,' I wrote. 'It is amazing how fresh these wines can still be when well stored.'

Next was the flight that I drank down to the last drop. Actually, they all were, come to think about it, but for some reason I wrote it for this flight, a flight that is about as rare as they come, a flight of pre-barrique (1976) La Moulines (bring back the foudre!) concluding with its first vintage, 1966. I guess I was saying that as good as all the other flights were, this was my favorite.

The **1971 Guigal Cote Rotie 'La Mouline'** was a wicked start to this incredible trio. Intoxicating aromas of menthol, bacon and mint graced its garden fresh nose. Rich, meaty, oily, long, balanced and with superb acidity, it had it all. What was most remarkable was its Burgundian like personality, something that is always a good thing (97).

The **1969 Guigal Cote Rotie 'La Mouline'** is a wine that I have given the elusive 99 point score to before, and it was pretty close again. I think the only reason that I gave it a point less on this evening was the context of consistent greatness on the table. I could not argue with the notion that every wine we had would be rated a point or two higher in a different setting with less wines or lesser wines around them. Anyway, the 1969's nose was meatier than the 1971's, dripping with more fruit and a pinch of coffee. It seemed so young for its age, full of exotic blueberry and caramel aromas. It came from someone who purchased it upon release, so its freshness and youthful quality were no surprise. On the palate it was quite peppery, 'chunky' as Rudy noted, with a tidal wave of enormous structure. Rob found it had 'a little bit of VA,' but make no mistake about it, this was a spectacular wine (98).

The **1966 Guigal Cote Rotie 'La Mouline'** was the grand finale to this grand flight, and again I have given this wine 99 points before and while it was spectacular as well, I rated it a step behind near perfection...as if it makes a difference when the air is that rare! Silky and gorgeous, this was Rhone Pomerol, absolutely breathtaking; hence my short notes (98+). Actually, it was because I was getting close to 'Hammeredtime.' I am sure many of you know the drill.

There was still one flight left, a rare flight of vintage Granges. Now it was officially 'Hammeredtime.' The **1971 Penfolds Grange** was 'as always' (94). The **1969 Penfolds Grange** had good texture but was a touch corked yet still thick, long, nutty and chocolaty with great tannin and black cherry cola flavors (94+?). The **1968 Penfolds Grange** was softer and 'Burgundian' as Brad noted, although it did gain in structure in the glass (93). Lastly, the **1967 Penfolds Grange** was a great ringer for a Rhone tasting as it was very Rhone-like. It gained, expanded and 'banged' (95).

I had to go. In six hours, it was time to wake up and make the doughnuts. The second session of the auction was already calling.

Well, we made more doughnuts than ever before on Saturday, and the pressure was officially over, and it was time to eat, drink and be merry, this time at Daniel on Saturday night.

We kicked off Saturday night with a **1947 Pommery Champagne** out of jeroboam, and although there was no petillance left, it was still a tasty, fully mature, wine-like experience with lots of baked bread qualities and quite solid (93).

Move over Pommery, we had a flight of DRC Montrachets to sample. The **1982 DRC Montrachet** had a great nose, nutty and full of minerals, baked earth and white fruits. Flavors of white corn and yellow fruits beautifully decorated its elegant palate, which was lighter than I expected after its nose but still delicious. 'Smooth and ready' someone observed (94).

The **1979 DRC Montrachet** had a noticeably dark color but didn't seem to be oxidized at first. It was rich, meaty, long and intense with lots of caramel, baked nuts and a rich, great mouthfeel. Its long acidity knocked the '82 out, and it was fat, round and tropical. Very exotic, some felt it was a touch affected, and I suppose with that color it was, but I still

enjoyed it a lot (95+A).

What can I say about the **1978 DRC Montrachet**? I had had one nearly a year ago with Aubert de Villaine in Paris that was almost perfection, and this came very close. Bob noted its 'sweet corn' right away, and its pure nose had incredible complexity, with layers of skin, nuts, palm, oil, musk, fruit and tropical honey. Long, smooth and pure, it was class in a glass (98).

The **1970 DRC Montrachet** also had fabulous aromatics, with that very exotic DRC Monty style. Fat and honeyed with exotic coconut and butter aromas, the wine was still firm and beautiful for a 36 year-old white. What a nose...fat, tropical, buttery and even a pinch of cocoa, this great DRC still lived up to its reputation of yesteryear (97).

One of my favorite things to compare and contrast is Musigny from the 1993 vintage. We had the four finest assembled for flight number two of the evening, beginning with a **1993 Drouhin Musigny**. The Drouhin had a creamy, dank nose that was edgy and very aromatic with black cherry, cola and stems. On the palate, the wine was smooth, soft and shy, really shut down and perplexing. Despite great aromatics, the palate was not showing me much (92).

The **1993 Mugnier Musigny** was all that and then some with its brooding, deep, long nose and this mineral, cedary, pungent edge as well as light meat, game and iron. Everything was subtle yet deep. The palate was long and had great cherry flavors, stems, minerals and ever-expanding flavors. It was both Rudy and Gorky's favorite wine of the flight (96+).

The **1993 Roumier Musigny** was up for the challenge, revealing more game and structure in its nose with great stems, spine and spice, along with this divine tea aroma. Rudy admired its 'density' on the palate. It was signature Roumier all the way, long, regal and great (96).

The **1993 Vogue Musigny V.V.** was my early on favorite in the flight because it had the most aromatic fruit complexity. It was 'the oakiest without being oaky' someone keenly observed. Rudy was not so enthralled with its 'tutti frutti' style, but Gorky liked its 'feminine' style. It went into a shell quickly and shut down, however (95).

Four Burgundies from the increasingly rare 1949 vintage were next. 1949 was long considered to be THE great old Burgundy vintage, but as of late some are starting to feel the wines are finally starting to tire.

The first wine was a **1949 Clos des Lambrays**, which looked like a reconditioned bottle. It had a nice nose, but Rudy found to be lacking in its 'licorice and volatile acidity' like a pure 1949 Lambrays. It still had spunk and spice, meat and game, but it was missing density and sweetness accordingly. I didn't find its nose lacking that so much, but the mouth was only old book flavors, soft and simple. Gorky found it 'a little roasted.' It had a 95-point nose and an 88-point palate (91).

The **1949 DRC La Tache** more than made up for the disappointing palate of the Lambrays with a stunning arsenal of aromas and flavors. 'Wow,' began my notes, 'a great La Tache.' Bob noted 'brown sugar,' Rudy its 'fat and liqueur.' It had this meaty, pungent, intense edge and was full of game, iron, plum, prune and animal. Rich, long and elegant, it still had excellent definition on its finish, and great game and soy flavors, along with a touch of brandy and 'licorice.' It was pure and a classic (96).

If there was a wine that could top the La Tache, it would be the **1949 Rousseau Chambertin**. This was another incredible bottle of Rousseau. Its aromatic complexity took it up a notch; everything was there - animal, meat, earth, leather, rose, cherry, tobacco. This was a big Chambertin in the mouth as well, with spiny, mint flavors and a long and special finish. Wow again (97+).

Unfortunately, the **1949 Vogue Musigny V.V.** was maderized, not completely, but enough where I didn't even want to bother with it after the last two wines (DQ).

After last night's fine show by the 1929 vintage, it was 1928's turn to show its merits. The mighty Bordeaux was at bat, and there was joy in Wineville on this night. I began with the **1928 Palmer**, which was classic '28 Palmer and consistent with the bottle I had the week prior. I love it when that happens. Possessing cedar and old book aromas and flavors, the Palmer was smooth, soft and seductive, 'most seductive and beautiful' according to Bipin and his favorite of the flight (96).

The **1928 Calon Segur** was 'absolutely amazing' to Bipin as well. Big, chunky, meaty and rich, the '28 was consistent with the Calons of last night. The palate had lots of dust and book flavors and got a bit oaky in the glass. It was very dry, a la the 1945 (93).

The **1928 Montrose** will probably never show as well for me as it did at that magical vertical in Paris hosted by Bipin last September, but this bottle was still outstanding. It had a big, rich, intense nose full of sauce and dripping with oil, cassis, minerals and a high-grade antique wood. The palate was similar; it seemed as if all the 1928s had this old book and cedar flavor profile. Bipin said it was 'as expected' **(95)**.

The **1928 Latour** was heads and shoulders above the rest of the flight, earning win, place and show all by itself. It had huge t 'n a with great definition and meaty, rich, brawny flavors. Walnut, mineral, earth, spice and tobacco complimented its so deep and so black fruit flavors, ones that would make the late, great James Brown proud. Bipin found it 'perfect' and summed up this great flight as having 'all textbook examples' **(98)**.

La Mission took center stage with a flight of magnums, all from the 1950s. We began with a **1959 La Mission Haut Brion**, which had a classic, gravelly nose that was still wound and young out of magnum, yet also deep and fat at the same time. This magnum was recorked in 1975 – maybe they put some of the great '75 in there! After a little air, it was dripping with cassis, tobacco and great, grapy fruit. The palate was rich, smoky and deep with great length and definition. It kept gaining and gaining in the glass **(97+M)**.

The magnum of **1955 La Mission Haut Brion** was atypical and a bit waxy. It was still meaty and long but a touch shy and stripped of its usual character. Espresso, dark chocolate and black truffle all emerged slowly but surely, and while it was still close to outstanding, it was not amongst the greater examples of this wine that I have had and probably a poor reconditioning job, as it did look reconditioned as well **(94M)**.

The magnum of **1953 La Mission Haut Brion** was a Nicolas bottle, recorked in 1985. Bob found it 'classic with its dirt and rocks in your face, but then kisses you.' I needed some water after that comment! It was true, and the '53 definitely kissed me with its plummy, grapy and cassis fruit. It also had wax and the inside of the shell nut skin. Smoke, iodine and band-aid joined the party. Smooth, soft and fully mature, it was beautiful despite the fact that it was 'lacking oomph or punch,' as Gorky observed, but that is '53. Bipin called it 'perfect claret,' and Jim admired its 'great balance and red pepper' and found it 'ready to drink' **(94M)**.

The **1952 La Mission Haut Brion** was the only magnum not reconditioned in this flight, and I know because it came from a case sourced by me in Europe, and I have already had a magnum from it before that was great. Lightning struck twice. There was excellent vigor in its nose yet still a delicate length about it. Iron, meat and intense t 'n a were balance by smooth and supple fruit. The palate was softer than the nose indicated, but it had nice length without the vigor **(95M)**.

I was pretty spent by this point, but two flights remained. Forgive the brief notes. The **1994 Vega Sicilia Unico** had great aromatics of leather and that Spanish kink, a touch of egg and great t 'n a **(95)**. The **1970 Vega Sicilia Unico** was fake. F@*\$\$. Another wine to worry about **(DQ)**. The **1968 Vega Sicilia Unico** was spectacular as usual. There was great kink to it along with meat, oil, leather and nut. It was nutty, long and superlative **(97)**.

Three more wines to go...and they were all Cuvee Cathelins. The **1998 Chave Ermitage 'Cuvee Cathelin'** was over the top, spiny and concentrated, peppery and with great acid. I am sure it will be great one of these centuries **(95+)**. The **1995 Chave Ermitage 'Cuvee Cathelin'** was less concentrated, lighter and lovely but lacking the power and depth of the 1998 **(93)**. The **1990 Chave Ermitage 'Cuvee Cathelin'** was the star of the flight, almost more Cote Rotie than Ermitage. There were loads of mint and black truffles in this heady wine **(96+)**.

Taxi, please.

Our version of a Sunday brunch was at Cru. These are a few of my favorite things. We started with some **1959 Dom Perignon 'Oenotheque.'** With all the great bottles that have been assembled over the first three years for these magical weekends, I have had the most bad luck with Champagne. The 1959 was not necessarily off, but it was disappointing. There just wasn't enough sprite and backbone there. It still had some richness and was a touch buttery but unexciting. Maybe these bottles were slightly off after all, or slightly cooked **(90?)**.

We returned to our regular programming with a flight of Raveneaus, Les Clos of course. The **1996 Raveneau Chablis 'Les Clos'** had fabulous aromatics and was so 1996 with its razor-like cleanness, lemon peel, minerality, anise, wax and dollop of butter. It was rounder on the palate than I expected and also had less vim and vigor. It was still very fine indeed and had a nice delicacy to it, but it seemed less sharp in the mouth than I would have thought for the so-called greatest vintage ever for Chablis. Someone, however, was 'excited about its long life' **(93)**.

The **1990 Raveneau Chablis 'Les Clos'** was spectacular. This vintage has always been a home run for Raveneau, and the Les Clos lived up to my previous experiences with any and all Raveneaus from this vintage. It had a very pungent nose full of anise and wet stones, brimming with citrus peel and ripe, gamy, marinated white meat. There was great

balance, great structure, great flavor, great spice and great length. Yes, it was pretty damn great (96).

The **1989 Raveneau Chablis 'Les Clos'** was no slouch, either, possessing another fabulous nose that was so forward and alive. Full of minerality and acid, its nose had great pop, depth, power and sun-dried yellow fruits. The palate meaty and nutty, still young yet seemingly more mature than the 1990 than the single year between them (95).

The **1985 Raveneau Chablis 'Les Clos'** was full of wax and more wax in the nose, pungent and laced with anise aromas. It was the most pungent of the flight so far, very pinchy in its personality. Entering a nice plateau of maturity, the 1985 had nice gamy flavors (94).

The **1983 Raveneau Chablis 'Les Clos'** was a bit of a disaster. It had a noticeably dark color, as many '83s are prone to have nowadays, and it also had aggressive, bizarre aromas with way too much spine. As Rob put it, 'it's like a dog took a shit under the bed.' It was actually well put. A bit corky and full of catbox flavors, I wasn't sure if this was the wine or the bottle, but either way I doubt I will pull the cork on this vintage of Chablis in the near future (85?).

The champ was finally here, as a foursome of young La Taches were next, all from the great decade of the 1990s. The **1999 DRC La Tache** was another 'wow' wine. Its nose was incredible as always, with so much fruit, spice and finish. Rudy found it 'so primary – still way too young,' but it was still dripping with saucy rose, cherry essence and young tannins. In the mouth, it was so fabulous, so rich, so creamy and with great spice and tannin flavors. The 1999 DRC La Tache had the best nose in a young wine (less than ten years old) that I have ever had. Rudy came around and cooed, 'it's so pure and balanced' and likened it to '99 and '29 (98).

I have always liked the **1996 DRC La Tache**, but the 1996 vintage seems to be producing more doubting Thomases as time passes by, at least for the red wines. Some feel that the wines are too screechy (too much acid) and that the fruit will never fatten out. The 1996 was indeed a stark contrast to the 1999, lean and very shut down by comparison. The wine indubitably had great acidity, and its nose also revealed a 'greenness' and 'underbrush.' There were nice, clean mineral flavors; the '96 was clearly not as concentrated as the '99 but was still a lean, mean fighting machine, and while I still found it in outstanding territory, Rudy and Rob were not willing to give it '5 star' status just yet (95).

The **1993 DRC La Tache** is the forgotten, great young vintage of La Tache. It really needed some time to open up, at first a bit herbal, very tight and structured. After some time, its density, balance and tannins took over, and its palate and acidity were enormous, even longer than the '99 although not as dense. Rose, iron and tea all reluctantly emerged in the mouth in this Frankenstein of a La Tache, a Frankenstein that graduated from Harvard, that is (97+).

The **1990 DRC La Tache** also had a brooding, deep nose with a unique, liqueur-like depth that I am sure the '99 will develop over time as well. Oily, musky, meaty and nutty, the 1990 had a concentration in its nose that was unmatched by the three previous vintages. The palate was rich, long and extraordinary; Rob noted 'powder,' but Rudy found it 'a touch stewed.' I found it to be great as did Bryan, who called it 'ripe and succulent, all the way to the finish. Powerful, sweet and enticing.' Exactly (97).

Now it was RC's turn, and we traveled in time back forty years to the 1950s, beginning with a **1959 DRC Romanee Conti**, actually the third time that I had had this wine in the previous ten days. When it rains, it pours! The 1959 was pretty consistent with the last two, perhaps a touch more advanced noted Rob (who also tasted the three different bottles with me), but not by much. It had game, iron, leather, iodine, meat, soy, old book and animal in its complex nose. Very smooth and tasty, it was very gamy and had lots of animal flavors. It kept gaining in the mouth, and its acidity really came out with a touch of food (96+).

The **1955 DRC Romanee Conti** was actually the third bottle that I have had of this wine from the very same case, the first being very good and the second being outstanding plus. Three was definitely the magic number so far in this flight! The third bottle of this wine proved outstanding plus as well; what was so fascinating about it was its light color. As Bipin noted, 'based on the color, you never thought it would be good, but it was great.' The '55 was a touch fresher than the '59 with more citric tension and great spine. It took a little more work to get this wine to come to you than the '59, but '59 has always been a vintage that is quick to show its goodies, so to speak, being the hot vintage that it is. Yes, if someone made a 'Wine Gone Wild' video, we'd see lots of '59 Burgundies; that is, if the 2003s would let anyone else get any airtime! Ok, enough of that tangent, back to the '55...Rudy noted 'nougat.' The wine was classy and complex with aromas of game, animal, meat and chocolate-covered caramel. The palate was great; long and with lovely tea, rose and menthol flavors, it was classic RC all the way and quite impressive (97).

Three did not prove to be the magic number for long, as the third wine in this flight was completely DOA. Unfortunately, the **1953 DRC Romanee Conti** was (DQ). Considering the massive amount of old and rare wines sampled this weekend, there were very few DQ's, so no one was complaining. Insert promo here.

The **1952 DRC Romanee Conti** was also affected, more a touch than a complete DOA like the '53. Its nose was on the mature side, and its palate rich, creamy and still tasty. As Bipin put it, 'this young vines RC has slight oxidation, but its structure and sweetness are extraordinary' (94A).

Rudy slipped a leftover wine from Thursday night's legendary evening, a **1959 Roumier Musigny**, which was as special as one would think. Gamy with a touch of heat and animal, it had the stew of '59. The palate was long and round, mature and had the soft delicacy of Musigny (95).

We said our goodbyes to Burgundy with a flight of 1940s VCCs. It was a good way to numb the pain of that goodbye. The **1949 Vieux Chateau Certan** had a great, expansive nose full of olives, plum, earth and chocolate. The palate was round and rich with nice mineral flavors and definition. Rich, creamy and long with nice vim and vigor on the finish, the '49 was a classy classic, although Greg found it 'a touch astringent' (95).

The **1948 Vieux Chateau Certan** had more barnyard in the nose with this pungent anise and catbox medley. Flavors of sour cherry and 'sweat socks' were there, and while it had more finish and power than the '49, there was some 'good brett in this forgotten vintage, best I have ever had of it,' as Greg shared. There was great expression of t'n a, but I have had better (93A).

The **1947 Vieux Chateau Certan** also had some unusual aromas to it at first, this bad laundry smell as if it was left in the washing machine all weekend. Once that blew off, it was the wine of the flight. Plums, earth and slate finally emerged out of the washing machine and into a long, earthy and 'drier' finish. Ok, that was bad, I know. I have to amuse myself sometimes, sorry. The wine had a great mouthfeel and a long finish, and while it was the best wine of the flight, I have still had better bottles (96).

Bryan had ordered a bottle off the list of **1990 Mugnier Musigny**, wanting to reciprocate some of Rudy's generosity, and it was back to Burgundy with an amazing bottle of this wine. It was fresh for a 1990, almost '99-ish in style in that regard, thick and dripping with meaty, oily and creamy fruit. It was so rich, tasty and long that it was indubitably the best bottle of this that I have ever had. Its red cherry fruit and cola flavors still had the soft, delicate and decadent style of Musigny (96).

The fifth flight of the day was easily the most controversial of the weekend, a flight of 1921 Bordeaux. We started with a **1921 Cheval Blanc**, a Nicolas bottling, which had a 'wow' nose with incredible concentration, red fruits galore and a vanilla sundae exotic quality. Long, smooth and tasty, the wine was obviously reconditioned and a touch on the young side, but it was classic Cheval on its long finish with great wintergreen edges and rich spices. Ray thought it might be 'wine of the weekend,' and it was a candidate although I found it a shred sweet but still Cheval all the way (98).

A **1921 Lafleur** was next, the third time I have had it from the same Nicolas batch, the last time being 99 points. Encore, bravo! Again, the bottle was reconditioned, showing more freshness and youthful qualities than the average 85 year-old wine. However, it still had the meaty, oily, deep Pomerol edge and sweet, nutty fruit. The concentration in the mouth was spectacular; the wine was loaded with more iron than an ore deposit, and its tannins, grip and structure were the stuff of legends. Just moments earlier, Roger had joked that I hadn't had a 99-point wine all weekend, and I told him that it was either palate fatigue or the consistently high quality of so many wines that made it difficult for any wine to stand out on that level despite many coming very close. I guess the 1921 Lafleur came right on cue (99).

The **1921 Petrus**, also a Nicolas bottle, had something to say about that, too. It had classic Petrus aromas, soft and delicate by comparison to the Lafleur. Mocha, olive, earth, spice and garden all graced this beauty. The structure was long and fine, so defined and fabulous stylistically, near perfect. Showing more maturity but still reconditioned, this flight showed why Nicolas bottles are highly sought after and the best bet when it comes to reconditioned wines (99).

Then came the purists, led by an anonymous old schooler. These wines are too young, they are not pure, they are not true, etc. Now I am the first to consider myself in the purist camp and not the biggest fan of reconditioning in general even though there are many great reconditioned wines; more often than not wines can be stripped of many nuances and complexities found in an original bottling, or watered down a bit. However, I found these three wines to be spectacular, and I found Cheval character in the Cheval, Lafleur character in the Lafleur, and Petrus character in the Petrus. I am not sure I could ask for anything more.

Never one to be outdone, Ray pulled a **1926 Lafleur** out of his magic hat. Incredibly exotic, chunky and rich, it was long, tasty and fascinating stuff. Quel surprise (96)!

There were two more flights, beginning with a La Chapelle one. The last two flights every session seem to be where the notes start waning. I guess I'm a 'five flighter.' The **1978 Jaboulet Hermitage 'La Chapelle'** got my attention rather quickly. It was a great bottle, one that I kept smelling over and over for minutes due to its breed and high class subtlety.

It was so minty and menthol and full of olive and meat, sweet and beautiful and probably the best bottle of this that I have ever had; however, it lacked a little power and definition in the mouth. Hmmmmmm (95).

The **1966 Jaboulet Hermitage ‘La Chapelle’** also had a great nose full of menthol and t ‘n a. A touch of fig rounded out this outstanding La Chapelle, which was showing beautiful maturity (95).

The **1964 Jaboulet Hermitage ‘La Chapelle’** was a touch corked and soft and simple beyond that. It was pleasant but just not inspiring given the competition (90A).

The **1959 Jaboulet Hermitage ‘La Chapelle’** was in a perfect place, seductive and with great balance. It was a classic and super La Chapelle (95).

Finally, the **1952 Jaboulet Hermitage ‘La Chapelle’** was no slouch, either. Showing more animal and game and smoother and softer in style, it was another beauty (94).

Last but not least for this monumental weekend was a flight of Italy’s greatest wine, Monfortino, and the flight seemed to revive my note-taking skills. The **1958 G. Conterno Barolo ‘Monfortino Riserva’** had a great nose with all the classic Piedmont truffle, smoke, tar, black rose, cedar and t ‘n a. Long and spectacular with an explosive nose, it was a bit softer in the mouth but still absolutely delicious (95).

The **1952 G. Conterno Barolo ‘Monfortino Riserva,’** Roberto Conterno’s favorite vintage, was both more seductive yet even more explosive in the nose than the ’58. The rose qualities were a touch more exotic, and the palate was a lot more intense, so long and full of A++ definition and length. Its flavors were classic rose and tar, and the finish was spectacular (98).

I had decided to give the 1947 and 1945 Monfortinos one last chance, as every time I had had either, not that it was that many, they had been oxidized, so I figured storage in the ‘40s was not that great in Italy. Obviously there were other concerns at the time. When the wines came out, the colors looked more like paint thinner than red wine, but something magical was in the glass this time. ‘That’s how old Barolos become,’ advised Bipin. Ray was all over its ‘power,’ while Brian called it like ‘a Fellini movie’ due to its bizarre color. It had this honeyed, truffled cheese aroma that was intoxicating, and great, sweet caramel and carob flavors. It was different yet still delicious and kept getting better and better and better. Rudy called it ‘gamy like 1911 RC,’ and Rob also picked up on its ‘truffles.’ Both of them gave it ‘5 stars plus,’ and they are very stingy with their stars. It was a special wine, and good thing, since Rob still has the other eleven bottles from the case I sold him (96+)!

The **1945 G. Conterno Barolo ‘Monfortino Riserva’** had a similar color and qualities, with more honey and less structure (94).

That’s all folks. Year IV will be in 2008, October 24-26, 2008. Mark your calendars now!!!

JK