

Tasters test fine French wines



wine
Richard Watson

Of all the world's greatest wine-growing regions (the two Cotes, Tuscany, the Rheingau, Napa County and the Champagne region among them) none can lay claim to being the home of three of the five First Growths of Bordeaux except Pauillac.

For that reason alone it must be considered as at least one of the very finest of all. It not only claims its three Premier Crus in its Mouton, Lafite and Latour, it also has two excellent Pichon Second Growths, a Fourth and a string of esteemed Fifth Growths, some of them considered the equal of many more highly classified wines.

All of this classification system is the one established in 1855, one that is with few exceptions still in place even today some 130 years later. That is tradition!

Surrounded by St. Estephe and St. Julien, the three regions produce an abundance of some of the world's greatest red wines from the cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc grapes grown there. While other close-by regions claim their stars (St. Emilion, Chateau Ausone, Graves, Haut Brion, Pomerol, La Peste, Margaux, Chateau Margaux) only in Pauillac is the density of prestigious producers so great. This is the Home of the First Growth.

A LOCAL GROUP of 44 people, winemakers all, recently gathered to sample a cross-section of the wines of Pauillac. The selection was based not only on the strength of the wineries (chateaux) but also on different vintages. Availability also played a part in the choices, the older vintages of these wines rarely leave the private cellars in which they rest so splendidly.

Older vintages of First Growths easily cost in excess of \$100 a bottle, sometimes much more. More recent vintages can cost \$50, while recent issues of Fifth Growths rarely exceed \$20 the bottle. Clearly some judgment had to be exercised if the assembly was to sample both age and prestige.

The evening was rather a bended-knee affair. Selected for the evening were four wines representing the three First Growths of the region: 1955 and 1971 Latour, 1970 Lafite and 1975 Mouton; one of both of the Second Growths, the 1980 Pichon Lalande and the 1979 Pichon Longueville.

The 1970 Dubart-Millon-Rothschild, the only Fourth Growth from Pauillac, was served, and the rest of the wines were First Growths: 1981 Haut Bailly, 1970 Grand Puy Lacoste and 1976 Haut Bages Liberal. The wines were

drunk blind and were evaluated by the collective assembly using a 9-point scale.

The results were interesting. Tradition, price, vintages and more were there to be seen and judged. If the 1855 Classification system were to hold, the Fifth Growths should be clearly exceeded by the Firsts, all of them, and the mid-Growths should end up somewhere in the middle of the pack.

TO A GREAT extent, with two exceptions, form held. Following is a ranked listing, with mean score values for each wine:

- 1970 Lafite (7.18)
- 1976 Haut Bages (7.63)
- 1955 Latour (6.85)
- 1975 Mouton (6.78)
- 1980 Pichon Lalande (6.75)
- 1971 Latour (6.70)

- 1981 Haut Bailly (6.58)
- 1970 Puy Lacoste (6.23)
- 1979 Pichon Longueville (6.18)
- 1978 Dubart-Millon (6.00)

First comments must be on the scores themselves. On a 9-point scale and using 10 wines, it is most unusual for a last-place wine to have a mean score as high as a 6. That can easily be a winning score in some competitions. And 7.18 as a winner is almost unprecedented. The evening was clearly a tribute to Pauillac.

Only the Haut Bages and the Pichon Longueville were out of expected order, and it was amazing that the 1955 Latour fared as well as it did. Its durability and grace earned several first-place votes. It's too bad people don't age that gracefully in a like number of years.

Edna Spaulding (Sally Field) is a young widow who tries to harvest a cotton crop on the family farm in "Places in the Heart."



the movies
Dan Greenberg

1 of '84's best is up-for-7-Oscars film about farmlands

"Places in the Heart" premiered last fall and is currently playing in a number of neighborhood houses for good reason — it has seven Oscar nominations and a lot of good qualities.

Nominations include Best Picture, Director, Actress, Original Screenplay, Supporting Actress, Supporting Actor and Costume Design.

That ties "Places" for second place in the nomination sweepstakes with "The Killing Fields." First place was also a tie at 11 for "Passage to India" and "Amadeus."

It may make it difficult for balloting, but it's the viewers' good fortune that 1984 premiered so many fine films.

"Places in the Heart" stars Sally Field as Edna Spaulding, a spunky woman with two truly charming children, Frank (Yankton Hatten) and Pecos (Gennie James). Her husband is Sheriff of Wazahatchie, Texas.

THE TIME IS 1935. A drunken black youth accidentally kills Sheriff Spaulding shortly after the film opens. To the movie's credit, it deals realistically but sensitively with the implications of that situation. Southern attitudes in the '30s and Ku Klux Klan activities.

The film's realism extends to its music and decor, in fact to every facet, and quite appropriately "Places" received the Oscar nomination for Best Costume Design. The clothes, hats and hairstyles all carry distilled essence of the Depression. The cars, faces and even facial expressions (obviously that goes well beyond costume and make-up design) carry the exact flavor of the '30s.

Faced with her catastrophic early widowhood, Edna determines to keep her family and farm in spite of the quick moves of banker Albert Denby (Lane Smith) to force her sale of the property.

Almost endless complications ensue, and to the film's credit potentially soapy and maudlin melodrama is avoided. The characters are sufficiently real and restrained so that we get interested in their tribulations, which are the trials of real people who mean something. For good reason, then, the nominations for Best Director and Screenplay.

Edna's sister Margaret Lomax (Lindsay Crouse — Best Supporting Actress nominee) is married to a handsome but unfaithful fellow, Wayne (Ed Harris). Viola Kelsey (Amy Madigan) and her husband, Bud (Terry O'Quinn), are good friends of Marge and Wayne which creates tension in their relationships and an effective counterpoint to Edna Spaulding's struggle.

MEANWHILE, BACK at the farm where, even though it may not seem like it, the major action of the film is under way. Banker Denby forces his blind brother-in-law, Mr. Will (Best Supporting Actor nominee John Malkovich) on Edna as a roomer. That turns out to be one of Edna's lesser problems as she struggles to save the farm.

Her agricultural and survival inspiration come from a kindly and clever black drifter, Mose (Danny Glover), who takes on a pretty heroic stature, exceeded only by Edna. They strive to save the farm by harvesting cotton and selling it to Mr. Simmons (Jay Patterson), a pretty nasty fellow in his own right, down at the cotton gin.

All this may sound pretty trite and soapy on the surface. What saves the whole enterprise from maudlin sentimentality is the good grace, restraint and effective realism of the production.

At film's end, the director alphas from his 90 minutes of carefully constructed emotional and physical realism, but by then a fine film is under the belt, and it's hard to spoil "Places in the Heart" at that late date.

what's at the movies

AMADEUS (PG). Superb rendition of Mozart's life with Tom Hulce and F. Murray Abraham. Directed by Milos Forman.

BEVERLY HILLS COP (R). Eddie Murphy is funny, but Detroit comes off second best in this cop show.

BIZET'S CARMEN (PG). Lush, sensuous rendition of Bizet's opera. Stars Plácido Domingo and Julia Migenes-Johnson. Visually rewarding experience.

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET (Unrated but probably PG-13). Humorous and clever, as black extraterrestrial slave escapes and lands in Harlem. Marred by murky conclusion.

FANTASIA (G). Walt Disney's animated classic featuring a new digitally re-recorded Dolby stereophonic soundtrack.

FLAMINGO KID (PG-13). High school graduate's summer vacation before college. A very busy summer, with Matt Dillon, Richard Crenna and Jessica Walter.

HEAVEN HELP US (R). Rebellious students in strict Catholic High School, starring Kevin Dillon, Andrew McCarthy and Donald Sutherland.

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Wayne Lomax (Ed Harris) and Viola Kelsey (Amy Madigan), who are both married to other spouses, have an affair.