

# Sampling '82 vintage Bordeaux

This may be the only regular wine column in the world that has not yet had something to say about the 1982 vintage of Bordeaux wines. There has been as much ballyhoo, hype, price negotiating, raving, all of that, as for any vintage in many years.

Certainly, there is much upon which to comment. Since barrel samples were first tried in 1983, this has been proclaimed "the vintage of the century," "the best since '61," "magnificent," "monumental." Time seems to have tempered this initial enthusiasm only a bit and there is certain agreement that 1982 Bordeaux is a vintage to remember.

However, I have not yet written on all this because, in my isolated local tower, it has been difficult to sample many of these personally. Until recently.

Certainly the recent strong dollar has played a significant part. This vintage is relatively inexpensive if the quality is there, and it is. And one must recall that Bordeaux enthusiasts delight in declaring a "vintage of the century" every five years or so.

WHETHER THE wines are great, good or merely mediocre, they must be sold. There are always a lot of gullible Americans (estimates of the 1982 Bordeaux vintage shipped into the United States go as high as 80 percent) ready to buy futures and snatch anything up that smacks of French ambience. The 1982 and 1983 vintages were huge; the 1982 vintage must be sold first.

I have read articles upon articles on the vintage. It is truly difficult to establish any kind of firm consensus except that there is almost universal agreement that the wines are at least notable and at best they are first class.

There appear to be some regional distinctions worthy of note. The wines from Pomerol and St. Emilion, made predominantly from the Merlot grape,

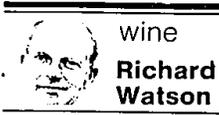
tend to be full of deep fruit and are a bit lacking in acidity. Tannin seems to be adequate to permit some aging potential. Medoc wines seem to be highly structured and big in all ways, showing the greatest acidity of all the 1982 Bordeaux. With fine aging potential, they also seem to be ready for present consumption. From Graves the reports are uniformly excellent; good balance, high alcohol combined with decent tannins and full of ripe fruit.

If there can be some valid generalizations about the vintage as a whole, they seem to focus on the following: Marvellous fruit (the grapes got fully ripe for once, no chaptalization was required); uneven acidity (sometimes a bit too light); high alcohol (for Bordeaux, enabling some to call the vintage more Californian than French); decent tannins and good aging potential yet, and this is unusual given the above, good approachability even now.

It would be pleasantly simple to repeat to you that my readings indicate there are five or six of the 1982 wines nearly everyone recommends as their favorites. It is not so. Indeed, when one goes beyond the premier crus, there seems to be very little agreement. I will mention now those names that occur more than once in my extended readings of favorite releases, based on comments by other writers and selected critics. I am not sure the list is helpful, but here it goes.

THE ISSUES from Ch. Boyd-Cantenac and Ch. Cantenac-Brown (both from Margaux), the under-\$10 Ch. Moulinet (Pomerol) and the Ch. Montrose (St. Estephe) all have received strong acclaim. Always dependable, Ch. Clerc Milon (Pauillac) is again characterized by its fine elegance.

Craig Goldwyn, esteemed editor, and a tasting panel gave platinum awards to Ch. La Lagune (Medoc), Ch. Margat (Margaux), Ch. Cheval Blanc (St. Emi-



wine  
**Richard Watson**

lion), Ch. Haut Brion (Graves) and Ch. Duhart-Milon-Rotschild (Pauillac) — pretty heady stuff. The first and last of these were also accorded Best Buy status by the panel.

Also frequently mentioned are Ch. Cos d'Estournel (St. Estephe), Ch. Brane Cantenac (Margaux) and Ch. Grand Puy Lacoste (Pauillac). The Pomerol issue of Ch. La Consolidaie was also noted a few times.

Most of the Big Guys from Bordeaux have received excellent reviews befitting their status and prices. The only exception is Ch. Ausone, but even here the evidence was equivocal.

At a recent local tasting where many

of the 1982 Bordeaux were featured, strong marks (using a most unscientific polling procedure) went to Ch. Chambert Marbuzet (St. Estephe), Ch. La Dominique (St. Emilion), Ch. Du Tertre and the Ch. Prieure Lichine.

These wines were considered well above average to excellent and well worth their cost, all in the \$12-15 price range. My personal choices were the Du Tertre and the Prieure Lichine, but take that with qualifications. I have a California-biased palate, as one must specialize in this too-abundant world of wines. It is not possible to drink every cabernet/merlot-based wine that is issued each vintage, try as I do!



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*It is truly difficult to establish any kind of firm consensus except that there is almost universal agreement that the wines are at least notable and at best they are first class.*

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