

# You get what you pay for in 1988 Bordeaux vintage

In practical terms, Bordeaux is a generic expression for the wines from the geographical areas known as the Medoc, Graves, St. Emilion and Pomerol. The Bordeaux region has 60,000 inhabitants, many of whom work the nearly 100,000 vineyard acres producing Appellation Controles (AOC) wines.

If they are not vineyard workers, Bordeaux residents live or work in one of the 7,000 chateaux, or produce wine in one of the 60 cooperatives. Many others work for one of the 300 wine negociants (shippers) located in the region.

ANNUALLY, ABOUT 500 million bottles of wine are produced in Bordeaux. A stock capacity equivalent to 1.7 billion bottles is available. Slightly more than 75 percent is red wine and slightly less than 25 percent is white wine. All totaled, the region accounts for 1/3 of the exports

of French AOC wines, but only three percent of this production is classified Grands Crus — the most talked about wines in the world.

Recently, Jim Lully of Cloverleaf Market, Michigan's largest wine retailer, conducted a tasting of 35 Bordeaux wines from the 1988 vintage principally. After tasting through all the wines, the following is our assessment.

With respect to quality, you get what you pay for in the 1988 vintage. Modestly priced wines (below \$15) from lesser-known chateaux have pleasing, but average flavors. Two of the most flavorful examples are Chateau Canon de Brem and Chateau Hortevie. Both have a solid fruit impression on the palate and in the finish.

A STEP up to the \$20 to \$25 range, reveals wines with a bigger, fuller expression and cellaring potential.



focus on wine

Eleanor and Ray Heald

The best wine in this category is the 1988 Chateau Phelan Segur. One of the largest in the Medoc region, this property as it is known today, was established in the early 19th century by Frank Phelan, who came from Ireland to settle permanently in Saint-Estephe.

Today, Thierry Gardiner is an owner of Chateau Phelan Segur. "The 1988 Phelan Segur is a classic Saint-Estephe wine with ample fruit and tannins," Gardiner remarked. "It will start to drink well in 1994 and has a 15-20 year cellaring potential."

We found the wine generous with well-balanced fruit, soft tannins and a lengthy aftertaste. It is a blend of classic Bordeaux varietals: 60 percent cabernet sauvignon, 30 percent merlot and 10 percent cabernet franc.

The 1988 Chateau Bahans Haut Brion (\$23) also competed well with higher-priced offerings. Nathaniel Johnston, owner of one of the oldest negociant houses in Bordeaux, exclusively represents this property. In the 1870s, Thomas Jefferson bought some of his wines through this negociant firm. "Bahans Haut Brion, the second label for the renowned Chateau Haut Brion, has the special cabernet sauvignon taste always attributed to Haut Brion," Johnston maintains.

IN THE upper price brackets and the better-known chateaux, the following are stellar examples: Latour (\$58), Cos D'Estournel (\$37), Figeac (\$39), Leoville Las Cases (\$47) and Palmer (\$50).

An outstanding Sauternes bottling must be mentioned. The 1987 Chateau Raymond Lafon (\$60.50) is ulti-

mate opulence. This property is adjacent to the prestigious Chateau Yquem. "Each wine produces only one glass of our wine," explains Lafon owner Jean-Pierre Meslier. "The vineyard is selectively picked four to six times each vintage to insure the best fruit. If you produce three or four glasses per vine, it's not the same quality."

### WINES SELECTIONS OF THE WEEK

A preview of wines from the 1989 Bordeaux vintage revealed the following values.

To avoid wine drinkers, red wines are synonymous with Bordeaux. The 1989 Bourais Numero 1 Blanc (\$9.50) is a white Bordeaux blend of 70 percent sauvignon blanc and 30

percent semillon with charm and personality. It's a good value for holiday entertaining as an aperitif wine or an accompaniment to fish courses.

1989 Chateau Pitray (\$7.50) shows the fruit opulence of a warmer-than-average growing season in Bordeaux. It's fruit packed and generous for current drinking at a value price.

In case you missed last week's "Bulletin Board," we're repeating that you have the opportunity to personally assess 40 Bordeaux wines from the 1989 vintage with wine critic Robert Parker at The

Bottlesnake Club, Saturday, December 7. The 6 p.m. tasting is \$70/person. The tasting followed by dinner which includes a vertical of Chateau Palmer wines is \$137. Reservations: 567-6843 secured by check only.

## new products

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Ashby's Sterling Premium Ice Cream, formerly only available through ice cream parlors and restaurants, is now available in 1/4 gallon cartons through ice cream parlors and retail stores. There are 10 flavors, including Mackinaw Island Fudge, Peach Cobbler and Turtel Sundae.

It is available locally at Quarton Market in Birmingham, Market Basket in Franklin and Sav Mor in Westland. Containing 14 percent butterfat, Ashby's Sterling Premium Ice Cream is very creamy. For the holidays, serve Ashby's French Vanilla ice cream alongside baked apple pie. Top with whipped cream and sprinkle with cinnamon.

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