



# Musings on the Vine

A Collection of Thoughts, Suggestions and Opinions about Wine

October 10, 2004  
Volume 3, No. 5



Teaching is perhaps the most gratifying exercise for me. To see pupils evolve from reserved beginning tasters into confident knowledgeable aficionados is such a rewarding outcome. Over the last year we have conducted a full series of wine appreciation classes and special tasting events. It has been enriching and informative not only to attendees (or so they tell me...), but also to me. There is a core of attendees that have been to nearly every class and event. This group started as self-proclaimed beginners and over the course of nearly a year, they have become truly masterful wine tasters. When I teach a class now and see and hear this group's comments, observations and assessments, I'm filled with happiness and pride. They're really quite an exceptional group. What has surprised me the most though, is the natural camaraderie that has formed within these classes. No hint of competitive attitude or arty pretension, just an honest passion for learning about and tasting really good wine. Another important thing that I've learned is that the Musings curriculum is a solid approach to learning about wine. Admittedly it takes commitment, but as one attendee recently said, "Thursday nights have become a regular event and a way in which we can indulge our passion for drinking wine and learn something new in the process." To this year's group of graduates I raise a glass and say thank you and congratulations on becoming some really fine wine aficionados. Here's to more tasting!

Cheers! Paul & Betsy

## Featured Region: Bordeaux



*Where does one begin to tell the story of the world's most famous wine region?*

*Well, now that I have your attention, this month we're going to try and unravel Bordeaux. Historically, Bordeaux has a long tradition of wine making that began in 1152, which coincided with Eleanor of Aquitaine's marriage to King Henry II of England. This marriage is one reason why so many French Chateaux and Negociant owners are of English origin. Bordeaux is located in southwest France along the Gironde, Garonne and Dordogne rivers. Easy access to the Atlantic has made Bordeaux an important city in France's global wine trade and is chiefly responsible for making the wines of Bordeaux so well known and sought-after. Bordeaux is at the confluence of the Dordogne and Garonne rivers, which meet to form the Gironde River that flows to the Atlantic Ocean.*

*Bordeaux is actually made up of three major areas. The area west of the Gironde River is often referred to as the "Left Bank." The area east of the Gironde and North of the Dordogne rivers is often referred to as the "Right Bank." The zone between the Garonne and Dordogne rivers is called Entre-Deux-Mers, or "Between Two Seas." The Left Bank is home to the Medoc, and Haut-Medoc in the North and Graves in the South. Within the Haut-Medoc are the famous communes of Saint-Estephe, Pauillac, Saint-Julien, Listrac, Moulis and Margaux. Graves contains the Pessac-Leognan, as well as the famous dessert wine areas of Barsac and Sauternes. The Right Bank contains the famous communes of Pomerol, Saint-Emilion and Fronsac, along with the lesser areas of the Cotes de Blaye and Cotes de Bourg. Entre-Deux-Mers is a very large area that is of little fame, producing large quantities of affordable, simple wines.*

*Bordeaux is all about red wine. Of its nearly 300,000 acres of vineyards, 85% percent are planted to red varieties and in total, nearly 75% of all wine produced in Bordeaux is red. The principal red varieties used in Bordeaux are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. While all of these grapes are grown in varying quantities throughout Bordeaux, certain areas are better suited for some and not others. For instance, the Left Bank, with its well drained, gravelly, sandy and pebbly soil tends to excel with Cabernet Sauvignon. The Right Bank, with its less well-*

drained clay and chalk soil is much better suited to Merlot. The principal white varieties used in Bordeaux are Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Muscadelle. Most white wine production in Bordeaux is limited to Graves and Entre-Deux-Mers, although Entre-Deux-Mers also produces a large crop of Merlot-based wines.

Most wine drinkers tend to gravitate towards Bordeaux because of a few certain factors. One is notoriety; two is quality; and three is collectibility.

Bordeaux has close to 60 Appellations, which may sound like a lot until you compare it with Burgundy that has close to 700. Appellations are delimited zones, governed by French wine laws that ensure the origin and composition of the products produced within those zones. For example, the area called the Haut-Medoc, and its communes like Pauillac is each an Appellation.

In addition to the Appellation system in Bordeaux, one is also faced with a relatively complex set of classifications. The oldest and most famous of these classifications is the Classification of 1855. This classification is a list of 87 chateaus (60 Medoc, 1 Graves, 26 Sauternes/Barsac), then considered to be the best wines in the Medoc, ordered by price. The classification consists of 5 "quality tiers" called crus or "growths." This is where the terms first growth, second growth, etc. originated. The Classification of 1855 has remained unchanged, except for one modification in 1973 when Mouton-Rothchilds was elevated from second to first growth. Because this classification has never been changed, despite the fact that many of the originally classified chateau have long since changed ownership, as well as property holdings, is but one reason why the ranking is of little value in ensuring quality. Despite this shortcoming, the Classification of 1855 was a stroke of marketing brilliance, virtually ensuring the successful futures of those lucky 87 chateaus.

Not to be outdone though, other wine makers in Bordeaux have undertaken other classifications over the years in the hopes of creating similar marketing appeal. The Classification of 1932 saw the addition of Cru Bourgeois wines. Although these wines are considered "non-classified," for the 419 properties listed as of 1978, the classification does earn these wines a certain degree of cachet. The Classifications of 1953 & 1959 added 16 Graves properties, each earning the right to include the term Cru Classé to their label. Not to be excluded, Saint-Emilion created the Classification of 1954. This classification ranks 68 properties according to quality. There are two quality levels, one comprised of 55 properties labeled Grand Cru Classé and one comprised of 13 properties labeled Premiere Grand Cru Classé. Confused yet? I know I am.

So how is the average wine consumer supposed to deal with Bordeaux? Well, unless you have a trust fund or its equivalent in disposable income, your best bet is to look for "second label" and "non-classified" wines from outstanding vintages. A "second label" is usually produced by a classified property to take advantage of over-production that doesn't quite measure up to the "first label" quality standard. Most of the higher-tier wineries listed




---

***"The spirit of wine  
sang in my glass, and I  
listened with love to his  
sonorous music, his  
flushed and  
magnificent song."***

***- William Ernest  
Henley***

in the Classification of 1855 all have second labels (see the Réserve de Comtesse in the following list.) “Non-classified” wines are exactly that, wines that are not found on any of the supposed “quality” rankings, but in excellent vintages still produce really great wine. Another trick is to look for good quality vintages that follow sensational vintages. For instance, the wines in the 1983 vintage, a very decent vintage that followed the highly publicized 1982 vintage, were a comparative bargain in Bordeaux. The same was true for 1971, 1986, 1990, 1996 and 2001.

In the end, there is little to deny Bordeaux its heralded spot in wine’s history. Always controversial and usually very expensive, Bordeaux remains the standard against which all other wines (at least those based on Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) are judged.

The following are a few wines from Bordeaux that I thought were worth mentioning because they are of exceptional quality and value. They are also generally available (this group came from Martignetti’s in Brighton, Massachusetts). These wines prove the point that great wine from a great region and vintage doesn’t have to be expensive.

Once again, a select group of Musings supporters took place in a group tasting of these wines. I’ve indicated favorites of the group. A new item for Musings reviews, please note that I’ve also included alcohol percentage levels for these wines.

*“His guests were to be served a rather good six-dollar wine; his glass was to be filled from a bottle of Chateaux Margaux wrapped in a towel.”*

*– Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein*

### **2002 Chateau Menaut, Graves, 12.5% (\$9.99/bottle)**

A favorite of the group. Fresh, minerally nose with lemongrass, kiwi and light floral notes. Medium-bodied with high acidity, firm and clean. Well balanced with fine structure – a real gem. Lovely palate of lemon, apple and traces of grass. Moderate length with a crisp, refreshing aftertaste. Drinking well now, and should hold for at least another 1 to 2 years. Superb value.



### **2000 Chateau LaGrange Les Tours, Bordeaux Supérieur, 12.5% (\$9.99/bottle)**

Ripe, aromatic nose with olive, mint, eucalyptus and mineral notes. Aromas of earthy clay, saddle leather and dried herbs also permeate the nose. Medium-bodied with moderate-to-high acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance with a dark fruit core: roasted game, baker’s chocolate and mocha settle on the palate. Moderate length with a tight finish. Persistent roasted quality on the aftertaste. Needs time to open up; perhaps another 3 to 4 years. Great value.

*“If you could make some wine like Claret, to drink on summer evenings in an about! For really 'tis so fine. It fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness, then goes down cool and feverless; then you do not feel it quarreling with your liver, no, 'tis rather a peacemaker, and lies as quiet as it did in the grape.”*

*- John Keats*



### **2000 Chateau Jouanin, “Cuvée Prestige,” Côtes de Castillon, 13% (\$10.99/bottle)**

*Tight nose with faint hints of cocoa, vanilla and cherry – a little “hot” on the sinus. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Closed palate, smoky with a slightly astringent taste – cedar with tart, sour cherry fruit. With time in the glass, the underlying fruit becomes more evident. Good balance. Moderate length with a closed finish. Needs time, perhaps another 2 to 3 years. Good value.*

### **2000 Chateau De Chastelet, Premières Côtes de Bordeaux, 13% (\$10.99/bottle)**

*Wet stone and mineral predominate the nose. Hints of vanilla, cedar and black cherry cut through an almost “musty” odor – not flawed. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance with dried fruit, dried herbs, allspice and black pepper on the palate. Moderate length with a persistent rustic-style finish. Drinking well now and should hold for another 1 to 2 years. Good value.*

### **2000 Chateau Thébot, Bordeaux, 13% (\$12.99/bottle)**

*A favorite of the tasting group. Ripe, black cherry nose with earthy, herbal and black pepper notes. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and firm, tough tannin. Well balanced with a dense, black cherry palate with tart, sourball hints. Overall a real winner. Moderate length with cocoa dust on the aftertaste. Charming. Needs time, perhaps another 4 to 5 years. Superb value.*

### **2000 Chateau Martinat, Côtes de Bourg, 12.5% (\$15.99/bottle)**

*A favorite of the tasting group. Tight, sweet nose loaded with mineral, vanilla and cherry aromas. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, dry tannin. Well balanced with sour cherry, dark chocolate, tobacco leaf and light floral hints. Very smooth with a long finish and persistent cocoa hints on the aftertaste. Drinking well, but will improve over the next 5 to 7 years. Superb value.*

### **2000 Chateau Segonzac, “Vieilles Vigne,” Cru Bourgeois, Premières Côtes de Blaye, 13.5% (\$15.99/bottle)**

*Barnyard, rustic nose with a slight cabbage patch aroma. Briny. With time the funkiness blows off to reveal pretty floral and cherry fruit notes. Medium-bodied with moderate-to-high acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance with dried fruit and sour cherry on the palate. Saddle leather, tobacco leaf and chocolate notes. Strange and not for everyone. Moderate length with persistent leather and dried fruit on the aftertaste. Drinking well now.*



**2000 Chateau Teyssier, Montagne Saint-Emilion, 13% (\$18.99/bottle)**

Bright, cherry aromas with vanilla and sweet cream hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, firm tannin. Well balanced with cherry fruit, allspice and cedar on the palate. Moderate length with a hint of burnt caramel on the aftertaste. Needs time, perhaps 5 to 7 years or more. Excellent value.

**2000 Baron de Boutisse, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru, 12.5% (\$20.99/bottle)**

A favorite of the tasting group. Lively nose with cherry, menthol and resin hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, firm tannin. Good balance with a chewy, dark fruit core and eucalyptus and dried herb notes. Moderate length with persistent mint aftertaste. Should improve over the next 3 to 5 years. Good value – but, stylistically, not for everyone.



**2000 Chateau Lalande-Borie, Saint-Julien, 13% (\$26.99/bottle)**

A favorite of the tasting group. Lovely nose with sweet, cherry aromas and hints of vanilla cream, leather, tobacco and cocoa. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, firm tannin. Well balanced with a dense, dark fruit core. Great complexity with unfolding layers of flavor. Long finish with a deep, black currant aftertaste. Wonderful. Should improve for at least another 10 years or more. Superb value given its aging potential.

**2000 Réserve de la Comtesse (2nd Label of Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande) Pauillac, 12.5% (\$34.99/bottle)**

A favorite of the tasting group. Massive, powerful nose with dense chocolate and black cherry aromas and hints of wet stone and gravel. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Well balanced with loads of fruit – black currant, cherry and plum. Delicious chocolate hints with saddle leather and roasted game notes. Simply wonderful. Long finish with nice complex aftertaste. A perfect example of how nice a second label can be in a superb vintage. Needs time, perhaps 10 years or more. Great value given its potential.

**2001 Chateau Liot, Sauternes, 13% (\$19.99/bottle 375ml)**

Lively nose with honey, caramel and lilac aromas. Medium-bodied with moderate-to-high acidity. Well balanced with delicious, creamy sweetness that is cut beautifully by the acidity. Long finish with nice butterscotch and honey aftertaste. Young and should improve for another 7 to 10 years. Superb value.

---

*“The plain fact is that wine has character. It is not a dead matter, like a motorcar, but a live thing like a human being or a page of fine prose.”*

*- Clifton Fadiman*

# Notable Potables: The Reds

## **2001 Jan Kris “Estate Select” Syrah, Paso Robles, California (\$12.99/bottle)**

*Tight nose with vanilla, cherry and fresh loam hints. Medium-bodied with low-to-moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance, well extracted with high alcohol. Jammy, black cherry palate loaded with gobs of fresh fruit. Long, complex finish with persistent cherry and cocoa on the aftertaste and vanilla, cedar hints. Should improve with 2 to 4 years in bottle. Excellent value.*

## **2001 Carredueñas “Tinto Roble”, Cigale, Spain (\$9.99/bottle)**

*Earthy nose with cherry, vanilla and anise hints. Some floral and spice qualities evolve over time. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, firm tannin. Good balance with a sweet fruit core. The wine is juicy with black cherry, black pepper and allspice notes. Moderate length with a fresh, lively aftertaste filled with fruit and spice. Overall, very likeable. Drinking well now, but should improve with another 1 to 2 years in bottle. Excellent value.*

## **2003 Le Lucat, Bordeaux, France (\$7.99/bottle)**

*Ripe nose with earthy, mineral and eucalyptus notes. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance with a nice core of dark fruit flavors - cherry, currant and blackberry hints. Easy drinking. Moderate length with persistent black cherry and mineral notes on the aftertaste. Drinking well now and should improve for another 3 to 5 years - not for long-term aging. Superb value.*

## **2003 Ca’ Rugate “Rio Albo”, Valpolicella, Italy (\$11.99/bottle)**

*Pretty cherry nose with nice earthy, floral hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance with a ripe, berry core of fruit. Very pretty and very drinkable. Moderate length with persistent cherry notes on the aftertaste. Slightly rustic - typically Italian. Drinking well now and should hold for another 2 to 3 years. Excellent value.*




---

*The following wines are a few “notable potables” that I’ve tried over the last few months. They’re from different countries, some are red and some are white, but they all left a distinct, favorable impression on me.*

# Notable Potables: The Whites




---

**“In water one sees  
one's own face, but in  
wine one beholds the  
heart of another.”**

**- French Proven**

## **2002 Domaine Vacheron, Sancerre, France (\$22.99/bottle)**

*Ripe, minerally nose with grassy, lemon rind and floral notes. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and great structure. Citrus fruit palate with a very pronounced wet stone/gravel flavor. Highly traditional, crisp and clean. Well balanced with a pretty, elegant finish. Drinking well now and should hold for another 2 to 3 years. Somewhat expensive, but nice.*

## **2002 Fifth Leg, Western Australia (\$13.99/bottle)**

*Blend: 54% Semillon; 36% Sauvignon Blanc; 10% Chardonnay*

*Pretty nose with loads of flint and limestone notes. Medium-bodied with moderate-to-high acidity. Good balance with pretty peach, honey and kiwi on the palate. Moderate length with a simple, clean aftertaste. Drinking well now, will not improve. Good value.*

## **2002 Jean Rijckaert “Les Sarres” Chardonnay, Cotes du Jura, France (\$15.99/bottle)**

*Rich, minerally nose with grassy and flinty notes. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and excellent structure. Green apples, apricots and lemon grass on the palate, quite pleasant. Tart and refreshing. Moderate length with a persistent lemony aftertaste. Drinking well now and should improve for another 1 to 2 years. Not your average Chardonnay - much more interesting and a very good value.*

## **NV Louis Bouillot “Perle de Vigne – Grande Reserve” Sparkling Chardonnay, Cremant de Burgundy, France (\$11.99/bottle)**

*Frothy, yeasty aromas - toast notes with citrus hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity. Good balance, crisp, lively with lemony flavors. Somewhat aggressive bubbles. Moderate length with persistent yeasty aftertaste. Drinking well now and should develop greater complexity with some more bottle age. The aggressive bubbles certainly give it sufficient staying power. Superb value.*

# Desert Island Selections:

## ***NV Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé, Champagne, France (\$74.99/bottle)***

*Rosé Champagne exemplifies romance and this gem from one of my favorite producers lives up to all expectations. A beautiful copper and rose-petal hue teases the eye and the full, vibrant nose belies the wine's overall delicacy. Soft floral aromas with cherry, vanilla and yeasty notes. Full-bodied with moderate-to-high acidity – superb structure. A ripe palate with hints of berry and peach fruit wrapped with toasty, butterscotch complexity. Excellent balance with a seemingly endless finish. Soft with unfolding layers of fruit, flowers, perfume and toffee on the aftertaste. Crisp and clean – will certainly stand the test of time – should improve nicely with at least 5 to 7 years of bottle age. Expensive, but demonstrates why Champagne is the king of sparkling wines.*

*Recent statistics indicate that wine is made in all fifty states in the US. While I'm sure quality and appeal must vary widely in states never thought capable of producing wine, the state known more for potatoes than grapes has produced a couple of real winners. These may be tough to find around here, but they are definitely worth the trouble of searching.*

## ***2002 Hells Canyon "Deer Slayer" Syrah, Falcons Fall Vineyard, Idaho, US (\$21.99/bottle)***

*Western Conservation Series; 1065 cases made*

*Ripe, pretty nose with hints of black pepper, blackberry and truffle oil. Fresh fruit aromas with nice floral touches. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and firm, somewhat tough tannin. Well balanced, although a little rough and young. Chewy fruit core with chocolate, plum and spice notes. Long finish with lovely cassis and anise on the aftertaste. Needs time, should improve over the next 3 to 5 years. Great value.*




---

*You know the game where you pretend that you are stranded alone on a desert island for the rest of your life and you only get to take along a few certain things? Well, the following are what I'm calling my "desert island" selections. Wines that I just couldn't (or rather wouldn't) live without.*



## **2001 Hells Canyon “Seven Devils Red,” Idaho, US (\$22.99/bottle)**

*Western Conservation Series; 986 cases made  
Composition: 53% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 17% Cabernet Franc*

*Fresh cherry nose with soft mint, briar and vanilla hints. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and firm, dry tannin - crisp and smooth. Good balance with black cherry, tar and cedar notes. Youthful and a little rough. Moderate length with black currant, black pepper and plum on the aftertaste. Very nice overall, should improve over the next 3 to 5 years. Good value.*



*“Apart from its elusive bouquet and complex aroma, a great wine presents to the eye joy of colour, and through the sense of touch, flatters the palate and throat, not only with a freshening sense of coolness and grateful feeling of satisfaction...but with the incomparable softness of its velvety texture.”*

*- H. Warner Allen*



**Paul J. Malagrifa, CSW, CWE**  
**Certified Wine Educator**  
**[Paul\\_Malagrifa@MusingsOnTheVine.com](mailto:Paul_Malagrifa@MusingsOnTheVine.com)**

