

A Dream Comes True - Tasting the First Growths!

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How would you like to consume what is considered the best wines in the world? Imagine the pleasure of sitting down with a group of like-minded wine enthusiasts to drink a flight of 1st Growth Bordeaux.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND

It was almost 3 years ago that our group (of 10) got together to share our common interest in learning more about wine. We decided to get together for a structured quarterly wine tasting and contribute dues of \$20.00 per person per month. Further, it was determined that we would not spend over ½ the quarterly income on any one tasting. We agreed our mutual goal was to fund a tasting of the best wines in the world! Also determined was we would meet in our members houses with an occasional dinner and tasting in a restaurant (as long as they didn't charge us too much for corkage!)

One of our greatest debates along the way was what to name our group? As you can imagine, a few glasses of wine always enhances one's point of view and everyone wanted their idea to be the one! After a great deal of discussion – and quite a few laughs – we mutually agreed on WEWE and OUI. (West End Wine Enthusiasts and Oenophiles Under the Influence).

THE BIG DAY ARRIVES

In January 2000 we finally had enough money to realize our goal. The approximate cost for the following seven wines was \$2500.00. One of our members suggested we choose wines with a 99 or 100 rating, which should showcase the best attributes of the particular winery.

On that extraordinary evening, each member had in front of him or her a sheet listing all of the wines to be tasted and the University of California @ Davis wine wheel. The wine wheel helps a taster verbalize the scents/flavors (s)he is encountering. Each member also armed themselves with a ½ dozen of their best (and biggest) wineglasses. To eliminate the concern that those poured first would get more than those poured last, a 2-ounce measuring beaker was used. It also left a little wine in the bottom of each decanted carafe for those who wanted to sample more of their favorite at the end of the evening.

Before the tasting started, the author of this article shared the history of the various vineyards, their specific soil composition and geographical location, the annual production, secondary labels – if applicable, the types and percentage of grapes used for the vintage and the tasting notes from Robert Parker, Jr. and/or Wine Spectator. Also discussed were the merits of the Classification of 1855.

The second most interesting highlight of the evening was, even though we had the characteristics of each wine and the tasting notes from the above mentioned publications, our group collectively found more flavors and scents than the experts put in their article(s)!

Following is a condensation of our tasting notes:

1982 Château Cheval-Blanc

Color: Dark Garnet with a brown tinge and white corona

Bouquet: Mocha chocolate, lemon, BUTTERSCOTCH, burnt sugar that changed to caramel

Taste: Orange, milk chocolate, licorice, smoke and pink grapefruit

Other Comments: Died after 1 ½ hours

1982 Château Latour

Color: Opaque purple

Bouquet: Carmel, smoky, honeysuckle, violets, cherries, cinnamon, barnyard/leather

Taste: Sour cherries, beef tartar, anise, slate

Other Comments: long, long, long finish

1982 Château Lafite Rothschild

Color: Garnet approaching purple

Bouquet: Vanilla, red raspberry, jammy berries, lead/slate

Taste: Anise, oranges, Tannic, cinnamon, lead/slate, coffee later

Other Comments: Chalky

1986 Château Mouton-Rothschild

Color: Deep purple/black

Bouquet: Pepper, tobacco, soft strawberry, coffee, cedar

Taste: Strawberry, Granny Smith apples, tight violets and big cassis

Other Comments: Color clings to side of glass!

1989 Château Haut-Brion

Color: Deep purple

Bouquet: Young cherries, raspberry, grassy, slate
Taste: Cedar, cherries, red licorice, hot chocolate
Other Comments: Chalky finish

1996 Château Margaux

Color: Dark purple
Bouquet: Cinnamon, baker's chocolate, licorice, cedar
Taste: Bell pepper, Raspberry & blackberry, toffee

1988 Chateau d'Yquem

Color: Golden straw
Bouquet: Apricots honey
Taste: Honey, vanilla, pineapple
Other Comments: Long finish

The favorite wine of the evening by majority vote was the 1982 Chateau Latour. It is interesting to note the 1982 Chateau Cheval Blanc received the majority of votes from the female members - perhaps this was attributable to the softness imparted by the cabernet franc & merlot?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Before sharing what our next big tasting will be, some of the events leading up to this tasting were:

Pinot noirs from Oregon, Burgundy and South Africa
Red Côtes-du-Rhône
Vertical of Caymus ('85, '87, '88, '89, '92 and '94
White Burgundy
Zinfandel
Australian Reds
The Big Italian Reds

Now with our efforts dedicated to replenishing our bank account, we'll probably set our sights on an evening in Burgundy - possibly in the company of the 4 ½ acres that comprise the Domain de La Romanée-Conti.

Speaking personally, I know the West End Wine Enthusiasts hope you can enjoy yourselves as much as we have (and currently are!) and I'd be remiss in not saying the most enjoyable portion of the evening was sharing great wine with a great group of people!

In vino Veritas,

Alan E. Achatz

A closing thought, “ I think it is a great error to consider a heavy tax on wines as a tax on luxury. On the contrary, it is a tax on the health of our citizens.” Thomas Jefferson