



A mammoth tasting

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Evidence of Malta's healthy wine scene are the many small, private wine clubs that are being set up. I know of at least 10 groups of wine enthusiasts who meet occasionally to taste, discuss and drink wines, mostly in the comfort of their homes. Among them there is the Bordeaux Wine Club where a group of avid collectors meet sporadically, to enjoy the great wines of Bordeaux.

I often am invited to their sessions, but the most recent was the best one of all – it was built around a mammoth tasting of some of the region's most renowned wines, all over 10 years of age.

The service of wines did not follow any particular order so I am going to list the wines according to age. The baby of the evening was an off bottle of Cheval Blanc 1996. Although even in the best of cases, the Cheval from this vintage rarely excites, this bottle was particularly bad. It had a weird, dusty and chemical nose, totally lacking the fruit, spice and velvety structure that so adorns this estate. Disappointing.

From the 1995 vintage we had two wines – a Pauillac and a St Emilion. Mouton Rothschild showed its perfect balance and charm – full mouth with ripe and very fine tannins, still in a youthful state with a long life ahead of it. Angelus on the other hand was quite developed. As a result of the heavy extraction and concentration that has typified the wines of this estate since the mid 1980s, the wine is now slightly unbalanced with burnt, caramel flavours dominating at the expense of fruit and freshness.

One of the most consistently top performing wines in Bordeaux is without a doubt Margaux's Chateau Palmer. The 1990 is making for great drinking wine. It has a mature, animal nose (maybe a touch of Brett) with smoky, earthy undertone. Full and complex on the palette, it is well layered and textured, fine and smooth tannins. It is great food wine.

I had the pleasure of tasting Petrus 88 on a number of occasions but was slightly disappointed by the bottle we opened on the evening. Lightly coloured, minty and spiry nose, a bit burnt on the palate. Not the Petrus I know. As the provenance of the bottle has a mixed history with French, English and American 'sejours' I suspect that at some point in its life the wine was badly handled.

The classical year of 1986 was represented by the great, but relatively overlooked estate of La Mission Haut Brion in Pessac – Leognan. Still firm and richly coloured, to begin with it was a bit austere with very tight tannins but opened up nicely in glass gaining a mineral complexity as time wore on. It had a chewy mouth feel and will easily handle another 10 years in bottle. One of my favourite

Bordeaux vintages of the 1980s is 1985. In Saint Emilion most 1985s are now drinking beautifully, with the lesser wines on their way out. On the left bank most of the top wines are still full of life as exemplified on the evening by Leoville Barton.

Having been decanted for two hours the wine was still closed when poured in the glasses but soon opened up giving us the mesmerising earthy bouquet that is so typical of St Julien and in particular this Leoville. Wonderful dark fruit enhanced by tobacco and a smoky hint, it was one of the best wines of the evening.

Another great year, 1970, was represented by Françoise de Wilde's popular St Emilion estate, Chateau Ripeau. Now fully mature with an orange/red colour, it had a mineral and earthy nose. The preserved cherry fruit was livened up by a good acidic structure. The tannins are completely smoothed out and it has a nice sweetish long finish. Going back to the Medoc, the Ch Cantemerle 1969 is showing the problems that the estate was facing at the period, accentuated by the uneven ripening of grapes during the summer of 1969. It was very light and cloudy orangey colour with brownish tints. It was tart and acidic – totally dead.

The Ch La Conseillante 1949 was absolutely superb. Considered as one of the top vintages ever produced by this famous Pomerol estate, this wine is very rare and nearly impossible to find, even at international auctions. Lucky to acquire, we were also fortunate to know the exact provenance of the bottle.

It was given to a collector in England in the late 1960s by Mr Nicholas, the owner of the estate, where it spent the last 40 years and brought to Malta late last year.

Never reconditioned the bottle had 'ullage' to the upper shoulder, which is always risky. Removing the capsule worsened our hopes as the cork had a very mouldy smell and had formed a shallow hole in the centre. Encouraged by the cork resistance to the screw and the eventual noise of the air suction still in the bottle we soon realised that we were in for a treat. Slowly decanted, we waited with anticipation for an hour or so before pouring. As usual with great wines of this age, it had a constantly changing bouquet and flavour.

Sweet coffee giving way to truffle. Wet soil one second, dried figs the other, spicy leather to iron minerality. It was full flavoured, big bodied, long lasting – both in the mouth and in the decanter. In truth no words can do justice except to say that it was pure magic.

At the end of the evening I suggested that the six people present for the tasting write down their favourite three wines of the session. La Conseillante, Leoville Barton and Palmer were by far the most popular.

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the people have VOTED!

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radio listening by broadcasting station

| Period: | Oct-Dec 2007 |
|--------------------|--------------|
| BAY RADIO | 15.5% |
| One Radio | 15.3% |
| Calypso | 10.0% |
| RTK | 9.4% |
| Radju Malta | 7.5% |
| Magic Radio | 7.2% |
| Radju Marija | 7.1% |
| Radio 101 | 6.7% |
| Smash Radio | 6.7% |
| Capital Radio | 4.7% |
| Community Stations | 3.1% |
| XFM Radio | 2.8% |
| Campus FM | 2.0% |
| Foreign Stations | 1.1% |
| Radju Parlament | 0.9% |

most listened to radio station amongst three age groups

| Age Groups: | 12-14 | 15-24 | 25-29 |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| BAY RADIO | 46.2% | 57.0% | 33.3% |

