

Wines

Bordeaux 1995 revisited



Michael Tabone

After the previous four vintages, 1995 brought back to Bordeaux good growing conditions and the return to a healthy *primeur* campaign (tasting wine while it is still in the barrel) in the following spring. The growing season started early after a mild winter with plenty of rainfall. Bud break was good, as was the flowering. The summer was warm and dry. The picking of the Merlot started relatively early on September 11, but rain arrived on the 13th and lasted for five days.

Most vineyards halted the harvest and resumed it after the rains, which were followed by an incredibly hot Indian summer. At the spring tastings the vintage was hailed as a Merlot year and therefore a right bank year, but after periodic tastings over the past 10 years I suggest that some vineyards in Margaux and Graves made fantastic wines. A debate is still going on as to whether the subsequent excellent vintage of 1996 produced better wines and, if so, where.

On a whole I do not think 1995 will go down in history as one of the greatest vintages in Bordeaux but there are certainly some good wines around, as proven at a recent tasting organised by the Bordeaux Wine Club in Malta.

The wines were all served in flights of two with one left and one right bank. The St Julien 2nd

Growth Ducru Beaucaillou has a big body, still holding on to its tannic structure, with a lovely ripe acidity. It outshone a regular favourite of mine, Ch Magdaleine from St Emilion, which tasted light and diluted.

The second flight was made up of the hugely successful La Mission Haut Brion from Pessac Leognan and the now first growth from St Emilion, Troplong Mondot. La Mission was clearly in a class of its own. Elegant and fine, with an unmistakable aroma of mocha and eucalyptus. Unfortunately, the Troplong was an off-bottle. It had a nice truffle and porcini nose but tasted bitter and rather disgusting.

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From Pauillac, 5th Growth Chateau Grand Puy Lacoste has classic blackcurrant flavours, medium-bodied, elegant and refined. The clear favourite in this lot was L’Evangile. This estate belongs to the Rothschilds of Lafite, and alongside Gazin, has in recent years offered some of the best value for money wine in Pomerol.

The 1995 is now at a very drinkable stage. It has a developed bouquet that is beginning to hint at gamey, earthy flavours. Tannins are sweet and spicy and well-integrated. It has a lovely, soft but long finish.

With a high percentage of Merlot, Ch Palmer from Margaux showed well. It had lovely red fruits but appeared a bit dull, probably because of low acidity, compared with the opulent Ch Angelus from



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St Emilion. I have to admit I was impressed with the latter wine, especially since the last two bottles I tasted of the same vintage tasted burnt and overdone, probably due to bad storage. Angelus was fresh, ripe and nearly sweet, but with an amazing texture and lively, polished tannins. It had a rich but smooth finish.

To finish there were three Bordeaux icons. The first two showed why, at this level, the region is able to muster the respect of all wine connoisseurs in the world. I have to say I found it difficult to show a preference for either Ch Margaux or Ch Cheval Blanc. Although different in style and breed, the two wines,

which were decanted around four hours before tasting time, evolved hugely in the glass, and were they showing their respective typicity only after about half-an-hour.

Margaux opened up into a smoky, fleshy, rich, jammy but fine, delicious wine. Equally luscious was the Cheval. Always mesmerising with a spicy nose, delicate richness and the telltale fine grained texture and velvety tannins.

The biggest disappointment of the evening was the ridiculously expensive Le Pin from Pomerol. This wine came to fame in the past 20 years or so with big, massive, super-ripe, oaky wines, and sometimes dangerously low

acidity levels achieving great reports in *en primeur* tastings. The wine was also an inspiration for the so-called ‘garage wines’, most of which have now moved closer to traditional forms of wine-making.

Anyway, back to Le Pin 95. The wine started off with a rich, mind-blowing nose which quickly changed to sweet-and-sour flavours. The sort of thing you get in a bad Chinese restaurant. Palate was charmless, which died pretty soon in the glass.

Quickly forgotten when a half-bottle of Don PX 1979 (Montilla – Morilles – Spain) was served as dessert.

Australia suffering from wine glut



Australia was producing too much wine from as far back as 2002, but only in a significant way since 2005.

Australian winegrowers have been forced to let their grapes wither on the vine and halt production due to damaging levels of over-supply in the sector, a leading industry body said.

The country needs to lose 20 per cent of its vineyards to counter the glut, which, coupled with a strong Australian dollar, has left the industry facing its worst crisis in decades, the Winemakers’ Federation of Australia said.

“The over-supply is in the order of magnitude of about 20 per cent of the industry,” chief executive Stephen Strachan told AFP.

Strachan said the glut, which is estimated to exceed 100 million cases, had forced vineyards, many of which are not viable businesses, to adapt.

He said there was evidence of significant numbers of vineyards giving up growing vines. “There has also been evidence of a number of vineyards that aren’t being watered,” he said.

Strachan said it would take years to turn around the situation, which, if production is not halted, would see the amount of unwanted wine more than double within three years.

“What we’re saying is that if your vineyard is not viable now, then don’t anticipate that things are going to turn around quickly,” he said.

Australia was producing too much wine from as far back as 2002, but only in a significant way since 2005, he said, adding that the long-running drought across much of the country had not helped the problem.

While the rise of the Australian dollar has been a major factor, cutting about 30 per cent from the country’s international competitiveness in recent years, there were simply too many winemakers, he said.

“A lot of people have come into this industry but not everyone gets it right,” he said.

“There are a lot of producers who sought to produce high-end wine and who are producing good quality wine but not necessarily high-end. A lot of people are aiming for that top end but not everyone gets there.”

Australia’s wine exports amount to some \$2.8 billion dollars (US\$2.5 billion) each year, with the US and Britain the dominant markets. (AFP)