



IN REVIEW:

The Fine Wine Experience "Vintage Pairs" Blind Tasting Reviews in 2019

20th February 2019 | 25th April 2019 | 16th October 2019 | 4th December 2019

© Alexnadria Rae Cabbage

IN REVIEW: "Vintage Pairs" Blind Tasting on 20th February 2019



Jacques Selosse – Sous Le Mont NV & Ambonnay Le Bout du Clos NV

Jacques Selosse – Sous Le Mont NV: Disgorgement date: 25 Jan 2012

Ambonnay Le Bout du Clos NV: Disgorgement date: 15 March 2013

12.5% abv for both

This pair was one of the toughest of the evening. For some, it even came across as potentially being Chablis. Nearly everyone thought the predominant grape in each was Chardonnay, and everyone thought it was vintage Champagne as opposed to non-vintage.

Anselme Selosse is unique in his approach to making Champagne adopting practices that are quite a step away from the norm like only using indigenous yeast for the fermentations, no malolactic fermentation, only bâtonnage, minimizing the use of SO₂, fermentation and ageing in wood barrels (with less than 20% new), leaving wines on their fine lees for extended periods of time, and keeping the dosage at a minimum.

For this pair, we tasted two of Selosse's single parcel Champagnes both of which are made primarily from Pinot Noir. He started making his single parcel range for Champagne in 2010. You can buy all six together in a collection he calls, "Lieux-dits", and the production on these wines is quite small.

With this pair we were able to compare the vineyard 'Sous Le Mont' from Mareuil-sur-Aÿ with 'Le Bout du Clos' from Ambonnay. 'Sous Le Mont' is an east-facing premier cru vineyard in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ located in the Vallée de la Marne of Champagne, and it's made up of 100% Pinot Noir. It's known for being the lightest Pinot Noir based Champagne in Selosse's lieux-dits range. By contrast, 'Le Bout du Clos' is known for its power, depth and structure as described by Antonio Galloni in his review of this wine in October 2012 for www.robertparker.com. This single parcel Champagne is made from 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Chardonnay.

From this pair, we learned that we rarely taste such that we are comparing the various vineyard sites in Champagne. Most of us do Champagne tastings and dinners where we are comparing vintages, vintage Champagne to non-vintage Champagne, or late disgorged to original cork.

At the end of the evening, I asked everyone to vote for their favourite wine. In this pair, the first wine, Jacques Selosse – Sous Le Mont NV, received three votes for favourite wine of the night. The second Champagne, Le Bout du Clos NV, was the second favourite wine of the night with five votes.

Domaine Jean-François Ganevat Côtes du Jura 'Cuvée Florine' 2014 & 'Les Vignes de Mon Père' 2006, both from magnum

Our second pair came from the Jura, a region most had never heard of or had a wine from, so this made the pair the most challenging one of the night. The Jura is a region in eastern France located between Burgundy and Switzerland. Jean-François Ganevat trained with Jean-Marc Morey in Chassagne-Montrachet before returning to his family's domaine in the Jura in 1998 to take over from his father. His style is a departure from the strong oxidative character found in many wines of the Jura. Like Selosse, Jean-François follows a low sulphur regimen (just a touch of sulphur at bottling), and to protect against problems during transport and oxidation of his wines he does extended lees contact.

We tried two very different wines from Jean-François in this pair and both from magnum. The first is a cuvée made from 100% Chardonnay from vines planted in 1996 and grown on limestone soil. It's named Florine after Jean-François' daughter and is from the youngest vines on his estate. The wine is from the cool and vibrant 2014 vintage. For this wine, some of you detected tropical notes which reminded you of the New World. It's a concentrated wine with golden delicious and green apple notes with a zippy lemony acidity and a minerally thread. The wine reminds me of Chablis from a warm vintage like 2005.

Then, the second wine comes from the warm vintage of 2006 and is 100% Savagnin. These vines were planted in 1930 and are grown in soils made up of schist and marl. For this wine, many of you felt it reminded you of Chenin Blanc, so when we started discussing region many thought the Loire Valley. This wine was fuller on the palate and showed mature and developed aromas and flavours including baked apple and pear with a bit of earthy, mushroomy notes. Of the two wines, this one was the favourite of most. These wines received no votes for favourite wine of the night.

Domaine Rossignol Cornu et Fils Volnay 1er Cru 'Les Robardelles' 2012 & 2008

This pair is from the family of one of the newest additions to the Fine Wine Experience Team, Florian Rossignol. As most of you know, he hails from Volnay, and his family's domaine is Rossignol Cornu et Fils. Several of you have asked about his family's wines, so I thought it would be fun to add them in our Vintage Pairs.

The 1er Cru vineyard of 'Les Robardelles' isn't well known, but it is well located and has a strong history. It's situated just a few metres from 'Les Santenots-du-Milieu' (on the other side of the road that separates Meursault and Volnay) to the south, and 'En Caillerets' is just metres from touching its northwest corner. The soil in the Rossignol Cornu 1er Cru 'Les Robardelles' vineyard is made up of clay and limestone. It's a combination of two parcels one where the vines are 22 years of age and one where the vines are over 60 years of age.

As we tasted through these two wines, what you mentioned first was the colour of the wines as the 2008 is already beginning to show its age and has become more garnet. The 2012 was bright ruby in colour with red berry and red cherry aromas and flavours as well as notes of cranberry. It also contained aromas of thyme and was medium bodied with the tannins well integrated and leading through to a savoury finish. The 2012 received two votes for favourite wine of the night.

The 2008 displayed some dried fruit aromas and flavours with more cherry notes rather than berry qualities and a hint of mint combined with earthy forest floor and a medium weight with moderate tannins. This wine received three votes for favourite wine of the night.

Domaine Arnaud Lambert Cabernet Franc 2015 'Montée des Roches' & 'Clos Tue-Loup'

Next up, we journeyed to the Loire Valley and tried two Cabernet Francs from the same producer, Domaine Arnaud Lambert, and same vintage, 2015, just from two different vineyard sites - Saint Cyr en Bourg and Brézé. Arnaud's father, Yves, founded Domaine Saint-Just in 1996, and it's located in Saumur in the Loire Valley. Arnaud started working with his father in 2005 after earning his viticulture and oenology degree. In 2009, they also became managers of Château Brézé. They make cuvées from both terroirs - Saint Cyr en Bourg and Brézé - which are approximately 20 hectares each. Sadly, Arnaud's father passed away in 2011, so Arnaud directs everything now.

The cuvée 'Montée des Roches' comes from Saint Cyr en Bourg which are the vineyards located at Domaine Saint-Just. Since 2017, both the cuvées from Saint Cyr en Bourg and Brézé are under the Domaine Arnaud Lambert label. The *terroir* of Saint Cyr en Bourg is east-facing with soil that is mostly clay with silt and sand on Turonian Superior limestone bedrock. Average age of these vines is 35 years old.

For the cuvée 'Clos du Tue-Loup', the vines were planted in 1995, and the vineyard comprises 2 hectares in the famous Brézé estate. Its soil is made up of sand and limestone. The limestone soil here is quite special as there is a significant portion of tuffeau (a porous, chalky limestone). That soil along with the relatively high elevation promote a refined and minerally Cabernet Franc.

As we tasted through this pair, a few of you felt ripeness to the fruit which lead you to the New World. A few others thought Bordeaux because you detected a green bell pepper note in the wines. It seemed that the warmth of the 2015 vintage in the Loire Valley fooled everyone a bit as it's a vintage where we find Cabernet Franc getting fully ripe while still maintaining its acidity but not having the green notes we often associate with classic Cabernet Franc from the Loire. The 'Montée des Roches' displayed aromas of thyme, red and dark cherry and red raspberry with a minerally quality and elegance in the wine. This wine received no votes for favourite wine of the night. The 'Clos du Tue-Loup' was firmer and more structured with herbal notes of sage and thyme on the nose and subtle earthy aromas of mushroom and forest floor combined with dark cherry and dark berry fruit. This wine received one vote for favourite wine of the night.

Marchesi Antinori Solaia 2006 & 2001

Finally, we tasted from magnum my favourite Super Tuscan Solaia and continued with the Cabernet Franc theme. This wine is comprised of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Sangiovese. Solaia is a 20-hectare vineyard located on Antinori's famed Tignanello estate in the heart of the Chianti Classico region in Italy. It's situated on the hillsides of the Greve and Pesa river valleys. The soil is made up of 'alberese' (hard limestone) and 'galestro' (flaky calcareous clay) rock.

This pair was the easiest to work through as right away most of you spotted the Sangiovese and Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon in the blend and you knew it was from a warm region in the Old World. The confusion came with the vintage as both wines being from magnum presented more youthful than they actually are. Both wines were double decanted at 6 p.m.

The 2006 showed aromas of thyme and rosemary with red and dark cherry fruit that was fresh and lively combined with aromas and flavours of tomatoes. Its tannins were fine and granular leading through to a lasting medium plus weight finish. This wine received one vote for favourite wine of the night.

The 2001 displayed more red cherry notes both fresh and dried with more vibrancy to the fruit and lift on the palate and also contained tomatoey notes leading through to a minerally finish. The warmer characteristics of the 2006 vintage offered a pleasant contrast to the cooler qualities found in the fruit in 2001. The Solaia 2001 received the most votes for favourite wine of the night with six votes



IN REVIEW: "Vintage Pairs" Blind Tasting on 25th April 2019



Philipponnat 'Clos de Goisses' & Dom Pérignon 2004

We had such good fun tasting the Champagne from Jacques Selosse, and it seemed that Champagne is something we rarely taste blind, so I decided to include another Champagne pair in this round of "Vintage Pairs". However, this time I wanted us to be able to focus on different styles, so I chose 2004 Philipponnat Champagne 'Clos de Goisses' and 2004 Moët & Chandon – Champagne Dom Pérignon' to compare.

The Philipponnat 'Clos des Goisses', is a walled vineyard of 5.5 hectares on a 45 degree incline. It's the warmest *terroir* in the region with chalky soils and facing south, receiving sunlight from sunrise to sunset with no shade.

The 2004 'Clos des Goisses' is a blend of 65% Pinot Noir and 35% Chardonnay. Harvest took place on the 28th September. The wine is partially vinified in wooden barrels (50%), and there is no malolactic fermentation. Then, the wine is aged for approximately ten years in their cellar. It receives very low dosage at just 4.25g/litre.

The 2004 harvest at Dom Pérignon began on the 24th of September, and the blend was 53% Pinot Noir and 47% Chardonnay. Since 1990, the Chef de Cave has been Richard Geoffroy, and this year Vincent Chaperon, who has worked with Mr. Geoffroy for thirteen harvests, took over.

At Dom Pérignon, they use stainless steel tanks for the primary fermentation. During the pressing they use sulphites to kill off the wild indigenous yeast and use two different house cultured yeast strains instead, one for the primary fermentation and one for the secondary fermentation. The wine goes through malolactic fermentation with the aid of commercial yeast.

Then, the wine is aged on its lees in the bottle for a minimum of seven years. After riddling, disgorgement, and the yeast is removed, the wine is stored for another six months before being released.

These two Champagnes are a sharp contrast to one another in terms of the way they are made and these differences came through when we tasted them. We had a few people who correctly guessed that the second wine in the pair was 2004 Dom Pérignon, but the 2004 Philipponnat 'Clos de Goisses' was much more difficult.

The 'Clos de Goisses' displayed more vibrancy on the palate with flavours of crunchy fuji apples, pears, lime acidity combined with aromas of brioche and an underpinning of minerality. The 2004 DP showed a much richer and rounder expression of Champagne with toasty aromas, notes of hazelnuts and flavours of sweet spices like nutmeg and clove combined with baked apples and lemon curd.

At the end of the evening, I asked everyone to vote for their two favourite wines. In this pair, the first wine, 2004 Philipponnat 'Clos de Goisses' received no votes for favourite wine of the night. By contrast, the 2004 Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon received

eleven votes for favourite wine of the night and was the overall favourite – it was the only wine served from magnum and many felt that made all the difference.

2016 Bâtard-Montrachet Grand Cru: Domaine Bachelet-Monnot & Château de la Maltroye

This pair of Bâtard-Montrachets offered a greater challenge for the group. In the end, someone did guess the wines as being Bâtard-Montrachet, but the producer and vintage were difficult with some guessing the vintage at 2008 or 2014. We opened both of these wines at 4 p.m. and put them in a decanter to breathe for an hour. Then, we poured them back in the bottle, and they were served at 6:35 p.m. just prior to the start of the tasting.

Domaine Bachelet-Monnot was founded in 2005 by brothers Marc and Alex Bachelet. The wine is made from just over twenty hectares of vineyards that are a mix of family owned vines and long-term leased vineyards. Their grandfather was a *vigneron* and created Domaine Bernard Bachelet et Fils in Chassagne-Montrachet. Their father also made wine at this domaine. In the vineyards, no herbicides are used. For the winemaking, they use approximately 25% new oak with 50% new oak for the grands crus and red Maranges. Marc and Alex age the wine for twelve months before racking it and putting it into tank for another six to eight months of aging on its lees before bottling. For the Bâtard-Montrachet, they only make three barrels or 75 cases. This Chardonnay comes from a third of an acre (0.13 hectares) of vines that were planted in 1997.

Château de la Maltroye is located in Chassagne-Montrachet. Jean-Pierre Cornut revitalized this estate when he took over from his father in 1995 installing high tech equipment to control the temperature of the wines during production as well as changing the training method of the vines to reduce yields and promote concentration and quality. The white wine undergoes malolactic fermentation and is kept on its lees in cask. It sees twelve months of ageing in 100% new oak barrels before light filtration and bottling. The Bâtard comes from a small parcel that was planted in 1937, and only two barrels are made each vintage.

This pair allowed us to compare two different expressions of Bâtard from the 2016 vintage. The Domaine Bachelet-Monnot Bâtard was vibrant and lively with aromas of lemon and lime citrus, green and golden delicious apple and crunchy orchard fruits with a hint of savoury herbs like sage. It was medium plus in body. And for me, the wine had quite a bit of minerality for Bâtard. This wine received one vote for favourite wine of the night.

The Château de la Maltroye Bâtard was a deeper lemon colour, so more medium lemon as opposed to the light lemon colour of the Bachelet-Monnot and showed aromas of vanilla, cinnamon and nutmeg with bosc pear, ripe apple and toasty notes with lemon citrus flavours. The texture was rounder and more akin to what I associate with Bâtard. This wine received five votes for favourite wine of the night.

Château Magdelaine 2009 & 1989

Over the past five years, Château Magdelaine has become one of my favourite wines from Bordeaux. It's a shame that I only discovered the wine after they stopped making it in 2011. Thus, I wanted us to have the opportunity to try these two wines that are twenty years apart. This pair was the most challenging of the night as most people were not familiar with this estate.

Since 1952, Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix has been the owner of Château Magdelaine. In fact, it was the first estate they purchased. The Moueix family decided to stop production with the 2011 vintage and use the grapes here as part of Bélair-Monange, another estate they own in St.-Émilion. The size of Château Magdelaine is just under eleven hectares and the blend is 90% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Franc. The estate is located on the limestone plateau and hillsides around the walled town of St.-Émilion. One of the most noted properties located in the area known as the "Côtes" is Château Ausone. The chalky, limestone soils of the area here create a wine with lively acidity. Wine writer, John Gilman, describes Château Magdelaine *'as very similarly structured to the top red Burgundies of Domaine Joseph Drouhin, which can often hide their inherent depth and intensity when young behind beautiful structures.'* A View From the Cellar, *'Château Magdelaine Another Lost Classic in St.-Émilion'*. He further explains in this article that a percentage of stems are used during the fermentation which help with the wine's longevity and likely make it a wine that is austere in its youth and needs time.

In this pair many thought the 2009 Château Magdelaine was from the New World. The 2009 conveyed the ripeness of the vintage

and what many might characterize as a style shift that we saw happening in Bordeaux with the 2000 vintage. We started finding wines from Bordeaux being more approachable in their youth. The 2009 Château Magdelaine showed aromas of vanilla, liquorice, ripe cassis, blackberries and blueberries, and the tannins were silky and integrated (the bottle was double decanted at 4 p.m. and poured at 6:30 p.m.). It was intense and concentrated being full-bodied with a long length. It received five votes for favourite wine of the night.

The 1989 was one of my favourite wines of the night. It showed aromas of old leather, dried and fresh red and dark cherries, cassis, thyme and conveyed a minerally quality. The tannins were fine-grained and balanced the fruit and acidity providing a sturdy structure and lasting finish. This wine was classic claret in the glass and offered a sharp contrast to the ripeness and power of the 2009 (The 1989 was opened and double decanted at 5 p.m. and poured at 6:30 p.m.). It received three votes for favourite wine of the night.

Dunn Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon 1996 & 1990

Dunn Vineyards is likely my favourite Cabernet Sauvignon producer from California. I've seen it mistaken for Bordeaux when tasted blind, so I thought it would be fun to see how we would fair with this pair. And, on Thursday we all thought these two wines from Dunn were from the Old World.

Randy Dunn started out working for Charlie Wagner as the first oenologist at Caymus and later went on to create Dunn in 1979. He has always put farming first in his winemaking, and he put Howell Mountain on the map, even ensuring that it be recognized as a sub-AVA in Napa. The Cabernets from Dunn require lots of ageing, so in that respect I suppose they remind me a bit of Bordeaux. Howell Mountain is unique in Napa as the area is still sunny when the fog rolls in and cooler during the day too. The result is Cabernet Sauvignon grapes that are smaller producing a deeper-coloured wine with higher tannins. In general, the wines from Howell Mountain are massive and ageworthy, and the wines of Dunn also exhibit this quality as we saw on Thursday night.

The 1990 vintage in Napa saw heavy rains in the spring that reduced the crop 20-30%. Then, June and July saw a warm summer that continued through the fall. The drought like conditions and low yield produced Cabernet that is intense and rich with high tannins.

Then, the 1996 vintage saw an unusually warm winter with lots of rain followed by a normal spring. In May cool weather combined with rain showers caused issues during flowering and fruit set. These conditions resulted in berry shatter and a reduced crop. Summer was warm with several heat spikes that ripened the grapes quickly. A cooling trend came in September allowing the grape flavours to catch up to the sugar levels. The wines produced in Howell Mountain were some of the best of the vintage, and 1996 turned out better than expected upon its release. The 1996 vintage was a smaller harvest and provides a bit cooler expression of Cabernet Sauvignon with livelier acidity, more restraint and medium tannins.



The 1996 Dunn Howell Mountain showed aromas of red and dark cherries, cassis, tobacco and eucalyptus, and a little brett. The tannins were medium leading through to medium plus body. It received seven votes for favourite wine of the night.

The 1990 exhibited notes of old leather, fresh and dried dark cherries, cassis, and dried tobacco notes. Even though both the 1990 and 1996 were double decanted at 5 p.m. and poured at 6:30 p.m. the tannins of the 1990 were still medium in character. I was surprised by their intensity reflecting the conditions of mother nature in the vintage. This wine received six votes for favourite wine of the night.

2015 Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné: Crozes-Hermitage 'Domaine Thalabert' & Hermitage 'La Maison Bleue'

Finally, we moved to the Northern Rhône, and more specifically to Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné who are most famous for their Hermitage 'La Chapelle' which we featured at a dinner at Amuse Bouche in late January. The first wine in this pair is a wine they make in Crozes-Hermitage, and the vineyard is called Domaine de Thalabert. It's the first vineyard that was purchased by Paul Jaboulet in 1834 and is the oldest vineyard in the appellation. The vines are 60-80 years old. These vines grow on pebbly terraces, and these pebbles store heat during the day that they release at night. The wine is aged in French oak barrels, 20% of which are new.

Hermitage 'La Maison Bleue' comes from the Rocoules section of the Hermitage Hill. The soil here has a higher percentage of silica as opposed to Bessards and Le Méal that have poorer granite and limestone soils. The Bessards and Le Méal vineyards are the primary sources for Hermitage 'La Chapelle'. By contrast this wine offers a softer, more approachable expression of Hermitage. The wine is made from 40-60+ year old vines. It's aged in French oak barrels, 20% of which are new.

Several people right away guessed this pair as being from the Northern Rhône and from 2015. The tougher challenge here was uncovering the AOC, wine name and producer. The Crozes-Hermitage 'Domaine Thalabert' showed aromas of violets, black olive, and brambly flavours of blackberries, dark raspberries, and other wild berries. The tannins were still quite present and showed the youthfulness of the wine leading through to a medium plus body. It received one vote for favourite wine of the night.

The Hermitage 'La Maison Bleue' displayed aromas of white pepper, liquorice, dark raspberry, dark cherry and blackberry. The tannins were medium plus with a full-bodied finish. It's an intense and concentrated wine that will benefit from more time in the cellar. The wine received one vote for favourite wine of the night.



IN REVIEW: “Vintage Pairs” Blind Tasting on 16th October 2019



Champagne Krug – ‘Grand Cuvée’ Edition 166 & 164

Edition 166 (Krug ID 217016)

Edition 164 (Krug ID 216016)

One of the first blind tastings I attended when I moved to Hong Kong was all Champagne. I find it quite challenging to taste Champagne blind, so I love tackling the topic. I’m fascinated by Krug ‘Grand Cuvée’ and have wanted to do a tasting of the editions side by side for a while, so decided it would make for an enlightening discussion as part of our “Vintage Pairs” this round.

The inspiration for Krug ‘Grand Cuvée’ came from Joseph Krug who wanted to create an outstanding Champagne every year regardless of changes in climate or grape growing conditions. It’s a blend of more than 120 wines from ten or more different years. In 2011, Krug started labelling their ‘Grand Cuvée’ to identify the base wine used in this multi-vintage Champagne by providing a code that could be entered into the Krug website to generate information about the bottle of Champagne. Then, in 2016, they began identifying the base wine in the ‘Grand Cuvée’ by including an edition number on the front of each bottle. And there is also a Krug ID on the back of each bottle to enable the purchaser to read specific information about their bottle of Krug.

For the ‘Grand Cuvée’ Edition 166 that we tasted, there are 140 wines in the blend from thirteen different years with the oldest being from 1996 and the youngest from 2010. The blend is 45% Pinot Noir, 39% Chardonnay and 16% Pinot Meunier. It spent at least seven years in the cellar at Krug and received its cork in the spring of 2017. The base wine for Edition 166 is the 2010 which was a challenging vintage because of the many climate changes and the fact that the year ended with cool conditions. To counterbalance the lack of freshness shown in the Chardonnay from 2010, Krug used Pinot Meunier as well as 42% of young reserve wines especially from vintages such as 2000 and 2006.

For the ‘Grand Cuvée’ Edition 164 that we tasted, there are 127 wines in the blend from eleven different years with the oldest being from 1990 and the youngest from 2008. The blend of the wine is 48% Pinot Noir, 35% Chardonnay and 17% Pinot Meunier. It spent at least eight years in the cellar at Krug and received its cork in the spring of 2016. The base wine is the 2008 which ended up being a stellar vintage for Champagne.

Initially, when the 2008 grape growing time began there was concern that the grapes wouldn’t reach full maturity as there were cool conditions in the spring and summer. A severe bout of hail in the Pinot Meunier vineyards were also of concern. However, the year turned around in September, and the final result was an outstanding vintage.

Upon tasting, Edition 166 was more giving; it showed toasty brioche aromas, notes of nutmeg spice mixed with apple and pear flavours with underlying lemony acidity. The Champagne was round, rich and full-bodied.

By contrast, Edition 164 showed brighter, livelier fruit and purity and precision came through while still showing depth and

concentration. Flavours of white peach and apple, zesty citrus and refined mousse came through on the palate leaving a lingering finish and inviting another glass.

At the end of the evening, I asked everyone to vote for their two favourite wines of the night. Edition 166 received two votes for top two favourite wines of the night while Edition 164 received six votes. Edition 164 came in second as the overall favourite wine of the night.

Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rouge 2009 & 1989

The region of Châteauneuf du Pape is one of my favourites, and I was lucky to have learned about it through one of the greatest collections in the world for these wines that of Park B. Smith at his now closed restaurant, Veritas, in New York City. Château de Beaucastel is unique in Châteauneuf-du-Pape as it's one of the oldest estates in the region (it dates back to 1549), and it uses all of the thirteen allowable grapes for this area. They are the following: Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Cinsault, Vaccarese, Counoise, Terret Noir, Muscardin, Clairette, Picpoul, Picardan, Bourboulenc and Roussane. While Grenache is king in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Mourvèdre is featured prominently in the blend of Beaucastel. It has high quality Mourvèdre in its vineyards some of which came from cuttings from vines of Domaine Tempier in Bandol. Mourvèdre brings a savoury, animal like quality to the wines of Beaucastel. The blend is usually 30% Grenache, 30% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah, 10% Counoise, 5% Cinsault and 5% other varieties.

In terms of vineyard practices, Beaucastel was also one of the first estates in the region to start farming organically; they began these practices in 1950 and by 1974, they were using biodynamic farming practices.

The 2009 vintage in Châteauneuf-du-Pape was a warm and dry year where the grapes experienced good ripening with cool temperatures at night enabling the grapes to retain acidity. Thus, the resulting wines have pure fruit expression and rounded tannins. Some reviewers compare the 2009 vintage to 2007 with 2009 having more acidity and freshness.

The 1989 vintage was of such strong quality in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, especially for Mourvèdre, that the Perrin family decided to create a new cuvée, Hommage à Jacques Perrin. It's quite unique because of its high concentration of Mourvèdre in the blend. The blend for this wine varies from year to year, but it is usually the following: 60% Mourvèdre, 20% old vine Grenache, 10% Counoise and 10% Syrah.

During the tasting, the 2009 showed aromas of lavender, menthol, dark raspberry, and blackberry. The warmth of the 2009 vintage came through on the palate conveying a medium plus body. However, there was still lively freshness, so the wine didn't show as jammy or overly hot and alcoholic. The 2009 received one vote for top two favourite wines of the night.

The 1989 vintage was garnet in colour so showing its age in the glass. Then, its aromas were a combination of animally notes, olive tapenade, and dried and fresh raspberry and dark cherry flavours intermingled with forest floor and old leather. This wine received seven votes for top two favourite wines of the night including one of my votes and was the overall favourite wine of the night. I think we were all reminded of the beauty and complexity of old Beaucastel with this pair.

Vega Sicilia - Unico 2004 & 1998

Now, we move to Spain with two vintages of a wine estate that's likely its most highly regarded – Vega Sicilia. Click [here](#) to read Linden's review of the 36-vintage two-day event we hosted with Pablo Álvarez of Vega Sicilia in October 2014. The estate is located in Ribera del Duero in Northern Spain about a two-hour drive from Madrid. It's original founder, Don Eloy Lecanda Chaves, brought cuttings from Bordeaux – Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot - which he planted alongside their indigenous grape, Tempranillo. 'Unico' is the flagship wine of Vega Sicilia and is made from a blend of Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon.

For the winemaking, the fermentation takes place in wooden tanks with indigenous yeast. The malolactic fermentation also takes place in wood. Then, the wine is aged at different stages of the process in both French oak and American oak barrels with a combination of new and used barrels. After the ageing in barrel, the wine is also aged in bottle prior to release. On average, 'Unico' spends approximately six years in wood and three years in bottle prior to release.

The 2004 vintage for 'Unico' was described by Pablo Álvarez (the Álvarez family has been the owner of Vega Sicilia since 1982) as

a textbook vintage. It's a blend of 87% Tempranillo and 13% Cabernet Sauvignon.

The vintage 1998 was good for Ribera del Duero but yields were plentiful, so in some cases the grapes didn't ripen enough. Vega Sicilia didn't have this problem. However, by comparison, the 2004 will likely outshine the 1998, but let's see what we think of these two top vintages side by side.

At the tasting the 2004 showed aromas of new leather, vanilla, sweet dried tobacco, blackcurrant and dark cherry combined with a tomatoey, savoury note as well as minerality. This wine is still quite youthful with medium plus tannins, vibrant acidity and a full-bodied finish.

The 1998 showed notes of coconut, green leaf tobacco, old leather, fresh and dried dark cherry and plum notes and was also minerally. The fruit displayed lively acidity with medium tannins and a medium plus to full-bodied finish. This 1998 is drinking well now but is also a wine that will continue to develop well in your cellar. The 2004 received four votes for top two favourite wines of the night while the 1998 received three votes for top two favourite wines of the night including one of my votes.

Tenuta di Biserno - Lodovico 2012 & 2008

Marchese Lodovico Antinori found the property for Tenuta di Biserno in 1995 when he was looking for property to extend Ornellaia. This property was hillier and stonier than the vineyards of Ornellaia, so in the end it became clear this new property should be its own winery. Also, the sale of Ornellaia to Robert Mondavi in 2002 prompted the Marchese to create this new estate, Tenuta di Biserno.

Marchese Lodovico founded Ornellaia and went on to create 100% Tuscan Merlot Masseto, so he is a real revolutionary in Tuscany. With his latest estate, Tenuta di Biserno he feels the area of Maremma where the estate is located is similar to Pomerol and St.-Emilion. Thus, he has planted Cabernet Franc with a little Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot as well.

Tenuta di Biserno is made up of 49 hectares located in Bibbona on the Tuscan coast. The estate is located right next to the town of Bolgheri. It was planted between 2001 and 2005. The wine, Lodovico, is made from 6 hectares of the best area within Tenuta di Biserno.

This wine is only made in vintages where it shows its best. The first vintage was the 2007. When the wine is produced, approximately 6,000 bottles are made. For the winemaking, fermentation takes place in stainless steel vats.

In the 2012 vintage, the wine was made predominantly from Cabernet Franc with a little Petit Verdot. Harvesting began at the end of August and finished on the 3rd of October. For the malolactic fermentation, 20% went into oak barrels with the remainder staying in tank. Then, for ageing the wine goes into new French oak barrels for sixteen months followed by twelve months of ageing in bottle prior to release. It is a strong vintage for this wine with the added maturity of the vines bringing depth and structure.

For the 2008 vintage, harvest began in mid-September and continued until early October. Then, for the winemaking, 50% of the wine went into oak barrels for malolactic fermentation with the remainder staying in tank. The wine was aged for eighteen months in new French oak barrels and then for another twelve months in bottle prior to release.

The 2012 showed flavours of ripe dark berry fruit, herbal aromas of thyme and oregano, and earthy notes of forest floor. It had ripe tannins that were velvety with a full-bodied finish. While there were some developing notes in the wine, it still has years ahead.

The 2008 displayed aromas of vanilla, sweet dark berry fruits, roasted coffee and cocoa. It's also full-bodied with velvety tannins. The 2012 received one vote for top two favourite wines of the night while the 2008 received three votes for top two favourite wines of the night. Most of the attendees had never had this wine, and it was a welcome discovery.

Château Doisy-Daëne Barsac 1962 & 1953

We ended the tasting with sweet wine, and more specifically, two vintages of Château Doisy-Daëne. This estate is located in the Bordeaux commune of Barsac and is classified as Sauternes 2ème Cru Classé.

The vineyards at Doisy-Daëne comprise 18.2 hectares and are planted with 86% Semillon and 14% Sauvignon Blanc with a small section of Muscadelle. Lots of replanting took place during the 1950s and 1960s. Today, Doisy-Daëne has a higher percentage of Semillon planted in their vineyards. The vineyards are located close to Château Climens, and the soils are made up of red sand, clay and limestone.

For the vinification, the wine is put into French oak barrels for an average of ten months with 65% new, and then the wine goes into tank for an additional eight months prior to release.

In Clive Coates book *Grands Vins: The Finest Château of Bordeaux and Their Wines*, he describes the 1962 vintage in Sauternes as one with ideal conditions where it would have been difficult not to make good sweet wine. He explains the wines are characterized by the following profile: 'plump, soft fruit and a fine, ripe acidity'. (p. 803). When the wines arrived in London in 1966, Coates noted that they sold for 15 shillings(75 pence) to £1.00. (p. 803).

In 1953, Bordeaux experienced a hot, warm growing season with lots of sunlight. Rain came in September delaying harvest, but otherwise the year produced favourable conditions for the grapes. Wine critics give this vintage high praise.

The 1962 Doisy-Daëne displayed aromas of sweet spice, crème brûlée, and smoky minerality. It was viscous and mouthcoating on the palate with more creamy texture and riper flavours than the 1953.

For the 1953 Doisy-Daëne, the wine showed a bit of tarragon combined with lively fruit notes of apricots and orange citrus combined with honeysuckle. The vintage was leaner and more elegant in character than the 1962.

For top two favourite wines of the night, the 1962 Doisy-Daëne received one vote and the 1953 received four votes. What was remarkable about both of these wines was their youthfulness. No one suspected they were from these vintages, and most pegged them as being much younger. It just goes to show the longevity of Barsac and Sauternes.

IN REVIEW: "Vintage Pairs" Blind Tasting on 4th December 2019



Weingut Keller Westhofen Morstein Grosses Gewächs 2011 & 2006

13% abv for both

This pair of dry Rieslings from Weingut Keller was inspired by a quote I read from Jancis Robinson. In a 2008 article in the Financial Times, Jancis Robinson wrote, *'If I had to choose one wine to show how great dry German Riesling can be I would choose a Keller Riesling. Those wines are the German Montrachets.'* So, I decided to include two vintages of Keller Riesling from the Grand Cru vineyard, Morstein, in our Vintage Pairs. This vineyard dates back to the 1200s, and the Keller family owns some of the oldest vines. Another well-known producer of high-quality Riesling from this vineyard is Philipp Wittman. The vineyard contains some of the most limestone rich soils in the Rheinhessen which helps to provide a racy acidity in these Rieslings.

The Keller estate dates back to 1789. Klaus-Peter and his wife Julia took over managing the estate in 2001. He studied winemaking and viticulture in Geisenheim and prior to that he went to South Africa and Burgundy to train. Klaus-Peter worked at Domaines Hubert Lignier and Armand Rousseau.

For the wines, his philosophy is that good wine is made in the vineyard. In his winemaking, he ferments his Riesling Grosses Gewächs in old oak fuder, uses indigenous yeast when possible and allows the wine extended periods of time on its lees.

With the 2006 vintage it was important to pick at the right time. Rains in August and during the harvest period created challenges, so those who waited to pick produced better wines. Prior to the cold conditions in August, the growing cycle for the grapes had started early in the spring and was followed by warm conditions in June and a hot August.

In 2011, the weather conditions were good for grape growing in Germany with the production levels returning back to their average level. During the prior years, yields were low. The 2011s tend to be open and very giving in terms of their fruit character.

For me, these wines showed true to their vintage characteristics. The 2011 had intense aromatics that included a touch of petrol, tropical fruit notes of papaya, passionfruit and star fruit combined with mandarin orange citrus. There was a lot of richness to this wine. Some felt that it was sweet and found it not as high in acidity as they would expect from a Riesling. However, I found the wine to be balanced with the ripe fruit aromas and flavours being supported by a minerally backbone and vibrant acidity. It had a medium plus to full bodied palate that left a lingering finish.

By contrast, the 2006 was less expressive but more mouthcoating and conveyed a feeling of more weight on the palate; it felt full-bodied. As a result, some guessed the Northern Rhône for this wine, finding similarities with Marsanne. The flavours conveyed on the nose included floral aromas combined with stone fruits of peaches, apricots and nectarines with a lime citrus underpinning combined with a spicy element. At the end of the evening, I asked everyone to vote on their top two favourite wines of the night. These two wines were the favourites of the evening even though they were the most challenging to guess blind. Each wine received five votes for favourite wine of the night.

2016 Philippe Pacalet Gevrey-Chambertin & Domaine Perrot-Minot Gevrey-Chambertin

13% abv for both

For this pair, I've chosen two wines from the same village and vintage, but from contrasting winemaking styles and philosophies. One is natural in his approach, Philippe Pacalet, being very hands off in the winemaking. With the other being more hands on, Christophe Perrot-Minot, using sorting in the vineyard as well as at the winery with two tables de tri (specially designed sorting tables that aid in the elimination of unhealthy grapes), 100% de-stemming and 25% new oak for the village wines and up to 50% for the grands crus.

Philippe Pacalet is the nephew of Marcel Lapierre in Beaujolais, one of the major figures in the natural wine movement, and is himself known as one of the first natural wine producers. He doesn't own any vineyards instead he rents land and makes the wine in a facility he purchased from the De Montille family that's located in Beaune.

After ten years of working for an estate in the Côte de Nuits, in 2001 Philippe began making his own wine. He exudes an intoxicating energy and passion for wine. Philippe loves magnums, and that's what he and his wife Monica shared with us when we visited them in November. Both Philippe and his wife are down to earth and revel in the joy of sharing wine.

He produces wine from some of the best vineyards in Burgundy including ones in the following villages: Pommard, Gevrey-Chambertin, Meursault, Chambolle Musigny, Puligny-Montrachet, Vosne-Romanée and Nuits-Saint-Georges. Philippe studied organic winemaking, so the farmers he contracts with farm organically and sustainably. He supervises their farming practices, and his team picks the grapes by hand.

For the winemaking, he uses indigenous yeast, does whole bunch fermentation and a long maceration and uses pigeage or traditional foot stomping of the grapes. Philippe only uses sulphur at the bottling stage. The wines are aged on their fine lees in used oak barrels. Philippe wants the *terroir* to speak through in his wines. His aim is to make wine in a non-interventionist manner, so that the pure expression of the fruit and the land come through in the wines.

Domaine Perrot-Minot dates back to the middle of the 19th Century. In the 1970s Marie-France Merme and her husband, Henri Perrot-Minot, joined her father Armand in winemaking at Merme. Then, when Marie-France's father passed away, the estate became Domaine Perrot-Minot. Christophe Perrot-Minot took over from his father, Henri, in 1993. Part of the estate comes from his maternal grandfather, Merme, and the other part was acquired in 2000 with the acquisition of Domaine Pernin-Rossin. Currently, the domaine has 13 hectares. Christophe also makes some wines from top grands crus in Gevrey-such as Chambertin and Chambertin-Clos de Bèze from grapes he purchases which are labelled without the inclusion of 'domaine' on the label.

For the winemaking, and in general, Christophe is very meticulous with his wines. He first does sorting in the vineyard and then on two tables de tri. The grapes are 100% de-stemmed and he tends to use pumping over instead of punching down for more gentler extraction depending on the wine. Then, village wines such as this Gevrey-Chambertin see 25% new oak and are aged for approximately eighteen months in barrel before bottling and release.

The contrasting winemaking styles showed in these wines. Colour of the wines is what stood out first with the Pacalet being a lighter ruby than the Domaine Perrot-Minot. This characteristic was likely due to the use of whole bunch versus de-stemmed grapes. And, this factor also showed in the aromatics of these two wines. The Pacalet was very floral and intense aromatically with wild strawberry and other bright red berry notes jumping from the glass along with red cherry and herbal notes of tarragon. These aromas are intense yet charming in character. The body was medium plus with lively acidity, moderate tannins and a long length.

The Domaine Perrot-Minot showed toasty aromas and sweet baking spices. For most, the use of new oak seemed obvious. However, if this wine would have been paired with a different wine, I don't think the use of oak would have stood out so much. Many times our impression of a wine is heavily influenced by the wine that comes before or after as we are prone to compare rather than judge the wine solely on its own. All agreed the wine is well made, but we also felt that the winemaking showed. The fruit was darker in this wine with dark cherry and dark raspberry flavours and more noticeable tannins and more weight on the palate.

2014 Caballus Pinot Noir & Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard Pinot Noir

Caballus Pinot Noir : 14.1% abv, Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard Pinot Noir: 13% abv

For the next pair, I chose two New World examples of Pinot Noir; more specifically, one from Oregon and one from California. Caballus Pinot Noir is a tiny production Pinot Noir made by two friends, Véronique Drouhin and Isabelle Dutartre, who met at a riding

club in Beaune thirty years ago. Caballus is made in the Willamette Valley in Oregon with grapes from two of its best AVAs – Dundee Hills and Eola-Amity Hills. In the winemaking, they use wild yeast for fermentation and then age the wine in French oak barrels approximately one third of which are new.

Then, for the California example, I selected Rhys Vineyards. They specialize in making top quality Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah in California. It's owned by a Burgundy lover, Kevin Harvey, who had a successful software and finance career that enabled him to establish his own winery. The winemaker is Jeff Brinkman. In the vineyard, they use a combination of organic and biodynamic farming practices. The philosophy at Rhys is that great wine is made in the vineyard not in the winery. They use practices such as foot treading and native fermentation using the natural yeasts found on the grapes when they're brought in rather than adding any nutrients. In addition, they ferment in small one-ton tanks, so they can ferment in small sections of the vineyard. Rhys is made up of seven estate vineyards. Six vineyards are located in the Santa Cruz Mountains and one vineyard is located in Anderson Valley. The Alpine Vineyard is located in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The 2014 vintage in Oregon was known for being a hot vintage and a large crop. In California, 2014 is an outstanding vintage for Pinot Noir, and Rhys is one of the producers Decanter highlights as being one of the best producers of the vintage for Pinot Noir. William Kelley, Decanter, "California 2014 Vintage Guide", 24 June 2016.

The Caballus displayed aromas of red raspberries and other red berry fruits combined with red cherries. The fruit notes had a purity about them but were sweeter than the previous two Pinot Noirs from Burgundy, so everyone was led to the New World with this flight. However, some thought New Zealand for at least one of the wines. The structure of the wine revealed moderate tannins, bright acidity, medium plus body and a long length.

For the Rhys, the fruit aromas and flavours were sweeter and darker with dark cherry and dark raspberry notes. Sweet spices intermingled with the fruit conveying more intensity as well as more body and concentration on the palate. The Caballus received two votes for top two favourite wines of the night while the Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard received one vote.

La Rioja Alta Gran Reserva 904 1998 & 1997

For the next pair, I chose two wines from one of my favourite regions – Rioja – and a producer that I find to be good value. The Sociedad Vinicola de la Rioja Alta was founded in 1890 by five Riojan and Basque families, and the first President was Doña Saturnina Garcia Cid y Gárate. The first winemaker was Monsieur Vigier and the first wine he made was Reserva 1980; this wine is now known as Gran Reserva 890. In 1904, Alfredo Ardanza, the founder of La Rioja Alta and the owner of Ardanza winery proposed merging the two companies. To honour this union, Reserva 1904 was created; this wine is now known as Gran Reserva 904. This Rioja Bodega continues to be a benchmark for traditionally made Rioja. The wines are made from a majority of Tempranillo with a small amount of Garnacha and Graciano. And its Gran Reservas are only made in exceptional years.

Gran Reserva 904 is a blend of 90% Tempranillo with 10% Graciano. Alcoholic fermentation takes place over a period of approximately two weeks, and then the wine is transferred to stainless steel tanks for the malolactic fermentation. Afterward, the wine goes into traditional American oak casks for four years. It also sees additional ageing time in bottle prior to release.

The Consejo Regulador DOCa Rioja rated 1998 as very good and 1997 as good; their top rating is excellent. The 1998 harvest saw the greatest production levels ever in Rioja. It began with favourable conditions from the start of the grape development process with low rain and mild temperatures. A strong growth cycle continued through August, and then rain and low temperatures in September slowed things down. These favourable weather conditions produced wines with good structure, balance and long ageing potential.

In 1997, the winter experienced quite a bit of rainfall and mild temperatures, so the development of the grapes began a month early. The spring saw healthy growth in the vineyards with just a bit of irregularity. But, the weather during the summer months saw more rain and lower temperatures than usual which created challenges for ripening. Fortunately, September was dry and sunny, so the grapes completed their ripening then.

The 1998 Gran Reserva 904 showed garnet colour in the glass with aromas of dill, herbal notes, coconut, old leather, earthy flavours, red and dark cherry fruit notes combined with more red berry notes both fresh and dried. Then, on the palate a savoury tomato note intermingling with the other fruits and earthy flavours with medium tannins, bright acidity and a medium plus body. This wine received two votes for favourite wine of the night.

The 1997 Gran Reserva 904 also showed garnet colour in the glass with similar herbal notes of dill as well as coconut combined

with green leaf tobacco and cigar tobacco. The fruit was darker with more dark cherry notes dominating and a combination of both fresh and dried fruit. This wine was riper with more depth and complexity. It had medium tannins and medium plus body with a long length. The 1997 received four votes for top two favourite wines of the night including one of my votes.

Cayuse En Chamberlin Vineyard 'The Widowmaker' Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 & 2002

Cayuse is located in the Walla Walla Valley in Washington in the U.S.A. It was started by a French *vigneron* named Christophe Baron. In 1996, he visited the area and saw this land covered with stones and decided to plant a vineyard. He wanted to produce wine that would have a minerally character and believed this stony soil would have that effect. The vines struggle in the vineyard naturally limiting the yields and producing concentrated grapes. Cayuse is farmed using biodynamic farming practices, and they grow primarily Syrah, with Cabernet-Franc, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Grenache, Merlot, Tempranillo and Viognier as well. The En Chamberlin Vineyard comprises 4 hectares and was planted in 2000. Three different wines are made in this vineyard: Widowmaker Cabernet Sauvignon, Impulsivo Tempranillo and En Chamberlin Syrah.

The 2013 vintage for Washington State saw a hot summer but harvest conditions were favourable. These conditions produced wines with ripe flavours and in some cases the tannins are pronounced, but the alcohol levels are moderate. In 2002, the wines were also ripe while also having strong tannins.

The 2013 Widowmaker showed aromas of liquorice, blackberries, dark raspberries, herbal notes of oregano and thyme as well as gamey and meaty notes. It was fresh and very youthful with medium plus tannins and a concentrated palate with a full-bodied finish. Some thought this wine was a Bordeaux from the Pauillac. This wine received three votes for top two favourite wines of the night.

For the 2002 there was more dried fruit aromas with the dominant fruit notes being blackberry and cassis with old leather, lead pencil and a bit of earthy dried leaves intermingled. The tannins were softer and integrated but the concentration, full-bodied expression and length were still there. This vintage was the first one they ever made of the Widowmaker Cabernet Sauvignon, and it still has years ahead. The wine received two votes for top two favourite wines of the night.

The big discovery for most during this session of Vintage Pairs was that Keller makes some killer Riesling which falls outside of what we generally associate to be the characteristics of Riesling. And these are wines we'd like to learn more about. We also saw the impact of using whole bunch in red Burgundy versus de-stemming; the colour, flavour profile and structure of the wine was different as a result. Some at the tasting were reminded of their love of Rioja and how it can still be value for money. And we also saw how Cabernet Sauvignon from Washington can deliver aromas and structural characteristics that we normally associate with Bordeaux. Thank you to everyone who came and played the blind tasting game with me. I hope to see you in February. And I promise to keep it fun and filled with surprises.



THE FINE WINE EXPERIENCE

www.finewineexperience.com

Shop D, 85 Queen's Road West, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Tel: +852 2803 0753 | **Fax:** +852 2803 0776

Opening Hours:

Monday to Friday 10am - 7:30pm

Saturday 1pm - 7pm

Sunday & Public Holiday Closed

