

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

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Inside this Issue

- 1 Bordeaux 2005
- 2 Tasting Notes
- 3 Tasting Notes
- 4 Tasting Notes

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Vintage of the Century?

The Wine Spectator's lead article reviewing 2005 Bordeaux, titled "The World's Richest Vintage" averred "There's no doubt that taken as a whole, Bordeaux 2005 is the world's most expensive young vintage ever. But it is also one of the best from France's premier wine region. As high-priced as some of the best wines are, they are magnificent, and touch your heart and soul the moment you put your nose in the glass." Indeed the prices for some 2005 Bordeaux are stratospheric: first growths are fetching thousands of dollars *per bottle!* Yet, as has always been the case in Bordeaux, there are a plethora of small, far less well-known producers whose output is affordable yet still representative of the strengths of this magnificent vintage. Many 2005 reds are still available on the market, so we thought this a good time to cull some of the best we've tried. White wines from the 2005 vintage are a bit harder to find - having been released earlier, they have mostly been replaced in the marketplace by 06s and 07s. Happily, 06 was also quite good and 07 whites are being extolled as another great vintage.

So what makes 2005 Bordeaux, or any particular vintage, great? Like all wine, these wines are the product of four factors: the grapes used, the soil and the geographic aspect of the land in which the grapes are grown, the climate, and the way the wine is made, i.e. its vinification.

In very broad strokes the characteristics of Bordeaux are that dry reds are blends of various parts Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot with handfuls of Petite Verdot and Malbec sometimes tossed in. Whites are made primarily from Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon with occasional dollops of Muscadelle. Located near the Atlantic in the southwest of France and divided by the Gironde estuary and Dordogne and Garonne Rivers, Bordeaux has soils that

range from sandy to clay. The maritime climate, warmed by the Gulf Stream, protects vineyards from the extremes of weather, the chief hazards being excessive rain, which dilutes grapes, and dampness, which can foster fungal disease. Each wine property (in Bordeaux often called "Château") grows its own grape blend: on the Left Bank blends tend to be dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon, on the Right Bank by Merlot. Finally the reds are most often matured in barriques (small oak barrels) for a few months to several years as they have been for centuries.

In the face of fierce world-wide competition, Bordeaux, like all major wine growing regions, has seen the benefit of a quality revolution as wine producers pay closer attention to just about every aspect of viticulture and winemaking. 2005 was, in other words, a particularly propitious time to have particularly propitious weather. Eyes were on the weather as early as April of that year, with sunny days and cool nights interspersed with below average rainfall. By July it was clear that the region was having the driest growing season in over 50 years. Excessive heat would have cooked grapes on the vine, but the heat never came - spring and summer were warm and sunny, but not overly hot. Water shortage produced drought-tolerant vines and tiny grapes, completely ripe and free of any hint of fungal disease. Thanks to these near-perfect conditions, harvesting was well-executed and the grapes were at peak quality, with the acid-alcohol balance that is requisite for long-lived wines that combine lasting freshness with lovely flesh. Add to that the beautifully ripe tannins from grapes rich in anthocyanins and you have the perfect recipe for well-structured, densely colored wines. To quote, again, from the *Spectator*, "The grapes were gorgeous when they were picked, wonderfully ripe yet crisp and bright with acidity. Most vintners described the growing season and harvest

as "ideal," even "easy" . . . [A]cidity levels in the grapes were higher than normal. . . The wines have loads of tannins, yet they appear fruity and refined due to their wonderful balance and harmony. . . [showing] complex aromas of ripe fruits, tobacco and minerals, intensely flavored palates, and seamless textures of powerful yet ultrafine tannins and fresh acidity.”

In this edition of Jim Hiller’s Wine Club a we give you sampling of red Bordeaux from the 2005 vintage and whites from the 2005, 06, and 07 vintages. Is 2005 indeed “the vintage of the century?” We present; you decide.

Tasting Notes

Taster’s Table Whites

2005 Château Le Grand Moulin 1ier Côtes de Blaye

Château Le Grand Moulin, founded in 1904, is approximately 30 miles north of Bordeaux in St. Aubin de Blaye, in the heart of the Côtes de Blaye wine region along the right bank of the Gironde River. The vineyard extends over rocky hillsides that allow for natural drainage as well as a night time radiant reheating of the vines that aids maturation of the grapes. The whole property consists of 30 hectares. One-third spreads out across a gravelly plateau favorable to the production of robust red wine. The remaining two-thirds constitute a lighter soil combining sand and clay, which produces a more subtle, fruity red wine. A few parcels offer a mix of sand and alluvium, which imparts a freshness and aromatic flavor to the white wines. This is a dry white, made from 100% Sauvignon Blanc, vinified without oak. Fresh in taste and nicely balanced, it shows the grapefruit, gooseberry, and mineral tang typical of sauvignon.

2005 Château Perron Graves

Château Perron is situated on the highest hilltops of the Graves region, near the Castle of Roquetaillade, in the south of the Graves appellation. It is made up of 25 hectares on gravelly soil and subsoil, 10 hectares of which is planted in the white Graves appellation. Grape varieties are 40% Semillon, 50% Sauvignon, 10%

Muscadelle and the average production of the whites is about 5,000 cases a year. Matured for 6 to 8 months in oak barrels, this remarkable wine has a complex bouquet with both mineral and citrus notes (quince, grapefruit and orange). It will perfectly complement fish, seafood and white meats and could, of course, be served as an aperitif.

2006 Château Haut Pasquet Bordeaux

This is a blend of 40% Semillon, 40% Sauvignon, and 20% Muscadelle showing a beautiful crisp herbaceous nose that follows through on the palate with tropical lime acidity and a very clean finish. The Semillon gives body and structure, the Muscadelle gives floral tones and the Sauvignon gives a superb herbaceous freshness. As with all these dry white Bordeaux, the real appeal of the wine comes through as it is paired with food; try with seafood and white meat dishes.

2006 Château Timberlay Bordeaux

The origin of Château Timberlay goes back to the 14th century, during the 100 Years' War, when Aquitaine was under English domination. The château was destroyed during the French Revolution, later rebuilt, and has been completely renovated since the Second World War. A well-balanced dry wine that is 50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Sémillon, it is soft, yet full of character with good acidity and lots of fruit and citrus aromas. The wine is an attractive pale yellow color with green highlights; its flowery bouquet is both elegant and complex.

2006 Barton & Guestier 1725 Sauvignon Blanc Bordeaux

In 1725, businessman Thomas Barton of Ireland started a negociant business in France, joining forces in 1802 with Daniel Guestier, a Frenchman who supplied wine to Thomas Jefferson, among others. This long history has produced wine of varying quality, but recently things have changed and B & G seems on the right path. The wines are affordable, widely available and consistently good. Fresh and crisp, this lively Sauvignon Blanc has aromas and flavors of grapefruit zest, limes and lemons. The herbal notes typical of the varietal are understated – perhaps a

suggestion of new-mown grass, while the crisp acidity, also a hallmark of the grape, makes for a superb seafood wine.

2006 Real Stones Sauvignon Blanc Bordeaux

The Real Stones label was created specifically for the American market, taking its name from Bordeaux's famed gravelly soil. Two-thirds of the fruit sourced for Real Stones came from Entre-Deux-Mers, an area between the two tributaries of the Gironde, the long, wide river that runs through the Bordeaux. The balance of the wine comes from the southern part of the Graves appellation. While the norm for white Bordeaux is a blend that includes Semillon, this wine is made from 100% Sauvignon. Bracing and cleansing, the intense nose is full of citrus notes such as grapefruit and candied lemon peel. There's also an attractive herby-green scent of chopped parsley and fresh grass. These aromas carry through onto the palate, with refreshing lift. A touch of stony minerality gives the wine a sense of its origins. Pair with a balsamic-dressed salad, fresh oysters or sushi.

Taster’s Table Reds

2005 Grand Bateau Bordeaux

Following fermentation in stainless steel temperature controlled vats, this 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon blend undergoes a “micro-bullage” process. This technique involves the diffusion of tiny amounts of oxygen through a tube into fermentation vats to sweeten and soften the tannin and extract better color and aromatic structure. The wine shows an expressive nose of ripe red plums and cherries with an understated frame of new oak and spice. It is a harmonious and relatively powerful wine with an appealing roundness on the palate, ripe tannins and a flavorful but short finish.

2005 Château Le Grand Moulin 1ier Cotes de Blaye

This intense dry red wine is composed of 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Cabernet Franc. The wine has a ripe, fruity taste with round tannins, good extraction and very nice balance. This is a terrific example of what makes 2005 a great year for Bordeaux: it’s a big wine

that in a lesser year could be too tannic and rough for early drinking – at the least, it would need decanting and a pairing with a juicy lamb dish to tame the tannins – but here the tannins are almost slippery and the acid/fruit balance makes for a wine accessible enough for unaccompanied sipping. It will surely improve with age and will show best with food, but it's just fine on its own.

2005 Château de Brandy Bordeaux

Château de Brandy is another very pleasant and approachable wine with a deep red color and aromas of bright ripe cherries. It has good structure and is well-balanced in the mouth with a long aftertaste. The blend is 70% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, and 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. The estate has been a family property since 1850. The soil is calcareous clay. Mechanically harvested, table sorted, and vinified in stainless steel vats. The 2005 vintage won a gold medal at the Concours General Agricole in Paris.

2005 Mouton Cadet Rouge Bordeaux

Mouton Cadet was established in 1931 by Baron Philippe de Rothschild of the Rothschild banking dynasty, and named after his premier cru vineyard, Château Mouton Rothschild and Cadet, (i.e., junior, the youngest) in reference to his youngest son. As a declassified Bordeaux and despite its lack of traditional prestige, the wine proved very successful, becoming one of the best selling wines in the world and hitting peak sales of over 6 million bottles in the U.S. in 1992. A re-blending of the wine and re-design of the brand took place in 2004 when it was acquired by Constellation Brands, the world's largest wine distributor. Despite its mega-brand pedigree, the 2005 version of this found-everywhere, affordable blend (65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 15% Cabernet Franc, matured 12-18 months) is quite charming and pleasant, perhaps the surest proof of the exceptionalism of this Bordeaux vintage.

2005 Château Haut-Plantey Haut Medoc

The vineyards of Haut-Plantey are situated between some very famous appellations, Margaux and St-Julien, and

one of the winemakers, Jacques Boissenot, is also a consulting winemaker at Château Margaux, Latour, Lafite, Rothschild, and Leoville las Cases. The wine is produced from fruit (85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot) grown on gravelly hillsides offering consistent sun exposure and early ripening. Extended on-the-skin maceration gives the wine intense color and flavor. Red fruit and spice in the nose carries through into the palate on a structure of finely grained tannins. As with almost all 05 reds, ageing will develop the wines complexity, but this can be enjoyed now with foods from grilled poultry to roasted pork, lamb, or beef.

2005 Château L'Eglise Bordeaux

Enjoy this oak-aged Bordeaux with grilled red and whites meats. Its fruity and woody notes are well balanced. The tannins are perfectly soft and ripe, fruit aromas are persistent in the finish. The blend is 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc.

Collector's Club Whites

2005 Château Coucheroy Pessac-Leognan

Its Gascon name was Couchiroy, meaning "the king slept here." Legend has it that the château was once host to a future sovereign of France, Henri IV, then King of Navarre. At the end of a taxing day, surprised by a violent storm, the future king supposedly sought shelter with local vigneron. Today, the estate, in the commune of Léognan, is situated among the appellation's most prestigious names. The Pessac Léognan Appellation, producing both white and red wines, comprises 1400 hectares of exceptional terrain, made up of ochre quartz and quartzites; white, red and pink jasper; agatoids, silex and lydian. These terroirs give the wines of this appellation their highly individual personality, helped by a landscape of hillsides ideally situated to catch the sun and sufficiently sloping to ensure remarkable natural drainage. Coucheroy white, a Sémillon Sauvignon blend, is instantly recognizable by its crisp elegance as an authentic Graves, typical of this part of the Pessac Léognan

Appellation, perfect with seafood and fish.

2006 Château Thieuley Bordeaux Blanc

Blended from 50% Semillon, 35% Sauvignon Blanc, 15 % Sauvignon Gris, this is a fuller-bodied example of white Bordeaux with fresh smelling floral and citrus notes in the nose, framed by vanilla, apple and butterscotch grace notes and ripe, rich fruit on the palate. "One of the best-run Bordeaux estates."- Robert Parker

2005 Château Partarrieu Sauterne

We would be remiss if we did not give some recognition to perhaps the most highly regarded, expensive, and decadently luxurious of all Bordeaux whites: the dessert wines of Sauternes. Big, bold, and powerfully sweet wine with thick, viscous mouth-feel and opulently rich flavors, Sauterne typically shows aromas of lemon, honey, coconut and vanilla. As with the other great sweet wines of the world, e.g., Riesling Trockenberenauslese from Germany and Tokay Aszú from Hungary, the best Sauternes have a very high acidity that balances the sugar and makes for an impression that is clean and refreshing, never fat and cloying. That high acidity makes Sauterne and pan fried foie gras one of the most magical wine/food pairings that exists. The Partarrieu is already approachable and attractive although it will obviously develop complexity with bottle age. Fragrant and stylish with a fresh nose showing very good fruit, there are distinct notes of classic botrytis here; the wine is nice and rich but with very good acidity.

2007 Château Gravelle Lacoste Graves

Hervé Dubourdieu's white Graves is made primarily from Semillon, a richer, more ample grape than the other staple of the region, Sauvignon Blanc. Semillon can show more subtle and complex flavors and can have a greater ageing capacity. Château Gravelle-Lacoste's gravelly soil produces an elegant, clean wine with aromas of honey, acacia, peach and almond. It is rich on the palate due to the high percentage of Semillon, but crisp and dry on the finish. Harvested in successive passes through the vineyards

in order to obtain perfectly ripe grapes, each varietal is then vinified separately so that Dubourdieu can capture the full expression of each type. The wine is stirred on its lees weekly to further increase the body and richness of the finished wine.

2007 Château Ducasse Bordeaux

Hervé Dubourdieu (see previous note) has six hectares within the Sauterne appellation from which the family has for years produced an inexpensive Sauterne sold only in Europe which the owner himself considers mediocre. But the same terroir is capable of producing a dry white similar to the Gravelle-Lacoste. However, not being officially within the Graves appellation, the Ducasse is labeled simply “Bordeaux.” The blend here is also similar, a tad more Semillon, a skosh less Sauvignon. The wines are, for all intents and purposes, the same. But the intricacies of the French appellation contrôlée system mean that the Ducasse will likely remain forever the better buy.

2005 Château Menaut Graves

A crisp, beautifully balanced Sauvignon Blanc, this wine comes from an estate run by Andre Lurton in Pessac-Leognan. The grapes used in Chateau Menaut are grown in gravelly soil, giving the wine a mineral note. The color is pale yellow, the nose features grapefruit, citrus and melon notes, and the palate shows flavors of apple, apricot, and a vegetal note of canned green bean. Try this medium-bodied wine with shellfish, crab cakes, or spicy stir fry.

Collector’s Club Reds

2005 Prestige de Grand Bateau Bordeaux

80% Merlot , 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc fruit was hand-harvested, fermented in temperature controlled stainless steel vats and macerated, after fermentation, a relatively long 3 weeks. The wine was aged 17 months in oak barrels (50% new oak). The wine shows in both the nose and palate an abundance of rich and ripe flavors: spice, black fruit, cigar box, chocolate and toasty oak. Solid,

charming and subtly perfumed this will age beautifully 5 – 10 years.

2005 Les Brulieres de Beychevelle Haut Medoc

66% Cabernet Sauvignon and 34% Merlot, medium to full-bodied with attractive, rich plum and red berry fruit aromas, this wine also shows excellent balance, structure and length and the potential to age gracefully for 5 to 10 years. It spent 15 months in oak casks, all of which were used for the Grand Vin Château Beycheville and 10% of which are renewed each year. Because oak becomes more neutral with use, this restrained use of new wood yields a wine that shows oak as a grace note, not a dominant chord. From the commune of Cussac-Medoc, south of Saint-Julien.

2005 Château Haut-Beausejour St. Estephe

In 1992, Jean-Claude Rouzaud, oenologist and Board Chairman of Champagne Louis Roederer, acquired and combined two Cru Bourgeois vineyards in the heart of the Medoc’s prestigious Saint-Estèphe appellation: Château Picard and Château Beauséjour. Together, these properties make up what is now called Château Haut-Beauséjour. The 2005 vintage is a richly colored, deep red wine. The nose is a hedonist’s delight: an endless array of red and black fruit, with notes of stewed apples and jam overlaid by discreet, elegantly classy hints of wood and aromas of spice and tobacco. On the palate, the taste is very slow to develop but remains elegant without a trace of hardness or dryness, and a finesse and elegance that echo the nose. The blend is 52% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot and 3% Malbec. .

2005 Château Bellevue, Côtes de Castillon “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”

Château Bellevue was founded in 1998, with its oldest origins dating to the 1960’s. The project is aided by Château Cheval Blanc’s former enologist, Gilles Paquet. Reserve wines are produced only when the vintage merits: most recently in 2000, 2001, 2004, and 2005. Total production is a little over 4000 cases, 95% of which is red and 5% rose from the same blends. The 21 acres of

vineyards with 40 year old vines, planted to Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon in hillside clay and limestone soil yield fruit with a distinct minerality and rich fruit expression. The wine is aged in mostly new oak barrels, 90% French oak, and 10% American oak, and some Château Haut Brion second barrels.

2005 Christian Moueix Saint-Émilion

This and the next wine (along with an excellent Médoc as well) comprise a collection from Christian Moueix, whose family is behind Château Pétrus, Château Trotanoy and other pretigious labels. The regional series is designed to showcase the distinctive terroir of these famed areas while keeping the price reasonable. The three soil types of Saint-Émilion, where Merlot dominates the blend in red wines, bring three distinctive characters to this wine: mineral notes from the chalky heavy soils of the plateau, firm tannins from the clayey hillside grapes, and ripe, up-front fruit character from the regions sandy soils. 15% Cabernet Franc smoothes out the tannins further to make a wine fit for substantial ageing while drinkable now.

2005 Christian Moueix Pomerol

The Pomerol was my favorite of this series of 05’s from Moueix, showing a lovely richness and complexity in the bouquet, suggestive not simply of dark fruits and earth, but of truffle and mushroom. Mouth-filling and flavorful from the attack through the mid-palate, it continues into a lingering, soft, ripe fruit finish framed by soft tannins and bright acidity. Beautifully balanced and bright, yet soulful in its complexity, this is a wine to be savored slowly over a roast lamb or beef dinner.

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Call Eric Novak at 248-355-2122 ext 1033. He will advise you on availability, best time to buy, and any upcoming discounts.