

# *New World Wines*

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## *Newsletter*

**November 2001**

**No. 5**

In my last newsletter I reported that I had visited Bordeaux on my way to Rioja in July.

I took the opportunity to visit Chateau Larrivet Haut-Brion whose wines I have been purchasing for four years now. The Chateau is located in the appellation of Pessac-Leognan, near the town of Leognan south of Bordeaux. No more than half an hour from the airport and less to the center of Bordeaux it is very pleasantly located in an area of rolling hills, pastures and vineyards. The appellation is noted for both red and white wines and I was able to taste through the last few vintages of both with winemaker Patrick Meraz.

### **White 1998**

A blend of sauvignon blanc and semillion. Patrick noted that 1998 was one of the best vintages in recent memory. The wine is fermented in new oak barrels and nuances of oak, hay and straw were present both on the nose and palate. The wine had a long finish with considerable acidity present. Patrick noted that the wine would be at its best in 5 – 7 years.

### **White 1999**

This wine was fresher and showed less influence of oak than the '98. Patrick confirmed that it was a lighter vintage and would drink earlier than the '98.

### **Red 1997**

This wine was a revelation to me in the sense that I had dismissed 1997 as a rather mediocre vintage based on tastings of selected 1997s over the past year. The wine had a lovely nose of fresh red fruits, good colour and a charming taste of plums. It was a perfect wine to match with food, silky smooth with very little tannin.

Patrick noted that the grapes had been picked bunch by bunch over the course of October, with the last Cabernet being picked at the end of the month. We subsequently had this wine at a brilliant restaurant in Terrasson-Lavilledieu called L'Imaginaire and it maintained its form.

**Red 1998**

Concentrated red and black fruits on the nose. Ripe tannins were present on tasting so this is a wine to leave for 3 – 5 years at a minimum. This was considered a very successful vintage by the Chateau. I have 25 cases maturing for future deployment.

**Red 1999**

This wine had just been bottled. It was quite sweet on the palate but also relatively light with some tannin on the finish. Even allowing for the likely “fleshing out” of the wine as it develops in the bottle this is not going to be a blockbuster.

The next stop was several chateaux in Margaux. At Prieure Lichine we tried the '97 which was undistinguished. At Giscours we tried their '96 and '97. '96 was an excellent year in Margaux but the Giscours was rather thin and herbaceous, with the '97 no better. I have been advised that in 1999 and 2000 they had made much better wines and I have purchased small stocks of each vintage to see.

The next stop was my negotiant, G.A.M. Audy where I met with Marie-Rose Vincent. Under the Bordeaux “system” most wineries sell their wines to the Negotiants who then on sell to the Merchants (such as me). I was taken to their tasting room where a daunting 40 wines were laid out to try. I duly whittled this down to about 20 that I was interested in and here are the notes on some of these:

**Chateau Lasalle 1998 St. Emilion, Grand Cru**

This is the second wine of Chateau Sansonnet. This Chateau was purchased in 1998 and the new owners decided to declassify that vintage. No Sansonnet was therefore released in 1998 (a very good vintage in St. Emilion) while changes to the vineyard and chai were implemented.

The wine was somewhat light with muted fruit flavours and light tannins in the background. However the wine was sweet and balanced and very fairly priced. For an easy drinking St. Emilion at a good price it is an excellent choice.

**Chateau Lasalle 1999**

Smokey gamey nose, deeper colour and more extracted than the '98. Yields were a modest 38 hl. per hectare.

**Chateau Sansonnet 1999**

Lovely nose of red and black fruits, sweet and reasonably concentrated for the vintage. Marie-Rose advised me that they had bled the vats (i.e. siphoned off some of the grape juice at an easy stage so that the remaining juice, still in contact with the skins, would be more concentrated.

The owners are clearly prepared to sacrifice quantity for quality and have invested significantly in a new chai. A property to watch. I purchased some of the 2000 vintage.

**La Croix du Casse 1997, Pomerol**

Subdued nose of oak, cream and fruits. Sweet and jammy without too much structure. Enjoyable wine for early drinking.

**Derezsla, Tokaji 1996 5 Puttoyons**

Lovely orange flavours smooth and delightful. A well priced desert wine.

Later in the week I had the opportunity to taste the last three vintages of Chateau Pomeaux. This Pomerol property was acquired in early 1998 by several private investors, including Hamish Macpherson who some of you might remember from his Bermuda days, and put under the guidance of noted oenologist Michel Rolland (also the proprietor, with his wife, of Chateau Fontenil whose wines I carry).

**1998**

Good colour nose of black fruits and harmonious oak. Medium bodied with some sweet tannins. Not a blockbuster but well made.

**1999**

Sweet fruit on the nose and palate but not much depth or complexity. Darker than the '98 but is this because of greater extraction rather than natural ripeness? Slightly herbaceous but it will probably gain weight as it matures.

**2000**

A pre-release barrel sample it had a good nose of sweet fruits and some oak. Tannin is present but overall this should turn out to be very good.

I do not currently bring Chateau Pomeaux in because the price-quality ratio is not quite right.

The outlook for Bordeaux wine lovers remains mixed. On the one hand the wines are better than ever, even in difficult years. Further the franc-dollar ratio is very favourable. On the other hand some wineries and negotiants have become a bit greedy (assisted, it must be said, by the wine buying public) and the price of wines is now becoming an issue for the "names". The 2000 vintage is a classic example of a wine bubble (remember the dot.coms). I think prices will fall substantially in the mid term and have only bought at the lower levels where quality was high and the prices sensible. As you will see in the next newsletter this problem is not confined to Bordeaux. California is heading in the same direction!

All the wines shipped in September/October are now resting comfortably in the warehouse. Lots of great Australian shiraz and cabernet from small wineries, and new pinots from Davis Bynum are but a few of the highlights. Check out the list on [www.bermudawine.com](http://www.bermudawine.com) for the complete selection.

**John M. Sharpe**

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