



Picking Futures

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



If you've been following my peckings (can't very well call 'em scribbles as I do them on a keyboard) the last few weeks, you know I've been uncommonly focused on Bordeaux and you might remember that the Bordeaux chateaux have been releasing their futures pricing on their 2009s. At this writing (Wednesday evening of June

23rd), it's nearly all over but the shouting. All but about a dozen of the significant wines have been released and those should come in the next two days. Except for some of that dozen, Spec's has bought most of the 2009 Bordeaux we are going to buy and we are now offering those wines to our customers as futures. Unlike pork bellies or bushels of wheat, you actually want to take delivery - in a year or two - on these futures, once they are bottled wines.

There are a couple of advantages to buying your Bordeaux as futures. One is that the price on these wines will never be lower. A wine we are offering as a future now for \$12.96 (Ch. Pontoise Cabarrus) will be more like \$17.99 when it is put on the shelf in another year-and-a-half to two years. Another advantage is that you can, until about the first of August and with some limitations, specify what size bottles you want to receive your wine in. If you by solid cases, you can specify half bottles (24x375ml), magnums (6x1.5L), or even double-magnums (3x3L). If the wine you are buying is listed as a six-bottle case, you can get either half bottles (12x375ml) or magnums (3x1.5L). Of course there is an up charge for these special bottlings but it is not prohibitive and this is often the only way to get wines of these sorts in either halves or in larger formats. Maybe the biggest advantage to buying these wines as futures is that you can make sure you will get some of the rarer wines that might be sold out before they hit the shelf.

I mentioned earlier that "it's nearly all over but the shouting". There is and has been some shouting. Early on, the shouting or at least the hype was that 2009 is a great vintage. It is that. It is likely better than 2000 and maybe 1995 but maybe not so good as 2005 and 1990. Like 2005, the bottom end of the vintage - the rest of Bordeaux outside the flagship 300 or so most famous chateaux - performed at a high level so there are and will be a lot of fine to excellent 2009s on the market with value price tags. Unlike 2005, there are some seriously over-extracted wines at the top end so, unless you like a bit of grit in your wine, caution is advised with wines like Cos d'Estournel, Pavie, and the like. More shouting is going on now about the prices. Make no mistake: the top performing properties have made an unprecedented money grab that even overshadows what they did in the 2005 vintage. The top wines are expensive but the price has been established and many of them have sold through in the original release (first tranche) and are rapidly selling through at higher second tranche prices. Some of these second tranche prices from the chateaux are higher than we are currently offering the wines for sale. I have checked our pricing against some of our competitors around the country and we are generally priced lower, sometimes substantially so, and if we are not, we are within a percentage point or two.

In the 2009 vintage, Spec's did pass on a few wines we normally buy and offer. Chx. Palmer and Ducru Beaucaillou, to name two, were both dreadfully over-priced in relation to other wines in the market and to their intrinsic quality. We were thinking of offering Ch. Figeac again this year but it would have been well over \$200.00 per bottle and it's just not worth that much. A look at our offer will tell you what we bought and what the prices are as well as what, at least in terms of scores, Robert Parker, James Suckling (the Wine Spectator), Jancis Robinson (effectively the dean of the British wine writers), and I thought of the wines. For our long-time Bordeaux savvy customers (you know who you are), that may be all the information they need. For the rest of you, here's a bit more.

Let's say you are interested in buying some good red Bordeaux to drink over the next ten to twenty years. Let's also say that, although you are interested in the big names, you find the top wines to be over-priced and maybe out of your price range. That puts you in my league as far as the sort of Bordeaux wines you want to buy.

Here are my 2009 Futures picks ...

ON THE LEFT BANK:

Ch. PONTOISE CABARRUS, Haut Medoc, 2009

12x750ml as futures: **\$12.96 \$139.92**

Located just north of St. Estephe in Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne next door to Ch. Sociando Mallet, Ch. Pontoise Cabarrus is planted on a mix of terroirs. The gravelly stuff closer to the Gironde estuary is planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and a bit of Petite Verdot while the clay over limestone part on the western side of the estate is planted to Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Fermentation is in temperature controlled concrete vats with malo in tank before the wine is moved into barrels (1/3 new) for 12 to 15 months. Spec's has followed this wine since the 1995 vintage. My note on the 2009:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Dark, rich, more black than red fruit with dusty earthy gravelly terroir, subtly integrated oak, and accents of black pepper, cedar, and tobacco. Long finish; supple and quite tasty. Fine. BS: 89+.

Ch. la BERNADOTTE, Haut Medoc, 2009

12x750ml as futures: **\$20.22 \$218.40**

Purchased in 1997 by May Eliane de Lenquesaing, the then owner of Ch. Pichon Longueville, Comtesse de Lalande (also known as Ch. Pichon Lalande), La Bernadotte is located on the western border of Pauillac with the Haut Medoc. The estate straddles the border and used to make both a Pauillac and an Haut Medoc. Under de Lenquesaing, the Chateau makes one wine from both parts of the vineyard and it is all sold as Haut Medoc. The winemaking team is the same as that at Pichon Lalande and the barrels are all once used barrels from Pichon. We have been drinking the 2001 of late and it is just getting to optimum drinkability. I tasted the 2009 a couple of times in April and again in June. The June sample was even better than the April samples. My note from April:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Ripe, sweet, juicy red & black fruit (red cherry and blackberry) with gravelly earth; supple oak and accents of cocoa, red flowers, tobacco, and cedar. Very long finish; fresh, alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 91.

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Ch. CARONNE STE. GHEMME, Haut Medoc, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$13.03 \$140.76**

"Ste. Ghemme" is an old form of "St. James" and as such was the name of a now defunct hamlet on the western border of St. Julien. This was the Chateau of that hamlet (just as Ch. Margaux is the chateau of the town of Margaux and Ch. d'Issan is the chateau of the town of Issan). Owned by a branch of the Borie family (the other branches of which own Ducru Beaucaillou, Grand Puy Lacoste, Trotteville, Batailley, Haut Batailly, and Lynch Moussas as well as the negociant firm Borie Manoux) now called Nony, Caronne St. Ghemme is maybe unique in Bordeaux, in that it has three complete cuveries (fermentation rooms) equipped respectively with concrete tanks, wood tanks, and stainless steel tanks giving the Nonys great flexibility in making the wine. Georges and François Nony run this pristine estate as if it were a cru classé and it shows. As Haut Medocs go, it is very St. Julien in style. Here is my April note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-to-full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Dark, juicy, ripe black & red fruit with earthy gravelly terroir, supple oak, and accents of tobacco, cedar, and black pepper. Long finish; rounded and rich. Really Fine. BS: 90+.

Ch. TOUR SALVET, Haut Medoc, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$11.92 \$128.64**

Ch. Tour Salvat is a separate and distinct wine made at a property called Ch. de Retout located on the road between Margaux and St. Julien in Cussac de Medoc. The owners, the Soale family, make two styles of wine. Ch. Retout Haut Medoc is an old-style, hard, takes-years-to-develop red. Ch. Tour Salvat is a more ready-to-drink, fruit-forward, but still classically flavored red. Madame Helene Soale runs a clean but working winemaking facility and barrel cellars. While the property is successful, they are not flush so the work is hard and the equipment is basic but up to the task. The property is planted to 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc. The vineyards were neat and looked well cared for. The wines are fermented in temperature-controlled, epoxy-lined concrete tanks and aged 12 months in tanks (40%) and oak barrels (60%) with 25% of the barrels new each year. These folks are working exactly as expected and making the best wine their terroir allows. My notes on the 2009:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Fermented in temperature controlled concrete tanks using pump-over and aged in oak barrels (about 1/3 new). Deep purple-deep red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Dusty-juicy black & red fruit with gravelly terroir, dusty oak, and accents of tobacco, black pepper, and cocoa. Very long finish; complete, quite tasty. Fine. BS: 89+.

Ch. TOUR SIEUJEAN, Pauillac, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$20.48 \$221.28**

Tour Sieu Jean is located on the western edge of the Pauillac appellation. While most of the vineyards are in Pauillac (near Ch. Batailley), the chateau is located in the Haut Medoc across the road from Ch. Larose Trintaudon. Before 2002, Tour Sieu Jean sent its grapes to the Pauillac cooperative winery (Ch. Larose Pauillac). The family owners decided to withdraw from the co-op to produce better wines and build an estate. At tastings at the offices of negociant Ulysse Cazabonne, I've tasted every vintage from 2005 to the present but I had never visited the property. When I visited this June, I found the winery to be a bit of a work in progress with gleaming stainless steel and a small barrel room to go with youth and determination. What we saw at the winery was clean and modern with the energy of a younger generation taking over. I think this will be a winner. My note on the 2009:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Merlot aged in all French oak barrels (60% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity. Dense, dark, juicy-spicy black & red fruit with dusty-gravelly terroir, supple oak and accents of tobacco and pencil shavings. Very Long finish. Delicious, exciting, quite tasty; alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 92.

Ch. BATAILLEY, Pauillac, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$36.10 \$389.88**

Owned by the Borie-Manoux branch of the Borie family, Fifth growth (Classification of 1855) Ch. Batailley used to be a lot bigger encompassing the vineyards of Ch. Haut Batailley (which is now owned by the Ch. Grand Puy Lacoste Branch of the Borie Family) as well those that are now its own. When the property was split, the existing chateau went with the Ch. Batailley name. Ch. Batailley is classic old style Pauillac. It rarely gets great marks when tasted young (it also never gets bad marks) but it is the sort of wine, like Gruaud Larose in St. Julien, that really rewards the time you cellar it with development and improved flavor. When I think of Batailley, I think of black fruit, pencil shavings, and tobacco with a rich but rustic feel. Ch. Batailley just tastes good every time I drink it. My 2009 note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon and 25% Merlot fermented using rack-and-return and aged in French oak barrels (25% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity; moderately chewy phenolics. Offers more black than red fruit with minerally gravelly earth; supple dusty oak and a very long finish. Develops notes of tobacco and pencil shavings. Elegant and delicious. Excellent. BS: 93.

Ch. HAUT BAGES LIBERAL, Pauillac, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$41.00 \$442.80**

Owned by the Merlaut family (also owners of Ch. Ferriere in Margaux and Ch. Gruaud Larose in St. Julien) and located between the road and the river between Ch. Latour and the town of Pauillac, Ch. Haut Bages Liberal sits on an impressive piece of real estate. The largest part of the vineyard is there as well with another part further south next to Pichon Lalande and another parcel on the Bages plateau next to Ch. Grand Puy Lacoste. The vineyard is planted to 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Merlot, and 3% Petite Verdot. The sites are all excellent and so is the winemaking under the direction of the formidable Claire Villars. The wine leans toward elegance rather than power but it does fill the mouth with classic Pauillac flavor. The wine is fermented in concrete vats using pumpovers and is aged in all French oak barrels (40% new). My 2009 note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-to-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Offers developed, dusty, juicy black & red fruit with gravelly dusty terroir, subtle oak, and accents of cocoa, tobacco, pencil shavings, and black pepper. Very long finish; quite elegant and already well integrated. Excellent. BS: 92+.

Ch. HORTEVIE, St. Julien, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$25.06 \$270.60**

Located across the road and down a bit from Ch. Ducru Beaucaillou and operated under the same ownership and winemaking team. Ch. Hortevie started off in the early 1990s as the oak aged old vines part of Ch. Terrey Gros Caillou (Gros Caillou = "big stones"). I think Hortevie is now more famous than the parent property. Although the wines were always really good St. Julien, the new regime has made them a bit richer and riper and at least in this case, that is a welcome change. My note on the 2009:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 5% Cabernet Franc fermented using pump-over and aged in French oak barrels (50% new). Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity; and moderately chewy phenolics. Dark juicy black & red fruit with earthy gravelly terroir, supple oak, and accents of black pepper and pencil shavings. Very long finish; big and robust and a touch rustic. Excellent. BS: 91.



Ch. PONTAC LYNCH, Margaux, 2009**750ml as futures: \$22.45 \$242.52**

Thomas Jefferson noted a Margaux chateau called Pontac Lynch as one of his favorite wines. A look at the "Bordeaux Bible" (Cocks et Feret's Bordeaux and its Wines) shows that the property still existed. The Bordeaux Bible also explained the most likely reason the wine appealed to Jefferson: location. Ch Pontac Lynch is located in what can only be described as a fancy neighborhood. Its four immediate neighbors are Ch. Margaux, Ch. d'Issan, Ch. Rauzan Segla, and Ch. Palmer.

Ch Pontac Lynch was founded in 1720 by the Pontac family who then owned Ch. Haut Brion. The chateau is located astride the border between the communes of Margaux and Cantenac - both of which are part of the Margaux AOC - in the sweet spot "between the road and the river" (the D2 and the Gironde estuary). As to the fancy neighborhood, if you can imagine a truncated triangle with the southern border of Ch. Margaux, the northern border of Ch. Palmer, and the eastern border of Ch. Rauzan-Segla making up the longer sides, Ch. Pontac Lynch is located on much of the land inside the triangle. The shared micro-climate and terroir (mostly gravel and sand) is evident in its obvious quality. By the 19th century, this Margaux estate's wine was established among the very best in Bordeaux, with Thomas Jefferson ranking it highly in his carefully-studied personal classification. What I don't understand is why this lovely classic, already famous wine was left out of the famous Classification of 1855. I guess their loss is our gain as, had it been included, the prices would surely be much higher.

As noted above, "Pontac" references the Pontac family who once owned Ch. Haut Brion. Lynch references the Lynch family who established Ch. Lynch Bages. Currently, the vineyard is planted to a very Graves-like blend of 40% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Petite Verdot. This blend in conjunction with the deep sand and gravel terroir gives the wine a unique perfume. The fermentation is the typical pump-over fermentation in temperature controlled concrete tanks with an extended post-fermentation maceration as is typical at most left-bank chateaux. One third of the barrels are new each year. Here is my 2009 note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Fresh, juicy, lively red & black fruit with sandy gravelly terroir, dusty oak, and accents of cedar, tobacco, and bit of Margaux's ethereal perfume.; Very long finish; elegant. It pushes all the right buttons and is a heck of a deal. Excellent. BS: 92.

Ch. TOUR de BESSAN, Margaux, 2009**12x750ml as futures \$18.82 \$203.16**

Located to the west and south of the villages of Margaux where the gravel begins to give way to clay-over-limestone and Cabernet Sauvignon begins to give way to Cabernet Franc and Merlot, Ch. Tour de Bessan is owned and run by Marie Laure Lurton (daughter of Lucien Lurton) who had worked with her father since 1984 and been his chief enologist since 1986. As she had been making these wines for her father for years, she hit the ground running when she took over. Her sense is that she has good terroir that offers the chance to make an elegant balanced wine that reveals the fruit flavors of the grapes and the character of the vineyard. Her wines are subtle and satisfying without being flashy. Marie Laure's wines are never overripe or over extracted so they are wines that know and show their "place". Ch. Tour de Bessan is planted to 42% Merlot, 34% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 24% Cabernet Franc (a Graves-like blend). It will be aged in French oak barrels for 6 months (20% new) and an additional 11 months in tank. My note on the 2009:

Tech: Barrel Sample. Sensory: Deep purple in color with well formed legs dry, medium-to-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity; moderately chewy phenolics. Dusty fresh with black & red fruit with earthy gravelly terroir; supple oak and accents of tobacco, black pepper, spice, and perfume. Very long finish. Fine. BS: 89.

ON THE RIGHT BANK:**Domaine de COURTEILLAC, Bordeaux Superieur, 2009****12x750ml as futures: \$11.66 \$126.00**

The appellation here is Bordeaux Superieur but there is nothing common about this wine. Located across the dourdogne from St. Emilion on the same sort of clay over limestone terroir, owner Dominique Meneret treats this property as if it were a cru classé of St. Emilion. The farming is meticulous and the winemaking more so. Meneret has super consultant Stephan Derenencourt on board but is still the primary style influence on the wine. Meneret likes elegance and balance and the taste of the place coming through in the wine. He is not a fan of "technical wines" or over extraction and it shows. My note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 76% Merlot, and 12% Cabernet Franc fermented using pump-overs with malolactic fermentation in barrels (about 1/3 new). Deep purple in color, and with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity; moderately chewy phenolics. Juicy spicy black & red fruit with limestone sandy terroir; spicy oak and accents of mocha, pencil shavings, black pepper. Focused and delicious; alive-in-the-mouth. Really Fine. BS: 90+. I tasted Coureillac in April and in June and rated it a point higher (91+) in June.

Ch. PUYGUERAUD, Cote de Francs, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$14.70 \$158.76**

Ch. Puygueraud in the Cotes de Francs (which abuts the Cotes de Castillon which abuts St. Emilion) is the home of the Thienpont family who also own Ch. le Pin and Vieux Ch. Certan. Puygueraud is an every-day priced red based on Merlot with some Cabernet Franc and Malbec typically in the blend. This charming wine is fruit driven with a rich texture. It is a consistent favorite in the range of lower priced Bordeaux. The chateau also makes a special cuvee called Georges Cuvee de Ch. Puygueraud which is built around old vine Malbec. It is a dusty, rich, spicy cuvee with plenty of fruit and a bit more terroir character. My note on the 2009:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Malbec fermented in stainless steel using both pump-over and rack-and-return and aged 15 months in 20% Stainless Steel tank 80% oak barrels (25% new) with malo in Barrels. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity; moderately chewy phenolics. Juicy lively ripe mostly black fruit (black cherry) with rich earth; subtle oak and accents of dark, sweet spice, and a bit of cocoa. Very long finish; delicious-fresh-succulent, lovely-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 92.

Ch. LAPLAGNOTTE BELLEVUE, St. Emilion, 2009**12x750ml as futures: \$15.43 \$166.68**

Madame Claude La Barre, a former partner in Ch. Cheval Blanc, owns Ch. Laplagnotte Bellevue in St. Emilion. She brings that high level pursuit of excellence and the expectation of quality with her. Her son Arnaud is the winemaker. For several years now, Ch. Laplagnotte Bellevue has been my favorite sub-\$30 wine from St. Emilion. The familiar themes of elegance and balance are there in a wine that shows fine red fruit flavors accented by hints of terroir, tobacco, and, in ripe vintages, cedar. This is always a pleasure to drink. Older vintages have proven to age well with good development to repay the time invested keeping the wine in the cellar. My 2009 note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 85% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc, and 3% Cabernet Sauvignon fermented in concrete using pump-over and in oak barrels. In 2009, the chateau lost 45% of the crop to hail. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity; moderately chewy phenolics. Offers juicy spicy black & red fruit sweet with gravelly limestone, supple spicy oak, and accents of tea, mocha, black pepper. Really long finish. Delicious, complete, alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 92.

VIEUX Ch. SAINT ANDRE, Montagne St. Emilion, 2009**12x750ml as futures \$16.21 \$175.08**

Vieux Ch. St. Andre was planted in 1957. The chateau is the home of Jean Claude Berrouet who recently retired from his job as the winemaker at Ch. Petrus. Now that he is retired, Berrouet focuses exclusively on Vieux Ch. Saint Andre. The 6 hectare vineyard planted to 75% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon has a classic shallow clay over limestone terroir. The wine is fermented in concrete tanks and is aged in French oak barrels. I first tasted this wine several years before I came to work for Spec's. Spec's has been following it since at least the 1990 vintage. The already very good quality jumped up in 1998 and has continued to improve since then. My 2009 note:

Tech: Barrel Sample. 85% Merlot and 15% Cabernet Franc fermented in concrete tanks using pump-over and aged 12 months in French oak barrels (15% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. More black than red fruit with limestone earth; subtle oak and accents of chocolate, black pepper, and black flowers. Really very long finish. Delicious-supple-rich; lovely-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 91+.

A case of each of these would provide great drinking for many years to come. 🌿



Ch. Puygueraud