



Bordeaux Reminder: Thinking about 2007, 2008, and 2009

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re-mind

Pronunciation: Iri- mind\ Function: transitive verb Date: 1660: to put in mind of something : cause to remember

The year is still young and I have already spent three weeks in, and a lot more time than that thinking, about Bordeaux. For the last three months, I have been thinking mostly about three vintages: 2007, 2008, and 2009. Each of the three presents its challenges and its opportunities.

My initial impression of the 2007 vintage, formed in early April of 2008 in Bordeaux is that 2007 is a "pretty good" vintage. "Pretty good" as in pretty and good and even classic but certainly not a "great" vintage. The vintage reminded me of a cross between 1999 and 2004. The 1999s are pretty and a lot of the 2004s are developing nicely. Unfortunately, many of the top chateaux tried to price the 2007 vintage above its intrinsic worth and so it did not sell through from the Bordeaux negociants to the trade in the US and the UK. The press also felt the vintage was overpriced and said so. Unfortunately, no differentiation was made between the prices of the top classified growth (cru classé) wines (fewer than 300 wines) and "the rest of Bordeaux" (well over 11,000 wines). That distinction – between the cru classé and the rest – is important as most of the rest of Bordeaux was priced fairly in 2007. In fact, most of these wines didn't even take big price increases in the big Bordeaux money grab of 2005. Nevertheless, the Wine Spectator, the Wine Advocate, and Decanter told us not to buy 2007 and we (the US and the UK collectively) didn't.

Why bring this up now? Well, after spending three weeks tasting in Bordeaux this spring, I am convinced that a lot of the 2007s coming into the market now are good wines and many (especially the "rest of Bordeaux") are selling at fair prices. Have I "drunk the kool-aid"? I don't think so. Rather, I have tasted and retasted and even drunk a goodly number of 2007s of late and I find that many of them are giving me a lot of pleasure. Some of the best values to be found in the market for the remainder of 2010 will be the lesser lights (non-over-priced) wines from the "Pretty Good" 2007 vintage.

The 2008 vintage was judged by the press to be superior in every way to the 2007 vintage. At the top end, this is absolutely true. It is also true that the chateau owners learned their lesson on the 2007 vintage and so priced their 2008 cru classé wines in a more affordable range so that they offered real value (better wines at lower prices – how often does that happen?). The wine trade in the US and UK did buy the 2008 vintage and, despite the faltering global economy, even sold a fair amount as futures. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of top scoring 2008s available as futures. The 2008 wines will be delivered beginning in October and over the following year. While they have gone up in price a bit since the initial offering in the summer of 2009, the 2008 vintage is still a good deal and is across the board cheaper than the highly touted 2009 vintage now being offered as futures. In his Wine Advocate coverage of the 2009 vintage, Robert Parker said of the 2008s ...

"Hopefully, the smart money has already purchased and will continue to purchase the undervalued and reasonably priced 2008 Bordeaux. More and more, I am convinced that in ten years this vintage will prove far superior overall to 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2007 and not far off the quality of the 2005 and 2009."

**"PEOPLE NEED TO BE REMINDED
MORE OFTEN THAN THEY NEED
TO BE INSTRUCTED."**

- DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

THE FUSS ABOUT FUTURES

If you've been around wine very long, you've heard talk about "Bordeaux Futures" and you may have wondered what the deal is. Is this like the commodities exchange where contracts are repeatedly traded without the actual goods they represent even moving or being ready to move? Or do people really buy these wines and drink them? The answer is yes ... to both.

At one level, there can be a fair amount of trading of Bordeaux futures contracts as the market for the wines gets stronger and the release dates approach. At the same time, educated consumers use the futures market to insure they are able to get the rarest wines and get them at the best prices. Here's how it works.

During the April and May (and this year well in to June) following a vintage, most Bordeaux chateaux offer a portion of their production to the wine brokers in Bordeaux at what is usually their lowest price. This first offer is called the premiere traunche, or first slice. These wines are then offered to the importers and exporters around the world who then offer them to the local trade - the wine stores and restaurants. Some restaurants will buy a few cases of rare wines but most restaurants don't have the sort of wine programs where they invest in young Bordeaux to serve years later. At Spec's, we buy as heavily as possible during this time for two reasons. One is to buy good quantities of wines in every price range so we'll have the inventory to sell off our racks and shelves when the vintage is shipped. The other is to offer the best possible prices on rare and expensive wines to our Bordeaux-loving customers. As we get confirmations on our orders, we offer the wines out for sale as futures, a way to buy wines that haven't even been bottled yet. On the wines we've tasted and like and on wines with great track records, we buy as much as we are allocated, often at several different prices. If our customers get hot on a particular wine and we run short or sell out, we may try to go back and buy more, usually at a higher price. We then make a second offering reflecting that higher price. In order to open the futures opportunity to as many customers as possible, Spec's offers Bordeaux futures sales on bottles as well as the standard twelve bottle cases. Some chateau now come in 6 bottle cases. Far and away the main benefit here is the guarantee of availability. Many of the top 2009s (such as Ch. Pontet Canet) are unlikely to ever make it to the retail shelf. So what's all the fuss about? Just that the futures market insures the savvy Bordeaux lover a way to buy his favorite wines at the best prices they'll likely ever sell for, and a way to insure himself that he will actually get some of the rarer wines that may never make it onto a rack or shelf in the store.

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Which brings us to 2009. To read the Wine Spectator and the Wine Advocate, you'd think 2009 was the best Bordeaux vintage ever. The scores were very high and the praise effusive. Some of the British press were a bit less impressed but who reads them anyway? To add my little 2-cents worth, I thought most of the 2009s I tasted were awfully good. The vintage offered fruit, freshness, and balance. The best producers allowed their terroir to shine through as well. The few 2009s that I didn't care for were from the chateaux that went for big extraction rather than accepting the freshness and sweet, even pretty fruit of the vintage. Other tasters found some of the wines of extraction to be "monumental".

Cos d'Estournel is one of those lightening rod wines of the 2009 vintage. Both Robert Parker (Wine Advocate) and James Suckling (Wine Spectator) gave it hundred-point-potential scores with Parker saying the 2009 Cos "is one of the greatest young wines I have ever tasted ... in the world." Certain other critics were less effusive. Jancis Robinson scored the 2009 Cos 16.5 out of 20 which any way you cut it equates to a "below 90" type rating. Personally, I didn't like the wine but I do "get it" – which is to say I recognize the quality and the aim (I rated it 88 but don't want to drink any). Nevertheless, I think it is too big and it doesn't taste like what it is. It is inky dark and almost chalky-gritty in the mouth due to the over-the-top extraction. Regardless of what I think, it is going to be very expensive.

Actually, pretty much all the top wines of 2009 are going to be very expensive. Pricing so far is following 2005 patterns with the only saving grace being that the Euro has weakened in relation to the dollar in recent months. Although I am not sure whether to call the economy "recovering" or "in recovery", customer interest in the 2009s seems to be high so the wines should sell well as futures. As the chateaux are still releasing their prices, the offering we are now making is incomplete but there are lots of big names and big scores to be found.

Ask your Spec's wine consultant for a 2009 Bordeaux Futures Offer OR email [bear@specsonline.com](mailto: bear@specsonline.com) with "2009 Bordeaux Futures" in the subject line and we'll send you a .PDF.

You have been reminded. 🌸

