

The Wine Guy's Wine Tasting Notes

June, 2009



The 2009 European Trip

London

Ilico, 2006 Illuminati, Montepulciano de Abruzzo, DOC

Zonia, 2007 Ripasso, Valpolicella, DOC

Tasted at Osteria Antica Bologna - a fine neighborhood restaurant near my son's home during several visits. The first comment from my son when I ordered the Illuminati was that it was very appropriate since the film "Angels and Demons" was being released that week, and the Illuminati figure prominently in the book and film. This is a fresh, fruity wine that worked well with my favorite dish - the green pasta Bolognas. On a return visit the Ripasso was dark and rich, but as a new release it was a bit too new and needs several more years to mature and smooth out. On our third visit we brought our own wine.

Pahlmeyer, 2006 Chardonnay, Napa

Comtesse Bernard de Cherisey, 2005 Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru, Burgundy

Louis Latour, 2004 Corton Charlemagne, Grand Cru, Burgundy

Felton Road, 2007 Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand

IL Poggione, 2003 Brunello di Montalcino, DOCG

Domaine Weinbach, 2004 Riesling Schlossberg, Alsace

When American friends are in London it is nice to get together, so my son and daughter-in-law hosted a dinner in their home for the 6 of us. The first two wines were brought over from the US that day and tasted blind. The **Pahlmeyer** had an off-nose which followed in the taste. We should have let it breathe for a while, but there was a lot more wine to be tasted. The **Montrachet**, which I recognized, was exactly what this fine wine should be - soft and gentle, but with a backbone. What can I say about my son opening the **Latour**? This is a wine that he can hold for a decade, and it will only get richer. I have tasted a lot of Latour wine and this one is as good as they get. I purchased the **Felton** from my favorite wine shop in London, Philglas & Swiggot, because it is one of New Zealand's finest Pinots, and I had never had it before. I was slightly disappointed in the light taste, but perhaps I was tasting it too young. **IL Poggione** is one of my son's favorites and mine also. Even without more bottle time, this showed the richness that should come from these great Italian wines. Our final wine of the evening was the **Weinbach**. I had purchased it to reminisce about my visit there last year and to have one terrific wine. Golden color and rich, yet light and sweet, it was a great end to an evening of good food, good wine and good friends in London.

Perrier-Jouët, Brut, Champagne

Taittinger, Rosé Brut, Champagne

Eichinger, 2007 Grüner Veltliner, Kamptal

Prior to a concert at the Royal Festival Hall, we had dinner at the Skylon Restaurant in the theater building. We arrived early to pick up our tickets so we had several glasses of Champagne, chosen from a list of 6 by the glass, and enjoyed the view of the Thames. The **Perrier-Jouët** was clean, crisp and very satisfying. However, the **Taittinger** was not up to what I expect from them. Limited in flavor, it did not show the depth that you usually see from their wines. The **Gruner Veltliner** with our dinner had exactly what I was looking for. Rich with light spice, this set us on the right note for the concert.

Dujac Fils & Père, 2005 Chambolle-Musigny, Burgundy

This is one of my son's favorite wines, and I bought it to share with him. I'm glad I did. We took it to the Italian restaurant and offered a taste to the manager who appeared very grateful. Soft and elegant, the full-flavored Pinot Noir has a style that can linger on the nose and palate for quite a while.

Southern Rhône and Provence, France

Domaine Camille Cayran, 2005 Gigondas, Southern Rhône

While exploring Arles (the city of Van Gogh and a Roman coliseum which is 1900 years old and still used for bullfights), we were accompanied by French friends who knew the city very well and had made reservations at an off-the-beaten path restaurant, La Gueule de Loup. In a quiet area of town, this restaurant has quality food and excellent service. Our friends ordered this wine for lunch because we were going to visit Gigondas the next day. The dark, rich color and amazing nose led me to a wine that offered the best of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre. Bold flavors worked well with the outstanding meal and our good friends.

Domaine Jaume, 2006 Côtes du Rhône Blanc, Rhône

Tasted with lunch at Les Florets in Gigondas, an inn and restaurant that is secluded and outstanding. We sat on the verandah overlooking trees and mountains, and it was absolutely quiet. Did I say the service was outstanding? Is it the high quality of the wine or the outstanding surroundings that made this wine so special? I'm not sure, but it was a remarkable lunch, and I look forward to finding this wine again.

Domaine Mont-Redon, 2004 Chateauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, Southern Rhône

Tasted at the Restaurant Frederick Mistral, which is named for the French poet after whom the Rhône winds are named. I've only had a few white wines from this region and never thought they were worth the rather high price. Now I've had a good one. A blend of Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, Clairette, Picpoul and Roussanne. The wine had deep, rich flavors and with the 4-plus years in the bottle, it showed very well. We enjoyed it so much we decided to visit the winery the next day.



Bruce in the Mont-Redon vineyards with its rocky soil typical of the area.

Chateau Rayas, 2000 Reserve Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Southern Rhône

Tasted at Restaurant La Mere Germaine in Chateauneuf-du-Pape. I've waited all these years to have my first Chateau Rayas, and the wait was worthwhile. Upon receiving the first taste I was surprised that the color was so light, the nose not much and the taste nothing exceptional. The waiter decanted the wine and after 20 minutes-- WOW! The color was a deep red, the nose was jumping out of the decanter and the taste . . . This was the most I've ever spent in a restaurant for a bottle of wine but I'll buy another any day. The wine list contained 6 vintages of the Blanc and 3 of the Rouge. What a welcome to Chateauneuf!

As additional information on this special wine, the vineyard for Rayas is only 19.8 acres which produce about 2,000 cases. The wine is fermented in cement tanks and aged for 12-22 months in old oak. The vineyard is planted with 98% Grenache. Robert Parker says about Rayas that "it reaches a level of sumptuousness and extraordinary intensity, allied with an opulence in texture and flavor, that even humbles a great Bordeaux or Burgundy."

Winery Visits

Domaine de Durban, Beauges de Venise

We visited this winery by picking the name from a street sign. I find it is always better to be lucky than good. The drive to the vineyard is a steep climb over the mountains on a single lane road. At the top you see a small valley with acres of vines. This is where we did our tasting. While we don't see these wines in the US, it was most interesting to try their dry white and reds.

- **2007 Vin de Pay de Vaucluse**, a blend of Viognier and Chardonnay, this was a pleasant wine with an acidic edge.
- **2007 Cuvée Speciale de Durban**, is 100% Viognier and is a unique wine with sharp Viognier flavors.
- **2007 Fruite de Durban**, a dry Muscat, which I thought was a bit out of balance.
- **2007 Vin de Pay de Vaucluse Rosé**, made from 100% Grenache, was a rich version of rosé and delightful.
- **2006 Beauges-de-Venise Rouge, Cuvée Prestige**, a G S M blend, is aged in oak, is rich and full-flavored and should age for 4 or 5 years (I brought a bottle home). They also have a regular version which sees no oak, but I preferred the Prestige version.

Domaine de Coyeux, Beauges de Venise

This is the wine we see most in the US. The drive to this vineyard was similar to the Durban and the scenery was just as beautiful.

- **2002 Beauges de Venise Rouge**, is a G S M blend, which had a tight nose and may be fading a bit.
- **2004 Beauges de Venise Rouge**, was rich in the aroma and a bit light in the flavor area. It showed little spice and would make a very pleasant lunch wine.
- **2006 Beauges de Venise** is what the region is famous for. The sweet dessert wine made from 100% Muscat a Petits Grains Blanc offers a light sweet wine that does not overpower and would work very well with fruit desserts.

Chateau de Saint-Cosme, Gigondas

This is one of the finest properties in Gigondas. With a small tasting room, there were always several others coming and going during our tasting.

- **2008 Côtes du Rhône Blanc**, a blend of Roussanne, Viognier, Marsanne and Picpoul, is a wine with a lingering finish and crisp taste.
- **2008 Côte du Rhône**, is made with 100% Syrah and had a spicy taste, but needs several more years of bottle age.
- **2007 Chateau de Saint-Cosme, Les Deux Alban**, is a G S M blend with deep, bold flavors, which can continue to improve for at least 5 more years.
- **2006 St. Joseph**, is 100% Syrah with a mellow taste made in the northern Rhône area and brought to the winery for bottling. A smooth wine that is very food-friendly.
- **2007 Gigondas**, is the flagship bottling and a G S M blend with 1% Cinsault. This is a big wine that will be well-served by decanting. Rich with a balanced finish.
- **2007 Côte Rôtie**, is 100% Syrah and is remarkably smooth for a young Côte Rôtie. I brought a bottle home, so watch for more details in the future.

Chateau Mont-Redon, Chateauneuf-du-Pape [photo of Bruce at Mont Redon]

After having a bottle of their white wine at lunch, we decided to visit the winery, and I'm glad we did. Note the accompanying photo in the vineyard of this producer. The vineyard was first planted in 1334, but the current vineyard averages about 50-year-old vines. Interestingly the tiled floor of the tasting room has 3 cutouts covered by glass. One contains the round rocks from the vineyard, one has chunks of limestone from the white wine vineyards and the third has poor quality soil and stone from the Côte du Rhône vineyard.

- **2007 Chateauneuf-du-Pape Blanc**, showed good fruit with balanced acidity.
- **2007 Côte du Rhône Blanc**, was smooth and mellow with balanced flavors.
- **2008 Lirac Blanc**, has light flavors and a flowery nose.
- **2006 Chateauneuf-de-Pape**, has a deep nose followed by rich flavors with a majority of Grenache and a variety of other red varietals. This will be at its best from 2012 to 2016.

A Word about Avignon

Avignon became famous in 1308 when Pope Clement V, a Bordeaux native, chose this city as the seat of the Papacy. He began building a castle fit for his position and his 7 successors continued the building and expanded on his plans. Pope John XXII, the second Avignon Pope, built a summer castle and planted a vineyard about 10 miles north in a town now known as Chateauneuf-du-Pape (new castle of the Pope).

This is where the world famous wines are grown on only 8,100 acres. With the election of Pope Gregory XI, Avignon had its last Pope in residence. The Papacy last through 1378 in the small French town, but they left the palace and huge walled city in Avignon.

During our visit to this area we stayed at the small Hotel Mistral, which was wisely selected because it is located outside the walled city. We thus avoided the daily drive along the very narrow medieval streets. The young owners of the hotel, Cori and Chris could not have been more helpful and gracious. We enjoyed getting to know them during our continental breakfast each morning.