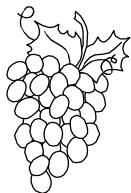



## FROM THE GRAPEVINE

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**July 2004**

One of my favorite annual wine events is the pre-arrival offering from **Maison Joseph Drouhin of Beaune**, held this year at Lawry's The Prime Rib in Beverly Hills. The affair featured red and white Burgundies of 2002, and the 2001 wines from **Domaine Drouhin Oregon**, which I visited a couple years ago. More than 30 bottles were available to sample. With Los Angeles being a driving town, I didn't come close to trying everything that was on hand.

We began with the 2002 whites. The *Bourgogne Chardonnay* (\$6.50) was a crisp bottle with pleasant citrus and apple flavors. The *Macon-Villages* (\$6.50) was similarly fruity and nice. I found the *Saint Veran* (\$8.50) to be a step up with its good fruit and long finish, as was the dry, even *Pouilly-Fuisse* (\$13). With a mineral nose and strong apple overtones, I quite liked the *Chablis Domaine de Vaudon* (\$13.50). The dry, flinty *Puligny-Montrachet* (\$26) featured nice cucumber notes. Next, the *Chassagne-Montrachet* (\$25) was round, even and all together pleasant. The *Mersault* (\$24) was quiet but not at all subdued – the full-bodied wine's honeyed fruit filled the mouth rewardingly.

We continued our journey up the price scale with the *Puligny-Montrachet Les Foliatieres, Premier Cru* (\$36). This subtle wine began with a vegetal nose and mineral cast, and ended rich and firm. This bottle can be easily laid down until 2009. Similarly the *Chablis Grand Cru Vaudesir* (\$40) lived up to its price tag. This bottle was deep yet balanced, smooth but strong. Lovely peach, apricot and floral notes bloomed into a full-bodied wine with a superb long finish. I particularly enjoyed the ripe, spicy *Beaune Clos de Mouches Blanc, Premier Cru* (\$48.50). Already ample and medium-bodied, it will be interesting to see how this wine matures. We ended the whites with a special treat: the *1988 Batard-Montrachet Grand Cru* (\$145). The bottle opened with herbaceous and green-pepper notes before intense fruit flavors marched in. Stylish and complex, the wine concluded with a stunning long finish. Patient connoisseurs should try to refrain from sipping this until 2012.

We then turned our attention to the 2002 red Burgundies, which were pleasingly uniform in quality. Everything we tasted already exhibited a beautiful color, nice balance, great fruit and an impressive structure. As the bottles evolve, this vintage shows promise of being a great one!

We began with the *Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2001* (\$8.50), which demonstrated lots of berry aromas and flavor. The wine managed to be light while tossing off undertones of the oak in which it had been aged. Next came the *Chorey-Les-Beaune* (\$13.25), which the winemakers themselves thought a ripe, balanced wine that should be saved until 2007 before opening. It presented lots of berries and raisin with a clean nose. I'm considering buying this one for myself to see how it ages. I found the *Cote de Beaune* (\$15.50) spicy and medium-bodied. A generous wine, it smoothed out nicely. I also want to buy the *Morey-St. Denis* (\$20), which had a velvety taste, vivid color and dark berries on the nose. The *Gevrey-Chambertin* (\$23) had eucalyptus on the nose and a zing on the palate. An energetic bottle, the winemakers think it should be put down until 2010.

I loved the complex *Chambolle-Musigny Premier Cru* (\$32.50), which showed a good nose, a great finish, and lingering spices and fruit. This bottle would best be enjoyed from 2010 onward. Also particularly good was the *Beaune Clos des Mouches Rouge, Premier Cru* (\$35.50). It's a nicely velvety yet tannic wine. Less impressive was the *Bones Mares 1996 Grand Cru* (no price provided), which proved slow to open. It started off vegetal on the nose and slowly unfurled with an earthy taste. Perhaps it was just high in tannin. I think it should age until after 2012. Another reward for the patient is the smoky *Charms Chamber tin Grand Cru* (\$58), which possessed good dark colors and a nice balance. This wine can be drunk from 2011 onward.

We concluded with the pinots made by Veronique Douching. The *Chardonnay 'Arthur' 2002* (\$17) is currently available. With apple and stone fruit up front and in the nose, this is a balanced Burundian-style wine. Another good example of the Douching product was the fruity and clean *Pinot Noir 2001* (\$28). I particularly liked the *Pinot Noir 'Laurene' 2000* (\$37), which is a big wine with integrity. Bursting with flavor, the fruit emerged quickly on the tongue.

Before we left, we were given one last treat: fruit *crèmes* (\$16) produced in Alsace, France. These preservative-free *crèmes* are made by steeping mashed, ripe fruit in an *eaux de vie* of the same fruit and then blending with honey. Seven different flavors are made, and at 20% alcohol are designed to be sipped alone or used as an ingredient for other drinks. I sampled the *Crème de Framboise* (raspberry) mixed with dry white wine to make a kir, and the delectable *Crème de Peche* (peach) in champagne. When the hot weather hits, these make the perfect summer drink!

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My long-time acquaintance Bill Gotti – owner-manager of Victor's in Hollywood and former wine manager of Greenblatt's Deli and Fine Wines – and I have been discussing collaborating on some wine programs. To see how compatible our pairing philosophies are, we recently had dinner at [Zucca Ristorante](#) downtown, where Bill's son Joseph is *chef de cuisine*. (And like all Joachim Splichal restaurants, it has a notable wine list.)

Let me tell you, Joe put out a magnificent effort. The pairing highlights included a *risotto frutti di mare* in a tomato-saffron broth with a *2001 Gavi* (\$8/glass) from [Principessa](#)

**Gavia** in Italy's Piedmont region. A stunning seared foie gras served with roasted peaches, puff pastry and a vanilla-Moscato sauce absolutely sang with the **Pra Recioto de Soave 1996 Reserve** (\$10/glass). I also particularly liked the coupling of **Farnese's Sangiovese 2001** (\$7/glass) with a roasted monkfish served with pea shoots, roasted potatoes and warm mushroom vinaigrette.

We greatly enjoyed our trial dinner and decided that we would collaborate with Chef Joseph to design a special wine dinner open to all wine- and food-lovers. As a result, we are pleased to announce a stunning six-course feast featuring the foods and wines of Burgundy to be held on July 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. The menu will consist of: *escargot* sautéed with parsley, garlic and butter; cedar-smoked trout coupled with a fingerling potato salad with tarragon and Pommery mustard; an orange-and-flower tea granite palate cleanser; a *saucisson* with a *jardinière* of pickled vegetables; a beef *roulade* with fresh herbs and mushroom *farce* served with a cracked pepper and red-wine sauce; a cheese plate featuring *Epoisses*, *Bresse Bleu* and *Supreme*; and last but never least a peach-almond beggar's purse with raspberry coulis. Wines will be paired throughout, and we'll wrap up with champagne over the dessert course. The price for this outstanding gastronomic event is \$165 per person or \$300 per couple. For reservations or more information, contact either Bill at 323-467-0620 or Joel at 818-429-6770. Seating is limited so reserve early!

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I want to conclude by reminding you that there are no 'rights' or 'wrongs' when it comes to wine pairings. The old rules have been cheerfully thrown out the window. The key is to be adventurous and see what works best for you. Most of all, have fun. Wine should be enjoyed, not be a source of stress in your life!

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