

Hey everyone, hope your summer was both relaxing and rewarding. I know it's been a while since I wrote some solid tasting notes, apologies. I most definitely have been drinking, so don't cry for me just yet. When you do as much business in six months as you did in the previous twelve, it's a bit intense. And this Fall is going to be pretty close as well. Long live wine.

A record setting year is worthy of numerous recordable events full of long-lived wines, and I will be catching up a lot on the year's most noteworthy events in the coming weeks. For no particular reason, I will begin with a lunch in Hong Kong. This was a lunch to which I was looking very forward, a showdown between the Right Bank's five biggest names from three consecutive vintages, 2000, 2001 and 2002.

The **2002 Cheval Blanc** began with a beautiful nose. It immediately struck Gil and I that 2002 was a delightful 'drinking' vintage, aka a vintage that drinks well in its youth. Some immediate satisfaction can be a good thing. Any top Chateau in Bordeaux will make wines that age twenty years, no matter what the quality of the vintage, and that was quite evident with the '02 Cheval. It had a great nose full of cedar, nuts, smoke, minerals and a hint of glaze. Olive crept out as well. The palate had nice flesh and flavors of green bean and stalk. It was pleasant, balanced and long. It gained in the glass and closed the initial gap between it and the 2001, which was still the better wine (**93**).

The **2001 Cheval Blanc** was more aromatic and perfumed, dancing in the nose with its great floral components. It was open and saucy, layered with enthusiastic sprinkles of spice. The palate came across just as densely as the nose indicated. It was chunky, chocolaty and more concentrated than the 2002. Vincent, aka 'The Poet' remarked, 'its structure is so good, yet it's also silkier than the 2000.' Gil was energetically in the 2001 camp already (**94**).

**2000 Cheval Blanc** was the only wine that could finish this flight properly, and indeed it did. The level of freshness and depth was miles ahead of the previous two, its freshness ahead in a penetrating way. It was so fine and long. I loved the depth in the nose, where multiple flavors were singing loudly. Its rich, long palate was both fine and deep, with an edgy, sandy swagger. 'Elegant, fine, long, fine, fresh' all appeared repeatedly in my notes. Its finish had a lift that the others didn't. The Poet decreed, 'fantastic tannins, and the fruit is there' (**96**).

It was now Ausone's turn, beginning with the **2002 Ausone**. The nose was much more concentrated, really dense, rich and saucy. There was a little animal and horse around the edges, and also a quality that was not dill, not citrus and not rosemary, but somehow a hybrid of the three. It was a big wine in the mouth, heavy, concentrated and thick. I preferred the Cheval, as the Ausone was drier and cedary, and it also had thinner flavors. Gil commented, 'freshly carved roast beef' but also conceded a 'watery element in the middle.' Vincent added, 'fresh water lilies' (**91**).

Gil opened the discussion on the **2001 Ausone** with 'back road Pennsylvania iron works deer hunter,' perhaps reminiscing about his youth :). I liked the '01 much more, as it was

more classic in the nose, full of ceramic crispness as well as great length and penetration. Aromas of mint, fir and chocolate glaze danced around its meaty core. The palate was fine, stylish and long, possessing that Cheval elegance despite it being all Ausone. It was crisp but also possessed that same cedary flavor that marred the '02, although the '01 kept it more in check (**93**).

The **2000 Ausone** was likened to a 'Tahiti beach' with its very exotic nose. There were definite sunscreen and cocoa butter aromas, wrapped around a cedary centerpoint. While it was clearly the best of the three wines, all of the Ausones were quite similar in their personality and power, more similar than I would have expected given the diversity of style of these three consecutive vintages. Much to my surprise, three out of four in attendance preferred the Ausone to the Cheval! I was a bit surprised, as I clearly preferred the Cheval across the board (**94**).

While Ausone took an early lead amongst the awakening palates of our group, I was pretty sure that would change quickly, as flights of Lafleur, Petrus and Le Pin were next. The **2002 Lafleur** was fresh and a real change of pace, clearly from a different territory. Gil observed 'earthiness' and 'vertesse,' aka a slight green. Alex noted 'white pepper.' It had a framework of cedar around a super deep plummy core. The Poet admired the 'freshness of earth' that climbed out of the terroir into our glasses. Its palate was thick, possessing hints of coffee grinds. This first Lafleur was long, earthy, full and big, and the least approachable 2002 so far. Its acidity really lingered; it possessed grip without length of tannins, however. 'Rust' came from the crowd. I vascillated between 92 and 93 points (**92+**).

The **2001 Lafleur** had a kinky nose, very tropical with its sweet orange, citrus, passion and wild fruit aromas. I also loved the many shades of purple in its nose, which were deep and plentiful. The palate was rich, but more shut down than I remember. It was cleaner than the 2002, and despite it being shut down on the palate (for now), it was all there. The acidity lifted the wine up after some time, allowing a peek into what will be (**95**).

The **2000 Lafleur** was a WOW wine, clearly the most layered and exotic. The nose was deep and thick, a veritable Pomerol phenomenon. Hints of beef and plum rounded out its chunky soup nose. The 2000's palate was also a bit shut down, but the 2000 couldn't be contained like the '01. Rich, long and great, the '00 possessed delectable supporting flavors of citrus, beef and dust. It told a glorious, long story on the finish, going on and on so elegantly. 'Wow' graced my notes again, along with a 'roasted/grilled goodness.' The 2000 Lafleur was strength without muscle, powerful yet deft, with the potential to age for decades (**97**).

The Petrus was certainly not afraid of the big, bad Lafleur, and the **2002 Petrus** quickly showed why. It was the best of the 2002 bunch (what else is new). Fresh aromas of garden tickled my nose at first. It seemingly had great everything - fruit, spice, tang, sweet citrus, a hint of game and a 'so sexy' perfume. Alex agreed with me, hailing it 'clearly the best of 02.' Flavors of garden, pungent flower and great spice rounded out

this beauty (94).

The **2001 Petrus** was reserved and stylish. Gil was taken aback by its depth, declaring, 'my word' about it. There was more noticeable tannin here, yet it was still so fine. The 2002 was more showy, but the '01 kept getting finer, like a beautiful woman slowly walking towards you from afar. Aromas of chocolate and secondary candle wax stood out, and the alcohol was also more noticeable. It got sweeter in the glass, and there was no doubting its greatness and potential. The 2002 was closer in quality than expected, though (95).

The **2000 Petrus** was the wine of the day so far, without a doubt. There was so much more concentration than anything else. There were lots of wows, oohs and aahs around the room. It was deep with big fruit, like this exotic sweet berry oatmeal that said good morning in the perfect way on the perfect day. It was long and sexy with a beefy edge, and the wine didn't budge in the glass, holding its ground longer than I could keep it out of my mouth (99).

Le Pin was the way we decided to end our afternoon, and the **2002 Le Pin** jumped out of the glass with its tropical, exotic and unique personality. Its nose was penetrating and exciting. Then again, isn't penetration always exciting? There were lots of dust, plum, citrus and spice aromas. The palate possessed richness and concentration, as well as exotic, sweet, fleshy, gorgeous, sexy flavors. Gil found it 'more powerful' and observed that it had the 'longest time out of the bottle' as well, perhaps opening its doors a bit more than those of the wines served earlier. The '02 Le Pin was definitely singing and another impressively approachable 2002 (93).

My notes were starting to wane, and shockingly so did the last two wines. The **2001 Le Pin** was spicy and fresh, possessing that flowery, exotic style, with a hint more wood than the 2002. I didn't like the '01 at all after the '02; it was thinner and simple (91?).

The **2000 Le Pin** was no amazing grace either. Its nose was a combination of cat box and mango juice, and not much more. It was smooth and a bit kinky, but either the bottle was completely shut down or 'off.' Feng Shui Tony also found it 'very disappointing' (90?).

While the finish was a bit anti-climactic, this tasting was quite dramatic overall. It was a glimpse into early greatness, a fascinating comparison of both producer and vintage. In the end, almost 3 out of 5 tasters preferred Petrus. Some things never change.

FIN

JK