

Notes From The Cellar (NFTC); Winepairings e-letter July 23, 2008

Highly rated Hermitage & Barolo two 94 point wines for about ½ price

The new movie “Bottle Shock” centers around the famous “Judgment in Paris “ when California wines actually beat the French wines in a blind tasting judged by French judges. The movie gets released today on the big screen. While some consider this event which happened over 30 years ago to be a defining moment in the American wine scene, I find the timing of the release a bit ironic. Here's why: Yesterday it was announced that the owners of the famous French Bordeaux estate Cos D'Estournel are purchasing no other than the winery which made the winner of the # 1 white wine of the aforementioned judgment in Paris : Montelena.

A sign of the times for sure, this could be the beginning of a new trend as the Europeans find it more beneficial to spend their money buying US assets including famous wineries. After all at 60 cents on the dollar in terms of currency exchange, this makes a lot of sense. How this will effect pricing of US wines is something that remains to be seen. Somehow maybe this is another sign that we are hopefully close to the bottom of this cycle, Long time readers of this newsletter know that the low dollar has made it more difficult to find great values in imported wines.

This brings us to today's featured wines – both recent distributor closeouts- purchased originally at much stronger \$, these wines are priced below the wholesale cost of current vintages. Normally I would feature these in the “Collector's Corner” simply because of the quality and age- ability. Since timing is of the essence, I am shortening the format of the newsletter to get these out quickly. All I know is that deals like these disappear fast so hopefully, if you have an interest -you are reading this before they are all gone.

Today's Wine Deal \$\$\$

Delas Hermitage Les Bessards 2004 \$68- (Wow! compare to 120-175)

Hermitage, this small area in the Northern Rhone region of France, is home to some of the most praised and collectible Syrah wines in the world -unfortunately also some of the most expensive. The owners of Deuts-Roederer Champagne were on to something. They knew that Delas had access to some of the best raw material in this tiny and world famous appellation. About a decade ago they purchased this house, and in very short period have whipped this once under-archiver into shape. Since the 1997 vintage, this has been consistently one of the best producers in Hermitage. As the wine world has come to recognize the turnaround, The Les Bessards one of the top wines produced at Delas has been moving up in price. Typically, a newly released bottle sells for around the \$160+ level these days. The 2004 vintage was wedged between 3 of the best recent vintages in Hermitage (2003, 2005 and 2006). While most producers in the Northern Rhone did not make exceptional wine in 2004 , the 2004 Bessards was one of the finest of the vintage

As the following review from Mr Parker indicates. At less than half price of current vintages this represents exceptional value.

Wine Advocate # 170 Apr 2007 Robert Parker Score **94 points** Drink 2010 - 2030 :” *The top cuvee of the house (but with the production limited to approximately 500 or so cases) is the Hermitage Les Bessards, only made in the best vintages. The 2004 Hermitage Les Bessards has dense ruby/purple color and a beautifully sweet nose of creme de cassis, underbrush, mineral, and subtle oak. The tannins are relatively supple, but the wine is rich, full-bodied, and atypically thick and intense for a 2004. This is a beauty and reminiscent of Chave’s brilliant 2004 red Hermitage,*

combining both power and elegance. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2030."

Vietti Barolo Brunate 2003 \$85 (compare to \$120 +)

2003 overall was not as universally successful a vintage in Piedmont as the 2001 and 2004. Yet some of the better producers managed to make excellent wines. Now that some of the wines have had a chance to age in bottle for a few years, it is becoming evident to Barolo aficionados that some of these wines have turned out to be better than originally anticipated. Further more by the time the 2004's were released, the hype of the great vintage coincided with the shrinking dollar. It is not uncommon to see prices up by 30 % or more. Stick to the best producers and select carefully and you will be handsomely rewarded. Such is the case with today's wine from Vietti. Long considered one of the top producers that Europeans have long clamored for. Vietti wines seem to possess that magic: offering modern clean fruit driven wines that still possess a powerful representation of their origin, as well as the structure and complexity often found in the more traditional wines. Perhaps the closest producer in that style I can think of is the iconic Luciano Sandrone. While Vietti is still not that well known in the US -this situation is changing rapidly due to the praise bestowed on the estate by Antonio Galloni Galloni's writings in Parker's Wine Advocate.

The Brunate is Vietti's best wine from 2003 and at about half the price of most of his single vineyard offerings from 2004, this is as good a deal you will find on a great bottle of Barolo.

Wine Advocate # 173 Oct 2007 Antonio Galloni, Score: **94 points**. Drink 2009 - 2023

"Vietti's 2003 Barolo Brunate is one of the stars of the vintage. This full-bodied, generous Barolo flows from the glass with seductive layers of vibrant dark fruit. The mentholated, balsamic notes that are typical of Brunate add overtones of complexity and the well-used oak contributes a final note of sweetness. This Barolo finishes with big tannins, but has plenty of intensity in its fruit to provide balance. The finish is elegant and fresh. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2023."

Thanks again for all your support and referrals, tell your friends, Cheers

Paul David, Chief Fermented Grape Taster.

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