



Your Source of Wine for Every Occasion

## Notes From The Cellar "NFTC" Newsletter *January 20, 2010*

### **Thoughts for the new year & Bubblics**

With a new year upon us I put some observations together for a brief overview : We are starting off the year pretty much where we left 2009. If you are a grape grower, wine maker or a part of the normal wine distribution system it looks like 2010 will continue to be a challenging year. If you are a wine consumer, or collector, these are amazing times.

A friend told me over the holidays that he feels better about his wine purchases than any of his investments "I got great deals this past year and at least with wine I know what I can expect" was his comment. I find it pretty hard to argue with his take. We have seen some very interesting trends over the past year. What was hot? Wines that come from good producers and good vintages, sell out quickly. Take the Southern Rhone from 2007: tremendous wines and those priced reasonably in their class, \$20-30 for some excellent village wines, and great Chateauneufs around \$50 got snapped up quickly. Older vintages of the better wines which normally commend premiums were occasionally offered at discounts. Those were also very popular. There are some draw backs: In general, the availability of new brands, or those wines that are less known is shrinking, and importers and distributors are reducing their risks by narrowing selections and consolidating into core known brands. The more exotic selections are often based on direct Import orders (DI) only. This is unfortunate as this is where you will find some of the more exciting wines which often represent the best values.

We will continue to adjust and strike where we can find the value, and there is good wine to come. It appears that 2009 has been a very solid vintage in many of the worlds growing regions. While many of these wines will not hit the market for a while, the prospect of some great wine down the road, will help keep the line on prices for current releases and probably lead to some good prices reductions on existing products.

On the domestic side is where I see some dark clouds. Most of this wine is sold here in the US . The American wine consumer is becoming more sophisticated, knowledgeable, and selective. The easy days of selling expensive juice from relatively new and unknown producers for top dollar are over. I see a big shakeup with many producers going out of business or selling out. The mid price market is particularly vulnerable. I have been saying for a while that we have too many players in this field and the soft economy will accelerate the inevitable retraction. Unfortunately this will also have it's effect on many of those folks making great wine who were not sharp business people or got over extended. There will be deals on some great wines, on brands that will unfortunately disappear from the landscape. Ultimately the survivors will emerge stronger but that may take a few more years.

For those of you who can accumulate wine for the long term -let me know if I can be of help with a strategic purchasing strategy. I come across many long time wine collectors on a regular basis-every single one of them is happy with some of the opportunities that are being presented due to the current economy. For those of you considering starting a collection, be it based on off site storage, purchasing a free standing wine fridge or finally taking the plunge and investing in building a temperature controlled cellar, I say: Go for it. From a historical prospective this is a great time. don' t let this opportunity pass you by.

### **\$\$\$ Today's Wine Deal \$\$\$**

On to today's offer. One of the biggest splits in demand for any segment in the wine business lately has been Champagne. While the big production, non distinctive offerings from the big houses is taking a hit (sales down 42% according to industry reports) The special bottling in the luxury market, wines from the top vintages, as well as the good stuff from the small producers has all seen a very strong increase in demand. Regular readers of NFTC know we are big Champagne aficionados and always look for the good stuff especially if the price is right. Today's offering is definitely one you should not let pass you by. Sure, we have St Valentine around the corner a good excuse for downing a bottle or two, and if you are looking for a special bottle give us call -we have a few gems in stock. Yet, I urge you to think ahead: if you are planing a big event this summer (wedding or graduation party ) this may be the perfect opportunity to strike & stock up .

## **LEOPARDI Leopart Cava Brut 2003**

**(lot 04-09)**

**\$31 per bottle , or \$29- / bottle- with our cash discount** (checks are ok)

Most Spanish Cava is junk. Cheap, either dry and aggressive, or sometimes sweet and nasty. In Spain they make it & drink it by the gallon. Since it's cheap, (mostly under \$15) most of the stuff that comes into the US is generally sold based on low price. It competes in the market with cheap Italian Spumante. On the other hand some producers have made premium products -most of those are made in the traditional Champagne method (2<sup>nd</sup> fermentation in bottle) and sold in heavy fancy bottles. Those can be good ,but by the time you pay \$40 and up for some of those, well, my attitude is that for that price, you are better off with a good French Champagne.

Leopardi is unique -what we are featuring today is the their top of the line. A tiny production of only 3000 cases -of which only 10% makes it into the US. In terms of the Cava market or even Champagne this is minuscule. This is a Grand Reserva which upon 2<sup>nd</sup> fermentation is aged for a minimum of 3 more years, often longer, to let the flavors integrate. A blend of 4 grapes; estate grown by a family in the wine business for over 6 centuries. It's a refined product with class. This is a serious wine which will be enjoyed by casual drinkers due to it's smoothness, as well as by connoisseurs due to it's nuances and refinement.



Fine bubbles , delicate flavors, with nice balance of fruit and acidity a slightly lemony flavor on the attack, and a mellow persistent finish. This is a perfect wine to serve in cocktail reception or with appetizers. A recent bottle consumed over several evenings at my house was a testament to the further potential of additional aging -though at over 6 years from the vintage with some additional bottle age, it is already at a great place. The effort here was in the juice not the packaging -a superb value from a great vintage of which there is very little stock left. This was offered by the local importer for a private presentation that I was asked to conduct on premium Spanish wines. We managed to get the green light to offer our readers a shot at the remaining stock of this wine. Do not miss it.

## **Pascal DOQUET Champagne, Premiers Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut (2000/01/02 MV blend) \*note this is not the**

**"regular" Blanc de Blancs NV**

**\$46 per bottle , or \$44-/- bottle- with our cash discount (checks are ok)**

Doquet is a small grower producer located in the village of Vertus near Avize.

Imported by Bobby Kacher; one of the finest presenters of superb wines from small producers into our market. I have been a fan of Doquet Champagnes for years. Wine maker/ owner Pascal's skills combined with access to top shelf fruit and small production with emphasis on quality is exactly what make small grower bubbles so special. This is Chardonnay based Champagnes (Blanc de Blanc) known for it's delicacy, elegance and incredible ability to age. A great food wine and a perfect match for lighter dishes or a nice plate of Sushi or Sashimi. (Order some out from your favorite Sushi joint, crack open a bottle and you turned a regular evening into a feast).

Perhaps the biggest problem I see with Doquet's wines is that they get released too early. They really need time to integrate and develop to reach their full potential . I have had his regular non vintage BdB (his basic wine) after keeping the bottles in my cellar for over 3 years and had folks blown away by the smoothness and flavor. Yet it is hard for a small producer or his importer to invest even more time in aging these wines. This is a bit ironic, especially since in the case of the higher end stuff like the one we are featuring today, the man already ages these wines for much longer than the law requires. It's a bit of a shame - while aged longer than usual, most get released and consumed way before they have reached their peak . Probably one of the reasons this is a little under the radar -than again



that keeps prices low for those in the know.

Today's featured Premier Cru is made from the family holdings in 3 vineyards from the southern end of the Cote des Blancs. All classified as 1<sup>st</sup> growth. In effect while classified as a Non Vintage (NV) Champagne which can be a combination of any vintage, this is a Multi Vintage (MV) Champagne; a product of only 3 distinct vintages. An MV Champagne is usually centered around a particularly good vintage -in this case the superb 2002 (51%) rounded off with a balance of the 2000 and 2001 vintages -offering a little riper and mature character to make it approachable earlier. So intense is the 2002 fruit that even as an MV blend this Champagne will improve for many years to come. I will keep my bottles at bay for 3-5 years. If you were to drink this champagne now, I would strongly recommend it be decanted and served in white wine glassed -even better open the bottle and keep it cold for about an hr prior to serving. If you can cellar it, you will have something very special on hand. Laser like focus with quince, tropical fruit and tremendous verve. Extremely fine bubbles with a fresh mousse and what I call a "steely" flavor profile which you often get from the great Champagnes made from the area of Vertus. Think Chablis with bubbles and you will get the right idea. With some time in the glass, you also get some nice mineral tones to the finish, and a hint of yeast to the overall experience. The Deal: This is a Champagne that was to be priced in the mid 60's -but with a small amount on hand, our local distributor made us a nice offer on some perfectly stored stock. Priced within a few dollars of what most retailers will charge you for a plain Jane Champagne mass produced in lots of tens of thousand cases. Instead this one is the real deal, a wine with soul and strong sense of it's origin and a fantastic quality for a deeply discounted price. Enjoy.

**Thanks for all your support and referrals.**

**Tell your friends, share the wine, & spread the good vibe. Cheers!**

*Paul David*, Chief Fermented Grape Taster.

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