

## ***Notes From The Cellar (NFTC); Winepairings e-letter Jun 04, 2008***

### **An aged 2001 Chateauneuf -Direct from the source; entering the sweet spot in it's drinking window**

Let's face it. Many great wines are consumed way to young. Just yesterday at a trade event, I spoke with a wine buyer for one of Denver's most established top tier restaurants. I commented about the lack of mature wines on most wine lists, and got the old line about costs, and inability to tie up funds in wine that will take years to reach optimal consumption....Yada Yada...

Unfortunately such is the situation with most retail wine selections as well. I know many of you are stashing away current vintages for future consumption. It's much harder to find ones to drink now.

I am always on the look out for older wines that may be approaching optimal drinking. If the cost is not prohibitive and the storage conditions good, these rare purchases always get me excited. When the cost is close to release, this becomes a very easy call. 5 months ago, when I came across an offer to purchase a great CDP released directly from the estate, the only hard part was the limited quantity offered to me. It is finally here.

A little background: A quite revolution has gone on in some of France's wine growing areas. Robert Parker in 2000 titled an article: **THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN RHONE AND THEIR IMMENSE QUALITY PROGRESSION**. In it he writes:

"I have been visiting France professionally as a wine critic for twenty-two years, and have never seen such a quality transformation in a viticultural region as I have witnessed in the Rhône Valley over the last four or five years. A new, young generation of winemakers has increasingly taken charge of their family domaines. This has resulted in a refreshing new, open-minded approach to winemaking where the goal is simple - high quality.... No region of France, with the possible exceptions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Burgundy, has made as much qualitative progression as the Rhône Valley. This new generation, mostly under 35-years of age, and are in positions of extraordinary power and influence within their respective appellations. They are revolutionizing the quality of wines consumers receive."

Parker goes on to list **Jean -Marc Diffonty** Maker of Vatican as one of those mavericks. Parker is not the only one praising Diffonty. In a Wine Spectator July 2006 article titled "**9 wineries to watch**" subtitled "These family-owned domaines are helping lead Chateauneuf-du-Pape to new levels of quality" senior writer James Molesworth list **Félicien Diffonty & Fils** as one of the stars of the region.

Here is what he wrote:

"This estate is run by the clean-cut, matter-of-fact Jean-Marc Diffonty, 34, who took over in 1994 from his father, Félicien. The domaine includes 54 acres in Châteauneuf and produces 6,500 cases a year, of which 20 percent goes to the United States.

This is one of the domaines where the new generation has taken over quickly and smoothly. "My father retired and he said, 'Here are the keys.' That was that," says Diffonty.

Diffonty employs the traditional fermentation using cement vats and then moves the wine to a mix of foudre and barrique. There are two red cuvées—the normal Cuvée du Vatican and the Sixtine Réserve. The regular cuvée features 80 percent Grenache, along with Syrah, Cinsault and the other red varieties. It's typically a solid, ripe raspberry- and black cherry-filled wine with both a creamy texture and stony persistence on the finish.

Diffonty's slightly updated approach has added some modern bass to the traditional treble, without resulting in overdone or jammy wines. “

In the past 10 years or so Diffonty and his Cuvee du Vatican CDP's have emerged as an excellent source of highly rated quality wines In a classic expression of the region (making the Spectator's top 100 list in 2005). Still considered a relative newcomer, the wines are generally very modestly priced for the overall quality making them a favorite purchase for my personal collection. The high end cuvee Reserve Sixtine (a wine that in a top vintage could age 15-20 years) gets most of the attention and has recently seen upward moves in price. The regular cuvee priced lower, is also starting to move but still offers great value, and the added benefit of reaching optimal drinking earlier.

Take the best current vintage widely available; the 2005- it retails in the \$30-40 range and will require another 5+ years to reach it's optimal consumption window. With the US \$ decline, I am certain that the 2006 and 2007 will see further price increases upon release. Today we feature a chance to sample a top vintage from the great 2001 which some have rated as Jean-Marc's best effort of this wine to date. Direct from perfect storage in France and at the same price range as the current vintage! If you are looking for a nice CDP to drink in the near term but with 7 years of maturity- this is very hard to beat.

### **\$\$\$ wine deals \$\$\$**

#### **Cuvee Du Vatican Chateauf-du-Pape 2001 \$36-**

Consider this: upon release this wine got a 91 point rating from Parker and a 92 point rating from Wine Spectator. Here are the reviews:

WS: "Beautiful. Rich, ripe, and generous, this abundant, full-bodied wine will fill your palate with joy, delivering elegance and class as well as lots of plum, mineral, some smoke and a stony character. Long finish".

Parker: "The deep ruby/purple-colored 2001 Chateauf du Pape reveals Grenache's powerful side in its intense kirsch, licorice, peppery aromatics. An opulent attack is followed by a multilayered, full-bodied mid-palate along with considerable structure and headiness in the finish. This is a large-scaled, but impeccably well-balanced Chateauf to drink between 2005-2016. “

These were excellent ratings in those days, quite impressive as there were much less wines of this quality being produced. Since its initial release the 2001 vintage has gained recognition as one of the finest since the the late 1980's. Many wines have been upgraded as they have gained in structure, smoothness and complexity. This particular wine has not been re-reviewed -yet. It helped in keeping it under the radar and the price from quickly escalating-at least for now...Just as important is the provenance -these are not bottles that have languished in suboptimal storage on some retailer's shelf. Considering the source, this is a true find -get yours before they are all gone.

**CONGRATULATIONS! Did you Know:** We have a new wine writer in town, My friend, fellow bon vivant and fan of all great matters of cuisine and drink Ben Weinberg is the new wine writer for the Rocky Mountain News. A big congratulations to Ben!

I am looking forward to his unique and honest reviews of all subjects vinous: catch his first write up [here](#)

### **events:**

**June** it's here: one crazy month with some of the nicest weather we get all year, so it is a great time to hang outside. Numerous free events from free movies at Infinity Park in Glendale to neighborhood street fairs and festivals such as the annual Greek Festival. Free jazz at city park on Sundays and so much more. Too many to list here.. check your neighborhood paper or the Westwards event page at <http://entertainment.westword.com/>

Why not call your friends and get out there to your favorite patio before it gets too hot.

One of the big joys of travel for me is to eat my way through a varied cuisine.. If it involves street life and people watching -even better . Here is an event that promises to be a killer deal. Tuesday June 10 for \$20 this will be hard to beat! C U there....

***The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Feast on the Fax*** details:

<http://feastonthefax.com>

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

Paul David, Chief Fermented Grape Taster.

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