



# ADAPTATION

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



Tuesday night dinner in Beaune: Steak Tartar, Pommes Frites (real French fries fried in goose fat) and a green salad with a lovely mustard vinaigrette (all after a dozen escargot) washed down with a bottle of 1999 Louis Jadot Beaune Couacheaux. Oh, yeah - and a bottle of Badoit.

*"If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with."*

– Billy Preston by way of Steven Stills

That line, a favorite of Billy Preston's that inspired Steven Stills to write (with Preston's permission) his 1971 hit *Love The One You're With*, is all about adapting. I've been doing a lot of adapting lately although in a different milieu than that of the song. My adaptation has been with wine rather than

women. Miss Carol has nothing to worry about.

A few weeks back, I had a heavy if blissful dose of "California elegant" during a two day celebration of Ridge Vineyards 50th anniversary. I came back to three weeks of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo where my wife Carol and I drank several bottles of supple Cline Cashmere red and several more bottles of Jansz Brut Rosé (Tasmania) at the Champion Wine Garden (the Show's outdoor wine bar). On the last day of the Rodeo, I flew to France where I spent a week in Burgundy and a week in Bordeaux. Then I flew back to Houston the day before Easter which got me home just in time to host two visiting French wine industry types (oddly enough one from Burgundy and the other from Bordeaux) for Easter night dinner. As my guests were French, we drank California wines that night as my rule is to never serve visiting wine professionals wines from their own region.

Adaptation kicks in here in a couple of different ways. I found it relatively easy to adapt to a week long business trip to the California wine country, the culmination of which was the two day Ridge event. Of course I was perfectly at home at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. While in France, I spent five nights at Hotel Le Cep (home in Beaune) and five nights at Hotel Burdigala (home in Bordeaux); I have stayed multiple days at each of the two hotels every year for the last fourteen and so am greeted by name at both places. Comfortable as I am, I am nevertheless in France sleeping alone in not-my-bed and eating differently than I do at home. Food and drink are different. No Lipton Diet Green Tea with Citrus to be found in France and no oatmeal either. (The last time I asked for oatmeal I got hot milk.) I somehow made do with croissants and smoked salmon and grilled bananas – don't knock it 'til you've tried it – and hot tea for breakfast. I ate no steak in France as when I'm there, I always go for the weird stuff: sweetbreads, kidneys, foie gras, confit, tartar, etc. that is hard to find here.

The real adaptation was in enjoying all the different wines in all the different places. While at the Ridge events, I greatly enjoyed the Montebello, Santa Cruz, Geyserville and Lytton Springs wines we tasted for their California elegance. More than most, these are California wines that well express their place – but I went over all that a few weeks ago in "Turning Fifty: Ridge Vineyards". Back in Houston, I didn't drink my normal eclectic mix of wines because we were at the rodeo almost every night. In Burgundy, I drank nothing but Burgundy and in Bordeaux, I drank nothing but

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I don't get caught up in the supposed battle between the new world and the old world or the invective between Burgundy and Bordeaux. I like it all. Or, I should say, I like the good wines from all those places. Truth to tell, I even like some (good) Italian wine ... but that may be a topic for a different article. I do get caught up in the difference between well made wines and those that aren't and of course do not enjoy poorly made wine no matter how fancy the address.

Enjoying all those wines does require some adaptation or, at the very least, some open-mindedness. In general, California wines are riper than wines from Bordeaux or Burgundy. It is fairly rare to find a red Burgundy over 14% alcohol. California Pinot Noir is generally over 14% and it is not uncommon to find examples over 15% alcohol. Likewise, red Bordeaux tends to be in the 13-14% alcohol range while even the most elegant California Cabs (such as Araujo) are often closer to 15% alcohol and many can approach 16%. If you have been tasting nothing but California Cabernet for a few weeks, even the ripest vintages of red Bordeaux (2003, 2005, 1990, 1982) can taste dry and austere. Conversely, after a steady diet of classic vintage Bordeaux (2004, 1999, 1996), a lot of California Cabernet can taste a bit Australian or even Port-like. Coming from Burgundy to Bordeaux with its attendant switch from Pinot Noir to Cabernet/Merlot-based wines poses a similar challenge.

Tasting a newer-style California Pinot Noir blind next to a classic Burgundy is a difficult exercise. Tasting or drinking the wines non-blind doesn't have to be difficult (as you - knowing what they are – can adjust your expectations). Recalibrating one's palate and changing one's expectations are the key to being able to enjoy and appreciate the wines of many places as opposed to only the wines of one place or style. In learning to do so, I suppose I have become something of a "Wine Chameleon" as I am able to immediately enjoy whatever I'm drinking - as long as it is actually good. Just as I don't want to live on steak-and-potatoes or even Mexican food alone, I also don't want to drink just California or just Bordeaux or just Burgundy. One of the great things about living in Houston (with Spec's) is that we have access to and can drink and enjoy it all.

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Here are a few random notes on some of the wine I've enjoyed tasting in various locations over the last few weeks.

**IN MY OFFICE** (*Since returning from France*)

**ARAUJO Eisele Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 2006**  
**6x750ml \$261.99 \$1475.71 (more arriving soon)**

Tech: 14.8% Alcohol. 88.5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot, 1.5% Merlot all from Bart and Daphne Araujo's Eisele Vineyard (certified 'Organic' by California Certified Organic Farmers and certified 'Biodynamic' by Demeter). Aged in 100% new French oak barrels for 24 months. Purple-black-red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Elegant, delicious, supple, integrated but thrilling. Mixed red and black fruit with subtle pencil shavings and tobacco notes. Expands and lengthens in the mouth. The oak and terroir are present but completely integrated. Evolving and delicious. The finishing note is pencil shavings with the fruit perfume lingering on. The wine changes the whole time it is in the glass. Outstanding. BS: 98.

**CLOS PEGASE Hommage, Napa Valley, 2005**  
**12x750ml Coming Soon**

Tech: 14.8% Alcohol. 96% Cabernet Sauvignon (Clones: 7 and 337), 3% Petit Verdot, 1% Cabernet Franc. All from the estate. Fermented with indigenous yeast and indigenous malolactic bacteria and aged 18 months in 80% new French oak, 20% neutral French oak barrels. (Made by Paul Hobbes.) Inky purple color that paints the glass; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Big, juicy, ripe, dusty black fruit Cabernet with lots of chocolate and black pepper, tobacco, and dusty oak. Fairly well integrated and quite delicious. Really Excellent. BS: 95.

**CLOS PEGASE Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 2006**  
**12x750ml \$30.48 \$335.53**

Tech: 14.9% Alcohol. 98% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot. 1st vintage under direction of Paul Hobbes. 66% Tenma Vineyard (formerly called "Palisades" on alluvial fan in Calistoga), 18% Applebone Vineyard (surrounds the winery, close-planted vines), 14% Graveyard Hill Vineyard (cool Carneros vineyard), and 2% Dunaweal Vineyard (the Petit Verdot). Aged 18 months in French oak barrels (48% new). Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Juicy, rich, cabby-chewy; much more black than red fruit. Supple juicy, black berry and dark cherry with lots of spice. Subtle gravel and integrated oak. Excellent. BS: 92+.

**CLOS PEGASE Merlot, Carneros, 2005**  
**12x750ml \$21.99 \$243.62**

Tech: 14.7% Alcohol. 96% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 2% Petit Verdot fermented with indigenous yeast and aged 15 months in 35% new French oak. Purple-black-red in color, and with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Supple, focused, cooler climate Merlot offering as much red as black fruit with notes of cocoa and coffee, black pepper, dark earth, and supple oak. Integrated and quite lively. Excellent. BS: 91.

**PERRIN RESERVE, Cote du Rhone, 2007**  
**12x750ml \$9.84 \$118.05**

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, and 20% Mourvedre grown on limestone-clay and gravelly clay. Fermentation in stainless, aged 13 months 75% in tank with 25% in cask. Purple-deep red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Juicy, ripe, red cherry-berry-grapey fruit with note of garrigue and black pepper and a touch of red floral. Fresh and delicious. Fine. BS: 89+.

**CHATEAU DE BEAUCASTEL Chateauf-du-Pape, 2007**  
**6x750ml \$95.55 \$538.02**

Tech: 14.5% Alcohol. 30% Mourvedre, 30% Grenache, 10% Syrah, 10% Counoise, 5% Cinsault, and 15% a blend of Vaccarese, Terret Noir, Muscardin, Clairette, Picpoul, Picardan, Bourboulenc, and Roussanne (and a partridge in a pear tree). Grapes are hand-picked and then hand-sorted. The skins of the whole berries are first heated to 80°C (176°F) and then cooled down to 20°C (68°F) – is that TMI?. Maceration in open-topped wooden vats for Syrah and Mourvedre and in concrete tanks for the other varieties. Aged in large oak casks for a year and bottled after fining with egg-whites. Deep purple color that stains the glass with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Succulent, supple, rich, juicy purple fruit. YUM! Less "brett" (and so less rustic) than usual. Blackberry, blueberry, mixed black cherry-berry. Stony minerally earth. Subtle, integrated oak and garrigue. Delicious. Really Excellent. BS: 95+.

**AT RIDGE**

**RIDGE Lytton Springs, Dry Creek Valley, 2008**  
**Fall 2010 release**

Tech: 14.4% Alcohol. 74% Zinfandel, 21% Petite Sirah, aged 5% Carignan. Aged 14 months in all air-dried American oak barrels (25% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Classic Ridge: focused, juicy black and red fruit Zin with briar and black pepper. Lovely feel and texture. Supple. Excellent. BS: 93+.

**RIDGE Geyserville, Sonoma County, 2008**  
**12x750ml Coming Soon**

Tech: 14.8% Alcohol. 72% Zinfandel, 20% Carignan, 6% Petite Sirah, 2% Mourvedre. Aged 14 months in all air dried American oak barrels (20% new). Deep purple-red-black in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with fresh acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Offers more red than black fruit with briar, spice, black pepper, and subtle earth. Well integrated oak. Deep but still very young. Excellent. BS: 93.

**IN BURGUNDY**

*These wines will be coming in the fall of 2010*

**ANNE GROS, Hautes Cotes de Nuits Villages Cuvée Marine, 2008**

Tech: 100% Chardonnay barrel fermented and aged in all French oak "Demi-Muits" (33% new). Straw in color, bright and clear with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity. Fresh and lively. Supple with ripe citrus and clean tree and stone fruit. Lots of mineral with a thrilling tension. Elegant, delicious, vibrant; alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 91+.

**ANNE GROS, Chambolle Musigny les Combe d'Orveaux 1er cru, 2008**

Tech: 100% Pinot Noir fermented using open tops with punch-downs. Violet-purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and medium plus phenolics. Elegant, perfumed, spicy red cherry fruit with subtle integrated cola, oak, violet, and more. YUM. Delicious, ethereal, elegant, delicate. Excellent. BS: 94.

**DOMAINE EUGENIE, Grands Echezeaux Grand Cru, 2007**

Tech: 100% Pinot Noir fermented using open tops with punch-downs. Deep red in color, bright and clear with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with balanced acidity and medium phenolics. Offers dark ripe red and black fruit with dusty, dark, stony limestone earth; mixed French oak and accents of cocoa, cola, savory spice, black pepper, and a touch of exotic wood. Really long finish. Delicious and complete. Elegant and refined but with real power. Excellent. BS: 94+. *Domaine Eugénie is the former Domaine René Engel now owned by François Pinault (owner of Ch. Latour in Bordeaux) and managed by Ch. Latour director Frederic Engerer who happens to be an avowed Burgundy geek.*

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## IN BORDEAUX

*These wines will be on our 2009 Futures offer*

### Ch. le PIN, Pomerol, 2009

Barrel Sample. Deep purple in color, and with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Juicy, lively, spicy black & red fruit with earthy rich terroir; supple spicy oak and accents of black flowers, mocha, and Asian spice; very long, elegant finish. Elegant, ethereal, delicious; pure and precise but well integrated. Truly Outstanding. BS: 100.

### VIEUX Ch. CERTAN, Pomerol, 2009

Barrel Sample. Tech: 84% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 8% Cabernet Franc. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Juicy and lively with as much red as black fruit and subtle, earthy, gravelly limestone; supple oak and accents of black pepper, red flowers, black flowers, and subtle mocha. Really long finish. Supple, delicious, elegant, ethereal; lovely-in-the-mouth. Pure and beautifully integrated. Outstanding. BS: 97+.

### Ch. PONTOISE CABARRUS, Haut Medoc, 2009

Barrel Sample. Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Dark, rich, more black than red fruit with dusty-earthly-gravelly terroir; subtle oak and accents of black pepper, cedar, tobacco. Long finish. Supple and Tasty. Fine. BS: 89+.

## AT THE RODEO CHAMPION WINE GARDEN

### CLINE Cashmere, California, 2008

12x750ml      \$12.41    \$137.97

A blend of 39% Grenache, 38% Syrah, and 23% Mourvedre aged 9 months in French oak barrels (25% new). Not a big wine but has big flavor. Medium-plus weight, nicely balanced GSM offering more red than black fruit and notes of earth, black pepper, and garrigue. Long and focused. Delicious. Really Very Good. BS: 87+VHR

### JANSZ Brut Rosé, Tasmania (Australia), NV

6x750ml \$18.85    \$106.14

A blend of 46% Pinot Noir, 38% Chardonnay, and 16% Pinot Meunier, Jansz Brut Rosé is a delicate pink color with a fine white mousse. It offers lots of toast and yeast and rich red fruit over subtle citrus and fine earthy minerality. It is rich, rounded and satisfying while staying in perfect balance. Excellent. BS: 92+VHR. ❄️

