



Bordeaux Discoveries

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



I've traveled to Bordeaux at least once a year for the last 15 years. I go every year right at the end of March or the first of April. I go for a lot of reasons. The most obvious is to taste and evaluate the newest vintage. Another is to wave the Spec's flag in front of the négociants and chateau owners and managers. A third is to look for new wines to bring to Spec's Customers. For me, discovering new wines is the most fun. I enjoy the hunt and I enjoy the vetting process – the tasting multiple vintages and checking out how the property works and the getting to know the owner/manager/winemaker. Most of these discoveries are wines that, for a lot of different reasons, haven't broken through to have a big international reputation but nonetheless deliver flavor and style, often at very good prices.

One of the first of these sorts of wines I stumbled on is Segla, the 2nd vin de Ch. Rauzan Segla established in 1994 (for the 1993 vintage) when the Wertheimer family, owners of Chanel, bought the then run down property – then called “Ch. Rausan Segla” - from Echenauer. The Wertheimers brought in John Kolasa (formerly of Ch. Latour) as new director general. He reblended the 1993 vintage into three wines. Only 40% made the cut to be sold as Ch. Rausan Segla. Of the remainder, 2/3 made the cut to be Segla and the remaining part was sold off in bulk with no right to the chateau name. The new ownership subsequently changed the spelling of the chateau's name from “Rausan” to “Rauzan.” For the 2010, those proportions are even tighter. Of the total production, Rauzan Segla and Segla each account for 38%; the remaining 24% was sold in bulk. As Kolasa took control of the property, he used the Wertheimer's deep pockets to revitalize the vineyards (improved drainage, removing inappropriate vines and replanting better vines including a lot of Petite Verdot) and renovate and expand the winemaking facilities. Spec's began with 56 cases of Segla in the 1993 vintage and we have followed it since with no quality issues. At one point, we were buying as many as 450 cases in a single vintage.



Also in Margaux, Ch. Pontac Lynch was a discovery from a few years back that keeps on delivering pleasure. I became interested in Pontac Lynch when I realized that it touches Ch. Margaux on the north, Palmer and d'Issan on the south and Rauzan Segla on the west. I'd call that a good address. The wine was sold exclusively by one négociant – Borie-Manoux - and even though I know them, it took a while to figure out that they had the wine. The first time I asked about it, they did not acknowledge that they sold it. As I read about the property, I learned that it had been a favorite of Thomas Jefferson but, due to its small size, Pontac Lynch was not included in the classification of 1855. The soils here have a lot of the gravel of Margaux but with a higher proportion of sand. The sand can lend the wine an extra bit of elegance and enhance its perfume. This has less Cabernet and more Merlot than some of its neighbors but you would be hard pressed to know that from tasting the wine; it offers all of the elegance and perfume you would expect from the best neighborhood in Margaux. Once I found the source for Pontac Lynch, I began buying it starting with some 2000 and 2003. Those wines are now mostly gone and we have moved through much of the 2004, 2005, and 2006 as well. We offered 2008 and 2009 as futures and will also offer 2010. When I visited the chateau in June of 2010, I discovered that they had a second label that is part Margaux and part Haut Medoc (labeled Haut Medoc) called Ch. Pontac Phenix. The Haut Medoc part is north of the Margaux appellation. We started with the 2007 vintage and have now ordered 2008 and 2009,

While we are still in Margaux, let's not forget Sirene de Giscours, the second wine of Ch. Giscours. With Francois Thienpont of Wings, I recently tasted through five vintages and am sold on both its quality and consistency. We are going to start with three vintages: 2005, 2006, and 2007 - with 2008 and 2009 coming next year. Along with Segla and Pontac Lynch, Sirene de Giscours completes Spec's trio of value-priced wines from Margaux. Like Segla, Sirene de Giscours will not be offered as a future.

Ch. Tour Seujean is a Pauillac I ran into and tasted through three vintages of at a tasting at négociant Ulysse Cazabonne (also owned by Rauzan Segla's Wertheimer family). As soon as I could, I arranged to visit the property to see how they worked. Ch. Tour Seujean is owned and operated by a young couple (and her parents) who are doing it right. The family have long owned the gravelly vineyards on the west side of the Pauillac appellation but the grapes used to go to the Pauillac co-op. Now they are keeping all the grapes and making the younger generation is making the wine themselves. They have good modern equipment and are doing a fine job. When the 2008 arrives, customers will find a solid classic Pauillac at a value price. As with the 2008 and 2009 vintage, 2010 will be offered as a future.

Ch. Horteve (St. Julien) is a wine originally proposed and initially put together by Archie Johnston with the then owner of Ch. Thierry Gros Caillou. Archie told the owner that with his terroir, he should be making better wine. The owner said he didn't want to invest in new barrels because he was getting on in years and might sell. They worked a deal: the chateau provided grapes from old vine parcels and Archie provided new barrels. They named the new cuvee Ch. Horteve after one of the plots they were using. Originally, the wine was sold mostly in the UK and in Northern Europe but we began buying it in the 1993 vintage. Before the 2005 vintage, the owner did finally sell – to Ch. Ducru Beaucaillou owner Bruno Borie. Horteve continues to offer good value in a riper, juicier, oakier style of St. Julien and the 2010 is exactly as expected: ripe and delicious and age-worthy. It will be offered as a future.

While the in-stock 2008 **Laplagnotte Bellevue** is excellent, the 2010 is easily the best Laplagnotte yet. It will be offered as a future. Also note that older vintages have proven to age well with good development to repay the time invested keeping the wine in the cellar.

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Located right at the end of the limestone plateau that underpins the vineyards of St. Emilion and much of the surrounding area, **Ch. Puygueraud** in the Cotes de Francs (which abuts the Cotes de Castillon which abuts St. Emilion) is the ancestral home of the Thienpont family who also own Ch. le Pin and Vieux Ch. Certan. Puygueraud is an every-day priced red based on Merlot with some Cabernet Franc and Malbec typically in the blend. This charming wine is fruit driven with a rich texture. It is a consistent favorite in the range of lower priced Bordeaux. The chateau also makes a special cuvee called Georges Cuvee de Ch. Puygueraud which is built around old vine Malbec. It is a dusty, rich, spicy cuvee with plenty of fruit and a bit more terroir character. These wines will be offered as a future.

Fifth growth **Ch. Batailley** used to be a lot bigger encompassing the vineyards of Haut Batailley as well those that are now its own. When the property was split, the existing chateau went with the Batailley name. Both Ch. Batailley and Ch. Haut Batailley got to keep their 1855 classification designations as fifth growths. Ch. Batailley is classic old style Pauillac. It rarely gets great marks when tasted young (it also never gets bad marks) but it is the sort of wine, like Gruaud Larose in St. Julien, that really rewards the time you cellar it with development and improved flavor. When I think of Batailley, I think of black fruit, pencil shavings, tobacco, and gravelly dust with a rich but rustic feel. This is classic Pauillac at a high level. Ch. Batailley just tastes good every time I drink it.

