



The Heat, A Class, Updates, & Save-The-Dates

by Charles M. Bear Dalton

The Heat

Early Monday evening while I was pulling the last few bottles together for my Tasting and Enjoying Wine Class at Rice University's Glasscock school of Continuing Studies, I noticed a woman who also was gathering a sizeable order of wine. One of our salesmen told her who I was and she said she'd see me in a few minutes - she was enrolled in my class. I told her that she should take her wine home first. When she said she wouldn't have time, I suggested she pick her wine up the next day. Why? Even though it was coming up on sunset, the temperature outside was still about 90° and she would be parked at Rice on a lot surfaced with asphalt that had been roasting in the sun all afternoon. That asphalt would be radiating heat for hours yet and there was no question that wine left in a car in that scenario, even as the air cooled and the sun set, would be at least somewhat damaged by the heat. The damage might not be readily visible but it would be there. I hope she came back and picked up her wine on Tuesday.

In Texas, heat damage is always a potential problem. This year has been especially bad and the last few weeks have been somewhat deceptive. I don't recall a hotter or drier summer and I've lived all my 52 years in Texas. The last couple of weeks have been deceptive because it has cooled down a bit and the air has been dry so it feels more comfortable. Do not be deceived. It "cooled down" from 105+° to "in-the-90s." And the 90s are still way up in the danger zone. Beyond that, there have been few-to-no clouds so the sun has been relentless. A bottle of wine left in a car parked in the sun on a 90° day can heat up enough to push up the cork in less than 20 minutes. Would you want to sit in a locked car parked in direct sun light on a 90° Houston day? Neither does your wine. Even on a "cool-ish" day (which we still haven't had this "fall"), a car parked in the sun can become a sort of solar oven heating up to over 110° inside.

Several times a week, I taste wine samples that have been damaged by the heat. Sometimes it's obvious even before the wine is poured. Maybe the capsule (the foil covering the top of the bottle and the cork) is bulging. Maybe the cork has pushed up enough to break through the capsule. Maybe wine has seeped out past the cork so the top of the capsule is wet or stained or the bottom of the capsule is corroded where the acid from the escaped wine is reacting with the metal foil. When the cork is pulled, maybe there are wine stains running up the sides of the cork. All of these are visible signs of heat damage. They are there because the wine got hot and expanded too quickly for pressure in the bottle to balance without wine at least trying to seep past the cork. While there are other things that can cause some of these symptoms, Heat damage is almost always the culprit. And a wine can be heat damaged without showing any of these signs. If the wine warms up very slowly and cools down very slowly, there may be little or no obvious physical evidence. Nevertheless, the wine is still heat damaged. How would you know? Only by tasting.

When you taste heat-damaged wines, especially right after the damage occurs, some or even most of the wine's flavor and aroma are still there. To use an audio analogy, it is the lack of high notes that tell the tale. If you think of the taste of wine as a piece of music being played over a stereo, heat damaged wines "sound" as if the treble has been turned partly or even all the way down. The worse the damage, the less high notes (and the brightness and freshness that come with them) the wine has. As time passes, the wine begins to "sound" as if you put your stereo's speakers under blankets. The mid range and bass (the other flavors and structure) are muffled or muddled.

Heat damage is such a pernicious problem that Spec's has on all its purchase orders that the wine "must be shipped in refrigerated containers" and we require that our wholesalers deliver our wine in temperature-controlled trucks. We have rejected deliveries that were too hot and, on at least two occasions, have rejected whole containers (1200 or so cases). We take a lot of care to make sure that the wines we are selling are delivered to you in the best possible condition so we most strongly suggest that you take your wines straight home on all but the coolest, cloudiest days.

What should you do if you do inadvertently let a wine get hot? Cool it off and drink it as soon as possible. Once a bottle has gotten hot, it will not improve with any further keeping. To salvage the most from these bottles, quickly cool your reds down to 55-60° and your whites, rosés, or sparklers down to 45-50° and drink them immediately. What could be more disappointing than pulling a treasured bottle from your wine fridge (You do have a wine fridge, don't you?), only to find out years after the fact that it got cooked. Save yourself and your wine from this fate.

A New Class: Wine 201



For the last couple of years, I have offered (at the Wine School at l'Alliance Française) a four-week introduction to wine and wine tasting that a lot of folks refer to as Wine 101. In that class we covered wine basics in a way to help the student organize what they already know about wine and fill in the holes so they have the basics down pat. This new class will start there with the assumption that you know the basics. Welcome to:

Wine 201: A Four-Week Course on Wine Beyond the Basics

Please join Spec's fine wine buyer Bear Dalton for this new four-week Wine Basics course. Wine 201 is for those who have a developed interest in wine. The class will work on understanding and improving tasting skills. In order to understand wine today, you have to understand its roots in Europe. This class will focus on the old world presenting classic wines in an organized fashion. We'll spend 2 weeks looking just at France. While focused on the more avid wine consumer, this class would also be good exposure for a service professional looking to move more into the wine side of the restaurant business or anyone in or looking to move into the wholesale or retail wine trade. The focus of each class will be more on the regions covered and how their wines have influenced the rest of the world of wines than on individual producers. The wines tasted will be "classic" examples chosen for their typicity of both variety(s) and region. I do anticipate offering a "Wine 202 - Further Beyond the Basics" that follows these styles into the new world in the spring.

Week 1 (11/15/11): Tasting Review. Part one of the wines of France: Bordeaux and the Loire. Why is Bordeaux so important? Ten wines will be tasted.

Week 2 (11/22/11): Part two of the wines of France: Burgundy, Champagne, the Rhone. Ten wines will be tasted. The relationship between these regions will be explored.

Week 3 (11/29/11): Alsace, Germany, and Italy. Ten wines will be tasted focusing on the classic wines that transcend a local identity.

Week 4 (12/06/11): Spain and Portugal. Ten wines will be tasted with a strict focus on the classics including Tempranillo, Garnacha, Cava, Port, and Sherry.

The four-week Wine 201 will cost \$250 total per person cash (\$263.16 regular) for all four sessions. The course will meet at 7pm on four Tuesdays: November 15, November 22, November 29, and December 6 of 2011. To reserve your spot for this unique four-week class, please contact Jessica Toner at 832-660-0250 or JessicaToner@specsonline.com. All sessions of this class will be held at l'Alliance Française, the French cultural center in Houston. Located at 427 Lovett Blvd., l'Alliance is on the southeast corner of Lovett and Whitney (one block south of Westheimer and two blocks east of Montrose).

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Update I: BIG 2009 Vintage Bordeaux Tasting

On January 19th, 2012, Spec's and the Wine Committee of the River Oaks Country Club will host over thirty Bordeaux chateau owners, directors, and/or winemakers presenting forty top-appellation Bordeaux wines all from the excellent 2009 vintage in a stand-up-and-walk-around tasting format. By appellation, the list of chateaux planning to pour include ...

Pomerol: Chx. Gazin and Clinet

St. Emilion: Chx. Angelus, Canon La Gaffeliere, Clos L'Oratoire, and Daugay

Castillon: Ch. d'Aiguilhe

St. Estephe: Chx. Lafon Rochet and les Ormes de Pez

Pauillac: Chx. Pichon Baron, Pibran, Lynch Bages (with Echo de Lynch Bages and Lynch Bages Blanc as well), Grand Puy Lacoste, Haut Batailley, d'Armailhac, Clerc Milon, and Haut Bages Liberal

St. Julien: Chx. Branaire Ducru, Ch. Leoville Poyferre, Talbot, Lagrange, and Gloria

Margaux: Chx. Brane Cantenac (along with Baron de Brane), Cantenac Brown, and Ferriere

Haut Medoc: Chx. Cantemerle, Chasse Spleen, Camensac, and Poujeaux
Pessac Leognan (Graves): Ch. Carbonnieux (both red & white), Domaine de Chevalier (both red & white), Smith Haut Lafitte (both red and white) and Clos Marsalette

Sauternes: Ch. Suduiraut

This is a fabulous collection of mostly Cru Classé properties making some of the best wines in Bordeaux. The tasting will open at 4:30pm and run until 8:30pm, giving people ample time to taste the wines and visit with our guests from Bordeaux. This will be the first time Houston has ever hosted such a delegation from Bordeaux. Stay tuned for more information but go ahead and mark Thursday, January 19, 2012 on your calendar.



Update II: Spec's Trip to Champagne and Bordeaux

In May of 2012, I will be leading a trip for Spec's customers to Champagne and Bordeaux. The trip will include two days and nights in Champagne (visiting both Grand Marques and Growers) and five days and nights in Bordeaux as well as two nights and a full day in Paris.

Your job is to get yourself to Paris any way you wish (your choice of airline, route, when you get there, when you leave, whether you use miles, etc.) and meet up with the group at Hotel Lutecia in Paris on the morning of May 18th (that's a Friday). Once you connect with the group, virtually everything else is covered. From Paris we'll take a coach to Champagne (where we will stay in the Hostellerie La Briqueterie in Epernay) to start our tour. On Sunday, we'll return to Paris by coach and then transfer to the TGV to Bordeaux. We'll stay in Bordeaux (Hotel Burdigala) through Friday and then transfer back to Paris (Hotel Lutecia) for dinner Friday evening, a full day of free time in Paris on Saturday, and a final dinner in Paris on Saturday night. After breakfast on Sunday, your job is then to either get yourself back home or extend your trip in Europe. The only meal not included will be the Saturday lunch in Paris. All three hotels are four stars.

We'll visit three to five producers per day. Champagne properties I plan to visit include: Moët & Chandon, Lancelot Royer, Jean Laurent, Krug, and Roederer ... and a couple of surprises. Bordeaux properties I plan to visit include Chx. Latour, Pontet Canet, Batailley, Leoville Poyferre and Leoville Barton, Gruaud Larose, Beychevelle, Branaire Ducru, Margaux, Rauzan Segla, Pontac Lynch, Canon la Gaffeliere, Vieux Ch. Certan, Haut Brion, and Smith Haut Lafitte. There will be a couple of off-beat and value stops as well. Lunches and dinners will be split between good restaurants and the chateaux and will include at least one cook out. Excellent wines will be drunk.

I am working with Sarah Donaho of FROSCHE Travel on all the non-winery arrangements; we plan to have the itinerary and budget completed by mid October. I have begun scheduling appointments at the caves and chateaux. On at 6:30pm on Thursday, October 20, 2011, we'll have a meeting in the second floor conference room at Spec's to go over the details. Initial deposits (to hold your place) will be due in November and final payments will be due in March of 2012. We will accept up to 25 travelers. If you are interested, please send an email with "France Trip" in the subject to Bear@specsonline.com and we'll put you on the update list. If you plan to attend the meeting please respond to JessicaToner@specsonline.com.

Save-The-Dates:

Rodeo Uncorked! Round Up and Best Bites

Save the evening of Sunday, February 19th for Houston's best annual wine and food event: The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's Rodeo Uncorked Round Up and Best Bites Competition at Reliant Center. Sample over 200 award-winning wines from the Show's 9th annual International Wine Competition (that's the "Round Up" part along with food (that's the "Best Bites" part) from over 60 of Houston's best restaurants, caterers, and specialty shops. The fun starts at 6:30pm and runs through 9:00pm. Advance individual tickets are \$125. Reserved tables for 10 start at \$1800. A limited number of premium tables for 10 are available for \$2,000. Table buyers and their guests get in 30 minutes early at 6:00pm. This event has sold out every year. Proceeds go to support the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's mission of Education, Agriculture, Entertainment and Western Heritage.

Rodeo Uncorked! Champion Wine Auction and Dinner

This evening includes a reception with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, a silent auction of champion wines and related items, a sumptuous seated dinner with winning wines from the competition served, and the excitement of live auction bidding for award-winning and champion wines.

Auction packages are available for \$6,000, \$9,000 and \$12,000 for tables of 10; the total table price may be used in the live auction. Limited tickets are available for \$300 per person or a table for \$3,000 (these dinner-only package purchasers may not apply any of the table or ticket price toward the live auction).

Details: Saturday, March 3, 2012 Reception: 6 p.m.; Dinner: 7 p.m.; Auction: 8 p.m. 2nd floor Reliant Center in the 600 series rooms. ✨

