



# A Day in the Haut Medoc

## by Charles M. Bear Dalton



You learn something new everyday, at least if you're paying attention. I try to do both - pay attention and learn. Last Tuesday, we visited five chateaux in Bordeaux, the first four of which I had never before visited and the last one I visit every year. Spec's carries (or will carry) all the wines. As to the "we" above, I am accompanied by my friend Ron Holder who is a retired airline pilot and a first-timer visiting Bordeaux. I am doing my business agenda and he is along for the ride. What makes this fun for me is that I get to see Bordeaux fresh through his eyes at some times rather wide eyes and nice camera lens. Ron took the pictures accompanying.

We are staying at "Golf du Medoc" which is a golf resort hotel not far from Margaux. As business friendly hotels in this part of the world go, it is reasonably priced, nicely appointed, and very quiet. The restaurant is good and fairly priced with a nice wine list and it has all the amenities. While neither of us are golfers, we know enough to indicate that it is a 36 hole links course set up. My golfing friends from Bordeaux tell me they like the course.

Our first stop, after briefly getting lost almost as soon as we left the hotel driveway, was Ch. Tour Salvat which is located in Cussac in the Haut Medoc between Margaux and St. Julien. Maybe I shouldn't say that we carry Ch. Tour Salvat as it is not yet in stock. We started with the 2005 which will arrive at Spec's next month but we have already ordered the 2006, 2008, and 2009 vintages. I like to visit the chateaux Spec's follows to see how they work so this was an opportunity to do just that and meet the people behind the wine.

We had a hard time finding the chateau as we were looking for Ch. Tour Salvat which is the wine we carry but the actual property is called Ch. de Retout. They make two styles of wine. Ch. Retout Haut Medoc is an old-style, hard, takes-years-to-develop red. Ch. Tour Salvat is a more ready-to-drink, fruit-forward, but still classically flavored red. Our visit went much as expected. We were met by the very nice owner Madam Helene Soale who showed us through a clean but working winemaking facility and barrel cellars. While the property is successful, they are not flush so the work is hard and the equipment is basic but up to the task. The property is planted to 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc. The vineyards were neat and looked well cared for. The wines are fermented in temperature-controlled, epoxy-lined concrete tanks and aged 12 months in tanks (40%) and oak barrels (60%) with 25% of the barrels new each year. These folks are working exactly as expected and making the best wine their terroir allows. The 2005 Tour Salvat wine will sell for under \$17.00 when it arrives. It's a great deal.



Bear and Helene Soale Kopp of Ch. Tour Salvat

### Ch. Tour Salvat, Haut Medoc, 2005

Tech: 12.5% Alcohol. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc grown at Cussac - Fort de Medoc, fermented using pump-over. Aged 12 months: 40% in concrete tanks and 60% in French oak barrels (25% new). Black-red-purple in color with good legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Dark ripe black and red fruit accented with dusty minerally-gravelly terroir; supple oak, and accents of bacon fat, black pepper, hint of Asian spice, a touch of rosemary, tobacco, and subtle pencil shavings. Very long finish. Exotic, complete, delicious. Complex and unique. **Really Fine. BS: 90+.** (Should be in stock by mid July.)

After Tour Salvat, we headed down the road to **St. Julien** where we visited Ch. Leoville Poyferre which many people in the US think of as "the third Leoville" after Leoville Barton and Leoville las Cases. In Thomas Jefferson's time, all the Leovilles were one chateau he knew as "Lionville." During the French Revolution, it was divided into Ch. Leoville-Las Cases and Château Leoville-Barton. In 1840, Ch. Leoville Las Cases was divided again and Ch. Leoville Poyferre was created from part of the vineyard. All three chateaux were classified as second growths in the classification of 1855. While I have visited Ch. Leoville Barton and Ch. Leoville las Cases many times, this was my first chance to visit Ch. Leoville Poyferre.



Winemaker Isabelle Davin of Ch. Leoville Poyferre in St. Julien

While at l'Ecole de Vin de Bordeaux the previous week, I saw a wine labeled Pavillon de Poyferre. I asked the instructor what the wine was and she said she thought it was another label for Moulin Riche, the second wine of Ch. Leoville Poyferre. I thought she must be right. Spec's (and every other wine sales organization from negociants to retailers I know) has been selling Ch. Moulin Riche as the 2nd wine of Leoville Poyferre for many years. During our visit, the winemaker - Isabelle Davin - informed us that Moulin Riche and Ch. Leoville Poyferre are actually two separate wines produced by two separate terroirs that are part of the same property but are not contiguous. They actually share a common "second wine" and it is called Pavillon de Poyferre. Ch. Leoville Poyferre is made from the property's eastern most vineyards (close to the river) and Moulin Riche is made from the property's vineyards on the western side of the St. Julien appellation. Pavillon de Poyferre is made from the younger vines from both sections so it is the second wine of the whole property. Who knew? I learned something new.

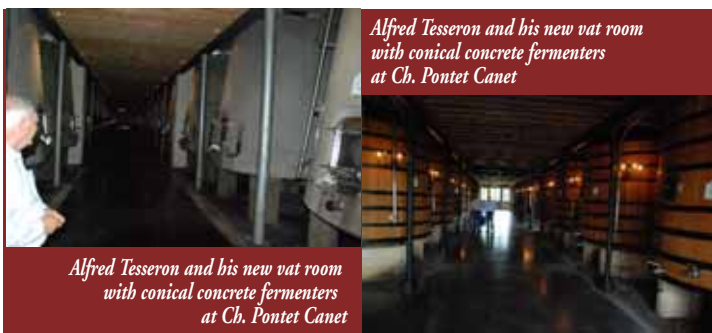
I also learned that the same ownership, the Cuvelier family, also holds Ch. Le Crock in St. Estephe. We tasted the 2007 Pavillon and barrel samples of the other three from 2009. The Leoville Poyferre was outstanding and the rest were excellent.

### Ch. Leoville Poyferre, St. Julien, 2009

Tech: 13.9% Alc. (Barrel Sample) 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 6% Petite Verdot aged 18 months in all French oak (75% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity; and moderately chewy phenolics. Lively-juicy-sweet-spicy-ripe black & red fruit with dusty-gravelly earth; supple but spicy oak, and accents of cedar, black pepper, and pencil shavings; meaty. Really very long finish. Delicious, elegant, almost ethereal; lovely-in-the-mouth. As good a young Poyferre as I have ever tasted. **Outstanding. BS: 96+.** (Spec's will offer this as a future but the chateau has not yet released a price.)

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Alfred Tesseron and his new vat room with conical concrete fermenters at Ch. Pontet Canet

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Following our visit to Leoville Poyferre, we headed for **Ch. Pontet Canet** – another chateau I had never visited - where we met owner Alfred Tesseron who toured us through the winery and fed us a super lunch. In tasting and drinking, I have watched the improvement of Ch. Pontet Canet from the 1970s to today. Alfred Tesseron has been the driving force behind that improvement in both the vineyard and in the winery. We tasted a 2009 barrel sample during the tour and drank the 2003 and 2000 with lunch. While showing us around, Tesseron let us in on the fact that the biodynamic certification of Ch. Pontet Canet is due any day. That will make Pontet Canet the first classified growth in the Medoc to go biodynamic. (Pontet Canet is a 5th growth but now sells at prices comparable to many 2nd growths. The market knows the wine's true value.) Tesseron also allowed that Pontet Canet is now using horses (rather than tractors) to plow a quarter of the estate and anticipates using horses for the whole estate in the next few years. The winery tour revealed two vat rooms, each big enough to handle the whole harvest. One is stocked with only traditional wooden tanks and the other with conical concrete tanks. Both sets of tanks include temperature control radiators. Tesseron says the use some of each type of vats each year and by having two vat rooms, he has maximum flexibility to deal with anything the harvest throws at him.



Lunch with Alfred Tesseron at Ch. Pontet Canet

### Ch. Pontet Canet, Pauillac, 2009

Tech: Barrel Sample. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petite Verdot. fermented in a mix of wooden and modern conical concrete fermenters and aged in all French oak barrels (60% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Juicy, lively ripe black & red fruit (blackberry, black cherry) with gravelly terroir (adjacent to both Mouton and Lafite), supple, spicy oak (even though Tesseron compares it to "too much makeup") and accents of pencil shavings, black pepper, and tobacco. Very long finish. Delicious, complete; lovely-in-the-mouth. **Quite fresh. Really Excellent. BS: 95+.** (Spec's will offer this as a future but even Tesseron says he doesn't know just when he will offer his wine.)

After Pontet Canet, we went out west to **Ch. Tour Sieujean**, where we met with young owner Catherine Chaumont. While most of the vineyards are in Pauillac (near Ch. Batailley), the chateau is located in the Haut Medoc across the road from Ch. Larose Trintaudon. Before 2002, Tour Sieujean was part of the Pauillac cooperative winery (Ch. Larose Pauillac). The family owners decided to withdraw from the co-op to produce better wines and build an estate. At tastings at the offices of negociant Ulysse Cazabonne, I've tasted every vintage from 2005 to the present but I had never visited the property. We offered the 2008 as a future and should have it on the shelf before the end of the year. We will soon be offering the 2009 as a future as well. The winery is a bit of a work in progress with gleaming stainless steel and a small barrel room to go with youth and determination. What we saw at the winery was clean and modern with the energy of a younger generation taking over. I think this will be a winner.



Bear and Catherine Chaumont at Ch. Tour Sieujean

### Ch. Tour Sieujean, Pauillac, 2008

Tech: Barrel Sample. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Merlot aged in all French oak barrels (60% new). Deep purple in color with good legs; dry, medium-to-full-bodied with balanced acidity and medium plus phenolics. Dark juicy chewy black and subtle red fruit with gravelly dusty notes and subtly dusty oak accented with tobacco, cedar, cocoa, and exotic dark spice. **Long finish; bright, focused. Really Fine. BS: 91+**

### Ch. Tour Sieujean, Pauillac, 2009

Tech: Barrel Sample. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Merlot aged in all French oak barrels (60% new). Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity. Dense, dark, juicy-spicy black & red fruit with dusty-gravelly terroir, supple oak and accents of tobacco and pencil shavings. **Very Long finish. Delicious, exciting, quite tasty; alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 92.**

We finished up the day with a business meeting at Ch. Pichon Lalande where I visit every year ... but we will have to wait to talk about that until some things get finalized.

Although a bit rainy, it was a great day to taste wine and a great day to learn new things about two lower priced new favorites (coming soon) and some classic classified chateaux Spec's has followed for many years. 🌸

