

Spring-Summer 2008

PIGEONHOLING PARKER

Criticizing Robert Parker as of late has become a cottage industry nearly as big as Parker himself. He has been blamed for the 'Parkerization' of the wine industry; that is every wine-maker is now making overly alcoholic, overly oakey, overbearing wines that have no sense of balance or 'place', yet receive high scores from Parker thus driving demand and prices ever skyward. This is a little akin to blaming the weatherman when it rains (or doesn't!). Parker merely rates the wines, he isn't holding a gun to anyone's head to buy them.

A case can be made that the man truly responsible for the modern state of wine making world-wide is none other than a Frenchman, Dr. Emile Peynaud. He began preaching in the late 50's for the French to thin crop load and let the grapes ripen longer than had been traditional. He was the first to say that great wines should not need 20 years in bottle to mature, they should be in balance from the very beginning. By 1982 he and his star pupil, Michelle Roland, had the ear of most of the top Chateaux in Bordeaux. The weather that year was quite warm and a very ripe and rich vintage resulted. The established old guard of critics (mostly English) declared the vintage mediocre at best and certainly to be short lived. Parker stuck his neck out and singularly declared it to be one of the greatest vintages of the post war era. History has sided with Parker on the '82 vintage; out with the old guard, in with the new.

No doubt there are countless examples on more than one continent of winemakers taking the good doctors' advice a bit too far, especially when it comes to hang-time. Next to determining what to plant and where our most important decision is when to pick.

Matt and I, after ten years together in the vineyards, have really begun to dial in that precise moment, catching that first window of true physiological ripeness and maintaining a wonderful amount of natural acidity. The wine on the cover of this issue, the '04 Reserve Cabernet, I think is a fabulous example of great timing. Along with obvious elements of delicious ripe mature fruit in this wine is a hint of bell pepper, one of the signature markers that help tell you that you are drinking cabernet. Any more hang-time and this marker would be gone as would some of the mouth-watering acidity that this wine has retained. As my father said to me many times growing up, the key to life is balance, taking anything to the extreme is usually a mistake.

Cheers,

P.s. Still no thank you note from the IRS !

—Michael Keenan