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WEEKLY TASTING REPORT (FEB 1-7, 2021): BORDEAUX, ARGENTINA, NAPA & MORE (412 WINES RATED)



Wednesday, February 10, 2021



James finished tasting almost 1,200 Bordeaux 2018 wines last week, and immediately began tasting Argentina bottles.

Today's report on what we tasted last week in Hong Kong and Australia marks the end of reviewing 2018 Bordeaux and the beginning of our Argentina tastings.

The 2018 vintage in Bordeaux will be remembered as a great one producing some very powerful and muscular wines that are intense and rich yet they still maintain the essence of Bordeaux with freshness and terroir-driven character.

"The 2018 is the result of the precision in the work, trying to find the optimum methods to combat the dry and heat," said Alexandre Thienpont, the head winemaker and part owner of Pomerol's famous Vieux Chateau Certan. "The elevage (aging in barrel) was very important. The weather was very strong and contrasty in 2018 but there is still some elegance in the wine. The wine is the closet expression of what nature gave. The wine has its own story to tell."

Thienpont's 2018 Vieux Chateau Certan was one of our top wines tasted last week and showed incredible strength and depth. It was one of the more powerful wines of the almost 1,200 bottles we reviewed last month. The famous first growth Chateau Haut-Brion was also a stellar bottle and shows fantastic aromatic complexity and toned and strong character.

"When you have a challenging year [like 2018], the terroir is stronger than the winemaker," said Jean-Philippe Delmas, head winemaker of Chateau Haut Brion and La Mission Haut Brion. He pointed out that the extreme weather conditions were balanced by the great soil and micro-climates of his estates.



Meanwhile, Argentina has some beautiful wines to taste and rate this month from a string of wonderful vintages including 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The latter was a very hot growing season in the Andes. I was in Mendoza last year at this time and it really was a scorcher. But winemakers there and in other parts of the country are much better able to fine-tune their vineyards against hot and dry weather as well as harvest at the right time and produce their wines in a softer and less extreme way.



Lagarde and Tapiz were among the first Argentine wines James tasted, and were full of freshness and drinkability.

"I have done 34 harvests," said Daniel Pi, head winemaker of Trapiche during a tasting last February. "And the 2018 and 2019 are the best ever for me. 2020 should be excellent as well but we will have less quantity."

The 2018 harvest in Napa made extremely fine and balanced wines, both reds and whites. This report includes two fabulous wines from Futo: Futo Napa Valley Oakville 2018 and Futo Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Stags Leap District 5500 Estate 2018. They may be the greatest wines the small winery has ever made.

Another hot release to check out in this report is the Sassicaia 2018. I tasted it blind against the powerful and structured 2016 and 2017, and I slightly preferred the more elegant and refined 2018. The quality of tannins and finesse is superb. It will be a gorgeous wine to try on release and drink for decades to come.

Another wine I want to mention is the La Coulée de Serrant Savennières 2015. I bought a bottle in Hong Kong and tasted (drank) it with my wife Marie and we loved it. Of course, it's still very young and will be better in a few years. But the intensity and layers of exotic fruit character were amazing. I used to drink lots of whites from Savennieres in the 1980s when I lived in Paris and this single bottle has rekindled my interest in Loire whites, especially those from biodynamically grown grapes.

I also tasted a range of natural, low intervention and orange wines that I bought in Hong Kong. And it was a fun and enlightening experience. I really liked some of the whites and reds where sulfur had not been added. I especially enjoyed the Burgundies from Domaine Renaud Boyer. There are also some outstanding quality chenin blancs from South Africa, particularly from the husband and wife team of Craven Wines. And, of course, the trendy whites of Austria's Gut Oggau were fascinating and pure.





This Coulee de Serrant was a beautiful find from the Loire, reminding James of Paris in the mid-1980s: sophisticated, challenging, and alluring.



We also tasted the latest release from Sassicaia last week, which shows extremely fine and integrated tannins as well as sheer berry and cherry fruit.

A few beautiful reds from France's sometimes overlooked Cahors region are also worth noting, including those from Clos Triguedina and Fabien Jouves. Their malbecs are so focused and pure with an added minerally and stony character from their terroirs.

Contributing Editor Nick Stock has some late comers for his soon-to-be published New Zealand report too, including wines from top names such as Trinity Hill, Bilancia, Neudorf, and Giesen. Current releases of Hawkes Bay syrahs seem to be on a roll at the moment. Check them out below.

There are also some Spanish and Italian wines to check out – most notably some Bierzos from Losada Vinos de Finca and wines from Dominio del Aguila in Ribera del Duero.

This report covering 412 wines has something for everyone from the grandest of Bordeaux reds to funky fun orange wines from South Africa. Check it out.

– James Suckling, editor

The list of wines below are bottles tasted and rated in the previous week by James and other tasters at JamesSuckling.com. They include many latest releases not yet in the market, but entering soon. Some will be included in upcoming tasting reports.

Note: You can sort the wines below by country, vintage, score, and alphabetically by winery name, and can search for specific wines in the search bar.

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LOSADA VINOS DE FINCA MENCÍA BIERZO ALTOS DE LOSADA LA BIENQUERIDA 2018 ^

Country	Spain		Score
Region	Castilla y León		97
Vintage	2018		

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Pine-cone, wild-blackberry, blueberry, lavender, bark, clove and white-pepper aromas. It's medium-bodied with sleek, ultra fine tannins and fresh acidity. So elegant and refined with beautiful freshness. Silky layers carry you along. Tangerine and orange peel. Hard to resist. Drink or hold.

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Country	Spain		Score
Region	Castilla y León		94
Vintage	2018		

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Aromas of wild blackberries, violets, lavender, cloves and dried black mushrooms. It's medium-bodied with silky, velvety tannins and bright acidity. Crushed-stone notes, too. Focused and wonderfully fresh. Drink or hold.

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Country	Spain		Score
Region	Castilla y León		92
Vintage	2018		

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Crushed berries, wild blackcurrants, licorice, black pepper and purple flowers on the nose. It's medium-to full-bodied with fine-grained, succulent tannins. Elegantly floral and spiced with a flavorful, fresh finish. So drinkable now, but will hold, too.

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