

Diner's Journal

The New York Times Blog on Dining Out

A Wine Report from Home

By **Eric Asimov** JANUARY 25, 2010



Tony Genicola/The New York Times

Had some great wines in the last few days, and rather than consign them to the loneliness of my computer notes, I thought I'd share a few of them.

Can't help but start with the best, a 1986 Corton-Charlemagne from Bonneau du Martray. I love Corton-Charlemagne, which is perhaps the least heralded of the grand cru vineyards for white Burgundy, and I love Bonneau du Martray, which makes great wine and up until five years or so ago used to be fairly reasonably priced. A generous friend opened this with a plate of salumi, and all I can say is that this wine was ravishing.

As with many '86 wines from the Côte de Beaune, this was a wine of great ripeness, with an almost sensuous richness. Yet, the longer the wine was in the glass, the purer and more focused it seemed to get, with the last few sips emphasizing the delicious minerality of the wine. What a treat.



This particular day brought an embarrassment of riches. At dinner that same night, I had another wine that made me think of the Bonneau du Martray. It was a completely different chardonnay wine, a 2007 Napa Valley chardonnay from Kongsgaard. Now, it's ridiculous to compare these wines, as they are more than 20 years apart and the Kongsgaard is a baby. And yet something in the richness of the Kongsgaard reminded me of the Corton-Charlemagne. Would love to try this again in a decade.

Last Friday was unusual in that on this one day I had two wines from Giuseppe Quintarelli, the great producer from the Veneto region of Italy. At lunch I had the 1998 Ca del Merlo, the same wine that my colleague Sam Sifton raved about in his review of Maialino. The menu at Maialino calls the wine a Valpolicella, and it may well be in spirit, but the label calls it an Indicazione Geografica Tipica, meaning it does not conform somehow to the rules of the Valpolicella appellation, or, perhaps, that Quintarelli declassified the wine for one reason or another. Either way, it's a delicious wine that combines the richness of an Amarone with the sleeker shape of a Valpolicella, and after more than 11 years is becoming increasingly complex, with earthy secondary aromas adding to the lush fruit flavors.

If this was a Valpolicella in all but name, that night I had an Amarone in spirit, the 1999 Quintarelli Rosso del Bepi, which indeed was a declassified Amarone, a rich, powerful wine full of opulent fruit flavors. I'm often at a loss as to how to serve Amarone, which can overwhelm foods other than the richest stews or game dishes, but this wine was well balanced, and went beautifully with a cheese plate.

This particular wine came at a wonderful dinner after an array of wines I felt privileged to try. They not only included the Kongsgaard, but a 1996 Vouvray demi-sec Le Haut Lieu from Huet, a wine that I ordinarily love. But this bottle seemed just a bit out of balance, as if the sweetness had outlasted the compensatory acidity. Among the reds at the dinner were a superb '97 Tignanello, one of the early super-Tuscan wines, which, unlike many of them, proves itself year after year. With its blend of 80 percent sangiovese, 15 percent cabernet sauvignon and 5 percent cabernet franc, I daresay Tignanello could qualify as Chianti Classico today. But it is its own wine, with the dusty, smoky cherry of sangiovese and the cedary tannic structure of cabernet.

Lastly, for this dinner, a pair of 1995s, a Ducru-Beaucaillou from St.-Julien, and a Ridge Monte Bello from the Santa Cruz Mountains. We had two bottles of each for the 15 people at the dinner, but one of the Ducru-Beaucaillous was corked, drat! So I only had a small taste, good enough to know that this was classic St.-Julien, sleek, balanced and elegant. The Ridge was not so different in its flavor profile, but burlier – both terrific wines.

Finally, dinner at home after the Jets sad end to a most uplifting season. We started off with a terrific pétillant Vouvray, a 2002 from Huet, which was beautifully balanced and might easily have been mistaken for a full-bodied Champagne, if not for the giveaway notes of lemon and honey that so often signal chenin blanc for me. The pétillant is bottled at a lower pressure than Champagne, which gives it a pleasingly soft texture and delicacy, despite its richness.

Then, with a pork shoulder braised in milk and herbs, I served a 2007 Regnié from Ducroux. This is an absolutely delicious Beaujolais, light yet juicy, and I've been enjoying it for several months now. I've had a version made without any sulfur, and I can't say I prefer it over the conventional bottling. They are both really good.

Did it take the sting out of the Jets loss? No. But I felt better knowing that, while it may be sometime before I have another Corton-Charlemagne, young or old, to say nothing of the other wines I was able to try over the last few days, I've got plenty of Beaujolais left to drink.