

VINE GUY

2003 Bordeaux: Chose wisely and often

By Scott Greenberg

Last week, I attended the 7th annual Heart's Delight Wine Tasting and Auction, which benefits the American Heart Association, and I now know what it's like to be the proverbial "kid-in-the-candy-store."

Each year, the event draws over 30 chateaux owners and representatives from the famed Bordeaux region of France, along with samples of their current vintage wines. This year, the grand tasting featured the wines of the persnickety 2003 vintage. Fortunately, not only did I have the opportunity to taste all of the samples side-by-side, I even had a chance to chat with the winemakers and owners directly about their wines.

What made the 2003 vintage in Bordeaux so uneven? Well, to start, only eight vintages in the last century have rivaled the extended heat that threaten to devastate the grape crop throughout France. Luckily, just the right amount of rain graced the vineyards of Bordeaux and kept the vines alive and productive. Next, many, but not all, vineyard managers resisted the urge to start the harvest too early, resulting in ripe grapes picked at a leisurely pace during the month of September.

Lastly, the combination of hot weather and soil composition contributed to the wide variation in style and quality. For example, the clay-based vineyards of the northern and eastern regions (North Medoc and Right Bank, respectively) fared better than the regions further south, where the vineyards are predominately made up of gravelly/sandy soils that could not retain the precious moisture needed during the hot, dry months.

The good news is the 2003 vintage offers savvy consumers powerful wines with good acidity, decent alcohol and well-integrated tannins. Even though this vintage may not be as celebrated as the now-legendary 2000 vintage, there are plenty of good-to-great wines in this herd worth owning. I have listed my favorites from the tasting below in order of preference. Many on these wines are now available in area wine shops and more are making their way across the Atlantic. Retail prices are approximate. All wines are from the 2003 vintage of Bordeaux, France with specific regions listed.

» **Chateau Valandraud, St. Emilion (\$250)** While the price of this "garagiste wine" might scare you, it will also certainly seduce you with intense floral scents of violets, blackberries and mocha. Near perfect balance between acidity and tannins support the velvety flavors of black cherries, sweet cassis and just a hint of mint on the long, elegant finish. If you can afford it, put it away for ten



years and give me a call!

» **Chateau Cos d'Estournel (\$150)** Exotic nose of blackberry and smoke with just the slightest hint of curry. A beautifully structured wine with abundant fruit (black cherry, plum and cassis) that is well-balanced with great acidity and semi-sweet tannins with hints of espresso on the long finish. Definitely a wine to cellar for 10+ years.

» **Chateau Angelus, St. Emilion (\$150)** Another wallet biopsy wine, but worth every drop. Expressive scents of blackberry, rose petal and mint explode out of the glass. The polished structure supports expressive flavors of black plums and cassis while hints of chocolate, tobacco and toasty oak play out on the ultra-long, elegant finish.

» **Chateau Palmer, Margaux (\$125)** Aromas of bright cherries and chocolate leap out of the glass. This wine has a wonderful "mouth-feel" to support the flavors of ripe black plums and cassis. Hints of black tea and leather round out the supple finish.

» **Chateau Lagrange (\$35)** Wonderful nose of leather and black plums. This young brute showcases big flavors of plum, cassis and ripe black cherries. It has big, bold tannins to keep the copious amounts of fruit in check and provide excellent structure. One of the best values of the vintage.

» **Chateau Pape Clement, Pessac-Leognan (\$85)** An intriguing nose of "fresh laundry" and rose petals combine with beautiful balance and silky flavors of black cherries, cassis and just a whisper of sweet vanilla cream on the lush finish.

» **Chateau La Lagune, Haut-Medoc (\$45)** Great nose of creamy cassis with dominate flavors of ripe cranberries and red cherries on the front of the tongue and hints of blackberry fruit and mocha on the well-balanced finish.

I would be remiss if I did not mention at least one sweet dessert wine. Coutet, from the Barsac region (\$40) has a seductive honey/apricot nose and a wonderful, unctuous mouthfeel that accents the lush flavors of honeyed orange rind and honeysuckle notes on the brilliantly long finish.

What big kid doesn't want to run amok in a candy store - or wine shop for that matter? I, for one, have no desire to ever grow up if I can keep doing this. Let me know where your sweet tooth lies at scott@vineguy.com

Mojito

with a twist

There are some simple solutions to one of summer's most refreshing drinks. The mojito is a delicious blend of rum, mint, lime, sugar and a little soda water — but by adding or substituting an ingredient or two, you have a different take on the chilled beverage.

WILD BERRY MOJITO

Serves one 12-ounce drink with only 34 calories in non-alcoholic version

- 8-12 fresh mint leaves
- 3-4 fresh blackberries
- 3-4 fresh blueberries
- 3-4 fresh red raspberries
- 1/8 cup lime juice
- 2-4 teaspoons Equal or 1-2 packets
- 1/2 cup soda water

1. Carefully press mint leaves into the bottom of the glass with the back of a wooden spoon to release their oils (do not tear leaves).

2. Mix mint, crushed wild berries, lime juice and Equal in a 12-oz. high-ball glass.

3. Fill glass with crushed ice.

4. Stir well until the ice is reduced by 1/3 and then top with more crushed ice, stirring until the glass begins to frost on the outside.

5. Pour in soda water and stir.

6. Garnish with a sprig of mint.

* Alcoholic option: Add 1/4 cup light rum after step 4.

BACARDI MIXERS MOJITO

Suggested retail: \$2.99-\$3.39

For those who'd rather not mess with all the mess of fresh limes and mint, the refreshing mix does all the dirty work for you. All you have to add rum, a splash of club soda and serve on the rocks.



BIG EASY COCKTAILS

By Jimmy Bannos and John DeMers

Although the mojito is typically considered a Southern beverage, a simple twist to it makes it truly a New Orleans staple. Switching rum for bourbon, you get a mint julep — found on page 23 of this bartenders' bible with a portion of proceeds going to Katrina relief efforts.



Brig Cabe/Examiner

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DIRECTIONS: I-270 North to Exit 22 (Hyattstown). Left 109, Left 355, Right 75 North for 13 miles. Right on Glissans Mill Rd. (4 miles to Winery).

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