

The Vine Guy » **Scott Greenberg**

## '09 Bordeaux: Plenty to love

**B**ill Blatch, a well-respected negociant and trusted wine adviser in Bordeaux, France, recently passed through D.C. on his "retirement" tour. For years, Bill has not only kept friends and colleagues informed about the best wines in Bordeaux, but he has developed an almost cult-like following for his extraordinarily in-depth annual vintage reports of the region. One of the things that really sunk in during our last meeting was the fact that — to the best of Bill's records — the past decade (2000 to 2009) was the first time Bordeaux did not experience any "off" vintages. Not a single one.

And, according to Blatch, 2009 seems to be the best of the bunch, with a perfect combination of a gentle, cool winter, a warm spring with the perfect amount of rainfall that resulted in model budding and flowering, and an even rise in temperature throughout the summer months. The latter provided just the right amount of sunshine and warmth to lead to perfect phenolic ripening — a term that refers to the changes in the tannins in the seeds and skin — and an ideal concentration of sugar levels in the fruit. As a result, both red and white grapes developed beautiful flavors that made spectacular wines. The bad news: Wine prices for this vintage have pushed the limits of most consumers' budgets. But, as with all things Bordeaux, buying these wines now to enjoy five to 10 years down the road could actually be a tasteful investment.

Here are a few of my favorites that I had the opportunity to sample at last week's Heart's Delight Wine Tasting and Auction, which featured Bordeaux wines from the 2009 vintage. Retail prices are approximate.

Rochet takes its name from the rocks that are found in the limestone subsoil that creates the landscape of the vineyards found on the property of Lafon-Rochet in the Saint-Estephe appellation. The **2009 Chateau Lafon-Rochet (\$55)** is made up mostly of cabernet sauvignon with a quarter of merlot and then smidges of petit verdot and cabernet franc blended in. The nose is full of bright cherry and smoky cedar that lead to flavors of dark black fruit, plum and dark cherry on the beautifully balanced palate. Soft tannins hold up the long finish, where hints of earthy minerals linger for over half a minute.

Rauzan-Segla, located in the Margaux appellation, has always been known as a high-end "Second Growth" Bordeaux property, but it really stepped up its game — and the quality of its wines — when the House of Chanel took over as new owners in 1994. Since then, pardon the pun, they have been making



THINK STOCK

fashionable wines. The **2009 Chateau Rauzan-Segla (\$99)** cabernet sauvignon-based wine has a healthy dose of merlot blended in and has a nose that shows off scents of violets and red cherry. The charming mouthfeel is delicate but delivers plenty of dark and red fruit flavors across the entire palate. A touch of Indian spice and minerality on the long, clean finish is charming and memorable.

The vineyard of Lynch-Bages is spread across the gravelly plateau of the town of Bages, in the Pauillac appellation, and has long been a favorite among collectors (myself included). The **2009 Chateau Lynch-Bages, Pauillac (\$179)** is one of the best wines I have ever had from this chateau. Made from mostly cabernet sauvignon, this wine exudes a sense of power and charm in every sip. From the aromatic scents of blackberry, dark plum and earthy tones to the silky-smooth layered flavors of rich cassis, blackberry, black cherry and rich mocha, this is a wine that seduces the palate. Firm tannins and abundant acidity keep this wine in perfect balance, with a long, well-delineated finish.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Daniel and Florence Cathiard, owners of the lovingly renovated Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte, for over a decade, so I am thrilled that their **2009 Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte (\$179)** is getting so much attention. Flavors of dark plum, smoky cassis, blackberry jam and roasted coffee all compete for space on the palate, but it is the remarkable balance between tannins, fruit and acidity that makes this a near-perfect wine. The seductive and delightful finish persists for well over a minute, leaving an indelible memory on the tongue.

# Roberto Donna dons his toque

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

When the news broke that one of Washington's most famous chefs had returned to the kitchen, foodies applauded: Roberto Donna, of Galileo and Bebo Trattoria fame, was back behind the stove. But this time, he is shaping his pastas in a small, contemporary restaurant on New Mexico Avenue. As executive chef at La Forchetta, Donna has full reign over an all-Italian menu that reflects his creativity and Italian heritage.

Donna has spent his entire life cooking — it's both a passion and an obsession. "I grew up in a two-family house," he said. "My family owned a grocery store and sold all the ingredients [to] the restaurant next door, so I would go into the restaurant and play with the chefs. That was the beginning of my passion for cooking."

He started picking through salad greens for restaurant chefs at the age of 4. A year later, he was tasked with peeling potatoes and learned how to make simple pastas. For this Torino, Italy, native, that's a major achievement. When he turned 8, Donna could already assemble a meal, and when he turned 15, he enrolled in culinary school.

As a young man, Donna moved to D.C., where he found Italian restaurants using American chefs who were unfamiliar with the hidden beauty of true Italian cuisine. So when Donna started cooking, the local food world paid attention: They were enjoying authentic Italian flavors and textures. He recalls being the first Italian to serve risotto and grilled rack of veal in a D.C. restaurant.

Several decades later, and after a several-year hiatus, Donna returns to the kitchen, where he has free rein to structure the menu. "The owner said, 'What you are doing, you do well,'" Donna said. "You know food, you know what people want." Donna said the owner wanted the best pizza in the city served with good Italian food.

Describing the restaurant as a trattoria, Donna said the dishes



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

"When I go back to Torino, this is what my friends and I eat," says chef Roberto Donna.

### What's your comfort food?

Pasta. Lasagna and cold cuts with good, crunchy bread.

### What's in your fridge?

Milk, eggs, Parmesan cheese, anchovies, garlic and olive oil

### What is your signature dish?

Risotto with white truffles

### Which is your favorite restaurant?

Vidalia, Citronelle, R.J. Cooper's Rogue 24, Kaz Sushi Bistro

### What are you must-have ingredients?

Olive oil, garlic vinegar, tomato sauce, flour, eggs, anchovies and fresh herbs such as rosemary, sage, thyme and basil

are slightly different than at his earlier, more formal destinations. "I use different cuts of meat," he said. "Some of the dishes are like those at Galileo, but I just change some of the ingredients. For example, at Galileo, I made a Parmesan cheese

pudding, and I make one here. But I do not use black truffles and fried shallots."

Donna said he really likes the style of food he is cooking. "When I go back to Torino, this is what my friends and I eat."

## EMBRACE YOUR TRUE IDENTITY.

New Pastry Informational Class starts **June 8th**

New Daytime Classes start **July 1st**

New Evening Classes start **August 7th**



**L'Academie de Cuisine**

THE ACADEMY OF CULINARY AND PASTRY ARTS SINCE 1976

Where good cooks become great.

16006 Industrial Drive, Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
301-670-8670 x201 · www.lacademie.com

