

GREAT WINES OF 2010

By Jeannie Cho Lee MW on 04 Jan 2011 in Wine Opines

A common question posed to me is: “You get to taste so much good wine, don’t you feel jaded? Is wine tasting now all work for you?” There were times when I felt it was work, during the years when I was refining my palate and blind tasting every day in preparation for the Master of Wine (MW) exam. Close family members commented, “You don’t have that glimmer of joy when you taste wine anymore. Are you sure you want to continue on this path?” I had never quit something I had started so it was never a question in my mind that I had to see this MW journey to its end— either failing all my three allotted attempts to pass or being successful.

Wine still gave me comfort, even after an exhausting day of studying, tasting blind and revising. For the MW exam, one needs to be clinical and objective – tasting like a detective and arguing like a lawyer. It is about the mind and senses coming together in a way that one can articulate the differences, the nuances and break apart the wine into its structural and flavour components. Then to see the final picture, one needs to be able to put the pieces all back together again to judge the balance and assess its quality and ability to age. Even after hours of such mental-sensory exercise, I reached for a glass of wine to enjoy at the end of the day, purely for pleasure.

Great wine still sends shivers up my spine and truly memorable wines bring tears to my eyes. While this happens a bit less frequently compared to when I was a newbie to wine, wine still moves me. At the close of 2010, there are wines which are etched in my memory from this past year. These are wines that made my taste buds tingle and left me breathless. Given the lack of space, I list only a handful below of my great wine memories of 2010:

1995 Domaine de la Romanne-Conti Batard Montrachet (Burgundy, France) – I could have filled pages and pages recanting the fantastic DRC moments of 2010. About half of my greatest wine memories for this year is of DRC: For example, the incredible 1999 La Tache which I rated 99 points; the 1989 Romanee Conti which is just opening up (99 points); and the 1990 which was a perfect wine (100 points); the magical, ethereal 1978 Echezeaux which is another perfect 100 point wine. This 1995 Batard Montrachet is special because it was enjoyed at the cellar with owner Aubert de Villaine; this wine is not for sale and made only for the domaine’s internal use. It is one of the most concentrated, powerful Burgundian whites I’ve ever tasted with an incredibly long finish. (96 points)

1966 Perrier Jouet Rose (Champagne, France) – I only became a fan of mature Champagne over the past five years. Among the wonderful vintage champagnes I enjoyed were the 1971 Lanson (95 points) and the 1989 Krug Collection, which was recently released (97 points). When great vintage Champagne has a few decades of bottle age, it begins to taste more like still wine, gaining complexity and depth and losing some of its carbonation slowly over time. This rose was shared at Amuse Bouche in Hong Kong with one of the largest collectors of vintage Champagne in Asia; we were all impressed with how wonderfully it had evolved exuding mature red Burgundy perfume and offering refreshing and complex flavours on the palate. A fantastic 98 point rose Champagne!

1992 Domaine Leflaive Montrachet (Burgundy, France) – I enjoyed wonderful white Burgundies in 2010, but no other producer’s name popped up more frequently than Leflaive. Among white Burgundies, it stands on its own in terms of consistency and style. Leflaive wines are lacy, feminine, nuanced and delicate yet powerful. I loved Anne Claude Leflaive’s 1999 Batard Montrachet (97 points) and jealously guard the few cases I own. This 1992 Montrachet is in a different league – it represents the juncture of concentration, elegance and refinement -- a perfect white Burgundy. (100 points)

1953 Chateau Margaux (Bordeaux, France) – I could replace the 1953 vintage with equally impressive vintages for this property such as the 1961, 1983, 1996, 2000, 2005 or 2009 (still in barrel). However, the 1953 ex-chateau bottle is special since it was my very first encounter with this wine and I happen to be sitting at a dinner at the Great Wall in Beijing. After taking the first sip, I swooned in my chair. This wine was perfect: Perfectly mature, perfectly balanced, perfectly poised and seamless. It glided across my tongue leaving behind remnants of subtle flavours, with a finish that made me reach for another sip, then another. A magical 100 point wine.

2007 Dana Estate Lotus Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley, USA) – **The number of fantastic Napa wines I enjoyed this year could fill a book. Among the most impressive were:** 1997 Harlan Estate (100 points), **1997 Aratujo Eisele Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (98 points)** and 2006 Colgin Estate IX Proprietary Red (98 points). The 1997 vintage kept returning as my clear favourite for Napa Cabernets, far superior to the much-touted 1994 vintage. 2007 is often compared with the 1997 and many Napa producers made fantastic wine in this vintage including this Korean-owned Napa winery whose total production is a mere 700 cases from its total eight hectare site. The 2007 Lotus Vineyard possesses incredible subtlety with layers upon layers of flavours that unfolds slowly in the mid-palate and rise to a crescendo in the finish. A fantastic wine that is deserving of its worldwide praise; I rate it 100 points.