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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

- DINU LIPATTI
- SOPHIA LOREN
- BLUES BROTHERS
- PARKER & PONSOT

OPEN • TUESDAY–SATURDAY 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. CLOSED • SUNDAY & MONDAY

FEBRUARY 2005

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## DOWN SOUTH

### 2003 BANYULS “VENDANGES” DOMAINE LA TOUR VIEILLE

I have found a great sweet Banyuls for you. It is such pure decadence, I have been impatient for it to arrive.

It has an enormous, dense, ravishing aroma of super-ripe (*confit*) black cherry and blackberry. The flavors are explosive, endlessly delicious, and the texture like velvet.

In the Pyrénées they like to serve black cherry jam with their local cheeses after dinner. No, serve this wine instead. Or it will work with roasted nuts, or chocolate. Or why not chocolate cake with nuts?

**\$22.00** PER 500-ML BOTTLE      **\$237.60** PER CASE

### 2001 PATRIMONIO ROUGE “PETRA BIANCA” • DOMAINE LECCIA

The wine is red, *noir*-ish red, but the rocks (*petra*) are white (*bianca*), as in chalky. And it is merely one of the best wines of the 2001 vintage. The bouquet is a marvel combining violets, maquis, intense black fruits, mineral, and you can take it from there. The structure is Eiffel Tower-like and the flesh upon that structure pure Sophia Loren. (The Italian touch must come from the grape variety's Sangiovese origins.)

Huge, penetrating palate with a tannin they should be teaching in wine schools. For *terroir*-ists, this is essential. And it will age well.

Hats off to Yves Leccia.

**\$27.50** PER BOTTLE      **\$297.00** PER CASE

### 2003 CÔTES-DU-RHÔNE ROUGE CHÂTEAU DU TRIGNON

It was a vintage of low yields, so there is not much of this popular favorite this year. It is a complete success.

**\$8.95** PER TENTH      **\$193.32** PER CASE  
**\$13.95** PER FIFTH      **\$150.66** PER CASE

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## SAVOIE

**I**F EVER YOU ARE in Lyon, you will be well-placed for a few wine-tasting tours. You are only about forty minutes from Morgon, Fleurie, Mâcon, Pouilly, and Fuissé.

You are about fifty minutes from Ampuis and its Côte Rôtie, Condrieu and its Viognier.

And it is only a fifty minutes' drive east to the Savoie, which features distractions that won't fit into a wine glass. It is best known for its winter sports. Albertville was the site of the Winter Olympics several years ago. I get cold feet in the snow, though, so July and September are my favorite months to go. The lakes are great for swimming. Jump into the *Lac du Bourget*, for example, float on your back, and look up at those mountains. Are those Alps? Yes. Are those grapevines growing on those impossibly steep slopes? Find a *friture du lac* (crispy, deep-fried little lake fish) with a bottle of the local white wine. Speaking of which . . .

### 2003 LES ABYMES • A. & M. QUENARD

Forget it. You don't have to be lakeside enjoying a platter of little fishies in order to appreciate Quenard's Abymes, so I brought some to you just in case you are in the mood for a luscious, lively burst of pleasure. I am not even going to try to write tasting notes because that would not be in the spirit of this perfect bistro-style white.

**\$14.95** PER BOTTLE      **\$161.46** PER CASE

### BUGEY-CERDON ROSÉ “LA CUEILLE” • PATRICK BOTTEX

One morning I showed up to taste at Marcel Lapierre's. Strewn around the cave, the parking lot, the dining room were empty bottles of Bugey-Cerdon. Party wine for the Gang of Four!

Here is the freshly bottled 2004, a fizzy, low-alcohol rosé that's fun. Momentum is gathering as jaded palates discover the pleasures of Bugey-Cerdon.

**\$18.00** PER BOTTLE      **\$194.40** PER CASE



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## — VALUE OF THE MONTH —

### 2003 PIC SAINT LOUP ROUGE CHÂTEAU LA ROQUE

We recommend Château La Roque

- not only because Jack Boutin is one of our favorite people.
- not only because he named his new chalky hillside parcel of Marsanne and Mourvèdre Côte Kermis (pronounced by Jack *coat-care-meat*).
- not only because Romans cultivated the vine there, too.
- certainly not because Jack told me his 2003 Cupa Numismae cuvée “is like the fat guy dancing in the Blues Brothers movie.”

We recommend La Roque because WE LIKE THE WINE 100 PERCENT. It will bowl you over by virtue of its vivid color, great flavor, beautiful structure,

and perfect balance. Don't imagine that it tries too hard. This is not a pandering score seeker.

It is the best La Roque yet. Here is a red that shows touch. It is not accidentally good. Jack Boutin fashioned it.

And it satisfies esthetically in every way you can possibly imagine. It is big enough, elegant enough, balanced just so, and while it is loaded with delicious fruit, you cannot accuse it of being a fruit bomb. It has an abundance of southern French character and tannin but does not lack a desirable portion of finesse.

Stock up on this one, because you will want to enjoy it now and save a bunch for later. Perfection rarely comes so reasonably priced.

**\$14.95** PER BOTTLE

**\$161.46** PER CASE



*La Roque*

*Photograph © Gail Skoff*



— PRE-ARRIVAL OFFER —

**2003 WHITE BURGUNDIES  
DOMAINE COLIN-DELÉGER**

I had the pleasure of tasting Colin's 2003s out of barrel early on, in February of 2004, then again this fall just after they were put into bottle.

In February my notes include an appreciation of the 2003 vintage at Colin's: "Incredible success. Montrachet-like." Yes, that is how I described the *vintage*, from his cellar.

Then, revisiting Colin and tasting the 2003s out of bottle this fall, we began with his cheapest appellation, the Bourgogne *Blanc*, and I wrote: "Could be sold as over-production from Le Montrachet."

It is a big vintage. Never have I seen such rich, opulent white Burgundies, even in 1983 and 1971.



Photograph © Carl Skoff

	PER CASE
BOURGOGNE CHARDONNAY .....	\$204.00
MARANGES <i>BLANC</i> .....	249.00
SAINT-AUBIN <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LES CHAMPLOTS" .....	396.00
CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LES CHENEVOTTES" .....	696.00
CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LES CHAUMÉES" .....	696.00
CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LA MALTROIE" .....	696.00
CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "EN REMILLY" .....	711.00
CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LES VERGERS" .....	711.00
CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "MORGEOT" .....	696.00
PULIGNY-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LA TRUFFIÈRE" .....	996.00
PULIGNY-MONTRACHET <i>PREMIER CRU</i> "LES DEMOISELLES" .....	1380.00
CHEVALIER-MONTRACHET <i>GRAND CRU</i> .....	2361.00

*Pre-arrival terms: Half-payment due with order,  
balance due upon arrival.*

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— MORE NEW ARRIVALS —

**2003 BOURGUEIL “VIEILLES VIGNES”  
DOMAINE DE LA CHANTELEUSERIE**

Presenting a great cuvée of Cabernet Franc at a tasty price. Like a 1976, 1964, or 1947, it is from a vintage for red Loire wines that will long be remembered.

Generous, thick perfume. Round, juicy, spicy palate. Sumptuous. The mouth-filling tannins are in balance with the abundant fleshiness.

**\$14.95** PER BOTTLE      **\$161.46** PER CASE

**2003 PINOT BLANC • KUENTZ-BAS**

You will hopefully join my applause for the dramatic evolution in quality at the old Kuentz-Bas domaine up in Husseren-les-Châteaux.

While vintage 2003 with its heat and drought was not an easy one to master, the lineup at KB is masterful. The ultra-ripe grapes made gorgeous drinks. Generous fruit, round and pretty, great purity, but above all their Pinot this year is downright delicious.

**\$13.95** PER BOTTLE      **\$150.66** PER CASE

**2003 MOULIN-À-VENT  
BERNARD DIOCHON**

“Don’t spill any on you, it stains,” Diochon laughed as he poured a taste of his 2003. It possesses the most regal color I have ever seen in the Beaujolais. However, the color is only a preview of what is to come.

The aroma is loaded with deep, ripe cassis-like fruit and seems somewhat Fleurie-like until you get a sip on your palate. You may never experience another texture like this unless global warming really gets serious. The palate is ultra-rich and dee-lish, with a huge, chewy tannin. This is impressive. Don’t miss it. A massive chewable slurper.

**\$19.95** PER BOTTLE      **\$215.46** PER CASE

Photograph © Gail Skoff



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## LOSING PARKER AND PONSOT

OUCH. I don't like myself in this little story of anger and repercussions. When I was preparing my new book, I reviewed my piece "Combat Vintage Chart Mentality" from 1989 (see *Inspiring Thirst*, p. 170), and I felt like doing some follow-up, some explaining. So here we go.

Robert Parker and I had been on super terms, but after reading my vintage chart piece he let me know how much it upset him. And I had been angry at him when I wrote it.

In those days, I imported Jean-Marie Ponsot's Clos de la Roche. Ponsot was a poetic type who seemed to have his ups and downs. He could make astonishing Burgundies, some of the best, but once in a while, rarely, something forgettable would turn up. He was moody, but I found him appealing. He could seem effusive, full of humor, excited, then the next time troubled, preoccupied, downcast.

Out of barrel I liked his 1986 and offered it pre-arrival. Later when Parker reviewed it in his *Wine Advocate*, he disliked it intensely. As I remember, he began by citing the lack of color and ended by calling into question J.-M. Ponsot's integrity. Parker's tasting notes did not match mine, and it bugged me that he attacked sensitive Monsieur Ponsot's integrity. In Parker's opinion the wine was so flawed it should not be released.

I called another wine critic, John Tilson, who had a review called *The Underground Wineletter*, and asked his advice about the 1986 Clos de la Roche. His tasting notes corresponded to mine.

All fired up, I wrote my piece, "Combat Vintage Chart Mentality." When I re-read it today, I cannot find many sentences to disagree with. No, what upsets me is that I barbed the truth and sent it flying at Robert Parker, who, it turned out, was right about Ponsot's 1986. What later arrived in Berkeley in bottle matched Parker's description. It was a broken wine, an embarrassing wine that should not have been released.

I told Monsieur Ponsot that I would not sell it, shipped the cases back to him, and returned to my customers the pre-arrival deposits they had paid.

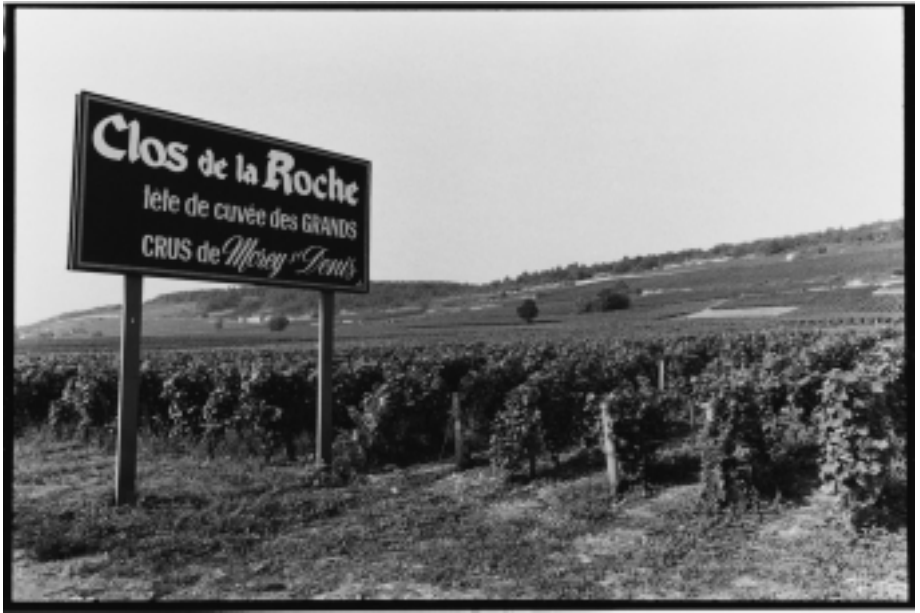
So, there was Robert Parker, whose opinion of me had changed, and one of my favorite winemakers, Jean-Marie Ponsot, who had to take back tens of thousands of dollars of *grand cru* Burgundy that I had tasted out of barrel and approved.

And that was not the end of the story. I managed to make it even worse.

I visited Ponsot to taste his 1987s. I was amazed to find him very congenial. He and his wife led me through the barrel tasting and everything seemed forgotten. We seemed to forgive each other, and I was relieved.

At that time there was a new part-time employee in my Beaune office, a young American woman hired to help with the paperwork. One day she informed me

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*Photograph © Gail Skoff*

that she had been to a tasting and “Monsieur Ponsot” was there. She said that he was very angry at me and never wanted to see me again because of that 1986.

Well, with my terrible French, even worse then than it is now, I wrote Ponsot and I wanted to say “Tell me it isn’t so,” but I fear that I may have said something more like “Okay, if that’s the way you feel, good-bye.” He answered back and said sort of the same thing.

Soon afterwards I learned that the part-time employee was not altogether reliable, and I had to see her off. I began to wonder about the whole episode. What would old man Ponsot be doing at such a tasting? It was not like him, nor was it like him to speak indiscreetly. Maybe it was young Ponsot at the tasting. A youngster might have been more hot-headed about the subject.

After all, I feel like I handled practically every aspect of this story badly and lost good relations with two people who had been quite favorable toward me.

In closing, I would like to recommend Dinu Lipatti’s piano recording from the 1950 Besançon Festival. Bach Partita #1, Mozart K310, Schubert Impromptus, Chopin’s Waltzes. Why can’t we all be so consistently impeccable?

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