

## What our scores mean

10 Dec 2009 by Jancis Robinson

Although I studied Maths as well as Philosophy at Oxford, I'm not too keen on the combination of numbers with wine appreciation. Drinking and assessing wine is a subjective rather than an objective process in my view. We all have different partialities and sensitivities, which is what makes it so difficult to encapsulate a wine's qualities in a single score.

However, I do realise how useful scores are for those reading and buying (and selling) in a hurry - especially in an *en primeur* market on fire. So, while scores can never be as expressive as a tasting note (and I acknowledge that my tasting notes are far from prolix), I am happy to see scores as a necessary evil.

Below is a rough guide to what our numbers mean.

- 20 - Truly exceptional
- 19 - A humdinger
- 18 - A cut above superior
- 17 - Superior
- 16 - Distinguished
- 15 - Average, a perfectly nice drink with no faults but not much excitement
- 14 - Deadly dull
- 13 - Borderline faulty or unbalanced
- 12 - Faulty or unbalanced

We occasionally give a '+' or even '++' to suggest that we think (but are not 100% sure) that the wine will improve, and if a score comes with a minus attached, it means that it has a drawback, usually described in the tasting note. But I'm sure these are annoying and we will try to keep them to a minimum.

As background, and for amusement, you might also like to see the [comparative scoresheet](#) compiled by Steve De Long of [www.delongwine.com](http://www.delongwine.com) reviewing many different scoring systems.

Our scores are for how the wine tasted when we tasted it, combined with any perceived potential. So a one-year-old first growth bordeaux is likely to be given a pretty high score, even though it may be not much fun to drink at that point (and not even bottled in fact). If we taste a wine that is obviously on the way *down* from its peak of maturity, the score denotes how it tasted when we tasted it and not how wonderful we imagine it might have been at its best.

Fortunately, I am confident that my fulltime assistant Julia Harding MW has a palate that is remarkably similar to mine. Richard has rather less tasting experience but his Master of Wine studies are rapidly remedying this. And I know that the rest of [the team](#) share our love of balance, eloquence, finesse and, where appropriate, ageability above sheer mass.

You might also like to see some relevant 2005 correspondence on the subject in [What my scores mean](#) in the precursor of our forum, which was called Your turn. In it I try to grapple with the fact that I do not believe there is a single objective yardstick of quality by which a Beaujolais, for example, can be measured alongside a Napa Valley Cabernet.