

## FRW's winning writer

## 4 Feb 2011 by Jancis Robinson

I spent much of Thursday and Friday reading 70 entries for <u>Fine & Rare Wine's competition</u>, offering the winner a chance to accompany them on their primeurs tasting trip to Bordeaux in early April. Hardly surprisingly, almost all the descriptions submitted were of red bordeaux.

The 'tasting notes' were very varied. One was just a diagram. Another was a single sentence. And I was amazed, given the fact that no one had to write at great length, how many typos, mis-spellings and grammatical errors there were, including of course the extremely common substitution of 'palette' for 'palate'.

But there were at least five that I thought would make worthy winners so suggested to FRW that they make the final choice. In they end they chose the tasting note below from Ivor Davies, who is in his late 70s, has been buying fine wine for decades, but has never been to Bordeaux. Apparently he made a resolution that in 2011 he would finally make appointments at some châteaux and see the region at last. His wish, it would seem, has come true.

## Ch Mouton Rothschild 1985 Pauillac

Bought en primeur, first bottle drunk 23 September 1995, with duck and mushrooms. My cursory note read:

'Very well-balanced, rather light, not very dramatic but fragrant and with fine tannins. It may mature a little during the next five years. It is not a brilliant vintage but has a classic quality of refinement.'

Disappointed and impetuous, I sold the remainder except for one bottle, which I kept in my cellar until I opened it on 25 January 2011, this week, half an hour before drinking. Too short a period for most purposes but I planned to drink it over the next day or two, and I did not decant it.

The level was a high fill. In the glass it was deep dark ruby to fine vermilion merging into a narrow brick edge. Medium-bodied, probably 12.5% alcohol, it issued aromas of forest fruits, blossoms and small bulbaceous flowers. Charming but thin at first taste, slightly earthy and leathery with fruit flavours, it became fainter in mid palate, and finally a longer lasting finish included fine acids and pleasantly light tannin.

The following evening after preparing a veal dish, I reopened what seemed to become a more darkly saturated Alizarin [I has to look this up <a href="here">here</a> in Wikipedia] crimson-centred wine, more oily in the glass.

Hardly aromatic, very faint traces of old tobacco, smokiness and blackcurrants, it gave few clues of the first tastes of plum and slight vanilla traces in an almost perfect structure. The mid palate was more substantial than before, lightly suggesting the exotic velvets of Pauillac and the almost decadent dream of a typical Mouton. Even with timid acidity disturbing the elegance, it will have been at its peak from now until 2015 but could live long, or at least until 2020.

Though some have compared the 1985 with the 1962, which I drank in 1977 under the Rex Whistler murals at the Tate restaurant in its non-profit making golden age, the 1962 was more directly fruity, denser and full-bodied. It has also been compared with the 1959, when I first took serious notes, but the 1985 is harder to fathom than that. To have double-decanted it eight hours before would have made the journey easier and yet it may have begun to oxidize by the third day.

Probably not the greatest of the vintage, or of Mouton's history, it is still more complex and enigmatic than it first appeared. It is hard to reach its heart and yet a joy to penetrate its mysteries. I am pleased not to have to award it an uncertain academic mark. Otherwise it would have risen from 70 to 92.