

The Successful Collector – By Julian Hitner  
~ Merlot and Bordeaux – as an ingredient and star ~  
Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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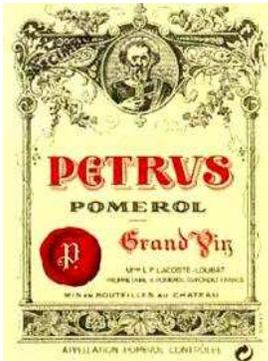
**Even more important than you think:**

I remember it well: the first time I began to learn about different grape varietals. It was probably about ten years ago. I was around eighteen years of age, and for whatever reason I shall never know, I took it upon myself to reorganize and categorize my father's wine collection in his cellar. Hardly a simple task, believe me, considering I knew absolutely nothing about how to read and understand wine labels at the time. There were a few concepts I could follow, things such as the name of the country, white versus red ... come to think of it, that was pretty much all I knew.



However, I also knew the names of a few grapes. These were Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. As for the rest, I had no idea what they were; though it did not take me long to realize what Shiraz was—my father seemed to own a ton of it, all from Australia. And so, it took me a while to learn that there was also a grape that was often actually blended with Cabernet Sauvignon. This grape, of course was, and is, Merlot.

Ten years later, I have since learned more about this indispensable grape than I ever thought possible. And Merlot *is* indispensable, most notably in Bordeaux, where there are more plantings (56%) of it than any other grape, even Cabernet Sauvignon. But its distribution is far from equal, planted to approximately 60% and 80% respectively in the most important Right Bank appellations of St-Emilion and Pomerol; but plays second fiddle to Cabernet Sauvignon throughout the most important appellations of the Left Bank (Margaux, St-Julien, Pauillac, and St-Estèphe) and Graves (Pessac-Léognan).



Essentially, the most important reasons for this relate to soil and climate. In St-Emilion and Pomerol, with their cooler, clay-dominant soils (though sand will also be present), Merlot does far better than Cabernet Sauvignon, which much prefers the more gravel-based deposits of the Left Bank. This goes a long way, for instance, in explaining the magic of Château Pétrus in Pomerol,

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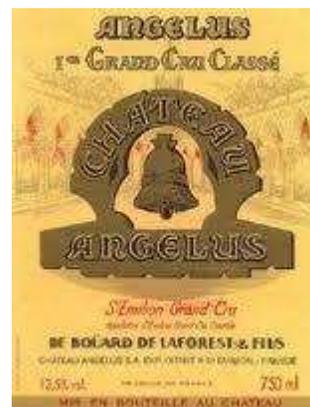
## ~ Merlot and Bordeaux – as an ingredient and star ~

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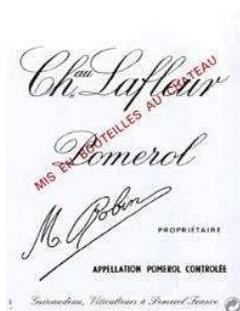
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where iron-rich soils make for one of the most magnificent, costliest wines on the planet. Merlot also buds and ripens earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon, a useful feature when considering that the Right Bank is more prone to cooler nights and frosts, compared to the more maritime climatic conditions of the Left Bank.

Likewise, it should also stand to reason that the Merlot-based clarets of the Right Bank would taste decisively different than their Cabernet Sauvignon-dominant counterparts on the Left. As a generalization, the best wines of St-Emilion and Pomerol, while capable of being cellared just as long as the best of the Médoc, tend to taste more flattering than, say, Pauillac or St-Estèphe. This also means that St-Emilions and Pomerols are typically much more approachable in youth, something that many modern Bordeaux enthusiasts seem to prefer. Furthermore, changes in climatic conditions nowadays throughout the Right Bank have also resulted in noticeable increases in alcohol, a trend North Americans do not seem to mind, either; though plenty have written in dismay about this very fact. Just take the 2010 Château Troplong Mondot: crafted to 83% Merlot (plus 14% Cabernet Sauvignon and 3% Cabernet Franc), the wine logs in at a staggering 15.5% alcohol, almost rivalling even the most powerful Napa Cabernets!



Still, it should be noted that not all wines in St-Emilion and Pomerol are crafted with such high percentages of Merlot. On the contrary, châteaux such as Cheval Blanc (56% CF in 2010) and Lafleur (62% CF in 2010) tend to use just as much Cabernet Franc in their blends as Merlot. In wines as prestigious as these, the results are wines of unbelievable fragrance and finesse—an unbelievable treat for those with the means to taste them. For the most part, however, percentages for Cabernet Franc are almost always much lower.



In the Médoc and Graves, the blend is much different. Around here, there is little question that Cabernet Sauvignon is king, with Merlot making up around 25% of the final bottling. What does it add to the blend? As would be expected, its greatest contributions pertain to roundness, softness,

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as well as additional fruit. For its part, Cabernet Sauvignon takes care of the structure and textural elegance (both extremely important) of the wine, while Cabernet Franc adds perfume, and small quantities of Petit Verdot contributes colour plus additional structure and fragrance. Malbec seems to be rarely seen these days throughout the Left Bank.



Also to be expected is the fact that some estates choose to use more Merlot in their wines than others. In 2010, Château Palmer went so far as to make Merlot the dominant grape in the blend, adding up to 54% of the total; Cabernet Sauvignon came in second with 40%. Other notables from 2010? Châteaux Pape

Clément (50% M), La Mission Haut-Brion (37% M), Montrose (37% M), Haut-Bailly (36% M), Talbot (33% M), Brane-Cantenac (30% M), and Pontet-Canet (30% M). The percentages vary.

As for how Merlot tastes, most would agree that Merlot is undoubtedly one of the easiest grapes in the world to enjoy. On the nose: finely, but not excessively, oaked versions tend to feature enticing aromas of plummy currants, black cherries, blackberries, blueberries (on occasion), mocha, pencil shavings, and spice—extremely similar to the aromatic profile of Cabernet Sauvignon. On the palate: smoothness and suppleness are the expected norms, with firm yet more approachable tannins and generous finishes. Of course, these are but generalizations of how Bordeaux should taste. As with all wines, the best, and most fun, way to learn is to taste as different examples as possible.

[Click here for a few gems from the 10 December 2011 Vintages Release and other picks](#)

## A few gems for collectors:

### White Wines:

**Domaine de Chevalier Blanc 2008, Pessac-Léognan AOC, Bordeaux, France:** The finest white wine I have yet to taste from 2008—nay, almost superior to the Pape Clément—the Domaine de Chevalier Blanc, already one of the greatest whites in the commune, seems to be getting (even) better and better with each passing vintage. Starbright, pale lime in colour, it offers gorgeously refined scents of starfruit, lemon, almonds, kiwi, white grapefruit, white spring flowers, quince, Life Savers®, and an

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extremely subtle hint of toasted oak, jasmine, and spice. Truly complex, with outstandingly vibrant fruit, balanced acidity, and a lingering, confidently elegant hint of lemon, spring flowers, and almonds on the finish. A wine of extraordinary elegance, breadth, and vitality. 85% Sauvignon Blanc and 15% Sémillon. Now-2025+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**94 \$125.00 (#135053) Vintages 10 December 2011 In-Store Discoveries**

### **Château Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc 2007, Pessac-Léognan AOC, Bordeaux, France:**

As good as their red is, the Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte almost never fails to inspire just a tiny bit more. Starbright, pale-light straw-lime in colour, the magnificent '07 exhibits tantalizingly serene yet poignant scents of lemon citrus and almonds that gently give way to nutted pears, kiwi, lanolin (very delicate), buttercups, orange zest, and a very mild hint of toasted oak and spice. Very complex, with wonderful vitality, crispness of fruit, zesty acidity, and an excellently refined hint of delicately nutted lemon citrus and pears on the finish. A white Pessac-Léognan of first-rate integration, finesse, and vibrancy. 90% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Sémillon, and 5% Sauvignon Gris. Now-2020++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**93+ \$114.00 (#102558) Vintages 29 October 2011 In-Store Discoveries**

**Robert Mondavi 2008 Reserve Chardonnay, Napa Valley, California:** Unmistakably superior to the '07, one can only hope future vintages of the Reserve Chardonnay are as brilliant as the 2008. Starbright, pale-light lime in colour, the wine is finely though not excessively toasted, with enticing, profound scents of quince, pure caramel, pears, lemon blossom, orange zest, wet stones, nuts, and a lovely hint of vanilla and spice. Very complex, delivering excellent fruit, balanced acidity, and a truly exemplary, powerful yet elegant hint of caramel, pears, and quince on the finish. Superbly delicious and balanced (despite 14.5% alcohol), crafted with clear Burgundian inclinations. Bravo! Now-2022++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92+ \$46.95 (#258186) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Roux Père & Fils 2009, Meursault Premier Cru Blagny AOC, Burgundy, France:** In all likelihood the best Meursault I have ever tasted from this oftentimes-variable operation, the 2009 Premier Cru Blagny is a wine of excellent character, intensity, and style. Starbright, pale-light straw-lime in colour, it delivers decisively elegant, textbook scents of delicate caramel, pears, hazelnuts, lemon, minerals, and a hint of saltwater taffy, and spice. Quite complex, with superb, almost supple fruit, balanced acidity, and a refined, polished hint of caramel, pears, and lemon drops on the finish. Marvellously done—what I like most is the wine's wonderfully caressing texture. Now-2022. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92 \$56.95 (#241141) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Vieil Armand 2007 Gewurztraminer, Alsace Grand Cru Ollwiller AOC, France:** The Grand Cru site of Ollwiller, while not as famous as that of Thann further south, can be a source of fine wine in its own right; as shown by the very cheerful Vieil Armand 2007 Gewurztraminer. Starbright, pale lime in colour, it reveals delicately streamlined yet undeniably delightful scents of spicy peaches and pears, lychees, rose water, ginger, and bergamot. Complex, with beautiful fruit, balanced acidity, and a lovely hint of peaches and lychees on the finish. Seriously well done: balanced, elegant, and merry. Now-2019. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

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**89 \$19.95 (#258897) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Astrolabe 2010 Voyage Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand:** As good as the '09, the level of consistency at Astrolabe continues to impress, with very little vintage variation—a positive feature when dealing with this sort of wine. Starbright, very pale lime in colour, the 2010 Voyage reveals lovely zesty scents of intense grassy gooseberries, minerals, mild tomato leaf, white grapefruit, and a hint of peach skins. Palate: refreshing, nervy fruit on display, coupled with balanced acidity, and a zesty hint of grassy gooseberries on the finish. Delightful intensity and balance; it really wakes up the senses. Screwcap closure. Now-2013. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, November 2011)

**88++ \$21.95 (#10421) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Anne Boecklin 2008 Réserve Pinot Gris, Alsace AOC, France:** A reasonable follow-up to the exemplary '07, the 2008 Réserve Pinot Gris, while not as flamboyant as its immediate predecessor, still remains a very solid purchase. Starbright, light straw-lime in colour, the wine offers refined, well-rounded scents of slightly candied peaches and lemon, spicy flowers, green apples, and a lovely hint of yellow plums and ginger. Mouthfeel: splendid approachable fruit showing, with balanced acidity, and a 'mellow' hint of lemon blossom and spice on the finish. Delightful style and balance. Now-2017. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, November 2011)

**88 \$18.95 (#106831) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

## Red Wines:

**Penfolds 2004 Grange, South Australia, Australia:** Thus far the greatest Grange of the third millennium, the '04 vintage is a miraculous wine of unbelievable structure, purity, pedigree, and power, to say nothing of many other applicable descriptives. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine delivers astonishing aromas of cocoa and milk chocolate that effortlessly subside to currants, leathery plums, mulberries, mint, eucalyptus (very faint), brownies, a little tobacco, fresh tar, vanilla, and spice—all very pure and remarkably complex. On the palate: revealing fulsome, extraordinarily delicious fruit, firm yet insanely smooth tannins, milder acidity, and a truly long-lasting hint of milk chocolate, elegant eucalyptus, and plums on the finish. I now have three notes on this wine, all of them fantastic. Quite fitting for one of the most iconic wines of the New World. Also contains 4% Cabernet Sauvignon. Now-2040+. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, December 2010)

**98 \$499.00 (#336388) Vintages Classics Catalogue**

**Beringer 2006 Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California (Magnum):** Though I have on several occasions already tasted the '06 from standard-sized bottles, with excellent notes each time, the magnum version is unquestionably finer. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon features incredible, multilayered aromas of mocha, earthy currants, tobacco, coffee, crème de cassis, crushed rocks, licorice, vanilla, and spice. Truly complex, with utterly delicious, delectable forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a very long, abundant (and elegant) hint of mocha, currants, and tobacco on the finish. Wonderful integration, structure, and layering—worthy of serious ovation. Now-2040++. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, November 2011)

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**94 \$249.95 (#210237) Vintages 10 December 2011 In-Store Discoveries**

**Clos L'Eglise 2008, Pomerol AOC, Bordeaux, France:** Collectors: do not be distressed if you haven't encountered this premium wine before, for it only comes from six hectares' worth of superlative plantings. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour with a touch of purple, the abundant '08 is beautifully toasted, possessing luxurious 'Pomerol' aromas of ironclad espresso, currants, blackberries, crème de cassis, graphite, licorice, mocha, loamy earth, vanilla, and spice. Seriously complex, delivering remarkably elegant, well-structured fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an amazing, lingering hint of mocha-espresso and crème de cassis (plus graphite) on the finish. A claret enveloped in its own intensity, structure, and class—wow! Now-2028++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**94 \$129.00 (#136507) Vintages 10 December 2011 In-Store Discoveries**

**Château Smith Haut Lafitte 2008, Pessac-Léognan AOC, Bordeaux, France:** The second time I have tasted this amazing wine in 2011, the '08 Château Smith Haut Lafitte represents an outstanding bottling possessing real grace, polish, and lustre. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, it does seem to be closing down since last tasted in January, nonetheless hinting at terrific aromas of currants and blackberries, gravely rocks, incense, pain grille, kirsch, and trace elements of dried blueberries, vanilla, and spice. Truly complex, delivering exemplary, elegant fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an exquisite, completely refined hint of velvety currants and plums (plus a trace of graphite) on the finish. Definitely a notch higher than the '06. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Now-2028. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**93++ \$85.00 (#136838) Vintages 26 November 2011 In-Store Discoveries**

**Chateau Montelena 2007 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California:** Flagship wine from the iconic Montelena winery, the Estate Cabernet Sauvignon fully avails itself of the advantages granted it by the excellent '07 vintage. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine features exuberant, inviting aromas of slightly fragrant currants and plums, crushed rocks, kirsch, incense, dried flowers, mocha, toasted oak, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with excellent, even elegant forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lengthy, delectable hint of currants, graphite, and spring flowers on the finish. Remarkably graceful in the face of power, intense flavour, and musculature. Built for a very long life. Also contains 1% Cabernet Franc. Now-2030++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**93+ \$134.95 (#709881) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Château Montrose 2007, St-Estèphe AOC, Bordeaux, France:** Exemplary outing for the vintage, I have already tasted the 2007 Montrose twice this month, each time with immense satisfaction. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine is beautiful toasted, with atypically approachable yet reasonably opulent aromas of currants, flowery (violet-themed) blackberries, crushed rocks, forest floor, asphalt, and a hint of espresso, vanilla, and spice. Really complex, boasting excellent, accessible fruit (common in '07), fine-firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a svelte hint of extremely elegant currants and crushed rocks on the finish. In the end: resolutely refined, composed, and laced with pedigree. 64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Now-2026++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

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**93+ \$109.00 (#98756) Vintages 26 November 2011 In-Store Discoveries**

**Jonata 2007 El Alma de Jonata, Santa Ynez Valley, California:** Crafted from 89% Cabernet Franc, the massive 2007 El Alma de Jonata, while hardly tasting like its predominant varietal, is nonetheless a wonderful wine of large-scale, brooding power and decadence. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, it certainly is richly toasted. With exquisite aromas of currants, black crème de cassis, leather, crushed rocks, tar, mild incense, forest floor, mint, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with extremely delicious, well-structured forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a mightily long hint of currants and licorice traces on the finish. Sumptuous, Parkerized wine—this one should keep well. Also contains 7% Merlot, the rest Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. Now-2028++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**93 \$143.95 (#218925) Vintages 26 November 2011 Release**

**Bodegas Y Viñedos 2007 Alion, Ribera del Duero DO, Spain:** Under the same ownership as the legendary Vega Sicilia, I don't think I have ever encountered a bad bottling of Alion, at least not for a very long time. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the '07 features terrific, multilayered aromas of grilled herbs at the outset that gently subside to reveal mocha, red currants, blackberry compote, scorched earth, hickory, granola, undergrowth, vanilla, and spice. Sincerely complex, with wonderful velvety fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, elegant hint of mocha, stewed currants, and hickory on the finish. Truly delicious, full-bodied, and finely structured—excellent showing. Now-2024++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92++ \$78.95 (#199331) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Catena Zapata 2007 Nicasia Vineyard Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina:** This wine is listed as having been crafted from the finest vineyards of the Catena family, which seems to bear out when considering the excellent quality on confident display. Brilliant, extremely dense black-purple in colour, the 2007 Nicasia Vineyard is beautifully toasted, featuring richly inlaid aromas of violet-laced blackberries, plummy currants, mulberries, coffee, saddle leather, purple plums, and a hint of dark chocolate, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with wonderfully decadent fruit, firm yet velvety tannins, milder acidity, and a remarkable, lingering hint of blackberries, violets and (even) white pepper on the finish. Quite powerful, rich, abundant, and inviting. Now-2022+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92++ \$79.95 (#132357) Vintages 26 November 2011 Release**

**L'Aventure 2009 Estate Cuvée, Paso Robles, California:** An ultra-powerful Paso Robles blockbuster if ever there was one, the 2009 Estate Cuvée will unfailingly appeal to collectors with a thirst for this type of style. Brilliant, extremely dense black purple-ruby in colour, the wine is heavily toasted, with powerful aromas of blackberry compote, crème de cassis, blueberries, licorice, creamy mocha, kirsch liqueur, incense, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, boasting extremely rich forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and seriously long-lasting, decadent hint of blackberry compote infused with licorice on the finish. Parkerized, yet undeniably delicious; not to be missed. 42% Syrah, 42% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 16% Petit Verdot. Now-2025. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92+ \$94.95 (#249375) Vintages 26 November 2011 Release**

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**Masi 2004 Mazzano, Amarone della Valpolicella DOC, Veneto, Italy:** One of two premium single-vineyard wines from the Masi stable, the 2004 Mazzano, while not as opulent as its counterpart, the Campolongo di Torbe, still ranks as an brilliantly maturing, deliciously robust Amarone that collectors will not want to miss. Brilliant, opaque red currant in colour with a touch of garnet, it reveals slightly more traditional aromas of dried cedary cherries and plums, leather, savoury herbs and meats, tar, asphalt, undergrowth, and spice. Very complex, showing beautiful, semi-smooth fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, elegant hint of cedar, savoury game, and plums on the finish. This beauty should last for another decade at least. 75% Corvina, 20% Rondinella, and 5% Molinara. Now-2021+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**92 \$99.95 (#215764) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release**

**Joseph Phelps 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California:** A great wine with an excellent future ahead of it, the 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon is an extremely decadent and delicious bottling. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, it certainly is richly toasted, with abundant aromas of hot chocolate, currants, blackberry treacle, pain grille, leather, burning embers, tar, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with sumptuous chocolaty fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a very long, downright luxurious hint of (you guessed it) very pure hot chocolate on the finish. Ultimately: the type of wine that appeals to the North American palate. Also contains 13% Merlot, 1% Petit Verdot, and 1% Malbec. Now-2024++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92 \$74.95 (#189795) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Miguel Torres 2007 Mas La Plana Cabernet Sauvignon, Penedès DO, Spain:** At last! A great vintage of Mas La Plana after so many years of waiting for the next stellar bottling to come along—one that surpasses virtually all expectations. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the '07 is finely toasted, delivering inviting aromas of black mocha, cherries, and currants, switching to leather, licorice, crushed rocks, incense, espresso, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with wonderful, patently delicious fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an excellent, lingering hint of blackberries and crushed rocks (also some mocha) on the finish. Immensely impressive, full-bodied, stylish, and sincerely tempting. Now-2022++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**92 \$46.95 (#129676) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release**

**Quintarelli 2002 Ca'del Merlo, IGT Veneto, Veneto, Italy:** A remarkable blend from the most famed producer in the Veneto, the 2002 Rosso Ca'del Merlo, while perhaps not as robust and concentrated as some collectors might like (also the vintage is not very good), nonetheless remains true to the Quintarelli philosophy of traditionalism, proper integration, and excellent character. Brilliant, dark garnet in colour, the wine reveals beautiful, now-mature aromas of cedar, wild game, leather, Bouillon de boeuf, sea salt, smoke, and spice. Very complex, with delicious, beautifully integrated fruit, evolved tannins, balanced acidity, and a smooth, elegant hint of savoury cedar and dried plums on the finish. Excellent wine. Now-2018. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**91++ \$84.95 (#958595) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release**

**Duckhorn 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California:** A reasonable follow-up to the excellent '07, the 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon represents a different style of

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wine: more accessible, slightly looser (not wholly negative); still undeniably appetizing and full of flavour. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, it is finely toasted, with more fruit-driven aromas of incense-infused black currants and plums, blackberries, licorice, asphalt, pain grille, mocha, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with seriously delicious forward fruit, firm yet approachable tannins, milder acidity, and a lengthy hint of currants and incense traces on the finish. In all, full of eager pleasure, flavour, and touchability. Also contains 13% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot. Now-2021+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**91+ \$74.95 (#24190) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Glaetzer Wines 2009 Bishop Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia:** Personally, I would expect nothing less from Ben Glaetzer, one of the most lauded winemakers in Australia. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the 2009 Bishop Shiraz presents rather voluptuous, full-throttle aromas of blackened eucalyptus and plums, cassis, black mocha, leather, licorice, mint, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with utterly sumptuous, supple fruit and tannins, mild acidity, and an extremely long, velvety hint of eucalyptus, plums, and black mocha on the finish. A burly Barossa Valley bottling of terrific purity, flavour, and length—if only more such wines were like this. Screwcap closure. Now-2021++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**91+ \$39.95 (#627869) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Clos du Calvaire 2009, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, Rhône, France:** Ideal as an introduction to one of the greatest appellations in France, the 2009 Clos de Calvaire is a delicious, accessible Châteauneuf that collectors may want to introduce to their more 'wine-novice' friends. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, it displays superb aromas of blackberries and black raspberries, switching to English lavender, forest floor, leather, licorice, perfume, and a hint of anise and spice. Very complex, with great, accessible fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a fairly powerful hint of black raspberries and licorice on the finish. Rounder, balanced, and more than befitting its origins. 70% Grenache, 20% Syrah, and 10% Cinsault. Now-2025. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**91 \$34.95 (#728139) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Château Mondot 2008, St-Emilion AOC, Bordeaux, France:** The 'second wine' Château Troplong Mondot, one ought not be surprised at the quality on display here for all to see. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the '08 Mondot is finely toasted, with tempting aromas of slightly blueberried currants and blackberries, licorice, pain grille, cherry liqueur, kirsch, vanilla, and a hint of dark mocha and spice. Very complex, boasting beautiful, enveloping fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lingering, powerfully inlaid hint of smooth dark plums and mocha on the finish. Delicious, full-bodied, and very finely integrated. Now-2021+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**91 \$45.00 (#137463) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Finca Los Nobles 2005 Cabernet/Bouchet, Mendoza, Argentina:** A wine of surprising elegance and integration, the 2005 Finca Los Nobles stands out as an excellent bottling from the large-scale enterprise of Bodega Luigi Bosca. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby-red currant in colour, the wine offers beautiful aromas of red currants and plums, licorice, mild herbs, pain grille, and a hint of graphite and spice. Complex, with impressive, superbly balanced fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and an almost refined hint of red

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currants on the finish. Hard to believe I am even tempted to use such words as 'stylish' and 'finesse' when describing this wine. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon and 12% Bouchet (Cabernet Franc). Now-2019. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

**91 \$63.95 (#175547) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release**

**Chateau Montelena 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California:** Of considerable appeal when accounting for the style, the 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon represents an approachable, fruit-oriented wine made in first-rate fashion. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, it is finely toasted, with more accessible aromas of mocha, currants, plums, licorice, raspberries, graphite, and a hint of undergrowth, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with highly agreeable forward fruit, firm yet accessible tannins, milder acidity, and a lingering, polished hint of plummy currants and licorice on the finish. Supple and delicious. Also contains 12% Merlot and 2% Cabernet Franc. Now-2022+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**90+ \$54.95 (#718452) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Château Pipeau 2008, St-Emilion Grand Cru AOC, Bordeaux, France:** Consistently one of the best values for collectors in St-Emilion, the 2008 Pipeau continues this tradition in the form of an impressive, refined claret of unmistakable pleasure. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, it reveals attractive, elegant aromas of currants, plums, blackberries, graphite, licorice, wild game, incense, and spice. Complex, with beautiful, poised fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a notably sturdy hint of currants and mild toasted oak on the finish. Lovely finesse, style, and refinement all-around. The vineyard is planted to 90% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Now-2019+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

**90+ \$29.00 (#138115) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release**

**Ridge 2009 Geyserville, Sonoma County, California:** Slightly off the mark compared to past efforts, the 2009 Geyserville nonetheless remains (for its type) a wine of superb purity, freshness, and balance. Brilliant, dark-opaque purple-ruby in colour, it is definitely more fruit-driven than usual, featuring abundant aromas of incense-infused plums, blueberry compote, violets, licorice, black raspberries, and spice. Complex, with beautiful pure fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lingering, polished hint of incense and plums on the finish. Still one of the best of its kind in California. 74% Zinfandel, 17% Carignan, 6% Petite Sirah, 2% Alicante Bouschet, and 1% Mourvèdre. Now-2019. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

**90+ \$42.95 (#723072) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release**

**Château de Monturon 2009, St-Emilion Grand Cru AOC, Bordeaux, France:** From the soon-to-be-legendary 2009 vintage, the Château du Monturon can easily be deemed a great wine: full-bodied, well structured, and refined. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, it is finely toasted, with beautiful aromas of licorice-infused currants and plums, dried blackberries, earth, vanilla, pain grille, and a lovely hint of 'roasted' asphalt and spice. Complex, with seriously fine fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a highly impressive, polished hint of curranted plums and charcoal on the finish. At this price, more of a collector's everyday claret—always useful to have. Now-2019+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**90 \$23.95 (#171017) Vintages 26 November 2011 Release**

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**Les Hauts de Castellás 2009, Vacqueyras AOC, Rhône, France:** A substantial bargain no matter which way you look at it, the 2009 Les Hauts des Castellás is not to be missed. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, this lovely, delicious wine from the Vignerons de Caractere exhibits superb, textbook aromas of Provençal-laced plummy currants and ‘dusty’ black raspberries, lavender, leather, anise, white pepper, and a hint of scorched earth and spice. Complex, with great fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a caressing yet rugged hint of plums and lavender on the finish. First-rate all the way. Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre. Now-2020+-. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**90 \$19.95 (#177634) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Alejandro Fernández 2008 Tinta Pesquera Crianza, Ribera del Duero DO, Spain:** Producer of extracted, delicious Tempranillo (known as ‘Tinta del País’ in Ribera del Duero), the wines of Alejandro Fernández almost always excite. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the 2008 Crianza is finely toasted, with beautiful, upfront aromas of coconut-inspired currants, blackberries, dark mocha, leather, granola, asphalt, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with fine, delicious fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an almost ‘dextrous’ hint of ripe blackberries and dried blueberries on the finish. More traditional in terms of choice of oak; still very full-bodied, well structured, and exuding much pleasure. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**90 \$27.95 (#341461) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Lapostolle 2009 Cuvée Alexandre Cabernet Sauvignon, Apalta Vineyard (Colchagua Valley), Chile:** Make not mistake: Viña Casa Lapostolle can safely be considered one of the finest operations in Chile, with the 2009 Cuvée Alexander Cabernet Sauvignon reaffirming this for everyone to see. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour with a touch of purple, the wine is finely toasted, delivering inviting, fully ripened aromas of black currants, mocha, cassis, tar, charcoal, black raspberries (unusual in Cabernet), mint, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with delicious, well-structured fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lingering, sumptuous hint of ‘dusty’ currants on the finish. Beautiful, robust, and extremely fine. Also contains 15% Carmenère. Now-2020. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**90 \$24.95 (#947929) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Clos de los Siete 2008, Mendoza, Argentina:** For those who love rich, chocolaty wines, the 2008 Clos de los Siete is a sure-fire winner. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, this latest bull’s-eye from the Michel Rolland-led operation offers attractive aromas of sweet mocha, ripe blackberries and plums, kirsch, asphalt, and a hint of mint, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with appetizing, well-structured forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting hint of intense mocha and plums on the finish. Always flattering and pleasurable. 56% Malbec, 21% Merlot, 11% Syrah, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 2% Petit Verdot. Now-2019. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**89+ \$21.95 (#622571) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Henry’s Drive 2007 Shiraz, Padthaway, Australia:** To be honest, most of my notes from Henry’s Drive have not been entirely favourable; which is probably why the 2007 Shiraz came as such a neat surprise when I tasted it. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine is intensely toasted, with fairly decadent, attractive aromas of eucalyptus, plums, blueberries, English herbs, licorice, cassis, vanilla, and spice. Complex, with powerful,

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fleshy forward fruit, supple tannins, mild acidity, and a very long hint of plums, eucalyptus, and baked blueberries on the finish. Extremely mighty wine at 15% alcohol, with lots of admirable flesh and length. Now-2019+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

**89 \$24.95 (#243527) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release**

**Château de Sainte Gemme 2005, Haut-Médoc AOC, Bordeaux, France:** Admirable claret from the magnificent 2005 vintage, the elegant Château de Sainte Gemme of said year seems perfectly at ease and is coming along nicely. Brilliant, dark red currant in colour, it presently features sincerely pleasant aromas of gently cedary dried currants, plums, mild savoury overtones, and a hint of cigar box and spicebox. Complex, with fine fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lovely, textbook 'claret' hint of dried cedary currants on the finish. Impressively focused and balanced. Now-2016+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

**89 \$23.95 (#236851) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release**

**Château Rousseau de Sipian 2006, Médoc, AOC, Bordeaux, France:** Sadly, I have not tasted nearly as many non-classified 2006's as I would have liked; but this does not mean there aren't some very fine wines to be had from this great vintage. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour with a touch of red currant, the '06 Rousseau de Sipian delivers gentle 'claret' cedarwood, switching to red currants and plums, dried cherries, earth, licorice, and the slightest hint of mint and spice. Complex, with fine fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lovely hint of red currants and earth (mild) on the finish. A most gentlemanly wine. Now-2017. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**88+ \$22.95 (#246637) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Leonardo 2007, Chianti Riserva DOCG, Tuscany, Italy:** A notch better than other bottlings from this oftentimes-variable operation, the 2007 Leonardo Chianti Riserva is a satisfying wine of amenable balance and character. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, it displays pleasant notes of dark, dried wild cherries and undergrowth, switching to black leather, herbs, and a hint of 'dusty' cedar, balsam, and spice. Good fruit showing, with fine tannins, balanced acidity, and a lovely hint of red plums and cedar on the finish. Delightful, 'forested' Riserva. Now-2016+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**88 \$19.95 (#164707) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

## Sparkling Wins:

**Laurent-Perrier 2002 Vintage Brut, Champagne, France:** Best known for its non-vintage rosé, the best selling of its type in the world, it is somewhat of a shame that the other champagnes from this great house sometimes go unnoticed. Starbright, pale straw-lime in colour, the 2002 Laurent-Perrier is delicately toasted, featuring more reserved yet truly superb scents of subtle brioche, yellow plums and pears, white grapefruit, ginger, jasmine, and trace elements of exotic spices. Very complex, with excellent, well-structured fruit, and elegant fruit, polished acidity, ending with a rather exciting, indeed quite marvellous hint of brioche, lemon, and spice, all very creamy, on the finish. In the end: wonderful, crisp, and delicious. Now-2022+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92++ \$74.95 (#983874) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

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**Charles Heidsieck NV Réserve Brut, Champagne, France:** One of my very favourite champagnes (in this price range), the Charles Heidsieck NV Réserve has been consistently excellent for decades. Starbright, pale-light lime in colour, the wine exhibits inviting, elegantly poignant scents of brioche and pears, switching to kiwi, jasmine, Asian spices, French toast, lemon, and vanilla. Very complex and luxurious, delivering deliciously stylish, fairly rich fruit, polished acidity, and a superb, lingering hint of brioche and pears on the finish. A champagne of remarkable integration, intensity, and structure—always a treat when the cork is popped open. Now-2020. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**92 \$54.95 (#36962) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Nicolas Feuillatte 2004 Vintage Brut, Champagne, France:** Best known for its eminently enjoyable though somewhat streamlined non-vintage labels, the 2004 Nicolas Feuillatte most certainly represents a much more serious, nay excellent offering. Starbright, pale straw-lime in colour, the wine offers innately delicate, engaging scents of biscuity pears, switching to lemon, white grapefruit, ginger, cream, and spice. Very complex (pure aromas), with wonderful frothy fruit, balanced acidity, ending with a superbly elegant hint of biscuits, spicy lemon, and cream on the finish. Quite the treat—so creamy and refined! If I'm reading the website correctly, the wine is a blend of 40% Pinot Noir, 40% Pinot Meunier, and 20% Chardonnay. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

**91++ \$62.00 (#240085) Vintages Online Exclusives**

**R. Dumont & Fils 2004 Vintage Brut, Champagne, France:** Checking my database, I have no recent notes from this particular house, though the 2004 Vintage does leave a first-rate impression. Starbright, pale straw in colour with a touch of lime, the wine is delightfully biscuity, with beautiful accompanying scents of dried mineral pears, white grapefruit, jasmine, pistachios, lemon, and spice. Complex, delicious, remarkable refined moussy fruit, balanced acidity, and a lingering, elegant hint of soft biscuits and a little lemon on the finish. A champagne of sincere grace, focus, and vibrancy. Now-2019+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**91 \$54.95 (#246702) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Ayala NV Majeur Brut, Champagne, France:** Ayala has long been known as a less pricey, reliable producer of solid champagne; but the NV Majeur is definitely a notch up from their regular bottlings. Starbright, pale-light straw in colour, the wine, with grapes sourced from famed Aÿ vineyards, reveals intense yeasty biscuits at the outset, with lovely scents of lemon, white grapefruit, pistachios, green apples, and a hint of ginger and spice. Complex, with beautiful fruit, polished acidity, and a refined, frothy hint of superb yeasty biscuits and lemon on the finish. More understated, yet extremely easy to appreciate: splendid balance and lots of life. Now-2018+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**90 \$49.95 (#4143) Vintages 10 December 2011 Release**

**Dessert Wine:**

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**Château Rieussec 2007, Sauternes AOC, Bordeaux, France:** Without question the greatest Rieussec since the astonishing '01, the 2007 represents a vital opportunity for collectors to acquire a case from one of the best châteaux in Sauternes. Starbright, light yellow in colour with a touch of gold, the wine exhibits fantastically youthful, extraordinary scents of richly nutted honeycomb, lemon drops and meringue, vanillin, honeysuckle, kiwi, and a hint of exotic spice. Wonderfully complex, with magnificent sweet fruit, balanced acidity, and a totally luxurious, youthful hint of honeycomb and lemon meringue on the finish. A sticky of astounding beauty, complexity, and elegance. The wine is typically 90-95% Sémillon, the rest Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle. Now-2040++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, November 2011)

**96++ \$66.00 (#97923) Vintages 26 November 2011 In-Store Discoveries**