

For as long as I can remember, I looked upon d'Yquem as strictly a desert wine. My stereotype was broken when I was doing research for this article. I found out that the wine is an excellent accompaniment to some dinner preparations such as roasted fowl and duck. You can follow this up with your cheese course, but make sure that Blue Cheese, ("Bleu" if you prefer) is included.

Let's go back to the time when the Classification of 1855 was established. The committee that Napoleon appointed thoroughly investigated the wines from the Sauternes, Gironde region in the southern part of the Bordeaux vineyards known as Graves. They evaluated several wines from this district and came to the conclusion that d'Yquem was in a class by itself. The wine was immediately designated as a PREMIER CRU SUPERIOR (Superior First Growth).

Why was the committee even in this area? The answer is that they knew that Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc grapes were grown in the Sauternes. Combine that with the knowledge that those species of grapes from the area were susceptible to the condition called "noble rot." Botrytis cinerea is a beneficial fungus that's necessary to produce many of the world's great sweet wines. When the mold attacks the grapes it turns them gray in color. The mold is now living in the skin and using up a significant amount of available water. This concentrates the sugar, flavor, and acid of juice that remains so that a complex wine of exceptional sweetness can develop. All of this sounds pretty yucky, but it takes place behind the scenes and the end result is a bottle of wine that will set you back more than a week's pay.

Ownership of Chateau d'Yquem is now in the control of the luxury goods giant LVMH Moet Hennessey-Louis Vuitton. Two hundred fifty acres of the available 310 acres are under vine. The vines consist of 80% Semillon and 20% Sauvignon Blanc. Harvesting is carefully timed and, on average, six passes are made to hand select the botrytized grapes. Very tedious work indeed! This work will result, in a good year, in approximately 100,000 bottles (that is bottles, not cases) or \$10,000,000 in sales. The average year will yield only 65,000 bottles.

D'Yquem is a wine of limited appeal. Those that like an ultra-sweet wine will appreciate it and spend the money for it. Those folks who do like the wine, if they research it, will find that the staff at d'Yquem is as particular about quality as any staff could be. Imagine declaring an entire crop not worthy of the d'Yquem name and selling it anonymously on the open market. This has actually happened ten times since 1910.

Chateaux d'Yquem is available in Lowcountry stores that retail fine wines. Make sure that your debit card has a good slug of cash remaining.

It was a very enjoyable experience to report on these last six wines. At the same time, I was also struck with an idea. What if someone wanted to get started with wines, but did not know where to start. Tasting would be the best place to start. However, there is some reading involved and here is where my idea comes into play. Combine the Classification of 1855 and the Wine Spectator Magazine issue that comes out once each year on the top 100 wines. Why? Because a great deal of the work has been done for the novice. The 1855 Classification presents 62 wines from the Bordeaux region in a very orderly way. The Wine Spectator presents 100 wines from around the world in their very orderly way. The list of 100 wines that we see from the Spectator Magazine is the result of over 19000 wines that have been tasted blind, from the very unfamiliar to the most famous vineyards. It takes a full year of tasting and evaluation to get from 19000 to 100. These two lists provide the novice with a terrific reference.

WINESPEAK

Here is how I got started. I was coached by a taskmaster who made me do several chores. I was to taste until I could not taste anymore and then I was to keep tasting. I was to put together a good list of reference books including, at a minimum, Hugh Johnson's *World Atlas of Wine*, A Glossary of wine terms, a book on wine and food matching and Karen MacNeil's *Wine Bible*

. I was to become familiar with three favorite wine and spirit stores and what they carry. It worked because I enjoyed doing it. All of the basic steps that Bob had me do led to a large book collection, a small but respectable wine collection, and a boatload of friends.

May I take this opportunity to wish all of our readers a Very Merry Christmas and New Year filled with lots of Good Health and Good Wines.