

In the last issue I set forth the Classification of 1855. In the top classification are five First Growths, and the first Chateau that I want to highlight is Chateau Margaux, located in the Medoc Region on the west side of the Gironde River. It is here that you will find a winery that dates back to the 1100s. However, if we go forward to 1562-1572, the winery became fixed in area at 265 hectares; this still stands today. (One hectare is equal to 2.471 acres.)

This was followed by a period of sophistication managed by a gentleman named Berlon. Berlon separated the red vines from the white vines and had them planted apart from each other. Berlon also established strict procedures for the harvest – i.e. time of day to pick – and was very selective about which clusters of grapes to pick. Fruit that was left behind was harvested for wines of lesser quality. Some wine historians say that this is the beginning of modern vinification.

Moving forward, the methods of producing wine At Chateau Margaux continued to improve. The improvement was reflected in the record prices that were realized at auction. Even Thomas Jefferson, when he was Ambassador to France and a well-known wine aficionado, placed an order for Margaux wine to be shipped to the United States. The word leaked out that Mr. Jefferson had placed an order for the wine and it spread like wild fire. It probably equates to a modern day stroke of marketing genius.

The wineries of France continued to produce wine, year in and year out, not knowing that a Magic Moment was going to take place in the year 1855. Emperor Napoleon III organized the Second Universal Exposition in Paris. It was an opportunity for him to display to the world the most prestigious products that France had to offer. Included therein would be the outstanding wines of the Medoc.

Napoleon wanted wines to be presented in the form of a classification. In order to accomplish this, a blind tasting was set up from approximately 60 wine properties from the Medoc and one from Graves. The results from the tasting revealed four Premier Grand Cru Classe wines with only Chateau Margaux scoring twenty out of twenty. This classification, which maintains its validity today, confirmed the qualitative hierarchy illustrated by the great price differences that had been practiced on the world market for a long time. Even before the events of 1855, the First Growths were being sold on the world markets at twice the price of the Second Growths. Whatever was going on inside the head of Napoleon III, it worked and it paid

handsome dividends.

Ownership of Chateau Margaux never seemed to be on firm footing. From the time of Berlon up until 1977, various owners appeared to be cavalier about what they really owned. This was in contrast to the workers, who, for generations, did realize what a gold mine they had and set about to produce quality wine. In 1977, a Greek gentleman by the name of Andre Mentzelopoulos purchased the property. The French called him "The Hellene." Chateau Margaux, over the years, must have had antennae that reached out whenever it was in trouble. The property seemed to survive all the battles it had to face. Over the centuries that it has been in existence, The Chateaux faced pricing fluctuations, many recessions, fungus, Phyloxera, and now cash. Enter Andre Mentzelopoulos. Andre was skilled in management and marketing. He recognized the Chateaux for the outstanding offering it had made to the wine arena and he knew that he could make it even better. He liked to call Chateau Margaux worthy of only first place in the world of wine. He brought in Emile Peynaud, a world-renowned oenologist who put in place technological advances in the vineyards and the modern new underground storage facility. The changes at the winery were immediate and positive as the next vintage, 1978, was recognized as outstanding.

Mentzelopoulos passed away in 1980 and stewardship of the winery was passed to his daughter, Corinne. She is very well educated and skilled in management and finance. In a seamless manner, Corinne took charge of the winery and met head-on the new challenge of overwhelming demand for Bordeaux wines. This was the result of the success of the 1982 vintage, which was recognized worldwide.

So here we are in 2014 and we find Chateau Margaux is enjoying worldwide demand for their wines, high prices, and full employment for their employees. Although gross profits are high, a good portion of the profits are poured back into the winery in order to maintain the First Growth Status. Being first is expensive.

WINESPEAK

Blind Tasting – Tasting wine without knowing the winery name, vintage or other label information.

Decant – Transfer of wine into a glass container. The important thing to remember here is to always decant your Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Sauvignon blends if you are not going to let them age.