

Nous Sommes Arrives! We have indeed arrived at the fifth and final of Napoleon's gift to the wine world. His committee selected Chateau Latour as one of the five first growths of the Classification of 1855, and from then on Latour was and is known as "Grand Vin de Chateau Latour Premier Grand Cru Classe."

Chateaux Latour is located in the heart of the Medoc, about 50 kilometers northwest of the city of Bordeaux, where the legend of the vineyards of Bordeaux began. The Chateau's prime terroir, L'Enclos, overlooks the estuary of the Gironde River, which over the years has kept the temperature in the area consistently mild.

The Chateau has ownership documents that can be traced back to 1331. Since only a few of us are able to remember that far back, I went forward to the days when wine was produced at a very high level of quality and thus demand grew. That would be in the early 18th century. The ownership was in the hands of the Segur Family. (Count Segur was named the "King of Vines" back in the 1600's.) The Segur ownership spread to other fine wine vineyards including Lafite and Mouton.

The Segur Family fortune grew when, in the early 18th century, the English Aristocracy developed refined tastes for just about everything, including wine. Wines from Oporto, Sherrys from Spain, and high quality Clarets from Bordeaux were at the top of every Englishman's list. Shipping from the continent to England had become less restricted and product was now easier to obtain. This being the case, demand for wine from Bordeaux went up along with the price. It is estimated that a barrel of wine from Chateau Latour, along with the wine from the other quality estates, was valued at four to five times the price as wine from a typical Bordeaux Estate. By 1729 the price ratio had risen to a factor of 13 and by 1767 the ratio sat at 17.

None of this good fortune went unnoticed at Latour. Meticulous records were kept and as a result, the winery grew stronger; so strong in fact that it survived the difficult environment of the French Revolution. Most importantly, the winery remained in the hands of the Segur Family. That lasted until 1962. A British financial group called Pearson took control for the next thirty years. In 1993 control was finally back in the hands of the French when Francois Penult purchased the winery from the Pearson Group

The Latour property is located in the southwest region of Pauillac. The fruit that is grown is 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. From this fruit there are three wines produced. They are Chateau Latour, Les Forts de Latour, and a third wine labeled simply Pauillac. Le Grand Vin de Chateau Latour is composed of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Grapes for this wine are hand selected from the vine and only the vines located in the original 47 Hectares of the E'clos. Year in and year out this plot of land brings forth fruit that yields the depth, elegance and concentration expected of a great wine. Once the wine is aged, bottled and released to market, it is expected that you will wait at least 10 years before drinking. That is how long the wine takes to fully develop.

The second labels from Latour, Les Forts de Latour and Pauillac, are Wines that are produced from the same Latour property however not E'Clos. Development continues on these two wines with the hopes that someday they also may be declared "Grand Vin."

Sixty-six People work at Chateau Latour. This is higher number of employees per hectare than most wineries; however this is what it takes to remain at the top. The workers are well trained; work year round and most of them hold their jobs for life and then pass them on to the next generation.

WINESPEAK

This is the last article in the series of the 1855 Classification of Bordeaux Wines. I covered only the wines in the First Growth level. The Classification had five levels of "Growths" – i.e. quality levels. Napoleon created the classification to present the wines of Bordeaux to the world in an orderly manner of five levels of quality. It was a solid plan and it has lasted for 160 years with only two exceptions. The 61 wineries on the list did go through economic ups and downs, particularly the two World Wars. However, survive they did and still do today.