



## Bordeaux's Big Gamble

For those who follow the classified growth pre-arrival offerings known as futures sales, the current offering of 2009 wines promises to be something to watch. Does this sound like a familiar story? My editorial for the Summer 2009 article was exactly the same except then it was about the overhyped 2008 vintage. The only difference is this time the stakes are much higher.

The conflict is between the Chateau owners and their established trading partners, the merchants of England and the United States. Stirring the pot are the wine critics who have universally declared the vintage to be the best in recorded history. The source of aggravation is the pricing, which for many properties is as much as 35% higher than the astronomical 2005s. Their pricing policy has many in the trade wondering who, or where, the wines will be sold.

This vintage jumped onto everyone's radar when Robert Parker rendered his opinion of 2009, "It may turn out to be the finest vintage I have tasted in 32 years of covering Bordeaux." Steve Spurrier, the head of tasting for Decanter Magazine, and the organizer of The Judgement in Paris in 1975 calls it, "the finest of my career." Likewise, James Suckling of the Wine Spectator likens the quality to 1982, but emphasizes that winemaking is now cleaner and more consistent.

Such lofty praise inspired many Chateaus to make their initial offering price as much as 25% higher than their expensive 2008 releases. This caused a major backlash at many English retailers, who are still the most important market for Bordeaux. Some houses, like Berry, Brothers and Rudd, who have an East Asia house, reported strong sales. Others, who would not be named in a Decanter article, said sales were sluggish at best. Other retailers in Europe reported terrible first offering results and question if anyone in Bordeaux is working in the same economy as the rest of us. United States merchants report mixed results, with consumers definitely buying either the highest

rated, prestige properties or shopping the best score to price ratio. It would appear that customers need to consider several factors before tying up their money for at least two years before they take delivery of the wines.

One of the biggest considerations for planning a purchase is the currency exchange. As of this writing the Euro is trading at 1.23 to the dollar, off a year high of 1.513. Everyone has their own opinions of where the bottom may lie, but if it continues to drop it will mean that later offerings, called **tranches**, will land in the US at a lower cost than the current offerings, if all other factors stay the same.

Another factor that has to be playing into the equation, beyond price, is the overall demand for the wines with American consumers. On the heels of the superb 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2005 vintages many consumers may struggle to find space in their full cellars for yet another "vintage of the century." For bargain hunting customers there are also some very good buys on existing inventory of 2006s and 2007s at prices well below their initial offering prices. To further complicate the issue, Diageo, the world's largest beverage company, dumped \$50 million dollars worth of Bordeaux inventory in New York, flooding that market with many 2005s and older vintages. All of these factors have put severe downward pressure on pricing that makes the 2009s seem even more unrealistic.

Finally, the Bordelais seem to be putting a lot of eggs in the basket of the far east. For most of this decade

the Asian and Russian markets have come to their rescue, buying the highest rated wines at any price. With oil prices off the summer 2008 high and the long arms of the recession stretching into Asia, this time they may not find the help they need.

One thing is for sure, as this drama plays out it should be interesting to see who blinks first. By most accounts the Chateau have only offered a small amount of their production in the early tranches to test the water. If demand is less than they expect we may see pricing fall before this all plays out. If not and the pricing holds then you can expect the top producers from California to hold their prices too.

### Locations

#### Orlando

407.895.9463

1223 North Orange Ave.  
Orlando FL 32804

#### Windermere

407.876.9463

428 Main Street  
Windermere FL 34786

#### St. Augustine

904.461.0060

128 Seagrove Main St.  
St. Augustine Beach, FL 32080

#### Lake Mary/Sanford

407.878.5806

5040 West State Road 46  
Sanford FL 32771

#### Oviedo

407.542.4963

1890 County Road 419  
Oviedo, FL 32765

# Boyanci InSpire

## 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon

\$69 per bottle (Buy the solid 12 bottle case for \$55.20 per bottle)

I have a personal connection to many of the wines we feature in this club but this is the first time I accidentally stumbled into one. After selecting this wine I went to their website for some basic information. The site goes into great detail about describing the inspiration of Boyanci but not very meaty in terms of technical information. So I sent an email to the principle who's name appeared on the *contact us* page. I started my email with the typical:

*Greetings, my name is Tim Varan and I run a small group of fine wine shops in Central Florida. I have selected your wine as a feature for our reserve club and need additional information. Who should I contact and when is a good time.*

To my surprise the response for this wine was as follows:

*Tim, Thank you so much for choosing the InSpire for your reserve program. I lived in Orlando for many years (Sommelier at Disney, and VP of Beverage for Ruth's Chris) and have become such a fan of not only the original Ivanhoe spot but all the new Tim's Wine Markets as well. You may not remember me, but we've met a couple of times throughout the years...*

*Kevin Boyer*

So this wine really fits our "promoting the faces and places that make wine great" mission statement, even if I can't remember the face.

The name for this winery, Boyanci, is a play on words. The partners in the project, Kevin BOYer and Tom SteffANCI, each contribute part of their name and they also feel the wines should be "uplifting." Not only do they feel the wines should possess this quality but they also want their endeavor to help lift people up too. For this reason they contribute 10% of their profits to charity, particularly children in Peru.

Reading their bio online it is interesting to see how this winery came to be. The two met at a business meeting in Napa and they quickly became friends. They spent a lot of time talking about the wines they enjoy, and dislike, and in the fall of 2009 they made their own wine with the help of winemaking diva, Mia Kline.

Their original wine, simply called Boyanci, is a single vineyard wine designed to showcase the character of the Pritchard Hill area of eastern Napa, specifically the Granite Meadows block of the legendary Stagecoach Vineyard. For InSpire, their second wine, they prefer to craft a wine that is expressive of all of Napa Valley, so the final blend is made from multiple vineyard sources. The bulk of the wine is from Oak Knoll in southern Napa, from a site called Red Hen Vineyard. This spot at the foot of Mount Veeder is perfect for growing Cabernet that is both aromatically complex and has good structure. They also use fruit that is declassified from the Boyanci project (which adds power and color) and sources in Yountville (aromatics and fresh fruit) and Rutherford (power and structure.)

Winemaking for the InSpire is pretty straight forward. The fruit is triaged to remove shot berries (green, underdeveloped grapes) then put into the fermentor for a three to four day cold soak to increase color. The tanks are allowed to warm up and the portions that spontaneously ferment are allowed to go (wild yeast ferment) and the rest are inoculated. After fermentation the skins are left in the tanks for 10 to 24 days, which helps to stabilize color and soften the tannins. Once Mia feels the wine is ready the free run juice is racked to barrel where it will rest for eighteen months. For InSpire they use only French oak, half new and half one-year-old barrels. Malolactic is inoculated in barrel and the wine is racked one to three times depending on reduction. Once the aging process is complete the wine is lightly filtered then bottled. The final blend of the 2007 is 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc and 5% Malbec. They produced 715 cases.

Ideally this wine needs to age for three to five years to come completely together. If you can't resist you will find a deep garnet colored wine with moderately high viscosity and some red staining in the tears. The nose is a complex blend of wet herbs (mint, parsley and thyme) mixed with fresh and cooked red cherries, dried red plums, sassafras, clove and allspice. In the mouth this wine is very dense and broad, with the rich core of fruit framed by well integrated tannins that hold together into the long finish. Right now this is the perfect wine for braised short ribs or brisket, served atop gnocchi with a gorgonzola cream sauce.

# Ladera

## 2006 Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon

\$65 per bottle (Buy the solid six-pack case for \$52 per bottle)

This wine is typically way out of our price range, selling on their website at \$70 and closer to \$80 here in Florida. I tasted it a couple of weeks ago and the local sales rep and I worked out this price to clean up their 2005 which is still in stock and they want to move. As luck would have it they could not get quite enough for us so he offered me the same price on the 2006, a wine with great critical press and more serious structure and material.

I was thrilled to work out this deal as Ladera is one of the most storied properties in all of Napa Valley. The property is actually two different vineyard sites. The first vineyard, Lone Canyon, sits at 1100 feet above sea level on Mt. Veeder, at the southern end of the valley. The property was originally part of the estate owned by General Mariano Vallejo and eventually passed into the hands of George Yount, for whom Yountville is named.

This wine comes from their Howell Mountain Vineyard, which is the site of the winery. Oddly enough, this vineyard has had a long history of French ownership. The original founders, two expatriates named Brun and Chaix, called the estate Nouveau Medoc and planted the site to Bordeaux varieties in 1877. At 1600 feet above sea level this was one of the first hillside vineyards planted, at a time when all the expansion of Napa was occurring on the valley floor. Brun and Chaix also built the three story winery that is still used today.

There is a break in the story in the 1900's, probably caused either by the Panic of 1912 or the Prohibition. In 1980 the estate, still called Nouveau Medoc, was purchased by Francis and Françoise DeWavrin. Although virtually unknown now, at the time they had just sold Chateau La Mission Haut Brion and the move was given the rising Napa wine business even more credibility. For some unknown reason the family planted the site to Chardonnay and named it Chateau Woltner. Never a commercial success, the property was sold to the Stotesbery family 2000.

The Pat and Anne Stotesbery's chose the name Ladera because it is the root word of hillside in French. They met while attending Stanford and the University of San Francisco but made their fortune in Montana, running a large ranch. They always dreamed of owning a winery and during a vacation to Napa made the decision to buy this estate. They

immediately refurbished the 120 year old winery and replanted the vineyards back to Bordeaux varieties.

For this wine all the fruit comes from fifteen vineyard blocks at the Howell Mountain vineyard site. The soils in this vineyard are iron rich due to the decomposed volcanic rock, with clay and loam as well as lots of fine gravel for good drainage. Almost all of the vines were planted in 1997.

The 2006 growing season was not without challenges, with heavy rains in the winter causing a later than normal bud break in the spring. The summer was hot, with periods of drought and the vineyards were even threatened by brush fires. The harvest was long, with the pickers having to make numerous passes through the vineyard to catch each block at the peak of ripeness. For this reason the first grapes arrived at the winery on September 28th and the last on November 1st.

Once in the winery winemaker Karen Cullen works hard to emphasize the character of the site from which the grapes are picked. After destemming and crushing the fermentations are allowed to begin spontaneously (without additional yeast) and typically last thirteen days. The wine is racked and pressed to barrel right before complete dryness and allowed to finish in wood. Malolactic fermentation is started by inoculation after alcoholic is complete. The wine is aged completely in French oak for twenty-one months, with just under half new barrels and the remainder second and third pass. After aging the wine is bottled without filtration or fining. The 2006 Howell Mountain is also 100% Cabernet Sauvignon.

I was surprised when I tasted the 2006 how approachable it is for a mountain wine. The color is deep garnet and there is some staining in the tears. The nose is a warm and inviting combination of cola syrup, cooked cherries, toffee and faintly herbal, resinous qualities of thyme and rosemary. In the mouth this wine is dense but plush, with the rich, sweet fruit framed by tannins that deeply imbedded into the fruit. Good now, with an hour or two in the decanter, this wine will likely age for three to five years in the proper cellar. You will want to serve this wine with softer texture meats, like filet mignon, beef tenderloin or rack of lamb.

# Darioush

## 2006 Merlot "Signature Series"

\$49 per bottle (Buy the solid six-pack case for \$39.20 per bottle)

It is almost impossible to miss the Darioush winery as you drive north on Silverado Trail through Oak Knoll into the Stag's Leap district. Most of the wineries in the area look like farms that have a parking lot for visitors. They are nondescript, functional affairs that almost blend into the surroundings. Then you come upon the Darioush winery, which rises from the base of the Vaca Mountains with sixteen free standing pillars and Persian inspired architecture. Owner Darioush Khaledi wanted a winery that projected his proud Persian heritage and used the ancient city of Persepolis as his model. Although out of place in an area that is really nothing more than expensive farm land, there is something really majestic about the place, especially when the sun first hits it in the morning.

Darioush grew up in the Shiraz region of Iran before the revolution. Prior to the Islamic rule the area was known as the wine producing region of country. As a child he remembers making wine with his uncle so you could say this was always his dream. Khaledi trained as a civil engineer, but just prior to the revolution he moved to the US. His education was not recognized here so he pooled money with his cousin to buy a run down grocery store in Los Angeles. From that start he now owns twenty-three grocery stores that employ over 1500 people. Although his grocery business targets inner-city neighborhoods in Southern California his passion for fine wine motivated him to purchase a thirty acre vineyard in Napa in the early 1990's. The vineyard, rumored to be a prime source of fruit to the Wagner family of Caymus, is the foundation for their wines today.

For several years I have admired the wines from Darioush but they are typically out of the price range of what we can make a club selection. During a chance tasting in the Lake Mary store I had the opportunity to taste the Merlot. All wineries have a hard time selling Merlot and we were able to make a deal to get this wine down to the right price to be included in the Reserve program. As is the case with so many good Merlots, this one is deeper and more complex, with good structure that is sure to appeal to all of you "big Cab" drinkers.

All Darioush wines are produced only with fruit from his estate vineyards. Since his original thirty acre purchase Khaledi has added an additional sixty acres in Napa that include holdings on Mt. Veeder,

Oak Knoll and in other parts of the valley. For this reason winemaker Steve Devitt is able to craft a wine with great dimension even though it is only blended with 5% Cabernet Franc. Steve can use Merlot grown in several different sites where the fruit contributes different levels of texture, aroma and structure.

The secret to the success of this wine is that the base fruit for the wine comes from steep, rocky vineyards on Mount Veeder. In this difficult location the Merlot struggles, so the grapes are smaller and their skins are thicker. This produces a wine with more concentration and structure than is the norm for the varietal. Then fruit from the valley and Oak Knoll add mid-palate and aromatics, creating a perfectly balanced wine.

Winemaking at Darioush emphasizes fruit flavors and texture, balanced with oak. All of the fruit is hand harvested and then sorted twice before going into the fermentors. Winemaker Devitt uses open top and closed fermentors to create different flavor profiles depending on fermentation lot. All of the tanks are cold soaked for four days prior to fermentation and are pumped over for gentle color and tannin extraction. After fermentation is complete the wine is left on the skins to further develop the wine's tannin structure. Once Steve is satisfied the wine is racked to barrel. For the 2006 Merlot the wine was aged in all French oak, 70% new, for twenty months before bottling without filtration or fining. The winery produced 2380 cases of this wine.

When you open the bottle you are in for a treat. Decant for half an hour and chill to 65 degrees to get the most out of the wine. You will immediately see this is no ordinary Merlot as the color is deep garnet with a purple center and there is even some staining in the tears. The nose is a heady blend of ripe, black plums, dark chocolate, black cherries, clove, star anise and vanilla. In the mouth this wine shows rich texture, with the ample fruit showing great concentration in the mid-palate and a long, deep finish. There is some tannin to this wine so don't be afraid to cellar for a year or so. Drink with a firm cut of meat, either a strip steak or stuffed and rolled pork loin. I also found this wine to work great with some extra pulled pork we had from an event but go easy on the sauce.