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# Decanter

## Rhône 2009

Your guide to the south's  
superb, balanced vintage  
**PLUS** the 30 best buys

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Inside the  
first growths

An exclusive insight  
into the biggest stars  
of the wine world

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The royals of  
Spanish wine

What next for the  
Torres dynasty?



**PLUS**  
the  
best of

**Aussie Chardonnay: 34 stunning wines**

**Sexy Spanish reds: Priorat & Montsant**

**New-wave Argentina**

**Alsace's 'Marmite' grape**

**And... Win a trip to Oregon**





# Spurrier's World

*Decanter's* globetrotting consultant editor gives the French a helping hand, lets his hair down in Portugal and gets stuck in London. Plus, top bottles to drink or keep

## The new French paradox

L'Académie du Vin de France, a venerable institution whose average age I lowered on election several years ago, held its annual AGM, Paulée and Gala Dinner at Paris' Restaurant Laurent in November. Jean-Pierre Perrin (Château de Beaucastel) retired after long service as President in favour of Prof Jean-Robert Pitte of the Sorbonne, who specialises in teaching the geographic history and culture of food and wine. Last year at the Davos du Vin (World Wine Symposium) at Lake Como, he attacked his government's 'Prohibition' attitude to wine, which forbids any advertising or promotion that may encourage consumption, saying in his acceptance speech that such attitudes must be fought. In this he was joined by newly elected Michel Bettane, who remarked that a country that considered its Belon oysters, Bresse chickens and Brie worthy of recognition by Unesco while vilifying its own viticulture was dangerously myopic and that damage already done would get worse. The Paulée consisted of a tasting of recent vintages from the 50 vigneron members, after which eight wines all from 2001 were served to accompany the dinner, my preferences being DRC's Romanée-St-Vivant presented in magnums by Aubert de Villaine and a superb Quintessence du Petit Manseng from Henri Ramoneteu in Jurançon.

*'These "grands vins" from the Douro stand out for their sense of place'*

Romorantin, offering a comparison of wines from ungrafted vines 156 years apart in age. Marionnet also makes ungrafted Sauvignon, Chenin, Gamay and Cot (Malbec) under his Vinifera label, finding these much superior to those from their grafted brothers. Unable to publicise such relatively inexpensive rarities in France, most are exported.

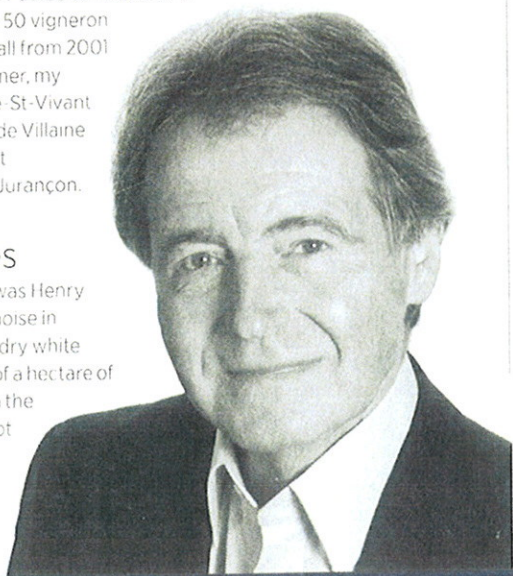
## Port and pigs

The following evening my wife Bella and I left for the Douro, as guests of Christian Seely, MD of AXA-Millésimes, for a weekend at its Quinta do Noval. Two of the Noval pigs, which had grown in their third year to 300kg each, were to be killed and we would watch the preparation for what chef Fergus Henderson of London's St John restaurant calls 'nose to tail eating', savour a few delicacies and drink a little Port. Christian had also invited *Decanter* columnist and DWWA East & Asia Regional Chair Ch'ng Poh Tiong, who had promised to bring his own cooks – on a previous visit he said that to prepare a pig properly you needed 3,000 years of history. Poh Tiong's chefs weren't available, so Christian invited the two brothers from Au Bonheur du Palais, Bordeaux's best Asian restaurant. Also staying was Daniel Llose, head winemaker at all the French AXA and Jean-Michel Cazes estates, who arrived with dozens of bottles.

Under blue skies which made the pre-lunch aperitif on the terrace all the more delicious, meals were for 18 of us, the Bordelais pig-preparers on one long table, the guests on another. The first night brought a cascade of northern Rhônes, the best being Chapoutier's Ermitage 1999, the second day's lunch saw an avalanche of Languedocs, while at dinner white Burgundies and second-growth 1998 Médoc were served, the final lunch concentrating on 2000, beginning with Cristal and going on with more Médoc. Pre-lunch tastings confirmed the great quality of the Douro reds from Quintas Noval and Romaneira, while the 10 different mature ports (see right) included some of the greatest I have ever drunk.

## Old vines, new wines

The other newly elected member was Henry Marionnet of Domaine de la Charmoise in Touraine, who makes a stunningly dry white named Proviognage from one third of a hectare of Romorantin vines (a cross between the now-extinct Gouais Blanc and Pinot Noir) planted in 1850. Four years ago he took cuttings which now produce La Pucelle de



## Steven recommends...



### Alpha Estate, Sauvignon Blanc, Greece 2010

£18.10 Classic Wine Direct

Grown on well-draining sandy-clay soils at 620–710 metres above sea level, this is Angelos Iatridis' first Sauvignon Blanc. Silver-pale, with a lovely floral minerality, restrained yet very present on the palate, this is a beautiful, perfectly balanced wine. Drink 2011–2013.



### Cuvée du Vatican, Côtes du Rhône-Villages, France 2009

£9.99 Laithwaites (Vinopolis)

From an estate known for its Châteauneuf-du-Pape, this 50% Grenache/30% Syrah/20% Mourvèdre is a very good example of modern southern Rhône: lots of spicy fruit, good depth, concentration and a sense of place. Very good value. Drink 2011–2014.



### Kleine Zalze, Family Reserve Sauvignon Blanc, South Africa 2009

£16 Dickens House Wines

From five different vineyards and a cooler-than-usual vintage that enhances the zestiness. Lemon-yellow, very good Sauvignon flavours with surprising complexity that combines richness and purity with enough body to improve over the medium term. Drink 2011–2014.



## Portugal does glitz

The last night we stayed at The Yeatman, the Fladgate (Taylor, Fonseca, Croft) Partnership's hotel that dominates Vila Nova de Gaia. Of the 82 rooms, most with views across the Douro to Oporto, 63 are named after Portuguese wine estates with decoration inspired and provided by the sponsors. The wine list contains 900 Portuguese wines, and weekly themed dinners are held to promote Portugal's viticultural diversity. Absent so far are wines from the owners - 'not what we do', says MD Adrian Bridge, but judging by the current top Douro wines (right) demanding high prices, I bet we'll see some Fladgate reds before too long.

## The wine trade aims young

Due to a snow-bound Heathrow, I could not get to Geneva for AIV's annual meeting of l'Académie Internationale du Vin (AIV) a think-tank I always refer to as 'the conscience of the wine trade'. Fellow member Nico Manassis (DWVA Greece Regional Chair) sent me a rundown, starting with Angelo Gaja's advice for the future: bring down the average age (already lower than the AVF); cancel the mandatory use of the French language; become active on the internet; stress that wine is the only alcoholic drink made to accompany a meal; defend the true craftsmen who maintain the culture of wine, the guardians of tradition, but who are also - citing Robert Mondavi - pioneers. He then illustrated his party piece, comparing Cabernet Sauvignon to John Wayne, 'reliable and always the same', and Nebbiolo to Marcello Mastroianni, 'unreliable and always different', to a round of applause.

The second day saw a presentation by Prof Patrick McLeod, who worked with past AIV President Prof Jacques Puisais at the Institut du Gout in Tours. He explained which part of our brain functions for sensory impressions, concluding that when we write a tasting note, we write about ourselves. Finally, under the theme Wine and Music, six wines were tasted alongside music that had been specially composed for them. Here is Nico's reaction to Pio Cesare Barbaresco 2005: 'Cherries and cocoa powder, laciness with a bite, elegance; the music a rare piece written for the flute by Argentinian tango composer Astor Piazzola; music and wine in total unison, fireworks permeating the entire room.'

Steven Spurrier will be hosting Decanter Education courses in March on a range of topics including Bordeaux (11 & 14 March) and How to Taste Fine Wine (28 March). To book, visit [decanter.com/education](http://decanter.com/education) or call +44 (0)20 3148 4513

## For the cellar:

### Top 2008s from the Douro

Tasting the range of Douro wines from Quintas do Noval and Romaneira from 2004 to 2008, not only was the improvement very marked, but it was plain that the 'grands vins' were very good wines indeed. These, and others from the New Douro tasting last October, are not cheap, being in the £30-£50 range, but they can stand alongside similar-priced wines from all over, and stand out for their sense of place and controlled robustness. The local grape varieties



provide a broad palette to work from, while outsider Syrah is proving a great success. But Cabernet Sauvignon retains an un-Douro leanness. Here are wines to which I gave 18/20 and over, to which I would give a drinking window of 2012-20. **Quinta do Noval** (Gonzalez Byass), **Romaneira** and **R de Romaneira** - all old vines (Liberty), **Quinta do Vesuvio** and the elegantly contrasting **Chryseia** (both Fells) **Niepoort's Batuta** and the very Burgundian **Charme**, **Quinta do Vale Meão**, **Quinta de Macedos** from 90-year-old vines (all Raymond Reynolds), **Poeira** (Fields, Morris & Verdin), **Quinta do Vallado Reserve Field Blend** (Bibendum), **Pintas** (Corney & Barrow).

## From the cellar:

### Quinta do Noval vintaged Ports

The heading states 'vintaged', as Noval justifiably takes great pride in its colheitas: Ports from a single year aged in cask and bottled to be drunk without further ageing. The youngest vintage Christian Seely opened was **1995**, amber-red, great purity of Douro fruit, expressive, vibrant and refreshing, young but still great. The **1968** colour of a 20-year-old tawny, fabulously concentrated, nutty, almost sweet brandy spice, superb flavour with dryness and sweetness in perfect balance, while the **1937** was deeper in colour, full of spice and extraordinary concentration after 73 years. A truly memorable wine.

The classic Noval vintages began with **1994**, black-red with terrific energy and grip, but a touch of leanness. Then a lovely

pair: **1967**, fine bitter cherry nose, a lifted, almost taffeta texture, very pure; and **1966**, fragrant, slightly minty, pretty and balanced, but a bit 'lost'. Quinta do Noval is most famous for its **Nacional**, coming only in the best vintages from a 2-hectare plot of ungrafted vines. The **1966** had all the vigour and depth the vintage lacked, while the famous **1963** with its wild violets nose, spice, grip and elegance in a powerful frame, was a wine of total fascination. A **20- and a 40-year-old tawny** completed the range, both outstanding.



### Altaïr, Cachapoal Valley, Chile 2006

£48.99 Selfridges

Brilliant winemaker Ana Maria Cumsille brings increasing elegance to this icon blend of Cabernets Sauvignon and Franc, Syrah and a little Carmenère. Dense colour, slightly smoky nose, cassis, almost succulent palate, classic smoothness and length, a 'l'afite' to the broader 'Latour' 2005. Drink 2012-2025.



### Raventós i Blanc, Gran Reserva de la Finca Cava, Spain 2006

£22.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, Slurp

From the family vineyards of one of the oldest estates in northern Spain's Penedès, a blend from 85% local white grapes with 15% Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Lovely lemony nose with white blossoms, quite full flavoured with light minerality. Perfect with a meal. Drink 2011-2015.



### Lustau, Botaina Amontillado, Spain NV

£11.50 The Wine Society

This is a superb light mahogany, hazelnut-scented from the La Ina solera when the 'flor' has died off in its second decade. The initial warmth finishes with bone-dry complexity. A stunningly good sherry, perfect with hard, mature cheese and an absolute bargain. Drink 2011-2012.