

The People Element

Can we apply the 'ultimate best' concept in measuring wines? Lim Hwee Peng shares his thoughts.

By Lim Hwee Peng



LIM HWEE PENG, CSW is an experienced wine educator, certified by CIVB (Bordeaux Wine Marketing Board) as an International Bordeaux Wine Educator; a Certified Specialist in Wines (CSW) from Society of Wine Educators, USA; certified Educators from Napa Valley Vintners Association, and recently gained a Diploma in Burgundy wines from BIVB (Burgundy wine marketing board). Lim's passion for wine has also been rewarded with two World Gourmet Summit Regional 'Wine Article of the Year' awards. Some of his current pre-occupations include being the facilitator for Singapore Airline (SIA) Sommelier group; Wine facilitator for SOPEXA, AUSTRADE and California Wine Institute. He can be reached at hweepeng@winecraftmktg.com

Confidently and categorically, I could answer specific queries such as, "Which are the most expensive wines in the world?" But to respond to "Which is the best wine in the world?" is rather difficult, and at times, a pointless pursuit. Due to the nature of my work, many of my friends simply assume that since I have tasted many wines from all over the world, I should be able to distinguish and select the so-called 'best wine'. Yes, I may have the fortune of tasting many wines, but to proclaim I have tasted ALL kinds of wines is ludicrous. Even after sampling many styles (new, old and modern) of wines from Europe, America, Africa and Australia, I am still unable to pinpoint ONE wine that I can assuredly declare as the best in the world.

After some pondering, I have come to realise, from a wine lover's standpoint, the enjoyment of wine is a communal, emotional and personal affair, not an effort for ranking or competition purposes.

I have also come to understand that regardless of the wine type, its nuances and unique flavours, is much more pleasurable in the presence of pleasant company; while enjoying wine in a special and memorable occasion enhances the flavours without even delving into details of the wine origin.

For doubters, try sharing your treasured bottle of, say, Chateau Petrus 1982 with an annoying individual and tell me every penny you paid for that fine wine is worth it.

Besides the companionship factor, the setting and occasion can also make a big difference to the enjoyment of wine. My experience can be a great testimony to that theory. I have been in active national service for decades. For all those years, what kept me motivated were the physical and mental demanding moments that bonded me closely with other like-minded individuals serving the same cause.

Today, more than two decades later, we still keep in contact and gather regularly for 'male bonding' sessions (never mind the girlfriends and wives who felt otherwise;



that is a different story for a different column). Throughout all those gatherings, wine was the only new 'member' amongst us. Wine has transformed us from mere tough mates to sensible and thoughtful creatures. We were happy (wine made us happier) to see each other keeping well after all those years. We raised a toast to many moments of joy as well as anguish (especially with demands from our daily lives in work and family). We also credited the discipline that was instilled in us for our current achievements in our profession; the years of the tough regime that we were subjected to served us well during challenges in both professional and personal capacity.

All those moments, as we reminisced, were much sweeter with a glass of white, red, sparkling, fortified or *stickies*. Through those gatherings and wine sessions, I have even converted some old boys to wine lovers too! (An unplanned objective, but certainly good news for the wine trade.)

From my experience, it leaves absolutely no doubt in my mind that there is no such thing as the best wine in the world. There is only the best wine experience.

WINES

*to be
enjoyed
and treasured*



Using the same token of reasoning elaborated in the main story, I have found some wines, wine regions, estates, and wine styles that were incredibly memorable, simply because they offered an emotional link.

For example, the clean, pure and beautiful region of Alsace not just impresses with its scenic and historical past, its wines are also a true reflection of its origin. Whenever I enjoy a glass of Alsace wine (any of the seven varietals), it instantly transports me back to Colmar, and the many wine domains which I've had the opportunity to visit. Also memorable is the ever professional and amiable Thierry Fritsch – the tireless brand ambassador for Alsace wines, constantly on the road promoting the beauty of Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Muscat and Pinot Noir to various corners in both the northern and southern hemispheres.

Being a big fan of white wines in the early days of my wine journey, I was unwilling to explore out of my comfort zone, especially with red wines, as my regular encounter then was always a gum-numbing, unpleasant tannic experience. Until I was poured a glass of Chateau Lynch Bages 1985; it was the 'Lunch Bag' (nicknamed by the Brits) that persuaded me to look at red wines with a pair of curious eyes.

Those were some of the wines and regions that have left an indelible mark on my wine journey. Nevertheless, I should also share with you one particular wine that impresses in the various encounters of the past weeks. Hopefully, you will be able to derive some pleasures (of any measure) from that sharing.

Dom Perignon

It is an open secret that there is only a handful of ultra-premium champagnes that connoisseurs would want to keep in their cellars. Dom Perignon is one of those rare bubbly bottles that will stand proud in a wine vault. I've had the privilege and pleasure to sample a vertical range of Dom Perignon Vintage Champagne from the recent 2000 vintage to as far back to 1996 (a Rose Champagne), 1995, 1993, 1975 and 1969.

Based on my impression, the 2000 Dom Perignon was forward, vibrant and accessible. Rose Champagne 1996 seems delicate on the palate but it is filled with ripe red fruit flavours and was displaying its charm like a proud peacock. The two vintage Champagnes from the early and mid 90s reminded me of a well-made Montrachet, with firm and structured nuances, and both are equally restrained on the palate, and still require some years in the bottle before they can be fully enjoyed. For those who were curious with the quality of Dom Perignon from '75 and '69, they were still vibrant with the former showing riper fruit flavours, clean and tasty, while the latter shows complexity on the nose, and offers freshness and vibrancy on the palate.

If you are interested in any of those vintage champagnes, I suggest you speak to your wine agent very soon because Dom Perignon is on most collectors' must-buy list, so act quickly before they disappear from the shelf.