

ONE BOTTLE: The 2007 Château La Roque “Pic Saint Loup” by JOSHUA BAER

Are we still friends? Are we?

We used to talk every day, then it was once a week, then it was once a month, and then it was only when you needed directions to Mario’s taco bar in Modesto, the recipe for *arrabbiata* sauce, or the telephone number of a tycoon. Which was fine with me, except that it was not fine with me. Fine with me would have been the sound of your voice, or the way I could always hear you talking when I read one of your calligraphic e-mails. Fine with me would have been the least significant part of you—any part of you, really—anything but your silence.

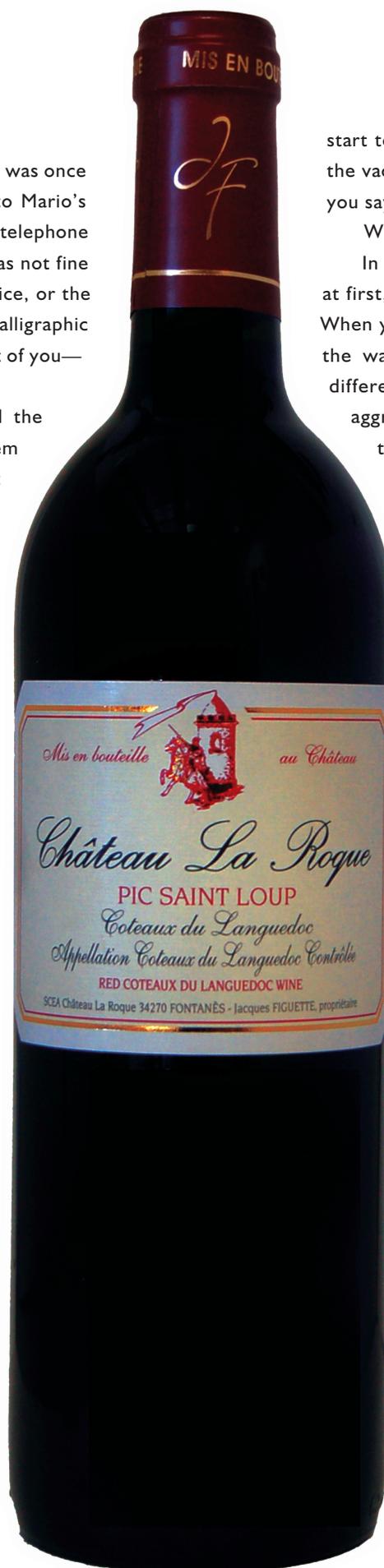
I should have said something. I should have addressed the silence issue years ago, when we were still talking. My problem was, when we were still talking, it never occurred to me that our conversation would end. It seemed like one of those lifetime conversations, the ones that always picked up where they left off. Like an idiot, I thought your face and your voice were in my life for good, the way my blood and my lungs were in my life. I thought you were the reason I knew how to laugh. The last thing I expected—from my friend, my other side, my partner in the absurd—was your silence.

Remember when you asked me about your medications? Remember the night when I made friends with your heart? Remember when you made the remark about controlled falling? Or was it about uncontrolled falling? Remember the *Ballad of the Enchilada*? Remember that disturbing thing you used to do with your eyes? You had a way of sitting in a room full of people and telling a story that turned the room and the people into the story you were telling.

Emerson said friendship was a masterpiece of nature. What happens when the masterpiece gets stolen and fenced and there is nothing left on the wall but a blank space and a nail? What happens when the masterpiece steals itself?

This is not your fault. I freely admit that I am a glutton for excess, an oversized personality who refuses to lose weight, an insensitive loudmouth who cannot wait for the next opportunity to speak before he thinks. Help yourself. Accuse me of being who I am. It will hurt and I will nurse one of those quiet grudges that people like me nurse when we are forced to face the truth, but at least we will be talking. At least you will have replaced your silence with your contempt.

You have nothing to worry about. I am too proud to beg, not that it would do me any good. I had my chances. You gave them to me, chance by chance, and I squandered them. The only good thing about silence is that you get used to it. You wait, you listen, and you never get the call you want to get, but after a month or two of relentless grief, you



start to savor what you have lost. You look at the space on the wall, the vacuum in your heart, the emptiness that gives birth to form, and you say, “Yeah, well, it was fun while it lasted.”

Which brings us to the 2007 Château La Roque “Pic Saint Loup.”

In the glass, the wine is an overcast ruby. The bouquet dances at first, then it assumes the lotus position and allows you to savor it. When you savor the bouquet, close your eyes. It makes a difference, the way listening to a love song with your eyes closed makes a difference. On the palate, the Château La Roque offers layers of aggression, mystery, sorrow, and delight. If you try to sort through those layers, you miss the experience of being overwhelmed by the wine. If you try *not* to sort through those layers, your unconscious mind does it for you. This may be why memories of drinking this wine are as enjoyable as drinking it. The finish is long and slow and delicate. It offers no apologies or explanations for being lovely. It carries out its mission and vanishes—maybe not into thin air, but into what thin air might be if thin air had a face, a voice, and a soul.

You can buy the 2007 Château La Roque “Pic Saint Loup” at Whole Foods for \$18 a bottle. Wine.com (physically located in San Francisco) has cases for \$191, shipping included, which works out to \$16 a bottle. You can drink the Château La Roque with anything, though it does seem to have an affinity for grilled lamb chops, and vice versa. The first time you drink it, drink it from a water glass.

Having a conversation with yourself is a lot like dying. You are here, and the world is here with you, and then the world says good-bye and you have no idea who or where you are. What happens next is anybody’s guess but I think we can be sure that silence is involved. So, thank you very much for preparing me for the inevitable. I treasure your absence the same way I used to celebrate your presence: with my whole heart. This is the time of year when cares are forgotten and debts are forgiven. These are the holidays, the holy days when Jesus has his birthday, the lit candle appears in the window, and Father Time passes the torch to the infant version of himself. I wish you well. Honest, I do. I think you made a mistake, but your silence has taught me a lesson and it is one I will never forget: Love is life’s big secret. ♥

One Bottle is dedicated to the appreciation of good wines and good times, one bottle at a time. The name “One Bottle” and the contents of this column are ©2009 by onebottle.com. Joshua Baer can be reached at jb@onebottle.com

