

ONE BOTTLE:

The 1999 Bonneau du Martray Corton-Charlemagne

by JOSHUA BAER

In those days, we were at war, and the first casualty of war was truth. The media pretended to tell us the truth. They reported the death of each of our soldiers but they could only make estimates about how many enemies and civilians our soldiers had killed. When we asked the media why they kept those numbers a secret, they said it wasn't their fault. They said our leaders had the numbers but refused to release them. Which made a certain kind of sense. Our leaders were busy listening to our telephone calls and finding out which books we had checked out from the library. How could they be expected to keep us informed of enemy casualties?

We knew our leaders were lying to us, at least that's what we told ourselves. What we didn't know was how much we were lying to our leaders. The lies we told were not bold-faced lies. We were too smart to tell whoppers, at least that's what we told ourselves. The lies we told were practical lies. Honest lies. Necessary lies. We never said anything like "Cut taxes and we'll vote for you" or "Lie to us and we'll vote for you some more." The lies we told were more along the lines of "We'll keep buying gasoline, buying designer jeans, taking vacations, buying software, buying pills, building mansions, refinancing our mansions, buying consumer electronics, paying health care premiums, paying taxes, buying pickup trucks, and looking the other way as long as you keep your undeclared war ten thousand miles away from us. But the minute you let any more smelly Arabs fly any more commercial jets into any more skyscrapers, we'll start asking questions, at which point your goose will be cooked."

It was a deal. It was a devil's bargain, is what it was. It was a dysfunctional relationship between a bunch of voters—one hundred million of us, actually, but who was counting?—and a bunch of politicians who saw the deal as a chance to grab power and hang onto it until we pried it from their cold, dead hands.

Of course, as in any democracy, there were disagreements over the terms of the deal. The liberals among us denounced the war, the way they always did, but after the liberals denounced the war they went out and bought Volvos, paid their taxes, bought gasoline, built mansions, and refinanced their mansions. They ignored the fact that there had never been a time in human history when human beings had not fought wars. They ignored the fact that all of us had grown up during an era of prosperity created, enforced, and prolonged by military superiority. The liberals were too busy criticizing the conservatives to stand up and say, "This is how you lead a country. This is how you win a war. This is how you keep the five billion people in the world who don't have enough from thinking that the one billion people who do have enough have too much. This is the difference between being a leader and being a politician. This is how you sacrifice."

The conservatives among us also liked to disagree. You might say the conservatives gave a whole new meaning to the art of being disagreeable. They knew their days were numbered. They knew the time would come when drilling for oil, polluting the planet, sponsoring dictators, selling the dictators weapons, and making more money than you could count would come to an end. In hindsight, you can see why the conservatives were reluctant to plan for a future they knew

they would never have. In hindsight, you can see why they borrowed money from our children and used it to cut taxes and fight wars. The conservatives were in a hurry. The meter was running. There were bribes to be paid and dirty little secrets to be kept. Time was money and the conservatives had only so much time.

It was an era of confusion, but none of us had the courage to admit we were confused. There had been a time when things went back and forth between normal and abnormal but that time had changed. No one could remember the exact date when things had gone crazy and stayed that way but we all knew it had happened and we all accepted the fact that normal was not going to stage a comeback anytime soon. It was weird. You could still sit down, eat dinner, and drink a spectacular bottle of wine with your family and friends, but in the back of your mind you knew people were dying like flies. You knew there was nothing wrong with celebrating life while less fortunate people died. You told yourself you weren't celebrating *their* poverty, *their* deaths, or the deaths of *their* children. You kept the comedy over here and the tragedy over there. Besides, you had to eat, so why not have something good to drink?

Which brought us to the 1999 Bonneau du Martray Corton-Charlemagne.

Corton-Charlemagne was an *appellation contrôlée* in the Aloxe-Corton commune in Burgundy, which was a beautiful part of the beautiful country of France. Red and white Burgundies were made in the Aloxe-Corton, but the white Burgundies from *Corton-Charlemagne* were the most luxurious. Legend had it that the hillside on which the chardonnay vines were planted had, ages ago, belonged to the emperor Charlemagne.

If you enjoyed drinking white Burgundy, sooner or later you became addicted to it. After you became addicted, you invariably ran into other white Burgundy addicts who told you, confidentially, that *Corton-Charlemagne* was the only white Burgundy worth drinking. When you drank *Corton-Charlemagne* with them, and they were doing the pouring, it was hard to disagree.

In the glass, the color of the 1999 Bonneau du Martray was straw on its way into gold. The bouquet was simultaneously timeless and urgent. On the palate, the *Corton-Charlemagne* went to work on your heart. It filled you with longing, then it satisfied that longing, which only made you want more.

What a wine. What an era. What a great time we had. It was over before we got the chance to appreciate it. At least that's what we told ourselves.

One Bottle is dedicated to the appreciation of good wine and good times, one bottle at a time. The name *One Bottle*, and the contents of this column, are © 2006 by onebottle.com. If you need help finding a wine or building a cellar, write to Joshua Baer at jb@onebottle.com.

