

ONE BOTTLE: The 2007 Domaine Les Pallières Gigondas “Terrasse du Diable”

by JOSHUA BAER

In the wine world, tasting notes are a big deal. Many of the people who buy and sell wine for a living are insecure about their own taste, so they turn to recognized wine experts for *their* taste. More often than not, that outsourced expertise is delivered in the form of the tasting note.

The reigning king of the tasting note is Robert Parker of Monkton, Maryland. Mr. Parker is editor-in-chief of *The Wine Advocate*, a monthly newsletter about wine. (For the record, I think *The Wine Advocate* is the Rosetta Stone of wine newsletters and that anyone who wants to learn about wine should pay attention to Robert Parker. To subscribe to *The Wine Advocate*, go to erobertparker.com.)

Here are Robert Parker’s tasting notes about the 1996 Dom Perignon, widely regarded as one of the greatest Champagnes of all time: “Notes of crushed rocks, honeysuckle, lemon oil, orange marmalade, and white pear provide a stunning aromatic display as well as palate impression. Great acidity and huge flavor intensity backed up by vibrant acidity make this an exquisite Champagne. 98 points.” (Mr. Parker rates individual wines on a 100-point scale, with 60 being a disaster and 100 being perfection.)

The reigning queen of the tasting note is Serena Sutcliffe, a Master of Wine and the current director of Sotheby’s International Wine Department. Here are Serena Sutcliffe’s tasting notes on the 1996 Dom Perignon: “Intense, piercing, rich winery nose. It almost smells Burgundian! Great honied flavour with winery length. Orange zest finish. Great verve and gravitas, combining the two 1996 characteristics of high sugar and high acidity.”

What these and other wine experts’ tasting notes have in common is the widely held assumption that wine tastes like food. This assumption has produced what is commonly known as “Winespeak,” an oenological patois that has become the de facto dialect of the wine world. While Robert Parker and Serena Sutcliffe speak an elegant—and occasionally poetic—form of Winespeak, other wine experts are less restrained. Here are Bruce Sanderson’s tasting notes on the 1996 Dom Perignon (Mr. Sanderson is the tasting director and senior editor at *The Wine Spectator*, arguably the best-known wine magazine in the world): “This features floral, candied citrus, pencil shaving and hazelnut aromas and flavors. It’s fresh and focused, with a firm structure offset by a mouthfilling richness and a lacy texture. Not a blockbuster, but seamless and seductive in its approach. Score: 93.” (*The Wine Spectator* rates individual wines on a 100-point scale similar to Robert Parker’s.)

At *One Bottle*, we disagree with the experts. (And by “we,” I mean *One Bottle*’s research department, which consists of my wife, Eliza, a small group of friends and in-laws who think highly of Eliza’s cooking, and myself.) While we enjoy the unintended comedy of Winespeak, we think Winespeak is based on a false premise. We like to drink wine *with* food but do not think wine is aptly described in terms of food. In short, we think there is more to wine than berries and cherries. We think wine is more accurately described in terms of the human experience.



Here is *One Bottle*’s description of the 1996 Dom Perignon: “If you are dating a Formula One driver, a jaded heiress, an aspiring tycoon, or a chef who thinks foam is ‘really cool,’ then this is an excellent first or second date wine. On the other hand, if you got married during the twentieth century, then this is the Champagne to pour on your thirteenth, nineteenth, or twenty-third anniversary. It has class, and lots of it, but when it comes to charm, it leaves you wanting something more.”

We also think that assigning a numerical value to a bottle of wine is like referring to a woman as “a nine” or “a ten.” It may be expedient, but when it comes to wine (or to women, for that matter), what, exactly, is the big hurry?

Which brings us to the 2007 Domaine Les Pallières Gigondas “Terrasse du Diable.”

In the glass, the 2007 Terrasse du Diable gives you choices. You can use a range of colors—garnet, scarlet, ruby, crimson—to describe the way this wine absorbs and reflects light, or you can admit that the color of the 2007 Terrasse du Diable is beyond description. Like the color of the space between the stars, it manages to be as deep as it is dark.

The bouquet leads you into a quiet room, then it hypnotizes your sense of smell. As you inhale the bouquet, you feel grateful but also apprehensive. Something special is about to happen, something beyond the reach of your expectations.

On the palate, the 2007 Terrasse du Diable makes up for all the bad luck and scorched relationships that haunt our lives. The textures, flavors, and surprises woven into this wine will raise your spirits and keep them elevated for hours, maybe even for days. If you want to congratulate yourself on your own cleverness, open a bottle of Dom Perignon. If you want to fathom the depths of another person’s heart, or your own heart, open a bottle of the 2007 Terrasse du Diable.

You can buy the 2007 Terrasse du Diable from Supercellars in Ridgewood, New Jersey, for \$27 a bottle. Magnums are available from the San Francisco Wine Trading Company in San Francisco, California, for \$76 a magnum—and yes, you will taste the difference. This wine will be available for another three or four months. After that, it will become impossible to find. Why? Because this is a wine full of grace.

Here are my tasting notes, from a dinner a few weeks ago: “Everyone responds to the Terrasse. It’s easy to drink but hard to forget. The generosity factor is off the charts. If taste is destiny, then we are lucky to be drinking this wine.” ♡

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 ©2011 by onebottle.com. For back issues, go to onebottle.com. You can write to Joshua Baer at jb@onebottle.com

