

ONE BOTTLE: THE 2005 DOMAINE LES PALLIÈRES GIGONDAS

BY JOSHUA BAER

People like to complain. It's in our nature to look at a circumstance and see what's wrong with it. Looking at the same circumstance and seeing what's right with it requires insight. Insight requires effort, effort takes time, and time is money, so why waste money on insight when you can save it by complaining?

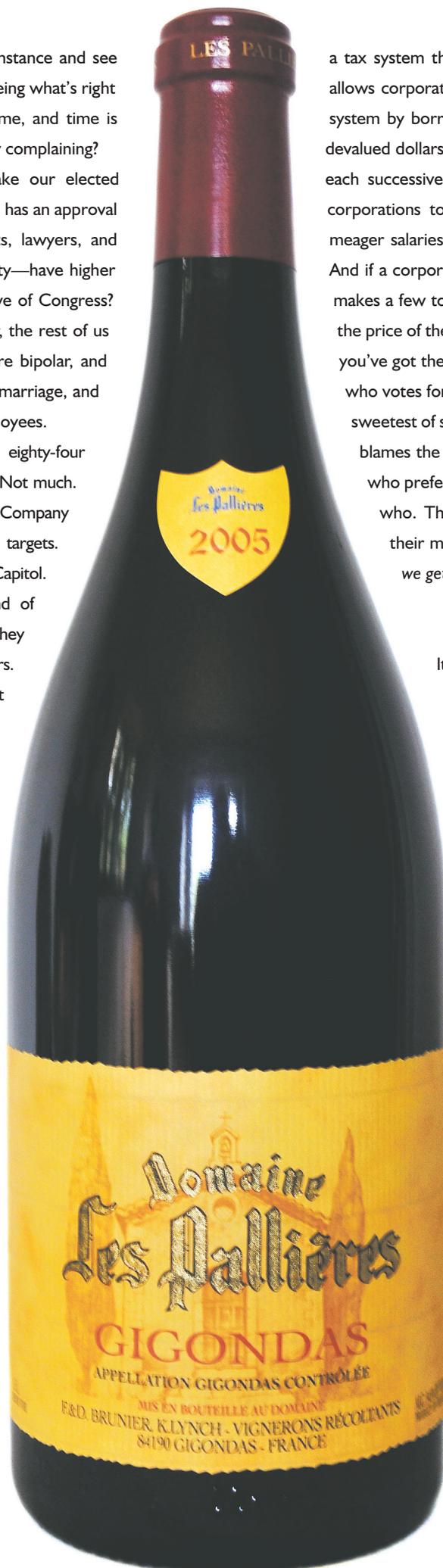
The more people complain, the worse things get. Take our elected officials, for example. According to Bloomberg News, Congress has an approval rating of less than ten percent. Funeral directors, journalists, lawyers, and telemarketers—not what you would call a hotbed of popularity—have higher approval ratings. Why do nine out of ten Americans disapprove of Congress? Because Congress can't get anything done. The rich get richer, the rest of us subsidize their wealth, our economy becomes more and more bipolar, and all our elected officials can do is bicker over debt ceilings, gay marriage, and whether or not to tax billionaires at the same rate as their employees.

Eleven years ago, Congress's approval rating stood at eighty-four percent. What was Congress doing then that it's not doing now? Not much. But a month earlier, in September of 2001, Mohamed Atta & Company hijacked four commercial jets and hit three out of four of their targets. Their fourth target was either the White House or the Capitol. When people are scared, they want leadership, and any kind of leadership is better than none. When people are comfortable, they think they can do a better job of running their lives than their leaders.

What we refuse to admit about our elected officials is that they don't work for us. We may have elected them but they don't work for votes. They work for money, and when it comes to money, nobody has more cash than the corporate world. It costs a congressman or congresswoman an average of two million dollars to finance a reelection campaign. That happens once every two years. For a senator, the price of reelection is an average of ten million dollars, and that's every six years. God help you if you're running for president. President Obama and former Governor Romney will spend well in excess of one billion dollars, *each*, on their campaigns. In a democracy, the people may be sovereign, but even on our best days we don't have that kind of cash. Where does big money come from? It grows on corporate trees. In our country, politicians get elected by a popular vote, but their campaigns—known in polite company as “the candidate's media buy”—get paid for by corporate donations.

Put yourself in a politician's shoes. If the billionaire CEO of a corporation with global interests in gaming, lodging, and money laundering offers to spend a hundred million dollars on television ads extolling your virtues and smearing your opponent, do you say, “No thanks, Sheldon”? Of course you don't. You invite Sheldon to dinner, give him a seat at your elbow, listen to his shopping list, promise to get back to him, and then excuse yourself and move on to the next table before any whiff of fundraising is in the air.

This is why we have gridlock in our government. This is why we have no high-speed trains, an anemic green energy industry, a generation of debt-addicted college graduates, and



a tax system that smells like an open sewer. Gridlock may suck, but gridlock allows corporations—and the billionaires who run them—to frack the financial system by borrowing money at less than one percent and paying it back with devalued dollars. Gridlock also keeps the unemployment rate high, which makes each successive generation of workers less apt to join unions, which allows corporations to hire experienced, well-educated employees who will accept meager salaries and inadequate healthcare benefits in exchange for paychecks. And if a corporation happens to spill more oil than it can afford to clean up, or makes a few too many liars' loans, or places a few too many leveraged bets on the price of the single-family residence, well, isn't that capitalism at work? Not if you've got the American taxpayer standing by, ready to cover your losses. And who votes for the federal appropriations that keep the corporate world in this sweetest of sweet spots? Who raises the debt ceiling, year in and year out, and blames the president for deficit spending? Who speaks for the corporations who prefer not to speak for themselves? Democrats and Republicans, that's who. They go by different names and espouse different ideologies but their message to the corporate world is the same: *If you make sure that we get paid, we'll make sure that you get paid.*

Which brings us to the 2005 Domaine Les Pallières Gigondas.

In the glass, the 2005 Les Pallières lives dangerously. Its deep garnet color is anything but transparent. If you want a wine you can see through, go buy a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, because this wine is not for you. The bouquet extends the risks taken by the wine's opacity. Using food words to describe the 2005 Les Pallières' nose is like using the word “fun” to describe married life. “Fun” tells part of the story, but the whole story is beyond description. It can be suggested, alluded to, or even ridiculed, but describing it is a fool's errand.

On the palate, the 2005 Les Pallières continues to take chances. Halfway through the bottle, you find yourself in that curious, weightless zone where anecdotes, memories, and sorrows converge. I recommend you drink this wine either with someone you have known since childhood or someone you just met. If you make the mistake of drinking it with a casual acquaintance, neither the wine nor the acquaintance will leave you wanting more. Like the end of a perfect day, the finish splits the difference between satisfaction and surprise.

Liberals like to complain about *Citizens United*, the Supreme Court's decision that allows corporations to donate unlimited amounts of money to Super PACs. I like *Citizens United*. I think it tells the truth about our government *and* our country. We have always been, and will always be, for sale to the highest bidder. Until we learn the difference between price and value, and start teaching it to our children, we have no right to complain. ♡

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