

# ONE BOTTLE:

## The 2003 Domaine Les Pallières *Gigondas*

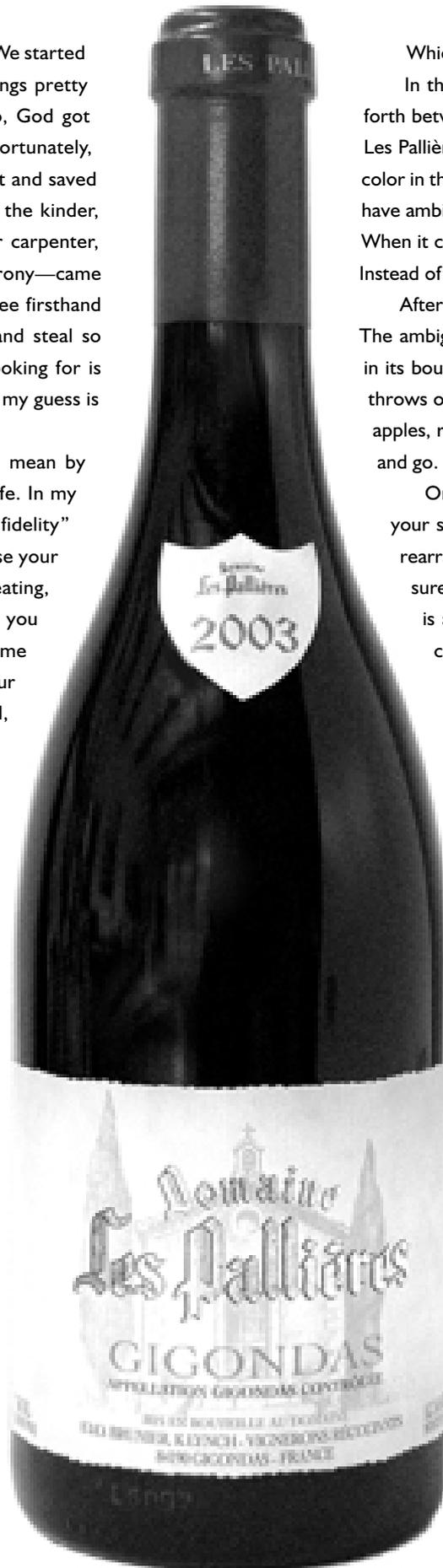
by JOSHUA BAER

Let me say from the outset that infidelity runs in our family. We started lying, cheating, and stealing in the Garden of Eden and things pretty much went downhill from there. Five thousand years ago, God got tired of our excuses and tried to flood us out of existence. Fortunately, one of our ancestors, a carpenter named Noah, built a boat and saved us from extinction. Three thousand years later, God tried the kinder, gentler approach. He turned himself into a man—another carpenter, actually—God always did have a finely honed sense of irony—came down to earth, and lived with us. I guess the idea was to see firsthand what our malfunction was—why we liked to lie, cheat, and steal so much. Whether or not God found the answers He was looking for is open to debate. I don't know the first thing about God, but my guess is we're still as much of a mystery to Him as He is to us.

This might be a good time for me to explain what I mean by infidelity. I definitely mean cheating on your husband or wife. In my book, adultery is infidelity, and vice versa. But when I say “infidelity” I also mean a loss of faith. If you think about it, when you lose your faith, you lose the resolve that keeps you from lying, cheating, and stealing. I'm not saying that faith alone will prevent you from becoming a liar, a cheat, or a thief, but faith does come in handy if and when you decide you've had enough of your own bullshit. Without faith, doing right by your husband, your wife, your God, or yourself is about as easy as living inside of a whale. It's been done, but the deck is stacked against you.

Infidelity is a touchy subject. It's easy to see it in other people. It's harder to see it in yourself. We live in a world where certain people like to confuse faith with obedience. They use words like “family values” and “God” to make the rest of us think they have principles. In fact, the only principles they have are the bottom line. I'm all for bottom lines, but I don't believe you can live by bottom lines alone. No matter how much you have in the bank, without faith your net worth is zero.

The curious thing about wine is that enjoying wine requires faith but it also requires skepticism. If you only drink wines in which you have faith, sooner or later you will lose your taste for your favorite wines and start pretending they still mean something to you. This happens a lot with expensive, brand name wines like California Cabernets and red Burgundies. By the same token, if you have no faith in the wine you're drinking, you'll develop a cynical palette and nothing you drink will be good enough for you. The key is to strike a balance. You have to believe in what you're drinking without taking its attributes for granted. In other words, you have to be a faithful skeptic.



Which brings us to the 2003 Domaine Les Pallières *Gigondas*.

In the glass, I like the way the 2003 Les Pallières goes back and forth between a deep garnet and a royal purple. If you hold a glass of Les Pallières between your eyes and a lit candle, you'll see a world of color in there. The colors will move into and out of each other—they'll have ambiguous meanings and messages—but don't let that rattle you. When it comes to wine, ambiguity is the sign of an honest winemaker. Instead of confusing you, it feeds your imagination.

After you fathom its color, swirl your glass and inhale the bouquet. The ambiguity that lives in the color of this wine has a second home in its bouquet. Each time I drink this wine, I'm amazed by the way it throws off the aromas of a thirty year-old wine. Suggestions of baked apples, roast lamb, treacle, cookies in the oven, and lemon pie come and go. It's hard not to like a wine that smells like home cooking.

On the palette, the 2003 Les Pallières challenges your faith and your skepticism. It's smooth, but then the finish gets in there and rearranges your first impressions of the wine before you're even sure of what they are. People talk about slow food. This wine is a slow drink. You don't swallow it as much as savor it. You celebrate whatever it is that you like so much about it, then you go back and question the premise of that celebration. The wine demands things of you. It asks you to figure out what it is about it that you can't figure out. If you're a cynic, you sidestep the challenge. But if you're a faithful skeptic, you pour yourself another glass.

Human nature is a great mystery. It's a who-done-it, a thriller, a red herring, a tall tale, and a parable all rolled into one. I've been alive for fifty-three years. I've seen ordinary people do extraordinary things, but I've never seen anything as consistently off the wall as human nature. Wine distills human nature. That's why no one can engineer a perfect wine. You don't have to love wine in order to appreciate human nature, but you do have to appreciate human nature in order to love wine. If you don't believe me—and why should you? I'm a self-admitted infidel—then you have a choice. You can dismiss the things I say as whimsy or you can take them on faith. Whatever you do, remember this: A wine that answers all your questions and satisfies all your cravings is an hollow wine. It has nothing to offer you but disappointment. By the same token, a wine that makes you wonder is a generous wine. It offers you the world. All it asks in return is that you drink it.

*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](mailto:jb@onebottle.com).

