



WINETASTING

100 POINTS IN THE GLASS

By Rasmus Palsgård
Photo Flemming Gernyx

The scene was set for a great night, when a small gathering at Nimb tasted 10 wines which had all been granted the coveted 100 points by The Wine Advocate. It became a tasting dinner that offered both disappointment as well as vertiginous excitement, and at the same time questions were raised about using Robert Parker's assessments as a measure of fine wine.

There are wine tastings, and then there are *wine tastings*, and the wine importer Jørgen Krüff from L'Esprit du Vin is notoriously famous for organizing some of those most spectacular on Danish soil. The tasting which took place on a late summer evening at the Nimb Hotel was no exception. 10 wines were chosen for the tasting with the theme, wines that had received 100 points from The Wine Advocate, Robert Parker's legendary and world-renowned wine magazine. With 10 times 100 points, the name of the tasting landed on the delightfully decadent '1000-points tasting', which is not something one comes across very often – it was certainly the first time I could look forward to experience 10 wines which shared The Wine Advocate's highest score in a single evening.



4



1

(1) Gastro Journalist Rasmus Palsgård attended a rarer type of wine tasting which took place at Nimb.

(2) The theme for the tasting was wines which had all received 100 points in Robert Parker's famous wine magazine, The Wine Advocate.

(3) Great wines always leave a sustained impression, and it is always good to take notes to remember all the impressions.

(4) Nimb seen from Tivoli after twilight.



2



3



5

The American lawyer Robert Parker launched his publication *The Wine Advocate* in 1978; a wine medium where American consumers could get independent, honest reviews of wine. Parker's breakthrough came in earnest, when he – as opposed to many European critics – gave the 1982-vintage in Bordeaux very positive critique and his evaluation of the vintage turned out to be true. He introduced his 100-points scale, which was easy for consumers to understand, and combined with the heavily increasing interest in wine in the USA during the 80's and 90's Robert Parker became the foremost wine critic in the world. A positive review could seriously move pallets, while a lukewarm evaluation could almost ruin the sales for a given producer.

In the beginning of his career, Parker had a preference for intense, full-bodied wines with power, and especially favoured wines from Bordeaux, Rhône and Napa Valley. His taste became synonymous with top-quality in certain areas, and many producers began

”
 “Diversity is now and again what makes the world of wine so exciting. One single judge of taste and quality should never define how an entire industry should act.

to make wines which appealed to his preferences. This phenomenon became known as *parkerization*, a style with more alcohol, fruit and powerful structure which more and more producers and areas made their own to hunt the powerful critic's favour; but in the last 10-15 years there has been a counterbalance against this method of winemaking – not least in the previously mentioned areas where Parker especially had had great influence. They seek a lighter style with lower alcohol and less use of new barrels. This trend also had the effect that some wine critics and enthusiasts do not consider a top evaluation by Robert Parker a conclusive seal of quality, because if 100 points means opulent, alcoholic and heavily-extracted wines, it probably isn't a guide to rely on much, unless it's that particular style for which one has affinity towards.

Judgement for debate

It is an exciting debate which was also discussed around our table; but it doesn't make sense to point fingers at Robert Parker in my opinion. All he has done is to give independent reviews of wine based on his taste. It is not illegal to have personal preferences, so perhaps the discussion should be if it has been a good development that many wine producers began to design their wines after what Robert Parker liked rather than follow the style in which they truly believed. It is easier for me to pick sides in this discussion, because diversity is now and again what makes the world of wine so exciting. One single judge of taste and quality should never define how an entire industry should act.

Let's move time forward to the tasting at Nimb Hotel once more, where the impressive collection of wines is about to be tasted. Now the big question is, if the wines can speak for themselves. My experience with the greatest wines is that they will always show greatness regardless of which style they belong to. Greatness is in many ways a universal quality which can be experienced in the slimmest and purest Riesling from Pfalz, as well as a strapping cabernet sauvignon from Napa Valley. It was obviously exciting to find out if the 10 wines chosen for this evening's session possessed this greatness, or if it would become more apparent that these wines were chosen on account of their opulent style rather than something reminiscent of objective quality, if such a thing even exists.

Nonetheless, the scene was set with 10 star-studded cast members, including three 1982's from Bordeaux, two champagnes from Jaques Selosse as well as the first Trockenbeerenauslese from Rheingau to ever score the maximum of 100 points and was also the rarest wine at the tasting – we will return to this.

As mentioned, many of the wines were already long in the tooth and in such an event, the variation of the bottle also becomes a bigger factor than with younger wines – regardless of how well they are kept. With that said, none of the bottles showed any sign of fault, so let us get to it. The wines are described in the order they were served.

About Robert Parker

Born in 1947, Baltimore, USA, and educated as a lawyer. In 1978 he published the first *The Wine Advocate*, a type of print newsletter. Things picked up serious speed when he praised the 1982-vintage in Bordeaux a great deal, which was the starting shot for Robert Parker's success as a wine critic. He is especially famous for introducing the 100-points scale which has become an international reference for reviews of wine. Now Robert Parker is retired. In 2019 *The Wine Advocate* was bought by Michelin.

(5) It was the wine importer Jørgen Krüff (in the middle on the right long side) from *L'Esprit du Vin* who was behind the initiative.

(6) With 10 times 100 points, the wine tasting ended up being called a '1000-points tasting.'



Millésime 2008, Champagne Jacques Selosse, Champagne, France

When we talk about grower-champagne (champagne from small producers who grow the grapes themselves and tend to the entire process) there are none above or next to Jacques Selosse, the pioneer over them all in this specific category. Millésime is a blend of many different crus from the same vintage which reflects the diversity in Selosse's vineyards, and the 2008 vintage is throughout Champagne considered to be the best vintage in this millennium. In the glass it reveals an approachable, deep golden colour, while it opens in the nose with notes of lightly oxidized apple cider, ryebread dough, toast, mature cheese and tarte tatin. The first taste hit the tastebuds as a true energy release which gives one shortness of breath and chills. You feel the nerve in this champagne, which makes itself known through a kilometric depth of minerality of flint and smoke, which is supported by an impressive wealth of ripe fruit – champagne does not come greater than what Selosse has accomplished here. The only part I took issue with was that the wine relatively quickly – after about five minutes – began to whither in the glass, but that is a minor problem, because its power of attraction was so great that the content of the glass would disappear instantly under normal circumstances.

Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial Blanco 1986, Marques de Murrieta, Rioja, Spain

White wine at about 40 years of age can be a challenge, because the fruit has totally faded after such a long time, so you just sit with the oxidative notes that are left. But Castillo Ygay is made of something else, which makes a long-distance runner of the most impressive kind. The wine is made with 97% Viura and 3% Malvasia from a vineyard at 485 meters altitude with vines planted back in 1945. The grapes of the 1986-vintage have matured in barrels for 21(!) years and a following six years in steel tanks before it was released in 2014, and it was the first Spanish white wine to receive 100 Parker-points. As mentioned, it is not easy for white wine to mature for so long, but in the glass the wine seemed to be as fit as in its prime. The oxidative notes of ripe pears and apples were expected and part of the style, but that the wine simultaneously possessed a dizzying arsenal of fresh notes and tight agile acidity was extremely impressive. I took note of fully ripe Iberian ham, truffles, roasted hazelnuts and resin in the bouquet, while it shined with its both broad shoulders and lightness of a ballerina in its taste.

It is a wine I would love to enjoy by itself or with an assortment of Iberian ham, salted Marcona almonds and perhaps an oyster to enhance the wine's lovely minerality, definitely one of my favourites this evening.



6

2013 L'Ermita 2013, Álvaro Palacios, Priorat, Spain

Álvaro Palacios is regarded as one of Spain's best winemakers, and he is renowned for his ability to create magic in the glass from anywhere in the wine regions of Rioja, Bierzo and Priorat. L'Ermita is from the last-mentioned area and is his most prestigious wine, which is simultaneously considered one of the most iconic examples of Priorat. Red wine from Priorat can, with its generally high alcohol and intense power, be quite a mouthful, but in the hands of Palacios, who is known for approaching wine production with finesse, one can hope to experience a wine with great balance as well as lots of finesse. The hope turned out to be well-founded. The wine is made from grenache and carignan from old vines. Dark berries scurried from the glass and up in the nose which quickly solidified that this wine just has begun its potentially long life. It almost tasted like freshly squeezed dark fruit juice, while I could also sense there was an infinite number of layers yet to come. There were some notes of eucalyptus, menthol, hot spices, cacao and chocolate, and I enjoyed the personality and energy of the wine one could not miss. It was definitely one of the most complete red wines that I have tasted in a long time, and I must once more take off my hat for Palacios' ability to bring out elegance in his wines no matter where in Spain his grapes are grown.

Pingus 2004, Dominio de Pingus, Ribera del Duero, Spain

The Danish Peter Sisseck knows something about the positive effect high Parker-points can have for an up-and-coming winery. When Parker gave Pingus 1995 – the first vintage of the wine – 96-100 points for its momentary assessment, Sisseck and his wines were catapulted into the elite of wine producers, and many times since then Pingus has reached the maximum of 100 points. This includes among others the 2004-vintage, which was poured into our glasses this evening. L'Ermita and Pingus were served side by side and the difference was palpable. While L'Ermita appeared to present Priorat in its most elegant form, Pingus turned out to be an example of how concentrated and powerful the red wines from Ribera del Duero can become. Nine years older the wine felt much more mature with notes of glazed beetroot, truffles, salsiccia, charcuterie and menthol in the bouquet. The meeting between the wine and the mouth felt like a perfect punch from a boxer right in the diaphragm – you were pushed back in your seat by the overwhelming power of the wine, a level of power which I haven't experienced before. Salty notes of umami, mushroom bouillon and sweet liquorice were left behind in the aftertaste of this dense wine, and even though the wine normally would be too dark and extracted for my taste, there were something so attractive, almost supernatural about it. As Jørgen Krüff said: "It appears to have a certain impact on the mind"



7





”

“Dark berries scurried from the glass and up in the nose which quickly solidified that this wine just has begun its potentially long life.”



Château Mouton Rothschild 1982, 1er Grand Cru Classé Pauillac, Bordeaux, France

In a tasting with Robert Parker as its theme it seems almost obligatory to include red Bordeaux from 1982. This tasting included three 100-points wines of that vintage, which catapulted the American onto the great scene of wine criticism. They were served to us side by side with Mouton as the first. I have tasted the 1982 once before, and I remember it as concentrated with a full-bodied viscosity, but here it was fluffy and void of tannins. The dark berry fruit was converted into notes of currants, currant jelly, red bell peppers, tobacco and black pepper. I was missing a bit more structure from the wine and a bit more concentration, but the clearly aged, more frail version was definitely also something. A lovely glass but compared to the two others from Bordeaux it was easily the weakest in my mouth.

Château Cheval Blanc 1982, 1er Grand cru Classé Saint-Emilion, Bordeaux, France

Cheval Blanc needs no grand introduction, because the legendary château in Saint-Emilion has a distinctly special status among followers of the wines from Bordeaux. Based on my experience with the château’s wines, Cheval Blanc is distinguished by great finesse, elegance and a very polished, smooth, velvet-like expression of tannins, which can almost be a bit too nice and orderly, while the wines are young, and one might expect a bit more wildness on the tongue. With that in mind it was also interesting that Cheval Blanc this evening appeared with tighter structure with more body and viscosity in the mouth compared to Mouton. I appreciated that and also enjoyed the aroma with notes of plumbs, eucalyptus, black pepper and chocolate; certainly a great glass of wine, but it lacked the last percent before I could feel something decidedly magical in my senses.

(7) Mikkel Ustrup, who is high-end director at Tivoli has been a part of the revitalization of Nimb’s culinary profile.

(8) Almost 40-year-old white wine from Rioja is poured into the glasses.

(9) Berlingske’s food-and wine critic Søren Frank was among the guests.



8

9

”

“Tasting the wine is like being hit by a train and softly kissed at the same time; a very paradoxical feeling which both seduces and excites.”



Château Lafleur 1982, Pomerol, Bordeaux, France

While both Mouton-Rotschild and Cheval Blanc have produced presumably 100.000 bottles, give or take, of their 1982-vintage, Château Lafleur’s production from that year was only about a tenth of that, which is attributed to the substantially smaller area under vine. Château Lafleur is based in Pomerol and is considered to be one of the best châteaux in the commune, and the small production also makes the wines quite rare.

This was my first experience with Château Lafleur, but up to this tasting I had heard from many that the 1982 from this producer is something completely special, and they were right.

Lafleur gave off the impression of being the only one of the three Bordeaux wines to have several kilometers left in its legs, and while writing this, it is at an exceptionally great stage. If one would resort to the expression “complete” this wine totally defines that expression. The bouquet was generous with concentrated notes of dark berries, plums, chocolate, brown liquorice, iron and matured beef. In the mouth it had a perfect balance of youthful concentration and beautifully polished, well-rounded tannins, while the aftertaste lasted for many minutes. I would probably have clocked this wine to be 10 years younger if I had received it during a blind tasting – a very positive thought about a 42-year-old wine. This is how 100 points should taste.



10



11

(10) The group, consisting of eight people, discussed through the evening if a top review by The Wine Advocate still can be seen as a definitive seal of quality.

(11) Eva Fricke, who participated in the tasting, has quickly made huge strides in her career as a wine producer and is the first to receive 100 points for a Trockenbeerenauslese from Rheingau.

Substance (1986-2012, deg. 07-2019) Grand Cru Avize, Champagne Jacques Selosse, Champagne, France

After three superstars from Bordeaux, it would be unworthy to continue down the red trail, and Jacques Selosse's unique champagne Substance came with a perfect change of scenery which was welcomed with open arms. Substance is based on a solera system, inspired by the wines from Jerez, where many vintages, year after year have been blended to create a very complex champagne. This Substance was based on the vintages from 1986 until 2012 and was disgorged in July 2019. Selosse shows with Substance what limits there are for how powerful and intense a champagne can become. Tasting this wine was as if being hit by a train and gently kissed at the same time, a very paradoxical feeling that seduces and excites you. I found notes of hay, roasted lemon, flint rocks, fallen apples and from the barrel some notes of toast. As opposed to Selosse's 2008, Substance was completely stable in the glass for the few minutes it was allowed to stay before it disappeared like morning dew, a magical champagne experience.

Lorcher Krone Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese 2019, Eva Fricke, Rheingau, Germany

Eva Fricke's career as a wine producer has taken enormous strides, since she began in 2006, making wines from old vineyards in the Rheingau as a hobby. For the same reason, it wasn't exactly on the cards that she would be the first person ever to receive 100 points for a Trockenbeerenauslese from Rheingau. Trockenbeerenauslese, the sweetest category for German wine, can only be produced during years where several factors must coincide perfectly. This happened in 2019 where Eva Fricke and her team of harvesters, after thoroughly picking and sorting every grape by hand, could produce 30 half-bottles. For the occasion, Jørgen Krüff had to obtain a bottle from Sotheby's in London to bring it for the tasting. Eva Fricke participated in the tasting and a chill went through the whole room, when she thought the wine was corked. Luckily, it was a false alarm and we could breathe again while still unaware of the wine sensation that was awaiting us. The first part of the wine was its seductive bouquet, which gave lime and apple gastrique with delicious notes of noble rot in the form of orange peel, honey and saffron. The acidity and sweetness stood as two monumental pillars which kept each other perfectly stable in complete symbiosis. A light nuance of salty minerality worked as the last piece of a puzzle that took the wine beyond perfection.



Château d'Yquem 1962, 1er Grand Cru Classé Supérieur Sauternes, Bordeaux, France

Château d'Yquem is considered by many to be the world's greatest dessert wine. The château has had special status since the classification of Bordeaux's left bank châteaux in 1855. Of all the châteaux, it was the only one to be associated with the adjective "supérieur" in addition to the already prestigious classification 1er Grand Cru Classé, and while sweet wines do not enjoy the same glorification as before, Château d'Yquem is one of the sweet wines which still gets wine enthusiasts on the edge of their seats. Generally, I am convinced that Sauternes often lacks acidity to balance its sweetness along with the very intense notes from the noble rot, and I was unfortunately proven correct despite sitting with a glass of one of the greatest Yquem vintages. It wasn't good for Yquem to be served after Eva Fricke's Trockenbeerenauslese as it made for an unflattering comparison. The bouquet came across as burned, with notes of burned caramel from a crème brûlée that had received too much from the blowtorch, and what other subtle notes were there never reached the surface. Yquem is said to have incredible aging potential, but this was not a wine which had aged gracefully, and I almost felt bad for it to be completely humiliated by Fricke's counterpart 57 years its junior.

Thus ended a tasting that will not be forgotten soon. My theory that greatness never goes away and that one can still see the greatness in the wines – whether a fan of Parker or not – proved to be true.