



WINE NOTES

By Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

BEATING THE CLOCK

I went to an estate sale where I purchased assorted bottles of wine, reds and whites from California from 1995 to 1998. They were \$1 each. The person selling them said they were stored "correctly." Are they too old and should I just throw them in the waste can? Or is there a chance that they may still be all right to consume?

—Joyce Young,
Jacksonville, Fla.

It's always a pleasure to hear from someone from John's hometown. Ms. Young included a list of the wines and, indeed, they are easy-drinking wines that should be consumed immediately if not sooner. At \$1 each, though, we also would have taken her risk in a minute. More broadly, you might be surprised how often we're asked, in one context or another,

"Should I try it or just pour it down the sink?" The question comes from people who think they have kept a bottle too long, who were given an aged bottle, who accidentally abused a bottle and so on. So here's our answer to that question: Never pour a bottle out without trying it. Wines, even old and abused ones, sometimes surprise you. And even after you open a wine and don't like the first sip, wait before you pour it out, because sometimes wines get more palatable after a time with air. As for the inevitable follow-up question: If you are considering pouring it down the sink, no, don't cook with it, either. You shouldn't cook with any wine you wouldn't drink.

VETTING VINTAGES

Several weeks ago your column talked about 2004 Chianti Classicos. You said any one from 2004 would be good. Last week you talked about 2005 Bordeaux. Are there any rules of thumb to follow when you have a choice of the same wine, same vintner but several vintages?

—Karen Trotter,
Newfield, N.Y.

We're often asked questions about the significance of the vintage. A vintage is simply the year in which the grapes were picked. Because most wines are made to drink right away, generally the vintage you want is the most recent on the shelf and the whole idea of a "good year" or a "bad year" doesn't matter. If you have a choice of two everyday Pinot Grigios at the supermarket, for instance, get the 2006 instead of the 2005. Don't worry about the weather or any expert ratings of the vintage; just get the young one. When it comes to finer wine, and certainly when it comes to wines you plan to lay down, it can be important to know something about the vintage and that really is all about the weather. Maybe there was hail one year during the harvest

and perfect sunshine another year; you want to know which year had the sunshine because the grapes probably got riper and tastier and the wine is better. Many good wine stores give away vintage charts near the cash register. In addition, there are many online. Here are four good places to start: erobertparker.com, bassins.com, decanter.com and

bbr.com. Keep in mind, though, that any vintage chart, no matter how complex, is just a guide. Some vintners find a way to make good wine in bad years and, unfortunately, some find a way to make bad wine in good years. When we give advice, we try to make it generally useful so, in case of the Chianti Classico, we think you'll have good luck with 2004 and, with inexpensive red Bordeaux, we think you'll have good luck with 2005. Having a general idea in the back of your mind about the most reliable years can be useful at the wine store.

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