



Judgment of Paris 40th Anniversary Time

BLOG | APRIL 30, 2016 - 9:56PM | BY DEBORAH GROSSMAN

The 40th Anniversary of the Judgment of Paris is generating wine buzz and filling inboxes with press releases and invitations to commemorative events. If you are an elite collector, it's time to uncork the '73 [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](#) cab or [Chateau Montelena](#) chardonnay. Otherwise, consider a Napa favorite.

A major factor in the enthusiasm about the 40th anniversary is that the main players from the Judgment are still involved with wine. Take Mike Grgich, the winemaker for the '73 Chateau Montelena. He celebrated his 93rd birthday in April—the same day his autobiography, "Glass Full of Miracles," was published. His daughter Viola is now the primary ambassador for [Grgich Hills Estate](#) and is hosting anniversary events such as a winemaker dinner at the National Museum of American History in Wash. D.C.

I spoke with Steven Spurrier, who hosted the tasting at his Paris fine wine shop in conjunction with America's bicentennial celebration, at the 2014 opening of the new FAY Outlook & Visitor Center at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. I posed for a photo with Spurrier (second from the left), Warren Winiarski who crafted the winning cabernet and founded Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, winemaker Heidi Barrett and her husband Bo Barrett who was the assistant winemaker for the winning chardonnay at Chateau Montelena and is currently CEO and Master Winemaker.

I spoke with Steven Spurrier, who hosted the tasting at his Paris fine wine shop in conjunction with America's bicentennial celebration, at the 2014 opening of the new FAY Outlook & Visitor Center at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. I posed for a photo with Spurrier (second from the left), Warren Winiarski who crafted the winning cabernet and founded Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, winemaker Heidi Barrett and her husband Bo Barrett who was the assistant winemaker for the winning chardonnay at Chateau Montelena and is currently CEO and Master Winemaker.

Spurrier's motivation was straightforward in holding the Paris tasting. "I just wanted to bring attention to California wines."

Still displaying an element of disbelief at the outcome of the tasting, Spurrier added that if the tasting had been held on a different day with different judges, the outcome could have been different. "It was that moment in time that made it special," he added.

Spurrier, a long time contributor to Decanter magazine, has added the title of vintner has been added to his resumé. He and wife own **Bride Valley Vineyards** in Dorset, “where the English countryside sparkles.” After careful selection of root stock from a famous Burgundian nursery, their first vintage grown on his wife's sheep farm appeared in 2014. Spurrier has joined what he calls the “English sparkling wine revolution.”

At the Stag's Leap event I also connected with George Taber, the sole journalist in attendance at the tasting who broke the story for Time Magazine. But he added, “The article was only four paragraphs—a short piece which changed the world's view of Napa.

At the time, Taber said, he had no clue of the impact of what was then called the “Bicentennial Tasting.” “There were maybe 30 wineries in Napa. Now there are over 600. It also encouraged American consumption of wine.”

Taber is at heart a wine historian. “In the early 60s to 70s, Americans were still coming out of Prohibition in a way. They were drinking sweet and cheap wines. Gallo was making okay dry wines, but the majority of their products were sweet. At the height of its popularity, Manhattan's 21 Club had only French wines on their list. The Judgment of Paris was a catalyst, though Steven didn't mean it to be a game-changer for American wine,” said Taber.

Ever the curious journalist, Taber published “In Search of Bacchus: Wanderings in the Wonderful World of Wine” in 2009. In the book Taber shares the stories of intriguing winemakers from countries such as Italy, France, Germany, the U.S. and the Republic of Georgia.

I first met Taber as he continued his wine adventures in continental Croatia in 2010. Last year our paths crossed again as judges for the **Finger Lakes International Wine Competition** in Rochester. What wines did we bond over? Given Taber's deep knowledge of and love for Georgian wines, we lifted a glass of Rkatsiteli and Saperavi atin Hammondsport on Keuka Lake.

At the FAY Outlook and Visitor Center opening, Winiarski was pleased with the outcome of the new tasting room. Always dreaming of a tasting room overlooking the Stags Leap Palisades, Winiarski said he is pleased with the quality stewardship of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars by the joint partnership of **Ste. Michelle Wine Estates** and **Marchesi Antinori**.

The movie “Bottle Shock” missed the 30th anniversary by two years. But the buzz around it continues. No doubt recently increased downloads will peak on May 24th. Many wine groups, formal and otherwise, will also honor and emulate the event.

Vintners in the Paso Robles region got a head start in April when the CABS of Distinction event was held. Hosted by the **Paso Robles CAB (Cabernet and Bordeaux) Collective (PRCC)** at the new **Allegretto Vineyard Resort**, six sommeliers tasted and discussed wines blind from Paso wineries with a few from Napa compared against several from Bordeaux. The sommeliers guessed incorrectly on many Paso wines. Pleased with the outcome, Calcareous Vineyard winemaker Jason Joyce of Paso said, "The Judgment of Paso was the culmination of what has been a four year journey in redefining our Cabernet program at Calcareous."

As an example of the many celebrations, the **Napa/Sonoma group of Women of Wine Sense** are celebrating with a grand tasting of fine Sonoma wines on the plaza in Sonoma.

At the FAY Outlook and Visitor Center opening, Spurrier was eager to tell me about his newly released Bride Valley sparkling wine. Now I will taste some of his bubbles at **Raymond Vineyards**' 40th Anniversary on May 15th at the Judgment of Napa, a creative idea from Jean-Charles Boisset who will host a tasting dual between Boisset's **JCB** range of California sparkling wine and Spurrier's English offerings—a rare opportunity because Spurrier's is rarely seen in the U.S.

But I am also looking forward to celebrating the 40th anniversary on the actual anniversary date at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Here we can fantasize over the original 1973 wine with first tastes of newly-released S.L.V. Estate Cabernet with a commemorative label replicating the original 1973 Cab which took top red honors. We'll toast those special moments in Paris and beyond when Spurrier, Winiarski, Barrett, Grgich and Taber evolved into disrupters of the Bordeaux reign in the wine world.