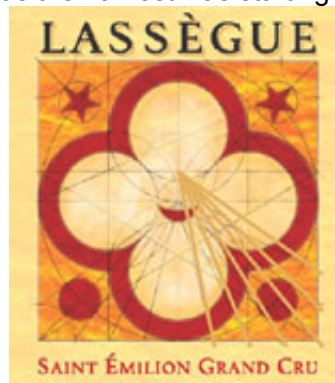




A Welcome Late-Release Bordeaux

By Mary Ewing-Mulligan

Château Lassègue, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru “Lassègue” 2005 (Sovereign Wine Imports, \$150): In 2005, I happened to visit Bordeaux just as the harvest was starting. Winemakers and chateau owners were giddy with excitement over the fruits of the warm and very dry growing season. The Merlot grapes were gorgeous -- plump, dark and healthy. At one chateau when the owner described with pride the extreme care he takes in sorting the grapes prior to crushing, I wondered how much incremental benefit that process could offer in a year when all the grapes appeared so perfect. It was an effortless harvest of even ripening in which winemakers could wait for just the right moment to pick each parcel.



Most of the 2005 Bordeaux wines entered the U.S. market about eight years ago and quickly found their way into the cellars of collectors. The 2005 vintage of Chateau Lassegue's flagship wine, "Lassegue," however, has just been released. Vigneron Pierre Seillan decided to hold back his 2005 for several years after bottling the wine in June 2007 to ensure that it had properly rested at the chateau before its general release. He believes that his 2005 can age for more than 30 years; in fact the wine is still a baby now.

Chateau Lassegue is a Saint-Emilion Grand Cru estate situated on the east side of the Saint-Emilion plateau. The estate and 18th century chateau were owned for 250 years by a single family until 2003, when it became the property of the Jackson family -- the late Jess Jackson and wife Barbara Banke -- and the Seillan family -- Pierre and Monique. Pierre Seillan had collaborated with the Jacksons since 1997 as winemaker of Verité in Sonoma County, where he produces refined Old World-inspired blends from Bordeaux varieties. He also makes wines in the Jackson-owned properties of Tenuta di Arceno in Tuscany, Anakota in Sonoma and Bellvue-Seillan, a new family property in Gascony. Now, a decade into the new era of Chateau Lassegue, the next generation of the Jackson and Seillan families are also actively involved in the property.

Pierre Seillan's winemaking focus revolves around identifying individual vineyard blocks, or micro-crus, managing their growth individually and then vinifying their fruit separately. With vines ranging in age from 40 to 60 years, more than a dozen different soil types, and vineyard locations on the crest of Saint-Emilion's limestone plateau, on the clay and limestone slopes below, and on the silica and gravel terrain at the bottom of the hill, Chateau Lassegue provides a rich complexity of terroirs with which to work. Seillan directs the grapes from the foothills into a separate wine, Chateau Vignot; the other parcels produce Lassègue and its second label, Les Cadrans de Lassègue.

Lassegue 2005 is a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon at 60, 35 and 5 percent respectively. Even at eight years old, the wine has a deep and youthful color. The aroma is also youthful, suggesting fresh cranberry, cherry preserves, and dark plum, with warm notes of baking spices and cocoa. In your mouth, this wine is powerful and yet refined, its every characteristic balanced by an opposing, equally attractive impression. Its fruit character is ripe and rich, for example, and yet the wine has an improbable freshness of acidity. Similarly, the wine's texture is fleshy and plush and yet the wine shows precision and purity of fruit in its finish. Although the wine's tannin is considerable, its ripe, fresh fruit balances the tannin effortlessly. Weight, rich texture, ripeness -- and yet delineation, freshness and focus.

I certainly recommend decanting this wine and allowing it to air for an hour or more before drinking it in a large glass. If you have a cool cellar, you can age it for many years.

93 Points