



Love and loathing in Bordeaux: Vinexpo 2011

By Ned Goodwin MW Jul 01, 2011 7:55AM UTC

Leaving Bordeaux and Vinexpo for Paris last week brought a rush of elation. Soon I would be eating good food and slamming crunchy Loire wines; meandering amidst the memories of lost love and the halcyon era of youth, when a student there.

Bordeaux is a city of handsome nineteenth century architecture, good shopping and a certain confidence which, despite the commercial allure of her top wines, feels provincial rather than international. There is nothing wrong with that of course and I am sure that in context, 'Bordeaux offers the pulse of a big city without the worries', as a taxi driver put it. Yet the traffic in Bordeaux is as gnarled as the new tram line is slick and it is this slickness perhaps, for which I have yet to find love.

I was in Bordeaux for Vinexpo, a paean to largesse: endless halls crammed with suited agents, buyers, producers, lycra-clad salesgirls; everyone in between. I soon learned that Vinexpo, unlike Vinitaly or even Prowein, is not a wine show for tasting but solely for business. For me, the naif, this was disenchanting.

While the Loire section in Hall 1 was interesting and the Irpinia stand in Hall 2 well supported by fine producers, detailed literature and an attractive area for tasting; it was what Jancis Robinson calls the 'off-piste' events that proved most rewarding. Jancis suggested that the organizers of Vinexpo discourage these extracurricular tastings and yet, given the sheer number of them, it would appear that many producers feel compelled to get their wines shown amidst the phalanx of the wine trade albeit, feel it incredulous to exhibit their wines in the main Vinexpo setting.

These producers likely feel that their wines are overlooked amidst the extravaganza. Given that many of the peripheral events were held by consortiums of organic, biodynamic and/or youthful gangs cheekily inviting attendees to 'rise up' for 'real wine,' and the like; some of these events smacked of rebellion. Then again, given the expense of renting floor space in the main shebang, it is also likely that many smaller producers simply could not afford to exhibit there.

In any event, my experience was augmented by these 'off-piste' gatherings and it is to these that I will return next year, risking accusations of perfidy! The most comprehensive gathering was 'la Renaissance des Appellations' which was held in the Grand Theatre, as glamorous a setting for a tasting as any.

The stars of course were Domaines Leroy, Lafarge and Leflaive of Burgundy and yet, it was Domaine Delesvaux and the precise Chenins and scented Cabernets from Anjou; Domaine Prieure Saint Christophe and unusual age-worthy mountain wines of the Savoie; the tangy crystalline Jurancons from Domaine de Souch and, uplifting in the heat of the French scrum, the glorious scents of violet and five-spice from Castagna's Aussie alpine Syrahs, huddled near Rebholz's tango of phenolics and acidity, the type of oral stimuli that seldom exists outside the finest expressions of German Riesling; that satisfied the most. Sadly, there was little Bordeaux among my favourites.

Elsewhere I tasted wonderful wines from two domaines in Pic Saint Loup, the understated and poised range from Chateau de Lancyre, offering superb value; alongside the intensity and chiseled precision of Chateau de Cazeneuve and the tour de force cuvee, le Roc des Mates.

Lastly, at another organic sideshow although this one, the 'Expressions des Vignerons Bio,' a tasting within the confines of Vinexpo albeit, inconveniently slotted in a remote hall on the other side of the river; I discovered a wine that made me swoon: Domaine de Cebene's Faugeres 'les Bancel's'. Here, Brigitte Chevalier is crafting stunning wines from schistous terroir, light on their feet, aromatic and bundled with ripe yet stemmy complexity, for grip and grace.

My heart had sunk trundling the halls of Vinexpo and yet, here I was, tasting uplifting and energizing wines from producers driven by the hope that something beautiful will emerge from their land and toil. Suddenly I felt, again, incredibly grateful to be in the wine world.