

my return from Paris in the 1980s I found myself in the role of his understudy. This involved receiving telephone calls from Michael along the lines of: 'Steven, I've been invited to lecture at such-and-such a place next month and can't go, so I have selected you.' Acting as a replacement for Michael led to my first trip to Chile, to a wine symposium in Helsinki, to a weekend of wine dinners in Nashville and even an appearance on *The Sensible Show* at ITV's studios in Manchester. I never lost my place as No 2 and when a smart cruise line offered us (and our wives) a free week on board in exchange for a few talks, Michael chose the South China Seas and left me with with Portsmouth to Bordeaux. But being No 2 to Michael Broadbent is a very good place to be, for he has done more for the understanding of wine than anyone before or since. He is now writing his memoirs, so he and his words and wit will be around for many more years to come.

## Improving with age

Michael Broadbent would have been in his element at a brilliant dinner hosted by Piero Antinori and Tom Baseler, chief executive of Chateau Ste Michelle in Washington State, the owners of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and, to answer the question 'Is the ability to improve with age the hallmark of a great wine?'. The opening comparison of Cervaro della Sala (Antinori's Umbrian estate) 2010 and 1996 showed the latter still firm and fresh, due to the acidity of 10% Grechetto. The three pairs of Stags' Leap Cabernets proved the point: the volcanic soil Fay Vineyard 2009 was full of energy and grip, the 1994 beautifully fragrant and balanced; the alluvial soil SLV 2009 was seductively rich, while the 1985 perhaps drying a little, but still lovely; the Cask 23 2009 was elegantly powerful, while the 1984 was finely textured in the Margaux manner. Tignanello 2010 (80% Sangiovese, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet France) was superb, with great Tuscan depth and will have a longer future than the 1999 it was paired with. Three Solaias (75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Sangiovese, 5% Cabernet Franc) ended the evening: 2010 a wine of first-growth quality, 2007 a bit rich and oaky for me, and 1985 all elegance and purity, at its beautiful peak. Buyers of the younger vintages have much to look forward to. **D**

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## From the cellar Lunch at Bordeaux Index

Eleven guests (Jancis Robinson MW and *Decanter's* Sarah Kemp being the only ladies) joined Gary Boom and his team. To start, **Taittinger's Comtes de Champagne 2005** was beautifully creamy, riper than the brilliant 2000 and 2002 but showing the same precision. With Cornish brill came **FX Pichler's Riesling Smaragd Durnsteiner Kellerberg 2006**: greeny-gold, heady, almost Sauternes richness and weight but a dry finish. Three superb **Haut-Brions**, the first two from magnum, accompanied the roast mallard: **1999**, still a youthful red, fragrant nose of wild roses with elegantly



lifted fruit, not a great year but pure Haut-Brion (drink 2014–2020); **1996**, the table's preferred wine, deep with a maturing rim, the richness of middle fruit that the 1999 lacked, beautiful texture, fine, long finish (2014–2030); **1990**, robust colour for its age, wonderfully smooth and rich from a hot year, warm fruit on the finish (2014–2020). With honey and cinnamon parfait came **Domaine Huet's Le Haut Lieu, Vouvray Moelleux 1947**: amber coloured, incredible richness lifted by crackling acidity, the greatest possible expression of Chenin Blanc, never equalled.

## For the cellar Viña Ventisquero's handmade reds

Viña Ventisquero owns 1,648ha (hectares) of vineyards from Chile's Atacama desert to the south of the Maipo Valley. These can produce high-quality wines, but the cream of the crop is in the hands of Chilean Winemaker of the Year 2012, Felipe Tosso. His single-block **Grey Pinot Noir 2011** from high-terraced vineyards in the Leyda Valley came top in a *Decanter* panel tasting of Chilean Pinot Noirs (*October 2013 issue*) and swiftly sold out. The **2012** (£13.99, Planet of the Grapes) shows the altitude with fine vineyard grip and length for the rest of the decade. His John Duval-influenced blend of **Grenache, Carignan and**

**Mourvedre 2012** from Colchagua's Apalta shows the vigour of these French Midi grapes. But his **Enclave**, a blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot, 5% Carmenere and 2% Cabernet Franc, from Pirque vineyards in Maipo, is exceptional. A pre-bottling tasting of the 2012 barrel samples showed the varieties individually, while the **2010** and **2011** (both £50, Planet of the Grapes) revealed the finished blend, the former firm with natural depth (2015–2022), the latter with more black fruits, cassis and flesh (2016–2024). Definitely for the cellar.



### Mas de Daumas Gassac, Pays d'Hérault, France 2011

£30 widely available  
An elegant concentration produced from 75% Cabernet Sauvignon planted in 1973 blended with 15 other grapes. Midi warmth softens the Cabernet austerity to give vigorous individuality. A brilliant wine. Drink 2014–2035  
Alc 13.5%



### Alain Graillot, Crozes-Hermitage, Rhône, France 2011

£19.95 Roberson, Yapp Bros  
Graillot vinifies non-destalked grapes as this allows a longer fermentation for denser fruit/terroir expression. Crushed berry and black pepper nose, firm fruit that will smooth out superbly well.  
Drink 2015–2025 Alc 13.5%



### Casa Mariol, Vermut Negro, Terra Alta Spain 2011

£16 Top Selection  
Discovered in a wine bar in Barcelona, this black vermouth is warmly rich but also refreshingly bitter, reminiscent of a gin-free negroni. Superb over ice with a twist of orange. Roll on the summer – but why wait?  
Drink 2014 Alc 16%