



You might think that of all the controversial topics in the world, wine would be pretty far down there in the grand scheme of things. However, current events in the world reared their ugly head and dragged French wine into a political issue from which it may have difficulty extracting itself.

The issue is France's recent unconscionable test beneath the surface of a Polynesian atoll. In the month of September the conservative government of France led by the all-too-Bugs Bunny-cartoon-named (Black) Jacques Chirac saw fit to conduct the first nuclear test by a country other than renegade China since 1992.

Currently the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is being negotiated by the reigning nuclear powers. Even our President Clinton, who seems to have no stand on any issue, strongly advocates a treaty that bans nuclear tests. This test flies in the face of current world politics, the will of the people of France, general good neighborliness not to mention stewardship of the earth.

The only reason nuclear weapons are tested in this era is (OK China does it for political gamesmanship as much as anything) to see if you can stuff a nuclear bomb into an eggshell of Leggs pantyhose and still kill every living thing within several hundred miles. There is no more theoretical data to be gathered. We pretty much know how they work. How small can they be made? Can we disguise it as a pencil? What if we name it Fred? Can we make one that will, in fact, kill cockroaches? Such are the nature of questions posed by countries slavering to test their arsenal.

Ah, and where does wine fit into all this? Well, people are quite pissed at France. Sure, here in the good old US of A we wagged our finger disapprovingly, stammered a few, "Tut, tut," like some oversized Winnie the Pooh, issued a press release through the Office of the Person the Press Doesn't Talk To, called it a day and ordered \$800 million worth of stuff on the Parisian version of the Home Shopping Network. Other countries have pulled diplomats, launched fairly massive protests, rioted in the streets and attacked French consulates in their countries.

Take a little peek at a map or a globe. The Polynesian Islands (and a colony of France mind you, just in case you thought imperialism was on the wane) are about as far from France as you can get without leaving the planets surface. Just a geographical point of reference to show you that these displays of anger are entirely well merited.

So somebody has to take the heat for this egregious action. As no one is going to be boycotting French movies or cars (since no one buys them to begin with) the logical choice for an economic boycott of France is, unfortunately, their wine. It is uniquely French, well known and proably carries enough political and economic muscle in the country to put some heat on Mssr. Chirac to at least mutter in public, "Je suis un idiot."

In Britain, which imports somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 million gallons of French wine annually, they are taking this whole thing very seriously (imagine that). An ad has been put together (this is running on TV on the good old BBC) that features a Chirac lookalike sipping on an unmistakable bottle of French Bordeaux. As the crosshairs of a powerful rifle scope focus alternately on Chirac's head, stomach and private parts an announcer's voice says "Hit Charac where it really hurts." The crosshairs swing to the bottle of wine and the bottle explodes in a million pieces, splattering the French President with red wine. The boycott is on.

Boycotts, by their very nature, tend to focus on an entity external to the situation at hand. Nitpickers have their moments in the sun with this fact, pointing out that "the little guy ends up getting hurt." Sad but true. The burden of the boycott will rest upon the brawny shoulders of France's national past time. Can the Leroy's, Romance-Contis, Moutons, Rothchild, get Chirac to admit that this test was unnecessary, an affront to the people of the world, entirely unexcusable and won't happen again? Chirac is a stubborn bastard with a conservative streak a kilometre wide. Fortitude will be tested.

Personally speaking I will engage in my own private boycott of French wines. I am a huge fan of Burgundies, am attracted a good Bordeaux and enjoy many of the other top varietales (Sauternes, Loire, Chablis, etc.). However, as a decent and principled human being and a former Greenpeace staffer (these folks recently dropped an anti-nuclear testing banner in Tianamen Square) I will be swearing off the purchases of these wines until some retraction comes from Cherac. Write to your Senator (we only have one these days), Congress people and President about how you feel. Encourage the imposing of sanctions, withholding of all Jerry Lewis material and basic nastiness.



Recommended Wines for the Month: A more than respectful tip of the hat to our friends in Australia. These people are really ticked at the French and are showing it by demonstrating, rioting (politely), pouring French wine into the streets, cancelling French governmental contracts and telling them to not bother submitting any more for the time being. The Aussies (and their New Zealand neighbors) are, collectively, the worlds largest group of anti-nuclear activists. They live with a huge ozone hole directly above them for large portions of the year and are trying to get folks like us to reelize our actions affect them. They also make some damn fine wine. I have done some exploring recently and I encourage you to put down that Chateauf de Pape and toast Australia.

Penfolds 1991 Cabernet/Shraz Bin 389: Shiraz is the most widely planted Australian varietal. It is the same grape as the French Syrah. When combined with the typically big, fruity, tannic Aussie Cab it creates a wonderful blend that is silky smooth, broodingly deep, loaded with spicy berry fruits, leather, sweet oak and coffee flavors. Penfold is one of Australia's top producers and many of their wines are fantastic deals. The Koonunga Hill series stands out for sub-\$10 wines. This one will run about \$15-\$16. It is a fine wine with foods right now but will cellar beautifully for years to come.

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Penfolds Grange Hermitage (1990 an 92 most commonly available currently): One of the more expensive wines you will run into. Usually retails for a \$90-\$100. Consider a purchase an elegant way of boycotting high end French Bordeaux. This wine will cellar, given proper conditions, for 30 or more years. Recent vintages can be drunk now but you will be passing up the true essence of this wine by being impatient. Wait and drink it in the future on the inevitable day that nuclear testing is banned in thero and reality.

Lindeman 1994 Chardonnay Bin 65: A bit of a cliché here. Many people have beaten me to the punch on this one. Lindemans is consistently reviewed as a top best bargain wine. Their Bin 65 Chard usually retails for about \$7. The quality surpasses many chardonnays twice its price. Minimal oak lets the fruit come through and despite a straight forward simplicity it has good weight and depth. Pack a picnic, get your feet in the sand, enjoy a glass of wine and some of the last warm sunsets this year has to offer.



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