

Too Rich for Our Blood?

OUR WINE MAN REVELS IN RECESSION-PROOF PRICING by Lance Sparks



Recession sucks, right? Lotsa folks are worried about jobs, mortgages and prospects for a dismal future. But while some are scratching out a bare living, some others are living just swell. The wine we drink measures the difference.

Let's say you're a "retired" hedge fund manager who found offshore parking for, say, \$29 mil just before the feds locked the doors and hauled away the hard drives. Now you're hosting an intimate dinner for your closest pre-indictment associates. You want to show pals that you've still got big-dough mojo, so you plan to serve vinos that convey that silly, playfully extravagant side of you that's always charmed the gang.

Soooo: Splash the party right off with the cream of Champagne, a double-magnum (3 liters) of 1999 Roederer Cristal. The ticket'll run \$2900, but that's (Wall) Street cred that represents. Plate assorted can-a-pees, and guests will go gaga right through the fish course.

It's a straight road from bubbly to Burgundy, and no label conveys the essence of pinot noir and pure panache like Domaine de le Romanée-Conti La Tache, \$3400. Players at the table will concur that your je-ne-sais-quoi still kicks and the Tesla's still in the garage.

The biggest of Burgundies gotta lead to the baddest of Bordeaux, and only a piker would de-cork any but a mature, historic vintage. Start soft, mighty merlot, Chateau Pétrus 1989 (*super year*), rings the register at \$2900. Could scrounge a truly historic vintage, maybe 1945, all-time greatest, but \$15K might seem pretentious. Of course, everybody's raving about Chateau Le Pin 2000, and it's only \$3900. Bit of a dilemma. But follow up with Rothschild f'sure, a classic year, 1982 Lafite Rothschild, peak of perfection, only \$2600 and a heart-warming expression of your affection and generosity.

Probably oughta show some buy-local, fly-the-flag patriotic fervor, so bring out a bad-boy Napa cab, oh baby, Screaming Eagle 1997 Oakville; even at

\$3900, the ooohs and aaahs will be worth it, make folks tenderly fondle their flag lapel pins.

No slackin' on dessert wine, go for the gold, the queen of Sauternes, Chateau d'Yquem, maybe the 2001 vintage, a 100-pointer according to Robert Parker, the king of raters. A bottle goes for only \$700, maybe not that impressive, but what about 1967, maybe the greatest ever, can be found at \$1800, boffo and affordable.

Dinner like that has gotta prove that even if your portfolio lost a little weight dodging the Bear, you've still got the legs to run with the Big Dogs.

Sure, those of us who live on Main Street instead of Wall Street might miss the party. And we might ask innocent questions, like, is that bottle of Burgundy really worth \$3400? Is it really a hundred times better, in flavor and quality, than a bottle of Oregon pinot noir stickered at \$34? Answer to the first question is sure, if you think it is. Answer to the second question is no, of course not, sillies.

Wine is said to be a barometer of recessions, and right now wine prices are falling — for the mid-range wines where working people, if they're working, buy their best. But those big-ticket lollapaloozas? They've dipped in price but are selling just fine. What in the world does that tell us?

First, we have to recognize that wine, like diamonds, is almost purely a supply-and-demand commodity, for which prices are directly related to whatever levels consumers abide and pay. If consumers suddenly decide, for whatever reasons, that diamonds are just rocks and there are plenty just as sparkly for a lot less money, then demand plummets, along with prices. Same with wine.

But mystique also has value. So do illusion and image, creating auras of worth and the ambience of power. And power, Tobias Wolff wrote, "can only be enjoyed when it is recognized." Wolff added, "and feared." I doubt there's much fear inherent in wine, but maybe some folks get a jolt out of hoping they're envied, reveling in that sense of exclusivity, I-can-have-it-and-you-can't. That's psychology deeper than we can go. Value and price, it seems, have to remain one of the mysteries of capitalism, even for wine.

Meanwhile, the party's on, for those who pack hefty juice. ■

DON'T EAT THIS AD!



Regular Menu:

Jumbo American Dog.....	\$3.95
Big All-Beef Frank.....	\$3.95
Polish Kielbasa	\$4.75
Sicilian Sausage.....	\$4.75
Cajun Hot Links.....	\$4.75
Mediterranean Chicken Sausage	\$4.75
Oktoberfest Sausage.....	\$4.75
Jalapeño Cheddar Frank	\$4.75
Chili Dog Supreme.....	\$4.95
Giant German Beer Sausage.....	\$4.95

Dog Of The Day:

MON: Knock-Out Knockworst.....	\$4.95
TUES: Hungarian Garlic Sausage..	\$4.95
WED: Cheddar Frank.....	\$4.95
THUR: Bavarian Bratwurst.....	\$4.95
FRI: Andouille Sausage.....	\$4.95
SAT: Black Forest Beef Sausage....	\$3.95

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Horse Shoes, Badminton, & Bocce Ball
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