



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SARAH HELLER, MW; SIMON TAM; JEANNIE CHO LEE, MW; YVONNE CHEUNG

Wine of the Times

Four resident industry professionals give pointers on the best bottles from 2017 to drink now and to cellar, as well as a few timely hints for the collector. **ANDREW DEMBINA reports**

IT'S BEEN A rollercoaster of a year in terms of fine wine. In the traditionally most revered European wine regions, 2017 brought numerous challenges and expectations for the vintage are not high. In California, wildfires in and around Napa and Sonoma counties damaged more than two dozen wineries; concerns remain, not only about vineyards but also about heat and smoke taint to wine stock. However, Bordeaux's recently released 2015 vintage has been hailed by critics as the best since the lauded 2010.

Locally familiar New World names that caused excitement with new releases are Ao Yun 2014 – the second vintage from a boutique Moët Hennessy production in China's Yunnan province – and Australian Penfolds' debut of its G3, a blend of three vintages (2014, 2012 and 2008). Both are very limited and extravagantly priced at about HK\$2,500 and

\$18,000 a bottle respectively. Penfolds' Chief Winemaker, Peter Gago, was in Hong Kong for G3's global launch in October, a telling sign of the continuing importance of the city's place in the world of wine.

In London, corks were pulled at the International Wine & Spirits Competition, where Jancis Robinson's Riesling trophy went to The Shortlist Riesling 2010 from McGuigan winery in Eden Valley, South Australia. It wasn't the big guns who scooped gold awards, however, but lesser-known producers such as the Portuguese Cooperativa Agrícola de St Isidro de Pégões CRL, for its Adega de Pegões Syrah 2013. The top accolade for a blended red went not to a Bordeaux but to Barossa Valley (South Australia again) and the Grenache-dominated Million Estate, which took the honours for The Royal GSM 2014.

Best releases of 2017

Jeannie Cho Lee, master of wine, consultant and *Forbes* columnist, says the best reds to come to market this year are not ready to drink now, but recommends three white Burgundies, all 2015 vintages, that she claims are gorgeous to sip right away. Maison Albert Bichot Château

Gris Nuits-Saint-Georges Blanc Les Terrasses, with its notes of "sweet ripe peaches and mixed nuts along with lovely freshness and a buttery texture" is, she says, "an intense, unique white from red-wine appellation Nuit-Saint-Georges". Fewer than 3,000 bottles of this are made each year. Of her second nomination, Domaine Dujac Morey-Saint-Denis Premier Cru Monts Luisants Blanc, she says, "The 2015 is voluptuous, generous and complex ... vibrant flavours, plenty of depth, with a long finish of fresh pomelo and minerals." Her last call, Domaine de Montille Meursault Premier Cru Les Perrières, is also approachable when young.

Sarah Heller, the world's youngest MW, was blindsided by Kumeu River Hunting Hill Chardonnay 2016 from New Zealand. "Kumeu's Chardonnays are almost disturbingly good," she says, "almost managing to out-

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Simon Tam, Christies



Burgundy Burgundy. Hunting Hill, often expressive early on, is pure lemony, floral bliss.” And though she thinks the actual Burgundy producer of her next selection would be surprised to see its Pinot Noir under “ready to drink now”, Heller also picks Domaine Faiveley Clos des Cortons Faiveley Monopole Grand Cru 2015, saying, “This wine was so pleasurable, with

lashings of charming black fruit on release, that even though it has the depth to age for years, I would happily drink it now too.”

Collecting tips

Lee recommends Bordeaux 2015 across all cru classes – “not necessarily from the first growths or top producers, since even the fourth and fifth growths as well as Cru Bourgeois made fantastic wines in this vintage”. Burgundy 2015, she says “was successful too, the reds more than

the whites; I would choose the top producers’ premier cru – rather than grand cru – for good value.”

“It will always be about Burgundy,” advises Simon Tam, head of wine at Christie’s Asia, especially in a good vintage year. “They don’t make a lot of wines; Bordeaux produces a lot more. Top Burgundy can age brilliantly, including the whites, which can easily age for 30 to 40 years.”

Tam mentioned evergreen bottles from Burgundy that collectors always keep their eyes open for: “Original cases of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti – the cases aren’t produced any more; Domaine Leroy re-releases from a few years ago in wooden cases are high on the Burgundy collector’s list; as well as Domaine des Comtes Lafon Montrachet in original wooden cases, especially 2003, 2004 and 2005 vintages.”

Tam also notes a current trend in Asia for collecting vintage champagne. “People used to celebrate and pop a cork

immediately, but there’s more interest in keeping some vintage bottles now,” he says, adding that back-vintage Bordeaux are shrewd buys at the moment. “After very high prices in 2012 and 2013, Bordeaux went from rock bottom in 2014 to just a little above it now,” he says. “We’re still 20 percent away from the ‘right price’ from great estates. Buying from a good château or single owner’s collection so that you get good provenance is a good idea.”

For value at auction, Tam recommends Spain’s Rioja. “It’s not on the radar of many collectors,” he says. “In Christie’s London this year, whites and reds that are decades old went for £40 and £50.”

Celebratory sips

Asked what wine treat she will be enjoying over Christmas and New Year, Yvonne Cheung, director of wine at Swire Hotels, plumps for Passopisciaro from Sicily, produced by Vini Franchetti. “The Passorosso 2010 from magnum is open and practically effusive, rather than mysterious, as I usually find the wine,” she says. “It’s a

totally different delivery – I love how each vintage is so expressive.

“And a glass of Savignin, from Domaine Marquis d’Angerville in Volnay – I did harvest there a few months ago. Afterwards, I went to their new property in the Jura, and gained a whole new respect and love for the bucolic and wild nature of the region. In fact, it was so gorgeous that it’s my new phone screen-lock image ... something I change about once or twice a year, max.”

Lee will enjoy the 1986 Château Léoville Las Cases. “This vintage took a long time to come around,” she explains, “I’ve had it in my cellar for over 20 years but it’s finally showing its full, brilliant, colourful peacock’s tail – a complete, well-balanced Bordeaux red, the best from Saint-Julien, with dried-blackberry, dark-earth and forest-floor notes. Intense, with a structured backbone built for long ageing, at 31 years old it’s now, finally, a mature adult.”

Heller looks forward to Domaine Auguste Clape Cornas 2002, from the Rhône. “With 15 years under its belt, I’m expecting this will finally have shed its formidable exoskeleton and picked up the unique hickory-smoke fragrance that I absolutely adore in Clape [wines].” **P**



SIX FOR THE CELLAR

Promising 2017-released wines best laid down to mature for a few years, as suggested by two local masters of wine.

SARAH HELLER, MW

Bartolo Mascarello Barolo DOCG 2013, Piedmont, Italy: The winery’s owner and winemaker, Maria Teresa, is unafraid of letting all the year’s characteristics be captured in her wine – herbal stems, tannic seeds and all – but they always coalesce into something brilliant 10-plus years down the line. The 2013 was perfectly formed from the beginning, more elegant and ethereal than usual.

Krug 2004, Champagne, France: Almost brutally tight at the moment, but a combination of the vibrant, gem-like nose and the way Krug Grande Cuvée Edition 160 (based on 2004) has developed suggest that in six to eight years’ time it will sing.

Burn Cottage Pinot Noir 2015, Central Otago, New Zealand: Gloriously perfumed and effusive now, I think in another two to three years it will take on more mineral, earth-bound qualities that will anchor it and give it real depth.

JEANNIE CHO LEE, MW

Sena 2015, Aconcagua Valley, Chile: A gorgeous Sena that offers a seamless, velvety textured wine that just glides over the tongue. In its wake, find notes of mixed spices, fresh herbs, earth and fresh blackberries. The nuances and layers of this are amazing.

Tolpuddle Chardonnay 2015, Tasmania, Australia: A cerebral Chardonnay that makes you ponder life as you feel its tingly acidity on your palate. Flavours are laser-sharp and inspired by Chablis in its minerality. I love the precision and the purity of the wine. Best after 2018.

Château Margaux 2015, Bordeaux, France: A hugely successful vintage for Chateau Margaux, it has an amazing perfume of violets, cassis and layers of sweet spices. Seductive, powerful, and intriguing with structure, intense power and silky tannins, and a very long finish.