

Red wine fashion victims

Jonathan Nossiter

Now that lower temperatures are on the way, Brazilians' thoughts are starting to wander toward wine without sweating over it. But, mysteriously enough, the country is still enslaved to a kind of thinking about red wine that's been out of fashion in Europe and North America for the past five years already. Those swollen red monsters, jellylike and alcoholic, were widely promoted by magazines (completely discredited today) such as *Wine Spectator* and Robert Parker's *The Wine Advocate*. For many wine lovers in Milan, Paris and New York, these wines are equally discredited. Unfortunately, in Chile and Argentina, the biggest suppliers of wines to Brazil, they still haven't gotten the news. While Brazilians go on paying for these dense wines, more solid than they are liquid, even though they're completely inappropriate to the country's climate and cuisine, the Chilean and Argentine businessmen who make wine as if it were soda pop are laughing all the way to the bank.

Elsewhere, one of the few positive effects of the economic crisis has been that it has accelerated the disappearance of spurious and phony products. At the same time, the notion that bigger and more are always better has also come to an end. So there's been something akin to a rebirth among wine producers in Europe, and, even – slowly – in North America, going back to the historical model of lighter reds, fresh, sharp, complex, and earthy. These finer reds are easily digestible, and are better accompaniments for any kind of meal, from grilled meat to cod.

Consider one of the few Bordeaux red wines that aren't Hollywoodized (commercially compromised): Château Le Puy (imported by Worldwine). After 30 years catering to the tastes of the U.S. market (with more fruit, more alcohol, and more sweetness than any Bordeaux wine in history), the Bordeaux châteaux, including the most famous names such as Margaux and Mouton Rothschild, have recently bowed before the exploding Chinese and Asian markets. Indeed in a cynical manoeuvre, they've increased even further the sickly sweet and syrupy style that few people in Europe or the United States are looking for in a wine. The sordid cliché of the westerner who journeys to the Far East in search of companions has been turned on its head. Now it's the easterners that travel to Europe in search of luxurious western courtesans.

It's also a fact that there are not many people in the new economy of Europe and North America that can afford these promiscuous speculative wines, which now cost (in France!) between R\$ 200 and R\$ 2000 [\$100 to 1000]. In Brazil, one might easily pay four times as much for a wine that in reality is little more than alcoholic fruit jelly with a snobbish label on it. So when people guarantee the liquidity of their financial instruments simply by calculating how many pounds of chemical additives they'll need to spray into their vineyards and cellars, it's quite a wonder that anyone would pay that kind of money just to poison themselves with something so inauthentic and inert.

o

A way of thinking about red wine

that has gone out of style

It's a small miracle that Château Le Puy, one of the few natural and super-organic wines made in Bordeaux, even exists. With 51 hectares in the Cote de Francs sub-region, it shares a geological substrate with Pomerol and Saint Emillion, and like its more famous neighbours it is one of the few places in the world that are suitable for Merlot, thanks to its clayey and limestone-silica soil. The property has been owned by the Amoreau family since 1610, and its current operator, Jean-Pierre, is simultaneously pioneering and traditionalist. One of the leaders of the biodynamics movement in the French viticulture world, and a scrupulous defender of the biodynamic thinking that holds that the whole ecosystem on his land needs to be cared for in a state of natural balance, Amoreau has also inherited a family tradition that has remained unchanged for 403 years. None of those generations of the family have ever put chemicals in their soil, or artificial additives in their wine. That's what makes Château Le Puy the historical precursor of the natural wines movement. It also means that at last you can drink the truest and clearest expression of the famous Bordeaux terroir, and understand what all the fuss has been about over the past 200 years.

But let the buyer beware: if you think that Bordeaux wines need to be big, rich, alcoholic and sweet, you're out of luck. At Château Le Puy, with its vines averaging 50 years of age, the wines are liquid, not solid. They are silky, subtle, sharp, fresh and more aromatic than the fruit cocktails that you get from the high technology and the lab-grown yeasts used in making conventional Bordeaux wines. And if you open up a bottle to accompany your steak dinner, you'll notice the way the saline acidity slices through the fat and smokiness of the meat like a knife plied by three star chef, allowing you to savour all the fibres and flavours of the meal, stimulating your palate with a tingling sensation that will leave you dizzy with pleasure. For wines with a profile that makes for a similar experience (and at comparatively affordable prices), I suggest Aphros vinho verde red (www.msirnport.com), Domaine Tissot Trousseau (delacroixvinhos.com.br), Domaine Breton's Bourgeuils and Chinons, and Puzelat's Chevernys (worldwine.com.br).