

## General and Personal Principles *by John Kapon*

I consider myself blessed in my experiences with wine. I have always enjoyed sharing good wine with good people.

That spirit is the energy behind everything I do. I have been creating and conducting great wine events for years; I only wish that I could share every experience that I have ever had with wine. Some of the early notes were not as detailed as they could have been. Most of my notes are taken in very social settings with many people, so there are always distractions aplenty. And tens of thousands of notes have stayed on the paper, never to be shared with the public. I will consider myself to be successful when I am able to share everything that I taste with the rest of the world.

To me, experiencing wine is innately social. Having a wine by yourself is almost like the tree falling in the woods that no one sees or hears. And while I have tasted tens of thousands of the world's greatest wines, make no mistake about it: I am a wine drinker. Sometimes, after 15 or 20 wines, the note-taking skills wane a bit; sometimes, I can't even read my own writing! When I looked back and realized how many great wines I had been consuming, I decided to share them with my friends and clients—in the spirit of wine itself. I have been drinking for years and have had most of the world's greatest wines on multiple occasions. Now, I am committed to sharing these experiences for the rest of my life, even though I always feel inadequate because so few of my notes actually go public.

There is enormous pressure on America's leading wine critics to review tens of thousands of new releases every year. As a result, no one is consistently reviewing the mature vintage wines of the world. Too often I will look up a note for a wine that was last tasted ten or 20 years ago. Well, what about now? Wines do change, some for the better, some for the worse. I think it is very important, especially for the serious collector, to know how wines are changing and developing. I hope I have filled that gap just a little bit. To me, there is nothing better than aged wine. It doesn't have to be fully mature, but it has to have maturity. This is what collecting wine is all about.

There are a few general and personal principles of drinking wine that I would like to share.

1) Everyone is right in his or her own likes or dislikes—that is, your palate is never wrong regarding what you taste and feel about a wine. We are all entitled to our own opinion, to what we like and dislike, and we are all right. I dislike people judging other people or thinking that they do not know wine because their opinion is different. Everyone has different tastes in music, clothes, cars, and so on and so forth. Wine is no different. So, anyone who rides a high horse can get off right here.

2) Older bottles are extremely variable. The wine world has come a long way, and there is far greater awareness now of the importance of storage. But the variability of wine storage is still significant, and it can often have nothing to do with the storage. Variability can also be a result of the winery and how they bottle. As a result, the same wine from the same vintage can leave different impressions. This is the Pandora's box of the fine-wine world. I have had many different impressions of the same wine, sometimes from the same case! Wines are, in a way, just like humans, and show different sides on different days.

3) Speaking of which, the human element is extremely variable as well. Have you ever heard the assertion that a bottle of wine always tastes better at the winery? Environment and emotion play a major role in the enjoyment of wine. There are days when I cannot drink wine—period. You could have bottles of



*John Kapon in the barrel cellar at Pétrus*





*John Kapon getting back to roots amid the vines at Pétrus*

'45 Mouton-Rothschild and '47 Cheval Blanc open, and I just wouldn't be able to experience them to the full (okay, maybe I would at least try!). Our senses can be affected positively or adversely by our emotions, environment, and health. You could have a bottle of the same wine from the same case seven days in a row and have seven different impressions. So, never hesitate to give a wine a second chance—you might be pleasantly surprised!

4) I am a firm believer in the power of comparative tasting. It doesn't have to be a vertical (same producer, different years) or a horizontal (same year, different producers). Tasting different wines at the same sitting gives valuable reference points for overall quality, even from a grab-bag of different wines from around the world. It is how I evaluate and enjoy wine to the full.

5) There is no such thing as a 100-point wine. I just don't believe in perfection. I believe in the pursuit of perfection. If there is such a thing as a 100-point wine, then it damn well better be at least 30 or 40 years old. Wines need to prove that they can age to be considered at that level.

6) My ratings are based on the 100-point scale because I am American and that is how we are trained to think. Any wine listed as NR means Not Recommended, which indicates that the wine was below 80 points. Life is indeed too short to drink bad wine, but not too short to taste it. Sometimes I sample wines that are interesting but ultimately unsatisfactory. It is still fun, however, to try them (if only out of curiosity!), particularly obscure older ones.

For me, 80–84 points is average. 85–88 points is above average, with 89 points bordering on very good. 90–92 points is very good. 93–94 points is excellent. 95–96 points is outstanding. 97–99 points is reserved for what I believe to be the world's finest, with 99 being the pinnacle of greatness, a veritable winegasm, if you will. Rating wine on this system is exponential—that is, the difference between 93 and 94 is greater than the difference between 92 and 93. Question marks indicate either that I think a bottle may be off, or that a wine is not showing what I have tasted previously. A plus sign means that the wine either deserves a slightly higher rating but not enough for the full extra point, or has the potential to improve (even though one could put all great wines in that category).

The point scores assigned to each wine are my own intensely personal attempts to quantify the quality of my experiences. My intentions are to share these experiences with you, and whether you agree with me or not is not the point. I am not trying to rewrite the book; rather, I think there need to be more editors. I have no intention of influencing market prices or selling more wine through what I write here. It is what it is, and nothing more. It is my heart and soul that I am sharing with you; anyone who thinks otherwise obviously does not know me.



7) Burgundy versus the World. Without question, to make great Burgundy is the hardest winemaking job on the planet. This is why the greatest wines are so special and so cherished (tiny productions don't help). A 95-point Burgundy is a little more notable than a 95-point Cabernet. This is not to take anything away from the Cabernet, but I feel it necessary to make the distinction. Burgundies also tend to climb the point-ladder more consistently as they age and mature, more so than any other wine.

8) A special wine-loving friend once motivated me to give her this advice upon her temporary departure from my life: Always chew your wine like a food, smell it like you would a lover, and taste it when it's gone. These are words to live by.

On that note, I would like to give thanks to a select group of people who have been significant others in the pursuit of tasting and enjoying the world's finest wines. Bipin Desai was the one who lured me into the rabbit hole, so to speak, and it was he, along with the Good Doctor, Wolfgang, and other disciples who took me to the other side in the beginning. King Angry, I mean the Cardinal, was my original New York partner in drinking wine, and still is to this day. G-Man and Suss were also there in the beginning and part of the original Angry Man crew. The Don, of course, has been the beacon of Burgundy not only for me, but for the world; the Burgundy market would not be what it is today without the Don. The Punisher has punished me with both ancient wine and modern business lessons, and I am grateful for both. Gentleman Jim and Lady Agah are the fine-wine world's first family, and they have also been great family friends. They have enriched my life in many ways. And then there is Big Boy, the man whom you either love or hate, and also the man who has opened up more legendary wine than anyone else in the world. Yes, I love Big Boy.

There are a select group of people whom I love to drink with, anytime, anywhere. The Hedonist and Hollywood Jef are certainly atop that list. The Mogul is hot in the current rotation, although I can't help but be a little upset it took him so long to find me. Big Mike is always a sign that the night is seriously official, or officially serious. I can't remember a night when he was there that wasn't extraordinary; he always brings out the best in everyone. The Inspector and the Burghound are two sure-fire ways to enjoy an evening of great Burgundy, although I have to warn you, Allen is very biased. I will never forget a 1945 Mouton at Cru late one night that was about as close to perfection as wine gets. Finally, here was a wine not from Burgundy that Allen could not deny. I gleefully approached him after he had some time with the wine, asking him (and leading the witness) what he would rate this incredible Bordeaux: 'Ehhh, 88 points.' Never serve the Burghound—or the Inspector, for that matter—anything but Burgundy. Speaking of Cru, how could I forget Sir Robert Bohr, the world's greatest

sommelier, even though he isn't a sommelier much anymore. It is tough to think of anyone with whom I have tasted and discovered more fine wine than Robert. Mr. Wine Vegas certainly deserves recognition, as another great friend who has consumed as much great wine as anyone. There are few people who can express the aromas and flavors of a wine as well as Gil—and he can do it in six languages. Lastly, San Francisco's versions of 'treats,' Wilf and Eric, with whom I have shared dozens of great nights and hundreds of bottles. Eric was the one who convinced me to stop trying to get subscriptions for *Vintage Tastings*, and to start sending out my notes via email. He's also the guy who has bought and sold more fine and rare wine than anyone in the world.

Before this ends up being a bad Academy Awards speech, I need to take it to a personal level, which begins with my three beautiful children—Nicholas, Maggie, and Katerina—who are about to be 13, 11, and two (and a half) as I write this. Whatever treasure a man has in his cellar, none of it is anywhere near as precious as a child. My children give my life true meaning, and I love them each more than words can say. I have another baby, equally special, but more in a when-a-man-loves-a-woman kind of way. Alexander the Great is the love of my life, and even though she knows how to wield a battle-axe, I still love her. She makes time stop; and for a man who always needs more time, there is nothing more that I could ask for.

I would also like to thank ALL of my co-workers, because without them I would never have been able to taste any wine, because I would live day and night at the office; all of those who have come and supported the Wine Workshop over the years, and who have lived to love wine; all those who have devoted their lives to writing about tasting wines and informing the public of what is good out there; and, of course, the producers, and all the people who dedicate their lives to making the world's greatest wines. You have all been an inspiration, and many of you are also friends.

Lastly, I would like to thank my father for working his whole life to provide me with an opportunity in this great business, and for encouraging me to do my own thing and build something special.

*In vino veritas,*

John Kapon  
New York, October 26, 2012

2009 DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI

FEBRUARY 21, 2012  
THE NEW YORK PALACE

*evently gets a +*

*at Pic 10 Bunker Mt. specialty imports wt - BT. who says whites 1st? Not A de V w LAST*

**VOSNE-ROMANÉE**  
*Subtractive 11 The work, open in an almost buttery way, but that vibrant frame of cedar... tender red cherry core... very musky, light impression in nose by DRG standards... very polished. palate pure + pleasant, acidity noticeable, citrus notes control of the red... nice light entry to fruit*

**CORTON** *'opportunity inspired me' - 'was looking for a challenge' loved the style*  
*Much deeper nose, enter black fruits, more spice + dust, black n cedar so seductively good nose... impressive plate rich flavors, black n purple fruits, meat + touch of game, minerals more present on finish - bigger deeper longer 'completely' different 'mad world' per A de V. So exotically comparison, fruit connects you* **93/94**

**ÉCHEZEAUX** *only 10 bottles out... fruit + a great effort for vintage*  
*Interesting follow up to Corton, one leaf of the nose so 2 speak, fruit more high pitched + forward w/ its red mixed w/ black n spice... candied spice, sweeter aroma along line of cotton candy... There's a tension in the nose that isn't obvious, cedar + smoke underneath fruit pushes play off of grapefruit... lean clean + serene palate, extremely bright, not as obvious as Corton, but = good if fruit better*

**GRANDS ÉCHEZEAUX** *thin capers, plum, plum, spice off clouds - a lot of humidity here* **93/94**  
*More aligned w/ each personality, in terms of fruit + spice, still takes more digging to get to it... more just a cedar n structural components in nose... fruit bleeds w/ some natural gas goodness... structure impressive but palate a bit closed, blaster in style, dimid? Better wine but what else left to say... I felt like I should have been more impressed...*

**ROMANÉE-ST-VIVANT**  
*Very shy as well, blaster fruits almost chocolate by comparison... that pinch of rust n cedar, core gets sweeter as it gets swirled... gets musky, inviting, core more casual... shy palate, cedar + red vitamins there*

*better on last sip, more assertive, style based comes out* **94/95**

**RICHEBOURG**  
*Bigger 'I'm better' nose... you don't forget complexity stands out immediately... very structured but in an elegant + balanced way... great core of exotic red fruits - so inviting, this is signature... some citrus n cedar n oak hints; mineral earth there, nutty reduction... big broad-shouldered nose w/ more* **94/95**

**LA TÂCHE** *who says 15 is better needs to drink more often... impressive, showed its fruit*  
*Making me work to get to know it... a thick green, more green cedar than fruit in a wet bamboo way... almost like there, empty, so subtle, this takes feminine to another level... really shut down, now, quite dramatic, too subtle on the mouth, all La Tache down the hatch... it's elegant now*

**ROMANÉE-CONTI** *it almost too much so... subtle endless fine line of leaves a lush memory of things*  
*Back to Jean - deep rich ready nose, so big n voluminous, nutty meat toast hints spice... every bottle for auto, morning of apples, sauce, liqueur comes in... makes me happy, a great wine should always stimulate the appetite it... heavy... still biggest champion of the world* **97**

**MONTRACHET**  
*Do leads AGAIN by this beauty w/ all the reds & gone; time for some white, that's right A de V here what last, put that in your wine program + watch all the computers melt down lol... and I can't stand when it's not 25 years we have to find new ways to check*

*of 09 not done over w/*

WILSON DANIELS