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2009 New York Wine Experience: The Top 10 Wines of 2008

A rare chance to taste the most exciting wines of the previous year

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Who can pass up the opportunity to try the 10 most exciting wines in the world—long since sold out—in a single afternoon? Every year, a crowd packs the seminar ballroom at the Wine Experience for the tasting of *Wine Spectator's* Top 10 wines from the previous year, shared by the winemakers and vintners who produced them.

In 2008, *Wine Spectator's* tasting staff reviewed nearly 20,000 wines from 20 countries—more than ever before. “The Top 10 is a distillation of the major trends,” explained senior editor and tasting director Bruce Sanderson, who co-moderated the panel. “It’s a snapshot of the world of wine, both the classic and the emerging.”

The **Top 10 of 2008** showcased five wines from the remarkable 2005 vintage in France, but also one wine each from Portugal, Italy, Australia, California and Chile. Each was chosen for their combination of quality, value, availability and excitement, out of a list of 5,300 wines that earned outstanding or classic ratings of 90 to 100 points that year.



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Harvey Steiman, Wine Spectator; Ed Seghesio, Seghesio winery.

To best showcase the wines, they were served in an order based on their power, weight and sweetness. First up was the **Seghesio Zinfandel Sonoma County 2007** (No. 10, 93 points, \$24). Ed Seghesio gave an impassioned talk about his family’s history; his ancestors, who came to the United States from Italy in 1886, planted Zinfandel in Sonoma’s Alexander Valley for the first time in 1895.



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From Portugal came the **Quinta do Crasto Douro Reserva Old Vines 2005** (No. 3, 95, \$40), introduced by Miguel Roquette, a Led Zeppelin fan. “Last year, we gave him a ‘Whole Lotta Love,’” Sanderson quipped. Roquette explained that the Port estate has been in his family for 110 years, but it wasn’t until 1994 that they began to focus on dry red wines. Weather conditions in the Douro are extreme, said Roquette: “We have nine months of winter and three months of hell,” during which temperatures can reach more than 120 degrees in the shade. The Reserva Old Vines bottling is made from 30 to 40 different varieties, from vines about 35 to 40 years old.

Miguel Roquette, Quinta do Crasto; Pio Boffa, Pio Cesare.

Next up, an Italian wine from Piedmont, [Pio Cesare Barolo 2004](#) (No. 6, 94, \$62). Owner Pio Boffa said the [outstanding 2004 vintage](#) disproved the notion that a small crop is always best: Even though they went through the vineyard three times to reduce yields, it was still the biggest crop of Nebbiolo in recent history.



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The next wine, [Château Rauzan-Ségla Margaux 2005](#) (No. 2, 97, \$100), was the first of five French wines from the [celebrated 2005 vintage](#). Managing director John Kolasa (a self-described Scotsman who “fell into wine instead of whisky”) described how the château has evolved since his first vintage in 1995. With the support of the new owners, he and his team cut case production nearly in half, redeveloped the vineyards and reintroduced Petit Verdot into this Cabernet-based blend.

John Kolasa, Château Rauzan-Ségla; Alfred Tesseron, Château Pontet-Canet.

Another Left Bank Bordeaux followed, the [Château Pontet-Canet Pauillac 2005](#) (No. 7, 96, \$100). Co-owner Alfred Tesseron credited the expression of *terroir* in his powerful wine to the estate’s organic and biodynamic farming practices. He invited the audience to walk with him through the vineyards and to share his passion. “At my home I have a good corkscrew. I also have the key to the cellar,” he quipped.

Chile captured the Wine of the Year honors for the first time ever, with the Carmenère-based [Casa Lapostolle Clos Apalta Colchagua Valley 2005](#) (No. 1, 96 points, \$75). “I’m very happy for Chile as a wine country, to have Chile on the map, and to show that Chile can make world-class wine,” said founder Alexandra Marnier Lapostolle. But she added, “There’s big pressure on my shoulders to be No. 1. What’s next?” The company had already completed a new winery solely for the Clos Apalta bottling in time for the 2005 harvest. So next they are focusing on converting their vineyards entirely to organic and biodynamic practices.



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Next in the flight was a pair of Southern Rhône reds. The Grenache-based [Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe Châteauneuf-du-Pape La Crau 2005](#) (No. 5, 95, \$55) is built to drink now, to enjoy with food and to age, according to co-owner and manager Daniel Brunier. “I think it’s easy to make big, heavy wines,” Brunier said. “I think it’s more difficult to create balance. And balance is very important for us.”

Daniel Brunier, Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe; Marc Perrin, Château de Beaucastel.

The [Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2005](#) (No. 8, 96, \$95) relies heavily on Mourvèdre and includes all 13 red varieties permitted in the appellation. All the varieties are harvested and fermented separately before blending. Co-owner Marc Perrin spoke of the importance of using all the different grapes, calling the final blend a “symphony,” in which even the minor parts, like the triangle, are key to the experience. “When we blend, if we try to leave out a variety, something is off,” explained Perrin.

The tasting jumped from the Old World to a wine that exemplifies the bold, ripe New World style, the [Mollydooker Shiraz McLaren Vale Carnival of Love 2007](#) (No. 9, 95, \$90). Even though the brand was founded in 2005, its wines have already appeared twice in the Top 10. But it wasn’t an easy road. Owner Sparky Marquis said that a year after starting Mollydooker, he and his wife, Sarah, had only \$17 in the bank. “We decided we should make wines we enjoy drinking, in case we had to drink the whole lot,” he quipped. Following their success, they started the Sip It Forward program to raise funds for schooling and food for Cambodian children. “When you’re blessed, you should bless others,” he said.



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The tasting ended on a sweet note, with the dessert wine [Château Guiraud Sauternes 2005](#) (No. 4, 97 points, \$57). Co-owner and winemaking director Xavier Planty also credited the growing conditions in 2005, which he called a “perfect year,” for the exceptional quality. “We try to make a wine where the sugar is not too present, but a balance between sugar, acidity and fruit,” he explained, noting that the blend contains a high proportion of Sauvignon Blanc to Sémillon, more than typical for Sauternes, to maintain the fresh character.

Sparky Marquis, Mollydooker; Xavier Planty, Château Guiraud.

After the tasting wrapped up, music filled the hall to energize the clean-up crew: “Whole Lotta Love” by Led Zeppelin. Many audience members, lingering over what was left of their favorite wines, laughed when they recognized the tune.