



DOUG FROST, MW & MS

In 1991, Doug passed the rigorous Master Sommelier examination before becoming America's eighth Master of Wine just two years later. He is the second person in history to complete both exams.

A Tale of Two Vintages

For any normal person, walking around tasting dozens or even hundreds of young, astringent red wines all day, spitting each and every one instead of swallowing, sounds akin to a visit to the dentist (with apologies to dentists). Doing it five days in a row sounds more like a visit to the psychiatrist may be in order. But this is my work; strangely, I enjoy it.

Partly, this is because I don't view these tastings as simply one wine after another. Instead, there is a narrative at work, particularly when I can taste seventy-five or so 2012 Bordeaux wines in one sitting; and then do the same a couple of days later with about one hundred Bordeaux from the 2014 vintage. With Bordeaux representing for many the pinnacle of age-worthy wines, there's a great deal to learn. Which wines will show well? Which don't? How similar are the wines from the Margaux commune in 2012 one to another; and how different and inconsistently styled were the Margaux wines in 2014 (the answer: quite a lot

different and I'm not sure why).

The plot unfolding as I tasted all those 2012's was very different than the story of the 2014's. 2012 was a wet and weird year; wines didn't ripen well, and under-ripe wines can be herbaceous and tart. I generally like tart when it's accompanied by fruitiness but that's not really the tale of the 2012s.

2014, on the other hand, is like a book that opens with a bang. Fruit is out front, black cherries, plums, blueberries, red currants and many more all abound. And the telling grows; herbal notes like rosemary sprout along with red roses and violets in the aromas; some of these are just plain fun.

Bordeaux isn't only dry reds and white wines; their lush dessert wines from Sauternes and Barsac are among the world's greatest wine bargains. But as pretty as were the sweet 2014s, the story of the 2012's held a surprise ending with many estates offering delightful character. It wasn't quite what I had expected but brought a rather boring tale to an exciting conclusion.

Don't let me put you off 2012s entirely; there are some pleasing wines and they may be found at reasonable pricing. And given the vintage's bad rap, people may end up discounting some of them. Hope springs eternal, and maybe this yarn isn't completely spun yet. Some of these may yet grow shapely and round, but the general tenor of the vintage is less generous than 2014's offerings.

Yet each reader may view the stories differently. Many of my colleagues were not as impressed with 2014 as I was. But then they can tell their own stories. This one's mine.