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The First Book By Neal Martin
Pomerol – the Definitive Book on One of Bordeaux's Least Known Appellations

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After the Book: Stockholm Syndrome

Sweden, and indeed Scandinavia as a whole, has fascinated this writer for many a year. Sure, they inflicted IKEA on the world and entire Sundays have been martyred in the process of sleepwalking around a giant warehouse for several hours, only to exit clutching a polka-dot spatula called "Obehövlig" (or something like that.) Of course, like half the world's population, my affinity with Sweden came from ABBA. During my teenage years I would spin "Dancing Queen" or "Waterloo" to blend a bit of kitsch into what was otherwise a night of hardcore cutting edge hip-hop. This was around 1987/1988 before the Swedish quartet became cool. I was threatened with physical violence just once, somewhere around the second chorus of "Mama Mia".

I never journeyed to Sweden, not until the opportunity arose to conduct a Pomerol tasting in Stockholm in conjunction with the book. I booked into an über-cool bijou hotel near the centre of town, a ground floor full of goatee-bearded men in rimless rectangular glasses plotting the next Spotify whilst sipping cappuccinos and nodding their heads to the ambient House music. Opening my Samsung laptop, I felt out of place and considered crayoning "Air Mac" onto the lid. But I managed to tap away at the keyboard, giving the impression that I was programming a revolutionary iPhone App instead of dawdling through friend's pages on Facebook to see what they were up to.

I had time to take a walk through Stockholm. I pretended to be admiring the architecture but in reality I was just trying to spot a member of ABBA, in particular Agnetha, with whom I conducted a turbulent imaginary affair from the ages of ten to twelve. I narrowed my search to blonde headed females, but that did not really work. For a split second, I thought I spotted Benny but somehow I doubt that he would have been sweeping the road in a luminous orange jacket smoking a fag. He's probably ensconced in some mountaintop ice palace writing the follow-up to "Chess".

I conducted two Pomerol-themed tastings in Stockholm for assorted guests. Since photographer Johan Berglund claims to be a Swede himself, he made the schlep from Malmo to join us and display his stunning photographs. It was an interesting array of wines. Some older bottles with age represented traditional, old school Pomerol, though both the **Clos René 1982** and **Château de Sales 1985** were pleasant, if a little rough around the edges. Moving back further, a **Château Gazin 1959** was rustic and a little fatigued, yet the acidity kept its life-support machine bleeping away. One of the real surprises was **Château Latour-à-Pomerol 2007**, which showed much better in bottle than in barrel, whilst the **Château Fleur-de-Gay 2000** was a sumptuous delight. The **Petrus 1988** was enjoyable if you are not paying full whack for the price. In some ways it serves as a stepping-stone to the 1989 and 1990 for whilst it does not have a hope of reaching those twin peaks, it is a move in the right direction after the disappointing 1985 and 1986. It cannot shake off the austerity of the vintage, not that I would want it to, so you end up with a conservative Petrus that just lacks a little excitement.

Following the tasting we retired to sports bar to watch Manchester United get thrown out of the European Cup by Real Madrid. I though I saw Björn behind the bar whistling "Knowing Me, Knowing You" under his breath, but I could have been mistaken. I enjoyed Stockholm and they certainly enjoy their Pomerol.

Thanks to Roberson Wine Merchants and Magnusson Fine Wine for organizing these tastings.

Tasting Notes

2007 Château Latour-à-Pomerol 89

The 2007 Latour-à-Pomerol has certainly improved since I tasted it out of barrel and it came across

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all...curmudgeonly. It shows fine clarity on the nose with a mixture of red and black fruit, the merlot particularly expressive. Give it 10 minutes and that mineralité begins to surface. The palate is nicely balanced and feels much more supple in the mouth compared to its showing in barrel. Lovely touches of redcurrant, boysenberry and mulberry with a gentle lift on the finish. It does not have the structure of a long-term Latour-à-Pomerol but will drink well over the next decade. Tasted March 2013.

2006 Château Bellegrave 89

The Château Bellegrave continues to offer much pleasure. Three years after I last tasted it, the Pomerol has developed a pastille-like purity and comes across "juicy" and "primal". The palate is billowing with bilberry and boysenberry fruit, maintaining the focus and symmetry found before albeit with an easy-going finish that suggests it will not be a long-term prospect. Very fine. Tasted March 2013.

2002 Château Trotanoy 90

The 2002 Trotanoy has definitely improved since our last encounter four years ago. Here it has a deep colour. The nose is well defined if conservative with graphite infused black fruit and cedar. The medium-bodied palate is structured, the tannins remaining firm in the mouth and has developed an attractive ferrous, slightly attenuated finish. Perhaps this is a little hard going, but it is drinking well now. Tasted March 2013.

2000 Château La Fleur de Gay 93

I really love this millennial Pomerol. At 13 years of age it offers that melted, smooth, sensual bouquet with mulberry and blueberry fruit, that exotic caramel note lurking in the sidelines. The palate is supple and sweet with a velvety smooth texture and nicely judged acidity. Long and plump, this is an opulent Pomerol, but seems comparatively for the vintage at this juncture. Tasted March 2013.

1999 Château La Conseillante 92

The La Conseillante '99 has stepped off the gas a little since its marvelous showing three years ago. Here it offers a fragrant rather than ebullient bouquet with wild strawberry, cedar, cigar box and just a hint of vanilla. The palate is medium-bodied with crisp acidity. Whilst not a complex wine it has plenty of tart red cherry fruit and dried orange peel curled around the slightly brutish tannins, then it cruises rather than fans out on the finish. Tasted March 2013.

1988 Petrus 89

It has been several years since I last encountered the Petrus '88. You can look back on it as a stepping-stone to the momentous 1989 and 1990. Youthful in colour, the bouquet seems a little aloof and distant. It is well defined with forest floor and touches of dried violets, but the tertiary notes are quite pronounced. The palate is medium-bodied, nicely focused though missing a little vigour at 25-year of age. There is a conservative here, but also there is breeding and aristocracy not fully released. But in retrospect, the '88 gives you a taster of what is to come. Tasted March 2013.

1985 Château de Sales 87

This is a respectable if not thrilling wine from Pomerol's largest estate. This bottle performed better than the last. Certainly it looks more mature than it should, but it has a pleasant, dusty raspberry nose and a supple palate that is clean. It does not build in the mouth, but remains very linear towards its bashful truffle-tinged, tertiary finish. It shuts the door without making a sound. Tasted March 2013.

1982 Clos Rene 88

This Clos Rene has an animally, rather bretty nose that might be unrefined and bucolic, but you

cannot help falling for its charms. Give it 10 minutes in the glass and there is a potent note of sweaty saddle. The palate is medium-bodied with good acidity. It is fleshy and quite forward like many 1982s now, a dash of cracked black pepper at the back of the mouth, good cohesion and a volatile kick right on the finish. You would not claim it to be fault free, nor would you wish to change anything. Tasted March 2013.

1959 Château Gazin 87

This is one of the oldest bottles of Gazin that I have encountered. Here, it has a pleasant, very rustic, menthol-tinged bouquet with scents of singed leather and mushroom developing. It is not a precocious nose like some other 1959s, but it offers a pleasant animally quality. The palate has decent freshness with agreeable decayed meaty notes emanating from the Cabernet Franc. There is a touch of piquancy on the finish and it rather dawdles across the finish line. Yet you cannot help going back for another sip. Tasted March 2013.

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