



Some thoughts and memories on the occasion of the 1000 bulletin.



This bottle of **Château de Fargues 1951** was consumed in 2007 at the residence of Alexandre de Lur Saluces in Fargues and holds a unique distinction - there is no Yquem 1951 as it was not produced. I selected this bottle in memory of Alexandre de Lur Saluces.

There are so many memories in 999 newsletters that this 1000th edition spans six pages. While preparing this newsletter, I received the sad news of Alexandre de Lur Saluces' passing. The role he played in my early steps within the world of wine was pivotal. I will address this first in the chapter dedicated to winemakers.

My first newsletter dates back to December 17, 2000. The 500th newsletter was published on August 21, 2012. I never thought I would reach the milestone of a thousand newsletters. Hence, the delight in reminiscing about these beautiful moments.

I would like to share with you the joy I have experienced during these 23 years. In the year 2000, I was entirely unknown in the realm of wine. An industrialist, far from the limelight of current events,

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I sought to organize dinners featuring aged wines, driven by a desire for haute cuisine. I possessed an extensive collection of vintage wines, and I had no inclination to part with them. The dinners became the chosen solution for sharing my wines, and I was determined they be enjoyed under the best possible circumstances. I had to introduce myself to journalists and chefs in order to orchestrate these dinners, and throughout this journey, I encountered winemakers.

Journalists and Writers

I was fortunate in 2002 when Jean-Claude Ribaut, a journalist from Le Monde, wrote an article about Alain Senderens, who had just completely transformed his menus by prioritizing wine over the dish. His article concluded with: "Alain Senderens does what François Audouze does." This allowed me to meet Alain Senderens during a private lunch. I brought along a Nuits Cailles Morin Père & Fils 1915, and upon tasting it, Alain called a server and requested: "Bring rose petals." The pairing of Nuits Saint-Georges with rose petals was simply sublime. I was impressed by his approach to pairings, and we met again at workshops he organized, with figures like Jacques Puisais and Jean-Pierre Perrin of Beaucastel. One of the very first journalists to support me was Nicolas de Rabaudy, who offered me numerous insights and introduced me to many fascinating individuals. It's thanks to him that I received an award from the Amorim Academy for a thesis I had written about the life of corks. It was to the Amorim company that I recently donated my collection of corks.

The elusive journalist François Simon, who never allowed himself to be photographed to avoid recognition, wrote about my dinners. He came to stay at my house in the south. We discussed wine and gastronomy with a particular sense of happiness.

Laure Gasparotto dedicated an entire page in Le Figaro to my dinners, featuring my photo on the front page. Influential figures in the wine world asked me: "How did you manage to get a page when we, who have been in the wine world forever, haven't?" An amusing anecdote accompanies this page. Laure included my phone number, and I feared being inundated with calls. I received only one call! And the person who called has since become a friend.

Oriane Nouaillac, who publishes the magnificent magazine "Vigneron," placed her trust in me and gave me a page to write for every issue. Michel Bettane is more than a journalist; he is a wine encyclopedia. He welcomed me at the Grand Tasting, where I participated in tasting sessions. Tasting a wine with him is absolutely fascinating because he knows everything and provides enlightening insights.

And I cannot omit Bernard Pivot, who in his "Dictionnaire amoureux du vin," dubbed me the Bossuet of old bottles and turned my name into a common noun, like Poubelle, Ampère, or Guillotin. Let's not dream, Larousse or Robert will probably not include it, but it remains an honor nonetheless.

The Chefs With Whom I Orchestrated the 276 Dinners

The brilliant chefs with whom I have had the pleasure of collaborating on dinners are listed here in alphabetical order: Yannick Alléno, Frédéric Anton, Pascal Barbot, Nicolas Beaumann, Akrame Benallal, Patrick Bertron, Gérard Besson, Alexis Bijaoui, David Bizet, Daniel Boulud, Alexandre Bourdas, Olivier Boussard, Hugo Bourny, Eric Briffard, Olivier Brulard, Boris Campanella, Jean André Charial, Bernard Dance, Marc Demund, Nicolas Decherchi, Jacques Le Divillec, Arnaud Donckele, Alain Dutournier, Marco Fadiga, Eric Fréchon, Pierre Gagnaire, Mickaël Gaignon, Christopher Hache, Kenichi Handa, Jocelyn Herland, Guillaume Iskandar, Joséphine Jonot, Philippe Legendre, Guy Martin, Richard Mebkhout, Thierry Méchinaud, Philippe Mille, Christophe Moret, Jean-Sébastien Monné, Sébastien Morellon, Michel Nave, Bertrand Noeureuil, Alain Passard, Christophe Pannetier, Clément Pecot, Alain Pégouret, Patrick Pignol, Gilles Reinhardt, Brian Reimer, Michel Rostang, Michel Rou, Frédéric Robert, Guy Savoy, Dominique Saugnac, Julien Schmitt, Alain Senderens, Alain Solivérès, Giuliano Sperandio, Christian Le Squer, Ryuji Teshima, David Van Laer, Marcus Verberne, Jean-Pierre Vigato.

Knowing that these esteemed chefs have welcomed my input in designing their menus is an honor I deeply appreciate. I recall Alain Senderens, who, upon sensing the initial unpleasant nose of the 1956 Romanée Conti at its opening—a wine I had pronounced deceased but later revived—remarked to

the guests, "You could never imagine that what you are drinking is the same wine as what was opened six hours ago."

I remember Guy Savoy, perpetually attentive to every detail and more present than any other chef. He once sat at our table to taste a sublime 1928 Suduiraut alongside a participant renowned for her olfactory skills. A rare moment indeed. He even devised a dish of bladder-cooked capon with a touch of Zan candy to pair with a 1845 Cypriot wine for my wife and me.

Christian Le Squer stands out in my memory. When I suggested he simplify his recipes, he responded, "But how can a chef showcase his talent?" Our camaraderie deepened over numerous meals. Pascal Barbot warmly received me, taking out a notebook and pen. The fact that a three-star chef agreed to transcribe my words left me astounded.

In Beijing, I remember Daniel Boulud telling my guests, "I have hosted hundreds of grand wine dinners, but I have never encountered anyone as demanding as François Audouze," as I had visited days prior to verify every dish of the menu.

I remember the complex cuisine of Pierre Gagnaire, which I sought to explore over lunch with Hervé This, his adviser. Hervé struggled to explain a dish, and as soon as Pierre arrived to elaborate, everything became clear. Memorable dinners ensued with this exceptionally talented chef.

With Ryuji Teshima (Teshi) and Kenichi Handa (Ken), I found exceptional listeners who put their talent at my service without sacrificing their creativity. At Restaurant Pages, I feel at home, on a terrain of pure friendship.

The closest bond, evolving into a fusion of friendship, blossomed with Arnaud Donckele. From the outset, we understood each other implicitly. This led to me organizing the first meal at Plénitude Arnaud Donckele, on the eve of the official opening at La Samaritaine. A privilege indeed!

The Winemakers

I mainly collect aged wines. Why bother disturbing winemakers out of curiosity or a desire to be known? Additionally, my wife does not drink, and I did not want to impose visits to winemakers on her or venture far without her. Therefore, I did not excessively indulge in winery visits. I have never visited Jean-Louis Chave, Christophe Roumier, Lalou Bize-Leroy, or the Moueix family, even though I adore their wines. It's only been opportune moments that led me to meet or visit winemakers, including those who participated in the 19 winemaker's dinners I organized with Bipin Desai, one of the greatest enthusiasts of aged wines on the planet.

In the 1980s, during my active professional years, I was seeking possible acquisitions from steel merchants. The largest Bordeaux negociant was led by Bertrand de Bentzmann. Naturally, we discussed our business, but he also invited me to lunch at Château d'Yquem, at the invitation of Alexandre de Lur Saluces. Christian Moueix recounted how his interest in the lands that would become Dominus Estate was sparked while jogging on the hills of Napa Valley. Count Von Neipperg shared how he developed the vineyards of Canon La Gaffelière and La Mondotte. I was captivated by this encounter with Alexandre and his friends. We met again subsequently. He invited me to my first dinner at Joël Robuchon's restaurant on Rue de Longchamp. At my 60th birthday dinner, I served only imperials, as the contents equate to 6.0 liters, matching my age's digits. The final wine was an imperial of Yquem 1983, and Alexandre mentioned that this 1983 was the greatest he had ever tasted, owing to the volume of the container, which facilitated its evolution. Speaking of imperials, during a visit to Château d'Yquem with the Friends of Yquem club, Alexandre had an imperial of Pétrus 1975 served. I requested that he keep this legendary bottle for my collection of empty bottles.

Another anecdote involves Yquem 1932. I had included this wine in a dinner I was planning at Alain Dutournier's restaurant. I called Alexandre to let him know that I was going to open Yquem 1932. Alexandre mentioned that he had never tasted it. I suggested he join my guests to taste it together. He had a dinner of his own in Paris. We waited for him to join us, and you can imagine the delight of the guests who had the opportunity to share this wine with Alexandre. He came up with a comment that

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only he could have put into words: "It's likely that today, we would have vinified the vintage differently." His grace, elegance, and refinement shone through in that remark. Long live his family and his Château de Fargues.

The second encounter, also thanks to Bertrand de Bentzmann, was a family lunch at Château Figeac. Thierry Manoncourt took me through the perfectly contoured hills and shared his disappointment when his wine could have been the winner of the "Judgment of Paris in 1976," but it wasn't due to the low score he had given to his own wine, not recognizing its worth and deeming it ordinary. He regretted it. It was during this meal that I tasted, for the first time in a single vintage, the three separately vinified grape varieties and the final blend that transcends each component.

May Eliane de Lencquesaing, from the outset of my journey in the world of wine, approved of my approach to showcasing aged wines. She showed me her museum of antique glassware and, after a lunch at her château featuring great wines, she led me to the château's cellar and then her personal cellar, saying: "Choose whatever you want." I told her that I wouldn't take a wine from a vintage of which she had only one bottle, but since she had a significant number of 1929 bottles, I would choose that year. She picked a bottle, placed it in a wooden case, and signed it. This dynamic and determined woman left a lasting impression on me.

A winemaker who significantly impacted my life is Jean Hugel. He was one of the most loyal members of the Academy of Aged Wines, and as he enjoyed public speaking, he would stand up to tell the academics: "You can't possibly know how lucky you are to have François Audouze." Thanks to his nephew Etienne Hugel, I had the opportunity to taste a 1791 Constantia. His way of introducing this wine was incredibly elegant. Etienne said: "As I was sure that you would drink 1791, as you were Jean's friend, I brought it to be sure to be able to drink a few drops". What kindness and grace.

Bernard Hervet was General Manager of Bouchard Père & Fils. He said to me: "you should come and drink our Montrachets from the 1860s, they are sublime". While I love old wines, white wines that are a century and a half old, I would be surprised if they were good. Montrachet Bouchard 1865 is the greatest white wine of my life, because while drinking it, the Earth stopped spinning as I was surrounded in a bubble of perfection. Joseph Henriot continued to give me the benefit of his kindness. One of the greatest encounters is that of Aubert de Villaine. I had been introduced to this great man at the French Wine Academy and he had invited me to spend a day at the Domaine de la Romanée Conti. The night before, I couldn't sleep and in a half-sleep, I imagined myself drinking a Montrachet on charcuterie. And that's what happened the next day. Since then, we have met at the annual presentation of the estate's wines and at winegrowers' dinners. We like to share our emotions on old wines from the estate. And Aubert reacts from time to time to my bulletins of which he is an assiduous reader. It was with him that I drank Les Gaudichots Domaine de la Romanée Conti 1929, an absolute rarity.

It was in the 1970s that I tasted my first Salon champagnes, including the 1959s for example, and my palate was not sufficiently trained to appreciate their excellence, but the history of Aimé Salon fascinated me. An industrialist who buys a domain for his sole consumption and defines very precise rules commands respect. I fell in love with this wine and became friend of Didier Depond. When during a lunch at the Domaine Didier opened a Salon 1943 because it is my year of birth, I appreciated this unexpected gift. It is also the greatest Salon I have drunk.

An almost symbiotic friendship began with my first encounter with Richard Geoffroy, who was in charge of Dom Pérignon. I invited him to the Laurent restaurant to share a Dom Pérignon 1929 I had in my cellar and a Romanée Conti 1956, his first Romanée Conti. The 1929 is my greatest Dom Pérignon.

Thanks to the sommelier at the French National Assembly, I had the opportunity to visit Madame de Volontat, who produces a Maury called La Coume du Roy. Her husband had passed away, and she had dozens of barrels. She kindly offered me a taste of the 1880 Maury from one of the barrels. She allowed me to buy a few bottles of this divine Maury.

There are many other anecdotes with captivating winemakers like Jean-Michel Deiss, so passionate, Jean-Pierre Perrin, a great vigneron from Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and the charming Laurence Féraud, as well as Margareth Henriquez, President of Krug. She had me organize a dinner in my cellar for her

entire staff and for Olivier Krug, during which I presented remarkable wines, including a Château Latour 1902, the only vintage of the 20th century that I hadn't yet tasted. Olivier Bernard's generous friendship has also been a joy. However, I will conclude these potentially endless recollections with Anne-Claude Leflaive. She knew she was afflicted by a severe illness. I asked her to receive friends I was accompanying, and the visit ended with a tasting in her cellar. Montrachet is never served in the cellar because its production is so limited. I looked at Anne-Claude imploringly, and she agreed to make an exception, saying: "You've written such moving words about my wines that I'll allow this exception." Her smile and gaze left an unforgettable impression.

A Few Numbers:

Being a man of numbers and possessing highly detailed databases, I have numerous opportunities for analyzing the wines from these 23 years covered in 999 newsletters.

I've recounted 18,000 wines, including 4,500 champagnes, 3,300 white wines, 7,800 red wines, and 2,300 sweet wines and spirits.

Starting from the 1885 vintage, I've tasted wines from every vintage without exception. The first vintage for which I haven't tasted any wines is 1884. In total, I've sampled over 190 vintages, with the oldest estimated to be from 1690.

I've enjoyed 7,000 wines from before 1970, with an average age of 61 years. This amounts to 302 wines per year, or almost 6 per week. Aged wine is an integral part of my life.

The 276 wine-dinners that I've organized have led to the uncorking of 3,100 wines, with an average age of 50 years. This average age breaks down to 34 years for champagnes, 39 years for white wines, 52 years for red wines, and 73 years for sweet wines.

So, Why All of This?

When I was leading a group of 70 publicly traded companies, wine was a sort of pastime, and only that. I compulsively purchased aged wines because I found that 'the truth' lies in aged wines and because I wanted to taste everything, to discover new sensations. While busy with my business affairs, when a friend asked me, "do you remember the sublime wine we had last Wednesday?" I wouldn't recall, as my brain was focused on managing my business. That's why I started keeping the empty bottles; they helped my memory.

As my cellar grew to levels that made it impossible to consume all the wines with my friends, the idea of creating high gastronomy dinners with my wines emerged. The project materialized in 2000 with the first dinner on December 20, 2000, just three days after the first newsletter, with friends of my son, to test the formula I had devised: ten guests and ten wines in starred restaurants.

I wrote on wine forums and realized the extreme ignorance of aged wines among those responding to my stories. Fortunately, due to the spread of information, the rejection of aged wines has greatly diminished, but there are still persistent misconceptions.

Robert Parker did a disservice to aged wines by discussing a maturity plateau followed by decline. What a mistake. When an enthusiast drinks a wine from 1934, they tend to think the wine is on a decline. That's an error. The wine isn't on a decline; it's on a step, a plateau. This means the wine is in a state of balance. One doesn't sense it declining; they taste the balance specific to the year 1934.

This is very important because instead of seeking how a wine is declining, the enthusiast should better focus on the equilibrium it has achieved. How often at my dinners guests are amazed that an almost century-old wine is still so youthful. They are on the right track. Aged wines offer us a step, a plateau. They don't offer us a decline. And this difference is fundamental. Rather than seeking how a wine is declining, try to understand upon which step it has landed. Less than a week ago, I had a perfect and generously fruity Château Certan 1918. It was 105 years old, and not a guest wondered if it was in decline. It shone, dazzled. It had found a new balance.

I've had a few points of pride. The first is the 'Audouze method.' This method resurrects wines believed to be dead. I'm glad this method is spreading because it yields spectacular results.

The second is achieving success on Instagram, now with over 54,000 followers. When Covid arrived, no dinners could be held. With nothing else to do, I decided to share on Instagram the wines I drink,

and I received an extremely warm welcome. This allowed me to develop my perspective on wine, which is not an object of science but an object of emotion. This view resonates with enthusiasts from all over the world.

In conclusion, I would say that wine should be a source of pleasure, a gastronomic delight, and not a subject of competition or knowledge. Of course, one can have fun showcasing their knowledge, but wine is about emotion. Aged wines are an irreplaceable treasure. I'm proud to try to showcase it and I thank everyone who has helped me promote this unique treasure, filled with so much joy and friendship.

With warm regards,

François Audouze

P.S. Many individuals have sent testimonials on the occasion of this 1000th newsletter. They are available for viewing here:

<http://www.academiedesvinsanciens.org/bulletins-du-2eme-semester-2023-du-numero-999-a/>