



Birthday Boys at Sale e Pepe on Marco Island (from left) Gregg Mason, Jim Eckmann, Mike Curtis, Greg Pearson, Howard Graham, and Jim Bryant.

The Rewards of Patience

FRIENDSHIPS AND WINES THAT STAND THE TEST OF TIME

ALTHOUGH I OFTEN USE the forum of this column to write about wine values, I want to focus this article on those who actually or potentially wish to drink classic wines at their time of maturity. As I referenced in the 2023 March/April QB article on Grange wines, Penfolds produces a great wine book that is updated every seven years named “The Rewards of Patience.” As noted in this column, the title is apropos to Grange and other Penfold wines, but also to many other outstanding wines of the world. I will focus on several recent events which highlight

the truism of this book’s title.

CELEBRATING ON MARCO ISLAND

The first event happened on Marco Island, Florida, in February 2024 on my birthday. Several of my friends came down to celebrate this occasion with me. All of us brought special wines from our own cellars which meant that all the wines were chosen by people who had knowledge regarding which wines were worthy of being cellared for the correct amount of time in the proper conditions. This also assumes the individuals had the economic resources to afford the investment and made the

decision to allocate enough of their resources to this opportunity to enjoy the wine under optimal conditions and in this case—to share the experience with like-minded friends.

The dinner was at Sale e Pepe on Marco Island which offers a classic setting that features beautifully prepared, delicious Italian food. All the food showed well with the mainly Italian wines, and the 2004 Sloan Cabernet was terrific, also. The 2010 Ornellaia (25th anniversary) and the Aldo Conterno Barolo Riserva Granbussia 2006 showed well as predicted. However, the stars of the night



Gregg Mason and the Sommelier with wines enjoyed at Jim Bryant's birthday dinner at Sale e Pepe. Wines for Dinner at Bleu Provence in Naples.

were the Gaja Barbaresco Sori San Lorenzo 1989 and the Gaja Barbaresco Sori Tildin 1990. Both Gaja wines had been stored in my cellar since release and have rarely been tried since.

Regarding the Sori San Lorenzo, this wine is distinguished by being the only single vintage of any wine where the entire history is chronicled day-by-day in the book, "The Making of Great Wine: Gaja & Sori San Lorenzo," by Edward Steinberg. This is the most profound wine book I've read, but I acknowledge that I am probably impacted by my friendship with the Gaja family and their wine portfolio. But I am most influenced by the fact that I have never had a better wine than this one and those who shared this bottle with me on my birthday (see photo) were uniform with their effusive praise. Coming from such an accomplished group of wine enthusiasts is quite a compliment. Suffice to say, this will be a lifetime memory for all of us.

A DISTINGUISHED DINNER

The evening progressed with multiple small plates of appetizers and entrees, all of which were accompanied by well-paired wines. The Ornellaia 2010 was fabulous and for those of us who had visited and dined at Ornellaia multiple times, it brought back treasured memories. The Sloan Cabernet Sauvignon 2004, is one of California's best wines. For several of us it was our first Sloan. What a treat!

The Italian line-up continued with one of my

favorite producers (Aldo Conterno) wines—Aldo Conterno Barolo Bussia 2006. In fact, I welcomed the 21st century with Aldo Conterno, the gift of his greatest wines, the original Barolo Gran Bussia 1971. Although the 2006 was only 18 years old, it was rich, round, and intense. The last wine was Gaja Barbaresco Sori Tildin 1990 which was served at the same time as the Gran Bussia and the Sori San Lorenzo. None of us could believe how exceptional all three wines were. My advice to my readers is to consider a trip down this wine road as soon as possible as it takes years of planning and research to hone your passion for this art form and to find a few like-minded friends who wish to travel down this same road.

A SECOND CELEBRATION IN NAPLES

Having been to the top of this mountain, the seven fortunate souls were treated to a French version of the same the next night at Bleu Provence in Naples, Florida. The food was fantastic, and each course had a distinguished wine from France which elevated both the food and wine to a similar level of the previous night. The wine highlights included La Conseillante 1990, Cos d'Estournel 1982, Haut-Brion 1989, Chapoutier Ermitage Le Pavillon 1999, Clinet 1989, La Mission Haut-Brion 1989, and Vacheron Sancerre 2022.

The Sancerre was from my favorite producer and was an ideal opening act with amuse-bouches. All the red wines were of legendary quality and truly among the best Bordeaux wines ever made

and accented the creative and exquisite cuisine of this great restaurant. What an end to this unforgettable birthday celebration.


In closing, I think putting such an event together with all the steps necessary to make it happen reminds me of the advice of an arborist who once told me that to best appreciate a tree on one's property requires a lot of knowledge of types of trees, a commitment to stay on the property for a long time, and to plant the tree. He agreed that it may have been the best time to plant the tree 20-to-40 years ago, but doing so today beats any time in the future. Happy wine experiences to all. *À Votre Santé!* 



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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