

*~An Upset in the World of Wine~  
The 1976 Paris tasting*

The 1960's was the first time Charles Bacigalupi had ever heard of Chardonnay. Bob Sisson, the University of California farm advisor for Sonoma County at that time began advising Russian River Valley growers to try planting Chardonnay. Charles obtained the budwood for the Chardonnay from Karl Wentz and planted 14 acres of it in 1964.

In 1973 the Bacigalupi's sold their Chardonnay to Chateau Montelena, a winery in Napa Valley. The winemaker at the time was Miljenko Mike Grgich. He made 1,800 cases of the 1973 chardonnay which amounted to just over 40 tons from local growers; about 20 tons from Henry Dick in Alexander Valley, 14 tons from the Bacigalupi's in Russian River Valley and the remaining 5 tons from Napa Valley growers John Hanna and Lee Paschich. The wine was fermented extremely slowly and spent six months in French oak barrels before bottling.

The original weigh tag from 1973

*Chateau Montelena*  
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1973 Vintage - Charles Bacigalupi

Pinot Chardonnay

2,375	x	23.0	=	54.625
2,400	x	22.5	=	54.000
1,600	x	22.8	=	36.480
2,600	x	23.5	=	61.100
2,700	x	23.7	=	64.050
2,550	x	23.5	=	60.112
<u>14,165</u>				<u>300.797</u>

14.165 tons x 25.15 = 357.2475 = 25.12 average balling

14.165 tons x 122.45 = 1734.44

Transportation 14.165 tons x 715.00/ton = 10128.225

215.40  
214,342.92

The famed Paris tasting was arranged by Steven Spurrier, an Englishman who ran a wine-shop and the Académie du Vin, a school for tourists and Frenchman in Paris. The wines were limited to two types, chardonnay, the grape that made the best whites in California and France, and cabernet sauvignon, the grape that made the best reds in both areas. The wines tasted were transatlantic cousins – four white Burgundies against six California Pinot Chardonnays and four Grands Crus Chateaux reds from Bordeaux against six California Cabernet Sauvignons.

According to its organizers the event was not “a competitive tasting, but an opportunity to acknowledge that a young vineyard area can produce top-quality wines, given the same love, interest, skill, and money that has been lavished on European vineyards for centuries.” The American entries were all from California and were hand picked and transported to Paris.

The tasting was blind and included a panel of 9 French judges, all experts ranging from esteemed sommeliers to three star restaurant owners and well known wine journalists. Each judge was asked to evaluate the wines as to color, bouquet, palate and balance and to give each a numerical rating on a scale of 20 possible points. The results: Chateau Montelena, 132; Meursault – Charmes, 126.5; Chalone Vineyards, 121; Spring Mountain, 104; Beaune Clos des Mouches, 101; Freemark Abbey, 100; Batard Montrachet 94; Puligny-Montrachet, 89; Veedercrest Vineyards, 88; and David Bruce, 63.



The Paris tasting revolutionized the wine industry and declared that great wines could be grown in California. In his book *The Judgment of Paris*, George Taber, the only journalist there has documented the actual events of the famed tasting. Without this book and other media coverage the tasting might have been dismissed as a one-time fluke or publicity stunt. Instead, the Paris Tasting unquestionably changed the way the wine world looked at California wine.

The Paris tasting block of Chardonnay on the Bacigalupi ranch still exists today, untouched. The family vows to keep the vineyard the same until it's pushed out its last grape. Currently the fruit is sold to Rudd Winery in Oakville.