

  
CHÂTEAU  
GRAND-PUY-LACOSTE  
GRAND CRU CLASSÉ EN 1855



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### All Upstanding! Grand-Puy-Lacoste 1978-2009

When I think of the Grand-Puy-Lacoste, the voice that enters in my head is that of actor, Richard E. Grant. Those unacquainted with his oeuvre should do themselves a favor and watch the impeccable cult 1987 film "Withnail & I" or if pressed with time, search for "**Posh Nosh**" on Youtube and treat yourself to a criminally overlooked parody by the BBC, full of surreal British humour and the odd wine review (trust me, you'll thank me for unearthing this gem.)

Hopefully you now have Richard E. Grant's voice in your head.

How does it sound?

Very English for a start, which is ironic since Richard E. Grant was born in Swaziland. He has that kind of Noel Coward enunciation whereby every word and every syllable is "proper". There is something ineluctably aristocratic in his timbre... Old money. Not some whippersnapper who made a bundle in the City but a gentleman of gilded lineage, a gentleman from "good stock": wet nurse, boarding school, ranking army officer and then retreat to country pile. There is a sense of conservatism and formality. It is a voice that is instantly recognizable, paradoxically high class yet friendly and avuncular; warm and reassuring, which is why Grant's voice-overs are in such demand.



Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste is a combination of all those things. It is upright and upstanding; conservative yet trustworthy; sometimes aloof but never unfriendly. In my eyes and according to my taste buds, Grand-Puy-Lacoste is the quintessential Pauillac and if Richard E. Grant ever popped round for supper, I would reach for this bottle (though he would politely decline since he is teetotal, difficult that is to believe if you witnessed his legendary boozing throughout Withnail.) Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste: it is for the traditional Bordeaux-lover who finds Burgundy far too befuddling, Rhône too bucolic and California too Californian.

My own appreciation goes back to my earliest days in wine when I would taste say, the 1982 and remark upon its obduracy after 20-years in bottle. How long could a wine remain statuesque? Or take the 1990: a sexy and flamboyant in most estates' hands apart from recalcitrant Grand-Puy-Lacoste who created a dense, tannic, masculine wine that could have sunk the Titanic had an iceberg not got there first. But the real revelation came during a memorable vertical tasting back to a magnum of 1943 in London. I had picked up some elusive bottles from the 1960s for a few shillings and they proved how this Pauillac needs decades and not years in bottle.

  
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Perhaps it was appropriate that a venue for a Grand-Puy-Lacoste vertical took place in the hallowed halls of Oxford University earlier this year. Not that the remarkably vibrant "Oxford Wine Circle" shun the New World. Far from it. Just the previous week the students had to endure a vertical of Harlan Estate. It's just that the oak paneled walls, oil paintings of illustrious dons down the centuries and the overriding feeling that this ancient campus is ostensibly Hogwarts for the adult intelligentsia - together this was where I would expect Grand-Puy-Lacoste to be at home.



*Xavier and his eldest daughter Emeline pictured at the château back in 2010 -copyright Johan Berglund.*

Though the style of the wine is masculine, tannic and conservative, that is not true of proprietor Xavier Borie who is certainly one of the most jovial and personable people you could meet on the Left Bank, someone refreshingly free of the airs and graces commonplace along the Gironde estuary. Tall with swept back white hair and hereditary aquiline nose, he has done an enormous amount to gently prod both Grand-Puy-Lacoste and its sibling Haut-Batailly into the 21st century. And it goes without saying that I always appreciate the novelty of visiting a Grand Cru Classé under familial proprietorship, of tasting a noble Claret not at the outpost of some luxury conglomerate but at somebody's home. On this occasion, he dispatched his eldest daughter Emeline to guide us through the wines from the 1970s to recent day vintages. She has taken an increasingly active role in the property, involved in all activities at the château and thankfully blessed with her father's rigor at work and congenial personality outside it.

The bottles, all ex-château, spanned vintages from 1978 until 2009. The tasting notes hopefully speak for themselves. More recent vintages uphold the untrammelled "Pauillac" personality, fine-tuned via investments in the winery and more precision in the vineyard that has rendered them more approachable than the wines of yore. Yet still even a generous vintages such as 2009 should be grace with 12 to 15 years in bottle. The 2005 is a magnificent wine, a benchmark until the stunning 2010 (absent here alas) although I fear that it over-shadows their hugely successful Grand-Puy-Lacoste 2006 that I have adored ever since I first tasted it from barrel. This only misfire is the Grand-Puy-Lacoste 2003 that could not escape a slight jamminess of texture that does not suit the style of the wine. The Grand-Puy-Lacoste 1998 was conservative and a little blunt and personally I prefer the 1995 that demonstrates more flesh and girth. We did not taste the "big-guns" such as the 1990 or 1982 (although you will find notes in the Wine-Journal database). The two eldest vintages attested to a wine that was then as hard as nails when released: stern and tannic. Both the 1978, the year that the Borie family acquired the estate and François-Xavier took over its running, and 1981 were interesting to taste but frankly I find them unyielding and oppressive like many of the vintages from that decade. You have to go back further in time to an era when the estate produced fabulous wines from the 1940s until the 1960s, though they are surprisingly elusive on the market.



The tasting reinforced my admiration for this Pauillac stalwart that in my opinion has produced some of the appellation's greatest wines in recent years. There is no drama about Grand-Puy-Lacoste, no ostentation or pretention, any glitz or fireworks. The Borie's simply knuckle down and quietly go about creating great Bordeaux wines, often at a more sensible price than their neighbours. And thinking back to "Posh Nosh", I like to think that the Honorable Simon Marchmont has a stash of "GPL" that he might share with his beleaguered wife Minty in his country pile with their "Architect's Fish & Chips" (and no, I don't do that little dance that Simon does after he does the blind olive oil tasting...well, I *try* to resist.)

*Thanks to William Kelley and the Oxford Wine Circle for inviting me to this tasting.*

## **Tasting Notes**

### **2009 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (95)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 2009 Grand Puy Lacoste is a magnificent wine for the vintage. It is extremely well defined on the nose, almost pixelated with stunning mineralité threaded through the blackberry, black olive and limestone scents. It is more reserved at first compared to other 2009s, but that bouquet begins motoring after 10-20 minutes with graphite notes becoming ever stronger. The palate is full-bodied and under-pinned by a chassis of firm tannins cloaked in sumptuous black fruit infused with black tea and graphite. It almost has the character of a 2010: much less flamboyant than its peers, but just as compelling. Wonderful. Drink 2023-2045

### **2008 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (92)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 2008 Grand Puy Lacoste has a slightly redder hue compared directly with the 2009. It has a well defined bouquet with blackberry, cold stone, graphite and a touch of bilberry - reserved at first but then coquettishly revealing its elegance. The palate is supple in the mouth and more approachable than either the 2005 or 2009. But still there is clearly good backbone here with bay leaf and seaweed subtly infusing the finish, leaving a residue of pencil lead, a memento of your vinous trip to Pauillac. Drink 2018-2032

### **2006 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (93)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 2006 Grand Puy Lacoste is destined to be perpetually over-shadowed by the previous vintage. However, it is well worth seeking out. Here, it has a deep, almost opaque bouquet with notes of blackberry, raspberry coulis, stewed tea and incense, all with impressive intensity. The palate is medium-bodied with slightly "furry" tannins. There is a good "bite" to this wine, fine tension and a savoury element developing towards the tender finish. This will not be as long lasting as the 2005, but it is one of the best Pauillac crus of the vintage. Drink 2018-2030

### **2005 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (96)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 2005 Grand Puy Lacoste continues its ascent, albeit at a glacial pace like the 1982 and 1990 before it. It has an enthralling bouquet, very intense with blackberry, pencil shavings and a touch of orange peel. There is far more precision here than previous vintages. The palate is bold and deep, bolstered by firm and sturdy tannins, yet here there is the acidity and delineation to really pull it off and make it far less imposing than you would expect. You can feel the weight in the mouth, yet it somehow "floats" across the senses. What a stunning Pauillac, one that is living up to its early promise. But it will need a number of years in the cellar before reaching its peak. Drink 2022-2050



### **2003 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (88)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 2003 Grand Puy Lacoste has an attractive nose of Japanese yellow plum, marmalade and iodine - atypical for this usual more conservative Pauillac. But it is clean and fresh on the entry with firm, rather imposing tannins. There is plenty of lush black fruit, although I was not the only one to detect just a touch of brettanomyces towards the finish. Still, despite some jamminess this handles the growing season well, although it is out-classed by other vintages. Drink 2014-2019

### **1998 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (89)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 1998 Grand Puy Lacoste has a pretty, straight-forward bouquet with black fruit, pencil lead, strawberry and a touch of white fennel. Leaving it for 20-30 minutes in my glass, more overt undergrowth aromas gain momentum. The palate is well-balanced but foursquare and linear, strong graphite notes infusing the black fruit towards the conservative finish. This is a no-frills "GPL", unapologetically classic in style, but perhaps missing the precision of later vintages. Drink 2015-2025

### **1995 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (92)**

The 1995 Grand Puy Lacoste is in its first stage of its drinking plateau. The nose is consistent with the bottle tasted in September 2011 with those intermingled strawberry and raspberry fruit that gradually give way to sous-bois and cedar characters. The palate is nicely balanced and less masculine than other vintages of this Pauillac cru, the fruit slightly redder but with those leitmotifs of cedar and tobacco returning on the finish. It will cruise at this level for the next 10 years at least. Drink 2014-2030

### **1981 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (83)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 1981 Grand Puy Lacoste has an attractive hue, youthful for its age. The nose is composed and focused, though not intense, with scents of blackberry, cedar and sous-bois, the damp tobacco note becoming accentuated with aeration. The palate does not quite match the pedigree of the nose: a little frayed around the edges with rustic, slightly hard tannins and some astringency towards the finish. There is a pleasant saline note on the aftertaste, but I would not keep this much longer. Drink 2014-2015

### **1978 Grand-Puy-Lacoste (86)**

Tasted from an ex-chateau bottle at Oxford University, the 1978 Grand Puy Lacoste has a light tobacco-scented bouquet with hints of undergrowth and brine developing. It shows more intent than the 1981 served alongside. The palate is classic Pauillac, not complex but well balanced with a fungal tincture that becomes more pronounced towards the finish. This is a very respectable 1978 Pauillac, although I feel it is on a downhill slide and needs to be consumed soon. Drink 2014-2016