

[sign up](#) • [member login](#)[home](#) [about](#) [why join?](#) [membership](#) [reports](#) [search](#) [the gang](#) [scoring](#) [news](#)

January 2010 Editorial

What the noughties did for wine, by Olly Smith

Welcome to the New Year! With the Noughties over and done the world of wine is facing sobering times. Much damage has been done to the culture of wine over the past ten years with, for example, the cynical rise of BOGOF mentality in UK supermarkets and, more recently, the global recession that threatens both the quality and diversity of wine on the UK shelves.

Wine producers have taken hits on several fronts - economically, ecologically and politically. Too often in the Noughties, winemakers would privately tell me of the pressure they faced from powerful buyers in order to keep their wines on the shelves. This has had a profoundly de-stabilizing effect on their planning and economic viability. Winemakers have been struggling simply to make a profit, and that can only bring downward pressure on standards. Perhaps a correction though was always on the cards. For us to move ahead, everyone who cares about wine needs to take a deep breath and consider how they think about, engage with and spend their hard-earned cash on wine.



In addition to the recession clobbering the wine world, wine lovers in the UK have also faced tax hikes at a time when trade is, to put it mildly, wobbly. This is nothing new. Between 1588 and 1598, Philip II's foreign policy had left a spanking deficit in the Spanish purse. The King raised taxes in all sorts of ways - notably oil, vinegar and yes, you've guessed it, wine. I believe that dramatic tax hikes on wine risk killing the goose that lays the golden egg and the evidence of the past months let alone years ought to be ringing alarm bells. The high street chain Thresher is in administration in the UK (though the name and a small number of stores have been salvaged) and many other specialist retailers are struggling.

Overseas the world of wine faces serious crises with varying causes. The inflated Bordeaux en primeur campaigns of recent years have been sustained partly by the rapid growth of the Asian market. And yet, the French wine industry overall is sliding deeper into jeopardy - witness the recent slashing of Champagne prices in the closing days of 2009, albeit good news in the short-term for consumers. The problems are not confined to Europe. Down Under, the mood is also grave. In a statement released just weeks ago by a group of wine industry bodies the news is grim: "Structural surpluses of grapes and wine are now so large that they are causing long-term damage to our industry by devaluing the Australian brand, entrenching discounting, undermining profitability, and hampering our ability to pursue the vision and activities set out in the Directions to 2025 industry strategy." With exchange rates, climate change and pressures on natural resources such as water added to the mix, wine-lovers throughout the world are facing a challenging future with a need for fresh ideas that adjust in favour of more sustainable models.

But let's not get too depressed when there are, thank goodness, reasons to feel optimistic. Chile has reason to laud its success with wine throughout the Noughties as well as celebrating its

bicentenary of independence in 2010. South Africa has also made hay as well as some terrific recent wines, especially Chenin Blanc, Syrah and inventive blends. With 2009 on record as one of the Cape's best both for reds and whites and the eyes of the world on the Cape for the World Cup in June, there's a palpably upbeat buzz in the air. And, despite our fears about prices (do the Bordelais ever learn?), the 2009 Bordeaux en primeur grapevine is working in overdrive suggesting a highly favourable vintage which we look forward to reporting on in due course.

Online, social media outlets are buzzing with wine discussion, bloggers and websites are increasing and the internet is offering a fantastic opportunity for wine fans worldwide to unite and share ideas. On the ground in the UK, there have been some welcome improvements such as signs of revival at Oddbins. Their recent tasting showed signs of intent and promise the like of which we have not seen in a decade. And with Laithwaites recent pledge to raise quality (and successfully acquiring the services of Justin Howard-Sneyd MW, formerly head buyer at Waitrose) it will be fascinating to see how their listings build and develop in 2010.

The Wine Gang is also planning a bumper year of activity which we look forward to sharing with you. With the success of our [first consumer tasting](#) in November 2009, we are delighted that there will be a repeat performance at Vinopolis in London on November 6th 2010. Tickets and details of exhibitors will follow - watch this space. We are also busy making plans for our Top 100 at The London International Wine Fair 2010, as well as continuing to take on board your valued feedback with regard to the website which will be revamped with a fresh design in the New Year. 2010 will also see the launch of The Wine Gang's online forum where we encourage and welcome your ideas, discussions and opinions.

It's your Gang and we are looking forward to sharing lively and spirited wine-packed discussions and tastings with you throughout 2010.

Our roving bunch of five category this month is 'Resolution wines' - excellent wines with which to celebrate 2010. We've selected wines that have tickled our fancy from all round the world, including an Austrian St Laurent that will appeal to lovers of Pinot Noir. Happy New Year from us all!

top scoring wine for January 2010



This month, one wine has achieved our first Wine Gang 100/100. Our very first 100 point score goes to Château Lafite-Rothschild 2005 - many congratulations. Our next top scoring wine scores an impressive 99/100, the Château Margaux 2005. However, if the prices of these Bordeaux beauties is eye-watering, don't worry, Bruno Giacosa's Barbaresco Rabajà 2005 scored 95/100 at £49.32 per bottle and just £14.99 would buy you the 94-point Heinrich Hartl St-Laurent Classic 2007 from Austria.

Château Lafite-Rothschild 2005

The price may be insane - thanks to the Far East's obsession with Lafite - but this is the wine of the vintage in our view and one of the greatest wines of the last decade. Dominated by 89% Cabernet Sauvignon, this is nevertheless a very subtle wine: balanced, poised, almost ethereal in its complexity with notes of Asian spices, cassis and cedarwood. The wine is comparatively forward but will mature for another 20-30 years. Also available at Turville Valley Wines and Seckford Wines. Score: 100/100. Find on wine-searcher.com.

Château Margaux 2005

Lovely, fragrant nose followed by similar balance, poise and elegance on the palate. This is as graceful as a prima ballerina, with fresh acidity, filigree tannins, red fruits, subtle oak and a long tapering finish. A wine to savour in the glass. Drink over the next 10-30 years. Score: 99/100. Find on wine-searcher.com.



[Back to main report](#)

[home](#) • [terms & conditions](#) • [privacy policy](#) • [links](#) • [contact us](#) • [login problems?](#)
