

Ripeness (part 2)

Jamie Goode



Night pickers at Hirsch. Photography courtesy of Hirsch

Jamie Goode takes his exploration of ripeness to the region where the issue has been most controversial: California. Catching up with members of the loosely affiliated (and now disbanded) In Pursuit of Balance group, he finds a movement devoted to terroir and elegance—and an understanding that a rejection of the state’s tendency to overripeness need not and should not lead to its opposite

It was a warm March afternoon in San Francisco. I'd agreed to meet with Harvey Steiman of *Wine Spectator* for lunch. We sat outside in the milky sunshine and chatted over a sandwich. I think Steiman was expecting a bit of a fight, because I was in town to take part in a seminar organized by In Pursuit of Balance (IPOB), a grouping of California Chardonnay and Pinot Noir producers who were looking to move away from the riper styles of wine that had previously characterized much of the state's production. IPOB and the existing power structures of *Wine Spectator* and *The Wine Advocate* had clashed quite badly. While IPOB didn't seem too controversial to Europeans, to the American wine press their manifesto was seen as a declaration of war. It was a revolutionary movement that dared to suggest that many of the wines that these publications had championed with high-90s scores were overripe monstrosities that didn't really belong in the category of fine wine.

In particular, Robert Parker had called Rajat Parr, one of the founders of the movement, a "turd" on his own website forum. "No serious person pays any attention to Raj Parr and his zealots," Parker wrote. This was fighting talk. Emotions were running high. But my lunch with Harvey passed without incident. We chatted freely and broadly. I think he'd expected someone more combative, eager to defend IPOB and criticize the *Spectator* and its penchant for very ripe styles of wines. But I wasn't there to fight; rather, I wanted to get a better understanding of this new movement, and I was intrigued by the whole situation. How had the issue of ripeness become quite so contentious?

The seminar itself was eye-opening. I was chairing a panel discussing ripeness as it applied to Pinot Noir, assisted by Jordan Mackay, and with winemakers Justin Willett of Tyler, Josh Jensen of Calera, Wells Guthrie of Copain, and Katy Wilson of LaRue. Each presented a couple of Pinot Noirs, and we looked at them through the lens of ripeness. Even more interesting was the tasting that followed, where the 30 or so producers showed their wines. This was one of the most interesting tastings of California Pinot Noir and Chardonnay that I'd experienced. These were a really interesting set of wines; in no instance did I feel that the wines were overly thin or green (in the case of the Pinots), or light and too acidic (in the case of the Chardonnays). They just showed lovely balance and detail. Yet to the palate of the American critics, this was a controversial bunch of wines, most lacking the richness and sweet fruit profile that they frequently rewarded with high scores. To a more European palate, these were simply good wines, balanced wines. A follow-up tasting with a subset of these wines in London a month later, held by London-based importer Roberson, showed the same thing; to a London trade audience, there was nothing controversial or revolutionary about these wines. They were just very good. It was only against the backdrop of California's new norm of overripe, late-picked wines that they were making a contentious statement.

In Pursuit of Balance

Rajat Parr and Jasmine Hirsch are the founders of IPOB. Parr is a sommelier turned wine grower who rose to prominence through his role at Michael Mina's RN74 in San Francisco and his book *Secrets of*

the Sommeliers. Jasmine Hirsch is the daughter of David Hirsch, who developed the pioneering Hirsch vineyard on the Sonoma Coast. They have in common a passion for fine wine. Hang with Parr and Hirsch, and you will drink well. Particular Hirsch/Parr favorites include Roulot, Jamet, and top grower Champagne.

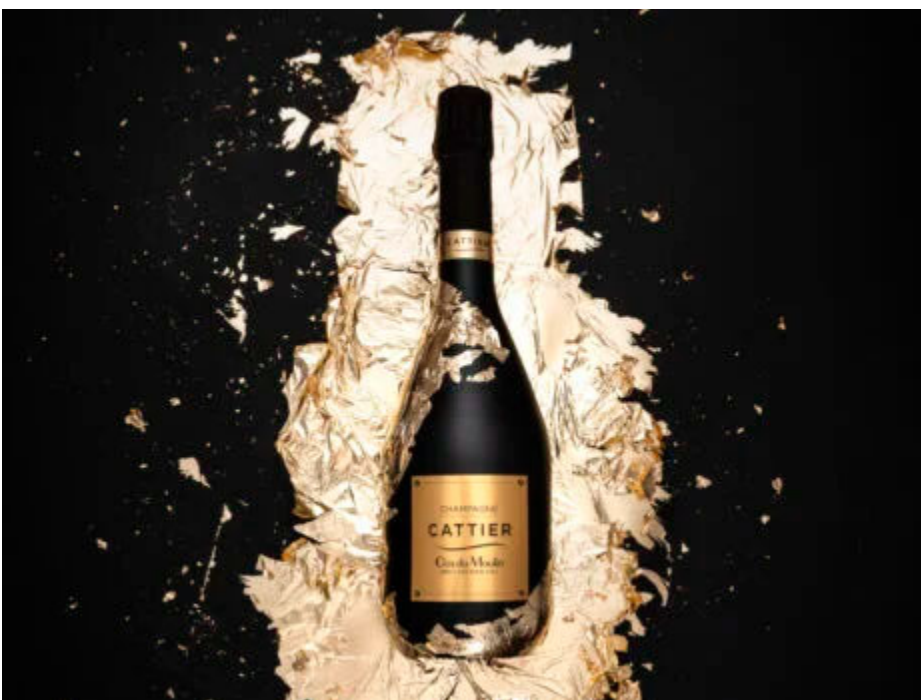
How did it all begin? In 2011, Parr was just releasing the first wines from his Santa Barbara County négociant winery Sandhi, and Hirsch was starting her role as general manager with the new wines from her family's vineyard. "We were talking and started discussing who our favorite producers of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were," recalls Parr. "We came up with a small list of 14 or 15 names." They decided to organize a tasting, and although they had a venue in RN74, they needed glasses and tables. This prompted them to throw the tasting open to consumers and sell tickets to cover the costs. "We gave the tasting a random name: *In Pursuit of Balance*," says Parr. "Then after the tasting—which was packed—there were a lot of articles in the press, some positive but a lot negative. It is almost as if someone had drawn a line in the sand, saying this is different from what is happening in California. This wasn't intentional. It wasn't a movement or an intention to change anything."

After the tasting, the participating producers decided they'd like to repeat it on a bigger scale. They held a tasting in New York and another in San Francisco. "It has been very successful with the audience, but very negative with the producers who are not members," says Parr. "I got a lot of hate mail."

He accepts some of the criticisms but thinks others are unwarranted. "They said it's a kind of cool kids' club," he says but points out that, for a while now, new entrants have had to pass a blind-tasting test with a committee in order to be included in the group. "Some people might say it is elitist, but it's all about discussion, about putting forward an idea about what we do in California," says Parr. "Because the reputation of California outside California is not favorable: It's big, oaky, rich wines. Even now, all the highest-scoring wines in the press are the big, heavy wines. There is no one endorsing elegant wines. People buy by scores, so we said if we have a group and our own voice, we might not need anyone else." Parr adds, "We want to tell the world that California can produce balanced, fresh, non-manipulated wines."

Content from our partners





“When you say you are pursuing balance, people who are making wines of style say, ‘Wait a minute,

are you saying my wines aren't any good?" says Ehren Jordan of Failla, one of the IPOB member wineries. "There's that inference that if you are not in IPOB, your wines aren't balanced." He adds, "These [IPOB] wines are going after the thoughtful wine drinker. I don't know whether America is full of thoughtful wine drinkers. There is a reason we make lots of wines of style in the USA—they appeal to the American palate."

Indeed, one of the implications from the name is that those who aren't part of the group are making unbalanced wines, but the emphasis of IPOB has been to talk about this fresher, lighter style of wine without criticizing other wine styles. "A lot of people pick quite late, and they have to manipulate their wines," says Parr. "But it's not our job to tell these people they should change, or to tell someone else that those wines are bad and ours are better. The idea is that what we do is to give people another choice. Here's a different style of wine that is more Old World than New World."

IPOB has continued to hold tastings, expanding from New York and San Francisco to include Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, Houston, and Dusseldorf. As of 2016, there were 36 member wineries. But at the time of writing, just one more tasting is scheduled, in November 2016, after which the organization will close. "We created IPOB at a time when this conversation was not taking place on a broad and public level," says Hirsch. "We achieved what we intended—to bring the debate around balance and winemaking styles to the forefront of the wine community." She emphasizes that while IPOB will stop, the debate is still not finished. "We wanted to end on a high note, and the impact of the IPOB events held around the globe this past year shows that our message is resonating solidly in the wine trade, as well as with consumers. This discussion about balance and wine's place at the dinner table has become a common part of the conversation about California wine all over the world."

Wines of place versus wines of style

"You can always pick grapes earlier," says Sashi Moorman, who works with Raj Parr as winemaker and co-owner of Sandhi and Domaine de la Côte in the Santa Rita Hills, in California's Santa Barbara County, as well as consulting for others. "The question is, when you pick earlier, can you still get the transparency of the fruit, or are you just going to get another style? There's a ripe style, and then there's a less ripe style." Just as you can lose terroir from picking too late, he suggests, you can lose it by picking too early.

"Raj and I are not interested in style," says Moorman. "We are interested in site expression. I think when people are talking about terroir, they are really talking about the soils— but the climate is what gives you the ability to express the soil. If you are in a warm climate, it becomes more and more difficult as the grapes get riper and riper. It becomes more about ripeness: That's a quality that can be lovely but is more about the roundness of the wine. As you go for earlier picking, when you are working in cooler climates, here you can begin to focus on different sites. You get the expression when you are at marginal ripeness zones. I think this is why you see more terroir-expressive wines in cooler

climates, whether you are in Europe or California or anywhere in the world. And this is the pursuit: to find the place where you have a cool climate that moderates the ripening so you can pick the grapes at a time when you get this site expression.”

So, IPOB isn't just about alcohol levels and a crazy desire to make wines at 12% ABV. “I think you can take it too far,” says Moorman, “at which point the wine is still good wine, but it is now a wine of the opposite style. Instead of the ripe style, it is now a lean style.” He adds, “I think what most winemakers in IPOB want to do is to find that area where you can make something distinctive.”

The point that Moorman makes is an important one. While picking earlier is often a good idea if you have been picking a little too late, wine growers need to understand their terroir in choosing when to pick. They need to interpret it wisely. Some sites have a talent for certain styles of wines, and there are sites that don't respond well to early picking. As an example, Australian Chardonnay has seen a style revolution of late, with wine growers looking to make leaner, more elegant expressions of this variety. But sometimes the result can be lemon juice with a bit of matchstick minerality from toying with reduction. These can be tasty wines, but they are wines of style and aren't necessarily intelligent interpretations of their terroirs. A simple black-and-white view that low alcohol is good and higher alcohol is bad doesn't reflect the complex reality of producing terroir-driven wines.

Changing styles

Wells Guthrie of Copain is a great example of a wine grower who has deliberately made a shift in style. His journey toward picking earlier began in 2003. “I really wasn't liking the way the wines were aging,” he recalls. “I think that, by California standards, the alcohols were moderate, at around 14–14.5%, but the wines lacked the energy and vibrancy I wanted a few years later.” He recalls that there were certain vintages where he wanted to pick but, for logistical reasons, he might have to wait a few days. Then he might end up picking a bit too ripe and be forced to add some water and acid to bring them back. “I can taste the wines that have been adulterated,” he says. “You can't hide it. You can keep them fresh and bright with a little water and acid, but there's an overripe compote-like flavor that comes back. It's really strange to watch that happen. I would taste these wines at five years, and they would taste compotey. I want that on my pancakes, not in my glass.”

2005 proved to be the turning point, when Guthrie decided to act on his instincts. There was a bad frost that hit his Pinot Noir vineyards, and production went from 48 barrels to two, all of which he sold to Raj Parr for Michael Mina. It gave him a chance to start again. “In 2006, I went all in,” he recalls. “Nothing was over 13% alcohol. When the berries came in, they were more turgid. Before they were slightly softening. I had been waiting for the seeds to brown; I was waiting for this theoretical ripeness.” Guthrie says that he got lucky with the Anderson Valley. “We have Pinot Noir at the winery which we sell to Kosta Browne and others,” he explains. “If I pick that at the potential alcohols I'm working with in the Anderson Valley, you just get really thin, insipid wine. It is light for light's sake.

There is low alcohol, but there is no flavor, no depth, and no concentration.” Guthrie says that the change from 14/14.5% alcohol to 13% is huge. “I don’t have to mess around with the wines anymore.”

His customers weren’t happy with the change. “They hated it,” recalls Guthrie. “For the Syrah, we had been getting 95/96- point scores from Parker. I wasn’t showing Parker the wines anymore, and I lost that segment of the population that wants more opulence. There was a huge difference in the palate weight, the structure and mouthfeel. They want more unctuousness in the wines.” But he wasn’t overly concerned about having to find a new customer base. “The clients who are buying the wines now are the clients I wanted from the beginning anyway.

Adam Tolmach of Ojai Vineyard also famously changed his wine style in the mid-2000s, moving to earlier picking. His Santa Barbara County wines, which were sought after and received high scores, were tipping 15% ABV and beyond. Tolmach decided he didn’t like them anymore and made the brave decision to change things. “I’d stopped drinking my own wines,” he’s quoted as saying. One of his early forays into lower-alcohol, better-balanced wines was his 2005 Ojai Vineyard Pinot Noir Clos Pepe Vineyard (Early Harvest) bottling. Parker reviewed it and described it as a borderline failure, giving it a score of 81/100. Interestingly, though, fellow critic and ex-Parker protégé Antonio Galloni gave it 93/100 when he reviewed it in 2014, suggesting that it had aged quite nicely. Tolmach’s wines aren’t the earliest picked, even today nudging 14% ABV, but he was courageous to make a noticeable style change toward picking earlier while he was already very successful, because he believed it led to better wines.

Another IPOB star also performed a dramatic stylistic volte-face. Jamie Kutch caught the wine bug while working as a NASDAQ trader for Merrill Lynch in New York, and this led him to change careers before he’d broken 30. “Growing up, I was always a hobby guy,” says Kutch. “I fell in love with wine in college. Then when I was working on a trading desk at Merrill Lynch, I geeked out with friends on Friday nights.” Kutch fell in love with Pinot Noir and approached Michael Kosta Browne, who took him on as an intern. This led to Kutch and his partner relocating to San Francisco, where he began living a double life, trading and then making wine at the weekends. The day job lasted six months. When his internship came to an end, Jamie started his own project making Pinot Noir. His first vintage was 2005, and he made a mere 150 cases. This had a heady alcohol level of 16.3%. His second vintage weighed in at 15.2%, and Jim Laube of *Wine Spectator* gave this wine 93 points. “I now get scores in the low 80s,” Kutch shares, “but I regard these as a badge of honor!” The third vintage he picked incredibly early, and it ended up at 13.2% ABV. He’s moved on from then, even—his 2013 Pinots ranged between 12.1% and 12.3% ABV and are beautiful wines, not lacking in flavor, intensity, or texture. And they will likely age really well.

The Napa Valley: to excess and back?

The Napa Valley is a key battleground in the debate over appropriate ripeness levels for fine wine. The

move in the late 1990s toward riper styles of wines has been well documented, not least by Jon Bonné in *The New California* (2013). The prevailing narrative is that this is a stylistic move prompted by the decision of producers to make wines of the type favored by the critics. That is, the move toward ripeness follows a deliberate change of course by producers to pick later in order to have a sweeter fruit profile and richer flavors, which is inevitably accompanied by a rise in alcohol levels. But there is an alternative reading of this situation, one that is more nuanced and places less blame at the door of producers. This is a viticultural story. Sashi Moorman says that it's not so straightforward to suggest that in California people have just been picking too late. "It's super-complicated," he says, "because viticulture in California has changed a lot over the past 20 years. Ten to 15 years ago, the genetic material wasn't as good as we have today, and viticulture itself was not as sophisticated." He thinks that the changes in viticulture have allowed people to plant in cooler sites that are suddenly viable, and that this can help keep alcohol levels down. But new plant material in warmer sites can be problematic.

Back in the 1990s, there was wide-scale replanting in the Napa. The big explosion of planting in the late 1960s and '70s had largely taken place on one particular type of rootstock: AxR1. This is a cross between Aramon (*Vitis vinifera*) and Ganzin (*Vitis rupestris*), and it is a strong performer, resulting in high quality and yields, ease of propagation, and tolerance to viruses. But it isn't very phylloxera-resistant, and by the mid-1980s it was being wiped out by a strain of phylloxera called Biotype B. As these vines were succumbing, they were replaced with new rootstocks and the latest virus-free clones of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and other key varieties. The consequence was new vineyards on vertical shoot-positioned trellises that produced extremely efficient canopies. In the warm Napa Valley climate, these began pumping sugar into the grapes as they ripened in a much more efficient way than the vines had done in the past.

Thus we have a perfect storm of overripeness. First, producers find their alcohol levels rising, as the quest for physiological ripeness, itself a relatively new concept, led them to leave the grapes hanging to the point that Brix levels at harvest were sky-high. Then there was the stylistic preference of the two leading California critics, Parker and Laube, who rewarded the riper style of wines with big scores and punished anything they saw as light or green. It's likely a combination of these factors—stylistic choice plus super-efficient vine canopies—that has led to unbalanced high-alcohol wines. There may also be a contribution from climate change, though the influence of climate change on the temperatures in the Napa Valley is not clear-cut, because of the important effect of the ocean-cooled air currents that find their way into the valley. But it is clearly not as easy to make wines that have good flavor ripeness with moderate alcohols as it used to be—even though there is an interesting discussion about what exactly flavor or phenolic ripeness is.

But while Napa is not really IPOB territory, and plenty of big, ripe Cabernets are still being made here, there are signs that this is changing. Not everyone is happy making big, sweet wines. Three visits over

the past year have given me the impression that in more recent vintages more wines are showing freshness and definition, although this is far from a scientifically valid conclusion, and may just be wishful thinking. The likes of Mayacamas and Corison are bright lights showing the way forward: Napa can make balanced, structured Cabernet Sauvignon with the potential for aging at moderate alcohol levels. Historically, the great wines of the 1970s, which have aged beautifully, invariably have alcohol levels around 13%. Chris Howell at Cain has been another voice of moderation when it comes to ripeness. A thoughtful winemaker, in 2012 he wrote an essay on ripeness that he sent out as a communiqué to his mailing list. “I was prompted to write this as a way of reflecting on our choices at Cain as to when to harvest,” explained Howell. “As early as 1992, we were beginning to note among our colleagues a drift toward picking riper and riper. By 1997, when Cain was working with some outstanding vineyards in the Napa Valley, our preferences to pick as much as three weeks before many of our friends was becoming painfully apparent.” He ascribes this later picking to several causes. “Both the terms ‘physiologic’ and ‘phenolic’ ripeness were in use. In practice, winemakers were looking for fully brown seeds as an indicator of tannin ripeness. Besides consultants such as Michel Rolland, the early 1990s saw the beginning of enology laboratories performing sophisticated tests for anthocyanins and tannins.” Howell published his own version of the charts concerning ripeness devised by French viticulturist Alain Carbonneau. In 2007, Carbonneau proposed a model of grape ripening based on 20 years’ experience in a paper titled *Théorie de la maturation et de la typicité du raisin* (“Theory of Grape Berry Maturation and Typicity”), in which he considered a number of ripening scenarios and the sensory characters of wines made from grapes picked at different levels of ripeness. “His key point was to present an array of semi-independent attributes and show how, under varying circumstances, they might evolve differently in the course of ripening,” says Howell. “Each region in each vintage, for each variety, and each vineyard is a different case, so there could be a different chart in each instance. It’s somewhat analogous to an adjustable combination lock, except that there is no simple yes/no answer.”

Howell thinks that it might be the way we taste as professionals that has in part led to riper wines. “While most of the drift toward ripeness has been ascribed either to critics or consumer preference, my thought is that this bias toward ripeness can be ascribed specifically to the methodology of comparative tasting,” he proposes. “As gatherer/hunter primates, as with most creatures, our first preference goes toward sweetness, and away from sourness, bitterness, and astringency. Intrinsically, we all like ripeness. In almost all comparative tastings, up to a certain point, it seems that ripeness is always preferred. As far as I know, these comparative tastings yield similar outcomes among wine drinkers, wine professionals, wine critics, and winemakers.

“At first, this does indeed say that these ripe wines are the ones that we like to taste. But are these also the wines we like to drink? In time, many of us learn to appreciate some bitterness, sourness, and astringency, at least in certain contexts. We like to think that comparative tastings give us some

objective measure of what we're talking about. But what if the method intrinsically conditions the outcome?"

The aesthetics of wine: Who decides what is fine?

This raises an interesting question. Are riper styles of wines —those California wines defended by Laube and Steiman, among others—legitimate wine styles? If they are liked by a large subset of American consumers, doesn't this validate their place in the world of wine? Who says that a Cabernet Sauvignon picked at 29° Brix and then watered back with ripe, sweet, jammy fruit, supported by the seductive spice and vanilla of new oak and given a richer body by 15% ABV isn't a legitimate style of wine? Why can't Pinot Noir at 15% ABV be balanced? Here we enter the realm of aesthetics.

In *The Aesthetics of Wine* (2012), academic philosophers Douglas Burnham and Ole Martin Skilleås have looked in depth at this subject. They argue that wine appreciation is an aesthetic activity similar to viewing a painting or listening to music. Typically, objects that are aesthetically appreciated fall into one of three categories. There are visual (such as paintings and dance), aural (music), and linguistic (literature, poetry) categories. This classification leaves out touch, smell, and taste. Traditionally, these proximal senses have been regarded as too subjective to be of use in aesthetics. Burnham and Skilleås ask, why are there no art categories corresponding to these excluded proximal senses?

They argue that it is possible to regard an object aesthetically without claiming it to be a work of art, citing the example of a beautiful landscape. Normally, aesthetics revolves around the intention of the artist; they are taking a different position, looking at the response of a group of perceivers. Wine tasting can only be aesthetic in the sense of aesthetic practice, taking into account the full context of the perceivers (what they have learned, their skills, their language for describing flavors). It is aesthetic in an intersubjective sense, in that we compare our sensory impressions to arrive at our judgment. It is not something done by individual tasters in isolation.

To help with this discussion, they introduce the term "competency," which refers to the knowledge and experience we bring to the appreciation of an aesthetic object. This competency can be divided into three branches: cultural, practical, and aesthetic judgment. Cultural competency is conceptual in nature: It's the knowledge of kinds and styles of wines, for example. We might ask ourselves, what is desirable in this style of wine? How should it develop in bottle? Practical competency is the ability we possess to taste wine: to detect, dissect, and discriminate what is found in the glass. It's our sensory competence that is then developed by experience. And Burnham and Skilleås emphasize an important point—this all takes place in the context of "intersubjective practices." This might include the procedure and conditions for tasting, the sequence in which the wines are tasted, and the serving temperature. All of these conditions help enable the exercise of judgment. Another part of this practical competency is the experience of different styles of wines. The development of a suitable

language for describing wine is also vital for discerning the characteristics of the wine. We learn about wine by tasting alongside others and developing a vocabulary for wine.

The third type of competency is what Burnham and Skilleås refer to as “emergent perception” or “aesthetic judgment.” Global descriptors used by tasters such as balanced, elegant, harmonious, complex, and profound are referring to properties of the wine that only exist as a combination of the various sensory attributes of the wine. They are emergent properties that aren’t reducible back to the component parts of the wine. So they are themselves based on aesthetic judgments. Aesthetic judgment represents the ability to move from aromas or flavors to the attributions of emergent properties. To do this, we need each other; we need to learn and be guided by others. This ability is acquired intersubjectively. These emergent properties are based on sensed properties of the wine, but the ability to detect and appreciate them must be learned. Aesthetic practice in wine tasting is therefore about a “community of judgment.” This community is a group with broadly similar tastes plus similar sets of competencies.

As individual tasters, we belong to an intersubjective community of wine tasters. And aesthetic judgments present themselves as normative; if I find a wine complex or balanced, I expect that you will, too. What is interesting about this way of thinking is that we have a shift of the focus in aesthetics from the individual perceiver (which is the normal approach) to one where we consider communities of judgment. Fine wine, as we know it, is an aesthetic system.

“Our perspective is that wine is not something that just exists,” says Skilleås. “It’s something we do. Wine tasters, producers, journalists, importers, and so on form what we call ‘the wine world’ (with implicit and explicit reference to Arthur C Danto’s essay, ‘The Artworld,’ first published in 1964).” Skilleås continues, “To you and me, the progression of tasting, for instance, or the glasses we use is second nature. But these, too, we have acquired from others—not to mention the vocabulary and the standards we set. Far from being the object without parts that critics of wine in aesthetics have maintained, wine is an object that is in part constructed by the community of wine—the wine world. The progression just mentioned is one way in which wine becomes an object that we can talk about.”

His view is that judgments of quality can’t be divorced completely from the way wine is treated as an object. “Unwittingly or by design, we learn to taste, talk about, and judge wine from others,” says Skilleås. “We call this guided perception, but we may as well have expanded this to ‘guided judgment.’ We think that the normativity of judgments of wine rest on guided perception and judgment. We are, as it were, members of the wine world, and we judge on its behalf. Of course, we like to stand out and to assert our independence—sometimes to go out on a limb, maybe—but none of this would make any difference if there were not shared norms for what constitute the desirable properties of wine.”

In the world of wine, it seems that there are competing aesthetic systems. There’s the classic world of fine wine, based upon the great wines of Europe. To the old-school wine trade of 40 years ago, the

modern 15% Napa Valley Cabernets would be wines that simply wouldn't fit into this aesthetic system. They are entirely outside it. Parker, with his confidence in his own palate, was prepared to operate outside this system. He helped usher in a new aesthetic system of fine wine that was overlapping with the old system but that embraced styles of wines that were quite new and included them alongside the established classics. Perhaps the way for Parker was made easier by the emergence of New World wines and by Steven Spurrier's famous 1976 Judgment of Paris tasting, which began to question the supposed supremacy of the Old World standards.

Now, it seems, a new aesthetic system is emerging, driven by a new generation of wine professionals who find the ripe, alcoholic style beloved by the influential critics to be distasteful and even ludicrous. This new aesthetic values stylistic diversity and lesser-known regions and varieties, alongside the best of the classics, with the proviso that the wines express a sense of place. Picking late is an enemy of this terroir expression. What we are witnessing with the contentious nature of IPOB is explainable as a clash between competing aesthetic systems. They are different—and perhaps more different than the aesthetic systems that collided with the emergence of Parker and other influential American critics back in the 1980s and '90s. Thus we could argue that this move away from excessive ripeness isn't just a correction or pendulum swing—it's a proper revolution, a regime change.

I will leave the final words to Cain's Chris Howell. "Taste is not only individual, it is also cultural. New wine drinkers— as we all were once—are always asking, 'What do we like? What should we like? What is good?' The answer may be personal, but it is also a shared conversation. Our wine culture is in constant evolution." Long may this important discussion continue.

In the final part of this series, we'll be looking at ripeness as it applies to Champagne and sparkling wine.