

“It was love at first glass.” That’s how many people feel about Chateau Lafite-Rothschild. President John Adams was introduced to the “First Growths” of Bordeaux, among them Margaux, Haut-Brion, Lafite and Latour. While we were still 13 colonies, President Thomas Jefferson identified the Lafite 1795 “the best liked wine of any that year.” Jefferson further reported that Lafite made about 175,000 bottles per year (about 14,500 cases) and sold them for as much as two and a half times the price of lesser growths. It was evident from Jefferson’s letters and notes that the 1784 Lafite was the greatest wine of his time and thus began our country’s love affair with what many call the world’s greatest wine.

This month the owner of Chateau Lafite, Baron Eric de Rothschild, will visit Nashville for l’Ete du Vin - a charity wine auction that benefits cancer programs. The dates are Thursday, June 23 through Saturday, June 25. It will be the first time Baron Eric will conduct a tasting of his wines in Nashville and many Lafite wines from various vintages and in various formats (sizes) will be auctioned for charity Saturday evening June 25. If you want to see crazy people pay crazy prices for rare wine – Go!

The Rothschild’s relationship with Lafite began at an auction in 1868 when Baron James de Rothschild bought the vineyard because it bore the same name as the street where he owned a bank. He died having never seen it after his purchase.

So what is this first growth status? In 1855, the wine brokers of Bordeaux attempted to classify the best wines of Bordeaux into five groups (or growths). First being best of best, fifth being least of best. All being the best. The 1855 classification gave four wines first growth status – Lafite, Latour, Haut Brion, and Margaux. Lafite was graded the top wine in the 1855 classification. Best of the best.

And their prominence was further made evident in the movie “Year of the Comet” when the story line revolves around a large format bottle of 1811 Lafite. Often called the greatest claret ever made.

But since 1974, Baron Eric has been in charge. The vineyard is the largest of the first growth and is part of the Pauillac region. Today they make about 25,000 cases of wine per year. The Grand Cru is made in all new French barrels. The soil is gravel or limestone.

As with all Bordeaux, the grape varieties allowed are Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot. But it is predominately Cabernet Sauvignon. A typical blend would be 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 3% Malbec and 2% Petit Verdot. It is more elegant than the other first growths, but still has what the French call “puissance” (a subtle strength). Another interesting fact is that Lafite usually stays in barrel longer than other wines before bottling. Sometimes as much as two years.

According to the critics, Lafite has made monumental wines. You probably won’t get a shot at pre-twentieth century wines (although I have a few). For example, the 1870 in magnum recently sold for \$25,000. But after 1900 these are some wines judged perfect from Lafite – 1928, 1929, 1945, 1949, 1959, 1982, 1986, 1996 and 2000. If you get a chance, try these or any Lafite, as far as that goes. The 1959 is \$2,000 and the 2000 is \$750.

So once again I am proud to say l’Ete du Vin is providing a world-class wine experience for the citizens of Nashville. If you’d like to go, e-mail me at tom.black@tecniflex.com or call Jan Anderson at the l’Ete du Vin office – 615-329-1760. You can also visit their website for more information – www.nashvillewineauction.com

Recently I saw this thought, “All I ask is a glass of wine from a laughing fellow rover, and a quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trek is over.” If only it were that simple.