

BURGHOUND.COM EXTRA.®

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Quick Review of 2003</i>	2
<i>An Incredible Dinner</i>	3
<i>Vintage Focus—1978</i>	4
<i>Important Changes</i>	5
<i>Auction Results</i>	6

BURGHOUND.COM EXTRA - A SUPPLEMENT TO THE NEWSLETTER!

The purpose of any newsletter is to provide specialized information to a targeted audience. And while the four major quarterly Issues I release each year do endeavor to provide a great deal of information, there are many aspects to understanding and enjoying Burgundy that are not necessarily always germane to the primary theme of each of these quarterly Issues.

In fact, ever since I started Burghound.com, I have lamented that I haven't been able to communicate more often with subscribers about drinking and enjoying Burgundy, which is really the goal after all.

So, to that end I decided to create a vehicle that will permit me to share with you comments on older vintages and how they're drinking, noteworthy restaurants, late breaking news, burgundy auction results, special tastings, personalities, wine events, personal reflections and anything else relating to the wonderful



Photo by the author

world of Burgundy. In short, my goal here is to present topics that will help you become more knowledgeable

yet have some fun doing it. I wish to stress that Burghound.com Extra is designed

(Continued on page 2)

Key Points on 2002:

- The vintage produced fresh, sweet and vibrant wines that presently speak more of pinot noir than *terroir*.
- 2002 is extremely consistent, from the lowest Bourgogne to the top *grands crus*.
- Relatively few master pieces were created but the overall level of quality is extremely high.
- The best 2001s are every bit as good, or even better than their 2002 counterparts—don't ignore them!

A QUICK REVIEW OF THE 2002 VINTAGE

I have received more mail regarding the much ballyhooed 2002 vintage than any other since I stated Burghound.com by reviewing the 1998 vintage. Thus, I thought it only appropriate to use **Burghound.com Extra** to offer a few initial summary observations.

I just returned from Burgundy after having spent 5 weeks there in October and November. Most of that time was devoted to the Côte de Nuits reds though I did drop down into the Côte de Beaune for several days to take a swift look at those reds and whites at several leading domaines.

I'll of course be returning for all of February to take a more in-depth look. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the 2002 vintage is that there is literally no consensus among growers as to whether it's a truly great vin-

(Continued on page 2)



Photo by the author

BURGHOUND.COM EXTRA MAKES ITS DEBUT!

(Continued from page 1)

only to supplement the material in the newsletter, not to replace its core emphasis on buying advice. It is also not meant to take the place on the major retrospectives that appear in each Issue.

Burghound.com Extra will be published whenever the spirit moves me and time permits. It is free to subscribers and feel free to share it with your friends.

It will be delivered via email directly to the email address you specify and will be encoded in Adobe Acrobat just like each quarterly Issue. At present, Burghound.com Extra will be available only via electronic deliv-

ery.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy this additional service of Burghound.com and as always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me directly, preferably via email (Burghound@aol.com).

Note: to navigate quickly and easily around the document, just click on the various links that will automatically take you to the adjoining sections, or conversely, return you to the beginning. The links will appear as small boxes and when you position your cursor above it, the hand will change to a pointing finger. When the pointing finger appears, simply click and voila, you'll be instantly transported to the relevant column!

“Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the 2002 vintage is that there is literally no consensus among the growers as to whether it’s a truly great vintage or not.”

A QUICK REVIEW OF THE 2002 VINTAGE

(Continued from page 1)

tage or not. Some believe it's the best they've ever made, some believe it's a strong vintage, as good as '99 for example and yet others believe that it's a perfectly good but hardly exceptional vintage.

What is clear though for consumers is that they should

absolutely be buying the lower level 2002s, which is to say the *villages* and Bourgogne level wines; they represent excellent value and are very consistent performers. In short, don't pass up the lower level wines simply to chase the more prestigious 1ers and *grands crus*.

Why? Because there were very few masterpieces cre-

ated and because the best 2001s are every bit as good as the best 2002s. And because of the hype about 2002, the '01s generally represent better overall values. Issue 13 will be chock full of in-depth information about the vintage, buying advice about top wines and top values from both '02 and '01. Stay tuned!

“In contrast to 2002, 2003 will likely produce the biggest range in quality since perhaps 1983, ranging from the superb to the undrinkable.”

A QUICK REVIEW OF THE 2003 VINTAGE

2003 will be known as a vintage of intense contrasts. It was the earliest harvest in more than a century, in fact the earliest since 1893, when reliable records were first kept.

As most everyone now knows, the early harvest was a result of the intense heat wave that gripped France and all of Europe during the summer. It was also the smallest harvest since 1991 with only 1.1 mil-

lion hl declared. This drop in volume is 30 to 40% lower than a typical harvest and in the Côte d'Or, many growers told me that they were down more than 50%. Those with small parcels were particularly hard hit as it's extremely difficult to vinify such small quantities, especially in red. In contrast to 2002, 2003 will likely produce the biggest range in quality since perhaps 1983, ranging from the su-

perb to the undrinkable. The heat blocked vines from maturing their fruit and those that picked early to save what acidity remained will likely have under ripe tannins. The whites are rich, alcoholic and full-bodied. As Dominique Lafon told me, "my whites will undoubtedly be exceptional," he said pausing dramatically with a wink "but in what sense I'm not yet sure"!

A TRULY INCREDIBLE DINNER

On November 4th, Edmund Asseily, a passionate collector and Burghound.com subscriber, invited three prominent winemakers and your faithful correspondent to share some spectacular older burgs. The dinner was held in the private dining room of that mecca of Burgundian *haute cuisine* Lameloise and the winemakers in attendance were Aubert de Villaine of the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Claude Dugat of Domaine Claude Dugat and Louis-Michel Liger-Belair of Domaine du Vicomte Liger-Belair. The occasion was simply that M. Asseily had collected these older wines and generously wished to share them with the heirs of the domaines in question (M. Dugat is a close personal friend of M. Asseily and was invited as a result). The food, service and wine service were all spectacular and my hat is off to Jacques Lameloise and his staff for the superb job that they did in ensuring that every aspect of this incredible meal was perfect. Richly deserved kudos as well to M. Asseily for his considerable skill in orchestrating the dishes with Jacques Lameloise to complement the wines and in the impeccable pacing of the wine service so that each wine received its proper moment in the sun. Dinner began with a bottle of Champagne followed by an introductory white, the 1995 Meursault "Clos de la Barre" from Comtes Lafon. After that, the following wines were served in this order:

- 1979 Montrachet - Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (the cork indicated that the wine had been reconditioned at the Domaine in 2002)
- 1980 La Tâche - Domaine de la Romanée-Conti
- 1929 Les Gaudichots - Domaine de la Romanée-Conti
- 1923 La Tâche - Nicolas bottling, labeled Cuvée Liger-Belair
- 1921 La Tâche - Nicolas bottling, no label - Domaine Liger-Belair
- 1900 Romanée-Conti - Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (shipper unknown) - two half bottles

As was discussed in detail in Issue 12, the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti did not own La Tâche prior to 1933. It is important to note that with respect to the Nicolas bottlings, the 1921 and 1923 are technically not La Tâche from the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Similarly, in the case of the 1929, it is not from the original parcel of vines known as La Tâche but rather from Les Gaudichots. The vineyard today measures exactly 6.062 ha (14.97 acres) but this wasn't always the case. La Tâche was at one time only 1.45 ha (which at the time made it even smaller than Romanée-Conti) but on December 6, 1932, it was permitted to annex the best parts of the adjoining vineyard of Les Gaudichots. After the annexation it reached its present size and in the *cadastres*, or official French records, the annexed portion of Les Gaudichots is still listed as a separate sub-climat of La Tâche and carries the name of Les Gaudichots *ou* La Tâche (Les Gaudichots or La Tâche). The respective proportions of the two *climats* are La Tâche at 1.45 ha and Les Gaudichots *ou* La Tâche at 4.63 ha. Please see Issue 12, pages 126-133 for more details.

1979 Montrachet: (The cork was stamped "Reconditionnée en 2002", which Aubert de Villaine confirmed was done at the Domaine). A simply exquisite nose of smoke, truffle and spice lead to deeply colored, mature, incredibly complex and powerful flavors supported by plenty of supporting acidity and a finish that lasts for minutes. The thick, dense flavors stain the palate and this is almost liqueur-like in its concentration yet there is no heaviness. The color concerned me at first but there is nary a hint of oxidation and while this is fully mature, it is holding so well that it should easily last another 15, perhaps 20 years. A genuinely great effort. 97/nw (tasted twice recently with similar results)

1980 La Tâche: (bottled cask by cask without racking). This leaps from the glass with soaring and ultra elegant, superbly spicy, completely mature aromas followed by medium weight, rich, detailed, wonderfully complex flavors and a finish that displays earth and a touch of the *animale*. This has begun to lighten now but it remains a wine of exquisite subtlety that is almost ethereal in its purity. By no means a wine of power but I find this to be a real stunner with one of the two or three best noses in this entire range of vintages. Completely ready to drink though it's holding well. This strongly vies for wine-of-the-vintage honors. **Note:** another recent bottle showed the effects of the cask by cask bottling and absence of racking as it was quite gassy and needed the better part of two hours to completely dissipate the gas, which caused the finish to seem unduly firm and borderline hard. 94/nw

1929 Les Gaudichots: As can be seen in the photo, this bottle possessed a blue capsule which was the style of Domaine Liger-Belair in that period; it was labeled by hand as La Tâche-Gaudichots and it's possible that it was the Liger-Belair La Tâche rather than a Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Les Gaudichots. Irrespective of these details, the wine was bricked all the way to the center. Quite closed at first, it exploded after 10 minutes or so of air, offering incredible spice notes mixed with plenty of *sous bois*. Remarkably, the wine improved over the course of 2 hours, becoming ever purer and more focused and



From left to right: '79 DRC Montrachet, '80 DRC La Tâche, '23 Nicolas/Liger-Belair La Tâche, '29 DRC Les Gaudichots, '21 Nicolas/Liger-Belair La Tâche and two half bottles of 1900 Romanée-Conti.

(Continued on page 6)

VINTAGE FOCUS - 1978 REDS

As the title suggests, this section will take an in-depth look at a different vintage in each Issue. This month we'll review where the outstanding 1978 reds are, with a white or two thrown in just for good measure. At age 25, there are of course relatively few wines that are not ready for prime time drinking so this discussion will focus more on what's exceptionally good and the general characteristics of the vintage.

Why 1978?: The reason that I chose 1978 for the debut issue is three fold: first, I've had quite a number of them in the last 3 months and thus its fresh in my mind; second, a friend recently posed a very interesting question: did I believe that 1978 was especially gifted from the standpoint of *terroir*? Third, it is unquestionably the best drinking vintage today of the last 25 years though it remains to be seen whether 1993 and 1999 will equal it. Before we get to some of the more interesting wines I've tasted lately and the answer to what I think is actually a very provocative question, let's first acquaint ourselves with some background information.

Background: 1978 produced a relatively small crop with concentrated, rich, sweet wines that for the most part have aged extremely well. While the decade of the 1970s was not an especially good one for the reds (it was much better for the whites), 1978 is, along with 1971, easily at the head of the class. The growing season was by all accounts a difficult one because of the poor weather in the spring along with a delayed and irregular *floraison* (flowering), which almost always means there will be uneven ripening come harvest time. Moreover, July and August were cool and the harvest thought to have been as much as 3 to perhaps 4 weeks behind schedule. However, the sun returned in September and there was essentially an uninterrupted three weeks of warm days and moderately cool evenings, and the crop managed to recover most of its delayed maturation. A very late harvest took place under good conditions and many top domaines did not begin picking until the middle of October; for example, the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti did not begin its harvest until the 16th, an interesting contrast to 2003, where many domaines were already picking by August 16th, fully 2 months earlier! Sugars were good but not exceptional yet because of the cool weather during the summer and especially during September and October, acidities were very good. Overall, the wines turned out so well after such a miserable growing season that some observers were moved to dub 1978 as the "miracle vintage".

The Wines: There is much to admire about a fine '78 as it combines elegance, purity of expression and balance with unusually good staying power and superb depth. As noted above, the wines also have good acidity, which combined with their concentration and excellent balance, has permitted them to age extremely well. The best examples of the vintage are still sailing along with no signs of tiring and while virtually everything has reached its peak drinkability, the elite wines will be with us for another 10 to 15 years, perhaps longer. As is referenced in the section on Auction Results (see page 6), the best '78s command a top dollar in today's auction market and given how consistent the wines are, it's frankly no surprise.

The Terroir Question: While I suppose this is somewhat anticlimactic, I don't believe 1978 is especially gifted in terms of its underlying transparency though neither is it a vintage that is especially marked by the vintage characteristics themselves. Even in its youth, the healthy acidity of 1978 permitted the flavors to display relatively fine focus and detail and thus one could focus on the quality of and type of aromas and flavors. However, today, as is usually the case when burgundies pass into the 20+ year stage, it's the structure and quality of the tannins that give the best clues for the careful and knowledgeable taster to divine a wine's origins. In short, I believe '78 is a perfectly respectable if not genuinely great vintage in terms of its *terroir* transparency.

These Selections: The following wines were all tasted within the last 3 months, both here and in Burgundy. Many of the wines were courtesy of two separate dinners organized by Burghound.com subscribers Jerry Hey of California and Ben Addoms of Colorado. Among more than 50 1978s tasted recently, here is a group that really stood out. We'll start with one white and move to the reds, presented in no particular order:

Bâtard-Montrachet—Ramonet: Incredibly youthful and fresh with Montrachet-like power, size and richness coupled with the complexity that only aged white Burgundy can deliver, the '78 Bâtard has it all plus simply superb acid/fruit balance and superb length that persists for minutes. A great effort that has reached its peak but will hold here for years if well stored. A real stunner of a wine. I have had this several times with consistent notes. 95/now

Volnay "Clos des Ducs" Marquis d'Angerville: Dried rose petal nose with rich, ripe, earthy fruit and elegant, sappy, still youthful flavors that offer outstanding precision and a real sense of underlying minerality. Very impressive and still holding beautifully and this finishes with simply stunning complexity. A great Clos des Ducs. 94/now

Volnay "Clos des Chênes" Michel Lafarge: Tasted from a Burgundian cellar: Simply stunning on the nose with incredible spice and earth notes that run the gamut of what the finest burgundies have to offer. Rich, full and complex on the palate with silk, velvet and real class plus unbelievable length. This is not a powerful wine in the style of say classic Richebourg but it delivers plenty of volume and the finish is long and pure. Still fresh though there is no reason to hold this further. Flat out wonderful juice! 95/now

Musigny—Domaine Drouhin: Wonderfully spicy nose cut with plenty of earth, leather and smoky game aromas followed by more spice and sweet flavors that both rich and complex. This is not a big wine but the elegance, purity and length are something very special to experience. A great effort and one more example corroborating that Drouhin is a highly under rated producer of Musigny. 93/now

(Continued on page 5)

VINTAGE FOCUS - 1978.....

(Continued from page 4)

Grands Echézeaux - Domaine de la Romanée-Conti: Powerfully ripe and expressive aromas that display a wonderfully spicy mix of *sous bois* and very warm earth notes followed by quite ripe and intense flavors underpinned by noticeable finishing structure that has a slightly rustic character to it. This is still quite vibrant and may very well outlive all of the DRC '78s with the possible exception of the Romanée-Conti. In short, this is a classic Grands-Echézeaux. 93/now

Chambolle-Musigny "Les Amoureuses" - Roumier: An utterly seductive nose of warm, earthy, cinnamon and clove infused aromas precede clean, pure, detailed and long flavors that offer marvelous complexity and stunning length. The rich, sweet, velvety finish is just beginning to thin somewhat but this remains very classy juice. I would suggest drinking this sooner than later but there is no rush. 92/now

Bonnes Mares—Roumier: Bricking color but the nose is remarkably fresh and young with rich, full, intense flavors and a slightly tannic finish. Impressive, long and altogether stunning in its intensity, elegance, richness and sheer palate impact. A first-class stunner of a wine that is still, amazingly enough, on the ascendency. In short, this is a great effort that should hold for years. 94/from 2006+

Echézeaux - Dujac: Almost as good as the magnum if not quite as rich, deep or as fresh. The magnum note is: Absolutely stunning nose of soaring *sous bois* and incredibly complex secondary fruit aromas lead to fantastically rich, intense, velvety flavors and the sheer elegance of this wine is just as remarkable as is the complexity on the back end. Just superb juice and this is undeniably great. 93/now

Clos St. Denis - Dujac: Heavy bricking with an absolutely stunning nose of dried rose petals, earth and a lovely hint of spice all framed by subtle *sous bois* notes. The medium weight, nicely pure and detailed flavors are just now beginning to thin out a bit on the moderately long finish but the complexity and focus are such that this is really a fine effort. I would be drinking this over the next 5 years to enjoy what is one extremely pretty wine. 93/now

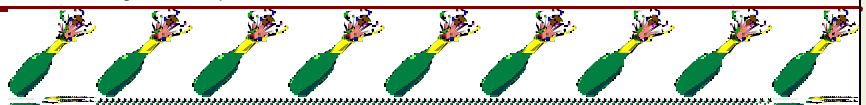
Richebourg - Henri Jayer: Absolutely stunningly complex nose of virtually every spice imaginable framed in earth and strong secondary aromas leads to full-bodied, rich, pure and still intense flavors that deliver fantastic depth and length. While this is still a spectacular drink, the beginning of the end has arrived as there is the slightest hint of dryness on the finish though it is largely buffered by the impressive amounts of velvet. Classy and refined in every sense and while this is in no danger of cracking up anytime soon, I would begin looking for reasons to drink this over the next decade. 96/now

Musigny Vieilles Vignes - Comte de Vogüé: I have had the '78 Musigny on a number of occasions and I have never quite understood why it is not better appreciated as it is both wonderfully complex aromatically and there is a silky, indeed velvety quality to the rich flavors that I find utterly seductive. No, it isn't in the league of the all time de Vogüé greats but it's a damn fine effort that is drinking perfectly now and in good storage, it should be capable of remaining at this level for years. Note: another recent bottle was still quite good but a bit one-dimensional and not up to the level of the bottle reviewed here. 91/now

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze - Pierre Gelin: Subtly complex, plummy and understated nose with packed, very dense flavors that are, remarkably enough, a long way from peaking. Austere and backward with plenty of structure. The only risk here is that it may dry out before all the tannins are resolved but this is capable of another 20 years worth of cellar time. Note: another recent bottle was less structured but sweeter and finer with wonderful depth, richness and a long spicy finish. 91/from 2006+

Musigny - Jadot: Seductive, complex, intense aromas with full, very rich, deep flavors and a touch of finishing rusticity. This is still in superb condition and will improve further, at least in terms of softening the still prominent structure. 92/2006-20

Important Changes:



Maison Nicolas Potel has been acquired by Labouré-Roi though this is primarily a financial transaction as both firms will retain their separate labels and marketing identities. Potel told me that the alliance with Labouré-Roi will permit him access to capital to refurbish his *cuverie* with state-of-the-art equipment and to develop further markets. Few people realize it but Labouré-Roi is a powerhouse in Burgundy and is the number three *négociant* in terms of revenues. Insiders tell me that this was less of an actual purchase than a bailout as rumors had been swirling for months that Maison Potel was over extended. Still, Potel was upbeat, telling me that with the new equipment and increased financial resources, he would have access to better sources and thus the quality of his wines would increase still further.

Jean-Louis Laplanche has elected to sell the **Château de Pommard** for approximately €5 million (though this amount will include certain renovations) to **Maurice Giraud**. Laplanche was the owner of the largest single proprietor clos in Burgundy, with vineyards covering fully 21 hectares (52.5 acres). The wines were marketed by agreement with Jadot/Kobrand but I do not yet know whether this arrangement will continue.

(Continued from page 3)

the finish ratcheted up in intensity. A stunning performance. 95/nw

1923 La Tâche: (Nicolas bottling, marked Cuvée Liger-Belair). Incredibly deep ruby color with only minor bricking. Port-like nose with fantastically rich, borderline over ripe flavors that now have more than a touch of acidity sticking out on the finish. This is clearly a *vin du soleil* (a wine of the sun) with some volatile acidity in evidence yet it doesn't really seem to get in the way. Showing very well but not as well as the bottle in June. 93/nw

1921 La Tâche: (no label though labeled Nicolas bottles carry the La Tâche name with Cuvée Liger-Belair in the lower left hand corner). Bricking on the edges but still a deep ruby in the center. While this isn't as delicate as the '29 nor as ripe as the '23, it is the most complete of the three with simply stunning aromas of carmel, spice, earth and only a touch of *sous bois* followed by pretty, pure and nicely rich if no longer powerful flavors plus an incredibly rich, superbly long finish. This held up in the glass for over two hours and was a most impressive showing. 96/nw **Note:** another bottle tasted 10 days later with a much lower fill was also impressive but oxidized rather rapidly after the first 20 minutes or so.

1900 Romanée-Conti: (from two half bottles, shipper unknown and stamped on the red wax capsule "1900". Fill levels were excellent on both bottles for wines of this age and the letters "DRC" were stenciled in large format print on the bottles). The two bottles were tasted at the same time, with the first having passed completely into the strong *sous bois* and Armagnac aroma stage. The color was completely bricked through followed by soft, regal, almost delicate flavors that have devolved into an extract of Burgundy essence with just enough length to remain interesting. The second bottle however was far superior with a deeper color, fresher nose and more vibrant flavors and while the essential character was quite similar, there was more power and overall presence. A lovely wine and it is truly incredible to consider that this was still alive and well, in a half bottle no less, at more than a 100 years of age. 96/nw

RECENT BURGUNDY AUCTION RESULTS

The world's largest charity auction, known as the Hospices de Beaune, occurs the third Sunday of every November.

Background: The Hospices is the second "glory" of the biggest wine festival in the world known as the Trois Glorieuses. The first is the wonderfully festive gathering on Saturday night of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin at the Château de Clos du Vougeot, followed by the Ventes du Vin for the Hospices on Sunday, which subsequently leads to the third glory, which is likely the world's biggest wine party, the Paulée de Meursault on Monday. The Hospices itself administers some 60 hectares (150 acres) of vineyards, of which 50 are planted to pinot noir. The Hospices has conducted an auction almost every year since 1859 though a few years were suspended due either to war ('39-42), miserable quality ('56 and '68), virtually no quantity (1910) or simply postponed (1916). Anyone can bid on the various lots though it must be done through a registered *négociant*, such as Jadot, Lator, Bouchard or literally dozens of others. They will take delivery of the wine and bottle it for you as well as arrange delivery.

Results: On November 16th, eager buyers from the world over descended on Beaune for the 143rd installment of the sale,

which helps a variety of charities. Overall, prices were up an astonishing 21.4% over the much better 2002 vintage for the 39 cuvees of the Hospices, which no one that I spoke to even remotely predicted prior to the sale. The increase in prices was driven much more by the prestigious *crus* than demand at the lower end. For example, a few of the more spectacular increases included +46% for the Corton-Charlemagne (Cuvée Françoise de Salins) and +36% for the Mazis-Chambertin (Cuvée Madelaine Collignon); several of the lower end wines actually finished with lower prices than 2002.

Even more curious than the overall price hike however was the fact that there was almost as much wine for sale by the Hospices as there was in the relatively generous vintage of 2002. In fairness, quantities were reportedly down 20% but since domaines everywhere in the Côte d'Or routinely reported production drops of 50% or more, it understandably fueled speculation that something was seriously amiss. Some *vignerons* openly joked that the difference was made up by "water from a hose"!

Other Activity: I consulted with John Kapon, auction director for US-based Acker Merrill & Condit, who reports that action for older Burgundy vintages remains brisk

while more recent vintages are active but mixed. Kapon noted that the dividing line seemed to be vintages of 10 years and older being stronger than younger vintages despite the generally higher quality of more recent vintages. He suggested that perhaps this was due to the relatively generous yields found in recent vintages and thus, more wine was trading to consumers in the primary retail market.

Specifically, Kapon noted that '96 was holding its own whereas there is "softness" in demand for the '97, '98 and 2000 vintages. The strongest among recent vintages is '93, which Kapon speculated may be due to the "consistent praise the vintage has received from Clive Coates and Burghound". Another vintage, which isn't seen all that often because of the low yields is '91, which Kapon describes as "strong when available". 1989 and 1988 are described as "forgotten vintages and relatively good buys".

Kapon went on to say that the strongest vintages of the last 25 years were 1990, 1985 and 1978. Interestingly, he suggests that there is a revival of interest in some of the better 1983s.

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