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By Linda Murphy

Judgment of Princeton

New Jersey didn't win, but it showed it's in the game.

Unlike in 1976, when a Napa Valley Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon outscored French wines in the now-famous 'Judgment of Paris' and catapulted American wines onto the world stage, New Jersey bottlings weren't quite as scene-stealing at last Friday's 'Judgment of Princeton' tasting at Princeton University.

Yet Jersey's Chardonnays did the state proud, taking three of the top four spots against five Grand Cru/Premier Cru burgundies. Its Bordeaux-style reds were less successful against real-deal Bordeaux, some of them lacking in depth and complexity, and one of them emphatically green and underripe.

The Joseph Drouhin Clos des Mouches was the overwhelming winner among the Chardonnays, with New Jersey's Unionville Vineyards, Heritage Vineyards and Silver Decoy Winery placing second through fourth, respectively – and respectably, as they ranked ahead of Domaine Leflaive's Puligny-Montrachet, Marc-Antonin Blain's Bâtard-Montrachet and Latour-Labille's Meursault-Charmes.

Prior to the tasting, which I had the pleasure of participating in, I met a few supremely confident vintners who expected New Jersey reds to give Bordeaux a run for its euro. But Chx Mouton-Rothschild, Haut-Brion and Montrose finished first, second and fourth, with New Jersey's Heritage Vineyards wriggling into third with its BDX blend – a reversal of the New Jersey v France Chardonnay result.

The American Association of Wine Economists staged the tasting as part of its annual conference, spearheaded by economics professors/wine buffs Orley Ashenfelter (Princeton) and Karl Storckmann (New York University) with George Taber, the lone journalist to cover Steven Spurrier's 1976 Paris tasting and author of the book *The Judgment of Paris*. The hosts duplicated as much as possible the conditions of the 1976 blind tasting, at which a Chateau Montelena Chardonnay and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa 'beat' top-flight French wines.

New Jersey's Princeton tasting entrants represented the crème de la crème of the state's wines, and not necessarily its wine industry in general. As Taber said, 'A lot of good wines are made in New Jersey; today was an introduction to them. They're made by a small, very serious group of wineries going after world standards.' By Taber's estimate, 15 of New Jersey's 46 producers are in that elite group.

As in Paris, there were nine judges at Princeton, though the makeup this time was skewed towards Americans rather than Europeans, with six US panellists (including me) and three Bordeaux-based wine economists. The wines were rated on the 20-point scale, with a few US judges expressing concern that their own rating methods and experience (100 points, stars, comments only, etc) were not directly or easily convertible to a 20-point system. Yet 20 points was the order of the day, as it was in '76.

The wines were arranged in flights by random draw, and only those available for purchase in the US at the time of the tasting were presented – just as Spurrier limited his tasting to wines sold in his Paris wine shop. Because of this, there was no uniformity in vintages in both tastings, and it was particularly difficult to assess the New Jersey reds, as they ranged in vintage from 2004 to 2010 while all the Bordeaux wines were from the 2004 vintage.

As economists are wont to do, combining the judges' scores and coming up with a ranked order was not enough. They chewed up and spit out correlations, means, group rankings, standard deviations, etc. In revealing the results, Princeton economics professor Richard Quandt said that after the Drouhin, Clos des Mouches, none of the other white wines 'were significantly bad nor significantly good; they were an ocean

of sameness' statistically. For the reds, the number-crunching showed the Four JGs Vineyard Cabernet Franc from New Jersey to be 'significantly bad,' said Quandt, 'and the rest insignificantly different.'

In other words, tasters were all over the board in what they liked and didn't like, and the wines bunched in the middle of the rankings weren't statistically discernible from each other. We were also reminded that we could taste the same wines the following day, and likely have rather different results.

So in the minds of the economists, and George Taber, the Princeton tasting was not so much to find winners and losers, but to demonstrate, as the Judgment of Paris did, that excellent wines can come from surprising places. Who would have believed that a New Jersey wine could be 'better' than one from Burgundy or Bordeaux, if it weren't for such tastings? New Jersey, like many other states in America, has apparently come out of nowhere to establish itself as a serious maker of wine. Jersey might not be the 'next Napa,' but it could be a 'next great thing' in US wine.

I'm only sorry that for reasons of space we can't allocate more pages to the state in our forthcoming book *American Wine*, to be published by University of California Press and Mitchell Beazley early next year.

Here are the final rankings:

New Jersey Chardonnay v White burgundy

Joseph Drouhin, Clos des Mouches Blanc 2009 Beaune
Unionville, Pheasant Hill Single Vineyard 2009 New Jersey
Heritage Vineyards Chardonnay 2010 New Jersey
Silver Decoy Winery, Black Feather Chardonnay 2010 New Jersey
Domaine Leflaive, 2009 Puligny-Montrachet
= Marc-Antonin Blain, Grand Cru 2009 Bâtard-Montrachet
= Bellview Winery Chardonnay 2010 New Jersey
8. Amalthea Cellars Chardonnay Sur Lie 2008 New Jersey
9. Ventimiglia Chardonnay 2010 New Jersey
10. Latour-Labille, Charmes Premier Cru 2008 Meursault

New Jersey Bordeaux-style reds v Bordeaux

Ch Mouton Rothschild 2004 Pauillac
Ch Haut-Brion 2004 Pessac-Léognan
Heritage Vineyards, BDX 2010 New Jersey
Ch Montrose 2004 St-Estèphe
Tomasello Winery, Oak Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 New Jersey
Ch Léoville Las-Cases 2004 St-Julien
Bellview Winery, Lumiere 2010 New Jersey
Silver Decoy Winery Cabernet Franc 2008 New Jersey
Amalthea Cellars, Europa VI 2008 New Jersey
Four JGs Vineyard Cabernet Franc 2008 New Jersey

The judges were:

Jean-Marie Cardebat, Professor of Economics, Université de Bordeaux
Tyler Colman, DrVino.com (New York)
John Foy, wine columnist, *Star Ledger* (New Jersey)
Olivier Gergaud, Professor of Economics, BEM Bordeaux Management School
Robert Hodgson, Professor Emeritus, Humboldt State University (California)
Danièle Meulders, Professor of Economics, BME Bordeaux Management School
Linda Murphy, co-author with Jancis of *American Wine* (California)
Jamal Rayyis, Gilbert & Gaillard wine guide (New York)
Francis Schott, Stage Left Restaurant, New Brunswick (New Jersey)