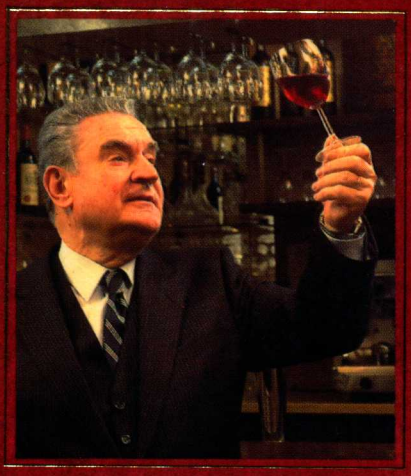

EMILE PEYNAUD

THE TASTE OF WINE

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF WINE APPRECIATION

INTRODUCED BY
MICHAEL BROADBENT
M.W.

TRANSLATED BY
MICHAEL SCHUSTER

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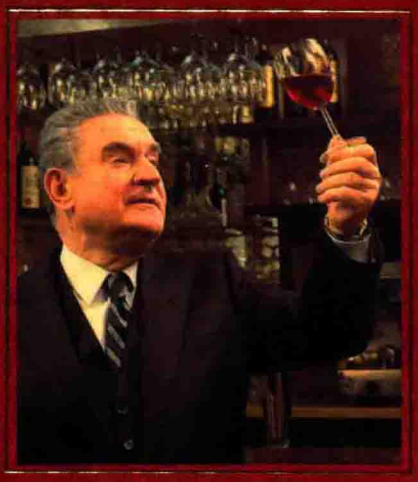

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Now available in paperback for the first time, this translation of Emile Peynaud's classic work *Le Goût du Vin* represents the culmination of a lifetime's work and experience, combining scientific fact and professional expertise with a rich sense of the history, tradition and culture of winemaking and wine appreciation. For the modern wine professional, *The Taste of Wine* is a masterclass on the science, procedures and vocabulary of wine tasting as currently practised at the highest level; for the amateur oenologist, it is both an essential work of reference and the key to enjoyment of this infinitely various subject.

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Translator's note

However accurate the translator attempts to be, all translation remains an approximation, a compromise between a strictly literal (and perhaps stilted) rendering, and one which is faithful to the spirit rather than the letter of the original, but which reads more fluently. In this case, rather than trying to imitate the author's style in English, I have made clarity my main object. Indeed, Emile Peynaud's own generous advice to me was to "adapt as you need to for English".

A particular problem in this book is that in many cases there is no single equivalent English word for a specific French wine term, especially where there is no context. The word moelleux *is an obvious example. Where it refers to red wine it means primarily* **softness** *and richness of texture; where it refers to white wine it indicates a degree of* **sweetness** *in taste. Some words, such as* rancio, *have no English equivalent whatsoever; others (many of them technical), though translatable, sound so odd in an English context that they are best left in French once their meaning is clear. Where words* have *been left in French I have also glossed them separately or included a translation in parentheses. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French wine terms have simply been rendered into a modern English equivalent. If there is room for argument between native speakers over the meaning of words they use to describe wine, there is certainly room for argument over translation. I have tried to give the most useful English option.*

There are three people to whom I would like to say a special thank you for their help in this project: to the author himself, who kindly clarified many technical and vocabulary problems; to Michel Bernard, chemist and translator, whose generous advice was invaluable throughout; and finally to Naomi Good, my editor, whose suggestions and corrections added so much to the clarity and polish of this text. Any mistakes that remain, however, are entirely my own.

Michael Schuster

May 1987

Introduction

MICHAEL BROADBENT M.W.

Peynaud is a legend in his own lifetime. Not an original phrase, but none the less apt.

The reader will note that I refer to the author not as Professor Peynaud or as Emile: the first is magisterial and has a formal, somewhat over-respectful, connotation, the second is over-familiar, and I hesitate to take such a liberty. In England the use of the surname alone has a lordly ring. It is one of respect. That's how I think of him and always refer to him and so, I believe, do many other admirers and disciples the world over.

Two or three years ago, I forget exactly, I was sent an unedited translation of three major chapters of Peynaud's *Le Goût du Vin*. The American publisher asked if the translation was any good and whether there was a market in England for the book. Looking back at the translation now I see it was a bit stilted, but I replied that technically it seemed quite accurate and that, despite a somewhat vested interest in the subject matter as the author myself of a long-running series of books on winetasting, I would be the first to buy it. My reasons were two-fold: first, my own knowledge of the French language is shamefully limited – it would be helpful to have a translation; secondly, from my gleaning of the original and from the drafts I was sent to examine, Peynaud seemed to have a singular ability to explain complicated matters succinctly, with directness, patience and refreshing humility. I also discovered, to my slight surprise and great delight, that Peynaud had a deft touch and a gentle sense of humour.

My own interest in the subject began in the early 1950s. As a young wine merchant organizing tastings and teaching, I found no written work in the English language on tasting. So I wrote, at one sitting, a pamphlet for the senior staff at Harvey's of Bristol on the technique of tasting. This was produced in 1962 and was serialized in English, French and Italian wine trade journals. It was first published as a book in 1968. Now I mention this because although, even by this time, there were many books on wine, they dealt almost exclusively with the broader elements: the history of wine, how it is made and where. Yet wine *tasting* was so basic; surely an understanding of this should precede all the generalities. Subsequent researches revealed that there had been some exploratory French texts. Amerine and Roessler had produced their somewhat complicated monograph for the University of California in 1959. Since then, as we all know, there has been a flood of books on wine, not quite as vast as the ocean of cookbooks, but enough to glut the market and exhaust the reader; and many, alas, have been unoriginal in concept and expression.

But what makes for a "good" wine book? There is the vexed question: is it more satisfactory to employ a professional writer who has, to a greater or lesser extent, researched his subject and who produces a work of some literary merit; or to learn first-hand from the pen of a man who is a thorough master of his subject, an authority but perhaps lacking some polish and style? The English authors who pioneered wine writing included Sir Edward Barry in 1775, Alexander

Henderson (1825) and Cyrus Redding (1833). They tended to be learned men but, with the odd exception, not in the business of making or selling wine.

Earlier this century the writers were largely amateur, slight, superficial and romantic. The pendulum has swung a little too far: recent wine books have focused more on facts and figures provided by wine professionals. Peynaud's work catches the balance neatly as it swings back, combining technique with humanity, hard facts with authority, clarity and style.

A quick flip through the pages will reveal some figures and graphs and charts which, at first sight, look daunting. Don't be put off. I have no head for figures. I find the supporting text direct and lucid, the diagrams merely expressing words in a more visual, more mathematical way. In other instances, an elaborate chart may be reproduced only to demonstrate a system or method that Peynaud subsequently dismisses as pedantic and full of shortcomings.

Which brings me to the nub of the book. Peynaud takes nothing for granted. He tells us much about the nature and origins of taste. Most important of all, he manages to explain the background with patience and clarity. He is patently a practical man and a great teacher, an academic who puts his knowledge to work, an authority of immense stature who has the unusual ability to talk, and write, simply and directly.

Peynaud is intensely human; he allows himself an occasional sly dig at, for example, those who rely overmuch on those who taste by numbers on elaborate but limiting statistical methods, on the use of algebra rather than words. But we must bear in mind that Peynaud is French. He is a Bordelais, born and bred. His working life has been spent mainly in France, principally in Bordeaux. Latterly he has been much in demand to advise in other areas and other countries; indeed years of his official retirement have been packed with work and with travel. He, and we, benefit from what he has seen and learned away from his beloved Bordeaux, but *Le Goût du Vin* was originally written in French for a French audience and, despite his peripatetic experience, has a distinctly French flavour – I avoid going as far as to say a Bordeaux bias. This is the archetypal French approach to wine. And as, dare I say it, the wines of France stand supreme, we have every reason to respect this approach.

Knowledge is one thing, understanding is another. Peynaud has both and helps us with both. He encourages us to flex our imaginations and, above all, to choose words carefully and to *use* them.

On the subject of words, I must praise Michael Schuster for his English text. It is no mean feat, for translating a book on tasting is not like translating a novel. A literal word for word equivalent does not give the flavour of the original, and as is well known to wine buffs – and as I found with the foreign translations of my own work – descriptive wine words and phrases have to be translated by someone who appreciates and understands their underlying meaning. I admitted earlier that my French is less than perfect, and it is quite likely that some lofty soul with greater command of the language will find something to disagree with. But, for what it is worth, I think that Schuster has done full justice to Peynaud.

This book will go down in the literature of wine simply as "Peynaud on Wine". We are the richer for him, and for it.

Christie's 1987

Preface

TO THE AMATEUR

You, dear drinker, are the most important link in the chain. You pay for the wine, you support the wine-growers, you cheerfully help consume what we produce. Whether you are a seasoned toper, an occasional bibber or, preferably, an enlightened amateur, you will find food for thought in this book.

If you are from a traditional wine-producing country you carry the responsibilities imposed by an established wine culture. You may, however, come from a country that has only recently been making wine; in either case you both reflect and influence the quality of your country's wines. In one sense you "fashion" that quality, for if there are bad wines it is because there are indiscriminate drinkers.

The wine you drink is the wine you deserve. It is up to consumers to discourage bad winemaking: the quality of wine will improve when they make up their minds to drink better wine and when they are also prepared to pay for that extra quality.

If you are French you are possibly an advocate of drinking in quantity with traditional Rabelaisian extravagance, but statistically you are not a connoisseur. Remember, sixty per cent of the best French wines are exported. Your wines may be of international standing, but it is well known in the wine trade that as a Frenchman your general knowledge of wine is below average and that you are a provincial drinker.

If you are one of those who drinks and extols the virtues of French wines from beyond the confines of France, I take my hat off to you; we owe our reputation to your forefathers. Keep your own cellar stocked in turn and bequeath it to your children in the certain knowledge that our great wines are made with you in mind.

This book will, I hope, teach the amateur to understand wine better and to appreciate it more. Knowing what to drink is based on knowing how to taste, and considered tasting teaches not only how to perceive with our senses but how to interpret those perceptions. Good wine encourages drinking in moderation, while alcoholism is the consequence of swigging a poor product. Drink less but be fastidious in your choice; every time you purchase an inferior bottle you compromise the reputation of good wine in general.

I would also like this book to teach you to talk about wine. Drinking should not be a solitary pleasure but a mutual one; if a wine is good say so in your own way. There are few pleasures which lend themselves so well to discussion as those shared sipping good wine, glass in hand. You will see that this is a school where progress is rapid.

TO THE WINE PRODUCER

Of all wine-related occupations yours is the best. You need to be a farmer, viticulturist, winemaker, cellarmaster and salesman. The wine you produce is a

reflection of yourself, the fruit of your land and your labour; but you also have a responsibility to the wider image of wine which is influenced by the impression your product creates. You can make one of the most fascinating and refined of delicacies – or just a dull and disappointing beverage.

The vine and wine make substantial and manifold demands on you and you must be skilled in numerous different fields. Viticulture is essentially agricultural and, as such, subject to the vagaries of the weather. The quantity and quality of the harvest are difficult to predict and the revenue they will yield even more so. Were it not for a pejorative ring in the context I would call vinification industrial in character, for it is essentially the processing of an agricultural product. The cellar-care of wine on the other hand is more of a craft; not, however, one of trial and error, for as a winemaker you will keep up with advances in oenology and in consequence your work will become yearly more exacting. Last but not least of your requirements is a good head for business. You need to be a company director, executive manager and financial adviser all rolled into one. Yours is an all-embracing occupation.

For you tasting should be a constant means of quality control. Whatever your kind of wine you need to learn to taste well, for there is always room for improvement, improvement which is difficult to achieve if the only wines you taste are your own. Take whatever opportunity you can to taste further afield, outside your own cellar, beyond your own region and appellation, in other countries if possible. Such encounters are often a salutary experience.

This book will furnish you with a systematic approach to tasting, suggest some new ideas and possibly inspire a new passion for your own wine. A good taster invariably produces a better wine because he makes it to his own liking. Olivier de Serres said: "A man who makes good wine is considered a good man." In other words such wine needs to be earned. How many mediocre wines would disappear from our shelves if only those who made them knew how to taste properly!

TO THE WINE MERCHANT

You may be a third- or fourth-generation member of a traditional wine merchant's business, a trade stretching back a century or two. It is thanks to you that the names and reputation of our French wines have spread throughout the world. Yet now and again the very appellations which owe you so much have turned against you. For times change and the growers forget that the wines themselves did not create the trade and that the expansion of the vineyards was only as rapid as the merchants' conquest of the markets. Equally, tradition is a cumbersome burden in family businesses and it is often difficult for long-established houses to change their ways. For generations the traditional wine merchants have taught newcomers the trade. I myself learnt to taste with a merchant, and from the very beginning managed first the classification of wines and then their production. For you wine merchants, then, this book may have little to offer. It may, nonetheless, remind you of all that modern technology has brought to bear in a field richly imbued with inherited know-how.

More likely you are one of those merchants who has adopted a more modern approach to commerce. You will have studied marketing and reorganized your distribution chain; you want a shorter period of pre-bottling cellar maturation

and a faster stock turnover. You may be a broker, intermediary between producer and trade, adviser to both; or an agent, a salesman, a retailer, a supermarket drinks manager, a restaurateur or a wine waiter. Among you are those who make the final sale to the customer and, whatever your place in the supply chain, you should remember that the wine you have sold will be consumed by the person who has paid for it. Thus it would seem only fair and wise for you to know how to taste and assess it yourself beforehand.

This book will help you do so by boosting your confidence and extending your vocabulary. In this way you personally become a guarantor of quality by only selling those wines you would be happy to drink yourself – surely one of the most reliable and pleasant ways of doing business.

TO THE OENOLOGIST

To you I speak as a long-standing practitioner for whom the aim of oenological research has been to explain the tastes in wine as well as to make a better product. I have always felt that wine is not there just to be swilled and swallowed but to be sipped and savoured. Some of you will have been taught oenology with very little tasting; indeed the syllabus leading to the 1955 oenology diploma seems to have been devised by teetotallers! Were they unaware that tasting is essential to good vinification, as well as to cellar-care, clarification, analysis and stabilization? How many are the oenologists who must have learned, and possibly forgotten, the biochemistry of fermentation without ever having learned how to taste. In their first jobs they will have found themselves in an unfamiliar world of professional tasting with a misleading trial-and-error approach, and the extent to which they have succeeded will have depended more or less on natural talent. Subsequently the teaching of tasting has developed considerably and since 1975 the Bordeaux Institute of Oenology has even offered a University Diploma in Tasting (Diplôme Universitaire d'Aptitude à la Dégustation: DUAD).

Oenology and tasting *are* linked. Having taught both at university I am not sure whether I have contributed most by making tasting an introduction to oenology or oenology an introduction to tasting. That is for the oenologists to decide themselves; after all, tasting is their sphere, their speciality, and where wine knowledge is concerned they hold sway. It is also their responsibility to organize the tasting groups of local viti-vinicultural trade unions, administrative bodies and wine businesses.

This book has been written in several registers: in textbook language for the oenologist, in simpler paraphrases for the amateur. It has benefited from the considerable theoretical knowledge that oenology has to offer and also from the direct "glass in hand" experience of practical winemakers.

Believe me, it is now up to oenologists to annexe and develop the field of tasting; Jacques Puisais acknowledges as much in his *Taster's Handbook* (*Livret du Dégustateur*). The next generation of great tasters will rise from the ranks of the oenologists.