

Bordeaux's Big Heart

By Karen Taylor - May 2, 2017

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Bottles from the 2016 Vintners dinner and auction. Image: Heart's Delight.

Is Bordeaux wine good for your heart? Heidi Arnold of the American Heart Association prefers not to weigh in on such claims. "That's not really my area of expertise. What I do know though is that Bordeaux winemakers are great for your heart!" Since 1999, Arnold has raised more than \$15 million for the AHA through Heart's Delight, an annual wine tasting and auction in Washington DC. "We owe much of those proceeds to the incredible generosity of Bordeaux châteaux," she says.

Heart's Delight grew out of a mother's grief: Ruth Bassin, owner of DC's MacArthur Beverages, had just lost her son, Bruce, who worked for the family business. He was only 40 years old when he suffered a heart attack at the airport on the way to France. In his memory, she helped launch Heart's Delight in DC. Wine critic Robert Parker, who had patronized the shop for years, pitched in, and together they persuaded 16 of Bordeaux's most storied châteaux to donate wines for the dinner and auction. "Our goal was to raise \$30,000," recalls Arnold. "We ended up netting \$220,000."

Event Details

From Wednesday 10 May 2017 to Saturday 13 May 2017

Heart's Delight Website

Buy tickets online [here](#)

For more information, contact Heidi Arnold at (703) 248-1720 or Heidi.Arnold@heart.org.



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Momentum has been building ever since. The original two-evening event is now a four-day wine and food extravaganza packed with tastings, embassy dinners (the French Residence is always a big draw), and a legion of participating chefs, sponsors, and special guests. "A key feature is the [Bordeaux Master Class & Grand Tasting](#)," says Arnold. "It has always been and will always be the core of Heart's Delight. It is one of the rare occasions when U.S. consumers can meet with Bordeaux winemakers." This year, they can chat up representatives from 14 famous châteaux, including [Beychevelle](#) and [Kirwan](#), both of which have just completed high-profile renovations of their historic Médoc wineries.



Selfie with Nick Calio at 2016 Vintner's dinner. Image: Heart's Delight.



2016 Vintner's auction. Image: Heart's Delight.

Bordeaux also holds pride of place at the black-tie [Vintners Dinner and Auction](#). "A *premier grand cru* wine is featured every year," says Arnold. "This year it's [Mouton Rothschild](#)—this is the third time they have been a sponsor!" Owner Philippe Sereys de Rothschild, son of the late Bordeaux legend Baronne Philippine de Rothschild, will preside over the dinner. Arnold points out that while the prices of Bordeaux's best wines such as Mouton have skyrocketed, the ticket price has

not increased in 10 years. "It's still \$1,000 per person; not cheap, but when the bottles being poured cost hundreds of dollars each, you could say it's a good deal."

And of course Bordeaux wines—rare vintages, fabulous large-format bottles—are the stars of the auction, conducted every year by the inimitable [Jamie Ritchie](#) of Sotheby's Wine. The most jaw-dropping moment to date occurred at the 2015 event, when a Chinese bidder who flew in for the event offered \$100,000 for a luncheon with Robert Parker, complete with vinous jewels from his cellar. After a moment of stunned silence, Ritchie banged his gavel on the podium, shouted "Sold!" and the crowd erupted into applause.

A testament to the success of Heart's Delight's win-win formula is the fact that a number of châteaux have become regulars. Guiraud, the Sauternes vineyard that famously became the first 1855 classified growth to convert to biodynamics, has participated every year. Smith Haut Lafitte is another repeat offender, generously donating its acclaimed Graves wines 12 of the past 18 years. "We love this event," says owner Florence Cathiard, who



A view of Château Smith Haut Lafitte, courtesy of the chateau.

along with her husband will be on hand for the 2017 edition. "When people visit us in Bordeaux or when we travel around the world, we typically see someone just once. At Heart's Delight, we see them several days in a row, and then year after year. We've become family."

As it nudges up against its third decade, Heart's Delight can boast a prominent spot on the national wine calendar, with 20 percent of attendees coming from outside the Washington area. Its growing prestige has made it possible to net more than a million dollars annually to help fight heart disease—something that has personally touched the lives of many participants and guests.

"It's a very emotional cause," says Charlotte Denjean, who represented the *grand cru* Château Lagrange at last year's event. "And for us in Bordeaux, wine is all about emotion."



Bordeaux Winemakers at Le Grand Tasting in 2016. Image: Heart's Delight