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# Decanter

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## 2001 Bordeaux

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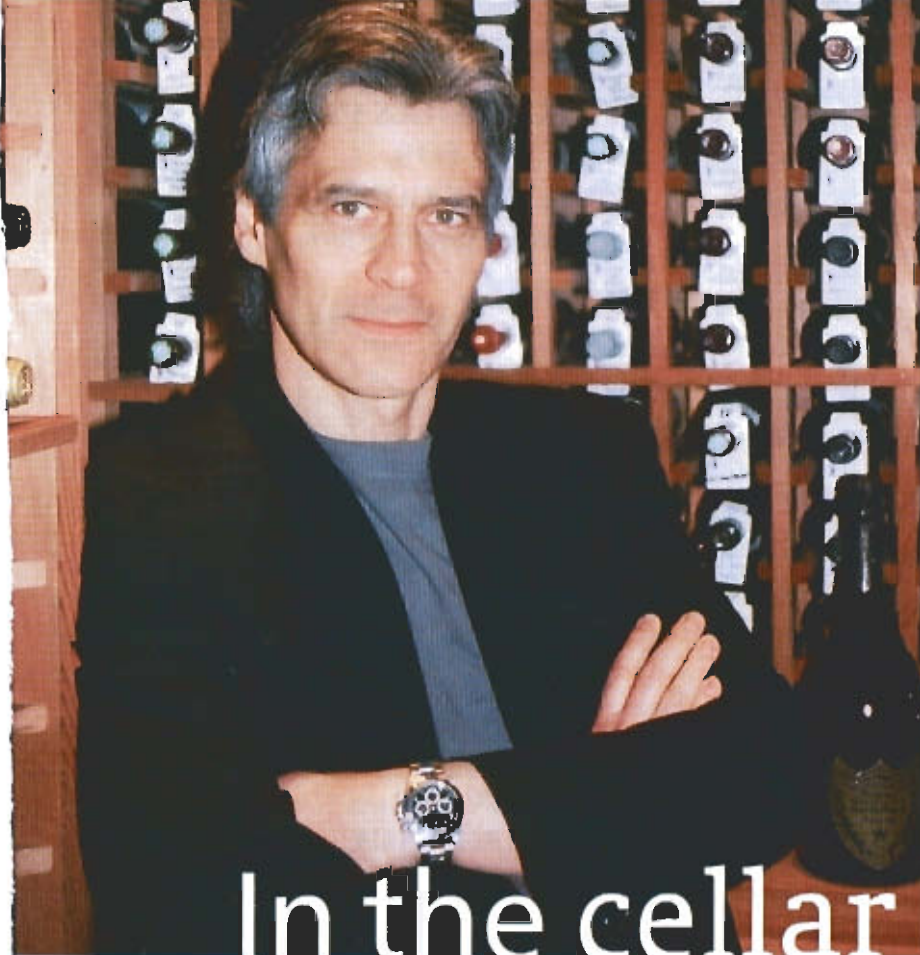


Photo: Gary G. Kuitst

## In the cellar

Hollywood screenwriter James Orr tells KIA McINERNEY about his passion for 'cult' and little known wines

James Orr is behind such film comedies as *Three Men And A Baby* and *Sister Act 2: Back In The Habit*, and has produced, among other movies, *Father Of The Bride* and *Young Harry Houdini* (which he also wrote and directed). He is currently working on a remake of the 1947 Cary Grant comedy, *The Bachelor And The Bobby Soxer*

### *When did you become interested in wine?*

When did I become interested in wine, or when did I start collecting? When I was at university I was drawn to the romance of wine, but without disposable income, could not indulge my interest. I started to learn as much as I could about it. In my early 30s, I started going to Napa, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Tuscany and buying wines. I now have a cellar of 4,000 bottles.

### *How did you begin?*

I had to learn about the politics of buying: there are front-room wines and back-room wines. The former you can buy from either the winery or your merchant, while the back-room wines are handmade and of limited quantity. You have to make your local wine merchant your friend.

### *What is the current focus of your cellar?*

I focus on what I call 'boutique wines'. I don't like the term 'cult wines' as it implies I should be

glassy-eyed, kneeling before idols – I prefer the term 'handmade wines', those made in small quantities and with such care and attention that they are the equivalent of Aston Martins in the automobile world.

### *What do you consider a high price for a bottle?*

Many of the bottles that I am interested in cost \$150 a bottle in the primary market (the first sale from the winery). But many collectors will buy them in the secondary market, pay \$1,000, and be happy to get them – I wouldn't be.

### *Which wines interest you right now?*

The obvious ones: Harlan Estate, Screaming Eagle, Bryant Family, Sine Qua Non, Colgin Cellars, Marcus & Marcus. But I really get excited about emerging boutique wines – you really have to work to discover wines like these. I visit chat boards, go online. I find it exciting to discover wines that no one has heard of yet.

### *Such as?*

Carlyle, Pillar Rock, Brewer-Clifton in Santa Barbara, Abreu... Paloma is going to be hot. These are small quantity, fabulous products overshadowed by the so-called 'cult wines'.

### *What wine regions interest you right now?*

Paso Robles in California is the next great domestic wine region. Oregon and Washington State are making great wines now: Washington State for Syrah, Oregon for Pinot Noir. And, of course, Chile, Argentina and emerging regions.

### *Do you have a cellar in your home?*

I have three large temperature-controlled storage cabinets of 700 bottles each for the wines I feel are drinkable now, and an off-premises area with 2,000 bottles, for those I feel need more time.

### *Do you have a favorite varietal?*

I love Syrah. That has been my favourite grape from the beginning, both from the Rhône and Australia. Carlyle's Syrah, made in Sonoma, is an extraordinary wine. I like Cabs, and I'm a huge fan of Zinfandel. I find them truly pleasurable. They are only made in California and are a truly American wine.

### *Clearly you love wine. Do you ever dream of having your own winery?*

There isn't a collector who does not have that dream. Perhaps it should stay out there – just a dream. As another wine wit once said, 'If you want to make a small fortune in the wine business, start with a large fortune.' Maybe I should leave it at that. **D**

**'I don't like the term "cult wines" as it implies I should be glassy-eyed, kneeling before idols'**