

The Living Section

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUAR

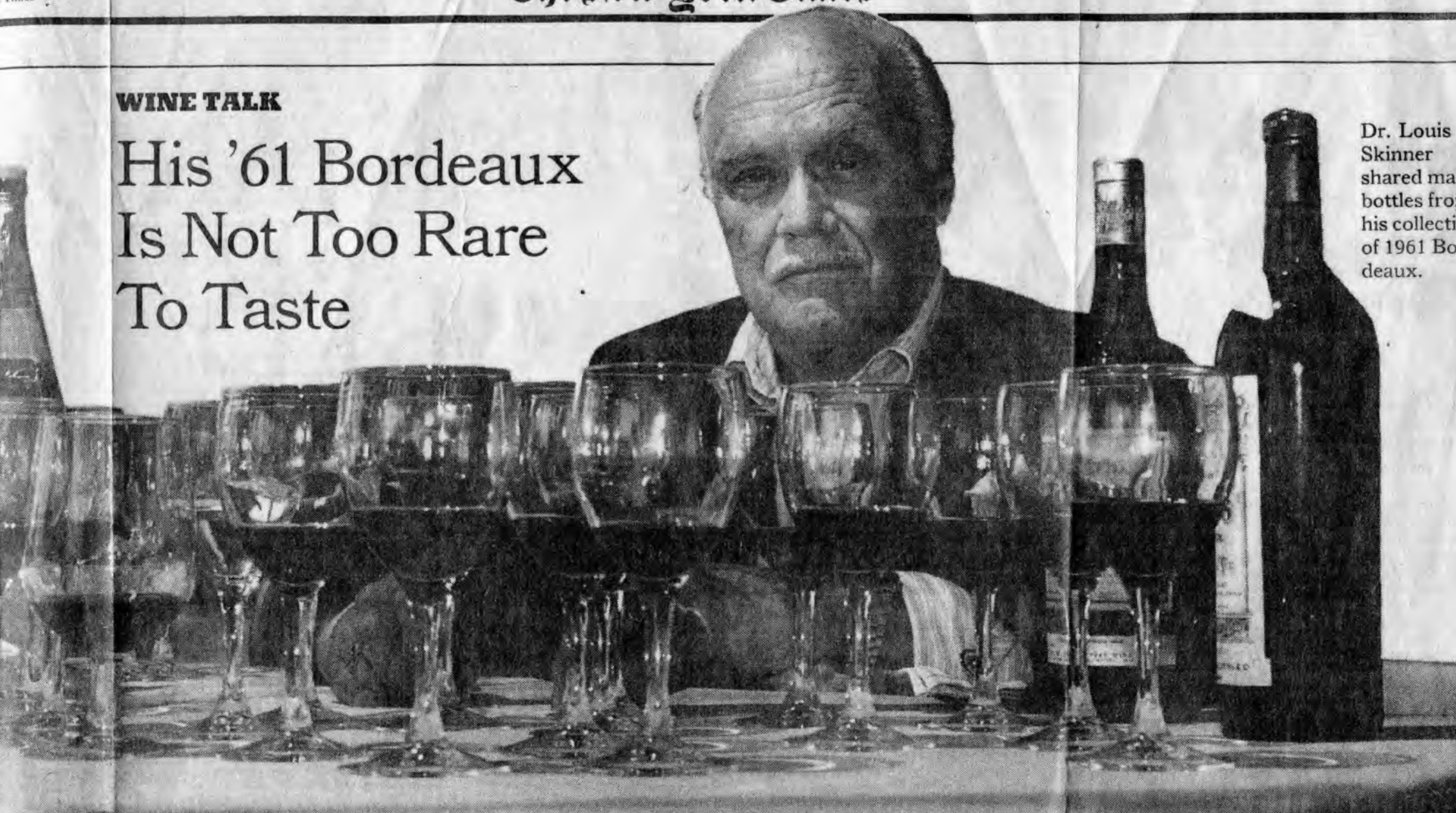
The New York Times

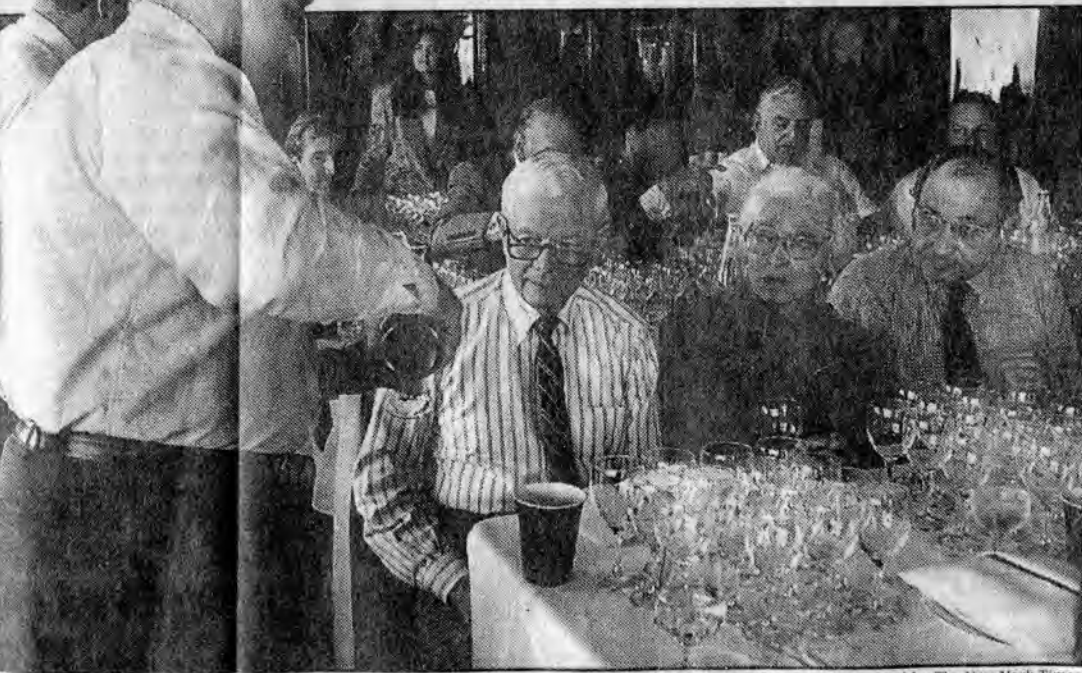
WINE TALK

His '61 Bordeaux
Is Not Too Rare
To Taste

Dr. Louis
Skinner
shared ma
bottles fro
his collecti
of 1961 Bo
deaux.

Times





Photographs by Susan Greenwood for The New York Times

Skinner is a collector who drinks his rare old wines, but with other connoisseurs.

By FRANK J. PRIAL

Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, Feb. 23 — A group of people demolished 110 bottles of Lou Skinner's rarest, and all but irreplaceable, wines this weekend, and made him a contented man.

Dr. Louis Skinner, a retired dermatologist who lives nearby in Coral Gables, is one of a small band of grand-scale wine collectors, most of them American, who are never happier than when they see something that may have taken a lifetime to create destroyed before their eyes. In this case, it was nine dozen or so bottles of Bordeaux wines of the 1961 vintage. To people who care about such things, 1961 has long been considered one of, if not *the*, finest Bordeaux vintage of the 20th century.

This is its 30th anniversary plus one, and Dr. Skinner decided about a year ago to invite 32 friends, fellow collectors and wine makers to join him in determining how the '61 Bordeaux, or at least 57 of them, have fared in recent years. Wines from eight chateaus were contributed by guests, but the others all came from Dr. Skinner's cellar.

"I think this is my swan song," he said — not too convincingly — during one of the tasting sessions. "I don't have that much wine left." Dr. Skinner, who is of the 1915 vintage himself, esti-

ated that some 3,000 bottles remain in his conditioned cellar, of which about 300 are of the 1961 Bordeaux. This weekend's event was his 30th anniversary and the second of his third tasting of the 1961's. The first was for their 20th anniversary and the second for their 10th.

Most great wine collections, including Dr. Skinner's, are assembled painstakingly over the years. Usually, collectors track down rare wines like detectives, studying vintage charts and wine lists, visiting wine makers, cultivating wine merchants and haunting the London wine rooms. Or they have agents do it for them.

Dr. Skinner's story is somewhat colorful. "I was in Bordeaux in 1963," Dr. Skinner says, "and I met a girl whose father was a wine merchant in St.-Émilion. He advised me to get into wine, and, for once I took someone's advice. I bought 100 châteaux, one case of each."

When the 1961 Bordeaux arrived in Miami in 1964, wines like Latour, Margaux, Rothschild and Mouton-Rothschild sold for \$10; lesser ones sold for \$3 to \$6 a bottle. The top 1961's are \$600 to \$750 a bottle. Pétrus, the current superstar of the 1961's, can cost \$2,000 for a bottle of the 1961 vintage.

Are these wines worth their current prices? For the most part, no. Several of the wines Dr. Skinner tasted were outstanding,

Continued on Page C10