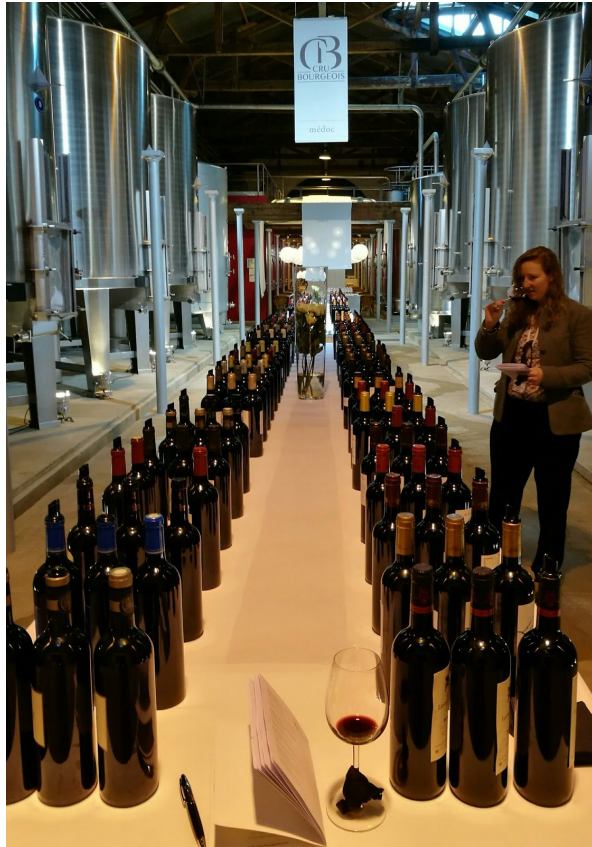


Bordeaux 2016 Vintage Report

Quality, quantity and an opportunity to seek out new producers



In brief

2016 was another high quality vintage in Bordeaux and the largest in a decade. Bordeaux is a vast wine producing region and in 2016 there are many very good wines to choose from. With prices on the rise and exchange rates weak, this year presents an opportunity to look beyond the celebrated names for those up and coming estates that offer genuine value and have made beautiful wines. This report is packed with recommendations for wines which we believe customers will be delighted to have in their cellars. We invite you to taste some of them with us in Cambridge on 10th May, and Oxford on 18th May.

Style

In comparison to 2015 many wines have slightly higher acidity and lower alcohol, which contribute to making more classic and potentially more long-lived clarets.

My colleague Alice Archer and I travelled and tasted extensively (500+ wines), and discussed the vintage with many winemakers, property owners and brokers. The vintage is far from homogeneous. 2016 was a vintage that required diligence in the vineyard but was capable of delivering optimally ripe grapes from

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc vines, in good quantity.

The precise terroir of the vineyards, the amount of rainfall, the decision on when to harvest and the *élevage* were therefore the factors that made the difference. There are many vigneronns that managed all those factors extremely well and made exciting wines as a result.

Top of the Medoc is the Tops

The vintage found its best expression in precisely those areas that missed out last year, namely the appellations of the Northern Medoc. In 2015 St Estephe and the Medoc region to its North experienced torrential rain before the harvest, which reduced quality. In 2016 the drought that lasted for 3 months stressed the vines, and those best able to cope were those planted on water retaining clay and limestone which the Northern Medoc enjoys.

Pricing

The UGCB reported that 5300 merchants travelled to Bordeaux in the first week of April 2017 to assess the new vintage, 20% more than had visited the year before and the highest since 2012.

With global interest in Bordeaux at an all time high, prices for wines at the top of the classification hierarchies will inevitably rise. The impact of the worsening £/€ exchange rate will exacerbate those

increases in the UK. Our analysis on prices shows that across a broad range of wines the 2015 vintage was on average comparable in price to both 2009 and 2010. That will make 2016 the most expensive on record. Exchange rates now are similar to those in 2009 and 2010 but 10% worse than they were before the EU Referendum, when the 2015 En Primeur campaign was conducted.

For those interested in purchasing top chateaux there could well be pressure on allocations and some properties will test the market with eye-watering prices. Such is the game the owners play, more with an eye on their neighbours than with a view on what customers will pay. We will be making regular offers of all wines we have marked as great quality.

Best value Crus Bourgeois – for now

The Alliance des Crus Bourgeois continues on its path to reinstating its own classification, this time with Superieur and Exceptionnel status being awarded to chateaux for a five year term. The proposal was agreed by members in September 2016 and is due to be ratified this year, with implementation possible as early as the 2017 vintage. The new structure if adopted will help consumers understand the differences among the large number (278 for the 2014 vintage) of chateaux. It will also allow those at the top of the classification to demand more for their wines, which might encourage some producers to return to the Crus Bourgeois family. So this vintage could well be a particularly good value one to buy Crus Bourgeois before the classification is implemented.

Vintage conditions - Very wet winter, very dry summer

A dry autumn led to a sodden January and rainy spring, when nearly a year's rainfall fell in the first six months. That much rain affects vines, causing excessive canopy growth, increased disease risk, complications with pruning and some spring sickness, all of which require diligent vineyard management. The Bordeaux region was mainly saved from the late April frost that spread across much of the continent and devastated many vineyards, Burgundy and the Loire Valley amongst the most affected. Fortunately June was dry enough to allow a uniform flowering, good fruit set and healthy bunches, particularly for the Merlot, which directly led to the highest yields since 2004. Then the sun came out and remained for 12 weeks during one of the driest summers ever recorded, with virtually no rain from 23rd June until 13th September. The early year rain certainly helped the vines survive during the drought period, particularly those planted on clay and limestone. The heavy bouts of rain that fell on 13th and 30th September refreshed the vines and October was cool but dry, allowing an 'a la carte' approach to harvesting.

The cooler temperatures helped to retain acidity as the vines reached full maturity and the harvest was complete by the end of October.

Lower alcohol and Higher Acidity?

I was delighted to find many wines with higher acidity and lower alcohol in 2016, a result of higher yields, cooler temperatures and probably slightly earlier picking (though vignerons spoke of picking at the optimal moment that date is a moveable feast open to interpretation).

Where were the best wines made?

As all grape variety vines enjoyed decent flowering and harvest conditions, we found very good wines in all areas. Some winemakers claimed it was a Cabernet Sauvignon vintage, but we found some great wines made from a majority of Merlot, whether in St Estephe, the Medoc or Fronsac, St Emilion or Pomerol. Right bank wines with some Cabernet Franc have an extra dimension.

The most interesting area for me, as mentioned above, is the Northern Medoc, comprising Saint-Estephe and the Medoc appellations. The area is planted to slightly more Merlot than Cabernet Sauvignon, has more clay and enjoyed excellent climatic conditions. Not only are some excellent quality wines to be found but the area is huge and has hundreds of producers making significant volumes. The Medoc appellation on its own, at 5,700 hectares of vineyards, is the same size as Burgundy's Cote d'Or vineyard area. We recommend plenty of wines below that have rarely been seen in the UK.

We tasted many excellent wines in Saint-Julien, Pauillac and Margaux, as well as Haut Medoc properties nearby those appellations. For various reasons the other Medoc appellations of Moulis and Listrac were less homogeneous in quality.

The wines of Pomerol, Saint-Emilion and its satellites, Fronsac and Castillon are exciting, powerful and juicy. The wines with higher levels of Cabernet Franc seem to have an extra dimension in many cases, and vineyards grown on limestone exhibit good freshness and minerality. There really are some exquisite wines made on the Right Bank.

Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon grapes destined for dry wines were harvested either side of the 13th September rainfall, in warm conditions. The Pessac-Leognan whites are intense for sure but at this stage seem tart and mean rather than flamboyant. Winemakers in Sauternes making sweet wines had to be patient as it was so dry during the autumn, but eventually were able to pick grapes affected by botrytis, or noble rot.

Should you buy En Primeur 2016?

You should buy En Primeur because:

- 2016 is the best vintage since 2010, and there is richness, ripeness and elegance. The best wines are exceptional and there are many mid-tier wines that will offer delicious mid-term drinking.
- In some cases it remains the guaranteed best price at which to buy wines, especially as global demand is growing.
- High yields, often up to the maximum permitted for the appellation, may mitigate against a desire to increase prices.
- You can taste a broad range of wines at the same level of maturity, gain a clear view of the characteristics of a vintage and choose the wines that are showing the greatest potential. The opportunity to taste 'horizontally' is rarer when the wines are bottled.
- Mature wines are becoming rarer and more expensive, so dipping back into the market is less easy and prices are higher because of worsening exchange rates.

Factors that dictate against buying en primeur include:

- Exchange rates. The pound has currently dropped to below 2016 levels and will remain depressed until the direction of Brexit negotiations become clearer. That makes wines 10% dearer than last year, before an expected increase.
- Wines may be offered at unrealistic prices, dampening demand and meaning they may be available to purchase at the same price when bottled.
- Tasting barrel samples gives you an impression of what a wine will become once bottled, but certainly not the full picture. Too often a critic's review of a wine will differ markedly from a barrel sample to a bottle sample.

Wines to buy

I will try to confine my recommendations to wines which deliver on quality and would be worth buying en primeur. I will rank wines below by my assessment of their quality in each appellation, starting with those that are outstanding and exceptional. From over 500 wines tasted my Wines to Buy list is a severe selection of fewer than 150 wines.

New scoring system

The 100 point system has come in for criticism following scores that seem ever to be on the rise. As a point of difference we will follow the British academic degree classification to rank wines. All wines ranked as Upper Second Class (High 2:1), First Class or Starred First Class are particularly noteworthy and stood out as having great potential.

60 Favourite wines under £200 per dozen IBD

First Class Value Wines (should be under £100 IBD)

Haut Medoc/Medoc: Ch. Aurilhac (d'), Ch. Castera, Ch. Cissac, Ch. Haut Madrac, Ch. Lousteauneuf, Ch Retout (du), Ch. Tois Moulins, Ch. Vieux Robin,

Graves: Ch. Haura,

Bordeaux/Cadillac/Castillon Ch. Reault, Ch. Reynon, Ch. Cap de Faugères, Ch. Pey la Tour Reserve,

First Class affordable wines (should be £100- £200 IBD)

Haut-Medoc/Medoc/Moulis/Listrac Ch. Beaumont, Ch. Bellegrave du Poujeau, Ch. Caronne Ste Gemme, Ch. Citran, Ch. Charmail, Ch Malescasse, Ch Saint Ahon, Ch. Fonreud, Ch. Greysac, Ch. La Lauzette Declercq, Ch. Mauvesin Barton, Ch. Rollan de By, Ch Tour Seran

Margaux Ch. D'Arsac, Ch. Deyrem Valentin, Ch. Labegorce, Ch. Marsac Segueineau, Ch. Siran,

Pauillac Ch. Bellegrave, Ch. Fleur Peyrabon, Ch. Plantey, Ch. Tour SieuJean

St. Estephe Ch. Capbern, Ch. de Come, Ch. Haut Beausejour, Ch. La Haye, Ch. Le Boscq, Ch. Le Crock, Ch. Serilhan, Ch. Meyney, Ch. Plantier Rose

St. Julien - Connetable de Talbot

Castillon/Francis/Fronsac/Pomerol/St. Emilion & Satellites Ch. Alverne, Clos de Bouard, Ch. Cote de Baleau, Ch.Cote Monpezat, Ch. Dalem, Ch.de Candale, Ch.de la Dauphine, Il de Saint Pierre, Ch. Moulin Pey-Labrie, Ch.Pierre 1er, Ch. Pindefleurs, Ch. Puygeraud, Ch. Siaurac, Ch. Teyssier, Ch. Tour Maillet, Ch. Villars

The Left Bank

THE LEFT BANK - MEDOC

2016 was a year for the Northern Médoc which this year received the rainfall it needed and enjoyed good weather throughout the harvest. Cool September nights helped to retain the acidity in the vines by slowing the production of sugars and it is the freshness in many of the Medoc wines as well as lower alcohol levels that mark them as particularly well-balanced. There are many Crus Bourgeois in the Médoc and St. Estèphe that represent good value in this vintage.

THE CRUS BOURGEOIS OF THE MEDOC

While I was in Bordeaux I was delighted to meet with Olivier Cuvelier who presides over the Alliance des Crus Bourgeois. Olivier owns Ch Le Crock in St Estephe, recently reviewed as the best Cru Bourgeois in a horizontal tasting of 2014s in Decanter Magazine. He also owns 2nd Growth Ch. Léoville Poyferré in St. Julien, one of the superstars of the Medoc. Oliver was open to new ideas to introduce Crus Bourgeois to the UK consumer and we plan to stage an event in Cambridge in late September with a number of Alliance producers.

Properties carrying the classification Cru Bourgeois have faced an identity crisis for the last decade and have missed out on the global wave of enthusiasm for Medoc wines that the Grands Crus Classés wines have enjoyed over the same period. With just one status and no hierarchy within the status that allows consumers to recognise the better chateaux, producers have been unable to raise their prices even when they demonstrate excellence over a number of vintages. Members of the Alliance once again voted for a reintroduction of different classification levels (such as Superieur and Exceptionnel) in September 2016, and Olivier expects this to be ratified this year, to be implemented as early as from the 2017 vintage. Until such time as there is a new classification the very best Crus Bourgeois will represent excellent value for money, being close in quality as well as terroirs as their more expensive Grand Cru neighbours.

Tasting the 2016 barrel samples reminded me that Merlot is not just the most widely planted grape variety of the Right Bank. It is also now the favoured grape of the majority of Cru Bourgeois. It ripens and matures earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon and is better suited to the clay soils in the northern Medoc. As explained above, conditions in 2016 suited most grapes varieties, Merlot possibly the best.

THE CLASSIFIED GROWTHS OF THE MEDOC IN 1855

Of the 60 Chateaux that still exist from the 1855 classification I tasted all but twelve and can easily recommend thirty of them on quality grounds. Recommending on price is another matter and many producers expected to raise their prices in line with other Cru Classés producers.

Medoc Appellation

The appellation Medoc comprises sixteen communes and 5700 hectares to the north of St Estephe. The best known communes for quality are Begadan, Ordonnac and St Cristoly. The terroir is different from the Haut Medoc further south, comprising richer, moisture retaining soils more suited to the Merlot grape. The style of the wines therefore changes but in 2016 we found many wines that really demanded attention, being ripe, flavoursome, well balanced, fresh and plump.

Property

Commune

Guide Price Dozen IBD

Starred First

Ch. Haut Condissas Bégadan

Powerful, rich fruit and oak nose yet juicy, plump and fine tannins on the palate. Keeper

Ch. La Tour de By Bégadan £130-£145
60% Cab Sauv 35% Merlot. Dark inky colour, ripe and intense flavours sustains a single chord to a long finish.

First Class

Ch. Castera Saint-Germain d'Esteuil

Appealing perfume. Well judged. Bouncy and vibrant, fresh and juicy. Early drinker.

Ch. Greysac Bégadan £105-£115

V elegant, stylish Medoc with lovely dried cherry nose, glossy palate, good structure and cool feel.

Ch. Lousteauneuf Valeyrac £90-£100

70% CS, 15% Merlot, 14% PV. Not shy, but also not over-extracted. Touch of cocoa on the nose.

Crammed with black fruit. Pretty big tannins, but fruit intensity holds through,

Ch. Potensac Ordonnac £200-£225

Nice acidity, very fresh. Balanced tannin. Blue, black, red

Ch. Rollan de By Bégadan £130-£150

100% new oak is evident on the nose but there is a rich quality to the fruit aromas which blends well.

Fleshy and opulent yet with good fresh acidity and persistence. keeper

Ch. Tour Seran Bégadan £135-£155

Rich and voluptuous, lots of new oak and ripe fruit on the nose. Long and ripe with plenty of tannin, which will need time. Keeper

Ch. de Tourteyron Valeyrac

Very ripe and pure fruit. Good extraction and ripeness. Accessible early but has good structure. Very happy to have found this wine.

High 2.1

Ch. Chantemerle Gaillan-en-Médoc

Refreshing ripe plum character. Fairly persistent.

Ch. des Brousteras Saint-Yzans de Médoc

High tannin, high acid, but supported all the way by superb intensity red fruit character.

Ch. des Cabans Bégadan

Overt oak on the nose, coconut, and coffee. Bright bouncy fruit. Very accessible now.

Ch. Grand Lacaze Ordonnac

Well seasoned oak character on the nose. Mellow tannin and acid on the palate, but good depth of blue and black fruit.

Ch. Griviere Bégadan

Very open. Black cherry and floral characteristics, with slightly dusty tannins. Refreshing.

Ch. L'Argenteyre Bégadan

Easily accessible. Classy wine, with plenty of plummy fruit.

Ch. La France Delhomme Saint-Yzans de Médoc

Plummy, light and accessible. More traditional on the palate than originally anticipated.

Ch. La Gorce Blaignan

Juicy, fruit forward, balanced acidity and oak. Touch fleshy on the finish.

Ch. La Tour Saint Bonnet Saint-Christoly-en-Médoc

Ch. La Valiere Bégadan

Fresh, light cherry fruit. Vibrant and accessible.

Ch. Ladignac Gaillan-en-Médoc

Fresh and pretty red and black fruit. Light-ish body, but tannins fit in well. Early drinker.

Ch. Laujac Bégadan

Powerful black fruit, chewy tannin, creamy finish. Slightly toasty.

Ch. Laulan Ducos Jau-Dignac et Loirac

Toasty but well integrated oak. Red and black fruits on the palate, with good acidity, and slightly chalky tannin. Approachable early.

Ch. Le Bourdieu Valeyrac

Pretty, with a slightly green and herbal character. Clean, well structured palate.

Ch. Les Trois Manoirs Gaillan-en-Médoc

Good early drinking. Packed with red fruit character.

Ch. Lestage Chevillon Gaillan-en-Médoc

Fresh, slightly rosy nose. Packed with fruit on the palette: redcurrant, strawberry, blackcurrant. Supple tannin. Easy and upfront.

Ch. Maison Blanche Saint-Yzans de Médoc

Bright, fresh acidity. Fairly bouncy. Red fruit, vanilla, easy going.

Ch. Mazails Saint-Yzans de Médoc

Lighter appearance. Very open, medium bodied, fresh and accessible.

Ch. Moulin de Canhaut Jau-Dignac et Loirac

Very pretty and forward nose. Medium bodied, medium tannins, but charming depth of red and black fruit. Early drinker.

Ch. Panigon Civrac-en-Médoc

Ripe blue and black fruit. Well rounded.

Ch. Poitevin Jau-Dignac et Loirac

Dense texture, lots of black fruits. Chalky, fresh, long. Keeper.

Vieux Chateau Landon Bégadan

Slightly smoky nose. Fruit driven, well rounded palette. Plummy and juicy, with balanced tannins.

Haut-Médoc, Lustrac and Moulis

The Haut Médoc appellation includes fifteen communes stretched out over 60km of the Medoc peninsular, so it is unsurprising that there is as much difference between the styles of Haut Medoc AC wines from Macau in the south and Vertheuil in the North, as there is between Margaux and St Estephe. I feel it is helpful to name the communes that the chateaux are located in. I have included properties from the appellations of Moulis and Lustrac in this section.

To the South lie Macau, Ludon, Le Pian-Médoc, Parempuyre, Blanquefort and Le Taillan. In the middle Medoc lie Arcins, Avensan, Lamarque, Cussac, while Saint-Laurent-Médoc. Saint-Sauveur, Cissac, Vertheuil and Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne lie to the North.

There are only five Crus Classés found in Haut Medoc AOC communes: Belgrave, Camensac and Tour Carnet are in the Middle Medoc, while La Lagune and Cantemerle are in the South.

Property

Commune

Guide Price Dozen IBD

Starred First

Ch. Citran Avensan

£125-£135

Deep colour. Peppery spice on the nose. Charming blackcurrant fruit on the palate, with a creamy texture, and fresh acidity. Very good tannic hold. Slightly toasty, smoky note, but pure fruit that wears it well. Slightly blue. Medium plus acidity, but glamorous, and good length.

Ch. Malescasse Lamarque

£120-£130

Plump, energetic, and bright. Plummy with some new oak character. Super persistent acidity. Classy.

First Class

Ch. Barreyres Cru Bourgeois Arcins

Smoky nose, plummy fruit, chewy tannin. Big structure, with ripe fruit all the way to the end. Fresh acidity.

Ch. Beaumont Cussac Fort Médoc **£105-£115**

Fruity, effortless extraction, good weight and good balance. Consistent tasting notes from this large property. Lush, rich, ripe, broad, and smooth. Third look (at least). Touch fleshy. Light grip on the tannin. Shorter, for younger drinking, but still structured.

Ch. Bel Air Gloria St. Julien

Clear CS character on nose. Fresh and vibrant. Long term. Elegant cherry fruit.

Ch. Bellegrave du Poujeau Le Pian-Médoc **£100-£105**

Superb balance and concentration. Great value

Ch. Cantemerle 5th Growth Macau **£245-£275**

Very extracted powerful thick but doesn't hold through (AA) Powerful mid palate, packed with fruit, chewy tannin, fresh acid

Ch. Charmail Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne

Silky, and voluptuous. High cocoa, dark fruit, but not overworked or over-extracted. Ripe, full. Fine well built tannin, good acidity persists on the finish.

Ch. Cissac Cissac-Médoc

Low yields of 35 hl/ha, Ripe and powerful with fresh acid (3.45 pH) Supper tannin profile. A wine that will keep well.

Ch. de Camensac 5th Growth Saint-Laurent-Médoc

50/50 blend, elegant and floral backbone, middling acid, firm tannin

Ch. du Retout Cussac Fort Médoc

Ripe fruity nose, oak in check. Full bodied with plenty of tannic structure but fruit to the end. Keeper

Ch. Duthil Le Pian-Médoc Not released en primeur

Flesh red and black plum fruit. Good structure and length with pleasing acidity.

Ch. Fonreud Lustrac-Médoc **£105-£115**

Tarry nose. Black fruit nose. Rich palate, long and textured. Fresh

Ch. Haut Madrac Saint-Sauveur

Easy extraction. Full blackcurrant fruit, edged by dark cocoa and smoky notes. Lovely power and finesse. Vineyards next to Lynch Moussas

Ch. La Lauzette Declercq Lustrac-Médoc

Very good ripeness, creamy oak, v plummy and juicy

Ch. Saint Ahon Blanquefort

Toast and licorice on the nose, super concentrated palate, and a creamy vanilla finish all controlled by a bold tannic structure.

Ch. Sociando Mallet Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne

pretty violets and plums on the nose good oak slick integrated plummy fresh acidity good finish

Ch. Trois Moulins Macau

Fruit compote (black, red, and blue), with good texture and persistence.

High 2:1

Ch. d'Agassac Ludon-Médoc

Creamy texture, vanilla, blue and black fruit compote.

Ch. Barateau Saint-Laurent-Médoc

Forward oak on the nose, chalky tannin, black fruit and cherries, long acidity.

Ch. Belle Vue Macau £120-£130
Typical modern character of the house. High merlot content. Fruit driven. Pretty. Medium - full. Not for the long term

Ch. Branas Grand Poujeaux Moulis £235-£250
Good weight, dark choc, cherry.

Ch. Cambon La Pelouse Macau £120-£140
Fresh, bit of everything. Blue, black, red, even slightly green. Well structured tannin, medium plus acidity. Chunky. Fruit not hugely clear

Ch. Caronne Ste Gemme Saint-Laurent-Médoc £110-£120
Lightly smoky nose. Lovely characterful wine. Great fruit persistence. Fresh acidity. Chalky tannin. Well built, well made. Classic

Ch. Chasse Spleen Moulis £235-£250
Big red fruit. Super acidity. Grippy fresh slightly stalky tannin.

Ch. d'Arcins Arcins
Good creamy texture, black and blue fruit. Classy. Sweet and juicy.

Ch. d'Aurilhac Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne £95-£105
V structured tannin, pretty florality, charming red and black fruit. Good weight on the palate. Tasty and affordable

Ch. Doyac Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne
Big tannic structure, good acidity, concentrated fruit.

Ch. Du Breuil Cissac-Médoc
Ripe and fresh. Tannins a little chalky

Ch. FontestEAU Saint-Sauveur
Ripe and juicy on the nose. Bold tannin on the palate, but good fruit persistence all the way through.

Ch. Labat Saint-Laurent-Médoc £100-£110
Meaty, earthy, herbal, floral. Fine grained tannin. Well structured.

Ch. Lamothe-Cissac Cissac-Médoc
Fleshy and persistent. Cherry fruit, dark chocolate.

Ch. Lanessan Cussac Fort Médoc £115-£125
V hopeful nose. Bright blue and black. Fresh and juicy. Perhaps lacking some persistence. But easy going and accessible. Modern medoc style

Ch. LarrivAUX Cissac-Médoc £100-£115
Firm juicy red and black plums. Sweet spice. Fine grained tannin. Fresh, and youthful. 50/50 CS / M

Ch. Martin Vertheuil
Oaky nose. Plump and ripe, juicy acid, lots of ripe tannin, full body.

Ch. Mauvesin Barton Moulis £120-£135
Bright, fresh, bouncy, juicy. Certainly not half the wine of Poujeaux

Ch. Peyrabon Saint-Sauveur
V close to Pauillac. Ripe nose. Fleshy fruit. Middling acidity. Firm tannin. Pure. Finish?

Ch. Pomies-Agassac Ludon-Médoc
Good focus and concentration.

Ch. Pontoise-Cabarrus Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne
Classic Claret. Slightly taut and lean. Good.

Ch. Poujeaux Moulis £235-£260
sloe char bigger bolder well structured tannin good acidity classic claret

Ch. Reysson Vertheuil £95-£105
Nearly 90% Merlot, plus CF and PV. No CS. Mostly on limestone. V juicy, fruit driven, blackberry, lots of currants, plums. Slightly chalky tannin. Good acidity. Lighter than expected. Medium body. But fresh.

Ch. Senejac Le Pian-Médoc £110-£120
Dusty tannin, plush black fruit. Quite ripe. Not as generous as 2015 but clearly well made

Ch. Villegeorge Avensan
Fresh, youthful, juicy, accessible, slightly grainy tannin.

St-Estèphe

Pick of the bunch in 2016 for the Grand Cru appellations and lots to choose from both in style and price.

Property	Commune	Guide Price Dozen IBD
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Starred First

Ch. Cos Labory 5th Growth £275+
Great structure. Grippy ripe tannins and juicy acidity. V ripe fruit.

Ch. Calon Segur 3rd Growth £600+
Very harmonious, integrated tannin, pretty acid, red fruits and ripe tannins. Excellent.

First Class

Ch. Capbern Saint-Estèphe £150-£180
Ripe and inviting nose. Effortlessly ripe, long, structured. Big backbone but still elegant edge. More 'clarity'

Ch. de Come Cru Bourgeois
Lovely silky texture. Fruit cake, raisins, and sweet spice characters. Super balance - everything perfectly in place. Good acidity, and long finish.

Ch. de Pez Saint-Estèphe
53% Merlot 42% Cab Sauv 3.5% PV 1.5% Cab Franc. Clay and limestone terroirs Great weight and concentration, still fresh and balanced. Keeper. Very concentrated but not over-extracted, ripe and persistent to a long finish.

Ch. Haut Beausejour Saint-Estèphe
62% Merlot 36% Cab Sauv, 2% Petit Verdot Deep ruby, Black cherry, juicy, with chalky tannins. Feels very pretty in the mouth. Lovely freshness.

Ch. La Haye Cru Bourgeois £150-£175
Pronounced red and black cherry fruit on the both the nose and the palate. Chalky tannin, and tangy acidity. Developing well.

Ch. Le Boscq Cru Bourgeois £175-£190
Oak prominent on nose. And on palate. But quality black fruit holds it well. Slightly grainy tannin, but well structured. Instant oak hit fades to leave pure fruit on the finish.

Ch. Le Crock Cru Bourgeois £170-£180
Great all round quality from owners of Ch leoville Poyferré. Keeper

Ch. Meyney Saint-Estèphe £225-£250
Pretty ripe well balanced new oak polished strong acidity structured tannin good length

Ch. Les Ormes de Pez Saint-Estèphe £240-£270
Deep deep ruby. Lifted and impressive nose of black fruits, cedar. Concentrated and tasty palate with good length.

Ch. Serilhan Saint-Estèphe £140-£160
Sweet blackcurrant nose, creaminess on palate, jam packed, but structured fruit, tannin, and acidity

High 2:1

Ch. Clauzet Cru Bourgeois £150-£170

Delicious, up front personality, ripe and juicy. Not hugely long. Drink early?

Le Marquis de Calon Segur 2nd Wine

Sweet and elegant, ripe black and red fruits, florality again plus herbal oregano edge touch choc bold tannin elegant

Ch. Plantier Rose Cru Bourgeois

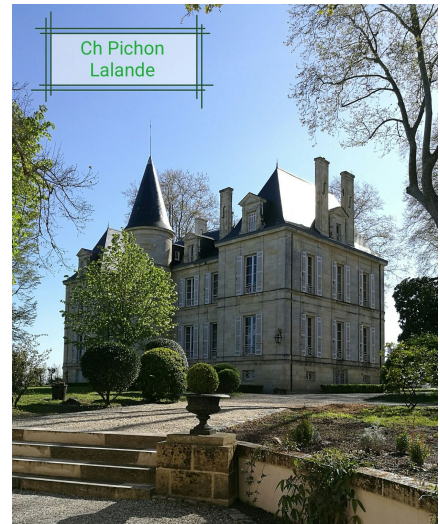
Cabernet dominant. Pretty blackberry and blackcurrant nose. Fresh and plump on the palate. Charming florality on the finish.

Ch. Tour des Termes Cru Bourgeois £145-£165

Rich spicy bouquet, juicy ripe plummy palate with firm tannins. Keeper

Pauillac

Producers in Pauillac looked very happy at all the events we encountered them and you can see why when you taste the wines. Cabernet Sauvignon, the dominant variety in the appellation, was successful and even the deep gravels that the terroir is renowned for did not stress the vines to the extent of creating much problem. That may have been as a result of strict selection of grapes, as the chateaux seek to include only the most perfectly ripe grapes.



Property	Commune	Guide Price
Dozen IBD		

Starred First

Ch. Batailley 5th Growth £400+

Seriously well extracted but not over-done. Dark, ripe and chewy tannins. Long and generous. Excellent.

Ch. Lynch-Bages 5th Growth £1000+

Big, broad and powerful, plump and satisfying. Keeper

Ch. Pichon Baron 2nd Growth £1100+

Rich, exotic, monolithic. Engine oil texture with big gobs of sweet blackberry fruit. Dramatic

Ch. Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande 2nd Growth £1100+

Deep ruby, mocha, blackcurrant nose. Perfectly ripe, fat sweet and elegant. Builds well in the mouth, long and fine.

First Class

Ch. Bellegrave Pauillac £180-£200

Toasty nose, then v fresh and bouncy palate. Lots of red fruits and juicy acidity. Not trying too hard and will drink young. Delicious.

Ch. Croizet Bages 5th Growth £290-£330

Lots of fruit throughout. Fine-grained tannins. Very long.

Ch. Grand-Puy-Lacoste 5th Growth £580-£625

Lush, ripe and powerful, packed with flavour, ripe tannins and a tad less acidity evident than others.

Ch. Haut Bages Liberal 5th Growth £320-£350

Black cherry, cocoa nose. Touch of spice on the palate, with stylish ready to wear initial fruit. Youthful drinking

Ch. Haut Bages Monpelou Pauillac £180-£200

V. fragrant nose. Big and ripe on the palate. Sweet spice and red fruit.

Ch. Lynch-Moussas 5th Growth £300-£340

Smoky, spicy nose. Creamy palate with very well structured acid and tannin. Super black fruit character, with added cocoa and coffee. Nice intensity.

Reserve de la Comtesse 2nd Wine £320-£350

54% Cab Sauv 37% Merlot. Beautiful nose with ripe black fruits, judicious and integrated oak, Ever so slightly green tannins (from young vines?) but long and delicious.

Ch. Tour Sieu Jean Pauillac

Toasty oak on the nose seems a little overdone but then Wow! great rich velvety palate, loads of black cherry, blackcurrant. Long finish. Bravo!

High 2:1

Ch. Fleur Peyrabon Cru Bourgeois £195-£220

Boiled sweet nose. V fine palate, deep and fruity, good development with good finish.

Ch. Fonbadet Cru Bourgeois £250-£275

Rich and sweet. Bit short but very tasty with ripe sweet tannin and good acidity.

Ch. Plantey Cru Bourgeois

Darker profile. Ripe and spicy on the palate with well extracted tannin and a supple finish.

Saint-Julien

Like Pauillac a little further north, the wines of Saint Julien are Cabernet dominated and wine makers revelled in the great conditions for this grape variety to make very good claret for medium to long-term cellaring. There just don't seem to be enough properties in this modestly sized 920ha appellation (Pauillac has 1200ha, Margaux 1350ha). There are only 30 properties and this keeps prices high and rising.

Property	Commune	Guide Price Dozen IBD
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Starred First

Ch. Leoville Barton 2nd Growth £600+

Rich, intense perfume. Dark fruit and coconut. Stylish.

Ch. Beychevelle 4th Growth £600+

47% Cab 47% Merlot Deep ruby, beautiful aroma, sweet fruit, cocoa, fresh and clean palate, very prim and proper

First Class

Ch. Branaire Ducru 4th Growth £450+

Classy and fresh. Coconut, black fruits and spice on the nose. excellent structure, tannic and fresh. Keeper

Ch. Gruaud Larose 2nd Growth £550+

Elegant, soft, and restrained. Very well structured palate. Slightly smoky nose, ripe blue and black fruit on the palate, not overworked at all.

Ch. Lagrange 3rd Growth £350+
Very ripe and plump cassis and plum fruit. Good tannic depth, and a fresh finish.

Ch. Langoa Barton 4th Growth £380-£420
55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc - relatively early picked.

Ch. Leoville Poyferre 2nd Growth £650+
Black and red currants and a touch of menthol. Well built.

Ch. Talbot 4th Growth £450+
Perfectly ripe red and black plum fruit, with a hint of cassis. Classy tannin, and a persistent finish.

Clos de Marquis Saint-Julien
Bold black fruit on nose, and a thick rich chocolatey palate, but still with fresh acidity on the finish. Plenty more to give

Connetable Talbot 2nd Wine £190-£215
Floral, blackcurrant, very well-balanced. Supple tannins, nice persistence, easy going and pretty. Can enjoy young or keep.

Les Fiefs de Lagrange 2nd Wine £180-£200
Good concentration for a second wine. Good fruit purity and long finish. well balanced

High 2:1

Ch. Gloria Saint-Julien £320-£350
Perfumed cedar, high acidity, pure fruit on the finish. Good extraction.

Ch. St Pierre 4th Growth £480-£520
Packed with plums and chocolate on the palate. Chunky, with a slight herbal edge.

Pavillon du Glana 2nd Wine £120-£130
Floral and easy going

Margaux

The wines from the southern Medoc are among the most consistently successful in 2015 and that includes the Haut Medoc 'new wave' wines from just south of Margaux (see below). In a vintage where the taster's palate was beset with chalky tannins and fresh acidity, the relatively restrained and elegant nature of wines from Margaux were a blessed relief. There was a lovely combination of ripeness and freshness without a tendency to over-extract. I am hoping that the lesser known Crus Bourgeois will offer good value.

Property	Commune	Guide Price Dozen IBD
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Starred First

Ch. Brane-Cantenac 2nd Growth £540-£600
Very pretty nose. red fruits and black fruits on the palate, v elegant and long and fine. Gorgeous

Ch. Labegorce £220-£250
Cool Minty Cabernet. Great structure, cool acid, tannic backbone.

Ch. Siran £220-£250
African violets on the nose. Good Margaux elegance but pretty intense. Sweet start but enough freshness. Not the most concentrated but nicely judged.

First Class

Blason d'Issan 2nd Wine of Ch. d'Issan £205-£220

Pretty red cherry nose. Slightly floral. Good tannic structure. Too much for a medium bodied wine? High acidity. Mouth watering. Juicy and red on the finish.

Ch. Cantenac Brown 3rd Growth £410-£450

Deep glossy black opaque. Toasty nose, black fruits, then juicy acid and ripe firm tannin.

Ch. d'Arsac Cru Bourgeois £150-£165

Red and black, grainy tannin, well structured. Crunchy fruit, good acidity. Big red bright finish. Pretty. Not over-extracted

Ch. Dauzac 5th Growth £350-£375

Plump, ripe and fat palate of good weight.

Ch. Deyrem Valentin £165-£190

Plump fruit, good structure, firm backbone and fresh and fruity to end.

Ch. Du Tertre 5th Growth £305-£320

Part of Giscours estate. Lovely svelte texture. Creamy, ripe with great length.

Ch. Ferrière 3rd Growth £305-£320

Not over-extracted. V Margaux-like. Silky, ripe, perfumed.

Ch. Marquis d'Alesme Becker 3rd Growth £325-£350

Dark, denser. More brooding than the others. Medium plus acidity. Good tannic length. Medium plus - full. V good.

Ch. Marsac Seguineau Cru Bourgeois

Charming nose, pretty full on tannin, but fruit perseveres

Ch. Paveil de Luze Cru Bourgeois

V pretty, vibrant, textured, juicy

High 2:1

Baron de Brane 2nd wine of Ch Brane-Cantenac

Lean, stalky ish nose. Early pick? Juicy red and a little bit black. Supple tannin. Not for too much age

Ch. Haut-Breton Larigaudiere £170-£190

V attractive fruit, acid and tannins well balanced. Should come round early

Ch. Tour de Bessan Cru Bourgeois £140-£150

Gamier. Bright red fruits again. Supple tannin. Shorter than above, but still good. Vanilla, baked fruit finish.

Ch. La Gurgue Margaux £165-£190

Bit much. Juicy, sweet fruit. Touch chewy, confected, and over-extracted. Good length, but grainy.

THE RIGHT BANK

The Right Bank is twice the area of the Medoc and Graves/Sauternes regions combined with twice as many appellations, more geological variation and much more wine made. The region as a whole enjoyed a pretty smooth ride through 2016. There many affordable wines to be found here and my recommendations include wines I would urge you to buy and enjoy in the medium term. Appellations such as Fronsac, Francs and Castillon that aren't particularly well followed made very good wines. Producers in Saint-Emilion and Pomerol made the best wines of the vintage.

Bordeaux Superieurs, Cadillac, Cotes de Bordeaux (Castillon & Francs), Fronsac

Property	Commune	Guide Price Dozen IBD
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First Class

Ch. Cap de Faugeres Castillon - Cotes de Bordeaux £95-£110

Clean spicy nose, red. Fruit driven palate. V juicy. Inky iron depth. Lively. Medium plus tannic hold. Finishes with fresh acidity.

Ch. Cote Monpezat Cuvée St Jacques de Compostelle Castillon - Cotes de Bordeaux £100-£110

Clean fruit profile, with good ripeness. Supple tannin and acidity all in control. Very good.

Ch. Dalem Fonsac £155-£170

Juicy and a little bit punchy. Medium plus to full bodied. Alcohol stands out a touch.

Ch. Pey La Tour Reserve du Chateau Bordeaux Superieur £60-£70

More weight. Developing. Structured tannin. Smoke. Creamy texture. Plummy, but mineral finish. Fresh acidity from cooler nights. Mostly clay soil, some gravel and clay. Early picking

Ch. Puygraud Francs - Cotes de Bordeaux £105-£120

Creamy, black cherry nose. Glossy look. Packed palate, quite low in acidity but enough, ripe tannin, good structure, nice mocha finish

Ch. Reaut Cadillac - Cotes de Bordeaux £85-£95

Full bodied. Chalky tannic. Structured. Ripe black fruit, cassis. Good length.

High 2:1

Ch. Fontenil Fonsac £160-£180

Bright red fruit. V fresh high acidity. Medium chalky tannin. Ripe and red.

Ch. Moulin Pey-Labrie Canon-Fronsac

Balanced oak, fruit, and tannin. Big, but not overblown.

Ch. Reynon Cadillac - Cotes de Bordeaux £85-£99

Fresh bright red fruit. Good acidity. Dusty tannic structure. Classic

Ch. Villars Fonsac £110-£125

Juicy, plummy. Firm tannic structure. Still a way to go. Good potential.

POMEROL & LALANDE-DE-POMEROL

It is no surprise that the best wines of Pomerol will come from the water-retaining clay and limestone soils that are to be found on the north and eastern flanks.

I love to drink Pomerol and believe the estates below made great wines to enjoy in the medium, and hopefully long term.

Property	Commune	Guide Price Dozen IBD
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First Class

Ch. Bellegrave Pomerol

Red fruits abound. Soft and easy palate. nice acid throughout. Early drinker

Ch. Bonalgue Pomerol £215-£230

Lovely bright fruit, bouncy mid-weight palate. Very ripe easy tannin. Elegant and long.

Ch. Siaurac Lalande-de-Pomerol £130-£150

Light florality on nose. Fresh acidity. Charming red fruit. Pretty and upfront. Persistent, but not heavy tannin.

Ch. Tour Maillet Pomerol £195-£215

Creamy, oaky nose. Full and ripe. Good fruit and tannin extract, but not OTT

Ch. Montviel Pomerol

Light smoke and meat on nose. Grafite again. Smoke, plum, medium plus mellowing tannin. Medium

Ch. Chambrun Lalande-de-Pomerol

£175-£195

Plum, damson, blackberry nose. Less exciting on palate. Shuts down. Tannin all over the place

Deuxieme de Saint Pierre Pomerol

£185-£200

Mellow, supple black and blue fruit. Cassis and cocoa. Fresh acidity. Good length. Medium plus accessible tannin. Structured. Sand and clay.

SAINT-EMILION

The deep limestone around Saint-Emilion helped to preserve water during the months of drought as well as add texture and freshness to the wines. Saint-Emilion produced dark, rich, extracted wines with high alcohol and supple tannins. The top A rated Premier Grand Cru Classé wines that I tasted were sensational.

Property

Commune

Guide Price Dozen IBD

Starred First

Ch. Pierre 1er Saint-Émilion Grand Cru

£135-£150

Plummy. V chunky tannin, but not in the way. Full body. Fruit character holds. Dark plum, cherry, dried berry fruit. medium plus acidity. Chocolate, coffee, spice. Graphite. Wait.

First Class

Ch. Teyssier Saint-Émilion Grand Cru

£130-£140

Plump nose. Charming spice on palate, little bit hot, pH 3.58. Touch higher acidity than elsewhere. Really accessible. Good dusty tannin. Medium plus - long finish. V open on the nose when return to it. Opulent oak and coconut. Pruney palate. Good depth on palate for level.

Ch. Alverne Saint-Émilion

From a small 1.8ha estate. 75% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Fresh and juicy. Very forward oak. Light and creamy.

Cote de Baleau Saint-Émilion Grand Cru Classé **£175-£195**

Good. Juicy, and clean. Slightly smoky back note

Ch. de Candale Saint-Émilion Grand Cru

Lean cranberry, red currant nose. Creamy chocolate juicy palate. Mid weight chalky tannin. Fresh red finish

Ch. Pindfleurs Saint-Émilion Grand Cru

£135-£150

80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. A good vintage for CF. Voluptuous plum nose, with a hint of wood smoke. Overt, but balanced oak. Mid weight tannin. Very fresh.

Ch. Boutisse Saint-Émilion Grand Cru

Limestone soils. Juicy but fresh after an oak driven nose. Quite powerful and precise.

Ch. Ripeau Saint-Émilion Grand Cru Classé

Oak dominant vanilla character, and a creamy texture.. Plum and damson fruit. Restrained tannin. Well placed acidity.

PESSAC-LEOGNAN / GRAVES / SAUTERNES

These regions, to the South-West of Bordeaux and some of which is actually grown in its suburbs, received consistently good marks from me. In general I was impressed with the performance from the wines, with successes in both reds and whites. For the reds, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are planted in roughly equal proportions and were usefully employed to add texture, fruit and acidity. The whites were wonderfully fresh but some lacked concentration and could be quite sour.

The wines of Pessac-Leognan and Graves to its south seem to be out of favour but I urge people to have a look at the wines from this vintage.

Pessac-Leognan, Graves

2015 was a hard act to follow in the Graves. The drought did takes its toll on the whites, most of which were picked before or soon after the rain of 13th September. The soil, mainly gravels, that gives the region its name was also less fit for the conditions than clay.

Property	Commune	Guide Price Dozen IBD
First Class		
Ch. Baret Rouge	Pessac Leognan	£120-£130
<i>Slightly smoky, refined tannin, plummy fruit, black and red, persistent finish, good acidity.</i>		
Ch. Brown Rouge	Pessac Leognan	£200-£225
<i>Big boned. Ripe tannin, coconut and blackberry fruit. Juicy, mid-length</i>		
Ch. Haura	Graves Rouge	£95-£105
<i>Juicy and vibrant, with persistent acidity, middling tannin. Nice texture and blueberry compote fruit.</i>		

High 2:1

Ch. Leognan Rouge Pessac Leognan
Garnet-red colour with bright tints. Aromas of roasted cocoa beans mingled with scents of red and black fruits. Velvety, silky-smooth and elegant, evoking the aromas in its flavours. A long finish.

Sauternes / Barsac

Xavier Planty at Chateau Guiraud was delighted with the 2016 vintage conditions in Sauternes, with complete maturation at low nighttime temperatures, leading to perfect conditions for botrytis. At the time of tasting we found many wines to be lacking weight, and some felt quite astringent and unbalanced. There were certainly some nice wines and we recommend the following

First Class		
Ch. Cantegril	Sauternes	£160-£180
<i>Very nicely balanced. Good botrytis character, easy enjoy young with bright acid and plenty of flavour.</i>		
Ch. Raymond-Lafon	Sauternes	£320-£350
<i>Fine, juicy, creamy pineapple, good botrytis, length and acidity.</i>		
Ch. Coutet	Barsac	£320-£350
<i>Citrus nose. Ripe fullness on palate. medium-full bodied. Fleshy and developing. Alcohol feels a touch too much.</i>		
Ch. Tour Blanche	Sauternes	
<i>Fleshier. Slight stone fruit character as well as citrus. Signs of development. Good length. Best of a fairly mediocre bunch,</i>		

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