

2009 Bordeaux – 1982 on Steroids? Reflections and Recommendations

Hal Wilson , Cambridge Wine Merchants 3rd April 2010



The Bordelais were definitely open for business during the Primeurs tasting week. The heavy rain did not dampen spirits or the sense of expectation at the pristine Chateaux that opened their doors and tasting rooms to the press and professional tasters. It was good to see many of the UK trade around as with 40 million bottles bought last year we are still the largest and most faithful export market for Bordeaux. Everyone seemed to be talking about the legions of Asian buyers who had come to secure allocations of their favourite Lafite and Mouton-Rothschild, or at least take photos of them. We will wait and see where prices settle but the only way is up after last year's surprising discounting.

Perfect growing season? The 2009 Bordeaux vintage has been heralded as one of the great vintages of the last 50 years, comparable to 1982, 2000 and 2005. This is primarily because of the weather during the growing season. As Bill Blatch of Vintex explained in his detailed report on the season "if extremes produce very good vintages, the great ones generally seem to come from gentler conditions." For a great vintage they say you need all of five conditions to be met:

1. Quick, early and even flowering
2. Hydric stress, firstly early to restrict berry size, then
3. more hydric stress at 'veraison', when the berries change colour in late July
4. Moderate heat and some light rain during ripening, and
5. Mild and dry during harvest.

2009 produced an almost textbook example of a great vintage, with a particularly long, warm, sunny harvest period which forced owners to make the critical decision of when to pick. Often the hand is forced but the harvest in 2009 went on into late October without rain and with bizarrely increasing temperatures. With the latest preoccupation for 'full phenolic ripeness' it is not surprising that many growers picked very late indeed, waiting for maximum concentration in the grapes. The level of Phenolic ripeness is measured on the IPT scale (Index of Total Polyphenols). Haut-Brion came in at a high 84 points, 10% higher than in 2005 which was the previous highest level recorded. This means that nearly all the wines in this vintage have more tannin than any other vintage and yet so many feel more fruity and less astringent than any vintage one can remember.

The effect of Climate change. The South-West of France is warming up at twice the rate of the rest of Europe. This has been partly responsible for there being no 'off' vintages in a decade in Bordeaux. Climate change can also be described as the increasing occurrence of freakish, extreme weather conditions and Bordeaux certainly experienced that in 2009. There were winter hurricanes and then, in late May, two belts of devastating hail swept across the region. The regions that were totally spared could consider themselves very fortunate indeed: the Médoc north of Cantenac, Pomerol, the western part of St Emilion, the eastern side of the Entre-Deux-Mers. The other regions suffered severe reduction of yield but also seemed to lose the ability to make great wine.



Cabernets rule – Merlot problematic.

The result of the late heat and late picking were very high alcohol levels, record levels of polyphenols, but often not enough acidity. Over-ripe Merlot in particular lacks acidity and many wines felt over-extracted and low in acidity. Even ripe tannin cannot put a wine back in balance if acidity is too low and fruit flavours become too jammy. Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon produce less alcohol than Merlot and retain acidity but are harder to ripen so it is obvious that the Cabernets are key to the most successful wines. Merlot is the widest planted grape variety in Bordeaux though, accounting for 60% of red vines planted. I've never tasted such elegant Cabernet Francs in the Right Bank as in this vintage, the higher percentage the better. Le Dome in St Emilion has the highest percentage of Cab Franc in St Emilion and is beautifully textured, elegant and ripe. The soil most suited for Merlot in this vintage were the cooler clay-limestone areas, rather than the hotter gravel-sandy areas.

The Best Regions – Quality and Value

So which areas were best suited to make the most of the conditions?

1. Those that avoided the hail: the Médoc north of Cantenac, Pomerol, the western part of St Emilion, the eastern side of the Entre-Deux-Mers

2. Those with geology best suited for its predominant grape varieties: St Estephe, Pauillac, Saint-Julien, Moulis, Pomerol (plateau), parts of Saint Emilion, Pessac-Leognan and Sauternes.

Value is a very tricky subject to address before prices have been released. I have based my tasting strategy on the following assumptions:

1. Demand will be high for the top Cru Classés as new markets increasingly take interest,

2. Even if the 2009s were released at 2005 prices the real terms increase because of Sterling's weakness would be 25%.

3. The global economy is in a fragile state of recovery and Bordeaux still produces too much wine, and still has previous vintages unsold.

4. Even if the top wines sell at highly inflated prices, the vast majority of chateaux should not increase their prices, especially since yields were pretty good where vineyards were spared the hail.

5. There is lots of choice and still not a big enough market for all the wine that has been made.

In conclusion, I would recommend that customers buy 2009 wine at prices that people are happy to pay 'en primeur', either because they want to drink delicious wines and pay the lowest price or they want to see a return by securing allocations at the best price. Customers who want to buy great wines to drink can set their own price levels and choose from my extensive recommendations below (and from their own favourites) as and when prices are released. Investors should let me know which wines they are interested in as soon as possible because supply will be exhausted quickly.

The Wines

I have included notes for all the wines I recommend on quality grounds. Very few prices are known, but where they are they appear quoted IBD per dozen (without duty and VAT). I was presented with a list of scores given by James Suckling from the Wine Spectator so share those. I also list wines not tasted at all where it appears relevant (first growths etc).

Allocation requests:

As soon as prices are released for wines recommended in this report we will e-mail it to our existing En primeur list. If you want to request allocation of other wines, specially First and Second Growth not listed above, please contact me or a colleague as soon as possible.

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We do not know our allocations yet but are a consistent supporter of Bordeaux with one of the most extensive ranges in UK retail and very good relationships with Chateaux and negociants.

THE LEFT BANK - MEDOC

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 recommend 27 below. So that's a little over half of the wines. I did not taste the following wines and give their Wine Spectator scores for reference: Château Lafite Rothschild (96-99) Château Latour (97-100), Château Margaux (96-99), Château Mouton Rothschild (97-100), Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (96-99), Château Leoville Las Cases (97-100), Château Cos d'Estournel (97-100), Château Montrose (97-100), Château Calon-Segur (93-96), Château d'Issan, Château Palmer (95-98), Château Duhart-Milon (91-94), Château Pouget (93-96). I sort the wines by alphabetically and by appellation.



Haut-Médoc **Château LA TOUR-CARNET** 4th GROWTH

From the Bernard Magrez stable with Michel Rolland consulting. Situated in the Saint-Laurent commune on gravels similar to those in Pauillac. Very good structure and a wine for the long haul. Ripe fruit, very ripe, punchy tannins, quite alcoholic but with sufficient acidity. Long and impressive. Drink 2020-2035

Margaux **Château BRANE-CANTENAC** 2nd GROWTH

Very dark with a black core. Pretty serious extraction which keeps fruits and tannins together for a full-bodied, long finish. A keeper which will not disappoint. Drink 2020-2035

Margaux **Château CANTENAC BROWN** 3rd GROWTH (WS 93-96)

What a marvellous wine but what future for this chateau, owned by Syrian tycoon Simon Halabi who has declared bankrupt this week? This wine was one of my favourites tasted across the Bordeaux region. It has charm, sweet blackberry and blackcurrant fruit, vanilla and liquorice, a beautifully sensuous feel in the

mouth, caressing tannins, perfect acidity and a long finish. It will be interesting to see what happens in the coming weeks as at the time of writing Mr Halabi's whereabouts are still unknown!

Margaux **Château DAUZAC** 5th GROWTH (WS 90-93)

As the vineyards were in the path of the May hailstorms the Chateau has produced a very good wine, if not very much of it. Margaux-like elegance but with big ripe blackberry fruit and plenty of structure. Neith heavy nor clumsy this is quite exquisite and should drink well young. Drink 2015-2025

Margaux **Château DESMIRAIL** 3rd GROWTH

70%CS 30%M. Commercial manager Remi Molis explained that more Cabernet was used in the final blend than normal and yields were restricted to 39 hl/ha, still not a bad yield. I've bought Desmirail before and this effort is more powerful than any I've tried. There's a great structure to the whole wine and although it is a bit dense and chewy at the moment I think this will be a keeper and provide great mid term drinking. Drink 2019-2032.

Margaux **Château DU TERTRE** 5th GROWTH (WS 88-91)

Another success given the location of the vineyards south of Cantenac. This has a lively, svelte feel with long ripe tannins and fresh acidity, possible as a result of the inclusion of Cabernet Franc in the blend.

Margaux **Château GISCOURS** 3rd GROWTH (WS 92-95)

Deep ruby. Already open nose of blackberry and blueberry, spice and vanilla. Medium-full body showing a preference for gentle extraction at low temperatures. Not very long but delicious. Drink 2016-2028

Margaux **Château LASCOMBES** 2nd GROWTH (WS 92-95)

Very dark ruby and richly extracted. Loads of black cherry, kirscha nd vanilla. Heavy duty tannins mask any nuance on the palate but this is bold, rich and long. Keep and drink 2020-2040.

Margaux **Château MALESCOT SAINT-EXUPERY** 3rd GROWTH (WS 97-100)

I'm a big fan of Malescot and buy it often. This is a seriously sexy effort and possibly the best yet. 50%CS 35%M 10%CF 5%PV Deep ruby cedary oak, raspberry, blackberry and vanilla present on the nose. Lovely svelte feel on the palate with fine tannins, tempting acidity and good length. A carmer to drink young and probably old. Drink 2016-2032.

Margaux **Château MARQUIS D'ALESME BECKER** 3rd GROWTH

Hubert Perrodo bought this estate from the Zuger family in 2006 only to tragically die later the same year. The wines have been more impressive recently and I enjoyed the slightly restrained and fresh style of the 2009. 35% CS 45%M 10% CF 10% PV, an unusual Margaux blend. Ripe sweetly scented, fresh style. Easy to enjoy young and normally affordable. Drink 2015-2025

Margaux **Château MARQUIS-DE-TERME** 4th GROWTH (WS 92-95)

Very dark ruby. 65%CS 30%M 5% PV. Long rich and seductive with black fruits, coal and cedar.

Very good and serious. Drink 2019-2032.

Margaux **Château RAUZAN-SEGLA** 2nd GROWTH (WS 93-96)

Black with dark ruby edge, this is the fullest bodied Rauzan Segla I've come across. Tannic and backward at present but with great depth of fruit, superb length. More like a Pauillac in style. Should last a very long time. Drink 2022-2045.

Pauillac **Château BATAILLEY** 5th GROWTH (WS 92-95)

Lovely ripe sensuous feel on the paalte. Fully ripe tannin and good body but elegant through and through. Drink 2017-2030

Pauillac **Château CLERC MILON** 5th GROWTH (WS 93-96)

Very well made, riper and more elegant than sister Chateau d'Armailhac. Ripe tannin, long, fresh summer pudding flavours. Drink 2016-2030.

Pauillac **Château CROIZET BAGES** 5th GROWTH

Deep ruby. Not heavily extracted and with bright red and black fruits on the nose and lick of vanilla. Plenty of ripe tannin. Drink 2017-2025

Pauillac **Château GRAND-PUY-LACOSTE** 5th GROWTH (WS 94-97)

Very dark, huge extraction with a wallop of tannin that seems ripe enough. Big, complex, tasty. A keeper. Drink 2021-2035

Pauillac **Château HAUT-BAGES LIBERAL** 5th GROWTH (WS 91-94)

Nicely extracted medium-full-bodied very ripe and all in balance. Drink young or keep for 15 years.

Pauillac **Château PEDESCLAUX** 5th GROWTH (WS 90-93)

Ripe fruits and excellent balance of tannin/acidity/fruit. Long finish. Drink 2017-2029.

Pauillac **Château PICHON-BARON** 2nd GROWTH (WS 92-95)

67%CS 33%M Very deep ruby with a glossy look. Low acid with lots of glycerine feel, soft tannins and bug ripe fruits. Hugely enjoyable to taste and hedonistic Drink 2018-2032

Pauillac **Château PICHON-LALANDE** 2nd GROWTH (WS 95-98)

Grilled, meaty notes as well as liquorice, blackberry and kirsch. Very ripe fruit and tannins. Not over-extracted at all but rich, long and hedonistic. Drink 2019-2035

St-Estèphe **Château COS LABORY** 5th GROWTH

Very nicely made wine with good character in all the right places. Plush ripe cabernet fruit, glossy fat tannins. Quite low acid and very long. Drink 2017-2030

Saint-Julien **Château BEYCHEVELLE** 4th GROWTH (WS 90-93)

Deeply coloured. Bit reticent on the nose but deeply flavoured with blackcurrant, long and elegant

Saint-Julien **Château GRUAUD LAROSE** 2nd GROWTH (WS 94-97)

Deep ruby. Exotic nose of blackberry, liquorice, charcoal and spice. Rich vivid flavours, full of black fruits. Lots of tannin but ripe and lead to a great finish. Impressive. Drink 2020-2038

Saint-Julien **Château LANGOA-BARTON** 3rd GROWTH (WS 90-93)

54%CS 34%M 12%CF. Wow! This property produced one of the most impressive wines of the week. Expressive nose of cloves, raspberry, blackberry, cedar, violets and liquorice. Wonderful flavour profile. High level of Cab Franc adds acidity and freshness. Lovely ripe tannins and great concentration and length. Drink 2018-2036

Saint-Julien **Château LEOVILLE-BARTON** 2nd GROWTH (WS 92-95)

Marvellous wine. 77% CS 22.5%M 0.5%CF. 46 hl/ha yield. Very dark ruby with oak and blackberry on the nose. Very rich saturated tannins which lift before finish to reveal good acidity and a 3 course meal of fruit, nuts, grilled meats. Excellent to drink 2020-2045+

Saint-Julien **Château LEOVILLE-POYFERRE** 2nd GROWTH (WS 93-96)

69%CS 20%M 5%CF 6%PV Yield 42 hl/ha. Very dark, saturated, glossy look. Velvet blackberry liqueur feels with blanket of ripe tannins and ripe sweet jammy filling. Relaxes into a long finish. Gorgeous Drink 2020-2040

Saint-Julien **Château SAINT-PIERRE** 4th GROWTH (WS 91-94)

81%CS 19%M. Hugely impressive structure, this wine should keep for decades and always deliver huge pleasure. Loads of flavours crashing around with full ripe tannins. Very long finish. Drink 2020-2040.

THE CRU BOURGEOIS OF THE MEDOC

Impressions

Many readers will know that the Classification 'Cru Bourgeois' was annulled in 2007 after an attempt to reclassify the Medoc's non-Cru Classés properties failed rather spectacularly. The term 'Cru Bourgeois' still exists as a label of quality that is issued on an annual basis to wines that satisfy an independent body. Any property in the Medoc may submit its wine. The extra ranking of Exceptionnel and Superieur no longer exist. We are still evaluating the same group of properties more or less, from the appellations of St Estephe, St Julien, Pauillac, Margaux, Moulis, Listrac, Medoc and Haut-Medoc.

Tasting the 2009 samples confirmed that it is a mistake to think that the vintage is uniformly good across the region but that were many super wines made. While tasting I sorted wines into their communes, even amongst the Haut Medoc and Medoc appellation wines, to try and appreciate how the conditions generally affected vineyards from a given microclimate. I have written above about the conditions in the Cru Classés communes (Pauillac, Margaux etc) but take things further below to help readers situate Haut Medoc and Medoc wines more easily. Obviously good winemaking techniques must be employed but where they were it is clear that some areas suffered or excelled due to the climatic and geological differences in each area, i.e. 'terroir' in action.



Southern Haut-Medoc - Cantezac to Le Taillan

The hail in late May damaged Southern Haut Medoc vineyards in the Margaux AC communes of Cantezac and Labarde but also the Haut Medoc AC communes Macau, Arsac, Le-Pian and Ludon. Nearly all the area on the map to the left was damaged, leaving the vines, even at harvest time, looking like a tornado had been through. The wines suffered as a result, through no fault of the winemakers, many of whose wines I regularly admire and buy (Cambon la Pelouse, Belle-Vue, Gironville, Angludet amongst many others). The damage to the flowering vines naturally restricted yields but winemakers still had to green harvest as the vines tried to produce a second flowering that was never going to produce anything worthwhile. The wines on the whole seem more tannic, hollow and awkward than the more successful wines of the Medoc. The exceptions are:

Commune Château

Arsac **Château Le Coteau, Margaux AC** Deep ruby, ripe black fruits, succulent fruit flavours, moderate and ripe tannins. Soft and easy-going wine. Drink 2015-22

Labarde **Château Siran, Margaux AC** (WS 90-93)The estate worst affected by hail but Edouard Mialhe told me hard work in the vineyard which restricted yields even further had paid off in the wine. They

have indeed. Well-balanced sweet ripe fruit, elegant acidity and tannin, this is delicious wine that has the grace that one associates with Margaux but finds less and less as the area warms up. Drink 2015-2025



Middle Haut-Medoc – St Julien to Margaux

This region experienced excellent growing and ripening conditions for all the grape varieties in 2009.

Many of the vineyards are largely planted with equal quantities of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, with Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot making up a balance of plantings.

Perhaps the Merlot started to lose its acidity and therefore freshness before full phenolic ripeness was achieved and alcohol levels are certainly high (13.5-14.5%).

Whereas the Cabernet Franc provided much needed freshness to the wines of the Right Bank to balance Merlot, it is was the job of the Cabernet Sauvignon to add complexity, acidity and balance to the blend. Many producers excelled in this area, especially Moulis where most wines tasted were beautifully ripe and concentrated without losing charm.

My recommendations are:

Commune Château

Arcins **Château Arnauld** NB This property was bought recently by Ch Larose Trintaudon. It is no longer made but has improved the new owner's wine (see below)

Arcins **Château Barreyres** Another large property in the Arcins commune. This is firmer in tannin than Ch d'Arcins but has a similar freshness and elegance to it. Drink 2015-2022

Cussac Fort **Château Beaumont** Another large property making very good wine consistently and with real elegance. Full bodied but with ripe fruits on the nose and not at all overpowered by tannins at this stage. Mirobullage may have been used to soften the feel of the whole on the palate. Nice ripe fruit and length.

Moulis **Château Biston-Brillette** Sweet fruit and charming toasty oak and violets greet the senses. Elegant medium-full body with lots of ripe red and black fruits and fine tannins. Again, a margaux-like wine from Moulis. Drink 2015-2024

Avensan **Chateau Bonneau** Made by Luc Thienpont who is Jacques' younger brother (owner of Ch le Pin). Dark ruby but sample cold so little evident on the nose. Gently extracted tannins reveal nice black fruits in a straightforward style.

Moulis **Château Brillette** Like Biston-Brillette this is soft, voluptuous easy-going Margaux-style wine that will be delicious soon after bottling. Drink 2013-2021

Listrac **Château Cap Leon Veyrin** Designated a Cru Bourgeois Superieur in the 2003 classification so presumably one of the best properties in Listrac. Enthusiastically run by the owner's daughter Nathalie Meyre. Plenty of ripe blackberry fruit, some oak and vanilla evident. Nicely integrated tannin and acidity.

Listrac **Château Capdet** A new Cru Bourgeois and hopefully a good value. The ripe fruit has been handled carefully, neither over-extracted nor left too flabby. Pretty and charming, surprisingly so for the appellation.

Listrac **Château Clarke** Deep glossy black/ruby. Lovely explosive fruit. Tannin firm but ripe, lowish acidity giving a stylish plump finish. Drink 2016-2027

Arcins **Château d'Arcins** This large property produced an attractive wine in presumably large quantities and hopefully at an affordable price. Delicious already with well balanced tannins and acidity, plenty of primary black fruits and hints of roasted nuts and liquorice. Will drink young 2013-2020

Soussans **Château Deyrem Valentin, Margaux AC** I bought this for the first time in 2005 and again in 2006 and 2008 and I am very happy to see the chateau produce another exemplary wine. Ripe, toasty aromas lead to a svelte palate with black fruits and some minerality. Drink 2014-2024

Saint Julien **Chateau du Glana** (WS 91-94) This very impressive offering has an enticing bouquet of violet, blackberry, cedar and vanilla. Although full bodied it has an elegance to it that is very pleasing, having lots of ripe tannin that gives the wine a long finish. Drink 2018-2028

Listrac **Château Fourcas Dupré** Regularly the best wine from Listrac after Ch Clarke. Full-bodied with masses of black fruits and vanilla, plenty of ripe tannin and a long finish. Lowish acidity but this is a classy effort and promises a good future. Drink 2016 - 2027

Saint Julien **Château Gloria** (WS 90-93) Another very impressive Saint Julien from Domaines Martin, owners of the delightful Ch St Pierre. Complexity of flavours, with lovely balance of fruit and big ripe tannins, lead to a long powerful finish. Drink 2018-2029

Moulis **Château La Mouline** Plenty of complexity in this overall sensuous style. Spice, fruits, liquorice and vanilla are present in a medium-bodied palate which finishes with ripe tannin. Drink 2013-2021

Soussans **Château La Tour de Mons, Margaux AC** (WS 92-95) Ripe and rich and fine if it were an Haut Medoc but seems to lack the finesse one associates with Margaux. Drink 2015-2024

Lamarque **Château Malescasse** 47%M 47%CS 6%PV Opaque deep ruby. Lovely ripe, elegant, Margaux style. Sweet, velvety feel to the tannins. Just the right level of extraction to make the wine feel full but balanced. Delicious and hard not to swallow even now. Drink 2014-2025

Moulis **Château Malmaison** Lovely ripe, sensuous style. Mirobullage employed I imagine to soften up tannins. Still a flattering easy to like wine. Drink 2013-2021

Moulis **Château Maucaillou** Moulis properties had a very successful 2009, none more so than Maucaillou, which produced a charming, ripely scented wine with depth of black fruit flavour and a long sumptuous finish. Bravo! Drink 2016-2024.

Listrac **Château Mayne-Lalande** Another Cru Bourgeois Superieur as was. Charming fruit, excellent texture despite the high levels of ripe tannin. Good concentration and length.

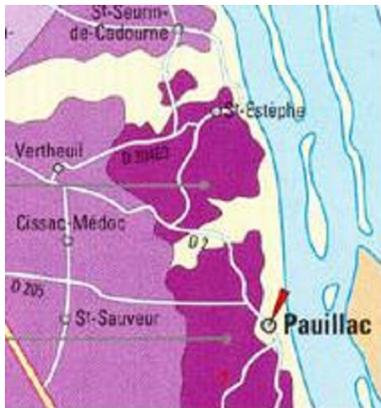
Moulis **Château Myon de l'enclos** Full throttle, hedonistic wine. Very good structure and length. Tannins are big but ripe and there is plenty of fruit and some acidity. Very impressive for a wine I had never heard of. New to Cru Bourgeois status. Drink 2016-2026

Soussans **Château Paveil de Luze, Margaux AC** As a Margaux wine should be, this is charming, soft and elegant. Not over-extracted which is a fault too many Margaux properties have fallen into. Will drink young 2013-2021

Moulis **Château Poujeaux** (WS 93-96) Very dark ruby, Lots of extraction but the fruit matches the tannin. Lowish acidity but everything is in balance and I think this will be delicious after 5 years in bottle. Hope the price stays sensible. Drink 2016 – 2027.

Listrac **Château Reverdi** Aromas much more like a Margaux than a Listrac, perfumed, floral and blackcurrant. A tannic frame holds the charming fruit flavours to a good finish. Drink 2016-2022.

Avensan **Chateau Villegorge** Ripe black fruits on the nose with toasty oak aromas. Fruity, deep and fresh with a good finish and ripe tannins. Drink 2016-2025



Northern Haut-Medoc – Pauillac to St-Seurin

This is where the wines got seriously good. The gravels of Pauillac produce 'hot soils' that allowed the Cabernet Sauvignon to ripen very well before sugar levels got too high. The clay-rich soils of St Estephe and its environs helped keep the Merlot vines from getting stressed and provided cooler areas which benefited the Merlot. The commune of Cissac threw up some lovely wines, surprisingly elegant and fresh. There have to be some good value wines from this region.

Commune **Château**
Saint-Estephe **Château Andron Blanquet** Situated next to Cos d'Estournel and Cos Labory this property has lived up to its potential in 2009. Immediately pleasurable and moreish with its ample ripe fruits and tannins. Even now the fruit outlasts the tannins to a long hedonistic finish. Drink 2018-2030

Saint-Seurin **Château Aurilhac (d')** I've admired this property's wines and occasionally bought it but this is the finest I've tried. Lovely extraction, with a glossy feel in the mouth and ripe blackberry fruit. Just lovely. Drink 2014-2021

Saint-Estephe **Château Beau-site** Beautifully made wine from this neighbour of Ch Calon Segur. Ripe, elegant and seductive, ripe and balanced tannins. Drink 2016-2028 (WS 90-93)

Pauillac **Château Bellegrave** Expressive nose with cassis, charcoal, roasted earth and nuts and cedar. The tannins are really ripe and powerful but the fruit is up to them and are ripe and seductive. Lovely long, balanced finish. Drink 2018-2030 (WS 92-95)

Saint-Saveur **Château Bernadotte** Now owned by Champagne Louis Roederer after it bought Ch Pichon-Lalande. I really liked this wine's balance, ripe fruit, pleasing tannin, acidity and length. Drink 2017-2028. (WS 87-90)

Saint-Laurent **Château Caronne-Ste.-Gemme** Saint Laurent lies to the west of Saint Julien. Caronne Ste Gemme lies adjacent to the 3rd Grange Ch Lagrange. Clearly a very ripe style on the nose, with blackberry, kirsch and chocolate. On the palate its all a bit chunky and perhaps lacks a bit of acidity but it is full-bodied, rich and chewy. Drink 2016-2025

Saint-Seurin **Château Charmail** As ever this is the best wine made in St Seurin de Cadourne after the excellent Ch Sociando-Mallet, to the north of St Estephe. Extracted fruit and tannin with just enough acidity. I imagine there is high alcohol but it all feels fantastic on the palate, with the new oak evident but classy. Drink 2017-2028.

Cissac-Médoc **Château Cissac** This has surprising charm, with its balanced acidity, ripe black fruits and subtle tannins. Long and balanced it should prove very popular and offer good value. Drink 2015-2025

Saint-Estèphe **Château Clauzet** Black glossy look. Blackcurrant and vanilla on the nose. There's plenty of extracted tannin here but it is more than matched by the glossy ripe fruits. Powerful finish. Drink 2018-2030. Second wine Ch de Come also good.

Cissac-Médoc **Château de Villambis** An unknown property to me but well made with sweet black fruits on the nose, an elegant soft mouthfeel and pleasant tannins. Drink 2014-2023

Pauillac **Château Fonbadet** Another well made Pauillac Cru Bourgeois. Ripe, full-bodied and balanced. Will keep and drink well from 2016-2028.

Cissac-Médoc **Château Hanteillan** Soft, pleasing fruits and everything well balanced. Medium bodied and a wine to enjoy soon after bottling. Drink 2013-2020.

Pauillac **Château Haut-Bages Monpelou** Ripe, exotic style with spicy aromas, black fruits, liquorice, fresh and well balanced palate. Drink 2016-2028

Saint-Estèphe **Château Haut-Beauséjour** (WS 89-92) Owned like Ch de Pez by Champagne Louis Roederer. Like de Pez this is ripe and hedonistic, with a charming acidity that makes it already pleasurable and balanced. Drink 2015-2025.

Saint-Estèphe **Château Haut-Marbuzet** Ripe, svelte feel in spite of the extraction and powerful tannins. The delicious fruit just keeps coming. Drink 2019-2031

Saint-Estèphe **Château l'Argilus du Roi** A new Cru Bourgeois on quality grounds. Ripe seductive fruits and nice balance. Drink 2016-2024

Saint-Estèphe **Château La Commanderie** Aromas of ripe black fruits and sunny earth. Dusty tannins but lots of lush fruit. Drink 2016-2025

Saint-Estèphe **Château La Haye** Small quality-conscious producer that has made the most elegant St Estephe Cru Bourgeois. Pretty fruit, restrained tannins and nice sweet mouthfeel. Drink 2014-2023

Saint-Laurent **Château Larose Trintaudon** This enormous property, the largest I know of in the Medoc, is normally predictably disappointing. As mentioned above it bought Ch Arnauld, a personal favourite of mine, and the 2009 is definitely the best Larose-Trintaudon I have tasted. Good structure and overall balance. Elegant and controlled tannins. Good length. Has to be good value. **Ch Larose Perganson** is also made at the property and medium-bodied, well balanced and impressive.

Cissac-Médoc **Château Larrivaux** Medium-bodied and well made. Not powerful but elegant. Drink 2013-2019

Saint-Estèphe **Château Le Crock** (WS 91-94) Owned by the Cuvelier family of Ch Leoville-Poyferré in Saint Julien, Le Crock has often been made in an extracted style and needs the best vintages to show balance. In 2009 it has excelled with loads of fruit, tannin and fresh balancing acidity. Keep it 8 years and Drink 2020-2032.

Saint-Estèphe **Château Lilian Ladouys** (WS 92-95) Wow! This is a revelation. Never a particular favourite in the past although a low priced St Estephe, the 2009 is complex, rich, ripe and gorgeous to taste. Lots of fruit, with big ripe powerful tannins. Long finish. Keep it for 5 years and drink for 20. 2017-2035.

Saint-Seurin **Château Maurac** Made to be drunk young, this is elegant medium-bodied with ripe tannin and fruit. Drink 2013-2019

Saint-Estèphe **Château Meyney** (WS 92-95) Shares the same type of blue clay that Ch Petrus enjoys. There is lots of extraction here and at first this is hard to contend with as a taster seeking balance. On closer inspection there is also masses of ripe fruit lurking beneath and the tannins are ripe and chewy and will resolve given time. The fruit should be more than a match and the all important acidity is fine. Drink 2017-2030

Saint-Estèphe **Château Ormes de Pez (Les)** 54% CS, 37% M, 7% CF, 2% PV. Another classic wine. Enticing nose of violets, plums, blackcurrant, vanilla. Glossy rich feel in the mouth. Lots of secondary flavours and great length. Loads of ripe tannin. Drink 2016-2028.

Saint-Estèphe **Château Pez (de)** (WS 86-89) Rich, ripe, hedonistic style with a cool menthol lift to balance the showy fruit and oak. Very impressive Drink 2016-2028.

Saint-Estèphe **Château Phélan Ségur** (WS 90-93) As is their wont in 2009, winemakers took the opportunity to extract lots of fruit from the perfectly ripened bunches. With it came forceful tannins. Phelan-

Segur is impressively structured and at the time of tasting the tannins were winning the battle but they are so ripe that I believe the fruit will show through and this will be a marvellous wine in 10 years time. Drink 2018-2030.

Saint-Seurin **Château Pontoise Cabarrus** Great purity of fruit, with lifted acidity and ripe tannins. The best I've tried from this property. Drink 2015-2024

Saint-Estèphe **Château Serilhan** (WS 90-93) New oak is obvious on the nose and there is a lovely glossy sheen to the black/ruby wine. Shows more rich, glossy, ripe fruit and ripe tannins with some fresh acidity. Lovely. Second wine Chateau Real also good.

Saint-Seurin **Château Sociando-Mallet** Sumptuous, velvety feel. It has a luxury feel to the fruit which is finely extracted, intense and concentrated without tannin overpowering the whole. There is juicy acidity here too. Excellent to drink 2016-2030

Saint-Estèphe **Château Tour des Termes** (WS 92-95) Inviting aromas of cassis, vanilla, spice and liquorice. Heavily extracted but the tannins are generous, mouth filling but not hard. A keeper and hopefully a real classic. Drink 2018-2028



The Medoc Appellation

The appellation Medoc applies to communes to the north of St Seurin de Cadourne. The gravels of Pauillac return here after the heavier clay of St Estèphe. The properties are well known for offering value for money, producing sturdy wines if sometimes lacking finesse. In 2009 I found many wines that I liked, nicely extracted with plenty of ripe fruits and tannin.

Commune Château

Bégadan **Château de By** Lovely glossy deep ruby colour. Lots of fruits on the nose, plus vanilla and spices. Ripe mouth feel and tannins reced before fruit finishes. Medium-body and good. Drink 2013-2020

Ordonnac **Château Fontis** Made by the Boivert family, owners of nearby Ch les Ormes-Sorbet. This is very good claret with loads of red and black fruits and a little spice, nicely judged use of 1/3 new oak barrels and perfect phenolic ripeness creating a sumptuous glossy hedonistic style with good length. Bravo! Drink 2016-2025.

Blaignan **Château Griviere** The winemaker M. Charloux has gone for extra extraction in this vintage and profited from it. This is full-bodied and attractive with ripe black fruits coated with fine tannin. Drink 2015-2025

Bégadan **Château Labadie** Nicely judged ripeness of fruit and tannin balance. A little short but should be very nice to drink young from 2013-2020.

Valeyrac **Château Le Bourdieu** Guy Bailly has worked hard in the vineyard and this wine really delivers. Cedar and ripe black fruits on the nose, plenty of length and ripe tannins.

St-Christoly **Château les Grandes Chenes** Another Bernard Magrez wine and very successful in this vintage. Lots of extraction but the ripe fruits stay to the end of lovely long finish. Drink 2015-2022

Couqueques **Château Les Ormes Sorbet** Soft ripe tannins in an easy to enjoy fruity style. Drink 2012-2018

Saint-Yzans **Château Lestruelle** One of the 'failed 77' chateaux that lost its Cru Bourgeois status in the 2003 Classification and on this performance that was unjustified. Bright red- and black-currant fruit and ripe tannins. Very charming. Drink 2015-2021.

St-Christoly **Château Loudenne** Cru Bourgeois owned by Champagne Louis Roederer along with Chateau de Pez and Chateau Haut Beausejour. This is elegant, not too heavy and nicely balanced. Drink young to 2022.

Jau Dignac & Loirac **Château Noaillac** The best wine I've tasted from this estate. Nice relaxed easy to enjoy fruity style with ripe tannins giving the wine a decent finish. This should offer great value drinking from 2014-2022.

Bégadan **Château Patache d'Aux** Soft, deliciously extracted flavours of blackberry and sweet spice. Well-made and good length here. Drink 2014-2021

Bégadan **Château Plagnac** Ripe, fullish primary fruit. Lovely weight and ripe tannin. Good length. Delicious. Drink 2013-2020.

Jau Dignac & Loirac **Château Poitevin** A lesser known wine from a commune at the extreme north of the Medoc region. Quite serious in that there is plenty of extract but with an elegance brought about by the gravel soil allowing earlier ripening and retained acidity. Very nice wine that should offer great value. Drink 2015-2022

Ordonnac **Château Potensac** (WS 87-90) The best known wine in the Medoc appellation but sadly unavailable to taste. Reports are that the wine is very good, as it is owned and made by Jean-Hubert Delon of Ch Leoville las Cases.

Lesparre **Château Preuillac** Liquorice, blackberry and sweet spice nose. Plenty of ripe tannin and good length.

Bégadan **Château Rollan de By** Flashy oak and very ripe fruits on the nose (Michel Rolland is the consultant here). Can't help but be impressed by the sweet fruit and well-judged tannins. Showy and sumptuous. Drink 2014-2022

Couqueques **Château Tour Blanche** Another ripe and soft effort from Bernard Magrez stable, influenced by Michel Rolland as chief consultant. There is lovely sweet fruit aromas and a luxury feel on the palate. Drink young until 2020.

Blaignan **Château Tour Haut Cussan** Serious and good. Plenty of extraction but nice black fruit flavours dominate and the tannins soften off after a long finish. Impressive. Drink 2016-2021

St-Christoly **Château Tour Saint Bonnet** A rich effort from this well-known property in St Christoly. Lovely rich mouthfeel, ripe and tannic with a luscious long finish. Low acidity suggests drinking this wine young, say 2014-2021.

Bégadan **Château Tour Seran** Glossy dark look, Fruity nose plus admirable charcoal and liquorice. Nice feel in the mouth leads to a ripe, tannic finish. Drink 2014-2022

Bégadan **Château Vieux Robin** Deep ruby, black and red fruits on the nose, a little jammy but the fruit is not overdone on the palate and everything appears balanced. Drink 2014-2022

Other wines of the Medoc

Bordeaux **'Z'** Made by Luc Thienpont and originally called 'Z de Zede' until the sale of labergorce-Zede. A single vineyard close to Margaux on the banks of the Gironde on gravelly soils. Made in tank. This is fleshy, sweet fruited with nice colour and pleasant extraction. Drink on release for 4 years. Value

Bordeaux **Cru Monplaisir** Made by Julie Gonet-Medeville, owner of Ch Gillette in Sauternes. Again from vineyard outside Margaux appellation. Tasty, soft and ripe.

THE RIGHT BANK

Merlot makes up the majority of plantings in the Right Bank, followed by Cabernet Franc. I've never known the Cabernet to form such a crucial part of the blend before but in 2009 the Merlot reached scary levels of sugar ripeness and suffered loss of acidity unless it was picked before phenolic ripeness. Saying that the good winemakers and those fortunate not to be hit badly by hail made excellent rich wines with ripe Cabernet Franc adding character and needed acidity. If a wine comprised at least 20% Cabernet Franc there seemed to be no problem with balance unless it was over-extracted.



Bordeaux **Château Tour de Mirambeau**

Emeric Fournier told me the vineyards are on clay-limestone and were able to cope with the Merlot particularly well. Very deep opaque violet. Opulent and charming nose of ripe black fruits, warm stones and spices. Richly textured with ripe tannins. Certainly alcoholic but very impressive.

Bordeaux Supérieur **Pezat** 70% Merlot 30 % Cabernet Franc

From vines just beyond the St Emilion boundary but attached to the Teyssier vineyard. Hints of brambles, hedgerow, liquorice. Rich and fruity with soft tannins holding the wine for a good finish. Definitely over delivers. Drink

Bordeaux Supérieur **Château de Brondeau**

Bordeaux Supérieur **Domaine de Courteillac** 70% Merlot Deep purple, sweet blackberry aroma. Plenty of extraction but not unbalanced. Soft tannins make the whole wine feel sumptuous but the acidity gives a lift to the wine. Another fine effort from Dominique Meneret and a potential value. Drink 2013-2020

Bordeaux Supérieur **Château Penin** 80% M 20% CS. Soft and velvety, this is always made in an approachable style. Very soft, ripe style without feeling flabby – just long and rich and summer pudding flavoured.

Cotes de Bordeaux **Château Le Doyénné** Nice ripe fruit, plenty of tannin and not over-extracted. We've bought this in several vintages and this is the best yet. A value. Drink 2015-2020

Castillon **Château Ampelia** 95%M 5%CF Exotic nose of new oak, blackberry and chocolate. Another wine from the Deespagne family, (Girolate, Tour de Mirambeau) so unsurprisingly rich, alcoholic, low in acidity and utterly delicious!

Castillon **Château Cote-Montpezat** 80%M 20%CF 14.5% A favourite of ours since the excellent 2005, which Jean-Francois Lalle followed up with a very pure 2008 and now this seductive 2009. A no brainer if the price stays as it has been at around £80 IBD.

Côtes de Francs **Château de Francs** Lovely ripe fruity, soft, attractive style

Côtes de Francs **Château Puygueraud** A wine from the Thienpont family, owners of Ch le Pin and a regular favourite. Lots of extraction this year and full on ripe tannin. Loads of rich crème de cassis flavour. A keeper Drink 2017-2027.

Castillon **Clos Puy Arnaud** Cool almost minty feel, nice oak and good acid balance plus the summer pudding flavour and ripe tannin. Another very good Castillon wine.

Fronsac **Haut-Carles** My favourite Fronsac from 2009. 90%M 5% CF 5% Malbec. Very ripe and well-extracted. Probably very alcoholic but enough balance to make this worth watching.

POMEROL

Armed with a map of all the Pomerol properties I went on a whirlwind tasting of 90 Chateaux large and



small. I didn't even taste the aristocrats of Pomerol but found superlative wines from all the sub-regions across the plateau. Around the heavier soils to the North-East the wines are rich, aromatic, weighty and seductive. Particularly La Croix de Gay, La Fleur de Gay and Vray Croix de gay. Along the Eastern Saint-Emilion flank there were wonderfully soft, exotic, supple wines, such as La Conseillante, Clos du Clocher and Clos Beaugard. On the Western side, on typically poorer, sandier soils I still found heady, creamy, plush wines such as Montviel, Enclos, Bellegrave and Clos René. Even on the southern fringe I found big, bold and lush wines like La Croix du Casse and Vieux Ch Ferron.

I recommend eighteen wines below but have not tasted the following wines which are highly regarded, rare and expensive: Certan de May, Hosanna, Lafleur, Petrus, Le Pin, L'Eglise Clinet, l'Evangile, Nenin, Trotanoy and Vieux Chateau Certan. The wines below I would place at the top of the second division of Pomerol estates and could offer value for money.

Château Bellegrave 75% M 25%CF Pretty, medium bodied, ripe style with good acidity and balance. Plums and blackberries with a lick of kirsch and hint of truffle.

Château La Cabanne 90% M 10% CF Enticing aromas of crème de mure, plums and vanilla. Warm and ripe black fruits and great structure. Generous, mouth-filling, moreish. Drink 2016-2026

Château La Conseillante (WS 95-98) Supremely elegant Pomerol, with velvety tannin, lovely acidity and excellent structure. One of the top ten wines of the week.

Château La Croix du Casse (WS 90-93) 88%M 12%CF. Now under the ownership of Philippe Casteja, owner of Ch Batailley and other important Bordeaux estates as well as negociant Borie-Manoux. This is big, bold and richly fruited, with velvety tannins and great balance.

Château La Croix de Gay Owned by the Raynaud family who also own la Fleur de gay and Ch Faizeau in Montagne-St Emilion. Made by Chantal Lebreton and her brother Dr Alain Raynaud of Lascombes and Quinault l'Enclos fame. Lovely weight and flavours, black fruits and coal on the nose, ripe fruit and tannin and a long, cool, mineral finish. Drink 2016-2029

Château l'Enclos 79%M 19%CF 2% Malbec. Recently bought by Stephen Adams, an American financier and the Chateau is improving fast. Avoiding the trap of over-extraction this is dense but elegant fruit and Cab Franc minerality and acidity. Drink 2017-2027

Château Enclos Haut Mazeyres 80%M 15%CF 5%Malbec Hefty fruit but very tasty, with its brambles, liquorice, chocolate and kirsch. Very long. A new estate for me and impressive.

Château la Fleur de Gay (WS 90-93) 100% M Heavenly. Velvety ripe Merlot, soft and seductive on the palate. Admirable concentration and length.

Château La Fleur du Roy 85%M 10%CF 5%CS Great balance here between sweet ripe fruit, acidity and ripe tannins.

Château Haut Maillet 79%M 21%CF Next to Ch Petrus but with more gravel soil. Owned by the Estager family who also own Ch La Cabanne which I recommend above. Seriously velvety ut with lovely minerals and acidity. Very good

Château Mazeyres This quite large estate by Pomerol standards is run since 2001 by Alain Moueix of Ch Fonroque in Saint Emilion. I've tasted fairly disappointing wines from here in the past but this is a huge improvement. Lots of ripe flavours here but also some raspberry and cherry elements among the black fruits. Fresh and toasty.

Château Montviel 80%M 20%CF. Fruity, creamy on the nose. Nicely extracted, plush feel with soft acidity and good length. Drink young for 10 years.

Château St. Pierre 75%M 25%CF This is a very old school estate, small and known mainly because it is situated next to the church that dominates Pomerol. I really like the wine though. Perfectly ripe, elegant and sinewy, it is a wine made in the vineyard and made traditionally.

Château de Valois 77%M 23%CF Lovely mouthfeel, soft and flavoursome but bright acidity making it serious. A spell-binding nose of black cherries, cinnamon and a touch of vanilla leads to a soft palate, gentle, tannic backbone. Great value and real Pomerol quality.

Château Vray Croix de Gay 75%M 25%CF Owned by Baronne Guichard with Stepane Derenoncourt consulting. Situated next to Lafleur on gravel and clay. I loved this wine from the very first sniff. Its Kirsch, blackberry and vanilla aromas are followed by ripe tannins and a zip of Cabernet Franc minerality.

Clos Beaugard Owned by Jean-Michel Moueix and situated across the road from their Ch Tour de Pin Figeac, this small estate is a beautifully crafted Pomerol with soft plummy fruit and the 30% of Cabernet Franc adding a lively texture to the ripe Merlot. Most enjoyable.

Clos du Clocher Owned by the Bourotte family who also own Ch Bonalque and the negociant J-B Audy, this is dark ruby with good ripe flavours and some minerality, plenty of ripe tannin and good length.

Clos René Ripe, stylish, traditionally made Pomerol that is just perfect in 2009. Well done Jean-Marie Garde. Could be a great value buy.

Vieux Château Ferron I'd never heard of this wine but the Garzaro family make wines in Entre-Deux-Mers as well as around Libourne and I think they have produced a delicious wine here. Beautiful concentration and elegant mouthfeel. Very pleasing.

Lalande de Pomerol:

Château Jean de Gué A big wine from a small appellation, this delivers way above its price level. Owned by Jean-Claude Aubert, who does impressive work at Ch la Couspaude in Saint Emilion, this small estate has been making increasingly better wines over the past decade, and this 2009 appears to be the best yet. Dense purple colour with gorgeously sweet perfume of black truffles, plum, black cherry and cassis, superb fruit here, complex and layered, earthy, smoky in character, full bodied and yet fresh at the same time, this is a superb wine.

Château Siaurac From Baronne Guichard comes this delicious Lalande-de -Pomerol

Château Tournefeuille Overlooking Ch Gazin across the little river that separates Pomerol from Lalande-de-Pomerol. The charming Emeric Petit confirmed that the 30% Cabernet Franc added greatly to the complexity and length in 2009. A discovery for me and very good.

SAINT-EMILION

During the week I spent 2 days in the Right Bank visiting Chateaux, The Union des Grands Crus Saint Emilion and Pomerol tastings, the Association de Crus Classés tasting and the Cercle de Rive Droite tasting which combines wines from Saint Emilion, its satellites, Pomerol and the Cotes de Bordeaux. This is a large area with many more appellations than in the Medoc, more geological variation and much more wine made. It is natural therefore that there is a much larger variation in quality to be found.

Saint-Emilion Grands Crus:

Château Boutisse Situated in Saint-Christophe des Bardes, a commune to the east of Saint Emilion town on a clay-limestone plateau. I liked several wines from this commune, including Destieux and Laroque. Great value here if the price remains at the £108 per dozen IBD range. Lovely, glossy look and ripe berries/vanilla nose. Taffeta-like feel in the mouth.

Château Faugeres Swiss industrialist Sylvio Denz bought this estate from the enthusiastic Corinne Guisez in 2005 and for a while I thought some of the character was lost. It is back on form though with its trademark primary, rich, extracted style 'a la Rollandais'. Satisfying

Château La Grace Dieu des Prieurs Small property owned by Alain Laubie. Has a luxury feel to the ripe fruit and tannin, making it impossible to remark on.

Château Le Dome Jonathan Maltus' star wine from a single block of old vines, mainly Cabernet Franc, next to Angelus. It's very expensive but seriously interesting. Cassis, tobacco, brambles, liquorice and spicy new oak. Full-bodied fruits give way to cashmere tannins. Great length.

Château Laforge 800 cases made 95% Merlot. Deep purple. Wild brambly nose, with new oak evident but adding to the exotic and enticing aromas which include cocoa, vanilla, sweet spices. Full bodied, rich black cherry, blackberry, deep velvety tannins. Concentrated and long.

Château Teyssier Jonathan Maltus is working wonders at this off the beaten track area near Vignonet. He now makes seven different cuvees, up to and including the superb Le Dome. The 2009s are all highly recommendable and I re-tasted some 2008s which I found to be fruity, elegant, well-balanced and forward. The 2009s in contrast are weightier wines, with more extraction, fuller mouthfeel and more complexity in aroma and flavour. 12,000 cases made 70% Merlot, Cab France the balance. Deep crimson. Very generous aromas of blackberry, plum, vanilla, spice. Lots of brambly and spicy flavours and ripe tannin, clearly no fear of extracting. Fullish body and lots of dry extract. This will keep for 12 years plus.

Montagne Saint-Emilion:

Château Faizeau Chantal Lebreton's petit chateau is nearly as delicious as her Pomerols with a hedonistic feel and plenty of extracted ripe tannins.

Château Messile Aubert Serious, well-judged tannins and plenty of fruit.

Saint-Emilion Grand Cru Classé

Château Beau - Séjour Bécot A classic Saint Emilion. Ripe and mineral, black fruits, chocolate and vanilla. Fruits carry on to the end of a long finish. Full body. Drink 2017-2026

Château Dassault Hail affected this chateau and although the wine is pretty, with balanced tannin and elegant fruit, it lacks a little oomph.

Château Destieux 70%M 15% CF 15%CS A real charmer. Lots of fruit on the nose. Chocolate/blueberry and mineral on the palate with lovely balance.

Château Fonplegade Black core, deep ruby rim, complex nose of cassis, black olives, chocolate and black cherry. Big body, big tannins and good length.

Château Clos Fourtet Gorgeous blackberry fruit, huge concentration full long and sweet fruit with a charcoaly mineral edge. Delightful if super-charged. 88%M 8%CS 4%CF

Château Grand – Mayne Violets, chocolate, blood, meat and coal on the nose. Rich, fruity attack followed by powerful tannins. Long finish in good balance. 85%M 15%CF

Château Haut Corbin (WS 90-93) Very dark ruby. Ripe cassis, dates and warm stones on the nose. Full-bodied palate, yummy ripe fruits and powerful tannins. The tannins are drying right now but there is lots of fruit to the end of long finish. Impressive and a keeper.

Château La Gaffelière (WS 92-95) Toasty oak and sweet fruits on the nose. Glossy feel to the fruit and tannins and great length. Wonderful wine.

Château La Serre Pretty, glossy look. Already very attractive, long and elegant with soft ripe tannins.

Château La Tour Figeac Across the road from Pomerol on sandy/gravelly 'hot soils'. Only wild yeasts and whole bunch maceration were employed (no destemming/crushing). The result is super sweet smelling fruits.

Château Laroque The largest estate in Saint-Emilion and situated in Saint-Christophe des Bardes. It's a vin de garde, and buyers will have to be patient but it is impressively fruity, has enough acidity to carry the wine along nicely. Drink 2019-2029

Château Laroze The best wine I've tasted from Laroze. Lovely ripe fruit on the nose with violets and sweet spices. Big fruit extraction with long, chocolatey, charcoaly tannins. Very long and delicious.

Château Le Prieuré The third in a trio of wines made by Baronne Guichard and Stephane Derenencourt. 75%M 25%CF. Dense, black/ruby. Lots of black fruits, cedar and liquorice on nose. Weighty, earnest feel. Nicely balanced and should keep very well. Drink 2018-2029

Château Pavie-Macquin Saturated, thick looking black wine. Clearly concentrated from first glance and it certainly is. Beautiful cassis, blackberry and chocolate richness. Nice acidity and great length. One of my favourite wines of the week.

Château Troplong Mondot Wow! This estate is on top form with this wine that just holds back from being over the top. Its powerful, complex and long with exotic flavours, cashmere tannins and a lick of mineral/acidity.

Sauternes



I know I have a sweet tooth but you couldn't wipe the silly grin from my face as I tasted through the UGC Sauternes tasting. It is a fantastic dessert wine vintage and I think there is more searching to do among the lesser appellations along the Dordogne.

The late summer and cooler nights brought on misty mornings ideally suited to the development of botrytis and owners had the luxury to be able to be very selective with the harvesting, going through the same vineyards 3 times if necessary to pick bunches at the 'moment juste'. Expect lots of residual sugar as in 2005, powerful flavours as in 2003 and wonderfully fresh acidity as in 2001. Really a great vintage. My favourites are:

Château D'ARCHE
Château LAVILLE
Château DOISY DAENE
Château GUIRAUD
Château CAILLOU
Château MYRAT
Château RAYNE VIGNEAU
Château LA TOUR BLANCHE

Château BASTOR LAMONTAGNE
CLOS HAUT PEYRAGUEY
Château DOISY VEDRINES
Château LAFAURIE PEYRAGUEY
Château LIOT
Château NAIRAC
Château SIGALAS RABAUD

Château de FARGUES
Château COUTET
Château FILHOT
Château LAMOTHE DESPUJOLS
Château de MALLE
Château RABAUD PROMIS
Château SUDUIRAUT

PESSAC-LEOGNAN

I was very pleased to attend a tasting at La Mission Haut Brion of the Ch Haut Brion and La Mission Haut Brion. Unfortunately I ran out of time to visit Ch Smith Haut Lafite for the Pessac tasting of Union des Grands Crus members.

So my experience of this vintage in Pessac is very patchy but what I have tried shows it is a terrific vintage both for reds and whites.

A few notes below and I will be able to offer wines to enthusiastic Pessac fans (of whom there seem to be few) on request.



Pessac-Leognan Whites:

La Clarté de Haut-Brion 84% Semillon 16% Sauvignon. 13.6% Pale gold. Waxy, ripe apple aroma. Pithy grape skin texture, powerful, bone dry and alcoholic. Full-bodied but fresh on finish.

La Mission Haut-Brion 84% Semillon 16% Sauvignon. 13.9% V pale gold. Lovely fresh fruit aromas, apple, grapefruit. Long and ripe but hides the alcohol level very well.

Château Haut-Brion 38% Semillon 62% Sauvignon 14.2% Pale gold. Loads of fruit, apples and pears, touch of vanilla. Very ripe Semillon, feels a little sweeter on the palate than the other wines. Lots of length.

Château Latour-Martillac Very rich with great acidity and length.

Clos Marsalette Rich ripe and round. Intense and grapey.

Pessac-Leognan Reds:

La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion (WS 90-93) 46%CS 44%M 10%CF 14.2% Deep glossy black/ruby. Dumb nose but wonderfully rich fruity entrance to the palate. Quite low acidity and super ripe tannins gives a luxury feel to the wine and it should drink young.

Le Clarence de Haut-Brion 46%M 39%CS 13%CF 2%PV 14%. Glossy black look. Lots of blackberry and vanilla spice. Ripe and soft fruits but plenty of tannin. Lovely.

La Mission Haut-Brion (WS 94-97) 47%M 47%CS 6%CF At 14.7% this is most alcoholic Mission ever. Deep violet/ruby colour. Beautifully plush feel to the ripe fruit and ripe tannins. Blackberry, a little earth, loads of charm and a lovely balance already achieved. Almost good to drink.

Château Haut-Brion (WS 97-100) 46%M40%CS 14%CF 14.3%. The level of Phenolic ripeness is now gauged on the IPT scale (Index of Total Polyphenols). Haut-Brion came in at a high 84 points, 10% higher than in 2005 which was the previous highest level recorded. The wine is very dark, opaque black/ruby. Savoury, mineral notes are evident on the nose along with cassis and blackberry. It feels much denser and more chewy than La Mission even though the vinification is the same. It's more savoury and more tannic. Huge body and length. Keep for at least 10 years.

Château Latour-Martillac Lovely, soft, ripe black fruits, fine tannins and long finish.

Clos Marsalette (WS 91-94) Rich ripe and round.