



C A M B R I D G E W I N E M E R C H A N T S

Bordeaux 2014 Vintage Report

The vintage that merchants forgot?

Vintage conditions

"In late August we were staring down the barrel of a disastrous vintage, and then the sun came out and we were saved". Frederic Bonnaffous, Head winemaker at Dourthe. Much mention has been made of the 'miraculous' Indian summer that blessed pretty much the entire Bordeaux region, and the resulting wines that everyone in Bordeaux hopes will be taken up enthusiastically by the international wine trade. Three disappointing vintages in a row and frankly absurd pricing has left customers counting the cost of anything they did buy. The first few months of 2015 have seen a very tentative recovery in pricing but mainly for older wines which are now ready to drink and rarer.



Fine spring, awful summer, miracle autumn

The growing seasons were marked by a promising spring followed by a fine, fast and even flowering in early June that suggested an early harvest. The summer, however, was a big disappointment with July wet and cool, and August too cool to remedy July. 'Aout fait le mout' (August makes the must) is a common wine expression, summing up the need for sunshine, heat and hydric stress which forces the vine to concentrate the sugars in the fruit. Bordeaux had a significant deficit of sunshine and heat in August 2014, the advanced vegetative cycle caused by May and June's warmth had been cancelled out, and winemakers were getting very nervous of a repeat of the poor 2013 harvest the year before. Then came the miracle of September and October, which were the warmest, sunniest and driest seen in Bordeaux.

Cabernet is king.

The late summer allowed the later ripening varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot to benefit greatly from the extra 'hang-time' the weather allowed, while arriving a little too late to allow proper phenolic ripeness of the earlier ripening Merlot and Cabernet Franc. That was my impression from tasting more than 500 wines across the region. Wherever a property's vineyards were planted with a majority of Merlot, the resulting wines often felt chalky, hard and a little hollow. Where Cabernet was the dominant variety planted, the wines more often felt vibrant, fuller, with ripe tannins. Most red wines felt fresh in the mouth, a result of higher acids and modest alcohol levels of 13 -13.5%.

Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon grapes destined for dry wines were harvested in early to mid-September, and the cool wet summer is noticeable in the fresh acidity and citrus, sometimes sharp, flavours. Winemakers in Sauternes making sweet wines had to wait long into October for rains to provide the conditions for botrytis, but once they arrived the grapes were very susceptible to the rot and a decent harvest was made, resulting in fresh and pretty sweet wines.

The case for and against buying En Primeur 2014

You should buy En Primeur because:

- 2014 is the best vintage for four years, and there is purity, freshness and class in the best wines.
- In some cases it remains the guaranteed best price at which to buy wines, particularly when the chateau controls distribution.



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- Exchange rates. The pound is 20% stronger against the euro than it was 12 months ago, and at seven year highs, a period which includes every vintage since 2007. This means that wine may be available at significantly lower prices than in any vintage since 2008, even if release prices for the wines do not fall as much as has been called for.
- 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.

You should not buy en primeur because:

- There are large stocks of unsold wine in Bordeaux, meaning bottled wine will be available to buy at lower than En Primeur prices.
- Exchange rates. The pound may be strong now but there is a chance it will get stronger rather than weaker.
- 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 recommend the top 5 wines to buy in each appellation, occasionally a few more if it warrants it. From over 500 wines tasted my Wines to Buy list is a severe selection of fewer than 100 wines.

Pricing so far

At the time of writing it is the early days of the campaign, but so far prices from the chateaux are the same or above their 2011, 12 & 13 release prices, some of them above their 2010 release prices. Any reduction in sterling prices will be as a result of exchange rate movements. The justification is that the wines are better than the last three vintages. Quite what the justification might be for those pricing above 2010 is harder to fathom. Virtually all merchants have called for lower pricing to correct the failure of en primeur in the past three years. Perhaps the urge to press the self-destruct button is just too tempting for some. This may turn out to be the vintage that merchants forgot.

Most successful regions – Left Bank wins

I tasted some very good barrel samples from Chateaux throughout the Medoc, normally where I found a majority of Cabernet Sauvignon in the blend. I was particularly impressed with wines from Margaux and the Southern Medoc, where the conditions helped to produce the sort of wines these communes are famous for. The 'middle' Medoc wines, from Saint Julien, Pauillac and the Haut Medoc communes such as Cussac and Saint-Laurent, were successful. The further north I tasted and the more Merlot is traditionally used, I found greater variability, although many St Estephe wines are again excellent.

I've written that the wines of Pessac Leognan are the most improved region in Bordeaux and found many to be ripe, well balanced and charming again, from properties that use more Cabernet Sauvignon. From the Right Bank Pomerol and Saint Emilion struggled to impress but as ever there are good wines to be found in all areas including the Cotes de Bordeaux.

Favourite wines under £200 per dozen IBD

Value Wines (should be under £100 IBD)

Château Carignan, Château Senejac, Château Belle-Vue, Château Chantemerle, Château Noaillac, Château Cissac, Château Haut-Bellevue, Château Cap de Faugeres, Château Cote Monpezat, Château Reynon, Château Pindefleurs

Seriously good and affordable wines (should be under £200 IBD)

Château Teyssier, Château Haut-Bages Monpelou, Clos Floridene, Château Pique Caillou, Château le Thil Comte Clary, Château la Clare, Château BELGRAVE, Château Angludet, Château d'Arsac, Château Labergorce, Château Fonbadet, Château Haut-Bellevue, Château La Fleur Peyrabon, Château Sérilhan, Château Bernadotte

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PART 1 - 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. It is natural therefore that there is a much larger variation in quality to be found than in the Medoc/Graves. There are still some affordable wines to be found here and my recommendations include wines I would urge you to buy and enjoy in the medium to long term.

Merlot is supposed to be the loser grape variety in this poor summer vintage. Early ripening, if Merlot was harvested when sugar ripeness was perfect but in some cases before phenolic ripeness. Merlot makes up the majority of plantings in the Right Bank, followed by Cabernet Franc, so it should not be a 'Right Bank vintage'. Indeed, it is not a uniformly great vintage in the Right Bank, the conditions were too difficult to allow that to happen, but viticulture and viniculture have advanced to such an extent that many of the problems thrown at chateaux owners are solvable, especially if cost is not a concern.



Jonathan Maltus told me the answer to making good wines in 2014 was a very careful extraction of the best bits and equally careful elimination of the not so good. He favoured a long cold soak and cool fermentation of 27oC to extract colour and flavour but not harsh tannins. This worked for his wines, leaving them feeling cool, fruity, round in the mouth with good length and silky tannins. Maltus' wines again provide a benchmark against which to measure other St Emilion wines, many of which failed to meet them.

The style of 2014 Right Bank red wines can be generalised as:

Fresh and acidic
Less alcoholic than in previous recent vintages (13-13.5%)
Many having awkward chalky tannins,
Medium bodied

Spare a thought too for the whites of 2014. The September sun allowed some more ripeness but retained acidity in the grapes, allowing expressive, piercing Sauvignon Blanc-dominated whites that are particularly crisp and intense and worth a look, especially from lesser appellations.

I use a 20 point scoring system and regard any wine over 15 as worthy. The more revered the appellation, the higher the score needs to be to be recommended, as the prices will be higher. Barrel samples are not finished wines so I don't give scores above 19/20, as that sort of judgement should be reserved for the wines when they are bottled.

My Top 5 picks in each appellation, chosen for value and quality

Bordeaux and Bordeaux Superieurs – Whites & Reds!

Bordeaux Rouge Ch La Croix du Duc	15+
Deep ruby, red fruits on the nose, ripe blackberry/mulberry finish. Delicious to drink young.	
Bordeaux Blanc Chateau Reynon	16
Attractive, lime sherbet, grapefruit, gooseberry. Fresh and pretty long.	
Bordeaux Superieur Ch Croix Mouton	15.5



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Opaque black ruby, with sweet and spicy hedgerow jelly and cedar nose. Pleasant soft tannin. Full ripe fruity palate resolves nicely with some fresh acidity. Drink 2016-2020.

Bordeaux Superieur Ch Pey La Tour Reserve 16

88% Merlot. Almost black with a black cherry nose and palate. Flashy and juicy it is easy to drink young 2018-2022.

Bordeaux Rouge Esprit de Pavie 16

Gerard Perse makes a blend of wines sourced from his vineyards, including Pavie, but mainly from Castillon, where he used to make Ch. Sainte Colombe that sold so well in the past. Juicy and delicious

Cotes de Bordeaux -Castillon/Francis/Bourg/Blaye/Cadillac

Cotes de Bordeaux Ch Ricaud 'Grand Vin' – Deep ruby, glossy, sticky looking and a palate saturated with black cherry and blackberry. Ripe tannin and juicy finish. Could be a bargain. 15

Castillon Chateau Cap de Faugeres 85%M10%CF5%CS Exotic, bitter sweet cocoa and cassis aromas with Asian spices, cedar and grilled meat too. Rich fruit, nice oak and good acid balance plus a wallop of ripe tannin. Another very good Castillon wine. 16.5

Castillon Château Cote-Montpezat 80%M 20%CF 14.5% A favourite of ours since the excellent 2005, which Jean-Francois Lalle followed with a pure 2008 and seductive 2009 & 2010 has intense aromas of black fruit, spice and oak (25% new barrels used). The oak adds a slightly roasted quality to the palate but there are big bold flavours and a long exotic finish. 16+

Cadillac – Chateau Reynon From Denis Dubourdieu this has lively fruit in a new wave style, rich and sumptuous with lovely acidity. Will drink young and is hard to put down 16

Cadillac – Chateau Carignan. 90%M 10% CF Very ripe and with macho extraction. Probably very alcoholic but enough balance to make this worth watching. 16

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 offer wines at prices one can afford to buy for pure pleasure. Other estates will have made excellent wine at higher prices.

Château Bonalgue 100% Merlot and made with consultant Julien Viaud (also at La Conseillante, Pontet Canet, Leoville Poyferre). Good ripeness, fresh acid and supple tannins make this wine easy to enjoy young 2019-2025 16+

Château La Croix du Casse 88%M 12%CF. 16+

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 dark and handsome, with damson and cocoa aromas, bitter chocolate and richly fruited, with rich tannins and great balance.

Château La Croix de Gay Drink 2019-2027 17

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. Opaque purple/garnet. Black cherry, pencil lead aromas. Elegant, ripe, powerful. Juicy acidity at finish along with chewy tannins. Will develop reasonably soon

Chateau du Domaine de l'Eglise A 7ha (respectable size for Pomerol) property also in the Casteja stable along with Croix du Casse. 93%M 7% CF. Dark, chewy and ripe yet fresh at finish. 16+

Clos du Clocher A 5.9 ha property surrounded by Trotanoy, Vieux Chateau Certan and Petit Village. 17

Very good structure, classy deep black cherry fruit. Excellent for such high percentage of Merlot





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SAINT-EMILION

Some vigneronns struggled in Saint Emilion because of the effects of the growing season on predominantly Merlot vines, causing a lack of phenolic ripeness. There are some highlights and hopefully some good value wines to enjoy in the medium term.

Saint-Emilion Grands Crus:

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. 18

Château Laforge 800 cases made 92% M 8% CF. Deep purple. Nice dense colour. More classic Merlot aromas of mocha, plums, blueberry with new French oak evident. Lovely structure. 16.5

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 2014s are all highly recommendable wines. 15,000 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. 16

Château Clos Saint Emilion Philippe Made with help from the talented Olivier Dugat, this had enticing aromas of red fruits, and joyously ripe mouthfeel and ripe tannins. 16

Château Pindefleurs Mother and daughter team Dominique and Audrey Lauret make this charming wine at the foot of the Cote, with some illustrious neighbours. I bumped into Audrey doing a tasting in a Cash Vins wine warehouse and tried her excellent 2010 vintage. The 2014 has supple tannins, deep velvety fruit and juicy acidity. 16

Saint-Emilion Grands Crus Classés:

Chateau Barde Haut – Quite firm but holding a real wealth of flavour and fruit 16+

Château Cote de Baleau - The core of plum and blackberry fruit is plump, the structure very refined. Hints of black tea and licorice glide through the finish 16+

Château Faugeres Swiss industrialist Sylvio Denz bought this estate from the enthusiastic Corinne Guisez in 2005. It has always delivered a hedonistic style of wine, glossy, exotic, alcoholic and well balanced. This is another fine effort, the exotic flavours balanced with tannin. 16.5

Château Quinault L'Enclos Very good extraction without the coarse tannins so frequently found in this vintage in St Emilion. Everything balanced 16.5+

Château Trottevielle 58%CF 42% M Lots of finesse here behind a slightly austere tannic shell. Lots of length and minerality along with a ripe, black fruit frame. For the long haul 16.5

Château Villemaurine a Derenoncourt wine. Blackberry and spicy nose. Intense and rich and with quite enough body to stand up to the tannin. Long. Needs time. 16.5





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Part 2 – The Left Bank

THE LEFT BANK -MEDOC

2014 was a year for the Cabernets, with an amazingly dry and sunny September and October allowing harvesting over a prolonged period. Cool October 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 that saves them from tasting too extracted and tannic.

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. Price is a different matter. I did not taste the following wines, primarily because the estates do not show their wines at the UGC tastings and I do not find time to make personal visits, much as the experience is a fascinating one. I give Tim Atkin's scores for reference: Château Latour (98), Château Lafite Rothschild (97), Château Cos d'Estournel (97), Château Margaux (96), Château Haut Brion (96), Château Leoville Las Cases (96), Château Mouton Rothschild (95), Château Palmer (95), Château Pontet-Canet (94), Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (93), Château Duhart-Milon (92). I sort the wines by appellation, including the Crus Bourgeois.



THE CRUS BOURGEOIS OF THE MEDOC

While I was in Bordeaux I was delighted to meet and have lunch with Frederic de Luze and Oliver Cuvelier who preside over the Alliance des Crus Bourgeois. Not only have they made excellent wines in 2014 at their properties Ch Pavail de Luze in Margaux and Chateau Le Crock in St Estephe. They were also open to new ideas to introduce Crus Bourgeois to the UK consumer. As a glass-half-full kind of guy I think it is great that there are so many emerging properties in the Medoc making excellent wine. I think quality remains high in 2014. It is a pity of course that the established Crus Classés of the Medoc are becoming less and less affordable but it is my job to find wines that people want to buy and drink and the Crus Bourgeois of the Medoc provide a rich seam to mine for lesser known jewels. I like the challenge.

As the Medoc's second division of wines it is also a pity that the 'Cru Bourgeois' classification itself faces an identity crisis, with many famous members leaving the club and the 2003 reclassification being annulled in 2007. The term 'Cru Bourgeois' now 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 Alliance des Crus Bourgeois now holds an annual tasting that is a well organised, simple and unfussy affair that I spend a lot of time at. It is a comprehensive Medoc tasting, organised by appellation and allows the taster to get a great feel for the terroir and relative successes of each commune. Does the classification mean anything any more if famous properties like Chateau Sociando Mallet do not wish to apply for it? Probably not if you know exactly what you are looking for. For those of us looking for new properties to discover the Cru Bourgeois status is now more than membership of a club – it is a mark of quality.

Tasting the 2014 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, I strongly feel 2014 was a vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon. I came to this conclusion during the tasting of some 350 Cru Bourgeois, where wines with a majority of Cabernet Sauvignon tended to taste more vibrant, balanced and interesting than the Merlot-dominated wines.



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Margaux

The wines from the southern Medoc are among the most consistently successful in 2014 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.

Cru Classés

- Château CANTENAC-BROWN 3rd GROWTH** Drink 2021-2030 17
Glossy black/ruby core. Ripe fruits, custard creams, kirsch on the nose. Pretty serious extraction which keeps fruits and tannins together for a full-bodied, long finish. Tannins melt away and fruit keep going. Charming and very pleasant.
- Château GISOURS 3rd GROWTH** Drink 2022-2028 17.5
A Marilyn Monroe of a wine! Deep ruby. Already open nose of raspberry, cream, cedar and vanilla. Medium-full body showing a preference for gentle extraction at low temperatures. Juicy acidity and melting tannin. Not hugely long but delicious.
- Château MALESCOT SAINT-EXUPERY 3rd GROWTH** Drink 2021-2030 17+
I'm a fan of Malescot, and buy it often. 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 firm tannins, tempting acidity and good length
- Château MARQUIS D'ALESM-BECKER 3rd GROWTH** Drink 2020-2030 17+
Classic Margaux combining power and elegance – chewy ripe tannin, black and red fruits and good acid
- Château PRIEURE LICHINE 4th GROWTH** Drink 2022-2032 17+
Powerfully built but with beautiful sweet plum and cherry fruit, rich velvety tannin, good length

Non Cru Classés

- Château Angludet** Drink 2020-2029 16+
Fresh, elegant, cool and well extracted fruit. Well managed tannin
- Château d'Arsac Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2018-2025 16
Deep crimson, ripe and toasty aromas. Svelte feel to the tannins and altogether charming yet full-bodied. Value
- Château Labergorce** Drink 2018-2026 16.5
Deep crimson, ripe and toasty aromas. Svelte feel to the tannins and altogether charming yet full-bodied. Value
- Château Siran Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2018-2025 16+
Well-balanced sweet ripe fruit, elegant acidity and firm tannin, this is an exuberant wine that has the grace that one associates with Margaux but finds less and less as the area warms up. Sumptuous
- La Sirene de Giscours** Drink 2018-2025 16
Lovely sweet black fruits, nicely balanced feel already in the mouth, fresh acid and well managed tannins

Pauillac

Clearly a successful vintage for the Cabernet Sauvignon dominated wines in Pauillac, many wines I tasted were full-bodied but avoided the drying tannins and slight hollowness of other areas.

Crus Classés

- Château CLERC MILON 5th GROWTH** Drink 2022-2030 16.5
Rich and exotic nose. Black cherry, firm tannin, long, fresh and plump.
- Château CROIZET BAGES 5th GROWTH** Drink 2022-2030 16.5
The deep glossy crimson sheen, the elegant cedar nose, the delicious blackcurrant flavour, the long plush finish and the attractively bitter, slightly dusty tannins. Slightly low acid means it may drink well young and not last the course.
- Château BATAILLEY 5th GROWTH** Drink 2021-2030 16
Lovely ripe sensuous feel on the palate. Firm tannins and not over-extracted. Nice ripe black fruits, full body with ripe fruit. Good length



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Château GRAND-PUY-LACOSTE 5th GROWTH Drink 2022-2035 17
Rock-solid, with a gutsy core of plum, black currant, steeped fig and melted liquorice snap, all carried by a gorgeous, charcoal-edged spine. Long, and loaded with fruit and grip.

Château LYNCH MOUSSAS 5th GROWTH Drink 2022-2029.
16.5

Textbook Cabernet/Pauillac nose, Blackcurrant, pencil shavings, vanilla. Easy to drink in comparison, because everything aiming for balance. Nice length and lift at finish. Lovely medium term drinking

Château PICHON-LONGUEVILLE COMTESSE DE LALANDE 2nd GROWTH Drink 2021-2035 18

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. A bit more flash than serious but still with superb length and beautiful finish.



Non Crus Classés

Château Fonbadet Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2025 16.5

Lovely creamy /cassis aromas, all very sweet and luxurious. Elegant palate, medium-bodied, harmonious. Tannins in check and nothing overdone. An unheralded Pauillac that deserves attention.

Château Haut-Bages-Monpélou Cru Bourgeois Drink 2019-2027 16+

I tasted three times and have consistent notes. Another success from the Casteja estate and a fine Pauillac. prominent oak on the nose with blackberry and cedar. The palate is medium-bodied with firm tannins, good fruit concentration and excellent structure. Well balanced.

Château La Fleur Peyrabon Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2025 16.5

A real class act with star Pauillac quality. Vibrant Cabernet fruit, fine boned tannins, great length.

St-Estèphe

Tracking down St Estephe wines to taste, even in Primeurs week, is strangely difficult. Only 5 at the UGC, a handful at various negociants plus a flight of Crus Bourgeois at the Alliance tasting. I did not make the trek to St Estephe so missed out on tasting Calon Segur, Cos d'Estournel and Montrose. There are many chateaux in St Estephe producing rich, complex and classic Bordeaux wines and I am happy to be a convert where I used to find the wines impenetrably tannic and charmless. I think many Crus Bourgeois are well-priced and offer some of the best value Medoc wines around.

Crus Classés

Château CALON SEGUR 3rd GROWTH Drink 2022-2030 17

Excellent. Big flavours lurk beneath a tannic sheath, with freshness and vibrancy

Château COS LABORY 5th GROWTH Drink 2022-2030 17

Deep inky ruby. Big body and lovely ripe black fruit flavours. V well integrated tannin

Château MONTROSE 2nd GROWTH Drink 2022-2030 17

Black fruits and kirsch liqueur nose. Fruity and rich. Vibrant and long

Non Crus Classé

Château le Boscq Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2025 16

50CS/50M. Svelte, ripe fruit and chewy tannins. Approachable young and a bit short.

Château Clauzet Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2025 16

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.

Château le Crock Cru Bourgeois Drink 2019-2027 16+

Impressively concentrated without feeling too heavy this has classic structure, cleansing acidity and great length.



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Château Ormes de Pez Cru Bourgeois Drink 2019-2029 17
Big and impressive, not lacking fruit but not much attempt at elegance. Needs time but has refreshing acidity so I think it will be worth the wait.

Château Sérilhan Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2027 17
A beautiful wine, and a great follow up to the impressive 2009. Sweet ripe, cassis and vanilla aromas, some cedar. Loads of late summer fruits, svelte tannins and juiciness at the finish. A real charmer

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.

Château BEYCHEVELLE 4th GROWTH Drink 2021-2038 17
Really graceful and fine St Julien. New oak, with blackcurrant, raspberry, . Hard tannins deny much flavour definition but there is balancing acidity and tannins eventually yield. Patience required

Château Gloria Drink 2022-2038 16.5
Deep opaque crimson. Precise nose with ripe blackberry, raspberry, cedar and graphite. The palate is medium-bodied with dry tannins, very good acidity, reserved and focused with a very powerful finish of dried fruit, cassis, cedar. Long in the mouth, this is a great Gloria for long-term ageing.

Château GRUAUD LAROSE 2nd GROWTH Drink 2024-2040 17
Deep ruby. Exotic nose of blackberry, liquorice, charcoal and spice. Rich vivid flavours, full of black fruits. Lots of tannin but not too hard at first, then drying up. Impressive.

Château LAGRANGE 3rd GROWTH Drink 2022-2036 16.5+
Impressive, not over-extracted stylish classic Saint Julien. Chewy, dense curranty fruit. Very Cabernet. Firm tannins that are hard work now but should resolve.

Château LANGOA-BARTON 3rd GROWTH Drink 2020-2036 16.5+
54%CS 34%M 12%CF.. Impressive, deep glossy opaque crimson. Smoke, toast, cedar on nose. Very attractive fruit and fabulous length. Ripe and sensuous to the end.

Château LEOVILLE-BARTON 2nd GROWTH Drink 2020-2045 17.5
77% CS 22.5%M 0.5%CF. Very dark ruby with oak and blackberry on the nose. Ripe, intense, focused fruit. Powerful yet graceful tannins. Long and finish lifted .

Château LEOVILLE-POYFERRE 2nd GROWTH Drink 2020-2040 18
Marvellous wine. 69%CS 20%M 5%CF 6%PV Yield 42 hl/ha. Very dark, saturated, glossy look. Velvet blackberry liqueur feel with blanket of ripe tannins and ripe sweet jammy filling. Relaxes into a long, fresh finish. This property produced one of the most impressive wines of the week

Château SAINT-PIERRE 4th GROWTH Drink 2020-2040. 18
81%CS 19%M. Sweet cassis nose – cedar and glossy black fruit. Plenty of extraction but the ripe fruit runs though. Fat, thick texture and very long. Dry finish.





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Part 3 - Haut Medoc, Moulis, Lustrac and Medoc

Haut-Médoc

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 separate the estates geographically into Southern, Middle and Northern communes, as these communes will have more in common with their neighbours than those further a field.

See map. To the South lie Macau, Ludon, Le Pian-Médoc, Parempuyre, Blanquefort and Le Taillan.

In the middle Medoc lie Arcins, Avensan, Lamarque, Cussac and Saint-Laurent-Médoc. I have included the appellations of Moulis and Lustrac in the middle Medoc section below.

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.



Southern Haut-Medoc communes include Macau, Ludon, Le Pian-Médoc, Labarde, Blanquefort and Parempuyre. Most of the best Crus Bourgeois are found in the Macau and Ludon communes. The best

Southern Haut Medoc wines expressed suave ripeness, Margaux-like finesse and forward drinkability.



Commune Château

Macau Château Belle-Vue Cru Bourgeois Drink 2017-2025 16.5

This is concentrated and rich and structured, with ripe black fruits, plenty of ripe tannin. Quite approachable young.

Macau Château CANTEMERLE 5th GROWTH Drink 2019-2025 16.5

Summer fruits, blackberry and toasty oak evident. Ripe and exotic palate of sweet blackcurrant, spices and liquorice with plenty of ripe tannins. Long and

Labarde Château Duthil Cru Bourgeois Drink 2019-2023 16.5

Made by the same team that makes Ch Giscours. Dark, opaque crimson. Big, rich blackberry nose with a little mocha and cedar. The tannins are firm but not over-powering. Refreshing lift at finish. Very good

Le Pian Château Sénéjac Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2023 16.5

Tasted three times, with some variation. At best very fine, with rich fruit that lasts the course while the thick bitter chocolate tannins do their work. Attractive and long.



CAMBRIDGE WINE MERCHANTS

Middle Haut-Medoc – Moulis, Lustrac, Arcins, Avensan, Lamarque, Cussac and Saint-Laurent-Médoc

Many of the vineyards are planted with equal quantities of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, with Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot making up a balance of plantings. I imagine winemakers put as much Cabernet Sauvignon as they could into the blend in this vintage and that really is why Bordeaux fold adopt a multi cepage vineyard strategy.

My recommendations are:

Commune Château

Arcins Château Arnaud Cru Bourgeois Drink 2019-2025 16.5

This property was bought in 2007 by Allianz. Full bodied, rich and ripe, with firm tannins that dry up a little.

Saint-Laurent Château BELGRAVE 5th GROWTH Drink 2020-2029 16.5+

Situated in the Saint-Laurent commune, adjacent to Saint Julien on gravels similar to those in Pauillac. Very good structure and a wine for the long haul. Slightly confected nose, with exotic crème de mure, crème caramel and toasty oak. Ripe fruit, very ripe, punchy tannins, quite alcoholic but with sufficient acidity. Long, juicy and impressive.

Moulis Château Chasse Spleen Drink 2020-2030 16.5

Attractive nose of black cherry, kirsch, vanillia. Charming with lashings of black fruits but pleasant acidity and ripe tannins.

Lamarque Château Haut-Bellevue Drink 2018-2027 16.5

Deep glossy black/ruby. Lovely pure blackberry fruit. Tannin firm but ripe, giving a stylish plump finish.

Listrac Château Peyredon Lagravette Drink 2018 -2029 16+

Full-bodied with masses of black fruits and cedar, tannins to the fore. Minerality here as well as acidity and tough tannins.

Cussac Château du Retout Cru Bourgeois Drink 2019-2025 16

85% CS 15%M Opaque deep ruby. Big bold fruit and tannin but all should come together in a rich satisfying whole/

Moulis Château Poujeaux Drink 2020 -2029 16+

Deep ruby. Lovely creamy, vanilla and cassis nose. Very attractive summer fruits. Good length and tannins in check. Drying at finish but will resolve.





C A M B R I D G E W I N E M E R C H A N T S

Northern Haut-Medoc – Saint-Sauveur, Cissac, Vertheuil and Saint-Seurin-de-Cadourne

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-Seurin Château d'Aurillac Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2014-2021 16
Lovely extraction, with a glossy feel in the mouth and ripe blackberry fruit. Just lovely.
- Saint-Sauveur Château Bernadotte** Drink 2019-2028 16.5
Sold by Louis Roederer to some Chinese investors who have struggled but the wine is very good. Characterful nose with blackberry, a cedar and pencil shavings. The palate is medium-bodied with firm tannins. Pauillac styled
- Cissac-Médoc Château Cissac Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2020-2028 16.5
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.
- Cissac-Médoc Château Larrivaux Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2018-2025 16
Medium-bodied and well made again after a very successful 2009. There is good intensity on the nose with crème de cassis and violets, quite opulent in style. The palate is medium-bodied with good tension, pure blackberry and plum fruits with a linear but focused finish.
- Saint-Sauveur Château Haut Madrac Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2018-2024 16
Made to be drunk young, this is elegant medium-bodied with ripe tannin and fruit.
- Vertheuil Château Reysson Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2018-2023 16
An exception that proves the rule, this wine has 80% Merlot in its blend, but is polished and cool, with elegant tannins.



Medoc Appellation

The appellation Medoc comprises sixteen communes and 4700 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. The properties are well known for offering value for money, producing sturdy wines if sometimes lacking finesse. Because of the majority of Merlot planted in these communes there are fewer stand out excellent wines. Many tasted tough and dry and lacking finesse although the best had ripe fruit, well handled tannin and solid structure.

Commune Château

- Gaillan Château Chantemerle Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2017-2022 16-
60% CS 35% M 3% PV 2% CF. Lovely glossy deep ruby colour. Lots of fruits on the nose, plus vanilla and spices. Ripe mouth feel and tannins recede before fruit finishes. Medium-body and good length.
- Begadan Château la Clare Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2019-2029 16-
Sweet fruit and flashy new oak evident, as is some mirobullage (controlled micro-oxidation) which peps up a young wine. Lots of flavours of ripe black fruits. Huge tannins may be problematic but it is certainly impressive.
- Blaignan Château la Gorce Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2019-2025 16-
Medium body and extraction. Very tasty, elegant fruit with tannins nicely in check. Will drink young. Very good
- Begadan Château Greysac Cru Bourgeois** Drink 2019-2025 15.5
Ripe fruits in a big chunky frame. Loads of tannins but they resolve.



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Lau Dignac et Loirac Château Noaillac Cru Bourgeois Drink 2018-2025	16-
Supple and tasty with ripe Cabernet flavours and handsome structure.	
Begadan Château Tour Seran Cru Bourgeois Drink 2020-2028	16+
Lovely ripe, fruity, accessible style that should be very popular.	

Part 4 - PESSAC-LEOGNAN / GRAVES

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 and Graves Whites:

Pessac Château Carbonnieux Drink 2017-2025	16
Fine oak and citrus nose, lemon and lime. Good tropical fruit with grapefruit edge. Focussed and long. Fine	
Pessac Château de Fieuzal Drink 2017-2027	17
Gorgeous weight and racy. Stylish. Hint of Juicy Fruit chewing gum (a dirty secret long behind me). Lemony and honeyed. Concentrated and long.	
Graves Clos Floridene Drink 2017-2024	16
Denis Dubourdieu's white Graves is a compelling, beautiful wine, with ripe peach fruit, teasing acidity and length.	
Pessac Château Haut Bergey Drink 2017-2024	16
Exotic nose, with new oak, lime, cream on the nose. Lots of acidity and concentration makes this complex and elegant.	
Pessac Château Larrivet Haut-Brion Drink 2017-2025	16.5
Exotic nose, with new oak, lime, cream on the nose. Lots of acidity and concentration makes this complex and elegant.	
Pessac Château d'Eck Drink 2016-2021	16
Ripe and floral nose, very inviting. Intensely fruity with lemon and lime. Very rich with great acidity and length.	
Pessac Château Picque Caillou Drink 2017-2024	16+
This is exquisite white wine. Well defined aromas of vanilla, grapefruit and peach lead to a ripe, mineral palate with lots of acidity, ripe peach and lime fruit. Delicious through the whole taste.	

Pessac-Leognan Reds:

Château Brown Drink 2018-2029	16
Very ripe, lush and aromatic. Although flamboyant and fleshy there is plenty of structure here. I think it will settle down quite quickly and drink young.	
Château les Carmes Haut-Brion Drink 2019-2029	17+
A classic beauty, this wine seems to have it all and will be accessible young. Nicely structured, lots of sweet black fruits, ripe full tannins and great length.	
Domaine de Chevalier Drink 2020-2036	17.5
Opaque black/crimson. Complex aristocratic nose, full of cassis, cedar, aniseed, toast, ripe and dark fruits and cocoa. Ripe, intense fruit, huge tannins and seriously impressive body and length.	
Château de Fieuzal Drink 2019-2029	16.5
Château Haut Bergey Drink 2018-2028	16+
Complex and beautiful. Glossy black/ruby, lovely open aromas of blackberry and cedar. Fruity and heady with a lovely minerality amidst the tannin. Should develop wonderfully	
Château Malartic Lagraviere Drink 2020-2028	16
Inky black/crimson. Lots of tannin but also juicy red currant and cassis fruit combine in this complex and exotic wine.	



C A M B R I D G E
W I N E M E R C H A N T S

- Château Pique Caillou** Drink 2019-2027 16
This estate and its vineyards lie in the Bordeaux. It certainly hits the mark this vintage and unless the price jumps this is a good value buy. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon and 45% Merlot, weighing in at 14% alcohol. Full body with lots of flavour, blackberry, plums, creamy oak and a little spice. Nice long finish.
- Château Smith Haut Lafitte** Drink 2022-2032 17
This is a classically structured, rich, sweet-fruited, exotic, delicious Pessac that is becoming, with La Mission-Haut-Brion and Pape-Clement, the best Pessac red after Haut Brion.
- Château le Thil Comte Clary** Drink 2019-2028 16
Another rich yet elegant, forward, juicy and drinkable red from Pessac.

Part 5 - Sauternes / Barsac

The conditions seemed unlikely to herald a great Sauternes vintage, given the requirement for rain and humidity in September which didn't happen. In his report on the vintage Bill Blatch wrote of Sauternes:

"Meanwhile, down in Sauternes, the relentlessly dry conditions of September prevented all but a few individual grapes from botrytising and necessitated a 1988-style series of tiny fastidious pickings.. until at last it rained on 9 October. This rain unleashed a widespread botrytis boom and a much more serious wave of harvesting could start during the unusually hot 27 °C [80.6 °F] days that followed. The beautiful dry days of 20-26 October, with their much colder nights, often down to 4 or 5 °C [39-41 °F] , saw the biggest part of the harvest, uniformly at 20-22% potential alcohol, and of total purity – provided that the utmost care was taken to eliminate acid rot, which had again taken hold and which was to account for much of the final diminished yield, generally 8-10 hl/ha. Most finished by 26 October, some in cooler areas such as Fargues, picking into the first days of November. "

Many of the wines I tasted were very sweet and acidic, with less botrytis character and more varietal character (lemon, lime) than in a great year for botrytis. The cold summer then dry autumn allowed acidity to be retained so there is a freshness to many of the wines. There are some very fine wines but I can't get too excited about selling these wines. They are likely to be more expensive than wines from the run of very good vintages over the last ten years that are already bottled.

The wines I think stand out are:

- Château D'ARCHE 16**
- Château BROUSTET 16.5**
- Château de FARGUES 16.5**
- Château COUTET 17**
- Château DOISY DAENE 16**
- Château CLOS HAUT PEYRAGUEY 16.5**
- Château NAIRAC 16**
- Château LAFAURIE PEYRAGUEY 16.5**
- Château RABAUD PROMIS 16.5**
- Château SIGALAS RABAUD 16.5**
- Château SUDUIRAUT 17**
- Château LA TOUR BLANCHE 18**

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The views in this report are those of the author.