

SEARSONS
WINE MERCHANTS



Bordeaux
2018
En Primeur

April 2019

Our report

Warm years are no longer the exception. Bordeaux vintage reports could be used as an example of the increasing annual temperatures created by global warming. Gone are the days of 12 to 12.5% abv, now 14% is the average with more above than below this figure in 2018. All or nothing seems to be the current stream with rainfall: 2018 saw record amounts fall in the spring and early summer with desert-like conditions emerging from July onwards. Hail has become the scourge of the Bordeaux vigneron. 'Classic' vintages are few and far between. Even the Bordelais are in uncharted waters. When asked about this vintage a number stated it was like no other before; tannin levels are the highest recorded thanks to the thick skins of near desiccated grapes affected by the dry, hot days from July to October. Unlike 2017, in 2018 there were no September rains to refresh the grapes. This year's harvest comprised rugged, sun-dried grapes with thick skins resulting in wines of great concentration and depth. On tasting, some wines showed a high degree of tannin and restrained fruit, suggesting that a supple extraction was more difficult with these stressed out grapes.

The 2018 vintage year started off slowly, with a wet winter and a very damp spring. March saw 126 mm of rainfall, almost double the 30 year average of 64 mm for this month. April, May and June were around average with July, August and September way below average. September had just 24 mm compared with 93 mm in 2017, 62 mm in 2016 and an average of 83 mm over the last 30 years. The early season rain brought with it mildew. 30% of the vineyards were affected by this. Standout examples were those practicing biodynamic or organic principles. Pontet Canet harvested just 10% of it's average crop thanks to the decimating activities of rot. When the sun came, it really shone. 2018 is the second hottest July and August since 1947. 2003 being the hottest. 1,136 hours of sunshine were recorded between June and September, a record for the last 50 years.



The precocious buds of 2019, an early start to this year

If you are reading this report you have most probably read others. Some merchants are claiming this vintage is on a par with 2010, others are exalting the tannic grip and defining the closed character of many wines as a sleeping beauty style vintage. We are more cautious in our considerations. It is a vintage unlike those before: there is a great deal of concentration, but the succulent fruit of 2016 is not there, the supple finesse of 2015 isn't there either, nor is the freshness of 2017. If we had to compare this vintage to those before you could consider it a cross between 2010 and 2003. It is, in our view, more of a right bank vintage. Merlot loved the warm, dry days, giving an exceptional expression with fantastic ripeness and outstanding depth of character.



What is interesting about this vintage is that there was no clearly defined path for the winemakers. Decisions right from the start were case by case. Leaf picking in the cool early summer months was detrimental for some when the hot sun arrived in July. Harvest dates were important, those holding out for some rain played a dangerous game with berries losing moisture and acid by the minute come late September. In the winery, tannin extraction was vitally important, with higher alcohol levels naturally creating more tannins during fermentation. Acids are integrated and modest, it's a difficult vintage to judge. The tannins are perfectly formed and some of the highest levels recorded for recent vintages adding weight to suggestions that this could be a vintage of great ageing potential. 2018 has sparked much discussion, with industry experts at odds as to whether it's another 'great' or not. As we have highlighted, there are some fantastic wines, but there are also some 'howlers'. It looks to be a case of 'wait and see'. Isn't this what we love about wine? The uncertainty, the discovery, the unexpected surprises? You may have to wait, but 2018 certainly shows promise with some exceptional wines in the mix.



Harriet, Nigel and Jeff in Bordeaux for this year's Primeurs

Left Bank, Sauternes and Barsac

MARGAUX

In our view, **Margaux** failed to live up to expectations. The feminine floral tones were marred by extraction errors in many wines. Ripeness masked the finer points and clumsy tannins brought scores down. **Ferrière** showed beautifully however, with generous blueberry notes under lifted floral tones and a persistent fine finish. **Labégorce** was sweet with beautiful tannin structure, great density and a polished finish. **Prieuré-Lichine** continued to impress us with a slightly closed nose being embraced by succulent, lively mid-palate fruit and a long, ethereal finish. **Siran** was fresh with blueberry tones and great concentration showing promise for the future. For those who managed their extraction with care, the wines certainly suggest that age will be kind.



Jeff at Chateau d'Issan

The wine retained it's classic polished style



Nigel with Lillian Barton at Ch. Leoville Barton

SAINT-JULIEN

As with the 2017 vintage, **Saint-Julien** seems to have shone again. A higher percentage of the wines tasted scored over 17 points (worthy of mention in this report) with **Beychevelle**, **Branais-Ducru**, **Gloria** and **Talbot** showing great expression and excellent integration of acid and tannin in a concentrated and powerful core. **Beychevelle** and **Branais** showed elegance, **Gloria** classic finesse and **Talbot** the customary darker tones. **Léoville-Barton** again played a blinder with such polish and finesse retained under the watchful eye of Eric Boissonnet. We still can't believe that this wine doesn't receive more acclaim. **Langoa Barton** held steady with the hallmark open expression and approachable honesty, a wine that will be drinking well earlier than others from this commune.



PAUILLAC

The 'hall of kings' did not disappoint. **Mouton** was as ever an epiphany of concentrated polish and finesse, not a foot put wrong. More closed at this stage than the '17 but certainly a sleeping beauty that could well rival the longevity of 2005 and 2010. **D'Armailhac** and **Clerc Milon** both showed tremendous scope with **Clerc Milon** showing greater expression against the slightly closed **d'Armailhac** with its strong, yet supple tannins binding the concentrated dark, fruit to the finish. **Grand-Puy-Lacoste** showed tremendous depth and integration of tannins, the self-assured style seems to mature with each vintage. **Haut-Bages Libéral** was concentrated and supple with generous black fruit driving the structured finish. **Lynch-Bages** is closed, grippy and not particularly inviting at the moment. A leather bound savoury edge shows promise on the long finish. But there is a dryness to the concentration that beggars the question of true excellence. **Lynch Moussas** is gentle with spicy blackcurrant tones and an open generosity showing opposing generosity to its neighbour. **Pichon Baron** enlists fragrant blueberry tones to soften the concentrated dark finish with evolving herbal notes piquing interest at the finish. **Pichon Comtesse** is brooding and mineral, her blackcurrant richness lends some breadth to a restrictive concentrated finish.

SAINT-ESTEPHE

Saint-Estèphe seems to have shed some of its tough restraint. The power was there, but the ripeness of the '18 vintage gave the wines great life and expression. **Cos Labory** offered generous baked plum notes. **Lafon-Rochet** showed great definition and a mineral core that carries a smokey finesse to a long concentrated finish. **Ormes de Pez**, always great value was almost floral in its expression and tamed the tannic grip with immense concentration and succulent fruit interest on the finish.

Harriet with Sophie and Francois-Xavier Borie of Ch.Grand-Puy-Lacoste

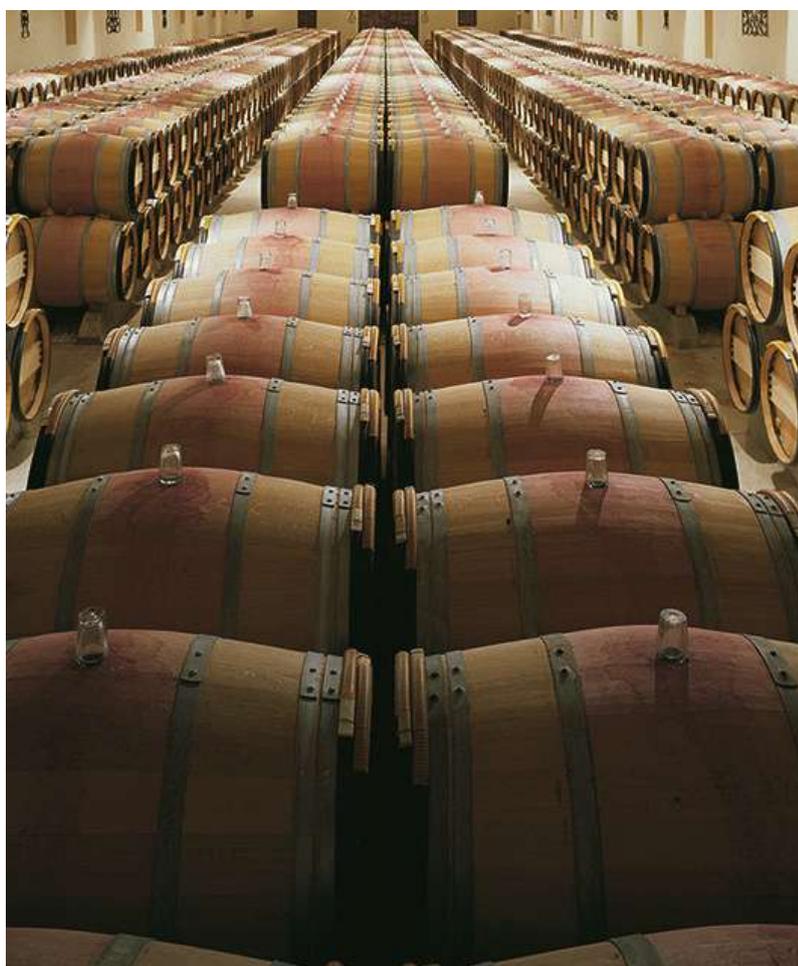


PESSAC-LEOGNAN

Marc Perrin of **Château Carbonnieux** spoke about the heat that the vines endured during the first 3 weeks of September. Very hot days meant that yields were reduced even further, having been adversely affected by frost then mildew early on in the season. **Carbonnieux** brought in just 30hl/ha, their lowest production in 30 years. This was exemplified in their red with great concentration and a supple ripe black fruited finish. The red of the commune this year has to be that of **Domaine de Chevalier**, with a divine, graphite-led, smoky expression, intense mineral depth and refined compact finish. Quite the wine! There were recurrences of slightly dirty (brett) notes in a number of the wines. A direct result of the high pH's that this warm vintage produced. **Latour-Martillac** showed a generous damson hinted plump palate with a lifted richness suggestive of an earlier drinking example. Leather tones, vegetal notes and a lack of acid pepper many of our notes, hallmarks of a hot summer.

The whites are ripe. Tropical notes with an exotic edge showed the ripeness of the vintage with **Picque Caillou**. **La Louvière** was high toned and expressive with a minerality that tamed the ripeness. **Carbonnieux** managed to find the right balance with a textured stone fruit mid palate and a mineral back bone lending structure to a delicate but persistent finish.

HAUT-MEDOC, MEDOC, LISTRAC & MOULIS



More often than not, a dark slightly unforgiving expression of fruit comes from the **Haut-Médoc**. The warmth of 2018 has however allowed many of these Châteaux to produce wines of a softer style. 'Silky, textural and soft' peppered my notes here, unusual for this appellation.

Camensac and Coufran showed great concentration and expression of fruit, with Coufran giving great definition and mineral tones on the finish. From **Listrac**, **Fourcas Dupré** had subtle concentration with a trace of cigar box and cedar emerging showing greater sophistication than expected at this level. In Moulis, **Mauvesin Barton** continues to show promise with Melanie Barton-Sartorius making steady progress with the winemaking here.

SAUTERNES AND BARSAC

Botrytis came late this year. The warm summer left some wines with a riper, less linear structure. Exotic notes with an open appeal can be expected. **Doisy Daëne** offered layers of fruit salad and spice, integrated and long on the finish. **Doisy-Védrières** is exceptionally ripe with 132g/l of sugar and 13.5% abv. The botrytis influence here is more concentrated with very tight apricot tones lingering on the finish. **Lafaurie-Peyraguey** is intensely aromatic this year with lemon blossom and apricot sitting behind an intensely citric nose. **Suduiraut** (100% semillon) seemed to thrive in the heat with a waxy lemon tinged, beeswax expression. A decent zing of acid elevated the lime blossom scent on the finish.



Right Bank

SAINT-EMILION

High-toned, velvet, brooding, ethereal and exciting: descriptors that populate notes from what was certainly a strong right bank vintage. **Bélaïr-Monange** benefited from its dominance of Merlot (90%) showing little on the nose, but a tight, dark mid-palate with tantalising hints of prune and black cherry burning off the brooding, very long finish. The long, hot autumn days were perfect for Cabernet Franc with **Clos Fourtet** showing that wonderfully complex darker edge and high toned tobacco notes that emanate **St Emilion** so well. **Clos La Madeleine** with 24% Cabernet Franc showed the full spectrum of excellence that this grape can achieve in such a vintage. **La Couspaude** showed great freshness with juicy cassis led fruit and a ripeness to the tannins that gave great texture to the palate. **La Gaffelière**, while more velvet and fruit-led showed technical excellence in the integration of oak notes.

Pavie Macquin exemplified perfection with aromatic plum and redcurrant spice on the nose leading to a tight, exceptionally concentrated textured mid-palate, not jammy, but brooding. They waited till the end of September to pick the Merlot which, although risky, seems to have paid them in spades with a huge spectrum of flavours emerging on the finish. **Valandraud** showed some great fruit expression with **La Tour Figeac** offering that herbal cab franc complexity on the finish. **Figeac** was (in their own words) 'symphonie fantastique'. Escaping the mildew endured by neighbours, the wine continued it's stratospheric rise to excellence with a damson ripeness tempered by toasty spice, despite a pH of 3.7 the acid was fresh, carrying the fruit to a precise, linear and intensely mineral finish. Tasted at the end of the day, **Cheval Blanc** gave us an exquisite violet tinted nose, ripe red currant base and leather bound richness. The baked plum, blackcurrant tones with cedar and chocolate hints on the finish sent the senses reeling. Another approachable yet concentrated vintage from this spectacular Château. 2018 is certainly a vintage of note for Saint-Emilion.



A slightly enclosed Figeac, with exciting activities and a lot of cranes surrounding their new winery



POMEROL

Defined fruit notes (blueberry, cranberry, damson) with dark brooding cores were the trend for Pomerol. Assured richness and high toned expressions give confidence that this is a good vintage worthy of years of enjoyment. **Bourgneuf** managed seaweed complexity with its generous fruit and careful vanilla edged oak integration trimming the concentrated finish. **La Croix de Gay** showed great promise with concentrated fruit and a brooding dark chocolate finish. **La Fleur-Pétrus** was slightly closed and struggling on the nose but the palate yielded dense plum notes with filigree structure and an ethereal elegance on the sustaining finish. **Petit-Village** was tight but a mineral depth and evolving tobacco tints on the finish suggest time will unveil a decent vintage for this Château. **La Pointe** was primary but in a lifted, expressive way with a fruit expression that suggests great complexity to come. **Rouget** is fast becoming one of our favourites. The crushed cherry hints over a concentrated sweet plum palate offer ample density and an enduring mineral finish, exemplifying the expressive richness of this vintage. **Trotanoy** lent a coolness to the commune with crushed violets and vanilla lifting a savoury, cedar led mineral based core carried by surprising acid, a rarity in this vintage.



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