

2009 VINTAGE

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VINTAGE OVERVIEW

With everyone already talking about this being the new 2005 (and that's just the low-key ones, the rest are bandying about 1982, 1945, 1047...), the count-down to the en primeurs has very definitely begun. This is the official press release from the CIVB on this year's vintage. Speaking as someone who lives here, has followed the vintage and tasted a number of vats across both banks, I think they are right to be feeling confident over the quality. Whether they are right to be as confident over the prices remains to be seen...

'Weather conditions this year have been particularly favourable for the vine's growth cycle and the grapes' ripening process. The months of July and August saw high temperatures and a generous amount of sunshine. This & weather continued into September, with an alternation between cool nights and warm daytime temperatures, which encouraged a concentration of aromas and an increase in anthocyanins.

The grapes ripened ideally and harvests dates are now being staggered. Crops being gathered are perfectly healthy. It is too early to make an estimate about harvest. We should keep in mind that hailstorms during the month of March caused significant damage to 19,000 hectares of vines (15% of the total Bordeaux winegrowing region). The extent of this damage varied considerably from one plot to another in vineyards, but the result is a decrease in production.

Dry White Wines

Harvests of white Sauvignon grapes began on 27th August in the earliest-ripening areas. In September harvesting of this variety became widespread and continued afterwards with the Sémillon variety.

Red wines

Merlot grapes are currently being picked. Harvests of this variety began in mid-September for the earliest-ripening areas. The berries are intensely aromatic, full of flavour, showing excellent concentration in sugar; the pips are crunchy and the skins appear to have marvellous colour potential (anthocyanan levels are high). Acidity levels are low; this is an indication of excellent ripeness. Harvests continued with Cabernet Franc in the first days of October, followed by Cabernet Sauvignon, depending on the earliness of

certain terroirs and how ripeness developed.

Sweet white wines

Gathered by successive stages of manual sorting on the vine, harvests of grapes for sweet white wines began at the end of September. Weather conditions were ideal for these grapes that undergo the influence of an extremely specific micro-climate. Humidity, in the form of early-morning mists, encourages the work of the botrytis cinerea fungus (noble rot), a vital factor for producing these wines. Very warm daytime temperatures dry out the grapes and concentrate all their flavours. The grapes express remarkable aromatic potential.

Weather Conditions (source Meteo France)

March : a generous amount of sunshine, temperatures slightly above average and rainfall levels less than half the average of the past 30 years. In the vineyards: budburst (when the buds open and small leaves appear) began at the end of the month. Sunshine 220.35 hours, rainfall 31mm, temperature 12.4C.

April: a mild month, particularly rainy, with a lack of sunshine. Sunshine 235 hours, rainfall 78.4mm, temperature 10.1C.

May: Fine weather, with summery temperatures and an excellent amount of sunshine; there was, however, a slight lack of rainfall. Violent hailstorms occurred on 11th, 13th and 25th May. No winegrowing area of the Bordeaux region was spared (Médoc, Graves, Entre-deux-Mers, Saint-Emilion, Blaye, Bourg, Premières Côtes). In the vineyards: at the end of May, flowering begins. Early and swift, it becomes widespread at the beginning of the month of June. Sunshine 159.35 hours, rainfall 115.8mm, temperature 17.3C.

June: a dry, warm month, with a remarkable amount of sunshine and temperatures 2 degrees higher than the average of the past 30 years. In the vineyards: on 15th June flowering had finished in the earliest areas. This is the period of berry setting (fertilised flowers turn into tiny grape berries). Sunshine 293 hours, rainfall 75mm, temperature 20.3C.

July: a warm month (temperatures slightly above average) and a generous amount of sunshine. In the vineyards: beginning of the véraison period. The berries swell and grape skins begin to change colour. Sunshine 262.31 hours, rainfall 46.6mm, temperature 21.5C.

August: extremely good weather, warm and sunny (+ 27 hours of sunshine).

There was a slight lack of rainfall compared with the average of the past 30 years. In the vineyards: ripening is encouraged by excellent weather conditions. Sunshine 270.34 hours (30 year average 242.55 hours). Rainfall 23mm (30 year average 59.5mm). Temperature 22.3 degrees C (30 year average 20.9)

September: a second month of August! Temperatures are slightly above the average of the past 30 years. There is a lack of rainfall, but an extraordinary amount of sunshine (+ 50 hours). In the vineyards: it's time for the harvests to begin. Sunshine 233.49 hours (30 year average 182.49 hours). rainfall 48.6mm (30 year average 90.3mm). temp average 19.2 degrees C (30 year average 18.1).

October: Sunshine continued through much of the month, again. Most grapes were in across all regions by the end of the second week, although there were still a few properties who were picking at the very end of October.

RIGHT BANK

Cercle de Rive Droite

This was one of the first tastings of the week, on the Sunday afternoon at Chateau de Carles in Fronsac. It was also one of the most instructive, because it quickly became apparent that the 2009 wines were not quite as straightforward as imagined. Personally, I was surprised by the quality of the Bordeaux/Bordeaux Superieur wines, and it was only as you headed up the scale that things became more varied. It seemed that as chateaux got better quality raw materials, the temptation to push them too far became tougher to resist. Stephen Spurrier, Decanter's consultant editor, commented that the lesser wines in this tasting were 'really fun to drink', and I would definitely agree. I didn't taste these blind by the way – there were over 130 wines, and would have found it tough to be fair to quite so many wines in one three hour afternoon session. I tasted around 90 of them in total.

Red Wines

Chateau Penin, Bordeaux Superieur

This is a great start to the tasting. Really a delicious wine, really full of rich purple fruits, good flesh, nice acidity, well balanced. A seriously good wine from owner Patrick Carteyron, one of the best I have tasted from this already very good estate. Tastes more expensive than it will inevitably be when on the market. 100% Merlot. 91+.

Chateau Pey la Tour Reserve, Bordeaux Superieur

This is good stuff from a very reliable property, owned by Dourthe negociant house. A little less exuberant than the some on display here, but still very accomplished. 90% Merlot, 5% Cab Sauvignon, 3% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc. 90.

Chateau Sainte Barbe, Bordeaux Superieur

Again, very impressive from this Bordeaux Superieur property owned by Antoine Touton. Lovely weight of fruit, and nice fresh finish. Ever ever so slightly drying tannins at the very end, but enough fruit that this should soften nicely, and an attractive touch of liquorice root. 80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc. 91.

Chateau Sainte Marie, Entre deux Mers (but this red wine AOC Bordeaux Superieur)

More gooseberry, less successful because the fruit is slightly more withdrawn, more of a typical Bordeaux Sup really, but again, a nice fruity finish. 86% Merlot, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot. 88-89.

Lucullus, Saint Foy Bordeaux

The top cuvee of Chateau Hostens-Picant, owned by Yves Hostens-Picant. This is the first one where the extraction is a little over the top, but having said that, there is a lovely wall of fruit supporting it, and a nice lift at the end. In fact, very good, once it has had time to settle. 91. (The main chateau wine, the Hostens-Picant itself, is not as good, a little hollow in the mid palate and generally less impressive. 87.).

Chateau Clos Chaumont, Cadillac Cotes de Bordeaux

Interesting wine, with very much with its own personality. Owned by Pieter Verbeek, this has a lovely charm, and good redcurrant fruits (60% merlot, 22% cabernet franc, 18% cabernet sauvignon), with a nice tingle of freshness. It doesn't have enormous complexity, but you would be very happy with this in your glass. Hubert de Bouard is consultant here. 91.

Chateau Le Doyenne, Cadillac Cotes de Bordeaux

Slightly less interesting against the (stiff) competition on display here. A little too extracted, which has dried things out. The fruit is fresh but not overwhelmingly seductive. 70% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet

Sauvignon. 88.

Chateau Mont Perat, Cadillac Cotes de Bordeaux

A big wine from the Despagne family, an injection of fruit and tannins, but a good precise finish, everything comes together on a well defined point. Perhaps a little too hot in alcohol, which throws things a little out of balance. 70% Merlot, 10% Cab Franc, 20% cab Sauvignon. 90+.

Alix de Chateau Plaisance, Cadillac Cotes de Bordeaux

I like this wine, from Philippe Magrez (son of Bernard Magrez. He also does the PR for his father's wine in the Asian market) Again, it is fairly intense, fairly extracted, but here this is all held together by a very nice burst of freshness. 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc. As an aside, Robert Joseph recently asked Bernard if his son would take over the family business. To which Magrez replied 's'il a des tripes— If he has the guts'. 90

Chateau Reynon, Cadillac Cotes de Bordeaux

Surprising how good all these wines are. This is very good value, and lovely dense fruit, easily one of the best wines I have ever tasted from this estate (owned by Denis and Florence Dubourdieu), without a doubt. 92.

Chateau Haut Bertinerie, Blaye Cotes de Bordeaux

A reliable Blaye estate owned by the Bantegnies family. More subdued on the fruit than many in this tasting, but that gives it an elegance and a touch of softness that is very appealing. It really sits with you for a while, and is very charming. 90+.

Chateau Cotes Montpezat, Castillon Cotes de Bordeaux

From the Castillon region, this is too high in alcohol for me, without the balance of many, and has overworked the vintage. 70% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. 87-88.

Chateau Cap de Faugeres, Castillon Cotes de bordeaux

Another Castillon wine that for me just has too much extraction. A shame, because I often like the wines from this estate (owned by Silvio Denz, and the site of a beautiful new winery). The fruit is dense, but the oak is too insistent. May just need some time, but up against this highly impressive tasting, it falls down. 89+.

Chateau Joanin Becot, Castillon Cotes de Bordeaux

A good 12 hectare estate owned by Juliette Becot. This is really a lovely wine, showing that not everyone in Castillon pushed things too far. Silky, rich red fruits, it really slips down terribly easily, but has an elegant fresh finish. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 92.

Chateau de Laussac, Castillon Cotes de Bordeaux

Different flavour palate, more gooseberries and loganberries than cherries and damsons. But this has a strangely hollow mid-palate, and the tannins are less well integrated. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 87-88.

Clos Puy Arnaud, Castillon Cotes de Bordeaux

Wonderfully rich colour, very joyful. And this has a delicacy and a purity that is really remarkable. 65% Merlot, 30% cabernet Franc, 3% Cab Sauvignon, 2% Carmanere. Biodynamic. 93.

Chateau de Franc, Les Cerisiers, Francs Cotes de Bordeaux

Leading estate of this tiny appellation, owned by Hubert de Bouard and Dominique Hebrard. Coffee, mocha, good fruit, all in all very pleasurable. 80% Merlot, 10% cab Franc, 10% Cab Sauvignon. 91-92.

Chateau Dalem, Fronsac

Very extracted, heading towards over extracted, and this is big in alcohol. But all in all, this holds things together, and has good layers of coffee and rich dark chocolate. A big wine, making full use of its 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. 90-91.

Chateau Marsau, Francs Cotes de Bordeaux

Owned by Jean Marie Chadronnier, this is 100% Merlot, but it has been quite heavily worked, and deliver impact without enough freshness for me. It's good, but not my favourite here. 89.

Chateau de la Dauphine, Fronsac

Lovely nose, crisp and fairly restrained. Good length, and very suave. Not perhaps as good as the 2005 from this estate, but still enormously impressive value for money. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 91+.

Chateau Fontenil, Fronsac

A Michel Rolland wine, a fact that is clearly marked all over the label. Good start to the wine, but somehow the finish falls too short, and the extraction gets the better of the fruit. 90% Merlot, 10% Cab Sauvignon. 88+.

Chateau Haut Ballet, Fronsac

A good wine from the increasingly high profile Olivier Decelle. This is also 100% Merlot, and is very soft, you kind of melt into it. It doesn't quite stand up to some of the others on display, but there is a lot of charm, and this will offer easy-drinking pleasure. 89.

Chateau Haut Carles, Fronsac

A property that has seen serious investment in recent years – this is the top cuvee of Chateau Carles, where the tasting is taking place. The wine has power, and is full of tight tannins (consultant is Jean Luc Thunevin). Needs a long time to soften, and clearly aimed at ageing and a long life, but it does have the elements to stack up. Liquorice and coffee abound. But for me it lacks some charm. 90% Merlot, 5% Cab Franc, 5% Malbec. 90-91.

Chateau de La Riviere, Fronsac

Owned by James Gregoire, who now also owns Vintex wine merchants. 82% Merlot, 13% Cab Sauvignon, 4% Cab Franc, 1% Malbec. Nice length, and very good build up in the mouth. I like this. Doesn't have as much lift on the finish as some (despite the wonderful limestone *terroir* that Gregoire, has, so that's a shame). Having said that, this is accomplished, with very silky and well worked red fruits. Good length, no harsh edges, and very enjoyable. 91.

Chateau du Gaby, Fronsac

Pretty, charming, you'd be very happy to be drinking this, but it has less depth than some others on offer in this tasting. 85% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc. 89-90.

Chateau La Vieille Cure, Fronsac

Good powerful fruits, nice lift on the finish, slightly over-intrusive tannins but it keeps everything together, and you can feel this will develop nicely over the coming year. Good. 90-91.

Chateau de Chambrun, Lalande de Pomerol

Very different from the Fronsacs. This is deeper, more solid, slightly brooding. Less of a fun experience, but this is certainly impressive in scope, with good layers of black fruits, at good ripeness. Again a Silvio Denz property. 94% Melot, 6% Cab Franc. 90.

Chateau La Fleur de Bouard, Lalande de Pomerol

85% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cab Sauvignon. Lovely, lovely fruit, that gently insists, in the manner of a Jackie Collin's hero in *Lace*. Really a nice wine, very very enjoyable. I tasted this again at Angelus, and found it just as enjoyable. 93.

Chateau Jean de Gue, Lalande de Pomerol

Charming crisp fruit and very strong roasted coffee beans, you could be spooning a butterscotch angel delight into your mouth here. Lovely wine, from the Aubert family of Ch La Couspaude in Saint Emilion – and no doubt far more keenly priced. 75% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. 91.

Ch Perron la fleur, Lalande de Pomerol

This is more structured, more held together than others in the tasting. Owner Bertrand Massonie has planted 80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cab Sauvignon over his small 5 hectare vineyard. As with many of these wines, you are looking for the faults. The alcohol and tannin level is high, that is sure, but it's well balanced. 90.

Chateau La Sergue, Lalande de Pomerol

85% Merlot, 5% Malbec, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, owned by Pascal Chatonnet. This is a very intense wine, the fruit is like pure, very intense, like the filling of a hot blueberry pie. It may whack everything else out a little – you have fruit, alcohol, oh and fruit and alcohol. But it's got ambition. 90.

Chateau Siaurac, Lalande de Pomerol

I like the fruit expression on this, which flirts with you a little before fully revealing itself. There is a nice play of red fruits, redcurrants and cherries, with a crisper gooseberry underneath. Good length Full disclosure here, my husband is third cousins with owner Paul Goldsmidt, but they only discovered that fact 12 months ago and I was giving this wine good points way before! Good value – this is not one of the most expensive Lalande de Pomerols. 91-92.

Chateau Tournefeuille, Lalande de Pomerol

70% Merlot, 30% Cab Franc. This veers into slightly candy territory, a bit overmade. Sorry Emeric Petit, I think it will have definite admirers, and it's a popular style, but it's a little sweet for me. 70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc. 88.

Chateau de Viaud, Lalande de Pomerol

Philippe Raoux's property (owner of Chateau d'Arsac over in the Medoc), with 67% Merlot, 27% Cabernet Franc, 6% Cabernet Sauvignon. The classic crushed violet nose is there if you look closely, but this somehow manages to be more clunky, less interesting than the others on display here. I have tasted better vintages from this estate. 87.

Chateau Beau Soleil, Pomerol

Owner Thierry Rustman work 3.5 hectares of vines, and makes this 100% Merlot. It's got very ripe fruit (the sunshine in the name clearly is referring to a microclimate), but in fact is a bit flat overall, needs more of a lift on the finish to avoid the feeling of over-extraction. Shame. 89.

Chateau Bellegrave, Pomerol

This has more body, and more lift on the finish. Incredibly dense fruit, black

cherries, damsons, good grip and a lovely minty lift of the finish. Gorgeous effort from owner Jean-Marie Bouldy. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 93-94.

Chateau Bonalgue, Pomerol

This is good, nice weight of fruit, it builds nicely and is quite understated, unlike some years where this is a very flamboyant wine. But this is very good, with great potential. Owned by Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Bourotte, with 95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc. 92+.

Chateau le Bon Pasteur, Pomerol

So ripe as to be very hot, high in alcohol and lacking balance. This is not a good calling card for Rolland this year, and I preferred to 2008 at this estate. Yes there is fruit there, and there is certainly extraction and power, but where is the elegance? 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 89.

Chateau Bourgneuf Vayron, Pomerol

Lovely. Lots of layers, plenty of complexity, some gently toasted almonds and coffee beans. Slightly too sweet on the finish for me, I prefer a bit of a minty lift, but this is good stuff. 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. 91.

Chateau La Clemence, Pomerol

I love the nose, there is a definite tang of juicy fruit and cherry blossom. A touch over-worked on the palate though, with some over-intrusive oak that needs to settle down over the next year. Good, but no cigar. 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc. 90-91.

Chateau Clos de Clocher, Pomerol

Another Pomerol estate from Pierre and Jean Baptiste Bourotte. This is fleshy and voluptuous, more of a style that I find in Bonalgue normally. But really very successful. Delicately floral nose from the cabernet franc, no harsh tannins, good length, very seductive. 70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc. 93.

Chateau La Croix, Pomerol

Redcurrant and gooseberry on the nose, a flavour that I have found on a number of good Pomerols this year. Love that flavour. This is gorgeous. A Janoueix wine – increasingly a name to look out for on the Right Bank, at all price levels. 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon – this gives it more gravitas, but a little less flirtatious fun. Only drawback for me is that this is evidently high in alcohol. 93-94.

Clos de l'Eglise, Pomerol

Chewy, concentrated tannins. This has lovely backbone, very good freshness, and a lot of power. Good coffee beans and dark, bitter chocolate. This is

awesomely good, easily one of the best in the tasting. Owned by Sylviane Garcin-Cathiard and Helene Garcin-Leveuque (owners also of Haut Bergey in Pessac Leognan, with Alain Raynaud as consultant here). 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 95+.

Domaine de l'Eglise, Pomerol

Again very good, nice coffee aromas, but not the punch of the Clos L'Eglise. Owned by Philippe Casteja, this has 95% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Franc. 92.

Chateau Fayat, Pomerol

Clement Fayat, owner of La Dominique in Saint Emilion also. That is extracted to within an inch of its life. It does finally soften out with the fruit, but the extraction is distracting. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Franc. 91.

Chateau Feytit Clinet, Pomerol

Owned by Jeremy Chasseuil. Not a well known Pomerol wine, but charming, and I really like it. Good coffee, nice freshness, interesting complexity. 91.

Chateau La Fleur de Gay, Pomerol

Lovely nose, toasted oak, roasted coffee beans, percolating coffee, yum. Really nice, very exciting wine, plenty of balance, it head towards over alcohol, but pulls itself back. A very big wine, but full of swagger. 100% Merlot from Alain Reynaud and his wife Chantal Lebreton. 94-95.

Chateau Mazeyres, Pomerol

A reliable, unflashy wine from Alain Moueix. It's not quite as enjoyable as I'd hoped from this estate – there is good weight of fruit, nice freshness, but doesn't quite deliver the sexiness that the best Pomerols seem to have this year. 91.

Chateau Montviel, Pomerol

Big, concentrated, very good wine from Catherine Pere Verge and consultant Michel Rolland. These are wines that you have to pay attention to. I like this, but don't love it - all the component parts to be a solid performer is here, but it isn't yet taking off. However, I just tasted a number of older vintages of Montviel, and it certain seems to reach greatness more often than not, so I am definitely prepared to give it time. 80% Merlot, 20% Cab Franc. 91.

Chateau le Moulin, Pomerol

Good, sweet oak, lots of plump fruits, very modern in style, very crowd pleasing, could have a little more elegance and a little more *terroir*. But still, this is flashy and exuberant and very good quality. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc from owner Michel Querre. Very nice finish, it sits in the mouth for a while, and builds to a rousing finish. Good. 93.

Chateau Rouget, Pomerol

Owned by Jean Pierre Labrueyere and his son Edouard, a Burgundy family who have vineyards both in Burgundy and Bordeaux (and follow a Burgundian philosophy to a large extent, with everything very small scale, natural and precise – often the malo hasn't even finished by the primeurs, although this year it seems to have done). The grapes mix is 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc. Good crisp fruit, it still needs some time to soften up, but this is really very successful. Bright purple fruits, very tight, very held together, enormously pleasurable, and far from being ready to approach. 94.

Chateau Taillefer, Pomerol

Owned by Catherine Moueix. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. Smoky oak, slightly sweet blackcurrant fruits. This is less cohesive for me than some of the samples of display. It's good, but there is stiff competition. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 90.

Chateau Vieux Mallet, Pomerol

90% Merlot, 10% Cab Franc from Herve Laviale of Franc Mayne in Saint Emilion, and right now investing seriously in this estate. It's a bit over-oaked (but no surprise there, this is often a signature of this family of wines), and a touch over-pedalled on the extraction. But there is good stuff underneath, enough plump fruits, to carry it through, and an excellent lift on the finish. 91+.

Chateau Vray Croix de Gay, Pomerol

75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. This is a lovely from the Goldschmidt family (and incidentally one of the wines that will be affected by the Pomerol ruling that says all estates must vinify in the appellation by 2018). There is a l.o.t of alcohol, but good balance, incredibly well toasted coffee beans, and really very charming. Very nice finish, a good lift on the finish. 93.

Chateau de Pressac, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

Good quality, lots of understated elegance at first, but actually quite a showy wine once it starts to assert itself. Quiet confidence from Jean Francois Quenin, like it – will need some time to fully reveal itself. 72% Merlot, 13% Cab Franc, 12% Cab Sauvignon, 1% Pressac, 2% Carmanere. 92.

Chateau Quinault, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

Very slick, very well made, full of smooth, rich coffee. New owners Alberet Frere and Bernard Arnault showing their intentions here. This is impressive, but it is ever so slightly a+b=c, not as interesting as it could have been, and the 05 was better for me. 91.

Chateau Jean Faure, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

Tastebuds losing the will to live by this stage of the tasting, but this lovely wine from Olivier Decelle has picked them back up again. This is good, full of flavour, very rich, good extraction, nice solid finish, with a touch of lift. 50% Cabernet Franc, 45% Merlot, 5% Malbec. 92

Chateau Peby Faugeres

Silvio Denz here works a 100% Merlot. Richly coffee and chocolate, very modern, and I imagine will please a number of critics. It's good, but fiercely rich and high in alcohol. Needs to soften. 91.

Chateau La Couronne, Montagne st emilion

100% Merlot, Thomas Thiou (president of the satellites I think, correct me if I'm wrong!). This is full on alcohol, very rich in fruit and tannins, it does manage to have some balance, but your tongue is left with alcohol, so for me it falls short a little. 89-90.

Chateau de Lussac, Lussac st emilion

I really like this. Plenty of extraction and rich fruit (this is a Herve Laviale estate), but this one has elegance also, and a really lovely core of fruit. Great value for money. 91+.

Chatea Patris, St Emilion Grand Cru

The vineyards here touché the southern tip of Angelus. This is great value for money from owner Michel Querre (of Le Moulin in Pomerol). Like this a lot, a bit high on alcohol, but nice fruits and some good tannic backbone. 91+.

Chateau Girolate, Bordeaux

This Despagne family star, from 6 hectares of 100% low yielding Merlot vines, is really gorgeous this year. Very smooth, very classy, rich well worked black fruits. Would I mistake it for a classified growth? Probably not (okay, maybe for Lascombes which I love but is similarly flashy), but unquestionably it is a very good wine, very accomplished, and I know that in 10 years it will be delightful. 94.

White Wines

Girolate blanc

This is 50/50 sauvignon semillon This is very grassy, but at the same time very sweet and round, and lacks some acidity. Nowhere near as successful as the red. 89-90.

Tour de Mirambeau white, Bordeaux Blanc

Much better, also from the Despagne family. This has a lovely freshness to

the glass, and great mix of pineapple, apricot and some fresh green apple. 70% sauvignon blanc, 30% Semillon. 91.

Chateau Haut Bertinerie, Blaye Cotes de Bordeaux

Good freshness, some lovely rich mouthfeel but it stays delicate. 91-92.

Cuvee Madlys, Chateau Sainte-Marie, Entre deux Mers

For me, a little too low in acidity. Has very rich apricot and mangoes, and really very good mouthfeel, Should be very successful, just not with me. 90.

Chateau Sainte Marie, Vielle Vignes

Apricot, lemons, full of richness, again this is not my kind of white wines, not anywhere near enough acidity for my clearly boringly European palate. But I can't deny that it is seductive, and will have fans. 90.

Chateau Reynon, Cotes de Bordeaux

Thank god for Dubourdieu. He manages to get acidity out of even the hottest years. This is lovely, very delicate, great balance and lovely juicy fruit. 88% Sauvignon, 12% Semillon. 92.

POMEROL

Petrus

Now vinified by Olivier Berrouet, who has taken over from his father Jean-Claude, this 100% merlot wine has amazing exuberance in 2009, but it's all very tightly controlled, with pure fruit and softly worked tannins. Incredibly deep, rich nose, and a power that revs up slowly in the mouth. There is an amazing freshness to this, similar to the 1990 with its exuberant finish. Powerful, persistent and truly seductive, with cassis, a sprinkling of vanilla and subtle liquorice flavours. The grapes were picked fairly early to preserve freshness – September 17-18 for the young plants, then October 1 for the heart of Petrus. IPT at around 80 (but as ever, Olivier and Jean-Claude are so sensible, they say the level doesn't matter, it is the type of tannins and polyphenols that count, and how they are expressed). Malolactic fermentation starts naturally after the vinification, no idea of co-inoculation here, and it was finished by the end of November. 98-100.

Vieux Chateau Certan, Pomerol

The 2009 vintage at this well-loved Pomerol estate saw the highest level of merlot since the late 1940s (84 per cent, with the remainder divided equally between cabernet sauvignon cabernet franc; last year, 25 per cent of the grapes were cabernet franc), so it is difficult to call this wine a classic Vieux Chateau Certan. But it has wonderful intensity and mid-palate weight, while maintaining freshness and elegance that owner Alexandre Thienpont seems incapable of not producing. 97-98.

Duo de Conseillante

The second wine of La Conseillante, and a clear link to the first wine (it is taken from the same plots, rather vinified for an earlier-drinking style). Picking was 17-23 Sept for the merlot and 23-28 for the cabernet franc. Final blend is 90% merlot, 10% cabernet franc. First vintage of this second wine was 2007 and it accounts for just 6% of the entire production (up to 15% in 2007 because clearly there were less impressive grapes overall). This is lovely – plenty of fresh, croquant fruit. Gilles Paquet is the consultant, and uses 50% new oak. 92.

Chateau La Conseillante

La Conseillante 2009 is 81% merlot, 19% cabernet franc. The alcohol is a little higher than in 2005 (14.2 compared to 13.8 in 2005). 100% new oak, and you can definitely feel the sweet edge that it gives. Nose is closed tight, but not only is this very young, but also just opened for the day's tasting. This has a lovely power and just beautiful juicy acidity, incredibly mouth-filling, fleshy, well integrated tannins, the thing floats above a bed of tannins. This might be my favourite La Conseillante ever. The black fruits are intense, the structure is perfect, and the length quite amazing. 4,000 cases probably produced this year, about normal (3,500 in 2008). One of my favourite wines tasted. 98.

Fugue de Nenin

The second wine of Chateau Nenin, owned by (at tasted at) the Borie family at Leoville Las Cases. This is very juicy, with gooseberry fruit, very 'croquant' (crunchy), as the French like to say. Maybe a touch too sweet, but pleasurable. 81% merlot, 19% cabernet franc. 88+.

Chateau Nenin

Very obviously from the same family, same gooseberry and redcurrant flavour profile. A classic lesson in moving from second to first wine, with immediate upwards trajectory of depth and structure. The blend this year is 80% merlot, 20% cabernet franc. Very good. 92+.

Moueix tasting (Alcohol levels throughout between 13.8 and 14 throughout the Moueix range).

Chateau Plince

This is big, lots of coffee, lots of extraction, the tannins are fairly chalky at first, then meat up, this is bristling, and very 'Pomerol'. Impressive. 72% Merlot, 23% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. 92-93.

Chateau Lafleur-Gazin

More of a fresh structure to this, prefer it to Plince in fact. Still high alcohol, lots of tannic backbone, lovely black cherry and vanilla, but rises up in the last quarter. Good. 93.

Chateau Lagrave

Silky, fresh, highly tannic and alcoholic but the more raucous elements steal up on you so you barely notice. The tannins do a great job of bringing the fruit into a long well-ordered line, like children on a school trip, for a couple of minutes. Seriously classy wine. 94-95

Chateau Bourgneuf

Burly, big, slightly less fresh than some of the others. Plenty of sexy smoke going on though. 91

Chateau Latour a Pomerol

A much more masculine counterpoint to Lafleur-Petrus, as is classic with this wine. This is a big, meaty wine, very good quality, long life ahead of it, excellent. 93-94

Ch Lafleur Petrus

Vineyard located right next to Petrus, but this one has stayed under the control of the Christian/Eduard Moueix side of the family. Very feminine, lovely soft fruits, very charming (the 20% of cabernet franc brings a lovely delicacy to the nose), but with real power underneath as well, the perfect politician's wife. Gorgeous. 94.

Hosanna

Big, flashy and exuberant fruit, very good structure, really makes an impression. For me there is the slightest touch of bitterness on the finish – perhaps just need the next year to smooth. But overall, this has a sense of drama, and is well controlled. 92+.

Providence

This is another step up on the modern and opulent staircase, the sense of drama is really very evident. Lots of layers of coffee here, some truly flashy fruits but it is held back from overkill by firm tannins and good elegance. I like this, but it's a definite style. 94-95

Chateau Certan de May

Five hectares right opposite Le Pin. Owned by Odette Barreau but distributed (and vinified) by Moueix. Deep, structured, very rich. Delicious. Very cohesive, all elements well in balance, but big, powerful and high in alcohol, up to 14%. 95.

Chateau Trotanoy

What a finish, even if Petrus isn't here!! That is the best here by a long way. Pure fruit, immense structure, wonderfully carried by the tannins and the acidity. Absolutely wonderful wine. 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc with 50% in new oak. 98-99.

JANOEUX

I stopped by this tasting while passing through Pomerol, and it ended up being one of my favourite of the week. The Bdx Sup of course don't really belong here, forgive me...

Chateau La Croix Mouton, Bordeaux Superieur

Lovely sweet fruit. This is really a great wine, such good value, and you would be happy to own it. I have two cases of the 2008 in my wardrobe (bought and paid for, not freebies!) and it is just such a pleasurable experience. 91+

Chateau le Conseiller, Bordeaux Superieur

This again is very fresh, good quality. Very enjoyable. 90.

20 Mille, Bordeaux Superieur

A highly unusual wine, made from vines that are planted at 20,000 vines per hectare (the absolute maximum usually is 10,000 per hectare, and the majority of Bordeaux Superieurs will come in at well under 5,000). This is very dense, with lovely freshness. But made in such tiny quantities that very few people will ever taste it!! 91.

La Croix St Georges, Pomerol

This is a big wine. Again, these well worked but very present tannins. Lovely weight of fruit, and a great length, absolutely delicious in fact, a really big finish, and plenty of savoury fruits. 93-94.

Chateau La Connivence, Pomerol

Stephane Derenoncourt consultant at this new property, that saw its first vintage in 2008. Cropped at 18 or 19 hl/h. Alcohol about 13.5%, because sandy terroir has managed to keep it delicate. Really a very good wine, lovely freshness, great red fruits, one of those brilliant 2009s that mask their power under this unbelievably silky cover. Could pretty much drink this right now, but feel certain that it will develop into something wonderful. Lovely (but £130 a bottle, so it should be). 95.

UGC Pomerol (tasted blind at Ch Balestard La Tonnelle)

Chateau Gazin

The colour takes a little notch up in intensity, although the Saint Emilions in this tasting were by and large very polyphenol-rich also. This is a little closed, but there is enormous power underneath it. Good freshness on the finish, it's a big wine, but it needs time, and it needs to be given space to breathe and open up. Subtly enormous, if that is even possible. 93+.

Chateau Petit Village

This has some rich red fruits that are immediately obvious. The tannins go to work right behind though, shovelling the saliva out of the way as they march towards the roof of your mouth. Good weight, and a nice lightness underneath it all. Quality wine – and lovely coffee aromas behind everything. 75% merlot, 17% cabernet sauvignon, 8% cabernet franc. 70% new oak. Stephane Derenoncourt has been consultant at Petit Village, since 2006. 3,000 cases. 94.

Chateau La Cabanne

This has a long impact. It's quite subtle for such a big wine, with such a large amount of fruit, because it steals up on you slowly, but the layers of flavour build up, and I like its slightly earth undertones enormously. Very good, although it just slightly falls off at the end. 93+.

Chateau La Croix de Gay

Owned by Alain Reynaud, this is big alcohol, lots of coffee bean flavours, again this modern Pomerol style that is very flashy and appealing, but lacks a little subtlety. It's undeniably good though. 93.

Chateau la Pointe

A good, rich nose. And I like the power on this one enormously. There is nothing wrong with high alcohol when it is so nicely underpinned by freshness and a tannic backbone, and this manages to achieve all of that very well. Very smooth, effortlessly elegant, with great depth of fruit. Like it enormously – and tasted also at Chateau Angelus (as Hubert de Bouard is consultant here) where I was equally impressed. It will be hard for sceptics to discount the changes being made at this Pomerol estate for much longer. 94+

Chateau Beauregard

Deep, deep purple colour, almost opaque. Another good one in the final stretch. Rich, elegant and very well extracted fruit, that manages to have power without slamming home. This is blackberry and rich dark cherry, you know the oak is there but it isn't overpowering. Good, if a touch dry on the finish, and the alcohol just pops up a little too much on that last stretch. 92.

Chateau Clinet

Very different. God this is extracted. Very big, plenty of freshness, but this whacks you around the side of the mouth. Bedding in for the long term, without a doubt. 92

(and for the sake of completeness, here are the Cercle de Rive Droite Pomerols in their rightful place!)

Chateau Beau Soleil, Pomerol

Owner Thierry Rustman work 3.5 hectares of vines, and makes this 100% Merlot. It's got very ripe fruit (the sunshine in the name clearly is referring to a microclimate), but in fact is a bit flat overall, needs more of a lift on the finish to avoid the feeling of over-extraction. Shame. 89.

Chateau Bellegrave, Pomerol

This has more body, and more lift on the finish. Incredibly dense fruit, black cherries, damsons, good grip and a lovely minty lift of the finish. Gorgeous effort from owner Jean-Marie Bouldy. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 93-94.

Chateau Bonalque, Pomerol

This is good, nice weight of fruit, it builds nicely and is quite understated, unlike some years where this is a very flamboyant wine. But this is very good, with great potential. Owned by Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Bourotte, with 95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc. 92+.

Chateau le Bon Pasteur, Pomerol

So ripe as to be very hot, high in alcohol and lacking balance. This is not a good calling card for Rolland this year, and I preferred to 2008 at this estate. Yes there is fruit there, and there is certainly extraction and power, but where is the elegance? 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 89.

Chateau Bourgneuf Vayron, Pomerol

Lovely. Lots of layers, plenty of complexity, some gently toasted almonds and coffee beans. Slightly too sweet on the finish for me, I prefer a bit of a minty lift, but this is good stuff. 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. 91.

Chateau La Clemence, Pomerol

I love the nose, there is a definite tang of juicy fruit and cherry blossom. A touch over-worked on the palate though, with some over-intrusive oak that needs to settle down over the next year. Good, but no cigar. 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc. 90-91.

Chateau Clos de Clocher, Pomerol

Another Pomerol estate from Pierre and Jean Baptiste Bourotte. This is fleshy and voluptuous, more of a style that I find in Bonalgue normally. But really very successful. Delicately floral nose from the cabernet franc, no harsh tannins, good length, very seductive. 70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc. 93.

Chateau La Croix, Pomerol

Redcurrant and gooseberry on the nose, a flavour that I have found on a number of good Pomerols this year. Love that flavour. This is gorgeous. A Janoueix wine – increasingly a name to look out for on the Right Bank, at all price levels. 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon – this gives it more gravitas, but a little less flirtatious fun. Only drawback for me is that this is evidently high in alcohol. 93-94.

Clos de l’Eglise, Pomerol

Chewy, concentrated tannins. This has lovely backbone, very good freshness, and a lot of power. Good coffee beans and dark, bitter chocolate. This is awesomely good, easily one of the best in the tasting. Owned by Sylviane Garcin-Cathiard and Helene Garcin-Leveuque (owners also of Haut Bergey in Pessac Leognan, with Alain Raynaud as consultant here). 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 95+.

Domaine de l’Eglise, Pomerol

Again very good, nice coffee aromas, but not the punch of the Clos L’Eglise. Owned by Philippe Casteja, this has 95% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Franc. 92.

Chateau Fayat, Pomerol

Clement Fayat, owner of La Dominique in Saint Emilion also. That is extracted to within an inch of its life. It does finally soften out with the fruit, but the extraction is distracting. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Franc. 91.

Chateau Feytit Clinet, Pomerol

Owned by Jeremy Chasseuil. Not a well known Pomerol wine, but charming, and I really like it. Good coffee, nice freshness, interesting complexity. 91.

Chateau La Fleur de Gay, Pomerol

Lovely nose, toasted oak, roasted coffee beans, percolating coffee, yum. Really nice, very exciting wine, plenty of balance, it head towards over alcohol, but pulls itself back. A very big wine, but full of swagger. 100% Merlot from Alain Reynaud and his wife Chantal Lebreton. 94-95.

Chateau Mazeyres, Pomerol

A reliable, unflashy wine from Alain Moueix. It’s not quite as enjoyable as I’d hoped from this estate – there is good weight of fruit, nice freshness, but

doesn't quite deliver the sexiness that the best Pomerols seem to have this year. 91.

Chateau Montviel, Pomerol

Big, concentrated, very good wine from Catherine Pere Verge and consultant Michel Rolland. These are wines that you have to pay attention to. I like this, but don't love it - all the component parts to be a solid performer is here, but it isn't yet taking off. However, I just tasted a number of older vintages of Montviel, and it certainly seems to reach greatness more often than not, so I am definitely prepared to give it time. 80% Merlot, 20% Cab Franc. 91.

Chateau le Moulin, Pomerol

Good, sweet oak, lots of plump fruits, very modern in style, very crowd pleasing, could have a little more elegance and a little more *terroir*. But still, this is flashy and exuberant and very good quality. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc from owner Michel Querre. Very nice finish, it sits in the mouth for a while, and builds to a rousing finish. Good. 93.

Chateau Rouget, Pomerol

Owned by Jean Pierre Labrueyere and his son Edouard, a Burgundy family who have vineyards both in Burgundy and Bordeaux (and follow a Burgundian philosophy to a large extent, with everything very small scale, natural and precise – often the malo hasn't even finished by the primeurs, although this year it seems to have done). The grapes mix is 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc. Good crisp fruit, it still needs some time to soften up, but this is really very successful. Bright purple fruits, very tight, very held together, enormously pleasurable, and far from being ready to approach. 94.

Chateau Taillefer, Pomerol

Owned by Catherine Moueix. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. Smoky oak, slightly sweet blackcurrant fruits. This is less cohesive for me than some of the samples of display. It's good, but there is stiff competition. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 90.

Chateau Vieux Mallet, Pomerol

90% Merlot, 10% Cab Franc from Herve Laviale of Franc Mayne in Saint Emilion, and right now investing seriously in this estate. It's a bit over-oaked (but no surprise there, this is often a signature of this family of wines), and a touch over-pedalled on the extraction. But there is good stuff underneath, enough plump fruits, to carry it through, and an excellent lift on the finish. 91+.

Chateau Vray Croix de Gay, Pomerol

75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. This is a lovely from the Goldschmidt family (and incidentally one of the wines that will be affected by the Pomerol ruling

that says all estates must vinify in the appellation by 2018). There is a l.o.t of alcohol, but good balance, incredibly well toasted coffee beans, and really very charming. Very nice finish, a good lift on the finish. 93.

La Croix Taillefer, Pomerol

This is big, and I assume high alcohol. The tannins are like King Kong over Fae-Ray, protecting everything beneath. Huge structure, very good quality in fact and all softens to a lovely finish. Very good. 95% merlot, 5% cab franc. Organic. 92-93.

Bonnes Rives – Ialande de Pomerol

Certified organic since 2005. Lovely, very fresh fruit. 100% merlot . 89-90.

Romulus – Pomerol

This is rich, full and again very big structure, big tannins. I still like La Croix Taillefer the most of these three (all from the same winemaker). Still, this is a big wine, but in great balance, with very good length and a soft, fruity finish. Good. 100% merlot. Organic. 91.

ST EMILION

Overview

As ever, Saint Emilion was up and down, the least consistent of the 2009s appellations (but much has been written about this, and you don't need me to add to it!). The big problem was alcohol, and how to control it – those who went too far really stood out.

I started with Chateau Ausone the week before the en primeurs, which gave a good benchmark of course for what could be achieved (only slightly spoiled by the new paint smell in the tasting room).

Chateau de Fonbel, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

This has those wonderful gooseberry and elderflower notes on the nose that I found in some of the Pomerols also. Lovely fresh flavours, crisp fruit and well balanced. 65% merlot, 25% cab sauvignon, 7% petit verdot, 3% carmanere (you'll increasingly find this grape variety appearing in tiny quantities on Right Bank labels). 30% new oak. Average age of vines 20 years. Fermentation in stainless steel. 100,000 bottles. 91.

Chateau Simard, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

65% Merlot, 35% cabernet franc. Slightly richer, less immediately exuberant than the Fonbel. Rich, well textured smoothed-out tannins, that are nevertheless insistent in the mouth. Feel this will go for the long term, and usually good value. The vines extend over the plain at the bottom of the village. 40ha in total. Lovely finish. 91+.

Chateau Haut Simard, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

These are the best plots of Simard, vinified in the same chai but as a separate estate, and bottled separately. This comes from 5ha of 70% merlot, 30% cabernet franc vines opposite Canon la Gaffeliere. Aged in 50% new oak after stainless steel vinification, this is a big hitter and will age very well. Needs time, the tannin are very knitted together at the moment. 26,000 bottles. 92.

Chateau Moulin St Georges, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. I always love this wine; it's so well made, such lovely deep fruit and almost always well priced. Stainless steel vinification, then 18 months in 100% new barrels. Average age of vines 26 years. The tannins levels are high, and this has perhaps less immediate pleasure than some years of this estate, but it really will be worth the wait. 94.

La Chapelle d'Ausone, Saint Emilion

70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc. After the recent plantings at Ausone, this is the second year that the new young vines have gone into the second wine. It has tingling, delicate tannins that are so well worked, just so utterly gorgeous. There are rich raw materials on show here, plenty of potential for reaching just unbelievable heights for a second wine. 6,000 bottles made. 94+

Chateau Ausone, Saint Emilion Premier Cru Classe A.

Rich colour, pure fruit nose, the precision is already clear, and it fully takes hold on you on the palate. This has it all - first rich plum, then deeply knitted tannins, then a powerful reach upwards on the finish, this really does grip hold of you, but with the gentlest of touches. 55% cabernet franc, 45% merlot. The wine spends time in large-size wooden vats for winemaking, then will spend 20 months in 100% new oak. Seriously good, gourmet fare. 16,000 bottles. 98-100.

and two others from the team at Ausone...

Val de Roc (Bordeaux Superieur)

Just northeast of Fronsac, this has elderflower and some good juicy fruits. A pleasant wine with good fruit, that manages to avoid the tannins being overworked or over-extracted. 89.

Clos des Baies, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

Look out for this wine, with a production of just 1,500 bottles (single plot, just 30 acres of 100% Merlot vines), from Philippe Baillarguet, the winemaker/cellar master of Ausone. It's located at the same level of Canon-la-Gaffeliere, at the foot of the Pavie slopes, and this is Baillarguet's third vintage. This is clearly precise winemaking, with a good density of the tannins, but lovely fruit that is brought to the fore by being vinified in stainless steel, then moved into barrels. 91-92

Chateau Angelus, Saint Emilion (Premier Grand Cru Classé B)

This puts its 50% merlot, 3% cabernet sauvignon and very high 47% cabernet franc to brilliant effect. It's very powerful, with rich but silky tannins and a grip of fragrant redcurrant and gentle tobacco. About 10% of the harvest was manually destalked this year, which further softened tannins. Alcohol at 14.5 (average, a few of the early merlots up to 15.5%!), but the quality of the year kept the freshness, and they were careful with the vinification to not extract too much. This is very smooth, very accomplished. 96-98

La Confession, St Emilion Grand Cru

A Janoueix wine. This is lovely. Great freshness on the finish, but an intensity of fruit that keeps jogging alongside the structure all the way through. There are some big tannins, does need some wading through, but very enjoyable, and things soften out at the finish. 93.

Ch Puy-Blanquet, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

This chateau has been an exclusivity with Moueix for almost 40 years, just past the village of St Christophe des Bardes in St Emilion, where vinification is also done by the Moueix team. North facing vineyard, lovely freshness to the fruit, very elegant. It's a good wine – and often offers good value. 90.

Chateau La Serre, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

La Serre is distributed by Ets JP Moueix, but owned by the d'Arfeuille family (previous owners of La Pointe in Pomerol). I always love this wine. Perhaps I liked the 2008 a little more, but it may have been the comparison with other far less good wines that made the difference. Good plump fruit, deep black cherries and a good freshness. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 94.

Chateau Magdeleine, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Very gourmet, again quite flashy in the new style of Magdeleine since Berrouet retired, but this has more elegance and freshness than last year (surprising I know, but that's how it feels to me), and it seems to have settled in to the whole experience very well, so the glamorous fruits feel more Ava Gardener than Marilyn Monroe (to shamelessly borrow a Parker quote on an entirely different wine). 94-95.

Chateau Belair-Monange, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Dense, and ever so slightly flat fruit. Clearly good substance, and big tannins, but seems strangely flat. Need to retaste...

PERSE WINES

These are wines which I didn't even begin to understand until I had tasted older vintages, and only then did they start to really make sense. I fully understand the division that they cause, because no-one can taste them without forming a strong opinion on them one way or the other - definitely not wines to ignore. But I am very happy that there are winemakers like Perse in Bordeaux, who are prepared to try new techniques, and not bow down to public opinion.

Clos les Lunelles, Castillon Cotes de Bordeaux

60% new oak barrels, 40% one year old. 80% merlot, 10% cab franc, 10% cab sauvignon. This is a big wine. I'm not sure for me that this is 100% successful. It is rich, keep, very tannic, very extracted. Does the *terroir* live up to the work that is performed on it? The winemaker, Laurent Lusseau, is the same across all of them, and was at Monbusquet before Perse bought it, then kept working along with all of them. Harvested 13-14 Oct (for me, this was about a week over what was needed). 88-89.

Chateau de Lusseau, Saint Emilion

This is the personal property of the winemaker of Chateau Pavie (Laurent Lusseau). It still has the extraction of Clos des Lunelles, but is lighter on its feet, has better balance and overall some very attractive complexity. Vinified in stainless steel, then aged in oak as with all these wines (except for Pavie and Pavie-Decesse which are both vinified in oak barrels). 90.

Chateau Pavie Decesse, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

That is absolutely gorgeous. 28 hl/h, so well balanced. Incredibly fresh but very deep fruits, from a blend of 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. One of the best Perse wines that I have tasted an en primeur stage – there is Fantastic depth of flavour, but a true lightness of touch, which is suprising considering harvesting didn't even begin until 12th October. That might explain the 14.5% alcohol, but overall it is well balanced. 97-98.

Chateau Monbusquet, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Harvesting 1-10 Oct. 60% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Very extracted, the tannins have a death grip on you, and just don't let go. Some good rich red fruits, lots of depth, but as ever with Monbusquet, I find it so tough as to be impenetrable, and certainly takes an entirely different approach to many 2009. 91.

Chateau Bellevue Mondotte, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Again, a tiny estate of 2 hectares. Delicious, rich ripe fruit, an unmistakably Perse touch. Vinified in large wooden vats, then fermented in barrels, and aged also in 100% new oak. The new sorting machines made a difference, added the extra touch of finesse and finish to the wines. Alcohol is at 14.3, but again there is the lovely balance that was found in Pavie-Decesse. 94.

Chateau Pavie, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe B

Wonderfully rich aromas. 14.5% alcohol, yield 28 hl/h, blend 70% merlot, 20% cabernet franc, 10% cabernet sauvignon. It is very tight, very high in tannins and alcohol, and you can't go anywhere near it for fifteen years minimum. It's like sucking on a piece of granite. But the top left banks are often applauded for this and why shouldn't a particularly good right bank be similarly? Perse is very clear in his belief that Pavie is the best *terroir* in Saint Emilion, and it is certainly true that tasting a 10 year old Pavie is a rather wonderful experience. Part of me thinks that he has missed the point of the best 2009s, but the other part says just bury this wine, don't think about it until at least 2025... and then have a really fun night making sense of it. 95.

Chateau Le Tour de Pin, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

This is quite tight and extracted, and seems to be settling in to the new regime of vinification under the Cheval Blanc umbrella. Some rich tannins, and good bristling fruits. 90

Le Petit Cheval, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

Another very good Petit Cheval, continuing the excellent performance with the 2008. This is smooth, dense, rich, but also very pretty and even a touch of elegance on the finish. A good lift on the finish, this has great potential. A little closed, but then it is cold (and very rainy!) outside. We need the Top Gear (W) marker for tasted when Wet. 92-93.

Chateau Cheval Blanc, Saint Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classe A

This is a tightly wound, big and dense Cheval Blanc, tightly controlled extraction, wet stones, very polished tannins. It's not especially exuberant in the way that Cheval Blanc can be, but is supremely confident, and with enormous reach and length. Builds slowly in the mouth, as many of the best 2009s have done, and just keeps on going. A very good wine. 97-98.

Chateau Figeac, Saint Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classe B

1/3 merlot (22 sept-28 sept), 1/3 cabernet franc and 1/3 cab sauvignon (5-19 oct for the both cabernets). 35 hl/h normally, in 2009 went up to 40 hl/h (because they were not affected by the hail). It has plenty of good grip and defined tannins, but lacks a little on the ample fruit. It's reserved and

elegant, but not the best I have ever tasted from this estate. The 2005 is for me a better balance. 100% new oak. Gilles Pauquet is the consultant winemaker here. 94.

Chateau Bellefont Belcier, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

I like this, quite frisky compared to many in this vintage, very charming red fruit with a nice shot of espresso coming in on the finish, and good acidity. Very attractive. 93.

Chateau Chauvin, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Good depth of fruit, nice intensity, slightly pinched, not particularly expansive, but still a very good wine. 92.

Clos St Martin

Gooseberry, but really pinched tannins, not enough length, doesn't work for me. 88.

Chateau Guadet, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

This is better than the 2008. It does have some fresh fruit, and the overall acidity level is high, but lacks complexity of flavours. Still, a definite improvement, a good sign that Stephane Derenoncourt is doing a good job as consultant on this property. 92.

Chateau Grand Corbin Despagne, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Francois Despagne continues to get the best out of his grapes at this organic (heading towards biodynamic) estate. Great purity of fruit, really lovely tangy blackcurrant and redcurrant. Good smoky coffee underneath also, and all pinned together by a lovely freshness. Delicious. 95.

Chateau La Tour Figeac, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Precise, nicely placed fruit. It doesn't blow you away in this vintage, but it is good, smoky mocha, soft red fruits, good balance of freshness and tannins, nothing is wrong with this. Just lacks a wow factor. 93.

Chateau Yon Figeac, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Tight, gooseberry and redcurrant flavours again (this has 20% Cabernet Franc, to 80% Merlot). But doesn't have a really big finish, and although I think it's charming, it's not one of the most impressive here. 91-92.

Chateau Le Prieure, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

It's flashy and exuberant. This does at least feel like an expensive wine, and in price terms it offers better value than many other of the classified Saint Emilions. But a little overworked in my opinion, in comparison to the excellent Pomerols from the owners this year. However, this does deliver fleshy red

fruits, and an enjoyable silky texture - the full production. 92.

Chateau Larcis Ducasse, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Very 'elegant', tastes like all the fruit has been through the juicer, and this is what was left behind. There are gentle coffee aromas, and some very nice balance and soft ripe flavours. But strangely lacking a focus. I'm not sure about this, in the context of the vintage. Either ballsily elegant or just a little strange. 89

Chateau Laroque, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Over-extracted, very tough on the finish. But still, there is fruit underneath, and reasonable quality for what is one of the cheapest classified wines. 90.

Chateau Fonroque, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Alain Moueix's biodynamic estate. Good depth of fruit, and a lovely coffee and smoky toast finish. Really nice, I like this a lot, one of the best examples of this chateau that I have tasted en primeur. 94-95.

Chateau Fonplegade, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

This is very deep in colour. Step forward Michel Rolland... how did I guess!! There is so much extraction here. Although also some very nice plump fruit in fact, and a good softness on the finish. He has somehow pulled this off!! 91.

Chateau La Fleur Cardinale, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Owned by the Decoster's family, formerly of Limoges pottery company Haviland, since 2001. Smooth, silky, very soft black fruits, tastes quite well worked (there is 100% new oak), but this has real elegance and a lovely fresh finish. Really good. 93.

Chateau Trottevielle, Premier Grand Cru Classe B

This has a fairly hot attack, but it quickly corrects itself, and is full of utterly lovely redcurrant flavours, and a touch of liquorice root and slippery wet stones. Lovely. Almost 50/50 Merlot and Cabernet Franc, owned by wine merchants Borie-Manoux. 93

Clos Fourtet, Premier Grand Cru Classe B

Some lovely blue cheese on the nose, and a good punch of pure fruit that has been well worked and is very slick. The foot is definitely on the extraction pedal, but a nice burst of freshness on the very last furlong keeps things interesting. A good wine, well made and definitely with ambition for a long life. This is a classic St Emilion also, with good, intense red fruits. Alcohol is high though, could do with a little less heat on the finish. 93-94.

Ch Beausejour-Becot, Premier Grand Cru Classe B

Again this lovely blue cheese-soft brie nose, and I like the greater depth of fruit that is apparent on this one, with the blue cheese keeping things savoury rather than too sweet. Nice plump tannins, well integrated, very nice lift on the finish. Good. 94-95

Château Beauséjour Duffau-Lagarosse

I like this. There is a good backbone of freshness that floats the whole wine upon it. Doesn't really have enormous impact or definition, but at the same time this is elegant, unmistakably Right Bank, with lovely minerality of Saint Emilion. Very different from many of the wines on display here. 94.

Chateau Canon, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe B

Good nose. If I had to make a choice, I might say I preferred the wonderful 2008 at this property, but it's a close run thing. This is owned by the Wertheimer brothers of Rauzan Segla, and John Kolasa is again director – you can feel the same drive towards pure and precisely placed fruit. Grapes planted at the estate (not sure of the exact blend of this year) are 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 93.

Chateau Troplong Mondot, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Christine Valette proves once again that she is not afraid of taking a chance. This is big, brash, sumptuous, in your face, all the things that I often don't like in a wine – but there is such a pleasurable side to this, and it has freshness that keeps it just on the right side of over-the-top. Brambly black fruits, intense tannins and a sweet fruit finish. A great wine, despite a – wait for it – 15.5% ABV. 95.

Chateau La Gaffeliere, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

I really like this – tasted twice, blind at GCC and at UGC. Very good, rich fruits, well defined, plenty of grip, plenty of bite. This has a real depth, it reaches right in and grabs you. Tannins ever so slightly drying on the finish, but there is a lovely minty freshness, and a very powerful grip to the structure. A big, ambitious wine that just about pulls it off, thanks in no small part to its great length and hint of sweet black cherry finish. Oak very evident at this stage though. 93-94.

Chateau Pavie Maquin, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

A touch too high in alcohol on this showing. Clearly a monstrous beast, very very concentrated, pure rich black fruits, turbo charged, long life ahead of it. Alcohol is high, extraction is full, saliva exits stage-left, but it's an experience. But boy it is going to need time, and doesn't display the steely side that (for example) Pavie has to take it all the way through in my opinion. But this is clearly a blockbuster. 94.

Chateau Tetre Daugay, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Owned by the Malet Roquefort family. This sample is just starting to be over-tired (barrel samples at this stage don't last for much more than four days), but can still feel the lovely rich fruits and soft tannins. Clearly a good wine, look forward to retasting. 91

Chateau Larmande, St Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Some nice menthol, but this is slightly pinched and too tight. The tannins are very present, and this will of course soften up over the next (ten) years, but the tannins are slightly puckering. Having said that, I very much like how it finishes, so there is definite potential. 90

Chateau Larcis Ducasse, St Emilion Grand Cru

Here again there is a touch of over-extraction, and frankly a touch of over-hot alcohol. The fruit is there, good intensity of flavours, but it has been thrown out of whack by the alcohol. 90

Chateau La Tour Figeac, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Good level of rich purple lovely polyphenol extraction without being too much. The nose has more redcurrant aromas from the 40% of cabernet franc. The palate is more reserved, it doesn't have the depth of fruit, although it does have some subtle charm, and is very gentle. Feels like it wants to say more, but hasn't quite got there yet. 92.

Ch Cap de Mourlin, Saint Emilion Grand Cu Classe

This is a more obviously seductive wine. Very polished, lots of new oak and some rich black fruit that has been coaxed fully out of its skin. It's a little international in style, but that doesn't detract from its clear success, and I'd be happy to drink this. Lovely silky texture, and some good freshness. 93+.

Chateau Grand Mayne, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

A little subdued, but another successful wine for me. It doesn't offer immediate seduction, but a balanced amount of acidity, and very fine, well integrated tannins. The finish is a little dry, so perhaps the fruit lacks a big of punch, but charming. 91.

Ch Franc Mayne, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Some good bakery aromas in here, lovely nose. On the palate, the fruit takes a moment to kick in, and there is a definite pause while the wine gathers some weight. The acidity is quite puckering at first, but then the fruit and the tannins come in to catch it, and the whole thing integrates quite nicely. I think this one is going to age very well and has plenty of time to knit down before being put in bottle. Great potential. 93.

Chateau Balestard la Tonnelle, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Deep brambly purple in colour. Seriously big on the palate, this has flashy, exuberant fruit, and the tannins suck all the moisture right out of your mouth, like a Dyson vacuum. An ambitious wine, and a very successful one – some acidity comes back in at the end, and the saliva makes a welcome return, preparing your palate for another sip. Then almost imperceptibly, rich blackcurrant fruits are there waiting at the end. A wine that you have to think about, frankly, and enjoyable for it. 94-95.

Chateau Berliquet, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Oh, I like this one a lot. This has a gorgeous amount of fruit, beautifully succulent, whole blackberry with a touch of baker's yeast – a wholewheat muffin with melted blackberries, I'm thinking Magnolia Bakery on Bleaker! Lovely acidity, great tannic structure, the whole thing floats along but delivers a killer punch. Gorgeous – got to be the best I have ever tasted from this chateau. 95.

Chateau Dessault, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Some definite charm here. There is a good fruit mid-palate, some well formed (slightly chalky) tannins, and a good length. Here are those slightly brambly, undergrowth flavours, this feels almost rustic, in a charming way that tells you it is not overworked, but has a real sense of place and terroir. It's good. 93.

Ch Canon La Gaffeliere, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

A slick affair. A good attack, nice fruit burst, but strangely lacking in mid-palate. It doesn't have the layers of fruit that build up in some of the best of these, and the finish is a touch dry. 90+

Chateau La Dominique, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

This one is very hot, for me just too out of balance with the alcohol. It is putting me off going any further to be honest. There are black fruits and of course a wall of tannin that tries to balance things out, but it falls far short of any elegance. 89.

Chateau Beausejour Becot, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Incredibly dense colour, lots of smooth coffee and vanilla on the nose, and rich blackberry fruits. Smells very suave. This is good in fact, very accomplished, very professional. High alcohol, but kept in balance by the tannins and acidity to a very good level. Touch hot on the finish, but otherwise this is a cohesive wine. 94.

Chateau La Couspaude, Saint Emilion Grand Cru Classe

Never difficult to identify blind, because there are some clear Michel Rolland touches - not unenjoyable, just buyer beware. Plenty of mocha, butterscotch

and chocolate here, but I feel there is some over-extraction that keeps it from being great, and although there is some lovely weight, it needs more freshness. A modern style, quite international. 91-92.

Jonathan Maltus tasting...

As ever, this was an enjoyable tasting. For the first time this year, Maltus will be putting a proportion of his wines through merchants on the Place de Bordeaux. He explained that they have always sold on an exclusivity basis, 'but if someone doesn't take their exclusivity, it becomes very difficult' - and as many Maltus wines are sold in the US, it is easy to imagine that this has become an issue.

Chateau Pezat, AOC Bordeaux

85% merlot, 15% cab franc – a lot from the low-lying terroir near to the river Dordogne. There is some crisp purple fruit and good soft tannins. Ever so slightly pinched on the end (picking was Oct 1-7 for merlot, Oct 16 for cab franc, was that a touch too late?), but overall there is lovely freshness and this is a charming wine. 89.

Chateau Teyssier, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

This is denser, richer and more meaty. They have improved the grapes for this wine by including some good plots from near Chateau Monbusquet, but the aim is to make a wine that is approachable, and drinkable within a year of purchase (although this year I would say it may take a little longer to fully soften up). 85% merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. 15,000 cases. 90-91.

Chateau La Forge, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

90% Merlot - the highest amount of Merlot that they do in any of the wines, as Maltus is definitely a believer in Cabernet Franc. This comes from a dispersed five hectares around St emilion – partly by Grand Pontet (clay limestone), partly by Le Dome (sand), and partly by Monbusquet (gravel). Silky fruits. Vinification temp reached maximum of 28 (around 2 degrees lower than in 2008), with less time on skins at the end. Beautiful length, the tannins are quite insistent, but smoothed out. 92.

Le Carre, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

Small 1 hectare plot, 350 cases. 80% Merlot/20% Cabernet Franc. Cold soaks up to nine days to get the colour and fruit without harsh tannins. The new installations at Maltus can get the temperature down from 30 degrees down to 4 in less than 10 minutes. Thick clay over soft limestone. Plump rich, feminine, 'American'. 94.

Les Asturies, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

As with Le Carre, this is a small 1 hectare plot, 350 cases. 80% Merlot/20%

Cab Franc, vinified by same team, in same way, so the difference is terroir. Slightly richer, more textured tannins in this one. This is the more masculine version of Le Carre. Damson richness comes through clearly, but it is more mineral, tighter, more precise than its brother. More 'European' in style. 95.

Vieux Chateau Mazerat, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

4 hectare plot. 3 hectares on the right of Angelus, one hectare on the left, each touching Angelus. This has such tingling tannins, incredibly well integrated. A stunning wine, this has wonderful length, gathering strength as it goes but without ever tipping over into over-extraction. Delicate finish. This has unbelievable balance. All alcohol levels around 14-14.5 for the reds this year. Blend here of 40% cabernet franc, 60% merlot. The extra parcel of merlot over sand and crasse de fer gives a gentle rendition of the Merlot grape that softens the whole wine. Beautiful texture. 97-98.

Le Dome, Saint Emilion Grand Cru

80% cabernet franc, 20% merlot. The nose is pretty closed on this one, a hint of just how brooding this is. Big, big wine. It has been described as 'lunch', with reason! The tannins are very rich, textured, very present. It's a wonderful wine, but this is a wine for the boys. A wine for the long-haul, with full-on glass staining purple, and one that needs to be opened and breathed for a good while before drinking (I'm sure that will remain true for most of its long life). For my own personal taste, I would go with the Vieux Chateaux Mazerat. 95

Clos Nardian

40% Semillon, 40% Sauvignon, 20% Muscadelle. This has a rich and round mouthfeel – again, as many of the whites in 2009 - with juicy finish. Vinification temperature for the white was kept cool at around 20-22 (and entirely vinified in barrel), with skin contact for the first night. This was really the first 'cult' Right Bank white of Bordeaux, and with just 350 cases, it disappears pretty fast. Alcohol 13.7%. Accomplished and successful, if you like a richer style of white. 90

SAUTERNES

Overview

My take on the 2009 Sauternes will be slightly different from the majority view. I completely agree with the assessment that these wines are rich, unctuous and luscious. But I would be slightly more hesitant to unreservedly applaud them for that. For me, the 2007 and easily the 2001 remain better wines, in that they offer more acidity, more delicacy and more 'drinkability'. What 2009 undoubtedly gives is the perfect Sauternes experience for Sauternes-lovers. These are not Sauternes for beginner drinkers, these are full and rich and will not convince many younger consumers that this is the year to rediscover the joy of sweet wines. But there are undoubtedly some wonderful wines among them... and Yquem is possibly the best I have ever tasted.

Chateau d'Yquem

The nose is piercingly direct, with an incredibly svelte mouthfeel of orange, lime and lemon blossom. There is enormous richness to it and great length, but the freshness really cuts through it all and seems to further build in the mouth after the liquid has gone. This is close to a perfect Yquem, definitely on a par with the 2007, and maybe with the 2001 - just with an extra kick of exuberance. As usual, a vast majority of semillon, with a tiny touch of sauvignon blanc. 97-100. There was very little point putting the spittoons out in this room. Five passes through the vineyard this year, as usual a vast majority of Semillon, tiny touch of sauvignon blanc. 97-100.

(Also tasted a 1989 Yquem, rich apricot colour, unbelievably dark at 21 years old. This requires some thought – it is very complex, very difficult to separate the old from the young on the palate – there are apricots and fresh mangoes against treacly rich marmalade and the beginnings of black truffles. What unbelievable power and length. All bodes rather well for the 2009!)

UGC

Chateau d'Arche

This has immensely rich fruits. And very nice grip of acidity – a good start, although in fact the finish is a touch sweet rather than sour. Lovely length, with exotic fruits, maple syrup and marmalade flavours. Consultant Henri Boyer. 91.

Chateau Bastor-Lamontagne

A slightly deeper golden colour. Lovely nose that is very subdued, but with biting power underneath. Again, it is the sweet, syrupy flavours that dominate. I would like more tang to the wine, but there is a good beat of acidity underneath. Can see there is enormous quality here, and long life. 91.

Chateau Broustet

Again this rich golden colour. The mid palate is less plumped out here; this is subtle, you have to sit with it to get the full impact, but I like the lemon-lime finish, they have gone for the lift. 70% Sémillon, 25% Sauvignon and 5% Muscadelle, clearly a more modern style Sauternes from owner Guillaume Fourcade. 92. *(I also tried the dry white from this estate, and can thoroughly recommend it, crisp and zingy but with plenty of complexity).*

Chateau Caillou

Some greener hints in this colour, against the golden yellow. I like the balance on this. Very rich, sweet honey with citrus peel and lime blossom, and here is the good sour finish. 92-93.

Chateau Doisy-Daene

There is plenty of apricot fruit in this Denis Dubourdieu owned estate, but for me I didn't enjoy it as much as the 2007 from here, and felt the overt sweetness meant it would get lost against most desserts. Still, with a good salty appetiser, it would come into its own. 90.

Chateau Doisy-Vedrines

Owned by Olivier Casteja, I really like the nose on this, some really good lime blossom. This is a very nice balance of sweet and sour, some delicious fat fruit, but not too heavy. An elegance on the finish, and real charm for me. 93-94.

Chateau Filhot

Very different flavour profile on the nose. More crab apple than exotic fruits. I actually like this, although there is a shot of pure sweet fruit that is almost overpowering on the attack. It is supported by a blast of fresh air afterwards that saves things from heading down to syrup, and is in fact very accomplished. 92+.

Chateau Lamothe

The rich mouthfeel of all of these is apparent simply from looking at the glass. This one is a little too sweet for me, there needs to be a far more bracing shot of acidity to really pump things up. This is soft, smooth, very seductive, but it's a little soporific. 90.

Chateau Lamote-Guignard

I like the nose on this one. A lovely fresh shot of passion fruit pips and that lovely slightly sharp hit of papaya. The residual sugar in all of these must be enormous, but here there is a lovely structure and a really attractive seam of acidity that keeps things lively. 90% Semillon, 5% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Muscadelle. Very good. 93-94.

Chateau de Malle

This is being tasted at a slightly colder temperature than the rest, which gives it an unfair advantage in the freshness stakes. Good lime and a twist of lemon that gives a real interest to the palate. Dripping in mango underneath, and the sticky sweetness is clear. 91.

Chateau de Myrat

Quite an overpoweringly open nose compared to many of the others here. This is more like a truly great Sauternes, with the lift and acidity that you want underneath a savoury-sweet mid palate, with not only sweet fruits but some savoury mushrooms and truffles. Excellent. Owned by Jacques de Pontac, the blend is 88% Sémillon, 8% Sauvignon Blanc and 4% Muscadelle 94+.

Chateau Nairac

Plenty of sweetness and exotic fruits, but without the belt-tightening fresh backbone. 90% Sémillon, 6% Sauvignon Blanc and 4% Muscadelle, from the Heeter-Tari family. 90.

Chateau Romer du Hayot

Some good structure evident, it's definitely not a wallflower, and has good power and a rich mouthfeel, but it needs the focus that would come from a bigger burst of acidity. 89-90.

Chateau Suau

Same issue for me. These are good wines, they must have high residual sugar, high alcohol, plenty going for them, lots of rich flavours and complexity – here you have good lychees, good mangoes and a very nice aromatic palate. But without the bite of acidity, it doesn't deliver excitement. 91.

Chateau de Fargues

More promising on the nose again, I like this one a lot. It has excellent well defined fruits, and is very clear in where it is going, which has been missing in some. Lovely finish, great uplift, very good. 80% Semillon, 20% Sauvignon Blanc from the Lur Saluces family. 95.

Chateau Coutet

Another goodie, giving me a renewed sense of optimism for the 09 Sauternes. It is heavy and rich, these are really spread them-on-toast wines. But this has a very nice structure, and again you can pick out the individual strands, and see them build into something cohesive. 75% Semillon, 23% Sauvignon, 2% Muscadelle. 92+.

Chateau Guiraud

Jointly owned by the Peugeot family, winemaker Xavier Planty and Stephan von Neipperg from Canon La Gaffelière. Good weight of fruit, with lashings of apricot, mixed with an attractive lime edge. The high levels of Sauvignon manage every year to keep this wine in exactly the right balance of succulent and edgy. 93.

Clos Haut Peyraguey

Very rich colour, a deep golden hue. A good fruit burst, this does have nice tingly finish of acidity, which has been lacking in many. The sweetness is the most overpowering impression, but it is carried by little tiny lime leaves that keep things fresh and light. Good. 92.

Chateau Lafaurie-Peyraguey

Even deeper, richer and more stately in colour. I like the complexity of the palate here, this definitely has a very rich array of flavours, and they are managing to pin-point each one. And there is a good lift, if not quite as high as I'd like. But all in all, a successful, smooth wine. 91.

Chateau La Tour Blanche

Lacks definition, from what is usually a very successful estate - all the rich stone fruit flavours are here, and the luscious mouthfeel, but this is all about sweetness, and needs about three more lemons to twist things up. 89+

Chateau Rabaud-Promis

A lovely soft, floating wine that absolutely caresses you, very nice texture, and not too intrusive with the sweetness, as some have been. Like this a lot, a very cohesive experience, and one that would be adaptable with different foods. I tasted it again at the end, because wanted one with a lift to finish on, and it delivered. 80% Sémillon, 18% Sauvignon Blanc and 2% Muscadelle, from owner Philippe Dejean. 93.

Chateau de Rayne Vigneau

Another goodie. This has a nice blend of freshness and slightly (overly) decadent sweetness. It has a nice attack, but dips down a little too hard on the finish, and sits in the stomach not the brain. 89.

Chateau Rieussec

There is a nice fresh start, and some interesting lime blossom and honeysuckle flavours – in fact strongly honeysuckle as the glass gathers pace. Ends well, on a lift, a very accomplished wine from the Lafite stable. Blend is 90% Sémillon, and the rest an equal split of Muscadelle and Sauvignon Blanc. 93+.

Chateau Sigalas-Rabaud

Some good bite here, this is definitely heading in the right direction, and there is an excellent grip that holds you as the sweetness steps up a pace. This is good, has complexity and rich seams of honey. 85% Semillon, 14% Sauvignon, 1% Muscadelle, from winemaker Georges Poly. 91-92.

Chateau Suduiraut

A robust wine, with some very silky textures and good rich exotic fruit aromas. But it's slightly slippery, and again heads down to the stomach not up to the brain. Still this has a lovely finish, and great length. 93% Semillon, 7% sauvignon blanc. Three passes through the vines – most important was the one after the rains at the beginning of September. 93-94.

S de Suduiraut (dry white)

Lovely candyfloss aromas, very candied fruits - 55% sauvignon blanc 45% Semillon. Really had to pick during the first week of September, after that the sugar level rose too high. 20% new barrels, 40% barrels of one wine, and 40% barrels of two wines. Some battonage. This is a very successful white wine. 92.

PAUILLAC, ST JULIEN, ST ESTEPHE

Overview

Thoroughly enjoyable in 2009, for me Saint Julien was the most consistently excellent appellation. It's been a very interesting year to taste, as some of the biggest names have made the most subtle, elegant wines in the Medoc, a reversal of many years.

Pauillac, AC Pauillac (*third wine of Chateau Latour*)

15.58% of the total production goes into this wine, that comes from only vines outside of L'Enclos, and there is a great density even at this level of quality. It drops off on the end a little, and the good ripe fruit doesn't do too much to stand out. 87-88.

Les Forts de Latour, AC Pauillac

45.9% of total production, with a blend of 65.1% cab sauvign, 32.3% merlot, 0.6% cab franc, 1.9% petit verdot. The whole thing comes in at 13.5% alcohol, and is enormously well blanced, with an IPT of 80 (Index of Total Phenolics, the buzz word of 2009, as has been quite rightly pointed out). Enormously different weight and fruit than the third wine, this is a very juicy Forts de Latour, really a tasty wine, perhaps my favourite of the 'First' second wines. Plenty of density, but crunchy, bright fruit. 93-94.

Chateau Latour, AC Pauillac

Around 10% press wine has gone into the First wine, and it underwent a slightly longer maceration than in 2008. This is very different from the other firsts in Pauillac. Absolutely full of liquorice and a tangy blueberry and blackcurrant coulis. There is a clear fist of tannins, but I disagree with some assessments that it is too much. It's more of a wave to surf over than a wall to scale. Like this very much, just such elegance and depth of flavour, and superb freshness on the finish. The blend is 91.3% cab sauvignon, 8.7% merlot, 13.7% alcohol. IPT 87 (2008 was closer to 70) – but again these silky fruit tannins. A very successful wine. 38.3% of total production. 98-99.

Carruades de Lafite, Pauillac

This has a very good weight, slightly chalky tannins. They are clearly upping selection in response to the enormous demand for this wine (the big question is are they also going to raise the price on it this year). The blend is 50.6% cabernet sauvignon, 42.2% merlot, 2.2% petit verdot, 5% cabernet franc. Has lovely subtle fresh lift on the finish, and very crunchy red rather than black fruits. Not a blockbuster, very approachable, good quality. 92.

Chateau Duhart Milon, Pauillac

More intense fruit here and clearly intended for a longer run than the Carruades. This is beautifully weighted, a real success this year. Just incredibly deft, very precise, beautiful lightness of touch. I think the best example of this wine I have tasted *en primeur*. 63% cab sauvignon, 37% merlot, harvested from 23 September to October 8. 94+

Chateau Lafite Rothschild, Pauillac

Blend is 82.5% cabernet sauvignon, 17% merlot, 0.5% petit verdot. There is less depth of colour than in some years, and on the palate it is truly surprising. This has that softness of tannins that was evident in Chateau Margaux, and is a signature of the confident winemaking of the very top chateaux in 2009. The tannins are very definitely there, but more of a benign force than a controlling one – instead they are soft, well balanced and fully integrated, even at this early stage. A lovely depth of fruit – red fruits mixed in with the tighter black fruits, again a very marked characteristic of this year. Not even the slightest

hint of over-doing one single part of this wine. Harvesting of the merlot began on 23 september, and went through until the petit verdot finished on 8 October. This is so different from the intense wine of last year. It's utterly delicious, very elegant. 97-99.

Petit Mouton

A good weight to the fruit, subtly exuberant, without shouting too hard. Charming – but it stood out for me more in 2008, perhaps because there were so few really good second wines last year, whereas this year there are lots. 63% cab sauvignon, 22% merlot, 15% cab franc. Some good subtly spicy undertones. 92+.

Chateau d'Armailhac, Pauillac

I very much like this haunting quality to the fruit. Lovely rich plum flavours, but a real intensity and build as it stays in the palate. Smoky charred aromas of coffee at the end that adds a modern touch without being overbearing. 60% cabernet sauvignon, 24% merlot, 14% cabernet franc, 2% petit verdot. Picking from Sept 23 for the merlot to Oct 6 for the cabernet sauvignon. This has very good structure and a good sweet fruit lift on the finish. 93-94

Chateau Clerc Milon, Pauillac

50% cabernet sauvignon, 44% merlot, 4% cabernet franc, 1% petit verdot, 1% carmanere. This has real elegance, and greater grip than the Armailhac, despite having less cabernet sauvignon. It's not as immediately appealing, but it really builds in intensity and finishes off with a gorgeous punch of fruit. 92-93.

Chateau Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac

The main event, and right from the start this is restrained, well defined and accomplished. As with Lafite, there is gentleness to the nose that you rarely see in a first growth at this stage. Wonderful mix of minty freshness on the top palate, and velvety rich fruits underneath. This has depth and stature, but has a softness that caresses the palate and is entirely seductive. 88% cabernet sauvignon, 12% merlot. Picking again Sept 23 to Oct 6. Average temperature here was 13.9, (0.5 higher than the 30 year average), and rainfall was 850.5mm (30mm less than the 30 year average). 97-98

Ailes d'Argent

72% sauvignon blanc, 27% Semillon 1% muscadelle. This year a little more sauvignon blanc than normal. Another gorgeous, searing acidity, beautiful apricot and crushed elderflower white wine. Just so lovely. Feel so pleased after tasting a number of lesser whites that have lost the acidity. This is gorgeous. 94.

Goulee, Medoc

From the team at Cos d'Estournel, this comes in at a high 14.5% alcohol, 3.7 PH. It only just manages to balance out with this level of alcohol, but it does get there. It's a smooth and silky wine but I preferred the 2008. Texture is great, and a really lovely attack, but would like a touch more fruit and a little less heat. 88-89.

Les Pagodes de Cos, Saint Estephe

Again 14.5% alcohol. This is big, tight, tannic. Could easily be the first wine of a lesser estate. Well integrated tannins, not giving a lot away at this stage. Far better than the 08, and clearly a long life ahead of it. 69% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot, 1% petit verdot. Aged in 50% new oak barrels. 92+.

Cos d'Estournel, Saint Estephe

65% cabernet sauvignon, 33% merlot, 1% petit verdot. Aged in 50% new oak barrels. The nose is even less open than the Pagodes, and there is a steely wall of tannins, but underneath it is utterly gorgeous – you just need to sit with this wine for a while and listen to what it is telling you. It's definitely a wine that tries to wow you, and almost loses itself in the process, but it's worth the wait in the end. Love the description (sorry whoever you are) that this is Las Vegas, where Montrose is Paris. Expect grilled bacon, wet stones, lots of silky blackcurrants and blueberries. Great precision and length. 94.

Tronquoy de Sainte-Anne, Saint Estephe

Second wine of Tronquoy-Lalande, also owned by Bouyges of Montrose. Chalky tannins to start off with, a nice feathery quality. 67% cabernet sauvignon, 33% merlot. Good rich fruits, better than expected and a lot better than the 08. 88.

Ch Tronquoy-Lalande, Saint Estephe

A lot more liquorice here, and obvious extraction. Picking from Sept 18-Oct 7. Not particularly generous, but this is a big year. 89.

La Dame de Montrose, Saint Estephe

Rich sweet fruit (but just 15% new oak, so this is ripe fruit coming through), cherries and damsons. Not the extraction of some, here the weight of this fruit seems more effortless. 28% of production went into the second wine, about the same as in 2003, just so much good stuff for the first. Very pretty and charming, nice tannic frame. 92.

Chateau Montrose, Saint Estephe

60% new oak. 72% of entire production has gone into the first wine. Very evident structure, the tannins are tight and standing up for attention, but not a hint of bitterness from the (evident) extraction. Not as flattering as the Cos,

but much more true to a 'classic Saint Estephe'. The finish is gorgeous, and there is a fresh feel overall, with great life at the end. Remontage kept to maximum of twice a day, because colours, tannins, polyphenols... all came out so quickly and easily. I really like the brambly purple fruit, this is an excellent Montrose. 96.

Chateau Potensac, Medoc

48% Merlot, 38% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Cabernet Franc. Aged in 30% new oak. Great value (was 11 euros ex negoce last year). Chalky tannins, good weight of fruit, 13.9% alcohol, but nice light finish. 91

Chapelle de Potensac, Medoc

Again, a potentially great value choice. Light, not complex, but pretty and charming. 65% merlot, 19% cabernet sauvignon, 15% cabernet franc, 1% petit verdot. 87.

Le Petit Lion, Saint Julien

The (new) second wine of Leoville Las Cases. This is lovely, very crisp, floating fruit structure. Not all all intimidating, this is very appealing wine, led by autumn fruits, and some summery touches of redcurrant, some elderflower here also. Very charming. 91

Clos de Marquis, Saint Julien

Different terroir (formerly seen as second wine but in fact different microclimate). I prefer the Petit Lion. This is good, but a little less weight on the finish. 89.

Leoville Las Cases, Saint Julien

What an utterly gorgeous nose. And beautiful, rich, joyously glass-staining purple. Fantastic wine, deep layers of flavour, all perfectly integrated. Lovely weight. 76% cabernet sauvignon, 15% merlot, 9% cabernet franc, aged in 65% new oak. The tannins are keeping things gith, they have their hands firmly around the fruit, protecting. But rich damson and vanilla custrard inside, delicious. Hold tight for the price though... 97-100.

Lalande-Borie, Saint Julien

Smells like wet Japanese ferns. Nice sweet fruit, bit overworked, but good. Rich fruit, very overripe, a popular choice I imagine, although lacks some elegance. From 30ha of vines. 89-90.

Le Croix de Beaucaillou, Saint Julien

From 30ha of vines that are always intended for the second wine (same approach as Latour, or Leoville). Kept vinification temperature at between 25 and 27 degrees, so as not to overextract. Remontage just twice a day, and

using azote to lift and break the cap from within, no harsh punching down. Lovely depth of flavour, there is lots of power, but wrapped in softness. Plum, damson, greengage, really like this. 91-92

Chateau Ducru Beaucaillou, Saint Julien

Beautiful structure, really wonderfully protective tannins, and lovely length. Good balance of power and delicacy in the mid-palate. There is an implied sweetness to the fruit, but it's not in your face. Since 2004, the Borie family has 100ha in St Julien, with 35ha going into this first wine (of 70ha in total at Ducru). Really enjoy this wine, very interesting, nothing too tight or unrounded out. Highest levels of tannins ever, far higher than in 2005 (hear this all over) but ripe, expressive and well integrated. Slightly concern that alcohol throws things out of whack on the finish. 94.

UGC (tasted blind at Ch Beychevelle)

Chateau Coufran, Haut Medoc

Over extracted and lacks a lot of charm. There is fruit, but it doesn't have the 'croquancy' of the Saint Julien wines. Still, if you look, the fruit is without doubt present, few people have missed completely this year. 87.

Chateau Citran, Haut Medoc

Sweeter fruit on the nose here. Plenty to like in this wine – good weight of fruit, very well balanced, alcohol that you can feel but that doesn't intrude, very nice tannic structure. Punches above its weight. 91.

Chateau Lamarque, Haut Medoc

Very smoky fruit nose, can definitely feel the presence of oak – and this is too much on the palate also. Over-extraction ahoy. Misses for me, although the coffee beans on the finish do go some way to redeeming it. But alcohol has not been tamed. 87.

Chateau Beaumont, Haut Medoc

Ever so slightly whiff of reduction on this, and again on palate. RT

Chateau Malescasse, Haut Medoc

This also doesn't have the best ever nose, and again manages to over-extract. In fact, this is surprisingly green, more than any of the others that I have seen. 47% Merlot, 47% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot. 85-86.

Chateau Belgrave, Haut Medoc

The weight of fruit is good. It gets plenty of tannic structure into the frame, and you can imagine there would have been rejoicing in the cellars. But where is

the charm of the best 2009s? Seems to be a little too imposing, although it gets recognition for great length, and a punch of fresh air on the finish. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 5% Petit Verdot. 90-91

Ch La Tour Carnet, Haut Medoc

It has sweet, squeaky clean fruit, and lots of mocha and chocolate, almost spooned in. Tastes oddly like it has had the terroir surgically removed – but that's not to say that it isn't a good wine, with lovely length, and some very good acidity that grips the fruit. Plenty of vanilla and bakery aromas. Has appeal, but don't expect a gentle ride around the park. 52% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot. 89-90.

Chateau Camensac, Haut Medoc

Good structure, very tight tannins, these Haut Medocs seem to be doing all they can to mimick the big guys, without realising that most of the big guys have relaxed this year, and just let nature and fruit shine through. This is a good wine, and will have its fans, and has a lovely finish. But not elegant enough. 90+.

Chateau Cantemerle, Haut Medoc

This has a subtly warming nose, I like it, and paired with a lovely rich purple colour. A little reduction on the palate though – had to taste two bottles, but the second one had a good density to this fruit, deep blackcurrant aromas. The fruit is good and weighty, the tannins start to come in strongly, and then taper off in the mouth, going to a soft finish. This is fairly delicate and subtly imposes itself, without too much aggression. It's very good. 49% Cabernet Sauvignon, 38% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot, 6% Cabernet Franc. 92-94

Chateau Beychevelle, Saint Julien

Richer, deep colour. This is a classic claret, where the tannins are strong and on a mission to remove all moisture from your mouth. Very good length, there is a bit of tooth-hurting sweetness right on the very finish. Interesting, well made. 46% Cabernet Sauvignon, 44% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot. 94

Chateau Talbot, Saint Julien

Again a step up in colour, until here we are basically opaque. Nose much more closed also, and here the fruit has less charm. It is big, no doubt will take a long time to open, but seems more of an old style, a little out of step with the possibilities of 2009. But no doubt very good matiere in here. 90-92.

Chateau Saint Pierre, Saint Julien

Again we have polyphenol extraction to an enormously high degree. This is glass-staining purple, a highly attractive colour, great grip, lovely vanilla and

slightly toasted edge, roasted nuts, lovely layers of flavour. Rounded off to a lively finish. Successful. 81% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Merlot. 94-95

Chateau Lagrange, Saint Julien

The nose is liting here, fill the glass immediately with a smoky waft of fruit. Big on the palate, the tannins have been turned up and fully worked, but with enough freshness underneath to keep this on the right side of extraction (only just – as it keeps building in the mouth, it does dip over into dryness at certain points). The finish though is good and clean. 93.

Chateau Gruaud Larose, Saint Julien

The colour takes its foot off the pedal a little on this one, some subtle ruby reds coming through. The nose also is slightly more charred cedarwood and appealing spicy cherry. Loses it slightly on the palate, where the alcohol comes in a little hot, but the fruit moves forward to scoop things up. This has definite charm and interest. But there is stiff competition this year and for me the nose delivers above all else here. 93.

Chateau Langoa Barton, Saint Julien

Back to black, as Amy Winehouse would say (over and over again – shouldn't she be recording something new?). Very modern vanilla and black cherry nose, highly fragrant, high alcohol on the palate, completely as I expected from the nose. Very powerful, great whoosh of fruits and acidity, and great length. This is undoubtedly enormously well made. More 'modern' than some years at this estate. 92-94

Chateau Leoville Barton, Saint Julien

There are just so many polyphenols in these wines the colours are astonishing (but then St Julien has the highest proportion of cabernet sauvignon in the Medoc, more so than Pauillac). Again, a big ambitious wine, where the tannins use bellows to suck any available moisture out of your mouth, but then fill the vacuum with a lovely fresh acidity. These are seriously impressive wines. My issue really again would be the alcohol, which has got to be very high on this one, although well balanced by powerful fruit. 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22,5% Merlot, 0,5% Cabernet Franc. 94-95.

Chateau Leoville Poyferre, Saint Julien

A big finish for St Julien, with another richly coloured wine. Really like the nose here, concentrated but open. This has beautiful intensity, but really does carry off the freshness underneath. Excellent. 93.

Chateau Croizet Bages, Pauillac

Rich, pure, very strong, a touch too hot in alcohol for me, but there is plenty to like and this is clearly bedding down for the long haul. Easily one of the best

wines that I have tasted from this estate, and rewarding a recent programme of replanting and careful selection. 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. 92+.

Chateau Lynch Moussas, Pauillac

Good sweet fruit on the nose, a whiff of tobacco leaf, some good clean fruit on the palate, all in all this is a successful wine. But again, it seems that most of these winemakers had no sense that you could approach this vintage softly. 90.

Chateau Haut Bages Liberal, Pauillac

I like that the fruits here are a little crisper and more lively, some redcurrant even gooseberry coming into the nose alongside the blackcurrant. But not sure that it makes it all the way to the finish line, just a tiny bit clunky at the end. 90.

Chateau Grand Puy Ducasse, Pauillac

Beautifully opaque, almost black in colour. The nose is subtle and fairly subdued, but underneath very nice spice and tobacco fruit. Good weight of fruit, some very attractive integrated tannins, but for me there is a whack of alcohol again that should have been better tamed. 40% Merlot, 60% Cabernet Sauvignon 90-92.

Chateau Lynch Bages, Pauillac

One of the deepest in colour of the whole tasting, this is a hugely extracted (visually) wine. I like that it doesn't wham right into you on the palate. There is definitely a sense of restraint, or rather barely-concealed power, to this wine. The producer is very keen to throw his weight around, and the length is terribly impressive, if that is the measure of a wine's success. All the elements are here, this is a wine that is supremely confident and knows how to toy with its audience. See you in a few years. 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, 18% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot. 95

Chateau Pichon Comtesse de Lalande, Pauillac

Rich, pure fruit on the nose, very ripe undoubtedly, but clearly worked to ensure fruit rather than tannin is paramount. This is much more in line with the elegant, hidden-power side of 2009 – the sweet, ripe fruit, the lovely elegance, the gorgeous weight, coupled with the soft tannins and a lovely fresh undertow. Very good. 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 5% petit Verdot. 94.

Chateau Batailley, Pauillac

Again, a very smoky nose. On the palate this has red fruits, and in this case could maybe add to weight of fruit rather than take it away. It's good, but a

slightly hot finish takes away the fresh attack. 22% Merlot, 74% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. 89.

Chateau Lafon Rochet, Saint Estephe

Red ruby colour, very rich without being manacing. On the palate, a little less polished. I do find plenty to like, and it has good acidity and a real perky fruitiness. And the tannins reach right in to remind you that they are there. In fact, this is nearly a perfect en primeur wine – so far from being ready, yet so eager to please. Really like it. 93.

Chateau Ormes de Pez, Saint Estephe

A little more grownup, less perky than is usual from this estate, owned by the Cazes family of Lynch Bages. The fruit is dark and fairly insistent, with a good density. The familiar zip comes in right on the finish, but it makes you wait. 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot 90-92.

Cos Labory, Saint Estephe

Very deep colour. A wine with plenty of ambition, that has stacked up every element that you could do in 2009 – all the fruit, the tannin, the acidity, the power, the backbone – 1 2 3 tick. It's good undeniably, but again could do with a little more charm. 89-90.

Chateau de Pez, Saint Estephe

Rich, lovely bright purple. Very good levels of extraction that don't venture over the line, mouth-searing freshness and loads of lovely coffee beans and toasted oak. Very good. 93-94.

Chateau Phelan Segur, Saint Estephe

A nicely subtle nose, far less try hard than some on display. Again, plenty of good raw materials, though the alcohol goes a little too high for me. Good attack, too hot finish, but overall plenty of charm, lots of interest. 89-90.

Chateau Pibran, Pauillac

60% Merlot, 40% cabernet sauvignon. This was a cru bourgeois Superieur, but they are now staying out of the classification ('the cru bourgeois is now a *millefeuille* of rules, and has just become too complicated for us and for our consumers'). A beautiful bright colour, very fresh and appealing. 50% new oak – unusually higher in merlot than cab sauvignon, because a very good harvest for the merlot. This is vinified and blended in the cellars of Pichon Baron, but aged in barrels in Pibran itself – moved in the barrels. The merlot are on light gravel over a good layer of limestone, fairly cool terroir have to wait to harvest. Really clear fruit tannins. 90.

Les Tourelles de Longueville, Pauillac

61% merlot, 14% cabernet franc (from a parcel close to Ch Batailley), gravel on aliose – where the maturity can be much more rapid – so these are always the vines for Les Tourelles. In 2009, 45% of the crop went into the 2nd wine, 45% 1st wine, and 10% of the third wine, called Le Pauillac de Pichon Longueville. Picking was 25 September, until 6 October. Crunchy fruit, plenty of personality. It's very good. 13.5% alcohol. 91.

Chateau Pichon Longueville, Pauillac

They stayed away from the UGC this year, and their answer when I asked why was: 'it's very difficult to keep track of the samples. At the trade tasting, there is someone on hand from the chateaux to explain, but not the press. And when the samples are so fragile, we like to ensure that we are in control of them.' Harvest was from 29 sept to oct 9, with old vines giving a yield of 33 hl/h. Undoubtedly the most concentrated Pichon that I have tasted, with 13.8% alcohol, 88 IPT – but just so elegant. The balance is perfect – it is wonderfully soft, with pure fruit and power in the mid-palate, but enrobed in silky tannins and a long finish. Vinified at between 26 and 28 degrees (they have kept things at low temperatures for the past few years to really emphasise the fruit). 17-25 days of extraction depending on vats – a short time compared to normal, and kept things slow and gentle. Crunchy black fruit with plenty of liquorice. 95-96.

Chateau Pontet Canet, Pauillac

Again, they stayed away from UGC. Director Jean-Louis Comme gave their biodynamic philosophy as the reason. 'How can we explain that we don't like using chemicals if we are surrounded by chateaux who do?' He said the chateaux extracted much less (less than half) than in 2008. No pigeage, no delestage, just a couple of pumping overs per days. Wonderfully bright and dense fruit, as ever with this estate, dark and ripe but with clear, precise structure and a beautiful length of the finish. 65% cab sauvignon, 30% of merlot, 4% cabernet franc, 1% petit verdot. According to Comme, the vines are not trimmed throughout the growth cycle ('rognage' in French). This started with cabernet sauvignon a few years ago, then cabernet franc, and in 09 for the first time with merlot and petit verdot also. No deleafing, no green harvesting, but small yields through long-term control of vigour. 80% Grand Vin, 'we could really do 100% because the viticulture just works so well, getting such fantastic grapes after 10 years of careful viticulture'. This is an estate that is just getting more and more confident. 95.

PESSAC LEOGNAN

Overview

Another strongly performing appellation for me this year. They were big though - definitely got the feeling that these chateaux are looking to make an impact.

La Chapelle de la Mission Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

Second wines are seriously worth looking out for this year. They should be well priced, and the overall quality of the vintage means that many have wonderful fruit flavours and will be ready to drink sooner than their big (more expensive) brothers. This second wine of La Mission Haut Brion is a great example, with 44% merlot, 46% cabernet sauvignon and 10% cabernet franc, all aged in 24% new oak. Delicate ruby red fruits, very charming, deceptively frank, but plenty of complexity under the surface. 92

La Mission Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

50% Grand Vin, La Chapelle 48%. 9,000 cases of La Mission, against 5,000 last year. Beautifully structured. A real mouth-tingler, with very careful tannic structure. A precise, tip-toeing wine. 44% merlot, 46% cabernet sauvignon, 10% cabernet franc. Such lovely length, and the finish is all about delicate red fruits. Raspberry coulis, redcurrants. 77% new oak. Used a new Vistalis machine for sorting in the fields, but didn't make an enormous difference as this year the sorting needed was minimal. Alcohol is at 14.7%, but well balanced with the tannins and acidity. Tannins levels were 84.5 – last year 74 (and 76 in 2005). But again, ripe, rich tannins. Wonderful wine, reaching the highest quality. 96-97.

Le Clarence de Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

39% of production went into the second wine this year, now known as Le Clarence de Haut Brion. The blend is 46% Merlot, 39% cabernet sauvignon, 13% cabernet franc, 2% petit verdot. A lot more structured and masculine than La Chapelle. The petit verdot gives a deeper colour also. The tannins are more structured and more present, and will take longer to open up. All

together, for a second wine choice, I would go with La Chapelle – but this is very good quality. 91.

Chateau Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

10,500 cases of Haut Brion made this year, against 7,000 last year, with 57% of the overall production. The deep, stately nose and colour are immediately seductive. 14.3% alcohol (slightly more evident than la Mission on first attack, although quickly smoothed in and balanced out). Lovely coffee, mocha, not so much grilled as toasted almonds. 78% new oak. Blend is 46% merlot, 40% cabernet sauvignon, 14% cabernet franc. The tannins are very present, has a wonderful structure. Incredible depth of flavour. For me the 08 stood out because it was just in such contrast to many others -it was head and shoulders above many for me last year. This year it is wonderful, but less stand out. It's a wine that you really have to sit with for a while, it steals up on you, and power builds in your mouth. Lost around 10-30% of production through hail, depending on plot, but recompensed by doing less crop thinning in summer – the hail did it naturally. 97-98.

La Clarete de Haut Brion Pessac Leognan

The second white wine, across both Haut Brion Blanc and La Mission Haut Brion Blanc. The blend is 84% semillon, 16% sauvignon. Very lemony, good mouthfeel, full, fat and expressive. 50% new oak. 89.

La Mission Haut Brion Blanc, Pessac Leognan

84% Semillon, 16% Sauvignon, 50% new oak. Picked August 31 to September 10, at 13.9% alcohol. Very clean berries, went twice through each plot. Juicy, full fruit, good acidity, crisp fruit, this has mango and papaya seeds, slightly more delicate than the Haut Brion blanc this year. 94.

Haut Brion Blanc, Pessac Leognan

14.2% alcohol, lovely balance of exotic fruit, grilled apricots and a good bracing acidity. Less acidity than 2008. Vinified at around 22 degrees. These are rich and round and full of personality. For me, I prefer crisper more defined years, I'm an 07 white kind of a girl! 92.

BLIND TASTING AT HAUT BAILLY REDS

Chateau Chantegrive, Graves

Lovely stately red colour, less vibrant than many from the northern Medoc, this is more of a 'red' than a purple. Good fruit on the nose that comes through on the palate, but there is a distinctly medicinal, slightly minty whiff that goes alongside the fruit. Not unappealing, and gives it a real sense of lift

and freshness, but doesn't quite reach the fruit I would like. 87-88.

Chateau Ferrande, Graves

This has a softer, rounder fruit nose, and the fruit goes deeper on the palate. But falls a little short on the finish – again, the competition is so high this year that the faults really stand out. 88+.

Chateau Rahoul, Graves

This is the most successful of the first three for me. Here there is a real sense of elegance and restraint to the fruit, and those soft silky tannins that have been present in a number of the successful wines this year. Good length, gentle blackcurrant fruits, really attractive wine. 91+.

Chateau Bouscaut, Pessac Leognan

The colour takes a step up in vibrancy, and some purple hints come rushing in. On the palate, again there is this lovely fruit, mixed with the sense of restraint and carefully placed tannins. The tannins build up to quite a crescendo on the end, and this has the staying power and grip of a highly successful wine, balanced with lovely fruit and great acidity. 93+

Chateau Carbonnieux, Pessac Leognan

Some slightly fuller extraction here, but it manages to keep things within balance, and there are quite beautiful notes of crushed violets on the palate. Subtle complexity, with slightly chalky tannins on the finish. It is heavier than some, but very good. 92

Domaine de Chevalier, Pessac Leognan

Again a rich velvet red rather than brilliant purple. Smoky nose, charred cedarwood and hints of tobacco. Modern and seductive. A high level of extraction, but these feel like fruit tannins, and I really like the sweetness on the finish, that has a good twist of acidity. An enjoyable wine from Olivier Bernard that should age very well. 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot. 95.

Chateau de Fieuzal, Pessac Leognan

Again that smoky nose, evident new oak but appealingly so, not overdone. Slightly ups intensity on the palate, and does need some time to integrate better, but the elements are all seriously impressive and ready to go – powerful fruits, rich structure, a good backbone. But does need to integrate – wonder how long ago the blend was done on this sample? 92+

Chateau de France, Pessac Leognan

Almost inky black, everything pumped up. Some subtle vanilla on the nose, this feels like more new oak, but less toasted. Plenty of well-placed fruits,

there is good acidity here but it is slightly overpowered by the alcohol, which must be very high. Good length, clearly well made, needs time. 89-90.

Chateau Haut Bailly, Pessac Leognan

Plumper, richer and sweeter fruit than the 2008, which was the epitome of restraint - you can clearly tell the sunshine was more generous in 2009. This still has the precision of a classic Haut Bailly, but with a richness to the fruit that is gorgeous. Blend is 60 per cent cabernet sauvignon, 37 per cent merlot and 3 per cent cabernet franc, using 50 per cent new oak. Very classy and understated, especially when retasted against some more exuberant 2009s. Excellent. 95-96.

Chateau Haut Bergey, Pessac Leognan

Full, deep and rich in colour. Rich cherry and chocolate on the nose. An increasingly dynamic estate, owned by Sylviane Garcin-Cathiard (also of Clos l'Eglise in Pomerol) with Alain Reynaud as consultant. Get the ice pick out to scale the walls of this wine – this will have definite fans, and it is not completely overblown, but it has a very definite point to make, and doesn't want to be forgotten. However, for me it loses some personality through its swagger. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot. 91-92.

Chateau La Louviere, Pessac Leognan

Ok, after recovering from Haut Bergey (water, tooth rub down), moving on to another stately purple. Far more subtle. You need to sit with this one and let it reveal itself to you. Subtle soft coffee and mocha, and some good floral touches, with violet making an appearance again. Steals up on you, charming. 64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot. 93.

Chateau Larrivet Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

A nose so tight that it is giving little away, and the colour also is terribly deep, in a Gruffalo-style manner (it has terrible teeth in its terrible jaws). Layers and layers of tannins, again you have to reach right in there with a tooth-pick to remove them from your enamel before it peels off. There is plenty of acidity too, all saved by a good whack of black cherry fruit. Plenty to admire in this wine, less to curl up with. 91.

Chateau Latour Martillac, Pessac Leognan

Another water moment needed; Pessac is really going for it this year. However, I feel the balance on this is good – there is plenty of turbo charge, and my palate is really feeling it. But this has softly-worked tannins, very good freshness and is a cohesive (if faint-inducing) experience. 93.

Chateau Les Carmes Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

Dark in colour, rich in nose, this shows again that Pessac Leognan is 19 with a bullet in 2009. This one has elegance as well, where the fruit and freshness do override the power and bulishness. Great length, a truly lovely wine. Love the gentle dark chocolate on the finish, dusted almonds. 55% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. 94+

Chateau Malartic Lagraviere, Pessac Leognan

This property, owned by the Belgian Bonnie family, delivers increasingly exciting and successful wines. There's nothing retiring about this - plenty of oak and tannins, enough to require a porter, but with exotic red fruits that make it supremely appealing. A long life ahead. Michel Rolland is consultant here. 59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 38% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot. 93-94.

Chateau Olivier, Pessac Leognan

A gourmet nose, but here is some freshness apparent. A fabulously direct wine, goes straight to your head, high alcohol but well balanced by very rich black fruits, a good shot of acidity, and a full backbone, but finishes very soft. Highly successful – if a little hot. 93+

Chateau Pape Clement, Pessac Leognan

The nose doesn't want to give too much away. In colour, you can gather that it is no stranger to anthocyanins and polyphenols. You have to sit with this wine and let it start the conversation – there's no butting in first here. Quite a brooder, a touch sulky at first and alcohol is definitely high. But there is charm, and the fruit builds up to a crescendo. I like it, but a touch out of balance on the finish – the alcohol has a hard time letting you go. 92-93.

Chateau Pique Caillou, Pessac Leognan

The nose is subdued because it's too much of a fight to make it through. This has all of the extraction with none of the charm. No question that the IPT levels etc will be through the roof. But I really feel a lack of freshness in this wine, and it whacks you round the head rather than kisses you good morning. Great length, I will give it that! 87-88.

Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte, Pessac Leognan

This has an impactful nose, but with enough restraint to let through hints of wild herbs and blackberry leaf. Chewy tannins, but bright fruit flavours, and I like the weight of the whole thing. It's gourmet, with lovely length, and an accomplished lift on the finish that brings things well into balance. 64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 1% Petit Verdot. 94+.

WHITES

Am I (and my teeth) ready for these!! I'm not sure that I agree with the general feeling that 2009 was as good for whites as for reds – although there were some brilliant examples.

Chateau Chantegrive, Graves

Love the soaring nose on this, a very pleasant spring flower, floral white blossom experience. Juicy fruits, good acidity, and really a very charming wine. Less floral on the palate, more lemony, but I like the balance. Good. 91+.

Chateau Ferrande, Graves

Rich yellow in colour. More straw and hay on this palate than lemon, I like that it has a slightly savoury edge. Good length and acidity. But I imagine also higher in alcohol, as that overrides the final impression on the palate; a shame as it brings everything down a little. 89.

Chateau Rahoul, Graves

Nice honeysuckle and apple blossom on the nose, this has a delicate feel to it. It is 100% new oak, but not too overpowering, and has a frankness and a directness that is appealing. 80% Sémillon, 20% Sauvignon Blanc. 90-91.

Chateau Bouscaut, Pessac Leognan

Pale yellowy gold, a nice delicate colour. Very powerful nose, plenty of fresh lemons and lovely pure fruit. On the palate this has fabulous minerality, really stands out for me. A deftness of touch, but plenty of flavour and a strong finish. 45% Sémillon, 55% Sauvignon, 45% new oak. 94+

Chateau Carbonnieux, Pessac Leognan

This is so pale as to be almost watery. Nose is quite subdued, but not unpleasant at all. On the palate, it just misses on pretty much every level though. There is alcohol, but the fruit is barely clinging on for dear life, what on earth has happened here??? 65% Savignon blanc, 35% Semillon, 30% new oak. This must be the bottle - need to retaste.

Domaine de Chevalier, Pessac Leognan

Again very pale in colour, an almost watery gold. Some richer fruit on the nose though, and I like the honeysuckle flavours that come through on the palate. A zippy white wine, although I felt the red was more successful this year from here. 90.

Chateau de Fieuzal, Pessac Leognan

A richer golden colour. This has plenty of straw, and you can certainly feel the alcohol, but there is some nice freshness to balance, and this seems to have good structure and a gentle spice. A better one for ageing than I have seen so

far. Good. 93.

Chateau de France, Pessac Leognan

Golden colour a sweeter, more honeyed nose – 80% Sauvignon, 20% Semillon, 30% new oak. On the palate it dips down slightly for me, because the alcohol starts reaching its fingers around the glass, and doesn't really let go. 87-88.

Chateau Haut Bergey, Pessac Leognan

Slightly subdued nose, but I like what it there – slightly savoury - and this has an attractive golden colour without being overdone. 80% Sauvignon blanc, 20% Semillon, 40% new oak. Again on the palate this is savoury rather than sweet, and is very restrained compared to many. Definitely apparent alcohol, but not too overpowering – although the hot finish brings things down for me. 91+

Chateau La Louviere, Pessac Leognan

Again, on the pale side of yellow, perhaps because this is 100% sauvignon blanc, with 30% new oak. This has very clear acidity, and some attractively gooseberry flavours, but surprisingly it's all a bit tart rather than fresh. Again, I felt the red was more successful from this estate. 89-90.

Chateau Larrivet Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan

Subtle pale gold, attractive colour. I like this, it has plenty of juicy flavours, with depth and intensity, without straying into over alcohol. There is good balance, nice apricot and exotic fruit flavours. 75% Sauvignon Blanc, 25% Semillon. 93+

Chateau Latour Martillac, Pessac Leognan

Pale gold again, but richer on the nose than many here. Like the fruit, and the *batonnage* indications of baker's flavours, but alcohol creeps up. 65% Sauvignon, 35% Semillon 33% new oak. 91.

Chateau Malartic Lagraviere, Pessac Leognan

Delicate gold, very pretty colour. This has a very refreshingly sharp edge, but good weight of fruit underneath, and I like the length. Successful. 80% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Semillon, a high 60% new oak, but it works very well. 92.

Chateau Olivier, Pessac Leognan

Quite a different nose, more candy. There is a nice weight of fruit here, good strong lemon flavours. Keep waiting for the alcohol to tip over into too much, but it is held in check by acidity and a fairly impressive structure. 78% Sauvignon blanc, 20% Semillon, 2% Muscadelle. 93.

Chateau Pape Clement, Pessac Leognan

More yellowy gold here, and a far more clearly structured nose. This has actually visible fruit, again it's the apricots and exotic kind and no denying that the alcohol is high. 48% Sauvignon blanc , 40% Semillon, 6% Sauvignon gris, 6% Muscadelle. 92.

Chateau Pique Caillou, Pessac Leognan

Again, I am enjoying the flavours that are coming through here. This is an attractive wine, some good rich flavours but some very nice acidity also. One of my favourites, right at the end. 80% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Semillon. 93.

Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte, Pessac Leognan

My last wine of the last tasting of the primeurs week, incidentally! Happy that this is an enjoyable finish. Good juicy fruits, nice structure and although alcohol present, not overpowering, good exotic fruits that suck you in without spitting you out. 90% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Sauvignon Gris, 5% Semillon. 50% new oak. 94+.

GRAVES

Overview

Tasted at the Maison des Graves, all blind, the week before the main primeurs started. There are some exceptionally good wines here, but you do have to be careful. Not everyone has lived up to the promises of the vintage, and over-extraction lurks...

Chateau de Carailan, AC Graves Rouge

Some good plum fruits, but not sparkling. The length is good, but this is not standout. 87.

Chateau Pessan, AC Graves Rouge

Fresh, ripe fruit, although some slightly too evident vanilla oak, giving a little dry pinch on the finish. Cold soak before fermentation. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, aged in 30% new oak (70% one year) for 12 months. 88-89.

Chateau de le Bourdillot, AC Graves Rouge

Over-extracted, the fruit is there but hasn't been allowed to shine. 50% Merlot, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. 87.

Chateau Venus , AC Graves Rouge

The nose is fresh on this one. The fruit is more velvety, and has some personality. Good freshness and lift on the end. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, with a cold soak before fermentation, then aged in 90% French oak, and 10% American oak, for 12 months. 89-90.

Chateau Haut-Maray, AC Graves Rouge

Deep colour, muted nose, real promise. But the finish is harsh and over-extracted, doesn't quite work. Merlot 60%, Cabernet Sauvignon 40%, aged in barrel (30% new). 84-86.

Moulin de Segourat, AC Graves Rouge

Inoffensive, strangely light, but charming and could offer a good lighter-style alternative to some of the bigger hitting 2009s. 87.

Chateau Chantloiseau, AC Graves Rouge

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. Not overly enamoured with the nose here – a little smudged and lacks definition. Not so bad on the palate, there is some fruit, but the aftertaste is not working for me. Aged in stainless steel vats. 85.

Chateau Peyrat, AC Graves Rouge

Quite tight, with good freshness at the end, and good dense fruit. 65% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc. 88.

Chateau Rougemont, AC Graves Rouge

This is a bit over-worked, but does have pleasant fruit extraction, a nice depth of colour, and good length. Merlot 60%, Malbec 5%, Cabernet Sauvignon 30%, Petit Verdot 5%, vinified and aged in stainless steel. 90.

Liber Peter, AC Graves Rouge

Very dark in colour, rich purple, glass staining. Starts very well, nice attack, good individual elements, but right now the elements are not well integrated. May improve dramatically over ageing – has plenty of coffee, mocha, liquorice. 89+

Chateau des Fougères, Clos Montesquieu (La Folie), AC Graves Rouge

Good plump fruit, good freshness, perhaps ends a little pinched, but a good solid wine. 55% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, quite young with only 15 years average age of the vineyard. 30% new oak. 89.

Chateau Rahoul, AC Graves Rouge

So sweet, with soft vanilla and very well integrated tannins, and good length.

Very international, little *terroir*, but a crowd pleaser, and plenty of drinking pleasure. 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3.5% Cabernet Franc, 1.5% Petit Verdot, with a cold soak for two days before fermentation, and aged in barrels, with 20% new, and 20% in larger sized 400 litre barrels. 88-89.

Chateau les Clauzots, AC Graves Rouge

Nose quite open, good redcurrants and blackberries. Less interesting on the palate though, and it falls a little short. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, aged in 40% barrels, 60% stainless steel. 87.

Chateau Duverger, AC Graves Rouge

Very light in colour, not particularly typical of the vintage. No depth to the fruit. Looking for the redeeming feature – it is light and so could be charming, but in fact that makes the alcohol go out of balance. 30% Cabernet Franc, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon, 65% Merlot, 5% Petit Verdot. 84.

Domaine de Lestang, AC Graves Rouge

A rich, deep colour, with 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. But this has managed to have to get stalky tannins that are over-extracted, quite the feat in 2009. 83-84.

Chateau Haut Reyes Vieilles Vignes, AC Graves Rouge

Over-extracted again. There is lots of fruit here, could be promising, the length is good, but they haven't pulled back when they should have done. Might improve over ageing period – there is good matiere. 88.

Chateau Saint Jean des Graves, AC Graves Rouge

Good, ample, rich nose. The fruit has a good sweetness to it, strawberries and loganberries, with some subtle vanilla oak. Good length, and nice acidity. I like this. 90.

Vieux Chateau Gaubert, AC Graves Rouge

There is good fruit here, but the alcohol is too high, and doesn't balance out. There is freshness in this, the finish isn't heavy, but it just doesn't quite hit the spot on the mid-palate. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Merlot, aged for 12 months in barrel (40% new oak). 88.

Chateau Mejean, AC Graves Rouge

Expensive bottle alert!! Much smoother, classier and weighty than the rest in the tasting so far. Slightly falls at the end, and should finish light but finishes heavy. But it's good, good weight and nicely worked. 62% Merlot, 38% Cabernet Sauvignon. 14 months ageing (32% new oak). 90+.

Chateau La Fleur Jonquet, AC Graves Rouge

I like this, until the finish, which is too dry. But there is plenty to enjoy here, good red fruits, redcurrant and dusty tannins. 75% Merlot, 20% cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, aged in barrel for one year. 88.

Chateau Langlet, AC Graves Rouge

Over-worked number here, without the basis of fruit. There is good length, some freshness, and chewy tannins. But too much extraction, swamps everything else. Seems a lot of effort going on. 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. 87.

Chateau Saint Agreves, AC Graves Rouge

Tastes like burnt marshmallows. Very odd flavour, not sure what they have done with the vinification here – the only information I have is that it is vinified 'traditionally', with one year in barrel, from 40% merlot, 30% cabernet sauvignon, 30% cabernet franc. 84.

Chateau de Chantegrive, AC Graves Rouge

A fresh nose, lovely blackcurrant on the aftertaste, good length. Slightly bitter finish, but overall good, perhaps it will round out over the ageing, definite quality there. 55% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, vinified in stainless steel, then aged in 50% new oak, 50% one year. 91.

Chateau des Gravieres, AC Graves Rouge

This has some good extraction, I was feeling happy at first, but actually, the elements are quite clunky and don't hold together. Definitely needs time to bed down together. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged in blend of barrel and stainless steel. 87.

Chateau Villa Bel Air, AC Graves Rouge

This is a bit vanilla-y (it is aged in barrel, although not all new). There is charming cherry, and cedarwood, some smoke, but alcohol bites strongly – I found the white more successful this year. 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. 87+.

Domaine de la Chouette, AC Graves Rouge

Not bad, not brilliant. Good lift at the end, nice balance and there is some good fruit and acidity. Nothing stand out, but a solid bottle, from 60% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, vinified in stainless steel then aged in oak for 14 months. 87.

Le Hauret du Piada, AC Graves Rouge

Nice rich, solid colour. Good deep nose, perhaps a little over evident on the oak. This is in the purple fruit vein, but really dips in the mid-palate, just drops away. 62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 38% Merlot, aged for 15 months in oak (no

new barrels though). 87.

Chateau Brondelle, AC Graves Rouge

This is okay, has some wet stones, some good extraction, some rich black fruits. Don't love the finish, but it does head upwards. Has complexity. Needs to open up, will do well over ageing. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot, 5% Petit Verdot. 12 months in new oak. 89-90.

Chateau Navarro cuvee Prestige, AC Graves Rouge

This is quite rich, velvety and enjoyable. Good fruit, not overwhelming. A little high in alcohol, but not too intrusive. 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 60% Merlot. Aged in 50% oak, with a cold soak before fermentation. 88.

Chateau Belon AC Graves Rouge

On the nose, the oak comes through a little too strongly. It swamps the fruit on the palate, takes it out at the knee. But there is nice fruit here and this could have been far more successful. Perhaps they can ease up on the oak over the next 12 months. 87-88

Chateau Saint Robert Poncet Deville, AC Graves Rouge

A good wine, with firm black fruit, good weight, nice creamy vanilla oak, good weight and length. I like this a lot. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, average age of vines 35-40 years, with malolactic fermentation in 100% new oak, then 12 months ageing, also in new oak. 91.

Chateau de Respide Callipyge AC Graves Rouge

Heavy bottle alert!! There is very good depth of fruit, and the tannins are present, but a little bit drying, and there is a little harshness from over-extraction. It has some good qualities, but overworked. Would be good to retaste, as no bitterness on the finish, and some real promise. 89.

Chateau La Rose Seree cuvee Damien, AC Graves Rouge

Have sat with this for a while, but while the fruit doesn't jump out, the alcohol does. The fruit seems to have gone too far over the maturity barrier, and it doesn't have enough balance. 86.

Chateau Beauregard Ducasse, Cuvee Albert Duran, AC Graves Rouge

Not bad start, some fruit evident, but tannins again very drying, not well integrated. This is one of the few in this tasting to go straight to the pit of my stomach, sorry to say. 50% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot. 84.

Chateau Crabitey, AC Graves Rouge

Much better. Good rich, deep red fruits, this has a nice length and good

balance, with a reasonably delicate finish. No harsh edges. Not standout, but good. 88-89.

Chateau Tour de Calens, AC Graves Rouge

Cranberry and crab apple on this one, and a touch of liquorice. I quite like this. It's quite fruit juicy, not enormous depth, but it is interesting, has a personality, and that counts for a lot. Like this, not a blockbuster. 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc. 16 months in oak. 89-90+

Chateau Ferrande, AC Graves Rouge

Again, a good nose. And good weight of fruit. A little too sweet and a little too high in alcohol, which swamps the fruit once you get to the palate. Shame. 87.

Chateau Roquetaillade la Grange, AC Graves Rouge

Lovely rich, pure fruit nose that comes translates smoothly into plums and cherries on the palate. High in alcohol, but manages to stay in balance because the fruit is richly textured. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. 89-90

Chateau Hay Mayne, cuvee Mayne du Cros, AC Graves Rouge

Bit too bretty for me. This is just a little light and one-dimensional. 86.

Chateau du Tourte AC Graves Rouge

Pinched and over-worked experience. Lots of coffee, but that over burnt coffee taste, when it goes bitter. Over-extracted on the pips. Bitter chocolate, but not in a good way. 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 65% Merlot. 83.

Chateau Magneau AC Graves Rouge

This has gently percolated coffee. Not enormous, but good fruit, nice weight. Charming. 88-89.

Chateau Respide Medeville, AC Graves Rouge

Unbalanced and really fairly harsh, a shame from what is often a good quality estate. 40% Merlot, 60% Cabernet Sauvignon. 84.

Chateau Haura, AC Graves Rouge

The vanilla tastes a little artificial (although it is real barrels, and will spend 18 months in one-third new oak, one-third one years, one-third two years) but there is some good fruit here. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot. 86.

Chateau Haut Selve Reserve, AC Graves Rouge

Heavy bottle alert. This has put in all the necessary elements – coffee, chocolate, rich deep blueberry colour, and although it heads towards over-extraction, it pulls back in time and in fact has pleasantly long, expressive

finish. 50% Merlot, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged in oak for 12 months (30% new) 89.

Chateau Tourteau Chollet, AC Graves Rouge

This is over alcoholic and the extraction is also a little too harsh. Good fruit underneath, but trying too hard. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot, with a cold soak, then long maceration up to 30 days, then 70% oak ageing for 14 months (30% in stainless steel). 85-86

Clos Floridene, AC Graves Rouge

Not a bad nose, some interesting complexities underneath. It starts well, but this is just a little flat, and disappointing. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot – not sure about this estate in 2009, usually a star performer from Denis Dubourdieu. 87.

Chateau Grand Abord Cuvee Passion, AC Graves Rouge

Good nose, and not bad at all on the palate. There is freshness, tight structure, the tannins are well worked. Should develop well over the next year. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged in oak barrels for 12 months. (more successful than the standard Ch Grand Abord, and good value at under 7 euros a bottle). 90+

Chateau Toumilon, AC Graves Rouge

Quite nice red, charming fruit, nice attack, good freshness. Alcohol still high, which is a shame, but there are no harsh edges, good length. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, cold soak before fermentation. 88.

Chateau Tourteau, AC Graves Rouge

Fine, quite light on the alcohol, slightly more of a deft touch. Quite charming cherry freshness at the end. Easy to drink, not complex, fresh and light (helped by a cold soak to emphasise the fruit). Like it. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot. Aged entirely in barrel of new and one year old French oak. 89+

Chateau Haut Selve, AC Graves Rouge

Good rich nose, but alcohol is a bit hot. On the palate, again bit too hot on the alcohol. Slightly rustic also, could be much better. Owned by the Lesgourgues family, this has 50% Merlot, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in barrel for 12 months (25% new). I found their Reserve bottle far more successful. 87.

Chateau Doms, AC Graves Rouge

Ruby red fruits on the nose. Really nice on the palate, red fruits, good balance. Slightly dry on the finish, but generally this is very accomplished.

70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in 30% barrels and 70% stainless steel. 89-90+.

Grand Enclos du Chateau de Cerons, AC Graves Rouge

Good coffee on the finish, this has complexity and is really pretty interesting. Hot in alcohol again, which annoys me, but good attack with red fruits. Nice. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in oak (one third new oak, the rest in one year old wine). 89+

Chateau Mouras, AC Graves Rouge

This is pretty good, with a nice smoky nose, and some complex flavours and aroma. Enjoyable. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon. 90.

Chateau du Mont cuvee Gabriel, AC Graves Rouge

Ok on the nose, not so interesting on the palate. Too hot, takes out all the flavour. Same burnt coffee flavour. 86.

Chateau Grand Abord, AC Graves Rouge

This is okay, has some good rich flavours, but not particularly interesting or stand-out. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, vinified in stainless steel and cement tanks. 86.

Fleur du Chateau Mamin, AC Graves Rouge

Alcohol too high, but there are some good flavours here, and it does just about manage to balance out. Good finish. 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. This is aged with oak staves, and although that may mean drink up quickly before this pleasant sweet fruit falls off, it's not bad at all. 88.

WHITES

Chateau Villa Bel Air, AC Graves Blanc

Lovely crisp, gooseberry nose. Juicy on the palate, there is a touch too much sourness on the finish – but this is a good wine, from 50% Semillon, 50% Sauvignon Blanc, fermented in barrel and aged on the fine lees. 90.

Chateau Le Bourdillot, AC Graves Blanc

Slightly overly flabby, not great freshness. Okay, but needs structure. 50% Semillon, 50% Sauvignon. 86-87.

Chateau Peyrat, AC Graves Blanc

It's okay, has nice acidity and crispness, and a pretty floral nose, but I don't love the finish. This has 70% Sauvignon Blanc, 25% Semillon, 5% Muscadelle. Aged in stainless steel. 88.

Chateau Rougemont, AC Graves Blanc

Grassy sauvignon. Not too lemony, but there is a lovely framework to hold the wine. This is a very classic Graves, well understated. 40% Sauvignon Blanc, 60% Semillon, aged in a mix of stainless steel and barrel. 89

M de Malle, AC Graves Blanc

Very thin, in both colour and on the palate. 70% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Semillon, aged for 9 months on the lees with stirring, and a cold soak before fermentation, then vinification in barrel – all things which should provide more of a flavourful experience than appears in the glass. Perhaps one to retaste. 83.

Chateau Chantegrive, AC Graves Blanc

Sauvignon-led, nice and fresh and crisp. Like it. Good depth of flavour, slightly pinched finish but overall impressive. Hubert de Bouard in consultant here, working 50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Semillon, vinified and aged in stainless steel tanks. Great value for a wine that is usually around 8 euros. 89+.

Chateau Chantegrive Caroline, AC Graves Blanc

Still undergoing malo, and I still get the apple crispness on the palate that will soften as malo finishes. Good structure underneath - this cuvee has 50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Semillon grapes, that are vinified and aged in barrel (9 months ageing). 88.

Chateau Douverger, AC Graves Blanc

Thin, not working for me. 83.

Liber Pater, AC Graves Blanc

This is still undergoing malo, so again not conclusive. Hot in alcohol, but a lot of complex flavours swirling around. 88.

Chateau Les Clauzots, AC Graves Blanc

Good, clearly good crisp acidity and good range of flavours. Sauvignon Blanc 60%, Semillon 40%, owned by Frederic Tach. 91.

Chateau Rahoul, AC Graves Blanc

Good wine – successful in both red and white this year. 78% Semillon, 22% Sauvignon Blanc, manual harvesting in small crates. 88+.

Chateau La Fleur Jonquet, AC Graves Blanc

High in alcohol, but some good fruits lurking underneath. 87.

Chateau des Faugeres – Clos Montesquieu (La Folie) , AC Graves Blanc

Good grip, high in alcohol. Very nice sauvignon flavour, don't love it overall though. 88.

Chateau Chateloiseau, AC Graves Blanc

This is attractive. Cut grass and some elderflower. Not bad at all. 89-90.

Chateau Moulin de Segurat, AC Graves Blanc

Boiled sweets, lacks some freshness. 80% Semillon, 20% Sauvignon Blanc. 86.

Chateau Haut Reys reserve, AC Graves Blanc

Round, lemony, good weight and mouth-feel. Not exceptional, but a good use of the 40% Sauvignon Blanc, 60% Semillon, which is aged on the lees in stainless steel. 87-88.

Chateau Ferrande, AC Graves Blanc

Not enormously impressed with this, tastes like a flat cider. Sauvignon Blanc 25%, Sauvignon Gris 25%, Semillon 50%. Aged in blend of stainless steel and barrel. 85.

Chateau Doms, AC Graves Blanc

Not as successful as the red, the acidity levels need to be firmer and fresher. 60% Semillon, 40% Sauvignon Blanc, aged in stainless steel, with gentle lees stirring. 87.

Clos Floridene, AC Graves Blanc

This has good crisp fruits of apples and elderflower, but it's not as good for me as in many years – unusually, I preferred the Chateau Reynon from the Dubourdieu stable in 2009. 51% Semillon, 2% Muscadelle, 47% Sauvignon Blanc. 90.

Grand Enclos du Chateau de Cerons, AC Graves Blanc

This is good, has rich flavours, but still undergoing malo. It has full citrus flavours, interesting, needs to be retasted. 55% Semillon, 45% Sauvignon Blanc, hand harvested into small crates, cold soaking, fermented in barrel, then aged for 10 months in mix of stainless steel and oak – plenty of attention to detail from Giorgio Cavanna. 89.

MARGAUX AND THE SOUTHERN MEDOC

Overview

A very impressive showing overall from Margaux this year. There were some guilty of over-extraction and high alcohol, but those were in the minority. Cru Bourgeois chateaux to be added soon.

Pavillon Rouge, (AC Margaux)

Paul Pontallier was as word perfect as ever: 'The grapes given perfect conditions to ripen, and we were given perfect conditions to harvest them.' This is particularly good. Some wonderful fresh fruit, and a beautiful balance of structure and lightness of touch. The thing about 2009 is that you don't really how dense it is, because the tannins are so soft. Pontallier agrees: 'What makes it so extraordinary is the highest density we have ever had, with the suppleness.' They have been stricter on selection than usual, and made the lowest proportion of Pavillon Rouge ever, and probably one of the best ever produced. 36% into 1st wine. 41% into Pavillon Rouge. 23% into the third wine – 13.5% alcohol. A great success. 93-94.

Chateau Margaux, (AC Margaux)

Just utterly gorgeous. Again, this mix of almost silky, unseen power, then a powerhouse of fruit. This is relatively open for a young Margaux; there is a real softness right from the start, but in fact this is the highest levels of tannins that they have ever had. It's so fresh, and the tannins are so soft and well worked that you can almost not tell they are there. 87% cabernet sauvignon, and a very reasonable 13.3° alcohol. Pontallier rightly says, 'I have never felt this combination of power with softness and immediate appeal.' Effortlessly elegant. The cabernets for this wine came from the gravel around the chateau. Some cabernets on the property reached up to 15%, but those went into the second or third wine. This is effortlessly elegant. 98-100

Pavillon Blanc, (AC Bordeaux Blanc)

This for me is easily one of the best whites I have tasted during the primeur week – but several people said they preferred the old style, which was rounder and had more impact (it was previously higher in alcohol). Here they have consciously worked a new style, and I loved the tangy freshness, that comes from the cool nights. Had to make many careful decisions not to get the high alcohols that have been dominant in the past (it's at 13.9%, last year was over 14.5%) because high alcohol can kill the delicate flavours. To do this, they took out the most over-ripe berries on some of the bunches. Eliminated almost the last third of the juice, because the first juice has all the acidity and freshness, the last juice has all the tannins, and far less acidity. It

is less opulent perhaps, but much more subtle, more mineral. 100% sauvignon blanc. 94-95.

Alter Ego de Palmer (AC Margaux)

Beautiful density of fruit, technical maturity early September, but waited for phenolic ripeness, and for the vines not to suffer from too much water stress, there was a very necessary bit of rainfall in the middle of September. In the end the yield was low, at 34 hl/h, close to that in 2005, and they will make 7,000 cases of Alter Ego (45%), 9,000 for Palmer (55%). That is a beautiful wine. Wonderfully dense fruit, but real elegance. Utterly gorgeous. Alcohol is at 13.2 – very reasonable level compared to many. I got a very interesting explanation here for the soft tannins that were so marked in 2009 – apparently the cabernet sauvignon berries had very few pips this year – just two average per grape, less than the usual four, which meant that almost all tannins in the wine are from the skin of the fruit (and therefore less potential for astringency) 49% cabernet sauvignon, 51% merlot, 30% new oak. 95.

Chateau Palmer (AC Margaux)

Unusually, the proportion of Merlot is higher in their first wine than second (just), with 52%, rounded out by 41% cab sauvignon and 7% petit verdot, with 50% new oak. This is because the merlot grapes have been planted on a classic gravelly cabernet sauvignon *terroir* at this Margaux chateau since before World War II, which goes a long way to explaining the balance of elegance and delicacy with power and exotic sumptuousness. As with many wines this year, they have recorded the highest ever levels of tannins in the wine, but it is so velvety, and with wonderful length on the palate. EPT levels probably 87, more than in 2005, but so velvety. And great length, this is very close in quality to Chateau Margaux for me. 98-99.

Chateau Du Tetre 2009 (AC Margaux)

For me, a clear step up from the 2008, although I enjoyed last year's and really think we are starting to see continued great results from this property. Fruit is plump and sweet and very approachable, especially for a primeur sample, but with great backbone. 55% cab sauvignon, 22% merlot, 15% cabernet franc and 8% petit verdot. 45% new oak. Picking from 28th September (2008 was Oct 1st, so not huge difference). 94+

Chateau Giscours 2009 (AC Margaux)

This has been very well received in 2009, and I can see why, but for me I am a fan of the du Tetre this year over the Giscours. It has a beautiful rich colour, deeply extracted, this is far more exuberant than du Tetre, and more consciously 'modern'. Lovely sweet vanilla and full extraction, a crowd pleaser. 53% cabernet sauvignon, 40% merlot, 7% cabernet franc. 93.

Ch Fourcas-Dumont (AC Listrac)

Owned by Borie family of Ducru Beaucaillou. From 08 vintage, now named Forcas-Borie. Dark fruits, maybe slightly overoaked (and not enough smoky oak). But good firm structure. 50% cab sauvignon, 40% merlot, 10% petit verdot, 20% new oak. 88-89

Chateau Siran (AC Margaux)

Lovely depth of fruit, very good wine, slightly short, but I have just come from Palmer! On a retasting, this is very charming, a good lower cost option. 93

Chateau Rauzan Segla (AC Margaux)

Near equal in quality but very different flavour profile from Margaux and Palmer. This has more intensity, more pressing tannins, but still utterly successful. 52% cabernet sauvignon, 48% merlot, 11% press wine, 55% new oak. Harvest was from Sept 23. Plenty of liquorice and clear black cherry, but also a great whoosh of freshness that allows the whole thing to float along your palate. Another great wine from Kolasa, just gorgeous, with the precision that Segla manages each year. 96-97

Chateau Rauzan Gassies (AC Margaux)

The blend is 75% cabernet sauvignon, up from 55% in 2007, together with merlot 23% and petit verdot 2%. They harvested right up to October 14, one of the latest in the appellation, and have used 50% new oak, which gives an attractive smoky edge. Eric Boissenot has been consultant here since 2007, and this year they tried co-innoculation for the first time (one of his favourite techniques). Unquestionably Rauzan Gassies has been improving in quality over recent years, and this is a gentle wine, with real elegance and good black fruit. But there is still a but... personally I thought the 2008 over-delivered for the vintage, and this slips back down a touch. 93.

Chateau Prieure Lichine (AC Margaux)

Grape blend is 65% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot, 5% petit verdot. This is good, very approachable, a nice amount of flashiness, there is evident oak but nothing too over-powering. Really enjoyable. Michel Rolland is consultant. 94.

Chateau Marquis de Terme (AC Margaux)

Changes happening at this estate include a new director and increasing of planting density. The 2009 wine is deep, rich purple in colour, more evident polyphenols than many in Margaux. This is definitely on the powerful side of the 09 spectrum, but actually successfully so, with a burst of freshness on the finish. Not my favourite, but certainly stands up well. 93-94.

Ch Malescot St Exupery (AC Margaux)

This has caused a stir this year, with a very high James Suckling score right off the bat, and it is unquestionably seductive and exuberant. The blend is 57% cabernet sauvignon, 37% merlot, 8% cabernet franc, 4% petit verdot, and a whopping 70% new oak that is put to maximum effect by consultant Michel Rolland. Picking 29 September to 16 October, making it among the last to bring in the final grapes. It lacks some of the lift and softness of the best wines of the vintage for me. 93+

Chateau Lascombes (AC Margaux)

Another Michel Rolland wine, with a blend of 48% merlot, 48% cabernet sauvignon, 4% petit verdot. I seriously preferred the 2008 for this wine (which was in fact one of my wines of the vintage last year). This time they have seriously over-egged the beautiful raw materials that were given in 2009. There is fruit, but it is drowned out by the oak and tannin. Really a shame, because I was looking forward to tasting the Lascombes after last year's success. Will retaste when it bottle and hope it has calmed down. 91-92.

Chateau Labegorce (AC Margaux)

Another chateau that has seen several changes over the past year – this is the first vintage since Labegorce and Labegorce Zede have been joined together into one wine. The tannins are fairly tight here and there are very well presented rich black fruits. I like it, but not my favourite here, could be a touch more expressive. 50% cabernet sauvignon, 38% merlot, 8% petit verdot, 4% cabernet franc. 91

Chateau Kirwan (AC Margaux)

A blend of 56% cabernet sauvignon, 17% merlot, 13,5% cabernet franc, 13.5% petit verdot (which they say did particularly well this year, and which gives a lovely dark colour and distinctively spicy edge to the wine). There is real power and personality here, and a wet stone minerality on the finish. Perhaps lacks a little elegance, but this is an impressive wine. 94.

Chateau Dufort Vivens (AC Margaux)

78% cabernet sauvignon, 5% cabernet franc, 20% merlot. Good elegance, I always like this wine and they have again produced a very enjoyable wine, with some good but not overworked extraction. 90-92

Chateau Desmirail (AC Margaux)

For me, one of the more over-extracted numbers here, although it does come into balance if you sit with it for long enough. This has 70% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot (there is now 2% of petit verdot in the vineyard, but it won't come into play until next year) They have upped the cabernet sauvignon quite significantly, and harvested it slowly over two weeks. 39 hl/h, fairly similar to 2008. 49 hl/h in 2005. 92

Chateau Dauzac (AC Margaux)

An Andre Lurton estate (run by his daughter) that has been getting better and better in recent years. 64% cabernet sauvignon, 36% merlot. 72% new oak. This year was a relatively easy vinification, because such good raw materials. Vinified at 28 degrees. A seriously classy wine, where the juice is left on the lees for four months after the malolactic fermentation. Eric Boissenot consultant. 94+

Chateau d'Angludet (AC Margaux)

A touch down for me this year compared to the usual wines from this property, but this is always a reliable Margaux that offers good value (and I'm sure for the price it will still be a good bet this year. Just up against stiff competition in this tasting). 90+.

Chateau Cantenac Brown (AC Margaux)

Simon Halabi's property continues to assert itself. The blend is 65% cabernet sauvignon, 35% merlot, 50% new oak. They produced 42% of the first wine in 2009, and 58% went into the second wine BriO. This is very emphatic, big and exuberant, almost seductive, if slightly try-hard. The 2008 felt more of a leap in quality for me, but this is certainly keeping up its level. 93-94

Ch Brane Cantenac (AC Margaux)

Good soft tannins that build up in presence in the mouth. This is very attractive, continuing a few years of ever improving performance from this chateau, owned by Henri Lurton. The blend is 53% cabernet sauvignon, 40% merlot, 7% cabernet franc with 60% new oak. Lovely length, highly velvety and seductive. A very successful year for the property. 94.

Villa des Quatre Soeurs (AC Margaux)

Owned by Luc Thienpont, this tiny estate has just 1.4ha planted to 10,000 vines per hectare. The blend in 2009 is 40% cab sauvignon, 55% merlot, 5% petit verdot. Eric Boissenot as consultant, they use entirely one-year barrels, which does help it keep this very delicate feeling. Good fruit, very fresh and can feel that alcohol is moderate (just under 13.5%) – just feels very easy to drink. 91.

Chateau Tayac Plaisance (AC Margaux)

Another Luc Thienpont estate, this has 65% cab sauvignon, 30% merlot, 5% petit verdot. 50% new oak, 50% one year. 3.5has, Jacques and Eric Boissenot again. This has much more power than the Villa, richer riper fruits, but really does finish on a big lift, lots of freshness. Really like this one – their biggest production. 92.

Clos des Quatres Vents

The last of Thienpont's Margaux triumvirate, and a sweeter, more seductive experience, with 55% cabernet sauvignon, 40% merlot, 5% petit verdot. 7500 bottles a year, so just 625 cases. There is a beautifully sweet edge to the fruit than comes from the 100% new oak barrels, but still with a soft tannins and sweep of acidity that puts among the most interesting of the appellation in 2009. Very impressive. 94-95.

CRU BOURGEOIS, OTHER

All comunals were tasted blind at Chateau Beaumont (an Haut Medoc). The others I tasted from samples at my house, or from other tastings around the UGC week. In general, the cru bourgeois were interesting, with many wines that showed well and I thought punched above their weight. In 2009, many of the smaller wines produced their best effort for years, easily since 2005. I found that it was as you climbed higher the quality scale that the temptation to turbo-charge became too difficult to resist... until you got right up to the top again and the winemakers seemed to once again relax and have nothing to prove. Anyway, there should be some excellent value wines in this lot.

St Estephe

Chateau Le Crock

Owned by the Cuvelier family of Léoville Poyferré, with female oenologist Isabelle Davin. This has nice bright (60% Cabernet Sauvignon) fruit and a lovely deep nose. It rises on the finish, has some interesting touches of liquorice root and cassis. Promising. 91-92.

Chateau Segur de Cabanac

Owner Guy Dellon sticks to his elegant style here, with a more reserved nose on this wine, from a 7ha estate planted to 60/40 Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot. Still a wonderful deep colour, this has more reserved tannins, and less obvious fruit. 89-90.

Chateau Meyney

Almost black in colour, very intense. Chewy tannins, plenty of black fruit,

liquorice and coffee. It's a bit over-extracted, it's brooding, but not quite delivering. Sustainable winemaking on the 56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Merlot, 9% Petit Verdot and 9% Cabernet Franc. 89-90.

Chateau Laffitte-Carcasset

Definite signs of over-extraction here. Trying hard, lots of coffee, oak, something interesting trying to get out of the 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, but overly harsh finish. 89.

Chateau Serilhan

Didier Marcellis continues to do good work at this estate, now in its second year with Hubert de Bouard as consultant. There is so much 'matiere' here. A good nose, very dense, very good croquant fruit, very enjoyable. This is richer in style again than it was in recent years, much more in keeping with the 2008. The whole structure needs to relax and let go a little, but clear quality here. 91-93.

Chateau Lilian Ladouys

Director here is now Vincent Mulliez from Chateau Bellevue in Haut Medoc, as owner Swiss owner Jacky Lorenzetti lives most of the time in Paris. This is another blockbuster colour, lots of extraction, starts off well, good attack, but bitter on the finish. They needed to let up a touch sooner. 89-90.

Chateau de Come

Softer tannins, some good fruit. Good texture, but doesn't deliver on the finish, and needs more lift. Starts well, and there's no doubt that this would be an appealing wine if it is well priced. The fruits continue to build in your mouth after the wine has gone, always a good sign. 90.

Chateau La Haye

Chocolate, rich, not as intense in colour, looks like higher merlot and/or softer extraction (this is vinified in stainless steel, and then moved into 1/3 new oak barrels). This is mocha rather than coffee, and has some freshness. 91.

Chateau Domeyne

Owned by Clare Villars of Chasse Spleen, with 60% Cabernet Sauvignon. Some lovely depth of fruit going on in this glass. Inviting nose, and inviting colour with a lovely reflective ruby purple. Pretty good. Red fruits, with some cassis leaf underneath. Wet stones, bracken and good liquorice. This is a big wine, but pretty. 91-92

Chateau Coutelin-Merville

Good deep colour, but this lacks fruit. All sinew, no fat, which sounds better on paper than in the mouth. A lift at the end saves it. 88.

Petit Bocq

Beautiful velvety red. This all look absolutely gorgeous and so far no overt the top alcohol, even if they are big wines. Very good indeed, blueberry and redcurrant, a good lift on the finish. Plenty of tannins but nothing harsh. Good (although we all know now that this has come out at an 18% price rise on last year!). 65% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, unusual for Saint Estephe. 93.

Chateau L'Argilus du Roi

A rubier red than many from Saint Estephe, less dense, perhaps because of the 58% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon & 2% Cabernet Franc blend. Has lots of appeal, some nice fruit, but the finish is a little bitter. Owner Jose Bueno was one of the winemakers at Mouton Rothschild for 23 years. 89-90

Chateau Andron-Blanquet

These wines have such weight when they are being poured out, you can see the mouthfeel in the wine itself. Like this one also. Very good freshness, steely core of liquorice, and that has a good personality, stands out from the others, and has good balance. 60% cabernet sauvignon. 92.

Chateau Picard

Big tannins, very chewy and dense. Plenty of extraction, but with sweet black cherry fruit. This is a brooder, it's big, will take ages to open up, and pretty masculine. Well-made, lacks some elegance for me personally, but hard to mark it down – doesn't really put a foot wrong. Perhaps alcohol a touch hot? Owned by Maehler Besse. 91.

Chateau Beau-site

Casteja family, located next to Calon Segur. A ruby red colour, plum and damson, slightly more easy going than the previous wine. This is fresh 60% Cabernet Sauvignon fruit, good cherry on the palate. It is high in alcohol, and could be a little better balanced but modern and fruit forward. 91.

Chateau Tour de Pez

This is again a ruby red, Dorothy's slippers. One that makes you wait for the fruit to arrive, and it's not that generous, but it's elegant, and it holds off from any over extraction. This is good. 92+

Chateau Clauzet

Exuberant, open nose. Lots of extraction, but well done. Heaps of vanilla oak also, this is modern, I don't love it. Obviously well made, and expensively done, but it lacks some charm for me. 90

Chateau la Commanderie

Another nearly opaque wine that is tightly closed and not giving much away. A

difficult one to judge, but it sits well in the mouth, and has some complex flavours coming through, with a pleasant minerality and freshness once you give it some time. Very dry though. 90.

Chateau Tour des Termes

Look at the colour of these things!!! Unbelievable amount of polyphenols in these wines. Here I think the extraction has been taken too far, and there is a bitterness on the finish, that strangles what is clearly good fruit. It either needs a long time to soften up, a triple decant. 89.

Chateau Pomys

This has rich extraction and sweet fruit. Had one bad bottle sample at the Cru Bourgeois tasting, but tried it again later in the week, and really enjoyed it. Such is the gamble of en primeur!! 90.

Chateau Haut Coteau

Not a great finish. This is tight and pinched, and just didn't work for me. 87.

Saint Julien

Chateau Moulin de la Rose

Gorgeous nose. Rich deep damson, and good freshness. Gooseberry, a lot of fresh, crispy fruit. Just lacks a little profundity on the finish. 91.

Chateau Glana

Owned by Gabriel Meffre, now working with his sons Ludovic and Julien, with Denis Dubourdieu as consultant. Rich, glass-staining purple colour. Well extracted tannins. They hold you tight, and I am waiting for them to kick in and dry out, but they don't. This is a big wine, very meaty, but it delivers with lovely fresh fruit. 93+.

Chateau Lalande

I like this a lot, it has liquorice and rich black fruits. 92.

Pauillac

Chateau Plantey

Very big, well worked. Lots of coffee, lots of liquorice. Very masculine, definitely one for the boys. 50% cabernet sauvignon, 45% merlot, 5% cabernet franc. 90

Chateau Fleur Peyrabon

This has good freshness, and the flavours are interesting. There are good layers coming in here, and the tannins are softer and more rounded. More supple overall, I like this a lot. Owned by Patrick Bernard of wine merchants Millesima. 93.

Chateau Fonbadet

Owned by the Peyronie family, this has slightly chalky tannins, which can be good at this stage, and they build up to an insistent finish. Very dry, some good fruit, but could do with a little more roundness. 89-90.

Chateau Haut Bages Monpelou

Owned by the Casteja family of Chateau Batailley, and very different in flavour profile from all the others so far. Slightly sour cherry taste, doesn't seem typical of the appellation – in fact, when I checked afterwards, this has nearly one-third of cabernet franc, which is certainly unusual for Pauillac. Has some weight, and the tannins are present, but not sure that I would choose a Pauillac if I am looking for these flavours. 89.

Chateau Tour Sieujean

This is onyx black in colour, very intense, also on the nose. Buckle up. The definition of wet stones and flint. That is all about extraction, and nothing about finesse. 70% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot. 88.

Chateau Bellegrave

Another deep colour. Good vanilla new oak nose, but with some freshness also. That has sweet fruit, good well integrated tannins and a nice weight, with a fresh lift at the end. Good. 92.

Margaux

Chateau le Coteau

Ripe red fruit, lots of vanilla oak. Sweet, slightly sickly even. Ripe blueberries, there is definitely some charm and weight to it, and ends well, but all over just a little overdone. 89.

Chateau Paveil de Luze

Chewier, meatier tannins. Seems more of a typical Medoc, and has good weight, but for me it lacks charm. A bit overdone and lacks some personality. Good, but misses its mark. Still nice coffee flavours, a nice pick-me-up. 90.

Chateau d'Arsac

Philippe Raoux delivers black cherry fruits, charcoal and wet stones. Some good depth of flavour and complexity. The mid palate falls away a little, but there is good minerality. 91.

Chateau Marsac Seguineau

Mocha, coffee beans, slightly bitter on the finish. This is okay, but not standout. 89.

Chateau Haut Breton Larigaudiere

Has a nice nose, good fruit., this seems a more classic Margaux, and there is some very nice red fruits. It's good, maybe lacks a bit of complexity. But fresh, delivers. 63% cabernet-sauvignon, 31% merlot, 4% petit verdot and 2% cabernet franc. 90+.

Chateau La Tour de Bessan

Marie-Laure Lurton produces a soft wine with some liquorice and truffles. Doesn't really follow through with the promise at the start. 90

Chateau Tayac

Lovely complexity. This is a good wine, very fresh. Like it a lot. 55 % Cabernet Sauvignon, 40 % Merlot, 5 % Petit Verdot 92.

Chateau Grand Tayac

Also owned by Vincent Mulliez of Chateau Bellevue, and again it is modern in style, with coffee, mocha and dusted chocolate almonds. But it carries this off – very pleasurable. 92.

Chateau Tour de Mons

Rich, big, good grip, it steals up on you and builds in complexity. A burst of black fruits and has a good fresh finish. Again, I am waiting for the tannins to overpower, but they don't. 93.

Chateau Mongravey

This has the components of good fruit, big tannins, some freshness, but doesn't come together as well. Needs to bed down, and could be interesting to retaste. 89.

Chateau La Galiane

Subdued nose, if only the palate was so subdued. Horribly over extracted. Perhaps this needs to be retasted, but it certainly misses the mark now! 84.

Chateau Pontac Lynch

Owned by Marie-Christine Bondon, with a blend of 40% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc. Good freshness, very rich extraction and flavour, like this one a lot. 92.

Chateau Deyrem Valentin

Classic Medoc flavours of blackberry and blackcurrant leaf, from owned Jean

Sorge. Wet stones, a good dry finish (or a little too dry, but again in that classic Medoc way). Tannins are full. Could develop well. 50% Merlot, 48% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Petit Verdot, 1% Carmanere. 91.

L'Aura de Cambon

This is not in fact a Cru Bourgeois, but comes from the team at Cambon la Pelouse (that is CB). This has very rich fruit, but a real seam of freshness that is almost mouth-puckering, but end up being really rather pleasant. Lots of vanilla on the finish, that gives a sweet finish, something tells me there is a lot of new oak here. Overall, I like this, there is definite quality here – but not sure that it feels particularly typical 'Margaux'. 90+

Moulis

Chateau Pomeys

Rich, well balanced good fruit. Not bad at all, ticks all the boxes. 91.

Chateau Biston-Brillette

This again has the good weight of fruit, has some lovely freshness, but it ends badly, with a note of overextraction. 88.

Chateau Malmaison

Okay, this is a more classic Moulis with some lightweight but appealing fruit. 88-89.

Chateau Duplessis

Another wine from Marie Laure Lurton), the fruit is very pure, with bright blackberries, good ripeness and some good freshness. Lacks some complexity and slightly dry finish, but overall good. 89+

Chateau La Garricq

This is interesting. There is good freshness and a good zippy attack. This would be an enjoyable wine to crack open without having to wait too long. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 20% Petit Verdot. 89-90.

Chateau Lalaudey

Owned by Patrick Meynard since 2007, this has a good weight of fruit, and starts off well. Over-extracted though, so the finish is a little bitter – really a shame to waste this fruit. 87+.

Chateau Brillette

Owned by the Flageul family. Vanilla, cedarwood, really quite a good balance of flavours and freshness. Again, a touch of bitterness on the finish that suddenly kicks in. 88-89.

Chateau Granins Grand Poujeaux

Nice texture and colour of this wine, lovely gloopy alcohol as you pour it in to the glass. One of the tastiest in the Moulis line up. This has good weight, nice black fruits, some new oak, and well balanced. 45% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot. Very good. 92-93.

Chateau Dutruch Grand Poujeaux

Another good one – in fact I think the Poujeaux plateau was smiled upon this year! Plenty of good fruits, bracken and wet stones, and good tannins that don't go too dry on the finish. It's good, but not elevating. 91.

Chateau La Mouline

Less interesting. The fruit is lacking a little, and the tannins are not weighty enough either. Out of balance. 87.

Chateau Branas Grand Poujeaux

Interesting, definitely a personality and a stance. Its own style. Lots of liquorice and some candy. This tastes expensive. Has a dry finish. Wet stones, tobacco, cigar box. Good, a little oaked but quality. 91-92.

Chateau Guitignan

Rich, but over-extracted. Nothing majorly wrong here, but doesn't excite – and the good wines in 2009 definitely do. 89.

Chateau Myon de l'Enclos , Cuvee Emotion

Good overall flavours here, and some nice, well gripping tannins This has structure, and is all in all good, but again fails to really take off. Bernard Lartigue owner. 90.

LISTRAC

Chateau Cap Leon Veyrin

This has rich fruit, purple damsons, and some fresh papaya notes. Velvety texture, good solid tannins, slightly sweet perhaps and definitely high in alcohol, but good. 91-92.

Chateau Saransot-Dupre

Good sweet black cherry, but god that is high in alcohol, and it whacks everything else out of balance. Shame, because there are nicely worked tannins here, but the alcohol is the most prevalent flavour, and that is not what you want from a glass of wine. 87.

Chateau Donissan

Again, this has good fruit and some backbone of tannins, but again the

alcohol takes over. 88.

Chateau Fonreud

This is a chateau that I have increasingly enjoyed in recent years, and owners Jean and Marie-Hélène Chanfreau deliver again this year. Plenty of cedar and vanilla oak on the nose. This has a good balance, and in fact a good complexity of flavours, with plenty of fruit and a fresh finish. 91-92.

Chateau Forcas Hostens

Not successful, which is a shame because I know a lot of investment has been going on in recent years. Almost green tannins on this, and the fruit is hidden. 86.

Chateau Capdet

Plenty of extraction and some juicy fruit, but overall a bit disappointing. Still, at least there is some flesh too it - but it drops off at the end. 88.

Chateau Reverdi

Tastes stinky and very disappointing. 87.

Chateau Fourcas Dupre

Quite hot in alcohol, and doesn't seem to be able to break through that barrier to let the fruit out Don't understand why Listrac is so different from Moulis?? 87.

Chateau Vieux Moulin

This is better, has grip, some nice fruit and some good fruit tannins. There is a mouth-puckering tannic finish, but it holds up, and it will develop very nicely. Good. 90+

Chateau L'Ermitage

Liquorice, dark bitter chocolate, lots of extraction This is big, and for me has ideas above its station, with major alcohol. Some will like this, but it's not for me. 89-90.

Chateau Lafon

A softer colour. Slightly uneventful, but this has quite an appealingly soft mouthfeel compared to many in this appellation. I think maybe Listrac has just tried to turbo-charge itself, and this one is more restrained, with a good soft aftertaste. Nice. 91.

Chateau Mayne Lalande

Owned by Bernard Lartigue, this has a good nose and is far more in balance than many in appellation this year, with good fruit, good freshness, a weighty

mid-palate and keeps its length. This one is easily one of the best Lustracs on show here. 93.

Chateau Lestage

Rich in colour, but not as black as some have been. A very mocha-filled nose, smells very international. On the palate also, this is consciously modern, has a lot of good stuff going on, if a little try-hard. Probably good value though. 55% Merlot, 44% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc. 90

HAUT MEDOC

Ch Beaumont, Haut Medoc

Nice black fruits, some good balance, but it is high in alcohol – just held in place by the well knitted tannins. There is potential here, and it is big – but honestly it is lacking in some elegance and freshness at the end. All of these wines have a reasonable finish. It's undoubtedly a good year, but some winemakers think this is good just because it is big. 89-90.

Chateau Agassac, Haut Medoc

Very good. Lovely rich red fruits, some sweet vanilla oak. Lovely powerful structure, with great freshness on the finish. 50% merlot, 47% cabernet sauvignon, 3% cabernet franc, 25% new oak. 93.

Chateau Liversan

Some nice black fruits again, but a little thin on the mid palate. This is a Domaine Lapalu wine, and I often rely on them to deliver very good value, reliable claret. This is good, but falls just a little short. 88-89.

Chateau Peyrat Fourthon

Another really good one. Lots of 'matiere' here, extracted cleanly, giving plenty of structure. Very contemporary and international. Like it, but could do with more lift on the finish. 91-92.

Chateau du Moulin Rouge

Lovely good fruit, but the end is a little tough (incidentally, didn't this used to be a cru artisan?) This isn't as good as some years – I preferred the 2005. But undoubtedly good value, and this should soften up and offer some early drinking. 89.

Chateau Doyac

Owned by Max de Pourtales. Bit over extracted, to the point that the finish is really quite unpleasant. Over worked. 87.

Chateau Cambon la Pelouse

This is often a reliable, unshowy wine, from the Maestre family, and it delivers again. Nice freshness, good balance, perhaps a little hot on alcohol, but there is plenty to hang on to, and lots of development potential. Always a good value wine. 90-91

Chateau Lieujean

A Domaines Lapalu wine, so hopefully again a good value pick. There is nice fruit, blackcurrant and cherries, and plenty of freshness. Not mind-blowing, and lacking a little mid palate, but overall good. 89.

Chateau Peyrabon

Pleasingly soft coffee aromas, with some richer mocha behind. Nowhere near as good as La Fleur Peybaron (this is the Haut Medoc version from the same winemaking team), but a good effort, with some charming fruit and no problems on the finish. 89.

Chateau Dillon

Tasted this also at the chateau, a few weeks before primeur. It's pretty good, good component parts, nice sweet fruit, quite dense, not harsh tannins. 90.

Chateau D'Arche

A Maehler-Besse wine, that is a success this year. Good, dense fruit, pure coffee flavours, really sharp ground coffee beans. Well knit tannins, and plenty of them. Promising. 91-92

Chateau Caronne Ste Gemme

Olivier Dauga consultant. Very nice. Slightly over-worked and over-extracted, it's quite chunky. But there is good dense fruit, and it all comes together on the finish. Hoping to go the distance. 90+.

Chateau du Taillan

This is a big wine, they have clearly pulled out all the stops. A little too big, too modern for me, really loses its typicity. But can't really fault them for effort, and no harsh edges. 89-90

Chateau Paloumey

One of the better vintages that I have tasted at this estate. Still doesn't really lift off, but there is some delicacy among the big fruit flavours, and definite potential. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, 40% Merlot 90-91.

Chateau Charmail

Good length, soft fruits, nice structure and weight. Enjoyable. 90

Chateau Bellevue

Here Vincent Mulliez shows again that he is playing to an international crowd. There are big chewy tannins, veering towards opulence, but with dense plums and damsons to pad things out nicely in mid-palate, and rich tannins for it all to slide along on. Good development ahead, if lacks a touch of freshness. 91

Ch Larriveaux

Very good quality, nice dense fruit, rich tannins. 91.

Chateau Saint Paul

A wine that comes from vineyards close to Le Boscq in St Estephe, but just over the border in Haut Medoc (not far from Sociando Mallet). Dense, classic, enjoyable. 89-90.

Vn de la Cardonne

Not strictly a cru bourgeois, but from a cru bourgeois property, this is a 100% cabernet sauvignon wine made only in exceptional years. And can I say well done for providing me with the sample in a WIT tube. Very tightly knitted black fruits, the tannins are full, and it only just makes it into the non overdone category, but actually when you sit with this for a while, it is quite soft, and has a definite personality and style. Not very 'Bordeaux'. Call Vn apparently because 1855 was not only the year of the Grand Cru Classification, it was also when Mendeleev started drawing the Periodic Table (and La Cardonne think of this as their first growth wine). 92.

And a few others...

Chateau Les Grand Chenes, Medoc

We ramp up the colour chart by about 10 shades of Pantone. This is richly extracted and terribly dense. It's definitely got a presence, but this makes me feel I am over the limit just with one sip. 89.

Clos du Jaugeyron, Haut Medoc

An attractive bright primeur purple. This is so different from the turbo-charged 2009s. Still richly fruity, but with elegance and restraint, and utterly delicious, lip-smacking, mouth-watering levels of acidity. Just lovely. 93+

Ch Senejac, Haut Medoc cru bourgeois

This has lovely bright fruit, and really good definition of flavours. Successfully ripe without overdoing things. This is now (biodynamic?? Organic??) but same team as Pontet Canet. Good length, very crip fruit (this is the definition

of 'croquant'). Zips along. 92+.

Ch d'Escurac, Medoc cru bourgeois

This has a smooth and elegant nose, red fruits, nothing too overpowering. Slightly less successful on the palate, a little flat, but there are some pleasant fruits here, and this is a non-too-showy take on 2009. Tiny bit hot on the finish. 87.

Other very good Haut Medocs: Chateau Cissac Cha Malescasse Chateau Trois Moulins Chateau de St Gemme Ch Montail d'Arsac (a lighter, fruitier wine, but very good)