



# Bordeaux's hidden treasures

Almost 60% of the Bordeaux vineyard is classified as Bordeaux or Bordeaux Supérieur. At an online tasting, and a London round table, merchants had the chance to discover and discuss whites and rosés from these AOCs

**T**he reputation of Bordeaux's famous red wines is unrivalled but the region is shining a light on its white and rosé wines, in a bid to broaden its appeal.

As with its reds, differences in growing conditions contribute to a diverse array of styles in Bordeaux whites and pinks, which was evident in a tasting led by Bordeaux wine tutor Laura Clay for readers of *The Wine Merchant*.

"There's been increased quality in white wine in the last 10 to 15 years," she says. "There's a lot of skin contact, skin maceration and lees stirring. All those things are making the whites better quality."

"The diverse soil types and micro-terroirs bring a lot of complexity, interest and reliability when blending. It's a very versatile category."

Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Muscadelle are the principal varieties in white Bordeaux blends but Sauvignon Gris is increasingly being used, as in **Château de Bonhoste Cuvée Prestige 2020**, a blend of 90% Sauvignon Gris and 10% Sauvignon Blanc.



"There's a lot of Sauvignon Gris character here, a kind of peachy, apricot aroma, some dried fruit character. It's much plumper, more generous," says Clay.

"If I was tasting it blind I wouldn't identify it as Bordeaux, but that's not a bad thing. Let's have diversity, let's have difference, let's shake it up a bit."

**Château de Lussac Le Blanc 2020** combines 65% Sauvignon Blanc with 35%

Sauvignon Gris.

It's fermented in oak for eight days and aged on the lees for six months.

"It has really smoky, creamy, toasty notes," says Clay, "but also with some orange blossom citrus character."

**Le Loup de la Loubière**, from Entre-deux-Mers producer Vignobles Jade, has 32% Sauvignon Gris tucked into a more conventional blend.

"In the past if a wine was stated as 90% Sauvignon, it might have been partly Sauvignon Gris, but producers didn't really differentiate," says Clay. "Now they are doing so because Gris is looked on as being trendy."

"Le Loup is fresh, zesty and zingy without being over the top on the palate, compared to New Zealand Sauvignon, which would be more punchy."

"Generally, Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc

is nothing like New Zealand Sauvignon. That's not to put New Zealand down, but Bordeaux is more restrained, lighter, more elegant, more food-friendly."

**Château Roc Meynard**, from Vignobles Hermouet in Fronsac on the right bank, is a straight 50-50 Sauvignon Blanc/Sémillon split. "This is very limey and minerally with some quince flavour," says Clay. "It has got a lot of fresh acidity but what is really noticeable is that the Sémillon makes it a slightly heavier wine – but still one that is beautifully balanced. There's a hint of creaminess from the lees stirring."

Two single varietal Sauvignon Blancs with similar production approaches highlighted how different sites produce nuances of style.

**Château Labatut Cuvée Prestige 2020** is night-harvested to ensure freshness in the grapes, and made with skin maceration,

cool fermentation and lees stirring for four months to produce "gentle floral aromas and a crisp, persistent acidity".

The Sauvignon Blanc from **Château La Verrière** has a slightly warmer fermentation than normal for whites, at 18-20°C, and, says Clay, has "more complex aromas, with hints of jasmine, lime and lime leaf".

The relatively recent revolution in Bordeaux rosé was led by British winemakers, making pink wine for the UK market, says Clay. Their success has led to many more producers developing specific sites to grow grapes to make rosé wines.

"They're picking the grapes earlier and taking the same approach as for white wine," says Clay, "with cool fermentation, as opposed to just drawing off a little juice when they want to make a more concentrated red wine. As a consequence,



## Merchant feedback

**Angus Weir, Great Grog, Edinburgh**

"Being a relative newbie in this industry, I haven't really been exposed to the whites and rosés of Bordeaux but I thought they were all very good, in particular the Château de Lussac and Château Penin. In a world where Sauvignon Blanc is so popular, but a hole created with the limited stock of New Zealand plonk, I can certainly see Bordeaux whites filling that gap."



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they're more elegant, more balanced and more marketable."

The tasting featured several examples. **Château Caminade Haut Guerin Rosé 2020** is a 90-10 Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon blend that, Clay thinks, has "almost saké aromas" and Hubba Bubba bubble-gum notes that resonated with some readers.

The 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet **Château Gandoy-Perrinat Rosé 2020** was more "red fruit character, summer pudding, with a nice sharpness to it".

For Clay, the authentic Bordeaux rosé shade is the currently-fashionable pale pink.

"The colour is definitely a way to encourage younger drinkers to try Bordeaux," Clay adds.

"But just because they're paler it doesn't mean they lack depth or body. Some rosés are pretty good matches with lamb – they

can cope with it."

An example of the more robust style was the Cabernet Sauvignon-dominant **Château Penin 2020**. "It's really bold but not over the top," says Clay. "It's still a very approachable and friendly wine that ticks a lot of boxes."

**Belle Rosée de Fontenille 2020** is made from the fruit of 30-year-old vines and is similarly "really bracing, very long, very fresh, very bold and distinctive".

The tasting also included **Château Mousseyron Rosé 2020** – a mouth-watering, aperitif-style wine from the right bank with "upfront aniseed, grapefruit, and distinctive acidity" and a hint of amber in the colour – and **Carrelet d'Estuaire Confidences 2020**, a 100% Merlot with a "lovely raspberry character, a hint of strawberry – very easy drinking with a light freshness". ■

“I was really taken aback by the quality of the wines and would love to explore selling more from Bordeaux

Aimee Davies



## Merchant feedback

Jane Taylor  
Dronfield Wine World, Derbyshire

"We only stock one Bordeaux Blanc at the moment but will definitely look to extend the range in the light of this tasting."

John Kernaghan, Liquorice, Shenfield

"Across the board the rosé colour was on brief. Against a Provence rosé they may have been a touch darker but none were what I would call dark. That is always the starting point.

"Château Penin was the most balanced of the range: dry, subtle, and with a medium long finish. Superb on its own or with a chicken or grilled fish salad.

"Le Loup de la Loubière was a great start. If you wanted to win someone over to Bordeaux whites this was the winner. Thirst quenching yet still classed as dry; good length and quite gluggable.

"The Bonhoste was my other favourite. Sauvignon Gris is obviously the winning element in this style of winemaking. It adds a texture which brings the wine together. This one was my dinner table wine."

Aimee Davies  
Aimee's Wine House, Bristol

"I was really taken aback by the quality of the wines and would love to explore selling more from Bordeaux.

"I was surprised by the oak use and lees techniques in the wines, along with the minerality.

"The rosés were more than comparable to Provence styles. One that stood out was Château Caminade Haut Guerin with its great character of anise notes and Hubba Bubba gum flavour.

"The labels on the rosés were all really presentable. And I was very surprised with all the food matches that were discussed for the rosés. They are very versatile wines."

# White heat

Indies agree that white and rosé Bordeaux deserves a wider audience. So what's the best way to draw in consumers? For some, familiar grape varieties are key. For others, it's the halo effect of a famous region

Cécile Frémont of Planète Bordeaux says: "Younger winegrowers want to develop another image of Bordeaux wines. Today there is a large diversity of Bordeaux wines, with the possibility of finding wines for all tastes and occasions. Bordeaux white and rosé wines are easy to drink, and delicate, with fresh and fruity notes."

Bordeaux whites are made from a variety of grape varieties including Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Muscadelle.

Josh Castle, of Noble Rot and Shrine to the Vine, is a fan of rounder, Sémillon-led styles of Bordeaux Blanc and suggests that "consumers are less aware of that fresher, zippier style of Bordeaux Blanc" that is typically the result of Sauvignon Blanc dominance.

Consumers are certainly familiar with that particular grape variety. So might that be a good way of hooking them into the white Bordeaux category?

Andrew Gray of Plume in Covent Garden thinks there's a better approach.

"I think we're a fairly icon-led market when it comes to wine," he says. "People care about Bordeaux because it has the name. Anything you attach to that name will have some success linked to it."

Rudy Hovath of Urban Cellar believes that consumers do relate to Sauvignon and this can only help with the process. But he also draws a parallel with Rioja: everyone

knows the red wine, but the white version can come as a pleasant surprise, especially with the halo effect of the region's name.

"We have only one type of white Bordeaux, so I'm quite excited to taste more," he adds. "It would be nice to have more on our shelves."

Playing the Sauvignon Blanc card is probably not the best route into Bordeaux Blanc in every case. Gray refuses to sell the New Zealand iteration of the variety, due to its ubiquity. Andrea Viera at Last Drop Wines thinks consumers are beginning to share Gray's antipathy.

"Our customers say they hate Sauvignon Blanc," she says, adding that, while such claims may or may not be strictly true, it's a position that people cling to. Perhaps it's a classic case of familiarity breeding contempt.

"I don't know anyone who tells me they love Sémillon," she says. "But they buy it because I tell them it's a great wine."

She adds: "There isn't any baggage to white Bordeaux, it's just completely unknown. We just need to get it in front of people. Most of the white Bordeaux we've had in the shop we've purchased with our en primeur order. We really liked the white and thought, at this price we've got to be able to sell it – and if we can't, we're happy to drink it ourselves."

Hovath thinks that Bordeaux Blanc's prospects may be enhanced by increased British tourism to the region. Castle does

not disagree but adds it's important to help consumers appreciate just how varied and complex Bordeaux's white blends can be.

He also points out that a price and quality ladder exists. "Bottle-aged Bordeaux Blanc at the higher end is competing with some of the great white wines of the world," he says.

The whites in our tasting line-up were described as "great value and very clean" by Gray.

"I would say these are extremely dependable wines," he says. "I would buy a large proportion of these wines, being confident I could sell them at those price points. It's not a risky biscuit investing in them."

The rosé wines also went down well. "I was really impressed with the rosés on the whole," says Castle. "I think that they were all really pleasantly dry, and they ticked the colour box – which is something consumers really do care about." Indeed Castle argues that rosés, being closer in colour to Bordeaux's famous reds, represent less of a leap of faith for consumers than the whites. ■

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