



VINTAGE AMBITION

Quality-minded winemakers are shaking off the 'industrial' image of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur appellations

Putting people first sounds like political sloganeering, but it is the focus for Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur appellations, which include about half of all Bordeaux vineyards. While some wines from these appellations are selected from supermarkets for office parties, where colleagues pay scant attention to quality, a tasting of over 100 reds from the 2019 vintage proves that many punch well above that dismissive image.

A week of estate visits and conversations with winemakers yields talk of organic winemaking, soil and climate and careful selection for blends. Aware of Bordeaux's 'old school' image being eaten away by trendier, organic wines from elsewhere, Bordeaux wines are going green. For the region as a whole, covering all 65 AOCs, 12% are already organic with 30% in progress of conversion, says Marc Médeville of Château Fayau. Over 65% are certified as having 'an environmental approach', up from 35% back in 2014.

Such change is essential. A common critique was repeated to me by a

sommelier in Paris this summer: 'Bordeaux is so out of fashion'.

To bring it back into fashion, Planète Bordeaux, the union for the two appellations, is increasing public tasting events and competitions worldwide, from Liverpool to Hong Kong. 'We must put winegrowers back at the heart of promotion,' remarks Stéphane Gabard, the union's president. 'The world is changing and customers want direct contact with producers, so that they can better understand the wines,' he says.

Quality-minded vintners such as Véronique Barthe of Château Freynelle and Thibault Despaigne at Tour de Mirambeau, Girolate and Mont Pérat are increasing planting densities, forcing vineyard roots deeper to deliver more complex elements of the terroir to their grapes. They, and many others, understand their soils and fine-tune winemaking to accentuate elegance and freshness, a stark divergence from clichéd 'supermarket wine'. They are also attuned to markets. Barthe's biggest market is the US, for example, where she sells one third of her wines and, being responsive to demand,

she has been using screw caps for her whites since the early 2000s.

Nicolas Lesaint, technical director at Château Reignac, a renowned Bordeaux Supérieur, recently co-organised an informal group of 20 like-minded Bordeaux Supérieurs dubbed: 'All You Need is Wine'. It did not surprise me that some of them – from Château Sainte Barbe and Château La Verrière to Château Pierrail and Château Recougne – scored among the highest in my tasting notes for this article. 'We cannot cast our wines with a negative, second-rate image,' Lesaint says over lunch at the estate. A vertical of Reignac reds reaching back to 2009 proves that quality Bordeaux Supérieur ages well. Although 'All You Need is Wine' is not an official group, it helps consumers to differentiate amongst so many wines: 'A hierarchy among the Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieurs would make sense,' says Strasbourg wine bar owner Stephan Maure of Ill Vino.

Based on tastings for this article, the 2019 vintage is very good. Although the growing season suffered from both drought and heat waves, just enough rain in late September helped to refresh the small and thick-skinned Cabernet Sauvignon grapes especially. Although alcohol levels were high, the wines seem less heady than in 2018, many vintners say, leaving the impression of brighter fruit. Château Fayau's Médeville for example agrees that 2018 has a bit more alcohol, 'while the 2019 reds are more balanced and rounder', although they do not reach 'the heights of the 2016 vintage'.

WINES TO TRY AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2019

Château Recougne, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 91

Majestic

The top wine of the tasting with a gorgeous nose of classy, cool blueberry, plum and pencil lead. The balanced palate exudes ripe fruit, more blueberry than plum, and a touch of chocolate. Density and freshness that suits fine dining. Alc 14.5%

Château La Verrière, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Jascot

Nuanced aromas with subtle oak and bright red and black fruit, the palate has density and grip, which is perfect for a fine dinner. An estate quite consistent in quality in recent years, and worth seeking out. Alc 14.5%

Château Laville, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

La Rousse Foods

A classic style with polish and refinement. Brownie chocolate notes appeal without being too rich. Well balanced, juicy and with a medium finish - and a certain grace, that holds up on day two. Bravo! Alc 14.5%

Château Le Sèpe, Cuvée Initiale, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Wineraks

Agreeable aromas of ripe fruit, spice and liquorice seduce - a rather vinous palate with salty freshness, too. The juicy mid palate is enjoyable too. One UK retailer described the 2012 vintage as 'rich and juicy

classic Bordeaux, at a fraction of the price' and the 2019 fits that description rather well. Alc 14%

Château La Loubière, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Unkorked

Bright red fruit aromatics, the palate is fresh and crisp in approach but with ripe fruit and nicely balanced acidity and alcohol. One of the top wines of the tasting. Alc 14.5%

Château Hostin Le Roc, Grande Cuvée, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Eucalyptus and plum aromas. The clay rich and limestone sub-soil serves this estate well, reflecting both density and freshness. UK merchants should take notice. Fine tannic edge that softens with a carafe.

Château Moutte Blanc, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Vine Trail Ltd

Roasted fruit, subtle spice, and an enjoyable palate density combined with juiciness. This has grip and texture. Alc 14%

Château Panchille, Alix, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Hoops and Champagne

Subtle aromatics of blackberry, plum, spice and red berry. A soft, elegant and refined palate, with a tannic edge to stand up to meat and selected vegetarian dishes. Subtle density coming from a selection of older vines and the best parcels. Judicious 24 months aging in new and one-year old oak, whose tannins are seamlessly integrated. Alc 14.5%

Château Sainte Barbe, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 90

Scrachley

A top wine of the tasting, classy and polished, with ripe and fresh fruit, hints of spice, leading to a nuanced palate with fine texture and density and a medium finish with lift. Instead of meat, why not try with brown rice risotto with mushrooms and oregano? HVE. Alc 14.5%

Compagnie Médocaine des Grands Crus, Cap Royale, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Tesco

Among the more powerful wines here, with ripe fruit and noticeable tannins. Some estates have tough-as-nails tannins but here it works. Six months ageing in oak. Jean René Matignon of Château Pichon-Longueville Baron oversees the winemaking. HVE, Vegan. Alc 13.5% ▶



Château Donjon de Bruignac, Premium, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Lovely chocolate brownie aromas. The palate is smooth enough, with texture and there is power too with a feeling of mint from the 30% Cabernet Franc which is a nice pairing for the more opulent expression of Merlot. Lovely wine. Alc 14.5%

Château la Cafourche, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Medium plus body with smooth tannins and a medium finish. A tasty crowd pleaser and then some. Nice job. Alc 14%

Château La France, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Smooth and has tannin presence but nicely integrated. Lacks the éclat needed for a 90 but getting close. There is a density that impresses here, with a fresh iodine like finish. Alc 14.5%

Château La Peyre, Cuvée Burdigala, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Peppery nose, well crafted and tannic but rounded enough: a wine of quality that should be aged two years before enjoying. Alc 13.5%

Château Lauduc, Grande Cuvée, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Dark berry fruit aromas lead to a rich and rather suave palate, vinous and a smooth texture leading to a medium finish. Very nice, although some unresolved tannin means you should let it breathe first. Alc 14%

Château Laurence, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Chocolate brownies and plums. Very smooth and appealing, a bit of high-toned fruit but balanced and lively. More red than dark fruit. But a creamy palate texture. Not bad at all! Pair with meat, sure, but vegetarians can try with black bean and cheese burrito. HVE. Alc 14.5%

Château Pierrail, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Hard to resist the tasty chocolate notes combined with damson and blueberry fruit. Another consistent, quality-minded producer. A rather seamless integration of just toasty oak derived notes works. This year is rather opulent at 15% alcohol, which is not too obvious as the wine is balanced, although one senses warmth on the finish. Alc 15%

Château Poujeaux-Saint-Genes, Carré d'or, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Neant Agreeable chocolate brownie cake nose, the palate smooth and refined. The 10-hectare vineyard includes gravel over clay and in the direction of the Compostelle walk. A top cuvée made from vines of about 35 years of age. Alc 13.5%

Château Terrefort Quancard, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Hayward Bros Ltd. Aromatically both wet earth and red and dark fruits. Tasty palate, rich with agreeable tannins. Very fun to drink, not as fine as La Loubière, tasted before, but palate enveloping. Alc 14%

Château Timberlay, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

The wine's brightness as well as tannic edge is enjoyable meaning that it can stand up to a dinner, balance out rich meats or cheeses more than adequately. Bravo! Terra Vitis. Alc 14%

Château Turcaud, Cuvée Majeure, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

Wimbledon Wine Cellar Nuance and complexity in the making. The palate depth and density is enjoyable as well as a certain brightness and pepper spice on the nose that intrigues the taster. Indeed, a wine that demands attention from connoisseurs in search of a fine Bordeaux. Although somewhat hard on the finish! HVE. Alc 14.5%

La Cuvée des Copains of Château Pertignas, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

David Matheson Easy drinking, fun and yet there is a fine structure to the wine. Long maceration to soften the tannins works here. Perhaps the Carménère lends freshness. A nice bottle of wine, and confirmed tasting it one day later. Bravo. Alc 13.5%

L'Esprit Lisennes, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89

The aromas are almost bewitching with dark ripe plum, pencil lead and tobacco leaf. The palate is more supple and even soft, which is not a bad thing. There is a certain refinement to this wine, with a smooth texture and an airy elegance. A medium finish. HVE and Terra Vitis. Alc 13%

AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019

Château Galoupeau, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 90

Stands out among the non-sulfite wines, this delivers superior fruit purity. The verve and ripe fruit are excellent. Enjoy with charcuterie and cheeses for a picnic. A pepper spice aspect lends freshness. Alc 14%

Château La Rame, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 90

Verve and richness, with bright red fruit and black plum and smooth tannins. The wine delivers the goods indeed with bright acidity ideal for matching with steak. Deserved gold medal winner at the 2020 Paris Concours Général Agricole. HVE. Alc 13%

Les Annereaux, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 90

Starting with juicy red berry aromas, this wine shows character and refinement. The alcohol is balanced by verve, offering a palate with depth and smooth texture. Located in Lalande de Pomerol, some vineyards lie outside of that appellation are used to craft this wine. Veritable medium body, supple tannin and juiciness with lift. UK importers, take notice! Certified Organic. Alc 14.5%

Bordeaux Z du Vignoble des Quatre Vents, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Understated aromas of cassis and plum, but kudos to a most vinous palate with freshness. The Petit Verdot adds spice. The tannins clamp down just a bit on the medium finish. The company name comes from a hilly location,



where winds come from four directions. Poetic, yes, and the wine is of fine quality. Alc 14.5%

Château de Beauregard-Ducourt, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Charles Taylor Wines Ltd Elegance, with grassy herb aspects. The palate is deceptively light, with rounded and integrated tannins, leading to orange rind freshness. The classic label, like a stencil drawing of the estate and its vines, reflects a sense of polish and pencil lead refinement. Try with Peking Duck or chicken à l'orange. Alc 14%

Chateau La Fontaine de Genin, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Waitrose Very supple and almost soft, for a wine with noticeable tannin. The fresh ripe fruit aspects are enjoyable with smooth tannins on the medium bodied palate, a wine without pretension. There is a brightness to the palate that sets it apart, as well. Notes of espresso and smokiness add complexity to the ripe fruit. Alc 14%

Château la Freynelle, Cuvée Emotion, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Cassis and plum aromas precede a bright and juicy palate, with a smooth texture and medium finish. Coming from top selections of the best grapes from this 80-hectare estate, the wine reflects as much the fruit of careful grape selection as fine winemaking. Alc 13.5%

Château Le Gay l'Enclos, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

A bright wine of verve, ripe fruit and some magical iodine freshness one expects from

quality Bordeaux. Touch of oak spice for complexity, with tannins to ensure structure for both matching rich foods and for ageing another year or two, but just fine today. HVE. Alc 13.5%

Chateau Le Roudier, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Peerless Deep dark colour, this wine conveys density and ripe fruit, and does not have hard tannins. Quite a success and would pair well with roast lamb and garlic. Nice work. HVE. Alc 13%

Château Les Reuilles, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Peerless Understated aromas but the palate is savoury and deep. A serious wine of structure that reaches veritable medium body. A ripe fruit profile enhanced by graphite/pencil lead from the Cabernet. Alc 13%

Château Joinin, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Worsley Wines Ltd Elegant and juicy in its expression of ripe black berry fruit, with a fine balance among the tannins, alcohol and acidity - this Bordeaux AOC punches above its appellation. Crafted from the same team that makes St-Emilion Grand Cru Château Pipeau. Medium finish. Alc 14%

Château Thieuley, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Charles Taylor Wines, The Wine Society Freshness and supple ripe fruit, cassis, plum and red berry. The finish is not as long as some of the other wines tasted for this article, but this estate almost always

delivers the goods and has a deservedly wide distribution. Enjoy with lamb chops. HVE and Terra Vitis. Alc 13.5%

D de Dauzac, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Cru World Wine Ripe red and blackberry aromas enchant the taster. A medium-bodied, rather vinous wine, suave and pleasant. Tannins provide the structure needed to stand up to summer barbecues. The 14.5% alcohol is well balanced by the acidity and this has a medium finish. Indicated 'vegan', the wine is crafted by the same team as Margaux classified growth Château Dauzac. HVE, Vegan. Alc 14.5%

Château Bonnange, Le Cot, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

A fine example of this 100% Malbec, with freshness from limestone and clay soils. Rather complex aromas of tomato vine, black olive, blackberry and pepper. Impressive concentration that requires a carafe (it got better after one day), although oak tannins still noticeable on day two. The word Cot means Malbec in southwest France. Alc 14.5%

Le Petit Verdot du Château Marchand Bellevue, AOC Bordeaux Rouge 2019 89

Darker hue than most wines assessed for this tasting. With aromas of cracked pepper and cardamom, the wine has a rich and ripe black fruit palate, with a slightly earthy aspect. I like its juiciness and tannic edge on the medium finish. This can be served by the glass at a trendy wine bar or pair well with steak. HVE. Alc 14.2%

