

Big and bold: Bordeaux reds 2018

Compared to the 2017 vintage, 2018 yielded bigger wines – sometimes a bit heady – as alcohol levels counted among the highest ever recorded.

The best estates managed to achieve balance with needed freshness. Especially for Merlot – a grape variety that does not tolerate over-maturity as well as Cabernet Sauvignon – it was important to ensure freshness. Indeed, with climate change, “high alcohol is becoming a recurring problem, even in Entre-Deux-Mers,” stresses Thibault Despagne, of Vignobles Despagne, which crafted two excellent red wines in 2018, reviewed among scores of others for this article.

Compared to the 2019 vintage, whose cooler August nights yielded inherently more balanced reds, “we especially needed to keep an eye on acidities to avoid their rapid loss”, explains Fabien La Peyre of the eponymous estate in the heart of Entre-Deux-Mers at Saint-Hilaire-du-Bois, known for its fine limestone soils. “We harvest at night,” he adds. In any case, his Cuvée Burdigala not only evokes the old Latin name for Bordeaux, but counts among the best red wines tasted for this article.

Many observers look upon 2018 as a

Janus like vintage with the worst start to the season ever experienced in Bordeaux including endless rains, which required vigilance against mildew. The rare and short treatment windows demanded much flexibility and mobilization of workers, who took no weekend or holiday breaks. At least that proved to be the case for the estates that worked hard to make fine wine at the level of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur AOC. But then, as Despagne recalls, came a “dream summer and late season which allowed us to harvest ideally ripe grapes à la carte”, he recalls.

Like other properties that succeeded in maintain freshness, Despagne practiced such methods as proper vine trimming to maximize freshness, lighter leaf stripping so as to minimize solar exposure and soil work that better maintained humidity to lessen the impact of heat stress. As a result, even with at least 75% Merlot in his blends, he achieved balance with 14% alcohol. I enjoyed many of the wines tasted for this article. Not quite as refined overall as in 2016, but reaching greater heights than in 2017, 2018 yielded quite a few stars. And at these affordable price points, some of these wines constitute worthy purchasing for Bordeaux hunters.

BEST BUYS

Bordeaux rouge 2018

Petit Verdot By Belle-Vue, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 91

Over £15 **Fine and Rare**

100% Petit Verdot. Under the same owners as the superb Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel Château Belle-Vue (AOC Haut Médoc), this Bordeaux - 100% Petit Verdot - demands patience. The solar vintage ripened the Petit Verdot very well and the complex aromas no doubt come from the over 75-year-old vines: seashell freshness, dark blackberry, black pepper spice, fresh earth and violet floral aspects. But the palate has impressive tannic grip that requires a carafe for at least one hour before serving. An impressive wine, that would go well with Beef Wellington or steak in a mushroom sauce. **Drink** 2021-2030

Château Bastian Réserve, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 90

<https://savigneux.com/>

50% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc. An enchanting nose of brambly red berry, juicy plum and hints of oak-derived spice greet the taster, followed through with a rich palate of ripe red and black fruit, overlaid by a touch of eau-de-vie, displaying vintage warmth. A solar year, but I like the balance. Enjoy with pan seared duck breast. Along with their new white wine, with consultation from the legendary Jean-Claude Berrouet, this is a must for importers.

Château Bel Air Perponcher, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 90

£10–£15 **The Wine Society**

80% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. An excellent representation of Bordeaux AOC justifiably featured by The Wine Society. Succulence is a word that comes to mind to describe both the aromatics and the palate: for a solar vintage, the wine is balanced and juicy as well as rather rich. I like the ripe fruit and subtle spice: a wine that can match a variety of foods, from Coq au Vin to Comte. One of the top wines of all the Bordeaux AOC!

Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud



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Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud

tasted for this article. And worth a visit: the main building on the estate is a 16th century fortified house, which overlooks the Engranne river valley in the north of Dordogne.

Damnation Du Château Roques Mauriac, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 90

Over £15 **Virgin Wine**

85% Cabernet Franc, 15% Merlot. What a title! With its vivid black and red label, the label befits a swanky club. But more importantly, the contents are very good: a panoply of red and black fruit, with touches of blackberry jam and subtle toasted oak provide aromatic pleasure. The attack is frank leading to a medium bodied, rather juicy wine, nicely structured and minty fresh. The 85% Cabernet Franc ripe and delicious indeed. The tannin is rather high, so best to serve with fatty red meats for balance, such as steak on a grill or shishkebab.

Château Des Léotins Cuvée Petit Verdot, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

www.vignobles-lumeau.com

100% Petit Verdot. Near optimal ripeness achieved here for Petit Verdot in the solar 2018 vintage. The wine is at once vivacious and rich, with a uniquely earthy and spicy expression often associated with this grape. Medium body, with a rather long finish. Aged 10 months in new French oak. Nicely balanced. Great to pair with potato au gratin or rich cheeses or even a fondant au chocolat.



Château Thieuley, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

£10–£15 **Charles Taylor Wines, The Wine Society**

70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. An ever reliable producer of quality Bordeaux, the 2018 vintage does not disappoint. For one of the hottest summers since 1900, the 2018 vintage would make you think of jammy wines, but here we have a deft expression of both ripeness and freshness: soft, plummy fruit with some brownie cake on the nose. The palate follows though with baked cherry - like the French cake Clafoutis - along with spice. A juicy Bordeaux to drink upon release. Bravo!

Château Tour De Mirambeau, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

£10–£15 **Ratcliffe and Brown**

75% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Justifiably a success in the UK already, the 2018 vintage of this estate has a Right Bank profile, combining mainly Merlot and Cabernet Franc and then 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. The aromas are more damson and plum than cassis or cherry. Both supple and substantial for its appellation, the wine would as easily match grilled T-Bone steak as a rich onion tart. And if in Bordeaux, the estate is worth a visit: located in Rauzan, a medieval village in the Entre-Deux-Mers region famous for the subterranean cave carved out by a river that runs underneath the limestone terroir.

Dolmen de Château Marchand Bellevue, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

£10–£15 www.vignoblesalaindufour.com/

100% Merlot. An excellent Merlot wine that is fruit forward, balanced and charming. Cold pre-fermentation at 8°C no doubt contributes to a cooler fruit extraction. Careful control of fermentation temperatures maintains freshness in a solar vintage with 14% alcohol. Aged in new oak for 18 months, the integration is excellent. An ideal pairing with red or white meats preferably grilled. At the end of the meal, try with Camembert or cantal cheeses. Another wine for UK importers to try. ➤

Semper Viva de Suau, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89www.chateausuau.com

80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Pure fruit aromatics and the absence of sulfur accentuates that impression. The Latin "Semper Viva" (Always Alive) is apt. Indeed, Château Suau began its conversion to organic farming in 2008 and since the 2014 vintage, all products are certified Ecocert and wines are produced under the direction of the famous wine consultant Michel Rolland. The 80% Merlot lends opulence and the Cabernet more structure. Medium bodied and smooth: a lovely wine that deserves UK distribution.

Valmengaux En Jarre, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

Over £15 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Riding Wine Co** 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. "A special limited edition wine with a subtly sumptuous aspect that exudes ripe plum fruit, earthy richness and baked fruit. Only 3,240 bottles made from wine aged in earthenware jars that enhance the aromas and fruit flavours. Made from a strict respect for organic specifications, which forbid the use of weed killers and chemical insecticides. Natural fermentation triggered only by indigenous yeast on the grape skins and in the cellar atmosphere.

AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018**Château Fleur Haut Gaussens La Viminière, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018** 91

Over £15 **Fields, Morris & Verdin** 100% Malbec. A top wine tasted for this article. A solar vintage like 2018 can ripen Malbec, and at "La Viminière" - one of the single-grape varieties of Château Fleur Haut Gaussens - success is achieved. Crushed tobacco, blackberry, pepper spice and blueberry enchant your senses. The palate has density and richness, with excellent acidity keeping the balance. Enjoy with prime rib and pommes au gratin or roasted rack of lamb.

Château La Peyre Cuvée Burdigala, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91www.facebook.com/chateauapeyre/

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Petit Verdot, 25% Malbec. Supple yet packed with aromas and flavours of cassis, plum, wet stone, and spice, this is a star of the series: aged exclusively in amphorae and made from old vines of Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec,

with younger Petit Verdot, the solar vintage ripened this wine very nicely. The palate is juicy and close to full body. The wine could use another two years of aging but would be enjoyable today with roast lamb and thyme for example. This could (should) be marketed to high end UK merchants. The label alone - Cuvée Burdigala - evokes the old Latin name of Bordeaux and the shape of the bottle reprises a 19th century form. Bravo!

Château Sainte Barbe, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91<https://chateausaintebarbe.fr/>

85% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon. Part of the Grand Cercle, this is easily a top wine from the tasting. The purity of the fruit in the aromatic profile is very impressive, with black berry and red currant, as well as pleasing oak derived spice. The palate reveals some freshly ground coffee bean along with ripe juicy plum. The finish tightens up a bit, so give it time. And kudos to the informative back label.

Château Vermont, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91£10-£15 **Bordeaux Tradition**

90% Merlot, 10% Petit Verdot. Already known in the late 19th century as a top wine from Entre-Deux-Mers, I can say with confidence that the 2018 ranks among the best for this article. Made from 90% Merlot coming from the best parcels of the vineyard and the oldest vines, the wine exudes breed: a noble aroma of dark fruit, liquorice, plum and spice. The attack has vitality, the mid palate fine density, and the finish is long with lift. A wine to enjoy on its own, or to accompany a grilled duck breast with chutney.

**Château La Verrière, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018** 90£10-£15 **Jascot**

85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. One of the top wines tasted for this article, this estate proves yet again how to make a wine of finesse and density for its bargain price point. Aromas are already rather complex, combining a certain "fresh" earthiness, red fruit, liquorice and floral aspects. The palate is at once fleshy and harmonious, with lift on the medium plus finish. Drink 2020-2026

Château Bolaire, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89£10-£15 **Fine & Rare**

50% Merlot, 50% Petit Verdot. 2018 was a vintage suitable for Petit Verdot, which ripened well. This wine exudes spice, ripe black and red fruit and has the tannic structure for several years bottle aging, but it is already fine today. Enjoy with grilled duck breast in an orange sauce. The estate belongs to the Mulliez family, also owner of Château Belle-Vue (Haut Médoc). And the strong presence of Petit Verdot is a signature of Mulliez vineyards.

Château De La Cour D'Argent, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89£10-£15 **Wine Trail**

95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc. Like so many other wines tasted, a deep colour reveals quite a bit of aromatic punch: dark red berry fruit, some marachino cherry, too. Almost liqueur of cherry. The palate has pleasing density and richness but well framed by tannic structure. A wine that "punches above its weight" in quality. Fermentation in thermostatically controlled 200Hl stainless steel vats, long (30 days) vat fermentation, délestage (the juice is removed and poured back over the cap) and pigeage (the cap is forced into the juice). Aging 14 months in barrels which were only used once before.

Château De Parenchère Cuvée Raphaël, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89Over £15 **Peter Osborne Wines**

65% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon. Here we have a Bordeaux that clearly merits a generous score. The nose is subtle and clean, with notes of plum and cassis and fine dark chocolate. The palate is supple and smooth, with fine tannins, and a successful integration of 25% new oak for the 12 month aging. Some "micro-oxygenation" - sending fine bubbles through the barrels - has broken down the tannins a bit more, and it works here.



Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud

and rich, reflecting the solar vintage. A wine that you can almost chew, it could be a fine by the glass selection. Spicy and succulent, with a long finish.

Château L'Oiseau Vieilles Vignes, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88www.vignoblesgeromin.com

80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. The attractive aroma combines both floral and fruit, leading to a juicy ripe red and black fruit flavoured palate. Smoothly textured and supple, this medium bodied wine is perfect for your summer barbecue or a filet of veal in a creamy mushroom sauce.

Château La Paillette, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88dbrasseur33@orange.fr

75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. Like many 2018s, the aromas leap from the glass and this is no exception: much juicy blackberry, dark chocolate, violet. A savoury and juicy palate invite drinking, and this would be a fine by-the-glass selection for a bar, or for you.

Château Les Gravières De La Brandille, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88£10-£15 **Stone, Vine & Sun**

65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc. An excellent Bordeaux, evoking juicy plum, blackberry liqueur and dark chocolate. The vines are 40 years old, yielding quality fruit. The palate in 2018 is rather supple and soft, not without tannin but perhaps not as structured as in 2016. The wine is made with much care: leaf clearing permits for better ripeness and aeration against rot, the grapes are harvested nicely ripe, and then de-stemmed for a cold maceration to optimise excretion while maintaining freshness.

Château Maison Noble Prestige, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88www.chateau-maisonoble.com

80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. The nose exudes a certain regal aspect: ripe red and black fruit but also wet stone. The palate is juicy and ripe, albeit well structured with noticeable tannin to stand up to your dinner. A wine that is made with much care, from harvest to bottling, and it shows.



Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud

20% Carménère, 60% Merlot, 20% Petit Verdot. This rather rare blend includes 20% Carménère and 20% Petit Verdot. The nose is focused with bright fruit, as well as notions of blackberry liqueur. The palate is more focused than broad, with a tannic edge to it, that demands some aging. Indeed, a wine that would be better opened in a couple of years, but should reward that patience.

Vieux Château Renaissance Des Vignobles Turtaut, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89www.vignobles-turtaut.fr

70% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc. Equipped with an ecologically friendly HVE certification, this wine is at once opulent, structured and impressive. A savoury taste of ripe red and black fruit, with a hint of liquorice, this would be a fine by-the-glass selection for a wine bar or restaurant - or for you! Aged 12 months in 50% new and 50% one-year-old oak, the wine punches above its weight as it is quite complex, enveloping the palate with subtle power, leading to a long finish. Highly recommended for the UK market. About €8 in France. 2021-2027

Château Hostin Le Roc Grande Cuvée, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88www.vignobles-boutinon.com

80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. A small production wine for which the clay and limestone subsoil proves ideal for the majority Merlot, which comes "full on" ripe

Château Lauduc Prestige, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89<http://www.lauduc.fr>

75% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc. A deep nose of ripe red and black fruit, coming from the predominant Merlot, enchant the taster. An explosion indeed of fruit and spice, so the word opulence comes to mind. The palate has fine tannic structure and backbone to create a fine wine overall. Needs a bit of time in a carafe before service. Given the decent production, a wine that would be of interest to the UK market, as it has earned numerous international competitions.

Château Pascaud, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89www.jalousie-beaulieu.com

100% Merlot. One has to admire the sheer floral aromatics of this Bordeaux Supérieur. Combined with subtle toasted notes and dark fruit, the wine is full-bodied, yet well structured for bottle aging. I like its clearly fragrant nature, and fine long finish.

Château Pertignas Cuvée Vin Des Copains, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89£10-£15 **David Matheson (Guernsey)**

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