

## 2021 - «A return to elegance and freshness»

By Mario Aschwanden

We had almost become accustomed to sunny and rich wines representing the new norm in Bordeaux. Then, after six such years – specifically keeping in mind the uniqueness of 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 - came a vintage that would have been considered "normal" a few decades ago and would probably have been anything but welcome at the time.

It was a vintage that had to cope not just with a few insignificant hailstorms but with every other possible setback. There were estates that had to overcome a whole range of problems, while others had only a few difficulties. At Cos d'Estournel, for example, the winegrowers experienced the full spectrum: early budding with frost in April (although this was sporadic it led to serious losses in some cases), drizzle in June (and thus also unevenly ripening grapes), mildew in June and July because of the persistent rain, and last but not least botrytis during the harvest. Rarely would an apprentice winemaker have learned so much in such a short time as during this year.

What saved the vintage, however, was the Indian summer. This largely compensated for the ripening problems caused by the cool and wet months of June, July and (early) August. This gave the late-ripening Cabernets and Petit Verdots a prominent position in the blends, as they benefited most from the beautiful late summer and the sunniest October in 30 years.

I travelled to Bordeaux with the then still preliminary expectation that I would be tasting wines from a cool, rather rainy vintage which would throw up some serious imponderables. I was also anticipating more than exclusively positive developments. To be honest, I was expecting a lot of over-extracted and watered-down wines with green tannins.

However, to my great surprise these negative expectations turned out not to be justified. Admittedly we are talking about a vintage that can't compete with the opulence and richness of recent years. But it has many of the characteristics on which the reputation of the great Bordeaux wines is actually based. The wines are fresh and energetic, often have ripe and fine-grained, beautifully mature tannins that are in the normal case perfectly adapted to the medium degree of fullness. They also possess a certain noblesse, combined with a minerality and saltiness that was not so evident in previous years. They are relatively "palatable" wines,

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with an alcohol content that is 1-2% by volume lower than their predecessors. Some wines from the less outstanding terroirs often also lack a little presence on the palate. In terms of its characteristics and weather patterns, the vintage is probably most comparable to that of 2014.

However, it is more heterogeneous than the latter and the yield was significantly lower. Thanks to ever-improving technical facilities and a commitment to uncompromising production of premium quality, some of the wines are even better than the underestimated 2014 vintage.

Because of the relatively large size of the grapes there were estates which re-introduced techniques that seemed to have almost been forgotten: saigné (drawing off part of the must in order to concentrate it), chaptalisation (sugaring the must in order to obtain a little more body), and even the almost forgotten concentrator was used again, assuming it had not previously been sold for lack of use.

In order to master all these challenges and to produce good to even great wines for the cellar, a number of factors had to be in place.

1. Great terroir, because in such areas the water resources are better regulated. This is also shown by the fact that in the case of the great wines, even the second-label wines are very often impressive.
2. A committed team, especially in the vineyard but also in the cellar, who are prepared to sacrifice their Saturdays and Sundays.
3. The right decisions, of which there were many difficult ones to make, especially of the critical and important harvest time, given the risk of a late harvest.
4. A well-equipped cellar that enables precise and delicate operations and, with the necessary technical support, enables a rigorous selection of the incoming grapes.

As you can see from the above points, my descriptions actually refer to the crème de la crème and thus only to around 250 of the best Bordeaux wines.

The main focus is, of course, always on the red wines. This year, however, the big winners are the usually neglected white wines and the rather unfortunate Sauternes.

Cool summers are generally the best preconditions for making dry white wines, and this is also true of the 2021 vintage. The Sauvignon Blanc in particular stands out with its intense, aromatic and edgy nature. If it's to be white Bordeaux, now's the time!

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Yes, the Sauternes vineyards were not to be envied, as they were the most affected by the weather conditions. Many didn't produce any wine at all, others had single-digit hl/ha figures. But what the cellars actually contain is simply sensational! The wines are clear, concentrated, full-bodied, fresh, brilliant and driven by an explosive acidity that I have never encountered at this stage. When I am tasting I usually only make a brief stop-off in this region. This year, however, I tried to taste as many wines as possible, and my reaction was: WOW with three exclamation marks!!!

Cheers to you!



Château Figeeac uses candles to protect itself against spring frosts. Every two to three years we are now experiencing what used to cause serious losses every two to three decades (1956 and 1991). Another consequence of global warming.

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## Saint-Estèphe

For me, the most successful appellations were St-Estèphe and Pessac-Léognan. These were already particularly successful back in 2014. The biggest positive surprise for me also comes from here: Meyney! An incredibly well-balanced wine, but also with the power and body of a bountiful year. This one will probably be available for a song. The refined and elegant Montrose was also outstanding. Despite being harvested almost a week earlier, the fruit is darker than that of Calon-Ségur. Lafon Rochet was sold to Jacky Lorenzetti, who also already owns Lilian Ladouys, Pédesclaux and 50% of D'Issan.

Montrose	95-97
Calon Ségur	94-95
Cos d'Estournel	93-95
Phélan Ségur (Smart Buy)	92-93
Meyney (Smart Buy)	91-93
Dame de Montrose	90-91
Pagodes de Cos	90-91
Marquis de Calon	89-91
Tronquoy Lalande	89-91
Capbern (Smart Buy)	89-91
Cos Labory	88-90
Lafon Rochet	87-89
Le Crock	87-88
Les Ormes de Pez	86-88
Frank Phélan	86-88
Prieuré de Meyney	86-88

## Pauillac

Pauillac is also impressive, with Château Latour probably the best wine in the Médoc. The region is home to numerous great terroirs and distinguished châteaux that spare no effort. This has resulted in many outstanding wines – at Château Lafite comparisons have even been made with the 1996 vintage. The wines do in fact have many parallels, but the comparison seems a little over-enthusiastic to me. Some wines have 90 percent and more Cabernet Sauvignon in the blend.

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Latour	96-97
Lafite Rothschild	95-96
Pichon Longueville Lalande	95-96
Mouton Rothschild	94-95
Les Forts de Latour	93-94
Pichon Longueville Baron	93-94
Pontet Canet	93-94
Haut Bages Libéral (Smart Buy)	92-93
Lynch Bages	92-93
Grand Puy Lacoste	91-93
Carruades de Lafite	91-92
Duhart Milon Rothschild	90-93
La Réserve de la Comtesse	90-93
Clerc Milon	90-92
Petit Mouton	90-92
Batailley	89-91
D'Armailhac	88-90
Grand Puy Ducasse	88-90
Echo de Lynch Bages	88-90
Haut Batailley	88-89
Pauillac de Latour	88-89
Pédesclaux	88-89
Lynch Moussas	87-88
Pastourelle de Clerc Milon	86-88
Verso de Haut Batailley	85-87

## Saint-Julien

In this district, too, the hl/ha yields vary enormously from one Château to the next. As mentioned at the beginning, the varying difficulties experienced by the individual vineyards were responsible for this. For some it was more the frost, for others the mildew or the drizzle that affected them. Gruaud Larose is increasingly catching up with the top wines of the appellation – the replanting programme initiated years ago (towards more Cabernet Sauvignon) is increasingly bearing fruit. Talbot, too, confirmed the good performances of recent years.

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Everything is ready for the early morning tasting at Château Gruaud Larose.

Léoville Las Cases	95-96
Léoville Barton	94-95
Léoville Poyferré	94-95
Ducru Beaucaillou	93-95
Gruaud Larose	92-94
Beychevelle	91-92
Talbot	91-92
Clos du Marquis	90-92
La Croix de Beaucaillou	90-92
Saint Pierre	90-92
Langoa Barton	90-91
Moulin Riche	89-91
Le Petit Lion (Cases)	88-90
Lagrange	88-89
Branair Ducru	87-89
Gloria	87-89
Sarget de Gruaud Larose	87-89
Le Petit Ducru	87-88
La Petite Marquise	87-88
Pavillon de Léoville Poyferré	87-88

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## Margaux

Here there are the usual ups and downs. From aristocratically fine to green tannins, from red to dark berry flavours, from full-bodied to thin, everything is possible. Some had finished their harvest at the end of September, others (like Malescot St-Exupéry) not until 20 October. The likeable couple Gonzague Lurton (Durfort Vivens) and Claire Villars (Ferrière, Haut Bages Libéral and La Gurge) are continuing on their biodynamic journey and have again made an impression this year with their lively wines. Even though the price of their wines has risen somewhat, the pricing has remained fair. La Gurge is very good again this year, with a proportion of Petit Verdot that has now even reached 19%.

Margaux	95-96
Palmer	94-96
Durfort Vivens (Smart Buy)	92-94
Brane Cantenac	92-93
Ferrière (Smart Buy)	92-93
Malescot Saint Exupéry	92-93
Rauzan Ségla	92-93
d'Issan	91-93
Cantenac Brown	91-92
Pavillon Rouge	91-92
Alter Ego Palmer	90-92
Lascombes	90-92
Dauzac	89-91
Giscours	89-91
Marquis de Terme	89-91
Marquis d'Alesme Becker	89-91
La Gurgue	89-91
Kirwan	88-90
Prieuré Lichine	88-89
Paveil de Luze	87-89
Rauzan Gassis	87-89
Blason d'Issan	87-88
Siran	87-88
Desmirail	86-88
Du Tertre	86-88
Labégorce	85-87
Baron de Brane	85-87
Monbrison	85-86

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The aristocratic Château d'Issan also makes wines like this. With the purchase of some great plots (from Château Pontac Lynch, also featuring Malbec and Petit Verdot), the wines have become even more exciting.

## Haut-Médoc/Médoc/Moulis

Sociando Mallet	89-90
La Lagune	88-90
Cantemerle	88-89
Pontensac	87-88
Poujeaux	86-88
Goulée	86-87
Chasse Spleen	86-87
Ducluzeau	86-87
Chapelle de Potensac	85-87
Madame de Beaucaillou	85-86



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## Pomerol

The already existing tendency towards greater proportions of Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon in the vineyard as well as in the blending has experienced further highs this year. These two varieties were certainly particularly successful, but when you look at what great 100% Merlots La Violette and Pétrus are, not to mention the almost 80% Merlot of Vieux Château Certan, you realise how important great terroir is. Pétrus, although quite different in style from previous years, is again THE wine of the right bank.

Pétrus	96-97
Le Pin	95-96
La Violette	94-96
Vieux Château Certan	94-96
Évangile	94-95
L'Église Clinet	93-94
La Conseillante	92-94
Clinet	92-93
Le Gay	92-93
Gazin	91-92
Le Manoir de Gay (Smart Buy)	89-90
Rouget	88-91
Bon Pasteur	88-89
Montviel	88-89
Blason de l'Évangile	88-89
Petite Église	87-89
Beauregard	87-88
La Cabanne	86-88
La Croix de Gay	86-88
La Pointe	85-87

## Saint-Émilion

Anyone who has the wonderful, elegant and noble Cheval Blanc in their glass can't say anything negative about the vintage. The fact that most of the wines have between 13 and 14 % vol. instead of the 14.5 to 15.5 % vol. of the last few years is also a positive development. However, since the grapes ripened very unevenly, multiple and strict selection was unavoidable and sometimes one of the keys to success. According to Marie Lefevre, for example, the sorting table used to weed out the grapes that were not quite ripe was also

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decisive for the outcome at Château Sansonnet and Soutard Cadet. Under the same ownership as Château Le Pin, Château L'If is increasingly living up to its price.

Cheval Blanc	95-97
Figeac	94-96
Angélus	94-95
Ausone	94-95
Tertre Rotebœuf	94-95
Pavie Macquin	93-95
Beauséjour Duffau Lagarrosse	93-94
L'If (Château Le Pin)	93-94
Pavie	92-93??
Canon	92-93
Petit Cheval	92-93
Troplong Mondot	92-93
Canon la Gaffelière	91-93
Clos Saint Martin	91-93
La Gaffelière	91-93
Sansonnet (Smart Buy)	91-93
Chapelle d'Ausone	90-93
Larcis Ducasse	90-93
Beau-Séjour Bécot	90-92+?
Bellevue Mondotte	90-92+?
La Dominique	90-92
Péby Faugères	90-92
Soutard Cadet	90-91+
Clos Fourtet	90-91
La Clotte	90-91
Pavie Decesse	89-92??
de Pressac	89-91
Grandes Murailles	89-91
La Fleur Morange	89-91
Monbousquet	89-90
Soutard	89-90
Jean Faure	88-91
Arômes de Pavie	88-90?
Balestard La Tonnelle	88-90
Clos de Sarpe	88-90

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Faugères	88-89
Quinault L'Enclos	88-89
Le Carillon d'Angélus	88-89
Bellevue	87-89
Fombrauge	87-89
La Tour Figeac	87-89
Lassègue	87-89
Laroze	87-89
Moulin du Cadet	87-89
Mondot (2 <sup>ème</sup> vin Troplong Mondot)	87-89
Gracia	87-88?
de Ferrand	87-88
Cadet Bon	86-88
Côte de Baleau	86-88
Villemaurine	86-88
Saintayme	84-86

## Miscellaneous appellations

I was blown away by the performance of the Mitjavile estates, including those of the small appellations. The Roc de Cambes is great, but so is the Domaine de Cambes ...! Bravo!

Roc de Cambes	91-93
Clos Lunelles	88-90
Domaine de Cambes (Smart Buy)	88-90
La Gravière	87-89
Biac	87-89
Montlandrie	85-87
Les Cruzelles	85-87
Petit Paveil	85-86
La Chenade	84-86

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## Pessac Léognan red

The better wines of these districts presented a relatively uniform and satisfactory level. At Smith Haut Lafitte they were said to have made a sevenfold selection of the grapes, and yet here in particular I would have expected a little more.

Haut Brion	95-96
Carmes Haut Brion	94-95
Haut Bailly	93-95
La Mission Haut Brion	93-95
Domaine de Chevalier	92-94
Smith Haut Lafitte	92-94
Pape Clément	91-93
Malartic Lagravière (Smart Buy)	91-92
Le Clarence Haut Brion	90-92
Le C de Carmes Haut Brion	90-92
Fieuzal (Smart Buy)	90-91
Il de Haut Bailly	88-91
Le Pape	88-90
La Tour Martillac (Smart Buy)	88-89
La Chapelle de Mission Haut-Brion	87-89
Le Petit de Smith Haut Lafitte	87-88
Le Thil	87-88
Larrivet Haut Brion	87-88

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The impressive new cellar at Haut Bailly, where the first harvest was vinified with the 2021 wines.

## Pessac Léognan white

Very good wines throughout. Definitely the best white vintage since 2017, if not for decades.

Haut Brion Blanc	96-98
La Mission Haut Brion Blanc	95-96
Domaine de Chevalier	93-95
Pape Clément	93-95
Smith Haut Lafitte	93-95
Malartic Lagravière (Smart Buy)	93-94
de Fieuzal (Smart Buy)	91-93
La Tour Martillac	91-92
La Clarté de Haut Brion Blanc	90-93
Carbonnieux	90-92
Bouscaut	89-92
Clos Floridène	89-91
Le Comte de Malartic	89-90
Les Hautes de Smith Haut Lafitte	88-91

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## Various white appellations

Pavillon Blanc de Château Margaux	94-95
Cos d'Estournel	93-95
Aile d'Argent	92-94
Les Pagodes de Cos d'Estournel	90-92
Lynch Bages	89-91
Paveil de Luze	88-89

## Sauternes

Great brilliance with an explosive interplay between sweetness and acidity. Not to be missed!

La Tour Blanche (Smart Buy)	97-99
Rayne-Vigneau (Smart Buy)	96-98
Suduiraut (Smart Buy)	96-98
Coutet (Smart Buy)	96-98
Laufaurie Peyraguey (Smart Buy)	95-97
de Fargue	95-97
Sigalas Rabaud (Smart Buy)	95-96
Rieussec	94-96
Doisy Daëne	94-96
Clos Haut Peyraguey	93-95
Secret de Biac	93-95
D'Arche	91-92
Lamothe Guignard	89-91