



# BORDEAUX EN PRIMEUR

## WINEONLINE 2022 VINTAGE REPORT



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The 2022 vintage in France was marked by hot and dry conditions, breaking records. However, despite the challenging weather, the wines produced were exceptional. The vintage has been described as complex, with some wines being among the best ever tasted en primeur (*tasted before bottling*). The initial concerns about the freshness of the wines expressed by winemakers shortly after the harvest were proven wrong as the wines aged and developed.

In mid-April 2023, Anne and I travelled to Bordeaux for 4 days for what is called 'En Primeur' week. We tasted over 500 wines from the 2022 vintage, marking our favourites, and creating a wishlist of the best wines as they went. As each Chateau subsequently released their wines, we were well poised to request allocations of the very best wines. These are secured and now available to you on a first come first served basis. Myself and Anne are here to advise you on what wines might best suit you, depending on whether you want a medium return in 5 years, a long term investment of 10 years + or whether you simply want a mix of wines to drink, with some investment wines in there to help pay for the wines you will eventually consume. Please ask us, as we have tasted each of these wines ourselves.

## The 2022 Growing Season

The growing season for the 2022 vintage had some distinctive features. The previous year's wet vintage helped replenish the soils, but from November to March, there was a growing deficit in rainfall. From April onwards, the drought intensified, with July being particularly dry. However, there were thunderstorms in June that provided relief to the water-starved vines. Despite the dry conditions, the wines maintained a surprising freshness.

Budburst occurred early in late March, followed by frost in early April, which had minimal impact due to the use of measures like wind fans and heaters. Flowering took place in mid-May, with temperatures already feeling like midsummer. The first heatwave hit in early June, and there were significant thunderstorms that month as well. Hailstorms in June affected some vineyards in the northern part of Saint-Estèphe. The high temperatures continued throughout the season, with some rain in August.

The harvest for the 2022 vintage started early, with picking for white grapes beginning in mid-August and red grapes at the end of August. Harvest dates and approaches varied, with some producers opting for multiple passes through the same plots, separating younger and older vines. The hot and dry conditions meant there was minimal disease risk, allowing producers to take their time during harvest. However, there was a concern about high sugar levels and resulting alcohol levels in the grapes, leading to a trade-off between phenolic ripeness and tannin structure.



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Overall, the volumes were lower than the 10-year average, especially on the Left Bank, where yields were even lower than the mildew-affected 2021 vintage. The dry conditions and gravel soils on the Left Bank resulted in smaller berries with a high skin-to-juice ratio, reducing the volume of liquid released. Yields were healthier on the Right Bank, with clay and limestone soils holding more water. White wines experienced more significant losses due to frost and the dry conditions.

The 2022 vintage drew comparisons to the 2003 vintage, which was also hot but had different conditions and produced wines that haven't aged well. The difference now is that the Bordeaux region has undergone significant changes in vineyard and winery practices over the past two decades, resulting in improved adaptation to warm conditions. Unlike the sustained heatwave of 2003, the 2022 vintage had spikes of heatwaves with cooler nights that allowed the vines to recuperate. The experience gained from previous warm vintages helped winemakers navigate the challenges.



Over the last two decades, there has been a revolution in the vineyards and wineries of Bordeaux, with a total transformation in terms of the level of precision and knowledge, with investment that has really paid off. It's a different place today. And, with the experience of not just 2003, but many other vintages (2005, '09, '10, '15, '18, '19, '20), vigneronns are now au fait with warm conditions.

In the vineyards, producers adjusted their practices to the hot and dry conditions. De-leafing was avoided to provide shade for the grapes, and some used sunscreens like kaolin or talc to protect the leaves and fruit. Organic and biodynamic producers had an easier year with fewer disease pressures. Old vines with deeper root systems fared better, while young vines showed signs of stress earlier. Different terroirs were put to the test, with clay and limestone soils generally seeing better yields.

Producers implemented various techniques to conserve moisture in the soil, such as spreading manure, seeding cover crops, and surface tilling. Some areas permitted irrigation, but few producers took advantage of it due to the costs involved. Despite the challenging conditions, the vines remained green until the end of the season, showing resilience. In the winery, producers handled the vintage differently.



## How did producers handle the 2022 vintage in the winery?

While some argued that the fruit quality in the 2022 vintage was exceptional to the point where winemakers seemed almost redundant, it is the skill and expertise of the vigneron, the person in charge of the estate's vineyard and winemaking, that truly distinguishes the very best wines.

This highlights the importance of the winemaker's role in the winemaking process, even in exceptional vintages. Although the fruit harvested in 2022 was generally healthy, sorting played a crucial role for different reasons. One of the key sorting tasks was to remove sunburnt or shrivelled grapes, especially those that were unripe but had dried on the vine. If these berries were included in the tank during fermentation, they would rehydrate in the must and release harsh tannins, potentially affecting the overall quality of the wine.



*Pic: Damian Barton Sartorius of Chateau Leoville and Langoa Barton.*

At the Barton estates, such as those managed by Damien Barton-Sartorius, specific measures were taken to ensure the removal of shrivelled bunches before harvesting. The vineyard workers conducted a pass through the vines to drop any shrivelled clusters, and then a vibrating sorting table was used to catch any remaining undesirable grapes. This meticulous sorting process helped maintain the quality and integrity of the harvested fruit. Overall, even in a vintage like 2022 with excellent fruit quality, the skills and decisions of the winemaker, including thorough sorting, remain vital to producing the very best wines and ensuring consistent quality across different estates.



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## What are the 2022 wines like?

Bordeaux's winemakers are as confused as anyone as to how the conditions outlined above produced the wines they did. They combine remarkable depth of fruit, with aromatic finesse, high levels of ripe tannins and surprising freshness. Although these are concentrated, rich wines, the very best have this remarkable sense of weightlessness that makes them seem almost ethereal. Those who have mastered the vintage captured the fruit, yet retained glorious freshness and remarkable delicacy that seems almost impossible.



The alcohols are generally high – with the lowest at 13.5%, and some reaching above 15%. It was rare, however, for even the punchiest of ABVs to stand out, there is such a weight of fruit that the alcohol is beautifully integrated. At Ch. Margaux, for example, it's the highest alcohol they've ever seen – with 14.5% for the Grand Vin (previously only hit 14%), but this is countered by what is – as Aurélien Valance noted – the *“most powerful, dense and concentrated wine [they've] ever produced”*.

Acidity is noted as the most challenging aspect of the 2022 vintage. The hot weather caused the degradation of malic acid, resulting in potentially high pH levels, reaching up to 3.9 for the red wines. However, despite these numbers, the majority of wines display vibrant and fresh characteristics. Winemakers and experts have been intrigued by the vintage's freshness, with a pleasing saline, savoury, and sometimes bitter note on the finish, particularly noticeable on the Left Bank. This freshness adds complexity and prevents the wines from being solely fruit-driven. While the vintage showcases generous fruit, the finest wines are distinguished by their seamless and fine-boned structure. They possess high levels of tannins but with a silky texture that doesn't overpower.

Although many wines in the 2022 vintage are well-balanced and age-worthy, there are undoubtedly some powerful wines that will require time to mature. These wines exhibit abundant fruit, high alcohol, and substantial tannins. They possess great potential for aging but will benefit from cellaring before becoming approachable. However, the vintage is not entirely homogenous. **While there are no bad wines, a few may not reach the heights of the greatest wines of the vintage.**



Some wines may have noticeable alcohol or tannins and insufficient acidity. These bolder-styled wines may appeal to certain palates but lack the finesse and elegance of the standout wines from the 2022 vintage. Identifying these wines is not as straightforward as associating them with specific appellations, classification levels, or picking dates, so it's important to rely on the advice of experts, critics, and your own preferences when selecting wines from this vintage.

The Left Bank of Bordeaux exhibited slightly less consistency compared to the Right Bank in the 2022 vintage, with the Margaux appellation being the most variable. Yields were generally lower on the Left Bank due to its free-draining gravelly soils. Most Pauillac wines were stunning, while Saint Julien was hit and miss, while having some stars.



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On the Right Bank, yields were generally more generous, and the overall results were more consistent. While Merlot, the dominant grape variety in Bordeaux, performed well overall, it was found that the best wines had a touch of Cabernet Franc in the blend. The inclusion of Cabernet Franc helped restrain the exuberance of Merlot and added precision and freshness to the wines. However, these are general observations, and there are exceptions to this pattern. It is important to evaluate each estate and wine on a case-by-case basis. The influence of terroir was significant in the 2022 vintage, with limestone soils playing a crucial role in maintaining freshness in the wines. Producers with limestone-rich vineyards were able to preserve acidity and freshness more easily.



**Overall, the 2022 vintage demonstrated that Bordeaux can adapt to climate change and still produce classic wines.** Despite the heat and dryness, the region was able to showcase the prowess of Merlot and the ability to craft wines with finesse and typicity. This vintage highlighted the importance of specific terroirs and the individual character of each château in the face of challenging climatic conditions.

**The 2022 vintage has left producers astounded and in agreement that it is a historic year.** They express the uniqueness of the vintage and its status in the annals of winemaking. Statements from esteemed producers such as **Alexandre Thienpont of Vieux Château Certan** declaring it "**un grand vin**" for the first time and **Henri Lurton of Château Brane-Cantenac** proclaiming it **the best vintage he has ever made, comparing it to the legendary 1961 vintage, exemplify the high regard for the 2022 wines.**

When asked about comparisons, producers offered a range of historical vintages that shared certain qualities with 2022. References were made to vintages like 1945, 1947, and 1982, highlighting the perceived greatness and potential longevity of the wines. Some producers suggested similarities to 2016 and 2019, citing balance, concentration, and freshness as shared attributes. The climate of the vintage was compared to that of 1870, emphasizing its exceptional nature. However, producers were clear that 2022 was not a "solar" vintage like 2009, 2010, or 2015, as it displayed more finesse and precision.

**Overall, 2016 and 2019 were considered the best comparisons,** with a balance of concentration, freshness, and precision. However, the finest wines of 2022 surpassed these vintages in terms of approachability and ethereal qualities. It is agreed that the vintage was incredibly exciting to taste and discuss, with meticulous attention to detail in the vineyard and winery determining whether producers achieved good or great wines. **The exceptional wines of 2022 showcase a harmonious balance, finesse, and compact concentration that will allow them to age gracefully for decades, although the challenge for enthusiasts may be resisting their allure until then.**



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*Pic: Tasting En Primeur at Chateau Bellevue, which is now made by the team at Chateau Angelus. It is 1/8 of the price. Tasting the Grand Vin at Cheval Blanc & at Chateau Angelus.*

## Summary of Bordeaux 2022 Vintage:

1. The 2022 vintage experienced record-breaking heat and dry conditions throughout the growing season.
2. Despite initial concerns, the vintage did not resemble the extremely hot vintage of 2003.
3. Significant diurnal temperature variations and some rainfall in June provided relief to the vines.
4. Old vines proved to be advantageous during the challenging conditions.
5. Yields were significantly lower, with a decrease of up to 40%, particularly on the Left Bank and for white wines.
6. Soils with water-retaining clay and limestone were beneficial and allowed for better yields. The small size of the berries and thick skins emphasized the importance of tannin management.
7. The vintage has been frequently compared to 2016, 2019, and 2020, as well as legendary vintages like 1945 and 1982. While the overall vintage is very good, it is not entirely uniform in quality. The best wines of the vintage are exceptional, showcasing concentration, structure, weightless power, and remarkable freshness.

Our team are on hand to discuss wine investment, on an individual basis. In the additional En Primeur Wine List & Price List we have included wine allocations secured and they will be allocated on a first come first serve basis.

If you would like to consider buying En Primeur, this is a great vintage to do it with. Contact me today on (01) 5820841 or by email as below.

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