

SEARSONS  
WINE MERCHANTS



BORDEAUX 2021  
VINTAGE REPORT





# BORDEAUX 2021 VINTAGE REPORT

The curse of covid has prevented us from giving full coverage of the past two en primeur campaigns. This does, in some way explain the rather long report this year!

It was with open arms that the Bordelais welcomed us to taste the 2021 vintage. We went with trepidation, fearing an astringent, unripe expression and returned buoyed by the outstanding hospitality and pleasantly surprised by what is proving to be a refreshingly expressive vintage. One that will have 'drinkers' raising their glasses thanks to lower alcohol and elegant restraint. Cellars may not fill, but glasses certainly will.

A cool year, started with frost and was further complicated by above average rainfall in spring leaving viticulturists working hard in the vineyards to manage mildew and ripening speeds in time for harvest. As Blandine de Brier Manoncourt of Château Figeac (and many others) said, the vineyard year was hard for the workers. They sent their vineyard man-

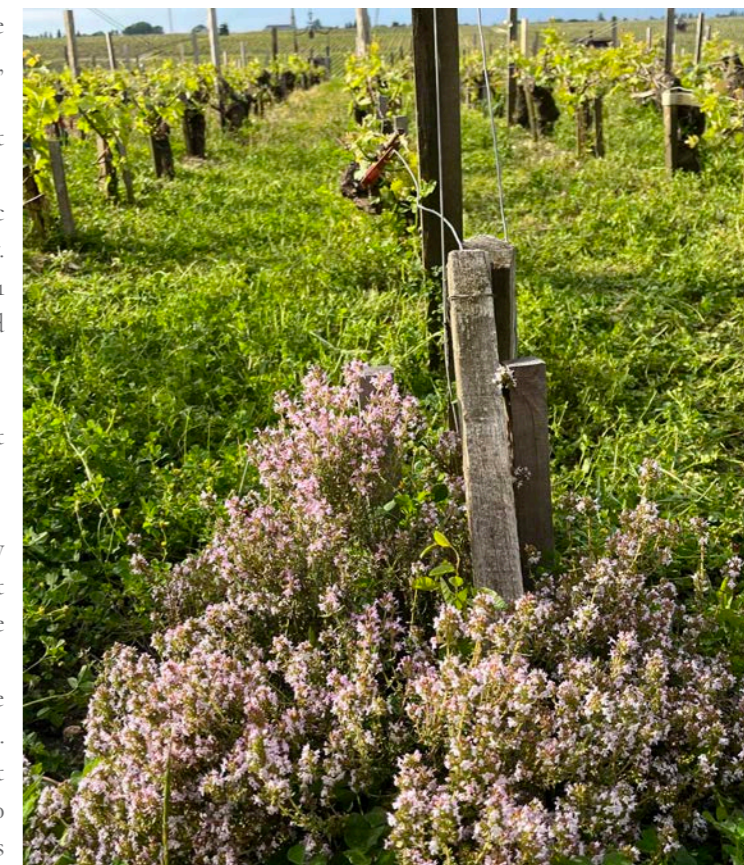
ager on extended holidays immediately after the harvest! The April frosts affected those further from the Gironde. Thanks to frost and the challenges presented by the rain, yields at Cheval Blanc were down to 20hl/ha against a norm of 35/40hl/ha. La Gafelliere lost 20% of their production. This reduction in yield was common across the region.

May and June were cooler than normal, vine growth slowed. This was illustrated best by the dates at Cheval Blanc where they picked 60 days after veraison. The norm is 40 days. They compared the extended ripening to slow cooking, allowing a slower evolution of more fragile flavours. At Ducru-Beaucaillou, Tracey Dobbin MW pointed out the issues with coulure thanks to unsettled weather at flowering. August brought with it warmer weather and an opportunity for the grapes to ripen faster. A late veraison and impending autumn was worrying for producers. Rain forecast at the end of September caused some to pick earlier than they would have liked. Many, however waited and were rewarded for their patience. The rain didn't appear as promised and an Indian summer for the first two weeks of October allowed the phenolics to reach perfect maturity. 2021 is vintage for grape growers, vigneron, in the vineyards of a grand Chateau. So many decisions. At Latour they joked "in a perfect world we would take the

"IN A PERFECT WORLD WE WOULD TAKE THE LEAVES OUT IN THE COOL SPRING AND PUT THEM BACK IN THE SUMMER"- WORDS FROM THE VINEYARD MANAGER AT CHÂTEAU LATOUR.

leaves out in the cool spring and put them back in the summer". Mildew pressure was high. At Pontet Canet, Alfred Tesseron was open about how they were determined not to see a repeat of 2018, when they lost 1/3 of the fruit to rot. The team were constantly on standby to treat the vines with one of 2 biodynamic preparations. Even if it meant working on a Sunday. They are now able to spray the entire crop in just 11 hours. This year the chateau lost 'just' 15% to frost and mildew.

For the first time we heard Châteaux owners talk about harvesting in successive tries through the vineyards. Figeac went back 3 or 4 times to ensure optimum ripeness. The sorting table was pivotal in 2021. Many used new density baths (filled with sugared water), that allowed the ripe berries to sink, separating the unripe yields. This seemed more popular than the revered optical sorter this year. Anomalies were a product of the vintage. In general, old vines are used for the grand vins. At Cheval Blanc however 1/3 of the Cabernet Franc that they used for the grand vin this year was less than 10 years old. The extra rain in June, meant that water tables were higher than normal, older vines languishing in the ease with which their roots could use this source. Younger vines could not yet reach the table, allowing adequate stress to increase the concentration in the grapes.



THYME ON THE ROWS - CHÂTEAU LATOUR



LANE IN VINEYARDS - MARQUIS D'ALESME OVERLOOKING CHÂTEAU MARGAUX



AMPHORA, CHÂTEAU LA GAFELIERE, SAINT EMILION



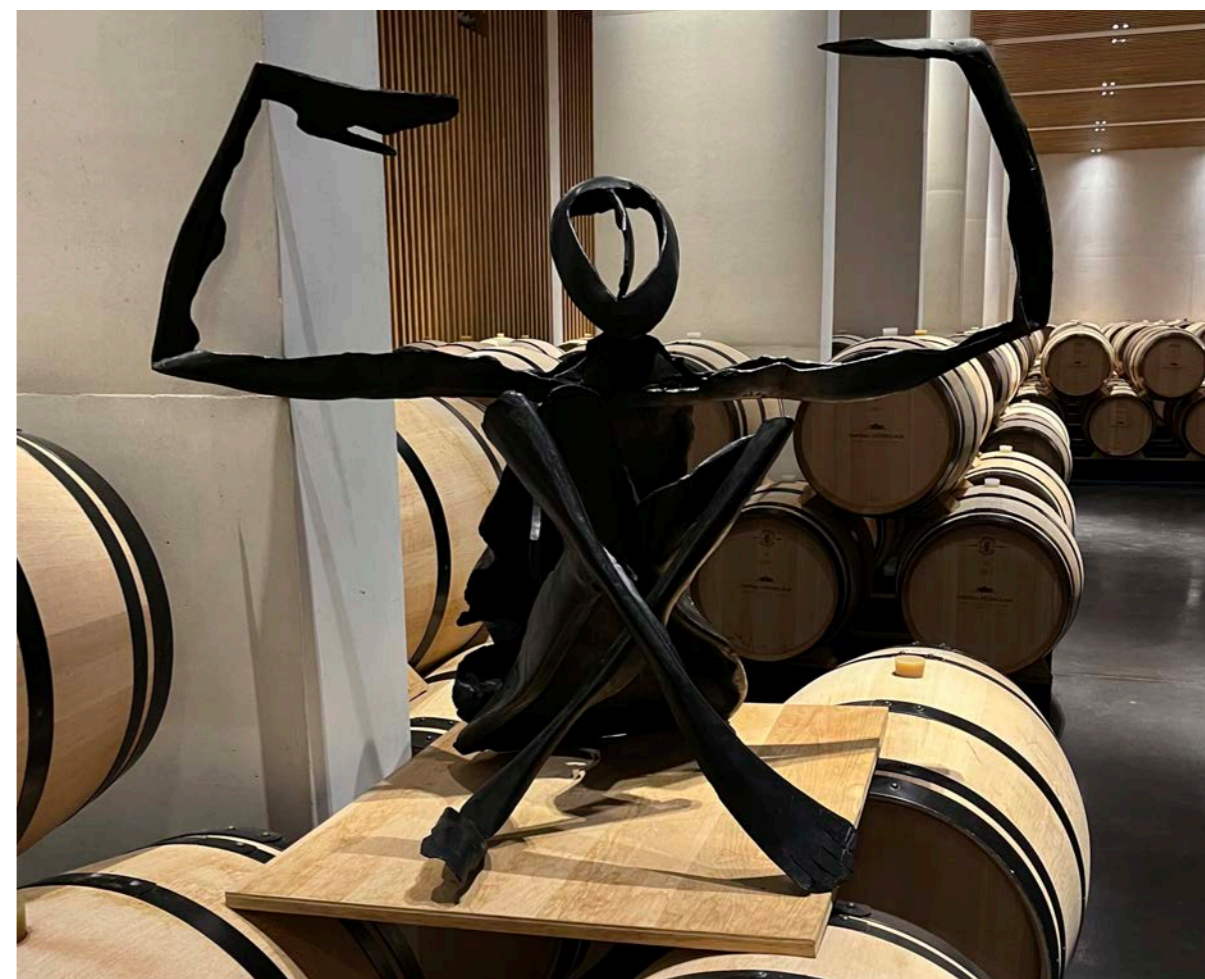


**“18, '19 WERE FLASHY, EXUBERANT, BUT NOT TRUE GPL (GRAND PUY LACOSTE), 2021 IS MORE GPL; LOVELY, MORE THE FLAVOURS OF CAB.”  
EMELINE BORIE, CHÂTEAU GRAND PUY LACOSTE, PAULLAC.**



TOWER THE VINEYARDS OF CHÂTEAU LAFITE ROTHSCHILD

A vintage for the Cabernets. Common words bandied around primeur week this year. This statement was mostly directed at Cabernet Sauvignon and the distinct varietal stamp that it left on the wines thanks to the extended autumnal ripening. What was encouraging to see however, was the beautifully coppiced Cabernet Franc expression that appeared in many of the Saint-Émilion wines. The freshness and linearity elevating the natural perfume of this variety is really energising in this cooler vintage. The predicted rains at the end of September meant some Merlot was perhaps picked a little early. This is not to say that there weren't some outstanding varietal examples of this grape. Our tasting at JP Moueix on the Friday morning confirmed that Merlot was certainly not a casualty of this vintage and deserves at least some of the attention ladled on the Cabs. And let's not forget about Petit Verdot. A slow ripener, similar to Cabernet Franc in the freshness and purple tones. Despite the cooler temperatures Pessac-Léognan produced some expressive examples this year, many such as Haut-Bailly and de Fieuzal with 10% Petit Verdot, they share the complex spicy perfume of Petit Verdot, bringing welcome lift to the classic dark fruit profile of this commune. There's no black and white this year, as Edouard Moueix rightly pointed out, Bordeaux is so much more than just grapes. Alluding to the 100% Merlot blends in the Moueix portfolio (a single varietal wine) "is a blend of rootstock, soils, cooperages", there is so much to consider. Climatic extremes are making terroir expression much more evident.



STATUE - ART AT CHÂTEAU PEDESCLAUX



AMPHORA AT CHÂTEAU D'ARMHAILHAC





We must not forget about the whites and sweets. This year, the aromatics and linear verve were elevated and exceptional on a large proportion of the Sauvignon, Semillon blends. Jancis Robinson is calling 2021 a white-wine vintage. From tiny yields have come beautiful wines. Our notes highlight some of the best, Domaine de Chevalier produced two fantastic examples with the grand vin and L'Esprit. La Mission Haut-Brion blanc was more than noteworthy and Pavillon blanc from Chateau Margaux was a lesson in aromatics and poise. Sauternes and Barsac benefitted massively from the September rainfall, encouraging botrytis. Thanks to the frost early in the year, yields are miniscule leaving producers of Sauternes looking at a small but perfectly formed vintage

2021, the year of the vineyard. So it would seem, but from the sorting table onwards it was evident that careful consideration was necessary to produce the wines of polish and precision expected from Bordeaux. 'Infusion' is a word that I heard regularly in Burgundy in November. This method of submerging the cap was a popular choice amongst the Bordelais this year. At Figeac they kept the cap submerged 50cm below the surface for a gentle extraction of tannins, but increased transfer of flavours. We got the impression that after the difficult season in the vineyards the work in the cellars was relatively straight forward. Having not toured the auspicious cellars of this region for 3 years, it was encouraging to see the emergence of a greater number of larger (500L plus) barrels. Concrete eggs seem to have been side lined in favour of concrete or clay amphora. Pontet Canet has installed an entire cellar of amphora shaped concrete vats (pictured), a huge investment. There were a number of new wineries, completed recently. The most impressive has to be the beautiful, sympathetic addition to Haut-Bailly. Huge consideration to nature and the surroundings mean this state of the art winery blends in beautifully. A triumph of both function and form, something that I'm not sure can be said of the new winery at Lynch Bages..



VATS - BEAUTIFULLY PAINTED CONCRETE VATS AT LES CARMES HAUT BRION

This year, Simon and I managed to taste a great number of the wines. Our notes showed how important this was. When buying en primeur this year, those informed will be rewarded for their research. Some of the greats didn't hit the mark. An example of this is the excellence of Pichon Baron, versus the 'miss' of Pichon Comtesse. We have published notes of the wines that scored above 16.5/20. This cooler year was a huge bonus for the whites, often overlooked in Bordeaux. The potential longevity of the white blends can't be underestimated, so if you're hovering on the edge of purchase. You won't be disappointed.

Unfortunately, we missed out on tasting a

small number of favourites, Rouget included. So please don't take their exception to mean they weren't up to scratch. If any of your wish list doesn't feature, do contact us.

2021 is a vintage of freshness, fragrance and precision. If you buy your Bordeaux to drink, it will be a pleasant surprise. Lower alcohol levels, 12.5% for many and fragile, expressive cores are a pleasure to enjoy in the mid-term. As our Rhône ranger Simon Tyrrell said 2021 is "a vintage I would spend my money on." Captured amongst the power and influence of blockbuster vintages (18,19 and 20), 2021 is like an interval, a break to rediscover the Bordeaux pre global warming, the restraint, the elegance

and the freshness enjoyed in the last century. 2021 can be seen as a unique and quite possibly rare vintage, amongst the new norms of the 21st century.

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