

SEARSONS
WINE MERCHANTS



BORDEAUX 2023
VINTAGE REPORT



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Recent vintages have been a lottery, a roulette wheel of extremes and unexpected events. However, 2023 is more a test of climatic realities.

We talk about the maritime influence that affects the vineyards of Bordeaux. 2023 saw humidity and the associated repercussions plague many winemakers right from the get go. Opinions from the various communes are mixed, but the relief driven by an absence of persistent heat and drought are obvious and reflected in the achieved yields of Châteaux throughout the region.

Spring started well. A generous water table from good levels of winter rain on the coat tails of the extreme dry periods of 2022, bought a sense of hopeful expectation to the winemakers. This continued with an early

bud break, which luckily saw minimal frost damage. May witnessed the most successful flowering in memory for many. Bruno Borie of Ducru Beaucaillou doesn't remember such a generous fruit set since 1984.

One of the lucky ones, Cheval Blanc saw no mildew and enjoyed yields of 40hl/ha. For others, Margaux included, the healthy water table and warm days resulted in faster than normal canopy growth and lots of green on the vines, reducing airflow between the bunches. High levels of humidity in May and June meant that workers were constantly in the vineyards controlling the spread.



VINEYARDS BELOW CHÂTEAU AUSONE IN SAINT EMILION

In Pessac-Léognan at Les Carmes Haut-Brion efficiency was the way forward: ‘You can have all the strategy that you want, but you have to have the response’. They can treat the whole vineyard in seven hours when the threat of mildew infection looms. Using over 80% of organic products. In response to their difficulties with mildew this year, Tracey Dobbin MW from Château Ducru Beaucaillou suggested that the coastal climate Bordeaux enjoys could be referred to ‘tropical’ rather than maritime.

An early veraison on 15th July saw expectations arrive for an early harvest. But heat waves at the end of August slowed transpiration and ripening and delayed the phenolic maturity.

Harvest dates are particularly relevant this year. As others started their harvest in early September, at Phelan Segur they took the unique decision to de leaf over ten thousand vines in order to aid ripening. The Château team were pulling leaves around the fruiting zone to expose the fruit to the lower autumn sunshine. Mavericks and risk takers were the winners in 2023. Phelan Segur is one of our highlights of the vintage.



CHÂTEAU GRAND PUY LACOSTE, PAUILLAC



WILLIAM AND HARRIET TINDAL WITH
CLAIRE VILLARS-LURTON

Mid September brought warnings of a period of heavy rain. It was a deciding factor for some, who picked all. Others, luckily a good proportion took their chances and waited for the unsettled weather to pass. This patience and trust paid off, less rain than forecast arrived and the weather settled for the remainder to the month, allowing what was for some the longest harvest on record. Sauternes and Barsac have a tradition of tries through the vineyard. This year, most of the Châteaux were taking three or four turns through the rows selecting only the ripest grapes for their sorting tables. This perhaps explains the inherent complexity and soul found in many of the best wines.

At Vieux Château Certan Alexandre Thienpont described 2023 as ‘Classic Bordeaux with traces of global warming’.



VINES AT SMITH HAUT LAFITTE IN PESSAC-LÉOGNAN

Each year Haut Bailly use a word to describe the vintage, this year it was ‘prophetic’. They likened the year to the journey of Ulysses in the Odyssey, travelling for 10 years to return home, coming across huge challenges along the way but, eventually returning and despite the travails, holding onto his identity.

Terroir has a strong influence in 2023. Many wines carry a good sense of place, defined by a mineral core and the associated structural identity. The reduction of new oak and use of larger formats is contributing to this renewed vineyard expression.

David Suire from Château Laroque sees the tannins as taking a big part in the terroir story. The tannins there have a chalky finesse reflecting the limestone rock that lies under their vineyards.



LES CARMES HAUT BRION



IS THERE A SPECIFIC STYLE TO THE COMMUNES?

Terroir has certainly left its stamp.

Pessac-Leognan displays a brooding darkness this year, crafted fine chalky tannins and a mineral persistence at the end.

Clarity, purity and drive with the expected power are found in Pauillac.

Saint Julien gives perfume, elegance and silky frames on many.

Margaux - Powerful beauty is how I would describe the wines from this commune this year. There is a precision and direction coming from the core that alludes to a future of perfume and fragrance.

Saint Estephe has played a blinder with resolved tannins and a precision that belies the more rustic associations of last century.

The Right Bank is mixed, but so are opinions. For us it was a vintage where the slow ripened Cabernet shone. Merlot is particularly susceptible to mildew and perhaps didn't show as well as the magnificent display in 2022.

Nonetheless descriptors include words like high-toned, lifted, perfumed and refined. Cabernet Franc was a star in terms of aromatics.

Pomerol perhaps gave way to Saint Emilion in terms of overall quality.

Sauternes and Barsac enjoyed a final flourish of botrytis after the second trie. The result are wines with higher sugar levels and a purity that lingers on the finish.



Overall, the whites are fantastic, integrated acids, saline depth and exotic aromatics suggest this could be stellar vintage for all stages of drinking.

Every year Leoville Barton is a lesson in restraint and elegance. Their new winery has certainly driven the estates trajectory even further upwards.



CHÂTEAUX BRANAIRE DUCRU IN SAINT JULIEN

There are some spectacular wines in 2023.

This could be the vintage to go off piste and discover new Châteaux.

We've seen classics produce resounding successes and witnessed exciting advances in others giving quality where it wasn't before.

We recommend that you take the time to read Harriet's tasting notes which follow.

These feature the Châteaux that scored well in our notes and stood out among the rest.

Of course, we didn't try everything, but from what we did try these are our recommendations.

Harriet Tindal MW
Tindal Wine Merchants

'Similar to 1771' according the weather reports rooted out by the team at Château Nenin



CHÂTEAU AUSONE IN SAINT EMILION

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