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## 2023 VINTAGE REPORT BY NICHOLAS JACKSON, MW

### VINTAGE SUMMARY

#### INTRODUCTION

Spring heralds the launch of the new Bordeaux futures campaign, this time for the 2023 vintage. No Bordeaux vintage ever exists outside its context, so a quick reminder of recent history may be helpful. With a couple of exceptions, Bordeaux has enjoyed a spectacular run of red wine vintages in the past ten years; the fruits of the warmer era Bordeaux is experiencing. What was previously a marginal region for grape ripening can now produce healthy harvests consistently, and sometimes even struggle to contain ripeness and alcohol levels. 2023 is a warm but not extreme vintage, and after the opulence of 2022, the wines of 2023 represent a refreshing return to a more classical Bordeaux profile. For Bordeaux devotees there is much to enjoy from 2023, albeit careful selection is warranted.

The campaign to sell the 2023 Bordeaux Futures is underway now; the short report that follows should help interpret the year; the tasting notes, guide your choices. As ever, purchasing futures is your opportunity to acquire these wines at release prices, and in the bottle format of your choice.

#### THE WEATHER

Unlike many other recent vintages, 2023 was not simply another hot and sunny year for a region now familiar with them. The beginning of the growing season was wet, with significant, even historic levels of mildew pressure in early summer requiring laborious vineyard work, and leading to yield reduction in places. Fortunately, flowering took place under good conditions at the beginning of June.

What followed set the stage for the wine style this year: while temperatures were high, rather than the usual summer sun, Bordeaux endured a prolonged cloudy period, especially in July and much of August. Only at the end of August when a heatwave hit the region did the skies finally clear. September continued fine with rain in the middle and end of the month, although neither in sufficient quantity to reduce fruit quality (although the latter did encourage some producers to pick earlier than perhaps they needed to).

Without the fine period at the end of the growing season, 2023 would have produced far weaker wines than what has ultimately emerged. Those six weeks of sun propelled the berries to good ripeness, with most of the Merlot harvested in mid-September, and the Cabernets towards the end of the month and into the first few days of October.

### THE WINES

This is not a vintage that obviously favours one variety or another; one side of the river or the other. Much depended on how the mildew threat was managed in early summer. Many producers lost much of their Merlot to mildew, meaning a greater reliance on Cabernets Franc and Sauvignon. Others were able to respond quickly and effectively to any new outbreak by spraying, ensuring minimal loss. That is why it is possible to see yields anywhere from 25-30hl/ha to as high as 55hl/ha, one of the highest in recent years.

Bordeaux's red wines in 2023 are in a mid-weight, fresh style, with moderate levels of fruit and alcohol, although often quite substantial tannin. On the one hand, there are certainly no signs of under-ripeness or insufficient fruit; on the other, no heaviness or elevated alcohol. A better vintage, however, would have yielded greater concentration of fruit and structure, and a little more flamboyance of flavour and obvious complexity. Many of the wines have a certain similarity, with the winemakers choosing gentle extraction to produce wines with soft mid-palate fruit and juicy accessibility, yet without much obvious terroir expression or, frankly, excitement. By contrast the best wines are those that go out on a limb to produce a daring, self-confident style; wines like Montrose, Canon, Lafite, Vieux Château Certan: all achieved excellence in the harnessing of the vintage conditions to their terroirs.

### WINE STYLE

On the Right Bank, the wines show a racy, precise fruit character, with supple tannins and refreshing, sapid finishes. The opulent fruit provided by the Merlot in recent hot years is rarely in evidence this year, with a drier, more savoury style instead predominating. In fact, the Pomerol wines were some of the driest (rather than sweet-tasting) I can remember, and recall vintages from the 1980s and 1990s, albeit with more precision and polish to the fruit. The St. Emilion wines are often quite chalky, the overcast year favouring the expression of these terroir notes rather than those of overt fruitiness.

On both sides of the Gironde, winemaking choices also played their part. Picking dates, blending choices, even the proportion of *grand vin* to second wine could influence the style. In St. Estèphe, for example, there is a marked stylistic difference between the 'big three' châteaux. Calon-Ségur is rich and ripe, with 14% alcohol; Montrose, structured and cerebral, and 13.6% alcohol; while Cos d'Estournel is fine-boned and pure, and only 12.9% alcohol. A few miles separate the properties; a much bigger gulf distinguishes the style of their wines.

I was reprimanded several times by winemakers for using the term 'classical' to describe this vintage; the distinction between this adjective, describing a Mozartian finesse, purity and attention to detail lost on those who heard a different term, 'classic' – a Bordeaux euphemism for a weak vintage. But I stand by the distinction. While there is ample fruit in the 2023 reds, the overall style of the most successful wines is classical in the best possible sense: refined and elegant.

The dry white wines fared moderately well in 2023; the hot spell at the end of August around or shortly before harvest probably diminished the vibrancy and aromas a little, so the style is one of soft fruit and easy drinkability. These should be consumed with 5-7 years of the vintage. One high point of 2023 was the sweet whites: Sauternes enjoyed the spread of significant botrytis in the second part of September, rapidly concentrating the berries. The wines are very sweet yet balanced by their excellent acidity, with gorgeous aromas and noble length.

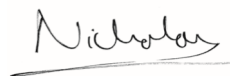
### CONTEXT OF THE CAMPAIGN

Last year's excellent 2022 vintage failed to sell well thanks to over-ambitious pricing. This, combined with high interest rates to fund stock holding and an overall tepid international wine market means that most chateaux will reduce their prices, some quite significantly. This yo-yo pricing between vintages does little for brand equity or consumer confidence and is likely to be reduced in years to come. But for now, discounts of 15-20% on the vintage's best wines would represent an attractive purchasing opportunity.

### IN SUMMARY

While 2023 is never going to be a legendary vintage, the chateaux worked well during a difficult summer to produce a range of very good, occasionally excellent wines. If you had a child or a significant anniversary in 2023, there will be plenty of very enjoyable wines to buy with confidence, especially among the top names. The classical Bordeaux profile of these wines, the moderate alcohols, ample tannins and overall dry style will age well and produce at least two decades of drinking pleasure, although the supple fruit character will ensure early accessibility – the best of both worlds.

Pricing is already available for many wines; for further advice, do not hesitate to contact any of the Sotheby's Wine team.



Nick Jackson, MW Consultant

IMAGE © CHÂTEAU LYNCH-BAGES



### Angéelus

Angéelus has a very sensual nose, full of spicy impact, displaying lots of Cabernet Franc presence (40% of the blend). It is rich but beautifully controlled on the palate, with beautifully ripe, fresh fruit, in a chiselled expression with very fine tannins and lots of energy. This is perhaps the most obviously sophisticated wine Angelus has produced during its ongoing evolution over the past decade; not necessarily the best – you'd need more concentration and structure for that – but in terms of finesse, balance and pure pleasure in drinking, this is pretty good. 93-95

### Carillon d'Angelus

The now familiar fresh and pure red fruit character of the house is present here in abundance; this is a particularly elegant, fragrant style, with great definition and detail. It is very fine and pure, dainty almost. This is a really nice way to make this vintage, but certainly a pleasant rather than a profound wine. 89-91.

### Armailhac

This is a classic, satisfying example of Armailhac in its elegant, unforced fruit, mid-weight frame, perfumed red fruit nose and cedary finish, for short to mid-term drinking. 90-92

### Ausone

This is a nose of great intensity, full of violets with an underpinning of salinity, followed by a particularly beautiful palate of succulent plummy fruits and imperceptible tannins. A firm structure is veiled by the fruit, and while this is unlikely to be the most long-lived Ausone, expect a healthy lifetime ahead. A Chambolle-Musigny analogy springs to mind; the sculpted succulence of the fruit impressive in its purity and winsome charm, perhaps thanks to the high proportion (60%) of Cabernet Franc. Rather than the more powerful recent expressions, the 2023 seduces with its alluring fruit and velvety texture. 94-96

### Chapelle d'Ausone

Chapelle d'Ausone offers a huge mouthful of spicy, succulent fruit – the Cabernet Franc (60%) playing its part remarkably. It is perhaps just a little light in the middle and on the finish, but this is certainly an attractive, fragrant style for early drinking. Fine and expressive, in a Chambolle-esque style emphasising perfume and supple red fruits. 91-93

### Beauséjour (Duffau-Lagarrosse)

Beausejour offers lovely, succulent, pillowy red fruits on the palate; accessible and juicy. This has a very limestone-y, chalky quality to the fruit, as befits the terroir. Not at all heavy; very refined and pure with the supple tannins and chalky fruit filling out the finish. This is an excellent classical style. 92-94

### Bélaire-Monange

Complex wild strawberry and raspberry notes appear on the nose, along with a touch of florals. There is a gorgeously supple quality to the fruit on the palate: just a remarkably pure expression of red fruits with a silky quality to the tannins and excellent freshness. A beautiful wine with an understated sensibility; relying on its finesse rather than density to convince – the very contrast of some recent years. 93-95

### Beychevelle

Beychevelle offers an opulent, glossy, dark cherry taste; this is extremely juicy and attractive. It is very modern in its clarity of diction and supple fruit, with a clean and bright finish. 91-93

### Branaire-Ducru

This is typical Branaire with its soft, easy-going, biscuity dark fruits and supple, well worked tannins. The finish is pleasant and fragrant, and the style unforced. 90-92

### Brane-Cantenac

Brane shows beautifully pure dark fruit on the nose, so svelte and glossy, with just a touch of stoniness. It is fascinating how this is obviously a dark-fruited wine when so many others are red. On the palate, it is pure and precise, linear and bright. It perhaps lacks the x-factor that riper fruit would have given, but this is nonetheless testimony to the wonderful effects of Cabernet on gravel. It couldn't be more classic left bank Cabernet, expressed in the usual medium-weight frame of this property. 91-93

### Calon-Ségur

On the palate, glossy, dark fruit envelops the palate, with a brilliant velvety texture and luminosity from the acidity. A rather moderate alcohol for this property (14%, last year it was 15%) contributes to the sense of brightness and lightness. Yet the depths of fruit here are impressive, with layers of cedary flavour already in evidence. This is quintessential modern, appealing Bordeaux: ripe but fresh, with excellent precision and finesse for a large-boned wine. Well-made and perhaps more successful in this slightly less ripe vintage than some from hotter recent years. 93-95

### Canon

This is a very bright, energetic, chiselled expression of Canon, with a glorious chalky core. A linear, streamlined wine, full of brightness – almost electricity! – that may become a modern classic thanks to its focused, precise, intricate fruit profile and its fresh, floral finish. It will benefit from 10 years as the fruit relaxes and expands, but this is already very beautiful and thrilling St.-Emilion. 93-95

### Carmes Haut-Brion

As usual, Carmes shows a spicy nose from the use of whole cluster berries. The palate is very bright and only mid-weight, and displays lots of red fruits (not black), in a glossy, refined style. The oak adds spice to the finish. As usual, there is tons of character on display here: Carmes remains uniquely its own style in Bordeaux. In this vintage, it offers a fresh, perfumed, almost Burgundian expression. 93-95

### Cheval Blanc

Cheval is not very expressive on the nose today, but the wine that follows is very svelte and elegant, with wonderful detail and precision. A superb blend of the succulence of Merlot (52% of the blend) with the spicy intensity of Cabernet Franc (46%), all in quite a weightless frame (13.75% alcohol this year). The tannins are paper fine. This is a classic Cheval Blanc, unmistakable in its aristocratic bearing and controlled hedonism. Superb. By chance we enjoyed the 2000 the night before, and this is absolutely in the same mould - which is quite a tribute! 95-97

### Petit Cheval

Petit Cheval has a lovely rich, succulent, plummy nose. Indeed, this is quite a Pomerol style this year: round, velvety and generous, although just a little light on the finish with prominent acidity. 90-92

### Clerc Milon

A tempting compote of red fruits emerges on the nose, and leads into a palate of richness and concentration, with an excellent tannin structure and a cedar and tobacco finish. Relatively large-boned, but with such suppleness of fruit and tannin that there are no hard edges. This is convincing and authentic, in an early-drinking style, and another delicious Clerc. 91-93

### Clinet

Clinet offers quite a heady nose, full of dark fruits and oak polish. What follows is a very streamlined palate, fresh and zesty, with excellent acidity and pretty firm tannins. In that sense, this is quite a traditional Pomerol style in its dryness and freshness, but modern in its pure, bright fruit. This is an energetic, fruity wine with good detail and focus. 91-93

### Clos du Marquis

Clos du Marquis presents a wonderful rich mouthful of juicy dark fruits with ample acidity. This is really full and generous, with the beginnings already of some cedary top notes. In spite of the firm structure, this wine is quite giving, with a beautiful velvety texture and a long-perfumed finish. This is excellent in a more approachable style than the recent more powerful vintages. 91-93

### Conseillante

Conseillante is beautifully red-fruited (88% Merlot in the blend), with perfectly supple tannins and a mid-weight body, in a very fresh and fine-boned style. There is a lovely saline, sapid quality on display here. This is almost a throwback style of Pomerol to the 1990s, without the density and weight of recent hot years. The fruit is understated but classy; very elegant and graceful. This is very convincing, as always at this property, and not trying to do too much. 93-95

### Cos d'Estournel

The nose here is quite tight and inexpressive at this time. The palate is mid-weight and understated, with particularly elegant, unforced fruit; linear and pure. This is quite an intellectual style, relying on subtlety and charm rather than density or mass. In fact, it is quite a gamble to make this restrained style for a Grand Vin! It would have been easier to try and extract a lot more, but Cos is successful in this finessed style, somewhat reminiscent of their excellent 2016. The tannins are ripe but tight and add dryness and mass to the wine. 92-94

### Pagodes de Cos

Pagodes has a wonderful raspberry-scented nose. The palate is very fine and bright, with delicious salty fruit wrapping around fine tannins. This is really zesty and vibrant and makes the most of the vintage conditions; not trying too hard for volume and generosity; accepting and exploiting the vintage style of mid-weight fruit and dryness. 91-93

### Coutet

Coutet opens with an immense botrytis nose followed by a bronzed palate of beautifully complex fruit, with ginger snaps and other dessert notes, very fine acidity and concentration without weight. Certainly a wonderful year with such easy complexity and immense unctuousity. 95-97

### Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

This is a ripe, generous, grapefruit-y style of Chevalier. It is a little quiet on the nose, but shows a beautiful tension and energy, and a pleasant, fragrant finish, but lacks the really defined acidity and structure of a great year. 91-93

### Domaine de Chevalier Rouge

A floral, red-fruited nose gives way to a vibrant, zesty palate, full of energy and sapidity. This is a streamlined, chaste expression with crystalline precision to the red fruit flavours. This is about elegance rather than opulence; tension rather than mass. It races across the palate, concluding fresh and dry. 92-94

### Ducru-Beaucaillou

The aromas of Ducru are immense: deep and concentrated with great depth of black fruits and a hint of stoniness. On the palate, this is a particularly broad-shouldered wine in the context of the vintage, with great reserves of tannin and fruit, pushing through in waves over the palate. This is a wine of immense juiciness yet with a dry heart – large-boned but true-to-type St-Julien, with a great long life ahead. Direct and structured, this is a more typical vision of this property than the overt fruitiness of hotter years like 2022. 93-95

### Croix de Beaucaillou

Croix offers a huge mouthful of dark, glossy fruit with a powerful dry tannin structure lurking beneath the surface. It is unusual in this vintage to get such opulence of fruit and full-bodied character. In decades past this would have been good enough for grand vin! 90-92

### Duhart-Milon

The 2023 is surprisingly rich and concentrated for Duhart, with a generous mid palate of red fruits and spice. This is really well done, and of the best Duharts I can remember, with its supple tannins, concentration and great finesse. 92-94

### Du Tertre

Medium-bodied, fresh and spicy; very attractive and approachable. Plenty of juicy fruit. This is a very solid year here. 89-91

### Eglise-Clinet

Eglise-Clinet shows an amazingly rich, luxe nose of glorious, glossy fruit, so hedonistic and irresistible. There is even a touch of orange in here. On the palate, the fruit coats the palate, and while there is a powerful tannic structure, the fruit just washes over everything. Mellifluous and sumptuous; you could almost eat this. This is a wonderfully complete wine of great texture, fruit concentration and sheer joy. 94-96

### Petite Eglise

Petite Eglise possesses a striking nose, full of spice and floral notes. What a wonderful palate this has, with vibrant, cashmere textured fruit; so energetic and complex. A gorgeous wine, so flattering and irresistible even now. 92-94

### Figeac

Figeac showcases beautiful floral freshness on the nose combined with easy-going fruit. This is a slender, fine-boned wine (13.5% alcohol); fragrant and bright, with a lovely floral, refreshing finish. A really precise wine, with chiselled, delineated flavours; a study in purity and precision. This is a very typical expression of modern Figeac; a neo-classical vintage of weightless concentration and finesse. 93-95

### Giscours

Giscours is almost sweet-tasting, with very glossy fruit and velvety tannins. What a beautiful, seamless style of Margaux, displaying effortless class and grace. There is wonderful mid palate concentration without weight, and such a tempting red fruit core. The extraction here is remarkable to achieve such texture with no hard edges in spite of the undoubtedly powerful tannins. A really lovely wine, that overachieves in the vintage. 91-93

### Grand-Puy-Lacoste

This is a classic style of GPL, featuring cedary, concentrated fruit, good freshness and firm but ripe tannins and a long tobacco finish. It is already quite developed in terms of its flavours, but the tannins certainly need time, which means it is hard to know when to drink. A superbly classic and rewarding GPL with such a long, fragrant finish. Well done. 91-93

### Haut-Bailly

Haut Bailly displays a floral and heather nose, followed by succulent dark fruits on the palate, complete with wonderful freshness and fine-grained tannins. This is a benchmark Haut Bailly, fully expressing its dry, savoury heart and earthy bass notes, overlaid by irresistible dark fruits. Beautifully textured, in a cashmere tone; both heady and serious, intellectual and pleasurable. Estate manager Véronique Sanders calls it a modern classic, and it's hard to disagree. 93-95

### Haut-Batailley

Haut-Batailley is a rich, concentrated wine, with a velvety texture and deep tobacco taste. It is very dry, but the ample fruit means there is nothing mean about this. Both structured and rich, it can drink young but will age beautifully. 90-92

### Haut-Brion

The wine opens with an extremely lifted, perfumed nose of great floral dimension, and continues on the palate with its wonderful combination of earthy, dark fruits, powerful tannins and particularly perfumed top notes. The finish is rich but dry, and very authentic to the house in its tobacco essence. Compared to the earlier-drinking La Mission, Haut Brion should be left alone for at least a decade as the powerful tannins integrate (they are the highest recorded since 2010). After that, expect the glorious tertiary development to emerge relatively quickly. This is classic modern Haut Brion, with its overt sensuality of fruit backstopped by a classical tannin structure to guarantee a long life. Very successful. 94-96

### Haut-Brion Blanc

A relatively quiet nose segues to a rich, almost oily palate - thus the Haut Brion Blancs of old! This is a particularly textural wine of excellent concentration and fruity depths. It is already expressive, but one senses the great potential here as the fruit will unfurl. 93-95

### Clarence de Haut-Brion

Clarence opens with a rich, almost glossy nose of dark fruits, followed by a seamless mouthful of the same, and a little gorse-like note thrown in. There is a putty-like richness of fruit with supple tannins and a mellifluous finish. As usual, this is a little more overt than Chapelle de la Mission, in a supple, succulent style. 91-93

### Clarté de Haut-Brion

Clarté starts with a hugely expressive nose of grapefruit; on the palate, it is relatively loose-knit and fresh although lacking a little concentration. This is light and bright, and a vintage to drink early while the vibrant aromas and fruit remain lively. 89-91

### Issan

Issan shows rich, glossy fruit with a full, succulent palate: no lightness here! The cedary taste is already emerging to create a very satisfying ensemble. This is rich, complex, and enjoyable with excellent depth to the fruit and good tannin structure. Nonetheless, this will be approachable when young; wait only 5-7 years after the vintage. 91-93

### La Fleur Pétrus

La Fleur Petrus has a lovely raspberry compote nose. Rich and complete, it shows layers of flavour complexity and an excellent balance of fruit, tannin and acidity. All the velvety succulence of top Pomerol is in full view here with its glorious texture, luxurious fruit and full finish. 92-94

### Lafite

Lafite has a nose of great subtlety and understated charm. On the palate, it exhibits the most wonderfully turned fruit of impeccable finesse and elegance; ripeness without weight and concentration without density. The finish is so alluring, with a touch of glycerol and great perfume. It is pure Lafite in its understated glory; this is always a wine that awards patience, and the layers of complexity and beauty are just waiting in the wings to emerge. Does it have the extra concentration and thrill of the truly great years? No, but you couldn't ask any more from this vintage. A wonderful wine and the best first growth this year. 95-97

### Carruades de Lafite

Carruades has a very fine, delicate, cedary nose. On the palate, a gorgeous, savoury, dry style of Carruades emerges, with high-toned flavours and fruit of immense finesse and weightless charm. The cedary tannins are almost imperceptible. This will be relatively early drinking, and glorious in its supple fruit and paper-fine tannins. A wonderful wine in a quintessential Lafite mould of purity and lightness of touch. 93-95

### Lafleur

Now here we are in benchmark Pomerol territory, with huge, velvety, all-enveloping fruit; succulent but dry, with an earthy undertone and spicy Bouchets notes (Cabernet Franc, 54% of the blend). This shows wonderful concentration, with such a plush texture and a salty, dry finish. This is a remarkable wine in the context of the vintage, fully displaying the potential of the site, with all the freshness and minerality available from these top Pomerol locations, balanced against a core of deep fruit. The finish is truffle and velvety. Outstanding. 95-97

### Pensées de Lafleur

Pensées has a classic Pomerol nose of milk chocolate, sweet spice and plums. This is quite a structured expression, with serious tannins. Layers of seductive red fruits tumble over one another on the palate, showing wonderful depth and effortless complexity. The finish is rich and long. Superb. 93-95



### Perrières de Lafleur

What a distinctive wine this is! 100% Cabernet Franc has yielded deep notes of florals and spice, with outstanding detail and precision on the palate and great inner mouth fragrance. This is not necessarily for beginners, but it is convincing and successful in its idiosyncratic way. There are absolutely no signs of limited ripeness here – you would never know the limitations of the vintage. This is a fascinating wine, and it is wonderful to experience the experimental – you don't often get that in Bordeaux! 91-93

### Les Champs Libres

Champs Libres has a musky nose of great intensity. This is chiselled, expansive Sauvignon, packed full of flavour, grapefruit especially. Beautifully done. 91-93

### Langoa Barton

Langoa is a very bright, loose-knit, attractive, red-fruited wine, with appealing doughy, biscuity depths and firm tannins. This is only mid-weight, with the tannins contributing structure and mass. 90-92

### Latour

Latour is quite backward at present; dense and stolid but with huge potential and supple dark fruits. This is a wine of huge dimension – more obviously so than any recent vintage I can remember – with huge structure, power and a great cerebral authority. This is an outstanding, concentrated year in grand and classic style. This will require 10-12 years at least. 94-96

### Forts de Latour

Forts is made in a firm, dry style, with stony minerality at the fore; it is almost a naked style, without any contrived fruit in the mid palate. This is perhaps not a generous expression, but certainly an authentic one and very terroir-driven. Good stuff. 91-93

### Léoville Barton

Leoville is a very supple, generous wine made in a lovely dry style that recalls many of the Leoville vintages of the 80s and 90s with its linear red fruits and cedary, dry finish. You couldn't get much more authentic left bank Bordeaux than this. Only with time will its fruit relax to become a little softer and more generous. Well made in an unforced, elegant style. 91-93

### Léoville-Las-Cases

This is a remarkably loose-knit style for Las Cases; relaxed and self-confident; regal, even. It is a little austere and dry, but you wouldn't expect anything else from this property. The fruit is very precise and fine-grained with marvellously supple tannins. Nonetheless, this vintage appears to lack the concentration and complexity to be a profound Las Cases. Perhaps another sample would have been different. 92-94

### Léoville Poyferré

What a huge wine this is, of all-encompassing dimension, wonderful depth of fruit and powerful tannins, displaying the full authority of this terroir. It is bright and energetic, with a core of powerful, concentrated, spicy fruit. At only 13% alcohol, Poyferré's movement towards a more balanced style continues with great success. 91-93

### Lynch-Bages

This is a rich, dense, powerful Lynch; a classic expression of great depth and authority. There is nothing missing here with a serious dry tannin structure, all coated by wonderfully velvety fruit. As usual, it is one of the densest wines of the Medoc, but with more than enough freshness and fruit to balance. This is a classic vintage – not a phrase used often regarding 2023. Well done. 93-95

### Echo de Lynch-Bages

Echo has a fine-grained, lifted, elegant style, rich but finessed. It is rich but dry, structured and bright and a bit more approachable than some vintages. This is very authentic and attractive. 90-92

### Château Margaux

Margaux has a very seductive nose, with beguiling cedarwood and floral aromas and such a fine-grained texture of absolute elegance and class. The fruit is far from opulent or abundant, instead racy and fine; but that is a style that so suits the lighter-bodied Margaux compared to the Pauillac first growths. This is a beautifully pure, high-toned expression of Margaux, wonderfully satisfying in its sophistication and typicity to the Margaux house style. 94-96

### Pavillon Blanc du Château Margaux

13%. Pavillon Blanc has a tempting citrus (grapefruit) nose; there is even a touch of strawberry in here somehow. On the palate, the style is quite brilliant and vibrant, with real lightness of touch and finesse. This is a gorgeous year for this wine, although the lightness means I would prefer to drink it within its first 5-7 years. This is certainly a candidate for white wine of the vintage. 94-96

### Pavillon Rouge du Château Margaux

This is a bright, refreshing, salty wine, with excellent drive and lightness of touch; displaying very supple tannins and elegant fruit. This is a very classic Margaux style: refined and elegant with a long, detailed finish. Excellent. 91-93

### La Mission Haut-Brion

The nose here is dark, almost mysterious in its depths and crevices; on the palate emerges a notably dark core of dark cherries and warm spices, with rich fruit and a melting texture. This is very glossy and sumptuous, with a distinct minerality on the finish. The wine finishes bright and fresh, with attractive dryness from the tannins, underpinning the hedonistic fruit. This is dangerously drinkable already but with its excellent concentration, structure and length, expect the usual long life ahead. There is not a paw out of place here. 93-95

### La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc

What a tempting wine! It possesses easy concentration and focus, with wonderfully intense grapefruit fruit and a loose-knit creamy texture. This offers lots of pleasure and is very accessible already. 92-94

### Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion

This is a beautifully balanced wine, with excellent, supple dark fruits managed by good acidity and some velvety tannins. The whole is integrated and seamless with good richness in the context of the year. Mid-weight at most, with a great drinkability. Very appealing and immediately attractive. 90-92

### Montrose

Montrose offers an engaging combination of succulence and power; authority and grace. Which is to say, the deep, dark fruit is so profound yet also juicy and accessible; the tannins powerful but supple. This is a fascinating vintage here, where the luxuriance of recent vintages has been replaced by detail and focus, and an almost intellectual approach to the terroir. The result is a triumph; a benchmark Montrose of huge complexity and sheer class, and among the wines of the year from one of Bordeaux's top performers at present. 94-96

### Dame de Montrose

Dame is a svelte, focused wine, quite fine-boned rather than broad-shouldered as is more usual. This is quite racy, stony and dry; another example of the 'modern classic' style of the vintage. Very pure, with a dry finish. 90-92

### Mouton Rothschild

Mouton is subdued on the nose today, but on the palate, glorious layers of complex flavours emerge, with great notes of tobacco and warm spice all wrapped in a wonderful velvety texture. The fruit envelopes the fine-grained tannins, although they re-emerge on the finish to give an overall sensation of dryness and freshness. This is a classical Mouton with ample structure and mid-palate succulent fruit that should be drinkable relatively early. Yet it will reward aging, as it unfolds its secrets, typical of the cerebral style of the vintage. 93-95

### Petit Mouton

Petit Mouton shows ample fruit with a fine-boned structure and a delicious milk chocolate finish. This is typical Mouton style in its easy fruitiness and native generosity with an appealing, perfumed finish. 91-93

### Aile d'Argent

Aile is another particularly aromatic white in this vintage, with lots of phenolic grip and dryness. This is a drier, less flamboyant style than usual for this wine, and is serious and concentrated. 91-93

### Palmer

Palmer is quite a dark wine, with a reservoir of pure black fruits at the heart, all shot through with wonderful acidity. The fruit is perfectly proportioned, neither buxom nor lean, in harness to the backbone of acidity and tannin. This is an excellent, classically styled Palmer with deceptive depths and ample fruit to unfold. And as always at this property, there is a glossy core of fruit with lovely glycerol seductiveness. This is excellent, unforced, elegant wine with great fidelity to its origins and house style, in the fresh, energetic style of the year. 93-95

### Alter Ego de Palmer

Alter Ego is delightfully fragrant and playful, with sapid, elegant fruit on the nose; gorgeous red fruits and spice on the palate, all in an unpretentious, accessible style. This is a loose-knit, supple wine which screams, 'drink me!' Fragrant and pure Margaux. 91-93

### Pavie

This is an opulent style, with heady, succulent, spicy fruit on the nose. The tannins are already well integrated, firm but ripe; and the finish, long and chalky. An approachable interpretation of the vintage, where the hedonistic fruit compensates for the lack of complexity. Very generous and full of pleasure. 91-93

### Aromes de Pavie

Aromes this year has been made in a very juicy, accessible style with soft fruit and well managed tannins. Easy-going, not particularly profound but it will be ready to go soon. This will please many in a hedonistic kind of way. 89-91

### Pavie Macquin

Pavie Macquin is a serious, dry, concentrated wine, with a powerful structure and excellent freshness. It is dense and serious, and begs for a little age to soften the edges, at which point a classical St Emilion will emerge. It is similar in style this year to Bélair-Monange or Canon, which is a compliment! 92-94

### Pétrus

The nose is fantastically floral, almost luxe; full of intense red fruits and warm spices. The texture is a pretty stunning cashmere, with effortless fruit wound round a core of imperceptible tannins. This is not an overweight wine; there is plenty of freshness and suppleness, and the fruit is lively and vibrant. Already, you perceive the smouldering core of minerality at the heart of this transparent and nervy wine. Such finesse and poise; a playful yet profound expression this year. 95-97

### Pichon Baron

The nose here is very deep, full of damsons and macerated cherry notes; it segues into a rich, structured wine of considerable fruit generosity. This is an irresistible style for what is often a rather standoff-ish property: that is to say, generous, pillowy fruit with a backbone of powerful but well managed tannins. This is really a beautiful expression of the vintage: easy-going fruit against a classic background of Bordeaux tannins and dryness. The finish is one of deep tobacco and gravel. This is excellent and just as it should be. 92-94

### Pichon Comtesse de Lalande

Pichon exhibits a very spicy nose, while on the palate, the freshness is the first notable characteristic; followed by a glycerol-rich fruit of great velvety texture. There is lots of bountiful, generous fruit in the mid-palate, with the whole wine driven by a brilliant energy and sapid length. There are plenty of tannins present, but they flow so effortlessly into the fruit. This is another excellent vintage at this estate. 93-95

### Reserve de la Comtesse

Reserve de la Comtesse has a 'dry' stony nose, followed by a long, linear palate of succulent dark fruits and warm spices. It is focused and pure, with a dry finish and an overall refined style. 90-92

### Pontet-Canet

Pontet displays an amazing fragrance, with exuberant red and dark fruits on the nose. On the palate, the fruit is particularly fresh and pure with excellent flavour delineation and a glorious glycerol finish coating the powerful tannins. This is the by now familiar, modern Pontet-Canet style with a focus on crystalline fruit expression; an overall concentrated, dry, savoury, fresh and balanced wine. Wait ten years for the tannins to retreat. 92-94

### Rauzan-Ségla

There is a lovely raspberry nose here so typical of this property, with lots of Margaux spice in evidence already. On the palate, the fruit is sensual and beautifully sculpted, outlined by acidity, and with very clean lines. This is a wine of great yet subtle depths, playful and vibrant. Do not underestimate the firm structure, although paradoxically, the wine is remarkably approachable already. This is a brilliant expression in a difficult year; precise and pure with a taut energy that is impressive. Excellent, and yet further confirmation of Rauzan's recently acquired star status in Margaux. 93-95

### Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc

There is ample fruit and concentration here, with some phenolic grip to structure the wine and enjoyable white peach and grapefruit flavours. A rich but dry white, well balanced between the creamy texture and the zesty freshness, for short to mid-term drinking. 92-94

### Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge

This is a very tight, structured style, with powerful but ripe tannins, and tightly-knit fruit, well focused and defined. Fresh and balanced, with an attractive dry heart to the wine: this is real Pessac! This is an extremely good rendition of Smith rouge, where the increase in the proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon (now 70% of the blend) has yielded a drier, more serious wine than other recent vintages. Ageworthy. 92-94

### Talbot

Talbot has a dark, spicy nose, with ample, plush fruit and excellent cedary depths. 90-92

### Troplong Mondot

This is a remarkably fresh wine, with incisive acidity and an intriguing line of dark fruit that propels the wine along. Very sapid, almost salty in its chalky, limestone quality. Really energetic, with a persistent fragrance in the mouth. Very fine-boned (only 13.5% compared to last year's 15%); elegant, detailed and graceful. Even a little milk chocolate on the finish. Irresistible and beautifully made St.-Emilion. 93-95

### Trotanoy

Trotanoy shows a beautifully fresh, fragrant nose of red fruits and spices, and a fine-boned, linear palate with masterfully handled tannins. This is firm, dry, serious wine as usual, just a little easier to access in this vintage. It will drink well within 7-8 years of the vintage, much earlier than normal. 93-95

### Vieux Château Certan

VCC is a beautifully supple wine, with great elegance and sapid freshness. The style is very fine and linear, with great precision and detail. Alexandre Thienpoint, the owner, calls it a timeless style, and indeed, the grace and charm on display here would win over anyone. A superbly balanced wine, with all the elements in harmony: the fruit measured, the acidity fine, the tannins seamless. This is a study in finesse. Reassuringly dry, with high-toned raspberry fruit on the finish. 94-96

### CONTACT

#### SOTHEBY'S WINE

T + 1 212 894 1990

wine@sothebys.com

wine.sothebys.com

### NEW YORK

#### VICTOR RABOT

+212 894 1845

victor.rabot@sothebys.com

#### CAT STEPHANI

+1 212 894 1099

cat.stephani@sothebys.com

### HONG KONG

#### FINNA SZE

+852 2822 9002

finna.sze@sothebys.com

#### TOM BAXTER

+852 2822 8199

tom.baxter@sothebys.com