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2006 BORDEAUX *TRÈS HÉTÉROGÈNE* A CURATE'S EGG...

After extensive tastings at the châteaux in April, Michael Schuster introduces a very variable vintage and provides his notes for the top wines

SUMMING UP THE 2006 VINTAGE

- Impossible to generalize easily—there is no simple pattern to impose
- Quantity down on 2005, itself 10% less than 2004; a *saignée* of 10–20% was routine—there will be plenty of 2006 Bordeaux Rosé!
- A sweltering July; a coolish, humid, overcast August; a blistering early September—and then the heavens opened
- A difficult, stressful harvest, much fragile fruit, beset by rain and rot
- The winemaking key was not to overextract from grapes that were not ideally ripe
- Quality: this is not a weak vintage, but it is very uneven. A handful of outstanding wines, a fair number of excellent ones.
- My tasting suggests Pomerol is the most consistently high quality commune, probably followed by Pessac-Léognan and the southern Médoc
- Not a “Left Bank” or a “Right Bank”, a “Merlot” or a “Cabernet” year; there are highlights everywhere
- A radiantly beautiful fruit in the best clarets, a long-term firmness in many, a leanness and rigidity of texture in the weakest
- An outstanding vintage for dry whites
- A small, difficult, and uneven year for Sauternes, but clearly some very good wines
- Despite the inconsistencies there will be a fair number of lovely wines worth buying en primeur ... at the right price.

A growing season of extremes

After a dry spring there was a rapid and healthy flowering in early June. July was notable for its dry conditions and especially for its

exceptional heat, the hottest for over 50 years. But August was then a month of unremitting overcast skies, a stagnant, drizzly humidity, and moderate seasonal temperatures. The effect was to retain the fresh aromas in the grapes, as well as their acidity—both positive characteristics in the best red and white wines—but it also slowed down phenolic ripening somewhat, and was an early factor in setting conditions for the easy development of rot in September.

In the first ten days of September there was a tremendous heatwave, but unlike the cool, north wind dried nights of 1996, the nights last year were warm and humid and the mornings misty, so rot became a constant threat. Although the grapes ripened in the heat, many also shrank and the skins of the Merlot especially became particularly fragile, meaning that when it did start to rain, from September 11th to 18th, and then again intermittently from the 21st to the 25th, they were particularly susceptible to swelling and splitting, and rotting. Much more so than the thick-skinned Cabernet Sauvignons, the bulk of which remained intact.

A trying harvest

Most Pessac-Léognan white grapes were harvested before the rain; fully ripe, concentrated, and with excellent acidity and aromas—the quality is clear to taste. The harvest details for the reds and the Sauternes are too complicated to detail here, but a few growers comments convey the idea: “Blue skies one moment, a huge dump of water the next,” “Very trying on the nerves,” “up to two sanitary *tries* a day,” “every day the instructions changed,” “It was really stressful as a vintage,” “It was like being blind in a wood, feeling one’s way from hour to hour.” And so on. The challenge was to pick each parcel at the optimum moment—for the Merlots in mid-September, and, after a week’s blue-skied relief, from September 26th to October 1st, then the Cabernet Sauvignons later on.

In the case of all the red varieties, many were picked less ideally ripe than we like them to be today, leading to the combination of

moderate density, firm tannin, and relatively high acidity that characterizes much of the vintage. But as Bill Blatch neatly summarizes it in his preliminary report: “2006 red wines are very variable, from region to region, estate to estate, and within each estate.” Quite!

Red wines: quality and style

At the classed growth and Cru Bourgeois level, the 2006 wines range from decent to outstanding, and whereas in 2005 you could make very attractive wine at practically any level, in 2006 the higher you go up the hierarchy the easier it is to find good quality—meaning more complexity, completeness, and finer textures—from riper fruit. But at quite a few properties, 2006 is not far from 2005 in quality terms, though clearly in a different, slightly more restrained style. Often the statistical analyses are not very different from 2005—high in alcohol, tannin, and acidity, that is—but to taste they are less dense, less rich, less fleshy, less persistent, with less overall amplitude.

However, 2005 is a demanding comparison, and the best 06s have a fruit which is as sweet, and a tannin that, for all its firmness, is often finer, less bulky than in '05. They are mostly, but by no means all, medium to long-term clarets, and a particularly attractive characteristic of the good wines is a radiant purity of fruit, and the mouthwateringly juicy character that comes from fruit that is fully, and yet still crisply ripe. Not the “flat” character of overripeness, but that perfect combination of joyous sweetness on the one hand, and sufficient teasing acidity to make your juices run on the other. That's pretty good, isn't it?

But there are also numerous wines that, although they are “fine,” have an overall leanness and severity. They may age well in the end, but their pleasure will be more puritan and they are a riskier early purchase.

Comparisons with other red wine vintages

2006 will inevitably suffer from two things: first, of course, from following 2005, and second, from the negative impression conveyed by its difficult harvest conditions. Accepting that it is uneven—but also that there are a lot of very good wines—if you ignore 2005, the oddball 2003, and 2000, it will stand comparison with any fine vintage since 1990.

On the Right Bank, the wines are mostly not up to 1998, but they are being compared with the fine 2001s (ie not far behind), which makes sense, and many of the respective 2006s seem to have even more fruit core and fruit persistence than in 2001. They are mostly finer, I think, than 1995, and they have more matter than 2004. On the Left Bank they are often considered as 2004+, but they are generally denser and more sweetly ripe than 2004, and, I think, 2001. The most frequent comparisons are with 1996, and occasionally with 1986/1988. For the most part the good wines have a finer, less astringent tannin than that in the 1986s, and a much sweeter fruit core than either of these 1980s years, or indeed 1995. I can see the similarities with 1996, in terms of quality and style—elegance, firm tannins, really fine Cabernet Sauvignon character—but the good 2006 Pessac-Léognans are certainly finer than most of their 1996s, and whereas in 1996 the great triumph was the consistently wonderful late ripening of the Cabernet in the northern part of the Médoc especially, in 2006 the northern Médoc was much more patchy in its Cabernet ripeness, even if yields were also lower. There seems to be a more consistent sweetness of fruit in Margaux and Pessac-Léognan than in the northern Médoc.

All in all the vintage stacks up pretty well for its best wines, its bedevilment will be its variability.

St-Estèphe

Typically firm, long haul for the most part. Both Cos and Montrouge demonstrate the “finesse” of this vintage. There is a new pair of experienced hands at the helm at Montrouge—those of Jean Delmas (father) from Haut-Brion, and it shows in the particularly refined wine this year.

Pauillac

Plenty of good wines here, especially at the top end. All three first growths are excellent, with probably the finest Mouton for a long time, and also probably the best Petit Mouton too. Stylish and fine textured Grand-Puy-Lacoste and Duhart-Milon, juicy Pontet-Canet, and a richly complete Lynch-Bages—one of the wines of the vintage. Both Pichons are fine, firm, and long-term.

St-Julien

The top wines are refined, but long term linear; finely, firmly tannic and very mineral rather than sweet cored. Delicious Branaire and Talbot, both accessible early, and yet another very good, and good value Lagrange, and a notably juicy Langoa. Many of the St-Julien wines seem to lack a little friendliness, just lacking the touch of sweetness that many wines in the vintage have, even if the communes is, as usual, pretty consistent in quality terms.

Margaux

It is often easy to see Margaux as uneven: very varied soils, quite a bit of new-wave “super-ripe and oaky” winemaking, a lot of underperformers for many years and so on, but there are plenty of excellent wines in 2006, and many have what seems to be missing a bit in St-Julien—an attractive sweetness of flavor. Margaux itself is a splendidly pure expression of Cabernet Sauvignon (90%), Ben Sichel has made yet another superb Angludet, Claire Villars' Ferrière and La Gurge are both delicious, Du Tertre is again a sweetly ripe charmer ... and so on.

Graves

The Haut-Brion group wines are lovely, as is Pape-Clement. And if some of the lesser Graves are indeed on the lean and mean side, there is a clutch of very successful Pessac-Léognans with both richness and sweetness of fruit, as well as silky tannins for the year: Carmes-Haut-Brion, Domaine de Chevalier, Fieuzal, and Haut-Bailly. All show winemaking with a sensitive palate and gentle hands from fully ripe fruit. Among the Left Bank stars.

St-Emilion

Ripe fruit in the good wines, with firmer tannins and crisper acidity than most Pomerols. Among the more “classically” made wines: very good Ausone and Cheval Blanc; very successful “côtes” and “plateau” wines (Belair, Berliquet, Canon, Clos Fourtet), a quite lovely Tertre-Rôteboeuf, delightful Tour-Figeac, very nice Angéus, Canon La Gaffelière, Beauséjour-Bécot, and with notably lighter winemaking hands in the case of the Pavie group, and Valandraud. The vintage, or a change of direction? As usual I have tried to indicate clearly in my notes what the relevant styles are for each wine.

Pomerol

Wines here made very much up to the potential of the year, and consistent across the commune. Clearly not the density and scope of their respective 2005s, but mostly a notch up from their very good '04s and '01s, if not up to '98. A very successful commune with a notably fine range of wines from the Moueix group (Pétrus,

Trotanoy, La Grave, Hosanna, Providence, Certan Marzelle, La Fleur-Pétrus etc), a wonderfully scented Laffeur, a whole host of deliciously fresh, ripe, fleshy, lesser Pomerols, impressive l'Église-Clinet and Vieux Château Certan.

Dry whites: quality and style

Dry whites are the best for a long time. The wines are consistent and high quality. They have at least as much concentration, along with more vigor, definition, and projection of flavor and aroma (the Sauvignons are remarkably aromatic) than the rather weighty 2005s, more matter and vitality than the fruitily fresh 2004s, and they have more fruit density to balance their acidity than the 2002s and 2001s. If you are a fan of dry white Bordeaux (the wine merchants' despair!) you should definitely buy, and if you don't know them this is a year to try them, at any level. The top and middle rank wines are splendid.

Sauternes: quality and style

Very difficult to know what to make of these as a group—see my comments at the head of the tasting notes.

The picking conditions were difficult, yields were low, there was a great deal of ignoble rot, *pourriture aigre*, often developing at the heart of bunches and therefore difficult to see. But clearly, with really attentive harvesting and severe selection, there are some very good wines, with plenty of noble rot, sugar, and lively acidity. The 2006 variability is clear to taste here, for the moment. That said, Yquem is a beauty, Climens looks first rate from the unassembled lots; De Fargues, Nairac, Suduiraut, Rieussec, Guiraud, Coutet, De Malle, and Raymond-Lafon are all good.

IF to buy? What to buy?

There is no obviously pressing reason to buy 2006 Bordeaux—especially if you have been buying en primeur regularly recently, and there have been offers just about every year for the past dozen years. So there is a fair amount of en primeur fatigue. Quite apart from 2005 Bordeaux this time last year, we have also recently been offered 2005 red and white Burgundy, 2005 red and white Rhône, 2005 Alsace, 2005 Germany... many winelovers have full cellars, or fat storage bills, and thin wine-budget wallets!

2006 is not another 2005, and it is also a vintage of great variability in quality, so it is much less easy to select than in 2005, or even 2004 for that matter. The Bordelais regularly made the point that: "In 2005 it was difficult to make a bad wine, in 2006 it was not easy to make a good wine!"

But there are some genuinely excellent wines, not far short of the quality of their 2005s, if in a different style, which will be really good value for money. And there are of course always people starting a cellar, or who are relatively early on in their building of a cellar. For them there are definitely clarets worth buying, and I have highlighted my personal choice of absolute quality and drinking value below. I would say it is not a year in which to buy much Sauternes early, though there are a few stars. It is a year in which to acquire some dry white Bordeaux, as this is probably the best vintage for a decade.

And it is worth remembering that, as of last year, the market for quality Bordeaux is expanding (Russia, Eastern Europe, China, the Far East...) but the quantity available is not. Though it is, of course, unclear how "constant" these new buyers will be in the long term.

Only £500/\$1,000 to commit to 2006 en primeur?

If you had only, say, £500/\$1,000 to spend on 2006 claret, what should you buy? As in previous years, I would buy one case each of

a benchmark Left Bank, Cabernet Sauvignon-based wine, and a benchmark Right Bank Merlot-based wine. As a combination of absolute quality and real value for money for this budget, here are two ideal pairs, you can look at their details in my notes. Each wine is exceptional value in the current claret context, a fine claret in its own right, a very fairly priced gem. They would also make a good quartet!

A) 2006 La Lagune, an elegantly classic, fine 3rd growth Médoc (£300?)*

2006 La Tour Figeac, a juicily delicious Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion (£180?)*

B) 2006 Fieuzal, a Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan, from the Graves (£200?)*

2006 Beauregard, a fine second-tier Pomerol (ca £200?)*

* A rough guesstimate of prices at the time of writing, April 21, 2007.

The notes

NB: With the exception of some Sauternes, all of these wines were tasted from fresh or recent samples, at the châteaux, from March 29–April 13, 2007.

What about my taste? Like all wine commentators I try to be objective in my assessments and descriptions; but also like all wine commentators I have preferences for certain styles of wines. I can readily admire what I wouldn't necessarily want to have at my own table, but constitutionally I don't like excess, and I feel strongly that winemaking excesses are almost by definition "in poor taste," often just lacking simple common sense. Like most people I am often impressed by powerful tasting impressions at the tasting bench, and by high quality new oak. But my wife and I do a lot of entertaining—and a lot of wine drinking—and I also recognize that these impressions don't make for ease of drinking, for actual beverage pleasure, at least not for us and many of our guests. And certainly not all of the time.

Cherry picking: my personal favorites of the 2006 crop

This is a vintage from which to cherry pick for drinking. And these are the wines I would choose to cellar. That there are far fewer than last year is a reflection of the very variable quality this year. The Highest Level wines are now, sadly, of academic interest for most of us. And the price polarisation is so extended after the 2005 campaign that my "just below the highest level" category doesn't make much sense any more so I have revised the three levels (NB the wines are not listed in any particular order within the communes):

1. At the very highest level: speaks for itself.
2. Premium: £350–1,000. Splendid wines. Value at a price.
3. Drinking values: £150–350. The real cherries, from the drinker's point of view, in terms of absolute quality per pound or dollar spent. At an affordable price, each wine will give a great deal of classic Bordeaux pleasure, without too long a wait, and will be a fine example of its type and origin.

LEFT BANK

At the very highest level: Lafite, Margaux, Mouton

Premium: Lynch-Bages, Grand-Puy-Lacoste, Branaire-Ducru, Haut-Bailly

Drinking values: Duhart-Milon, Lagrange, La Lagune, Brane-Cantenac, Ferrière, Angludet, Domaine de Chevalier, Fieuzal, Carmes-Haut-Brion.

RIGHT BANK

At the very highest level: Lafleur

Premium: Tertre-Rôteboeuf, LEglise-Clinet, Clinet, Providence, Hosanna

Drinking values: Certan-Marzelle, Beauregard, Moulinet, Tour-Figeac, Berliquet, Roc de Cambes.

SAUTERNES

At the very highest level: d'Yquem

Premium: De Fargues

Drinking values: Nairac, De Malle.

DRY WHITE BORDEAUX

At the very highest level: Haut-Brion, Laville-Haut-Brion

Premium: Domaine de Chevalier

Drinking values: Couhins Lurton, La Louvière, La Garde.

Key to symbols after the property name:

** = Outstanding claret, sauternes or dry white Bordeaux at the highest level, and a first rate example of its type.

* = Notably excellent within its category, at whatever level.

v = The Drinking Values! See above.

St-Estephe

Château Calon-Ségur Troisième Cru St-Estephe

Deep purple; dense and minerally to smell, with fresh ripe fruit behind; nicely balanced with a good core of fruit, firm acidity and fine tannin; crisply “red fruit” rather than sweetly ripe, quite complex across the palate, and with good scented length. Classic, fresh, quite fine, but overall a bit severe and lacking a little “fat”—for the moment anyway. Long term. 2016–26. **15.5/16**

Château Cos d'Estournel Deuxième Cru St-Estephe

Oak cedar dominated nose, with a refined Cabernet Sauvignon struggling to surface from underneath; an elegantly balanced, fairly concentrated Cos—a fullish medium-weight wine—with a fine, firm tannin; fresh, sweet, scented cassis fruit core, quite complex and refined, long in the mouth and long to finish, all the while marked by the mouthcoating, chalky dry wrapping of new wood tannin. Great finesse, lovely purity of Cabernet fruit, wish there were less than the 80% new oak. 2018–30. **16.5/17**

Les Pagodes de Cos

Inky color; very Merlot to smell; firmly tannic frame round a fluid core of fruit. Fair, but the Marbuzet, from the same stable, will provide a much more satisfying glass of wine eventually. **14**

Château De Marbuzet Cru Bourgeois St-Estephe

Inky color; ripe black fruit to smell, a little “wood dry”; well balanced in a firm style, with a fresh acidity and a chewy but not coarse tannin; rich, long, quite fleshy blackcurrant fruit to taste, and with good fruit length. No lack of matter here, a very nice, tasty, medium to long-term Marbuzet. 2012–20. **14.5/15**

Château Montrose Deuxième Cru St-Estephe

Black red; dense, ripe blackcurrant Cabernet Sauvignon nose; fairly concentrated medium-full wine with a fresh, but nicely integrated acidity and very refined tannins. Sweetly ripe flavor, very “cassisy”; elegant, long across the palate, with a lovely fruit core, complex and fine and with excellent, scented length and no asperity in the tannins. I think we can taste the hand of Jean Delmas (the ex-manager of Château Haut-Brion, who has now taken over at Montrose) in the finesse of this wine—certainly a success in the vintage. 2018–30. **16.5/17**

Dame de Montrose St-Estephe

Inky; fat and ripe to smell; well balanced middle-weight in a very firm style—tannins fine, but very present. Good core fruit, very successful second wine for the vintage, but will need to wait a good 6–8 years. 2012–20. **14.5/15**

Château Les Ormes de Pez Cru Bourgeois St-Estephe

Inky color; vanilla cream and blackcurrant to smell (40% new wood...); medium-full, crisply rather than richly ripe, finely tannic, if a little oak dry; crisp, mineral and blackcurrant flavor, with good fruit length; straightforward, attractive lesser claret. 2012–18. **14.5+**

Pauillac

Château d'Armailhac Cinquième Cru Pauillac

Inky; ripe fruited, minerally nose; medium-full, lively in acidity, but supple textured for the year; ripe and spicy to taste, very fresh and pure in flavor, moderately complex and with good, light length. A high proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon makes this more “Pauillacy” than usual. Nice. 2014–22. **14.5/15**

Château Clerc-Milon Cinquième Cru Pauillac

Inky; finely oaky blackcurrant nose; very nicely balanced, concentrated middleweight, fresh and finely tannic; ripe rather than sweet, with a particularly fleshy presence (more than twice its usual proportion of Merlot); overall a very nice combination of richness, fresh ripe fruit, and refined tannin texture, and good, slightly roasted length to follow. A lovely Clerc-Milon. 2015–25. **15.5+**

Château Duhart-Milon Quatrième Cru Pauillac v

Inky color; fine blackberry fruit and mineral nose; well balanced, medium-full wine, crisp, and finely tannic; a lovely expression of cassis cabernet fruit, long, pure, sweet and stylish, and with good fruit and mineral length. Very nice. 2014–25. **15.5/16**

Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste Cinquième Cru Pauillac *

Deep black red; fine, fresh, cassis ripe Cabernet nose; elegantly balanced middleweight with a very refined tannin; a deliciously juicy purity of fruit, sweet, fresh and fine, with a particularly silky texture for the vintage; long, scented, focussed and harmonious. Lovely GPL! 2014–24. **16.5**

Château Haut-Batailley Cinquième Cru Pauillac v

Deep purple; quite dense and redcurrant ripe on the nose; crisp, firmly tannic middleweight of moderate concentration, with a juicy, well defined, fruit of lovely freshness and purity; quite complex, good scented length, a mouthwateringly attractive Haut-Batailley. 2012–20. **15/15.5**

Château Haut-Bages-Libéral Cinquième Cru Pauillac

Inky purple; deep, fat, and ripe to smell; nicely balanced in a solid style with chewy, but not coarse, tannin; fresh, crisply ripe, nice length in the mouth, with clear Pauillac muscle. Plenty of matter... for solid fare. **15+**

Château Lafite Premier Cru Pauillac **

Inky; a beautifully, expansively ripe nose of richly ripe Cabernet essence, dense, perfumed, and persistent; rich, ample to taste, with a very refined tannin; sweetly, yet freshly ripe with a lovely fleshy density for the vintage; long and racy, penetratingly complex, Pauillac spicy; rich yet delicate, and with great, gently resonant length. Mouthwateringly good! A wonderful Lafite—again. Only 40% of the harvest. It shows. 2020–35+. **18.5/19**

Carruades de Lafite Pauillac

Deep purple; still rather raw on the nose; a fine, chewy tannin round a straightforward, fresh, juicy fruit; crisp, appetizing, and with a scented red fruit length, but lacking a bit of core richness and without much complexity, but will be an attractive “drinking” bottle relatively early. As quite often, a good, rather than a notable second wine. 2012–20. **14.5+**

Château Latour Premier Cru Pauillac **

Dark purple; a restrained, but very finely scented nose of subtly fragrant, gently minerally, ripe black fruit; a rich and beautifully balanced, concentrated middleweight with very refined tannins and a fresh but almost imperceptible acidity; long, restrained, even and harmonious, sweetly, mouthcoatingly ripe in flavor, tenaciously long, effortless quality. A lovely combination of ripeness, freshness, purity, precision, and refinement. 38% of the vineyard’s production. 2020–35+. **18.5+**

Les Forts de Latour Pauillac

Deep purple; ripe and lightly minerally to smell; elegantly balanced in the pure, linear style of the vintage—moderately concentrated, fresh in acid, fine in tannin; ripe, fresh, pure red and black fruit Cabernet flavor, long and gentle and consistent across the palate with a fine, scented, spicy length. No severity here, great purity, finesse and definition. Will need 8–10 years at least. 2014–24. **16+**

Château Lynch-Bages Cinquième Cru Pauillac *

Deep purple; brisk red and blackcurrant fruit nose, mineral-infused too; a very nicely balanced, rich middleweight, finely balanced with no excess astringency whatever; an appetizingly sweet, fully ripe yet fresh core of fruit, long, complex, close-grained, very nicely defined and with fine, mineral-scented length. A particularly fine Lynch-Bages, a beautifully pure, concentrated expression of Pauillac Cabernet Sauvignon, very close in quality to its '05. 2/3 of the crop. One of the standout stars of the vintage. **16.5**

Château Mouton Rothschild Premier Cru Pauillac **

Black purple; dense and oaky on the nose; rich, elegantly balanced, concentrated wine with a fresh, but unobtrusive acidity and a very refined tannin; sweetly and crisply ripe blackcurrant core, long, discreet, complex, and with a lovely purity and linearity of flavor and very fine length; a particularly polished, harmonious Mouton, full of promise—a beauty!

Possibly a finer wine than its 2005. 2020–35+. **18/18.5**

Petit Mouton Pauillac

Black purple; dense and blackcurranty to smell; very nicely balanced, moderately concentrated wine, slightly dry-edged; a fine, pure cassis cabernet fruit flavor, long, elegant, and subtle. Certainly better than its 2005, a very fine second wine, and one of the best Petit Moutons so far. 2015–25. **16**

Château Pibran Cru Bourgeois Pauillac

Inky; dense and mineral to smell; nicely balanced wine with a good core of sweet fruit, round, ripe, fleshy, and flowing (this is 70% Merlot to 30% Cabernet Sauvignon), within a moderate, but firmish tannin; sweet to finish. A good Cru Bourgeois, but will probably need 6–8 years. 2014–22. **14**

Château Pichon-Baron Deuxième Cru Pauillac

Black red; densely ripe blackcurrant Cabernet nose; rich, elegant, well-packed wine with a fresh acidity and fine but firmly tannic frame; rich, even, complex, and very minerally behind the crisply ripe fruit and sweet, scented length. Good, but with its somewhat military bearing indicating a long wait. 2018–30. **16.5**

Château Pichon-Lalande Deuxième Cru Pauillac

Inky purple; dense and mineral to smell, rather than sweet in fruit; elegantly balanced in a slightly leaner style than usual, with a fresh acidity, and firm, dry-edged, long-term tannin; ripe, juicy, scented fruit, quite complex, and with excellent fruit length. Lacks a little density at present, but no lack of fruit presence.

An unusually high proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon here this year: 64%, with 36% Merlot, and no Cabernet Franc (12% in the vineyard) or Petit Verdot (8% in the vineyard). Missing a bit of its Cabernet Franc complexity and Petit Verdot core? Another one that will need plenty of time. 2018–30. **16.5**

Château Pontet-Canet Cinquième Cru Pauillac

Inky purple; fine black fruit and new oak vanilla nose; concentrated middleweight with a fine, if slightly oak-dry textured, tannin; vividly ripe fruit in a fairly firm frame, long, even, and minerally to taste with a very nice fresh, red fruit persistence; slightly new wave/new oaky, but without excess; long, pure, juicy, fine—a classy, long-term Pontet-Canet, very close to its very good '05. 2015–25. **16+**

St-Julien**Château Branaire-Ducru Quatrième Cru St-Julien**

Dark purple; vividly fruity, mineral-scented nose; medium-full, very nicely balanced with a fresh acidity and very fine-grained tannin; ripe red fruit, juicy, long, restrained and stylish, with typical St-Julien elegance, and good scented length. Very well managed texture, with no impression of the often very firm '06 tannins here, and close in quality to its fine 2005. 2012–22. **15.5+**

Château Ducru-Beaucaillou Deuxième Cru St-Julien

Black red; dense, refined, ripe red fruit nose with a fine underlying minerality; very nicely balanced in the slightly more austere mould of this vintage; fresh, finely tannic, elegant and restrained rather than particularly concentrated,

but long across the palate, very red fruit in flavor, and with good length; marked minerality, perhaps just lacking a point in core sweetness—as is the case with many of the St-Julien. Great finesse, as usual; slight austerity too. 2018–28. **16.5**

La Croix Beaucaillou St-Julien

Deep purple; gently, freshly ripe raspberry fruit to smell; nicely balanced in a slightly austere, dry-edged style, but crisp and sweet and juicy in fruit with nice scented length. Moderately complex, very much in the style of Ducru. Good, but a touch of severity. 2014–20. **15**

Château Gruaud-Larose Deuxième Cru St-Julien

Dark red; fine, crisply ripe and minerally nose; elegantly balanced, quite rich middleweight with a fresh acidity and firm tannin; freshly ripe red fruit, quite complex and aromatic, rather than particularly fruity or fleshy, ie not fat, but fine, and with good sweet, pure, scented length. Very “Médoci!” 2016–26. **16+**

Château Lagrange Troisième Cru St-Julien v

Dark purple; ripe and minerally nose; elegantly balanced, nicely concentrated medium-full wine with a fresh acidity and fine, firm dry tannin; crisply ripe, sweet blackberry fruit of moderate complexity, fresh, pure, clearly mineral and with good, scented length. Successful, classic, slightly firmer St-Julien style with an excellent fruit centre, likely, as always, to be very good value. Marcel Ducasse’s twenty-third and final vintage. 2015–25 A recent vertical tasting showed how consistently well these age. **15.5+**

Château Langoa-Barton Troisième Cru St-Julien

Inky; dense to smell; elegantly concentrated with a lovely ripe and juicy fruit, quite complex, long, and plump, satisfying within a firm, but not excessive tannin and with good, scented length; fleshy for the vintage, a very nice Langoa, but even so will probably need ten years. 2015–25. **15.5**

Château Léoville-Barton Deuxième Cru St-Julien

Black red; concentrated, ripe blackberry fruit to smell, subtly minerally, promises a very fine bouquet; nicely balanced, fairly full, fresh and firmly tannic; a soft, fleshy-ripe fruit within the tannic frame, long, dense, and complex, with good fruit persistence. Fine, firm, long-term Barton. 2018–30. **16.5**

Château Léoville-Poyferré Deuxième Cru St-Julien

Inky purple; a really classy, refined, scented nose, combining ripe fruit and clear minerality; perfectly balanced proportions of fruit to crisp acidity and very fine-grained, if firm tannins; ripe flavor and gentle minerality, long in the mouth and long to finish—real core class, complexity, and definition. A fine, harmonious, linear, long-term Poyferré. 2018–30. **16.5+**

Château Léoville-Las-Cases Deuxième Cru St-Julien

Inky purple; dense blackberry and blackcurrant nose, very minerally; full, concentrated, fresh, and tannic; a deep, long, crisp, complex, and mineral-infused blackcurrant Cabernet flavor, all within a very present, firmly tannic frame, excellent gravelly length. Very good, muscular, Pauillac-like St-Julien, whose austerity looks like needing decades of cellaring. 2020–30+. **17**

Clos du Marquis St-Julien

Deep purple; firmly tannic wine of moderate concentration and a vivid acidity; crisply ripe, quite complex fruit with good length, all within a fairly severe tannin frame which will need plenty of time to mellow. Good, solid. 2014–24. **14.5+**

Château Talbot Quatrième Cru St-Julien v

Deep purple; nicely balanced, relatively supple middleweight with a fresh, but not pronounced, acidity and dry but fine tannins for the vintage; quite long and crisp and even, only moderately complex, but with good length; this should make a nice, juicy, refreshing glass of quite classy claret in 6–8 years. An attractive and accessibly supple St-Julien, as it has been so often recently. 2012–22. **15.5**

Haut-Médoc, Médoc, Moulis

Château Charmail Cru Bourgeois Haut-Médoc

Dark purple; soft, blackberry ripe nose; crisp, minerally, aromatic, pure, and red-fruity claret; lacks a bit of flesh at the moment, but should make a nice, fresh glass in 4–5 years. 2010–18. **14+**

Chasse-Spleen Cru Bourgeois Moulis

Deep purple; freshly aromatic raspberry and mineral nose; nicely balanced, supple yet fresh with a fine, firm tannin; not particularly concentrated, but with a refreshing, scented red fruit flavor, a wine of freshness, finesse and minerality rather than volume, drinkable relatively early. 2012–20. **14.5**

Château Belgrave Cinquième Cru Haut-Médoc

Inky color; a nose of new oak and super ripe fruit; nicely balanced, moderately concentrated, relatively supple; very (almost raisiny) ripe, very fruity, very pure “modern” winemaking with very well managed tannins, no astringency, and nice, warm length. “New wave,” but without excess, which will make attractive early drinking. Good rather than fine Haut-Médoc. 2011–16+. **14.5**

Château La Lagune Troisième Cru Haut-Médoc * v

Deep purple; fresh and sweetly ripe on the nose; beautifully balanced middleweight wine with very refined tannin and a lively acidity; a lovely ripe fruit core, long and fine in the mouth, subtly minerally, with both density and complexity within a relatively velvety texture for the vintage, and excellent length. Classy, elegant, beautifully made. A fine Médoc. This comes from a sacrificial 60% of a normal crop, with two thirds of that being La Lagune itself. And it simply confirms Caroline Frey as a particularly sensitive palate and gifted winemaker, who has brought La Lagune to the fore remarkably over the past three years. 2014–24+. **16/16.5**

Château Potensac Cru Bourgeois Médoc

Deep purple; brisk red-fruit nose; medium-full wine, fairly tannic and with a lively acidity; austere for the moment, with the tannins very dominant on the palate. A tough prospect, so I’d wait to try this in bottle. **13.5/14?**

Château Sociando-Mallet Cru Bourgeois Haut-Médoc

Deep purple; lightly fruity, lightly minerally nose; fresh, supple, medium-bodied wine, with notably soft and fine-textured tannins for the year; light, elegant, aromatic, gravelly fruit, not particularly concentrated, but this will be

an attractive, fairly silky, rounded middleweight, drinkable relatively early for the vintage. Stylish, if not a great deal of “matter,” but none the worse for that! 2012–18. **15**

Margaux

Château d’Angludet Cru Bourgeois Margaux * v

Deep purple; briskly ripe blackcurrant and mineral nose; very nicely balanced indeed, a fresh, elegant, complete middleweight with a very fine-grained tannin; long in the mouth, sweetly ripe to taste, but very “pebbly” too; classic claret in the best sense, crisp, refreshing, and with fine length. Beautifully made, and a fine follow on to Ben Sichel’s lovely 2005. 2014–24. **15+**

Château Brane-Cantenac Deuxième Cru Margaux

Deep purple; freshly ripe blackcurrant and mineral nose which should make a lovely bouquet; elegantly balanced wine with a very fine-grained tannin round a soft and juicy fruit; flowing, fruity, mineral-infused, subtle, and with good length. Good, if some way from its fine 2005. 2014–24. **15.5/16**

Château Durfort-Vivens Deuxième Cru Margaux v

Deep color; fresh, ripe blackcurrant and mineral nose; elegant middleweight with a lively acidity and very fine tannin for the year; ripe, scented, sapid, and minerally in its typically restrained style; a bit of the ’06 rigidity shows, but there is very good fragrant length. Will need time. Classic, fine, linear Margaux. 2014–24. **15.5/16**

Château Ferrière Troisième Cru Margaux v

Inky color; fine, ripe, minerally nose; beautifully balanced middleweight wine with a lovely core of ripe, sappy, and minerally fruit; long, very Cabernet Sauvignon flavor, but with a nice Merlot “fat” too; excellent length, very successful in the vintage. Close in quality to its fine 2005. 2014–24. **15.5+**

Château Giscours Troisième Cru Margaux v

Deep color; freshly ripe blackcurrant nose; medium-full, firm in tannin, with a sweetly ripe fruit, and Margaux scent and finesse; long in the mouth, but quite firmly tannic to finish. Good, medium to long-term. 2014–24. **15.5**

Château La Gurgue Cru Bourgeois Margaux v

Deep purple; dense, ripe, fresh, gravelly nose; very nicely balanced medium weight, with a nicely judged tannin and fresh fruit; a sapid, classy Cru Bourgeois Margaux, delicious at its level. 2012–18. **14.5+**

Château Kirwan Troisième Cru Margaux

Deep purple; dry and closed to smell, from the new wood; medium-full, with an attractive, softly ripe fruit core surrounded by a dry oak tannin; quite fleshy, nice bright acidity, good light length. New wave, a bit oak-dry, but good in the style. 2015–25. **15?**

Château Malescot-St-Exupery Troisième Cru Margaux

Inky purple; ripe mulberry fruit to smell; well balanced in the modern style, with soft ripe fruit at its heart; fresh, ripe, juicy, minerally, nicely sustained flavor, very “Margaux-fine” in character, but also quite marked in texture by the fine, chalky-dry coating from the 100% new oak. 2015–25. **15**

Château Margaux Premier Cru Margaux **

Dark purple; richly sweet to smell: pure, perfumed, and gently minerally; rich, fresh, concentrated mediumweight with a very fine, perfectly balanced tannin; lovely, freshly ripe fruit flavor, crisp but without sharpness, long and even and delicate but without any weakness; tannins tight and firm but without any impression of hardness; a density and intensity of fruit which is not immediately apparent, a quiet yet imposing presence, a mouthcoating scent, and great, wonderfully fragrant length. Gorgeous! 2020–35+. **18.5+**

Pavillon Rouge Margaux

Deep purple; dense, minerally, ripe blackcurrant nose; very nicely balanced, elegant middleweight with a refined tannin texture and the fresh to crisp acidity of the year; ripe-fruited, warm, minerally, long and even in the mouth, dry to finish, but neither chewy nor pinched and with good, scented length. A beautifully harmonious Pavillon that will drink relatively early for the year. 55% of the crop. 2014–24. **16**

Château Palmer Troisième Cru Margaux

Inky purple; concentrated nose of ripe Cabernet, minerals and oak cedar; medium-full, moderately concentrated, finely tannic; a good core of well sustained, racy fruit, fresh and minerally within the typical Palmer “soft-ripe” Merlot flesh; slightly rigid tannin on the finish, but a long, sweetly ripe and scented aftertaste. Classic fleshy-centered Palmer within a slightly firm frame. 2015–25. **16.5/17**

Château Rauzan-Ségla Deuxième Cru Margaux

Deep purple; dense, crisp fruit to smell, with a marked gravelly character; elegantly balanced middleweight with a firm tannin and lively acidity; ripe, fleshy fruit of moderate complexity, scented and fine rather than imposing and with good length. Firmish style, but very Margaux and very nice. **16.5**

Château du Tertre Cinquième Cru Margaux v

Mineral and red-fruit nose; a very nicely balanced combination of sweetly ripe, delicate fruit—fresh, refreshing, and juicy, if not particularly rich; the high proportion of Cabernet Franc (20%) gives this a most attractively fresh and subtle fragrance; a lighter claret, with good length and full of charm, for relatively early drinking. **14.5+**

Graves Pessac-Leognan (Red)

Château Les Carmes-Haut-Brion Pessac-Léognan * v

Deep purple; rich red fruit and oak cedar on the nose; very nicely balanced rich middleweight with a fine, dry tannin; sweetly juicy core of ripe, pure fruit, graceful, elegant, gently minerally, scented, and complex; long and succulent in the mouth and with excellent scented length. A lovely, complete Les Carmes, a most satisfying, classically proportioned Graves. 2014–24. **16/16.5**

Domaine de Chevalier Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan * v

Inky color; dense, ripe black fruits to smell; very nicely balanced lively, fleshy mediumweight with fine, relatively silky tannins for the year; crisply ripe in fruit, long in the mouth, scented, minerally, and with a fine cassis-fruited finish. Very nice Domaine de Chevalier red. 2014–24. **16/16.5**

Château de Fieuzal Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan v

Inky color; dense red-fruit and mineral nose; rich for the vintage, but fresh too, and with a lovely fleshiness within a very fine tannin; ripe and richly juicy to taste, close-grained, complex, silky textured and with lovely scented length. A really fine Fieuzal red. The property has made a most successful red and white pair in 2006. 2012–22+. **16+**

Château Haut-Bailly Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

Deep purple; a nose combining both darkly ripe fruit and marked minerality; elegantly balanced medium weight, rich and fresh, with very gentle tannins; soft, vivid, juicy fruit, long and refined, sweetly ripe but gravel-scented too, indeed a lovely combination of ripe vine fruit and Graves terroir aromas, with a fine aromatic finish. A lovely Haut-Bailly, which will give at least as much pleasure, earlier, and for just as long as its firmer, more “serious” ’05. 2012–22+. **16/16.5**

Château Haut-Brion Premier Cru Pessac-Léognan **

Black red; a beautifully rich nose, full of promise—ample, ripe, sweet, complex; beautifully balanced, fairly full-bodied Haut-Brion, with the usual super fine-textured tannin allied to that ’06 freshness; for all its generosity (and you feel the caressing warmth of 14+% alcohol, but it is no way “hot”) this retains the characteristic finesse; long, subtle, and scented across the palate, sweet in fruit, pebbly in scent, quietly complex and with lovely scented length. As with the La Mission, not the density of a grand year (like the ’05), but all *sotto voce* class. 2020–30+. **18/18.5+**

Château Bahans-Haut-Brion Pessac-Léognan

Very deep color; soft, sweet, plummy nose, refined and gravelly; nicely balanced, fresh, medium-full wine with a fine but firm tannin; the elegance of Haut-Brion’s soil very much in evidence in its texture and its pebbly perfume; crisply fruity, subtly complex, good, scented length. 2012–40. **16**

Château La Mission-Haut-Brion Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

Black red; richly ripe to smell; elegantly balanced, fairly full, but fresh too, with a refined but firm tannin; a refined but long-term, structured flavor, with Merlot warmth allied to Cabernet Sauvignon sinew; a very sweet fruit, long and flowing and fairly complex, not the close-knit complexity of a great La Mission, but a clear emphasis on finesse, that will need time to mellow. 2018–30+. **17**

La Chapelle de La Mission Pessac-Léognan

Inky purple; sweetly ripe Cabernet Sauvignon to smell; medium-full, moderately concentrated, a fresh acidity and a refined, firm tannin; a flowing, scented, fresh, and ripe fruit rather than any particular concentration, plenty of finesse, good length. The incorporation of the fruit from La Tour-Haut-Brion (see below) has not coarsened this at all, but given it a little more “core,” and the high proportion of Cabernet Franc gives it a lovely fragrance. 2012–22. **15.5+**

Château Pape-Clément Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan

Inky; ripe red fruit and new oak to smell; rich middleweight with a juicy pillow of ripe fruit and a fine, firm grape and new wood tannin; long, fine, fresh, subtle, and pure in flavor, sweet and juicy in fruit, and with excellent length. Classy, if, as usual, a little oak dry in texture. 2015–25. **16/16.5**

Château La Tour-Haut-Brion Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan

This brand/cru has been discontinued and as of the 2006 vintage its grapes have been, and will be, incorporated in La Chapelle de La Mission, the second wine of La Mission.

Graves Pessac-Léognan (White)

Domaine de Chevalier Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

Dense and vivid to smell; rich and vigorous in constitution; very concentrated to taste, dry and yet very ripe, both succulently fruity and very mineral-infused in flavor, and all the while with such a defining vigor to balance the richness; mouthfilling aromatic complexity and great length. A grand Domaine de Chevalier blanc of great resonance and presence. Will need well over a decade to mellow, I should think. 2018–30. **17.5**

Château Couhins-Lurton Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan * v

Fine, scented, vividly projected, ripe, minerally Sauvignon; a beautifully balanced, rich middleweight with a vigorous defining acidity; rich, ripe, and juicy, but long and elegant and classy, and with superb length. A very fine Couhins. This wine ages very well indeed, drinking nicely from 4 or 5 years, but 15 years is no problem with good vintages, and they develop into really fine mature white Graves, with surprisingly Graves Semillon-like characteristics (even though it is 100% Sauvignon Blanc). 2010–20. **16.5**

Château de Fieuzal Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

A beautiful nose, ripe and generous and well projected; very nicely balanced, concentrated wine with plenty of vigor; ripe, juicy, and vivid with a fine minerality behind the effusively ripe fruit, complex and long and fine. Rich, elegant, complete; a lovely long-term Fieuzal. 2010–20. **16.5+**

Château La Garde Pessac-Léognan * v

Finely delineated Sauvignon Blanc on the nose, with the Sauvignon Gris (50% of the blend) giving it a particularly “fat” character; rich, vigorous, sappy wine, long and tasty and refreshing, with very good length. A delicious dry white Graves at the level, enjoyable young but will most likely develop with a bit of bottle age too. 2008–12+. **15**

Château Haut-Brion Premier Cru Pessac-Léognan **

Greeny gold; rich, refined, subtly oaky nose with a vital guava-like fruit to smell; a lovely balance, full yet restrained, a most harmonious combination of concentration and freshness; long, subtle, ripe grape and mineral flavor, graceful, highly scented and with wonderfully persistent aromas on the finish. Not the drama of Laville, but more subtlety and complexity. A quite lovely Haut-Brion Blanc, very clear grand cru quality. 2018–30. **18.5**

Château Laville-Haut-Brion Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

Pale greeny gold; very Sauvignon Blanc to smell at present, with notably clear cut, well projected aromas; beautifully balanced dry white, rich, concentrated, vivid in acidity yet remaining very elegant—rich and lively, the perfect long-term balance. Rich, juicy, sapid flavor, with Semillon fat and Sauvignon definition marked by both very ripe fruit and a strong minerality, long and complex and with great aromatic persistence. Fat, structure, scope, length, elegance, a grand Laville in the making. Grand cru quality. 2018–30. **17.5/18**

Château La Louvière Pessac-Léognan * v

Vividly ripe, well-defined, well-projected Sauvignon aromas, and with a palate to match: ripe, concentrated, sapid, juicy, aromatic, long, and vital; not a grand white Graves, but a deliciously vivid one that will drink early but develop for a few years as well! 2008-14. **15.5**

Château Malartic-Lagravière Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

Rich, vivid, powerfully aromatic, minerally Sauvignon nose; dense and ripe and with a vigorous acidity; juicy, sapid, concentrated wine with a fine underlying minerality and good fruit and aroma length. Very good, will drink well young and last well too. 2010-18. **15.5+**

Château Pape-Clément Cru Classé Pessac-Léognan *

Pale gold; dense to smell, finely Sauvignon Blanc; well constituted, rich, concentrated, and vigorous; lovely flavor, fat and ripe but well defined too, Semillon rich and Sauvignon racy to taste, sapid, subtly oaky and with excellent aromatic length. A fine Pape-Clément blanc. 2014-22. **16.5/17**

St-Emilion**Château Angélus Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion**

Deep purple; crisply ripe cassis fruit and minerals to smell against a light oak vanilla; fairly concentrated, fullish wine with a fresh acidity and an, at present, very firm oak tannin; fresh, pure, mineral backed fruit, nice length in the mouth, oak clear but not excessive (the 100% new notwithstanding) and with good, crisp, scented length. A fine, linear Angélus, juicy without being particularly rich. 2014-24. **16+**

Château Ausone Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion **

Inky color; dense, oaky, red-fruit nose; rich, middleweight Ausone with a generous core of fruit and firm tannin and a lively acidity; rich, racy, complex, and very mineral in character; very long and tenacious in the mouth with excellent, scented length. The slight austerity of the year will mean that this is a relatively long-term wine, but a very classy one. 2018-30+. **18**

La Chapelle d'Ausone St-Emilion

Inky purple; dense, minerally nose; very nicely balanced, lively middleweight with a fine, firm, as yet rather oak-dry tannin; quite rich and fleshy behind the tannin, with a slight austerity from the combination of lively acid and firm tannin, but good, scented length. Will need more time than usual to mellow. 2014-20+. **16**

Château Beau-Séjour-Bécot Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Inky; ripe red fruit which is slightly woody at the moment; freshly, elegantly balanced, with the usual slight oak dryness and a fine-grained tannin; most attractively pure and well delineated ripe, red fruit, sweet and complex—and oaky—and with fine, scented length. Very nice in its ripe, oaky style. 2015-25. **16/16.5**

Château Belair Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Dark purple; fine, restrained, sweetly ripe, mineral-backed fruit—almost cassis-like ripeness; very nicely balanced, crisply fresh mediumweight, with a very refined tannin; long,

gentle, even wine, ripe, pure, and transparent in flavor; quite racy, with nice complexity and good length. Graceful and stylish St-Emilion Côtes wine, as usual. Drinkable relatively early. 2012-20. **16+**

Bellevue-Mondotte

Inky purple; dense, and oak-dominated (the Australian term is “planky”) to smell; concentrated, firmly tannic, oak-dry; a very sweetly ripe fruit at its core, with some complexity and a certain elegance, but still very much in the “house” style of warm, super-ripe, extracty (but not coarse) new wave. Good, warm, scented length. Good of its type, but you have to like that type! A substantial 20% rise in yield this year over last year—from 15 to 18 hectolitres per hectare! 2016-26? **16+**

Château Berliquet Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion * v

Deep color; ripe red fruit and light oak to smell; well balanced mediumweight in the lighter style of the St-Emilion Côtes and with a very light tannin; a lovely, ripe, red fruit flavor, spicy, moderately complex, very limestone minerally, and with good scented length. Fresh, vital, pure; a lovely '06 to follow its fine '05. 2012-20. **16**

Château Canon Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Deep purple; sweetly ripe and minerally nose; very nicely balanced, rich middleweight, fleshy but well defined with a fresh acidity and fine tannin; an attractive density of ripe red fruit, long, close-knit and minerally, with a flowing core and sweet, scented length. Typical Canon, typically restrained, fine St-Emilion Côtes style. Very nice. 2014-24. **16+**

Château Canon-La-Gaffelière Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Deep purple; ripe fruit a little wood-dominated at present—cassissy; as usual, an elegantly balanced, fresh yet supple middleweight, with a very fine tannin; long in the mouth, if not particularly concentrated, but complete, complex and stylish; elegant, minerally, discreet, and persistent. Very nice. 2014-22. **16+**

Château Cheval Blanc Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion **

Deep purple; dense caramel-cream Merlot nose, rich and subtly oaky to smell—a classic Cheval Blanc bouquet in the making; medium-full, but rich, fleshy, and generous, with the '06 lively defining acidity and a very refined, firm tannin; the flavor reflects the nose in being vanilla creamy alongside the ripe red fruit, long, mouthcoating, subtly spicy, and racy to taste, a delicious combination of juice, flesh, and vitality, with excellent length. 2015-30+. **17.5/18**

Petit Cheval St-Emilion

Deep red; light, fresh minerally nose of redcurrant and raspberry; medium-full with a fresh acidity and a firm, dry tannin; ripe, quite creamy textured, gently fleshy, moderately complex, scented, graceful, and with good length. A classy second wine. 2012-20. **16+**

Le Dôme St-Emilion Grand Cru

Inky color; mineral and very ripe fruit on the nose; rich middleweight with a very refined tannin, and that mainly an oak-dry tannin; sweetly ripe, complex, very fragrant and

finely minerally to taste, and with remarkably scented length. The very particular scented quality of this wine is perhaps not surprising when you know that it is very nearly three quarters Cabernet Franc. Very low yields and very ripe fruit make for a wine that is quite powerful and mouthcoating, but it remains delicate and transparent at the same time—Burgundian in that sense. Very individual, with a faintly raisiny imprint from the super-ripe fruit. Impressive, though a bit difficult to judge as it is the first time I have tasted it en primeur, and I have no idea how it ages. The first vintage was 1996. Certainly fine wine, in a sort of more restrained new wave Pavié style. **17?**

Clos Fournet Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Inky purple; dark ripe fruit, a fairly dense nose; very nicely balanced limestone plateau wine, medium-full, fresh yet supple in acidity and with a very fine tannin; pure and ripe in fruit, long, even, elegant, and limestone mineral-suffused, with excellent scented length. Considerable finesse, a fine expression of the plateau, and of its class. 2014–24. **16.5**

La Gomerie Grand Cru St-Emilion

Inky; dense, ripe, oak-tinged fruit; nicely balanced, slightly oak-dry middleweight, moderately tannic, with a concentrated core of fresh, ripe, blackberry fruit, long and warm, gently mouthcoating, very scented both on the palate and on the finish. The rather present oakiness means this is not my style, but it is very nice of its type. 2014–22. **16**

Château Magdelaine Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Mid-purple; light, scented nose, fragrant, ripe raspberry, blueberry, and a subtle minerality; fresh, flowing mediumweight with a very fine tannin and a fresh acidity—a very harmonious balance; light, sweetly ripe, fresh, and fragrant to taste, long and moderately complex but overall delicate, with nice scented length. Classic St-Emilion limestone Côtes character, stylish and typical. Drinkable relatively early. 2012–20. **15.5/16**

Château Monbousquet Grand Cru (Classé) St-Emilion

Inky purple; ripe fruit marked smoky oak on the nose; a concentrated, but elegantly balanced wine with a fine, firm tannin; long and rich with an attractive complexity and good length; slightly “hot” to finish, but this is much less marked by new oak astringency than it has been in the past (60% new wood this year, rather than 100% hitherto) and all the better for it. Very nice. A Perse wine to try if, like me, you have not been a fan? 2012–22. **15.5/16**

Château la Mondotte Grand Cru St-Emilion

Deep bright purple; a dense cassis fruit here, quite marked by its new oak; a moderately concentrated la Mondotte with a lively to sharp acidity and, currently, a very oak-dry tannin; the fruit seems less absolutely ripe here than in the other Neipperg wines, so it is much more dominated by its acid/tannin structure than it was in the very fine 2004 and 2005 wines. Don't know what to make of this at the moment...

Clos L'Oratoire Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Deep purple; oak dominates a freshly ripe raspberry fruit; nicely balanced, if slightly dry-edged from the wood; fresh fruit of moderate concentration, but no weakness, nice mid-

palate length, ripe, elegant, moderately complex and complete at a lesser level, and with a nice, scented finish. 2010–20. **14.5/15**

Château Pavié Premier Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Inky purple; dense, sweetly ripe cassis and blackberry fruit—with no wood in the way—which should make a striking bouquet; elegantly balanced, fairly concentrated wine, with a fresh acidity and dry tannin; long and refined to taste, still marked by its new wood but much less than in the past, the class is clearly there and there is excellent, scented length. Complete, and very nice of its still clear new wave type—just seems less extreme this year. 65% new wood rather than 100% must have something to do with it. 2018–30. **17**

Pavié-Decesse Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

Inky purple; strong, ripe, black glacé cherry and marked new oak on the nose; medium-full wine, with a crisp acidity and very firm tannin, marked and dried in texture by its new oak; the ripe core fruit doesn't seem up to its tough frame at the moment. Vinification seems less extreme than in the past, and there is only 70% rather than 100% new wood, but I'm not sure how this will balance out in the future. At present it is much less obviously successful in its style than the Monbousquet or Pavié itself. It will need 8–10 years at least. 2015–25. **15+?**

Château Tertre-Rôteboeuf St-Emilion Grand Cru **

Dark red; lovely freshly, crisply ripe fruit to smell; full, rich middleweight with a very fine tannin; sweet in fruit, very suave, warmly ripe and mouthcoating with a Burgundian transparency of flavor; scented, supple, graceful, and graciously textured, with great scent on the finish. Enormously seductive charm alongside the class and finesse. Lovely! 2015–30. **17.5/18**

Château Roc de Cambes Côtes de Bourg *

François Mitjavile's Côtes de Bourg is also a beauty. A rich, medium-full wine, supple yet fresh, sweetly ripe in flavor, gently minerally with a complexity at the level of a St-Emilion Grand Cru Classé and fine length. A radiantly fruity wine, accessible early. 2011–18. **15.5**

Château La Tour Figeac Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion * v

Deep purple; seductively, sweetly ripe redcurrant and cassis nose; beautifully balanced, concentrated, and juicy middleweight with a fresh acidity and fine tannin; long and round and pure, with a nice, gentle fleshiness for the year and good, scented, mineral-infused length. A lovely wine; warm, ripe, juicy, flowing, natural. 2014–24

I did a vertical tasting of all Otto Retenmayer's wines in early April (his first vintage was 1994), and they show a remarkable consistency since 1998, in keeping with the style and up to the quality of each year, and ageing most seductively. Both 1998 and 1999 are, in their different styles, drinking beautifully now, fine examples of modern winemaking without excess. And it remains real value for money. **15.5+**

Château Troplong-Mondot (Premier) Grand Cru Classé St-Emilion

(100% new oak sample—the wine now goes into 70–80%

new wood). Inky purple; oak-dominated nose; very nicely balanced fresh, elegant middleweight, if a bit oak-dry; fine, ripe, red-fruit flavor, pure and flowing, subtle and scented, long to finish. Should be very nice in its slightly oak-dry coated style. 2016–26

Troplong's wines are beautifully made, without coarseness, very nicely delineated, and with classic, fine St-Emilion purity of fruit, but they are oak dry, and that very fine, mouthcoating chalky dryness never really disappears. A question of taste? **15.5/16**

Château Valandraud Grand Cru St-Emilion *

Inky color; dense, oak-cedary nose; medium-full, very nicely balanced with a fresh acidity and fine tannin; sweet in flavor, fresh, pure, lively, and transparent in character, long in the mouth, and with a notable purity and vitality throughout, lovely scented finish. I think this will be a much more delicious wine to drink than the rather matt and muscular 2004 and 2005. 2016–26. **17+**

Pomerol

Château Beaugard Pomerol * v

Deep purple; fresh, crisply ripe and mineral nose; very nice balance—moderately concentrated, fresh and relatively supple in tannin; lovely fruit, elegant, fleshy, long, quite complex, gently minerally, and with good scented length. Delicious second-tier Pomerol. Very nice indeed. 2014–22. **16**

Château Bon Pasteur Pomerol

Deep purple; softly ripe on the nose, sweet-cored plum and red cherry; nicely balanced, moderately concentrated middleweight with an imperceptible, fresh acidity and very fine tannin; supple, flowing, freshly ripe in fruit, quite long and with nicely scented length. This will be accessible relatively early. Good second-rank Pomerol. 2010–20. **15/15.5**

Château Certan-Marzelle Pomerol *

Deep purple; ripe, fresh, minerally, caramel Merlot nose; beautifully balanced, rich, fresh, fleshy medium-full wine, all within a fine-textured dry tannin; delicious, sweetly ripe and juicy fruit, freshness there but acidity imperceptible as such; long and quite complex with excellent, scented length. Quietly classy, very Pomerol. 2012–20. **16+**

Château Certan de May Pomerol

Inky purple; earthy, truffley Merlot nose; rich middleweight with a very firm tannin and fresh acidity; sweetly ripe, good quality fruit very marked by its oak tannin, quite complex, but lacks a bit of overall harmony. I'm not sure the wood will ever really integrate.... It will certainly need time. 2018–25? **16?**

Château Clinet Pomerol *

Deep purple; ripe fruit and minerals to smell; rich, full, concentrated, and finely tannic, with a lovely balance of fruit to structure; not a particularly big wine, but long, ripe-fruited, complex and fine, with a lovely scented persistence. Seems a little oak-dry (as is the excellent '05), but it does also seem to absorb this, and since the Laborde purchase in 1998 this wine has been ageing very stylishly, so a fine Pomerol in prospect, relatively early. 2012–20+. **16.5**

Clos L'Eglise Pomerol

Dark red; ripe red fruit to smell; rich middleweight with a lively acidity and a rather dry (mainly oak) tannin; a very nice ripe and fleshy fruit, quite complex and minerally too and with good fruit-scented length. Excellent primary matter, and a lovely Pomerol fruit, but ... with a very new oak-dry tannin texture, which I doubt it will ever absorb completely. 2014–24. **15+?**

Clos René / Moulinet Lasserre Pomerol

Dark purple; nice, ripe, mineral-scented, red-fruit nose; nicely balanced, fairly fleshy middleweight with a very light tannin; juicily ripe, nice length across the palate, violets and licorice and mineral aromas, flowing and easy if not particularly complex; good, light length. Lovely lesser Pomerol, accessible early. 2010–18. **15**

Château La Conseillante Pomerol *

Deep purple; lovely scented nose of violets and cream; medium-full, freshly defined, finely, firmly tannic; sweetly ripe red fruit, subtly gravely, not particularly thick or fleshy, but long, fresh, fragrant, particularly fine-textured and with lovely length. Classic, graceful La Conseillante proportions, utterly without austerity or astringency. 2015–25. **17**

Château L'Eglise-Clinet Pomerol **

Deep purple; intensely sweet blackcurrant and redcurrant-fruit nose; beautifully balanced fresh and finely tannic middleweight, packed with fruit; a pure, graceful, freshly sweet, vanilla and violets-tinged fruit, which mirrors that of the splendid nose, and which is fleshy, very fine, elegant, and very long on both palate and finish. Wonderful balance, great harmony, another gorgeously classy wine, not far short of the quality of the 2005. 2016–30. **17.5/18**

Château L'Evangile Pomerol *

Deep purple; dense, spicy Merlot nose; moderately concentrated, fairly rich, with a lively acidity and fine tannin; elegant, fleshy middleweight, crisply ripe and red fruity to taste, fresh, complex, refined and scented, with a marked minerality; long, even, and complete, but clearly in a leaner, cooler style than its superb 2005. 2016–24. **16.5/17**

Château Gazin Pomerol

Deep purple; cassissy-ripe on the nose; very nicely balanced, fresh middleweight with a fine-grained tannin; very pure, ripe red fruit in flavor, with a clear gravel aroma; elegance, freshness, sweetness, purity, and length. Very nice second-tier Pomerol. 2014–24. **15.5+/16**

Château Gombaude-Guillet Pomerol * v

Deep purple; very ripe to smell; quite full, yet still delicate, a lovely combination of fruit sweetness, fresh acidity, and moderately firm tannin; ripe fruit, purity, perfume, transparency, and lovely scented length. Very much in the pure, scented style of Lafleur, at a lesser level, like the Pensées, for example. A deliciously gentle, but not weak, lovely style of Pomerol. 2014–24+. **16+**

Château La Grave Pomerol

Deep purple; fresh red-fruit nose, sweet and ripe and persistent; nicely balanced, fleshy middleweight, supple and finely tannic; a pure, sweetly ripe Merlot flavor, warm,

moderately complex, quietly spicy, nicely sustained across the palate, sweet, plush, satisfying. Very attractive middle-rank Pomerol. 2012–22. **15.5+**

Château Hosanna Pomerol *

Deep purple; lightly scented, mineral-suffused nose, perfumed, persistent; very nicely balanced in quiet, restrained, but very classy style; rich, supple yet fresh, finely but firmly tannic; deliciously sweet fruit, vivid, mouthcoating flavor, intense yet delicate and very long across the palate and finish; succulent, transparent, refined. An emphasis on finesse without weakness, as seems typical of this wine. Lovely quality. 2016–30. **17.5+**

Château Lafleur Pomerol **

Mid-purple; very ripely sweet cassis and blueberry nose; perfectly balanced, full and fresh, naturally silky, with no evidence of wood whatsoever; amplitude, yes, but of a mouthcoatingly delicate character; beautifully supple, velvety textured, violet-scented, exotically spiced, superbly refined and sustained as a complex, effortless, mouthfilling aromatic presence with great persistence. Delicacy, fragrance, purity—classically fine, scented Pomerol. 2014–24. **17.5/18**

Les Pensées de Lafleur Pomerol

Mid-purple; fresh red fruit and mineral nose; supple, flowing, fleshy medium weight with a very gentle tannin; gently ripe, faintly gamey-flavored fruit, long, pure, scented, and fine, with good mineral length. A delightful second wine—very refined, as with the grand vin. 2012–20. **16**

Château Lafleur-Gazin Pomerol

Deep purple; a fine nose of sweetly ripe red fruit, mineral tinged; very nicely balanced, gently fleshy medium weight with a fairly firm tannin, fresh but acidity barely noticeable as such; sweetly ripe flavor, quite refined, warm and spicy caramelly merlot, good length, but behind the flesh there is a fairly firm backbone of tannin, so this will need a while. Middle-rank Pomerol with sinew. 2015–25. **15.5**

Château La Fleur-Pétrus Pomerol *

Deep purple; intensely fruity to smell, a combination of pure red and black fruit, very ripe merlot; rich, warm, supple, elegantly balanced medium weight with a very refined, gentle tannin; rich, sweet, and subtle to taste, particularly pure, fine-textured Pomerol flavor, long and complex and with excellent, violet-scented length. A fine and stylish La Fleur-Pétrus. 2015–25. **16.5**

Château Latour-à-Pomerol Pomerol

Deep purple; softly plummy Merlot nose; nicely balanced, medium-full, and moderately concentrated wine, with a supple acidity and very light tannin; ripe and smooth without being particularly sweet; discreet, scented length. Lacking a point in concentration in comparison with the best of this vintage at a similar level? Will drink nicely relatively early. 2012–18. **15.5?**

Château Moulinet Pomerol * v

Inky; very seductive nose of discreet oak and sweet black cherry; a beautifully balanced medium-weight Pomerol with

a very fine tannin; fleshy, elegant, very ripe without being mawkish, gently complex and with good, warm length. This comes from selected vines on a gravelly outcrop on the sandy, western extreme of Pomerol and is vinified by Denis Durantou of L'Église-Clinet. It's a baby beauty, lovely at the level and drinkable young. 2012–20? **15.5**

Château Petit Village Pomerol

Deep purple; ripe, oaky nose; rich, fresh, medium-full wine with a firmly tannic frame; a nice cushion of plump and sweetly ripe fruit within that frame, generous, moderately complex and with good, sweet length. Very good second-tier Pomerol in a firmish style. 2015–25. **15.5/16**

Château Pétrus Pomerol **

Dark purple; dense, oaky nose; rich, firm, concentrated, and tannic; very dense to taste, juicily rich in fruit at its core, velvety within the firm tannins; close-knit, mouthcoating, very spicy, and very long across the palate, finishing with great, richly sweet fruit length. A grand, long-term, fairly muscular Pétrus, requiring a 15 to 20 year wait! 2022–40+. **18/18.5**

Château Plince Pomerol

Deep purple; attractive plum and caramel Merlot; fresh, supple, flowing mediumweight with a moderately firm tannin; sweetly ripe, buttery Merlot, not particularly concentrated, but a fresh, easy, plummy, lighter style of Pomerol with good, light length. 2012–18. **15**

Château Providence Pomerol *

Deep purple; dense and concentrated and very clear cut nose: pure ripe redcurrant, strawberry, blueberry, and mineral; beautifully balanced, rich, fresh middleweight with a firm but fine, dry tannin; mirroring the nose this has a particularly sweet, very pure fruit flavor, fleshy yet delicate, very long across the palate, warm, mouthcoating, silky and subtle with great fruit length. A beautifully pure expression of Pomerol. 2016–30.

In 2005 Moueix made this wine, not having had complete control of the vineyard, and though very good, it tasted a bit disjointed. The combination of a fine 2006 vintage, and complete control of viticulture and vinification really show its potential. **17/17.5**

Château Rouget Pomerol

Dark red; concentrated ripe fruit to smell; nicely balanced, moderately fleshy, fresh and lightly tannic; ripe and juicy to taste, with a clear minerality behind the fruit, quite rich, nice length in the mouth, gently creamy and with good scented length. Very nice second-tier Pomerol. A bit of oak to absorb.... 2014–22. **15.5/16**

Château Trotanoy Pomerol *

Deep purple; sweetly fruited, scented nose; very nicely balanced, fresh, firmly tannic, concentrated medium to full-bodied wine; long, sweetly ripe, generous, succulent Merlot; dense, fleshy, very complex and with a really rich charge of fruit and great length. Long-term splendor, another very successful Trotanoy, following on from its magnificent 2005. 2018–35. **17.5+**

Vieux Château Certan Pomerol *

Black red; dense, very ripe fruit on the nose; rich, fresh, finely

tannic middleweight; densely ripe to taste, with an exotically spicy fruit, a vividly fresh sweetness, a prolonged combination of Merlot flesh enhanced by the finesse and perfume of 25% Cabernet Franc, and with fine scented length. Fine Pomerol, fine VCC. 2016–26+. 17

Pavillon Blanc du Château Margaux

A concentrated, mineral-infused, Sauvignon Blanc nose; at 15%+ in alcohol, this is surprisingly well balanced, and free from any impression of excess warmth or excess weight; concentrated and sappy to taste, with a fine, fresh, defining acidity; rich, juicy, long, and complete, with a remarkable clarity and delicacy of expression given its volume! A striking expression of the grape. At 12 hectolitres per hectare, this was a half-sized crop as a result of April frost, and for the second year running this is likely to be an imposing Pavillon Blanc, young or old. 2012–20. 17.5

Sauternes

The variation in the quality of the Sauternes samples this year, unlike any I have encountered before, perhaps reflected the problems there had been in the vineyard, and during the very challenging harvest conditions. At the Union des Grands Crus (UGC) tasting I attended there were many wines that, if they were a true representation of their performance, would indicate a very disappointing performance, in particular the presence of the sour, vinegary sharpness of *pourriture aigre*, but also just a lot of rather weak and lacklustre wines. And yet the producers said they had tasted perfectly healthy samples earlier in the year, and other tasting centers had fewer problems than we did. Unlike many people, I don't feel I have a problem tasting Sauternes en primeur, and I have been as happy (as far as one can be) with my assessments as with those for red wine, assuming they are truly representative of the final blend. But I have indicated those wines I tasted only at the UGC tasting, where I feel the assessment is very provisional. Where I was not happy I have not given a score.

Château Bastor-Lamontagne Sauternes (UGC)

Pale gold; light, minerally nose; medium full with a lively acidity; citrusy; medium-sweet flavor, overall rather limited, not much depth or length. Not bad, pleasing aperitif style, to drink fairly young. 2010–18 NS

Château Caillou Deuxième Cru Barsac (UGC)

Pale lemon; nice fresh honey, mineral and citrus nose; well balanced in a lighter style with a fresh to lively acidity; medium sweet, medium depth, pure, clean, lightly mineral style; quite vivid, nice light length. 2010–18 NS

Château Climens Premier Cru Barsac

As usual, only component parts tasted, but the wine looks like being very sweet (for Climens), elegant, lively, and with lovely potential. 17+?

Château Clos Haut-Peyraguey Premier Cru Bommes (UGC)

Turbid gold; something not absolutely clean about this—a touch of sourness; palate seems better, if a little hot on the finish; quite rich, quite sweet, but short in the mouth—just goes nowhere, no projection, no tenacity, little persistence. Overall an attenuated feel to this.

Château Coutet Premier Cru Barsac

Bright gold; honeyed, rich, well balanced, unctuous as well as lively; very sweet indeed, pure, juicy, long and succulent, “fat”, yet very Barsac in its restraint, with a lovely purity and length. Not the tautness or definition of a great Coutet, but this is certainly a lovely one, and a stand out in the vintage. 2012–20. 16.5/17

Château Doisy-Daëne Deuxième Cru Barsac (UGC)

Mid-gold; marked Semillon waxiness to smell; nicely balanced lighter style of middleweight, with a lively acidity; fairly sweet, quite minerally in aroma, but on the lighter side for the property; medium length. Not bad, but another aperitif style, probably best drunk young, though will doubtless keep. 2012–20 NS

Château de Fargues Sauternes

Turbid mid-gold, intense, persistent, wax and mineral nose; rich and fairly concentrated and with a firm acidity; very sweet, pure, fresh, and linear across the palate, long, well sustained, racy and with a vivid citrus and mineral flavor, very good fruit and aromatic length. Will need time, shows the potential of the best of 2006 Sauternes. 2012–25. 16.5/17

Château Guiraud Premier Cru Sauternes

Turbid gold; dumb to smell, and rather marked by new wood at present; lively middleweight, quite concentrated, fairly sweet, and with good length in the mouth and on the finish, without being particularly intense. Complete, however, in its characteristically vivid, aromatic style. Quite racy, and a good performance in the year. 2012–25. 16

Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey Premier Cru Bommes (UGC)

Turbid mid gold; dumb to smell, faintly mineral; medium full, lively acidity, but, lacks its usual intensity and projection of flavors. Medium sweet, minerally, moderately complex and with quite good length across the palate and on the finish. Good, not special. 2012–20. 16+

Château de Malle Deuxième Cru Preignac (UGC)

Turbid mid-gold; quite rich, well focussed nose of honey, lemon, wax, new wood; well balanced middleweight, fresh, citrus and honey flavor, moderately concentrated, fairly sweet, and with both length and complexity. Overall lighter style, but complete. Very nice. 2010–20. 15/15.5

Château Nairac Deuxième Cru Barsac *

Very turbid pale gold; rather dumb, but complex seeming, lemon and mineral nose; concentrated, rich, compact, vigorous; intensely sweet, sapid wine within the vivid acidity, long, fine, complex and racy in the mouth, well sustained, with a fine “fat” for the year, and a clear minerality alongside the honey and lemon fruit, very long to finish. Great length of both fruit and minerality on the aftertaste. A beautifully delineated, pure, and vital Nairac, a most complete 2006. 2012–25. 17/17.5

Château Raymond-Lafon Sauternes

A nicely balanced, fresh to lively middleweight; medium-sweet, moderately complex, good light length. 2012–20. 15.5/16

Château Rieussec Premier Cru Fargues

Deep turbid gold; fine, fresh, citric nose; a rich middleweight, very sweet, but without being excessively so, quite unctuous in texture, dense and sapid with a moderately spicy complexity and good length. A very good, rather than a great Rieussec, certainly a good 2006. 2012–25. **16.5/17**

Château Sigalas-Rabaud Premier Cru Bommes (UGC)

Orange gold; very slightly sharp, honey, and wax nose; quite rich middleweight with a lively acidity and an elegant overall balance; sweet, moderately complex, and with a clear minerality behind, and medium length. Like many, not much projection, especially for a top property. 2012–20. **15/15.5**

Château Suduiraut Premier Cru Preignac

Orangey gold; intense, dense, combination of citrusy fruit and botrytis spice; rich, well balanced, elegant middleweight, in a restrained, less fat than usual style for the cru; very sweet barley sugar and mineral flavor, long and racy, with a fine botrytis spice complexity and excellent scented persistence. A fine performance in the year. Very good long-term Suduiraut, one of the few which stands out in the vintage. 2012–25. **16.5/17**

Château D'Yquem Premier Grand Cru Classé Sauternes **

Turbid gold; discreet but seductively fragrant nose: subtle honey, lemon, wax, lime blossom; beautifully balanced and harmonious without being particularly concentrated. Intensely sweet without tasting “strong,” but characteristically racy and refined, very long across the palate, with a clear minerality behind the notably pure fruit, and followed by a lovely, scented length. Complete and classy, and very much where it should be, right at the head of the appellation. Gloriously refined, and reminiscent of the 1988. 2015–35+. **18.5**

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