

# VINTAGE AMBITION

## Quality-minded winemakers are shaking off the 'industrial' image of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur appellations

Putting people first sounds like political sloganeering, but it is the focus for Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur appellations, which include about half of all Bordeaux vineyards. While some wines from these appellations are selected from supermarkets for office parties, where colleagues pay scant attention to quality, a tasting of over 100 reds from the 2019 vintage proves that many punch well above that dismissive image.

A week of estate visits and conversations with winemakers yields talk of organic winemaking, soil and climate and careful selection for blends. Aware of Bordeaux's 'old school' image being eaten away by trendier, organic wines from elsewhere, Bordeaux wines are going green. For the region as a whole, covering all 65 AOCs, 12% are already organic with 30% in progress of conversion, says Marc Médeville of Château Fayau. Over 65% are certified as having 'an environmental approach', up from 35% back in 2014.

Such change is essential. A common critique was repeated to me by a

sommelier in Paris this summer: 'Bordeaux is so out of fashion'.

To bring it back into fashion, Planète Bordeaux, the union for the two appellations, is increasing public tasting events and competitions worldwide, from Liverpool to Hong Kong. 'We must put winegrowers back at the heart of promotion,' remarks Stéphane Gabard, the union's president. 'The world is changing and customers want direct contact with producers, so that they can better understand the wines,' he says.

Quality-minded vintners such as Véronique Barthe of Château Freynelle and Thibault Despagne at Tour de Mirambeau, Girolate and Mont Pérat are increasing planting densities, forcing vineyard roots deeper to deliver more complex elements of the terroir to their grapes. They, and many others, understand their soils and fine-tune winemaking to accentuate elegance and freshness, a stark divergence from clichéd 'supermarket wine'. They are also attuned to markets. Barthe's biggest market is the US, for example, where she sells one third of her wines and, being responsive to demand,

she has been using screw caps for her whites since the early 2000s.

Nicolas Lesaint, technical director at Château Reignac, a renowned Bordeaux Supérieur, recently co-organised an informal group of 20 like-minded Bordeaux Supérieurs dubbed: 'All You Need is Wine'. It did not surprise me that some of them – from Château Sainte Barbe and Château La Verrière to Château Pierrail and Château Recougne – scored among the highest in my tasting notes for this article. 'We cannot cast our wines with a negative, second-rate image,' Lesaint says over lunch at the estate. A vertical of Reignac reds reaching back to 2009 proves that quality Bordeaux Supérieur ages well. Although 'All You Need is Wine' is not an official group, it helps consumers to differentiate amongst so many wines: 'A hierarchy among the Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieurs would make sense,' says Strasbourg wine bar owner Stephan Maure of Ill Vino.

Based on tastings for this article, the 2019 vintage is very good. Although the growing season suffered from both drought and heat waves, just enough rain in late September helped to refresh the small and thick-skinned Cabernet Sauvignon grapes especially. Although alcohol levels were high, the wines seem less heady than in 2018, many vintners say, leaving the impression of brighter fruit. Château Fayau's Médeville for example agrees that 2018 has a bit more alcohol, 'while the 2019 reds are more balanced and rounder', although they do not reach 'the heights of the 2016 vintage'.

## WINES TO TRY AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2019

### **Château Donjon de Bruignac, Premium, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

Lovely chocolate brownie aromas. The palate is smooth enough, with texture and there is power too with a feeling of mint from the 30% Cabernet Franc which is a nice pairing for the more opulent expression of Merlot. Lovely wine. Alc 14.5%

### **Château la Cafourche, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

Medium plus body with smooth tannins and a medium finish. A tasty crowd pleaser and then some. Nice job. Alc 14%

### **Château La France, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

Smooth and has tannin presence but nicely integrated. Lacks the éclat needed for a 90 but getting close. There is a density that impresses here, with a fresh iodine like finish. Alc 14.5%

### **Château Poujeaux-Saint-Genes, Carré d'or, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

Neant

Agreeable chocolate brownie cake nose, the palate smooth and refined. The 10-hectare vineyard includes gravel over clay and in the direction of the Compostelle walk. A top cuvée made from vines of about 35 years of age. Alc 13.5%

### **Château Terrefort Quancard, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

Hayward Bros Ltd.

Aromatically both wet earth and red and dark fruits. Tasty palate, rich with agreeable tannins. Very fun to drink, not as fine as La Loubière, tasted before, but palate enveloping. Alc 14%

### **Château Timberlay, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

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### **Château Turcaud, Cuvée Majeure, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur Rouge 2019 89**

Wimbledon Wine Cellar

Nuance and complexity in the making. The palate depth and density is enjoyable as well as a certain brightness and pepper spice on the nose that intrigues the taster. Indeed, a wine that demands attention from connoisseurs in search of a fine Bordeaux. Although somewhat hard on the finish! HVE. Alc 14.5%

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