

DÉJÀ VU 1989 / 1990

# BORDEAUX EN-PRIMEUR 2010

PHOTO & TEXT: HUBERT LI



The Bordeaux 2010 vintage is an exciting one, with many winemakers drawing comparisons of 2009 and 2010 to the great 1989 and 1990. July has been hotter and drier than in 2009 and 2005, giving body and tannin to the wines. August on the other hand has been cooler than in 2000 and 2005, giving high acidity. Luckily September has been warm and dry, allowing the grapes to ripen fully. Overall, this very dry vintage has produced fine but small berries with little juice, hence production volumes are lower than 2009 by as much as 30%.

#### MONDAY 4<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2011

My tastings began in the morning of Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April, with first appointment at Chateaux Haut Brion at 8am. The “breakfast” session consists of 3 whites and 4 reds from Haut Brion and La Mission Haut Brion. Unlike 2009, the 2010 reds are generally more tannic and high in alcohol, but thanks to Mother Nature, the acidity level is also high, giving freshness to the wines, so the alcohol is not easily felt. As with most vintages, La Mission is often more powerful, while Haut Brion is more elegant, and 2010 is no exception.

The next stop is Chateau Margaux and I have the honour to receive a warm welcome from Corinne Mentzelopoulos, owner of the Chateau. Tasting began with the Pavillon Rouge, followed by Chateau Margaux, and finished off with Pavillon Blanc. Production volume of Pavillon Rouge is down from 2009 due to more stringent selection, as they are determined to produce a higher quality wine to match the higher prices now.

The 2010 vintage of Margaux is a blend of 90% cabernet sauvignon, 7% merlot, 1.5% cabernet franc and 1.5% petit verdot. This high % of cabernet provides exceptional aromatic finesse, restrained power and subtle freshness. Quality is on par with 2009, but the style is very different. While 2009 is very seductive and approachable, 2010 is more traditional Bordeaux in style that is rich and tannic, and much patience is required for the wines to blossom. If you have to draw similarities to the back vintages, 2010 has the purity of 1996, but bigger in style!



Chateau Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan



Red wines being served at Haut Brion.



Assorted platter of Haut Brion for breakfast.



*Chateaux Margaux & Pavillon Blanc.*



*Aurelien Valence taking us through the wines.*

Great care has been given to the production of Pavillon Blanc as well, a 100% Semillon wine with a mere 1,000 cases produced this year.

Palmer is widely regarded as one of the most perfumed wines on the left bank and they have done it again, thanks to the relatively high % of merlot grapes in the blend (40% cabernet sauvignon, 54% merlot, 6% petit verdot, almost the same blend as in 2009).

I then headed up north to Saint Julien and Pauillac, first stop being Leoville Lascases. Here I had the opportunity to taste other properties of the family including Nenin in Pomerol, Clos du Marquis and Petit Lion, the second wine of Lascases, first produced in 2007. The gradual improvement of Clos du Marquis has opened up a market for this affordable label produced from younger vines planted on the gravelly-clay soils of the Grand Vin vineyards.



*Le Petit Lion, second wine of Leoville Lascases.*



*Chateau Pichon Longueville Baron.*



*Vertical tasting of 2009 and 2010 vintage side by side.*



*New cellar under construction at Mouton Rothschild to accommodate new gravitational presses, which are tried and tested to make finer wines.*



*Chateau Mouton Rothschild 2010.*

There has been a popular saying to relate 2009 and 2010 to the legendary 1989 and 1990 vintages. But given modern technological advances and much increased investments into winemaking, we may well have a better duo now, at least across the board it is.

I then set off to Chateau Mouton Rothschild to taste their full range of wines. First up is Petit Mouton and it came as a pleasant surprise! This wine is very floral and open, much more attractive than the 2009 that did not leave me much impression last year. The Armailhac is respectable, followed closely by the Clerc Milon, which is a further step up in quality. Lastly I tasted the classy Mouton, and as expected, it is very dense and concentrated but not particularly showing. It is hard to judge the quality of wines at this stage but only time will tell.

Across the road is Pontet Canet and I have very high expectations for it, given the high standards in recent years, and it doesn't disappoint! It is very rich and bold, balanced with plenty of ripe fruits and high acidity to mask the alcohol. Once again I think they have delivered the full package and remains easily as one of my top picks on the left bank.



*Pontet Canet being served at the Chateau.*



*New concrete vats implemented at Chateau Pontet Canet.*



*Tasting room at Chateau Lafite Rothschild.*



*Entrance at Chateau Lafite Rothschild.*



*Dense and powerful Lafite 2010 with a dark purple rim.*

Following a quick lunch at Pontet, I arrived at the long-anticipated Chateau Lafite Rothschild for the first time. Here I get to taste the Carruades, Duhart Milon and Lafite. The Carruades is a decent wine, but there are better wines to be had at that price range. Lafite is well known to be a difficult wine to taste at en-primeur, as it is usually tight and not approachable young, but I can just about feel the density and potential underneath. I wish they could show L'Evangile and Rieussec here too...

Next up is Cos d'Estournel, neighbour to Lafite. I have heard a lot about the impressive construction of their new cellars. The lobby is more like a 5-star resort hotel, with state-of-the-art fermentation room with internal lifts, amazing! Their wines are equally as impressive. The 2010 vintage is extremely different to the 2009, both beautiful but very different in style. It has plenty of blackfruits, very bold and fruity, fine tannins and a very long finish. This is a wine of the vintage!



*State-of-the-art fermentation room at Chateau Cos d'Estournel.*



*Reception at Chateau Cos d'Estournel.*

Last chateau visit of the day is Grand Puy Lacoste. This wine rarely receives a high score from Mr. Parker, as chateau owner Xavier Borie holds a very different view in quality winemaking, where elegance and balance is key. Their 2009 vintage is seductive but may have lacked the density of a legendary wine, but with the help of the weather conditions in 2010, they may have found the missing piece in the puzzle, producing a seductive, elegant and complex wine that is also dense and rich. This may just be the best GPL ever produced!

At GPL, I also tasted Lacoste Borie, a value wine similar in style to its bigger brother. The Haut Batailley doesn't quite have the complexity and x-factor as the GPL, but then it's also at only a fraction of the price, so you just can't complain.



*Cellar at Grand Puy Lacoste.*



*Mr. Xavier Borie, Grand Puy Lacoste.*

TUESDAY 5<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2011

The next morning, I kick-started at the Union de Grand Cru (UGC) tasting event at Chateau Lascombes, where many wines from the Margaux village are being served. In particular, I remember tasting quality from Malescot Exupery with rich fruits and a hint of dark chocolate and long finish. Rausan Segla and Lascombes have maintained their high level of quality from recent years. Among the value picks, I'm impressed with Giscours and D'Angludet, quite pleasurable drinking now!

I quickly headed to Branaire Ducru to taste the St. Julien and Pauillac wines. Above all, The Leovilles really showed their class. Leoville Poyferre is a blend of 30% merlot, 61% cabernet sauvignon, 3% cabernet franc and 6% petit verdot, where Leoville Barton is 72% cabernet sauvignon, 21% merlot and 7% franc. Very different blends but are equally impressive wines as with their 2009s. I had better experience with Pichon Lalande compared to last year, not as powerful as Pichon Baron, but very elegant. Lynch Bages is very much the same with their 2009, quite rich on entry and mid-palate, with tannins are a little rough so patience is needed.



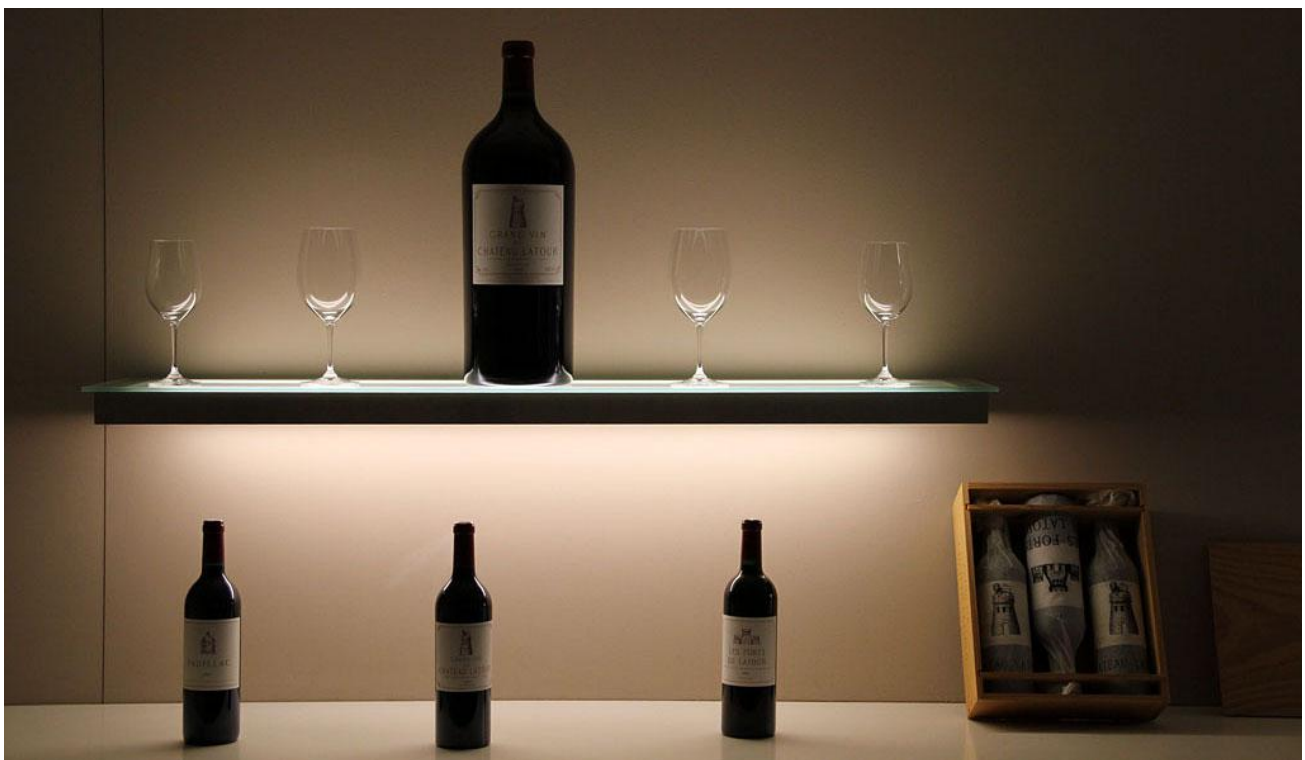
Chateau Latour & Les Forts de Latour.

Beychevelle has produced a wine above my expectation this year with a very perfumed wine, just give it 5-10 years for tannins to smoothen. Could be the best Beychevelle ever for me! However, given the strong branding and demand from China for this wine, it could be a little pricey for the quality, but we shall see...

For the value picks, I have no hesitation to recommend Branaire Ducru and Ormes de Pez, as well as Clerc Milon that I have tried the second time.

The highlight of the day is a special visit to Chateau Latour, where I had a one-to-one encounter with Frederic Engerer, President of Latour. I'm so flattered with his special arrangement, giving me a little more time to introduce our wine vault concept to him.

Latour is a wine that you have to taste to believe. The density and size is above all, and there is so much of everything packed in it but not overdone at all. I would be very surprised if this wine cannot warrant a perfect score from Mr. Parker. Wine of the vintage for sure!



**WEDNESDAY 6<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2011**

My first appointment in the morning is with my good friends at Moueix, where I also get to taste their full range of wines from Saint Emilion and Pomerol. Elegance is key to their wines, and for 2010, I am particularly impressed by 3 wines. Magdelaine was above my expectations in terms of the smoothness of the tannins, and the quality of La Fleur Petrus is very high but strong mid-palate, I would say on par with Hosanna this year. Trotanoy is again outstanding and it is hard for them to go wrong with this quality terroir.

There is a lot of change at Chateau Petrus this year, as they are building a new cellar, and they have also built a new landmark: Japanese torii, which symbolizes the entrance to a sacred space. This torii can be spotted from far away, great for guiding visitors to the Chateau!

I have received a warm welcome from the young and talented Olivier Berrouet, winemaker of Petrus. I took a sip of the welcome drink and wow! There is no doubt that Petrus is in a class of its own, seductive and elegant, with multiple layers of fruit, silky smooth and approachable. Price aside, this is the wine that I have naturally swallowed. The spittoons in the tasting room are clean, which says a lot about the quality of this special wine!



*Chateau La Fleur Petrus, Pomerol*



*Jean-Claude Berrouet introducing Chateau Petrus 2010.*



*New landmark at Chateau Petrus: Japanese Torii.*





*UGC Tasting at Chateau La Pointe, Pomerol.*

I then set off to the right bank UGC tastings, and for this year, all the Saint Emilion wines are being served at La Couspaude. Among the wines being served, I'm most impressed with Figeac, Larcis Ducasse, Canon La Gaffeliere, Grand Mayne and Troplong Mondot. Troplong is very dense and tannic but not overextracted. I then found out that it had an alcohol level of 15.8%, which is rarely heard of for a Bordeaux wine, but the alcohol heat is nicely hidden by the freshness, thanks to the high acidity.

I have also tasted a broad range of right bank wines at the negociants. For those who enjoyed the powerful style of Pavie, Monbousquet and Angelus, they have again produced some serious wines. Here I have also tasted an interesting garage wine called Gracia. Taste is unique and very pleasurable, great for those who would like to try something different.

Pomerol wines are being served at La Pointe. La Conseillante stood out to be one of the top wines on show (no surprises), full-bodied and with a long aftertaste, but as with many other wines, the level of tannins will deter you from touching it for perhaps a decade. Clinet and Gazin are worth an honourable mention too. I've also enjoyed La Crois de Gay with unique and pleasurable fruit taste and a medium length finish, could be a bargain to look out for.

I then visited Alexandre Thienpont at Vieux Chateau Certan (VCC). Their production is significantly reduced from 4,200 cases in 2009 to just 3,300 cases in 2010, due to much smaller berries, and a poor flowering season. The 2010 vintage is a blend of 86% merlot, 8% cabernet franc and 6% cabernet sauvignon. What a baby this is! Throughout my trip so far, there have only been 2 wines that possess the seductive aromas and smoothness of tannins to give pleasure drinking young, one is Petrus, the other is VCC. I wish I can get my hands on a few more bottles.



*UGC Tasting at Chateau La Pointe, Pomerol.*



*Lunch buffet also being served at all UGC events.*



*New building at Chateau Cheval Blanc.*



*Chateau D'Yquem can now be tasted at Cheval Blanc.*

Appointment at Cheval Blanc is the highlight of the afternoon. From a distance, I can see the new construction taking shape, and I have been told that the project will be completed just before the Vinexpo in June 2011. At the entrance, I received the leaflets describing their 3 wines: La Tour du Pin, Petit Cheval and Cheval Blanc, followed by greetings from Pierre Luton, general manager of the estate. It is the first time I taste La Tour du Pin and this is an easy-going fruity wine, excellent for drinking within the next decade. This is followed by the Petit Cheval, and the quality is really up there, but with the level of tannins, you know that this wine is made for medium term drinking. Cheval Blanc needs no explanation, and for 2010, they definitely live up to their reputation by producing a wine with perfect balance between ripe fruit, high acidity, mouth-filling rich on entry and mid-palate and a very long finish. My only worry is what their asking price will be, given they have been aggressive in 2009.

This year, Chateau d'Yquem is also being served at Cheval Blanc, saving me a trip down to Sauternes. The warm and dry vintage gave excellent and even ripeness to the grapes. Luckily there were showers from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> September, which brought the first wave of botrytis (noble rot), followed by more rain in early October, and harvest took place during these two cold periods. This favourable vintage produced wines with perfect balance between freshness, richness and ripeness.

As usual, it is a lot of work for very little wine, with production at only 22 litres per hectare, and with their rigorous grape selection process, only 40% of the crop has made it into d'Yquem, with the remainder being sold to make generic wines.

I was very honoured to be invited by our friends from Moueix and Mouton Rothschild to attend the Banc de Millesimes dinner at the CAPC Museum in Bordeaux City Centre, where I have bumped into many familiar faces in the wine community. Erwan Le Brozec from Mouton Rothschild has been very kind to offer us the following wines:

- 2008 Aile D'Argent
- 2008 Petit Mouton
- 1998 Clerc Milon
- 1988 Mouton Rothschild
- 1997 Coutet

The quality of wines being served says a lot about the importance of proper storage, as both the Clerc Milon and Mouton have showed extremely well, despite they are only from the average vintages. You just can't go wrong when wines are coming direct from the Chateau!



### SUMMARY

The 2010 vintage has once again benefited from the favourable weather conditions, producing traditional Bordeaux style wines of great density and richness, but as with 2000 and 2005, a lot of patience is required before they will blossom.

Prices for 2010 will no doubt be higher than 2009 for us, because the Euro has much strengthened against the US Dollar compared to last year, and we would expect some estates to test the market by raising their prices a little more. Having said that, there are still plenty of wines of excellent value to be found. This is a vintage too good to miss!

Between the first growths, I am most impressed with Petrus, Latour and Margaux, but it is really splitting hairs comparing them. Among the rest, I would not hesitate to recommend the following wines:

	Top Picks	Value Picks
<b>Left Bank</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cos d'Estournel, Saint Estephe</li> <li>• Leoville Lascases, Saint Julien</li> <li>• Leoville Barton, Saint Julien</li> <li>• Leoville Poyferre, Saint Julien</li> <li>• Pontet Canet, Pauillac</li> <li>• Grand Puy Lacoste, Pauillac</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Branaire Ducru, Saint Julien</li> <li>• Smith Haut Lafitte, Pessac Leognan</li> <li>• Clerc Milon, Pauillac</li> </ul>
<b>Right Bank</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• La Conseillante, Pomerol</li> <li>• Vieux Chateau Certan, Pomerol</li> <li>• La Fleur Petrus, Pomerol</li> <li>• Troplong Mondot, Saint Emilion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gazin, Pomerol</li> <li>• La Crois de Gay, Pomerol</li> <li>• Grand Mayne, Saint Emilion</li> </ul>

