

A Bargain Vintage? Bordeaux En Primeur 2014

Photo and Text by Hubert Li





Some of the finest cabernet franc vines planted at Chateau Cheval Blanc

The 2014 vintage started beautifully with a good flowering season, but July and August were so wet and cool that ruled out the vintage from being another 2010, luckily the vintage is saved in September and October by being very warm and dry, allowing the grapes to fully ripen before picking. Such weather conditions favour the later ripening grapes like cabernet sauvignon and cabernet france, but don't rule out the merlots just yet, as some can be equally outstanding!

So how does this vintage rank among the past decade or so? There is a general consensus among chateaux owners and winemakers that this vintage will sit right between 2008 and 2010. It is a more concentrated version of 2008, but not quite 2010, and with more freshness due to the high acidity

coming from the cool August. I would not be surprised to see some very high scoring wines among the wine critics!

Bordeaux En Primeur prices have been falling for the past three vintages and prices are currently at a reasonable level. As long as chateaux owners do not get carried away with raising prices, this should be a good vintage to invest in.



Tasting the full range of Nicolas Thienpont wines at Chateau Pavie Macquin.

The Right Bank

Generally speaking, wines with higher portion of cabernet franc have excelled, and this includes Ausone, Cheval Blanc, Angelus and Lafleur. They do not only have excellent concentration and structure, but also incredibly fine tannins too. Figeac is also among the high flyers, showing superb depth and an intense nose of red berry fruit and spices.

Merlot-based wines are more varied in terms of concentration, but it is still easy to find power in the top wines like L'Église Clinet and Petrus. At the more affordable level, I find wines like Gazin and Clinet to be pleasurable.

For those who enjoy the blackcurrants style from Saint Emilion, I would recommend Troplong Mondot and Beausejour Duffau, as well as Monbousuget for those who wanted a value deal. Among other vineyards managed by Nicolas and Cyrille Thienpont, Larcis Ducasse is big, while Pavie Macquin has more finesse, but the biggest surprise came from Puygueraud located in Cotes de Francs, which apparently benefited from relatively less rain in August and therefore the wine possesses very good concentration. Those who attended our tasting event last year would have already identified the quality of this wine!



Tasting of Chateau Haut Brion with Jean-Philippe Delmas and Prince Robert of Luxembourg.

Pessac-Leognan

The red wines in Pessac-Leognan are very good across the board. Haut Brion is leading the pack with great structure and elegance. According to Jean-Philippe Delmas, General Manager of the estate, 2014 is significantly more concentrated and yet also more fresh than 2008 (Parker 96pts). Quality is on par at La Mission Haut Brion across the street, which is always that bit more powerful and masculine in style. It is also worth mentioning that their property in Saint Emilion: Chateau Quintus, has produced by far the best vintage to date since the project began in 2011.

Chateau Haut Bailly is receiving increased attention and they have produced a vibrant, precise and approachable wine in 2014.

The white wines in Pessac-Leognan are equally good. The cool summer brings high acidity and freshness, and there is good core fruit ripeness to allow the wines to age gracefully. Among the wines being offered here, Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc and Domaine de Chevalier Blanc are the safe bets, and I also find La Clarte (second wine of Haut Brion Blanc) to be attractive if the price is fair.



Jean Garandeau talking us through the 2014 vintage of Chateau Latour and Les Forts de Latour.

A very fine effort at Chateau Pichon Lalande.

The Left Bank

The wines from the Margaux appellation are very consistent in quality, and these include Giscours, D'Issan, Lascombes and Malescot St Exupery, with Rauzan Segla offering a bit more power than the rest. Wines from here are very fruit driven and easy-going. Over at Chateau Margaux, Mr. Paul Pontallier, CEO of the estate, is very pleased with the results, and he considers the vintage to sit somewhere between the 2008 (Parker 94pts) and 1996 (Parker 100pts).

The wines from the Saint Julien appellation up North are also very consistent too. I always like to

taste Talbot first, as it sits on lower swamp land and this sets my minimum expectation on the vintage, and the wine is very respectable this year with medium-full body. My top picks are Leoville Lascases and Ducru Beaucaillou for the strength and structure; and Leoville Barton and Clos du Marquis are my value picks.

Pauillac is where most stars of the vintage lie. Apart from Latour that no longer sell En-Primeur, I find Lafite and Mouton to be equally great, although stylistically a bit different, with Mouton offering more



Cellar at Chateau Cos d'Estournel, containing wines dating back to the 19th century.

cedar flavours. I was pleasantly surprised with the quality of Petit Mouton, the second wine of Mouton, offering strong coffee notes on the palate. Among the lower growths in Pauillac, I am most impressed with Lynch Bages, which is a big wine with velvety smooth tannins! This is closely followed by Pichon Baron, Pichon Lalande and Pontet Canet, as well as Grand Puy Lacoste as my value pick.

For Saint Estephe, 2014 is a phenomenal vintage with Cos d'Estournel and Montrose leading the pack, with Calon Segur following closely behind,

all three wines have immense concentration of black fruits while retaining purity, quality-wise they do come close to 2010! Do keep a close eye on Lafon-Rochet, Tronquoy Lalande, Dame de Montrose and Ormes de Pez, as they are so good that it would be a joy to drink them every day.



The wine trade shows interest in tasting the 2014 vintage.

Is 2014 vintage a good deal?

Among the chateaux people I have spoken with, it is unlikely that prices will go lower than the 2013 vintage. However, as the Euro has weakened against the US Dollar by 20% over the past 12 months, even a 10-20% increase in prices will make it the cheapest vintage since 2008 for us, and this implies a very good deal, especially for the quality of wines being offered.

My Recommendations

My favourite wines this year come from Saint Estephe, Pauillac and Saint Julien, with very good to excellent quality to be had. For Pessac Leognan, it is best to stick with the most famous names for both reds and dry whites; and for the right bank, wines with higher percentage of cabernet franc in the blend are the best bets.

My top picks are as follows:

The Left Bank

- Lafite Rothschild, Pauillac
- Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac
- Haut Brion, Pessac Leognan
- Cos d'Estournel, Saint Estephe
- Montrose, Saint Estephe
- Lynch Bages, Pauillac
- Leoville Lascases, Saint Julien
- Ducru Beaucaillou, Saint Julien

The Right Bank

- Ausone, Saint Emilion
- Cheval Blanc, Saint Emilion
- Angelus, Saint Emilion
- Figeac, Saint Emilion
- Troplong Mondot, Saint Emilion
- Beausejour Duffau, Saint Emilion

And my value picks (below HK\$300 a bottle) are as follows:

The Left Bank

- Tronquoy Lalande, Saint Estephe
- Dame de Montrose, Saint Estephe
- Lafon Rochet, Saint Estephe
- Ormes de Pez, Saint Estephe
- Cantemerle, Haut Medoc

The Right Bank

- Puygueraud, Cotes de Francs
- Monbousquet, Saint Emilion



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