



2011 Bordeaux

Special Report

2011 BORDEAUX VINTAGE REPORT

PRICES RETURN TO REALITY?

K&L's Take on the Year of the Optical Sorter

We begin the second decade of the century on the heels of an admirable trilogy of Bordeaux vintages: 2008, 2009 and 2010. It was a highly unusual decade that saw only good and great Bordeaux vintages, and wine enthusiasts the world over will be comparing the first decade's wines' relative qualities for many years to come. This second decade, however, (my, how fast did that first one go?) begins with one of the most complicated vintages in memory. The growing season was extremely challenging due to: summer-like weather in spring that lead to an accelerated growing season from start to finish, less sunshine than usual in July, above-average precipitation in the month of August and the return of summer weather in early autumn. Conditions in 2011 were indeed strange, with unpredictable consequences. With summer in the springtime and spring in the summertime, August vacationers were not the only ones who were unhappy.

There were several "firsts" for K&L on our trip to taste the 2011 wines. In addition to the usual Bordeaux *En Primeur* veterans (Trey Beffa, Ralph Sands, Alex Pross, Kerri Conlon and myself), Auction Director Molly Zucker joined us. It was her first trip to Bordeaux, and I am sure she learned a lot and that knowledge will help her continue to build our auction program. This was also the first time we went to Bordeaux a week after the UGC tastings—we decided instead to just attend the big Moueix and Joanne tastings, and then to visit the properties. It was also the first time a First Growth (Lafite Rothschild) announced their opening price while we were tasting at another First Growth (Mouton Rothschild). It felt a little weird to go to Lafite to taste just two hours later. (We were convinced that Lafite opened because they knew the K&L



contingent was on its way to the property, and they did not want to hear us plead for a low price.) Their 2011 was, in fact, priced 30% below their 2010. As a side note, a couple of days later Cos d'Estournel opened at nearly half their 2010 price.

We left for Bordeaux on April 10th and returned April 19th, and as I write this report and assemble notes from my colleagues it is already May 10th—the first time I have ever written a vintage report in May. This trip was about two days shorter than many of our trips, so we were not able to taste as many wines as we normally do. We were able to get a very good overview of the vintage, though, when we attended the marathon Joanne tasting the day after we landed in Bordeaux. We spent more than six hours sitting around a table in a temperature- and humidity-controlled room while the négociant poured us approximately 250 wines, organized by commune. We started with the cru bourgeois and ended with the stickies, which are stunning this year. But I digress.

We had heard rumblings about the vintage before we left, so we were not expecting what we found there: red wines from all different appellations that were quite nice, very good Sauternes—in league with 2009 and 2007, maybe a step behind the magnificent 2001s—and stunning dry white wines. As K&L Wine Club Director Alex Pross put it, “The 2011 vintage is better than we thought it would be. Overall, I’d have to say we were pleasantly surprised. While there may not be many, if any, legendary wines, there were quite a few very-good-to-excellent wines made. In my opinion, 2011 on the whole can be compared to 2004 and 2008—good quality vintages that produced nice-drinking and ageable wines. While they may not offer the exceptional quality of vintages like 2000, 2005, 2009 or 2010, the wines are just a notch below 2001 and 2006 in overall quality.”

THE WEATHER

Winter and Spring

Other than an especially cold December, the winter of 2010-2011 was not harsh. Temperatures were close to normal in January and slightly above average in February. The winter was also dry, prefiguring the drought conditions that had a strong influence on the 2011 vintage. March was warmer and drier than average and reinforced the impression of a mild winter. Bud break occurred during the last few days of March. It seemed like everything was “fine.”

But then instead of spring, summer weather set in for the next three months. April was very hot, dry and sunny—the second hottest April since 1900. Drought conditions continued, with just 10 millimeters of rain falling compared to the average of 80. Hailstorms at the end of April and in early May caused damage in Sauternes, as well as in the Côte de Blaye and Entre-Deux-Mers regions. May was the hottest it’s been since 1922, and almost no rain fell, just a bit more than the bone-dry 1945 vintage. Because of the hot and dry weather, the vines grew rapidly and flowering took place around May 10th, a good two weeks earlier than normal. Still, everything was going along swimmingly, and there were no problems with disease in the vineyards. June was warmer than average, but not as warm as 2005 or 2009. And it was still dry. Because of water stress, vine growth slowed down as the fruit set. **That meant two of the main criteria for a good quality red wine vintage were met: 1) a quick and early flowering and 2) the beginning of water stress at fruit set.** Yet some of the châteaux worried about the lack of water, especially those with gravel soils. (Remember that the water levels were low because of a dry winter and early spring.) Some people thought this vintage would be a repeat of 2003.

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OUR SCORING SYSTEM FOR 2011

½* to * to *½+ “Good” to “Very Good” to “Excellent” wine for the vintage (89-93 points).

** to *** “Outstanding” to “Classic” wine for the vintage (94-100 points).

V: Should be a Value, a “sleeper” of the vintage if you will, for its price-to-quality ratio.

These wines have not yet been released to the public. This is a preview of the vintage put together by K&L with our personal impressions of the vintage. Once prices for the wines are available, a selection will be offered through a futures campaign, with the majority of the wines arriving in our stores for shipping or pick up in 2013 or 2014. If you have any questions or are interested in ordering 2011 Bordeaux, or any other wines, contact one of our knowledgeable salespeople at 877.KLWINES (877.559.4637) or visit our award-winning website: KLWines.com.

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Availability Certain wines are in short supply and may sell out before you receive this newsletter. It takes weeks from the time the newsletter is written to the time you receive it.

Will call/holding policy We will gladly keep your wines at any of our locations up to 90 days. If you need to store your wines after 90 days, we have both short-term and long-term storage available at our San Carlos facility. Please contact us for details.

“The 2011 vintage is better than we thought it would be. Overall, I’d have to say we were pleasantly surprised. While there may not be many, if any, legendary wines, there were quite a few very-good-to-excellent wines made.”



The K&L Bordeaux team in 2011, from left to right: Trey Beffa, Clyde Beffa, Molly Zucker, Alex Pross and Ralph Sands. Kerri Beffa not pictured.

A major problem for the vintage occurred on June 26th and 27th when temperatures soared above 100 degrees, sun-burning many of the grape clusters. Cabernets planted on dry soils suffered big losses, sometimes in excess of 20%. What was strange about these two hot days was the fact that the Cabernet grapes suffered more than the sensitive Merlot grapes. Perhaps Merlot’s wide leaves protected the berries better or the heavier soils on which Merlot is planted helped retain more water.

Summer and Harvest

July is usually a critical month for the vintage—at least in “normal” years. Well, after a warm first week of July, the weather turned cool and cloudy with slightly above-average precipitation. The south of Bordeaux received more rain than the north and east. *Véraison* (color change) started around July 10th under cool conditions, and then **the third condition for a good quality harvest was met: vine growth ceased in July**. Unfortunately, the partially sun-burned bunches underwent uneven *véraison*, and they had to be removed through a green harvest. Some of the Merlot and grapes on young vines suffered greatly during this period, too. Mid-*véraison* occurred two weeks early, but it was spread out and some berries remained green or pink. This meant the sorters at harvest time would become critical to the vintage. In fact, most classified châteaux with good financial reserves bought and used “Optical Sorters” to get out the bad grapes, and most of the big name properties mentioned these optical sorters as a key to their success in this difficult vintage.

The month of August was somewhat warmer and much wetter than usual, especially during the first and last weeks. Thunder showers in early August at the end of *véraison* came too late to give new momentum to ripening young vines partly defoliated because of the drought. Those grapes ripened incompletely and with difficulty. August rain on deep, sandy and silty soils swelled the berries and diluted their flavors. This phenomenon mostly affected Merlot. September was dry and warm. A violent hail

storm hit on Thursday, September 1st, seriously damaging grapes in part of Saint-Estèphe. Some 80 millimeters of rain fell on this “black Thursday,” and consequently the harvest was moved up in the worst affected plots of Merlot. The rest of September was dry.

So the fourth condition for a good red wine vintage—full ripening of the various varieties during the dry and moderately warm months of August and September was only partially satisfied. This posed no problem for the dry white wines, which were picked under ideal conditions from mid-August to the first week of September, two weeks early. The grapes had fine acidity and the resulting wines were very good. The wet and warm August weather was favorable to the development of noble rot—*botrytis cinerea*—so sorting was very important even for the dry white wines. Vibrant, well-integrated acidity, typical of a year with a cool summer, is unusual for an early vintage. In other words, the hottest summers, such as 2003, usually result in early-ripening vintages for dry white wines. These generally do not have good acidity or aromatic expression. In the 2011 vintage, however, the grapes owed their early ripening to a warm spring rather than a hot summer. The relatively cool ripening period made for beautiful acidity and bright aromatics in both Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon on the most suitable terroirs (limestone and clay).

Worried about the condition of the grapes, estates began harvesting Merlot on September 5th and the Cabernets around the 12th. The last Cabernets were picked in the final week of September and the first few days of October. The berries were small, so the tannins are quite evident in the barrel samples. It is difficult to generalize concerning sugar and acidity levels, as they depended on when the grapes were picked. Sugar levels in Merlot were generally more moderate than in 2010, whereas those of the Cabernets were comparable to 2010. The acidity in Merlot, similar to 2010, was higher than in 2009, whereas acidity was extremely variable in



Clyde finishing lunch at Domaine Select's headquarters.

the Cabernets, again depending on when the grapes were picked. Cabernets picked at the very end of September or the first days of October were harvested more than 70 days after mid-véraison. This extended "hang time," normal in the New World, has never been as long in Bordeaux as it was in 2011.

The harvest for Sauternes was short and sweet, with the best properties making two or three passes through the vineyards. Most of the best grapes were harvested between Sept 5th and Sept 28th, during a period of hot and dry weather. The morning mists and hot afternoons were perfect for the development of botrytis, and the wines are loaded with it—about as much as the 2009 vintage. The acidity levels are also high, so the balance is fabulous.

"There are literally hundreds of excellent estates producing world-class wines for fair prices. In my own humble opinion, if you look at Bordeaux priced from \$20-\$120, they beat every other region in the world in terms of quality for the price."

THE WINES

As you can imagine, we had a great time tasting the dry white wines and the Sauternes. There were many stunning wines in both of these categories—even the dry Médoc whites were superb. Evaluating the red wines was more complicated. You can't single out an appellation as the best or worst. There were great wines and bad wines in all appellations. Alex Pross says, "Pomerol was the best performing appellation followed closely by both St-Julien and St-Emilion, but I think there's been way too much time and energy spent hand-wringing over the pricing of the top 30 or so classified growths. Once you get past them, there are literally hundreds of excellent estates producing world-class wines for fair prices. In my own humble opinion, if you look at Bordeaux priced from \$20-\$120, they beat every other region in the world in terms of quality for the price."

The Merlot-based wines from heavy soils were fabulous, fresh and concentrated. Some of the Cabernet Francs from the Right Bank were also excellent, especially when combined with the aforementioned Merlots.

The 2011 reds from the Left Bank have good structure, due to the remarkable Cabernet grapes, but some are very tannic and a bit short on the palate. Production levels are low at many Left Bank properties.

THE MARKETPLACE AND OUR CONCLUSIONS

The 2011 vintage turned out a lot better than we had thought when we left for Bordeaux. It was a topsy-turvy vintage for sure, with the summer weather arriving in the spring, and the spring weather arriving in the summer. The 2011s are definitely not as sweet and lush as the 2009s, nor are they as concentrated as the 2010s. Perhaps they're a bit like the 2001 and 2008 vintages mixed together.

K&L Bordeaux Specialist Ralph Sands says: "The long story short, from my perspective, is that 2011 is a vintage where the weather was difficult; they experienced summer in the spring and spring in the summer, yielding a small crop with small berries. The Merlot on the Left Bank was uneven, so Cabernet Sauvignon percentages are a bit higher, but Merlot did better on the Right Bank. Overall the wines are surprisingly solid and a testament to the outstanding winemaking in Bordeaux today, but there is no compelling reason to buy these wines ahead of time unless prices fall drastically. This is where it gets complicated. The châteaux know they have a small crop and pretty good wine, so dropping prices is not something they want to do, and we are often mildly reminded that America is not the primary market for their wines any longer."

K&L Vice President Trey Beffa saw it this way: "For the properties, in order to make good wine, they needed technology and experience on their side. If a château had an optical sorting table, you can bet it was used in 2011. Also a ton of work was required in the vineyard long before harvest. Unlike 2009, where the weather conditions were so ideal that nearly everyone made great wine, 2011 is a mixed bag. The good wines are very good and the bad wines are really bad. The châteaux know it, and are not wasting any time releasing their prices. As consumers, I think we will all benefit from the properties that made good wine and price it reasonably. The 2011s will be good wines to buy and store in your cellar short- to mid-term. We need these types of vintages—wines to buy and drink rather than to buy and sell!"

The best advice we can give you is buy the wines that look to be good values. Quite a few properties have already released their prices. I would really look to buy Pontet-Canet at one-third the price of the 2009 (and about half the price of their 2010). For pure drinking pleasure, the Fonplégade is inexpensive, delicious and has a big score to boot. Lafite is priced lower than any other vintage of Lafite on the market. Pape Clément is superb and priced below even their 2008 vintage. Cos d'Estournel is \$200 a bottle less than their 2009. I will take the 2011, thank you. The good news is that so far many of the top wines are priced 30-50% less than their 2010 counterparts.

Clyde Beffa Jr. with help from Ralph Sands, Alex Pross, Clyde "Trey" Beffa III, Kerri Conlon and Molly Zucker

JUST RELEASED

Some of Bordeaux's great châteaux have finally listened to their customers, lowering prices on their 2011s 40-60%!

2011 La Mission Haut-Brion is 40% off their 2010. And it's just as good!

2011 Haut-Brion and 2011 Margaux are HALF the price of their 2010s. Stunning wines!

2011 Calon Ségur also HALF the price of the 2010. A fabulous wine.

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Left: Philippe Dambrine of Château Cantemerle. Right: The K&L team with Caroline Frey (red scarf) and Tom Hlasney from Château La Lagune.

FRONSAC, CÔTES DE CASTILLON, ETC.

The 2011 vintage was not nearly as even as 2009 or 2010, so you must cherry pick from thousands of wines. We liked the wines below for their value, though not nearly as many 2011s as 2009s from this category caught our fancy. Fronsac and Côtes de Castillon performed particularly well in 2011 thanks to a higher concentration of Merlot and heavier soils.

Château Croix-Mouton, Bordeaux Supérieur $\frac{1}{2}$ *V
Boysenberry fruit and a good middle. Trey: Decent fruit, sweet, bright and spicy. RS: Concentrated dark fruit, very strong, serious wine. *

Château Gigault "Cuvée Viva" Premières Côtes de Blaye $\frac{1}{2}$ *V
Blackberry and licorice aromas follow to the palate. Fine mid-palate feel. Nice wine and a good value.

Château Puygueraud, Côtes de Francs
Good richness and a dry finish. Tannic. Trey: Toasty, creamy texture, good fruit, fresh, firm. A bit dry on the finish. RS: Lovely aromas of Bing cherry. Big, sweet cherry fruit. A strong wine with great fruit. Impressive. *

Château Cap de Fauquier, Côtes de Castillon
A spicy, high-toned wine. Quite nice. RS: Very deep and super fruity, which is always its style. No doubt very attractive.

Château Côte Montpezat "Cuvée Compostelle" Côtes de Castillon
Red fruit and cinnamon flavors.

Château Joanin Bécot, Côtes de Castillon $\frac{1}{2}$ *
Trey: Quite dark and chewy, with sexy dark chocolate, fruit and mocha. New wave, but with good balance; it should be very good if new wave wines are your style. RS: Good freshness. A tasty wine with some toasty coffee notes. *

Château de Carles, Fronsac *
Big and sweet on the palate. Very nice and ripe, with black raspberry fruit. Trey: Dark, chewy and sweet, with good middle fruit. RS: A very complete wine with good fruit front to back! *

Château La Dauphine, Fronsac
Trey: A dark wine with pleasant fruit and good concentration that's tannic on the finish. RS: Good, pure, strong fruit. A linear wine with everything in good balance.

Château La Vieille Cure, Fronsac $\frac{1}{2}$ *
Good mid-palate. Quite nice. Trey: Red fruits abound. Extracted nose, with red licorice, mint and sweet fruit. There's a bit of tannin, but it's still in balance.

Château Moulin Haut-Laroque, Fronsac *
Sweet fruit. New wave. Sweet mid-palate. Dry back-end. Nice. Chocolate on the finish. RS: Round, lots of good tasty fruit and a nice finish. *

Château Villars, Fronsac

Good entry. Sweet middle. Oak and fruity too.

MOULIS, HAUT-MÉDOC, MÉDOC, LISTRAC, ETC.

There were plenty of well made wines in 2011, but also a lot of disappointments, with some wines dried out and tannic on the back end. Be careful here. Below are some wines we like a lot. Please note the new Barton property.

Château Bernadotte, Haut-Médoc

Good richness on the palate, this simple and easy wine is relatively inexpensive. Trey: Pretty light and lean, slightly sweet with red fruits. Simple, decent.

Château Cantemerle, Haut-Médoc $\frac{1}{2}$ V
Great nose. So fruity. A fabulous wine. Trey: Great balance, sweet fruit—almost jammy plum and red fruits—minerals, lots of spice. Polished. RS: Sweet raspberries and black fruits, very floral, with herbal notes and earth all pulled together by round, firm tannins and a very long finish. Tasted twice. I'm 56 years old and Cantemerle is now my #1 favorite château, and I seriously doubt that will ever change. The reason is simple: great, complex wine, consistent quality and a fair price. A winner every time! **

Château Chasse-Spleen, Moulis

Two samples were tired. Must retaste.

Château La Lagune, Haut-Médoc *+
60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, 5% Petit Verdot. Blackberry aromas and flavors. Very good balance and sweet flavors on the palate. Lovely. Trey: Bright red fruits. A leaner style, but very pretty. Elegant.

Château La Tour Carnet, Haut-Médoc $\frac{1}{2}$ *
Slightly new wave. Good middle fruit. Trey: Flashy, new wave, extracted and intense. Slightly over the top, but still quite good.

Château Lanessan, Haut-Médoc *V
Tons of ripe fruit. Super flavor. Great value! This is stunning wine for the vintage. RS: Dark fruit and a touch of pepper. Attractive front to back, with good grip and tannin control.

Château Larrivau, Haut-Médoc *V
This property belongs to the co-owner of Négociant Joanne's niece and her husband Basil Tesseron. Very good value. Plenty of sweet fruit, bacon notes and toasty oak. Superb mid-palate. This is a property to watch.

Château Mauvesin Barton, Moulis *V
This is a new property recently bought by Anthony and Lilian Barton of Léoville-Barton. They've done a great job with this wine. Very fruity on the nose. Elegant. Very good. Trey: Good fruit, very fresh, lively. A bit light, but clean and not green. Elegant. Good value! We tasted this three times, and it was very good all three times.



Clyde and Château Cantemerle's Philippe Dambrine.

Château Poujeaux, Moulis

***V**

Fresh and forward. Full of red fruit and licorice. Superb. Trey: Dark and chewy, with plenty of sweet fruit, cocoa and graphite in this mineral-driven wine. Good balance and fresh, ripe tannins. RS: It is mind-blowing to me how good this wine always seems to be, especially in difficult vintages, and the 2011 is no exception. Sweet, deep black licorice fruit, with no angles or edges. Everything in fine balance. A complete wine. **

Château Senejac, Haut-Médoc

½*V

Mocha and chocolate flavors. Slightly new wave, but well made. Another château on a roll. Buy their 2009.

THE WHITE WINES OF PESSAC-LÉOGNAN

The dry white wines of 2011 are superb, perhaps the most consistent wines of the year. They have great acidity à la 2010 and 2008, with the power and richness of 2009. These wines have such great acidity, fruit and balance that they will cellar well.

Château Reynon Blanc, Bordeaux

½*V

White peach and citrus notes with crisp acidity. This is a fantastic wine to buy when it arrives in a few months. It will be priced in the \$13-14 range.

Clos Floridene Blanc, Graves

***V**

Rich and lush on the palate. Very deep flavors. A delicious, focused wine. Will cellar for 10 years, easily. Also buy this when it arrives. Due in December and will cost approximately \$23.

Château Carbonnieux Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

Trey: Very aromatic. Quite rich and deep with creamy mid-palate fruit. Slightly toasty, with good acid. A delicious, balanced, fine wine.

Château Cantelys Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

½*V

A bit tropical, with fresh guava and baked apple flavors, ripe.

Château de Fieuzal Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

***+**

A flowery mouthfeel with notes of lime blossom and other citrus. Quite good. Creamy. Decent balance.

Château Haut-Bergey Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

Very crisp and melony, with notes of citrus and pear. Great balance and freshness. Tasty.

Château La Garde Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

White flower and passion fruit aromas. Great mid-palate. Focused and delicious.

Château Larrivet Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

Heavy, sweet and rich, with a creamy, fat texture. Controversial. We'll see.

Château Latour-Martillac Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

½*

Very citrusy, with nectarine and linzer torte nuances. Crisp, high acid, focused, intense, lots of zip.

Château Malartic-Lagravière Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

***½**

Intense, mineral wine. Very fine. At the property: Creamy yet mineral-driven, with hints of vanilla and spice. Crisp finish. Very nice. Trey: A very crisp, focused, bright, lively, chalky, mineral-driven wine. Long and fresh. 90-92 points.

Château Pape Clément Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

***½+**

At the château: Rich, with hints of vanilla and cream upfront, lemon and lime in the middle and a spicy, long finish. Very tasty. Trey: Stony, mineral-driven aromas, intense and concentrated. Powerful for a white, with great acid and focus. Not overdone. Fine, indeed.

Château Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

Good, sweet fruit—pears, baked apples—with bracing acidity. Extremely rich. Superb as usual. At the château: Very fresh and crisp, with a ton of rich, creamy, layered fruit in the middle. Fresh, with plenty of acidity to carry through to the finish. Delicious.

Domaine de Chevalier Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

Decadent, with fleshy fruit and spice. Creamy, very rich and long on the palate, but balanced by acidity. A stunning wine.

THE RED WINES OF PESSAC-LÉOGNAN

The red wines from Pessac-Léognan were very inconsistent in 2011.

Rely on your wine merchant (K&L, we hope) to lead you to the best wines. There are some stunning wines, but quite a few that were not so good. The light soils suffered from the dry conditions.

Château Branon, Pessac-Léognan

Deeply colored, full-bodied wine with some toasty oak on the palate. Trey: A bit gritty and tight, but there's some good fruit. Slightly steely.

Château de Fieuzal, Pessac-Léognan

***+**

A very nice wine. Full and ripe. Good blackberry fruit flavors. RS: Superb nose of black fruits. Sweet, almost creamy on the palate and the finish! A complete wine. Quite shocking, but in a great way. This is the best wine from Fieuzal in decades. **

Château Haut-Bergey, Pessac-Léognan

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot. Trey: Dark chocolate, cola and darker, almost roasted, fruit flavors. Slight whisky barrel characteristics, but pretty nice wine. Sweet oaky aromas that follow to the palate. Plenty of acidity on the back end.

Haut-Brion and its Wines**La Chapelle de La Mission Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan**

A spicy wine with some cinnamon on the nose and palate.

Le Clarence de Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan

1/2*

An excellent wine with lovely texture on the palate. Minty, spicy, with red fruits and sweet herbs. Depends on the price.

Château La Mission Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan

**

Only 4,500 cases. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Merlot and 11% Cabernet Franc. Very rich and round. Trey: Very focused and tightly wound, with lots of mineral and cedar and sweet mid-core fruit. The tannins are rather soft for La Mission, integrated and velvety; it's still a big wine, but has finesse. I like it. 91-93 points.

Château Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan

**

46% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, 19% Cabernet Franc. A more feminine style than La Mission. Focused, with red currant and chocolate flavors. Long and lingering on the palate. Minerals abound. Trey: Compact. This wine's tight palate is dense and concentrated, with a sweet core of black cherry and black berry fruit, lots of structure and power. Very dense, but the tannins are integrated and fleshy. 92-94 points.

Château La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

**1/2

73% Sémillon, 27% Sauvignon Blanc. Laser-like focus. Superb minerality. Fabulous, and almost perfect. Trey: Rich and complex nose, with concentrated fruit—lots of melon—and good acidity. The fruit on the palate seems to be shut down now. This is very delicate and balanced. Fresh. 92-94 points.

Château Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

**1/2

58% Sémillon, 42% Sauvignon Blanc. More floral than La Mission. Lush mouthfeel. Sweet and lovely. Almost perfect. Trey: Only 420 cases made. This has an oaky, decadent nose, a toasty, sweet core of middle fruit and notes of honeysuckle and cream. Very rich, fleshy and heavy, but with acidity to balance it out. A spicy 93-95 points.

Château Haut-Bailly, Pessac-Léognan

*1/2+

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 47% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc. Very similar blend as their 2000. Flowery aromas with lots of minerality. Upfront red fruit flavors. Opens up with some air. Big wine. Lots of spice.

Château La Garde, Pessac-Léognan

V?

Sweet cola aromas. Black cherry soda. Fine mid-palate. A good effort. Could be a value! Trey: Decent fruit; much lighter than the prior two vintages.

Château Malartic-Lagravière, Pessac-Léognan

*+

Trey: Sweet cola, racy red fruits and minerals, with good freshness, balance and length. RS: Perfectly ripe. Good, firm but rounded tannins. Long in the mouth and on the finish. *

Château Pape Clément, Pessac-Léognan

*1/2

Trey: Inky color, dark and toasty nose. This is very concentrated and layered, with tons of vanilla and spice. Definitely in a flashy style, but I like it. 90-92 points. RS: Very deep and full of grapey fruit, plus hints of clove and earth. Very pure and very good. Tasted twice. **

Château Smith Haut Lafitte, Pessac-Léognan

*1/2

Trey: Minerals, earth, lots of fruit—black currants and dark black cherry—firm, sturdy and compact. 89-91 points. RS: A very attractive, freshly-styled and bright Smith. Attractive across the board. *

Domaine de Chevalier, Pessac-Léognan

*1/2

Seamless, delicious wine. Drink it now; it's very good and peppery. Outstanding. Trey: Lots of perfume on the nose. Open, spicy and creamy on the mid-palate. Sweet, long and fresh. Medium-bodied. Lots of finesse. This is a natural wine, not overdone. 90-92 points. RS: Round, sweet and pure red fruits, fine overall balance. A nice, elegant wine. *

MARGAUX

A huge appellation that produced wines of all styles and quality levels in 2011. It is a very controversial appellation this vintage; some tasters loved them, and others did not.

Château Angludet, Margaux

*+V

Bright raspberry aromas with black cherry undertones. A creamy wine with a fine texture. Full and lush on the palate. Long finish. Great balance. Trey: Perfumy aromas, nice middle fruit and firm tannins that don't come off as dry. A success for the vintage.

Château Brane-Cantenac, Margaux

*

Pleasant fruit, with a good mid-palate. Fresh, clean and bright, dominated by tobacco and sweet fruit, with a spicy finish. Good wine. RS: Textbook Margaux, with pure raspberry fruit. Lovely, elegant wine. A real beauty. *

Château d'Issan, Margaux

*

Bright cherry fruit and spice. Slightly herbal, almost minty clean, with a firm finish. Could be a sleeper.

Château Giscours, Margaux

*+

Trey: Dark roasted espresso, black cherry. Good fruit. Quite nice. RS: Has a lovely, fresh nose, with strong, regal, old vine fruit that still retains its elegance, and a long, round, but crisp finish. Complex wine! *1/2

Château du Tertre, Margaux

*

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 10% Petit Verdot, 20% Cabernet Franc. Red berry aromas with a creamy texture on the palate. Fine balance. Very nice. Trey: Lots of berry fruits, red currants and spicy edges. Slightly herbal, but overall a good effort.



Clyde, Alexander Van Beek, Director of Château Giscours, and his wife, Véronique Sanders, General Manager of Château Haut-Bailly.

Château Labégorce, Margaux

*V

Trey: This is a big, intense wine, with lots of fruit and a full rich middle. Graphite flavors, huge tannins. Overall an excellent effort. This is a property to watch; they are making outstanding wines of late.

Château Lascombes, Margaux

*+

Trey: Dark and chewy, but with pleasant fruit. This is less extracted than recent vintages; they are backing off on the Merlot and going back to Cabernet. A very good effort. RS: Round and tasty, a fruity style with nice spice, but not overdone. California palates will love this. *1/2

Château Margaux, Margaux

**1/2

86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc. The highest tannin level ever here, but you do not notice it. Stunning wine. Trey: Sweet mocha upfront and fleshy fruit, seamless in the middle with a long finish. Lush, sweet and rich. From a very small crop. This is very approachable young. The tannins are silky, but the wine is quite serious. May be my favorite of the vintage. 94-96 points. AP: Loaded with dark, dark red berry fruit—raspberries, cream and cranberry. Really deep and powerful, layered and sexy, with great energy.



From left to right: The blue clay soils of Pétrus; Elizabeth Jaubert of Château Pétrus; Ralph Sands tasting; a big pour of 1999 Haut-Brion at Pontet-Canet.

Pavillon Rouge de Margaux, Margaux *+
65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc. Trey: Juicy black fruits and sweet mocha. Very fresh, lively, forward and sweet for the vintage. Soft, silky finish. Very fresh; it tastes pretty good now. 90-92 points.

Pavillon Blanc de Margaux, Margaux **
Trey: Honeysuckle, melon and honey, great acidity and freshness. Bright and fresh, with great verve and length. 93-95 points. Three fine vintages in a row. They're on quite a roll.

Château Palmer, Margaux *1/2+
55% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon. Trey: Their smallest harvest since 1961. Dense and concentrated, with juicy blue fruits. This is big and firm, quite tannic, with a bit of a hard edge but still a solid effort. 91-93 points. AP: Gorgeous nose, beautiful floral notes intermixed with black cherry and lots of purple fruit. Layered, complex, elegant yet powerful. There's lots going on here. Very pretty with great length.

2011 Alter Ego de Palmer, Margaux *++
48% Merlot, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Petit Verdot. Trey: Chewy blueberry fruit, spice and cola. Bright and fresh but very firm and tannic. A pretty serious wine for a second label. AP: This is delicious! Tons of bright, energetic fruit—black raspberry and black cherry. This is viscous and layered with great floral components.

Château Malescot-St-Exupéry, Margaux *1/2+
I always love this wine, and this year is no different. It just depends on the price. Trey: Very fresh and sweet, with crushed blackberries and red currants. Good balance and length; the tannins are integrated and ripe, balanced and pure. 90-92 points. RS: Excellent, pure black/red fruits, perfect wood. A masculine wine for Margaux. A lot like Giscours. *1/2 AP: So smooth, deep and rich, this wine has dark red fruit, hints of milk chocolate and great density. Wow!

Château Rauzan-Ségla, Margaux *+
A very good wine. Extracted nose, lush and rich in the mouth, spicy and sweet, good length. Depends on the price. RS: All you need to know is that RS makes fantastic wine! Once again, a great effort. Pure fruit, superbly balanced, long finish. **

ST-JULIEN

There are not a lot of châteaux in this appellation, but the wines we tasted were quite good. Now, if the prices come way down from the 2010s, we should sell quite a bit.

Château Beychevelle, St-Julien 1/2*
Smooth and elegant. On the light side. Nice sweetness. Trey: Perfumy nose, with good spice. Surprisingly sweet, soft and fleshy, with a smooth finish. A bit light, but good.

Château Branaire-Ducru, St-Julien 1/2*
Fine richness on palate. Should be fine. Good effort for the vintage.

Domaines Delon

Jean-Hubert Delon always makes fine wines, whether they are from Pomerol or the Médoc.

Fugue de Nenin, Pomerol *V
Could be a super value. Pretty upfront fruit, sweet and delicious. Forward.

Château Nenin, Pomerol 1/2*
Very balanced, elegant and fresh, with a soft texture, open and clean.

Château Potensac, Médoc V
Big wine. Tons of tannin. Trey: A bit firm and tannic. A rustic style.

Clos du Marquis, St-Julien *
Dark, roasted chewy fruit lingering at the back of the palate. A bit tannic and rough as well. Quite nice.

Château Léoville-Las Cases, St-Julien **+
Deep color. A complex wine with layers of red fruit. Silky, with power on the back end. Excellent. Trey: Very dark, inky in color, with a juicy texture, sweet graphite and mineral components and a dense, sweet core of fruit. Good length, firm, ripe tannins. 92-94 points.

Château Gloria, St-Julien *V
Coca-Cola on the nose and palate. Mid-weight. Sweet finish. This could be a sleeper if the price is right. They are doing quite well here of late.

Château Lagrange, St-Julien
Big, masculine wine, in a rough, firm style, with a hard edge.

Château Langoa-Barton, St-Julien *
Ginger ale and black raspberry on the nose. Good middle. Tough on back palate. Should be fine, it just needs some airing. RS: Very strong red fruits—cherry cola—and a firm grip.

Château Léoville-Barton, St-Julien **
One of the top wines of the vintage. Bravo! Big, dense and concentrated. Firm and sturdy structure. Black cherry flavors. An ager. Trey: Black currant fruit, cocoa powder and anise upfront. Dark and chewy, with good middle fruit and hints of menthol and minerals. The tannins are firm but in balance. Very good. 92-95 points. RS: Super sweet, serious layers of purple-red fruit and blackberry jam. Concentrated, with great power and firm but very good tannins. **

Léoville Poyferré, St-Julien **+
58% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc, 6% Petit Verdot. Cab Franc nose. Good depth. A powerful wine. One of the best of the vintage. Each one of us loved this wine. Trey: New wave nose, lots of oak, creamy sweet and lush on the mid-palate. Ripe, fleshy tannins and a sweet finish. Loads of fruit and concentration. Lots of stuffing. 92-94



Kerri Conlon and Bruno-Eugène Borie of Château Ducru-Beaucaillou sit down to a spectacular dinner that Bruno prepared.

points. RS: As usual the great vineyard of Léoville produced three superb wines, and all could be considered for wine of the vintage. Barton and Las Cases show the power, and Poyferré shows the “silky side” of this great vineyard. All demonstrate rich layers of fruit and complexity that most wines in 2011 just do not have. The Poyferré’s fruit is blood red and silky. Good weight. A terrific wine. **

Château Talbot, St-Julien

Dusty, woody nose and cardboard-like flavors. Rustic, but with some fleshy fruit underneath. Sample may have been off.

Château Saint-Pierre, St-Julien *

More ripe fruit on the nose than usual. This fairly rich wine has a high pH, salty edges and a sweet core of fruit.

The Wines of Bruno Borie

These wines show great attention to detail—they are pure and compelling. This is the third great Ducru vintage in a row.

Château Fourcas-Borie, Listrac V

Dark color. Sweet and polished for Listrac, with hints of cocoa powder. A good value and a definite sleeper of the vintage.

Château Lalande-Borie, St-Julien ½*

We like this property and this wine does not disappoint. Fine richness on the palate. Sweet middle. No hard edges.

Croix de Beaucaillou, St-Julien *+

Crunchy, ripe fruit. Spicy, lively, very bright and fresh, with firm tannins and a leaner middle. A really good effort. Lots of Petit Verdot in the blend. A finely balanced wine.

Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, St-Julien **+

85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot. Only 25 hectoliters per hectare; they produced 30% less wine than in 2010. 13.1% ABV. Toasty oak nose combined with cassis aromas. Long and supple on the palate. A regal wine—First Growth quality. Trey: Dark and exotic on the nose, then spicy and open, dense and concentrated. Lots of power, plus big powerful tannins that are ripe and almost silky. Long, firm and fleshy on the finish. 93-95 points.

PAUILLAC

St-Julien and Pauillac, in our minds, vie for the best Médoc appellation of 2011. Conditions were very good in both places, and the Cabernet grape came through with flying colors. There was some sun-burning of the grapes in late June, but the new optical sorters kicked out the bad grapes.

Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste, Pauillac *+

Red fruits. Sweet and solid. A classic wine; just a step behind their 2010.

Château Latour, Pauillac **½

84.5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, .5% Petit Verdot. Only 6,000 cases produced. Black color. Asian spice, cinnamon and black pepper aromas. Sweet mid-palate with layers of fruit. A very complex, lovely wine. This may be the last year to buy this property on futures. Trey: Smoky flavors of graphite, slate and minerals, with a sweet core of black berries and red currants. Still firm on the finish. A very good Latour. 93-95 points.

Les Forts de Latour, Pauillac *½+

Red currant and cassis aromas. Very rich and deep, with lots of power. Focused, intense. A bit more closed than the Pauillac de Latour. Firm tannins. 91-93 points.

Pauillac de Latour, Pauillac *+

At last we can sell this wine—the distribution system has changed. A fine value every year. Baby Latour. Trey: Spicy, sweet and fresh, with crushed black fruits. Pure elegance, with power. Lots of ripe tannin. 90-92 points.

Château Lafite Rothschild, Pauillac **

80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot. Red berry aromas. Deep and complex. This elegant wine got better after some airing. A step behind 2009 and 2010, but at a better price. Trey: Dark color. Intense on the nose. Tightly wound, deep and super concentrated. A massive wine with huge tannins that’s not showing much for me now. Very focused. I loved ’09 and ’10 out of barrel, but I had never understood this wine in its youth before those two vintages—now I am back to not understanding the wine.

Carruades de Lafite, Pauillac

Deep, blackish color. Cedar, menthol, lead pencil, blueberry, black currant and raspberry fruit and spicy anise flavors. A bit short, with sharp tannins, but still very nice.



Left: A horse-drawn plow at Château Pontet-Canet. Right: The K&L team with Sylvie Cazès (middle) and négociant Pierre Lawton (far right) at Château Pichon-Lalande.

Château Duhart-Milon, Pauillac

Hard to taste today—judgment withheld.

Château Lynch Bages, Pauillac

*½+

72% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Merlot. From small Cabernet grapes and huge Merlot grapes, the resulting wine is quite big and tannic. Will be great. Trey: Nice nose, with hints of mocha and spice, sweet and fleshy in the mouth, with lots of mineral and graphite and very firm tannins on the finish. Successful for the vintage. 90-92 points.

Echo de Lynch Bages, Pauillac

½*

Formerly Haut-Bages Averous. It seems like the new name has brought a better wine. Pleasant fruit, spice, hints of mocha and black cherry flavors.

Château Lynch Bages Blanc, Pauillac

*

Crisp and fleshy, with hints of citrus and melon. Sweet and fresh. Great acidity. Superb.

Château Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac

**+

90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc. Inky. Trey: Spicy, almost exotic mocha aromas in the glass. Dark chocolate, fleshy mid-palate fruit and a velvety texture. This wine is sexy and long—definitely an earlier drinker. This wine should show well on release; it tastes pretty good now. 93-95 points.

Le Petit Mouton, Pauillac

*

70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot. Nice black cherry nose and toasty oak. Fleshy wine. Depends on the price.

Château Clerc Milon, Pauillac

*?

54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 1% Petit Verdot, 1% Carmenère. Trey: Tighter than the Armailhac, less forward fruit, quite tannic and closed up. Judgement reserved.

Château d'Armailhac, Pauillac

*+

57% Cabernet Sauvignon, 28% Merlot, 13% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Trey: Lots of cedar and lead pencil flavors and bright fruit. Very fleshy and ripe, with integrated and silky tannins. Tasty, even at this stage. A big success for the vintage. 90-92 points. Alex: I love this. Smooth and layered. An easy drinker.

Aile d'Argent Blanc, Bordeaux

*½

The best one ever? Tropical, with white flower aromas and super acidity. Delicious. Trey: Concentrated rich fruits—key lime, mangos—and honeysuckle, with a fine backbone, bright acidity, a creamy texture and a crisp, long finish. Best Aile d'Argent I have tasted. 92-94 points.

Château Pichon-Baron, Pauillac

*½+

82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Merlot. A big Cabernet vintage here. Red currant fruit aromas mix with spice and chocolate. Mocha flavors. High tannin from the very small grapes. Nice finish, with a long aftertaste. Very fine. Trey: Dark color, with lots of mocha and blackberry jam flavors. A very masculine style. A bit shut down in the middle right now, with big tannins and lots of structure. A success for the vintage. 91-93 points.

Les Tourelles de Longueville, Pauillac

*V

A high percentage of Merlot—60%—plus 28% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Very bright and fragrant. Sweet blackberries abound on the lush palate. Trey: Never my favorite out of barrel, this wine shows polished fruit upfront with dusty edges.

Château Pibran, Pauillac

½*V

55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot. Ripe and tasty fruit, with spicy cola flavors. A polished, vibrant wine with firm tannins. Very impressive up front. Could be a sleeper.

Château Pichon-Lalande, Pauillac

* ½+

78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. A very high percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon for this property—like the 2000 vintage. A fine effort here that seems very elegant for so much Cabernet. Great texture. Trey: Seems a bit light. Full of red fruits. Elegant, soft and delicate—a very feminine style, though it should bulk up on the mid-palate.

Reserve de la Comtesse de Lalande, Pauillac

½*

Red berry notes. Silky texture. Rich, good upfront, very spicy, with good middle fruit.

Château Pedesclaux, Pauillac

*V

Here is a property to watch; their 2009 and 2010 are awesome and their 2011 is super ripe. New wave with good fruit flavors. Well-balanced. A value wine.

Château Pontet-Canet, Pauillac

**½

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. In the running for wine of the vintage from the Médoc. Black color and aromas of blackberries and vanilla oak. Some orange peel undertones. Lots going on here. Seamless wine. Great for the vintage. Trey: Inky dark color, roasted black coffee aromas, very ripe, slightly alcoholic nose. Spicy, with a very fleshy texture—the tannins are silky and ripe—this will be an earlier drinker. It seems quite elegant and fleshy, and it tastes good now. 92-94 points.

ST-ESTÈPHE

There was a big hail storm in St-Estèphe in the late summer that really affected the quantities produced there and, in some instances, the quality of the wines.

Château Calon Ségur, St-Estèphe

*½

78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot. Red berry aromas and flavors. Sweet palate entry. Lingering red fruit flavors. Trey: Rich, dark plummy fruit. Bright and fresh, very clean, good middle. Very nice for the vintage. Only 50% of normal crop here.

Château Capbern Gasqueton, St-Estèphe

*V

I love this property of late; buy the great 2009. Trey: Nice fruit, red cola flavors, spicy, almost jammy. A silky, easy drinker. Pleasant. A sleeper.

Château Cos d'Estournel, St-Estèphe **

65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc. Cos had a small crop because of hail damage. The wine shows tons of red currant fruit. Tannic on the mid-palate, but will be fine. Trey: Black licorice aromas. This is an inky, dark, meaty, chewy wine, with a ripe nose. Concentrated and intense. Lacks finesse and elegance now. A big and bold wine.

Les Pagodes de Cos, St-Estèphe *+

Spicy, meaty aromas and flavors. Black fruits on the palate. Nice length.

Château Cos d'Estournel Blanc, St-Estèphe *++

Trey: Sweet and fresh, candied green apple, mango and pear flavors. Good acid and sweetness. 91-93 points.

Château Le Crock, St-Estèphe *+V

I love this. Tons of boysenberries. Trey: Another outstanding effort for Le Crock. Fruit is forward, rich and velvety. Tannins are ripe and sweet. Wine is fresh and balanced. A really great buy!

**Alex Pross's 10 Best Values of 2011****1. Château Capbern Gasqueton, St-Estèphe**

From the owners of Calon Ségur, this perennial value has been one of my favorites over the last three or four vintages. The 2011 displays red cherry, cinnamon, cranberry, cloves and minced-meat pie. Good fruit, spicy, with a long finish. Outstanding value.

2. Château La Lagune, Haut-Médoc

Caroline Frey is an amazing and beautiful woman who seems to effortlessly juggle being a new mom and making great wine. Tons of black

licorice, dark black fruits and a subtle hint of chocolate, with a full, rich body that doesn't seem too heavy or tannic.

3. Château Cantemerle, Haut-Médoc

Along with La Lagune, this property stands out for being a perennial value and a top producer from its commune.

4. Château Alter Ego de Palmer, Margaux

This is the second wine of Palmer, and it's delicious! Tons of bright and energetic black raspberry and black cherry fruit. This is viscous and layered, with great floral components.

5. Château Angludet, Margaux

A great wine from Margaux for under \$30? Yes! This has red and black plum, spice and hints of fig, along with layers of cherry fruit. Very tasty, with dusty tannins.

6. Château Fonplégade, St-Emilion

This wine could easily have also gone onto my list of top 10 wines overall because, besides being an incredible value, it is also one of the best wines we tasted on our entire trip. Black raspberry, plum, spice and red berry fruit, all perfectly integrated. This wine is so sleek and seductive it feels like a super model.

7. Château Labégorce, Margaux

This and Angludet are the greatest values in all of Margaux. Layers of red raspberry, fresh smashed fruit, spice notes. Very tasty.

8. Côte de Montpezat "Cuvée Compostolle" Côtes de Castillon

One of the best wines to come out of Côtes de Castillon on a yearly basis, the 2011 opens up with bright minerality, cinnamon and spice, with racy red fruits and a seductive note.

9. Château Lanessan, Haut-Médoc

This is one of the great classics as far as values go—always good and dependable. It has a racy nose with hints of herbs, flowers and loads of red fruits. Nice creaminess. This is classic.

10. Château Poujeaux, Moulis

Easily the best wine to come out of Moulis, Poujeaux has a very distinctive style. Black licorice and black cherry, with hints of herbs. This wine also has layers of fruit and a nice, long finish.

Château Lilian Ladouys, St-Estèphe

A new value property, but the sample was not showing well.

Château Meyney St-Estèphe ½*

Good richness. Nice flavor. This could be a sleeper of the vintage.

Château Ormes de Pez, St-Estèphe ½*V

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 41% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Trey: Lots of blackberry fruits, red currants and spicy edges. Slightly herbal, but overall a good effort. Firm.

Château Phélan-Ségur, St-Estèphe

Decent cherry cola fruit, spice, good balance and a fine finish.

Château Montrose, St-Estèphe **

62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot. I love this. Elegant red currant and cassis aromas. Very spicy wine. Lovely palate entry. Quite tannic back end. Ager.

La Dame de Montrose, St-Estèphe

Trey: Leans more towards red cherry fruits. Spicy, but a bit simple and short on the finish.

Château Tronquoy-Lalande, St-Estèphe V?

Dark and slate-y, dense and a bit hard edged, with big tannins. Plummy undertones. Could be a value. Buy the 2009.

ST-EMILION

There are more than 4,000 properties in this appellation and its satellites. The 2011 vintage turned out some great wines, like Angelus, to not so great wines. Look for great values like Fonplégade and Fleur Cardinale.

Château Angelus, St-Emilion **

47% Cabernet Franc, 52% Merlot, 1% Cabernet Sauvignon. A super serious wine here. Layers of black fruit flavors cover the tannins. Black color. Blackberries and power. Ager. Trey: Very dark color and perfumy aromas. Deep mocha, roasted cocoa powder and black berry flavors. Juicy and full on the mid-palate, with tremendous depth and power. Seamless and exotic, the tannins are so integrated and ripe you barely notice them. 94-96 points.

Le Carillon de l'Angelus, St-Emilion *V

50% Merlot, 47% Cabernet Franc, 3% Cabernet Sauvignon. A delicious wine. Value. Trey: Extremely fruity upfront, ripe and sweet, almost lush in the mouth. Very fresh, clean and ripe, with sweet tannins, great balance and finesse. One of the best second wines we tasted. 90-92 points.

Château Bellevue, St-Emilion *+

Trey: Mocha aromas, dark color, blackberry fruit. A thick, decadent, chewy wine with an excellent mid-palate and ripe, integrated tannins. A serious wine for the cellar. It's really delicious, but maybe a bit too obvious? 91-93 points.

Château Barde-Haut, St-Emilion *

Trey: Fat and sweet, with fleshy fruit and toasty spice. There's lots of oak, but it has the fruit to balance it out. New wave style but actually pretty nice. 90-92 points.

Château Beau-Séjour Bécot, St-Emilion *+

Dark, inky-tarry color, black berry and red currant fruit, sweet and thick. A bit short on the finish, but still a monster wine.

Château Bellevue Mondotte, St-Emilion *+

Cinnamon, red licorice and Asian spice. Tannic. Trey: Jammy and tannic. Over the top for me.

Château Canon, St-Emilion *½

Good richness. Very well made. Depends on price. Trey: Sweet red fruits, fleshy, jammy mouthfeel, firm and tannic. Good wine. 90-92 points.

Château Figeac, St-Emilion ?

Powerful wine. Balance? Trey: Spicy, meaty aromas, red currants.



The K&L crew with Estelle Tehan and Jean-Christophe Meyrou of Château Fonplégade.

Clos Fourtet, St-Emilion

Vibrant red fruits, spicy and delicious. This property is right on.

*+

Château Fombrauge, St-Emilion

Dark cherry and black fruits, spicy and thick, but has balance. Good.

Château Fonplégade, St-Emilion

**V

This property is on a roll. A must-buy. Trey: Dark and inky in the mouth, with minerals sweet minerals, graphite and slate. Still very tannic on the finish and big. Should age well—there's enough fruit. Great freshness.

Château Fleur Cardinale, St-Emilion

*V

Exotic and spicy. A very lush wine. Depends on the price. Sleeper?

Château Grand Mayne, St-Emilion

Blueberry pie and sweet, but huge, tannins. Intense.

Château La Confession, St-Emilion

Blueberries and a sweet, fruity finish. Buy it on arrival.

Château La Gaffelière, St-Emilion

*+

Sweet, lush. Very fine. Trey: Big, ripe, dark nose, juicy palate with notes of mocha and chewy fruit. Ripe tannins and a sweet core. 91-93 points.

Château La Dominique, St-Emilion

*

Trey: A pretty, aromatic nose with notes of spice, rose petal, lavender and sweet cherry pie. Good mid-palate red fruit. Long and spicy. 90-92 points.

Château L'Arrosee, St-Emilion

*

Ripe blueberry spice on the nose. Sweet, juicy texture on the palate, with balanced, ripe tannins. This property is doing well of late.

Château Monbousquet, St-Emilion

*

Quite rich, but balanced. Not overdone. Trey: Big and dense, tannic. This has fruit, but there's still a rough edge about it.

Château Pavie, St-Emilion

**?

Big, jammy, extracted nose. Zin-like. Massively tannic, harsh finish. Controversial.

Château Pavie Decesse, St-Emilion

*?

Mineral, menthol, black berry fruit on the nose. Graphite. A bit tannic. Intense, over the top style.

Château Soutard, St-Emilion

*V

Minty-sweet blueberry aromas. Intense, ripe tannins. Sleeper?

Château Troplong Mondot, St-Emilion

*½

Exotic, Asian spice flavors. Super sweet. Perfume and red cherry fruit. Bright and not overdone.

Stephan von Neipperg Properties

Our first stop on our 2011 tasting tour. Solid wines as expected.

Stephan von Neipperg mentioned that the drier soils on the Left Bank had problems with the drought and the stress it caused the vines, resulting in lower yields, while the heavier soils on the Right Bank did well and yields were average quantity-wise.

Clos Marsalette Rouge, Pessac-Léognan

56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc. A spicy, sexy wine with earthy flavors. Red fruits dominate. RS: This wine is always elegant and tasty. Its fresh nose has a hint of passion fruit, a touch of spice and sandalwood, and a Rutherford dust-like quality. Elegant.

Clos Marsalette Blanc, Pessac-Léognan

*

Slight petrol aromas with superb balance. Quite rich upfront, with bracing acidity at the back. Excellent. A small crop here.

Château d'Aiguilhe, Côtes de Castillon

½*V

Racy and spicy. Lovely. Tobacco notes. Trey: Perfume on the nose, toasty and pretty thick in the mouth, with very nice fruit that carries through to the firm finish. RS: I love the "just ripe" expansive nose of flowery red fruits. Very nice.

Clos de L'Oratoire, St-Emilion

*

90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. Trey: My favorite wine of the tasting. Dark, inky color, with chocolate flavors. Exotic and fat in the mouth. Flashy style. RS: Good weight, dark blueberry and plum fruit, with some good grip. Very good. *

Château Canon-La-Gaffelière, St-Emilion

*+

60% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Cabernet Franc. Lovely entry, spicy and sweet fruit flavors. Great mid-palate. Superb. RS: Elegant, crisp red fruits, violets and roses. A little dusty, with a touch of grip.

La Mondotte, St-Emilion

*+?

Trey: This wine is very good, full and strong, with ripe fruit. Not a standout, but shows well. A bit closed now. Only 18 hectoliters/hectare. Tiny production.



From left to right: The 2011 Château Hosanna; a map of the Moueix properties; Christian Moueix.

LALANDE-DE-POMEROL AND POMEROL

Perhaps the most consistent and best red wines overall in 2011. The clay soils held water during the drought months. We did not taste a lot of wines from these appellations, but most of the wines we tasted were quite good.

Clos l'Eglise, Pomerol

*+

Excellent richness and blackberry fruit flavor. Well made. Trey: Big, rich, thick texture, dense and full, quite open in the mouth. Still some aggressive tannins and hints of herbal components.

Château La Fleur de Bouard, Lalande-de-Pomerol

V?

Shows good blackberry aromas and flavors. Could be a value. Trey: Comes around with some airing.

Château La Fleur Saint Georges, Lalande-de-Pomerol

*

Good sweetness on the palate. A very fine wine. Excellent balance. Trey: Decent fruit, spice, perfume and good length. Toasty good.

Château La Gravière, Lalande-de-Pomerol

½*

Trey: Lots of perfume on the nose. Toasty, sweet fruit melts in your mouth. Tannins are soft and ripe. Drinking well.

Christian Moueix Properties

A very fine tasting with Christian Moueix. These wines are not pushed or overly-extracted. Plus the prices are 20-30% less than 2010.

Château Puy-Blanquet, St-Emilion

Black cherry and raspberry aromas and good mid-palate sweetness. Value. Trey: Fruit, espresso bean and cocoa powder flavors. Rich, slightly lean in the middle, but good fruit and firm, slightly dry tannins.

Château Magdelaine, St-Emilion

*

Very structured wine with gobs of spice and blackberries. Trey: A rustic style, leaner and more restrained. The tannins are a bit too dry for me, but it's done in an old school style with some charm.

Château Bélair Monange, St-Emilion

Sweet mid-palate. Decent length. Trey: High-toned red cherry fruit, spice and high acidity. A bit lean but still sweet.

Château Lafleur-Gazin, Pomerol

½*V

Nice aromas of red currant and cassis. Forward and sweet. Trey: Very fresh crushed fruit aromas, sweet core of fruit, spicy, toasty cola flavors. Long, balanced and very nice.

Château Plince, Pomerol

Sweet aromas and toasty oak undertones. Good texture on the palate. Could be a sleeper. Trey: Big ripe and fruity nose. Really pleasant fruit upfront that seems to fade away with the tannins. Will need time in a cellar.

Château Bourgneuf, Pomerol

*

Asian spice and blackberry aromas. A racy and sexy wine. Quite lovely. Trey: Always a rustic style. This wine shows quite a bit of fruit and is clean, not pushed, with nice purity. Alex: The best they have made.

Château Latour à Pomerol, Pomerol

½*

Quite spicy on the nose with blackberry and coffee aromas. Sweet mid-palate. Fine texture. I love it. Trey: Good clean fruit and spice. Fresh, but with a rustic backbone and big tannins. Could be good if the wine comes together.

Château Providence, Pomerol

*

Boysenberry nose and flavors. Quite ripe and very sweet on the mid-palate. Good effort.

Château Certan de May, Pomerol

½*

Red licorice aromas that lead to a spicy flavor profile. Balance?

Château Hosanna, Pomerol

*+

Trey: Dark fruit and smoky, almost meaty aromas. On the palate, the fruit is there, but underneath a mass of tannin and structure. This wine will need some time to come around.

Château La Fleur-Pétrus

*½

Exotic, Asian spice aromas—so enticing. Full mouthfeel with plush texture. Has tannin but good fruit balance. Very fine, indeed. Trey: Spicy, ripe crushed fruit, with big tannins but nice freshness.

Château Trotanoy, Pomerol

**

Super lush aromas of black fruits and toasted oak. Finely structured. A big winner in 2011, for sure. Layers of fruit. Trey: Amazing nose, complex, exotic, very showy, with a sweet mid-palate core of fruit. Long, deep, with lots of structure. The tannins are firm but integrated. 92-94 points.

Château Gazin, Pomerol

*

Trey: Rich and sweet, toasty, jammy and full.

Château L'Enclos, Pomerol

*V

Blackberry and spice. This is a racy, sexy wine, with lots of plum flavors. Vibrant. Only 2,000 cases made. Trey: Very pretty and rich fruit upfront. Serious wine that is well structured and tannic.



The K&L crew and AXA Millésimes' managing director Christian Seely tasting at Pichon-Baron.

Château La Conseillante, Pomerol

*

Perfume on the nose. Very tight, but seems to have good balance. Elegant.

Château La Violette, Pomerol

**

100% Merlot from 80-year-old vines. Very fat and lush, with layers of fruit and considerable ripe tannins. Sweet finish. Trey: Very pure fruit, lush and seamless in the mouth, with tons of mocha and chocolate flavors, spice and lots of integrated and round tannins. 91-93 points.

Château Le Gay, Pomerol

*½

90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. Sweet palate entry. Seamless wine. Elegant and integrated. Very good. Trey: Ripe, jammy black berry fruit, sweet mocha and big-time fresh, ripe tannins that are well-integrated on the finish. Will need some time to age. 90-92 points.

Manoir de Gay, Pomerol

V?

Delicious wine. Could be a sleeper. Buy it on arrival. Trey: Sweet coffee aromas, toasty, fleshy fruit, though a bit short on finish. Very good for a second wine.

Château Montviel, Pomerol

Trey: Toasty, ripe fruit upfront, firm tannins. A bit rustic in style, with lots of structure. A good wine.

Château Petit Village, Pomerol

*+

72% Merlot, 19% Cabernet Franc, 9% Cabernet Sauvignon. Intense Asian spice aromas that follow to the palate. Plenty of tannins, but enough fruit to balance them out.

Château Rouget, Pomerol

*+

Another success here. The wines of Pomerol are the hits of the 2011 reds. This wine is spicy and racy. Delicious.

Château Pétrus, Pomerol

**

Tons of spice on the palate. Blackberry jam. Good mid-palate, with lots of round tannins that are covered by the fruit. Trey: Tons of red currant and black berry aromas. Very creamy texture, sweet mocha flavor and extremely pure and crisp fruit. Melts in your mouth, and then the tannins—big, but ripe—come through. Not as seamless as '09 or '10, but still very good. 92-94 points.

Top 11 Wines of 2011 According to Alex Pross

These are my top 11 wines—not including First Growths. The First Growths and Pétrus will be rated separately as a group since I feel they are a category unto themselves because of price and perception.

1. Château Angelus, St-Emilion

Wow! This wine knocked my socks off! One of my favorite wines ever was the 2000 Angelus, and tasting this gave me flashbacks. Blackberry jam, hints of scorched earth, tobacco and graphite. Pure, long and rich, with a long, long finish. This is the wine of the vintage, in my opinion.

2. Château Trotanoy Pomerol

The last five vintages of Trotanoy can arguably challenge Pétrus as far as overall quality while selling for a fraction of the price. The nose foretells of layer upon layer of black fruits that unfold as black cherry and blackberry on the palate. This wine is dense and complex, but in total harmony and balance.

3. Château Léoville Poyferré, St-Julien

Just call them butter, 'cause they're on a roll! This is the third vintage in a row that Poyferré made one of the best wines of the vintage. This wine is gorgeous, with black cherry, cola and mashed sour blackberries. Layered, with nice length and good fruit. Shows some tannins.

4. Château Pichon-Baron, Pauillac

Mocha and spice on the intoxicating nose. Lead pencil and blackberry on the mid-palate. Shows great length and complexity with blue and black fruits that continually appear throughout the long, layered finish.

5. Château Pontet-Canet, Pauillac

Okay, so you're upset that you can no longer afford the First Growths. Settle for this Fifth Growth that is producing wines capable of challenging the Firsts, but at a fair price—usually between \$100 and \$175. Floral and bright, this wine has amazing energy. Vibrant blackberry flavors, layered and lush. This wine is so seamless and so full, with vibrant fruit and energy, dusty tannins and flavors of bright berries, menthol and tobacco. There's precision and density here.



Left: The barrel room at Château La Lagune. Right: Clyde, Anthony Barton, Molly Zucker and Ralph Sands sneaking in the back door at Château Langoa-Barton.

6. Château Léoville-Las Cases St-Julien

When Mouton was elevated to First Growth status there was one property that I believe had a legitimate gripe: Léoville-Las Cases. Like Latour the wines are the quintessential “iron fist in a velvet glove.” Aromas of black cherry, cola and a hint of milk chocolate linger in the glass while the wine displays great length and a creamy, long finish.

7. Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, St-Julien

Black cherry and cola, hints of chocolate, dark fruits, blackberry liqueur. Great energy, with a finish that goes on and on.

8. Château Calon Ségur, St-Estèphe

Red cherries, cranberries and green herbs, with great length and good depth. Layered, elegant plum flavors with a hint of spiciness.

9. Château Léoville-Barton, St-Julien

Spicy chocolate with hints of tobacco and menthol notes. Scorched earth and dark blackberry fruit on the palate, with great balance, layers and elegance.

10. Château Fleur Cardinale, St-Emilion

These guys are doing some great stuff! Exotic nose of Chinese five spice, good fruit, great balance and harmony. Delicious.

11. Château Fonplégade, St-Emilion

This is an up-and-coming property. They have a new rich American owner and a great young director in Jean-Christophe Meyrou, and with the help of famed oenologist Michel Rolland some great things are happening here. Black raspberry, spice, plum, red berry fruit. Noticeable tannins, but layered and integrated well. Very tasty and racy.

SAUTERNES

The 2011 Sauternes are fabulous wines with the acidity of 2010 and the richness of 2009. After some rain showers and morning mists in September, the warm afternoon temperatures that followed were perfect for the formation of botrytis. Barsac was particularly blessed during this time and only needed two passes through the vineyards to bring in the whole crop. Denis Dubourdieu (Doisy-Daëne, Reynon) mentions that in 40 years of winemaking he has not seen such bursts of botrytis as in 2009 and 2011.

Château Climens, Barsac

Not tasted.

Château Coutet, Sauternes

**

Lovely balance and a super long finish. Trey: Bright and lemony, very concentrated, intense and crisp, with laser beam focus and lots of acidity. One for the cellar.

“Fonplégade is an up-and-coming property. They have a new rich American owner and a great young director in Jean-Christophe Meyrou, and with the help of famed oenologist Michel Rolland some great things are happening here.”

Château de Fargues, Sauternes

*½

Figgy and very rich. Trey: Good balance, sweet, compact and juicy. A well made wine.

Château Doisy-Daëne, Sauternes

**

Very sweet. This is a heavier style that's lush with tons of botrytis. Trey: Very sweet, lemony and rich, with notes of honeysuckle. Leans more toward the sweet side.

Château Doisy-Védrines, Barsac

**

Lush, with a super long finish. Reminiscent of the great 1989. Trey: Very sweet and juicy, with bright acidity. Rich but fresh.

Château Guiraud, Sauternes

*

Plenty of rich botrytis fruit flavors, with pineapple, honey, coconut and white flower aromas. Very thick and full-bodied. One of the heavier styles in 2011. Trey: Sweet and nutty on the nose, with baked apple and lemon meringue notes. Juicy, sweet, good acid, though a bit heavy.

Château La Tour Blanche, Sauternes

*

Plenty of rich botrytis fruit flavors, with pineapple and honey aromas. Very thick and full-bodied. Coconut and white flowers, also. One of the heavier styles of 2011. Trey: Very focused and rich, with a sweet core of fruit on the spicy, lively palate. Crisp and bright. 90-92 points.

Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes

Trey: Pineapple, with nice balance. Will come together. Hard to taste now.

2011 Château Rayne Vigneau, Sauternes

*

Extremely lush and tropical flavors. Fine underlying acidity, but one of the richer stickies for 2011.

Château Rieussec, Sauternes

**

Lush aromas of of coconut and melon. Fine acidity and balance. Sweet-tart on the palate. Superb! Trey: Big, rich, lush and sweet. Very decadent and fat on the palate, but has the acid to back it up. An excellent wine. 92-94 points.



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