

# 2018 Bordeaux

## Vintage Report



### 2018 BORDEAUX VINTAGE REPORT FEATURES

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## 2018 Bordeaux: A Velvet Fist in an Iron Glove

By Clyde Beffa Jr.



**There will be more on the vintage title as we go through this summary of 2018.** For the first time in *many* vintages, I do not have a Bill Blatch vintage report as a guide. I believe he is still writing it, and we can't wait to get this summary of our trip and the very fine 2018 vintage to our faithful Bordeaux customers.

Our trip to Bordeaux this year was from March 30 through April 5—much too short a time to be able to taste all of the great wines of 2018. I take total blame for the trip length. You see, I plan these yearly trips way in advance—in fact, at least nine to ten months before we actually go. When I picked the dates for the trip in early June, the weather in Bordeaux (January–June) could be summed up in one word: lousy. It rained for six straight months—even during the flowering in late May and early June. So, I picked just one week for our visit, figuring we would be seeing another 2013 vintage. I was totally wrong! The wines from 2018 are, for the most part, quite good—especially the red wines.

This year our group consisted of myself, the cagey veteran Ralph Sands, Ryan Moses from the marketing department, Trey Beffa, and Alex Schroeder. No airline strikes this year, so Trey was able to join us, and Alex was making his first trip to Bordeaux. And of course, Alex speaks perfect French! There was no golf tournament for K&L this year, so we started tasting as soon as we arrived on Saturday afternoon in St-Émilion. For the second straight year we started our trip on the Right Bank for two nights. We figured we would taste the soft and supple Right Bank wines first and then head to the Left Bank. Well, the first three days

of our trip were “root” days, meaning the wines showed more tannin and less fruit than a “fruit” or “flower” day. After that, the “fruit” days dominated our trip, and the wines tasted more supple and less tannic. Of course, some people do not believe in these fruit, root, flower, or leaf days—so to you nonbelievers, it is more about barometric pressure. The higher the barometric pressure, the fruitier the wines taste. We tasted some wines on the first two days of the trip, and again during the rest of the trip, and they were very different—hard and tannic at first, and then smooth and elegant later on. They were definitely different—this is what makes tasting young barrel samples of Bordeaux so difficult.

### The Weather: Winter and Spring 2017–2018

From November 2017 until spring was the wettest winter period in Bordeaux since 1957! The months also saw below-average temperatures (but not many super-cold days to kill the bugs in the soil), and there was more than twice the average rainfall of an average year. Bud break was later than average and occurred early in April for most estates. Actually, from the period of November 2017 to May 2018, Bordeaux received 800 millimeters of rain, which is more than the average rainfall for an entire year. Temperatures, which had been below average through March, took off starting in April and kick-started the vineyards and growing season, getting the vegetative cycle back to close to average by the end of May. Unlike 2017, there was virtually no frost danger in 2018, except for small, isolated instances. There were some hailstorms in late May and some vineyards suffered big losses due to the hail (especially in Graves, Pessac-Bourg, and Blaye).

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## Summer

Flowering occurred at the end of May and early in June—only a few days behind average—and was surprisingly even, and consistent. Most of the properties lucked out here, as there was plenty of rain early in June (until the 13th), but overall June rainfall was normal, as was the average June temperature. Successful flowering was the reason why many estates had normal to above-average yields. The rainy spring (particularly the month of May), which saturated the ground, was followed by quickly rising temperatures in May and June, resulting in perfect conditions for downy mildew, which thrives in damp, cool conditions. For those estates locked into organic and biodynamic viticulture, which allows for little in the way of fighting this fungus, and for those estates that were unable to perform treatments

at the right times (i.e., over the weekends), their vineyards were infested by downy mildew. If this mildew appeared on a Friday, you could not wait until Monday to fix the problem—it would be too late to save the affected property. Several high-profile domains lost as much as two thirds or more of their crop. Also, if you did not work the weekends in July and August, when most French are at the beaches, you likely lost a good part of your production. Adding insult to injury, isolated July hailstorms, mostly in the Graves, the southern part of the Médoc, and in the Bourg and Blaye regions on the Right Bank, decimated the vineyards of an unlucky few. Just one note on the *bio* (organic) properties in Bordeaux, with its maritime climate: 2018 was very difficult for these properties, and some lost over one-half of their production. One famous château director said there was the equivalent of one bunch of grapes per vine in some of his vineyards. A few directors told us that they went from organic to conventional methods in order to save the crop. Others said they would never go bio, but they respect organic methods. We heard rumblings at some famous properties that maybe bio is not the way to go in Bordeaux. I would not be surprised if some properties abandon their bio ways in the future. I'm just saying...



*The weather is fine at Château Haut-Bailly.*

Starting about the 15th of June, the weather changed dramatically, with rainfall amounts plummeting and daytime temperatures soaring. Daytime highs matched 2016, 2003, 1990, and 1947. However, and critical to understanding the vintage, nighttime temperatures remained cool. It is this combination of high daytime temperatures followed by cool nights that gives the 2018s their beautiful mix of sunny, sexy characters paired with terrific purity and freshness. Between June and September, the region recorded a record-breaking 1,136 hours of sunshine.

## Harvest Time

The sunny, dry, and hot summer months allowed the vineyard ripening cycle to catch back up to normal, with veraison occurring for most estates at the end of July and beginning of August. Small rain showers at the end of August and early in September helped alleviate hydric stress on some of the younger vines (Lynch-Bages labeled it “Purple Rain”), and warm, normal weather persisted through the end of October, allowing estates to pick at will. Due to the ideal weather during harvest, with little in the way of rain pressure, estates were able to make whatever style of wine they wanted. If you wanted to harvest two weeks ahead of everyone early in September, no problem. Wait, until mid-October? Again, no problem.

If you consider the old saying that June makes the quantity, August makes the style, and September makes the quality, in 2018 you have a warm, average June resulting in a large crop; a hot, dry, and incredibly sunny August with cool nights; and picture-perfect weather in September and October. So, is 2018 the best vintage ever in Bordeaux? Certainly, you have to temper this and consider the massive winter and spring rains, as well as the resulting mildew problems. 2018 might have been an easy harvest, but it wasn't a straightforward vintage for winemakers. The rain and mildew mentioned above, and then three months of sun and drought, meant less juice, higher alcohol, powerful tannins, concentration, lower acidity—and therefore careful extraction. Not all properties followed the extraction rule.



*Bring it on: Clyde awaits the latest taste of Rauzan-Sègla—one of the best of the 2018s.*





*Through a glass or two darkly: Clyde Beffa considers the vintage from all angles at Château Ducru-Beaucaillou.*

### The Wines: Whites and Sauternes

While 2018 is not a great vintage for the whites of the region, there are plenty of solid wines, particularly from Sauvignon Blanc. The Sémillon cuvées were a bit flabby and dull. There are so many great white Bordeaux available from 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2017, K&L will not follow very many 2018 whites. We only tasted about 20 Sauternes, and they are OK, but there is not much botrytis nor is there a big quantity of 2018 stickies. The long, dry autumn was not ideal for the development of botrytis, and again, there is so much great Sauternes in the market (2001, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, etc.). We will only feature a few of our favorites from 2018.

### The Wines: The Reds

In general, the red wines of 2018 are quite good—in fact, some are outstanding. 2018 saw good-to-outstanding wines made in all the regions of Bordeaux. Fabulous and not-too-fabulous wines were made everywhere. Our group thought that St-Julien was the best overall region, but that is a bit unfair, because St-Julien is a very small region with many top (not first growth) properties. Also, there was a bit less rain in the St-Julien region—so, less mildew. The vast Margaux region also had many successes, but then again, some failures. Ryan and Trey really liked the Right Bank and St-Estèphe. Let's just say there are a lot of exceptional wines throughout Bordeaux. While 2018 has high overall quality, the style of the wines spans from fresh and lively to powerful and opulent, driven primarily by harvest decisions. Both the limestone soils of St-Émilion and the deeper clay soils of Pomerol excelled, with both soil types holding ample moisture that helped the vines weather the hot, dry summer months. It's also worth noting that while all grape varieties excelled in 2018, mildew adversely affected the Merlot on the Right Bank and even on the Left Bank. This explains why some Right Bank blends are shifted more toward Cabernet Franc than

normal. The result is wines that show slightly more elegance and purity, with less overt Merlot richness and sexiness—and maybe a bit less alcohol. If you are not a fan of alcohol, 2018 may not be the vintage for you. Some Right Bank wines are 15 degrees and over.

Some brilliant wines were made throughout the Graves and Médoc regions, where the soils have more gravel than the Right Bank. As you go north in the Médoc, the soils become a little less gravelly and have more clay content, and they hold the water better. Incredible ripeness was achieved in the Médoc, with alcohol levels pushing 14.5% (or more for some estates). That is quite high for Cabernet-based wines. Some of the best wines, like the Latour stable, were just over 14 degrees, while Lafite managed to keep their wines under 14. On tasting the wines, we really did not think the

alcohols were that high because there was a sense of purity and elegance—probably due to the cooler nighttime temperatures.

In general, berry sizes were tiny and grape skins were ripe and thick. The resulting wines are inky colored, with tannin levels and polyphenols just about off the charts. In 2018, one of the main qualitative differences between the wines was the quality of the tannins, and gentle, cooler vinifications were touted by just about everyone. We found quite a few wines too tannic and/or too extracted. Remember—one of the results of mildew is dry tannins. You had to be gentle with your extraction this year. While some critics found most of the wines soft and sexy with elegant tannins, we thought that there was a plethora of wines with tannins evident



*Team Vintage 2018 at Château Angelus, left to right: Ryan Moses, Trey Beffa, Clyde Beffa Jr., Alex Schroeder, Ralph Sands.*



*Assessing the vintage at Joanne.*

covering the sweet, ripe fruit. Hence the title of this piece: “A velvet fist in an iron glove.” We really think most of the wines beg for some long cellaring. So, taking recent vintages into consideration, 2018 could be a combination of 25% 2010, 25% 2009, and 50% 2016—all very good vintages for sure. 2018 is not as tannic as 2010, and not as opulent as 2009 (my favorite vintage since 1989). It takes a little from both of these fabulous vintages and combines the vibrance, purity, and precision of 2016. Which of these vintages is better? It depends on your tastes. I would rank them with 2009 at the top, followed by 2010, 2018, and 2016, with 2015 just behind. Remember, I am an old 74, and I want to enjoy Bordeaux in the near future—2009 will be more approachable sooner than the other vintages listed. If you want to compare 2018 to older vintages, try 40% 1988 and 60% 1989—vintages that are drinking perfectly right now.

Quantity-wise, production was slightly below the average for the last ten years. Of course, some bio/organic properties had very low productions (some 9–12 hectoliters per hectare). Other properties

that were not affected by the mildew, or frost, or hail, made normal to above-normal productions. We found many properties with normal yields right next to places that lost 25%–75%. The economic effect on the properties that suffered low production numbers will start to be felt later this year or in early 2019, when the absence of revenue kicks in. Meanwhile, the increased cost of tending a damaged vineyard has to be met by current vintages. That’s agriculture for you.

### **Our Conclusion and the Marketplace**

It seems that I can cut and paste the conclusion and marketplace each year. It all depends on the prices! Here we have an excellent 2018 vintage with some classic wines—one of the best vintages in the past 18 years, for sure. We know the wines will not reach the stratospheric prices of 2009 or 2010, and that is a good thing. We kept telling everyone at the properties: “Be reasonable.” We meant for them to be in the range of the 2015 opening prices, and surely less than the 2016s. Up to now, as I write this on May 8, a few property owners have listened. Some properties that lost a lot of their production may not be so kind. Of course, our customers look at the final price when evaluating a wine, not how much the property produced. In general, the prices so far have been between 2015 and 2016 opening prices. With Vinexpo in mid-May this year, there will be a week-long break, and the big guns will open after the fair. The world economy was definitely a major discussion point during our trip. Seems like Asia may not be a big player this year—economy problems, even though it is an “8” vintage. The European economy is not great and the UK people are facing Brexit issues. So, everyone pointed to us and the US as being an important market for 2018 Bordeaux. Our economy is great, and people are spending—but will they buy 2018s? If the prices are correct, we could see another fine campaign like 2016—and much better than the disappointing 2017 campaign. We shall see!



*A clean, chandelier-lighted place: the vintage rests at Château Pape Clement in Pessac-Léognan.*



# Collectibles in 2018: Brilliance for the Cellar

By Ryan Moses



The best of 2018 in Bordeaux has the capacity to be truly special, rivaling some historic releases from properties that hit all the right marks. The first that comes to mind is **Lafite Rothschild (\$Inquire)**, a potential masterpiece that Saskia de Rothschild was quick to rank above their famed 2009.

It seems to be in the early running for the reference-point first growth of the vintage. **Pichon-Lalande (\$Inquire)** also mastered the vintage and produced a quintessential and soulful Grand Vin. North of Pauillac, there are many superlative wines that have an elite profile for the château and vintage. Among the successes in St-Julien, **Léoville-Barton (\$89.99)** and **Ducru-Beaucaillou (\$Inquire)** seem to have the brightest future. Ducru was one of the wines that had lots of buzz in the campaign, and we were thrilled to see it easily meet very lofty expectations.

In the long run, however, it might be hard to top this trio of flagship St-Estèphes: **Montrose (\$Inquire)** is layered, deep, and structured, with everything we've come to expect from the best of the Jean-Bernard Delmas era. **Cos d'Estournel (\$Inquire)** follows in the footsteps of the past few vintages, where a compact, bright, and refined style replaces the hedonistic style of the past decade. **Calon-Ségur (sold out)** rivals the pair, however, with a potential all-timer that marries the refinement of Cos and the depth of Montrose, but with their own unique signature. Unfortunately, the property released very little on first tranche and we sold out in one day.

Two of the most interesting wines from a collectible standpoint will be **Pontet-Canet (\$129.99)** and **Palmer (\$349.99)**—both of which suffered a diminished crop upwards of 70% due to a steadfast dedication to biodynamics, which prevented them from spraying synthetic chemicals to protect their vines from mildew conditions. Their perseverance is admirable, but the fact that two of the biggest names in Bordeaux will have very little to put in bottle will be a fascinating twist. Both wines, fortunately, were very intriguing in the end. Pontet-Canet is very exotic, polished, and full-throttle. Palmer, on the other hand, was classic, composed, concentrated, and complex. Both will be captivating to follow over time.

On the Right Bank, there were some very decadent and dense wines to be found, but many were able to harness that power and craft something tremendous. **Figeac (\$Inquire)**, which is on a nearly unrivaled hot streak in the past five vintage, made a great 2018 that is perfectly structured. The same can be said for the polished **Canon (sold out)**. The **2018 Vieux Château Certan (\$Inquire)** stole the show for us in Pomerol, taking advantage of the brilliant quality of the Cabernet Franc. Another wine worth mentioning is **La Gaffelière (\$69.99)**. It performed at a very high level, and floored us on two separate occasions. The wine is deep, focused, bright, and elegant.

It could be one of the great sleepers of the vintage. **Cheval Blanc (\$Inquire)** will also be one to keep an eye out for, as it has some serious high-end potential and will be in the conversation of their top vintage of the decade.

For sleepers of the vintage with some serious upside, **Domaine de Chevalier (\$79.99)** and **Rauzan-Ségla (this wine is sold out)** are in the early running. They both made wines that we adored and are receiving rave reviews. Watch these wines closely. Other wines that have a high ceiling for the vintage are **Canon la Gaffelière (\$89.99)** and a trio of St-Julien from **Branaire-Ducru (\$54.99)**, **Léoville-Poyferré (\$94.99)**, and **Beychevelle (\$89.99)**.



*Château Ducru-Beaucaillou owner Bruno Borie always makes sure there's more than wine on the table.*

## 2018 on the Right Bank: Variations on a Vibrant Vintage

**The Right Bank has such incredible diversity.** Combine that with ever-evolving styles of many properties, and it is sometimes hard to pin down what to expect. While some wines are rich and extracted, others strive for focus and grace. Neither is wrong, and in the end, it is the terroir that truly ends up doing the talking. 2018 is an interesting case study in this, as it ranges from the classic and ethereal (Canon) to the deep and hedonistic (Tour St-Christophe) to the refined and layered (Vieux Château Certan). There are even properties that were once champions of a certain style that have since done a complete one-eighty—Troplong Mondot's elegant 2018 is a night-and-day counterpoint to their dense 2010, while Figeac's turn from the esoteric to the cream of the crop in the past decade has been stunning.

All of this is to say that the 2018s run the gamut, but one constant is that quality is generally very high across the board. The biggest

Key: **\$Inquire** Price not yet released All wines in red, bold type (hyperlinked in the PDF version) in this Vintage Report are 2018 vintage with pre-arrival pricing. If no price is listed, we will only offer them as they arrive. **Prices quoted are as of May 25, 2019 and may change at any time.** M Merlot CS Cabernet Sauvignon CF Cabernet Franc PV Petit Verdot

challenge for most producers was making sure the early-ripening Merlot handled the heat. Luckily, the reserves from a wet spring helped sustain the vines through a long summer. Regardless of how vigneron tended their vineyards, berries were small and concentrated, a characteristic that went a long way toward shaping most wines. As for the other star of the show, most all producers were quick to talk about how brilliant their Cabernet Franc was. It was transparent in the wines too: while the Merlot in this warm year saw deeper fruit, some of the best wines borrowed a brightness from their Cabernet Franc holdings.

This was also a vintage where winemakers had all the time in the world to make the wine they wanted: the harvest was long, pristine, and the grapes came in incredibly clean. Ripeness wasn't a problem, and picking often happened over a long stretch, where each property could focus plot-by-plot and figure out what they wanted from the fruit. Another bit of good news is that yields were largely generous—a bit more so in St-Émilion than in Pomerol.

Overall, this is going to be a vintage in the Right Bank that isn't about cherry-picking the good wines, but more about finding wines that speak to your preferences and palate amidst a sea of high-quality options. Do you prefer purity and bright red fruits, or robust, structured wines with a darker fruit profile? Are you looking for something that's going to be ready to drink early, or something that's going to age well for many years? It's all there, but finding your sweet spot is going to be the challenge in this generous Right Bank vintage.

### St-Émilion

St-Émilion is one of the best places to find value in all of Bordeaux (and well beyond, as many would argue), and 2018 will undoubtedly have a bevy of options. Both **Tour St-Christophe (\$29.99)** and **Haut-Brisson (\$24.99)** made the most of the vintage and provided another thrilling set of wines from the Kwok stable. They both deliver the accessible, full-throttle profile that we've come to expect from them over the years, but there is tremendous depth as well. On the other hand, a beautifully elegant and refined bottling in their recent acquisition, **Bellevue (\$44.99)**, highlights the range one can find in the appellation, even from the same winemaking team. Also look for some under-the-radar sleepers from **Sansonnet (\$36.99)**, **Fonplégade (\$39.99)**, and Bellevue, three names that might be on the minds for savvy buyers after their superlative '16s. Each seems to provide another brilliant chapter in a successful end to the decade which saw them among the best buys in all of Bordeaux.

For the more collectible set, there are plenty of opportunities that span the spectrum. One of the wines that really stole the show for us was **La Gaffelière (\$69.99)**. They have been making some remarkable wines of late, but one significant change they've made in the past year has turned the tide—they've started to use only their hillside fruit for their Grand Vin. Why is this remarkable? Considering this is the plot that's adjacent to Ausone and with the same exposure, it attempts to emulate a \$1,000 cult collectible—and it delivers the goods in 2018. They also have a large proportion of Cabernet Franc, revealing a wine that is extraordinarily graceful and composed.

Another château that found refinement and poise in the vintage was **2018 Canon (sold out)**. They used a good portion of Cabernet Franc, resulting in a pure, red-fruited, and deeply complex rendition that echoes their massive successes from the past few vintages. Speaking of Cabernet, **Figeac (\$Inquire)** is one of the champions of both Franc and Sauvignon in the Right Bank, with 63% of the wine split between the two. They continued their meteoric rise with a deep, structured, and seemingly effortless Grand Vin in 2018. **Cheval Blanc (\$Inquire)** also features 40% Cabernet Franc in 2018, and the resulting wine has tons of stuffing, a luxurious texture, and a resounding finish. It will be one to follow closely.

### Pomerol

The elite of Pomerol didn't miss a beat in 2018, but the charm of the region is going to be some of the mid-level estates that outperformed their station. It's almost cheating to say that **Petrus (\$Inquire)** was good, but the real brilliance is in finding high-upside wines that will be reasonably priced. Two of the most exciting wines came from labels that folks are quick to write off. But they will demand attention in this vintage—**2018 La Pointe (\$44.99)** and **2018 Rouget (\$49.99)**. Tasted twice, La Pointe was able to home in a beautiful red fruit profile, balanced acidity, and fine tannins, resulting in a wine that speaks beautifully to Pomerol while being reasonably priced. Rouget, however, was the real eye-opener. Often an afterthought in the Pomerol landscape, it was brilliant both times we tasted it, with layered fruit, great persistence, and a long finish—on the richer side of things but well balanced. One could almost imagine enjoying a bottle now, even at this young age.

The highlights in the collectible, but still reasonably priced range, start with **2018 Clinet (\$94.99)**. Going from one strength to another, Clinet has crafted some masterpieces over the past few years, and their 2018 will be in that category. Rich, ripe, and generous, it is a wine that will be impossible to resist on release, but will have a long and bright future. **2018 Feytit-Clinet (\$Inquire)** is also an over-achiever, with a gorgeous texture, and a profile that is both vibrant and detailed. Le Gay continues a tremendous run that puts them back into the conversation of best-of-class Pomerol, a string that started a decade ago.

The standards of Pomerol did perform at a very high level in 2018. Our team was left speechless by a monumental **Vieux Château Certan (\$Inquire)**, a property that is quietly and humbly making wine-of-the-vintage-caliber bottlings seemingly every year. This year is no different—as Alexandre Thienpont called it, “a year for Cab Franc,” and the immense quality of the fruit was immediately apparent. The Moueix properties also put their stamp on the vintage with towering Pomerols from **Hosanna (\$189.99)** and **Trotanoy (\$Inquire)**, the latter of which was electrifying from the aromas to the mouthwatering finish.

# Tasting Notes: 2018 Right Bank and Pessac-Léognan

By Trey Beffa



## Right Bank: Castillon and Lalande de Pomerol, et al.

**Gigault “Cuvée Viva” Blaye Cotes De Bordeaux** Toasty, bright and fresh. Bit oaky but finishes long and spicy.

**d’Aiguilhe, Côtes de Castillon (\$24.99)** Hints of chalk, limestone, and red fruits. Lots of spice. Bit tight in the middle, with firm

tannins. Should develop well.

**La Dauphine, Fronsac** Lots of ripe fruit in the nose; very fresh and exotic; rich, round middle. Great value.

**Siaurac, Lalande de Pomerol** Aromatic nose, spicy and sweet; long finish; fruity, silky finish. Great buy! We will buy it on release and not sell pre-arrival.

**La Fleur de Boüard (\$Inquire)** Another solid effort from Coralie de Boüard. Plenty of blackberry flavors.



*Tasting at La Conseillante.*

## Pomerol

**Petrus (\$Inquire)** A solid core of ripe fruit with hints of minerals and graphite. This is a big, sturdy wine with a firm backbone and intense tannins. But the concentrated, ripe fruit balances this wine out. Wonderfully pure and focused, this will be a wine for the cellar. One of the top wines of the vintage—as usual!

**La Conseillante (\$Inquire)** A blend of 83% Merlot and 17% Cabernet Franc. Aromas of spicy red fruits and cocoa powder explode from the glass. This wine is fresh, lively, and elegant in the mouth. Tannins are firm but not hard.

**Vieux Château Certan (\$Inquire)** The fruit is so velvety and pure that it seems to glide across the palate like a ballerina.

**de Sales (\$29.99)** 69% Merlot, 16% Cabernet Franc, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. This is one of the better younger de Sales we have tasted. The wine is fresh and pure, with an elegant mid-palate and silky tannins that linger on the finish.

**Clos l’Eglise (\$89.99)** Lush mouthfeel, fleshy, deep, concentrated core of fruit, with a sweet middle. Tannins are big but ripe and long.

**Petit-Village (\$69.99)** Shows lots of finesse, balance, and purity. Silky texture and firm tannins on the finish.

**Feytit-Clinet (\$Inquire)** Solid core of fruit, sweet middle; shows elegance and finesse. Solid effort.

**La Pointe (\$44.99)** Cherry flavors, cola, spice. Nice texture and core of fruit.

**Le Bon Pasteur (\$74.99)** Nice balance, good fruit and structure.

**Gazin (\$89.99)** Wonderful sweet core of fruit. Lovely spice. Very pure and focused. Ripe, silky tannins.

**Bourgneuf (\$64.99)** Very pretty aromas of Asian spices; soft, silky middle fruit; ripe tannins; hints of mint and sweet herbs.

**Latour a Pomerol** Sweet upfront cherry cola flavors. Big tannins. Needs time to come together. 100% Merlot.

**Certan de May (\$Inquire)** Very aromatic and fresh. The fruit is open and very approachable. Tannins are ripe. Hints of cassis and plums.

**La Fleur-Petrus (\$Inquire)** Hints of smoke, minerals, and cassis. This wine shows lots of polish up front, and a firm, tannic backbone.

**Beauregard** This is ripe and plummy, with some oak evident. Blackberry jelly.

**La Cabanne (\$39.99)** A great value in Pomerol. This property is on a roll of late. Not nearly as rustic as in the early 2000s. The wine is toasty and sweet.

## St-Émilion

**Angélus (\$349.99)** The 2018 Angelus is a big, dense, and powerful wine underneath its upfront fruit and spice. The middle fruit is lush and velvety before tannins grab you on the finish. This is a cellar pick!



*An epic dinner begins at Château Angelus.*





*Andréane Gornard samples from the barrel the fabulous Château Canon 2018.*

**Carillon d'Angelus (\$109.99)** Hints of violets and licorice in the nose and mouth. Quite floral and pretty up front, with a fair amount of tannin and structure in the back. Should come together in time.

**Bellevue** Very dark, nearly black color; smoky, toasty aromas; sweet core of fruit. Salty, mouthwatering.

**Cheval Blanc (\$Inquire)** Another possible wine of the vintage! The core of fruit is intense, pure, sweet, and seamless. Amazing balance and finesse while still being quite powerful.

**Le Petit Cheval** 70% Merlot and 30% Cabernet Franc. A yield of 43 hectoliters per hectare here—normal crop. Great texture and mouthfeel. Long finish.

**Quinault l'Enclos (\$34.99)** Pretty nose; fresh, sweet and rich in the mouth; nearly jammy texture with ripe, silky tannins.

**Tour St-Christophe (\$29.99)** This will be a big winner for the money in 2018! Our biggest seller to date.

**Haut-Brisson (\$24.99)** This wine is made in a modern style but it is balanced and delicious. A sleeper!

**La Gaffelière (\$69.99)** Absolutely fabulous! A must buy!

**Figeac (\$Inquire)** A blend of 37% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, and 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, the Figeac is toasty and spicy in the nose. The mouth is delicate and pure and shows a lovely spice and freshness in the middle palate. One of the great wines in 2018.

**Canon La Gaffelière (\$89.99)** Pretty aromas and flavors of cranberry and red cherry. This wine is fresh and lively in the mouth. Tannins are firm yet integrated and ripe.

**Clos de L'Oratoire (\$42.99)** Big, dark and extracted, dark and chewy, with a big wallop of tannin that grabs you.

**La Mondotte (\$229.99)** Very extracted and dense. New wave. Shows chalk and mocha flavors; a modern style, and not hard on the finish; balanced and smooth.

**Canon (sold out)** Lovely fresh nose of red fruits, spice and toasty oak. Pure, sweet and elegant in the mouth. This wine is focused, precise and silky. Tannins are integrated and ripe.

**Barde-Haut (\$39.99)** Wonderful nose of crushed fruits and spice. Firm but fresh, and ripe tannins.

**Fombrauge (\$29.99)** Dark color with a sweet, rich core of fruit.

**Berliquet (\$49.99)** Upfront savory red fruits, fleshy middle, silky texture, and a finish of firm yet ripe tannins.

**Beau-Séjour Bécot (\$64.99)** Rich, cola fruit, lots of perfume, mocha, spice, firm tannins; long, well balanced.

**Beauséjour Duffau (\$Inquire)** Extracted spicy aromas, dark, plummy fruit; loaded with Asian spice, cola, and sweet mocha. Ripe tannins and long finish.

**Larcis-Ducasse (sold out)** Red fruit aromas. Elegant nose. Tons of fruit—very sweet on the palate. Sexy.

**Pavie Macquin (\$74.99)** Slightly woody in the nose, extracted and dense, very tannic at the back end but lush, jammy fruit mid-palate.

**Troplong Mondot (\$104.99)** Red cherry aromas, sweet strawberry, crunchy red cherry fruit and spice. Nice purity to the wine, good length and fresh. Excellent.

**Clos Fourtet (\$114.99)** Well balanced, fresh, red fruit-driven, lush and long, firm but ripe tannins. Good wine!

**Bellefont-Belcier (\$44.99)** Lots of perfume in the nose, toasty, spicy, and upfront. Silky and fleshy in the mouth.

**Couvent des Jacobins (\$34.99)** Toasty and fruity aromas; long and fresh; ripe tannins. Seems like an early drinker.

**Fonplégade (\$39.99)** Fruity nose, bit dusty, tons of mineral and limestone flavors in the mouth; silky texture.



*Behold, a possible wine of the vintage: the group heads into Château Cheval Blanc in St-Émilion.*

**Puy-Blanquet (\$24.99)** Dark fruits, black cherry, roasted coffee, and juicy texture. Tannins are integrated and ripe.

**Grand Mayne (\$44.99)** Lush, smooth, and elegant after being closed up on the nose.

**La Dominique (\$54.99)** Pretty, spicy fruit, elegant, with a sweet core of fruit. Velvety tannins, nice purity.

**Sansonnet (\$36.99)** Just ask Ryan Moses—better than the fine 2016.

**Côte De Baleau (\$24.99)** Very perfumed nose, lots of spice and red fruits, strawberry, raspberry coulis fruit. Sleeper!





*Véronique Sanders, managing director at Château Haut-Bailly, talks with Clyde and Ralph about their new wine labels.*

## Pessac-Léognan Reds

**Let's be clear: there are some fabulous wines from Pessac-Léognan in 2018!** Domaine de Chevalier, Haut-Bailly, and Smith Haut Lafitte are right up there with the top wines of the vintage. Other solid efforts include Latour-Martillac, Malartic-Lagravière, Le Pape, and Carmes de Haut-Brion. However, it was quite difficult for us to get a read on the commune as a whole. The wines were quite variable when we tasted them. It is possible that some just need more time to come together....Pessac-Léognan had the same mildew issues that all of Bordeaux had during the late spring and summer. They also had problems with frost and hail at certain properties. Perhaps the problem was due to the hot, dry summer, which put a bit more pressure on the vineyards, where it is always a degree or two warmer than the Médoc. Another contributing factor could be the gravelly soils, which tend not to hold water as well as the clay soils. Whatever the reasons, 2018 brought many challenges for both the vineyard crews and the winemakers. They surely had their work cut out for them in 2018.

**Haut-Brion (\$Inquire)** Red fruits and spice in the aroma. A bit tight, but very focused and balanced. This wine has a wonderful, seamless, and polished character.

**La Mission Haut-Brion (\$Inquire)** The 2018 La Mission Haut-Brion is a dense, somewhat closed wine currently. Tannins are big but not dry. This is a candidate for long cellar life!

**La Chapelle de La Mission** Very ripe red berry fruits. Sweet entry and long finish. Quite nice.

**Le Clarence de Haut-Brion** Blueberry aromas and boysenberry flavors. Some chocolate, cocoa on the nose. Tannic at back.

**Pape Clement (\$89.99)** Big, dense, dark, and rustic. This wine shows flavors of licorice, cassis, and spice. This is a cellar candidate.

**Latour-Martillac (\$39.99)** Aromatic and deep in the nose. This wine shows black fruits, with toasty and smoky hints. Flavors of mineral, menthol, and black cherry are followed by firm but integrated and ripe tannins. A bit chewy now but a solid wine!

**Domaine De Chevalier Rouge (\$79.99)** Pretty aromas; toasty, sweet core of fruit; round middle; spicy, long, and fresh. Silky fruit, ripe tannins. Well balanced. Shows finesse and elegance. Lovely!

**Smith Haut Lafitte (\$Inquire)** Sweet fruit up front; very tannic and masculine; compact and closed in the mouth, but still shows a fleshy mid-palate texture.

**Haut-Bailly (\$Inquire)** Fruit is ripe and fleshy, while the mouth is chewy and dense. Lots of power and structure here. Tannins are big but not dry.

**Haut-Bailly II** Sweet, silky fruit that glides across the palate This wine is round and soft in its texture and finishes fresh and bright. A new name for the old Parde de Haut-Bailly.

**Le Pape** The Le Pape shows a lovely nose with some floral hints and spicy red fruits. A bit tight in the middle at this young age, this wine should round out nicely.

**Malartic-Lagravière (\$49.99)** Very ripe and fruity up front but lots of structure and tannin. Masculine wine and one for the cellar.

**de Chantegrive Rouge, Graves (\$16.99)** Fine sweetness. Soft and elegant on the palate. Great value!

**Les Carmes Haut-Brion (sold out)** Nice nose. Pretty fruity. Long, elegant, and fresh. Very fine indeed.



*Trey Beffa listens as Jean-Jacques Bonnie, owner and director of Malartic-Lagravière, describes the importance of the estate's gravelly soils.*

**Lespault-Martillac (\$29.99)** Aromas of coffee and blackberry fruit. This wine shows a fleshy mouthfeel with hints of cola, mocha, and a silky, soft finish. Lots of character. Very solid wine!

**de Fieuzal (\$44.99)** Pomegranate aromas and red berry fruit flavors. Good mid-palate and fine finish.

**Clos Marsalette (\$24.99)** Earthy aromas and some mineral flavors. Sweet on palate. Value! No mildew problems here.

# Left Bank: A First Look at 2018 Margaux

By Alex Schroeder



**This April I took my first trip to Bordeaux with the K&L buying team.** After nearly a decade of looking at pictures of impressive châteaux on wine labels, I finally got to see them in person, and with the best buying team in the country guiding the way! Visiting the area, speaking with the owners as they laid out the red carpet for Clyde

Beffa, and tasting wines from a vintage that will surely be considered a classic has left me with the indelible confirmation that there is no doubt—Bordeaux is the best wine region in the world. And what vintage report is complete without an in-depth look at the wines from the famed commune of Margaux?

As readers have undoubtedly already read, the defining event in Bordeaux in 2018 was the havoc wreaked by mildew caused by rain in the middle of the growing season. This was especially the case in Margaux. From château to château there were wild variations in vineyard output, based on who decided to use conventional methods to control downy mildew versus those brave properties who chose to follow the ever-more-popular organic and biodynamic methods of control. Output was down across the appellation on average nearly 30%, and in some cases up to 90%. The good news is, if there was any fruit left after the onslaught of mildew, the warm, dry harvest period allowed growers the freedom to choose when to pick, with some waiting until early October. The result is a wide array of styles in the region, with most wines displaying plenty of ripeness, power, and concentration. The summer of 2018 was one of the warmest on record, so many of us expected the wines to lack in acidity, but this was not the case. Even though the average daily temperatures were high, the saving grace came at night when temperatures would drop down quite low, allowing fruit to retain charming levels of acidity and freshness. The combination of powerful, ripe, concentrated fruit with lifting acidity and freshness means that this vintage in Margaux has the strong potential to become a classic one, similar to 2016, 2010, 2009, 2005, or 2000.

I can think of no better overall embodiment of the vintage and its difficulties in Margaux than **Château Palmer (\$349.99)**, one of the leading proponents of biodynamic viticulture in the region. During *en primeur* week in April, CEO Thomas Duroux led our tasting team through a nearly empty barrel room to our tasting table, where he explained that the combination of rain and heat in July caused mildew that lowered production levels to 11 hectoliters per hectare, or about one fist-sized bunch per vine. The usual average is about 40 hectoliters per hectare. That being said, the wine was stunning. It was made from 53% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, and 7% Petit Verdot. It has a robust bouquet of spicy blackberries and black cherry, violets, and licorice, with the essence of jam on toast. The mid-palate is replete with rich fruit, while the tannins are integrated and smooth, retaining Palmer's signature elegance and femininity in

the face of all that power. The low production numbers and the high quality make this a wine to buy on futures, as it is sure to be a rare sight on retail shelves.

**Château Margaux (\$Inquire)** fared better, though it still produced a lower-than-average 31 hectoliters per hectare. The Grand Vin de Château Margaux was bold, powerful, and elegant. At its core, concentrated black fruits and cherry kirsch, licorice and gravely minerals, with robust mid-palate weight. The ripeness of the fruit allowed for a softer, gentler extraction; the tannins reflect this, already showing polish while adding great structure and grip.

We saw some great second wines on this trip, though perhaps none were as good as Château Margaux's **Pavillon Rouge (\$Inquire)**. The high quality of the estate's fruit allowed them to add 15% more of the overall harvest to the wine than last year. It has a beautiful, powerful

core of red fruits, gravely minerals, notes of licorice and spice. The tannins are fully ripe and elegantly extracted, with nice freshness and acidity on the finish.

**Château Rauzan-Sègla (sold out)** produced one of the top wines of the vintage in Margaux, in its classic style. Delicious, rich



Alex Schroeder at the gates of Château Margaux: "And he speaks perfect French!" according to Clyde Beffa.

blackberries, plums, graphite, smoke, and toast on the palate, with such a silky texture and mouthfeel. The finish is pure-fruited, long and steady. For value-seeking readers, there is hardly a wine more exciting than the **Marquis d'Alesme (\$44.99)**. It has beautiful dark cherry, bright red currant fruit, with herbs and hints of chocolate and vanilla bean. It has serious structure on the palate with grippy, plush tannins and a bright, lingering finish. Its sister wine **Labégorce (\$29.99)** offers a similar quality-to-price ratio. It has a powerful, concentrated bouquet of black cherry, blueberry, graphite and licorice. On the palate, the powerful fruit is immediately lifted by gentle acidity and delicious, ripe, mouthcoating tannins.

**Malescot-St-Exupéry (\$57.99)** is bold, ripe, and very appealing. It has spicy black fruit, licorice, and herbs on the bouquet, with a very round, silky texture from the plush tannins, ripe fruit on the palate, and nice, firm tannins on the long finish. This will age beautifully and is one of best values of the vintage. **d'Issan (\$64.99)** is a lovely wine reminiscent of its 2016 and 2005 vintages. It has a beautiful bouquet of briary blackberries, plums, mint, and licorice. On the palate it has supple, ripe tannins, and nice freshness.



**Brane-Cantenac (\$69.99)** was another favorite of our group. They produced a very elegant, sexy wine this year, with a sweet core of mocha and cola berry, silky tannins to carry the plush fruit, and overall seamless structure. This will go down as one of their greatest wines yet.

**Marquis de Terme (\$44.99)** was extremely elegant and expressive already. It had spicy purple fruit and perfume on the nose, plenty of plush fruit and polish, with nice toast and a long, fresh, sweet finish. Just delicious! La Tour de Mons was another surprisingly good value wine. Always a great value in terms of Margaux, it had sexy dark fruits with a touch of cocoa and licorice, great mid-palate weight, and elegant structuring tannins and acid.

Overall, despite the difficulties posed by the warm, humid summer weather conditions of 2018, the commune of Margaux fared quite well, and those readers who prefer its elegant wines would do well to buy deep and put them away—they show impressive aging potential and, though in some cases it may take some time, will undoubtedly show the expression, balance, and grace they are known for in the best of vintages.

### Margaux Tasting Notes by Trey Beffa

**Château Margaux (\$Inquire)** Many picked this wine as the wine of the vintage. The 2018 Margaux is big, dense, and concentrated. Tannins are big but integrated. 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot.

**Palmer (\$349.99)** There are only 6,000 cases of this gem. In the mouth, velvety, blackberry fruit coats the palate. This wine is densely concentrated and almost thick, but without being out of balance. It is fresh and focused despite its intense, layered, ripe fruit. Pretty amazing wine. Note: no Alter Ego was made this year.

**Malescot-St-Exupéry (\$57.99)** A big, ripe, broad Malescot, this wine shows notes of violets, black currants, and hints of chocolate. It has exotic fruit flavors, a spicy, rich, lush mouthfeel, with a long and seamless finish.

**d'Issan, Margaux (\$64.99)** Lots of mineral and graphite aromas, a dark purple color, and a solid yet ripe core of fruit. Hints of blackberry, mint, and licorice dance around the edges.

**Rauzan-Sègla (sold out)** One of the top Margaux wines of the vintage, this wine is very dark in color, with a concentrated and complex core of fruit and a seamless and pure mouthfeel. Lots of concentration and depth; ripe, mouthwatering tannins. Excellent!

**Marquis d'Alesme (\$44.99)** Lovely sweet middle fruit that is well balanced and elegant in the mouth. Hints of chocolate and vanilla bean, dark cherry fruit, with a fleshy middle texture and firm but integrated tannic finish.

**Labégorce (\$29.99)** Toasty and aromatic in the nose. Spicy, crunchy fruit. Quite ripe and fleshy in the mouth, but with lots of freshness and finesse.

**Brane-Cantenac (\$69.99)** Mocha and cola flavors, elegant and silky texture, long finish, polished and seamless, and silky!

**Cantenac Brown (\$56.99)** Rustic and firm, dark fruits, masculine wine—best to cellar this one.

**du Tertre (\$44.99)** Spicy red fruits up front with a lingering savory character. Pretty and spicy.

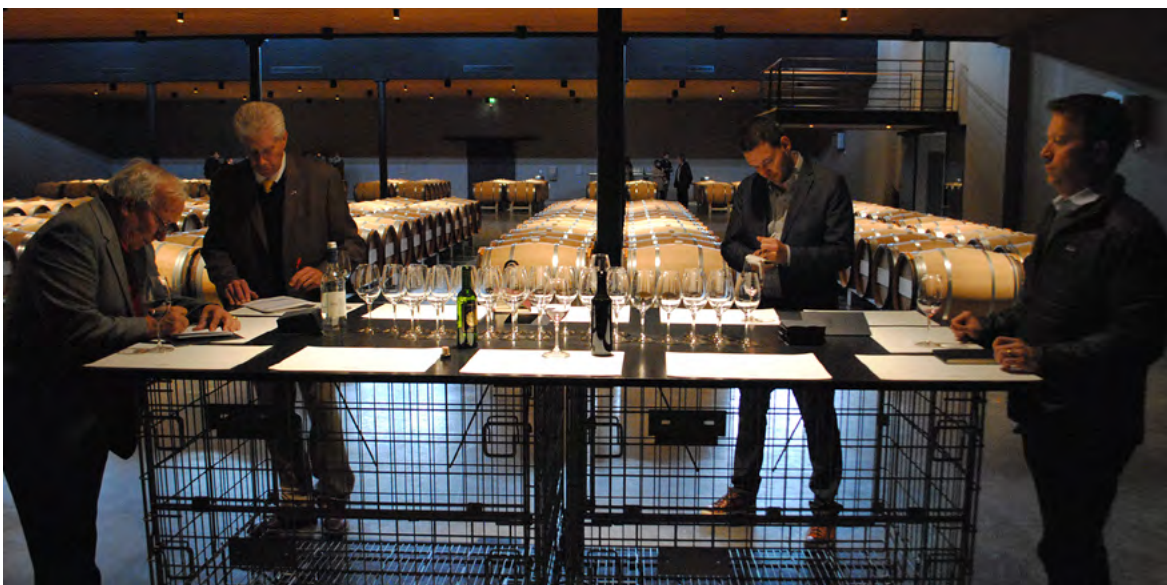
**Giscours (\$64.99)** Dark and chewy, lots of minerals, deep and concentrated. A bit closed now.

**Prieuré-Lichine (\$44.99)** Nice fruit, with cola, mocha, and coffee flavors. Round middle, ripe tannins, long finish. Very nice.

**Siran (\$29.99)** Red fruits in the nose; sweet, fleshy mouthfeel, long; bit of a cola flavor. Soft, well made, good effort. These guys are on a roll.

**Kirwan (\$44.99)** Toasty, perfumy nose; hints of cola and black cherry fruit; sweet middle, very elegant and long; ripe tannins. A smashing success for the vintage!

**Lascombes (\$74.99)** Black color. Big wine with tons of toasty oak aromas and flavors. Sweet and sexy on the palate.



*Team Vintage 2018 takes notes in the cool cellar at Château Palmer.*

# 2018 Bordeaux: Find Your Sweet Spot!

By Ralph Sands



**There is no question that 2018 is an exciting vintage shaped by extreme and difficult weather.** The wines are pure, powerful, and intensely focused, with high acid and firm tannins. The greatest, possibly legendary wines will take decades to blossom.

In my opinion, 2018 is in the style of 1975, 2000, and 2010. If you are a passionate collector or investor in Bordeaux wine, 2018 is a must-buy, but you will have to be patient. If you are young and considering starting a collection, you are in a great spot. 2018 will be a strong foundation, combined with the outstanding and powerful 2016 vintage (arriving this year). They will become the pillars of a great Bordeaux collection.

The fantastic 2015 vintage will provide the walls of this great collection, as it is a great-tasting vintage with ripe fruit and exquisite balance that guarantees a big drinking window. We are still offering over 100 selections from this delicious vintage, and I advise spreading out and buying a wide and deep cross section of the 2015s to enjoy while 2018 and 2016 develop.

Making wine in Bordeaux is not a piece of cake every year, as in many parts of the world. Mother Nature always makes it exciting, and every vintage is very different—this is the essence and the beauty of Bordeaux wine. The weather is the music in the delicate dance between ripeness of fruit, natural acidity, and tannin—and eventually the human touch.

In 2018 there are many great wines of power made in every region and I hope to live long enough to enjoy them all, but at 63 years of age I must be very picky. I must find the best-tasting wines with the highest levels of sweet, rich fruit that are in harmony with the acid and tannin, and will be drinkable in 15–20 years. In 2018 that sweet spot for me is the commune of St-Julien and the wines below.

**Gloria (\$41.99)** Could be the best value of the entire vintage! Good strong fruit, serious and tasty! This is a complete wine, tasted three times, and it performed each time. 2 stars!

**Beychevelle (\$89.99)** Super bright and fresh; elegant blueberry fruit; so clean and attractive. Lovely wine with great elegance, and will drink earlier than most. 2 stars!

**Léoville-Poyferré (\$94.99)** is composed of 64% CS, 30% Merlot, 3% CF, and 3% PV. This is a candidate for the best-tasting wine of the vintage at the top level. Big wine loaded with freshness and layers of silky, blood red fruit. The layers, along with the middle fruit texture and the rounded tannins, are the key here, leading to a very long aftertaste. Outstanding! 3 stars.

**Branaire-Ducru (\$54.99)** is an absolute beauty! Pure, plump red fruit with great freshness, elegance, and most importantly, a great-tasting and complete wine. This wine hits all the marks of greatness and is a “3 star” wine—one of the best wines of the vintage. It will drink a bit earlier and give more pleasure than most 2018s.

**Léoville-Las Cases (\$Inquire)** Pure, powerful red fruits of deep raspberry and cassis; perfect extraction, no hints of over-ripeness; and a touch of sweet middle flesh. Very strong wine with sparkling acidity and freshness—this wine will live a very long life! 2 stars.

**Langoa-Barton (\$49.99)** 63% Cabernet Sauvignon. Maybe the best Langoa I’ve ever tasted! The deep red fruit has great freshness, with some good flesh and well-rounded tannins. Tasted three times and attractive each time. 2 stars!

**Léoville-Barton (\$89.99)** 82% Cabernet Sauvignon. Very strong wine driven by great fruit that is deep and black-purple; racy acidity, and solid, masculine structure. A classic combination of power, complexity, and freshness! 2.5 stars.

**Ducru-Beaucaillou (\$Inquire)** For a wine composed of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% press wine, this wine has incredible lift and freshness. The silky, perfectly ripe, red-black fruit on the palate is so clean and precisely balanced, it’s amazing. A delicious-tasting wine for the ages. 3 stars!

Please feel free to contact me with any questions on the wines of Bordeaux.

*Cheers, Toujours Bordeaux and Go Giants!*



*Longtime Vintage Report readers will note that the windowsill at Château Léoville-Barton where K&L Bordeaux expert Ralph Sands takes notes—every year since 1990—appears to be sunnier than ever in 2019.*



# Left Bank: 2018 St-Julien, Médoc, Haut-Médoc, and Moulis

By Trey Beffa with Clyde Beffa Jr.

## St-Julien Tasting Notes by Trey

**Léoville-Las Cases (\$Inquire)** Very structured and firm. The tannins are balanced with layers of red and black fruits that nearly melt into your mouth. Big and dense, the 2018 Las Cases is a serious wine. One for the cellar!

**Clos du Marquis (\$54.99)** Smoky and toasty nose. Blackberry and black cherry fruit. Chewy tannins.

**Léoville-Barton (\$89.99)** Very dark color, very aromatic and intense, concentrated and complex; bit compact now, but this wine has a ton going on. Big and sturdy but with elegance and purity. Excellent. Could be one of the best wines of the vintage.



*The team marches on the Bartons—Léoville and Langoa.*

**Langoa-Barton (\$49.99)** Very pretty nose. This is aromatic, with red fruits. Toasty, elegant, and pure. Very fresh, long finish. Wonderful purity. Excellent wine!

**Léoville-Poyferré (\$94.99)** Big, dense wine, with dark fruits. Round middle, lots of power, but shows some elegance. Extracted and concentrated. Very good wine!

**Ducru-Beaucaillou (\$Inquire)** Very dark and concentrated; dense but juicy texture; lots of chocolate, red currants, and cocoa powder flavors. Underneath the fruit are hints of mineral and graphite. Overall very fresh and ripe, with lots of finesse. One of our favorites of the vintage!

**Croix de Beaucaillou (\$49.99)** This shows lots of sweet fruit, red fruits, and sweet, velvety tannins. Long and fresh. One of the best second wines of the vintage. Great value!

**Lalande-Borie (\$29.99)** Toasty, fresh, and plummy fruit is followed by a crisp yet balanced finish. Lots of ripe fruit. This should be a wine to enjoy upon release. A sleeper!

**Branaire-Ducru (\$54.99)** Red fruits, hints of cola and spice, long and sweet core of middle fruit; long, fleshy and silky. Excellent wine. Tastes great now.

**Gloria (\$41.99)** Espresso hints in the nose and mouth; juicy, expressive, nearly exotic fruit; elegant and long. Very sweet and fresh! Excellent wine! Their best since the mindblowing 1966?

**Lagrange (\$49.99)** Dark color, exotic fruits; oaky, harder edge; masculine fruit; firm. Solid wine.

**Saint-Pierre (\$59.99)** Dark color, extracted and deep; intense, masculine and firm, but with layers of chewy, ripe fruit. Hints of graphite and mineral.

**Talbot (\$59.99)** Exotic fruits; spice, cedar; very grippy tannins, firm but not dry. Masculine wine.

**Beychevelle (\$89.99)** Dark fruits; minerals, sweet herbs, bright fruits; hints of earth and savory fruits; lush, good. They are on a roll here. They have the boat and the “8” on the label.

**Moulin Riche (\$31.99)** One of the best Moulin Riches? Toasty nose; round, sweet middle fruit; hints of spice, vanilla, and espresso. Polished tannins. Integrated and balanced. Long finish. A sleeper!

## Clyde's Notes on Médoc, Haut-Médoc, Moulis

It is hard to rate a region like Médoc or Haut-Médoc, because these regions cover a vast area from north of St-Estèphe to south of Margaux and all around. Potensac and Sociando are very much north of the famous St-Estèphe region, while properties like Lanessan are just south of St-Julien, and Cantemerle is south of the Margaux region. Moulis and Listrac are somewhat confined regions west of the famous St-Julien and Margaux regions. There were good and not-so-good wines in 2018. The best of them, like Cantemerle and Potensac, are great values.

**Sociando-Mallet, Haut-Médoc (\$34.99)** Fresh, red fruits, cherry fruit, sweet middle—solid wine for the money. Good value. A special label here commemorating Jean Gautreau's 50th year of winemaking at the château!

**Cantemerle, Haut-Médoc (\$29.99)** Lots of raspberry fruit; spicy, fresh; wonderful elegance and balance. Long finish; pure. Excellent! Dambrine waves his magic wand again. Small production this year. Hail!

**La Tour Carnet, Haut-Médoc (\$Inquire)** Modern-style wine. Firm, with lots of toasty oak. Does it have enough fruit in the middle to carry through and keep balanced?

**Mauvesin Barton, Moulis (\$17.99)** Red fruits; spice; very fresh, yet savory; and crisp tannins. Lots of life! They lost their 2017 crop due to frost. They made a fabulous 2018.

**Poujeaux, Moulis (\$31.99)** Dark fruits, graphite and mineral; bit of a hard edge to it, but it should come around nicely.

**Potensac, Médoc (\$26.99)** Fruity and fresh, lots of berry fruit; spice, red cherry fruit; nice length and freshness. Very good! Probably the best-tasting Potensac from barrel—ever!

**Goulee, Haut-Médoc** I am not sure that this will be released pre-arrival, but it is delicious. So sweet with red berry aromas and flavors. Very spicy.

# Left Bank 2018: Focus on Pauillac

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

I was in the minority with our group when I declared that Pauillac was the most successful region in 2018. Most of the group said St-Julien was the best, and it was great, but St-Julien is a very small commune composed of mostly big-name, non-first growth properties. Pauillac, on the other hand, is a much larger region with many different properties ranging from the three first growths to small non-classified properties. Let it be said that some of the 2018 Pauillacs were as good as I have tasted in *any* vintage. Lafite was mindblowing and Duhart was the best ever for us. We were lucky to retaste Pichon-Lalande and Reserve Comtesse in early May and they were off the charts. It was by far the best Reserve Comtesse I ever tasted out of barrel. The Pichon-Lalande really reminded me of the great Pichons of the 1980s (1982, 1983, 1986, 1989).

## Pauillac Tasting Notes by Trey Beffa

**Lafite Rothschild (\$Inquire)** We all agree that this is one of the top wines of the vintage. A blend of 91% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8.5% Merlot and .5% Petit Verdot, the 2018 Lafite is a dark and inky wine that is dense, tightly wound, and powerful. It is loaded with cassis-like fruit that sits underneath its structure and tannins. This wine has it all and should be a great pick for long-term cellaring.

**Latour (Not offered on pre-arrival)** Intense and concentrated, the 2018 Château Latour is loaded with a ripe, juicy core of fruit. The middle is seamless and pure as it dances across the palate. Hints of espresso, graphite, black licorice, and mocha coat the mouth. One of the best of 2018, but you have to wait.

**Mouton Rothschild (\$Inquire)** On the nose the wine is ripe and upfront. The fruit in the mouth is velvety and sweet. Hints of mocha and espresso are followed by ripe, full tannins that linger on the finish.

**Duhart-Milon (\$79.99)** This is one of the most approachable Duhart-Milons we have tasted in a while. This wine shows flavors of tea, mocha, and tobacco, underneath a wonderfully fresh and ripe core of fruit. The texture is silky and the tannins are ripe and integrated. We are big fans of this wine!

**Carruades de Lafite (\$Inquire)** Dark purple color, dusty aromas, sweet middle core of fruit. Quite open and accessible.

**Clerc-Milon (\$89.99)** This wine was as good a Clerc as I have tasted from barrel. It shows some elegance with some pretty high-toned fruit and spice. Quite delicious, though a touch on the expensive side. They lost some production in 2018.

**d'Armailhac (\$51.99)** Lead pencil aromas, cola. Compact. Hints of graphite, slate, and minerals, with firm tannins.

**Les Forts de Latour (Not offered on pre-arrival)** Nearly exotic fruit with hints of red cherry, mocha, and coffee. This is a delicious wine that finishes surprisingly soft and mouthwatering. Should be a great drinking wine once released.

**Pichon-Lalande (\$Inquire)** One of our favorites from the vintage! Flavors of espresso bean, mocha, and coffee jump from the glass. The texture is pure velvet, with fruit that nears exotic. The tannins are big but remain silky and juicy on the finish. Great freshness and verve!

**Reserve de la Comtesse (\$Inquire)** Lots of perfume in the nose, toasty, soft and elegant in the mouth, with silky tannins. Shows poise and precision. Maybe the best second wine of the vintage! A must-buy.

**Pichon-Baron (\$Inquire)** Very tight and concentrated with an almost chewy texture, this wine shows flavors of black licorice combined with red cherry and berry fruit. Lots of tannin and structure. Another wine for the cellar.

**Pibran (\$39.99)** Ripe fruit up front with hints of licorice and black cherries. Tannins are firm. Solid effort.

**Les Tourelles de Pichon-Baron** The 2018 Les Tourelles shows lots of black fruits, anise, cedar hints, and mineral flavors.

**Pontet-Canet (\$129.99)** The 2018 Pontet-Canet is different than most all of the other Left Bank wines. The fruit is very ripe and nearly jammy. Flavors of red licorice and cola come across on the palate with a velvety and sweet texture. The finish is very long and is surprising silky. So rich on the palate! The big problem with this wine is the quantity, as production was next to nothing because of the mildew problems and *bio* practices.



Château Pontet-Canet in Pauillac.

## Lynch-Bages (\$129.99)

Dark inky color, aromatic nose, lots of graphite and mineral hints. A big, masculine Lynch-Bages. One for the cellar!

## Echo de Lynch-Bages

(\$41.99) Forward, spicy, and crisp. 62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc.

## Pedesclaux (\$44.99)

Loaded with perfume

aromas. Juicy fruit, black fruits, fresh and clean. Focused, ripe tannins. A sleeper for the vintage!

**Grand-Puy-Lacoste (\$79.99)** Pretty nose. Lots of toast, velvety texture. Lots of backbone and power in the back. One for the cellar!

**Grand-Puy-Ducasse (\$39.99)** Aromatic and toasty in the nose. The middle fruit is a bit closed right now, tight. Should round out over the next year or so.

**Lynch-Moussas (\$39.99)** Lots of coffee and mocha in the nose; toasty, cola fruit. Falls apart a bit on the finish, but pretty up front. Elegance epitomized.



# Left Bank 2018: Focus on St-Estèphe

By Trey Beffa

The wines from the commune of St-Estèphe were broadly considered a success in 2018. After tasting through them this past March, I believe that next to St-Julien, no other commune on the Left Bank shows more consistency in terms of quality than St-Estèphe. In general, many of the wines had a velvety sweetness in the middle palate that wines from other regions lacked. The fruits are ripe and the alcohol levels are quite high, with many getting close to the 15% level. Some of the value buys from the region will turn out to be delicious wines as well. This is where my money will go, as these are the wines I can buy a case of and enjoy in the first 10 years after release.

## St-Estèphe Tasting Notes

**Calon-Ségur** *Sold out.* Loaded with fleshy red fruits, espresso, and blackberries. Pure, fresh and vibrant, this wine coats the palate. The finish is long and tannins are firm but ripe and integrated. Quite high alcohol at 14.9%, but this wine still shows a ton of finesse and beauty!

**Montrose (\$Inquire)** Concentrated, minty aromas; dense and intense in the mouth. Always a masculine style, this wine is a classic Montrose. A good cellar candidate. A quite high 14.5% alcohol level.

**Cos d'Estournel (\$Inquire)** Very ripe and sweet, with briary fruit on the palate. Cola flavors. Lots of vanilla bean and espresso flavors, and shows some oak at this early stage. Velvety tannins. The finish is long and lingering.

**La Dame de Montrose** Aromatic and bright, red cherry fruit up front. Pretty and spicy.

**Pagodes de Cos** Spicy and minty aromas, almost Zinfandel-like aromas; very fruity and sweet up front, followed by dry, firm tannins.

**Marquis de Calon (\$29.99)** Forward fruity aromas; very ripe and fleshy in the mouth. Velvety texture and long, sweet tannins on the finish. Really a delicious wine. One of the best of the second wines in 2018.

**Phélan-Ségur (\$44.99)** Loaded with flavors of mocha and spice. Sweet core of middle fruit and ripe tannins. Another winner from the region. Fabulous!

**Ormes de Pez (\$31.99)** Spicy, toasty nose, silky texture, and intense cassis fruit. One of the best from Ormes de Pez that we have tasted, at this early stage.

**Cos Labory** Nice nose, cola fruit; very fleshy, sweet middle fruit, hints of vanilla; very tannic on the finish. Should be a good wine if tannins integrate and soften a bit.

**Lafon-Rochet (\$44.99)** Nice perfume on the nose. Sweet mid-palate and nice length—touch tannic at back.

**Meyney (\$31.99)** Big, dark, and chewy. Firm and masculine. Lots of tannin and oak right now. Ager.

**Haut-Marbuzet (\$44.99)** Quite exotic on the nose. Toasty oak. Sweet mid-palate.

## Values in St-Estèphe

**Capbern (\$24.99)** Lots of perfume on the nose. Toasty, crunchy red fruits. Long and elegant middle; firm, tannic backbone, but balanced. A sleeper!

**Le Crock (\$26.99)** Very aromatic and fresh, this is quite polished for Le Crock. Sweet middle fruit with velvety tannins. One of the better Le Cocks we have tasted from barrel. Sleeper!

**Tronquoy-Lalande** Dark purple color, extracted and ripe, but still has some freshness. Lots of chalk and mineral flavors. Probably will not be released as a pre-arrival.

**Lilian Ladouys (\$21.99)** This is very ripe and lush up front, but the fruit is kept in check with a sturdy structure and backbone. This wine should come together nicely and drink well upon release—just like their 1989!



*Tasting the great Calon-Ségur with Sophie Marc.*

# The Bordeaux White Wines and Sauternes of 2018

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

## White Wines

**Overall, the white wines from the vintage were decent.** The properties who focused on their Sauvignon Blanc in the blend seemed to do well. The lower acidity in the Sémillon caused many wines to seem a bit fat and lifeless. The top whites from 2018 are very fine wines that should be considered “early drinkers” and will be approachable upon release.

**Blanc de Lynch-Bages (\$43.99)** 60% Sauvignon Blanc. Clean and lively. A totally enjoyable wine right now. Try the 2017 when it comes in.

**Cos d’Estournel Blanc** 67% Sauvignon Blanc. Rich and dense fruit, lots of concentration with a juicy, soft texture. Some fig and flower notes on the palate.

**La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** A blend of 57.4% of Sauvignon Blanc and 46.6% Sémillon, this is lush and round in the mid-palate, with hints of coconut and toast. This wine should be enjoyed upon release. Very \$\$\$.

**Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan** Always one of the top whites from the vintage, and the 2018 is no exception. A blend of 80.6% Sauvignon Blanc and 19.4% Sémillon, which is the highest percentage of Sauvignon Blanc ever in the blend. The wine is lush and slightly sweet in the mouth, with a wonderfully fresh finish. Super \$\$\$.

**Pavillon Blanc (\$Inquire)** 100% Sauvignon Blanc as usual. Classic Pavillon Blanc. Rich, creamy, and toasty fruit aromas up front. Lots of verve and freshness. Lemony flavors. This is one of the better blancs from the vintage!

**Carbonnieux Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$29.99)** Showing notes of honey, this is creamy, with hints of vanilla, apricot, and pear. Some acid but a softer style. Very fine indeed.

**Latour-Martillac Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** Fresh and spicy. Nice freshness and acidity! 50% Sémillon and 50% Sauvignon Blanc.

**Malartic-Lagravière Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$54.99)** Honeysuckle, with rich coconut aromas and flavors. Fine acidity at the back end.

**Pape Clément Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** Big, broad, and a bit heavy, but very rich.

**Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** Probably one of the best whites of the vintage! This is rich and creamy up front with

layers of baked apples and coconut. There is acidity here, and the finish shows hints of lime and zesty acidity. The big problem is quantity. They got hit by a big hail storm. No malolactic fermentation.

**Domaine De Chevalier Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$99.99)** Very soft and creamy; lush and exotic fruits. Good acidity. The blend is 75% Sauvignon Blanc, 25% Sémillon.



*At Malartic-Lagravière, our last chateau visit of the 2019 trip, the long journey of the 2018 campaign begins.*

## Sauternes

**It was a difficult year for Sauternes producers.** The long, dry autumn was not ideal for the development of botrytis. The good news is that there is a wealth of great stickies from many vintages in the 21st Century. We will buy most of the ’18s after they are released in bottle.

**Suduiraut (375ml \$29.99; 750ml \$59.99)** 100% Sémillon. This wine still manages to show some freshness and lively acidity. A lighter-style Suduiraut that should be good for early drinking. Very clean and fresh.

**Doisy-Védrines (375ml \$17.99; 750ml \$34.99)** Nice perfumy nose that leads to a honey-infused palate. Quite rich for the vintage.

**Guiraud (\$Inquire)** Ten-minute hail storm here—maybe no 2018?

**Sigalas-Rabaud** Some botrytis; lively on the palate; fine acidity. Clean and long.

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