

# 2017 Bordeaux Vintage Report



## 2017 BORDEAUX VINTAGE REPORT FEATURES

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## The Fourth Time Is a Charm, or Wild 7's?

By Clyde Beffa Jr.



**More on the headline at the end of this article.** First, I report on what happened from the winter of 2016–17 through to the harvest to make this 2017 vintage unique or special. Again, I must thank Mr. Bordeaux, Bill Blatch, and his invaluable 2017 vintage report from which my report emanates.

What a difference a year makes, and what a great difference between tasting the 2016 vintage and tasting the 2017. First of all, knowing that we had cut the 2016 tasting trip too short, I extended this one an extra two days. That was a good thing even though the 2017 vintage may not match the great 2016 in quality. But I wrote in last year's report, "We had eight wonderful days of tasting under ideal conditions—in fact, it was quite warm at the end of our trip. All the days seemed to be 'fruit-days' instead of 'root-days.' The former days are the best wine tasting days, while the latter days are difficult tasting days. The 2016s tasted very good every day of our trip—so easy to taste, so fresh and aromatic, with soft, ripe tannins." Well, this year we tasted under mostly grey skies with quite a few rainy days—more root days than fruit days for sure. This year, 2018, has been the wettest year in Bordeaux going back to 1957, and it did not stop raining for us. The Bordelaise had constant rain from mid-December 2017 until the week after we left. Of course, after we left, the sun came out and warmed up the region. In the vineyards this year, there were very few buds pushing, let alone shoots: 2018 was behind in development compared to 2017. In fact, in the 2016 report I stated that the April weather was so nice and warm during the tasting week that it seemed very much like our

1991 tasting trip. That was a big frost vintage, as the warm early spring weather had advanced the growth of the vines so quickly, but on April 23, 1991 Bordeaux was frosted. Well, maybe I jinxed them, but there was a devastating frost on April 27 and April 28 of 2017 in Bordeaux, and many properties lost a big percentage of their crop. More about this important event later.

Our group left "luckily" on Friday, April 6 and returned on April 15. I should say *most* of our group left on April 6 and avoided the French airline strike by a day, and we also made our connection to Bordeaux on the seventh—one of only a few flights to go from Paris to a French city on that day. Trey Beffa, leaving from LA on the seventh, was not so lucky, and after two flight cancellations he decided to stay home. You've got to love "Air Chance." So our group was myself, Ralph Sands, Jeff Garneau, and Ryan Moses from the marketing department. For the first time in *many* years, we started on the Right Bank for two nights and then made it to the Left Bank the rest of the nights. A small but good group of K&L people was all we needed to see the ins and outs of the 2017s. So what happened during the growing season to make 2017 come out like it did? Let's go with Mr. Blatch through the months leading up to the harvest.

### Winter 2016–17

The feature of the winter was heat. In fact, from the 2016 harvest until November the Bordeaux region was under a high pressure system. As Blatch says, "Christmas was spent on the veranda, yet nobody seemed concerned about the old adage 'Noël au balcon, Pâques au tison.'" This

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would later adopt a seriously ominous ring, but for now the concern was not of frost danger, rather that the absence of a cold snap had prevented the vines from having a good rest following a very prolific 2016 crop. The coldest January in 30 years helped kill the bugs, but February and March were warm. Meanwhile, the all-important winter rainfall was almost totally absent in December and January, but luckily, under the influence of some big Atlantic storm systems, returned to just about normal in February and March.

By mid-March, such warmth and late winter rainfall made it abundantly clear that the year would get off to an extremely early start. The words around town were (in a mood of great optimism) 1990 and 2009, those two vintages that had so superbly benefitted from starting so early.



*A fair spring day in 2018, in St-Emilion.*

### Spring 2017 and the Budding

The very warm weather in the middle of March got the early budding started before the twentieth—with a vengeance. By the end of March there had been leaf-burst, and this was very early. Fear of frost now started to be the subject of conversation, and the mood quickly changed from rejoicing at the early start and its attendant quality potential to the dangers of frost and consequent possible vintage catastrophe. Bordeaux had gotten away with the earliness in 1990 and 2009, but could they get away with it again? As I stated at the beginning of this report, tasting the 2016s under the warm sun and clear skies, I mentioned to my colleagues and a few Bordeaux friends that it felt the same as in 1991! I should have kept quiet.

Some biodynamic growers thought that the impending combination of the moon being simultaneously new and at perigee on April 27 was a big concern for frost. With more warmth the shoots were out 30 centimeters by mid-April, with 5-6 fully formed leaves on each—even more in some areas. The arid ground from the almost non-existent April rainfall was not enough to stop them from growing. These were hitherto unseen conditions for the month of April. And it meant trouble.

### The Frost

There was a first wave of frost that hit on the early morning of April 20, the same night that savaged Champagne at  $-9^{\circ}\text{C}$ , Chablis at  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . In the Bordeaux region, such a dry frost was much less damaging, more like a classic spring frost, with a burning of some shoots situated in the low-lying areas. The Bordeaux and Saint-Emilion appellations are said to have lost just 10% at this time, far less than elsewhere in France. But on April 24–25, humid air and showers came up from Spain, covering Bordeaux in a swathe of moisture. Then, on the night of the twenty-sixth, just like on April 21, 1991, the wind suddenly dropped, and in the stillness of the early morning of April 27, the temperature went down to  $0^{\circ}$ , then in many areas progressively to  $-2^{\circ}$ ,  $-3^{\circ}$ ,  $-4^{\circ}$  and even  $-6^{\circ}$ . In some areas, the early morning sun wrought even more damage, burning the foliage through prisms of ice. The damage was immediate, and as if this was not enough, the following two nights of April 28–29 saw further negative temperatures, finishing off any shoots that were still struggling to survive. The bio guys had nailed it to the day!

When the sun came up, the vineyard was a horrific sight, the affected vines keeled over into a brown and ugly tortured shape, leaves and embryo bunches hanging down parched and withered. Some regions lost 50–80% of their vines, especially in the low-lying areas and the inland areas. The properties along the Gironde escaped again, just like 1991, with some of the properties not losing any vines. This 2017 frost though was more widespread than the 1991 frost. As Bill Blatch states: “From this moment on, Bordeaux was going to be running three separate vintages at once: the totally frosted one, the partially frosted one and the unaffected one.” The first ones lost almost everything because the counter, or secondary, buds were already out and got frosted. Such growers went from being players to mere spectators for the rest of the year. The second became the most difficult to manage, since these vineyards contained a mixture of unfrosted and regenerated shoots several weeks apart from each other, while the third continued uniformly on a normal and regular ripening cycle as though nothing had happened. Saved by the Gironde again. This frost was to be a big problem—but not the only problem of the 2017 Bordeaux vintage. Jack Frost struck and for many it was all over by April, while others, including most of Bordeaux’s top 250 wines, were spared and went on to make good wine.



*Vines just starting to bud out during our trip had better luck in 2018!*



## Summer

May and June were quite hot, and under such conditions the flowering was swift and efficient, but of course spread out over 3–4 weeks between the non-frosted bunches, which flowered early, and the frosted ones that had somehow regenerated from occasional counter buds or from rebel shoots that had sprung up all over the vine stump.

Hopes began to rise a little for those who still had some bunches left: if the few bunches that survived the frost and rain of the flowering in 1961 could go on to make a legendary wine, why not in 2017? Wishful thinking, for sure.

Welcome rains came at the end of June to give nourishment to the remaining vines with grapes. July had some heat bursts, but in general it was cool—and dry. The non-affected vines did well, the others not so well. Adding insult to injury, a hailstorm on July 27 over the southern Graves wiped out most of what was left in that unlucky region.

August slowed things down a bit by alternating between cool periods in the low 20s (Celsius) and very hot ones well into the 30s. In addition, enough moisture was still in the ground from rains at the end of June and didn't really need the topping up it received from the showers of August 7–9 and at the end of August. August was a relatively cool month and the rain really did not help.

## September–October and the Harvest

As usual, the early dry white Pessac-Léognans started first, harvesting in the extreme heat of August 28. A few were reported as early as August 23. Most carried on until around September 12 in much cooler conditions that ensured the health of the grapes and, in spite of the rain, they could be picked relatively leisurely, many in several “tries” in order to take account of the irregular ripening occasioned by

the frost. Everyone was pleased when the musts came in smelling vividly bright and varietal, with good acidities, plenty of backbone and with no excessive potential alcohol. In the end, this wet first half of September had been beneficial to the balance of these dry whites...and also, if everyone was honest, to their yields.

The first few days of September continued the warm, overcast, yet dry conditions. Then through the middle of September, the region received over 90 millimeters (3.5 inches) of rain. Of course, there were wide ranges of rain depending on location. Many of the estates



*A winding alley of St-Emilion.*



*Mostly Team Bordeaux 2017 at lunch in St-Emilion, left to right: Jeff Garneau, Ralph Sands, Clyde Beffa Jr. Not pictured: Ryan Moses.*

were in the middle of harvest, as this was an early vintage. Along with the April frosts and overcast summer, the September rains are one of the most critical factors in the vintage. Most of the Merlot was harvested during this period, with the later-ripening Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon having more time to recover. Numerous blends on the Right Bank are shifted toward Cabernet Franc due to this. The cool, cloudy August and September set the aromatic profile in the wines and the September rains added some dilution to some of the wines. Some fine properties were able to get this mid-palate richness, but many did not. The Merlots suffered because they were picked more to avoid the rot than to get the ideal ripeness. Some Merlots never achieved a perfect balance before getting to phenolic ripeness and such vats were generally demoted. But the majority, if picked at precisely the right moment, were impressive. Harvesting the frosted vines was a totally different matter, as each plot, each vine, each bunch presented grapes of widely divergent ripeness. It was a painstaking process for very meager results and usually all of it had to be set aside for rosé or even totally discarded.

Meanwhile the Cabernets were ripening fast and could start to be picked from September 22, unusually close to the Merlots, at first under sunny skies but then warmer and damper. The skins started weakening and this second half of the harvest became something of a race against time. These Cabernets were originally planned to go well into October, but with the return of the drizzle over the last two days of September and the first three days of October, some could wait, some couldn't...some did wait and some didn't. Many finished by September 29 while others went on until Friday, October 6 after the skins had firmed up again.

## Vinification

There were no general rules. Everyone had to adapt to each tank's special requirements. If there was a rule, it was gentleness of extraction not only because of the rather tough nature of the tannins but also in order to prioritize the extraordinary pure quality of the fruit which could easily become dwarfed by these tannins. If the harvest was perfectly sorted and the lots properly selected, a concentration of tannin equivalent to the 2014s could be easily achieved without

forcing anything. The 2014 vintage was the comparison that was most frequently drawn at this time. Later, after the vinifications, everyone noticed that the wines were in the end softer than the 2014s—more like 2012 or 2001.

### The Wines: 2017 Reds

Bill Blatch says: “The underlying gentle nature of the wines, not very high in alcohol, seems to want to prevail and to fill out the mid-palate, allowing the charming, lively and often complex red fruit tones to spread out during the ‘*élevage*.’ There is tremendous variation in the wines and it is not because of the region. There are very fine wines just next door to not-so-fine wines. In terms of absolute quality, there seems to be little difference this year between the top wines of the Left and Right Banks. Both have made some impressive wines, by dint on the Left Bank of the absence of frost close to the river, and on the Right Bank, of the frost’s elimination in the blends of the lesser, lower-lying vineyards that got frosted. We thought that perhaps St-Julien made the most consistent fine wines in 2017 reds. But that is somewhat unfair because the region is quite small and has many top classified growths in it. There were near-great and very-near-great wines from all regions.

### 2017 Dry Whites

These are extremely balanced wines, moderate in their alcoholic power and nicely tensile from the cold nights of the second half of August and from the cool days of the first half of September. Before the rot risk arose toward the end of September, and especially because of the thickness of the skins, the harvest could be performed in a much more relaxed manner than the reds. We loved the dry whites with their very perfumy aromas of tropical fruit, mango, pineapple and also citrus in the mix. They drink well right now. We will buy quite a few of these if the prices are correct.



*Tasting at Smith Haut Lafitte with our private sample.*

### 2017 Sauternes

Very generally, the cuvées will be composed of one-quarter to one-third very fresh-styled end-of-September pick and three-quarters to two-thirds of the much more concentrated October picks, rather like in 1998 but with much more density and a more racy balance, say, of a 2010. There is not going to be much of it to go round

but what there is will be really excellent, and yet again, as in 2013 and 2014, by far the best part of the Bordeaux vintage, very concentrated and sweet but also beautifully lively and fine. That is what we all



*Walking to taste at Smith Haut Lafitte.*

need—another great stickies vintage: ’13, ’14, ’15 and now ’17. As Bill says: “We spare a thought for those who had too few grapes left either from the April frost or from the September ‘aigre’ to take advantage of these fabulous and unexpected October conditions. But, again, as we all know, a Sauternais never surrenders.”

Latest estimates have confirmed finally, a decrease in production from 2016 of 40% for the reds and 50% for the whites, representing a total loss of 1.6 billion euros. This is virtually pure loss for the growers, as even with insurance, they only get compensation for a small percentage of the basic generic price. The economic effect will start to be felt sorely 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.

### Our Conclusion and the Marketplace

After easy tastings of the fruity 2015s and the vibrant 2016s, we found the 2017s a bit harder to taste. Yes, the weather was not great and that was a problem. Plus, no single region had all standout or all weak wines. There were fine wines next door to less-fine wines. We did find great pleasure in tasting the dry white wines and to a somewhat lesser extent the Sauternes, but the reds presented problems. And what vintages did 2017 remind us of? Definitely *not* 2000, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2015 or 2016. Maybe a combination of the 2001 and 2012 vintages with some 1999 thrown in. Good vintages for sure, but not great. Yes, there are a handful of great wines, which we will talk about in this report, but in general they are mostly fine wines and less-fine wines. We liked many Right Bank wines and most of the St-Julien with some Pauillacs and St-Estèphe wines. There were some outstanding Pessac-Léognan wines as well as Margaux wines.

It all comes down to price, and my headline for this introduction and weather report. The prices were not correct for 1987 or 1997 or 2007 Bordeaux wines. Each of these “7” vintages followed two very good



or excellent vintages. The opening prices were too high to support the quality of the vintage. We call it the curse of the “7’s” or the wild prices of the 7’s. But if the property owners lower their prices enough, there will be a lot of great bargains from 2017. The 2017 vintage is far better than 1987, 1997 or 2007. All we need is a good price point to sell them. They must be less than the 2014s, ’15s or ’16s. If so, we will have a good campaign. We can only hope!

### Postscript

As of May 23, there have been some more ’17s that have released their prices. Some properties released at same as their 2016 price—that is not helpful for the campaign. Most have lowered their prices 10–15% and those we will follow in this campaign. A few properties really did well, with decreases of over 15%—up to 25% on a few. Bravo for those properties, and we really liked some of these wines. I really

recommend the **Lynch-Bages (\$104.99)** which I put in my top ten of the vintage (not counting first growths). I also love the **Malescot-St-Exupéry (\$52.99)** for its purity of fruit. Do not miss the **Clinet, Pomerol (\$79.99)** which is almost \$100 less than the 2015 and \$30 less than the 2016. And finally, the exceptional **Beau-Séjour Bécot, St-Emilion (\$59.99)** which I think is better than their 2015 or 2016.



*K&L's Clyde Beffa Jr. assessing the 2017 vintage with confidence, realism, born of experience: watch those 7's!*

## Left Bank First Growths and Some Top Wines to Note from Pauillac

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

**Margaux, Margaux (\$Inquire)** They lost only 10% from frost, etc. 89% CS and only 13% alcohol. Red roses and violets on the nose and red currant flavors. Some earthy flavors; elegant wine to enjoy young. Some say it is similar to 1996 Margaux.

**Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** Intriguing nose of allspice and savory undertones. Lots of mineral on the nose and palate. Medium weight with lots of spices as the wine warms up. Red currant flavors and nice balance; tons of spice at back end, too.

**Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** Boysenberry aromas mixed with minerals. Red fruit on the palate. Velvety on the palate with no hard edges—not expansive but nicely structured.

**Lafite Rothschild, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** A fabulous first growth with a regal and elegant nose. Very precise and focused, 96% CS, and it is all Cab on the palate with red fruits abounding and rose undertones. Long and lingering, medium weight and on the elegant side.



*Not for nothing do they call it Latour: the “tour” at Latour.*

### Look But Don't Touch—For Your Information

**Les Forts de Latour, Pauillac (NA)** 65% CS and 33% M with 2% other. Substantial wine with fine palate entry and long finish. But you can't buy it on pre-arrival.

**Latour, Pauillac (NA)** One of the better wines of the vintage, no doubt. Seems like the fine 2001. Red berry and red currant flavors. Still holding back—but do not worry, it is not for sale as pre-arrival.

### A Few Notable Pauillacs

**Pontet-Canet, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** 64% CS and CF. Not a monster like 2010 nor as voluptuous as their 2009. Quite lush and sweet on the palate and finish. Forward tannins.

**Reserve de la Comtesse, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** One of the better second wines we tasted in the northern Médoc. 60% CS and 36% M. Great year for Petit Verdot and 4% in this wine. Very fruity and aromatic nose, great texture on the palate, and fine length—could be a fine value!

**Pichon-Lalande, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** 7% loss here. 70% CS. Spicy, cedary aromas and flavors. Good weight on the palate. Lovely, spicy, lush wine—like they made in the 80s. I love this wine—they are doing great at Pichon-Lalande these days.

**Pichon-Baron, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** 79% CS, 21% M. Normal crop this year, no frost damage. Sweet, toasty oak aromas with cassis undertones. Red fruits dominate the palate. Lingering finish.

Key: \$Inquire Price not yet released RP Robert Parker's Wine Advocate WS Wine Spectator JS James Suckling WE Wine Enthusiast VN Antonio Galloni's Vinous DC Decanter M Merlot CS Cabernet Sauvignon CF Cabernet Franc PV Petit Verdot. All wines in red, bold type (hyperlinked in the PDF version) in this Vintage Report are 2017 vintage with pre-arrival pricing. If no price is listed, we will only offer them as they arrive. Prices quoted are as of June 1, 2018 and may change at any time.

# 2017: Frosty and Cold, Great for the Whites!

By Ralph Sands



**Does the “curse of the 7’s” continue or will the Bordeaux château owners lower their prices enough to have a great campaign?** In other words, will they reduce them enough to make this fine vintage a value vintage, or will they continue the less-than-fine tradition of overpricing their wines like they did for the 1987, 1997 and 2007 vintages?

Only a handful of wines have opened at this writing, and prices have come down. But is it enough?

We started our evaluation of the 2017s on the Right Bank this year on Saturday, April 7, and were immediately exposed to the very best wines of 2017. We knew going in that frost had been a serious factor in some areas, but as you read in Clyde’s report, it was only one of the elements that estates had to manage in this very difficult, cool weather vintage.

To no one’s surprise, **Pétrus (\$Inquire)** made the wine of the vintage, featuring strong fruit with perfect ripeness, lush, silky middle fruit texture and a finish that makes the wine totally irresistible and a great wine in any vintage. But that being said, the neighbors’ wines give Pétrus a serious run, especially when considering price.

**Angélus (\$Inquire)** was not far behind in terms delicious, sweet fruit with seamless balance and fine tannin integration. **Pavie (\$Inquire)** made a great wine that featured intense dark fruit, power and structure all in perfect focus, ensuring a long life in the cellar. It is interesting to note that both Angélus and Pavie are harvesting a bit earlier and using less new oak. **Clos Fourtet (\$Inquire)** made a delicious wine that has layers of racy, dark, exotic and sweet ripe fruit with flavors of black cherry and cassis with beautiful texture. The epitome of freshness, elegance, purity of fruit and delicious taste was on display next door at Vieux Château Certan. **Figeac (\$Inquire)** produced a classic wine with linear, spicy black fruit and superb balance while losing 55% of the crop to frost. The allocations for these wines are always very small, so unfortunately the fine quality, combined with lower production from the frost, will make them even more difficult to procure.

But do not worry, we tasted many other delicious Right Bank wines the will be more affordable: the likes of La Gaffelière, Canon-La-Gaffelière, Barde-Haut, Clos Eglise, Larcis-Ducasse, Pavie-Macquin, Clos Fourtet, Bon Pasteur, Gazin, Troplong Mondot, Canon, Clinet, Tour St-Christophe, Haut-Brisson, Beau-Séjour Bécot, Beauséjour and Rouget. The few hours we spend tasting these very special wines are truly some of the most enjoyable hours of my life every year, and especially so this year for the 2017 vintage!

On Monday, April 9, we were pretty excited to transfer to the Left Bank and attend the UGC Tasting at Hangar 14 held along the banks of the Garonne—it is supposed to be a silent tasting and everyone is supposed to be there. Well, for some it was really silent because the people had left the building and only empty bottles remained. My

excitement was also dimmed by looks on the faces of the people that were there pouring. They looked worn out, completely uninterested and bored, with some pouring others’ wines and having relaxing conversations with other proprietors. It was clear to me that these people knew darn well that this vintage did not measure up to either 2015 or 2016.

As we tasted the Left Bank at the estates and UGC tastings, we indeed tasted some nice wines from north to south, and most of the wines were consistent style-wise, for better or worse. The wines showed no flaws and no greenness, are laced with elegant, cool, racy and fresh red fruits, and this is all good. But some wines lack any attractive ripeness to grab onto, are devoid of any opulence, middle fruit, texture or flesh, and lack finish and length.

Following 2015 and 2016, the best-tasting wines of 2017 were easy to identify, and below are my winners in the context of this vintage, but do not approach the quality of 2015 and 2016. Those estates are the usual suspects near the river. Château Montrose, Calon, Cos, Lynch-Bages, Pontet-Canet, Mouton, Lafite, Latour, the Pichons and the Léovilles, the Ducrus, Palmer, Maletscot, Issan, Rauzan, Smith Haut Lafitte, Haut-Bailly, Domaine de Chevalier, Malartic-Lagravière and Latour-Martillac.

So the big question is, where does 2017 fit in the world pecking order? The answer is down the road: unless there are drastic price reductions of 30% or so, which seem unlikely, 2017 will take its place alongside 1997, which we sold nicely 10 years after the vintage, and 2007 in the same scenario—which we are still selling today.

We have done the work and know the wines, so when quality meets price and drinkability, 2017

will have its time in the marketplace and hopefully, eventually show the charming fruit of those vintages. Until then, the 2017 vintage will have to wait for the 2011 vintage to have its time, and that time is approaching quickly.

*Cheers, Toujours Bordeaux and Go Giants!*



*Seen diligently writing his vintage notes at this windowsill at Château Léoville-Barton since 1990, K&L Bordeaux expert Ralph Sands takes one more sip of the 2017—just to be sure.*



# Clyde's Top Picks for Value and Great Buys of the 2017 Vintage

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

## Top Six Picks Under \$35

**Goulée de Cos Estournel, Haut-Médoc** I think this is the best they have ever made here. 40% less than normal crop. Impressive blackberry and oak aromas. 72% Merlot. Very spicy and lively on the palate—delicious wine. Should be a great value.

**Capbern, St-Estèphe (750ml \$22.99; 1.5L \$45.99)** Four great value years in a row here. 55% CS, 39% M, 3% PV and CF. Very spicy aromas and red berry flavors. Actually quite elegant for St Estèphe; lively entry. They always make great value wines—at least since 2009.

**Tour St-Christophe, St-Emilion (750ml \$27.99; 1.5L \$59.99)**

Third year in a row that this makes my top values of the vintage list. Another Peter Kwok wine and our biggest-selling 2015 and 2016 in terms of bottles. There is 40% less wine than normal, as the berries were quite small. Very perfumy aromas with undertones of sweet oak. This will need a few years in the cellar. Another great value from this top property.

**Labégorce, Margaux (750ml \$28.99; 1.5L \$59.99)** The 2016 was one of the best, if not the best, under-\$30 Bordeaux. This 2017 follows closely behind it and is priced reasonably. 30% lower production than normal. 61% Cabernet is the backbone here. Intense red berry aromas that follow to the palate. The wine is soft and elegant—very feminine style and I love it. A great value 2017 for sure.

**Tronquoy-Lalande, St-Estèphe** This property is really knocking it out of the park of late. Maybe because of the addition of a fine plot of Phelan-Segur they acquired in 2010. Perfumy aromas of black cherry and toasty oak. Black licorice, black fruit flavors conceal the latent tannins. Round and subtle, with a lingering finish.

**Daugay, St-Emilion** A small parcel just below Château Angélu owned by the Angélu people. This knocked us out—we had never tasted this property. 75% Merlot. Very sweet mid-palate and lingering toasty, fruity finish. A bit modern, but lovely. Hopefully this will be released on pre-arrival.

## Some Great Buys Under \$60

The price is still pending on some of these:

**Beau-Séjour Bécot, St-Emilion (\$59.99)** One of their best ever? I like this more than their 2015 and 2016. I do not know what they did, but it worked. Blackberry aromas and flavors. Elegant and forward. Not overdone—one of Ralph's faves.

**La Gaffelière, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** So lush and lovely. It frosted on their lower vineyards and so only their hillside grapes were used in the blend! Precise and focused wine. Reminds me of the 1953 and 1962 that I recently drank!

**Bellevue, St-Emilion** This new property of Hubert de Boüard is getting better each year. So rich on the palate—this 100% Merlot sings blackberry pie. Elegant, yet very cellar-worthy.

**Phélan-Ségur, St-Estèphe (\$42.99)** Spicy, oaky, powerful red. Finely balanced with some tannin hiding the fruit right now. The Gardinier family sold the property, but Véronique Dausse still runs the show and has made a fine 2017.

**Pedesclaux, Pauillac (\$41.99)** Back on top since the 2009 vintage, this is a very well-priced classified Pauillac. Quite rich on the palate. Bright and lively red with plenty of substance for the cellar.

**Grand-Puy-Lacoste, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** This could sneak into the great value under \$70 range? Nice perfume, very sweet and ripe on the palate. Lush and lovely.

**d'Armailhac, Pauillac (\$45.99)** I much prefer this wine to the Clerc Milon. This has elegance and finesse on the palate. Red berry fruits abound. Superb mid-palate texture and smooth finish. Very nice.

**Prieuré-Lichine, Margaux (\$39.99)** A lot of wine for under \$40. Red berry flavors. Lingering finish. Some tannin hiding the fruit.

**du Tertre, Margaux (\$41.99)** Lots of Cabernet Franc in this blend. Quite lush up front and some unresolved tannins on the back—will blossom to a fine value. They were hurt greatly by the frost.



# Right Bank 2017: Uncovering the Gems

By Ryan Moses



Following the trend of the vintage at large, the Right Bank had its challenges, with many in St-Emilion losing a significant portion of their crop to early frosts, while others were challenged by heat spikes and rains. That said, those that were able to navigate these challenges made some brilliant wines both at the affordable and collectible sides of the spectrum.

We led our trip with a brilliant value from **Tour-St-Christophe, St-Emilion (\$27.99)**. The 2017 was incredibly accessible, impressively integrated, and full of juicy black and red fruit. Done in a slightly modern style but never over the top, it will certainly be hard to beat for the price (as usual!). Instead of tasting at the property, we actually were able to taste at their recently acquired Bellefont-Belcier. Although the 2017 doesn't have their signature on it, keep an eye on it over the next few years, as they've had the Midas touch in Right Bank Bordeaux over the years.

One of the dark horse surprises for our entire team was **La Gaffelière, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)**. Not one we usually look to first, it was a reference-point wine this year. Deep, complex and bold, with waves of fruit, beautiful acidity and a mid-palate concentration that others missed in the vintage. **Valandraud, St-Emilion (\$149.99)** keeps the streak going—one of those properties that has a modern edge to their wines but has found balance in the past few years. The wine is big but not overdone, with a velvety texture and beautiful aromatics.

Two other wines worth noting are memorable for their terroir: the hillside limestone of **Pavie Macquin, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** and Pavie Decesse showed beautifully for each property. The former was a standout for its beautiful, pure red fruit, balance and persistence. The latter was a surprise at Pavie that had us talking for the rest of the week. Both are worth following, but there was a must-have nature to Pavie Macquin in this vintage.



Château Canon, St-Emilion: A favorite in 2017.

The Moueix stable had some standouts as well. While Trotanoy usually steals the show, Belair-Monange was the stunner. The property has taken incredible leaps in the past decade and it is hard not to love the polished, pure and hugely promising 2017. Around the corner is **Pavie, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** who made one of the most demanding and dense '17s. It is a wine that will take a few years to unwind—something unique as many others in the vintage made more accessible and forward styles.

On the Pomerol side of the coin, it was a similar story—there were some disappointing wines and towering successes. Some saw a bit of frost loss, but less than in St-Emilion. Some of the wines showed a shadow of their 2015–2016 selves, but there were a few who rose to the challenge. As always, it was a small sample size, but it seemed to be top-heavy for 2017.

Perhaps it is rote to say **Pétrus, Pomerol (\$Inquire)** was brilliant... but it was. The same can be said for Vieux Château Certan, but as it is in a price range for more collectors, it is worth noting their dense, explosive and poised rendition this year. With dusty tannin and a structured profile, it is another notch in the belt for one of the true treasures of Pomerol.



Yes, the Petrus was stunning.

## 2017 Favorites from Ryan Moses: Right Bank

**Canon, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** This wine will live in the shadows of an epic 2015 and 2016, but it has potential all the same to turn into something very rewarding in time. A bit reticent at this early stage, it still showed great refinement, with a seamless texture, bright red fruit and a good persistence. While some St-Emilions used wood to mask anything missing, there is good purity and transparency in 2017 Canon. Less dense than its predecessors, it should be accessible relatively early and drink for the following decade without issue.

**Figeac, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** Figeac is on a qualitative roll that puts it among the finest in Bordeaux in any given modern vintage, and 2017 is no different. Production will be down about half, one of the most significant numbers we heard from any major property. There is an incredible purity here that is supported by bright and resounding blue and black fruit, terrific texture and vibrant detail. One of the most dynamic and complex wines of the vintage, it will be one to grab early on and follow for 10–20 years.



**Larcis Ducasse, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** Slightly dialed back from previous years, there is still great character and depth at Larcis Ducasse in 2017. Impressive aromatics are highlighted with deep red fruit, nutmeg and blood orange. On the palate there is a core of red fruit, a savory note and a cool elegance that carries it deftly. Focused, persistent, with easy fine-grained tannin, it is very accessible already and will charm collectors for a decade after release with ease. Drink 2022–2032.

**Pavie, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** This is one of the more dense, brooding wines of 2017. The reticent nose leads to dark red fruit, cocoa, forest floor and French oak on the palate. There is good acid buried under it to support everything. It seemed to demand time and patience like few others in the entire tasting. The pedigree and class is there in the depth, texture and intensity; if it resolves it will be one of the great wines of the vintage, but only time will tell. Drink 2027–2040.

### Where to Look in Pessac-Léognan: Top Reds and Whites

There is good and bad news from Pessac-Léognan this year. While some folks called it a “white wine vintage,” it seemed instead to be one where both white and reds saw highs and lows. Where the reds had concentration and ripe fruit on the mid-palate, they were terrific. Where the whites found a focused acidity for vibrancy and length, they were resplendent. Some of the elite properties had us scratching our heads—many lacked the concentration and depth that has defined them over the past few vintages. That said, one of the truly great parts about the vintage was that some of the potential successes were truly dynamic and will most likely be affordable for a time to come.

Take for example the wines of Latour-Martillac. The white wine, **Latour-Martillac Blanc (\$36.99)**, is filled with beautiful acidity, deftly balanced weight and notes of Key lime and kiwi. It is textured, bright, pure and slightly tropical. Basically, one of those wines that leads you to believe it was a brilliant white wine vintage. Instead, it showed more particularly about how successful Latour-Martillac was in the vintage. That was highlighted with the red, **Latour-Martillac Rouge (\$34.99)**, which also was an impressive young wine with a signature gravely tannin underneath juicy, mouthfilling fruit. Certainly two wines to keep an eye out for.

Smith Haut Lafitte found the same success—again for the red and white. **Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge (\$Inquire)** tilted to the modern side with some French oak lifting the mouthcoating blue and black fruit. It also had nuanced aromatics, a terrific texture and depth that will unfurl beautifully over the years. Very few wines of the vintage found this kind of richness. **Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc (\$Inquire)** was also fresh, showed great delineation, and while never heavy, it had that extra texture and dimension that makes Bordeaux blanc special.

The other two charmers of the vintage have a good portion of Cab Franc in them: Larrivet Haut-Brion has 23%, and **Les Carmes Haut-Brion (\$Inquire)** has 41%. They both showed a sense of refinement and accessibility, pure red fruit, and soft integrated tannins. Perhaps Carmes Haut-Brion gets an edge in 2017, but both will be wines to look for on release and beyond.



*The vintage rests in the barrel room at Château Pavie.*

### Two Faves from Ryan Moses: In Depth

**Domaine de Chevalier Rouge, Pessac-Léognan (\$59.99)** With the signature textural refinement of the estate, 2017 Domaine de Chevalier shows a real charming profile in the vintage. Juicy, round and showing impressive depth for the vintage, it has notes of milk chocolate, round red fruit, good detail and well-integrated tannin. Not a blockbuster, but the go-to quality that you’d expect from DDC over these past years. Drink 2021–2031.

**Les Carmes Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** Pessac 2017s that had a good chunk of Cab Franc tended to shine in early tastings where others struggled—such was the case for Carmes Haut-Brion (41% this vintage). The aroma is pure cassis while the palate is clean, elegant and packed with red fruit (strawberry, cherry), tobacco and very fine tannins. One of those under-the-radar properties that took a big turn for the better in 2014, the 2017 caps off a string of four very fine vintages for Carmes. Drink 2021–2032.

### Margaux: Some Brilliance Shines Through

Margaux didn’t escape the frost in 2017, whereas many of their neighbors to the north were spared. While there were no catastrophic losses like some experienced on the Right Bank, there will be up to 30% less of some major properties. The fruit that did survive (perhaps the crucial story of the vintage once you get past the frost) had its own challenges with heat spikes and rain. So when we tasted some brilliant wines from properties like Labégorge, Malescot-St-Exupéry, Cantenac Brown, and Brane-Cantenac, it was a welcome relief to see how cleverly some handled the vintage.

**Labégorge, Margaux (\$28.99)** is perhaps not a big surprise—they are turning the value equation on its head over the past four vintages and 2017 is no different. Although the new oak is not easy to miss at this early stage, it has some beautiful aromatics, vibrancy and depth leading to slightly chalky minerality to pair with deep red and black fruit. Its stablemate **Marquis d’Alesme, Margaux (\$40.99)** wasn’t shy either and will be one to keep a close eye on—loaded with fine dark chocolate and fruits and chewy oak tannin, it has the potential to round out into something superb.

Malescot-St-Exupéry was one of the highlights of the trip. Jean-Luc Zuger was incredibly refreshing—a man of very few words, he let the wine speak for itself instead of trying to explain away any shortcomings. He seemed to know he was sitting on a gem, especially in the scope of the vintage, and both samples we tried supported that.

**Malescot-St-Exupéry, Margaux (\$52.99)** has a spot-on combination of concentration, structure and bright fruit that will make for a truly compelling wine on release.

The gold-labelled pair of **Cantenac Brown, Margaux (\$Inquire)** and **Brane-Cantenac, Margaux (\$Inquire)** also continue to be properties that collectors and drinkers alike should keep an eye on. The former is a more elegant style that showed perfumed aromatics, pure and bright fruit, and composure and depth that shows promise for things to come. The latter showed tremendous pedigree with remarkable aromas of leather and deep red fruit and a pure, seamless, precise palate.

**Palmer, Margaux (\$279.99)** is very intriguing in 2017. It is one of those properties that tends to thrive in challenging vintages and Margaux had its fair share of challenges. There was a buzz around the wine from folks who tasted it, though. Perfumed and smoky aromatics lead to a bright, clean palate with good depth, juicy red and blue fruit, slightly grainy tannins and an easygoing finish. There was an approachable nature to it that seems to indicate it will be an accessible vintage. It will be compelling to follow on release to see if it adds some depth and layers. Drink 2023–2034.



*Another favorite in 2017: Home of Château Léoville-Barton in St-Julien.*

### Some Médoc Favorites

**Léoville-Barton, St-Julien (\$Inquire)** This was a consensus success for our team at *en primeur* and we were fortunate enough to be able to taste it multiple times. For a vintage that saw a lot of easygoing and accessible wines, Léoville-Barton showed its usual grip and structure. Complex aromas of black cherry and vanilla lead to a signature bright red fruit core and fine-grained tannins. Great for the vintage and a wine that will need time. A high percentage of Cab (93%) this vintage.

**Ducru-Beaucaillou, St-Julien (\$Inquire)** Ducru managed to meld a modern touch without being overdone in 2017—it handled the 100% oak in a way that very few others could even imagine doing in the vintage. Very Cab heavy, it showed a deep extracted color, richness and seamless texture that has become the house signature. Dense, layered and uniquely powerful, it is perhaps missing an extra level or dimension of the great vintages but comes through with some great class and persistence. If this is your style and the price is right, it will be an enjoyable Ducru for a few years to come.

**Lynch-Bages, Pauillac (\$104.99)** Another solid Lynch-Bages from an estate that seems to go from one strength to another. Graphite, pine, and blackberry lead very fine aromas that precede flavors of bright black fruit, integrated tannin and a general easy-going profile. Very accessible for such a young Lynch-Bages, well made for the vintage, and one to drink while waiting for the 2016 (or even 2010) to come around. Drink 2021–2031.

**Pichon-Lalande, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** There is no shortage of fans of Pichon-Lalande at K&L, and it is wines like the terrific 2017 that show why. We have no qualms calling this one of the wines of the vintage. The aromas are complex with wood, pine and wild cherry. There's tons of red plum and spice on a dense, compact and linear palate. It is layered in way that shows immense potential and pedigree, and both samples tasted showed the same upside. Superb.

**Pontet-Canet, Pauillac (\$Inquire)** An all-star like always, Pontet-Canet is a breath of fresh air in 2017, Bordeaux from an estate that can seemingly do no wrong these days. Pure aromas of black and blue fruit lead to an extremely polished palate full of vanilla, cassis, black cherry, barrel char and vanilla. There's tons of depth and complexity here but enough acid to carry everything through. Chewy, mouthfilling, and modern—those who have enjoyed Pontet-Canet in their modern years will find a lot to like here.

**Duhart-Milon, Pauillac (\$69.99)** We were treated to a stunning sample of Duhart at Château Lafite Rothschild. It was one of those moments that everyone looked around the table to make sure we had the right glass. It reached an aromatic complexity that was rare in 2017, with aromas of wild black fruit, a touch of vanilla and sage. Silky, balanced and clean on the palate, there was ample sweet plum, blackcurrant and blue fruit. Good acid and well-judged tannin completed an impressive finish.

**Calon-Ségur, St-Estèphe (\$Inquire)** On a run of late, and 2017 Calon-Ségur was very compelling on both occasions tasted. Reticent aromas of graphite, soil and dark fruit lead to bright red cherry, fine-grained tannin. Great structure, focus and purity of fruit lead to a balanced St-Estèphe that is more and more competing with Montrose and Cos for the title of top of the region.

**Montrose, St-Estèphe (\$Inquire)** A slightly reticent nose gives way to a palate chock-full of dark chocolate, vanilla and blackberry. The wine is remarkably textured and continues to show nuance throughout with pine, French oak and pure red fruit. Mouthwatering acidity keeps it lifted and adds length. It is a structured Montrose and a strong showing for the vintage. Montrose continues on a qualitative roll that is the envy of many in Bordeaux and beyond. Drink 2025–2035.



# Northern Médoc 2017: Pauillac, St-Estèphe and St-Julien

By Jeff Garneau



**When we first arrived in Bordeaux in April of this year, our first concern was determining to what extent each producer was affected by the frost that Clyde talks about in the introduction.** We found most producers eager to talk about the frost, especially those whose losses were minimal. What they generally preferred not to discuss,

and what we discovered over the course of our visit, was the many other challenges faced in 2017. While May and June were quite hot and dry, July and August were unusually cool. Veraison was delayed and though some ground was made up in the latter two weeks of August, September brought no relief. It was cool and humid with frequent showers and rain, heavy at times during the first two weeks. Not exactly ideal conditions for harvest. The Merlot was particularly affected, with the risk of dilution a real factor. Later-ripening parcels of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon fared better, but the constant threat of rot forced many to pick sooner than they would have preferred or risk losing their crop entirely. By the end of September most of the harvest was complete, a disappointing end to a vintage that had begun with much promise.

2017 is a very heterogeneous vintage, with results varying greatly from region to region and producer to producer.

The rains during harvest did lead to some dilution, with many wines lacking weight in the mid-palate (which some producers endeavored to flesh out with the addition of press wine). While there were few if any green, unripe or herbaceous wines, those producers who tried for a bigger, more extracted style generally fell short. Aggressive wood tannins were very much in evidence in those wines using a high percentage of new oak. The vintage seemed to favor those producers with a lighter touch. The most successful wines were medium to full-bodied and very aromatic with lively acidity, sweet fruit and fine tannins. They had that quality of fruité, combining ripeness and freshness in a very compelling way.

## Saint-Estèphe

In Saint-Estèphe, my top pick among the classed growths was **Montrose (\$Inquire)**. With the harvest conditions of September favoring Cabernet Sauvignon over Merlot, its inclusion in the blend was of a higher percentage than usual. The final assemblage was 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. All the best elements of the vintage are here: a gorgeous nose; bright fruit, sweet and ripe; firm, fine tannins. A complete wine. A close second was the very successful **Calon-Ségur (\$Inquire)** where the blend was nearly identical: 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot. Many of the plots of Merlot and Cabernet Franc usually included in the grand vin were relegated to the second wine. I admit to being slightly disappointed in the **Cos d'Estournel (\$Inquire)**. The 2016 was truly extraordinary, and while it is by no means fair to judge this most recent vintage by last year's standards, my expectations were high. 2017 is a solid effort, without

fault, but a step or two behind the other leading properties in the region. I had hoped to get a better read on it at the later négociant tasting but the sample we had was flawed. I am withholding final judgment until I have a chance to taste the wine in bottle. I would be delighted to be proven wrong.

It was, sadly, not a vintage for second labels. Though yields were undiminished by the frost, perhaps there was simply a lack of top-quality fruit to go around? If so, they faithfully served their primary purpose of improving the quality of the grand vins at their own expense. Intriguingly, many of the supplementary labels showed quite well at en primeur and should make for excellent near-term drinking. Tronquoy-Lalande was soft and supple with ripe, sweet fruit and fine tannins. **Capbern (\$22.99)** was similarly delicious, bright and spicy and aromatic with great freshness. The 2017 Goulée by Cos d'Estournel was very much in the same class, a delight to taste.

One notable success among the ranks of the non-classed growths in Saint-Estèphe was the **Ormes de Pez (\$29.99)**. Playing to the vintage's strengths, the Cazes family produced a wine with great freshness of fruit and lively acidity with good underlying ripeness and fine tannins. Chapeau!



*Jeff Garneau finds a well-lit corner of the château to review his notes of the vintage.*

## Pauillac

Blessed by the beneficent presence of the nearby Gironde, Pauillac too emerged largely unscathed from the brutal April frost. Among the first growths, **Mouton Rothschild (\$Inquire)** stood out for its extraordinary weight and richness, the most purely hedonistic of the trio. **Lafite Rothschild (\$Inquire)** and Latour were both more restrained, in keeping with the vintage overall. Bright and lively, very fresh in style, and with the aromatic complexity characteristic of the very best wines of the vintage, all three of the appellation's Premier Crus have placed their faith in the strength of the Cabernet Sauvignon in 2017, with Mouton at 90%, Latour at 92% and Lafite at a whopping 96% of the blend.

Not to be outdone, Pauillac's twin second growths, Pichon-Baron and Pichon-Lalande, both excelled in 2017. Like Lafite and Latour, **Pichon-Baron (\$Inquire)** is a model of restraint with sweet, ripe fruit and



*Château Pichon Longueville Baron in Pauillac.*

very fine but quite firm tannins. Cabernet Sauvignon accounts for nearly 80% of the blend; the remainder is old-vine Merlot picked in late September in dry conditions. **Pichon-Lalande (\$Inquire)** is a bit more exuberant, showing more overt ripeness but in a very polished, eminently refined style. Pichon-Lalande lost a few hectares to frost (about 7% of their total) in those vineyards farthest away from the river but the fruit destined for the grand vin was unaffected.

At Duhart-Milon, too, there was some frost damage to vineyards that typically supply fruit for the second label, but the grand vin suffered not at all. In fact, while it can sometime be difficult to assess young wines at this stage of their development, the **Duhart-Milon (\$69.99)** made an unequivocal impression. An exquisitely balanced wine with perfectly ripe, expressive fruit and admirable length. Bright, fresh and lively with very fine tannins. Superb.

Pauillac is also home to around a dozen fifth growths, with varying degrees of quality. Historically, **Lynch-Bages (\$104.99)** has stood at the forefront, first among equals. In 2017 they showed why this is so, making one of the best wines of the vintage in my opinion. It is a wine that is perfectly true to itself, a model of freshness, suppleness and balance. During last year's en primeur tasting we found out that the Cazes family had just acquired Château Haut-Batailley from the Borie family. Jean-Charles describes **Haut-Batailley (\$64.99)** as a "more feminine style of Pauillac, more like a St-Julien." The 2017 is the first vintage made by the new owners. Many changes are no doubt in store here, but they are off to a good start. At Château Mouton, we tasted both Château Clerc-Milon and Château d'Armailhac. Though some will no doubt prefer **Clerc-Milon (\$69.99)** for its concentration and rich, silky texture, **d'Armailhac (\$45.99)** captured my attention with its typicity. Aromatic, very fresh with bright fruit and firm, fine tannins, it is a wine very much in keeping with the vintage. Fans of **Pontet-Canet (\$Inquire)** will be reassured to know that they faced the vagaries of the 2017 vintage with aplomb. The wine shows admirable ripeness, very supple with firm, fine tannins. Though we didn't have time to visit every château, some we were able to sample at the UGC St-Estèphe and Pauillac tasting held this year at Château Lafon-Rochet. One of the standouts was **Grand-Puy-Lacoste (\$Inquire)**. There is more weight here than many of its peers, and ample fruit. Tannins, however, are quite firm.

### Saint-Julien

In a vintage as heterogenous as 2017, it is difficult, even dangerous to generalize, but I felt that of all the major appellations, Saint-Julien

was the most consistent. Among the second growths, the "Léovilles" fared particularly well. **Léoville-Las Cases, St-Julien (\$Inquire)** demonstrated great typicity in 2017—"très, très Las Cases."

**Léoville-Poyferré (\$Inquire)** was also very true to form, generous in style with ripe fruit and firm tannins. Of the three, however, only **Léoville-Barton (\$Inquire)** truly surpasses itself. With 93% Cabernet Sauvignon in the blend, this has all the classic black-fruited Barton character and more. A big, deeply colored wine with gorgeous aromatics, one of the undeniable successes of the vintage. **Ducru-Beaucaillou (\$Inquire)** entices with its mélange of spice and floral notes. There is less body but more elegance in the 2017, a very pure expression of the Ducru terroir. **Gruaud-Larose (\$Inquire)** is harder to assess, a bit closed but showing very well. All the pieces are there.

Among the classed growths Château Lagrange suffered the most damage from frost with 30% of the crop lost. With its vineyards farthest inland from the Gironde, it was the reference point in 2017 for what might have happened without its moderating influence. Nevertheless, **Lagrange (\$Inquire)** produced a good wine for the vintage with bright, sweet fruit and firm tannins. **Langoa-Barton (\$48.99)** fared a bit better. Though quite firm at the time of tasting, this is obviously a vintage that plays to the château's strengths. Very bright and fresh with sweet, ripe red fruits.



*With Bruno Borie at second growth Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, St-Julien.*

Of the fourth growths, **Branais-Ducru (\$51.99)** really shone. Very pretty, bright fruit with lovely aromatics. Ripe, sweet fruit. Texture like velvet. Tannins very fine. A wine of great poise and elegance. Pleased to see continued improvement at both Talbot and Beychevelle. **Talbot (\$54.99)** was typical of the vintage, very lively with fine tannins. **Beychevelle (\$74.99)** was surprisingly ripe, almost jammy. **Saint-Pierre (\$Inquire)** enjoyed a good vintage. There is good ripeness on a solid frame there, though the wood influence is quite apparent at this early stage. Not to be missed is Saint-Pierre's sister property, **Gloria (\$39.99)**. Though technically not a classed growth, this is always one of the great values in Saint-Julien. The 2017 vintage is excellent, very fresh with bright fruit, good concentration and fine tannins. A balanced effort, well made.



# Sauternes and Dry Whites of 2017

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

## 2017 Sauternes

Another great year—so what else is new?

**Bastor La Montagne** Under the ownership of Florence and Daniel Cathiard, this property is near Suduiraut, and there was no problem with frost here. Fresh and elegant, long and lingering. Will be a great value for sure.

**Guiraud (\$Inquire)** This is power and elegance together. One of the better 2017s we tasted.

**La Tour Blanche (\$Inquire)** 83% Semillon, 5% Muscadelle, 12% Sauvignon Blanc. Full-flavored with plenty of pineapple and coconut undertones. Another lush wine with great acidity—hallmark of 2017.

**Doisy-Védrières (375ml \$20.99)** The frost really hurt them this year and they only made the 375-milliliter size. Always a K&L favorite. Plenty of citrus on the nose and some coconut on the palate. Quite lush and definitely on the rich side.

**Doisy-Daëne (375ml \$21.99; 750ml \$42.99)** As usual, one of the best values in the stickies. Spicy aromas with honeyed flavors. Delicious wine with great acid balance.

**Coutet (\$Inquire)** This property is on a roll of late. Full-bodied and full-flavored. Extremely rich on the palate, but fine balancing acidity.

**Clos Haut Peyraguey (\$Inquire)** A Bernard Magrez wine. Exceptionally lush with peach and mango aromas, undertones of banana also. Fatter style, but again fine acidity to balance it out.

**Suduiraut (\$64.99)** A great vintage for Suduiraut. They picked in three tiers—no frost problems here, 80,000 bottles produced. Thick upfront with citrus and peach flavors. Undertones of pineapple. Very long and lingering finish. Superb!

**Rieussec (\$59.99)** Not tasted.

**Climens (\$Inquire)** Not tasted. Final blend not done.

**d'Yquem** (Not released until a year from September). Unfortunately we did not taste it.

Bordeaux						
Partly Cloudy						
Now	11PM	12AM	1AM	2AM	3AM	4AM
30%	30%	30%	30%	30%	40%	40%
64°	62°	60°	59°	57°	56°	55°
Saturday						
Sunday						
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

*Nice weather during our Bordeaux trip—  
for rich, warming wines of Sauternes!*

## 2017 Bordeaux Dry White Wines

The 2017 white Bordeaux wines are exceptionally good—not a big quantity available, but lovely wines with tremendous aromatics and rich mid-palate texture that leads to a crisp citric finish.

**Clos Floridène Blanc, Graves (\$21.99)** One of their best. Combination of tropical notes on the nose and palate entry and then crisp acidity on the finish.

**Lynch-Bages Blanc, Bordeaux (\$44.99)** I love this wine. Superb acidity and tons of fruit. Fresh and complete. So much better than their first few vintages. They are on a roll.

**Mouton Rothschild “Aile d’Argent” Bordeaux Blanc** Lots of ripe melon on the nose that follows to the palate. Tropical, mango, peach notes throughout.

**Pavillon Blanc du Margaux, Bordeaux (\$Inquire)** 100% Sauvignon Blanc. So ripe and so delicious—and very limited in terms of volume.

**Malartic-Lagravière Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$59.99)** More citrus up front than most other ones near this property. Superb balance after a lemony start on the palate. Slight hints of mango.

**Latour-Martillac Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$36.99)** We all loved this white. Wonderful aromatics of white flowers with undertones of citrus. Very focused wine with a long, lingering finish.

**Lespault Martillac Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$25.99)** 80% Sauvignon Blanc. Lively and vibrant white. Superb value from the Domaine de Chevalier people. Plenty of lemon-lime crispness to balance the rich and round fruit-forward flavors.

**Domaine de Chevalier Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$94.99)** We always love this property, and 2017 may be better than 2009–2016. Superbly balanced with citric notes on the nose and palate.

**Smith Haut Lafitte Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** We also love this wine and think it is among the top whites of 2017—from any region! Two stars for sure. Lemon, pink grapefruit and spice all marry with just the right amount of oaky accents.

**Pape Clement Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$139.99)** An exotic beauty with hints of passion fruit, pineapple and lime blossom. Quite dense and rich on the front palate and quite crisp at the back end. Not over the top and one of the best of the whites in 2017.

**La Clarte de Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan** So melony on the nose with some tropical fruit nuances. Clean, crisp finish.

**La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc (\$Inquire), Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (\$Inquire)** Of course, these two whites are ethereal, with the La Mission having white flower aromas and crisp acidity, while the Haut-Brion shows tremendous concentration and structure. It has melony aromas. So lush and full-bodied. Both will be very expensive.

## 2017 Pessac-Léognan Reds: Wines of Note

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

**A mixed bag vintage for this region.** The top wines did a severe selection and made excellent wines. Some properties had big problems with frost and lost considerable production. Some properties had problems with the rains in late summer and the wines lack mid-palate richness. Some properties had problems with both frost and rain. The whites escaped the rain problem and many whites were wonderful—see them on page 13, and Ryan wrote up some of the reds on page 9.

**Le Pape (\$Inquire)** A new property for Véronique Sanders and her team at Haut-Bailly. We actually stayed at this lovely château at the end of our 2018 Bordeaux trip. This wine will not be released on premier to my knowledge. Nice minerally black fruit wine with fine mouthfeel.

**La Parde de Haut Bailly (\$Inquire)** The second wine of Haut-Bailly. They lost 30% due to frost. Very nice mid-weight wine with earthy undertones. At Joanne the wine showed even better—sweet and sexy on the palate.

**Haut-Bailly (\$Inquire)** 60% CS and 32% M with 4% PV and CF. They also lost 30% due to frost, etc., but not a lot of rain here. Very aromatic with red berry aromas dominating. Quite elegant style with violets and earthy tones on the palate. Lots of sweetness under the tannin layer. We all love this property and its managing director Véronique Sanders. Ever since she started managing the estate in the late '90s, Haut-Bailly has been one of K&L's best-selling Bordeaux wines.

**Le Thil** Owned by Florence and Daniel Cathiard of Smith Haut Lafitte fame. 95% M and 5% CF, only 4,500 bottles produced. Very much blackberry jam on the nose and palate. Will be a value in stock.

**Lespault-Martillac (\$25.99)** 65% Merlot. Made by the Domaine de Chevalier team. Very black fruit dominated and quite lush and sweet on the palate. Here is a very well-made value red. A property to watch.

**Malartic-Lagravière (\$49.99)** About 45% M and CS. Perfumy aromas of black fruit and oak. Fairly modern style with nice texture and finish. A bit of tannin covering the fruit.

**Pape Clément (\$94.99)** Another winner for Bernard Magrez and his team. Maybe a step behind their monumental 2015, but much less expensive. Earthy elements in the nose and on the palate. A bit more reserved than their 2016, but just as good. A wine to enjoy while you wait for the '15 and '16 to age.

**La Chapelle de La Mission Haut-Brion (\$Inquire)** I loved this wine at the La Mission tasting. 49% M, 42% CS, 9% CF. Black raspberry aromas but the flavors are more red berry and earth. Slight licorice notes on the palate. Soft, round tannins. One of the better second wines in 2017, as I found many of them lacking mid-palate richness.

**La Mission Haut-Brion** 56% M, 40% CS, 4% CF. Black and blueberry aromas. A ton of minerals on the palate. A bit tight with tannins showing through—should turn out fine.

**Haut-Brion (\$Inquire)** 53% M, 41% CS, etc. One of my top ten wines of the vintage for sure. Spicy, savory aromas. Full mouthful, like the 2016. This wine has such great sweet fruits at the entry to the palate and spicy, earthy, oaky notes on the mid-palate. Long and lingering finish. Definitely a winner—hope the price is reasonable.



*Château, chapel (far right) and gardens at Château la Mission Haut-Brion in Pessac-Léognan.*



## The Right Bank: Values and Classics—I Like These

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

**Enclos Tourmaline, Pomerol (\$134.99)** Only 2,400 bottles made with plots near Clinet and La Fleur-Pétrus. Intense black fruit aromas and flavors. 100% Merlot.

**Barde-Haut, St-Emilion (\$39.99)** Precise, great mouthfeel, intense but easy to drink. Minty and sweet.

**Clos l'Eglise, Pomerol (\$79.99)** Across the path from l'Eglise Clinet. Tons of spice and blueberries. Elegant.

**Daugay, St-Emilion** Just below Angélus—first time I remember tasting this gem. Very good value. Owned by part of the Angélus clan.

**Bellevue, St-Emilion** 100% Merlot, so sweet and sexy. Long and lingering finish.

**Angélus, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** 70% M, 30% CF. Coffee and tea aromas. Some mocha underneath. Minty on the palate. So sweet and quite sexy. A victory here. Harmonious wine.

**d'Aiguilhe, Côtes de Castillon (\$22.99)** They lost 50% of crop. Very spicy wine—always a value and this year is no exception.

**Clos de l'Oratoire, St-Emilion (\$37.99)** Only 11 hectoliters per hectare. Raspberry aromas and flavors.

**Canon-la-Gaffelière, St-Emilion (\$79.99)** 16 hectoliters per hectare. 50% crop here. Surprisingly rich and round with fine structure and full body. Very good.

**La Mondotte, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** No frost problem; great terroir. Fat and rich on the palate.

**l'Evangile, Pomerol (\$249.99)** 100% Merlot this year. 50% frost loss. Asian spice aromas, blackberry fruit flavors with some coffee undertones.

**La Conseillante, Pomerol** Only 15% frost loss. Boysenberry aromas. Earthy flavors. Bright and fresh.

**Cheval Blanc, St-Emilion (\$Inquire)** 14% CS, 56% M, 30% CF. Red fruit aromas and flavors. Very elegant wine with mineral flavors. Very nice but will be expensive.

**Bourgneuf, Pomerol (\$64.99)** Very nice mid-palate fruit. Plenty of substance here.

**Hosanna, Pomerol (\$179.99)** Subtle and elegant nose. Full-bodied and rich on the palate. Red fruit flavors. Very good. Very limited availability.

## 2017 Haut-Médoc and Other Value Regions

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

**Quality varies a lot in 2017 as per the first five pages of this report.**

First the frost and then the rains and rot problems. We offer some of the wines pre-arrival, but if no price is listed it means we will only offer them as they arrive.

**Mauvesin Barton, Moulis (\$Inquire)** They lost almost all of their 2017 to frost. Only 1,000 produced.

**Lanessan, Haut-Médoc (\$Inquire)** Always one of our favorites—consistent and very good value. Modern style.

**Beaumont, Haut-Médoc (\$Inquire)** I always love this wine, it is so easy to drink and is a perfect crossover wine from California Cabernet to Bordeaux. Quite delicious. Buy on arrival.

**Sociando-Mallet, Haut-Médoc** Very full-bodied and powerfully built for the cellar, yet there is a lot of sweet fruit on the mid-palate and a bit of dry tannins on the back end.

**de Lamarque, Haut-Médoc** 60% CS with 5% PV and the rest Merlot. Nice mid-palate sweetness. No frost problems here. Could be a value.

**Fourcas Hosten, Listrac (\$Inquire)** 50% loss here. 67% Merlot this year. Fine balance. Black fruits.

**Chasse-Spleen, Moulis (\$Inquire)** 40% loss here. Good middle fruit.

**Maucaillou, Moulis-en-Médoc** Lost 40% of crop. Nice nose and great texture on the palate. Value when it arrives.

**Coufran, Haut-Médoc (\$Inquire)** 85% Merlot. No frost problems—near water. Rich and round. Will be a value.

**La Tour Carnet, Haut-Médoc (\$32.99)** Bernard Magrez wine and his prices are reasonable. Perfumy aromas and soft entry on the palate. Lush wine with a layer of ripe black fruit. Value.

**Goulée, Haut-Médoc** Without a doubt the best Goulée ever made, hands down. 77% Merlot and 100% satisfying on the palate. Extremely aromatic—like many of these far northern Médoc wines. All fruit in the mouth. Seamless.

**Potensac, Médoc (\$27.99)** From the Delon stable of fine wines, this wine sings. This is a powerful, very rich wine for the cellar.

**Poujeaux, Moulis (\$32.99)** Always a hit at K&L, this wine does not let us down. Superb, from the very aromatic red rose and black cherry aromas to the lingering finish. Coffee and tobacco undertones.

**La Lagune, Ludon (\$49.99)** Solid wine. Reminds me of the 2002.

**Cantemerle, Haut-Médoc (\$29.99)** Another winner—so what else is new? They lost 20% of their crop, mostly the Merlot, so the wine is 70% CS with 5% PV and 25% M. Sweet nose of red currant and cassis. Lovely on the palate—a red fruit value for sure.



*In the fabled properties of Margaux, it all starts with plain old farming. Pictured: Château Margaux (not reviewed on this page).*

## The Best of the Rest: Margaux and St-Julien in 2017

By Clyde Beffa Jr.

### Marvelous Margaux

The commune of Margaux is not only the largest of the seven major communes that comprise Bordeaux but it also boasts the most classified growths from the 1855 classification, with 21 properties obtaining a classified status. Many of the Margaux properties survived the drought of the summer of 2016, but many were affected by the frost and rain of 2017. Angludet was especially hit hard by the frost.

**La Tour de Mons** Big frost damage here, but what was made turned out quite well. Ripe, sweet black berry jam notes on nose and palate. Long on the palate.

**Siran (\$28.99)** Another solid effort. Just a bit behind their fabulous 2015 and very good 2016. Not a lot of frost problems as they are near the water.

**Kirwan (\$46.99)** Unfortunately we did not taste this wine as it was not at the Joanne tasting and we missed the Margaux UGC.

**Giscours (\$Inquire)** Lots of red berry aromas and flavor. Good sweetness on the palate and reasonably long on the finish.

**d'Issan (\$Inquire)** They lost 15% from the frost, etc. 65% Cabernet Sauvignon. Very pretty aromatics. Silky and velvety! Very feminine style. Elegant and packed with red berry flavors.

**Pavillon Rouge** 76% CS, 24% M. Earthy red raspberry aromas and flavors. On the more elegant side.

**Rauzan-Ségla (\$Inquire)** We tasted out of the barrel at the property: four separate barrels from four different barrel producers. Then at Joanne the final blend was tasted—it showed the red berry fruit. Sweet and tart palate impression, very intriguing.

**Alter Ego de Palmer (\$74.99)** 53% M, 41% CS, 6% PV. Powerful wine on the palate. Lots of blackberry fruit, too. They added a bit of press wine to boost the mid-palate.

### St-Julien Gems

We thought that perhaps the best region for 2017s was St-Julien. Most of St-Julien escaped the frost except the parcels near Lagrange.

**Croix de Beaucaillou (\$Inquire)** No frost problems here. 58% Merlot. Lively, vibrant and fresh. One of the better second wines. Lots of blackberry jelly on the palate here. Could be a great value.

**Clos du Marquis (\$49.99)** 72% CS, 1% CF, 27% M. Elegant red berry aromas, raspberry on the palate. Nice structure and length. Only 10% frost loss.

**Gloria (\$39.99)** Always a value for us—ever since the excellent 1966 and 1967 vintages. Very nice palate entry and aromatics on the nose. Black cherry cola nuances on nose and palate. Good mid-palate fruit. Value.

**Léoville-Poyferre (\$Inquire)** Another solid effort from the least-known Léoville at K&L. Check out Jeff's notes on it.

**Léoville-Barton (\$Inquire)** I end this newsletter with what just might be the best for the money in 2017. Of course I am prejudiced, but Léoville sings in 2017. 93% Cabernet Sauvignon tells the story here—Merlot did not do well in the region. Very spicy on the palate. *Surprisingly easy to drink.* Not a huge wine, but a seamless, totally enjoyable 2017. Can be enjoyed in the next five years. Bravo to the Barton team and my best to Anthony and Eva Barton.

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