



# How to Buy the Best Bordeaux Wine for Your Cellar

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The Bordeaux wine region is one of the most prolific wine producing regions in the world. It produces 750 million bottles of wine per year. It makes everything from table wine (the lowest classification of wine) to some of the most celebrated wines in the world. It's the latter or investment grade wine that's the primary focus here. For those simply looking for recommendations on good, affordable Bordeaux, or up and coming chateaux read – "[Bordeaux: The Wines, The Vineyards, The Winemakers.](#)"

## Red, White, Sweet or Sparkling Wine?

Bordeaux is best known for its red wines, which are over 75 percent of production. But it also produces dry white wine, sweet wine, rose wine and sparkling wine.

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**Rule of Thumb:** For the purposes of buying Bordeaux wine for your cellar, you should focus on red, dry white and sweet wines which tend to age better.

## Grape Varieties

To be considered a Bordeaux wine, only 6 red-wine varieties and 3 white-wine varieties may be used.

### Red Wine

1. Cabernet Sauvignon
2. Merlot
3. Cabernet Franc
4. Malbec
5. Petit Verdot
6. Carmenere

### White Wine

1. Sauvignon Blanc
2. Semillon
3. Muscadelle

Unlike the United States that often produces wine based on a single grape variety, Bordeaux wines are blends. In general, at least 3 grape varieties are used although one is usually dominant. The dominant grapes are:

### Red Wine

- **Cabernet Sauvignon** – The Cabernet Sauvignon grape produces distinctive wines that are tannic and can have long-aging potential. Average aging for Cabernet is 5 to 10 years in order to achieve peak flavor. In Bordeaux wine it is usually blended with other varieties to make wines with increased complexity.
- **Merlot** – Compared to Cabernet Sauvignon the Merlot grape is lower in tannins and makes wines that mature faster and are softer in texture. In Bordeaux wine Merlot is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon in order to soften the blend.

- [How to Decant Wine and Aerate Wine at the Same Time](#)
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- **Cabernet Franc** – Although similar in structure and flavor to cabernet sauvignon, this red wine grape is not quite as full-bodied, and has fewer tannins and less acid. It is, however, more aromatic and herbaceous. In Bordeaux wine Cabernet Franc is most often blended with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, though it's usually not the dominant grape in these blends.

### White Wine

- **Sauvignon Blanc** – The most prominent characteristic of sauvignon blanc is its distinctive, penetrating aroma, which can evoke scents of grapefruit, lime, green melon, gooseberry, passion fruit, freshly mown grass, and bell pepper. In Bordeaux wine it is often blended with Semillon in both dry and sweet wines.
- **Semillon** – Semillon produces wines that are full-flavored, rich and aromatic. In Bordeaux wine, Semillon is most often blended with other varieties (especially Sauvignon Blanc) to take advantage of the strengths of each variety. Whether in the sweet wines or in dryer styles, Semillon has the ability to age for a very long time.

So, you can buy a Cabernet-Sauvignon-based red wine or a Semillon-based sweet wine that will keep in your cellar for a long time (this will appeal to serious wine collectors). But the key is to buy a quality Bordeaux wine.

A quality Merlot or Sauvignon-Blanc dry white will also age well, and while they may not last as long as a quality Cab, they have other advantages. Merlot wine is smoother than Cabernet Sauvignon and more accessible when young. A dry white wine is, well dry, so your choice is a matter of taste.

**Rule of Thumb:** Quality of Wine is more important than Grape Variety

### Using the Appellation d'Origine Controlee System

The French initiated the Appellation d'Origine Controlee system in 1935 as a means of safeguarding the more quality-conscious winemakers, vineyards, and areas from unethical producers who were taking advantage of the better-known names.

Bordeaux wines that pass a set of seven criteria regulating grape varieties, viticultural and winemaking practices, yields per acre and alcoholic content are allowed to use the phrase Appellation Controlee (AOC or AC) on their labels. Wines that cannot meet these criteria are put into the following categories from highest to lowest:

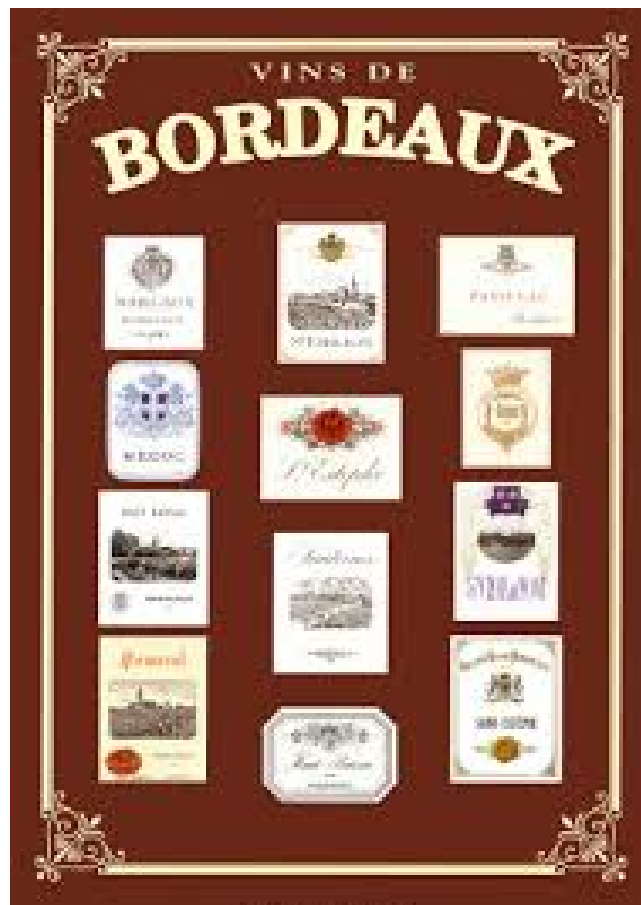
- Vin Delimite de Qualite Superieure
- Vin de Pays (country wine)
- Vin de Table (table wine)

**Note:** An Appellation Controlee (AC) is a geographical term used to identify where the grapes for a wine were grown (e.g. Appellation Pauillac Controlee).

**Rule of Thumb:** Smaller appellations produce better wines.

### General Appellations

The largest appellations are Bordeaux AC and Bordeaux Superieur AC, which cover the entire region of Bordeaux. Wines from these two classifications are made with grapes that come from any appellation within Bordeaux, white or red. Most of these wines are white. Bordeaux Superieur has lower grape yields and a higher alcohol content than Bordeaux.



### Districts

The Bordeaux wine region can be separated into districts with their own appellations. These districts can also be categorized as major or minor.

**Rule of Thumb:** Wines from major districts (appellations) are of higher quality than minor.

### Communes / Villages and Area Appellations

#### Medoc

#### Villages

1. St. Estephe
2. Pauillac

#### Major Bordeaux Wine Districts

1. **Medoc** – Red Wine (Cabernet Sauvignon primary / Merlot secondary)
2. **Graves** – Red Wine (Cabernet Sauvignon primary / Merlot secondary)

3. St. Julien
4. Margaux
5. Listrac
6. Moulis

### Areas

1. Haut Medoc (Upper Medoc) – Refers to the southern area of the Medoc district. Also refers to any wine made in this area that is not included in a village appellation.
2. Medoc / Bas Medoc (Lower Medoc) – Refers to the northern area of the Medoc District. Wine made in this area is usually just given the appellation Medoc.

### Graves

1. Pessac-Leognan (Area)
2. Sauternes and Barsac (Villages)

**Rules of Thumb:** 1) Commune / Village appellations are of higher quality than Area appellations.

2) Wine of the Haut Medoc is considered of greater quality than Medoc.

This is where the appellation system breaks down. Major Bordeaux wine districts like St. Emilion and Pomerol do not split into smaller appellations like the Medoc, and it's not because they don't produce high quality wines. On the contrary, **more fine wine is sold under the Saint Emilion appellation than any other.** However, there is another classification system that is used in addition to the AC system.

## The Grand Cru Classe (Classed Growth) System

The first attempt to classify Bordeaux wine came in 1855 under the reign of Emperor Napoleon III. He needed a system of classification to determine which wines would be displayed to the world during the 1855 Exposition Universelle de Paris. Brokers from the wine industry ranked

secondary), Dry White and Sweet-White-Wines (Semillon / Sauvignon Blanc)

3. **St. Emilion** – Red Wine (Merlot primary / Cabernet Franc secondary)
4. **Pomerol** – Red Wine (Merlot primary / Cabernet Franc secondary)

### Minor Bordeaux Wine Districts

1. **Blaye** – Red and White Wines
2. **Bourg** – Red Wine
3. **Entre-Deux-Mers** – White Wine
4. **Premieres Cotes de Bordeaux** – Red, Rose, slightly Sweet, White Wines

the wines according to a chateau's (wine-producing estate's) reputation and trading price, which was equated to quality. The result was the Bordeaux Wine Official Classification of 1855.

Bordeaux wines were ranked in importance from first to fifth growths (premiers crus to cinquiemes crus). All of the red wines that made it on the list came from the Medoc region except for the Chateau Haut-Brion from Graves. The only white wines that were ranked were the sweet wines of Sauternes and Barsac which were given their own ranking system. This list has only changed twice in 150 years. The top chateaux were and are as follows:

### The Medoc (Red Wine Classification)



Tower and Flags of Chateau Latour Vineyard in Pauillac, France

#### First Growth (Premiers Crus)

- Chateau Lafite-Rothschild (Pauillac)
- Chateau Latour (Pauillac)
- Chateau Margaux (Margaux)
- Chateau Haut-Brion (Pessac-Leognan, Graves)
- Chateau Mouton-Rothschild (Pauillac, reclassified from Second Growth status in 1973)

#### Second Growths (Deuxiemes Crus)

- Chateau Rauzan-Segla (Margaux)

- Chateau Rauzan-Gassies (Margaux)
- Chateau Leoville-Las-Cases (St. Julien)
- Chateau Leoville-Poyferre (St. Julien)
- Chateau Leoville-Barton (St. Julien)
- Chateau Durfort-Vivens (Margaux)
- Chateau Gruaud-Larose (St. Julien)
- Chateau Lascombes (Margaux)
- Chateau Brane-Cantenac (Margaux)
- Chateau Pichon-Longueville-Baron (Pauillac)
- Chateau Pichon-Longueville-Comtesse-de-Lalande (Pauillac)
- Chateau Ducru-Beaucaillou (St. Julien)
- Chateau Cos d'Estournel (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Montrose (St. Estephe)

#### Third Growths (Troisiemes Crus)

- Chateau Kirwan (Margaux)
- Chateau d'Issan (Margaux)
- Chateau Lagrange (St. Julien)
- Chateau Langoa Barton (St. Julien)
- Chateau Giscours (Margaux)
- Chateau Malescot (Margaux)
- Chateau Cantenac-Brown (Margaux)
- Chateau Boyd-Cantenac (Margaux)
- Chateau Palmer (Margaux)
- Chateau La Lagune (Haut Medoc)
- Chateau Desmirail (Margaux)
- Chateau Calon-Segur (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Ferriere (Margaux)
- Chateau Marquis d'Alesme Becker (Margaux)

#### Fourth Growths (Quatriemes Crus)

- Chateau Saint-Pierre (St. Julien)
- Chateau Talbot (St. Julien)
- Chateau Branaire-Ducru (St. Julien)
- Chateau Duhart-Milon-Rothschild (Pauillac)
- Chateau Pouget (Margaux)
- Chateau La Tour Carnet (Haut Medoc)

- Chateau Lafon-Rochet (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Beychevelle (St. Julien)
- Chateau Prieure-Lichine (Margaux)
- Chateau Marquis de Terme (Margaux)

#### Fifth Growths (Cinquiemes Crus)

- Chateau Pontet-Canet (Pauillac)
- Chateau Batailley (Pauillac)
- Chateau Haut-Batailley (Pauillac)
- Chateau Haut-Bages-Liberal (Pauillac)
- Chateau Grand-Puy-Lacoste (Pauillac)
- Chateau Grand-Puy-Ducasse (Pauillac)
- Chateau Lynch-Bages (Pauillac)
- Chateau Lynch-Moussas (Pauillac)
- Chateau Dauzac Labarde (Margaux)
- Chateau d'Armailhac (Pauillac)
- Chateau du Tertre (Margaux)
- Chateau Pedesclaux (Pauillac)
- Chateau Belgrave (Haut Medoc)
- Chateau de Camensac (Haut Medoc)
- Chateau Cos Labory (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Clerc-Milon (Pauillac)
- Chateau Croizet Bages (Pauillac)
- Chateau Cantemerle (Haut Medoc, added in 1856)

#### Sauternes and Barsac (Sweet White Wine Classification)





Chateau d'Yquem, Sauternes, Bordeaux, France

### Premier Cru Superieur (Superior First Growth)

- Chateau d'Yquem (Sauternes)

### First Growths (Premiers Crus)

- Chateau La Tour Blanche (Sauternes)
- Chateau Lafaurie-Peyraguey (Sauternes)
- Chateau Clos Haut-Peyraguey (Sauternes)
- Chateau de Rayne-Vigneau (Sauternes)
- Chateau Suduiraut (Sauternes)
- Chateau Coutet (Barsac)
- Chateau Climens (Barsac)
- Chateau Guiraud (Sauternes)
- Chateau Rieussec (Sauternes)
- Chateau Rabaud-Promis (Sauternes)
- Chateau Sigalas-Rabaud (Sauternes)

### Second Growths (Deuxiemes Crus)

- Chateau Myrat (Barsac)
- Chateau Doisy-Daene (Barsac)

- Chateau Doisy-Dubroca (Barsac)
- Chateau Doisy-Vedrines (Barsac)
- Chateau D'Arche (Sauternes)
- Chateau Filhot (Sauternes)
- Chateau Broustet (Barsac)
- Chateau Nairac (Barsac)
- Chateau Caillou (Barsac)
- Chateau Suau (Barsac)
- Chateau de Malle (Sauternes)
- Chateau Romer (Sauternes)
- Chateau Lamothe (Sauternes)

### Super Seconds



While many agree that the chateaux at the top of these lists make some of the finest wines in the world, many also believe it's time for the lists to be updated (this is easier said than done, the issue is very political). The chateaux most likely to benefit from this would be the so called "Super Seconds."

"Super Second" is an unofficial term referring to certain deuxième crus that are so highly regarded that they're often considered as good as (sometimes better than) the premier crus.

These highly sought after chateaux are:

- Chateau Leoville-Las-Cases (St. Julien)
- Chateau Leoville-Barton (St. Julien)
- Chateau Pichon-Longueville-Baron (Pauillac)
- Chateau Pichon-Longueville-Comtesse-de-Lalande (Pauillac)
- Chateau Ducru-Beaucaillou (St. Julien)
- Chateau Cos d'Estournel (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Montrose (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Palmer (Margaux -although actually a third growth it is so well respected that it is included on the list)

### Cru Bourgeois



Chateau Paloumey, Cru Bourgeois, Bordeaux, France

Another useful list is the Cru Bourgeois (ordinary growth) classification. Created in 1932 by the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce, many of the better chateaux from the Medoc that were not included in the 1855 Bordeaux Wine Classification were added. In 2003 they were ranked in three tiers:

### **Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnels**

- Chateau Chasse-Spleen (Moulis)
- Chateau Haut-Marbuzet (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Labegorce-Zede (Margaux)
- Chateau Les Ormes-de-Pez (St. Estephe)
- Chateau de Pez (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Phelan-Segur (St. Estephe)
- Chateau Potensac (Medoc)
- Chateau Poujeaux (Moulis)
- Chateau Siran (Margaux)

### **Cru Bourgeois Superieurs – 87 chateaux**

### **Cru Bourgeois – 151 chateaux**

Many believe that some of the cru bourgeois exceptionnels are the equivalent of a grand cru classe chateau. However, the 2003 revision was met with immediate controversy and was voided.

After many years as a defunct classification the Alliance des Cru Bourgeois du Medoc now in charge of the classification has changed it to an annual quality assessment, not a classification of chateaux or terroirs like the 1855 classification.

For the 2008 vintage a panel made up of paid wine professionals (but with no chateau owners) set the benchmark for the minimum level of acceptability for a cru bourgeois classification. It will be adjusted every year according to vintage quality.

Any chateau can apply to be a cru bourgeois; all wines are re-tasted between March and July every year for the new listing. Wines are tasted in barrel, with a percentage re-tasted after bottling in anonymous “shelf tests”(i.e. the wines are chosen at random from retailers’ shelves).

The new listing is democratic, with all selected chateaux classed together and no Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnnels or Superieurs. As a direct result, a group of former Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnnels, including Chateau Chasse Spleen, Chateau Les Ormes de Pez, Chateau de Pez, Chateau Potensac, Chateau Poujeaux and Chateau Siran broke away from the Alliance in May 2010, with the intention of forming their own grouping: "Les Exceptionnels."

**Note:** All three levels of Cru Bourgeois were labeled Cru Bourgeois.

### The Graves Classification System



Barrel Aging Cellar, Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte, Graves, Bordeaux

Although Chateau Haut-Brion and Sauternes (which lies in the southeast corner of Graves) were included in the 1855 Bordeaux Wine Classification, other producers in the area were ignored. This became very important after the Second World War when the omission directly affected the price and desirability of the wine from the region. The result was the 1953 Graves Classification which was not made official until 1959.

The 1959 classification gives 16 chateaux the title Grand Cru Classe. The chateaux are considered equals and are divided into red and white wine groups (some chateaux are classified for both). All of these chateaux are now in the Pessac-Leognan appellation.

### Red-Wine Classification (Grande Cru Classe)

- Chateau Bouscalt
- Chateau Haut-Bailly
- Chateau Carbonnieux
- Chateau Domaine de Chevalier
- Chateau de Fieuzal
- Chateau d'Olivier
- Chateau Malartic-Lagraviere
- Chateau La Tour-Martillac
- Chateau Smith-Haut-Lafitte
- Chateau Haut-Brion
- Chateau La Mission-Haut-Brion
- Chateau Pape Clement
- Chateau Latour Haut-Brion

#### White-Wine Classification (Grande Cru Classe)

- Chateau Bouscalt
- Chateau Carbonnieux
- Chateau Couhins
- Chateau Couhins-Lurton
- Chateau Domaine de Chevalier
- Chateau Haut-Brion (added 1960)
- Chateau La Tour Martillac
- Chateau Laville Haut Brion
- Chateau Malartic-Lagraviere
- Chateau d'Olivier

However, some Grand Cru Classe chateaux that are not listed as white-wine producers are making top-notch white wines. They are:

- Chateau Pape Clement
- Chateau Smith-Haut-Lafitte
- Chateau de Fieuzal

#### St. Emilion's Classification System



Chateau Grand Mayne, Saint Emilion, Bordeaux, France

St. Emilion is the second most important Bordeaux wine region after the Medoc. Despite the fact that it produces many wines of distinction, it was omitted from the 1855 classification. It wasn't until 1955 that an official classification for St. Emilion was created. Unlike the Medoc, this classification system was set up so that it could be revised every 10 years, at which time chateaux could be elevated or downgraded.

This is the kind of system that many Bordeaux wine critics wish the Medoc would adopt. But, with every revision comes controversy, especially with the recent 2006 classification. The classification was suspended indefinitely in March 2007 after four demoted chateaux filed suit (11 in total were demoted). Then in July 2008, it was ruled invalid leaving St. Emilion without a classification. Then a week later it was resurrected with 1996 rankings.

But while the demoted chateaux were happy about the return to the 1996 classification, the 8 chateaux that were promoted in 2006 were devastated and started a PR campaign of their own – regaining their 2006 rankings in December 2008.

**The result:** A cobbled together classification – 1996 rankings, plus 2006 promotions, enshrined in law until 2011.

On the 21st of June 2011, the French government finally signed off on a new classification and invited estates to submit applications.

The new rules involve the establishment of an independent organization to monitor the decision-making process and to prevent legal challenges based on partiality. The new classification will be administered by a commission of seven Institut National des Appellations d'Origine (INAO) members, none of them from Bordeaux. All chateaux – Grand Cru Classe, and Premier Grand Cru Classe (A and B) – will be tasted blind. Wines will be assessed on taste, their terroir, where they sit in the market (i.e. price), and their existing reputation.

On 7 September 2012 the new classification was released.

### 2012 St. Emilion Classification

#### Premiers Grands Crus Classes A

- Chateau Angelus (promoted)
- Chateau Ausone
- Chateau Cheval Blanc
- Chateau Pavie (promoted)

#### Premiers Grands Crus Classes B

- Chateau Beau-Sejour-Becot
- Chateau Beausejour (Duffau-Lagarrosse)
- Chateau Belair-Monange
- Chateau Canon
- Chateau Canon-la-Gaffeliere (promoted)
- Chateau Figeac
- Chateau La Gaffeliere
- Chateau La Mondotte (promoted)
- Chateau Larcis Ducasse (promoted)
- Chateau Pavie-Macquin
- Chateau Troplong-Mondot
- Chateau Trottevieille
- Chateau Valandraud (promoted)
- Clos Fourtet

#### Grands Crus Classes

- Chateau Balestard la Tonnelle



- Chateau Barde-Huet (promoted)
- Chateau Bellefont-Belcier
- Chateau Bellevue
- Chateau Berliquet
- Chateau Cadet-Bon
- Chateau Cap de Mourlin
- Chateau Chauvin
- Chateau Clos de Sarpe (promoted)
- Chateau Corbin
- Chateau Cote de Baleau (promoted)
- Chateau Dassault
- Chateau de Ferrand (promoted)
- Chateau de Pressac (promoted)
- Chateau Destieux
- Chateau Faugeres (promoted)
- Chateau Faurie-de-Souchard
- Chateau Fleur-Cardinale
- Chateau Fombrauge (promoted)
- Chateau Fonplegade
- Chateau Fonroque
- Chateau Franc Mayne
- Chateau Grand Corbin
- Chateau Grand Corbin Despaigne
- Chateau Grand Mayne
- Chateau Grand Pontet
- Chateau Guadet
- Chateau Haut Sarpe
- Chateau Jean Faure (promoted)
- Chateau L'Arrosee
- Chateau La Clotte
- Chateau La Commanderie (promoted)
- Chateau La Couspaude
- Chateau La Dominique
- Chateau La Fleur Morange (promoted)
- Chateau La Marzelle
- Chateau La Serre
- Chateau La Tour Figeac

- Chateau Laniete
- Chateau Larmande
- Chateau Laroque
- Chateau Laroze
- Chateau Le Chatelet (promoted)
- Chateau Le Prieure
- Chateau Les Grandes Murailles
- Chateau Monbousquet
- Chateau Moulin du Cadet
- Chateau Pavie-Decesse
- Chateau Peby-Faugeres (promoted)
- Chateau Petit Faurie de Soutard
- Chateau Quinault L'Enclos (promoted)
- Chateau Ripeau
- Chateau Rochebelle (promoted)
- Chateau Saint-Georges-Cote-Pavie
- Chateau Sansonnet (promoted)
- Chateau Soutard
- Chateau Tertre Daugay
- Chateau Villemaurine
- Chateau Yon Figeac
- Clos de l'Oratoire
- Clos des Jacobins
- Clos La Madeleine (promoted)
- Clos Saint-Martin
- Couvent des Jacobins

**Note:** The use of “St. Emilion Grand Cru” on a wine label should not be confused with the superior classification of “Grand Cru Classe” discussed here. “St Emilion Grand Cru” is similar to the AOC classification of Bordeaux Superieur, and reflects a lower yield for harvest (40hl/ha rather than the 45hl/ha generally allowed in St Emilion) and a 0.5% higher alcohol strength than basic St Emilion.

### Garage Wine – A Fad with Lasting Effect in St. Emilion

Garage wine is a term used to describe high-quality, extremely expensive wines produced in very small quantities. Other terms used to describe these wines are: garagistes, cult wine,

boutique wine, Parkerized wine, micro-chateaux and super-cuvee.

In Bordeaux, garagistes are controversial to say the least. The main criticism is their departure from the traditional methods of viticulture and winemaking, creating a wine that does not taste like Bordeaux (i.e. they are anti-terroir). Their methods create a wine that is fruity, concentrated, alcoholic and oakey. All geared to impress the palate of one wine critic in particular, Robert Parker (thus Parkerized wine).

Garage wines first appeared in St. Emilion in the early 1990's. They quickly achieved financial success with the influential support of Robert Parker. Parker's influence created very high demand, and combined with a small supply pushed the prices of these wines past those of the Premier Crus.

Over the years many of the original garagiste have fallen by the way-side, but many still remain and have expanded the size of their vineyards. They may no longer operate out of a garage, but still use modern-style winemaking methods with distribution in the thousands of cases instead of hundreds. Their wine prices may no longer exceed the absolute top-level chateaux, but they're doing well enough to be included in the latest St. Emilion classification where recent rules changes take into account wine price among other things.

In fact, the 2012 St. Emilion classification has catapulted two of the most well-known garage wines to Premier Grand Cru Classe B, remarkably, from no previous standing within the classification. Others have also been included.

### Top-Level Garagiste

- Chateau Valandraud (Premier Grand Cru Classe B and first garage wine produced in St. Emilion)
- Chateau La Mondotte (Premier Grand Cru Classe B and has the same owner as Chateau Canon-La-Gaffeliere)
- Chateau Quinault L'Enclos (Grand Cru Classe)
- Chateau Peby-Faugeres (Grand Cru Classe)

Garage wine may no longer be the most accurate description of these wines, but their modern-style winemaking methods still set them apart from the majority of traditional top-level St. Emilion wines. Their winemaking methods may create wines that are delicious and velvety smooth to drink, but there is still a question about their longevity and thus suitability for the wine cellar. [Recent tastings have shown that the older vintages aren't holding up as well as other](#)

Premier Crus wines. They are likely to fade in 5 to 8 years while other Premier Crus wines are improving.

**Rule of Thumb:** Highly extracted, high alcohol, low-acid wine is a recipe for wine that does not age well.

### Pomerol (No Classification)



Wine Cellar, Chateau Petrus, Pomerol, Bordeaux, France

Pomerol is the smallest Bordeaux wine-producing district. It's also the only district not to have rated its chateaux in some official classification. Despite this, Chateau Petrus and Chateau Le Pin are considered the equal of the Premier Crus of the Medoc and St. Emilion and bring some of the highest prices in Bordeaux.

Pomerol is an area of mostly small-sized producers. As a matter of fact Chateau Le Pin is considered the first cult wine. It was catapulted into fame in 1982 after receiving a fantastic score of 99 from Robert Parker. However, unlike the garage wines that followed Le Pin reflects its terroir.

Below are some well-known Bordeaux wine producers:

### Outstanding

- Chateau Petrus
- Chateau Le Pin
- Chateau Lafleur

### Excellent

- Chateau L'Eglise Clinet
- Chateau L'Evangile
- Chateau La Conseillante
- Chateau Vieux Chateau Certan
- Chateau Trotanoy (same owner as Chateau Petrus)
- Chateau La Fleur de Gay (miro-cuvee of Chateau La Croix de Gay)

### Very good

- Chateau Latour a Pomerol
- Clos L'Eglise
- Chateau Clinet
- Chateau Gazin
- Chateau Beaugard
- Chateau Petit-Village
- Chateau La Fleur-Petrus (same owner as Chateau Petrus)
- Chateau La Croix de Gay
- Chateau Certan de May
- Chateau Le Gay (same owner as Chateau Lafleur)

## Getting the Best Bordeaux Wine for Your Money

### Vintages and Ratings

1990 Chateau Petrus with a Robert Parker (RP) rating of 100, the perfect-price storm. At a recent record-breaking auction in Chicago (May, 2007), an imperial of 1990 Chateau Petrus (6.0 litres or 8 bottles) sold for \$59,750. That's \$7,469 per bottle!

Those prices are heart-stopping for a mere mortal, but a perfect illustration of what a Bordeaux wine from a top chateau in a good year with a fantastic rating can do to your wallet (or for your wallet).

Now, if I were the seller of this imperial I'd be on top of the world right now. If I were the buyer, I'd feel pretty stupid since I could buy 8 bottles of this wine at retail for \$3700 – 5200 each. Of



course this is assuming that the money means more to you than the wine. For many money is no object, they just want to possess it.

A wine's vintage and rating will always affect its price, but there are times when it means more than others. A wine collector who thinks of wine as art will want the best Bordeaux wine ever made (i.e. best vintage and best rating) for his/her collection and the rarer the better (like Petrus that only produces 4,000 cases per year). A wine investor will want the same Bordeaux wine, but will try to buy it at a cheaper price (e.g Bordeaux futures or buying the wine before its bottled).

But for those buying wine primarily to drink, vintages and ratings should not be used in the same way. Modern wine-making techniques have narrowed the quality gap between Bordeaux wines made in good years and those made in bad.

For example, 2000 Chateau Ausone RP 100 a fantastic year for Bordeaux selling for \$1800 – 2600 per bottle retail. The anticipated maturity for this wine is 2020 – 2075, its the perfect heirloom for your grandchildren. On the other hand there's the 1997 Chateau Ausone RP 91(outstanding), one of the worst years for Bordeaux retailing at \$200 – 250. Unfortunately, this wine probably peaked in 2005.

An excellent buy if you wanted to drink Chateau Ausone would be the 1998 (RP 94), retailing for \$350 – 760 per bottle. This year was not a homerun for Bordeaux, but St. Emilion did well. In addition, this is a wine you can drink now and hold for decades (maturity 2008 – 2030).

**Rule of Thumb:** If you're primarily looking for Bordeaux wine to drink and hold for a few years, it's not necessary to buy the best vintage. Even in the worst years a quality chateau can produce a wine that's outstanding (in taste if not longevity).

The best Bordeaux wine vintages of the last 25 years are:

1982, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1996, 2000, 2005

Sources of Bordeaux wine ratings, vintage charts and maturity dates are membership websites, newsletters, magazines and wine guides mostly written by wine critics:

- Wine Advocate (Robert Parker)
- Wine Spectator
- Wine Enthusiast
- Wines & Spirits
- International Wine Cellar (Steven Tanzer)
- Connoisseurs Guide
- The Wine News
- The Purple Pages (Jancis Robinson)
- [Hugh Johnson's Wine Guide](#)

### White Bordeaux

Don't overlook white Bordeaux. Bad years for red wine can often be fantastic years for white wine (e.g. 2001). In addition, because dry-white Bordeaux isn't sought after by collectors like red Bordeaux and Sauternes (they prefer white Burgundy), it is usually much cheaper and a source of great deals from Premier Crus chateaux.

For example, many people don't know that Medoc Premier Crus produce white wine (albeit in small quantities). The 2001 vintage of Pavillon Blanc (Margaux) had a rating of 94 – 96 (RP) and costs \$50 – \$100 per bottle (maturity 2012 – 2020). Chateau Margaux's red wine (2001) has a rating of 93 (RP) and costs \$180 – 450.

### Super Seconds

Drinking Bordeaux wine from blockbuster years like 2000 can be very expensive. But if you still want to sample the best Bordeaux wines of the vintage, Super Seconds are usually among them at half the price of Premier Crus.

For example, Super Second Chateau Leoville-Las-Cases (St. Julien) produced a top wine with a Robert Parker rating of 99 in 2000 (maturity 2012 – 2040). It retails for \$220 – 490 per bottle. On the other hand, Chateaux Margaux also produced a great wine with a 99 (RP) rating. It retails for \$850 – 1400.

Of course, you might consider a \$200 bottle of wine too expensive. In that case you should explore the Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel. For example, the 2000 Chateau Potensac (Medoc) has a rating of 89 (RP) and retails for \$25 – 50 (maturity 2004 – 2011).

The same idea applies to St. Emilion. Instead of buying Premiers Grands Crus Classe A wines, you can work all the way down to Grand Crus depending on your budget.

## Second Wines

Most chateaux in Bordeaux produce second wines. Second wines are the product of grapes deemed unworthy of the grand vin or primary wine. Usually these grapes come from young vines or parts of the vineyard that were not as successful as others. Nevertheless, the wines produced can be very good, just not the absolute best.

**Rule of Thumb:** Second wines are an excellent introduction to Bordeaux. They do not have the depth and complexity of the grand vin (or longevity), but they are often accessible when young and cost less than a third of the price. On top of that, the second wines of Premier Crus can rival the grand vins of Grand Cru Classe chateaux.

### Second Wines of Premier Crus (2000 vintage)

- Chateau Lafite-Rothschild (\$800 – 1000) – Carruades de Lafite (\$80 – 165, RP 90, drink now)
- Chateau Latour (\$900 – 1500) – Les Forts de Latour (\$120 – 250, RP 90, drink now to 2020)
- Chateau Margaux (\$850 – 1400) – Pavillon Rouge (\$60 -145, RP 90, drink after 2010)
- Chateau Haut-Brion (\$300 – 500) – Bahans Haut Brion (\$59 – 78, RP 90, drink now)
- Chateau Mouton-Rothschild (\$600 – 700) – Le Petit Mouton (\$70 – 150, RP89, drink now to 2015)
- Chateau Ausone (\$1800 – 2600) – Chapelle d'Ausone (\$90 – 150, RP90, drink now to 2015)
- Chateau Cheval Blanc (\$800 – 1500) – Le Petit Cheval (\$90 – 110, RP90, drink now)
- Chateau Lafleur (\$1700 – 3000) – Les Pensees de Lafleur (\$150 – 200, RP89, drink now)

### Second Wines of Super Seconds (2000 vintage)

- Chateau Leoville-Las-Cases (\$220 – 490) – Clos du Marquis (\$45 – 83, RP 91, drink now to 2018)
- Chateau Leoville-Barton (\$125 – 250) – La Reserve de Leoville-Barton (\$35 – 45, drink now to 2015)
- Chateau Pichon-Longueville-Baron (\$100 – 220) – Les Tourelles de Longueville (\$35 – 65, drink now)
- Chateau Pichon-Longueville-Comtesse-de-Lalande (\$145 – 250) – Reserve de la Comtesse-La-Lande (\$40 – 50, RP 89, drink now to 2015)



- Chateau Ducru-Beaucaillou (\$120 – 210) – La Croix de Beaucaillou (\$30 – 55, RP 89, drink now to 2012)
- Chateau Cos d'Estournel (\$95 – 180) – Les Pagodes de Cos (\$32 – 50, RP 89, drink after 2010)
- Chateau Montrose (\$125 – 250) – La Dame de Montrose (\$35 – 55, RP 90, drink now to 2010)
- Chateau Palmer (\$180 – 350) – Alter Ego (\$60 – 75, RP 89, drink now to 2010)

## Conclusion

There are of course cheaper Bordeaux wines of good quality, but these wines are generally ready-to-drink and do not benefit from aging. The goal here is to show you the best Bordeaux wines for your cellar, and by now you should have noticed that **price is a very good indicator of aging ability**. In general \$25+ bottles of Bordeaux wine are the most appropriate for cellaring.

Please remember that a good rating (no matter where it's from) is not a guarantee that you will like the wine. You should explore all the wine regions of Bordeaux and come up with your own ratings. Unless of course you are a collector or investor, in which case ratings can make or break you. **Nevertheless, the rating of wine is subjective and you should use your own judgement.**

*In Vino Veritas*

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