



Understanding Bordeaux

The best wine in the world

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Bordeaux is the largest fine-wine district on earth offering an extensive variety of wines, which are identified by over fifty separate appellations according to their region of production. Ninety-five per cent of the Bordeaux vineyards are planted with only five grape varieties: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc for the reds; and Semillon and Sauvignon for the whites. Each of these behaves distinctively creating, especially in the case of the red varietals, a worldwide benchmark of style known universally as the Bordeaux blend.

The guide to relative quality in Bordeaux can be expressed in the form of a pyramid. At the base are the dry whites (Bordeaux and Entre-Deux-Mers) and red Bordeaux. Above them are the red and white wines from the Côtes. Above these are the regional appellations of Graves, Saint-Emilion, Pomerol, Médoc, Sauternes, and so on. From this group, but above them, are Châteaux, beginning with the classification of the Médoc, Graves, and Sauternes in 1855 and ending with the re-classification of Saint-Emilion in 1996. The Crus Bourgeois (re-classified in 2003) and grands crus are very near the top of the pyramid, the cru classes are above them, and the premier crus classes are at the very apex.

For the average person who purchases great wine, Bordeaux represents the pinnacle of winemaking and what's perceived to be the best wine in the world. These days, though, there will always be people who have the money to fulfill their desires and buy the super-priced first growths (current releases run anywhere from \$300 a bottle and up), but there is growing demand for well-priced wines further down the classification system. If you are a novice to Bordeaux looking for good value, you might seek out some of the larger producers such as Dourthe, Sichel, and Moueix. They own a number of properties in Bordeaux and make wines at several levels on the quality and price spectrum, including so-called brand-name wines. You might also sort

your Bordeaux by grape variety: if you love Merlot, you should like the wines of the right bank (Saint-Emilion, Pomerol, Libournais, and the like); for Cabernet lovers, the wines from the left (the Médocs, Graves, and their sub-appellations) make good choices.

Another strategy to finding good value is to look for lesser vintages. Following the hugely successful 2000 vintage, the 2001s and 2002s are always going to struggle for recognition, even though the best Châteaux succeeded in producing some great wines at more affordable prices. You may therefore want to spend your cellar money on the underrated lovely reds from the 2001 and 2002 vintages. —Peter Blattman

Cellar Notes

Feature Bottle

2001 Le Petit Mouton de Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac
CSPC 421834, \$120 GST included

Made from a selection of the young vines of the illustrious first growth Château Mouton Rothschild, this wine reflects the same top-class winemaking skills as their grand vin. This full-bodied wine reveals juicy blackberry flavours enfolded in well-rounded tannins with a touch of cedar wood on the long finish—enjoyable now with excellent aging potential.

Notable Whites

Dourthe No. 1 2004
CSPC 231654 \$20

Notable Reds

Sichel 2001 Sirius
CSPC 700583 \$20

J.P. Moueix Pomerol 2001
CSPC 370882 \$35

Château Belgrave 1999 (fifth growth Haut-Médoc)
CSPC 550657 \$49

Château Lagrange 2002 (third growth St. Julien)
CSPC 717707 \$60

Château Le Bon Pasteur 2001, Pomerol
CSPC 719358 \$120.