

Bordeaux 2010 – En Primeur Individual Château Tasting Notes

As I said in my Initial Tasting Notes, 2010 is in essence a fabulous Vintage. It will definitely be mentioned in the same breath as 2005 and 2009. Whether it fully establishes a command *over* those two legends in the making however remains to be seen. The ingredients are undeniably there but has the Chef somewhat overcooked the broth? The best wines are coming out circa 13.5 to 14% alcohol but many are 15% and even higher. Pause for a minute. That is Port before it is fortified, Amarone and so on. So, there *are* some phenomenal wines here but as often for me, this is about individuality. It is not religiously uniform like 2005 but instead is about some very successful wines produced in somewhat testing conditions.

Selection therefore is crucial. The standard (and rather transparent) profit margin on En Primeur for the Wine Trade is generally 10%. You add in the time and expense spent in Bordeaux; the time and cost of an En Primeur Campaign lasting three or four months; shipping costs; and the later tax gathering (Import Duty & VAT) work for the Revenue, then any profit is well into single figures only. The “big boys” of the U.K. Wine Trade will simply offer you *every* Châteaux available. I however will tell you when I think a wine is simply too expensive and equally when the wine is just not up-to-scratch. So most of my wines will be competitive at 10% but for a few I will be perhaps ten or twenty pounds above the lowest market price and I justify this by deliberately offering you a shorter field.

We don't get rich out of En Primeur (unless we have an allocation of Lafite-Rothschild etc and play games by not offering it to you at the First Tranche price and simply release it later at a much higher price) but I consider En Primeur as an ongoing service to my existing customers who will almost certainly end up enjoying these wines, five or ten years hence, or in the case of these 2010's, perhaps twenty plus years!

So despite the extraordinary financial pressures on Bordeaux from several parts of the Globe and the clear greed of a handful of the Bordelaise there are still unequivocally wines that I think will be worth buying En Primeur. Simply put though, this task gets harder and harder with each Vintage. And where there is doubt, you can easily go retro. I have been buying heavily earlier this year and will follow-up this offer when all the Châteaux prices are known, with an offer from Vintages like 2000, 2005, 2009, if I think that a given Château has priced its 2010 too highly.

This Campaign has only really just begun for the Estates of note, as far as we are concerned. Those of interest that have released their prices are: **Angludet; Beaumont; Gazin; Haut-Marbuzet; Lafon-Rochet; Les Ormes de Pez & Sociando-Mallet.** I expect this week to show the release a fair few more middle ranking Estates.

The Left-bank of Bordeaux

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Saint-Estèphe

I always like to begin in the most northerly commune and work my way south. St-Estèphe continues to provide the epitome of the masculine side of Bordeaux, rarely at the top level to compete with its illustrious neighbours of Pauillac and St-Julien but invariably better value. These wines will be £ 250-350 ish and the first four are all crackers. (*Exactly what I wrote in 2009, merely adding 10% to the price!*)

Haut-Marbuzet (Cru Bourgeois) – This is the first wine we tried on the Sunday in Bordeaux and it showed us we weren't going to be just clubbed over the head with over-extraction; whopping tannins; and searing acidity. Again, the more typically burnt, singed black fruits that the week of barrel tastings showed, gave way to more classic red fruits like strawberries and raspberries. Soft and supple, charming. Sappier, juicy, fresher with terrific and lively acidity. A beautiful colour that you can actually see through. Fractionally cheaper than last year. You won't see that much in 2010. £ 310.00

Lafon-Rochet (4th Growth) – The traditional rugged value that Lafon-Rochet has offered over the years has begun to make way for a more substantial (and not just in terms of this specific vintage character) and better crafted wine. At the foot of Tesson's garden is Lafite-Rothschild so it is not surprising that these momentous changes have also made them up their game. Simply put, this is a more serious wine. I thought the 2009 was fabulous but Basile believes his 2010 is even better. Beneath that massive opulent wall of fruit are flighty and perfumed and delicate hints of cassis and blackcurrants. Dare I say sufficiently in check at a mere 14% abv (alcohol by volume) and overall well balanced. 67% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 27% Merlot; 4% Petit Verdot; 2% Cabernet-Franc £ 355.00

Les Ormes de Pez (Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel) – 3% more Cabernet-Sauvignon and 3% less Merlot than in 2009 and what a serious wine that has resulted in. A wall of pure cassis. Big, brooding, dusty, yet managing to be satiny and velvety too. Extraordinary purple and black fruits. Lovely texture in the mouth. But finishing with that classic St-Estèphe, stony, earthy, dryness. If you can't afford Lynch-Bages or you'd just like a great example of Bordeaux under £ 30 a bottle, indulge in more than one case of this. We sold 50 cases last year, certainly worth repeating! 57% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 34% Merlot; 7% Cabernet-Franc; 2% Petit Verdot £ 240.00

Meyney (Cru Bourgeois) – Ink black in colour. Nice cool, mineraly black fruits. Almost citrusy. Good mouthfeel. Ripe fruits, minerals and graphite giving a solid backbone to this little league wine. A bit simple in context of the field but still nicely settled and it will be a sensible price against some of the others.

Cos d'Estournel (2nd Growth) I remain unconvinced by the monster they produced in 2009 but thought this was an impressive return to form. With the 2009 at circa £ 2,350, at what price however. Muted nose but still full of exotic and Oriental spice.

Lovely creaminess beneath the initial hit which develops with layer upon layer. A terrific long metallic hold in the mouth giving it a vaguely Pauillac air about it. At its likely price I won't dwell on this wine, unless anyone insists.

78% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 19% Merlot; 2% Cabernet-Franc; 1% Petit Verdot

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Pauillac

The effective powerhouse of Bordeaux and home to three of the five First-Growths so for quality one kind of has to look at Pauillac first. Not as consistent as St-Julien for me but the highs make up for that.

D'Armailhac (5th Growth) – To be honest this was a tad like Californian Cabernet. Simple, supple, with a waterfall of ripe black fruits. A solid effort. I slightly question the New World style but it will be a rarity in the sense that it'll be an affordable Pauillac.

60% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 23% Merlot; 15% Cabernet-Franc; 2% Petit Verdot

Batailley (5th Growth) – Okay so this is little league Pauillac but it is undeniably commercial. Classic Pauillac fruit, bold and sweet. Fairly rounded but a touch fiery too. If you can't afford *Les Pichons*...look to Batailley.

78% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 19% Merlot; 1% Cabernet-Franc; 2% Petit Verdot

Clerc-Milon-Rothschild (5th Growth) – A big step-up over the *D'Armailhac*. Ultra creamy, lovely scented purple fruits. Vibrant. A solid effort.

50% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 36% Merlot; 11% Cab-Franc; 2% Petit Verdot; 1% Carmenère

Duhart-Milon-Rothschild (4th Growth) – What a neat little wine this is. Slightly smoky, a touch of animal hair. Beautifully balanced, tightly, neatly woven. Good weight of damson and purple fruits on the palate, consistent, holds the attention, firm acidity. Very even, very settled. Huge 94-96 Parker score but alas this wine has now become a trading commodity rather than solely a drink pleasure. Unless you have bought previously, cross off the list.

73% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 27% Merlot

Grand-Puy-Ducasse (5th Growth) – For G.P.D. this is surprisingly raffiné. Big brooding black fruits yet still reserved. A notch or even two notches better than usual. Maybe an Estate to watch. A *great* starting point in Pauillac.

Grand-Puy-Lacoste (5th Growth) – Beautiful; scented; imperial; elegant. Neat and compact berry fruits. Terrific concentration. With *Pontet-Canet* making silly money this at nearer half should prove a worthy foil.

83% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 17% Merlot

Haut-Bages-Libéral (5th Growth) – Muted nose but sappy entertaining black fruits. Usually a clear neck or more ahead of *Grand-Puy-Ducasse* in terms of refinement and sophistication but I think G.P.D. might be a better buy this year. Not a bad wine just not as good as it could or should.

Haut-Batailley (5th Growth) – A decent example without excelling itself.
78% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 20% Merlot; 2% Cabernet-Franc.

Lafite-Rothschild (1st Growth) – Wow. The unctuousness and silky texture visible in the glass is quite extraordinary. A few in the Trade have been running Lafite down (on price, understandable) but this has the most perfect cassis berry fruits imaginable. So utterly harmonious, so integrated. Purity. Balance. Fabulous fruits on the palate. Exceptional. It would be mean spirited to say otherwise. Just an insane price.
87.2% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 12.8% Merlot

Lynch-Bages (5th Growth) – A totally closed wall of dense black fruits. Retiscent. Brooding. Hint of cassis fruits, my favoured Lynch-Bages characteristic. Such juicy, jammy, sappy fruits on the exit. An amazing wine. Textbook Cabernet-Sauvignon. If you can't afford the First Growth (and unless you are gambling for a profit, who can?) this is where you should look. I am going to stick my neck out here and say this could be a match for their 1961. One of my all-time favourite wines. A tall order but I will be trying to buy more than double what I bought last year. Optimistic...lunacy...? £ 920.00 last year but I suspect this could be £ 1,100 this time around. Anything less might in one sense actually prove to be a bargain.
79% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 18% Merlot; 2% Cabernet-Franc; 1% Petit Verdot

Pichon Longueville-au-Baron (2nd Growth) - For only the third or fourth time ever, I preferred this to the people on t'other side of the street, *Pichon Comtesse-de-Lalande*. Caramelized fruits. Truly multi-layered. Delicious.

Pontet-Canet (5th Growth) – I was prepared to indulge this extraordinary, freak of nature, last year because it had such effortless style and I genuinely felt it a match for the likes of Cheval-Blanc. A success again in 2010 no doubt but not as charming I think as the 2009 clearly was. As with 2009, perfumed licquorice and intense violets and blackcurrants. Port-like concentration. At what will assuredly be over £ 1,000 a case I am not so convinced this time. Tesseron is playing the new game but I am not sure I will start on this one. A huge Estate at 81 Hectares, an equally huge price. No chance of him cutting some slack on where this Estate has now decided to price itself.

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Saint-Julien

The traditional home of elegance and consistency in Bordeaux. With backbone.

Branaire-Duluc-Ducru (4th Growth) – A delightful, soft, creamy nose of purple fruits, absolutely coating the glass. I wouldn't say at the top if its game but a pretty good effort. Again, I felt Parker's 93-95 points fractionally generous.
65% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 28% Merlot; 4% Cabernet-Franc; 3% Petit Verdot

Gloria – Almost black in colour. A zesty and citrusy nose. Not as layered and complex as some wines but a massive grip on the finish after a decent weight of blackcurrants resulting overall in a noteworthy Gloria.

Gruaud-Larose (2nd Growth) – A lovely earthy, stony, textured, muddy nose, with hints of bonfire smoke. Elegant ripe purple and black fruits, berries, simple, scented. Soft tannins. Rich but not overbearing. Entertaining. Proper old Bordeaux. You can't accuse this one of being overcooked. Likely to be excellent value for this quality level.
66% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 28% Merlot; 6% Petit Verdot

Lagrange (3rd Growth) – Not historic but a decent offering. Pretty, elegant, clean, efficient but not setting the world on fire. Well poised, direct purple fruits. Certainly good value against say nearby *Beychevelle* however.

Langoa-Barton (3rd Growth) – A terrific effort this year. Beautiful tight, small berry fruits. Spice. Leather. Very neat. Wonderfully vibrant, fresh. Fruit literally exploding in the mouth. Gorgeous.

Léoville-Barton (2nd Growth) – Unsurprisingly this is bigger than Langoa and yet nothing is forced about this wine. More old-fashioned, drier, textured, layered. Violets, Provence herbs, fresh cardboard. Beautiful weight. I agree with Parker that this was a touch difficult to evaluate but I cannot see how he can score this on a par with *Château Cantemerle*. It'll be two to three times the price; it certainly is twice the wine.

St-Pierre (4th Growth) – Super ripe, tight-knit cassis nose, layered with chocolate, smoke and tobacco. Extraordinary power, concentration and precision. A truly gorgeous nose and it was very hard to put this down. Traditionally a pretty sleepy Estate but what an improvement. Multi-layered. Graphite. Thick and unctuous in the mouth. The difficulty is that 95-97+ points from Parker means it'll be tough to secure, regardless of price. Shame. Lovely wine. Fabulous wine. 81% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 19% Merlot

Talbot (4th Growth) – Wonderful citrusy, lime, lemony, pineapple, grapefruit. If ever a red wine can have a nod to Sauvignon-Blanc. My Holy Grail for pukka Bordeaux is tiny cassis berry fruit. For the acidity, it is something akin to grapefruit. I have seen that on outstanding names like *Vega Sicilia* and *Clos de Tart* but it is in the main pretty elusive on reds. There is a little hit of it here however. An admirable quality. Not one to spit.

Margaux

Brane-Cantenac (2nd Growth) – A lovely stalky, chewy nose with twigs and earth. Soft and supple in the mouth and slightly drying tannins. Similar in style to the old-fashioned but impressive 2009 but a fraction more so. Leather, farmyard characteristics.
53% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 40% Merlot; 7% Cabernet-Franc

D'Angludet (Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel) – Back to the gamier rather slicker side of Margaux. Very meaty and chewy. Benjamin Sichel thinks this is his best yet. £ 249.00

Kirwan (3rd Growth) – These middle-ranking Margaux's have tended to pander to Robert Parker with too much over-extraction and new oak. A bit of a return to tradition at Kirwan. Maybe due to the new winemaker, formerly at *Château Palmer*? An unusual pomegranate like acidity. Relative charm here with a nice, easy, lazy, slightly smoky nose. A grainy texture. Understated, rare in itself for a 3rd Growth Margaux these days. A certain warmth but not excessive heat. *Lascombes* and *Malescot* will catch the headlines (we weren't convinced) but if you seek more honest pleasure at a more honest price, this will do better.

50% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 35% Merlot; 9% Cabernet-Franc; 6% Petit Verdot

Margaux (1st Growth) – Another outstanding Cabernet-Sauvignon led Margaux. Ultra perfumed, elegant. Silky, velvety, truly hedonistic. Slips down with such consummate and indulgent ease. Epitome of pretty Margaux. Deft, stylish. Nothing excessive. Weight, refinement, purity. Reasonably in check at 13½% abv.
90% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 7% Merlot; 1½% Cabernet-Franc; 1½% Petit Verdot

Marquis-de-Terme (4th Growth) – You can count on one hand how many great Vintages this Estate has produced in living memory. The new owner is unquestionably going to change things. The trouble is, change takes time. Typically prices don't increase until a proven track record has shown itself. Today however, with the *Lafite* effect, things move more swiftly. Only 9,000 cases produced but I think price is still an issue here. If the wine is mid £ 250's then worth considering. If pushing to £ 300 and beyond I don't think it is quite there yet. On the nose, eucalyptus and dense blackcurrants. Minerality. Decent.
60% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 35% Merlot; 5% Cabernet-Franc

Rauzan-Ségla (2nd Growth) – For a mid-priced Grand Cru Classé (£ 500-750) I would have to say that along with *Domaine de Chevalier* and *Gazin*, this Estate really stood out for me. Fabulous inky black-purple colour. Rich, toasty, oaky, smoky, cigar like nose. Extraordinary concentration. A fabulous wine. So neat and so contained yet brooding with hints of something impressive to come. A colossal wine. The tannins and acidity are high but I think the overall balance is close to excellent. Simply needs time to see how good this'll become. Henry picked-out black cherries and stated, Black Forest Gâteau! Impressive as he wasn't even born in the 70's! 58% Cab-Sauvignon; 42% Merlot

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The Graves and Pessac-Léognan

De Fieuzal (Cru Classé) – A wonderfully clean, closed, tight surface of purple fruits. Rich, ripe, superb mouthfeel. Smooth but steely. Maybe on par with their terrific 2009. Slightly drying tannins, a little fiery at this stage but sufficient interest to merit attention and like *Meyney*, likely to be reasonably-priced.

Domaine de Chevalier (Cru Classé) – Just on the nose you sense the extra weight, dimension, layers and texture to come. A really good purple-black fruit core. A hint of the exotic about this with nutmeg, charcoal, chocolate, leather. Balanced, understated but oh-so long on the finish. Silky tannins. For a mid-price 2010 this would be one of the best examples I can think of. A serious wine.

La Louvière – If prices of most Estates prove too lofty, yet you feel you really must have something from such a potentially great Vintage as 2010, this is a good value alternative which should be around £ 200 a case. A simple but expressive, rounded, comforting Graves with chewy fruits. A good attack of acidity.

Picque-Caillou – As above, if the Grand Cru Classé really proves unattainable for you then this charmer, as good as their excellent 2009, at about £ 15 a bottle with taxes is a true bargain. Neal Martin scores this an impressive 88-90 which for a Petits Château is, what can I say but to reiterate, impressive! £ 130.00

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Moulis-en-Médoc

Chasse-Spleen (Cru Bourgeois) - Beautiful, concentrated berry fruits. A little bit of an elevated Whisky nose as well as violets but fundamentally elegant. Fairly fresh and juicy with a good even finish on the palate and fractionally drying tannins. Quite weighty for the usually deft and feminine Chasse-Spleen.

Poujeaux (Cru Bourgeois) – Wonderful blackberries and elderberries. Tropical. Exotic. Pineapple. Very even. Mouth-filling and expansive finish. Buttery fruitcake. Boiled blackcurrant sweets. Pointy acidity darting in the mouth. A really good effort this year. Much hype about this wine in the last few years, which I wasn't fully sold on. I am now. 53% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 43% Merlot; 4% Petit Verdot

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Haut-Médoc

Beaumont (Cru Bourgeois) – Well, here this little £ 4.99 wine I used to buy in Sainsbury's all those years back. Now, an impenetrable colour. Port-like, creamy, minerally, hint of pepper. Big, bold purple fruits but a cool finish. A good tannic structure. I don't think as well balanced as the terrific 2005 Beaumont but such stuffing and at circa £ 100 a case, it would be decidedly mean to fault. Like 2005 we will offer in Halves; Magnums; Double Magnums; Imperials. £ 98.00

Belgrave (5th Growth) – Real cassis and Ribena nose. Picquant. Dense, cool black fruits but deep down, still very traditional.

Cantemerle (5th Growth) – The lowest ranked of the 1855 Grand Cru Classé. I think this was something absurd like £ 110 a case back in 2003. A noble effort here. Creamy, cassis fruits on the nose. Compact, neat, pretty good length of finish. Chewy ripe black fruits but a bit of dog hair and hint of pepper on the nose. Grainy tannins. I think Parker's 91-93 score is a tad generous but I am happy that this is a decent effort. 52% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 35% Merlot; 8% Cabernet-Franc; 5% Petit Verdot £ 255.00

La Lagune (3rd Growth) – Really back at the top of its game. Wonderful silky black creamy fruits. Chewy. Long. Herbs, undergrowth. 60% Cabernet-Sauvignon; 30% Merlot; 10% Petit Verdot

Sociando-Mallet (Cru Bourgeois) – Bizarrely I have always avoided this property as during most En Primeur tastings I have felt it too singular, too clumpy for its own good and too monolithic. What a beauty in 2010 however. Lighter than usual, not as extracted, yet still ironically big and brooding. Elegant, floral, with a curious hedgerow, bramble, leafy, nettle effect. Spicy cigar box aromas too. A steely lead pencil core to this wine as well. Fresh, zingy acidity on the exit. I think this could be a very interesting and characterful wine given a decade or so in the cellar. £ 270.00

(The Right-bank of Bordeaux)

With Merlot being the predominant grape I have to say we were ultra careful in our selection on this side of the river. Without doubt some phenomenal wines were fashioned here but many, many more that were simply not to our liking. Pomerol was definitely more successful than St-Émilion for us.

Pomerol

Bellegrave – A beautiful red colour. Lovely, charming, thick and creamy textured. Great flavours on the palate including orange peel. Bright acidity. Incredibly long finish for Bellegrave. Perfect weight in the mouth. Pretty. Elegant. A simple pleasure.

Clinet – Spectacular. A sumptuous wall of Ribena like purple and black fruits. Oozing sweetness and ripeness. Fabulous concentration. Immense finish. Dancing acidity staying in the mouth almost too long. Seriously good.
85% Merlot; 12 Cabernet-Sauvignon; 3% Cabernet-Franc

La Conseillante – If *Clinet* is spectacular, perhaps La Conseillante is merely to be described as exhilarating!

La Croix Saint-Georges – depending upon availability.

Gazin – Situated on the rougher, far outer edges of Pomerol, if anywhere can be called far (or rough) in Pomerol, Gazin has historically produced chewy and somewhat rustic Pomerol. The wine is now twice the price to that of just a few years ago but I sincerely believe it is twice the wine. Lively, vibrant, vivid purple fruits. A decent core of solid black and purple fruits. Zesty, lively. A very decent effort indeed. If you'll struggle to get allocation (or accept the price) of *Clinet & Evangile* etc then Gazin's a fair bet. £ 560.00

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Saint-Émilion

Almost the identical problem in 2010 as in 2009 as far as I was concerned. Overcooked Merlot leading to too many wines around or even in excess of 15% abv. Only three renowned wines that I actually liked, *Clos-Fourtet*; *La Gafellière*; and *Figeac* but the latter is simply risible on price now. *Cheval-Blanc* was utterly charming but for that sort of money it also needs to be profound. I didn't think it was!

The St-Émilion “Big Boy” League:

Clos-Fourtet (Premier Grand Cru Classé B) – A rich, chocolatey, seductive nose. Gorgeous ripe fruit. Big, silky, satiny texture. Just oozing blackcurrants. Whereas most of the St-Émilion Premier Crus were I felt a bit over-the-top, this was one of the three that packed a real punch but was still in full command of itself! A very good wine, only the price to fear.

La Dominique (Grand Cru Classé) – Creamy black fruits. Drying tannins on the exit but otherwise well balanced and nice weight overall.

La Gaffelière (Premier Grand Cru Classé B) – Almost as good as the *Clos-Fourtet*, If the *Clos-Fourtet* is too flighty in price, I’ll look here. A seductive, creamy, crème de cassis nose. Velvety. Enveloping. Fruits of the forest. One criticism is the level of alcohol but that aside, the constituents are excellent.

90% Merlot; 10% Cabernet-Franc

Sauternes and Barsac

Some wonderful Sauternes but I just can’t see the economic sense of buying them En Primeur. Rieussec will be cheaper and most will be unmoved a year or two hence. Sad but that is the reality.

A single but clearly indicative example of this has to be **Château Rayne-Vigneau** the First Growth Sauternes. Their 2010 was released just yesterday at circa £ 330.00 a case. Yet we can offer the higher ranked (and I feel fractionally better) 2007 Vintage at a much more modest £ 250.00. It is I believe better; it is tangibly available now; and it is 25% cheaper!!! We have half-a-dozen cases so don’t delay.
(Neal Martin scores the 2010 at 88-91 points and the 2007 at 91-93 points.)

Retro...?

If you are otherwise tempted to go retro, let me know, and we will e-mail you a select list of alternative 2005-2006-2009 from Margaux; Pomerol; St-Estèphe; & Graves and others, mostly modestly priced between £ 130 and £ 288 per case.

Any questions you might have, please telephone us on 0207-229 1602.

Tuggy Meyer & Henry Palmer

25th May, 2011