



## PRIVATE CELLAR

### *Bordeaux 2018 En Primeur behind the scenes*

Faced once again with the prospect of a spectacular vintage – at least the fourth of this current decade – the 2018 Bordeaux harvest requires some rigorous behind-the-scenes investigation to better understand its future. As befits a region which is over 100km from top to bottom and almost as wide, with over 42,000 hectares under vine, there are huge differences in microclimates and localised weather, depending on proximity to the sea, hills and rivers, and in 2018 these differences were starkly evident, with dramatic differences in fortune even within the same commune, depending in part on weather and in part on individual choices during the season and regarding harvest time.

#### *The Growing Season*

First, the basics on the weather which hold true to all: the winter and spring were very wet, exceptionally so, usefully replenishing the water table across the varying soils after several consecutive drier years. This wet weather brought huge pressure of disease, particularly downy mildew which, for some, was overwhelming, and for those practising organic or biodynamic viticulture it meant increased vigilance and spraying many more times than usual; even so, many lost a significant part of their crop because the mildew was so virulent and infected the nascent bunches as well as leaves; Château Palmer, who have been biodynamic for some years now, had a yield of just 11 hectolitres per hectare (hl/ha) meaning that instead of an average 20,000 cases across their first and second wines, they produced just 6,000 cases in 2018, and they were not alone with such a dramatically reduced harvest. Similarly, Château Angludet produced only around 10 hl/ha having recently converted to biodynamic viticulture and, for the second year in a row, they will have only a tiny amount of wine to offer.

From mid-July onwards, the sun came out and shone right up to the end of October with only sporadic showers, so localised that one grower could see literally half as much rain as his neighbour. The summer was very hot, with thirty days over 30°C and eight over 35°C, with every month from June to September exceeding the thirty year average, yet, thanks to the earlier rainfall, the majority of vines showed no signs of stress and ripening continued steadily and evenly throughout the summer and autumn. Come harvest time, the growers had the rarely-afforded luxury of picking to a timetable set by the vines rather than the weather, and for many this meant picking over an extended number of days, in some cases returning to parcels multiple times to harvest at optimum ripeness. Harvesting began early; Haut Brion started picking white grapes on 27th August, whilst elsewhere Merlot began to come in during the first third of September; the later ripening Cabernet, on the other hand, was afforded as much time as it needed with much of it picked in the first few days of October.

#### *The Wines*

So often at this stage of the proceedings, a previous vintage will be bandied around as the marker for the present release, but when tasting the 2018s we heard virtually no comparisons being made; the consensus is that 2018 is like 2018 and no other; the combination of a hot, sunny vintage allied with freshness of fruit appears unique; many records were trounced this year – the highest tannin indices (IPT), high pH scores, low yields – yet the top wines don't show an excess of tannin, concentration, alcohol or low acidity, despite the numbers.

What is clear is that the variation between communes and individual properties is even more marked than usual; talking with many of the proprietors, the most important issue with the 2018s was how the fruit was handled from the very minute it was picked, with some cooling their fruit before allowing fermentation to start, others soaking the fruit pre-fermentation at low temperatures to extract colour without big tannins. Almost all the growers we spoke to had lowered their fermentation temperatures in order to control the tannins and extract more carefully, and most reduced or removed all pumping over and racking; in some cases, pumping over was restricted purely to keeping the cap of the vat wet rather than allowing extraction; almost all had reduced the number of days the wine remained on the skins post fermentation.

*Continued...*

The best wines are incredibly deep and powerful, both in colour and texture, with massive, very ripe tannins which coat the palate – and which, when tasting, we found we needed to remind ourselves to mention, so subtle were they. On the whole, alcohol levels were around 14% but, again, in the top wines, this was not noticeable as alcohol is an integral part of the overall balance, however there were many wines which we have excluded from our selection this year thanks to their alcoholic burn on the palate. At the top level, the fruit is incredibly fresh, despite the hot, sunny summer, with few of the cooked fruit notes found on some other hot vintages like 2003 and even 2009. The wines which didn't make the Private Cellar cut this year are those which felt unbalanced, with an excess of alcohol or extraction, or where the tannins were so extracted as to leave the fruit flavours cold; we are not convinced that these wines will make old bones and will therefore not be offering them. All the wines we will offer this year are those which we are confident have a future, where their fruit, tannins and acidity are all in line and working together to produce something better than the sum of its parts.

To our minds, the areas which showed the best results in 2018 were those on the stark limestone soils – the Côtes in St Emilion, Fronsac and Castillon: the wines from these soils can be severe in some vintages but in 2018 they have a rich lushness overlaying their structures. Clay subsoils, as ever in a hot vintage, acted as a reservoir feeding water back to the vines throughout the dry period, so the plateau of Pomerol with its clay, St Estèphe and some parts of the Médoc, where the gravel sits on clay, were particularly favoured, whilst vineyards notorious for being chilly and late ripening had some exceptional results in 2018.

## Our top picks

Finally, our top picks – the list of successful wines is very long so here we are only highlighting those which achieved truly outstanding success; of note was that, right across the board, the second wines of the top properties were absolutely stunning, offering really good value for money and a real chip off the old block. The First Growths all produced exceptional wines, with Lafite more aloof than Mouton, and Margaux offering incredible purity and elegance, whilst the Pessac pair of Haut Brion and La Mission were all about velvety power. Unsurprisingly the summer heat has resulted in lower acidity in all the white wines meaning that the dry whites will drink earlier than previous vintages; possibly our most exciting dry whites of the tastings came from Château Grand Village, the Guinaudeau's property on the edge of Fronsac; at a rather higher price, Pavillon de Margaux, Smith Haut Lafitte and Blanc de Lynch Bages were all particularly successful. Sauternes had a harder time of it and although there was some botrytis, many of the wines were super-sweet and only mid-weight – Olivier Casteja of Doisy Védrières was very frank, calling it a 'charming vintage, the perfect aperitif wine' rather than a great vintage for long keeping. Needless to say, his wine and neighbouring Doisy Daëne were both beautifully charming and poised, amongst the most successful of the year.

### St Estèphe

Calon Ségur & Marquis de Calon  
Capbern  
Cos d'Estournel & Pagodes de Cos  
Lafon Rochet  
Lilian Ladouys  
Montrose & Dame de Montrose  
Ormes de Pez

### Pauillac

Clerc Milon  
Grand Puy Lacoste & Lacoste Borie  
Haut Batailly  
Lynch Bages & Echo de Lynch  
Pichon Baron  
Pichon Lalande & Réserve de la Comtesse

### St Julien

Beychevelle  
Branaire Ducru  
Ducru Beaucaillou & La Croix de Ducru  
Lalande Borie  
Langoa Barton  
Léoville Barton  
Léoville Las Cases  
Léoville Poyferré

### Margaux

Brane Cantenac  
Giscours  
Issan & Blason d'Issan  
Labégorce  
Rauzan Gassies  
Rauzan Ségla

### Pessac-Léognan

Domaine de Chevalier  
Fieuzal  
Pape Clément  
Picque Caillou

### Bordeaux, Côtes Satellites

Beaumont, Haut Médoc  
Cap de Haut, Haut Médoc  
Carignan, Cadillac  
Chenade, Lalande de Pomerol  
Clos Fontaine, Côte de Francs  
Clos Puy Arnaud, Castillon  
Dalem, Fronsac  
Domaine de Cambes, Bordeaux  
Fourcas Hosten, Listrac  
Grand Village, Bordeaux  
Montlandrie, Castillon  
Moulin Haut Laroque, Fronsac  
Roc de Cambes, Côtes de Bourg

### St Emilion

Bélaïr Monange  
Canon  
Canon La Gaffelière  
Clos Cantenac  
Figeac  
La Gaffelière  
Moulin du Cadet  
Pindefleurs  
Saintayme  
Tertre Roteboeuf

### Pomerol

Beauregard  
Bourgneuf  
Certan de May  
Connivence & Belle Connivence  
Eglise Clinet & Petite Eglise  
Feytit Clinet  
Gazin  
Hosanna  
La Fleur Pétrus  
Mazères  
Séraphine  
Vieux Château Certan

**Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler MW**  
Director of Buying, April 2019

[www.privatecellar.co.uk](http://www.privatecellar.co.uk)

## Your Wish List

To ensure that we keep you up to date with the releases of your favourite wines, please let us have your wish list for 2018 Bordeaux by calling us on 01353 721 999 or contacting your salesperson direct using the details below:

Andrew Gordon	andrew@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 721 999	M: 07795 973 371
James Naylor	james@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 721 993	M: 07920 096 707
Amanda Skinner	amanda@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 721 608	M: 07920 080 042
Camilla Shepherd	camilla@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 721 999	M: 07919 095 799
Charlie Stanley-Evans	charlie@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 977 995	M: 07949 088 292
Peter McCalmont	peter@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 721 999	M: 07803 296 544
Laura Taylor	laura@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 977 997	M: 07702 905 137
Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler MW	nicola@privatecellar.co.uk	T: 01353 721 999	M: 07889 598 577