



Bordeaux 2025
Vintage Report, by Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler MW

Bordeaux is Back

Many column inches have been devoted to the state of the Bordeaux *en primeur* market over the past couple of decades, particularly discussing whether its time has passed. Then along comes a vintage like 2025 which may well change the narrative.

Noemie Durantou of L'Eglise Clinet called 2025 'the year of the gamble', with uncertainty at every stage as to what the outcome might be by harvest time. The growing season began wet, then turned impossibly hot and dry and when rain finally fell at the end of August everyone was relieved but still anxious about how the wines would fare. However, as soon as they tasted the resulting wines, they were ecstatic – the 2025s major in red fruits rather than black, have relatively modest alcohol levels and, analytically at least, stacks of ripe tannins. These are wines which are multi-layered yet approachable, and with a level of freshness not seen for some time.

If the châteaux follow the recent trend for more reasonable pricing, wines of this calibre should get the market excited again – and we will all be the winners when we come to drink them.

The Growing Season

2025 started out with a warm, wet spring, so much so that a re-run of the soggy 2024 was feared, and treatments started promptly to protect the early buds. The weather soon cleared up and with continued warm temperatures the vines galloped ahead, resulting in flowering in the third week of May under perfect conditions, with a good fruit set across the board. It remained dry for three whole months, putting many vineyards under water stress, resulting in delayed *véraison* (when the grapes turn from green to red) which happened in late July.

Alongside the drought, there were three significant heatwaves, defined as three days of raised temperatures (essentially over 30C) with nights above 20C which happened at the end of June, in July and again in August, amplifying challenges for young vines or vines planted on free-draining gravel and sand. In most areas, the temperatures between heatwaves returned to normal levels, allowing respite for the vines, and the night time temperatures were cool, the wide diurnal range helping the vines recover after the very hot days.

Some regions had brief storms at the end of July, giving a boost to *véraison*, but for most it was a long, tense wait until the end of August when there was meaningful rainfall on the 20th and 29th, although again the amounts varied hugely between regions – some areas only got 20 to 30mm whilst others were at 75mm. By this time the Merlots were all but ripe, just needing a boost to get them over the line; many harvested their Merlot immediately after the rains, which gave no time for the wines to pump up excess water but allowed a welcome boost to phenolic ripeness and reduced the sugars.

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Harvesting was early and remarkably speedy in all cases, with many properties saying they had never had such a fast, early vintage (sporadic rain in early September brought a risk of botrytis, meaning some later-harvesting properties had to triage their fruit). Unusually this year, the highly technical optical sorters were brought in not to winnow out unripe fruit but to reject dried or raisined berries to avoid them getting into the vats.

Irrigation remains prohibited in Bordeaux except by special decree – and even then it is hard to implement without the infrastructure already in place. Notably, Château Lafleur in Pomerol found their water reserves on the plateau, a mix of gravel and sand, were depleted by July and, with no rain forecast they needed to decide whether to protect their vines or stick to the appellation rules. The health of their vines – and soil – came uppermost so they opened a narrow trench between the vines and injected a small amount of water, 10 litres per square metre, before covering it back over to reduce evaporation. This has meant that they can no longer use the Pomerol appellation but instead are labelling all their wines as *Vin de France*. It wasn't an easy decision to rescind the appellation name but faced with flora and fauna in the soil being baked to death, and with no other options like shading or nets working, they felt they had no choice.

2025 has led many growers to rethink their vineyard canopies and practices, delaying or no longer carrying out leaf plucking (which is generally used to promote ripening and access to the sun, as well as increasing air flow around the fruit), changing the height of their canopy, or, in several properties, reducing hedging which allows the vine to bush out more into the tracks, the latter two practices designed to generate more shade and reduce temperatures around the fruit. Others carried out multiple green harvests (four, in the case of Cheval Blanc, with one plot of younger vines eventually reduced to no fruit at all in order to save the vines). However the properties dealt with the drought and the heat individually, they were collectively impressed and surprised by the resilience of their vines, but there was no doubt that those with deep clay or limestone in their subsoil weathered the conditions better. The result was a harvest of small, concentrated berries with a very high skin to juice ratio, with high concentrations of anthocyanins and colour.

The Quality Issue

Our first concern, having lived through the hot summer and read the weather reports, was that we were going to be faced with dense, sun-infused wines stuffed full of tannins and alcohol. Instead, we were greeted with wines of extraordinary freshness and purity, explained by the late rains delaying ripening and preventing a build-up of sugars in the fruit, along with the cooler nights between heatwaves to preserve acidity. An incredibly consistent vintage, Cabernets on both sides of the river have a slight edge over Merlot, however almost all the wines show incredible depth of fruit and subtlety of tannins – indeed, in many cases we had to make a mental note to comment on the tannins as they are so well integrated into the wines. These wines are not lush, but neither are they austere, instead they tread the middle route with a light step and often signal their quality on the finishes which are so incredibly persistent – if tasting in a hurry, it would have been so easy to underestimate the potential of these wines.

In terms of tannic structures, the volume of tannins (recorded as IPT – *Indice des Polyphénols Totaux*) is higher than in many previous solar vintages, yet the wines feel fresh and vibrant. Notably, we were not drained by the end of the tasting day. These are wines which will drink well in youth but which have got the stuffing to age for years to come, and they will retain their fresh edge as acidities are good and alcohol levels moderate, ranging from 12.5% to 13.5%.

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The Market

No *en primeur* report is complete without reference to the market into which they will be released.

We are all aware of the geopolitical stresses which are playing out across all markets, and the rarefied world of Bordeaux *en primeur* is not immune. Volumes are down for the second consecutive year, while quality is significantly improved over 2024. Many are placing the vintage in the quality range of 2022 and 2016, both stellar years.

Prices are therefore likely to increase slightly compared to the 2024s but should remain well below the highs seen in 2020 and 2022.

In this context, the wines represent strong value and will provide excellent drinking in the medium to longer term. Where pricing aligns accordingly, we have no hesitation in recommending buying at all levels.

Our list of top wines to buy will follow shortly.

Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler MW
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Stay in touch with us using the email addresses below

or call 01353 977 995

Andrew Gordon	andrew@privatecellar.co.uk
Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler MW	nicola@privatecellar.co.uk
Laura Taylor	laura@privatecellar.co.uk
James Naylor	james@privatecellar.co.uk
Charlie Stanley-Evans	charlie@privatecellar.co.uk
Nick Clarke	nick@privatecellar.co.uk
Peter McCalmont	peter@privatecellar.co.uk
Alasdair Lawson-Dick	alasdair@privatecellar.co.uk
Josh Morris Lowe	josh@privatecellar.co.uk
Mark Wilson	mark@privatecellar.co.uk
Hugo Spencer	hugo@privatecellar.co.uk

www.privatecellar.co.uk