

BORDEAUX 2017

report



In the second week of April we made the annual trip to Bordeaux to taste the soon to be released 2017 Vintage. Having spent 4 full days tasting and re-tasting hundreds of samples from all appellations and speaking to the wine makers, we now have a clear idea of the quality and potential of this vintage. I must admit, like many people, when we boarded the flight on Sunday morning, it was with the trepidation of spending 4 long days tasting dilute, frost affected and under-ripe wines. It therefore was with great relief and a little surprise that after the first day was done and with cold beer in hand, the picture was a lot rosier than I had envisaged.

Overall 2017 is a good vintage, not great like the recent blockbuster vintages 2016, 2010 and 2009 but more like a hypothetical blend of 2014 and 2015. The buzzword was freshness this year, the best examples are classically styled wines at 13-13.5% abv with structure, balance and great energy. Where the wines are good the fruit is ripe, bright with well-integrated tannins and as Francois Mitjavile of Tertre Roteboeuf said “very expressive and vibrant”. We regularly noted the lovely minerality and saline acidity of the best examples, and it is the balance of acidity and fruit that creates the freshness. A lot like 2001 this will be a vintage that grows in popularity, 2001’s are wonderful now especially in Pomerol where they frequently outperform the more lauded 2000 vintage. Vieux-Chateau-Certan again takes our award for top wine of the vintage and Pomerol is probably the most successful appellation just pipping Pauillac and Saint Estephe. It is the wines that avoided the worst of the frost that will receive the highest praise.

Lynch Bages, Montrose, Calon Segur, Pichon Lalande, Grand-Puy-Lacoste along with VCC, Figeac, La Conseillante, Eglise Clinet and Tertre Roteboeuf all made very good wines, but there are many more at all price points that should be on your list to buy if (and it’s a big IF) the prices are below that of 2016, and (hopefully) 2015.

The White Wines

A special mention needs to be made for the white wines of 2017, both sweet and dry whites. This is a very successful vintage for these wines as is so often the case in high acid years. We tasted very good wines starting at around £100/12 EP all the way up to the likes of Haut-Brion Blanc and Pavillon Blanc de Chateau Margaux. Suduiraut continues its successful run, it was a truly exquisite Sauternes. If you are a fan or even a curious buyer then a case or two of something white from 2017 should be on your shopping list.

The Growing Season

The mild winter resulted in an earlier bud-burst or “advance” as the Bordelaise refer to it. This meant more time for the grapes to ripen, and early comparisons were being drawn to 1990, however in mid-April a very severe frost struck. In the Medoc vineyards that were close to the Gironde were protected, but those further in-land suffered badly, for example Mauvesin Barton made no wine in 2017. In Pessac it was much more mixed, de Fieuzal again completely wiped out, but Haut-Brion being closer to the warmth of the city was largely un-touched. On the right bank the plateau of Pomerol or slopes of Saint Emilion were largely frost free, however those on the lower slopes suffered badly.

The summer was then long and dry but not overly hot, meaning alcohols are lower and the wines fresher. The Harvest tended to be much earlier but was more drawn out, some properties taking the whole month of September to harvest plot by plot. James Suckling sums up below.

“The terrible frosts in late April last year reduced the volume of the 2017 harvest by more than 30 percent. Some wineries, particularly those in low-lying areas in less prestigious appellations, lost their entire 2017 crop. Some were forced to use part of their grapes from second-generation buds in their new wines. In spite of that, I was surprised — considering the press reports about the frost — that so many of the top wineries we visited (about 60 in total) were unaffected.” <https://www.jamessuckling.com/>

The Wines

We will be sending offers, with our notes and that of the critics we follow as and when the wines are released over the coming months (between May and July), and recommending where we feel the price warrants it. If you are interested in receiving these offers, please let us know by e-mailing wine@latimervintners.com or telephoning us on 020 3848 1070.

Fingers crossed for a good campaign!

James Pymont Director