

2000 bordeaux - winners and winners

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See my *tasting notes, scores and suggested drinking dates on nearly 50 top 2000 bordeaux* on [Purple pages](#)

As you read this I may well be in Bordeaux, almost certainly with my nose deep in a sample of the highly touted 2009 vintage. I will report on whether the hype is justified in a couple of weeks, but last week I had the most delightful reminder of just what the red bordeaux fuss is all about.

Tasted young, it can be a bit of an assault, chock full of astringent tannins, blackening colour and marked acidity. But the point of red bordeaux at all levels except the most basic is that it has to be aged in bottle before it provides real drinking pleasure - if you're lucky. At the very top level - first growths and the like - there are rarely disappointments nowadays because the proprietors can afford to cossset the vines and choose only the crème de la crème of what was produced each year for their signature wine. But lower down the ranks it is not difficult to find some pretty boring wines, especially in lesser vintages. Mid and lower range 2007s, 2006s and 2002s are usually competent, for example, but rarely inspiring. The real excitement of bordeaux for me comes from vintages that are so consistently successful that you can find delicious wines at virtually all prices and quality levels.

I liked 2000 bordeaux from the start and found many of the well- priced Haut- Médoc minor châteaux really rather inspiring when I first tasted this vintage in April 2001, and again in 2003 soon after it had gone into bottle. At a more elevated level, 2000 has tended to show well in vertical tastings (different vintages of the same château) ever since, but it was only last week that I had a chance to participate in a really wide- ranging horizontal tasting (same vintage, various different châteaux) of top- quality 2000 bordeaux now that it is 10 years old and has benefited from at least eight years' bottle age.

Fine wine traders Bordeaux Index called in or bought samples from 48 of the top addresses – from Château Pétrus down to Château Chasse Spleen – and showed them in their airy quarters in London's diamond district to assorted wine commentators in the morning and some of their best customers in the afternoon. Rarely has such a tasting given me so much pleasure.

What I love about this vintage is that in almost all cases the grape obviously ripened properly (unlike so many Bordeaux vintages - although in this context Sociando Mallet looked a little herbaceous) and yet it has delightful freshness (unlike 2003), gentle tannins (unlike 2005) and seriously impressive harmony.

Even my least favourite wine in this selection, Château Belair in St- Émilion, which has since been taken in hand by J P Moueix of Libourne, whose team also make Château Pétrus, is a perfectly nice drink at this advanced stage in its life. It is less intense than most 2000s and is very definitely in the ancient rather than modern style of winemaking on the right bank of the Gironde but it should please traditionalists looking for a fully mature, subtle, if not exactly wondrously complex 10- year- old wine. It contrasted dramatically with its near- neighbour Château Angélu, one of the more successful exponents of a more modern, fruit- driven, glamorous and attention- grabbing style – although Angélu is selling at almost four times the price of Belair (now called Belair- Monange).

Although I knew the identity of the wines I was tasting, I had the pleasure, and advantage for true objective assessment, of tasting them without a record of their current prices to hand. While there was a strong correlation between my scores and current prices, with most of what I felt were the most exciting wines selling for depressingly high prices (Château Lafite 2000 at £17,000 a dozen, anyone?), there are still some underpriced 2000s.

Most obvious is Château Lagrange, the renovated St- Julien property, which is currently trading at around £480 a case of a dozen bottles and can be found in the UK for as (relatively) little as £45 per single bottle at Davys of London. To me this was the epitome of non flashy claret with beautiful balance and still serious potential to age and gain even more complexity.

Even more discreet, and perhaps aimed more at classicists, is Domaine de Chevalier, whose track record is such as to reassure anyone who finds a slight lack of fireworks in the 2000 at present. Summertown Wine Café of Oxford are currently offering it at £49.95 a bottle – not quite such a bargain as the Lagrange, I think, but all six of the Pessac- Léognans shown in this retrospective tasting were looking delightful, with Haut- Bailly and Smith Haut- Lafite also offering reasonably good value, albeit at slightly higher prices than Domaine de Chevalier. It's hard to see why the flashier Château Pape- Clément should cost almost twice as much as they do at nearly £900 a case.

At first- growth- or- equivalent level, the two most famous Pessac- Léognans, Châteaux Haut- Brion and especially its stablemate La Mission Haut- Brion, look like the best value to me, trading at below £6,000 a case whereas all the Médoc first growths (apart from the China- inflated Lafite) are around £8,000 a case. But then at this level I suppose much of the wine is being sold to investors rather than drinkers.

Let us return to what wine is for: drinking. Most of the wines in this tasting were beginning to drink well, even if their life expectancies varied hugely. The only wines I would firmly stash away before even thinking of broaching them were Châteaux La Conseillante and Clinet in Pomerol (a very successful appellation); Rauzan- Ségla and Margaux in Margaux; Branaire- Ducru, Langoa- Barton, Léoville- Barton and, definitely, Léoville Las Cases in St- Julien; Grand- Puy- Lacoste, Lafite, Mouton and Latour in Pauillac; Montrose and Cos in St- Estèphe; Ausone in St- Émilion; and La Mission and Haut- Brion in Pessac- Léognan. But not all of these still- tight wines were necessarily the best wines. This vintage seems to have produced some great wines that could already give pleasure but will still clearly be doing so in 20 or 30 years' time. Start to open any lesser examples you own. Gloat over the rest.

Since even a wine as robust as red bordeaux can be adversely affected by poor transport and storage, and since there are all too many fakes of wines nowadays – mainly but not exclusively the most expensive – it is worth noting that all these bottles came either directly from the château or from reputable UK merchants.

Top scorers

Pétrus
Latour
Lafite
La Mission Haut- Brion
Église- Clinet
Cheval Blanc
Léoville Las Cases

Best- value wines

Lagrange
Langoa Barton
Grand- Puy Lacoste
Domaine de Chevalier
Haut- Bailly
Smith Haut- Lafite
Du Tertre

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