

## 1996 left bank bordeaux tasted 10 years on

29 Sep 2006 by JR

The bulk of these 70+ left bank Bordeaux 1996 were tasted blind at the Sep 8 tasting on which my [overview](#) can be found in free for all, although a dozen of them were either re-tasted or tasted for the first time, again blind, at a subsequent small tasting on 26 Sept built around the chance to look at a non-corked bottle of Ch Rauzan Ségla. Where appropriate I have given both tasting notes.

Wines are listed in the flights in which they were served, each flight listed in the order they were tasted, first growths at the end, but individual wines have been re-ordered so that within flight, my highest-scoring wines are at the top.

### SECOND WINES

#### **Les Forts de Latour 1996** Pauillac 17 Drink 2005-15

Mature rim. Real lift - and then quite delicate. A good package that is just becoming ready to drink. Far from a blockbuster but great balance and grace - not words I would necessarily expect to write about Les Forts. The most popular of this flight - quite rightly.

#### **Réserve de la Comtesse 1996** Pauillac 16.5 Drink 2005-15

Bright crimson. Very mineral, sappy nose. Lovely sweet line of fruit goes all the way through the tasting experience. Very vibrant and complete.

#### **Carruades de Lafite 1996** Pauillac 16 Drink 2006-16

Watery rim and rather low-key nose that opened out to strong mineral elements. Neat and plummy and inky on the palate but with a very appetising dry finish. Velvety texture - lots of interest buried in here, not to mention some very ripe tannins still doing their stuff.

#### **Petit Mouton 1996** Pauillac 16 Drink 2008-18

Very dark yet with a very promising sheen to it. Deep, brooding, intense. This does not taste like a second wine (even though it's in a supposedly second wine flight)! Very luscious and velvety. Rather furry tannins on the finish but clearly very ambitious. Almost over-extracted but it has the fruit intensity to stand the tannic charge. Unusually for a second wine, not ready to drink. Very dry finish. Second favourite!

#### **Clos du Marquis 1996** St-Julien 15.5 Drink 2004-10

Pale, slightly aged rim. Rather simple ripe fruit flavours on the nose but nothing at all wrong with it. Complete and nice integration on the palate. Just a hint of tannin on the finish. A good medium term drink.

#### **Clos du Marquis 1996 St-Julien** 16.5 Drink 2006-12

**26 Sept:** Mid crimson. Mellow, fully developed nose. Clean and lively, quite delicate in terms of body. Brisk and a bit angular. Quite notable tannins still. And a bit of alcohol on the finish. Not sure about the balance of this.

#### **Ch Haut Bages Averous 1996** Pauillac 15.5 Drink 2004-12

Excellent depth of colour - still some blue notes. Very Cabernet with some stoney mineral quality on the nose. Round and fully evolved on the palate. Very respectable drink without having enormous excitement. Just a hint of slightly pinched tannin on the finish.

#### **Pavillon Rouge de Ch Margaux 1996** Margaux 15 Drink 2005-10

Lively, still predominantly fruity, sweet nose then finishes very classically dry. Still some life left here and a good, ripe mid palate. A little dusty on the finish. Please note that two tasters thought this had TCA problems.

#### **Tourelles de Longueville 1996** Pauillac 15 Drink 2006-12

Some tawny on the rim and dark crimson in the middle. Slightly feeble nose and rather simple fruit on the palate. Dusty tannins on the finish. A little mean but decent persistence.

#### **La Chapelle de La Mission 1996** Pessac-Léognan 14.5 Drink 2000-07

Very mature rim with ruby middle. Light, absolutely classic nose. Ready with only the faintest tannic hint. Rather short.

**Ch Bahans Haut-Brion 1996** Pessac-Léognan 14 Drink 2002-08

Ruby with mature rim. Light earthy notes. Round start and then a little pinched on the finish. Hollow and a bit mean.

**Les Secrets de Lafon Rochet 1996** 14 Drink 2005-07

Dark crimson. No great intensity on the nose with vaguely mineral notes. Definitely mean - over-extracted. Can't see this ever coming into balance as the fruit is already fading.

**Ch Roseraie de Gruaud Larose 1996 St-Julien** 15.5 Drink 2006-14

**26 Sept:** Almost certainly the same wine as is sold under the Sarget de Gruaud Larose label. Mid crimson. Brick rim. Quite intense mineral nose. Good attack and balance. Lots of acidity in evidence. Still some tannin there. Study, classic stuff. Full bodied for a 1996. Quite long.

## MARGAUX AND SOUTHERN MEDOC

**Ch Ferrière 1996** Margaux 17 Drink 2003-15

Lovely sumptuous layered ruby. Seductively perfumed - almost floral. Fully evolved but with lovely ripe fruit in evidence and ripe tannins well in retreat. A very complete, attractive wine, although it is far from overripe... For classicists.

**Ch Brane Cantenac 1996** Margaux 16.5 Drink 2005-12

Dark crimson with a pale rim. Very classic, well balanced though lightweight nose. Delicate, some Margaux sweetness and even some intensity. Very neat finish.

**Ch Durfort Vivens 1996** Margaux 15.5 Drink 2006-12

Bright, lively crimson. Light mineral scents. No great subtlety - rather raw, simple fruit and slightly aggressive tannins. This may develop into something more exciting.

**Ch Cantemerle 1996** Haut Medoc 15.5 Drink 2004-09

Fully mature colour - ruby. Very light nose. Well balanced, mature fruity drink with slightly dusty tannins but a distinct lack of intensity.

**Ch Malescot d'Exupery 1996** Margaux 15 Drink 2005-10

Layered nose. Quite velvety texture - certainly competent but just a little green and tart for enormous pleasure.

**Ch Palmer 1996** Margaux 15 Drink 2006-12

Deep, healthy ruby. Relatively volatile. Then chunky fruit without great harmony or expression. Very chewy finish. Tannins pretty brutal.

**Ch Palmer 1996 Margaux** 15 Drink 2009-12?

**26 Sept:** Mid crimson. Very light nose and slightly green, raw notes. Raw tannins. Edgy and no fun.

**Ch La Lagune 1996** Haut Medoc 15 Drink 2003-07

Mid crimson. Slightly weak rim. Fully evolved, not desperately layered nose. Rather dry tannins on the finish. As ready as it will ever be probably as the fruit is not especially intense.

**Ch d'Issan 1996** Margaux 14.5 Drink 2008-10?

Dark crimson, sweet nose. Oddly, eerily simple Cabernet Sauvignon aromas. Blunt and straightforward but no Margaux subtlety. Raw tannins. Coarse finish.

**Ch Rauzan Ségla 1996** Margaux

Badly corked.

**Ch Rauzan Ségla 1996 Margaux** 17 Drink 2008-15

**26 Sept:** Exceptionally dark ruby. Fresh, frank nose - not overpoweringly ripe but very clean and brisk. Good balance - very neat. Slightly bracing. Not yet ready.

**Ch Giscours 1996** Margaux

Volatile. The new owners didn't want to show this!

## GRAVES

### **Domaine de Chevalier 1996** Pessac-Léognan 18 Drink 2005-12

Subtle maturation on the nose. Very lively and dancing with good core of fruit. Good for now but supported by exceptionally fine tannins. Delicate, dancing.

### **Ch La Mission Haut-Brion 1996** Pessac-Léognan 17 Drink 2004-14

Healthy, shaded ruby. Smells strongly of cumin! Certainly attention-grabbing and distinctive... Sweet start to the palate and tannins well in retreat. Powerful, confident wine. Richer and more powerful than most.

### **Ch Smith Haut Lafitte 1996** Pessac-Léognan 16.5 Drink 2007-17

Quite light crimson without much development. Firm quite intense, ripe nose. Meaty, savoury notes with just a hint of oak, which became more obvious as it sat in the glass. Sweet, intense, neat and concentrated. No great subtlety but lots of force! Not for those who seek superripeness above all else.

### **Ch Pape Clément 1996** Pessac-Léognan 16.5 Drink 2005-12

Very light nose. Very dusty tannins becoming even more evident as the fruit fades. But there is a convincing middle to this wine. Quite a kick. Mellifluous texture.

### **Ch Haut Bailly 1996** Pessac-Léognan 16.5 Drink 2005-10

Pale rim. Low-key, neat, well balanced but pretty standard issue. Vigorous.

### **Ch La Tour Haut-Brion 1996** Pessac-Léognan 16 Drink 2004-10

Mature rim and ruby middle. Powerfully aromatic with tannins fully evolved on the palate. Already an attractive drink even if a bit chunky and very very slightly green notes. Medium weight.

### **Ch Fieuzal 1996** Pessac-Léognan 1 Drink 20

TCA

## ST-ESTEPHES ETC

### **Ch Cos d'Estournel 1996** St-Estèphe 17 Drink 2009-19

Lively, dancing, nose with lots of development. Sweet, concentrated, quite dry, takes no prisoners style. Very correct. No rough edges and no excesses, but worth waiting for.

### **Ch Cos d'Estournel 1996 St-Estèphe** 17 Drink 2006-12

**26 Sept:** Dark crimson, fully evolved nose. Quite light but very pretty indeed. Lovely drink now. Good balance. Very refreshing and lively. Clean and neat. This bottle seems much more advanced than the earlier one.

### **Ch Calon Ségur 1996** St-Estèphe 17 Drink 2007-17

Strongly mineral nose. Very fresh and sappy. Good integrity of fruit right through the beginning, middle and end of the tasting experience. Lots of tannin there still which is very slightly dusty. Correct St-Estèphe. Sweet start and then glossy.

### **Ch Les Ormes de Pez 1996** St-Estèphe 17 Drink 2007-15

Lively intense crimson. Neat, fully evolved nose with some chewiness on the finish still. There is fruit but no excess of it. Vigorous, slightly minty. A good drink.

### **Ch Ormes de Pez 1996 St-Estèphe** 16 Drink 2008-15

**26 Sept:** Mid crimson. Rim beginning to fade. Very straightforward Cabernet nose without much complexity. Almost smells like Coonawarra!!! Chewy and fresh but without much interest at present.

### **Ch Poujeaux 1996** Moulis 16 Drink 2008-15

Dark crimson. Very rich nose, thick and sweet. More modern than classic in style. Competently made. Quite chewy on the finish. Chestnut flavours, Good mid palate but wait awhile.

### **Ch Potensac 1996** Medoc 16 Drink 2007-17

Dense and dark crimson. Very different style of St-Estèphe from most. Some voluptuousness about the nose. Very complete with a beginning, middle and end - though just a hint of overripeness - most unusual in this vintage! It would be

easy to take this for quality but I am looking for a little more refreshment value. Oak is evident. Just a bit too earth-bound.

**Ch Sociando Mallet 1996** Haut-Medoc 16 Drink 2006-16

Exceptionally dark. Strongly meaty, savoury notes (like Smith Haut Lafitte). Appetising drink with no shortage of fruit though there is still lots of tannin here. Very neat, refreshing finish but the acidity pushed through as it sat in the glass.

**Ch Lafon Rochet 1996** St-Estèphe 16 Drink 2008-15

Relatively pale and evolved. A bit stringy and light on the nose. Very lightweight though correct - a bit austere. This will never be voluptuous!

**Ch Montrose 1996** St-Estèphe 15.5 Drink 2009-13

Not much nose and very dry tannins. Tannins very much in evidence now. A bit brutal and bloody.

**Ch Lanessan 1996 Haut-Médoc** 16 Drink 2008-18

**26 Sept:** Very beautiful glowing dark ruby. Intriguing, fully developed nose with strong mineral notes. Grainy, chewy, almost as though there is a mild hint of TCA but this is serious wine. A bit dusty. Still lots of tannin and some alcohol in evidence.

**Ch Chasse Spleen 1996** Moulis 15 Drink 2008-15

Very blueish crimson. Light, well-balanced nose. Minerals. A bit of toast. Lightweight and a bit austere. Lots of acidity. Not fun yet!

**Ch Haut-Marbuzet 1996** St-Estèphe 15 Drink 2004-08

First bottle: On the way to oxidation. Second bottle: Deep, layered crimson. Unusually ripe on the nose. Round and mellifluous. Lovely drink already though the fruit seems to be in retreat. Drink soon! Fades fast on the finish. And after a few minutes in the glass, it also aged rapidly. What a shame...

**Ch Meyney 1996 St-Estèphe** 15 Drink 2000-08

**26 Sept:** Fully mature rim. Light nose. Hint of oxidation. Lightweight and low key. Lots of acidity. Lunchtime claret. Tannins already melted.

## ST-JULIEN

**Ch Léoville Poyferré 1996** St-Julien 17.5 Drink 2008-20

Particularly deep crimson. Very dark. Sophisticated and subtle on the nose. Some liquorice. Mouth-filling but no compromises. Very dry as opposed to sweet. Lots there - rewarding. Finishes a bit like sucking on a stone.

**Ch Langoa Barton 1996** St-Julien 17 Drink 2005-15

Bright ruby. Very delicate balance and wonderfully classic style - though definitely not for blockbuster seekers. Much more evolved than many, though there are some fine tannins on the finish.

**Ch Talbot 1996 St-Julien** 17 Drink 2009-20

Bright crimson with some age on the rim. Sweet, mild nose vaguely reminiscent of a malted milk drink. Full, complete, fully ripe and should satisfy both modernists and classicists. Chewy finish but lots of ripe fruit in the middle. Drying tannins on the finish.

**Ch Lagrange 1996** St-Julien 16 Drink 2010-22

Interesting dried herbal notes on the nose. Rather tired nose. Very dry and pretty uncompromising. Sucking-stone sensation on the finish.

**Ch Lagrange 1996 St-Julien** 17.5 Drink 2006-16

**26 Sept:** crimson. No sign of age. Toasty, attractive nose. Very mellow and sweet and charming - is this the Gruaud? Lovely, sprightly, well balanced and already approachable although with some tannin still underneath the ripe fruit.

**Ch Léoville Las Cases 1996** St-Julien 16 Drink 2010-20

A hint of greenness on the nose. Really tough and unfriendly. This could be infant Las Cases, I suppose. You have to take it all on trust at the moment...!

**Ch Léoville Las Cases 1996** ("mystery wine") St-Julien 16.5

Second bottle served with first growths 8 Sept: Tasted sweet and gentle and well melded. But rather overoaked. Bill Baker of Reid Wines: "a wine for selling not drinking"

**Ch Léoville Las Cases 1996 St-Julien** 17 Drink 2006-16

**26 Sept:** Dark crimson. Mellow, quite layered, interesting nose though a slightly green topnote. Good balance the very aromatic and supple. A good drink already. Sweet start almost disguises the tannins underneath which are not the supplest.

**Ch Gruaud Larose 1996 St-Julien** 17 Drink 2006-18

Bright crimson. Hint of minerals, very well mannered. Mouth-filling, lots of fruit. Much richer than most 1996s. Long and powerful. I originally scored this wine even higher but, since all the other tasters consistently scored it lower, I have reduced my mark from 18 to 17 and note with due humility that I may have overscored this one. Unfortunately there was no back-up bottle.

**Ch Gruaud Larose 1996 St-Julien** 16 Drink 2006-10

**26 Sept:** Healthy crimson with some development. Hint of oxidation on the nose. Lightweight and lacks real freshness. Furry tannins.

I definitely overrated this first time round!

**Ch Léoville Barton 1996 St-Julien** 16 Drink 2006-16

Mature rim on ruby core. Straightforward, very slightly green Cabernet notes on the nose. Some mintiness. Well sculpted but rather obvious flavours. Not absolutely obviously Bordeaux. Rather like a skinny New World Cabernet.

**Ch Léoville Barton 1996 St-Julien** 16 Drink 2010-18

**26 Sept:** Very dark and still with a hint of blue. Tired nose with a raw note. Relatively simple fruit in the middle and rough tannins on the edge. Rough textured.

**Ch Ducru Beaucaillou 1996 St-Julien** 16 Drink 2006-16

First bottle: Transparent ruby - looks unusually developed. Oxidising on the nose. Very hard work indeed. The fruit seems to have been left somewhere???

Second bottle: Much fruitier. My mark is for this second bottle which is quite beguiling.

**Ch Branaire-Druce 1996 St-Julien** 16 Drink 2005-15

Particularly lustrous dark crimson. Sweet, beguiling toasty nose. Black cherry elements. Sweet start, not the most classic St-Julien by a long way but it should give pleasure. More developed than most.

**Ch Beychevelle 1996 St-Julien** 16 Drink 2009-18

Bright ruby. Ripe and velvety on the nose. Round but quite aggressive and brutal. Lots of tannin still there. Wait for this to calm down. Competent but not the most exciting.

**Ch Gloria 1996 St-Julien** 14 Drink 2005-10

Looks pretty mature. Light, evolved nose. Ready! In fact drying out. Hint of toastiness but no great intensity of fruit.

## PAUILLAC

**Ch Pichon Baron 1996 Pauillac** 18 Drink 2005-18

Complete, very sophisticated. Dry finish with lots of tannins well smothered by evolved fruit. Not heavy, very delicate. This is a vibrato wine that dances on the palate. Much more lift than most.

**Ch Grand Puy Lacoste 1996 Pauillac** 17 Drink 2008-18

First bottle: Not the deepest ruby. Interesting mineral nose - relatively transparent to taste as well as look at. Not big. But lively and rewarding. Just very slightly chunky. Tannins a little crude. Very mineral. Got drier and drier in the glass.

Second bottle: Richer fruit

**Ch Duhart-Milon 1996 Pauillac** 17 Drink 2008-18

On the borderline between velvety/voluptuous and oxidised. Very attractive evolved nose. Rich start and then very neat. Chunky and lively.

**Ch Haut-Batailley 1996 Pauillac** 17 Drink 2007-17

Very deep. Lustrous dark ruby. Sweet tea leaf aromas. Very neat and compact and dense. Very slightly too much oak in

evidence. Warm, almost hot(!) finish - almost unheard-of in 1996... Quite a dramatic, obviously consciously sculpted wine.

**Ch Batailley 1996** Pauillac 17 Drink 2008-18

Savoury, almost cheesy, nose. Minty cassis hints too. Rather an old-fashioned wine - no concessions to tannin management. Authentic Pauillac but some will find the dustiness offputting but there is lots of integrity here.

**Ch Clerc Milon 1996** Pauillac 16.5 Drink 2009-19

Quite meaty, sweet, vivacious fruit though without much subtlety. Violets and sweetness. Needs lots more time. Very dry tannins on the finish.

**Ch Pichon Lalande 1996** Pauillac 16 Drink 2005-12

Mid crimson. Very obviously minty. Sweet, round start - unusually mature for a 1996 Pauillac but certainly easy to drink now. Just not especially fine and complex.

**Ch Pichon Lalande 1996 Pauillac** 17.5 Drink 2005-12

**26 Sept:** Light nose. Dark crimson. Very full and broad and well balanced and yet with hardly discernible tannin until the very very end. Quite forward but a lovely drink. Nothing out of place. A *much* better bottle than we saw in the first line-up.

**Ch Haut Bages Libéral 1996** Pauillac 15.5 Drink 2006-17

Sweet and rich on the nose. Much more developed than most and far from the purest expression of Pauillac.

**Ch d'Armailhac 1996** Pauillac 15 Drink 2008-17

Quite evolved rim. Meaty, developed nose with a hint of meat extract/Oxo. Sweet start and then very chewy austere finish. A rather muted Pauillac. Second bottle even more obviously reduced.

**Ch Lynch Bages 1996** Pauillac 14.5 Drink 2004-08

Rather pale. Loose textured and a bit flabby, verging on oxidised. Dried out on the finish. Nb I marked this much lower than most other tasters.

**Ch Pontet Canet 1996** Pauillac 14.5 Drink 2008-12

Sweet, rather simple nose. Very dusty, dry tannins on the finish. Thick and aggressively astringent.

## FIRST GROWTHS

**Ch Mouton Rothschild 1996** Pauillac 19 Drink 2010-25

Very savoury nose. Dense and thick and sweet but not ethereal. Still very embryonic. Chewy tannins. Very correct and racy.

**Ch Lafite 1996** Pauillac 18.5 Drink 2010-25

Very intense nose and very obviously intense, ripe Cabernet. Essence of 1996 though not yet comfortable to drink. Very rich and intense and focussed. Long and reverberating.

**Ch Latour 1996** Pauillac 18 Drink 2008-20

Mature rim. Inky mineral nose. Delicate, lively wine. Really racy. Very dry finish. A bit gawky.

**Ch Haut-Brion 1996** Pessac-Léognan 18 Drink 2009-25

Sweet, very ripe nose. Round and charming. Great intensity but also subtlety. Dry finish. Long, captivating. Not the greatest clarity though - almost muddy. I kept on marking it down as it oxidised in the glass.

**Ch Margaux 1996** Margaux 17.5 Drink 2008-18

First bottle: Quite light rim. Suggestion of TCA. But very lively - very dry on the finish. Lots of exciting flavours though. Second bottle: Minty sweet nose. Transparent. Chewy, dusty tannins. Slightly hot finish. Very pinched tannins on the finish.