

## Bordeaux 2001 - the forgotten vintage?

30 Mar 2011 by Jancis Robinson/FT but this is a little longer

See my [recent tasting notes](#) on about 60 of the most significant bordeaux 2001s.

The current buzz may be all about 2010, and 2010 may be my and my palate's current preoccupation, but how about the vintage in which those last two digits are reversed? I guarantee you that it is currently providing much better value...

Having tasted a wide range of 2001 bordeaux now that they have reached the magic age of 10 years, many of them in a single tasting very recently, I would reiterate what I wrote nine years ago: 'If I have two words of advice about Bordeaux's 2001s, they are: buy Sauternes'.

But the difference is that now that the red wines have benefited from so many years in bottle, they look considerably more charming than they did at just a few months old. In fact those who bought 2001 red bordeaux en primeur should feel quite pleased with themselves. And those who bought 2001 sweet white bordeaux should feel very smug indeed.

This was a vintage that has long been overshadowed by the more famous 2000, and to begin with was lumped together with the 2002 as one of the weaker vintages of the beginning of the new century. But over the last two or three years, all my tastings have suggested that 2001 is generally much better than 2002 and can in some instances show better than the equivalent 2000 - especially the St-Émilions and Pomerols on the right bank of the Gironde. Both Châteaux Pétrus and Lafleur can be stunning. Yet the 2001s invariably cost much less than the 2000s: £200 to £300 per dozen bottles in bond for some of the lesser names.

A recent tasting of nearly 60 significant 2001s organised in London by fine-wine traders Bordeaux Index confirmed these impressions. (It has to be said that 10 years does seem to be the ideal age to judge a bordeaux vintage - far too much guesswork is needed much earlier than this. And let no one think that tasting a vintage at only a few months old, as we are currently doing with the 2010s in Bordeaux, is a precise science. More on this in two weeks' time.)

The reds may be less dense than the 2000s, but for the most part they are beautifully balanced with an appetising kick on the finish - not light, and not in general tart, although some show the slight greenness that resulted either from picking a little too early or failing to restrict yields sufficiently in what was quite a challenging growing season.

The Bordeaux Index tasting concentrated on the smartest wines, with all the first growths (mostly £4,000-5,000) and equivalents, almost all of which had been donated for the tasting, including Le Pin, which is a tiny property and whose 2001 is currently trading at around £18,000 a case, and most of the significant classed growths. But the exuberance, confidence and harmony of the two cheapest wines included in the tasting, one from each bank, Ch Poujeaux 2001 Moulis (£225 a case) and Ch La Tour Figeac 2001 St-Émilion (£295), suggests that there are many bargains among the lesser 2001s.

Looking at my recent tasting notes from assorted dinners and so on, I see that I found even Ch de Camensac 2001, which you can pick up for not much more than £20 a bottle, is still offering 'a fresh, elegant waft of classic claret', though I did also note 'not for Australians', meaning that it is on the spindly side. One of the best bargains is surely Ch Beauséjour (Duffau-Lagarrosse) 2001 St-Émilion, which can be found for £300-400 a dozen and is really plump, succulent and rewarding.

I've had a couple of chances to enjoy Ch Brane Cantenac 2001 Margaux recently and suggest that it is a fine buy for around £450 a case if you seek elegant, polished Margaux that did not suffer, like several other Margaux at that period, the fate of being too heavily tarted up. St-Julien 2001s are a very solid group, even if Las Cases 2001 seems even more reticent and surly than usual. And in Pauillac there is no shortage of fine performers, with Ch Grand Puy Lacoste 2001 (£450) one of the better buys, as is so often the case, and Ch Lynch Bages 2001 (£950) also very attractive and perhaps longer lived. There is no obvious 'winner' between the two Pichons in 2001, but both are already starting to drink well. Of the two most prominent St-Estèphes, Ch Cos d'Estournel 2001 (£850), continues to outperform Ch Montrose 2001 (£650) and is certainly worth the premium. In fact it is almost of first-growth quality on the basis of the bottle tasted at the Bordeaux Index tasting. But it is always worth remembering the extent to which individual bottles can vary. The Angélus 2001 I tasted at Bordeaux Index was not nearly as impressive as most other samples I have been lucky enough to taste.

There seemed to be at least a couple of relative bargains in Pessac-Léognan: Ch Malartic-Lagravière at around £300 a case and Domaine de Chevalier, which, considering the track record of this wine that can last for decades, seems absurdly underpriced at under £400 a case.

(Although virtually all the 2001 reds at the Bordeaux Index tasting stated 13% or 13.5% alcohol on the label, Ch Haut-Bailly in Pessac-Léognan and some of the Margaux were labelled just 12.5%. The new-wave Pomerol Ch Clos l'Eglise's was the only red wine labelled 14%.)

My overall impression of the reds may have been much more favourable than when I first tasted them in early 2002 but the sweet whites continue to outshine them. Thanks to some late-September rain that promoted the development of 'noble rot' at just the right time, the array of Sauternes was of uniformly high quality even if they varied stylistically from the unctuous richness of star performer Ch Climens (£3,000) through the relatively savoury style of Ch de Fargues (£780) to the raciness of the Ch Doisy Daëne (£325), which has to be one of the bargains of this vintage.

These sweet white treasures, so much more difficult to make than the red wines of Bordeaux, continue to be underpriced - with the most obvious exception of Ch d'Yquem (£4,600), which has been so firmly moved into the luxury goods category by owners LVMH. Château Climens is not cheap, but many other great 2001 Sauternes are well under £400 a case and, as usual, are likely to outlast their red-wine counterparts by quite a margin.

Most of the red 2001s are already drinking well, with the lesser (cheaper) ones coming towards the end of their ideal drinking window, although some of the first growths are still very tightly furled and still ideally candidates for the cellar rather than the table.

### **SOME FAVOURITES**

With approximate UK prices per dozen bottles in bond.

#### **Top quality**

Ch Climens 2001 Sauternes (£3,000)  
Ch d'Yquem 2001 Sauternes (£4,600)  
Ch Latour 2001 Pauillac (£5,200)  
Ch Haut-Brion 2001 Pessac-Léognan (£4,100)  
Ch Lafleur 2001 Pomerol (£3,000)  
Ch Pétrus 2001 Pomerol (£16,000)

#### **Best value**

Ch Doisy Daëne 2001 Sauternes (£325)  
Ch Doisy Védrières 2001 Sauternes (£350)  
Ch Coutet 2001 Sauternes (£395)  
Ch Rayne Vigneau 2001 Sauternes (£395)  
Ch La Tour Figeac 2001 St-Émilion (£295)  
Ch Beauséjour (Duffau-Lagarrosse) 2001 St-Émilion (£380)

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