



France, Bordeaux: 2019 En Primeur Report – The Miracle Vintage
LISA PERROTTI-BROWN
18th Jun 2020 | The Wine Advocate | June 2020 Week 3

Here's my conspiracy theory. As I'm interviewing winemakers and château owners each year during the Primeurs period, I start to hear the same words and stories, over and over again. I'm now convinced that about two weeks before the Primeurs visitors descend upon the region en masse, all the major château owners and technical directors from across Bordeaux gather together for an enormous meeting. Actually, knowing the Bordelais, it is probably more like a big Pre-Primeurs Party. Collectively, they get their story straight about what "really" happened during the growing season and harvest. I'm even more convinced of this when I visit during the harvest or in February, which have become my habits, and the responses to my enquires about that vintage in the pipeline are blank deer-in-the-headlights stares. I imagine they are thinking, "We haven't had THE PARTY yet. What do I say? What do I say?"

This Party probably begins with a pep-rally reminder of the rules of Primeurs communication:

1. If there were no witnesses, any adverse act of nature that cannot categorically be proven, did not happen.
2. If there were witnesses (curse you, Gavin Quinney!) or scientific evidence, no matter how catastrophic the event, it was for the best.
3. Nothing unusual occurred. Unusual is bad. Everything that occurred this year has happened before in another indisputably great vintage.
4. What happens in the sorting room, stays in the sorting room.

Most importantly, it is during this Party that they all come up with the buzz words for this vintage. The buzz words are an essential brainwashing tool, meant to feature heavily in the reports and tasting notes of every critic and merchant who visits. I know this, because I hear the same words from the mouths of every winemaker, château owner and foie gras server at each and every tasting room. In 2016, the buzz words were: Homogenous, Polished and Perfect. In 2017, they were: Elegant, Floral and Precision. In 2018, they were: Power, Legendary and Ka-ching.

Of course, this year was different. Instead of the hundreds of cars in a jam at that one little roundabout in Saint-Émilion, there was an abandoned foie gras cart and Styrofoam tumbleweed. In the end, when it was finally decided that the show must go on, suddenly everything had to be done remotely, by video conference calls. For the last few weeks, I've been listlessly singing, "Com'on and Zooma-Zooma-Zooma Zoom" to myself each morning to get out of bed. And yet, damn it, the winemakers still must have somehow managed to have their Party this year. A Zoom Party. During which, I'm pretty sure they were all given lessons on how to make it look like their Zoom screen had frozen when they were asked any tricky interview questions. That happened a lot. But how I know for a fact that they still had the Party was those repeated buzz words. Over and over again I heard these same words about 2019: Easy, Energy and Miracle. Ok, I'll give them Easy(er) and Energy, but Miracle? Pffft.



Château Pedesclaux vineyard on September 24,

2019

The Growing Season

A lot of winemakers commented on how it was an “easy” growing season. Marketing speak aside, I could not but interpret this in a relative sense, since the two previous years were fraught with considerable challenges: 2017 with the widespread spring frosts and 2018 with the rampant mildew early on in the season. 2019 was easy in that growers did not have to contend the same scale of natural disasters, but I wouldn’t say it was it a year where the vineyard workers could recline with their sunglasses on, sipping iced tea and watching the grapes ripen. No matter how effortless winemakers may try to paint the vintage, the best results are clear in the wines from those growers who knew when to act and when to do nothing.

“ENERGY”—There’s that buzz word, written right at the top of the tasting note page of Château Haut-Bailly’s 2019 tasting booklet. “Yes,” technical director Veronique Saunders laughed when I pointed it out to her. “The energy is something we found in the wine—but also, the vintage required a lot of energy from us.” This started with the early budburst this year and subsequent risk of frost. “We had to light fires five times,” Saunders mentioned. “Even though we don’t have much risk at Haut-Bailly,” she hastened to add.

“2019 was quite easy for us,” Château Margaux’s technical director, Philippe Bascaules, told me. “The spring was usual, average temperatures, a little more rain than usual at the start, but this was good to help keep the vines fresh through the year.”

Sifting through the gilded chaff for the 24-carat grains of truth, this “little more rain than usual at the start” turned out to be an important point contributing to the quality of the vintage. The winter rainfall was lower than average for Bordeaux, but spring rainfall from April onward was above average, with the April and June rainfall numbers being well above average. “There was a lot of water in the soils in early 2019,” Henrique Da Costa of Château Pavie confirmed, whose limestone-rich soils, admittedly, have better water holding capacity than many.

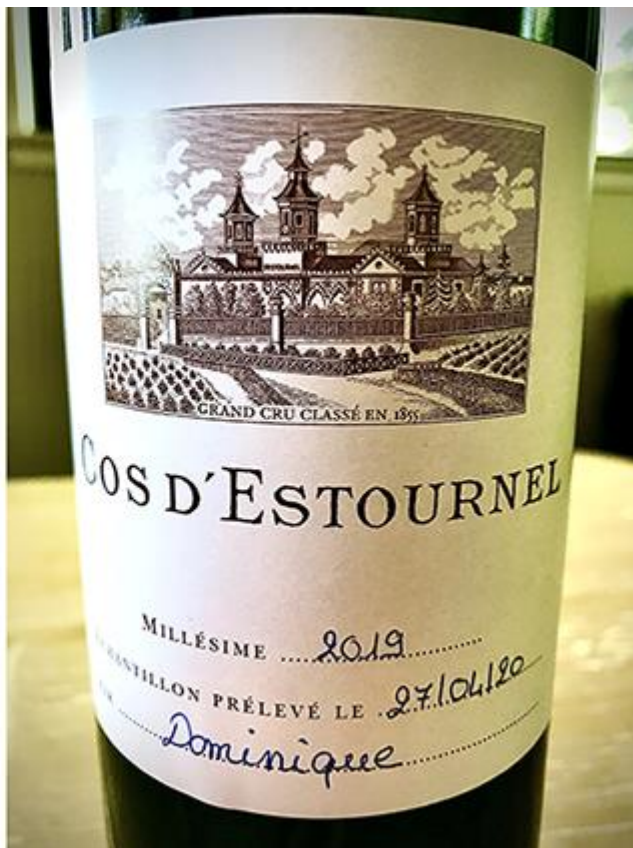
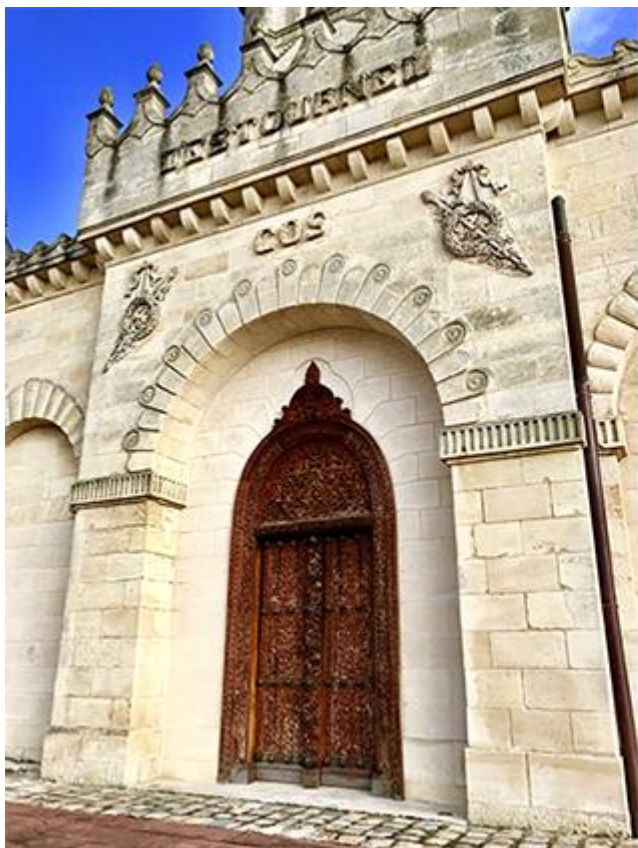


Château Pavie's enviable vineyard sits atop this wall of limestone, over a vast underground lake (accessible by the hole at the bottom), on Saint-Émilion's famous limestone plateau.

The level of spring precipitation would be critical to giving the vines the wherewithal to power through the first phase of this relatively dry vintage. The months of February and March were, however, notably warm and dry—accounting for a nail-bitingly early budbreak, requiring a lot of late-night vineyard candle burning to help protect against the frosts that spring. Most vineyards got away unscathed.

“2019 started dry and hot,” Cos d’Estournel’s technical director, Dominique Arangoïts, informed me. “This explained the early budbreak—at the end of March. The number of buds was not high, because of the very rainy spring the year before. This is the first important point,” he stressed. “A good budbreak. But we were nervous of flowering—especially for the Merlot. In the end, the result was not bad. Flowering went well—we needed it to be hot and dry. Yields would be down, but the bunches were ideal.”

Arangoïts’s alluded hiccup with the Merlot flowering was another key clue to what I had been tasting. In fact, a few winemakers mentioned that their Merlot yields were down this year due to some incidences of coulure, which, of course, mainly affected the Right Bank. “We had lower yields because there was some coulure on the Merlot, and we had very small Cabernet Sauvignon berries. But the balance was there in the vineyard,” said Figeac’s technical director, Frédéric Faye.



While some winemakers glossed over the issues with Merlot flowering and coulure early on in the season, I believe this factor has a lot to do with the very different styles and, in some cases, quality of the Merlot versus Cabernets. Most telling was what Faye went on to say: “Veraison was unusual because it was very long. It started with the Merlot, and we noticed that for some time, some of the berries had changed color, others had not.” This point was elaborated upon by Aymeric de Gironde of Troplong Mondot, “We believe there was some heterogeneity in the ripening within the Merlot bunches. We noted that within the same bunch, there could be riper and less ripe berries. I think this comes back to the flowering—it was longer than usual, nearly two weeks. Then, we saw a longer period of veraison.” While this is a key point, I urge readers not to jump to the conclusion here that heterogeneity in bunch ripening is a bad thing. On the contrary, in some cases. I’ll elaborate in the section on quality.

Early to mid-June was fairly cool and rainy. From about the last week of June, however, the heat really started to kick in. I happened to be vacationing with my family just south of Bordeaux during the first week of July, when the heat wave was in full swing. Yep, it was hot.

“By the 23rd of July, the grass was all brown, but the vines were still green,” said Saunders of Haut-Bailly. “We have old vines and deep roots. The young vines on sandy soils struggled, but ours have a lot of age.”

“July was very dry and hot,” Arangoïts of Cos d’Estournel confirmed. “At the peak on July 23rd, we were afraid we would not have enough water in the soils for the vines. Fortunately, we had 30 millimeters of rainfall on July 25, 26 and 27, to help the vines on gravel. The vines on clay soils didn’t need any help. At the end of veraison, on August 7th, more rain helped push the berries through veraison.”

Marielle Cazaux of La Conseillante said, “What was important for us in terms of vineyard management was realizing that it was a year when, finally, doing nothing was the best solution. We left the leaves on the canopy. Except for the young vines and Cabernet Franc, the vines did well, positioned on the clay. For the young vines, we plowed a little ditch to collect the water when it rained. We have a saying: ‘one good holing is worth two waterings.’”



On particularly well-drained soils such as the deep gravel plateaus in the Medoc and the sand and gravel soil profiles on the Right Bank, the rains at the end of July and early August were critical factors in the ultimate quality of the vintage.

Another important point that helps account for the style and quality of wines I was tasting came from Michel Rolland, who said, "It is important to note that the period of drought occurred without too much sun and temperature. This could have been difficult. This kept the freshness. We were not very often over 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit). It was a dry year, but not too hot. You can see this in the quality of the dry whites."

There were some heat spikes in the summer of 2019, no doubt, but what Rolland claimed is true. Average temperatures for July and August in 2019 were well below those of 2018 and more on par with 2016.

I was in Bordeaux in late September 2019, tasting some of the newly bottled 2017s and doing a little early intel on the 2019 vintage. It was right in the middle of the harvest. On the Right Bank, Merlot had started coming in, and on the Left Bank most of the Merlot had come in and growers were waiting, waiting, waiting on the Cabernet. And then, during the week I was in the Medoc, from September 23rd through the 26th, it rained. Not a deluge—just light, persistent showers for a few days. I remember clearly heading out of my hotel in the Medoc on one of those days and fumbling around in my bag for my umbrella. As I made my way to my car, I thought, "It's raining at harvest, but why do all the winemakers seem so happy?" By 11 a.m., when I was arriving for my appointment at Ducru-Beaucaillou, the rain was just a faint drizzle. Bruno Borie was so excited he could hardly contain himself. Not about me, I hasten to add, about the rain. Sod the Ducru vertical tasting I was supposed to do, he wanted me to jump in the jeep with him and check out the impact of the rain on his Cabernet.



Photo of a Cabernet Sauvignon grape bunch

taken at Ducru-Beaucaillou on September 26.

I had to give it to him, it looked like the beleaguered Cabernet bunches had just been given a completely new lease of life—tiny, but nicely taut and downright crunchy to taste. “This is good,” Borie kept chanting with a big smile on his face. “This is going to be very good.”

With regard to Pichon Baron, Christian Seely said, “The rain episode was a good thing. I think had it not happened, we might have got too much stress at the end. The Cabernet blocks came in during the first 12 days of October. Had the rain not happened, the vines may have shut down.”

Arangoïts of Cos d’Estournel commented, “So, in 2019, three times we had rain and it was like a miracle.”

Again, I refuse to use that buzz word “miracle” that I was hearing again and again, but I will say that the Cabernet Sauvignon vines, really, really needed that September rain to push through, and the timing was impeccable. Most Medoc Cabernet growers waited a few more days to get that last push of phenolic and flavor ripeness thanks to the rains and then picked during the first couple of weeks of October.

For the Right Bank it was, depending on the grape varieties and the soil profile, a similar story. “We tried not to pick before the rain,” Guillaume Thienpont of Vieux Château Certan told me. “It took some time. We waited for the rain to give more phenolic ripeness. We were saved by the rain. Usually we say we are saved from the rain, this year we are saved by the rain. The key was wait, wait, wait. Before the rains, we noticed that the tannins were not ripe; we tasted the grapes, and they were still quite tough. Twenty-four to 48 hours after the rains, the difference was noticeable. The skins got thinner, you could now extract the tannins.”

While the Cabernet harvest strategy on the Left Bank was a bit more straightforward, it seems there were three major ways to approach harvest on the Right Bank, where differences in soil type

played a critical part in stages of development. Vines on clay and limestone, understandably, progressed and a steadier rate and tended to ripen slightly quicker. Those on sandier/gravelly soils generally experienced a sluggish period, needing to wait for the rains in late September for phenolic ripeness. And there were many on the larger estates with varying soil types that divided what they did down to even smaller plots, according to ripening, and got seriously strategic. These efforts made all the difference.

“During the picking I had to make strategic decisions,” said Frederic Faye from Figeac. “I have been working here for 17 years. I knew some plots of Merlot were ready. We needed this to maintain the brightness of fruit. Then I decided to wait for the rest of the Merlot—for the texture. It was so dry. The rain was necessary for the Cabernet—these vines really needed that late September rain. In the end, this year I think I have picked the best Cabernet Franc that I have ever picked!” The harvest at Figeac occurred over an impressive four-week stretch, starting on the 13th of September and finishing in mid-October.



The Winemaking

The first lesson in Wine Quality 101 is that you can't make great wine without great grapes. Lesson two is that the greatest grapes come from the greatest terroirs. These cornerstones remain true. But what is also increasingly true is that you can make pretty good wine from average terroirs in an excellent vintage with sensitively applied winemaking. One of the keys to the consistency of this vintage is the winemaking.

As I mentioned in my report last year, there has been a recent winemaking shift in Bordeaux. From around the 2015 vintage, there have been notable changes in how Bordeaux's red wines, in particular, are made, with movements toward forging wines that are more approachable in their youth. Whereas the extended period of time on skins with daily pump-overs for the reds was once a source of bragging rights, the emphasis now is on gentle maceration as opposed to full-on phenolic extraction. What's the difference? Pauline Vauthier at Château Ausone summed it up beautifully: “Now it is more like dunking a tea bag.” At last, this paradigm shift in Bordeaux is creating wines that are better-balanced at an earlier stage, offering desirable drinking experiences within just a few years, without all that waiting time.

These recent changes have not been without a lot of soul searching. Because, of course, Bordeaux cannot sell its soul: that ability to age and give more over time. What's more, Bordeaux should never surrender its signature understated, soft-spoken style that pushes the fruit to the background, that celebrates savoriness, freshness and the flavors of the earth above all else. The good news is that even in the warmer, drier vintages like 2019, while there is certainly a lot of fruit and weight to these wines, there also are all those distinctive accents, offering plenty opportunities for the wines to expand, to evolve, to mature into something more.



2019 harvest

at Château Pedesclaux

This vintage in particular, successful winemakers took extra measures to preserve the freshness of the fruit, which is one of the key signatures of 2019. What surprised me slightly this year is how that gentle maceration/extraction goal of today's top châteaux has trickled down to be adopted by many of the more modestly priced labels. I can taste it. This was a warm, dry vintage where hydric stress was potentially an issue. I was looking for hard, unresolved tannins. But there were very few cases in which I found this.

At the top end, many winemakers were going that extra nine yards this year to capture the purity and freshness of the vintage. The use of amphorae and larger barrels for the élevage is an increasingly popular way to achieve this. "In 2019, we added an additional fudre. We wanted to protect the Cabernet Franc from oxygen, along with reduced impact of the oak. Forty percent of our Cabernet Franc is now aged in the fudre," Stephanie de Boüard-Rivoal of Angélus told me. Others are looking to lock in that freshness even before the wines get to barrel. Figeac's Frederic Faye does not add any sulfur before or during fermentation, in order to help keep that brightness of the fruit, only adding a little for protection from oxidation after the fermentation. Meanwhile, over at La Conseillante, Marielle Cazeaux mentioned, "Since 2017, all the tanks have had debourbage [a cool settling] done prior to fermentation. We do that overnight, simply to get rid of the dust and dirt. When the vintages are hot and dry, there can be a lot of dust and dirt on the grapes—the quantity can be incredible. We want the wine to be as pure as possible."



The Quality

Tasting the Primeurs samples from my home office this year was a fascinating exercise. The ability to be able to taste these nascent wines side by side, in their raw state, and really focus in on the stylistic differences was a great opportunity. To offer one example, my samples of La Conseillante and Vieux Château Certan—properties right next door to one another—just so happened to arrive on the same day. So, I was able to taste them together. This allowed me to very clearly see the differences in the 2019 wines of these two estates, most notably the differences in tannin texture/ripeness and sheer range of subtle nuances. Likewise, I tasted the two Pichons together, three of the Medoc First Growths, etc., etc. And so, I feel this might be one of my most accurate Primeurs reports ever. Not because of the hierarchy of scores. Scores are largely an absolute. It is that ability to vividly see the specific style differences between the wines and highlight those unique signatures of each wine within the tasting notes. Please, read the tasting notes!

2019 is an outstanding vintage. I've heard some mutterings that it is a somewhat inconsistent vintage with a lot of disappointing wines at the lower end. I've been looking and looking for those real howlers. Honestly, I haven't found many.

I have been pleasantly surprised by the consistency in quality, from top to bottom, especially for such a warm, dangerously dry vintage. It appears it was within the realms of even the châteaux of more modest means to produce a good, if not very good, wine in 2019, especially considering the relatively new, growing use of this judicious approach to extraction.

Given what I already knew about the growing season, I've been on the lookout for signs of hydric stress in the wines: hard and unresolved tannins, a stunted and simple range of flavor compounds and, in the worst cases, raisin/dried berry characters from shriveled berries and/or a sweet and sour overripe/underripe aspect to the wines. While I have no doubt that there were vines throughout Bordeaux that suffered from hydric stress, from what I am seeing in the wines, I can only deduce that hydric stress was 1) limited to younger vines and particularly susceptible soil profiles, and 2) it was generally well-managed in the vineyards and in the wineries. It is important to remember, given other recent vintages, hydric stress is not exactly new to Bordeaux by now.

This all said, it certainly wasn't a vintage that you could blindly stick the highest scores on the châteaux with the highest classification ranking/reputation. In this respect, it may well have been a deceptively easy vintage that caught some illustrious châteaux by surprise, thinking the prize was automatically in the bag. With the playing field leveled somewhat by the growing season's weather, to really excel in 2019, growers had to go those extra lengths in the vineyard and especially during harvest to achieve potential perfection. Arrogance and complacency are the enemies of greatness.

If you are a Cabernet lover, the Cabernet Sauvignon coming out of the Medoc this year is through-the-roof good. In retrospect, I found that the châteaux that really made the most of their spectacular Cabernet this year shined like beacons. Mouton and Pichon Baron have unusually high proportions of Cabernet Sauvignon this year, and WOW are they good. An exception (with wine, there is always an exception!), is Ducru-Beaucaillou, which has a bit more Merlot this year (20%), and it is simply stunning.

The Merlots on the Right Bank in 2019 are a bit more complicated. Not only do we have the mix of soil types to consider, with wildly different water holding capacities and relative warmth, but there was this aforementioned issue of the coulure and the noted various stages of ripening within bunches at veraison. Just by chance, Tod Mostero, the technical director at Dominus happened to drop off the Moueix samples for me yesterday. We spoke a little about the quality of Bordeaux 2019, and then, without prompting, he asked me a very telling question: "How do you feel about uneven ripening in a bunch?"

"Ah," I said with a knowing smile. "I think I know why you're asking."

Mostero came right out and told me that he feels the pinnacles of quality must come from the layers that exist in perfectly ripe grapes, not from the layers that can be manifested from bunches containing berries at various states of ripeness. And while I agree with him that aiming to layer in complexity with uneven ripening of red/black grapes is a dangerous game, when it comes to a question of ultimate quality, the answer is not so black and white. The stance that one should aim for perfect uniformity/homogeneity of ripening across an entire bunch or group of bunches assumes that there is only one perfect state of ripeness. And I just don't think that is the case. I think there can be multiple states of ideal tannin/flavor ripeness—within a narrow band, I hasten to add. That band of ideal ripeness can be quite narrow for varieties like Cabernet, which have relatively high levels of pyrazines and unforgiving tannins to dodge. But for Merlot, that band is a little wider. For this reason, I think the cases of slightly uneven ripening in some of the Merlot sites in 2019 made for some very exciting wines. I'm not saying this based on theory, I'm saying it based on taste. Therefore, when considering astonishingly great wines like Figeac and Troplong Mondot, which were among the châteaux that came out and told me this was happening, I think this vintage phenomenon certainly played into the hands of winemakers who were on their game this year.

Finally, one thing Robert Parker made very clear to me when I first started reviewing for The Wine Advocate was that it was essential not only to put my personal label preferences aside but also—and more importantly—my people preferences. He said, "Sometimes the worst people make the best wines, and the best people make the worst wines. You can never let your opinion of the winemaker alter your judgment." (Note that I've nicened-up his actual words to make this a more family-friendly report.) There isn't a tasting day that goes by when I don't remember these words of Parker.

This vintage, in particular, I also feel I need to remind readers that, ultimately, wine quality isn't always about the amount of effort exerted. For examples, I don't think there is anyone out there in Bordeaux working harder than Marielle Cazeaux of La Conseillante and Nicolas Glumineau of Pichon Lalande right now. What they have achieved at their respective properties in recent years

is mind-blowing. And, given their vineyards and resources, I have absolutely no doubts that their perfect day will come. However, wine is not made by a single person, it is made by a team. And by team, I mean the site, the vintage and the winemaker. In some great years, even though the winemaker is giving 110%, the vineyard just doesn't have the wherewithal or the stamina. From a spectator's point of view, that's what makes this game so exciting. Everything has to come together, in perfect harmony, within the very short space of a growing season each vintage.

2019 has surprised me. A lot. If you had asked me before I started tasting who I thought might be in the three-digit-score zone, I would not have had Figeac, Pichon Baron or even Ducru-Beaucaillou on that list.



Longevity and Drinking Windows

It hasn't been my habit to hazard drinking ranges for Primeurs wines/barrel samples, mainly because the maturation period can impact this estimate significantly. There are so many ways a wine can go during the élevage, as it transforms through various stages of reduction and oxidative handling (e.g., racking). New oak will give the tannins a significant boost, fining will soften some of the firmer ones, etc., etc. So, it has always been my practice to wait until the wine is bottled before giving a drinking window. This said, a number of subscribers have come to me asking for drinking windows for these barrel samples, and therefore, I'm happy to begin providing these estimates for future reports.

A lot of the 2019 reds will be approachable relatively young, but I believe they have solid staying power. Even some of the top, top wines should be approachable from about 2025 to 2027. More tightly wound wines like Haut-Brion could well need a good 10 years to come around.

I suppose the million-dollar question here though is: How long will they last? That is a good question. As I mentioned before, the winemaking has shifted the styles coming out of Bordeaux, so we are all a little anxious to see how this will impact longevity. Critically, what we are looking at this vintage is maybe slightly less tannin than some other great years, but this is largely thanks to

the winemaking, whereby only the best-quality tannins are being extracted. So, while these are incredibly structured wines, what we have is tannin quality over quantity this year. I can say with a fair amount of confidence and experience, however, that the best wines should easily go on for 30 to 40 years or more.

The Styles

“2019 for me is a vintage with energy, with this architecture of high-quality tannins and good tension creating a verticality to the wines,” said Hubert de Boüard. “For me it looks like a super 2001 vintage on the Right Bank. 2001 was very great on the Right Bank!”

Energy. Dang it, “energy” is the perfect word to describe the style of this vintage. Compared to 2018, the flavors are remarkably bright and refreshing—like crunching into ripe but not overripe fruit. And yet, these are also wines with gravitas, weight and jaw-dropping intensity. The juxtaposition between alcohols (on the high side), crunchy fruit profiles, higher acids and lower pHs (for the most part) is what gives the best 2019s this real sense of energy in the mouth. 2019 is like a vortex of contrasts together creating a truly amazing sense of harmony on the palate.

While many winemakers commented on higher acidities/lower pHs, this wasn’t always true. L’Eglise Clinet had a slightly higher pH this year, up from around 3.6 to 3.65. Lafite took me a little by surprise with a pH of 3.9 and an alcohol of 13.4. And yet, the wines are brighter and fresher than 2018. This is largely due to the fruit signatures. 2018 was opulent, spicy—all about preserved fruit, baked plums and crème de cassis. 2019 is fresh black, blue and red fruit with loads of floral accents and minerality galore.

Aymeric de Gironde of Troplong Mondot made a comment that perfectly summed up what I had been seeing in some of the Right Bank, Merlot-based wines, “2019 tastes like two vintages in one. You have the charm, sexiness in the nose, with silky tannins, but you also have this zippy backbone that you normally find in not-so-warm vintages.”

The red wines of the Right Bank and Pessac-Léognan are a bit more varied in style, than those of the Medoc. There are a few of the more opulent, spice-bomb 2018 styles, but then you can also find wines of incredibly freshness, elegance and finesse, particularly those coming from vineyards situated on limestone and clay. In this respect, I will give a shout-out to the Saint-Émilion satellites and Castillon, where a lot of value can be found this year.

Good Value?

Speaking of value, I’m finding there’s a lot to be had this year. I’m not referring to the top end—that is largely for the market to decide. At the mid to lower end, I’ve got my shopping list ready for when these reviews post. Here it is (so far):

- Tour Bayard l’angelot
- Lilian Ladouys
- Meyney
- Clos Junet
- Bellegrave (Pauillac)
- Preuillac
- Bolaire
- Domaine de Bouscat Les Portes de L’Am
- Laroque
- Monlandrie
- Alcee
- Bernon Bécot
- Montlandrie
- La Rousselle (Fronsac)
- De Pez

The Samples

First, let me come right out and admit that I was slow off the mark when it came to having samples sent. I refused the first few offers to send samples from châteaux and Bordeaux merchants, partly because of the risk involved with sending barrel samples and mainly because all the indications coming out of Bordeaux seemed to suggest that there would be no Primeurs campaign. Then there were suggestions it might happen in the autumn. As soon as I heard prices could well be coming out in June, I got my butt in gear.

As readers are probably well-aware, there are a number of top châteaux that refused to send samples. I completely respect and support this stance. Nicolas Audebert of Rauzan-Segla and Canon went the extra step of calling me to explain, “It is not because we don’t respect your view—it is the opposite. We want to be able to manage every small detail. We want to be able to explain. The atmosphere has to be in balance with what you are tasting.”

So that readers understand why I have no reviews of certain wines, here is the list of the major châteaux who would not send samples:

- Petrus
- Le Pin
- Lafleur
- Ausone
- Cheval Blanc
- Canon
- Latour
- Palmer
- Rauzan-Segla
- Montrose

Finally, on the topic of samples, while the sample-sending mostly went off without a hitch, there were a few notable cases where it all went pear-shaped. The big shipment of UGC samples that was prepared on May 25th finally arrived at my place on June 16th, after taking a long holiday with the USA customs authorities. I am in the process of disposing of this batch of samples. (Some of them were actually leaking.) The UGC is preparing a second batch now, and once received, they will be tasted as swiftly as possible, hopefully featuring in Part 2 of this report, posting at the end of June. I don’t need to tell readers that there are some very important names in there.

The other major omission is Léoville Las Cases. Their fourth batch of samples (don’t ask) arrived safely a few minutes ago, taking just two days this time. YAY!!



The Tastings

I won't bore readers with the ins-and-outs of my logistics trials and tribulations. I have been tasting, zooming and writing from five in the morning until five in the afternoon every day, including weekends and holidays, for the past four weeks. Given the isolation conditions, I had to do everything myself, and so, suffice to say, it was a challenge. Each morning I had two major goals—get the new deliveries swiftly into my cool basement and taste everything that arrived the day before. I feel like I've been through a war.

All wine boxes were unpacked as soon as they arrived and checked to see that they were cool to the touch. Anything warm or leaking was disposed of immediately. All samples were given a 24-hour resting period prior to tasting and were tasted within 48-hours of arrival. Wines that showed any signs of fading fruit, oxidation or volatile acidity were not reviewed.

Readers should note that there was a week when a lot of samples arrived at the same time, and so I had to taste quickly, writing the notes in my own shorthand. Not all of these notes have been edited into complete sentences and entered into our database yet. Please bear with me, reviews of these wines will come out in Part 2, publishing at the end of this month.

Flash Reviews

First and foremost, *The Wine Advocate* remains a buyer's guide, as it had been intended when it was created by Robert Parker in 1978. To be clear, we work for our subscribers. When wines that are in short supply and high demand are released, it is arrogant for a critic to think that the market will wait for the reviews. Wine lovers often need to be fast off the mark to take advantage of those offers. There is often a lot of money at stake. Potential wine buyers need advice as and when the opportunity to buy arises. If that's not what we're here for, then what are we here for?

The Flash Reviews were not a marketing gimmick nor are they a new feature that I plan to continue to roll out. They were a lot of work, and I'll confess that I hated doing them. I don't like to work that way.

I blame Pontet-Canet for jumping the gate on the 27th of May. After that, a deluge of prices and offers started coming in thick and fast. My heart sank. I had already tasted a lot of wines, but my report was not ready. Still, we had to be there for our subscribers. So, we started publishing Flash Reviews of the wines I believed could sell through quickly if our readers didn't act fast on their offers. These were published just a few hours prior to the price releases. How did I know when prices would be coming out? In some cases, I was tipped off by merchants, and in others, the wineries came to me to let me know.

Links to Flash Reviews, including producer notes based on my interviews, are available here for the following wines (and in some cases, their second wines):

[Pontet-Canet](#)
[Cos d'Estournel](#)
[Lafite Rothschild](#)
[Duhart Milon](#)
[L'Evangile](#)
[Mouton Rothschild](#)
[Clerc Milon](#)
[D'Armailhac](#)
[Pavie](#)
[Pavie Decesse](#)
[Bellevue Mondotte](#)
[Clos Lunelles](#)
[Monbousquet](#)
[Angelus](#)
[Haut-Brion](#)
[La Mission Haut-Brion](#)
[Quintus](#)
[L'Eglise Clinet](#)
[Figeac](#)
[Smith Haut Lafitte](#)
[La Conseillante](#)
[Pichon Baron](#)

This Is Only Part 1

I still have a lot of work to do to complete my 2019 reviews. My Sauternes samples have yet to arrive, so I will be commenting on the styles and quality of Bordeaux's sweet wines as well as the dry whites in Part 2 of this report, publishing at the end of June. Also, the UGC samples—yet to arrive—will hopefully feature in that report. I'm still tasting, tasting, tasting. And, as soon as I am able to travel, I will taste all the wines from those châteaux that did not send samples. Buzz words aside, what I can say is that when I finally get everything tasted and this report is complete, it will well and truly be a miracle!

All the 2019 Bordeaux Reviews in One Search

If readers want to see all my Bordeaux 2019 reviews together in one search, then it couldn't be easier than typing, "Bordeaux 2019" into our bright yellow "Search for Wines" box at the top of any page. Or, you can simply click here: [Bordeaux 2019](#)

Happy Bordeaux 2019 Wine Hunting!

NB: If you are a producer who sent samples and you do not see your review attached to this report, please don't panic just yet. To repeat: There was a week when a lot of samples arrived at the same time, and so I had to taste quickly, writing the notes in my own shorthand. Not all of these notes have been edited into complete sentences and entered into our database yet. Please bear with me, your reviews will come out in Part 2, publishing at the end of this month.