

Bordeaux 2021 En Primeur report

After 3 excellent, warm and sunny vintages in Bordeaux (2018-2020), the 2021 vintage saw a return to a more classic, “traditional” growing season in the area.

Key aspects of the 2021 growing season

The 2021 growing season was a difficult one in Bordeaux, suffering a range of unexpected weather conditions:-

- Frost in April **reduced yields**.
- A wet May and very wet June (with almost 3 times the amount of rainfall vs a normal June) followed, causing growers a lot of hard work in combatting mildew, coulure (poor fruit set) and millerandage (irregularly sized berries in the same grape cluster). **Lower yields were the result**.
- A cool mid summer (July and early August) meant that the grapes ripened slowly.
- This was followed by a warm and sunny late summer (late August and September), but these good ripening conditions arrived a little too late to ripen most earlier-picked Merlot grapes perfectly, particularly on the Left Bank. **As a result, many wines from both the Left and Right Banks lack weight and fruit density in the mid palate and feel a little hollow**.
- Crucially, the end of September and first 2-3 weeks of October were beautifully warm and sunny, with long hot days and cool nights. These weather conditions were much drier than forecasted, so **those producers who had the nerve to wait until October to pick their Cabernets – specifically on the Left Bank - undoubtedly showed the best results, producing wines with more fruit ripeness, density and weight**.

2021 was a vintage where the best terroirs shone through, and those producers with the financial means to do whatever was necessary in the vineyards during the summer clearly benefitted.

The style of Bordeaux 2021 wines

In terms of style, the best 2021 reds are fresh and fine with crunchy acidity and vibrant red fruit flavours. Tannins are intentionally light – most producers were very gentle in their extraction of tannins during winemaking in this vintage – to give pleasantly balanced wines with a nice silkiness of texture. Alcohols are on average 1% lower than in the previous 3 vintages, giving light to medium bodied wines which will be approachable from a young age (3-5years) but which will not have the lengthy life expectancies of the previous 3 vintages (most should be drunk within 20 years)

This is a very nice vintage for Bordeaux’s white wines and has produced whites with good fruit intensity and vibrant acidity, which should give pleasure when young and, in the best cases, have the structure and potential to develop in bottle over 10 years.

What about prices?

If you buy Bordeaux en primeur, release prices should be crucial to your buying decision. This applies particularly in a heterogenous quality vintage such as 2021, where the quality is generally good but not great. I am more cynical than most when it comes to price. In my opinion, the release prices this vintage should be cheaper than the past 3 vintages because the quality of the vintage is not as high; simple!

However, so far, most wines are being released at prices similar to 2020, which was already considerably more expensive than 2019 – reduced yields is the key reason being given to explain this. 2021 is unlikely therefore to be a vintage which gives a good return on your investment in the short to medium term. I suspect prices won’t go up once the wines are in bottle vs their release prices, so why invest your money now, two years before the wines are bottled?

Please continue to page 2 to read our views about pricing this year.

These are the only reasons to buy en primeur this vintage:-

1. Because a wine was of particularly high quality in 2021, and you want to make sure you buy it at its opening price.
2. Because you want to buy different formats of your favourite Bordeaux eg half bottles, magnums or larger
3. Because you quite simply enjoy the process of buying Bordeaux en primeur and would like to have a few examples of the 2021 vintage in your cellar for the future

My top 20-30 recommendations of the 2021 vintage

Once most of the chateaux have released their 2021 wines for sale en primeur –around the middle of June – I will send out my top 20-30 recommended buys this vintage, taking price and value into account. There were a few delicious successes this vintage which I will highlight to you in this offer.

If you would like to receive this offer, please send me an email paul@realwines.ch