

Bordeaux En Primeur 2023; Good wines – hard times! An honest assessment of the new vintage.

I travelled to Bordeaux at the end of April for this year's round of 2023 vintage "en primeur" tastings without much optimism! I had ominously received very little information about this vintage's quality from the Bordeaux "marketing machine", which I imagined was a negative signal. I was also – and remain – very aware that the economic situation around the world is not good right now, and buying expensive wines two years before they are bottled may not be at the top of most wine consumers' priority lists!

So it was with increasingly pleasant surprise that I tasted my way around the chateaux of the Left and Right Banks, because there are in fact many delicious wines this vintage! It is certainly not a top quality vintage across the board, as was 2022, but one which varies immensely in quality and style from chateau to chateau. It is a year where the quality of the individual terroir, the degree of time and effort invested in the vineyards, and the vinification decisions taken in the winery were hugely important, as 2023 was no easy vintage for Bordeaux's producers....



A quick vintage overview

2023 was another in a line of warmer than average recent vintages.

An early budburst was followed by a warm and wet May and June, with mildew being a constant threat and causing vigneronns much work in the vineyards. July was rather dry and overcast, with slightly cooler temperatures than average, allowing a steady, balanced ripening of the grapes. August was warmer, with 12 days over 30C and a heatwave at the end of the month which continued into the first week of September. The earlier ripening Merlot grapes were generally picked in ideal conditions between 5th – 20th September. A big rainstorm took place on 20th September but rain did not continue after this, allowing the region's Cabernet grapes, if not already picked before the storm, to be picked when fully ripe in the beautiful sunny conditions which lasted into early October.

What do the wines taste like?

It is very difficult to generalise about vintage style this year, but these are some of the attributes that most 2023 Bordeaux red wines possess:-

Juicy fruit flavours – dark cassis in the Left Bank and red fruits and plums on the Right.

Light to medium body with a mid palate which is sometimes a little dilute and lacking in density

Fresh acidity, often with tension, vibrancy and "energy".

“Average” alcohols between 13.5-14.5%; this is not a vintage of excess power or overripeness.

Refined yet firm tannins. The quality of the tannins is one of the key differentiators in style between different chateaux this year. The most successful wines are those where the vinification was the most gentle and the extraction of tannins from the skins the most careful. Too much pumping over of the skins during fermentation or too much press wine used in the final blend caused tannins which are out of balance and give a sense of bitterness and astringency on the finish.

The best red wines this year have a beautifully refined elegance and finesse, combined with a silky texture from the tannins.

In general, the wines of Pauillac and St Julien have more mid palate weight and structure than the wines of Margaux, St Estèphe and Pessac Léognan. On the Right Bank, Pomerol’s reds have more weight and opulence and a silkier texture than those of St Emilion.

2023 seems to have been a very successful vintage for the region’s white wines, which have pleasant acidity and freshness and rich, often exotic fruit flavours. And it was a 5 star vintage for the sweet wines of Sauternes and Barsac, where botrytis and high sugar levels are supported by delicious tropical fruit flavours and refreshing acidity.



When to drink 2023?

This is a vintage which in most cases can be enjoyed relatively young, any time from 3-20 years. Only the top red wines have the potential to keep longer than 20 years. 2023 is not a serious, long-keeper such as 2016, 2010 or 2005.

Should you buy 2023 Bordeaux “en primeur”?

- To be brutally honest, **ONLY IF** the prices are reduced significantly from last year and offer a clear discount versus other easily available recent vintages from that chateau. Otherwise, you can wait until the wines are bottled – production volumes were significantly higher than average from most chateaux this year! And there are a lot of unsold wines from 2020, 2021 - and soon also 2022 - vintages sitting in negociant’s cellars right now, which have not increased in price from their initial en primeur release prices.
- Yes, if there are specific chateaux you love and you want to be sure of securing a case or two of at their release price.
- Yes, if you would like half bottles or large-sized bottles, which are very difficult to buy in the future.

I will only recommend wines which I genuinely believe offer excellent quality **at a fair and competitive price**, and crucially which are worthy of investing your money on two years before you will actually receive them in bottle.

I will send out my Bordeaux 2023 En Primeur offer in early June, as soon as the majority of wines have been released for sale, and I have had the opportunity to select my best buys of the vintage.

Please let us know if you would like to receive our Top 40 Bordeaux 2023 offer in June?

E mail:- paul@realwines.ch