

WINE

Dave McIntyre

Bordeaux for the rest of us

Does Bordeaux matter anymore? If you read the major publications in the "winestream media," you might decide it doesn't. The top chateaux are chasing the nouveau riche in China, who continue to drive prices skyward in their thirst for prestige while the rest of the world is "trading down" in a tough economy.

When the press descended on Bordeaux last spring for "en primeur" tastings of the wonderful 2009s, the enthusiastic reviews left normal folk wistful about ever catching a sniff of one of those wines, much less a taste. We can expect a similar frenzy this April for the 2010s, by all accounts another great vintage.

If you really want in on some of the top wines of 2009, it's not too late. The Web site Wine-Searcher.com recently listed the Chateau Lafite Rothschild at \$1,400 to \$2,300 a bottle. Chateau Mouton Rothschild will set you back \$800 to \$1,400.

In this month's Wine Spectator, columnist Matt Kramer makes a case for the irrelevance of Bordeaux, calling it "neither a reference point nor a personal wine reality for young American wine drinkers. The famous red Bordeaux are beyond their reach. They're not real. Inexpensive red Bordeaux are viewed as uninteresting or worse, lacking either the newness or the narrative of so many wines from Spain, Italy, California, Oregon, Portugal, New Zealand, Argentina or Chile."

And yet, any wines from those trendier regions made with traditional Bordeaux grapes (cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, petit verdot and malbec) will in some way be using Bordeaux as a model. That is especially true given the growing interest in blended wines over single-variety bottlings. So Bordeaux does matter.

And there's good news: The high quality of the 2009 vintage means even Bordeaux's lesser wines — from the petits chateaux that don't get the attention of collectors — are better than they are in an average vintage. Those wines are reaching our stores now, and they offer good value and a chance to rediscover Bordeaux. Just don't expect them to linger long on retail shelves.

Recommendations

★★★ Exceptional ★★ Excellent ★ Very Good

Prices are approximate. Check WineSearcher.com to verify availability, or ask a favorite wine store to order through a distributor.

Chateau Hermitage Mazeyres Pomerol, 2009

★★★

Bordeaux, France, \$26

Quite firm and reticent now, this is a cellar selection. Either put it away for a few years to allow the wine to mellow, or decant it several hours before consuming to let it gasp for air. The wine will reward you with cherry and plum fruit and nice complexity, with some earthy notes underpinning its silky tannins; 100 percent merlot.

M Touton Selection: Available in the District at Burka's Wine & Liquor, Paul's of Chevy Chase, Pearson's, Subway Liquors II. Available in Maryland at Jason's Wine & Spirits and Pine Orchard Wine in Ellicott City, Old Farm Liquors in Frederick, Rollins Beer & Wine in Rockville, Wine Harvest in Potomac.

Chateau Vieux Duche Lalande de Pomerol, 2009

★★★

Bordeaux, France, \$23

This is a "right bank" (i.e., merlot-based) selection that seems to shine in these early wines from 2009. Rich and dense with cherry/plum, cocoa flavors and grippy tannins, it is striking primarily for its texture: mouth-coating and plush, a bit rustic from being so young but eminently appealing. It shows good balance between fruit and acidity, accented but not marred by oak. This wine is from a new distributor/importer, a name to watch.

J.W. Sieg: On the list in the District at Bistrot Lepic. Available in Virginia at Ashburn Wine Shop, the IGA in Marshall, Leesburg Vintner, Town Duck in Warrenton, Unwined in Alexandria and Bellevue, Vienna Vintner, the Vineyard in McLean.

Chateau Moulin de l'Isle Saint-Estephe, 2009

★★½

Bordeaux, France, \$19

Quite stylish, it has cocoa, pomegranate and currant flavors, and silky texture that fleshes out nicely a few hours after opening. This is a "left-bank" wine, primarily cabernet sauvignon (with 25 percent merlot). Decanting is recommended.

M Touton Selection: Available in the District at AB Liquors, Burka's Wine & Liquor, McReynold's Liquors, Paul's of Chevy Chase, Pearson's, Subway Liquors II. Available in Maryland at Jason's Wine & Spirits and Pine Orchard Wine in Ellicott City, Old Farm Liquors in Frederick, Party Time Liquors in Mount Rainier, Rollins Beer & Wine in Rockville, Silesia Liquors in Fort Washington, Wine Harvest in Gaithersburg and Potomac.

Chateau de Taste Cotes de Bourg, 2009

★★½

Bordeaux, France, \$13

GREAT VALUE
This wine shines right off the cork and keeps getting better as the night goes on. Bright red-fruit aromas with a

hint of flowers, with refreshing acidity and a silky mouth feel. Decant an hour or two before drinking to allow the flavors to emerge.

J.W. Sieg: On the list in the District at Bistrot Lepic. Available in Virginia at Ashburn Wine Shop, the IGA in Marshall, Leesburg Vintner,



PHOTOS BY DEB LINDSEY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



The Washington Post

Most years, these petits chateaux wines tend to range from thin and acidic to eminently drinkable. The 2009s are a step or two above that: Most of the wines I tasted recently were quite pleasant at least, while the better ones showed a verve and spirit that are remarkable for wines of this price, from anywhere. As more of the 2009 Bordeaux come to market over the next year (with higher-end wines arriving later), we will have an opportunity to stock our cellars for the next decade.

Don't expect a clear-cut lesson in grape varieties, however. Almost all Bordeaux will be a blend of two or more grapes, but the label typically will not tell us which or how much of each. To know that, you need to study the geography and the individual wineries. Appellations such as Medoc, Margaux and Saint-Estephe will favor cabernet sauvignon, while Pomerol and Saint-Emilion are

Town Duck in Warrenton, Unwined in Alexandria and Belleview, Vienna Vintner, the Vineyard in McLean.

Chateau Michel de Vert Lussac Saint-Emillon, 2009

★^{1/2}

Bordeaux, France, \$12



A nice merlot-based wine (the Saint-Emilion in the appellation is the clue here), with plummy, cherry fruit upfront and appealing earthiness that emerges on the finish. According to the importer, it is 60 percent merlot, with 30 percent cabernet sauvignon and 10 percent cabernet franc.

M Touton Selection: Available in the District at AB Liquors, Best in Liquors, Burka's Wine & Liquor, Connecticut Avenue Wine & Liquor, McReynold's Liquors, Pearson's, Subway Liquors II, Timor Bodega, Towne Wine & Liquors; on the list at La Ruche, Montmartre. Available in Maryland at Bay Ridge Wine & Spirits and Mills Fine Wine and Spirits in Annapolis, Cork 57 Beer and Wine in Bethesda, Jason's Wine & Spirits and Pine Orchard Wine in Ellicott City, King Farm Beer & Wine in Rockville, Lenox Beer & Wine in Silver Spring, Old Farm Liquors in Frederick, Town & Country Wine Liquor Etc. in Easton, Travilah Oak Market in Potomac.

predominantly merlot. Right now, the merlot-based wines seem to be showing better. Many of the wines coming to market are simply labeled Bordeaux; odds are they favor merlot, though there's usually no way of knowing by reading the label.

What we can expect from these wines is to experience the

flavors and styles of Bordeaux in a top vintage: simple, everyday bottlings, meant for the dinner table rather than the trophy case in the wine cellar. The best of the 2009 Bordeaux, including those trophies, is yet to come. But much of what's already here is delicious.

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