



# A Guide to the Appellations of Bordeaux

## Understanding the Appellation System

The word “appellation” in English and French means a ‘denomination’, a ‘designation’, a ‘title given’. For wine lovers, the word represents a rather cryptic nomenclature used to certify that wines have originated from their designated regions or ‘terroirs’. It is also the reason why French wine labels tend to emphasize appellation of origin followed by the estate owner or producer, rather than emphasizing grape variety. Such labels presume that the consumer already knows what grape varieties the wine is composed of (amongst other things) by virtue of the appellation information supplied. Not surprisingly, for the consumer who is ignorant of Europe’s wine regions, and who will be accustomed to new world wine labels, the very idea of an appellation system can seem rather unhelpful or even irrelevant. Regardless, without some understanding of how and why the appellation system came about, any introduction to Bordeaux and her wines will be lacking and likely only to confuse matters further. In France, the present day organization of the wine industry is founded on the appellation d’origine laws, (as opposed to the ‘Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée’ laws, which came later). The first law of its kind was conceived in 1919 and was a practical response to economic depression and widespread fraud within the viticultural sector. The law was designed to ensure wines actually came from the place as defined on the label in order to assure the consumer, protect the integrity and quality of French Wine in general, and ultimately improve sales.

Before the final wording was decided upon, a vast number of verbal battles had taken place and the result was that the appellation d’origine law was watered down so badly that it was virtually useless: Provided that the makers of a certain wine could, within reason, show that they had been making it for some time according to local customs, and that it came from a particular commune, then the right of the title of origin automatically applied. As the years passed it became clear that the very law which had been designed to protect the quality of French wine was having the opposite effect. In 1923, the total amount of appellation d’origine wine declared in all France was 5 million hectolitres and by 1934 it had passed 15.7 million hectolitres. What was happening was, according to M. Capus, the then Minister of Agriculture and a former professor of agriculture in the Gironde, that, “...straight away in regions where the appellation d’origine applied, people planted thousands of hectares of barley or scrub land with low grade grape species, but big bearers”. The inferior wines that resulted nevertheless benefited from

the appellation quality statement. "It was a disaster!" exclaimed Capus. So the better vignerons revolted, and Capus formulated a further law which was passed in July 1927 and was called the "Law Capus". This re-articulated the earlier law and tied up rather loose phrases, but was mainly concerned to see that wines should not have the appellation d'origine right unless the grape species and the nature of the soil both conformed to usages local, loyal and constant.

Progress was being made, but it was nothing like enough. Great abuses of the law were still taking place until in July 1935, there appeared another law which this time had teeth. (It should be mentioned that in the meantime M. Capus had become a senator). At a meeting with representatives of la Gironde, la Dordogne, Gaillac, les Charentes, la Touraine et Centre-ouest, la Bourgogne, Arbois, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, and l'Alsace, he had propounded new legislation which he proposed to call "appellation d'origine controlee". This 1935 law resulted in the establishment of the "Comite national des appellations d'origine des vins et eaux-de-vie".

The committee started work in May 1936 and in May 1938 they had published 108 decrees on controlled appellations around France. From then on, if a wine had the controlled title right and was being sold in bottle, it had to have an appellation Controlee statement. The law then turned its attention to cultivation and vinification. It obliged wine makers to plant the correct types of grapes, that vineyards were not over cropped (which could significantly effect quality), that the actual viticulture and vinification methods conformed to certain standards and even added the necessity of seeing that the alcoholic degree of wines was sufficient. Some difficulties inevitably appeared. For example, certain vineyards found that they had a double appellation; the new controlled one and the old d'origine one. Thus, on 3rd August 1942, this duality was suppressed, leaving only the controlled one with the maximum guarantees. (1) Capus had laid the foundations for the "Institute National des Appellations d'Origine des Vins et Eaux de Vie" (INAO), a body which for more than fifty years has been responsible for refining the concept of the appellation d'origine controlee (AOC), and ensuring that old traditions are preserved, while new technology and the commercial domain are not neglected.

In spite of all the bureaucracy, the French appellation system has not always delivered what it has promised. There are growing criticisms suggesting that it impedes, rather than enhances, actual wine quality; that current law does not adequately recognise the importance of the winemaker in determining the quality of his or her wine. Others are concerned that in many parts of France, the boundaries of the appellations do not adequately reflect the realities of the terroir, that rules governing both viticulture and vinification are too strict on style and not strict enough on quality, and that French wine labels are confusing and offer little information relevant to the quality of the wine.

For better or worse, such appellation systems have now spread to other western European nations. European Union law now stipulates that wines made outside the specifically demarcated regions, or without following the other legal requirements, may not call themselves 'quality wine' but instead are defined as 'table wine'. This means that they are generally forbidden to give a region of origin or vintage date on their label (although the introduction of 'vins de pays' in 1979 modified this somewhat).

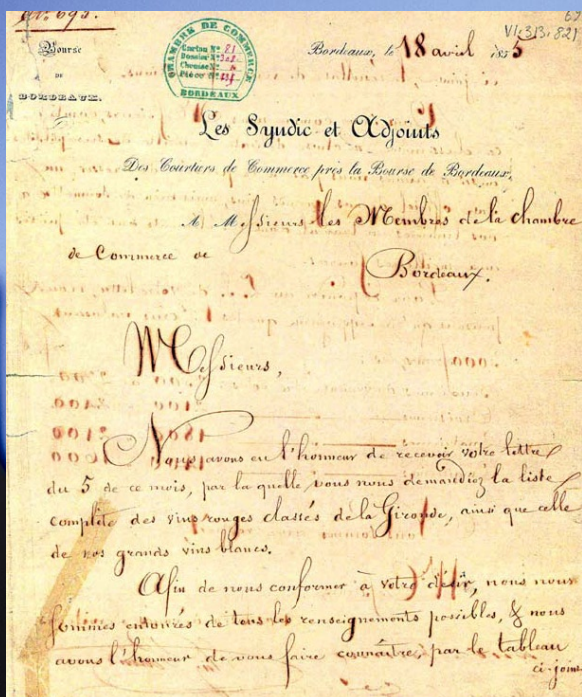


Appellation information sourced with permission from the official Bordeaux  
Wine website: [www.bordeaux.com](http://www.bordeaux.com)  
© Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux.



© This article was originally published online at [www.nicks.com.au](http://www.nicks.com.au)  
This article may not be circulated or reproduced without the above  
statement being prominently acknowledged.





Above: The first page of the 1855 Medoc Classification.

## The Classification of 1855

The 1855 Bordeaux classification remains something of an anomaly within the modern appellation controlee system. It is today the wine world's most enduring classification, yet it was never actually intended to be permanent. Ironically, it still has a major impact on the world wine market - particularly the secondary market - and so an understanding of the reasons for its creation are of obvious interest.

After London hosted the first international exposition in 1851, Napoleon III realized that France needed to seize back the initiative. The motive given for the 1855 Paris World's Fair (Exposition Universelle de Paris) was to celebrate forty years of peace in Europe since Waterloo. A hidden agenda, however, was the competition among the major European nations to establish their industrial and artistic supremacy - all ultimately to boost trade. Having decided that the great Bordeaux Wines should be shown, Napoléon asked each selected wine region to establish a quality classification to inform visitors at the exhibition. This classification was initially developed for the Médoc (Red Bordeaux) and Graves (Sweet White Bordeaux) wines and included 60 wines of the Medoc (one of them actually a red Graves-Chateau Haut Brion). The classes were termed "Growths" with the Medoc divided into 4 first growths, 15 seconds, 13 thirds, 11 fourths and 17 fifths. The Sauternes district was divided into 1 grand first, 10 firsts and 12 seconds. Chateau Peixotto, a second classified growth of the Sauternes, ceases to exist.\* (The predominance at the time of wines from Médoc and Graves and the absence of the CCI ['Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Bordeaux' in Libourne, only established in 1910] explain the absence of wines from the right bank.)

The Chamber of Commerce was responsible for the Gironde department. This department, in turn asked the Syndicat des Courtiers (brokers' syndicate) to classify the Gironde wines into five groups according to quality. Being pragmatic businessmen, the brokers ranked the wines according to the traded prices being attained by each of the chateaux in prior years. This was in distinction to the appellation d'Origine system, the classification of which was primarily geographic in nature. Given this fact alone, it is remarkable that the 1855 classification has survived at all, let alone that it continues to command respect. What's more absurd is that it has only being officially updated once in 150 years when in 1973, and even then only after tireless campaigning from Phillipe de Rothschild that Jacques Chirac, then the Minister of Agriculture, passed a decree conferring the status of Premier Grand Cru Classe upon Chateaux Mouton Rothschild. On the right is the 1855 Classification as it stands.

What does this classification mean to us today?

Given its methodology and original intent, the classification could be considered as little more than an historical curio. Its relevance is diminished by the fact that since 1855, many of its Growths have merged or have acquired neighbouring estates which were not even included in the original classification, thereby potentially effecting the quality of the wines for better or worse (the vineyards of third growth, Ch Desmirail, for example, have for long being subsumed into Ch Palmer). Secondly, while the perception that high ranking, premier cru estates on the whole tend to make better wines, there are a number of wines that frequently disappoint, as well as some lesser estates that offer quality well beyond what one would anticipate. The 2005 vintage is a case in point, a year which had Robert Parker describing the wines from many minor producers as 'Little Big Ones', represented by "...sincere, over-achieving men and women who are taking unheralded, less prestigious terroirs and turning out brilliant wines...". Acknowledging the 1855 classification for what it is, we can confidently disregard it, before moving on to discover the wines of Bordeaux for ourselves.

## Les Grands Crus Classes du Medoc en 1855

### Chateau

#### FIRST GROWTHS (Premiers Crus)

Chateau MARGAUX  
Chateau LAFITE-ROTHSCHILD  
Chateau LATOUR  
Chateau MOUTON ROTHSCCHILD (upgraded in 1973)  
Chateau LATOUR  
Chateau HAUT-BRION

### Appellation

Margaux  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pessac

#### SECOND GROWTHS (Deuxiemes Crus)

Chateau RAUZAN-SEGLA  
Chateau RAUZAN-GASSIES  
Chateau DURFORT-VIVENS  
Chateau LASCOMBES  
Chateau BRANE-CANTENAC  
Chateau PICHON-LONGUEVILLE  
Chateau PICHON LONGUEVILLE COMTESSE DE LALANDE  
Chateau COS D'ESTOURNEL  
Chateau MONTROSE  
Chateau LEOVILLE LAS CASES  
Chateau LEOVILLE-POYFERRE  
Chateau LEOVILLE BARTON  
Chateau GRUAUD LAROSE  
Chateau DUCRU-BEAUCAILLOU

Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Saint-Estephe  
Saint-Estephe  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien

#### THIRD GROWTHS (Troisiemes Crus)

Chateau LA LAGUNE  
Chateau KIRWAN  
Chateau D'ISSAN  
Chateau GISCOURS  
Chateau MALESCOT SAINT-EXUPERY  
Chateau BOYD-CANTENAC  
Chateau CANTENAC BROWN  
Chateau PALMER  
Chateau DESMIRAIL  
Chateau FERRIERE  
Chateau MARQUIS D'ALESME BECKER  
Chateau CALON SEGUR  
Chateau LAGRANGE  
Chateau LANGOA BARTON

Haut-Medoc  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Saint-Estephe  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien

#### FOURTH GROWTHS (Quatrieme Crus)

Chateau LA TOUR CARNET  
Chateau POUGET  
Chateau PRIEURE-LICHINE  
Chateau MARQUIS DE TERME  
Chateau DUHART-MILON  
Chateau LAFON-ROCHET  
Chateau SAINT-PIERRE  
Chateau TALBOT  
Chateau BRANAIRE-DUCRU  
Chateau BEYCHEVELLE

Haut-Medoc  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Margaux  
Pauillac  
Saint-Estephe  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien  
Saint-Julien

#### FIFTH GROWTHS (Cinquiemes Crus)

Chateau BELGRAVE  
Chateau CAMENSAC  
Chateau CANTEMERLE

Haut-Medoc  
Haut-Medoc  
Haut-Medoc

Chateau DAUZAC  
Chateau DU TERTRE  
Chateau PONTET-CANET  
Chateau BATAILLEY  
Chateau HAUT-BATAILLEY  
Chateau GRAND-PUY-LACOSTE  
Chateau GRAND-PUY DUCASSE  
Chateau LYNCH-BAGES  
Chateau LYNCH-MOUSSAS  
Chateau D'ARMAILHAQ (previously Ch Mouton-Baron-Phillipe)  
Chateau HAUT-BAGES LIBERAL  
Chateau PEDESCLAUX  
Chateau CLERC MILON  
Chateau CROIZET-BAGES  
Chateau COS LABORY

Margaux  
Margaux  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Pauillac  
Saint-Estephe

## Les Grands Crus Classes de Sauternes & Barsac en 1855

### Chateau

#### FIRST GREAT GROWTH (Premier Cru Superieur)

Chateau d'YQUEM

### COMMUNE

Sauternes

#### FIRST GROWTHS (Premiers Crus)

Chateau CLIMENS  
Chateau COUTET  
Chateau LA TOUR BLANCHE  
Chateau LAFAURIE-PEYRAGUEY  
Chateau GUIRAUD  
Chateau CLOS HAUT-PEYRAGUEY  
Chateau RIEUSSEC  
Chateau de RAYNE-VIGNEAU  
Chateau RABAUD-PROMIS  
Chateau SUDUIRAUT  
Chateau SIGALAS-RABAUD

Barsac  
Barsac  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes

#### SECOND GROWTHS (Deuxiemes Crus)

Chateau de MYRAT  
Chateau NAIRAC  
Chateau DOISY DA NE  
Chateau CAILLOU  
Chateau DOISY-DUBROCA  
Chateau SUAU  
Chateau DOISY-VEDRINES  
Chateau BROUSTET  
Chateau de MALLE  
Chateau diARCHE  
Chateau ROMER DU HAYOT  
Chateau FILHOT  
Chateau ROMER  
Chateau LAMOTHE  
Chateau LAMOTHE-GUIGNARD

Barsac  
Barsac  
Barsac  
Barsac  
Barsac  
Barsac  
Barsac  
Barsac  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes  
Sauternes

# The Five Official Classifications Since 1855

Five categories of Bordeaux wine have now been established at different points in time. These legally defined classifications have identified benchmark producers in their respective appellations. Though, as with the original 1855 Medoc Classification, these benchmarks remain fundamentally subjective. Each new vintage feeds debates amongst wine professionals and consumers alike.

1. The 1855 Classification, which has already been mentioned above, concerns 60 Crus from the Médoc including 1 Grand Cru Classé in Graves (Château Haut-Brion). As with wines from Médoc, the weighty reputation and incredible demand for these sweet wines positioned them as the ideal representatives from the Gironde at the 1855 Exposition Universelle. The classification of the Sauternes and Barsac crus has only three classes: Premier Cru Supérieur, Premiers Crus and Deuxièmes Crus. The “Premier Cru Supérieur” does not exist in the Médoc classification. It was attributed only to the Château d’Yquem. Thus 27 sweet wines from the Sauternes and Barsac regions were classified in 1855, including 10 from the Barsac region.

## 2. The Graves Classification

At the request of the Défense de l’appellation Graves, the Institut National des appellations d’Origine (INAO) proceeded to classify the crus from this region in 1953, and revised and completed its work in 1959. The classification was organised by district and wine colour for these terroirs, since both excellent red and white wines are produced. 16 Domaines (or estates) were classified for one (red and/or white) or both colours (6 of them). Château Haut-Brion was not part of this process, since it was included in the 1855 classification. The Graves crus classification has only one level and thus does not establish a hierarchy. All of the crus classés from Graves are situated on the appellation of Pessac-Léognan, which explains the pre-eminent quality of this relatively recent appellation (1987). The legal written framework of this classification does not allow for revision.

## Official 1959 Graves Classification

### Chateau

### Commune

#### Classified Red Wines

Chateau Bouscaut	Cadaujac
Chateau Haut-Bailly	Leognan
Chateau Carbonnieux	Leognan
Chateau de Chevalier	Leognan
Domaine de Chevalier	Leognan
Chateau de Fieuzal	Leognan
Chateau d’Olivier	Leognan
Chateau Malartic-Lagraviere	Leognan
Chateau La Tour-Martillac	Martillac
Chateau Smith-Haut-Lafite	Martillac
Chateau Haut-Brion	Pessac
Chateau La Mission-Haut-Brion	Talence
Chateau Pape-Clement	Pessac
Chateau Latour-Haut-Brion	Talence

#### Classified White Wines

Chateau Bouscaut	Cadaujac
Chateau Carbonnieux	Leognan
Domaine de Chevalier	Leognan
Chateau d’Olivier	Leognan
Chateau Malartic-Lagraviere	Leognan
Chateau La Tour-Martillac	Martillac
Chateau Laville-Haut-Brion	Talence
Chateau Couhins-Lurton	Villenave d’Oron
Chateau Couhins	Villenave d’Oron
Chateau Haut-Brion	Pessac

### 3. The St. Emilion Classification.

The first Saint-Emilion classification was established a century after those of Médoc and Graves, and unique to Bordeaux in that its legal framework provides for systematic updates every 10 years. Every cru classé from Saint-Emilion must follow the same procedure to continue to be classified. Price is not considered in the classification as it was in Médoc and the Graves in 1855. Instead, the decree states that in order to be a candidate for classification, the estate "must constitute a sufficiently large economic and viticultural unit and have cellars used exclusively for wine made on the estate," but also that "at least 50% of the total vines must be able to produce wines entitled to Saint-Emilion Grand Cru status from vines over twelve years old." Furthermore, "over the last ten years, the estate must have obtained the approval certificate for Saint-Emilion Grand Cru status for at least seven harvests." The current classification criteria were designed to ensure stability in the quality and management of the vineyards. As a result, candidates must also undertake not to modify the property and to bottle their wine at the château. The first classification was done in 1954; the most recent (2006) is the subject of lively discussions among wine insiders and the press. See the entry on the St. Emilion appellation for more.

## St Emilion Classification (Officially re-classified 2006)

### Premier Grand Cru Classé A (First Great Growths category A)

Château Ausone  
Château Cheval Blanc

### Premier Grand Cru Classé B (First Great Growths category B)

Château Angelus  
Château Beau-Sejour-Becot  
Château Beausejour (Duffau-Lagarrosse)  
Château Belair  
Château Canon  
Château Figeac  
Château La Gaffeliere  
Château Magdelaine  
Château Pavie  
Château Pavie-Macquin  
Château Troplong Mondot  
Château Trotteville  
Clos Fourtet

### Grand Cru Classé

Château Balestard la Tonnelle  
Château Bellefont-Belcier  
Château Bellevue  
Château Bergat  
Château Berliquet  
Château Cadet-Bon  
Château Cadet-Piolat  
Château Canon la Gaffeliere  
Château Cap de Mourlin  
Château Chauvin  
Château Corbin  
Château Corbin-Michotte  
Château Dassault  
Château Destieux  
Château Faurie-de-Souchard  
Château Fleur-Cardinale  
Château Fonplegade  
Château Fonroque  
Château Franc-Mayne  
Château Grand Corbin  
Château Grand Corbin Despanges  
Château Grand Mayne  
Château Grand Pontet  
Château Guadet St-Julien  
Château Haut Corbin  
Château Haut Sarpe  
Château L'Arrosée

Château La Clotte  
Château La Couspaude  
Château La Dominique  
Château La Marzelle  
Château La Serre  
Château La Tour-du-Pin-Figeac (Giraud-Bélivier)  
Château La Tour-du-Pin-Figeac (Moueix)  
Château La Tour Figeac  
Château Laniote  
Château Larcis-Ducasse  
Château Larmande  
Château Laroque  
Château Laroze  
Château Le Prieure  
Château Les Grandes Murailles  
Château Matras  
Château Monbousquet  
Château Moulin du Cadet  
Château Pavie-Decesse  
Château Petit-Faurie-de-Soutard  
Château Ripeau  
Château Saint-Georges Côte Pavie  
Château Soutard  
Château Terte-Daugay  
Château Villemaurine  
Château Yon-Figeac  
Clos de l'Oratoire  
Clos des Jacobins  
Clos Saint-Martin  
Couvent des Jacobins

### 4. The Medoc Crus Bourgeois Classification

The Alliance of Médoc Crus Bourgeois includes over 200 estates that maintain a tradition of quality dating back to the 12th century. Although the middle-class were able to purchase high-quality land in Médoc as of the 15th century, it was not until 1932 that 444 of them were named "Crus Bourgeois" by the Syndicat des Courtiers de la Place de Bordeaux. However, due to the war and successive crises in winemaking, their number dropped to 94. During the exceptional development of Bordeaux wines in the 1980's and 1990's the Crus Bourgeois returned to centre stage developing a growing reputation. Today, the Médoc Crus Bourgeois account for 44% of the vines in the Médoc. Beginning with the 2006 vintage, three new labelling rules have come into effect in order to improve the perception of quality: any reference to a cuvée, or special bottling, is forbidden for a Cru Bourgeois; additional references of an unregulated or informational nature (old vines, barrel aged, etc.) that may create confusion among consumers are forbidden on the front label; and the Cru Bourgeois designation, followed by its classification rank, must appear on the label.

### 5. The Cru Artisans Classification

Although not widely known, in Médoc, vineyards with the "cru artisan" denomination have existed for more than 150 years alongside larger, and often classified, estates. A ministerial decree of January 11, 2006 officially reserves the "Cru Artisan" denomination for 44 properties in Médoc, Haut-Médoc and the Médoc's community appellations. The publication of this classification is the result of a long process undertaken by the Union of Médoc Crus Artisans at the instigation of several châteaux. Since February 1989, the Union worked to restore the rightful title to this family of crus that disappeared in the 1930's. It helped restore honour to the term "artisan", which was formally recognized by the European Union in 1994. The 44 classified properties must be family businesses that grow, make, market and sell their wines. The Crus Artisans may use the "Cru Artisan" denomination on labels, in presentations, advertising and all other forms of marketing. Today, they represent 340 hectares of vines in production, mainly in the Médoc and Haut-Médoc appellations, but also the Médoc's community appellations of Listrac, Moulis, Margaux, Saint-Julien, Pauillac and Saint-Estèphe. As such, the Crus Artisans are subject to the same controls and production standards as the other Médoc wines, under the aegis of the Institut National des appellations d'Origine. (2)

# The 57 Bordeaux Appellations and their Grape Varieties

The Bordeaux wine trade today involves many groups, and within each there are also vast differences of scale. There is very little in common between a grand cru classe proprietor in the Haut-Medoc and a small grower with a few hectares on the opposite side of the Gironde estuary at Bourg or Blaye. Accounts of the Gironde wine industry often fail to include the many small vineyards run by peasants, although such places are immensely valuable to the region, providing wine-lovers with good wine at low prices. The variety of people and organizations is echoed in the diversity of the natural environment. First of all there are the distinctive local soils, beginning with the most famous, the gravels which have given their name to Graves and which are present throughout on the left bank of the Garonne and in the Libourne region (in Pomerol and part of Saint Emilion). These provide ideal soil conditions for vines as they encourage deep root penetration and a well regulated intake of water. Limestone and clay/limestone soils on sites in Saint Emilion, Sauternes and the Cotes also have specific characteristics. Finally, there are areas of molasse sandstone, boulbenes (stoney silt/clay) and recent alluvial deposits. The latter are typical of soils alongside rivers and are known in the Gironde area as palus (from the Latin for 'marsh'). The variety of soils has encouraged the production of a broad range of wines produced in 57 appellations which can be approached in a variety of ways. We have adopted the division into 6 major sections as follows:

1. BORDEAUX & BORDEAUX SUPERIEUR
2. MEDOC & GRAVES
3. COTES DE BORDEAUX
4. St EMILION, POMEROL & FRONSAC
5. DRY WHITE WINES
6. SWEET WHITE WINES

Becoming familiar with what regions are permitted to produce which wines is a daunting learning curve for those with little experience of Bordeaux. Thankfully, we have had some help in this endeavor, and much of the information you will find below has been compiled from the official Bordeaux web site, [www.bordeaux.com](http://www.bordeaux.com) with the permission of the "Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux". The peculiar or common characteristics of each appellation, the grape varieties used, along with a general impression of each district's wine style are outlined, as are some of the more notable producers. We trust this guide will serve as an introduction to "The Wine Capital of The World", and stimulate interest for Bordeaux wines which Nicks Wine Merchants continue to ship on a regular basis.

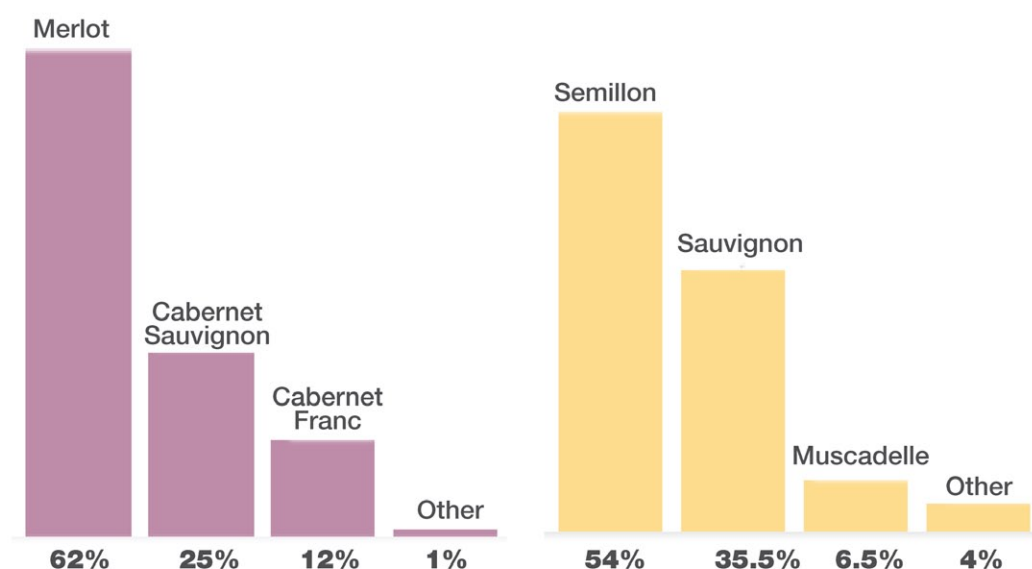
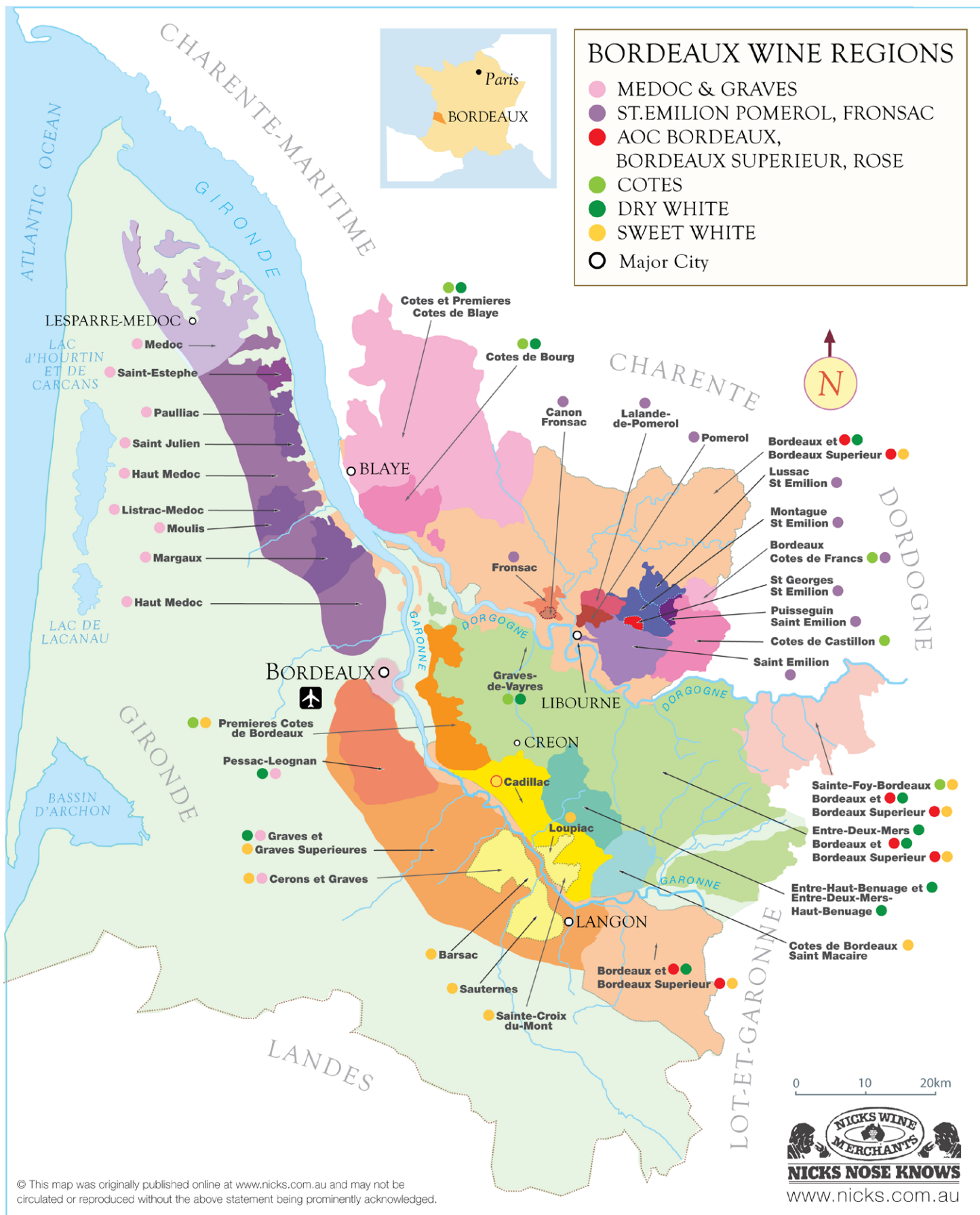


TABLE 1: Proportions of Grape Varieties planted in Bordeaux





Introductory notes adapted from: "The Wines and Vineyards of France" published by Viking (Penguin)  
 Appellation information sourced from the official Bordeaux Wine website: [www.bordeaux.com](http://www.bordeaux.com) © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux.



# Bordeaux & Bordeaux Supérieur

## Bordeaux AOC

Bordeaux AOC wines are made from Cabernet Sauvignon, whose tannins are balanced by the fruit and silky texture of Merlot. Cabernet Franc can also be part of the blend to impart roundness and spicy aromas, whereas Malbec and Petit Verdot are used sparingly. Bordeaux AOC wines can be produced on the entire wine-producing area of the Gironde in accordance with quality norms set by the I.N.A.O. (Institut National des appellations d'Origine). Accordingly, the maximum authorized yield is 55 hL/ha, and the alcohol level (in % of volume) must be between 10 and 13%. If not qualitatively then at least quantitatively, Bordeaux AOC wines are the most significant with an average yearly production of 2 500 000 hL and a declared surface: 44 000 ha

## Bordeaux Supérieur

Bordeaux Supérieur AOC wines are produced from selected vineyard plots and older vines. As a result, these red wines are generally more complex and have a better ageing potential than Bordeaux AOC wines. Red Bordeaux Supérieur wines are made from the same varieties as Bordeaux AOC wines, however this AOC has even stricter production norms than the Bordeaux AOC: smaller yields (50 hL/ha), a higher permitted alcohol strength (0.5%) and the producer must age the wines a minimum of 12 months before selling them.

## Bordeaux Clairet

Taking their name from the English term "Claret", which was used to describe Bordeaux wines in the Middle Ages due to their light robe (luminous ruby colour), the Bordeaux Clairet AOC is made from blends of the same grape varieties as red Bordeaux AOC wines, wherein Merlot often dominates. With little tannin, these wines are fresh, light, silky and easy to drink and subject to the same quality constraints during production as other Bordeaux AOC wines: yields of 55 hL/ha maximum, chemical analysis and an official tasting.

## Bordeaux Rose

Bordeaux Rosé is a regional appellation which stretches over the whole Gironde production area. As with other Bordeaux wines, they must conform to production norms: yields are limited to 55 hL/ha, a chemical analysis and an official tasting to validate the granting of AOC status. While consumers' interest for Bordeaux Rosés has recently increased, they can be difficult to produce. Aromas, which depend on the type of yeast used and on the conditions under which maceration occurs, are very sensitive to oxidation. In order to achieve this and to satisfy consumer demand, producers have equipped themselves with the latest technology to better master the production process. Combining freshness and aromatic richness, Bordeaux Rosés are perfect with all types of food, notably light Summer meals and exotic dishes and are best drunk within 1-2 years.



Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux

# The Left Bank: Medoc & Graves

The Médoc and Graves include ten AOCs, including reds to the north in Médoc, and both reds and whites to the south in Graves. The reds, which are made primarily from Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, are well structured, full and rich with significant aging potential. The whites, which may be dry or medium sweet, are blends of Sauvignon and Sémillon. Representing approximately 15% of wine production in Bordeaux, this AOC family includes all of the winemaking areas situated on the Left Bank of the Garonne River. The Médoc, located north of the city of Bordeaux, and the Graves, in the south, share temperate weather conditions due to the proximity of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as soil containing stones and sand carried by the river from as far away as the Pyrénées Mountains. A great number of the Bordeaux classified wines are produced in the Médoc and Graves, such as the 1855 Grands Crus Classés, the Crus Artisans, and the Graves Crus Classés.

## Medoc

The name Médoc comes from the Latin “in medio aquæ”, meaning “in the middle of the water”. The geographic disposition of this peninsula, with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Gironde river on the other, confers a gentle and temperate climate, sheltering over 1500 Chateau properties. While this appellation includes all of the winemaking areas north of Bordeaux, on the Left Bank of the Gironde it is mostly in the northern point of the peninsula that the majority of the Médoc AOC wines are produced. Soils are composed of terraces of alluvial gravel deposits, separated by tiny streams which provide an excellent drainage system. The light soils are highly suited for growing Cabernet Sauvignon. Merlot, on the other hand, prefers deep clay soils located between the gravelly terraces. The two dominant varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, which alone represents 50% of planted surfaces. Petit Verdot and Malbec are sometimes added to improve the tannic structure, colour and fruitiness of wines during blending. The district is generally considered a source of inexpensive, good-value, basic Bordeaux. Noteworthy properties include: Haut-Condissac, Le Boscq, Rollan de By, Lafon, Loudenne, Ormes-Sorbet, Patache d'Aux, Potensac, and Tour de By.

## Haut Medoc

The vast Haut-Médoc accounts for approximately one third of the Left Bank's total vineyards. It is the region of the Médoc located closest to the city of Bordeaux and contains six other appellations including Margaux, Pauillac, Saint-Julien and Saint-Estephe, enclaved in the district's centre. The Haut Medoc AOC which was separated from Medoc's appellation in 1936, includes 25 townships. The diverse soils include well-drained alluvial gravel terraces are best suited for the growing of Cabernet Sauvignon (52% of planted surfaces). This being the dominant variety in Haut Medoc wines, is blended with Merlot. Petit Verdot, and, to a lesser extent, Malbec are also often added. The Haut-Médoc appellation itself has five “Grand Cru Classé” - or Classified Growth properties: La Lagune, La Tour-Carnet, Belgrave, Cantemerle and Camensac, as well as several quality properties such as Agassac, Cambon la Pelouse, Coufran, Arche, Malescasse, Cissac, Hanteillan, Lamothe-Bergeron, Lanessan, Larose Trintaudon or Sénéjac. The official decree for the Haut-Médoc AOC defines strict production norms: a high planting density (a minimum of 6,500 plants/ha) and low maximum yields (48 hL/ha).

## Listrac Medoc

A communal appellation since 1957, Listrac-Medoc offers fleshy and aromatic blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, which imparts structure, and Merlot, which imparts aromatic strength and fruitiness. Cabernet Franc is added in small proportions to add fruitiness and spicy aromas. The proximity of the vast Landes forest to Listrac Medoc protects this appellation from prevailing winds, enabling grapes to ripen slowly and regularly. Vines are spread over three gravelly terraces lying over a limestone base in which roots penetrate deeply to find nutrients. This terroir offers particularly impressive natural drainage. While full bodied, virile and powerful in their youth, the Listrac Medoc's wines become more velvety after 5-10 years of patience. Notable properties include Bellegrave, Clarke Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Fonréaud, Fourcas Dupré, Fourcas Hosten, Fourcas Loubaney, Maucaillou, Mayne Lalande, Reverdi and Vieux Moulin.

## Moulis

Named after the numerous windmills (“moulins” in French) scattered throughout the countryside, Moulis has welcomed vines since the 13th Century, but its current reputation only took off after the French revolution (1789). Today, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are planted in equal proportions with smaller areas of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Like Listrac Medoc, this appellation is protected from prevailing winds by a vast pine forest that grows alongside it. Terroir is composed of gravel terraces alternating with silt and limestone soils typical of the peninsula. As with other communal appellations, the production norms are particularly strict: maximum yields of 45 hL/ha, and a planting density of between 6,500 to 10,000 vines/ha. The appellation's best properties include Brillette, Chasse-Spleen and Poujeaux.

## Margaux

Despite its fame, this prestigious appellation was only decreed in 1954 and today consists of five communes: Soussans, Margaux, Arsac, Cantenac and Labarde. Distinguished by its poor soil, composed of a plateau of gravel and silt based on a layer of limestone or silt with clay, the region has been prized since the Gallo-Roman era for the production of great wines. The climate is tempered by the proximity of the Gironde Estuary, and excellent natural drainage makes for conditions conducive to the vine and to the proper ripening of the fruit. Today, one third of the Grands Crus Classés from the 1855 classification and Crus Artisans are produced in Margaux. These wines are made from blends wherein Cabernet Sauvignon dominates, to which Merlot is added along with small quantities of Malbec and Petit Verdot. The wines are considered to be amongst the most elegant and aromatic of the Haut Medoc with excellent ageing potential.

The appellation's best properties include Château Margaux (First Growth), Palmer (unusual for the high proportion of Merlot (equal to its content of Cabernet Sauvignon), Rauzan Ségla, Ferriere, d'Issan, Brane Cantenac, Kirwan, Giscours, Prieuré Lichine, Labégorce Zédé, La Gurgue, Cantenac Brown and Rauzan Gassies.

## Pauillac

Arguably Bordeaux's most prestigious wine producing region, Pauillac is a port located on the Gironde Estuary, but the vineyards are perched on a magnificent hilltop of well drained, sandy gravel soil in the heart of the Medoc. The soil is so light and poor that little will grow except grapevines, whose roots penetrate a layer of cool and compact clay and limestone (also known as hardpan) to find nutrients.

The appellation has the greatest concentration of First Growths in the Médoc. These include the famous two 1st Classified Growths - Lafite Rothschild and Latour. Mouton Rothschild joined the duo in 1973 after Edmond de Rothschild finally obtained a partial revision of the historical classification. There are 18 Grands Crus Classés within Pauillac's borders which account for 80% of the area's total production. Not surprisingly, Pauillac today is synonymous with perfection and represents the pinnacle of Médoc wines. Cabernet Sauvignon, which accounts for 65% of planted surfaces in this area, is at its most majestic in Pauillac. (Merlot, and much smaller quantities of Petit Verdot or Malbec may find their way into blends). The region's full-blown, sometimes opulent, fruity, powerful and complex wines are beautifully balanced by an incomparable tannin structure that sees its wine's ageing potential frequently fall between 10 and 20 years - from the fine elegance of Lafite Rothschild, to the restraint of Mouton Rothschild that turns to opulence with age, and the sheer power and longevity of Latour. Pichon Lalande is arguably the most important of the Second Growths, followed by Lynch Bages, and Pichon Baron, which has been revived recently, but the same range of styles and character is found through the entire level of classification.

Significant properties of the appellation include: Lafite Rothschild, Mouton Rothschild, Latour, Lynch-Bages, Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande, Pichon Longueville Baron, Grand Puy Lacoste, Pontet Canet, Clerc Milon and Duhart Milon.



Some famous labels from the Medoc.





Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux

## Saint Estèphe

Saint-Estèphe is the largest appellation commune in the Médoc, located halfway between the city of Bordeaux and the estuary of the Gironde, right after Pauillac. The appellation was planted with the arrival of the Romans and the vineyards developed under the guidance of important landowners in the 19th Century, while négociants from the place de Bordeaux secured the regions' reputation. Beautiful châteaux, emblems of the power and dynamism of this period, still stand today. The terroir of Saint-Estèphe is somewhat cooler than others in the Médoc because of its more northerly setting. With good natural drainage, the soil is heterogeneous, being composed of a gravel-covered plateau overlooking the Garonne River. On the surface, the soils appear light, typical of the Médoc, but underneath, a layer of clay and limestone enables the vine to take the best of what the earth has to offer.

Robust, powerful wines of the region generally require a long ageing before revealing all their richness and potential. The best examples of these wines, produced largely from Cabernet Sauvignon blended with Merlot and Cabernet Franc, include those from Châteaux's Cos d'Estournel, Haut Marbuzet, Montrose, Calon Ségur, Meyney, Phélan Ségur, de Pez, Lafon Rochet and Ormes de Pez. The region's reputation for 'hard' tannic wines is typified by the lesser growths; the two top properties, the Deuxième Crus Cos d'Estournel and Château Montrose, usually produce very full wines. With the movement to wines that are fruitier and that drink well sooner, Cos d'Estournel has overtaken Château Montrose (which used to be famous for the long term cellaring it required to become drinkable) as the leading property in the appellation, and it is usually considered one of the "super-seCONDS" that are considered to be close to the First Growths in quality.

## St Julien

At the geographic centre of Médoc lies Saint-Julien. Located near the port of Beychevelle, about 45 kilometers North-West of Bordeaux downstream the Gironde, this terroir is well known for the quality of its soil and its excellent drainage. On the gravel-covered terrace created by the Garonne rest clay-limestone, large stones and hardpan, particularly well suited for growing Cabernet Sauvignon. The appellations best wines tend to combine power and concentration with a feminine elegance, but require some patience to be appreciated at the maximum of their potential with average aging usually 10 -15 years. Wines are comprised mostly of Cabernet Sauvignon, blended with Merlot and, to a lesser extent, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. With eleven Classified Growths including five superb second Grands Crus Classés, Saint Julien remains a very desirable appellation, often favorably compared to Pauillac. Some properties of note include Châteaux Léoville las Cases, Léoville Barton, Ducru Beaucaillou, Gruaud Larose, Saint Pierre, Langoa Barton, Léoville Poyferré, Gloria and Talbot.



## Graves

With a slight predominance of Merlot (50% of planted surfaces), and a strong minority of Cabernet Sauvignon (40%), these wines are a perfect example of the Bordeaux balance between suppleness and firmness, richness and aromatic persistence, with good ageing potential. The appellation stretches for 50 km along the Garonne River southeast of Bordeaux and takes its name from its soil (Graves is French for 'gravelly terrain'), a mix of stones and gravel, carried by the Garonne from the Pyrenees, over 500 km away. The pebbles and stones are mixed with silts and light clays and rest on a soil that is sandier than that of Médoc and can be pure sand or hardpan (iron-oxide cemented sand).

Protected from poor weather by a dense pine forest and from heat by the breeze from the river, the Graves terroir has an excellent micro-climate for vines. Some of the more famous properties include Pape-Clément and Haut Bailly.

## Pessac - Leognan

Pessac-Leognan is reputed to be the place where wine growing began in Bordeaux around 2000 years ago. Since the Roman era, the aptness of this terroir had been recognized and its wines have been famous in Europe since the Middle Ages. Yet despite its ancient terroir, it is the most recently decreed left bank appellation, originating in 1987, when the Graves district was split in two. Situated immediately south of Bordeaux and literally surrounded by urban development, the Pessac-Léognan vineyards owe their reputation to their Crus Classés composed of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc.

Soils possess excellent drainage and are composed of a particularly thick layer of gravel and stone. Underneath lies sand, hardpan and clay in variable proportions. Further away from the city, the vines are planted in vast clearings, surrounded by pine forests in the south west that protect the vineyards from humid western winds. Balanced and elegant when young, these wines have a structure and depth that allows them to age for many years. The wines tend to reveal earthier tones compared with the Médoc, and are often described as showing smoky, cigar-box aromas. Ch Haut-Brion is the most famous exponent of the style.



Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux



# Cotes de Bordeaux: The ‘Hills’

The wines produced here, mainly red, distinguish themselves by their strong character, aromatic power and well balanced structure. Although Merlot dominates, the blends always include Cabernet Sauvignon and, occasionally, Cabernet Franc. Certain Côtes AOCs produce a significant amount of medium sweet and sweet wines, thanks to a specific micro-climate that favours the over-ripening of the grapes. The Côtes (literally ‘hills’) are located in the east, on steep slopes of hills and valleys created by the Garonne and Dordogne rivers that flow through the area. Often facing south or southeast, the vines that grow on these slopes have excellent exposure to the sun. With similar clay-limestone soils, the Côtes includes some quality wine-producing terroirs and represents 14% of Bordeaux wines.

## Premieres Cotes du Bordeaux

The Premières Côtes de Bordeaux vineyards have been planted out since the Roman era and the district long benefited from its proximity to the city of Bordeaux, from where it exported its wines to England and the rest of the world. Overlooking the Garonne River, the appellation is a succession of hills with excellent exposure to the sun, producing more generous wines which have a good ageing potential but can also be enjoyed young. The vineyard of the Premières Côtes de Bordeaux spreads over a 60 km strip along the river, from Bordeaux to Langon. Here, there is no thick layer of stones and pebbles but, rather, dense and deep clay limestone or clay gravel slopes. Well drained due to the natural inclination, these soils also have fine elements in lower areas, such as silt and clay, or coarser elements higher up on the hills, such as rocks and gravel.

## Blaye

This AOC is located on the right bank of the Gironde. Vines benefit from a clay-limestone terroir of hills perpendicular to the Gironde Estuary, perfectly exposed to the sun. Produced from a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Malbec, and occasionally Petit Verdot, these wines are concentrated, balanced, well structured, and develop beautiful bouquets over time. The Blaye AOC, established in 1936, was relaunched in 2000 by winemakers who agreed to work with severe production limits to produce higher quality wines. Plantation density is set at a minimum of 6 000 vinestocks per hectare, and wines must be aged at least 18 months before being sold.

## Premieres Cotes de Blaye

The largest of the Côte appellations, and most northern (45 km north of Bordeaux), this appellation produces velvety, fruity, balanced wines. The Blayais vineyards are made up of hills and valleys, with the Gironde Estuary separating Blaye from the Médoc. The position of the hills in relationship to the estuary creates an almost constant ventilation for the vines ensuring healthy, ripe fruit. The nearby water tempers the area’s sunny conditions (approx. 240 days of sunshine a year). Clay and limestone soils predominate, ideal for Merlot. As a result, the blends of this appellation combine Merlot (which predominates) with Cabernet Sauvignon and minor proportions of Cabernet Franc and Malbec. Since 2006, this AOC is able to use the term Côtes de Bordeaux, as can the other Côtes AOCs. This appellation also produces dry white wines.

## Cotes de Bourg

The Bourg vineyards, just south of the Blaye vineyards, are opposite the majestic area where two great rivers, the Garonne and the Dordogne merge, 35 km north of Bordeaux. Here as well, the important presence of water tempers the very sunny microclimate of the hills. The medium surfaces are somewhat poor, as is often the case in the east and north of the Bordeaux vineyards. 250 winegrowers bring their grapes to four cooperatives with the AOC comprised of 15 communes and 500 winemakers, mostly family based. The soil of the hills has a strong clay limestone base. Sandy gravel deposits are sometimes covered with brown and red marl, suitable for Merlot, and so not surprisingly, it accounts for 67% of the vines planted in the AOC. Other varieties include Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec. In their youth, the Côtes de Bourg wines are often characterized by flavours of red fruits and spices and may be appreciated at a young age for their delightful fruit and balance. Growers also produce wines which have good aging potential.

White Côtes de Bourg are very rare, with only 20 ha in production. A blend of Sauvignon (45%), Sémillon and Colombard, they enchant with their vivacity, their fullness in the mouth, and delicately aromatic notes of citrus, peach, yellow and white flowers. Properties include Barreyre, Bel-Air, Bellevue, la Grave, and Renardière.

## Sainte-Foy-Bordeaux

Along the Dordogne River, this AOC is an alignment of hills. Composed of 19 villages, some tiny, in the eastern extreme of the Bordeaux region. The wines of this obscure appellation use Merlot as their base which represents 60% in blends. Cabernet Sauvignon is reserved for lighter, warmer soils and represents only 20% of vines planted. Vineyards are generally on the upper reaches of hills and plateaus. The terroir features quite deep soils, with lots of clay and limestone. 60 producers share this small appellation. Some among them have founded the “Club 45” with the idea of lowering their yields to 45 hL/ha, lower than the current AOC requirement of 50hL/ha.





Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux

## Bordeaux Cotes de Francs

The smallest of the Côtes de Bordeaux AOC's consists of three villages grouped around their historic church. This AOC, created in 1967, is 10 km east of Saint-Emilion and includes around 50 winegrowers. The average area of the enterprises, often family-based, is only 6 ha. The terroir is well aerated, has excellent sunny conditions, very little rain and ideal temperatures to encourage the gradual ripening of Merlot. Being not far from the Dordogne River, the Côtes de Francs also benefits from a certain warmth that tempers the continental weather influences of this zone. Clay and limestone soils overlay chalky sandstone depths. In the red wines, Merlot is the leader (50% of vines planted), followed by Cabernet Franc (25%) and Cabernet-Sauvignon (23%). However, as in other AOC's in the east of Bordeaux, it is not unusual to find that Cabernet-Franc is planted more in some vineyards. It matures more quickly, and contributes to creating wines that are more perfumed, rounder and generous. Pleasant to drink young, these wines have a potential to age from 5 to 10 years. There are also some rare bottles of white Côtes de Francs that are blends of Sémillon (60%) and Colombard (25%). Good, fruity rich wines, some of which are even sweet.

## Cotes de Castillon

Castillon-la-bataille recalls tragic events in the history of France and England (the battle that took place there in 1453 marked the end of the 100 Years' War). This AOC created only recently in 1989, is hidden behind Saint-Emilion. On the side of the hills and on the plateau, the soil is composed of clay and limestone, with some sandstone. At the bottom of the hills, on the alluvial terrace, closer to the river, the soil contains more silt and sand, with stones. The wines here are smoother, charming and pleasant, though less powerful. Due to the clay-limestone soils and the more continental weather, Merlot is the primary grape variety in the AOC (70% of vines planted). Cabernet-Franc comes in second (20%) and on warmer plots Cabernet-Sauvignon (more difficult to mature) is also planted. In the past, the regions wines were generally used to enhance Saint-Emilion blendings in poor years. But in the 1970's, a particularly dramatic effort by local wine growers improved the overall quality of production and in just a few years, Castillon has become a serious competitor of the main appellations of the right bank. Some of the more highly regarded properties include Domaine de l'A, d'Aiguilhe, Fompeyre, Clos l'Eglise, Guilhemanson, La Tuque Bel-Air, Brisson, Cap de Faugères, Pin-Beausoleil and le Pin de Belcier. Since 2006, this AOC also can use the term Côtes de Bordeaux, as can the other Côtes AOC's.

## Graves de Vayres

Known for its Renaissance Château in the Dordogne domain, the AOC Graves de Vayres, which has existed since 1936, has been revitalized since the tragic frost of 1956, when massive replanting was undertaken, with an emphasis upon producing red wines. Situated in the extreme north of the Entre-Deux-Mers region, it is a zone of gravel soil in the middle of a vast region of clay limestone soil (Entre-Deux-Mers). Thanks to the Dordogne, which is very wide here, the Graves de Vayres AOC enjoys a temperate effect during the summer.

Merlot is planted widely (75%), along with some Cabernet-Sauvignon (15%). Wines obtained are smooth and light. Cabernet-Sauvignon brings the wines structure and solid tannins and depending on how much of this variety is in the blend, wines can age from 5 to 10 years. Since 2006, this AOC also can use the term Côtes de Bordeaux, as can the other Côtes AOC's.

# The Red Wines of the Right Bank: St Emilion, Pomerol & Fronsac.

This group of AOCs is located in the eastern part of the Bordeaux winemaking area, on the Right Bank of the Dordogne River, close to the city of Libourne. Wines from this family represent 10% of planted surfaces in the Bordeaux area. The landscape is composed of plateau, terraces, slopes and valleys. Soil composition varies. The vines benefit from good exposure to the sun and from the Ocean climate, characterized by cool and humid winters which regulate temperatures. These more feminine red Bordeaux wines are aromatic, supple, subtle, elegant and have velvety tannins. Merlot is the main grape variety here, along with Cabernet Franc, with Cabernet Sauvignon playing a secondary role.

## St. Emilion

The expression “the hill with a thousand Chateaux” in relation to the medieval village of Saint-Emilion is not just poetic fancy: The AOC represents more than 800 winegrowers, as well as being a distinguished world heritage site both for its historical value and its importance as an exceptional wine-growing terroir. It is also one of the most beautiful wine-producing villages in France. For various reasons, before the French revolution (1789), St-Emilion’s land was initially divided into thousands of plots. Thus, the current average size of the properties does not exceed 7 ha - tiny when compared to the vast Medoc estates which can be up to five times larger. Fortunately this historical inheritance later turned out to be an advantage due to the astonishing diversity of the local soils. While the district is often divided into two main soil types, it is probably more accurate to suggest four or even five. In the centre is a limestone plateau, surrounded by chalky soils with clay and silt (also called “molasse”). In the northwest of the AOC, a sandy layer covers mostly clay soils. Finally, in the Dordogne Valley to the south, lighter soils contain alluvial stones and sand.

The weather is oceanic and temperate, due to the nearby Dordogne river, which cools the summers and helps to avoid spring frosts. Autumns are sunny, encouraging perfect ripening of the grapes. In St. Emilion, very little Cabernet-Sauvignon is to be found since it ripens too slowly. Instead, Merlot (60% of vines planted) and Cabernet Franc (30%) attain new heights of quality. Given the diverse terroir, it is hardly surprising that Saint-Emilion wines have a variety of profiles, from very powerful and concentrated, like those grown on the limestone plateau, to refined and delicate, such as those from the terroirs to the south. In St. Emilion, we also find the finest Growths, capable of maturing for decades produced alongside pleasant but light clarets. During the 1990’s, a surprising new category of wines appeared: the “garagiste” wines, whose tiny production and extremely low yields give highly fruity concentrated and extracted wines. The two most famous “garagistes” estates are Valandraud and Mondotte. The Châteaux of St. Emilion are classified into four levels, in ascending order: St. Emilion, St. Emilion Grand Cru Classé, St. Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classé (B), and St. Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classé (A).

## St Emilion Grand Cru

While it occupies the same prestigious territory as Saint-Emilion, this appellation has more restrictive production norms: a maximum yield of 40 hL/ha forces winegrowers to limit the vine’s load so that the grapes produce concentrated berries, resulting in some of the highest quality wines in Bordeaux. Producers must also submit their wines to a second formal wine tasting after 12 months of aging. The Saint-Emilion Grands Crus develop more concentrated notes of red berries with an aromatic richness supported by a powerful structure and silky, finely woven tannins. Pleasant and plump when young, these wines have potential for aging that can often exceed 10 years. However, since the AOC Saint-Emilion Grand Cru is on the same production zone as Saint-Emilion, winegrowers can choose to produce according to the rules of one or the other appellation, depending on their soils, exposure to the sun, the age of the vines or the concentration of the grapes.

It is important to note here that St Emilion is unique amongst France’s appellations in that it has a classification system which is updated every ten years based upon vertical tastings rather than market prices. Although this has not been happening on schedule, it has been revised four times since its creation in 1955 (1969, 1979, 1984 and 2006); with notable changes (unlike the 1855 Medoc classification). In theory, its regular re-evaluation compels the Crus Classés to undertake efforts to maintain and upgrade their quality. However, as prestigious as the Grand Cru classification might sound, in reality, its designation is based on little more than a few details of the harvest - a maximum of 40 hl/ha rather than 45 hl/ha for basic St Emilion - and a minimum alcoholic strength of 11%. For the consumer, the more important difference lies in one further classification by which properties are promoted to the highest status in St Emilion, namely, St Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classe. Controversy marred the most recent 2006 re-classification, which was temporarily suspended after certain chateaux were demoted and subsequently took the Syndicat to court over the alleged partiality of its judges. However, in November 2007, the suspension was lifted and the new classification stands. Only two Châteaux, Ausone and Cheval Blanc, are included in the very top tier of class A Premier Grand cru; at the time of writing, there are 10 Châteaux in the class B of Premier Grand Cru. Famous properties include Ch Figeac and Ch Canon.

## Lussac - St. Emilion

Created in 1936, the Lussac-Saint-Emilion AOC not only bears its prestigious neighbour’s name but much of its terroir too. Here, the weather is also moderately rainy with hot temperatures in the summer. The soils also share a family resemblance: a base of quality clay and limestone. In Lussac, the winegrowing areas consist of a gravel plateau in the west, and cooler clay soils that retain more water in the north. The appellation is like a theatre, with excellent southern sun exposure. It has ideal natural drainage and like Saint-Emilion, offers wines with a dominant Merlot component (60% of vines planted), though Cabernet-Franc is also in its element (30%). The wines are generally elegant and well structured, in the Saint-Emilion style. Families make up the majority of the winegrowers.





Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux

## Puisseguin St Emilion

Located very close to Saint-Emilion, this AOC created in 1936 occupies the highest elevation (89 m) in the Saint-Emilion. While its wines are little known, its south and south east exposure provide the conditions necessary to ripen and produce concentrated fruit. The main component of its soils is the clay-limestone mix that is common to the region. But here it covers rocks from which the roots absorb the nutrition they require and sustain the vines during the hot and frequently dry summers. The blend remains faithful to traditional Saint-Emilion wines with Merlot dominating (60% of vines planted) due to the clay-limestone soils. In these conditions, it ripens easily even with the weather. Cabernet Franc, at 30%, is its preferred partner.

## Montagne St Emilion

The village of Montagne lies opposite the Saint-Emilion appellation and shares a similar terroir, though its wines are less well known. Like St. Emilion, Montagne-Saint-Emilion also has a rich and turbulent history, as attested to by its monuments and other Roman vestiges. The barbarian invasions that followed put winegrowing on hold until it returned to prosperity in the Middle Ages. More recently, Montagne winegrowers have taken advantage of Saint-Emilion's proximity to improve their vines and the quality of their wines. The appellation has become a rising star in the region. Its weather is almost identical to its neighbour's Saint-Emilion, separated from Montagne by only a small stream, the Barbanne. The terroir consists of limestone and clay limestone soils on a thick and compact layer of porous asteriated limestone, which, by providing water to the vines during the summer dry period, plays an essential nutritional role. The more gravel and sandy soils produce lighter, more delicate and less tannic wines than the areas with limestone. The appellation's blend generally consists of Merlot (60% of vines planted) and Cabernet Franc (30%). Cabernet Sauvignon, which is more difficult to cultivate due to its late ripening, is reserved only for the "warmest" and best-exposed sites.

## Saint Georges Saint Emilion

Until 1973, the commune of Saint-Georges was independent from Montagne, but its fusion with its neighbour is understandable, considering this little village was surrounded on three sides by it. Located very close to Saint-Emilion, this the smallest appellation in Bordeaux, however, the 35 Saint-Georges winegrowers stand out due to the consistent soils throughout this appellation. Clay limestone covers a porous layer of purer limestone that is ideal for providing the vines with nutrients in the relatively dry summer months. Naturally, Merlot is the king of grapes in this appellation. It represents 70% of all vines planted, followed by Cabernet Franc at 20%. The soft slope of this terroir guarantees perfect drainage for these varieties, yet they never suffer from drought because the underlying porous limestone ensures moisture.

The wines of Saint-Georges-Saint-Emilion are when young, fruity (with notes of red berries or stone fruit) with a spicy character. Their ability to age is known to connoisseurs.

## Pomerol

Formally part of St Emilion, this appellation was created in 1936 and has had a winemaking tradition since Roman times. Viticulture was abandoned during the Hundred Years War and vineyards were not re-established until the 15th century when it was continued by religious groups who also created a hospital for pilgrims passing on their way to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. Like a work of art of the Bordeaux countryside, Pomerol has resisted the urban spread of its neighbour city of Libourne. Instead, every possible square metre of ground that is suitable for growing vines is used. The terroir is relatively heterogeneous but generally speaking, the grounds are of a gravelly nature on the greatest properties which are located on the highest elevations. Soils tend to become more argillaceous in the Western part of the district from Pomerol and more sandy near Libourne. The terroir also has one fascinating geological feature: the surface of stones and sandy deposits covers clay mixed with iron oxides, a sort of ferruginous sandstone locally known as “crasse de fer” (iron filth).

Dense in colour, refined and powerful at the same time, the Pomerol AOC is a wine that can age, but can also be enjoyed young. Powerful tannins are partially concealed by a smooth, velvety, full texture. Thanks to its soil and extraordinarily low yields, Pomerol is today home to the world's elite Merlot-based wines that combine exceptional aromatic power with velvety tannins. The appellations most famous producer is Château Pétrus, a worldwide icon of Merlot winemaking, whose soil is composed of black clays with a strata of ‘crasse de fer’ close to the surface. Merlot grows so well here that it represents 70% - 80% of vines planted (approx 20% being Cabernet-Franc). After Petrus, a non exhaustive list of Pomerol's best properties includes Chateau Lafleur, regarded as “hors classe” growths; Le Pin, one of the precursors of the “Garage” or Garagistes style - unfortunately totally unaffordable; Eglise-Clinet, Trotanoy, Vieux-Château Certan, L'Évangile, Certan-de-May, La Fleur-Pétrus, Clinet, Bon Pasteur, Le Gay, Rouget, Clos l'Eglise, Nénin, Petit-Village, Lagrange and Gazin. Great vintages offer an extraordinary experience for any wine lover.

## Lalande de Pomerol

Perhaps in part due to its proximity to its prestigious neighbouring AOC, Lalande-de-Pomerol, comprising one hundred and ninety-two producers, has gained well-deserved recognition. The AOC is composed of successive terraces covering two communes: Lalande, quite flat, and Néac, quite hilly. The soil in this appellation is an ideal mix of clay, stones and even sand in the western part, close to the river. In Néac, the clay can even be found deep in the ground, which lends a wonderful dimension to Merlot. This variety accounts for 80% of the vines planted, along with Cabernet Franc at 15% and Cabernet Sauvignon in the minority. The Lalande-de-Pomerol wines have a unique very dark ruby-garnet colour. Their very distinct and expressive nose, with notes of small red berries (red current, strawberry, cherry, raspberry), develops notes of plums, leather, game and even coco. Tight tannins are always velvety and never hard. Some wines are even reminiscent of those from neighbouring Saint-Emilion or Pomerol and at a fraction of the price. Suffice to say, Lalande-de-Pomerol has become a rising appellation and is increasingly sought after. Star properties include La Fleur de Boüard, Belles-Graves, de Chambrun, Haut Chaigneau, La Chenade, Château La Sergue, Tournefeuille, Jean de Gué, De Viaud, Les Annereaux and Des Tuileries.



## Fronsac

Located in a rugged, picturesque landscape where the Dordogne and the Isle rivers meet, Fronsac is an ancient fortified city with a long history of wine production. (Libourne's elite recognized its excellence as early as the 18th century, even before Saint-Emilion, and its wines have been appreciated in Europe since the 16th Century). Where the Isle River flows into the large Dordogne, it creates a microclimate that reduces night frosts in spring and cools summer's heat. Steep slopes are another unique feature of the terroir. The appellation has many different soil types, but they all share the alluvial characteristics at the bottom of the slopes and clay-limestone hills (and even pure limestone, as in Saint-Emilion). Deeper in the ground, rocks with chalk and clay are found (molasse) making for excellent drainage. Powerful and complex wines result. Merlot, which prefers deep soil, ripens better here than Cabernet-Sauvignon. Cabernet-Franc contributes touches of raspberry and round but powerful tannins. The ageing potential Fronsac wines is quite significant and the best wines can easily wait 10-15 years to be tasted at their optimum. Some properties include Canon de Brem, Dalem, La Dauphine, Fontenil, Moulin Haut Laroque, La Rousselle and Cassagne Haut-Canon.

## Canon Fronsac

Smaller than Fronsac, the Canon-Fronsac appellation occupies higher terrain, with steep slopes known as "Côte de Canon", being the AOC's characteristic geographic feature. Situated close to and above the neighbouring Fronsac AOC, Canon Fronsac overlooks the point where the Dordogne and the Isle rivers meet. Here too, the water cools the air in the summer, and warms it in the spring, much to the benefit of the vines. Soils are composed of clay-limestone over banks of compact limestone. Over the last 100 years, the winegrowers of Canon-Fronsac have completely changed the types of vines planted. Malbec used to be planted on the hills of these two appellations. But when it was proven that Merlot was better suited to these clay limestone soils, the producers adopted it (70% of vines planted). Cabernet-Franc and Cabernet-Sauvignon are equally represented at 15% each of vines planted. The region's wines are often considered to be under-rated, having even more depth and consistency in the mouth than Fronsac, with a frank and powerful attack. The region is tiny, with approximately 300 ha under vine.

# The Dry White Wines of Bordeaux

Bordeaux offers beautifully balanced white wines, predominately made from Sauvignon and Sémillon, offering the ideal combination of fruit, liveliness and aromatic richness. Although most of these wines are consumed young, others are sought after for their complexity, their strength and their ageing potential. These AOCs include wines from all categories: from simple, easy to drink wines, to wines that have been classified, notably in the Graves. The family of Dry White Wines is composed of all white wines produced in the Gironde, including within appellations specific to red wine production (Médoc, Saint-Emilion-Pomerol-Fronsac etc.) or to the production of sweet wines. This family of wines is comprised of 12 AOCs and represents 8% of Bordeaux wines.

## Bordeaux & Bordeaux Sec

The Bordeaux region's dry white AOC wines offer a fine balance of Sauvignon's fruitiness and Sémillon's roundness. These whites can be found throughout the Bordeaux region under a large regional appellation. Like Bordeaux reds, the dry whites are produced by blending the major grape varieties authorized by appellation's formal production standards. The three main varietals are Sauvignon (42% of all vines planted), Sémillon (42%) and Muscadelle (9%). Each variety is planted in the micro-climates and soils across the region that best suit it. Sauvignon prefers cooler terroirs with soils dominated by clay and limestone (as found in the Entre-Deux-Mers area and more generally in the eastern parts of the region), while Sémillon is better suited to warmer and lighter soils (such as in the Graves region). Bordeaux AOC whites must be absolutely dry and must not surpass 4 grams of residual sugars per litre. They develop elegant, fruity and floral aromas uniting lemon notes with those of white flowers and peaches.

## Entre-Deux-Mers

This appellation lies between the Dordogne and Garonne rivers, and offers lively and smooth dry white wines, produced throughout the area between the two great rivers. In fact, after Bordeaux AOC, the Entre-Deux-Mers is the biggest dry white appellation in the Bordeaux region. Growers are members of cooperatives, and are preoccupied with the study of aromas produced by the various local grape varieties, with a specific focus on Sauvignon, the star grape variety of Entre-deux-Mers. This varietal is the subject of vinification studies in the search for a balance between its powerful aromas and its naturally high acidity. While the primary grape variety cultivated in Entre-deux-Mers is Sauvignon, Sémillon (which adds roundness and power) is its preferred partner. Muscadelle sometimes adds highly appreciated wild and musky notes. The vines are grown in clay-limestone soils and the wines which vary greatly in quality, are generally best drunk young being distinguished by a refreshing quality and a good persistence of aromas with notes of citrus, yellow flowers and exotic fruit.

## Entre-Deux-Mers-Haut-Benauges

In the southern part of the region, this little-known AOC makes similar wines as Entre-Deux-Mers. The AOC takes its name from the Château de Benauges, the seat of the Viscount who governed the region. Vines grow in clay-limestone soils and are distinguished by a thirst-quenching freshness, but also by good persistence of aromas with notes of citrus, yellow flowers and exotic fruit.





Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux



## Blaye

The largest of the Côte appellations, it is also the most northern, situated 45 km north of Bordeaux. This appellation, the l'AOC Côtes de Blaye, created in 1936, is almost unknown with only 20 ha of Colombard under vine along with Ugni Blanc and smaller plantings of Sauvignon Blanc. The resulting wines are lively and fresh, but take second place to the region's Premières Cotes de Blaye reds.

## Premières Côtes de Blaye

In the northernmost part of Bordeaux, the Premières Côtes de Blaye AOC offers a special exposure and micro-climate, perched on a rocky ridge dominating the Gironde's estuary. Its particularly high number of sunshine hours and clay and limestone soils make it perfectly suited to white grape varieties such as Sauvignon and Sémillon. Colombard and Ugni Blanc also play a part in the blend, though they do not exceed 30% of the vines. Conditions are good for growing these two grape varieties (which are highly regarded in nearby Cognac).

The wines typically have a delicate, light colour with hints of green. Being quite delicate these wines make excellent apéritifs and can accompany fish, seafood and white meat equally well.

## Côtes de Bourg

The Côtes de Bourg AOC is a 'new generation' of Bordeaux wines with enthusiastic winegrowers now delivering generous, full-bodied, aromatic wines. A blend of Sauvignon (45%), Sémillon and Colombard, they enchant with their vivacity, their fullness in the mouth, and delicately aromatic notes of citrus, peach, yellow and white flowers. Ugni Blanc is also grown. With only 20 ha under vine, these wines remain rare.

## Bordeaux Côtes de Francs

The Cotes de Francs area is situated about 60 kilometers east of Bordeaux, running along the Dordogne river amongst charming hilly landscapes. Recognized A.O.C Côtes de Francs in 1967, the appellation's soil is characterized by molasses and limestones. Forty producers vinify wines which have close characteristics to their cousins of Saint Emilion a strong and opulent fresh fruit flavour in their youth, which tends to soften with time as the tannins equilibrate with the structure. The Cotes de Francs are pleasant to taste young on the fruit, they normally reach their peak after 5-10 years or so. Largely unknown amongst amateurs, the best wines of Cotes de Francs are of special interest from a price/quality point of view. Properties include Puygueraud, La Prade, Vieux-Chêne, Terrasson, Puyfromage, Lalande de Tifayne and Charmes Godard (red and white). Source: [http://www.winemega.com/region\\_cotes\\_de\\_francs.htm](http://www.winemega.com/region_cotes_de_francs.htm)



## Graves

Created in 1937, this AOC is dominated by Sémillon rather than Sauvignon Blanc. This is not by chance, since this grape variety prefers shallow, warm well drained soils as those found here. Sheltered from bad weather by a thick pine forest and from excessive heat by breezes from the river, the terroir provides a perfect microclimate for white grape varieties. The appellation stretches for 50 km along the Garonne River southeast of Bordeaux and takes its name from its soil (Graves is French for 'gravelly terrain'), a mix of stones and gravel, carried by the Garonne from the Pyrenees, over 500 km away. The pebbles and stones are mixed with silts and light clays and rest on a soil that is sandier than that of Médoc and can be pure sand or hardpan (iron-oxide cemented sand).

Invariably blended with Sauvignon in the, the appellations wines are noted for their roundness, power and floral and fruit aromas and is undoubtedly the best in Bordeaux for the production of powerful yet elegant white wines. The most famous white wine from the district is the rare Laville Haut-Brion. Excellent oak aged or barrel fermented examples are made by Clos Floridene and Ch Chantegrive.

## Graves de Vayres

The Graves de Vayres AOC white wines are produced in an area of gravel soil that is surrounded by the clay-limestone soil of Entre-Deux-Mers. Their complexity, roundness and power are Sémillon trademarks. Situated in the extreme north of the Entre-Deux-Mers region. It is a zone of gravelly soils in the middle of a vast region of clay-limestone soils (Entre-Deux-Mers). Once again, the gravelly terroir explains the word "Graves" in the name of this AOC with the second name derived from the historic town of Vayres. Thanks to the Dordogne River, which is very wide here, the AOC enjoys a temperate climate during the summer. Sémillon and Sauvignon are planted here and are occasionally complemented with Muscadelle. On soils of gravel and sand, this appellation produces elegant dry white wines, sometimes barrel matured, marked by notes of hazelnut, citrus and white-fleshed fruit that are fresh and unctuous. Some parts of this appellation also produce sweet wines, thanks to Sémillon's ability to over ripen in the autumn sun.

## Pessac-Léognan

This AOC, which is literally surrounded by the urban development of the city takes its name from its two most important wine producing communes. The Classement des Crus de Graves of 1953, which predates the creation of the Pessac-Léognan AOC, identified domains that today are all part of this new AOC and the district proves that Sauvignon -- which dominates here -- can produce rich and powerful wines with a good potential for aging, as demonstrated by its Crus Classés.

The terroir is composed of a particularly thick layer of gravel and stone, carried by the river: it can be as thick as 3m in some places. Underneath this layer is sand, hardpan and clay in variable proportions. Drainage is particularly efficient. Further away from the city, the vines are planted in vast clearings, surrounded by pine forests in the south west that protect from humid western winds. Sémillon is very frequently planted as it has the complexity and power needed for the traditional barrel and bottle aging of the appellation's fine whites. Sauvignon nonetheless must represent at least 25% of the blend. The result is a balance of lively fruit and power, roundness and complexity. In the last 15 years, the Pessac-Léognan appellation area has made a spectacular leap from 500 hectares in 1975 to approximately 1,300 today, thanks to the dynamism and devotion of the producers. Some world famous and highly sought after dry whites are made here, the most respected being from Ch Haut Brion, Domaine de Chevalier and Ch Malartic-Lagraviere, all of which can develop in the bottle over decades.

## Crémant de Bordeaux

Bordeaux also produces small quantities of AOC sparkling wines by the same methods used in Champagne and as with champagne, both red and white grape varieties are used. All harvesting is done by hand, and to ensure the grapes are not crushed, they are transported in small baskets. Delicate pressing (to produce only 100 litres per 150 kg of harvested berries) is used to avoid extracting the red pigments in the grape skins. The grapes are subject to an obligatory registry. Sulphur use in the vinification is regulated to keep levels very low. The final major hurdle to AOC status is wine tasting, which is done at two stages: after the wine's fermentation and after the secondary fermentation that occurs in the bottle to produce the bubbles. See Making Sparkling Wine.

There are several types of Crémant de Bordeaux, depending on the grape varieties that are used in its production. Blanc de Blancs are Sémillon, Sauvignon or Muscadelle based while roses are made from the classic Bordeaux red varieties. Typically these are slightly fruity, lean wines and while they can offer value for money, as yet they represent no serious alternative to the major Champagne brands. Consequently, production remains very limited but is being constantly developed.



Image © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux

# Introduction to Bordeaux's World Famous Sweet Whites

The magic of Bordeaux sweet wines is their remarkable balance between sugar and acidity which never becomes cloying. Medium sweet and sweet wines are made principally from Sémillon and Sauvignon and, to a lesser extent, Muscadelle. Their exceptional sugar content results from the activity of *Botrytis cinerea*, also known as noble rot which requires a very specific micro-climate to set. See [Making Sauternes & Sticky Wines](#). These wines have made an enormous contribution to establishing and maintaining Bordeaux's reputation, notably with such icons as the crus classés from Sauternes-Barsac, as well as other less well-known appellations that also produce high quality sweet wines of outstanding value for money. The production area of Sweet White Wine stretches along both sides of the Garonne, south of the city of Bordeaux representing 3% of planted surfaces in Bordeaux and includes 12 AOCs outlined below.

## Barsac

Barsac is located at the mouth of the Ciron, a small tributary of the Garonne, in the heart of the terroir that is so favourable to the development of noble rot (*botrytis cinerea*). The cold waters of this river create a micro-climate where night mists give way to mostly sunny autumn days. This alternation of wet and dry keeps the rot from running riot and becoming destructive. Instead it is elevated to 'noble' status. The Barsac AOC is just as reputable as its famous sister, Sauternes, yet perhaps because it is smaller, with ten sweet dessert Crus Classés but no Premier Cru, it receives disproportionately less attention. The village of Sauternes had long been controlled by Barsac, and for this reason, Barsac wines are permitted to use the Sauternes appellation (the reverse is not true, however).

Barsac's dessert wines are produced with Sémillon (80% of vines planted) and Sauvignon (15%) grapes. Muscadelle is used as a complementary variety. More susceptible to noble rot than the other varieties, Sémillon's aromas are enhanced after infection. It is also the grape variety that is most at home in Barsac's soils of stones, gravel and red sand. Traditionally considered to be lighter than Sauternes yet of similar quality, Barsacs have a characteristic full, deep nose with a warm and elegant bouquet. In the mouth, there are notes of honey, white peach, almond, oriental spices and mango or pineapple, as well as dried apricots or even toasted bread and vanilla. These wines are exceptionally persistent, but never become cloying. They deliver a fresh and even mentholated finish. Powerful but elegant, luscious but fresh, Barsac seem to have multiple identities and much depends on individual properties' winemaking and viticultural practices.

## Bordeaux Moelleux

Bordeaux Moelleux is a regional AOC, which means that quality sweet wines can be produced anywhere in the Bordeaux region. They have a sugar level greater than 4 grams per litre. Sémillon, Sauvignon and Muscadelle are the grape varieties used in sweet Bordeaux wines, which give them fresh and fruity aromas. Similar wines, produced using the same winemaking process in even smaller quantities, are marketed under the Bordeaux Supérieur AOC. The 60 ha of Bordeaux-Saint-Macaire also produce Bordeaux Moelleux wines; they are made primarily with Sémillon grapes on a terroir of hills and hillsides with southern exposures located on the Right Bank of the Garonne, facing the commune of Langon.

## Bordeaux Supérieur

These traditional sweet white wines are perfect as apéritifs, and are ideal with poultry since their residual sugars round out its flavour.

## Bordeaux-Haut-Benauges

Within the southern portion of Entre-Deux-Mers is the small Haut-Benauges AC, which produces both dry and sweet white wines.

## Cadillac

Located on the right bank of the Garonne, 30 km southeast of Bordeaux, right next to the major dessert wine appellations is the small appellation of Cadillac. The AOC was not established until 1973 when Cadillac was split from the Premières Côtes de Bordeaux AOC further north - the latter produces sweet whites as well as red wines, while Cadillac wines are exclusively white and/or sweet. Cadillac enjoys a micro-climate that favours the growth of noble rot, but because its wines cannot command the prices of Sauternes, the costs involved with the production of high quality sweet whites is difficult to justify for most in the region. The vines are generally planted on south and southwest facing slopes of the area's clay-limestone hillsides. The sand, chalk and gravel soils are perfect for the Sémillon grape, which represents 70% of the vines planted. Sauvignon and Muscadelle are planted in smaller quantities. The wines are aromatic, full and unctuous, but never as heavy as Sauternes. That said, good vintages from the likes of Chateau Fayau offer wonderfully affordable Sauternes style experiences and are worth seeking out.

## Cérons

Probably the least important of the sweet white appellations is Cérons, a little-known communal AOC of 40 ha of vines that has had an association with wine since Roman times. Since 1936, Cérons has produced sweet wines, however, with the 20th century decline in consumption of dessert wines in France, its winegrowers turned to producing dry whites and red wines under the Graves AOC. Nevertheless, many wine brokers and other Bordeaux enthusiasts today consider the Cérons dessert wines to be one of the region's best kept secrets, making wines that are similar to Barsac, despite the fact that much higher yields are allowed (40 hl/ha as opposed to 25 hl/ha in Sauternes & Barsac). The Cérons AOC wines are 80% Sémillon, and the coarse sands that cover compacted limestone terroir suit it perfectly. Recommended are the sweet wines from Chateau de Cerons.

## Côtes de Bordeaux-Saint-Macaire

The Premières Côtes de Bordeaux are minor sweet wines produced on steep, well-oriented hillsides.

## Graves Supérieures

The Graves Supérieures AOC sweet wines possess moderate sugar levels making them good apéritifs or complements to delicate sauce dishes and desserts. Their quality and style is sometimes compared with the sweet wines from the Cerons appellation. Since the creation of the AOC in 1937, consumption patterns have changed in favour of dry white wines and so the volume of sweet wines produced under the Graves Supérieures AOC was reduced. Sémillon and Sauvignon grapes are the most used varieties, planted in soils of gravel and mixed sands with veins of clay and limestone. Graves Supérieures wines have notes of citrus and candied zest, as well as white peach or nectarine. They also excel when served with a Tarte Tatin (caramelized apple pie) and many other desserts.



Some familiar and less well known Bordeaux Sweet Whites.

## Loupiac

Positioned between Cadillac and Ste Croix de Mont on the right bank of the Garonne River is the small appellation of Loupiac. Grape vines have long been part of its heritage with Loupiac's wines first cited in the 13th century at a time when the region was much bigger. With its south and southwest exposures, it is guaranteed excellent sunlight, and the clay-limestone soils of Loupiac's hillsides are ideal for growing the classic sweet white varieties. Its location at the meeting point of the Garonne and Ciron rivers is even more serendipitous: The Ciron is a small river that runs cold and in the autumn it produces mists as it runs into the warmer Garonne. At night, these mists cause the humidity that favours the growth of noble rot. Its sunny days are also essential to the over ripening required to produce fine dessert wines.

Sauvignon is planted, and most particularly Sémillon, which represents over 80% of the vines. Production of Loupiac's sweet nectars is subject to very strict norms that with maximum permitted yields being less than 40 hL/ha. Notable producers include Domaine du Noble and Ch. Loupiac-Gaudiet.

## Premières Côtes de Bordeaux

The Premières Côtes de Bordeaux mainly produces fruity red wines, but quality sweet white wines dominate in the warmer southern part of the appellation. This quality is augmented by strict production norms which have applied to this AOC since 1937. Here, the steep clay limestone hills of sometimes gravelly terrain offer a good exposure to the sun and allow for a long and intense ripening period during which Sémillon (70% of vines planted) and Sauvignon (25%) grapes are subjected to the effects of the noble rot (*Botrytis cinerea*). The sweet Premières Côtes de Bordeaux wines are more or less yellow in colour according to the degree of over ripeness. They have a fruity and floral bouquet with notes of citrus and candied fruit, quince, peach and yellow flowers. At high levels of residual sugars akin to those of the great dessert wines, they have notes of sun-roasted fruit like Sauternes.

## Sainte-Croix-du-Mont

Arguably the most important of the sweet white appellations on the right bank of the Garonne is the magnificent hillside village, Sainte-Croix-du-Mont. Situated 50 km southwest of Bordeaux next to Loupiac and facing Sauternes and Barsac, this AOC occupies a strategic location for producing classic dessert wines. There the Garonne and Ciron rivers meet, creating an ideal micro-climate for the promotion of noble rot. Composed of clay and limestone, the soils of Sainte-Croix-du-Mont's sometimes steep hillsides have massive outcroppings of pure limestone, usually only found at greater depths. Here, the Sémillon grape variety (85% of vines planted) experiences a slow ripening in autumn, aided by an absence of thunderstorms, which tend to follow a more northerly track. The grapes flourish in this wonderful terroir and over ripen to produce slightly lighter style dessert wines which in good years can approach Sauternes. The Sainte-Croix-du-Mont captivate with their aromas of raisins, fig, acacia, honeysuckle, apricot and peach. In the mouth, they are livelier than their neighbour and have a more airy and expansive side. They are powerful, complex and intense with a long finish. As with all great dessert wines of the region, they have potential for aging.



# Sainte-Foy-Bordeaux

Appellation regulations for this district which lies to the extreme east allow for the production of sweet whites as well as red wines, though the sweet whites are relatively undistinguished in comparison to those of its famous neighbours.

## Sauternes

Approximately forty kilometres south west of Bordeaux lies Sauternes, an AOC composed of five communes: Sauternes, Fargues de Langon, Bommes, Preignac and Barsac. Chalk and clay soils are found in Bommes, Sauternes and Preignac, whilst grit and sandy soils are found in Fargues de Langon and Sauternes. Vineyard orientation is very important, and the great vineyards all have a north east aspect which ensures that grapes are fully ripened, as compared with over-exposure on southerly aspects. The properties throughout the region are relatively small. There are 19 large vineyards over 20 hectares (50 acres), 83 vineyards between 5 and 20 hectares (12-50 acres) and 159 under 5 hectares (12 acres). The total area of Sauternes is restricted to around 1900 hectares (4700 acres) making it the largest dessert wine AOC in Bordeaux. Its soils and microclimate are perfectly suited to the production of some of the world's greatest botrytis effected wines. The vineyards at the highest elevations and farthest from the river have the best terroirs and produce the majority of the Crus Classés, including the monumental Château Y'quem. The wines are made from Sémillon (approximately 80% of vines planted) and Sauvignon (15%) grapes. Some Muscadelle occasionally is used. These varieties are susceptible to botrytis rot for two reasons: Firstly they have thin skins which are more easily pierced by the fungus, and secondly, the grapes grow tightly packed together in the clusters causing poor air circulation between berries creating a micro-climate conducive to fungal growth. Sauternes wines have a gold colour that is denser and darker than other dessert wines. When they age, they develop a stunning amber colour. The nose has aromas of flowers and fruit that melt together to create a bouquet of remarkable complexity and balance. The primary aromas include almond, quince, mango, pineapple, stewed peach, dried apricot and passion fruit. There are also floral notes, with touches of linden, acacia, mimosa and honeysuckle. And as is typical with Sémillon, there are also notes of beeswax, almond and hazelnut. In the mouth, Sauternes wines have a power and viscosity but while retaining a sense of elegance.

The great examples from the best vintages are wines that simply must be experienced and include wines from properties such as d'Yquem - the undisputed star of the appellation - Climens, Rieussec, Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Suduiraut, Fargues, Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Coutet, Guiraud, La Tour Blanche, Rayne Vigneau, Sigalas Rabaud, Doisy Védérine and Doisy Daene.



Appellation information sourced with permission from the official Bordeaux Wine website:  
[www.bordeaux.com](http://www.bordeaux.com) © Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux.



© This article was originally published online at [www.nicks.com.au](http://www.nicks.com.au)  
This article may not be circulated or reproduced without the above  
statement being prominently acknowledged.