



Decanter  
**BORDEAUX**  
GUIDE 2024

# Best of Bordeaux

THE WINES, CHATEAUX, VINTAGES AND DESTINATIONS TO SEEK OUT

## Blind tasting 101

Expert tips on how to deduce grapes, appellations and vintages

## Spotlight on...

2010 Médoc, crus bourgeois, 2018 Pessac, 2014 a decade on, and more

## Plan your trip

Discover St-Emilion, and get off the beaten track in Entre-deux-Mers



# 20 TOP BUYS: The Crus Bourgeois

This long-established official selection of wine estates provides an assured quality level of characteristic Bordeaux reds across the eight appellations of the Médoc region. We asked one of our Contributing Editors to pick 20 of the best value in a blind-tasted line-up

WORDS & SELECTION ANDY HOWARD MW

Bordeaux's Crus Bourgeois du Médoc classification is often pushed to one side amid all the excitement and glamour that surrounds the official ranking of its more illustrious neighbouring properties: the Médoc Grands Crus Classés en 1855. But quality at this level is on a high, with the most recent Crus Bourgeois classification in 2020 identifying 249 estates that are permitted to carry the designation. With a combination of a run of good vintages and friendlier price points than the Bordeaux cru classé wines, it makes sense to see how these wines stack up in the market now.

The tasting considered 50 wines available in the UK from high street, supermarket and independent retailers, with prices ranging from £14 to above £50 per bottle. Importantly, they were tasted blind, with limited details provided on vintage, vinification and maturation, but not about their status in the cru bourgeois hierarchy. So it was a good opportunity to see whether wines carrying the higher classifications (exceptionnel and supérieur) achieved more notable scores.

## THREE STEPS OF QUALITY

The Crus Bourgeois du Médoc classification has been through several iterations since the first 'modern' categorisation on 17 June 2003. Unlike the almost unchanged 1855 Grands Crus Classés, the Crus Bourgeois are reviewed every five years, with the most recent classification confirmed in 2020. This considered wines produced over five

vintages (2018–2022), with inclusion in the classification dependent on blind tastings by a group of professionals. Like that of St-Emilion, the Crus Bourgeois classification seems to generate plenty of discussion (and sometimes legal challenge), but the most recent version, based on the tasting, does seem to stack up with the wine in the bottle.

The 2020 classification includes 249 estates, producing about 28 million bottles (close to 31% of the Médoc's total,

**'A range of vintages was tasted, with the most enjoyable wines coming from 2020, 2019 and 2016'**

based on official data averaged across 10 vintages), from some 27.5% of the Médoc's total vineyard area. Within this, the largest geographical grouping is the Médoc (115 estates), followed by the Haut-Médoc (88 properties). St-Estèphe has 15 members, Margaux and Moulis-en-Médoc eight apiece, Listrac-Médoc 14 and Pauillac just one.

The three-tier classification persists, with wines designated either as cru bourgeois (179 estates) or one of the two higher levels – cru bourgeois supérieur and exceptionnel (respectively 56 and 14). To warrant the higher designation, estates must additionally be able to show sustainable vineyard practices – equivalent to certification under HEV2 ('High Environmental Value') standards

as a minimum; comprehensive quality assurance systems in place; and marketing plans (including improving the experience for visitors).

In total, 12 wines in the tasting scored 93 points or higher, with three achieving 95pts (a *Decanter* 'Outstanding'). Of the six wines scoring 95 and 94pts (*opposite*), one is cru bourgeois exceptionnel and three cru bourgeois supérieur. The two others, Châteaux Arnould and Le Boscq, are from 2016, and for that vintage were still classified as cru bourgeois.

Since the 2018 vintage (as per the new 2020 classification), both estates have been elevated to cru bourgeois exceptionnel level.

Among the 50 tasted, the five wines in the exceptionnel category averaged 92.6pts, with 22 supérieur averaging 91.2pts – solid justification for the quality tiers.

A range of vintages was tasted, with the most enjoyable wines coming from 2020, 2019 and 2016 – the latter still showing balance, finesse and potential for longer ageing, as is to be expected from this renowned vintage. Although 2018 (very wet until early July, threats of mildew, sunny and very dry through to October) was more difficult than 2019 and 2020, it also held some good surprises.

Regionally, St-Estèphe delivered the highest scores, with all wines achieving at least 92pts, and two Outstanding.

The results of this blind tasting seem to back up the current tiering of the Crus Bourgeois du Médoc classification, and these wines can often represent excellent value in comparison to some of Bordeaux's more famous names.

### Château Clément-Pichon, Haut-Médoc CB 2016

£32 House of Townend, The General Wine Co

Plenty of plump, dark fruit on the palate with lovely purity, driving acidity and structure from the well-judged oak and fruit tannin. Blend based on 85% Merlot, only 30% aged in barrels, 64% new, for 12 months. Softly fruited; those wanting pencil lead character should look elsewhere, but many will enjoy this fleshy, ripe style. **Drink** 2024-2027 **Alc** 13%



### Château de Côme, St-Estèphe CBS 2019

POA £ Top Selection

Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend with 10% Petit Verdot. Rounded, generous and appealing, with the ripeness of 2019 apparent, yet balanced by fresh acidity and plenty of palate structure. An earthy quality adds to the appeal. Well-integrated oak, fleshy and very good, length to finish. Organic. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 13%



### Château de Malleret, Haut-Médoc CBE 2020

£27.50 House of Townend

A wonderfully proportioned property with 54ha of vineyards, located south of Margaux. Burly, full-bodied wine with more of a New World rather than Bordeaux character. Plenty of dark berry and plum fruit notes. Fleshy, firm tannin, oak to the fore at the moment, but the components are all there and I suspect this just needs a few more years for a higher score. **Drink** 2024-2029 **Alc** 14%



### Château La Gorce, Médoc CB 2018

£15.05-£19.99 Christopher Piper, Moreton Wine Merchants

A consistent cru bourgeois located in the north of the Médoc, and a certified organic estate since 2022. There is cool Médoc character with firm but ripe tannins, bright acidity and plenty of concentration with drive and freshness. Blackcurrant notes and a hint of leafiness add to the complexity; a classy example. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 14%



### Château Larose-Trintaudon, Haut-Médoc CBS 2019

£28.99 Alexander Hadleigh, Noble Green, Shelved Wine, The Wine Reserve, Winesquare

A large estate close to Pauillac with almost 200ha under vine in total. The 2019 blends Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon with 8% Petit Verdot. Elegant, concentrated and beautifully balanced, with juicy dark fruits. Crisp, with a fine grain to the tannins. Has all the components to develop very well over the next several years. **Drink** 2024-2029 **Alc** 13.5% ►

