

2021 VINTAGE REPORT

White wines of the Médoc: 2021 and 2022 vintages



JANE ANSON, NOVEMBER 2023

TOP 5 WINES

VINTAGE	WINE NAME	SCORE
2021	Château Margaux Bordeaux Blanc Pavillon Blanc 2021	97
2021	Château Mouton Rothschild Bordeaux Blanc Aile d'Argent 2021	96

2021	Château Cantenac Brown Bordeaux Blanc Alto de Cantenac Brown 2021	94
2021	Château Saransot-Dupré Bordeaux Blanc 2021	94

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Although globally renowned for its red wine, there are around 70 different estates that produce a white wine on the Médoc peninsula, from iconic names like Pavillon Blanc, Aile d'Argent and Blanc de Lynch Bages to newer high quality arrivals like Poitevin and Le Blanc de Tronquoy. Of the 1855 classified estates, an increasing number have a dry white – at last count I believe 20 of them, although I am bound to be missing a few that are in development.

Among the oldest white producers on the peninsula are Château Saransot-Dupré and Château Loudenne, both dating back to the late 1800s, with new ones arriving every year – Château Kirwan, for example, will debut a Chardonnay in 2023 (not tasted here, so check back during the En Primeurs). One of the biggest is Château Lagrange, with 10ha of vines for its Les Arums de Lagrange, not far from Château Margaux with its 11ha, and one of the smallest is Blanc de Lunier from Château Vieux Robin with just 20 ares (equivalent to 2,000m²).

It's a category of wines that is exploding right now, with new names arriving with every vintage, and plenty of creativity – you'll find here two 100% Blanc de Noir Cabernet Sauvignons, and several wines that were aged in amphora, along with many who choose to work with non-Bordeaux grape varieties, most famously Château du Tertre Blanc and the Vin Blanc de Palmer. And the innovation continues: Château Loudenne – that has bottled a white wine under the château name since 1881 – planted 1ha of Chardonnay in 2023, and will be planting Viognier, Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Gris in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

This tasting looks at 50 examples from the 2021 and 2022 vintages. For context, I have included En Primeur notes for just Pavillon Blanc and Aile d'Argent but I

These are two particularly fascinating vintages to taste for white wines, because they were essentially completely contrasting years – and both great examples of how what works for red wine in Bordeaux does not always do so for whites. So where 2021 was pretty underwhelming for the reds, you'll find some exceptional white wines that I highly recommend. And where 2022 had many excellent reds, its unrelenting heat did not provide the best conditions for the whites.

All of these are currently bottled as AOC Bordeaux Blanc or Vin de France/VSIG (*Vins sans Indication Géographique*). This is likely to change – for at least some of these producers – once the new appellation that is upcoming in 2025 or 2026 comes into force. Our understanding right now is that it will be an extension to the AOC Médoc appellation allowing estates to bottle their white wines under this label (in much the same way AOC Entre deux Mers is now allowing reds as well as whites).

And it's not an entirely new idea. Yves Raymond, owner of Château Saransot Dupré in Listrac, is one of the great defenders of the idea of white Médoc. He was very helpful when I was researching for *Inside Bordeaux* on the subject, and I am reprinting part of his research here, for historical context:

The first recorded white vines in the Médoc were found in Blanquefort in the early 18th century, with winemakers in the neighbouring commune of Taillan following soon after. These are described by André Jullien in his 1816 book *Topographie de tous les vignobles Connus* as being at the same quality level as the best known Graves of the time: Carbonnieux.

In 1824, in a book by William Franck, *Traité sur les vins du Médoc et les autres vins rouges du département de la Gironde*, they were described as selling under the denomination Vin Blanc de Graves (this was not all that unusual, as all of the Left Bank was regularly referred to as the Graves, reflecting the gravel soils, for much of the region's history, certainly until the Médoc was truly developed as a wine production centre in the 17th century).

The separate between the Médoc and Graves at the time began at the Jalle de Blanquefort, but the distinctions were far less clearly defined than they are today. Even as late as 1946, Feret book's *Bordeaux et Ses Vins* described wines from this area as being Vins de Graves de Blanquefort, and said they were more structured than most white Graves.

total production of 1,200 tonneaux, and Taillan of 200 tonneaux out of a total of 1,000 tonneaux. In 1845 Taillan had quadrupled its production to 800 tonneaux, but it was at this point that many of the white vines of Taillan began to be ripped out because of poor sales (ironically because of the strong sales of sweet wines further south in Bordeaux).

Jullien described the Blanquefort wines, and particularly those on the Dulamon slopes – now suburbs of the city – as being particularly successful for their aromatic qualities, their *sève* or sapidity, and ripeness.

By 1850, Féret recorded that the majority of vines in Blanquefort and Taillan were being converted from white to red, and the 1868 edition again underlined that the reason was due to consumer preference for sweet or semi-sweet whites – a preference that continued until the mid 1960s, when tastes once again abruptly changed.

During this period, Listrac in particular began making a semi-sweet white that became highly sought – described as ‘ripe’ but ‘dry’, while higher up in St Laurent du Medoc, on clay limestone soils, both Château Sèmeillan and Château La Tour Carnet were recorded as making excellent dry white. In 1922 Féret recorded that dry whites were being made in almost every commune of the Médoc (not just from Sauvignon and Sémillon, but Folle Blanche, Grayan, Soulac and Vendays), with Château Lagrange in St Julien producing 360 hectolitres. The whites of Listrac were described as ‘excellent’ in the 19010 *Larousse*, and those of St Saveur ‘highly sought after’.

The 1929 crisis famously led to a decline of all plantings, but the white vines seem to have proved relatively stable – overall Feret records the same amount of white production in the Médoc in 1949 as in 1922. Certain estates in the northern Médoc such as Châteaux Livran and Beaulieu produced as much red and white, while Château Hautrive produced twice as much white as red.

White wines from the Médoc often bottled under the name Médoc until the 1960s, and often you would see Les Blancs du Médoc on labels.

Between the 1960s and 1980s the production almost entirely disappeared, as there was a move towards following the AOC rules more closely – meaning from this point on everyone had to declare under the Bordeaux Blanc appellation if they were to bottle a white at all. By 1982 there was almost zero production of

Pavillon Blanc was an exception, due to the reputation of Château Margaux, as was Château Loudenne, thanks to its long history and its owner the Gilbey family of wine merchants. A few others kept going with just a few hectares – Saransot Dupré and Bibian in Listrac, Dillon in Blanquefort, Sénéjac in Pisan Médoc, Les Arums de Lagrange and Caillou Blanc of Château Talbot in Saint Julien. Lynch Bages had produced a white for family and friends, but began to sell it ‘officially’ in the 1980s, around the same time as Le Merle Blanc of Château Clarke, and Cygne du Château Fonréaud.

Les Ailes d’argent àfrom Mouton Rothschild arrived in the 1990s, further raising the profile of the category.

In the 2000s, many other classified growths joined them: Cos d’Estournel, Palmer, Cantenac Brown, Prieuré Lichine and Le Tertre, along with many non classified on the ‘historic’ white terroirs of Listrac: Fourcas Dupré, Fourcas Hosten, Liouner and Lestage.

With all of this, it’s clear that white wines in the Médoc are not a new idea – and the tasting below shows that there are some wonderful examples being produced today. **But do they need to reclaim their own AOC?**

That’s debatable, honestly. Yves Raymond, as you can see from all of this exceptional historical research, is clearly in favour. He says, ‘the Médoc is capable of producing great white wines, particularly on its clay limestone soils – and those cooler later-ripening areas in the northern Médoc are well adapted to take advantage of a changing climate. We see today in France that the proportion of red wines sold in supermarkets has dropped from 70% 20 years ago to 50% today, and a new Médoc Blanc AOC could respond to this opportunity’.

Hugo Bernard of Domaine de Chevalier (and Clos des Lunes in the Sauternes area, that bottles as AOC Bordeaux Blanc) sees the opposite argument. ‘The strength of Bordeaux Blanc is its simplicity, and its democratic reach. To have white wines under the same appellation made by Château Margaux, Château Yquem, Cos d’Estournel, Mouton Rothschild, Clos de Lunes, Angélus Blanc and Cheval Blanc is extremely powerful. To dilute that just as it is all going so well seems wrong. Right now, as white Burgundy even at village level is climbing upwards in price, white Bordeaux is extremely well placed to step into the gap. Why would we want to change that

Tasting Notes

 Wines

 Tasting Notes

VINTAGE ▾	WINE NAME ▾	COLOUR ▾	SCORE ▾
2021	Pavillon Blanc	White	97
2021	Aile d'Argent	White	96
2021	Blanc de Lynch Bages	White	95
2021	Alto de Cantenac Brown	White	94
2021	Château Saransot-Dupré	White	94
2021	Brane Cantenac Blanc	White	94
2021	Le Blanc de Tronquoy	White	94
2021	Château Retout Blanc	White	93
2022	Le Blanc du Château Prieuré-Lichine	White	93
2021	Château Fourcas Hosten	White	93
2022	Le Merle Blanc de Château Clarke	White	93
2022	Tertre Blanc	White	93
2022	La Mouette	White	93
2022	Blanc de Lynch Bages	White	92
2022	Le Pélican	White	92
2021	Le Pélican	White	92
2022	Château Peyradon Lagravette	White	92
2022	Chateau Fourcas Hosten	White	92
2022	Les Arums de Lagrange	White	92

VINTAGE ▾	WINE NAME ▾	COLOUR ▾	SCORE ▾
2022	Château Saransot-Dupré	White	91
2022	Château de Malleret	White	91
2021	Anthoinette	White	91
2022	Brane-Cantenac Blanc	White	91
2022	Le Cygne	White	91
2021	Blanc de Chasse-Spleen	White	91
2022	Blanc de Côme	White	90
2021	Le Vin d'Chai Nous	White	90
2022	Le Retout Blanc	White	90
2022	Château Corconnac	White	90
2021	Collection Blanc	White	89
2021	Château Paveil de Luze	White	89
2021	Loudenne le Château	White	89
2022	Château Livran	White	89
2022	Anthoinette	White	89
2021	Château Peyradon Lagravette	White	88
2022	Le Blanc de Saikouk	White	88
2022	L'Impatient de Gadet Terrefort	White	88
2021	Château Poitevin	White	88
2021	Château Fourcas Dupré	White	88

VINTAGE ▾	WINE NAME ▾	COLOUR ▾	SCORE ▾
2022	L'Aile de Liouner	White	87
2022	Blanc de Chasse-Spleen	White	87
2022	Blanc de Lunier	White	87
2022	Le Vin d'Chai Nous	White	87
2022	Loudenne le Château	White	86
2022	Blanc of Black	White	86
2022	Cuvée de l'Alouette	White	86
2022	Château Escot	White	86
2022	Caravelle	White	85
2022	Linas	White	85

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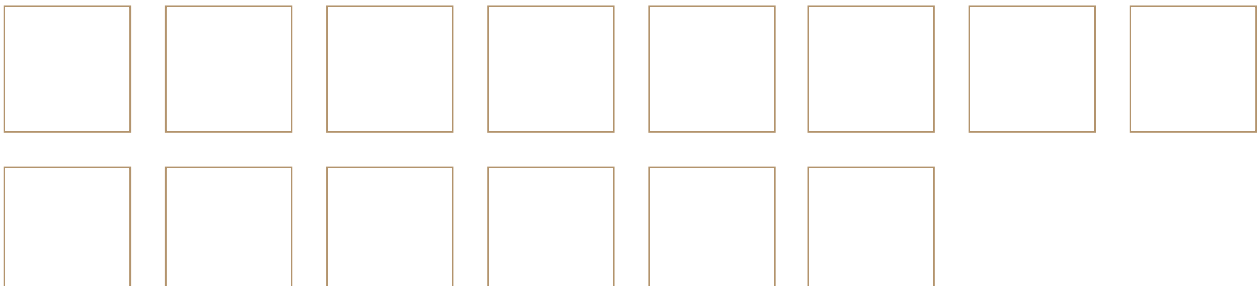
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- BY PRODUCER
- TASTING REPORTS
- PODCASTS
- FEATURES
- ABOUT
- BOOKS
- SUBSCRIBE
- GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

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- MY ACCOUNT
- THE VINTAGES – 1855 ONWARDS
- TERMS & CONDITIONS
- PRIVACY POLICY
- COOKIE POLICY
- CONTACT US
- ETHICS PAGE

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