Bordeaux Vintage Comparison

Society of Wine Educators’ Annual Conference – August 2017

Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW
Linda Lawry, DWS, CWE
Wines 1 to 9 are divided into 3 groups of 3 wines. Each group is made by the same producer and includes 3 different vintages. The same vintages are represented in each flight.

a. Think about how you might identify the three different vintages using evidence from three wines.

b. For each group of 3 wines (1-3, 4-6 and 7-9) think about how you might identify the origin as closely as possible and the vintages using evidence from all three wines.

c. For each wine think about quality and ability to age.
2010 Growing Season

- Jan-April – very dry, below avg’ temps ≈ late start to growth cycle
  - BUT helped avoid March frost damage
- Late vegetative cycle – bud-break, flowering, veraison, harvest
  - Flowering = uneven + slow, cold, wet, changeable June
  - Millerandage + coulure (Merlot most affected) ≈ reduced yields
- July – temp spikes + drought - hot and dry
2010 Growing Season (cont’)

• August – late *but* an even quick veraison
• August and Sept – one of the driest in past 30 years
• August/Sept – KEY: Warm but not hot and good diurnal differences ≈ preserved acidities and freshness
• September - overall dry, some light rain– enough to kick start vine metabolism ≈ anthocyanin build-up
• But cooler September temps led to some variation in quality of ripening
• Harvest started somewhat later + yields down
2010 Growing Season Impact

- Low disease pressure
- A Cabernet year
- Small bunches + concentrated berries – high skin to juice ratio
- Acidity, freshness, aroma purity
- High alcohol – especially with Merlot
- Some green/ vegetal notes + hard tannins – sorting necessary
- Cellar techniques: to manage the concentrated juices – More gentle extraction preferred and moderate fermentation temp
2010 Vintage Characteristics

- Wines considered very good to excellent
  - opinions vary whether 2009 or 2010 was better!
- Considered a ‘Cabernet’ year
- Tannins – firm + structuring – though angularity and astringency in some wines
- 2010 wines
  - Structure, acidity, freshness, purity, complexity and fruit concentration
  - Deeply colored, rich, dense, tannic, high alcohol,
  - Need time – but already enjoyable to some!
  - Some over-ripeness, some greenness, some portly, some harsh tannins
2012 Growing Season

• 2012 started out crisp & dry – wet, cold spring delayed bud-break.
• Wet March, April & early May (May slightly warmer than April)
• Late flowering + June rain and cold weather ≈ uneven flowering
• Coulure (Merlot & CF) + millerandange (CS)≈ crop reduction
• Cold July
• August – hot and sunny ≈ extreme heat spikes blocked veraison, berry scorch – drawn out veraison
• Water stress in August ≈ unripe polyphenols ≈ harsh green tannin
• Early September dry and warm but latter part marred by heavy showers ≈ more of a left bank Cabernet ripening challenge than right bank & Merlot
• Situations varied by site and by vine age - older deep rooted vines faring better.
2012 Growing Season Impact

• Late harvest for reds
• Berry breakage and very high disease pressure
• Uneven maturity between bunches and within bunches
• Human intervention key – in the vineyard + the cellar
  • strict selection to eliminate green / unripe berries, flavors and rot
  • the year of the optical sorting machines
• Left bank and Cabernet more impacted than Merlot
• Right bank fared better – more structure
2012 Vintage Characteristics

• Fruity vintage – ‘fruity’ wines for early enjoyment – more immediately aromatic than 2011 – broader with darker fruit than 2011 – more earlier charming and less austere - less complex than 2010
• “softer’ / smooth gentle tannic structure - not powerful wines
• Some mid/back palate hollowness and green notes
• Equally if not more heterogeneous than 2011
• Best wines are Merlot dominant – Right Bank and Pessac Léognan
• Lacking precision and concentration of better vintages such as 2010
• Some comparisons to 2002 and 2008
2014 Growing Season

- Mild, wet winter – replenished water table (after a few dry winters) and facilitated an early start to growth season
- Spring (March) started warm – above normal temperatures – but cool nights delayed budding a bit (but still March and ahead by 2 weeks of the norm)
- April remained warm but was very dry (slowing growth somewhat)
- May – variable – cool and damp with a mid-month heat spike –
- June – first half hot and sunny – so fast
- End June, July and August – growing season fell apart – cool, dull and showery – slowed ripening, disease pressure
- Summer marked by humidity – way less hours of ‘dry air’
- End of August – weather changed and through October glorious Indian summer – warm, sunny and dry – enabled red grapes to ripen and concentrate – 3rd hottest September on record (after ‘61 and ‘21)
2014 Impact of growing Season

- Variable
- Long Indian summer enabled grapes to fully ripen
- Cool summer kept pH low and preserved high acidity levels
- Some poor fruit set for Merlot
- Poor summer weather (i.e. HUMIDITY) = increased disease pressure early on – so vigilance in the vineyard important – especially for Merlot – also some ‘withering’ of Merlot
- Hail on right bank also impacted quantity
- Veraison …… long and painstaking
- Mainly dry sunny Sept and Oct meant very little rot to deal with at harvest.
- Gentle extraction important to balance with medium concentration / structure and more elegant style
- A Cabernet vintage on the Left Bank
2014 Vintage Characteristics

Promising beginning – Worrying Middle – Happy Ending

• Wines of elegance rather than power
• Characterized by high acidity – some initially said ‘too high’ – but good for aging
• Deeply color with aromatic complexity and medium+ flavor concentration – but not the power or concentration of 2010
• Tannins fine and smooth – left bank more structured than 2012
• A Cabernet vintage on the left bank
• Right bank less powerful than usual – and easier drinking
## WINES

### SWE Bordeaux Seminar - Three Vintage Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-Order</th>
<th>Wine</th>
<th>appellation</th>
<th>vintage</th>
<th>Blend</th>
<th>Abv</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Château Brown</td>
<td>Pessac-Léognan</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>$42</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Château Brown</td>
<td>Pessac-Léognan</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 46% Merlot, 4% Petit Verdot</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>$35</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Château Brown</td>
<td>Pessac-Léognan</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>$30</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Château Lafon-Rochet, 4th Growth</td>
<td>Saint-Estèphe</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Château Lafon-Rochet, 4th Growth</td>
<td>Saint-Estèphe</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>67.5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Merlot, 1.5% Petit Verdot</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>$45</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Château Lafon-Rochet, 4th Growth</td>
<td>Saint-Estèphe</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Merlot, 4% Petit Verdot, 4% Cabernet Franc</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Clos de l’Oratoire</td>
<td>Saint-Emilion Grand Cru Classé</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>$60</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Clos de l’Oratoire</td>
<td>Saint-Emilion Grand Cru Classé</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>$45</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clos de l’Oratoire</td>
<td>Saint-Emilion Grand Cru Classé</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc</td>
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WINES

Thank you!