

Precisely: BORDEAUX

Teaching one of the classic fine wine regions

Gary L. Twining, CWE, SWE, CSWS

winingwithtwining@hotmail.com

TWINING'S TEACHING TIPS

- Select specific information to illustrate
- Determine topics for comprehension
- Start with basics and expand
- Simplify the difficult
- Isolate the necessary information
- Integrate Bordeaux into your classes
- Answer detailed questions after class
- Clearly explain the processes/concepts
- Use questions/quizzes to gauge learning
- Repeat facts/concepts to ingrain
- Make it fascinating and enjoyable!
- Break down concepts to 3 issues/parts

“Never talk down to your audience.” *Dorothy Fuldheim*

World's largest fine wine region

Focus – dry red wines (11% dry white, 2% sweet white)

Region – 300,000 acres, 5,800 wine growers, 7000 Chateaux

All quality levels and price points produced

Origin of many fine wine grapes

Blended wines are typical

Environmental factors – Proximity to water important
Atlantic Ocean

Gironde/Dordogne/Garonne/Ciron - largest estuary in France

Medoc's gravel – precipitation control in wet years (can be challenging in dry)

Large properties and availability

Single owner estates (Roman inheritance laws) – estate passed to oldest son.

Numerous estates of various sizes and quality levels

Style – subtlety over power

Cool climate

Blending of varieties

Winemaking philosophy (balance)

Defining the wines – by category & origin

- Red wines from the Left bank - Medoc and Graves
- Red wines from the Right Bank - St. Emilion, Pomerol, Fronsac, Bourg, Blaye
- Red and White wines between the rivers - Entre-Deux-Mers
- White Wines on either side of the Garonne Sauternes, Barsac, Graves/Pessac-Leognan Cadillac, Loupiac, Sainte-Croix-du-Mont

Appellation Contrôlée: implies a certain level of authenticity

1. Delimited area of production
2. Approved grape varietal(s)
3. Alcohol percentage (& chaptalization)
4. Yield
5. Viticultural methods
6. Vinification methods
7. Required analysis, tasting and approval
8. Bottling in production region
9. Labeling

1855 Classification

For the Universal Exposition in Paris. Ranked by Union of Brokers (know all trade)
Based on price, demand, reputation, owner stability* (original Mouton ranking)
Classified the Medoc reds, Sauternes/Barsacs, Haut-Brion from Graves.

Designations – Left Bank

Cru Classe (Noble wines - 1-5th growths) 1855

Medoc Crus (60 Chateaux) + 1 Graves (Haut-Brion—classified also in Graves)

5-1st Crus, 14-2nd Crus, 14-3rd Crus, 10-4th Crus, 18-5th Crus

Sauternes/Barsac (27 Chateau)

1-1st Cru Superieur, 11-1st Crus, 15-2nd Crus

Crus Bourgeois (2020 – Merchants classified 1932 – established in Middle ages)

Red wines, Medoc Appellations, chateau of highest standards – 5 years (2018-2022)

Quality/taste, environment, Traceability/authentication, Ongoing tasting checks

For Superieur and Exceptionnel + technical management & marketing/promotion

249 Chateaux – 8 appellations

31% of Medoc output

Exceptionnel (14)

Superieur (56)

Cru Bourgeois (179)

Cru Artisan (1989 Syndicate - 1994 legally re-introduced - existed over 150 years)

36 Chateaux – in 8 Medoc appellations 2012 – reviewed every 5 years

DESIGNATIONS – RIGHT BANK/GRAVES

ST. EMILION (2012 - first classified in 1954 – 82 crus – revised every 10 years)

Premier GR Cru Classes (18 Chateaux)

Angelus, Ausone, Cheval Blanc, Pavie=A

Grand Cru Classes (64 Chateaux)

POMEROL - never classified, Petrus and Le Pin equal to Medoc first growths

GRAVES (1959 – first classified in 1953 – 1 level - no revisions – 16 crus)

Cru Classes (red/white – 6 estates) (red only – 7 estates) (white only – 3 estates)

Commune (Pauillac)

Regional (Haut Medoc, Medoc)

Bordeaux Superieur (.5% more alcohol)

Bordeaux

Historical background

60 BC – Roman occupation south and east of Bordeaux.

1 AD – wines first made.

Middle ages passed to the English crown – encouraged export business

Late 1700's – investment by French aristocrats, 1800's – bankers, entrepreneurs.

- English heir ruled the region, married the French Duchess of Aquitaine.
- Encouraged vineyard development due to shipping access/English market.
- Preferential trade arrangements. No export tax = fewer restrictions/lower prices.
- Bordeaux first in the region to be shipped each vintage = market domination.

1800's – Bordeaux merchant class that could purchase, cellar and export wines.

1855 – Classification – brought prosperity to the region.

1860 – Anglo-French Treaty (1st trade treaty)

- Lower duties = 2X exports to England.
- Major wars
- French government relocated from Paris to Bordeaux

1924 - Mouton estate bottles.

1936 – Appellation Contrôlée established for authenticity and regional protection.

1945 – First post-World war II vintage – right bank wines became known and desired.

1950's – profits meant modernization for the region.

1972 – Mandatory estate bottling by classified growths.

1973 – market crash = foreign ownerships.

1990's – good vintages and growth of the Asian/ far East market.

Grapes – “Wine is an individual interpretation of the appellation”

Steven Spurrier

Varietals are specified by law, percentages planted/blended by estate are not.

Cabernet Sauvignon – firm structure and acid, long finish, color/flavor intensity.

Merlot – Texture over flavor, moderate structure/acidity, lighter color.

Cabernet Franc – Light color, soft tannins, aromatic, firm acidity.

Malbec – Firm tannins/structure and acidity, offers smoothness and dark fruit.

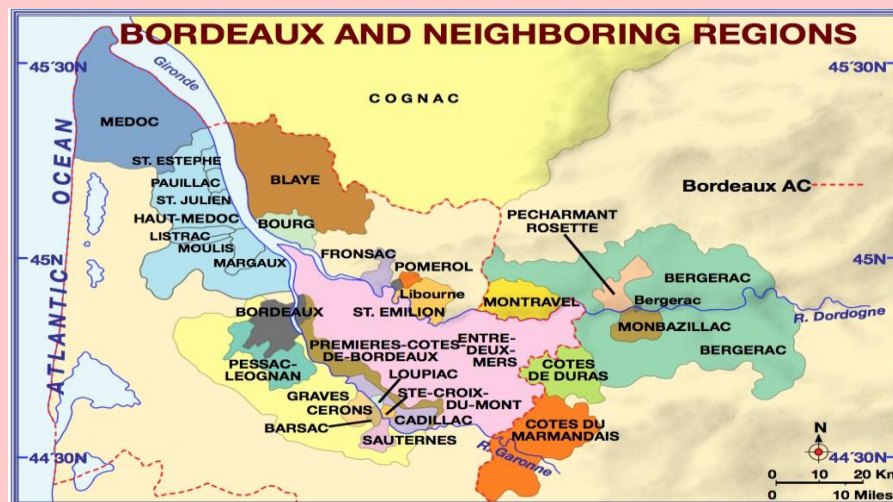
Carmenere – Cabernet structure/Merlot charm, sweet, dark fruit, low acidity.

Petit Verdot – small amounts for color, spice, tannins and acidity.

Sauvignon Blanc – firm acidity, direct/pure flavors and aromatics, mod. weight.

Semillon – Texture and weight, low acidity, thin skins susceptible to botrytis.

Muscadelle – small plantings, musky aromatics, less subtle.



Defining the wines

Climate – maritime, moderate, very warm summers, cool nights = acid retention

- Moderated by Gulf Stream, Atlantic ocean and wide Gironde estuary.
- Growing challenges = insufficient warmth and excess rainfall
- Spring frosts, winter freeze protection.
- Forests protect from salt ocean winds.
- Spring frosts during flowering, cold rain during pollination, hail.
- Rain at harvest – oidium, mildew, dilution of juice, fruit splitting, soil toxicity.

Climate variability = vintage specific purchases

Fair and simply good vintages – easier to drink early or with food

- Often great values at better price points

Define “Best quality”.

- Sometimes it is specific use and price/value ratio.

Impacts of sunlight and cool climate temperatures

Acidity level	+
Nuance	+
Overtness	-
Tannins/astringency	+ (can be green)
Fruit ripeness	-
Varietal character	-
Alcohol	-

Remember-under-ripe wines “ripen” in bottle, cooler/lesser vintages improve

Soils (part of the equation with climate and vine – always a generalization)

- Left bank – more gravel, well-drained and warmer soils.
- Right bank – more clay, water holding, cooler soils.
- Limestone in Graves, Sauternes, Barsac and also Pomerol, St. Emilion

Man’s influence

Harvest date (Sugar, acidity, tannin, color components - balance)

Reception/cellar treatments

- Triage
- Destem/crush, whole cluster, whole berries, cold soak
- Adjustments – Sugar, acidity, concentration, SO₂

Fermentation and aging choices

Yeast (cultured normally or indigenous)

concentration/chaptalization

Fermentation vessel (inert or flavor impartation, anaerobic or oxygen aging)

Fermentation temperature

- whites 18-20C (64/68F)
- reds 28-30C (82/86F)

Color extraction (gentle or intense methods)

Maceration - additional time steeping on the skins (phenol polymerization)

Malolactic or not (maintain malic acidity or not)

Malolactic in barrel (integration of oak/fruit) or tank (no interplay with oak)

Aging vessel (wood/inert, large/small, age of wood)

Micro-oxygenation (controlled oxygen impartation – often replaces barrel)

Lees contact/battonage for dry whites

Racking, lees aging, fining, filtration

Blending lots and varieties, aging

Timing of bottling (last style impact to wine)