

James Molesworth  
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## BORDEAUX SQUEAKS BY IN 2013

In the weakest vintage for red Bordeaux since 1997,  
dry whites and sweet wines offer a bright spot

Whew. That is basically the feeling among the Bordelais as the red wines from the 2013 vintage are now finally headed to retail shelves in the United States. There's a sense of resignation and relief that the vintage—easily the region's weakest since 1997—was a small crop that should result in quick absorption by the

marketplace. Like the character Neo in *The Matrix*, Bordeaux's winemakers twisted and turned in an effort to dodge everything that Mother Nature threw at them during a chaotic growing season.

"2013 was certainly the most difficult vintage I've known in Bordeaux," says Stéphane Derenoncourt, the owner of his own *Domaine de l'A* in Castillon and an influential winemaking consultant to dozens of Bordeaux estates.

In the end, those vintners who were rigorous in their viticultural work throughout the season and uncompromising in their sorting at harvest—as well as positioned to benefit from a hefty dose of technology in the cellar—managed to coax a set of light-bodied, early-drinking reds into bottle. The dry whites, typically overshadowed by the reds, are generally excellent in 2013, and the sweet wines of Barsac and Sauternes are mostly superb, giving the region something to cheer about.

Overall, I have reviewed nearly 475 finished, bottled wines from Bordeaux's 2013 vintage via blind tastings at Wine Spectator's New York office and in Bordeaux. These reviews confirm my initial impressions based on the barrel tastings I conducted in the spring of 2014, when the vintage was first presented by winemakers and *château* owners, a period known as *en primeur* (see "Disaster Averted," June 30, 2014). The total count of all wines in this report is 362 reds, 83 dry whites and 27 dessert wines.

The ratings for most of the finished wines fall within the projected ranges from my initial barrel tastings in 2014, although a noticeable number of bottlings came up short, with the modest fruit that is the vintage's profile having faded a bit following the *élevage*. None of the reds in this report achieve a classic rating of 95 points or higher on Wine Spectator's 100-point scale, while only 54 reds—barely 15 percent of the total number reviewed—earn outstanding scores of 90 or more points. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all 2013 Bordeaux tasted is available.)

### 2013 RED BORDEAUX

Starting with a cold and wet spring that led to a reduced crop set, 2013 was off to a troubled start. Cool, rainy weather persisted through the early growing season, with hail storms hitting Margaux and the southern Médoc, among other areas. The troubled weather pattern was broken only by a spate of warm and dry weather in July and early August. But just as vintners thought they might get something



they could work with, picking the early-ripening whites under generally good conditions, the rains returned by mid-September and didn't let up, dashing hopes for red wine producers. Many vintners call it the most difficult vintage they have worked with, comparing 2013 to the harsh decades of the 1960s and '70s, when weather patterns were typically more severe.

"2013 was basically wet and cool overall, but the worst was late September and early October, which was wet and warm, and so rot developed," says Nicolas Glumineau, technical director at Château Pichon Longueville Lalande, in Pauillac. "It was like the '70s, where you were hoping all season long it would be OK. Then, boom, at the end the autumn was awful and there was basically no wine. We jumped from picking Merlot to [Cabernet Sauvignon], forsaking the Merlot because the Cab was still good. It didn't make sense to have everyone picking Merlot to wind up getting 4 hectoliters per hectare [0.3 tons per acre]."

The result of this decision to give up on the Merlot is a 2013 Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 2013 (91 points, \$96) that is entirely Cabernet Sauvignon, the only time, according to Glumineau, that the estate's grand vin has been made up of just the one variety. Showing cedar, tobacco and currant notes, with a bright savory edge, the wine is a strong effort in this difficult year. With the low crop and severe selection, only 1,915 cases were produced, down from a typical level of around 15,000 cases annually.

Yet while the weather pattern in 2013 was a throwback to the bad old days, modern technology meant that producers had the means to get something acceptable into the bottle. The first battle was in the vineyards. With rot spreading as the rains continued through the harvest, those who had leaf-pulled for aeration and crop-thinned to maximize ripeness—even with the already short crop—had a chance. Those with the benefit of well-drained terroirs could then perhaps capitalize on their vineyard work.

Leading the way among the 2013 reds are a handful of Right Bank wines sourced from either the limestone terrace atop the plateau or on the well-drained gravel soils below. The Château Bélair-Monange St.-Emilion 2013 (93, \$140), La Mondotte St.-Emilion 2013 (93, \$161) and Château Pavie St.-Emilion 2013 (93, \$268) showcase the finesse and purity Merlot achieves on limestone, while the Château Cheval-Blanc St.-Emilion 2013 (93, \$423) and Château Figeac St.-Emilion 2013 (93, \$79) benefit from their reliance on Cabernet situated on gravel. The lone Left Bank wine to match them is the Château Mouton-Rothschild Pauillac 2013 (93, \$350), which, in keeping with the profile of the vintage, relies more on acidity than tannins to carry off its pure beam of cassis backed by iron, violet, apple wood and tobacco.

"The ripeness was not perfect, and during the vinification it was important not to extract too much, in order to maintain the wine's balance and freshness while not overextracting, which risked green notes," says Frédéric Faye, general director at Château Figeac. In one of many tweaks Faye has made since ascending to the position in 2012, he also deviated from the wine's typical blend of equal parts Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, instead relying on a blend that is half Cabernet Sauvignon (with the rest split between Merlot and Cabernet Franc), sourcing the fruit from the estate's best-drained parcels. His efforts to restore this historic estate to prominence are on display with the 2013, which packs a serious core of fig, blackberry and black currant fruit. In many ways it's the wine of the vintage.

Other top Right Bank reds include the Château Canon-La Gaffelière St.-Emilion 2013 (92, \$62), Clos Fourtet St.-Emilion 2013 (92, \$72) and Château Pavie Macquin St.-Emilion 2013 (92, \$53). Of the 81



St.-Emilions in this report, nearly 30 percent rate outstanding, with the wines from Angélu, Larcis Ducasse, Monbousquet, Pavie-Decesse and Valandraud also of note. From neighboring Pomerol, there was less success, with only 10 of the 44 wines reviewed (23 percent) rating 90-plus. The Château L'Évangile 2013 (92, \$165), Pétrus 2013 (92, \$2,097), Château Trotanoy 2013 (92, \$200) and Vieux Château Certan 2013 (92, \$146) earn kudos for their efforts.

In general, the Right Bank is the safer choice in 2013, with the best terroirs in St.-Emilion and Pomerol delivering wines with some generosity of fruit and elegant, floral finishes. The Left Bank is more variable, with the Merlot there hit hard by rot. The Margaux appellation, which relies heavily on Merlot, is the most disappointing of the major AOCs, while farther up the Médoc, later-ripening Cabernet Sauvignon was able to shrug off some of the moisture, though severe selections still had to be made. Overall, I rate the 2013 vintage 86 points for the Right Bank and 84 points for the Left Bank.

On the Left Bank, where the region's largest estates reside, there is far more heterogeneity in 2013. The big estates were scrambling for pickers, trying to move as quickly as possible as conditions in their vineyards steadily deteriorated. Those who managed to get their grapes into the winery then had to rely on technology such as optical sorting, while also tweaking their vinifications to accommodate the more fragile fruit.



**"In 2013 you had to disconnect the harvest and the cellar from one another," says Vincent Bache-Gabrielsen, technical director at châteaux Pédesclaux in Pauillac and Lilian Ladouys in St.-Estèphe. "You had to harvest very quickly, but then really take the time in the cellar to sort properly and figure out how to handle the vinification." The Château Pédesclaux Pauillac 2013 (90, \$31) is one of the year's surprises, thanks in part to the substantial investments—**

**including a new cellar—recently made by its owners, the Lorenzetti family.**

At the northern end of the Médoc, the windswept, gravelly hillocks of St.-Estèphe provided a bulwark against the wet weather. The Château Montrose 2013 (92, \$94), Château Cos-d'Estournel 2013 (91, \$133) and Château Calon-Ségur 2013 (90, \$65) are excellent efforts, keeping up what has recently become a spirited competition among these estates. For good value, the Château Meyney 2013 (89, \$30), Château de Pez 2013 (88, \$37) and Château Lafon-Rochet 2013 (88, \$36) all performed well.

Heading south to Pauillac and St.-Julien, the best wines mostly come from gravelly terraces that could drain enough to help offset the rain. In Pauillac, both the Château Lafite Rothschild Pauillac 2013 (92, \$451) and Château Latour Pauillac 2013 (92, \$NA) nearly matched Mouton's effort, with the Lafite showing its typically perfumy charcoal, bay leaf and tobacco notes, albeit on a smaller-than-usual frame. The Latour is built more on its acidity than tannins, with a very pure streak of red currant and bitter plum fruit. Châteaux Lynch Bages, Pichon-Longueville Baron and Grand-Puy-Lacoste also produced outstanding wines.



Next door in St.-Julien, the Château Ducru-Beaucaillou St.-Julien 2013 (92, \$109) and Château Léoville Las Cases St.-Julien 2013 (92, \$131) set the pace, followed by outstanding efforts from Léoville Poyferré, Léoville Barton, Clos du Marquis and Branaire-Ducru. Among the best values is the Château Gloria St.-Julien 2013 (89, \$34), which managed to keep its gutsy, brambly persona even in this more dilute-style vintage.

From there, heading into Margaux and Pessac, the results grow increasingly mixed. Of the 25 Margaux reds in this report, only two—Château Margaux (91, \$346) and Château Palmer (91, \$246)—come in at 90 points or higher, and in Pessac-Léognan the percentage of outstanding wines is even lower, with just two of 32 2013s—Château Haut-Brion (91, \$344) and Domaine de Chevalier (90, \$47)—hitting the mark.

Those who decide to chase after the 2013 reds will need to move relatively quickly. Quantities are drastically lower than usual, a function of both the low initial crop set and the severe sorting needed to weed out rotten and underripe grapes. Some small estates, such as Château Haut-Bailly in Pessac and Le Pin in Pomerol, produced so little wine in 2013 that they chose not to submit samples for tasting. Others decided not to release any wine at all, such as Silvio Denz's Château Faugères and Château Peby Faugères in St.-Emilion. Many of the large estates on the Left Bank saw reductions of 50 percent or more. At Château Palmer, the famed third-growth in Margaux, general director Thomas Duroux produced only 3,800 cases of grand vin in 2013, half of what was produced the previous year, also a smaller-than-usual vintage.

The lower quantities, however, are a blessing of sorts, as producers hope to move on quickly from 2013 to the much better 2014 and potentially superb 2015 vintages waiting in the wings. For consumers, this could be a sound strategy as well—to sit out 2013 and wait until the '14s and '15s head this way. If you choose wisely, though, you can find some charming wines among the 2013 reds. At their best, they are clean and easy-drinking, without excessive herbal flavors or astringent tannins from underripe grapes. At their worst they come off as dilute and lacking energy. The fact that they're certainly better wines than could have been made under similar conditions a generation ago, before the current level of viticultural precision and winemaking technology existed, is a testament to how strong a region Bordeaux is in general.

## 2013 BARSAC & SAUTERNES

While red wine producers were scrambling to deal with the spread of gray rot at the end of the season in 2013, the region's sweet wine producers were happy to watch their own form of rot develop—botrytis. This is the "noble rot" that shrivels grape skins and concentrates sugar, helping Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon to produce some of the world's greatest sweet wines. In the end, the best 2013s are not as deep and complex as the stunning 2011s, but they are generally excellent, with fresh acidity and racy profiles to match their sweetness. Although the vintage is a success, it was not without its hurdles. As rot spread quickly, leaving only minimal time between rains, producers still had to work fast.

"We had a lot of rain on Oct. 4 and 5, and then Oct. 11. We were very lucky to see a strong south dry wind from Oct. 17 to 20, which was efficient to dry the effects of the rain and have a rapid concentration of the berries," says Eric Larramona, director at Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey in Bommes. "But we had to pick quite quickly, and we finished on Oct. 25. The result is a very low yield—11 hectoliters per hectare [0.8 tons per acre]. But the quick picking gave the wine a good purity because the botrytis was very



fresh when we picked." The Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey Sauternes 2013 (95, \$59) is one of the stars of the vintage as well as a promising new beginning for the estate, which was purchased by Silvio Denz just after the 2013 harvest.

With most of the sweet wines now released, the Château d'Yquem Sauternes 2013 (98, \$360) leads the way. (Château de Fargues is the last top producer still to release its '13 Sauternes.) Other top dessert wines include the spectacular Château Climens Barsac 2013 (97, \$68) and Château Doisy Daëne Barsac L'Extravagant 2013 (97, \$195/375ml), the latter an individual berry selection of only fully botrytised Sauvignon Blanc grapes. Châteaux Coutet, Guiraud and Doisy-Védrières also produced classic-rated wines in 2013. Overall, two-thirds of the 27 Barsac and Sauternes in this report earned outstanding ratings.

## 2013 WHITE BORDEAUX

Though this report focuses primarily on the 2013 reds, lovers of racy, detailed Sauvignon Blancs would be remiss if they neglected the dry whites. The Château Doisy Daëne Bordeaux White 2013 (92, \$35) is a prime example, a glistening white with lemon pulp and chamomile notes backed by a racy core of jicama, almond, tarragon and thyme.

"The dry white wines are excellent-minerally, fruity, balanced. Because they were picked before the second week of September," says Doisy Daëne owner and winemaker Denis Dubourdieu.

The majority of 2013 whites were released earlier in 2015; for more in-depth coverage, see "2013 Bordeaux Whites," in our April 30, 2015, issue. Of the 83 dry whites I have reviewed since then, more than one-third of them earn outstanding ratings. Included are some late-release bottlings that merit hunting down. Both the Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte Pessac-Léognan White 2013 (96, \$106) and Château Pape Clément Pessac-Léognan White 2013 (95, \$150) show how strong this vintage is for Sauvignon Blanc. The former is a rapier of citrus, verbena and quinine notes, while the latter delivers more flamboyant flavors of toast, shortbread and macadamia nut.

The Château Olivier Pessac-Léognan White 2013 (91, \$32) is an excellent choice for relative value. There are other good values too, particularly outside the prominent Pessac appellation. The Baron Philippe de Rothschild Bordeaux White Mouton Cadet 2013 (86, \$11) makes an ideal aperitif or light sipper with fresh oysters or goat cheese.

Like the region's sweet wines, the dry whites are a bright spot for Bordeaux in a year of challenges and setbacks.

