

# Bordeaux Wines: The Vintages That Almost Break Us, Help To Shape Us

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 New York State of Wine  
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2017 Château Pédesclaux, Pauillac AOC, Bordeaux.jpeg



Jun 06 2019

*Those sections of our lives that we consider the good times are not the ones that typically shape our lives in the most profound ways, but it is those sections of our lives that bring us to our knees and challenge us in every way that can not only bring meaning to our lives, but also make us better. The same can be said for the varying vintages of the classic wine region of Bordeaux.*

As children, when we dream about the future we foresee it in an idyllic way. As an adolescent, we experience the terrifying blows of life, whether it is through common growing pains, through tragedy at a young age or through witnessing the pain of others. We start to slowly understand that life is so much more than a fairy tale or even just simply a comfortable, safe existence. But in a way, many of these hurdles that we encounter give us a chance to be better, to be stronger and hopefully, to pass those lessons on to younger generations that will evolve past us. Those "vintages" in our lives, like those that can violently swing to extremes for classic wine regions such as Bordeaux, are what ultimately guide us in our growth as well as purpose in life.

## 2017 Bordeaux Vintage

A couple of months ago, I was invited by **Millésima**, a fine wine retailer, to go to Bordeaux, France, to try over 150 Bordeaux wines from the 2017 vintage. Some of you may be acquainted with Bordeaux's En Primeur (wine futures) system – an event that happens every year in Bordeaux after the spring of the previous vintage, while the wines are still in barrel. This gives wine buyers, as well as journalists, a chance to pre-buy (or review) this vintage and sell it at a discounted price to their clients. Well, Millésima thought it would be a great idea to offer a "Panorama" tasting during the same time, to give buyers, as well as writers, a chance to taste the previous vintage such as the 2017 as well as the 2018's. As many of you can imagine, En Primeur has drawbacks; to name two: some of the producers have not decided on the final blend yet at such an early stage, and it takes the wines time to reveal themselves. The Panorama tasting still offers a discount for pre-buying, with the 2017 not arriving until 2020, yet the wines are easier to assess at this time.



The Millésima Panorama 2017 Tasting

I did this same tasting with Millésima last year for the 2016 vintage, which was across the boards a great vintage; the wines were open and vibrant, displaying a beautiful texture. But 2017 is another type of vintage and was less homogeneous – actually it was downright all over the place with quality varying from mediocre to pretty good, to some of the best wines a château has made. Many parts of Bordeaux endured devastating hail in the spring of 2017 and some winemakers gave alternating stories of having cooler or warmer temperatures in the micro-climates of their vineyards. And then there was the significant amount of rain in mid-September that diluted some wines, yet not others right before harvest. But no matter the results, it was a stressful vintage for all involved.

#### The Tough Times That Benefited

I think the toughest times in my life have not only given me a purpose but have made me a better person, hence helping me to be of more value to the world around me. There are many of those tough times for myself, as there are for all of you I'm sure, but three in particular come to mind in regards to thinking of the 2017 vintage. The first, when I initially came to New York City at the age of 18 with no family, no resources and no sense of what I was going to do; the second, my first marriage, albeit short, ending in divorce because I was cheated on; the third, going through eight years or so dealing with someone close to my inner circle who was not only seriously ill physically, but mentally ill as well.

Each of those events taught me something different, and despite already intellectually knowing these concepts, I didn't truly understand them in my bones until afterwards. The first time I came to New York City, at such a young age, taught me to be resourceful and to take responsibility for my life, even though I was dealt a bad hand; this certainly applies to those producers who were resourceful during such a challenging vintage. I have always been a romantic and so when I first got married at the tender age of 23, I gave myself completely to the relationship, even though it was not a good one, and lost my sense of self in the process. Because I lost my sense of self, when the rug was pulled out from under me after he told me he was having an affair, I went into a dark hole and I learned that I should never place myself in that position again – just the way that some Bordeaux producers lost themselves by trying to follow a trend instead of truly expressing their land. Even if they did lose themselves, as we all do for a time, I admire the ones who came back to their sense of place. The last event, that involved dealing with someone who was physically and mentally sick for so long, taught me to enjoy life no matter how unfair it may seem, and as long as we are decently healthy, we have so much to be grateful for – and it is like those producers who will be thankful for even a mediocre vintage and strive to make a stellar wine under less than ideal conditions.

#### A Compelling Vintage

I do admit that the 2016 Bordeaux wines made my heart skip a beat with joy, but I found 2017 to be more compelling. As I tasted each wine, it was like living through different moments in life that ranged from disappointing to ecstatic. And it was quite remarkable to see some producers make the best wines I had tasted from them in years; for some, 2017 was their year. And it is symbolic of when we go through times when our life seems to be falling apart. Sometimes we don't realize that it is actually the best thing that could have happened to us, and we end up having the vintage of a lifetime.

Below are some of my top recommendations, ranging from \$12-\$158, that are still available for future purchase with the wines arriving in 2020. All of the wines listed below are red Bordeaux selections.

#### Special Occasion Wine (from \$15 to \$50)

**2017 Château Fonréaud**, Listrac-Médoc AOC, Bordeaux (\$17): I do not know the blend for this wine. This wine had chewy tannins which I liked because it had rich flavors such as cassis and sweet tobacco leaf, so I loved chewing on these flavors and it's a great deal for those who like this type of structure.

**2017 Château de Sales**, Pomerol AOC, Bordeaux (\$29): I do not know the blend in this wine either although it is a majority Merlot. For years I always thought of de Sales as the Pomerol that one can buy for an affordable price. But it really over-delivered and I was so impressed that I had to look at the label twice. I had heard that de Sales was making a lot of improvements and it shows. Pristine fruit with fresh blueberries and black raspberries with a plush mid-palate that had bright acidity with a pretty floral finish.

**2017 Château Pédesclaux**, Pauillac AOC, Bordeaux (\$43): 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc and 3% Petit Verdot. Pédesclaux has always lived in the shadows of its nearby neighbors, first growths Lafite Rothschild and Mouton Rothschild, while they languished in the background as a fifth growth. Well, they have taken on major renovations in their cellar as well as research in their vineyards, and they have made a leap in quality. I would buy these wines now as a few Bordeaux wine critics are already talking about Pédesclaux being a producer to keep an eye on, so prices won't stay this low for long. An intoxicating nose of truffles and blackberry pie with a lush body and silky tannins.