

# BORDEAUX 2014: THE VERDICT

## *The highs and lows of en primeur*



Photography: Gavin Quinney

There has been little incentive for consumers to buy Bordeaux en primeur in recent years. Can the chateaux turn that around? Our man on the ground, local winemaker **Gavin Quinney**, reviews the latest vintage

**F**or the first time in four years, there's genuine enthusiasm within the trade to get behind the Bordeaux en primeur campaign. There was a positive reaction to the wines at the annual tastings but, as we all know, there has been little advantage in buying recent vintages while the wines were still in barrel.

The 2011s, 2012s and 2013s failed to ignite much interest en primeur, so consumers are going to need some convincing – it's now in the hands of the leading chateaux as they set their opening prices a year or so before the wines are bottled. For UK buyers, the exchange rate should help too. →

# 100 en primeur wines rated 90+

Wine	AOC	Score	Best to drink	£ (case of 2012*)
Mouton Rothschild	Pauillac	95-97	2021-38	£2,900
Pontet-Canet	Pauillac	95-96	2020-35	£625
Lafite Rothschild	Pauillac	95-96	2022-40	£3,490
Pichon Baron	Pauillac	94-95	2020-35	£610
Pichon Lalande	Pauillac	93-95	2021-38	£610
Lynch-Bages	Pauillac	93-94	2019-34	£645
Petit Mouton	Pauillac	92-94	2021-33	£1,075
Grand-Puy Lacoste	Pauillac	92-93	2019-32	£300
Duhart-Milon	Pauillac	92-93	2021-38	£485
Clerc Milon	Pauillac	91-92	2019-33	£360
Carruades de Lafite	Pauillac	90-92	2018-30	£1,255
Haut-Batailley	Pauillac	90-91	2019-29	£205
Haut-Bages Libéral	Pauillac	90-91	2019-33	£195
Batailley	Pauillac	90-91	2019-33	£250
Armailhac	Pauillac	90-91	2019-33	£250
Ducru Beaucaillou	Saint-Julien	95-97	2022-40	£670
Saint-Pierre	Saint-Julien	93-95	2020-35	£290
Léoville Poyferré	Saint-Julien	93-95	2020-35	£415
Léoville Las Cases	Saint-Julien	93-95	2023-38	£940
Léoville Barton	Saint-Julien	93-95	2022-40	£425
Talbot	Saint-Julien	92-94	2020-35	£285
Langoa Barton	Saint-Julien	92-94	2019-33	£270
Gruaud-Larose	Saint-Julien	92-94	2019-34	£325
Croix de Beaucaillou	Saint-Julien	92-93	2019-34	£205
Branaire Ducru	Saint-Julien	91-93	2022-38	£275
Lagrange	Saint-Julien	91-92	2019-34	£225
Gloria	Saint-Julien	91-92	2019-33	£205
Beychevelle	Saint-Julien	91-92	2019-34	£445
Clos du Marquis	Saint-Julien	90-92	2019-33	£280
Cos d'Estoumel	Saint-Estèphe	94-96	2022-38	£820
Montrose	Saint-Estèphe	93-95	2022-38	£550
Calon-Ségur	Saint-Estèphe	92-93	2022-35	£500
Lafon-Rochet	Saint-Estèphe	90-92	2019-33	£220 (2014)
Chateau Margaux	Margaux	95-96	2023-40	£2,800
Palmer	Margaux	94-96	2020-35	£1,600
Rauzan-Ségla	Margaux	93-94	2020-38	£400
Pavillon Rouge	Margaux	92-93	2020-32	£860
Malescot Saint Exupéry	Margaux	92-93	2021-36	£285
d'Issan	Margaux	91-93	2021-35	£275
Brane-Cantenac	Margaux	91-93	2019-33	£295
Alter Ego de Palmer	Margaux	91-93	2019-30	£370
Lascombes	Margaux	91-92	2019-32	£365
Giscours	Margaux	91-92	2019-33	£250
Cantenac-Brown	Margaux	91-92	2019-30	£250
Boyd Cantenac	Margaux	91-92	2022-34	£325
Marquis de Terme	Margaux	90-92	2021-30	£220
Durfort-Vivens	Margaux	90-92	2021-32	£210
Prieuré-Lichine	Margaux	90-91	2018-30	£220 (2014)
Marquis d'Alesme	Margaux	90-91	2021-33	£200
Kirwan	Margaux	90-91	2020-32	£230

## Key to list of wines:

Gavin Quinney has listed his scores for wines that merited 90 or more and are likely to be of interest for the UK en primeur market. With prices to be announced, he's noted the average list price for the 2012 in bottle\*, as quoted by Liv-ex, as a guide.

Wine	AOC	Score	Best to drink	£ (case of 2012*)
La Lagune	Haut-Médoc	92-93	2020-34	£330
Cantemerle	Haut-Médoc	90-91	2019-34	£170
Pape Clément	Pessac-Léognan	92-94	2021-38	£465
Haut-Brion	Pessac-Léognan	92-94	2022-37	£2,605
Haut-Bailly	Pessac-Léognan	92-94	2022-36	£400
Smith Haut Lafitte	Pessac-Léognan	92-93	2020-35	£415
La Mission Haut-Brion	Pessac-Léognan	91-93	2022-38	£1,450
Domaine de Chevalier	Pessac-Léognan	91-93	2019-33	£325
Lafleur	Pomerol	95-97	2021-38	£3,780
Le Pin	Pomerol	94-96	2020-35	£10,600
Pétrus	Pomerol	94-96	2023-40	£16,700
L'Eglise Clinet	Pomerol	94-96	2020-35	£1,920
Vieux Château Certan	Pomerol	94-95	2022-38	£995
Hosanna	Pomerol	93-95	2019-30	£720 (2014)
La Conseillante	Pomerol	93-95	2020-35	£635
Trotanoy	Pomerol	93-94	2019-30	£2,240
La Fleur Pétrus	Pomerol	93-94	2019-30	£1,215
L'Evangile	Pomerol	93-94	2022-36	£970
Le Gay	Pomerol	92-94	2021-34	£600
Rouget	Pomerol	92-93	2018-30	£220
La Violette	Pomerol	91-94	2020-30	£1,595
Vray Croix de Gay	Pomerol	91-93	2019-29	£310
Pensees de Lafleur	Pomerol	91-93	2019-28	£770
Feytit Clinet	Pomerol	91-93	2019-30	£365
Clinet	Pomerol	91-93	2018-30	£455
Petite Eglise	Pomerol	90-92	2018-28	£260
Cheval Blanc	Saint-Emilion	95-96	2021-38	£3,250
Ausone	Saint-Emilion	95-96	2021-38	£3,900
Pavie	Saint-Emilion	94-96	2023-38	£2,225
Tertre Roteboeuf	Saint-Emilion	93-96	2020-35	£1,150
Valandraud	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2020-33	£745
Troplong Mondot	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2022-40	£535
La Mondotte	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2021-33	£1,135
Figeac	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2022-36	£495
Canon La Gaffeliere	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2021-33	£375
Beauséjour Duffau	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2020-32	£540
Angélus	Saint-Emilion	93-95	2023-40	£2,980
Le Dôme	Saint-Emilion	92-95	2020-32	£700
Larcis Ducasse	Saint-Emilion	92-94	2019-30	£360
La Chapelle d'Ausone	Saint-Emilion	92-94	2019-30	£995
Bélair-Monange	Saint-Emilion	92-94	2020-32	£705
Petit Cheval	Saint-Emilion	91-93	2019-30	£1,040
Pavie-Macquin	Saint-Emilion	91-93	2020-33	£395
Clos Fourtet	Saint-Emilion	91-93	2019-33	£465
Les Asteries	Saint-Emilion	91-93	2019-29	£600
Fleur Cardinale	Saint-Emilion	91-92	2019-30	£220
La Tour Figeac	Saint-Emilion	90-92	2019-30	£200
Moulin Saint Georges	Saint-Emilion	90-92	2020-30	£205
La Dominique	Saint-Emilion	90-91	2019-30	£225
Canon	Saint-Emilion	90-91	2019-30	£370

\*2012 in-bond price for comparison (source: Livex, average list price)



For more from Gavin on how the harvest unfolded, visit [gavinquinney.com](http://gavinquinney.com)



## Where does 2014 rank?

So how good are the wines of 2014? In short, it's a good to very good vintage, but not in the same league as 2000, 2005, 2009 and 2010 for the reds. Every vintage has its own unique character but, in terms of quality, the red wines of 2014 arguably rank alongside or just ahead of the second-tier vintages of 2001, 2006, 2008 and 2012 (the latter having been underrated en primeur, but now showing well in bottle). The 2014s are superior, in general, to their counterparts of 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2011 and, of course, 2013.

As for the dry whites, 2014 is a very good vintage – in fact, the dry whites of Bordeaux have been favoured by the weather in the past five years (discounting the hail in the Entre Deux Mers in 2013). For the late-picked sweet whites, it's another excellent vintage to add to the stocks of the lovely 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013. Overall then, 2014 could certainly be considered “the best of the rest”.

## The “miracle” vintage?

The 2014 has been widely quoted as a “miracle” vintage. This is because the outlook was quite gloomy after a damp and cool summer, but we then had six weeks of lovely sunshine from the last week of August to the first week of October. The red harvest began towards the end of September, with just about everyone picking in early October. The week ending October 10 – when many Left Bank estates wrapped up – was overcast and at times rainy, so I don't really go with the notion of a perfect Indian summer all the way through. However, there was no pressure of any rot, unlike at the end of the three previous harvests.

## Growing season: a promising start

Looking further back during the growing season, it was certainly one of ups and downs. After a mild and wet winter, budburst in late March was fairly early and the vines shot out of the blocks in the April sunshine. It was a good, even start to the season, yet May was wet and chilly – slowing things down considerably. But then, in the nick of time, the first part of June was warm and sunny for the crucial flowering and the early forming of the grapes (see the chart on page 29). Flowering wasn't uniformly good but it was, on the whole, pretty successful – and vital after some shockingly low yields of 2013.

## The dodgy summer

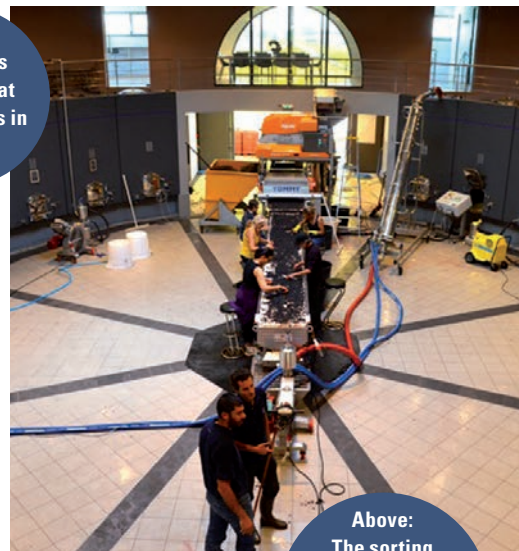
July was relatively damp, and August both damp and cool, although it's not as if the heavens opened (except on July 25 in some areas). The average rainfall across the six key sub-regions was unusually consistent from month to month – March 75mm, April 69mm, May 66mm, June 77mm, July 80mm, August 67mm. What was really challenging for the vines



The harvest under way at Pétrus



Below: The grapes are sorted at Lynch-Bages in Pauillac



Above: The sorting line at La Conseillante; below and right: Pontet-Canet



was just how many days of rain we had in July and August – around one day in two on average, depending on the sector.

This lack of hydric stress in July, when the vines needed a signal to stop the vegetative cycle and concentrate their efforts on producing fruit, coupled with average temperatures in August of 2.5°C below the norm, combined to suggest a somewhat mediocre vintage. Mildew was also a threat.

Then came the glorious September, with just 37mm of rain on average. A season of highs and lows, fortunately finishing on a high.

## THE REDS

I tasted around 600 wines over 12 days in late March and early April, including the 250 “most searched for” Bordeaux wines on wine-searcher.com, and here are my observations.

There are many really appealing wines with bright, ripe fruit, lovely texture, no rough edges and plenty of freshness for medium-term drinking. You'd expect that from the leading chateaux, given the lovely weather in September and early October.

Many wines have lovely aromas, good colour and refreshing acidity (notwithstanding that “acidity” in





“The top dry whites, often produced in tiny volumes, benefited from the cool August and the bright sunshine in September”

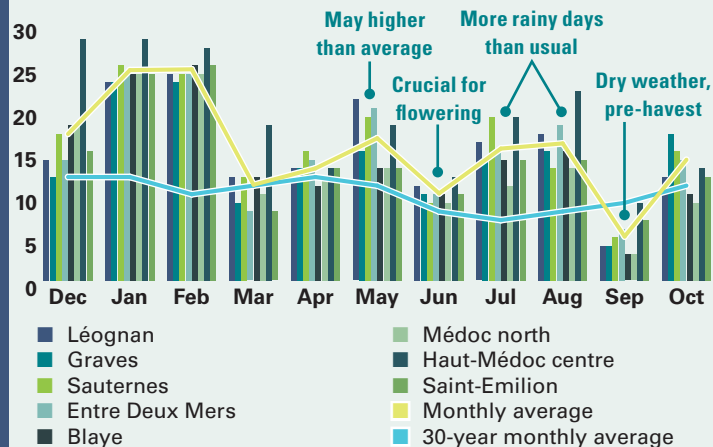


Above: the harvest at Gruaud-Larose;  
left: Lynch-Bages

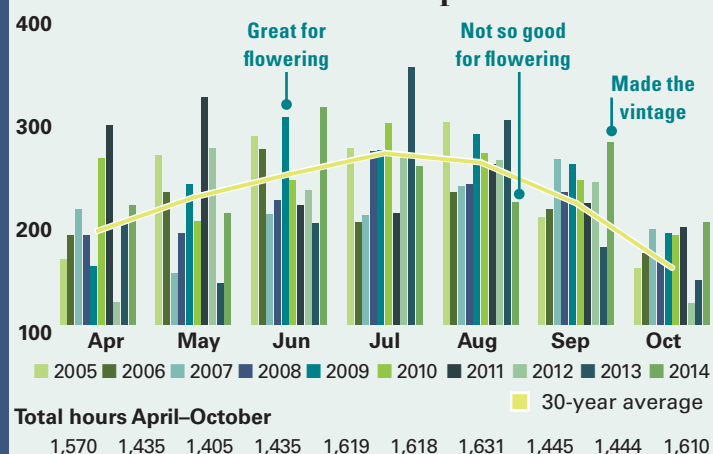
## WEATHER FOCUS

The all-important sunshine/rainfall balance in Bordeaux and how it has affected the harvest in recent years

### Bordeaux rainfall (number of days of rain) 2014



### Bordeaux sunshine hours comparison 2005-14



reds is a harder sell for consumers) that bodes well for a longer life, despite a rather light tannic frame in many cases.

There isn't the intensity, power and depth that you get in great vintages like 2005, 2009 and 2010. Many wines, while being delicious and fruity, are missing that inner core.

There are no truly "great" red wines this year, in my opinion, and the lack of real depth and intensity is in keeping with the damp, cool summer. Fresh, yes, but not profound.

There are many delicious wines, however, that will provide lots of drinking pleasure. Looking through my notes and scores, I noted over 200 wines that should merit 90 or more when bottled (excellent +) with a further 200 rated as 87 or more (very good) and many more in the mid-80s (good).

Stylistically, the 2014s have more in common with recent "even" years – a hypothetical blend of the straight-laced, late-harvest 2008s, the charming 2012s, the structure of many 2006s and a dash of the penetrating fruit of the 2010s. They're not like the dry, leathery 2007s, the sun-drenched, robust 2009s or the fairly tannic 2011s.

Alcohol levels on the reds are what the Bordelais→



Clockwise from above left: Lafite, Brane-Cantenac, Léoville Poyferré

might call “classic”, ranging from 12.5% to 14.5% abv, with the majority around 13% to 13.5% abv. Many consumers will prefer these levels to the more powerful 2009s and 2010s.

Yields aren’t bad, but many estates had smaller crops than they had originally projected. It was quite common to hear of 30–35hl/ha, rather than 40–45hl/ha (the maximum allowed by law is in the mid-50s). Low yields don’t suggest lower prices.

Overall, I was most impressed by the great wines of the northern Médoc – Saint-Julien and Pauillac, where Cabernet Sauvignon is his nibs, and to a lesser extent, Saint-Estèphe. Saint-Julien is probably my favourite appellation in 2014 for sheer pleasure and consistency, and if prices are right, these are wines to buy. If not, then wait until after they’re bottled.

Margaux had many successes in 2014 but it’s no surprise that it was not as consistent; the appellation spreads over a wider area and covers numerous estates, and rainfall was higher here than in the north.

While Pomerol is often favoured over Saint-Emilion, sometimes due to the sheer size of the latter, there are seriously good wines from both in 2014. Not forgetting that the small production wines of Pomerol can be way beyond most people’s budgets, mind.

Many wines with a healthy slice of Cabernet Franc showed well – Ausone, Cheval Blanc, Lafleur, Le Dôme, Canon La Gaffelière – but that’s not to take away from Merlot on the great terroirs.

If the northern Médoc has the edge, it’s not necessarily down to Cabernet Sauvignon being a later-ripening variety than Merlot, and therefore benefiting more from the autumn sunshine. After all, they were picking Merlot on the Right Bank at the

same time as the Cabernets were being harvested on the Left. It’s more about how the various varieties performed on the different terroirs. Rainfall at critical times also varied considerably across the region.

In the so-called lesser appellations, hundreds of properties have upped their game in recent years and have produced attractive, balanced, fruity wines in 2014. Values can be found in the Haut-Médoc, Médoc, Graves, Fronsac, the Côtes and so on. Whether these are candidates for buying en primeur is another matter, but they’ll certainly be worth looking at in more detail after bottling.

The wines at the top end feel quite precise. We’re seeing more precision in the wines nowadays, through better viticulture, more flexibility over harvest dates, lower yields, greater sorting, stricter selection of vats and no end of new kit. Perhaps this is a shame – sometimes we’d like more of a “warts and all” approach – but it’s a fact.

Eleavage will be important, as ever. This is one of Bordeaux’s great strengths and many chateaux have invested heavily in new barrel cellars of late. We can expect the 2014s to put on weight in barrel, and I think many will show better in bottle when the time comes.

## THE WHITES

With 89% of the Bordeaux vineyards given over to red, it’s easy to overlook the whites. The top dry whites, often produced in tiny volumes, benefited from the cool August and the bright sunshine in September. They have ripeness, freshness and racy acidity as a result, and are well worth seeking out. (As a grower with 15ha of Sauvignon and Semillon, it might be, ahem, inappropriate for me to comment on just how good the less expensive dry whites are.)

The late-picked sweet whites are among the stars of the vintage: the cool August, the warm September and then the rain around October 8 brought on a final rush of botrytis. The Sauternes and Barsac group tasting was, once again, one of the highlights of the en primeur circus.

“We’re seeing more precision in the wines nowadays, through better viticulture, more flexibility over harvest dates, lower yields, greater sorting, stricter selection of vats and no end of new kit”