

Flying High Over 2005 Bordeaux

By Evan Saviolidis

With all the hype surrounding the 2005 vintage in Bordeaux, I was eager to experience the Airbus A380 of vintages. This opportunity came to pass in January when the Union des Grandes Crus de Bordeaux caravan landed in Toronto.

At the tasting, three things grabbed my attention. First, was the sweeping quality—from the basic Médoc wines right up to the famed villages, there was not one ounce of bad juice poured. Second, was the freshness of the wines. Given the fact that it was such a hot and dry year in Bordeaux, many expected this to be an overripe, high alcohol, low acid year, along the lines of 2003— a year of torrential extremes, including a six week period without any rain during the middle of summer. Such was not the case in 2005. Yes, it was very hot, but the evenings were cooler than in 2003, and what little rain that did fall was spread over the summer, which allowed the vines to freshen up, helping to preserve the acids and produce wines that are fruit driven and balanced. Immensely enjoyable now, most of the wines will only improve with time. Last, was the price. In a nut shell, most of the wines are beyond the means of the average Bordeaux lover, as prices for the more famous houses have doubled and tripled since the 90s .

As for Sauternes and Barsac, it is also an excellent vintage. The first “tries” or pickings occurred in late September from over ripe grapes, as there was no moisture to encourage botrytis. In fact, some producers felt that it would be like 1985; where over ripeness would be the key to the wines success. Then, during mid October, a storm passed through the region, allowing the noble rot to spread through the vineyards. Stylistically, the wines are concentrated and very sweet, with a combination of upfront fruit flavors as well as the complexity derived from botrytis.

So, is 2005, Bordeaux’ greatest vintage as many have touted? Many producers I talked to are very enthusiastic, giving it the nod over the finest vintages of the 20th century. In my esteem, it is better than 2000 and 2003, the two most recent “great” vintages. I also believe it is a more homogeneous vintage than 1982 and 1990, as winemaking today is much more advanced. In terms of being the best ever, there is a strong case—but only time will tell.

All prices are at futures listings.

Margaux

92 Château d’Angludet (\$77)

The best Angludet I have ever tasted. Cassis, vanilla, caramel and roasted herbs launch into a mouthful of ripe dark fruits. Excellent depth and length. Drink over the next 20 years.

91 Château Kirwan (NA)

Still closed, it offers moderate amounts of cassis, vanilla and smoke. Tannins are present, so let the wine sleep for another 5 to 7 years and drink it until 2030.

91 Château Dauzac (NA)

This wine greets the taster with plum, smoky cherries, graphite and vanilla. Full bodied with a fruit driven mouthfeel and long finish. Drink over the next 20 years.

90 Château du Tertre (\$83)

There is leathery/animal edge to the smoky cassis, cocoa, raspberry and violets. Medium to full body and ready to drink now or until 2022.

89 Château Ferrière (\$79)

Not as ripe on the palate like other 05s. Rather, it is linear, offering cassis, vanilla, roses, spice and tobacco in a masculine style. A 15 to 18 year wine.

Haut-Medoc/Moulis-en-Medoc

91 Château La Tour Carnet (\$48.60)

This property is owned by Bernard Magrez of Pape-Clement fame. It is very aromatic with cassis, boysenberry, scorched earth and tobacco. Mid weight with cassis and minerals chiming in on the finish. Now to 2022.

89 Château Chasse-Spleen (\$65)

Cassis, vanilla, herbs, cocoa, violets and raspberry precede a spicy experience in the mouth. Mid weight and downright drinkable with a lovely plummy aftertaste. Now to 2020.

88 Château Camensac (\\$36)

A rather grippy Cabernet Sauvignon based wine that churns out cassis, herbs and violets. It will probably never be a thing of refined beauty, but it is a tasty drop none the less. Hold for a couple of years and drink until 2020.

Pauillac

95 Château Pichon-Longueville-Baron (\$197.35)

I went completely ga-ga over this wine! The sweet perfume of plum and cassis combined with waves of vanilla, cocoa and smoke completely seduced me. Full bodied with serious concentration, super ripe tannins and a long finish. Drink from 2015 to 2040.

94 Château Pontet-Canet (\$199)

For many years, Pontet Canet languished in mediocrity; a downright shame considering its privileged terroir right beside Mouton-Rothschild. It was only in the early 1990's did the things start to change for the better. Today, this house is on a hot streak and the 2005 maybe the best

wine yet. Cassis, raspberry, vanilla, mint and cocoa are hallmarks of this wine. It finishes with a swirl of raspberry, vanilla and tobacco. From 2015 to 2030.

93 Château Lynch-Bages (\$215)

This wine is built for the long haul as witnessed by the heaps of tannin that are buried underneath the cassis, smoky tobacco, vanilla, herbs and graphite. Great density, so stash it away for a decade and drink until 2040.

92 Château Clerc-Milon (\$96)

The 2005 Clerc-Milon exhibits a bouquet of cassis, vanilla, game, tobacco and scorched earth. On the lips it adds plums and dark cherries. Full bodied, I suggest cellaring it for 5 years so as to allow the tannins to mellow, and then drink until 2025.

91 Château D'Armailhac (\$62.50)

I always find this wine a touch lighter than the Clerc-Milon (which are both owned by Mouton). Animal, smoke, cassis, toast and tobacco present themselves as you taste the wine. From 2010 to 2022.

89 Château Haut-Bages –Liberal (\$85)

A minty, cassis, plum and raspberry bouquet, medium to full body and excellent length make this a 15 year wine.

88 Château Talbot (\$71.40)

Surprisingly, a bell pepper aroma mingles with the dark fruits on the nose. Very good length with more dark fruit on the finale. Drink over the next 15 to 18 years.

Pessac-Léognan

96 Château Pape-Clément (\$319)

This is essentially the type of wine you could sit around and smell all day as it evolves in the glass- cassis, vanilla, sweet tobacco, earth and mint were just part of the profile. In the mouth there is a huge dark fruit with abundant tannin. Hold until 2012 and then drink to 2035.

Saint-Émilion

97 Château Angélu (\$391.70)

Jean Bernard Grenié believes that this is the best Angelus since the fabled 1990- I agree. It is a delicious expression of Merlot, offering up super ripe plum, raspberry, and cherry super imposed on a backdrop of cocoa, vanilla, coffee and spice. Beautiful depth, elegance and length! Hold for 5 years and drink until 2040.

95 Château Troplong-Mondot (\$329)

This is a super sexy and seductive offering that flatters with plum, cassis, sweet cherries and cocoa. Full bodied, it drinks well now, but can improve for another 15 to 20 years. Top notch stuff!

95 Château Pavie-Macquin (\$349)

This property's terroir always makes wines that are atypically tannic for the St-Émilion appellation. Dark colour, there is a perfume of sweet cherry, plum, vanilla, spice and cocoa that fills the glass. The palate is full bodied and powerful with loads of the aforementioned tannin and sweet berry fruit on the lengthy finish. Hold for 5 or 6 years and drink until 2035.

93 Château Canon-La-Gaffelière (\$137.85)

A blend of 50% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Franc and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon that spreads across the palate with a soft texture that is concentrated with flavours of plum, spice, raspberry, cocoa and an undercurrent of herbs. It is super ripe with a long sweet finish. Now to 2030.

90 Château La Couspaude (\$98.20)

I visited this quality property a few summers back, which gave me the chance to taste the consistency of the vintages from 2000 to 2004. The 2005 follows suit, offering up roasted espresso, cocoa, cherries, sweet cassis, tobacco and liquorice as well as excellent length. Drink until 2025.

Saint-Julien

95 Château Léoville-Barton (\$309)

It would be a crying shame to crack this wine open before its 10th birthday as it is still restrained and in its infancy. Ripe and beautifully delineated, it offers moderate smoke, cassis, vanilla and spice. It is currently only a glimmer of the greatness that it will become. Hold for 5 years and drink until 2040.

94 Château Léoville-Poyferré (\$199)

This is the best Poyferré I have yet to try-even surpassing the great 2000. Out of the glass jumps cassis, vanilla, leather, violets and spearmint, which is pursued by masses of sweet fruit on the attack-cassis, raspberry, spice and violets on the finish. Drink over the next 25 to 30 years.

92 Château Gruaud-Larose (\$84.30)

This is full bodied offering which will benefit from five years of cellaring at least. Both the nose and palate resonate with plum, cassis, tobacco and smoke. Consume it over the next quarter century.

91 Château Lagrange (\$96)

This is a 25 year wine, which profits from lots of grapey tannins and a profile of plum, flowers, raspberries, cassis and cocoa. It is tailor made for a roast leg of lamb.

90 Château Langoa-Barton (\$113.05)

From Anthony Barton, owner of Léoville-Barton, comes this forthcoming and accessible raspberry, plum and spice laden wine. Drink between 2010 and 2020.

Sauternes

95 Château Suduirault (\$114)

Since 2001, this Chateau has positioned itself as one of the top five producers in the land of golden love. So, get ready to loosen the purse strings for this absolute stunner of a Sauternes. Full bodied, it is thick and concentrated, but not cloying. It serves up wall to wall peach, honey, apricot, coconut and spice. Easily, a 30 year wine.

95 Château Climens (\$88.25/375ml)

Absolutely gorgeous! A super rich Sauternes packed full of smoky stone fruit and honey. In the mouth it is super viscous with honey macerated apricots and spice The finale is long and oh so satisfying. Now to 2035.

92 Château La Tour-Blanche (\$48/375ml)

Deep gold colour with dried apricot, waxy spice, honey and peach. Super sweet and opulent it is well balanced with excellent length. Now to 2030.

92 Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey (\$39.70/375ml)

I have the highest respect for this house, as they always price their wines reasonably. The 2005, at this point, is somewhat tight, with a honey, floral, peach, pineapple and botrytis profile. Medium to full body, it needs 2 years in the bottle before opening and will last for two decades.

91 Château Guiraud (\$45/375ml)

The 05 Guiraud possess a bouquet akin to a freshly baked brioche, lathered with peach and apricot jam. On the palate, spice and crème caramel add to the mix. Now to 2020.

89 Château Bastor-Lamontagne (\$45)

This little known Sauternes really shines in the great vintages (90, 01, 03), offering great bang for the buck .Not a powerhouse, rather the 2005 offers elegance with aromas of peach, pear, apple and botrytis, while the palate offers caramel tinged apples and spice. Now to 2020.