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Antonio Gallino - 24 Février 2022

2019 Bordeaux From Bottle : The Two Towers

Ever since the 2020 vintage was in the books, maybe even before, Bordeaux was buzzing with talk of a magnificent trilogy. The three consecutive vintages spanning 2018 through 2020 were spoken of in reverential, glowing terms that evoked mystical images of the “Lord of the Rings” or perhaps the grandeur of “Star Wars”. Now that the 2019s are in bottle, it’s time to take a look at the middle vintage in this collection, I mean trilogy, of three harvests that will surely be the center of much discussion for years to come. This article covers the main appellations of the Left and Right Banks. We will be adding wines from satellite appellations plus Sauternes in about a week’s time.

Two years ago, in my article 2019 Bordeaux: A Long, Strange Trip, I wrote “I tasted phenomenal wines in every appellation, although there are some places that appear to have done exceptionally well, such as the north of Pauillac and into Saint-Estèphe on the Left Bank.” My tastings of the 2019s in bottle confirm that impression. Two thousand-nineteen is unquestionably a Left Bank vintage. That’s not to say there aren’t profound wines on the Right Bank; there most certainly are. But looking at things globally after tasting more than 800 wines, 2019 is simply stronger on the Left Bank than on the Right.

I won’t repeat a breakdown of the growing season, as that has not changed over the last two years. Readers might want to revisit my en primeur report and/or check out Neal Martin’s recent article, *Omne Trium Perfectum: Bordeaux 2019s in Bottle*, for all the details. In short, after a very hot and dry summer, late season rains were welcomed in the Médoc, where parched Cabernets were happy to get some water. The sweet spot, in my view, is in Saint-Estèphe and Pauillac, where so many wines are exceptional to profound, at all levels in the hierarchy of terroirs. Quality is superb moving south into Saint-Julien and then Margaux, but maybe just a touch less impressive overall. Pessac-Léognan also looks very, very good. Many of the second wines (often shown en primeur on the Left Bank but less frequently on the Right) are fabulous. Overall, 2019 is an extremely high-quality and consistent vintage on Bordeaux’s Left Bank.

Over on the Right Bank, where Merlot features more heavily, the heat of the vintage and late season rains were penalizing for some sites and wines. There are exceptions, and they are notable. But they are to be found in either top terroirs and/or in wines that have important components of Cabernets. Quality becomes more variable moving down the hierarchy and into the satellite appellations. A number of wines are disjointed, while others show signs of evolution that are not typical at this stage. The second wines are often less interesting than they are on the Left Bank.

The Right Bank

Saint-Émilion

Stars: Cheval Blanc, Figeac, Ausone, Canon, Valandraud, Larcis Ducasse, L'If, Troplong Mondot

Sleepers: Les Grandes Murailles, Millery, **de Pressac**, Laroque, Tour Saint Christophe

The talk of the town in Saint-Émilion is new classement, or ranking of properties, scheduled to be published later this year. Readers will find plenty of information on the internet, along with many points of view. My opinion is pretty simple: Any classification of properties that considers factors other than wine quality (such as hospitality facilities for example) can't be taken seriously. Let's look at the wines. Saint-Émilion is a large appellation and there are a ton of highlights.

Cheval Blanc and Figeac share a rich history. Both wines are utterly profound in 2019. The interplay of Cabernet Franc (and some Sauvignon) in Cheval and Franc and Sauvignon more equally in Figeac is just magical. Franc plays a leading role in Ausone, another stellar Saint-Émilion in 2019. At Canon, it's all about site, site and site, such a critical factor in 2019 on the Right Bank. Valandraud is a wine of daring, a great wine from Jean-Luc Thunevin and Murielle Andraud, visionaries who recognized the potential of a terroir that had previously not been highly regarded. It is a brash Saint-Émilion that enters a room full of aristocrats and proclaims: "I belong here." It sure does. At the other end of the spectrum Larcis Ducasse is all class, all sophistication. Larcis may very well be the most pedigreed Saint-Émilion that is still under the radar. Troplong Mondot impresses with its purity of its new style driven by Managing Director Aymeric de Gironde and consulting winemaker Thomas Duclos. Just down the road, Cyrille Thienpont made another brilliant wine at L'If.

Les Grandes Murailles, Laroque and Millery are Saint-Émilions that emphasize finesse over power, although they all have gorgeous fruit presence in 2019. **Pressac remains one of the most distinctive wines in the appellation, and yet I rarely see it talked about.** Tour Saint Christophe offers remarkable value in today's world. There are some disappointments, though. L'Évangile, Beauséjour Héritiers Duffau-Lagarrosse and Bélair-Monange are less impressive from bottle than they were from barrel.

One last note: I have yet to taste Pavie and the Perse family's range of wines. They preferred to show the 2019 a bit later this year, and my samples are stuck in Customs somewhere. We will post reviews for those wines as soon as possible.

I tasted all the wines in this article during a ten-day trip to Bordeaux in December 2021, followed by several additional days of tastings in our New York offices.