

## 2009 Bordeaux En Primeur

### To conclude...

Recession, what recession? The 2009 Bordeaux campaign was truly one of the more remarkable 3 months that we can remember in the wine trade. It all started quite sensibly with wines being released at prices that, given the quality of the vintage, seemed reasonable. Then Robert Parker dolled out his scores and suddenly wines were being released at double the price of their 2005 counterparts. Oh how we all chuckled when Sauternes that would normally sell at £300 a case were being offered at £600+. Many such releases got their just desserts and failed to sell (so perhaps the desserts will have to be enjoyed with another vintage at a later date?). In amongst the barking mad releases lots of wines came out at prices that given some consideration were worth the money, after all wasn't this the greatest vintage ever? Lets see in a few years, shall we? So momentum started to build and yes the Chinese really were buying as well and not just waiting for the First Growths. Before we knew it pandemonium was in full swing, wine merchants all around the world were looking like 1980s city traders with phones pinned to their ears screaming (and often begging) for more wine whilst the increasingly satisfied Bordelaise watched their still in barrel wine disappear from their inventories. Clients in turn were asking us for increasingly large quantities of rarer wines and the last week of June was as hectic a time as we can recall.

Then suddenly July arrived and the last wines were released and it all stopped and calm was restored, well the Bordelaise had to plan their holidays didn't they? And there was real concern that August might get interrupted!

Sanity has restored and now we await the releases of 2009 Rhones in November and 2009 Burgundies in January 2011, one imagines these will be every bit as in demand but the prices are likely to be a little less eye watering.

James Price  
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### Introduction

Is this really the "vintage of the century" an expression so over-used in Bordeaux that many of us have become utterly immune to it? Well the answer is yes and no. I have given more wines high scores than ever before, but on the flip side many growers have not done themselves justice and this is all too often due to over-extraction. So many of the best wines have wonderful concentration and ripeness, words that appear time and again in my tasting notes. Potentially high alcohol levels had been a concern raised by many over the last few months however with a few notable exceptions these have generally been kept in check, particularly on the Left Bank where levels between 13-14° are the norm and additionally the extraordinary high concentration of fruit, tannins and acidity means that the best wines show extraordinary balance. This offer lists the wines that I believe are the best of the vintage.

### Growing Conditions

Spring budding was slower due to the cold and relatively dry winter but by mid-April the growth was almost back on schedule. Just as everything started to look rosy, two separate hailstorms damaged Southern Médoc, Cantenac, Arsac, Léognan, Southern Graves and parts of St Emilion. With record temperatures over summer and little rainfall growers anticipated another 2005 vintage. Right bank growers harvested their Merlot just before the rain the on 14 September while others held out having to pick in the rain. From 21 September the weather was ideal allowing the fruit to develop wonderful concentrations and phenolic ripeness. Harvest lasted up until 16 October with Sauternes also experiencing a great vintage.

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## The Wines

In 2009 Cabernet is king and the home of Cabernet Sauvignon is the Médoc, with the commune of Pauillac leading the way, the First Growths are all exceptional here and one does not always say that. As is often the case Saint Julien is just behind in overall quality, with Saint Estephe and Pomerol vying over the next places. It is worth noting that the Cabernet Franc, which is used in higher proportions in Pomerol than in Saint Emilion, also performed well and gave the Chateaux that use a higher proportion of it the edge over the Merlot dominated ones. Of the rest the most unevenness was to be found in Margaux, Saint Emilion and Pessac Leognan, where the issues of extraction referred to earlier were most evident. In the lesser appellations the best examples are again from the Left Bank. Finally 2009 Sauternes has been heralded as a great, I personally loved many of the wines, but found that some were rather weighty, so if you are lover of big concentrated Sauternes this is your year.

The one point I would mention is that there were wines I tasted that others found better or worse than I did. One noticeable example is Chateau Beaumont the normally very reliable Cru Bourgeois, I am afraid the sample I tasted was weak and dilute, the Wine Spectator disagrees with me. Many of you have already bought the Chateau Hourtin-Ducasse which I think is the best alternative to Beaumont this year and is in this offer. As ever all I can be is honest in my assessment of what I am tasting and there is no question that when wines are this young you are always prone to find that one sample can be better than another.

## Prices

The continued weakness of the Pound, the, as yet, unknown level of interest from the emerging Asian markets for En Primeur (other than the fact that they want all the Lafite they can lay their hands on!) and the expectation or lack of it (wishful thinking I fear) of the Châteaux owners makes it difficult to determine the price. However my gut reaction is that the very top wines will get up to 2005 prices and beyond, as it is known that many of the leading owners want to see less speculation on the wines (not much chance of that), so could try and scare investors away by setting very high prices. All that being said I do believe that there will be other extremely good wines from well-known Chateaux that will be released at sensible prices, the Bordelaise do realise that the world economy is very fragile.

## Recommendation

2009 is an extraordinary vintage for Bordeaux, I have tasted some of the greatest young wines of my career. In a perfect world the recession would be over and sterling stronger against the pound, but to miss out on the wines of this brilliant year would be a mistake.