

Bordeaux beyond the Grands Crus...

THE WINES

The appellations of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur provide some of the best-value and most accessible wines of this world-famous region – and if you look closely, you will find many excellent, well-priced properties and producers that have taken lesser known terroirs and applied stringent wine-making techniques. Over half the entire surface area of Bordeaux is vinified in these two regional appellations, representing around 6,300 winemakers. The difference between the two appellations is largely in methods of viticulture, permitted yields and allowed alcohol levels, and together they produce around 400 million bottles of wine each year (around 80% in AOC Bordeaux).

For this selection, Decanter tasted over 150 wines, both AOC Bordeaux and AOC Bordeaux Supérieur, from the 2008 and 2009 vintages, and selected around 45 wines (which scored three stars or above). The 2008 vintage are all in bottle, while the 2009 vintage were mainly still barrel samples (although some are already in bottle, most will join them over the coming months, and some will wait until early 2011).

These are two good quality vintages, although with far more variation in quality in 2008 due to a cooler, more difficult summer. 2009 enjoyed near-perfect growing conditions throughout the season, and this is reflected in good fruit flavours and firm tannins. From the evidence of this tasting, the 2009s performed significantly better across these less appellations, as the 2008 growing season needed time and money spent on keeping the vines in good condition.

Stylistically, it is of course difficult to generalise with such a large number of producers growing in such a diverse area – producers in both of these appellations can come from anywhere in the greater Bordeaux vineyard region, although by and large they are found on the Right Bank of the Garonne river, with a particular concentration around Entre deux Mers (this is a white-wine only appellation, so all red grapes grown here must be bottled AOC Bordeaux or

AOC Bordeaux Supérieur).

What is nearly always true is that these wines are made to be enjoyed young – so think about drinking after three to five years in bottle, rather than the 10 years that many of the more ‘established’ chateaux require. Other stylistic clues to these wines include softer tannins, less oak ageing and an emphasis on fruit. This is because of the terroir in which they are grown, the choice of grapes used for the blending, and the specific wine-making processes chosen (such as stainless steel instead of barrels, or a cold soak before fermentation to show fruit over tannin). There are exceptions of course but many of these wines offer a pleasurable and more accessible introduction into the wines of Bordeaux. With the best wines, you will find an immediacy to them, and a fruity mouth-feel that makes them ideal for sharing with friends at home, or drinking in a wine bar or restaurant.



AOC Bordeaux 2008

Chateau Bonnet Reserve Château AOC Bordeaux 2008 ** (4 stars)**

This has maintained its beautiful crimson rim, showing a young wine that has a long life ahead. From the Andre Lurton stable, there is a bite of extraction, but well layered with vanilla and mocha. An equal blend of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, this is modern in style, but very appealing. (£9 Bibendum)

Chateau Haut Marchand, AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3.5 stars)**

This has an intense brooding colour, and some gentle smoke on the nose. Overall, a very pretty wine that has a freshness to it. 100% Merlot, with an attractive charred quality that doesn't take away from the soft autumnal fruits. vignoblesdufourg@wanadoo.fr

Château Rauzan Despagne Réserve AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3.5 stars)**

A former hunting lodge, now owned by the ever-reliable Despagne family, this shows a medium intensity in both palate weight and in colour, with good sweet fruit and a pleasant balance of freshness and tannin. The blend here is 86% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon; 6% Cabernet Franc. Good. contact@despagne.fr

Château Maurine AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3.5 stars)**

Predominantly Merlot blend for this wine, which has cherry and raspberry flavours alongside some mocha and chocolate. It manages to get these across without being over the top. Accomplished, with a good punch. export@cavesderauzan.com

Château Rambaud “Cuvée Extrait de Rambaud” AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3 stars)**

The Mouty family have properties in Pomerol and Saint Emilion, as well as this 7 hectare estate in Bordeaux. This has a good rich purple colour, turning russet-red at the rim. Like the charred nose, and the soft fruity appeal of the 100% Merlot fruit. (Wine Growers Direct)

Château Haut Mazieres AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3 stars)**

A consistent wine made by cooperative cellar Caves de Rauzan. This has freshness and fruit, although the tannins could be smoother in the mid-palate. The finish comes back to the fruit though, so all well that ends well! 65 % Merlot; 30% Cab Sauvignon; 5% Cab Franc (Charles Taylor Wines)

Ad Vitam Aeternam AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3 stars)**

The name means ‘For life eternal’, and although that may be a touch over-ambitious, there is definitely a good structure here, and firm tannins. Pleasant roundness to the fruit, and good length. 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc from winemaker Xavier Buffo. vin.advitam@orange.fr

Chateau Pey La Tour AOC Bordeaux 2008 * (3 stars)**

Always a reliable name to follow, there is good potential here, with well defined fruit, and well-integrated tannins. The finish is a little short, perhaps due to the vintage, but this is an estate to follow. 69% Merlot; 20% Cab Sauvignon; 10% Cab Franc; 1% Petit Verdot (Tesco £6.99)

Château de Crain AOC Bordeaux 2008 (*) (3 stars)**

Nose is fopen and pleasant, gently oaked but not overpowering. It is rustic, but doesn't seem ashamed of the fact, and has a personality and a smile. Autumnal fruits, some gentle spice, soft finish. 70% merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Malbec fougere@chateau-de-crain.com

Château Joinin AOC Bordeaux 2008 (*) (3 stars)**

Deep red colour, and a rich fairly meaty nose, touches of smoky bacon apparent. On the palate, extraction could be smoother, but there is plenty of potential here. chateau.pipeau@wanadoo.fr

Bad Boy AOC Bordeaux 2008 (*) (3 stars)**

Deep purplish black in colour, with some good vanilla extract. This is a highly-charged wine, as befits the name, bursting with tannins and extraction. A fun bottle from the ever-challenging Jean Luc Thunevin. thunevin@thunevin.com

Château Au Grand Paris AOC Bordeaux 2008 (*) (3 stars)**

Rich damson in colour, the nose here is gentle and warm, and fairly inviting. The summery fruit mix of cherries and raspberries is subtle, but well placed and has an open expression when given a little time to breathe. 60% Merlot; 30% Cabernet Sauvignon; 10% Cabernet Franc. chateau.au-grand-paris@hotmail.fr

Château Tour de Mirambeau, Réserve AOC Bordeaux 2008 (*) (3 stars)**

Ripe, sweet fruit, majoring very definitely on redcurrant and strawberry. This is an enjoyable wine that is a touch obvious with the oak, but has a very attractive nutty quality, and real potential for good easy drinking. 80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon; 10% Cabernet Franc. Ratcliffe & Brown Wines 1 Spirits Ltd - London

Château Thieuley Réserve Francis Courselle AOC Bordeaux 2008 (*) (3 stars)**

Strong rich purple colours, with a hint of over-extraction on the first attack, but pulled back just in time by the ever-reliable Courselle sisters, Marie and Sylvie. This has great promise, good coffee overtones to the fruit, with plenty of easy-drinking charm. 80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon Charles Taylor Wine, London

AOC Bordeaux 2009

Château de la Cour d'Argent AOC Bordeaux 2009 ** (4 stars)**

Intense purple colour and equally rich and deep on the nose, heading to over extraction but just pulling back. This estate is located near to Saint Emilion, and is producing good quality, modern-style Bordeaux. 100% Merlot, with some liquorice and blueberry flavours. High alcohol, but successful – if chewy. (Handford Wines)

Chateau Bois Pertuis AOC Bordeaux 2009 ** (4 stars)**

A modern and highly successful take on a Bordeaux from Chateau Pape Clement owner Bernard Magrez. Deep purple in colour with some chocolate and mocha on the nose. Clear vanilla pods, black cherries and damsons with creme anglaise on the palate. Should deliver well with food. 75% Merlot; 20% Cab Sauvignon; 5% Cab France. (Waitrose £8.99)

Chateau Haut Mondain AOC Bordeaux 2009
***** (3.5 stars)**

A softer colour than some, but with a warm, cedary nose. Good floral notes, with touches of violet flowers. This is very gentle, not a big hitter but very charming. 60% Merlot, 30% Cab Sauvignon, 10% Cab Franc, from the dynamic Vignoble Charles Yung & Fils, who in total has 110 hectares of vines.
www.zebordeaux.com

Château La Caderie Expression AOC Bordeaux 2009
***** (3.5 stars)**

A classic primeur purple shade here, always an encouraging sign (not all the wines in these appellations have that vibrancy when very young). Firm red fruit nose, and a very attractive palate. Charred woodsmoke and plenty of spiced cherries. Good. 97% Merlot, 3% Malbec from winemaker François Landais.
chateau-la-caderie@wanadoo.fr

Chateau Penin (Natur) AOC Bordeaux 2009
***** (3.5 stars)**

With no sulphur added during the winemaking process, this is an interesting wine from a highly reliable winemaker, Patrick Carteyron. Good bright purple in colour, and crisp, well-defined fruit. Good silky texture, loganberry and vanilla flavours. This is striving for quality, and very nearly making it. Just the finish trails off a little early. www.chateaupenin.com

Chateau Mousseyron AOC Bordeaux 2009
***** (3 stars)**

Lovely rich purple, with an earthy nose here. This is a little tight on the finish, some evidence over extracted tannins but overall the 70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon fruit comes through, and there is good structure.
larriautjacques@wanadoo.fr

Château Haut Domingue AOC Bordeaux 2009
(* 3 stars)**

Good deep colour. This has a subdued nose, although with a touch of woodsmoke that is very pretty. A pleasant wine, with soft tannins. Not much mid palate, but again pleasant with no harsh tannins. jeanpaul.acker@free.fr

Château Bellevue La Randée AOC Bordeaux 2009
(* 3 stars)**

Deep red colour, still young and tight on the nose. This is smooth, with a good texture, and evident black fruit. It's all rather quiet, but this is has understated charm. 45% Merlot; 10% Cabernet Franc; 45% Cabernet Sauvignon.
thunevin@thunevin.com

Château Cabredon AOC Bordeaux 2009 (* 3 stars)**

This is a dusky purple colour, and has an attractively sweet fruit edge, and th palate has complexity and some depth. A little short on the finish, but a charming wine from winemaker Jean-Paul Charitte. 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc.
Chateau@cabredon.fr

Augey AOC Bordeaux 2009 (* 3 stars)**

An attractive bright cherry colour and a pleasant cherry nose. This would work well as a light lunchtime wine, for barbeques or picnics – has a touch of vanilla to the soft red fruits. 65% merlot, 35% cabernet sauvignon. Export@cavesderauzan.com

Château Lamothe Vincent AOC Bordeaux 2009
(* 3 stars)**

Soft purple in colour, with some damson fruit evident on the palate. Brothers Christophe and Fabien Vincent work this Entre deux Mers estate, that uses natural fertilizers and has made great strides towards organic winemaking in recent years. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Booths Supermarket. info@lamothe-vincent.com

Château Briot AOC Bordeaux 2009 (* 3 stars)**

Medium intensity ruby red, perfectly charming, with attractive vanilla woodsmoke on the nose. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in a mix of oak and stainless steel. This has perky strawberry and raspberry on the palate, a good quaffing wine.
ducourt@ducourt.com

AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008

Château La Mothe du Barry cuvée Design AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 ** (4 stars)**

Slightly kitsch name for this one, from excellent winemaker Joël Duffau. Dark chocolate centre, with ruby rim. Nose is fairly subdued but this has plenty of promise on the palate, and manages to have good length without bitterness. Very enjoyable wine. joel.duffau@aliceadsl.fr

Chateau Timberlay AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
****** (4 stars)**

Owned by Bordeaux merchant Robert Giraud, one of seven properties owned by the family (including classified Saint Emilion Villemaurine). Visually, the wine has a pleasantly vibrant purple, rare to see in these appellations once a wine has reach two years old. Good fruity nose, fairly precise, and well extracted fruit with good tannic quality, fairly fine. Not great length, but real potential. www.chateautimberlay.com

Château Penin Grande Sélection AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 ** (4 stars)**

Good deep colour, and a clear step towards complexity with this wine. Good brambly fruit flavours with serious chocolate overtones. Very good. 100% Merlot (Les Caves de Pyrene, £13-£15)

Chateau Le Pin Beausoleil AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
****** (4 stars)**

A real name to look out for, this wine has a rich deep cherry colour, with mid to full intensity. Very clear blackcurrant on the palate, with a spicy damson edge, coming from the blend of 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet France, 17% Cabernet Sauvignon and 3% Malbec. A wine to make you smile. Consultant here is Stephane Derenoncourt.
<http://www.lepinbeausoleil.com/>

Château La France AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3.5 stars)**

Slightly purplish red, attractively youthful, and a very welcoming nose. Smooth and easy to drink, which is exactly what you want with this style of wine. Things are clearly going well for new owner Bruno Mottet (who bought the estate in 2009 and so will have looked after the blending, ageing and bottling of this vintage). 65% Merlot, 15% Cab Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec. www.chateaula-france.com

Château Lamothe Vincent “Héritage” AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 * (3.5 stars)**

Inky purple, pleasant in colour and on the nose. There is a swagger to this wine – it's a touch dry on the finish, but it steals up on you, and there is real heart. Some micro-oxygenation used. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon

Château la Peyrère du Tertre cuvée Catherine AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 * (3.5 stars)**

Lovely rich red colour, some real vibrancy to the nose. Tastes like a lot of care has been taken over this wine by owners Cathy and Jean-Jacques Lucas, although again the finish is a touch dry. Still, overall impression is of a wine with true potential. lapeyreterredutertre@wanadoo.fr

Château Font Merlet AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3.5 stars)**

Plenty of investment going on at this property from winemaker Pierre Barbé, and it seems to be paying off. Deep plum robe, good sweetly oaked nose. This is charming; not overly complex but good fruit and lightly structured. Real personality evident. 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. pierre.barbe33@wanadoo.fr

Château de Malromé Cuvée Adèle de Toulouse Lautrec AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 * (3.5 stars)**

Ruby red, with a little too much oak on the nose. But this translates into a very pleasant coffee and mocha on the palate. Modern in style, but with personality. A little try hard, but overall effective.
www.malrome.com

Chateau Darzac “Réserve” AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3 stars)**

Lovely warm nose, open and cedary. A touch one dimensional in the mid-palate, but this has good fresh fruit. 70% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, from winemakers Stéphane & Alain Barthe. www.chateau-darzac.com

Château Passe Craby cuvée Prestige AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 * (3 stars)**

Located near the pretty village of Galgon, winemaker Jérôme Boyé works alongside his parents Vincent and Marie-Agnès. This wine has a deep rich colour, and an unforced and understated nose. This is pleasant on the attack, nicely expressing its fruits, although oak is a little too insistent (it spends 12 months in barrel). www.passecraby.com

Château de Lugagnac AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3 stars)**

Medium intensity, with lovely bright reflections. Subtle cocoa powder on the nose and good smooth fruits on the palate. The alcohol is insistent, but it only on the very finish that it becomes intrusive. Good potential. www.chateaudelugagnac.com

Château Saint Jacques de Siran AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 * (3 stars)**

Fairly light in colour, with a pleasantly fruity nose, if a touch hot on alcohol. Some vanilla evident. good autumnal fruits on the palate, with a well defined structure. The vineyards for this wine lie just outside the Margaux appellation (and are owned by Chateau Siran), reflected in a fairly high degree of Cabernet Sauvignon (36%) alongside 42% Merlot and 22% Cabernet Franc.
<http://www.chateausiran.com>

Château Vilatte cuvée “fûts de chêne” AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008 * (3 stars)**

Attractively rich purple colour, and nicely open nose. On the palate, this is smooth and well structured, if a little overoaked. 75% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon.
www.chateauvilatte.com

Château Mirambeau Papin AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3 stars)**

Dep red velvet in colour, stately but lacks a little vibrancy. Pleasant on the nose though, and good blackberry flavours on the palate. Smooth, although the finish is tight. 90% merlot, 10% cabernet sauvignon.
contact@despagne.fr





Château Féret Lambert AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3 stars)**

Rich in colour and flavour. This has a subdued nose, which turns out to be because it is hiding lashings of punch on the palate. Plenty of extraction, plenty of ambition, lacks some heart but there is potential here. www.feret-labonnelle.com

Château L' Escart Omar Khayam AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2008
***** (3 stars)**

Deep intensity, truly purple rather than red. This has been given the full oak treatment, and the nose is a little too much. But on the palate, good brambly fruit comes through, with clear blackberry and black-currant. One for food. www.chateaulescart.com

Château Vieux Mognac, 2008 Bordeaux Superieur
***** (3 stars)**

This has a classically plummy Bordeaux colour, and the nose is very attractive; full of redcurrants and some charred cedar wood. This wine, from owner Sylvie Milhard, is not aged in oak but there are clear tannins coming through from the skins and pips, but with good firm fruit flavours to balance it all out – just on the finish things get a touch too dry. vieuxmognac@gmail.com

Domaine des Collines, 2008 Bordeaux Superieur
***** (3 stars)**

Owned by vineyard architect Philippe Mazieres since 2006 (the man behind the winery at Yquem and Margaux), this lovely estate overlooks the Dordogne river on the Right Bank of Bordeaux. Good weighty red colour and pleasantly open nose. Fairly fresh on the palate also. This is a charming, pretty wine. 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc. www.domainedescollines.com

Château Montlau, 2008 Bordeaux Superieur * (3 stars)**

A touch obvious with the vanilla and mocha flavours, but this is clearly a wine that has had care and attention taken over it, and there is a pleasingly smooth structure to the whole thing. Good ripe fruits, all a little tight right now, but clear potential – excellent value for money here. 67% Merlot, 33% Cabernet Franc
 Wines of the World, London

AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009

Château Tayet AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009 ** (4 stars)**

Very attractive colour, good depth and luminosity. Like the fruit on the nose also, and this has some real class and elegance on the palate, rich smooth black fruits. A touch vanilla-infused on the finish, but overall successful. 60% merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Waterloo Wine, London)

Château Haut Chatain AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
****** (4 stars)**

Black cherry on the eye and on the nose. Very pretty on the palate, this wine is doing full justice to the 2009 vintage. 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. www.hautchatain.com

Château Brande Bergère “Cuvée O’Byrne” AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009 ** (4 stars)**

Deep purple, full throttle colour. A pleasure on the palate, with elegance and freshness alongside good rich fruit, firmly placed. The chateau is located to the north of Saint Emilion. edith.dalibot@wanadoo.fr

Château de Parenchère AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
***** (3.5 stars)**

Good bright purple. Very subdued on the nose, but can just discern black fruits. Nice layered expression of fruit on the palate, and extracted to (almost) the right amount. A successful wine. 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 60% Merlot, 9% Cab Franc, 1% Malbec. (Nicolas £13)

Château Ducla AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
***** (3.5 stars)**

Red rather than purple in colour, but good intensity. This is soft and yet confident, with firm red fruits, and a touch of violet flowers on the nose. Pretty. info@yvonmau.com

Château Mousseyron “Cuvée Joris” AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009 * (3.5 stars)**

Very dark in colour. This is shamelessly modern, with lovely ripe fruit and a dollop of chocolate and cream. Appealing, with good balance. larriautjacques@wanadoo.fr

Château du Bois Chantant AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
***** (3.5 stars)**

Inky black colour, and tightly controlled vanilla and mocha on the nose. Extracted on the palate, but gets away with it because well balanced. Certainly this needs to be given a good ageing, but there is fruit hiding between the tannin. 65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc. (Booker £6.99)

Château de Cazenove AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
***** (3 stars)**

Rich, dark cherry colour, pleasant if a touch hot on the nose. This is good but a little too sweet on the palate. Still, a crowd-pleaser, with good modern fruit delivery. 60% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc. (Wine Society, Lay & Wheeler)

Château de la Vieille Chapelle AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009 * (3 stars)**

Rich purple colour, good coffee and blackcurrant on the nose and palate. A little over-extraction, but another year in barrel should smooth it out. Potential. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. f.maillier@chateau-de-la-vieille-chapelle.com

Château la Favière AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
***** (3 stars)**

Deep and rich colour, closed nose. Slight over extraction, but an interesting wine that has good fruit. 60% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Franc, 5% press wine. dom.la.cabanne@gmail.com

Château de l’Enclos AOC Bordeaux Supérieur 2009
***** (3 stars)**

Rich purple again, slightly sweet cherry nose, but with some charred cedar to add complexity. Too much extraction on the finish. 65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc. producta@producta.com

Château de l’ Enclos AOC Bordeaux Superieur 2009
(* 3 stars)**

Rich purple again, sweet cherry nose, with some charred cedar to counterbalance the ripe fruit. This is an ambitious wine, has some over-extraction evident, but there is plenty of structure, and definitely one with potential to soften up over the next few years. prproducta@producta.com

L’Insolent du Château Laville, Bordeaux Superieur 2009
***** (3 stars)**

Deep rich purple, sweet oak on the nose, dusted with cocoa powder. Some mint and herbs on this one, needs time to open up, but there is potential here. chateaulaville@wanadoo.fr

Château Port du Roy, 2009 Bordeaux Superieur
***** (3 stars)**

Colour again good. The alcohol is a touch hot, but this has plenty of appeal for the price point, and there is a lot of good firm fruit

evident, with no thinning out mid-palate. 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon fruit, from old vines, aged in oak barrels. This wine is owned by the same family as Chateau de Portets in Graves. www.chateauportets.com. <http://www.chateauportets.com>

Château Val Beylie cuvée Plaisir, 2009 Bordeaux Superieur
***** (3 stars)**

Rich velvety red in colour, with a subdued but pretty nose. A little rustic on the palate, there are plenty of autumnal fruits on show and the tannins are soft and well-integrated. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. valbeylie@free.fr



WINE TOURISM

Close to the Atlantic Ocean, the Bordeaux wine region is located in southwest France around three hours drive from the Spanish border. With a UNESCO World Heritage-classified city centre, and some of the most celebrated vineyards in the world, the region makes a great destination for a wine tourism trip. Many of the big-name estates in the Médoc and Saint Emilion, however, sell all of their production through wine merchants, so although many do offer visitors tours of the estate, the choice of wines to buy is either limited or non-existent.

In the appellations of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur, in contrast, you can discover small family-run wineries, where you can meet the person who actually made the wine, and bottles can be bought direct with great ease. Tastings often take place in cellars among the rows of oak barrels, or in tasting rooms overlooking the vines themselves. The larger estates in these regions, and the cooperative cellars that group together a number of different producers, often have extensive wine tourism circuits and boutiques, and in the heart of the region is Planet Bordeaux, the region's largest interactive wine experience.

Outside of the wineries, for those travelling in families or with friends, there is also plenty to do. The majority of winemakers in Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur are based on the Right Bank of the Garonne river. Some are in the large area between the Garonne and the Dordogne Rivers, known as Entre deux Mers, where many beautiful villages and undulating landscape makes this great area to discover by car, bike, boat or even horseback. There is a further concentration around the town of Beychac-et-Caillou, where the winemaker's wine body, the Maison des Bordeaux, is based. Around here you will again find many visitors circuits, chambre d'hotes to stay in among the vines, and a number of restaurants and cafes that offer seasonal produce to match with the local bottles.

And when travelling further afield in the region, do remember that winemakers can choose to bottle their wines under the Bordeaux or Bordeaux Supérieur label wherever they are based within the Bordeaux vineyard region (they may be placed just outside their nearest village AOC, or simply choose to harness these two iconic names for the marketing their wines). So even if you are travelling in the Medoc, or Saint Emilion, or Bourg and Blaye, you may come across wines bottled under the Bordeaux or Bordeaux Supérieur.

Planet Bordeaux

Located in the town of Beychac-et-Caillou, Planet Bordeaux is a link between the wine lover and wine producer. Its interactive exhibits – through sound, images and games – explain the region, the production process, and helps to unlock the principles behind tasting and enjoying the wines. There is a boutique with over 1,000 different wines from the area, and regular tastings on offer for visitors. Among the recent innovations at this award-winning wine tourism centre is a Wine Casino game, Jazz and Wine Festivals, Green Winemaking Tours and events around the Tour de France a Voile – an annual yachting race around the French coast.

Planet Bordeaux Wine Tourism Centre

Located in the heart of the vineyards on the Right Bank, the Planet Bordeaux Wine Tourism Center is a link between the wine lover and wine producer. Its interactive exhibits – through sound, images and games – explain the rich history of the area



and the production process, unlocking the mysteries and joys of wine tasting. There is a boutique with over 1,000 different wines from the region, and regular tastings on offer for visitors.

Virtual Planet Bordeaux

A new English-language online promotional program has recently been put in place, named after the center. It includes a lively new website – www.planet-bordeaux.com – with information on the wines and the people who make them. There is also a Planet Bordeaux page on Facebook, PlanetBordeaux on Twitter, and a blog by an American living in the vineyards for the first time (www.jana-bordeaux.com <<http://www.jana-bordeaux.com>>). Please visit the various sites, tell us what you think and what you would like to see there.

RN 89, exit 5, 33750 Beychac et Caillou
www.planete-bordeaux.fr

FOOD AND WINE MATCHING

One of the most exciting things about these two areas of Bordeaux is the discovery of little-known winemakers who are working outside of the classification system, and outside of the more renowned appellations. Often these are young and dynamic producers who are taking risks with grape varieties or blends, or with their vineyard work and production methods, and who deserve to be better known. And all of this experimentation on the production side makes it a real pleasure to use some creativity on the consumer side also, by trying out food and wine pairings.

If you are visiting the estates in person, always remember to ask if the owners or winemakers have any special preferences for foods to match their wines. Many of them put recipe suggestions up on their websites, so look out for those as well. And remember that because there is vintage variation in the Bordeaux region – mainly due to the location near the Atlantic Ocean, and on the 45th parallel, where summers can be changeable – ideal food matches may change each year. A lighter vintage such as 2007, for example, may work better with lighter meats such as chicken and pork, while a firm-fruited and structured 2005 or 2009 may need a richer sauce, a good steak or a mushroom risotto made with the area's rich and meaty cepe mushrooms.

The majority of wines in AOC Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur have a high degree of Merlot, making them welcoming with a wide-variety of food stuffs, and they are also likely to work with a plate of charcuterie as part of an early-evening tapas. Besides the many excellent reds, this is also an area with a high proportion of rosé wines, the slightly more structured claret wines, and plenty of whites, made from Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and

Muscadelle – and even crémant, the sparkling white wine made in the traditional method of a second fermentation in bottle. So pretty much every style of wine is covered in these two regional Bordeaux areas, giving you plenty of flexibility with your choice of ingredients and cooking style.

Concentrating more fully on the reds, it's worth taking the time to discover the blend of grape varieties when selecting a menu to go alongside your bottle. You might find, for example, wines that have a higher proportion of Malbec in than in many other parts of Bordeaux, which means they have a certain spiciness and depth of colour and flavour that can make for perfect matches with strong sauces and red meat stews. Or a high proportion of the softer and more perfumed Cabernet Franc. Cabernet Franc has raspberry and violet aromas, and can be a perfect match with warm toasting walnuts, pears and blue cheese. Cabernet Franc and Merlot blends are also a very good match with roast chicken, Mediterranean-style foods and home-made pizza.

There are no hard and fast rules to food and wine matching – although a typical suggestion is to either balance weights and flavours of food and wine, or to contrast them (so a rich red wine with a crisp light goat's cheese, or a structured meat stew against a tannic red wine). You can go far outside of the region for good matches – a classic lamb curry with a soft Merlot-based red, or an Italian pasta dish with a Cabernet-based red. If you want to stay regional, some of the best local produce of Bordeaux (and the wider southwest) include Pauillac lamb, (a soft and very delicate flavour) and Bazas beef (far heartier, and a classic combination in the region is to serve an entrecote of Bazas beef in a red-wine sauce covered in finely chopped shallots).

And no matter what you try, the fact that many of these bottles remain excellent value for money means you can fully relax when trying out new flavour combinations, and share the experience with friends.

Planet Bordeaux Cooking Class

Among the many food and wine-matching initiatives here are the Gourmet Saturdays and Planet Cooking.

Planet Cooking offers 4 hours tasting and cooking class when you can prepare either a starter, main course or dessert to be matched with wines of the appellations Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur. It's available upon reservation for group only, on week and weekend. Gourmet Saturdays see local food and wine producers from the region come down to the centre for tasting and discovery of their products.

www.planete-bordeaux.fr

