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# BORDEAUX

## The Wine Capital of The World

By Stu Nudelman aka Stu The Wine Guru, WSET 2 Sommelier

**A**s I write this article, it is November, and unfortunately, we are still enduring the COVID-19 health crisis. I am still staying home, staying healthy, staying positive. .

However, I always try start my articles off on an optimistic note... Happy New Year! 2021 could not have come soon enough. At least 2020 is finally behind us.

I hope by the time you are all reading this article in January, things are better in the world, and first responders and healthcare workers have already received their doses of the vaccine to conquer the virus.

Now, lets talk about wine! I chose Bordeaux as the topic of this article for a few reasons:

It is my favorite wine region. It has always fascinated me. It is a mecca for any

wine lover, enthusiast, or professional to visit, and it holds a special place in my heart for one reason.

The first style of wine I tasted from Bordeaux 25 years ago, shook me, impressed me, and made me realize why Bordeaux was such a powerful expression of wine, and gave me the curiosity about the region.

I'll tell you what specific wine that was at the end of this article, so keep reading.

I'll also tell you about an amazing book about the region of Bordeaux called *Exploring Wine Regions: France: Bordeaux*, Written & Photographed by Michael C. Higgins, PhD.

And, if you keep up with my articles, you know I like to share my finds from the wine world. In this issue, it's a new game to test your blind wine tasting skills in a fun and educational way. It's

called: SOMM Blinders: The card-based game for blind tasting wine from the makers of SOMM Films.

So, sit back, grab a glass of Bordeaux (preferably if you have some) and lets get at it.

First up, some history about this complex and rich-with-history region. Bordeaux is 365 driving miles south of Paris, or a litter over a one-hour flight, and 460 driving miles south of the Champagne region of France or an almost five-hour train ride.

It is said that historians date the first vineyards in Bordeaux back to the second century AD, when the Romans planted the first "Vitis Biturica". The appellation has a range of gravel, alluvium, clay and limestone soils.

Let's start with the basics. The key grape varieties of this region are:

**REDS**

MERLOT  
 CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
 CABERNET FRANC  
 PETIT VERDOT  
 MALBEC  
 CARMENERE

**WHITES**

SÉMILLON  
 SAUVIGNON BLANC  
 MUSCADELLE COLOMBARD  
 MERLOT BLANC  
 SAUVIGNON GRIS  
 UGNI BLANC

Let's now start with some quick geography, so we can better understand where these grapes are grown and why, via the "lay of the land" so to speak. The Region features two main areas: the Left Bank and Right Bank, which are separated by an estuary and two rivers. Specifically, Bordeaux is split in two by the Gironde Estuary, which divides into the Dordogne and Garonne rivers.

**LEFT BANK**

The wine growing regions to the west and south of the river are called The Left Bank. On the Left Bank of Bordeaux, the best terroirs are predominantly gravel based. It encompasses the Médoc wine region north of Bordeaux, and includes the Médoc, Graves, and Sauternes districts. Médoc then can be further divided into two regions. The northern-most portion, called the **Bas-Médoc** (called Médoc on labels), is where Merlot and Merlot-based blends are predominantly found and the **Haut-Médoc**, is where higher rated wines are found. The more well-known smaller appellations within this region are Saint-Estéphe, Pauillac, Saint-Julien, and Margaux

**Graves and Pessac-Léognan:** Soil content here is generally gravel based. Cabernet Sauvignon is the more dominant grape variety in these appellations.

Graves and Pessac-Léognan are allowed to produce both red and white wines. Pessac-Léognan, in the northern portion of Graves, is well-known for producing premium white wine. Many are cru classé status.

As with the red wines of Bordeaux, most whites are blended wines of Sauvignon Blanc with Sémillon.

**Sauternes and Barsac:** Sauternes is from the Sauternais region of the Graves section in Bordeaux. Sauternes is made from Sémillon, Sauvignon blanc, and Musc-

adelle grapes that have been affected by Botrytis cinerea, also known as noble rot. This is where the grapes shrivel and become partially raisined. The results are concentrated flavors in the wine.

Sauternes is one of the few wine regions where infection with noble rot is a frequent occurrence. Wines from Sauternes, especially the Premier Cru Supérieur estate Château d'Yquem, can be very expensive due to the very high cost of production. Barsac lies within Sauternes and is entitled to use either name however they charge far less, with varying quality which is not as high in many cases.

Onto the Right Bank...

**RIGHT BANK**

Right Bank is dominated by clay-based soils. Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon are key here. Here are the appellations of the Right Bank:

**St. Émilion:** It is from the two areas of St. Émilion and Pomerol, where the most prestigious wines known come from.

**Pomerol:** Pomerol, while smaller in size than St. Émilion, both have similar reputations for producing outstanding wines.

**Côtes de Bordeaux:** There is a group of "lesser known" red wine appellations that have collectively agreed to share the name Côtes de Bordeaux: Formed in 2009 with the union of four regions: Côtes de Blaye, Côtes de Castillon, Côtes de Francs and Côtes de Cadillac. Together, they cover nearly 30,000 acres of vines, with 950 producers and represent 10 percent of total production of Bordeaux.

**Entre-Deux Mers:** Located between the Garonne and Dordogne Rivers is a white wine only appellation. Wines here are Sauvignon Blanc dominant. Exceptions here will be blends with Semillon and Muscadelle.

Okay, get ready for a geeky deep dive below into classifications. I'll try to keep them brief. For accuracy purposes, the Classification information below is taken from the Bordeaux.com website. I want to be factually correct and completely transparent.

**THE FIVE BORDEAUX WINE CLASSIFICATIONS**

Bordeaux introduced the concept of classification in 1855 under Napoleon III, and it now serves as the top expression of quality and prestige globally. The concept of the crus classés ("classified growths")

shows the perfect combination of "nature" (meaning terrior, climate and weather), and "nurture" (human intervention from the vintners and generations of winemakers producing the wine of this calibre).

At the Exposition Universelle of 1855 in Paris, Emperor Napoleon III asked each wine region to establish a classification. The Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce and Industry, founded in 1705, began that process for the Gironde.

**Reds:**

These consist of 60 crus from the Médoc and 1 cru from Pessac-Léognan (Château Haut-Brion) based on five categories: 5 Premiers Crus, 14 Deuxièmes Crus, 14 Troisièmes Crus, 10 Quatrièmes Crus, 18 Cinqüièmes Crus.

I chose the 2009 vintage for all of these reds because it was a fantastic vintage and one you might more readily find available for purchase. It is also drinkable now and certainly age-worthy to lay down for another 20 or more years as well.

**First-Growths/Premières Crus**

2009 CHÂTEAU LAFITE ROTHSCHILD  
 Average Price: \$900-\$1,100

Appellation: Pauillac  
 Nose: black currant, plum, cigar box, leather  
 Palate: fig, black tea, plum, espresso, mocha



**Second-Growths/Deuxièmes Crus**

2009 CHÂTEAU LÉO-VILLE LAS CASES  
 Average Price: \$299-\$350

Appellation: Saint Julien  
 Nose: blackberries, dark chocolate, menthol, sandalwood  
 Palate: black cherry, cassis, allspice



**Third-Growths/Troisièmes Crus**

2009 CHÂTEAU GISCOURS  
 Average Price: \$99-\$125

Appellation: Margaux  
 Nose: wood embers, blackberry, raspberry  
 Palate: blueberry, hint of chocolate notes, baking spice



## select spirits



### Fourth-Growths/ Quatrièmes Crus

2009 CHÂTEAU TALBOT  
Average Price: \$79-\$99  
Appellation: Saint Julien  
Nose: floral and earth tones, dark fruit, cedar  
Palate: dark cherries, thyme and espresso



### Fifth-Growths/ Cinquièmes Crus

2009 CHÂTEAU LYNCH BAGES  
Average Price: \$229-\$299  
Appellation: Pauillac  
Nose: bell pepper, olive, spice, blackberry  
Palate: fig, plum, vanilla, blueberry

### Sweet Whites:

There are 27 crus of the Sauternes and Barsac appellations: 1 Premier Cru Supérieur, 11 Premiers Crus, 15 Deuxièmes Crus. Sole revision: In 1973, the promotion of Château Mouton Rothschild from the rank of Deuxième Grands Cru Classé to that of Premier Grand Cru Classé (Médoc). Note: I picked predominantly 2013 for the whites – with one exception) for the same reason I picked the 2009 for the reds.



### First-Growth/Grand Premier Cru

2013 CHÂTEAU D'YQUEM  
Average Price: \$329-\$369  
Appellation: Sauternes  
Nose: dried fruits, apricots, nutmeg, tropical fruits, papaya  
Palate: almond, marzipan, chamomile, apricots

### First-Growth Premières Crus

2013 CHÂTEAU RIEUSSEC  
Average Price: \$69-\$79  
Appellation: Sauternes  
Nose: floral notes of lily, candied fruit, lemon  
Palate: candied ginger, pear, dried papaya



### Second-Growths/ Deuxièmes Crus

2013 CHÂTEAU DOISY-VÉDRINES  
Average Price: \$45-\$60  
Appellation: Sauternes  
Nose: stone fruits, apple, mint, green papaya  
Palate: pineapple, honey, cumquat, apricots

### THE GRAVES CLASSIFICATION:

There are 16 crus in the Graves classification, which was defined in 1953, at the request of the Syndicat de défense de l'appellation des Graves, and established by the Institut national des appellations d'origine (INAO). All 16 Crus belong to the AOC Pessac-Léognan: 7 red, 3 white, 6 red and white. Fun Fact: Château Haut-Brion is the only Bordeaux wine to be classified twice, as it appears in both the Graves classification and the Grands Crus Classés en 1855.



2009 CHÂTEAU HAUT-BRION  
Average SRP: between \$900-\$1,100  
Appellation: Pessac-Leognan  
Nose: dark berries, cassis, espresso, toasted wood  
Palate: licorice, spice,

blueberry, blackberry, cassis



2009 CHÂTEAU DE FIEUZAL  
Average Price: \$55-\$65  
Appellation: Pessac-Leognan  
Nose: earthy forest floor, plums, tobacco, coffee, vanilla, licorice and black cherry  
Palate: dark chocolate, espresso bean, black raspberry, allspice



2016 CHÂTEAU CARBONNIEUX BLANC  
Average Price: \$50-\$60  
Appellation: Pessac-Leognan  
Nose: lemon, pear, honeysuckle, apple  
Palate: candied orange, lemon curd, ginger

### THE SAINT-ÉMILION CLASSIFICATION:

The 82 crus in the AOC Saint-Émilion classification began in 1954, at the request of the Syndicat de défense de l'appellation Saint-Émilion, the Institut national des appellations d'origine (INAO).



### Premiers Grands Crus Classes

2009 CHÂTEAU CHEVAL BLANC  
Average Price: \$1,100-\$1,250  
Appellation: St Emillion  
Nose: black cherry, menthol, tobacco leaf and kirsch  
Palate: black plum, star anise, mint, black cherry



### Grands Crus Classes

2009 CHÂTEAU FOMBRAUGE  
Average Price: \$45-\$60  
Appellation: St Emillion  
Nose: black mulberry, cassis, mocha  
Palate: plum, raspberry, dark chocolate

### THE CRUS BOURGEOIS DU MÉDOC CLASSIFICATION:

The history of this classification and the term Cru Bourgeois became established through sheer use, as it dates back to the Middle Ages, when the citizens (bourgeois), residents of the "burgh" (bourg) of Bordeaux, acquired the region's best lands and were subsequently granted this designation. In 1932, the Crus Bourgeois were grouped in a list established by the Bordeaux wine merchants, under the aegis of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce and the Gironde Chamber of Agriculture.



2009 CHÂTEAU ROLLAN DE BY  
Average Price: \$25-\$35  
Appellation: Medoc  
Nose: graphite, earth tones, cherry, black raspberry  
Palate: black currant, black cherry and fig

**THE CRUS ARTISANS CLASSIFICATION:**

In the Médoc, the term “Crus Artisans” has officially existed for over 150 years: they were small wineries often belonging to coopers, wheelwrights, and blacksmiths. Over the last 40 years, they have been recognized as small to medium-sized estates, which all operations of their vineyards are managed by the winemakers. They produce and sell their AOC wines at the chateau.



**2009 CHÂTEAU LES BARRAILLOTS**  
 Average Price: \$30-\$35  
 Appellation: Margaux  
 Nose: black tea, violet, mushroom, black fruit  
 Palate: blackcurrant, bilberry, cocoa

Now that I have given you a sense of the region, its wines and history, I'll discuss the book that is quintessential to read/have as your bible for all things Bordeaux : *Exploring Wine Regions: France-Bordeaux* by Michael C. Higgins, PhD.. This book will guide you through all the places to experience the wine, food, castles, places to stay, and the French way of life in Bordeaux.

It is worth it to read this book just on the incredible photography alone – but the information also is extensive, up to date, well-laid out and by all accounts totally complete. This is all you need to review before booking a flight from wherever you are in the world to go to Bordeaux.

It tells you about the history and geography with beautifully detailed maps of each region and appellation. You'll find full restaurant recommendations, wine chateaux for each appellation to visit.

This book is part of a series of books by Mr. Higgins called *Exploring Wine Regions*, which currently includes Bordeaux and Argentina.

With “more in the works” as I'm told by Michael, this is a must-read for wine-lovers. Find more info at [exploringwineregions.com](http://exploringwineregions.com)

Now onto some fun with a new wine Game for Wine Enthusiasts of all levels who want to improve their Blind Wine tasting skills. It's called: **SOMM Blinders: The card-based game for blind tasting wine** from the makers of SOMM Films (\$35, [blindersgame.com](http://blindersgame.com)).

*Somm* is a 2012 American documentary following the attempts of four candidates to pass the extremely difficult Master Sommelier examination, a test with one of the lowest pass rates in the world.

It was a revolutionary film for the wine world because it exposed the long felt mystique of what a Master Sommelier must go through to get the certification. They followed up with two more films in the trilogy: a sequel, *Somm: Into the Bottle* was released in 2015 and a third film, *Somm 3*, came out in October 2018. In 2019, SOMM TV was launched by creator Jason Wise with original shows. Many of the key wine Instagrammers I follow, and who follow me, are hosting shows on SOMM TV. I watch regularly and learn from them.



The game is great concept for you or any wine-lover in your life : The objective of the game is to correctly match your cards to the wine in each Bottle Round, and earn the most points based on those cards. After all wines have been tasted, the taster with the most points wins the game, and the taster with the lowest points cleans the spit bucket!

Each player must bring a wine from the wine list in the deck with the label hidden so that no other player knows what they've brought. The table decides the first “dealer”, who shuffles and deals everyone 5 cards face down. They then pour their wine to each person's glass without letting anyone see the label.

Starting left of the dealer, every player – including the dealer – must pick up from the blind pile or the discard pile and then discard a card, face-up, to the discard pile on their turn. All eyes are on the dealer's discards because they know what the wine is.

What you need to play:

- Wine
- Glasses for tasters
- Decanter (optional)
- Pen and Paper to keep track of score
- Spit bucket



Due to COVID, I played with family members already living with me. Under other circumstances I would have called upon some of my sommelier friends. It actually worked out well, because they learned about tasting wines and relying on their taste buds and analytical skills rather than asking me what they were tasting.

This proves it works for all levels of wine knowledge. I loved playing this game and will play it with my wine colleagues as soon as its appropriate. It will be a great game to play before and after the American Fine Wine Competition which will hopefully be on Memorial Day weekend 2021.

Now back to the start of this story – I won't leave you in suspense anymore... the wine that blew me away in 1995 was a 1988 Chateau Margaux. I experienced it at an upscale dinner party that a well-versed wine friend was having. The bottle was so exquisite that it was actually given to him as payment for his accounting services. He could not wait to open it. Even though it was still very young, it was an outstanding vintage. My first Bordeaux was that bottle, and It made a life-long lasting impression on me. **stb**

Check out my website [www.stuthewineguru.com](http://www.stuthewineguru.com). Follow me on Instagram and Twitter @stuthewineguru. Find me on LinkedIn: [Stu Nudelman](https://www.linkedin.com/in/stu-nudelman).



Listen to my radio podcast: *Wine talk with Stu The Wine Guru* on ITUNES or where ever you enjoy podcasts.

And, as I always say “Wine evolves in your mind as well as in your glass.”