

Finding Bordeaux AOC gems in challenging vintages

2017 may not be in the same category as top red Bordeaux vintages like 2005, 2010, 2015 or 2016, but one can find excellent values. A terrible late April frost wiped out at least 40% of the potential crop: the lowest quantity of red Bordeaux produced since 1991. The frost damage was so widespread that the government allocated funds to help estates that had been especially hard hit. Public spending helped pay for new vine plantings to replace those destroyed by frost, for example.

But for properties that were able to make wine, many 2017 reds are ripe, bright and smooth, as the tasting notes show. International wine consultant and harvest observer Bill Blatch said it best: many have an “underlying gentle nature” that brings forth “charm, moderate alcohol levels and pleasing aromatics”. Some with more noticeable tannins will require another year in bottle before optimal drinking.

While frost was the culprit in 2017, aggressive mildew hit vineyards in 2018. Furthermore, a summer hailstorm devastated some vineyards, too. What mattered most for producers who successfully managed the mildew and escaped the hail was the dry and rather hot summer and harvest period that led to splendid reds. The high temperatures with dry weather conditions were excellent for being rot-free, as well, but proved more challenging for a lack of enough balancing acidity for many dry whites, which seem to lack the panache and balance of the 2017 vintage and the zingy energy of 2014, 2010 and 2008.

However, vintners who picked earlier or harvested grapes from colder soils were able to retain freshness, crafting better-than-expected whites. Colder clay soils especially retained enough acidity to bring about fine whites with body and enough energy, as the tasting notes attest. And the prices are more than promising.

WINES TO TRY Whites 2018

Bordeaux Revolution, AOC Bordeaux Blanc 2018 90

Up to £10 www.producta-vignobles.com
100% Sauvignon Blanc. Lovely brightness, and a nose of ripe, juicy expressions of morning grapefruit! The wine has a mouth filling appeal that is not heavy in any way. The dry heat of 2018? Not an issue. Bravo to David Hohnen of Cloudy Bay in New Zealand, who vinified this wine in its first year of production for the vintage 2018. Only £9 suggested retail in the UK market, but not yet officially listed. Look out for it. **Drink Until 2023**

Château Bel Air Perponcher, AOC Bordeaux Blanc 2018 90

£10 *The Wine Society, the International Exhibition Co-operative*
85% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Sémillon, 5% Muscadelle. One of the top wines of the tasting, with white apricot, ripe pear, and decent mid palate density. With admirable freshness and lift on the finish, the wine works



well with steamed or grilled fish. The owner, Vignobles Despagne, is responsible for six properties in Bordeaux spanning 300 hectares and is known for taking excellent care of its vines. At under £10 per bottle, you cannot go wrong. **Drink Until 2023**

Château de Bonhoste, AOC Bordeaux Blanc 2018 89

£10-15 *Hourlier Wines, Bloombury Wine*
60% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Sémillon, 10% Muscadelle. I like the salinity to the aromas here. The fruit is crispy and pure, especially for a dry and hot vintage like 2018. A certain density makes this fit to match your dinner. Nice job! **Drink Until 2022**

Château de Marsan, AOC Bordeaux Blanc 2018 89

£10 *Ellis Wine (London)*
60% Sauvignon, 40% Sémillon. Superb balance between 60% Sauvignon Blanc and 40% Sémillon, as the wine delivers both freshness and creaminess. Medium plus body with vivid fruit driven flavors makes for a superior by-the-glass Bordeaux white selection for restaurants looking for savvy purchases. Also worth noting is that the estate boasts the coveted Haute Valeur Environnementale (“High Environmental Value”) certification, which even many classified wines lack, in its commitment to sustainable viticulture. Bravo! **Drink Until 2022**

Château d’Haurets, AOC Bordeaux Blanc 2018 89

Vignobles Ducourt
95% Sauvignon Blanc, 3% Muscadelle 2% Sémillon. Svelte and even creamy on the palate, with fresh croissant aroma. Nicely balanced by grapefruit citrus on the palate, with enough tonic lift on the finish. Not only did cooler clays help in retaining freshness but the owners have a wide variety of vines, which no doubt helped them to craft a fine white in this challenging vintage.