

# FLINT WINES

Flint Wines Ltd, 38 De Laune Street  
Kennington, London SE17 3UR  
Tel: 0207 582 2500 Fax: 0207 582 2210  
[www.flintwines.com](http://www.flintwines.com)

## 2009 Bordeaux

In spite of the British Airways' cabin crew's best efforts, the annual wine trade pilgrimage to Bordeaux took place last week amid almost unprecedented hype for a new vintage. The dogs have been barking about the 2009s since the grapes were safely harvested back in October and it was time to see if they were right.

The week is an intense mix of lively group tastings and more tranquil individual châteaux visits. Each commune designates one of its châteaux to play host to its cru classé peers from the area, allowing tasters to get a real feel for both the style and the success of each commune as a whole. These tastings take place over three days, allowing buyers the time to taste in St Emilion, Graves, Sauternes, Margaux, Haut-Médoc, and Pauillac, St Julien and St Estèphe, which are grouped together in Pauillac. Interspersed amongst these group tastings we get the chance to visit both those châteaux that choose not to participate in them (mainly the First Growths and some Super Seconds) and those that we are especially keen to re-taste on site in hushed calm.

It's not easy tasting such young wines, remember they are less than 6 months old, but in fact the differences between the châteaux can already be quite stark and it's fascinating how one gradually builds up quite firm opinions about both the vintage as a whole and the performances of the individual properties.

Once back in the UK, we decipher and compare our notes and put together a shopping list of our top performers, trying to select a balanced mix of what will no doubt be highly sought-after, well-known names as well as a few secret gems that we have unearthed that will offer some great value.

Prices will begin to appear over the next few weeks, although it is unlikely we will see any of the really grand names before May. This is the last factor that will influence our purchases, some wines pricing themselves out of the equation and others offering better value than expected. As the various wines are released so we will offer them on to you via email or telephone. Such is the likely demand for these wines that immediate action and response will be necessary to bag the things you want.

So enough of the logistics of the process, what did we think of the wines?

Having said many times that Burgundy is not an area about which one can generalise, we must say the same here about Bordeaux. For some communes this is truly an exceptional vintage, without any qualifications whatsoever. For others, it is less overwhelming. As a whole the communes of Sauternes, St Julien and Pauillac have produced simply spectacular wines. We had rumours that Sauternes had done well, perhaps not surprising given the Indian summer of last year, but we were not prepared for what we encountered at the group tasting. There was not a single wine amongst the 40 or so on tasting that wasn't at least very good and many were out of this world. Intense sweetness and richness of fruit was brought to life by a mouthwatering freshness and acidity. This has to be at least on a par with the brilliant 1988 and 2001 vintages. Climens and d'Yquem weren't showing but there so many stunning wines they weren't missed. Highlights included de Fargues, Rieussec, Nairac, Rabaud Promis, Coutet, Suduiraut and Rayne Vigneau.

Both St Julien and Pauillac excited massively. It's hard to say which one performed best, suffice to say both excelled. In St Julien the wines have great vibrancy to bring alive their finesse and purity and in Pauillac

terrific poise and freshness to counterbalance their undoubted power. In St Julien, St Pierre, Branaire Ducru, Gruaud Larose and Léoville Poyferre really shone out and in Pauillac Lynch Bages, Pontet Canet, d'Armailhac were out of the top drawer. It's harder to give an overall feel for St Estèphe as we didn't taste to the same depth and the style of its most renowned château, Cos d'Estournel, is not to our taste, but Montrose was superb and lower down the scale both Les Ormes de Pez (from the Lynch Bages stable) and de Pez performed above their station.

If Bordeaux was just these four communes then we would only have the most positive things to say about the vintage and being that they are the most important ones, we have to concur that yes, 2009 is a stunning vintage. However, on a more cautious note, we will be limiting our purchases from the other communes and we remain less excited by much of what they had to offer, which was either a result of less optimum growing conditions or overly modern winemaking techniques. To the latter, first, as geographically the area that was most guilty of mutilating potentially good fruit was the commune of Margaux, which lies just a few miles to the south of St Julien. The climate here does not seem to have been the problem as Margaux itself and, indeed, its second wine, Pavillon Rouge, were both superb and the more classical offerings at the group tasting were also very good. The problem here was modernity, too much extraction, though arguably less than a few years ago, and far too much oak. Purity and fruit character were discarded in favour of flashy new oak aromas and dry, harsh tannins. Once again, Brane Cantenac stood out for its classicism and it was pleasing to see its virtual namesake, Cantenac Brown, emerge from the shadows. D'Angludet ignored the modernist trend and produced what could be one of the bargains of the vintage and Durfort Vivens has perhaps made their best wine ever. Amongst the more modern types, Malescot St Exupery stood out some way clear. We also found a terrific small property housed in the Château Paloumey stable called Château Bessane, which had lots of the re-emerging Petit Verdot in it and was full of vibrancy and purity.

Just south of Margaux in the Haut-Médoc area, which includes Macau, La Lagune was a revelation, Poujeaux beat off its big rival Chasse Spleen and Fourcas Dupre produced a terrific little wine.

And so to Graves, where most of the châteaux produce both red and white wines. The whites were generally a bit under-whelming, lacking a little zip, with a few exceptions such as de Fieuzal, Latour Martillac and L'Espault Martillac, which was making its début for the Domaine de Chevalier stable and arguably stole the show from the much more expensive Chevalier white. However, the Chevalier red was awesome and certainly the stand out wine of the tasting. The property has been on a roll for some years now and if it continues to under price its wines then they will continue to offer some of the best value in all of Bordeaux. Other wines we liked which could also offer some terrific value were Latour Martillac, Smith Haut Lafite, de Fieuzal and Malartic Lagravière. We weren't sure about Haut Bailly as they submitted a 100% new oak sample (the final blend will be around 50%) and the oak dominated but we re-tasted their 2008, which was stunning, so hopefully the finished 2009 will also prove to be much better than it showed here.

We made the long journey to St Emilion and came back with mixed reactions. Less extraction perhaps than on previous occasions but still plenty of new oak and a mix of good wines and slightly disappointing ones with just a handful of real corkers. Both Angelus and Troplong Mondot have made crackers, we were split as to which we preferred, although the Angelus had perhaps more refinement as its second wine, Carillon de l'Angelus, was also terrific. Château Bellevue, from the same stable, was also excellent. Canon La Gaffelière also impressed but we will be treading carefully here. Time didn't allow us to do Pomerol but in a successful Cabernet vintage we took the view that if we had to miss something out then the merlot-based Pomerols were perhaps the things to miss!

So all in all, we left thrilled by much of what we tasted but not all and we will be concentrating our purchases very much of the four communes that impressed us most, with a smattering of the top wines from the others. In terms of longevity these wines should go the distance. The consistent nature of the warmth of the summer has meant the top wines are more about length than explosive volume. Whilst average temperatures were high from June through to September, extreme highs were rare, in fact on a par with 2005 rather than 2003. Importantly, evening temperatures were much lower than in 2003 and helped maintain the freshness and definition in the wines. Cabernet Sauvignon flourished as did Petit Verdot, which as a grape variety adds real energy to a wine. There will no doubt be some châteaux who get greedy but until we see prices we can only comment on the wines themselves and many of them were simply outstanding.

## **Our favourite 2009s (excluding 1<sup>st</sup> Growths)**

### **Graves**

Domaine de Chevalier  
Smith Haut Lafite  
Malartic Lagravière  
Latour Martillac

### **St Emilion**

Bellevue  
Canon La Gaffelière  
Troplong Mondot  
Carillon de l'Angelus  
Angelus

### **Haut Médoc/Macau/Moulis**

La Lagune  
Poujeaux  
Fourcas Dupré

### **Margaux**

Bessane  
D'Angludet  
Durfort Vivens  
Malescot St Exupery  
Cantenac Brown  
Brane Cantenac  
Pavillon Rouge de Margaux

### **St Julien**

Léoville Poyferre  
St Pierre  
Gruaud Larose  
Branair Ducru  
Lalande Borie  
La Croix de Beaucaillou  
Gloria  
Léoville Barton  
(didn't taste Las Cases)

### **Pauillac**

D'Armailhac  
Clerc Milon  
Lynch Bages  
Echo de Lynch Bages  
Tronquoy Lalande  
Haut Bages Liberal  
Charmail  
Haut Batailley  
Lacoste Borie  
Grand Puy Lacoste  
Pichon Baron  
Pontet Canet

**St Estèphe**

De Pez

Les Ormes de Pez

Montrose

Haut Marbuzet

**Sauternes**

Nairac

D'Arche

Rabaud Promis

Rayne Vigneau

Coutet

Rieussec

De Fargues

Suduiraut