

## Wine

BY RYAN GREENE



# Simplifying BORDEAUX

A FEW  
*Recommendations*

After selecting your Bordeaux wine, you want to maximize your experience by following these drinking tips. The wine should be served at a temperature slightly cooler than room temperature. This temperature allows for the maximum aromas and characters of the wine to show through. Most red Bordeaux wines benefit from at least 30 minutes of air, either in the glass or a decanter. The younger and higher quality the wine, the longer the required decant, even up to several hours. And don't forget that Bordeaux wines are known for their exceptional ability to pair with food, especially red meat. Try a Bordeaux with your next steak, and you will soon understand why Bordeaux is still considered the greatest red wine producer in the world.

I have to admit; my heart and palate belong to Bordeaux. This wine region, on the Western coast of France, produces some of the greatest wines in the world. But now more than ever, confusion and misconceptions surround the wines of Bordeaux. Many assume they are too expensive, difficult to find, and hard to understand; as a result, consumers often opt for New World wines, or other areas such as Italy or Spain. With some basic information, it will be easy to discover these fantastic wines.

### THE SOURCE OF THE CONFUSION

Most wine drinkers identify wines based on the grape varietal (i.e. like Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir). This is what you will find on most New World wine labels, making it very easy to know what you are buying. Bordeaux wines, on the other hand, are almost always blends of multiple varietals, which is what gives them their uniqueness and complexity. Almost, every Bordeaux you will ever drink is made up of a different blend. But this should not intimidate, as there are simple guidelines to understand what you are buying.

The two dominant red grapes in Bordeaux are Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Additional varietals such as Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot are often added for blending with the dominant grape. Geographically, Bordeaux is divided by the Gironde river, and chateaux on the left side ("Left Bank") produce wines with predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, while the right side ("Right Bank") produces wines that are a higher percentage of Merlot.

### LEFT BANK VS RIGHT BANK

Cabernet Sauvignon wines are typically bolder and have aromas of dark fruit (black currant, plum, and spice), with higher tannins. Merlot tends to be more

fruit-forward with red fruit, and it's smoother on the palate. If you prefer Cabernet Sauvignon, choose a wine from the Left Bank of Bordeaux. Both the Left and Right Banks of Bordeaux are also broken up into appellations. These appellations (geographical areas) include St. Estephe, Pauillac, St. Julien, Margaux, and Haut-Medoc; if you see any of these appellations on the label, the wine is most likely Cabernet-based. If you prefer a Merlot-dominated wine, then choose from appellations on the Right Bank such as Saint Emilion, Pomerol, and Fronsac. In fact, the most revered Merlot in the world is found in Pomerol, Chateau Petrus.

Another source of confusion is determining which vintage (i.e. year) of Bordeaux wine to buy. The best recent vintages in Bordeaux are 2000, 2005, 2009, and 2010, but often better values can be found in the so-called "off-vintages" such as 2001, 2004, and 2006. Wines in the best vintages are often priced higher due to their tendency to age longer (even over 50 years). The benefit of buying the less expensive off-vintages is that you may find excellent quality wines that are great to drink and enjoy now (since they don't have the potential to age longer). Wines from the higher quality vintages often require a few years in the bottle to soften up a bit, but these off-vintages are more enjoyable sooner. ■