

Decanter

Bordeaux 2015 en primeur: High hopes but nerves linger on price

April 4, 2016

Excitement for the Bordeaux 2015 vintage is being tempered by early trepidation over possible release prices as en primeur tasting week begins in the region's vineyards.



Bordeaux 2015 en primeur wines ready for the Grand Cercle tasting at Bellefont-Belcier on 3 April.
Credit: Decanter / Chris Mercer

Many châteaux are expecting extra visitors to taste the Bordeaux 2015 vintage en primeur, with American tasters in particular set to turn out in greater numbers.

Anticipation has been building for a vintage already pitched as somewhere between good and great – albeit considered unlikely to match the power of the lauded 2010.

But, there are clearly nerves around the pricing of the subsequent en primeur campaign, following several difficult years for Bordeaux negociants and non-Bordeaux merchants. Consumers have on average made a loss in five of the last eight campaigns, according to Liv-ex.

Even if the wines live up to the pre-tasting hype, one trade source told Decanter.com in Bordeaux, ‘If someone comes out early with a ridiculous price, it will kill it [the campaign].’

Bordeaux 2015 en primeur wines: Early signs

Throng of wine critics from all over the world, and including Decanter’s own expert team, will spend the next several days tasting and rating hundreds of Bordeaux 2015 en primeur wines.

It was a slightly unusual growing season for the Bordelais. A brief, solid flowering period was followed by several weeks of sunny, warm weather and drought, and then storms and rain in August. There was respite from the rain in September, although northern Medoc appellations, such as Pauillac and St-Estephe, had to deal with several extra days of wet weather versus those further south.

‘It was such an extraordinary year,’ said Edouard Moueix, of negociant JP Moueix, at a recent Justerini & Brooks (J&B) tasting in London. ‘There were tornados in the Charents.’

Some Right Bank estates were very upbeat in Bordeaux this week. ‘I have been here for 15 years and it’s the best vintage we have produced,’ said Emmanuel de Saint Salvy, general manager of Bellefont-Belcier, which hosted a tasting for the Grand Cercle group of producers.

- Look out for the first impressions of Decanter's core Bordeaux 2015 tasters on Decanter.com's en primeur page throughout this week.

'August rain saved the vintage'

Pauline Vauthier, of Château Ausone, a St-Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classé A, told Decanter.com at J&B in London last month, 'I was worried by how dry the vintage was – especially at the end of July. But the August rain saved the day. It was a good easy harvest with perfect conditions.'

She added, 'Blending was very easy this year, each barrel was good. But this is not the vintage of the century like some others say.'

Laurent Dufau, of Calon Segur, said at the same tasting, 'In St Estephe, we had a bit more rain just before the harvest which possibly took the edge off things for the Merlots and Cabernet Franc. But it was good for Cabernet Sauvignon. Everything was good but not at the level of 9 and 10 in terms of homogeneity.'

Consultant Stephane Derenoncourt told Decanter.com in Bordeaux this week, 'It was an easy vintage. I liked it a lot because it was possible to be very creative. The harvest window was very long.'

'2010 was ripe and acidic, but 2015 is ripe and fresh. It's a vintage where you won't have to wait for 10 years to taste the wines.'

That freshness was also highlighted by dry white and Sauternes producers, who were initially concerned about how to get enough acidity in the wines during the early summer drought.

Terroir

Early signs suggested the Bordeaux 2015 barrel samples would be marked by significant differences in style, both between estate as well as soil type and geographic positioning.

'You can find the identity of place easily,' said Derenoncourt, who consults for more than 50 estates in Bordeaux, predominantly on the Right Bank but also covering several Left Bank properties.

For the first time, he will encourage critics at his annual La Grappe tasting at Château La Gaffelière in St-Emilion to taste en primeur wines by soil type, as well as by appellation.

'I have never seen such a wide spectrum of wines,' said Olivier Bernard, of Domaine de Chevalier and also head of the Unions des Grands Crus (UGC).

Value

Some believe that the traditional mantra of seeking out smaller estates in good years could offer value to fine wine lovers in the Bordeaux 2015 vintage.

'There will be unbelievably good value, with great wines from 10 euros,' Derenoncourt said.

Whether that value would be realised during an en primeur campaign or once the wines are released in bottle remains to be seen.

Further up the ladder, many merchants expect en primeur release prices for larger estates to at least match the 2014 vintage, and probably go a bit higher – depending on how tasters react this week.

'It's a normal vintage, so there's no reason why it shouldn't be a normal price,' Olivier Bernard told Decanter.com at a reception organised by Château Guiraud.

He said that he expected pricing would be somewhere between 2014 and the more restrained release prices from early in the 2009 vintage campaign, depending on the estate.

There has been some speculation about a late campaign, perhaps not beginning until May, but the practicalities of a Vinexpo Asia Pacific trade show scheduled for 24 to 26 May could bring the release timetable forward.

<http://www.decanter.com/learn/vintage-guides/en-primeur/bordeaux-en-primeur/bordeaux-2015-en-primeur-high-hopes-nerves-linger-price-297091/>