

Graves & Pessac whites 2012

Bordeaux's red wines invariably steal the limelight from the whites, but the dry styles from these prestigious appellations offer exciting value drinking. Jane Anson reports

THE LAST FEW vintages in Bordeaux have been nail-biting for the red wines. Less talked about, however, are the whites, which have enjoyed easier conditions. One reason is that whites are less sensitive to water stress than reds, and slightly cooler temperatures preserve both acidity levels and aromatic intensity. So while red wines need dry weather for three to four weeks before harvest and during picking itself to reach their full potential, you can halve that time for dry whites, so long as they are healthy and free from grey rot, as any damage to the skins will have severe effects on flavours, particularly with Sauvignon Blanc.

In 2012, things got off to a slow start, with a stubbornly cool spring and early summer, meaning uneven flowering and fruit set which affected both red and white vines. But the second half of the summer saw beautiful weather that lasted into the first three weeks of September.

This was almost the exact opposite of 2011, which saw a cool summer book-ended by a hot spring and beautiful (early) autumn: excellent for dry whites. In 2012, growers instead got the sunny and hot August days, but a dreary spring and autumn. This meant the grapes ripened later than in 2011 – the dry white wine harvest in Pessac-Léognan and the Graves lasted from 2-18 September, a full two weeks later than in 2011. The weather during harvest was sunny and dry during the day and cool at night, which helped lock in aromas, and kept the grapes in good condition. The only concern was if grapes were not picked quickly enough before sugar rose too steeply and acidity levels fell too low.

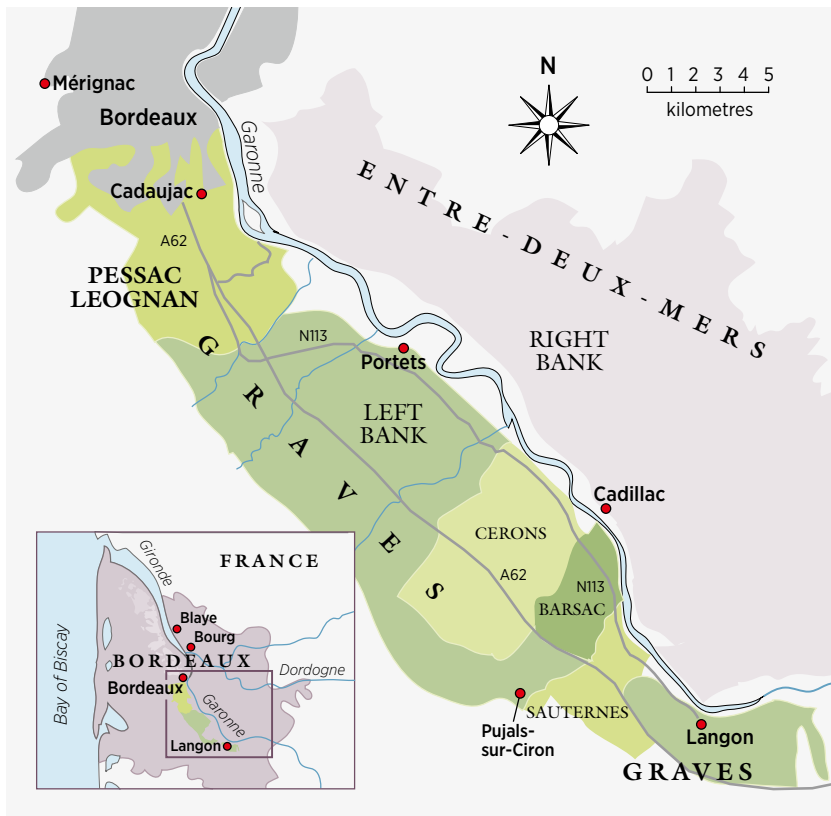
Gaining in popularity

Dry white wine in Bordeaux – which tends to be clustered around Entre-deux-Mers, Blaye-Cotes de Bordeaux and Pessac-Léognan/Graves – is experiencing a sales boom, with a 31% climb in overseas markets over the past five years, now standing at 47% export overall, compared to just under 40% for Bordeaux as a whole. The prestigious regions of Graves and Pessac Léognan have done much to contribute to this success.

Bordeaux whites from the Right Bank and Entre-deux-Mers are almost invariably early drinkers, whereas those from the Left Bank (so Graves and particularly Pessac-Léognan; the only region where the best white wines have received a cruclassé ranking), should be capable of ageing and improving in complexity in bottle for five to 10 years, or longer. Because production is small, prices have risen for classified whites over the past few years, but they are rarely seen as investment wines in the way that white Burgundy is, with a few exceptions (La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc and its sister Haut-Brion Blanc, and perhaps a few other sure-value picks such as Domaine de Chevalier).

White Bordeaux is an exciting area where much research into varietal aromas and the importance of effective viticulture and vinification techniques has been done at the Institute of Oenology. The results have been widely disseminated through the vineyards, meaning that as a category Graves and Pessac-Léognan should offer good value for money, and real drinking pleasure.

Jane Anson is the Bordeaux correspondent for Decanter and Decanter.com and author of Bordeaux Legends



Graves & Pessac-Léognan whites: know your vintages

2013 Complicated for both reds and whites. Whites seem to have enjoyed greater success than the reds, as they were picked under dry conditions.

2012 Dry whites were almost all picked before the September rains started. Aromatic, although the August heat meant grapes had to be picked before the acidity dropped too low.

2011 An early harvest, with many Sauvignon Blanc grapes coming in at the end of August, meaning some very good whites – again better than the reds this

year. Those who didn't pick before the rains were less successful.

2010 Excellent conditions for both reds and whites, although whites were marginally less successful than the reds as alcohol levels were high, dampening some varietal characteristics. Two schools: early pickers to keep acidity or late pickers for rich, powerful whites.

2009 Excellent vintage for reds, with good results for whites. Again two styles are evident: fresh and aromatic if picked early, or rich and powerful if picked late.

Graves & Pessac-Léognan: the facts

- Graves region: 50km from north to south, 43 communes, producing 30% white wine.
- White grapes: Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris, Semillon and Muscadelle
- AC Graves whites cover 752ha, compared to 268ha of white vines in Pessac Léognan.

- There are 10 classified estates for white wine in Pessac-Léognan, covering 120ha for their white vines. Confusingly, you will see them labelled Cru Classés de Graves, because the 1953 ranking pre-dates the 1987 creation of AC Pessac Léognan. ➤

The results

The crus classés and Pessac-Léognans fared best, with the Graves AC entries more inconsistent, but all the wines came under scrutiny by our panel for their oak use. Christelle Guibert reports

THE WHITES FROM Bordeaux’s Graves and Pessac-Léognan region are some of the world’s most underrated wines, and when looking at the stats – 97% of the wines recommended – the bottles submitted certainly put in a good performance, despite no Outstanding ratings. ‘The balance of these wines is fantastic!’ raved Steven Spurrier, ‘Yet they seem to be misunderstood because they are so understated.’

Stephen Brook found some good Graves wines, but felt the Pessacs were a notch up in quality. ‘They had good concentration and were more consistent and persistent,’ he said. So it wasn’t surprising that 15 of the 16 Highly Recommendeds were from this superior zone (confusingly, wines labelled as Graves Cru Classé are from Pessac).

Andy Howard MW felt the best examples ‘are an absolute contender to white Burgundy’ and that, like Brook, there was a distinct difference between the wines from Graves and Pessac. Howard explained: ‘The Graves AC is a pretty big area and consequently the wines were very inconsistent. Some were 100% Sauvignon Blanc, some were heavily Semillon, some were lean and others very oaky. I’m not sure how consumers find their way through that?’

Brook agreed that there were ‘a few boring Graves’ that,

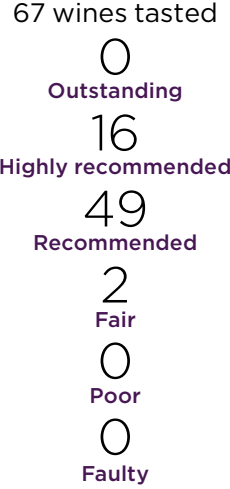
‘They have fantastic balance but are misunderstood because they are so understated’

Steven Spurrier

while enjoyable, were simple and fairly short term. ‘Those that were Semillon-dominant were fruity and aromatic but a bit short and lacked clarity and zest. I preferred those based on Sauvignon which had more acidity, freshness and vigour.’

Compared to the other white wines from Bordeaux, Brook felt there wasn’t much difference between Graves and Entre-deux-Mers: ‘You have more Semillon in the Graves and more Sauvignon with Entre-deux-Mers, but in terms of general quality and concentration, there’s not a lot between them – you can sometimes get an Entre-deux-Mers that is cheaper and better than a Graves.’ Spurrier disagreed, saying that Graves AC whites had more character. ‘Entre-deux-Mers whites can only sell on their fruit – they have no terroir. White Graves is definitely more gravelly. It’s a style of wine I like a lot and I always approach it as a sort of aperitif because it’s generally fresh and sappy.’

The scores



The tasters’ verdicts

Stephen Brook



Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996 and is Regional co-Chair for Bordeaux at the Decanter World Wine Awards. An awarded author of more than 30 books, his works include Complete Bordeaux, the definitive study of the region and in its second edition. Brook also fully revised the last two editions of Hugh Johnson’s Wine Companion.

Brook’s verdict

‘When the Pessac-Léognan appellation was

created in 1987, it essentially detached the northern part of the Graves from the southern. This caused outrage in the southern Graves, but time has justified the move, and this tasting again confirmed it. There are some very good whites in AC Graves, but the most concentrated, complex, structured wines almost invariably come from Pessac-Léognan. Only the best terroirs in the Graves allow wines to be oak-aged, and in general southern Graves whites should be enjoyed for their youthful freshness. Not so Pessac-Léognan, the best of which do develop more complexity with age.

‘If the Graves is about immediate pleasure, then for me its Sauvignon-based wines offered more satisfaction. In 2012 acidity was an essential component of the wines, and Sauvignon generates more than Sémillon. Sauvignon rules in much of Pessac-Léognan, and the best wines showed how exhilarating they can be, especially with some judicious oak-ageing.

‘There were some excellent crus classés, as one would expect, but it was interesting to note how many non-classed growths rivalled them in quality and complexity. With the prices of premier cru white Burgundy rising, lovers of complex whites could do worse than explore the recommendations here.’

Andy Howard MW



Howard has more than 30 years’ experience as a buyer at Marks & Spencer. Within the wine category he oversaw Bordeaux among other areas. He lives in London but also has a house in Gaillac, where he made wine for six vintages. Howard has recently retired from M&S to focus on consultancy through his business Vinetrades.

Howard’s verdict

‘As in 2007, 2012 was not a great year for red wines from this region, but dry whites

enjoyed good press at the time of the *en primeur* campaign a year ago. As a result, I had high hopes for this tasting of 2012 Bordeaux.

‘The tasting supported the creation of the Pessac-Léognan AC and Graves Cru Classé system as there was a lot of inconsistency in style and quality from the much larger Graves AC to the south. Despite this there were some excellent wines hailing from here which should provide a lot of the style of their more illustrious northern counterparts and very good value for money.

‘The area around the villages of Pessac and Léognan undoubtedly saw a step up in quality and consistency but left me expecting more complexity. It may be that some of the wines are rather young at the moment, although a number seemed to lack the concentration and structure to age for more than two or three years. Although, sadly, four of the 10 crus classés were not submitted, the six that were provided some benchmark examples, with lovely oak integration to match the vibrant acidity and powerful aromas.

‘When it is good, white Bordeaux provides a great alternative to Burgundy, particularly in price, and there were many Highly Recommended wines that displayed these qualities.’

Graves & Pessac whites 2012

Brook was pleasantly surprised by the oak use in the AC Graves samples. ‘The oaked Sauvignons were slightly more interesting than the oaked Semillons, which is interesting – because of their high acidity, it’s a bit trickier to oak Sauvignon.’ Conversely, he found quite a few over-oaked Sauvignons among the Pessacs: ‘Some wines had distinct oaky aromas which I didn’t like at all.’

Spurrier was less enthused by the oak on the basic Graves whites. ‘It certainly added something to the wine but it wasn’t anything that was really necessary.’ He added: ‘I’m not about to say that all châteaux in Graves should stop using oak in their whites, but there’s a freshness and a ‘Graves-ness’ about these wines that I appreciate which does not need oak.’ As for Pessac, less is again more according to Spurrier. ‘If I had a white wine vineyard in Pessac, I wouldn’t ferment in oak. The quality of the fruit is so good that it’s almost better preserved as fresh fruit and perhaps spending a few months in oak after that.’

Our judges felt this tasting has something for everyone and every budget, from straightforward aperitif wines to more food-friendly styles. As Howard noted: ‘Consumers need to look at our average scores, decide on the style they want and pick a producer. White Bordeaux is still a much-underrated style. When it’s done well it can be really fantastic – and it ages well too, with the best cellaring well for a decade or more.’

Entry criteria: producers and UK importers were invited to submit their Graves AC, Pessac-Léognan AC and Graves crus classés white wines from 2012

The crus classés of châteaux Haut-Brion, La Mission Haut-Brion, La Tour-Martillac and Domaine de Chevalier did not submit samples

Highly Recommended

17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Château Couhins-Lurton, Graves Cru Classé

Decanter average score: 17.75/20pts (92/100pts)

Individual judges’ scores: Stephen Brook 18 Andy Howard MW 17.75 Steven Spurrier 17.5

£31.49 Bibendum

Elegant nose of white flowers, ripe apricot and a hint of jasmine. Good ripeness on the palate, which has a spicy edge. Fine, piercing acidity supports and cuts the ripe fruit and gives excellent length. Drink 2014–2025 Alcohol 13.5%



Château Carbonnieux, Graves CC

17.5 (91) SB 18.25 AH 16.75 SS 17.5

£18 Berry Bros & Rudd, Millésima, Top Selection

Ripe lime and pear nose with discreet oak and hints of iris. Concentrated and balanced, with considerable complexity and admirable length. Drink 2015–2025 Alc 13.5%



Château Malartic-Lagravière, Graves CC

17.5 (91) SB 16.5 AH 17.25 SS 18.5

£18.50–£24 Albany Vintners, Nebuchadnezzar

Wines, Top Selection

Muted apple and lime nose. A beautifully poised wine with excellent concentration and layers of fruit that combine with high-quality oak, giving a long, lingering finish. Drink 2015–2020 Alc 13.5%



Château Bouscalt, Graves CC

17.25 (90+) SB 17 AH 17.5 SS 17

£25.70 Fine & Rare

Lovely ripe fruit flavours combine with toasty, fine-quality oak. Quite rich with great concentration and a long, lingering aftertaste, which emphasises the quality. Drink 2015–2025 Alc 13.5% ➤

Highly Recommended (continued) 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Château Brown, Pessac-Léognan 17.25 (90+) **SB** 17.5 **AH** 17.5 **SS** 16.75
POA Ellis of Richmond
Citrus-dominated with yellow fruits on the nose and palate. Displays good concentration and ample zest and flair. Ripe acidity gives a long finish that is both balanced and stylish. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Couhins, Graves CC 17.25 (90+) **SB** 17.5 **AH** 17 **SS** 17
£20 En Primeur
Ripe melon and citrus nose and a concentrated palate that has lift and freshness. Lovely acidity, vibrant lemon and lime zest fruit flavours. This has a good future. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13%



Château La Louvière, Pessac-Léognan 17.25 (90+) **SB** 17.5 **AH** 17.5 **SS** 17
£32.99 Bibendum
Delicate apple and quince aromas and a complex palate of tropical fruit and zippy acidity. Very well expressed with lovely balance. The long finish and mineral edge leaves you wanting another glass. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Lamothe-Bouscaut, Pessac-Léognan 17.25 (90+) **SB** 18.5 **AH** 16 **SS** 17
£19-£20 Thorman Hunt, Wined Up Here
Good weight and concentration on the palate is combined with zesty, lime fruit flavours and perfume. Stylish and imposing without being heavy handed. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Olivier, Graves CC 17.25 (90+) **SB** 16.75 **AH** 17.5 **SS** 17.75
£22-£23 Corkr, En Primeur
Complex nose blending white and yellow fruits, spice and seamless oak. Lovely ripeness to the fruit that is balanced by zesty, lively acidity; a very fine example of white Bordeaux. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13%



Château Baret, Pessac-Léognan 17 (90) **SB** 16.5 **AH** 17 **SS** 17.5
N/A UK +33(0)6 88 07 42 97
Vibrant, grassy characters on the palate combine with aromas of ripe tropical and quince fruits. Very good length with well-blended oak and good expression now and for the mid term. **Drink** 2015-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Cantelys, Pessac-Léognan 17 (90) **SB** 17 **AH** 16.75 **SS** 17.25
£12 Bibendum
White fruits with green flowers and a touch of honey make for an elegant nose. The palate is a leaner style – less weighty than some but with vibrancy and freshness. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13%



Château de Fieuzal, Pessac-Léognan 17 (90) **SB** 17.75 **AH** 16.75 **SS** 16.5
£29 Charles Taylor, Millésima, Morrisons, Top Selection
Elegant floral notes with a citric edge. Lean and intense, with a fine attack and considerable poise. The fruit is subdued but it has an appealing raciness and tension; a harmonious wine with style and persistence. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Château de France, Pessac-Léognan 17 (90) **SB** 17.5 **AH** 17 **SS** 16.5
£25 McKinley Vintners, Wined Up Here
The subtle nose promises a lot for the future. The palate is rich, firm and concentrated, with ripe citrus fruit and equally ripe acidity. You can identify the high-quality winemaking here. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 14%



Château La Garde, Pessac-Léognan 17 (90) **SB** 16.5 **AH** 17.25 **SS** 17.5
£20-£21 Berry Bros & Rudd, Thienot UK
Smoky, struck-match notes on the nose with a touch of iris. The palate is rich and dense with the weight of a premier cru white Burgundy and as much length. **Drink** 2015-2019 **Alc** 13%



Château Le Sartre, Pessac-Léognan 17 (90) **SB** 17.5 **AH** 16.75 **SS** 17
£15-£20 Fine & Rare, Top Selection
Greener notes on nose with nuances of lemon, pear and discreet oak. Good attack – fresh and concentrated – with ample ripe citrus fruit and tropical flavours. Stylish and long. This will go the distance. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Pont de Brion, Graves 17 (90) **SB** 17.25 **AH** 17 **SS** 17
£14.95 (2010) Jascots
Complex nose of lush apricot and yellow fruits. A serious wine with an attractive oaky bite. It may lack a little subtlety and charm but has depth and persistence and will age well. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 12.5%

Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	SB	AH	SS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Château Crabitey, Graves	16.75 (89)	17.5	16.5	16	A delicate nose of pear and apricots. A sleek, concentrated palate with fine acidity and poise. Integrated oak leads to a delightfully long, honeyed finish.	13.5%	2015-2020	£14-£18	Humble Grape, Maison Sichel
Château Ferran, Pessac-Léognan	16.75 (89)	16	16.5	17.5	Lime and apple bouquet with a touch of wild iris. Immediately pleasurable, it's hefty but the acidity gives a lightness of touch and it shows finesse.	13.5%	2014-2018	£20	Goedhuis
Château Gazin Rocquencourt, Pessac-Léognan	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	16.75	Lime aromas with evidence of stylish oak. Surprisingly complex, with a good middle palate showing hints of honey. Nice zesty finish.	13%	2015-2020	£18.50	Nebuchadnezzar
Château Lespault-Martillac, Pessac-Léognan	16.75 (89)	16.75	16	17.5	Mild apple and quince aromas. Good concentration on the palate showing a mineral thread and fresh acidity. A very good wine.	14%	2015-2020	£14	Millésima
Château Luchey-Halde, Pessac-Léognan	16.75 (89)	17.5	17	15.5	Lovely nose of apple, tropical fruit and toast. Good concentration on the palate with subtle quince and a touch of smokiness. Good length.	13%	2015-2025	N/A UK	www.luchey-halde.com
Château Magneau Julien, Graves	16.75 (89)	17	17.5	16	Grassy, zesty aromas with tinges of melon. Rich depth of fruit on the palate, balanced by tangy acidity on the finish. Good ageing potential.	12.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.chateau-magneau.com
Château St-Robert, Cuvée Poncet Deville, Graves	16.75 (89)	17	17	16.25	Elegant aromas of ripe stone fruits. Plump and forthright with ample, ripe apricot on the palate and a lively balancing acidity. A long, lingering finish.	14%	2015-2020	N/A UK	+33(0)5 56 76 63 36
Château de Cruzeau, Pessac-Léognan	16.5 (88)	15.75	17.5	16	A ripe, apricot-charged nose with honey undertones. A silky palate shows toasty oak, lively acidity and a hint of minerality. Good potential.	14%	2015-2020	£18.49	Bibendum
Château Haut-Bergey, Pessac-Léognan	16.5 (88)	17.75	16	16	Aromas of spicy white fruit and fresh lime. A citrus-focused palate with racy acidity and good minerality.	14%	2015-2022	£22.50-£35.99	Corkr, En Primeur, Fine & Rare
Château Haut Nouchet, Pessac-Léognan	16.5 (88)	15.5	16.75	17	Aromas of Granny Smith apple and lime on the nose. A lean style with good acidity and freshness. A richer-than-expected palate and subtle use of oak.	12.5%	2016-2020	N/A UK	www.hautnouchet.com
Château La Croix, Graves	16.5 (88)	16.5	16	16.75	Aromas of rich honeydew melon with some floral tones. A fleshy style with impressive concentration and well-integrated oak.	13%	2014-2018	N/A UK	+33 (0)5 56 63 29 36
Château Lafont Menaut, Pessac-Léognan	16.5 (88)	16.75	16.75	16.25	Powerful grassy aromas with a touch of bitter lemon. A sleek texture on the palate with rich lime tones. Flavoursome, pure and fresh.	13%	2014-2020	POA	Harrods
Château Le Bruilleau, Pessac-Léognan	16.5 (88)	17.75	16.25	15.5	Intense aromas of ripe pear lead to a palate of toasty lime and quince notes and a good deal of oak – a burly style. Shows great power and personality.	13.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.chateau_le_bruilleau.monsite-orange.fr
Château Lionne, Graves	16.5 (88)	16.75	16.5	16	Charming pear nose with delicate oak influence. Smoky, gunflint characters are emerging and there's a lick of minerality. Capacity to develop.	12.5%	2015-2018	£13.90	Haynes Hanson & Clark
Château Rahoul, Graves	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.75	16.25	Delicate lime and melon nose leads to a rich, suave palate which shows good concentration. Flavours of lime zest and grapefruit. Good ageing potential.	12.5%	2014-2018	£16	The Wine Society
Clos Floridene, Graves	16.5 (88)	15.5	17.5	16.75	A subtle nose showing apple notes and grassiness. Full bodied and weighty with great precision of flavour; it has the structure to develop well.	13%	2015-2020	£18-£21	Christopher Piper, The Wine Society
Domaine de la Solitude, Pessac-Léognan	16.25 (87)	15.75	16	17	Elegant citric nose which shows evidence of the oak ageing. There's a touch of sweetness on the palate which shows fresh, juicy fruit and balanced acidity.	13.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.domainedelasolitude.com
Château de Respide, Callipyge, Graves	16.25 (87)	16.75	16	15.75	Ripe pear and apricot aromas couple with notes of subtle oak. The palate is fresh and lively and shows good concentration which leads to a nutty finish.	12.5%	2015-2020	£15	Berry Bros & Rudd
Château de Rochemorin, Pessac-Léognan	16.25 (87)	15.25	17	16.5	A grassy freshness on the nose with a touch of lime. The palate is soft and textured with depth of fruit and demonstrates good structure and balance.	12.5%	2015-2018	£18.49	Bibendum
Château des Fougères, Clos Montesquieu, Graves	16.25 (87)	17	16	16	Fresh and crisp with a lean, assertive fruit nose. Strong citrus characters with tropical fruit on the palate. Tangy and sherbetty with well integrated oak.	13.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.chateaudesfougeres.fr
Château du Cros, Cuvée Mayne du Cros, Graves	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Fabulous power on the nose – zesty and citric with rich, ripe apricot. Lovely oak with lots of ripe fruit character – a well-balanced wine.	12.5%	2015-2020	N/A UK	www.chateauducros.com
Château Lafargue, Cuvée Alexandre, Pessac-Léognan	16.25 (87)	15.75	16.75	16	Big, red apples create a lively nose. The palate is elegant with a creamy, sweet touch and shows off a good mineral edge which adds complexity.	12.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.chateau-lafargue.com
Château La Fleur Jonquet, Graves	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.25	16.75	Hints of gun-metal and flint on the nose with a touch of ripe lime. Sweeter fruit appears on the palate, plus there's decent acidity and a lick of minerality.	13%	2015-2017	N/A UK	www.chateau-fleur.fr
Château Larrivet Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan	16.25 (87)	15.5	16	17	A rich nose of ripe apricot accompanied by a snip of green fruit. The palate is expressive and shows good acidity and length – a keeper for the mid term.	14.5%	2015-2018	£21.50-£25	Corkr, En Primeur
Château Roquetaillade La Grange, Graves	16.25 (87)	16.5	16	16	Powerful grassy and zesty aromas accompany the charm of ripe citrus. The palate is lean and fresh and backed by crisp acidity. Tangy and long.	12%	2014-2018	N/A UK	+33 (0)5 56 76 14 23
Château de Portets, Graves	16 (86)	16	16.25	16	White flowers, grass and a touch of oak on the nose. A pleasing wine with broad flavours, good acidity and the potential to evolve.	12.5%	2015-2017	N/A UK	www.chateaudoportets.fr
Château le Cossu, Cuvée Numérotée, Graves	16 (86)	15.75	16	16	Exotic flower and apple aromas exude freshness from the start. A supple wine which is well textured and displays lots of fresh fruit on the palate. Enjoyable.	12.5%	2014-2016	N/A UK	www.vignobles-guindeuil.com
Château Les Clauzots, Graves	16 (86)	16.25	16.5	15.5	Attractive white flower, melon and citrus fruit aromas. A rich, broad and concentrated palate with layers of lemon flavours and balanced acidity.	12.5%	2014-2016	£10.95	Jeroboams, Milroys of Soho
Château Lestang May, Graves	16 (86)	15.5	16.5	16.25	Uplifting grassy aromas accompanied by hints of blackcurrant leaf, apple and melon. A creamy palate showing good acidity and length.	13%	2014-2017	N/A UK	+33 (0)5 56 78 41 85
Château Rougemont, Graves	16 (86)	15.5	16.75	16	Zesty fruit and toasty oak dominate the nose accompanied by a touch of lime. A fleshy palate with rich, concentrated fruit. One to age for a couple of years.	13%	2014-2016	N/A UK	+33 (0)5 56 63 19 06
Château Tourteau Chollet, Graves	16 (86)	17	15.5	15.25	A zesty apple- and apricot-charged nose leads to a palate exploding with tropical fruit flavour. Charming with a good bite of acidity and a tangy finish.	13%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.vitisvintage.com
Château Brondelle, Graves	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16.5	A delicate nose of apple and fresh lime with a hint of sherbet. On the palate the oak brings complexity and texture. A classy wine.	13%	2014-2017	£13	Le Bon Vin
Château D'Arricaud, Cuvée Prestige, Graves	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15	16	An interesting nose of lime zest, melon and apple compote – akin to a New World style. Hints of coffee emerge on the palate. A unique style.	12.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.chateau-darricaud.fr
Château Magence, Graves	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15	16	Fresh, sleek and delicate apricot aromas with a touch of white flower. A pretty wine with good concentration and a long tangy finish.	12.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.magence.com
Château Roche-Lalande, Pessac-Léognan	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15.5	Aromas of ripe apple and apricot with a touch of toast. The palate displays intense tropical fruits and notes of vanilla. Moderate length.	13%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.chateaucecastres.fr

Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	SB	AH	SS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Vieux Château Gaubert, Graves	15.75 (85+)	15.75	16	15.75	Smoky, struck-match aromas are joined on the palate by notes of mango and pear. An inviting wine – rich, suave and assertive with a lingering finish.	13%	2014-2018	£16	Bennetts
Château de Malle, M de Malle, Graves	15.5 (85)	14.5	16.25	15.5	Bundles of juicy lemon and lime on the nose. Rounded and weighty with refreshing acidity and ripe fruit. Should develop well over a year or two.	13%	2014-2016	N/A UK	www.chateau-de-malle.fr
Château de Rouillac, Pessac-Léognan	15.5 (85)	14	16.25	16	The nose discreetly shows off the use of oak and displays hints of lime. A stylish and lean wine with zippy acidity, it's elegant and has good length.	13%	2015-2019	N/A UK	www.chateauderouillac.com
Château Doms, Graves	15.5 (85)	15.5	16.5	14.5	Aromas of apple compote and melon softly delight the nose. Lush and rounded, showing good complexity on the palate – it will develop.	12.5%	2014-2016	N/A UK	www.chateau-doms.fr
Château Haut Lagrange, Pessac-Léognan	15.5 (85)	15.5	15.5	15.75	Bright citrus fruits and white flowers give a fresh, attack on the nose. The palate has a kick of vibrant acidity and good crisp fruit. Early drinking.	12%	2014-2017	£21	Vine Trail
Château Lagrange, Cuvée Prestige, Graves	15.5 (85)	15	15.75	16	Aromas of melon and summer fruits, as well as strong evidence of the oak. Fleshy stone fruits come through on the palate with a zesty acidity.	12%	2014-2016	N/A UK	www.chateaulagrange-graves.com
Château Langlet, Graves	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Bounds of citrus aromas fill the nose – grapefruit, lemon, lime and a touch of apple too. The palate is fresh with a sleek texture. A well-made wine.	12.5%	2014-2017	£14.25	Berry Bros & Rudd, Top Selection
Château La Rose Sarron, Graves	15.5 (85)	15	15.75	16	Some grassy hints on the nose which marry nicely with the notes of peach and honeydew melon. Fresh and juicy on the palate – ready for drinking.	13%	2014	N/A UK	www.la-rose-sarron.com
Château Trébiac, Graves	15.5 (85)	15	15.75	15.5	Fragrant white flowers on the nose alongside a touch of melon. A broad palate with good depth and nice concentration.	12.5%	2014-2016	£10	Maison Sichel
Château de Cérons, Graves	15.25 (84)	15	15.25	15.75	Aromas of white flowers and a squeeze of lime. Supple and fruity with fleshy summer fruit flavours and a hint of lemon rind on the finish.	12.5%	2014-2016	£15.50	Field Morris & Verdin
Château des Places, Graves	15.25 (84)	15.75	15	15	Subdued nose: clean and fresh but lacking character. Palate is similar – lacks some concentration and is rather lacklustre. Probably picked with high yields.	12.5%	2014-2016	N/A UK	www.vignobles-reynaud.fr
Château Chanteloiseau, Graves	15 (83)	16	15	14	Lively apple fruit punches out from the nose with a hint of mandarin. The palate demonstrates precision and finesse with a tangy acidity.	12%	2014-2017	£10	Borough Wines
Clos Marsalette, Pessac-Léognan	15 (83)	15.5	15.75	14	Luscious apple compote aromas with a touch of honey. A rich, plump and concentrated palate showing ripe, sweet fruit with evolving notes of quince.	12.5%	2014-2017	£17-£20 (2011)	Corkr, Fine & Rare
Domaine de la Chouette, Graves	15 (83)	15.75	14.5	15	Lemony aromas with notes of sweet fruit. Rich and firm in style with good concentration and the acidity balances it well.	13%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.domainedelachouette.fr

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)
■ Château Chante L'Oiseau, Graves 14.75 (82)
■ Château Moutin, Graves 14.75 (82)

For full UK stockist details, see pXXX

My top three
Stephen Brook

- **Château de France, Pessac-Léognan** For some years Arnaud Thomassin has been making excellent wines, red and white, at this well-located Léognan property. The white sees a fair amount of oak, but it's judiciously handled and never dominates the fruit. It's also a wine that offers excellent value. **17.5/20 (91/100) Drink** 2015-2022
- **Château Couhins-Lurton, Graves CC** The indefatigable André Lurton probably saved this estate from extinction in the 1960s, as it was in danger of being grubbed up. He has been making first-rate pure Sauvignon wines here ever since. The wonderfully elegant 2012 is no exception. **18 (93) Drink** 2014-2025
- **Château Brown, Pessac-Léognan** Since 2005, négociant Jean-Christophe Mau has put a huge effort into improving quality at this formerly obscure Léognan estate. It's a wine that usually offers immediate pleasure rather than ageing potential, but is none the worse for that. **17.5 (91) Drink** 2015-2022

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

My top three
Andy Howard MW

- **Clos Floridene, Graves** An excellent example of why Denis Dubordieu is in such high demand as a consultant, this vibrant Graves is close to Barsac yet here they produce a lovely dry white wine with grassy flavours and aromatics, subtle oak and lively acidity. **17.5/20 (91/100) Drink** 2015-2020
- **Château Magneau Julien, Graves** Another fine, elegant wine showing that the best wines are not exclusively Graves Cru Classé or Pessac-Léognan. Vibrant and aromatic, this Sauvignon-dominant wine had depth, richness and length, and has the potential to develop well for several years. **17.5 (91) Drink** 2014-2018
- **Château La Louvière, Pessac-Léognan** A famous name that continues to deliver the goods in the modern age. Of particular note are the subtle but noticeable oak characters, very typical of fine white Bordeaux, which combine beautifully with riper tropical fruits and zesty acidity. A complex, characterful wine. **17.5 (91) Drink** 2015-2022

My top three
Steven Spurrier

- **Château Brondelle, Graves** This Bordeaux white blend had more complexity than most (though not as much as Denis Dubordieu's Clos Floridene, to which I gave 16.75) and struck the perfect balance of white summer fruits and a hint of oak to bring texture and complexity. Great value too: buy a case and drink over three years. **16.5/20 (88/100) Drink** 2014-2017
- **Château Ferran, Pessac-Léognan** This historic estate whose vines adjoin those of Latour-Martillac has impressed me in recent years with its florality, precision and lifted elegance that shows well young but can age beautifully. The 2012 is a very well-made blend to rival the Graves Crus Classes. **17.5 (91) Drink** 2014-2018
- **Château Malartic-Lagravière, Graves CC** Belgian Alfred-Alexandre Bonnie and his family have invested with passion since their purchase of Malartic-Lagravière in 1997, and this shows in their wines. This Sauvignon-dominant white is always among the very best in Bordeaux, with great poise and class. **18.5 (95) Drink** 2015-2020

Expert summary: Jane Anson

No Outstanding wines, and sadly not all of the crus classés on show, but still a good set of results with Pessac-Léognan taking the lion's share of the highest marks



Jane Anson is the Bordeaux correspondent for *Decanter* and *Decanter.com* and author of *Bordeaux Legends*

ALTHOUGH THIS WAS overall a successful tasting, with 16 Highly Recommended wines, and just two seen as Fair, it is slightly disappointing that none were rated Outstanding. The results seem to confirm the general, opposing, rule about red and white Bordeaux vintages: of the past three challenging years, 2012 is widely seen as being the most successful for the reds, so perhaps the whites didn't quite creep up to the heights they achieved in 2011 and 2013. Despite this, there are some excellent wines here, with Pessac-Léognan expectedly showing a stronger set of results than the larger, less well-funded region of Graves. André Lurton (who lobbied for the creation of Pessac-Léognan back in the 1980s) should be particularly pleased with these results, as both his Couhins-Lurton and La Louvière made it into the Highly Recommended category, with his Cruzeau and Rochemorin not too far behind. His is a name to trust in white Bordeaux, even at lower price levels in AC Bordeaux and Entre-deux-Mers. It's also reassuring to see that all of the Graves crus classés tasted made it into the top tier of results, though it seems a shame that more were not presented, with only six of the 10 classified white properties on display. Perhaps we would have seen an Outstanding from one of the missing four? Classified whites from this region are increasingly able

to stand up against the best whites in France, so it's great to see them doing so consistently well here. Price-wise, from the top wines, Château Couhins and Chateau Olivier (for me, a white that rarely fails to deliver) offer some of the best value, while Château Brown proves yet again that it deserves to be considered among the classified names, if the rankings were ever reassessed. Château Cantelys is also excellent value for money, especially when compared to its cru classé stablemate Smith Haut Lafitte which was not submitted. In the basic AC Graves category, it's worth pointing out Château Pont de Brion, a little-known family-run estate in the southern half of the Graves, near Langon, and the only one of its peers to receive a Highly Recommended. Not surprising, perhaps, when you consider the leaps made in white winemaking over the past decade, but it is striking that it was the northern part of Graves (ie, Pessac-Léognan) that scored all the highs in 2012 according to our experts. **D**

‘Graves crus classés are increasingly able to stand up against the best whites in France’



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