

White Graves & Pessac 2009

While much has been written about the reds from this lauded Bordeaux vintage, Christelle Guibert and James Lawther MW find plenty of interest among the whites



AT THE TIME of the *en primeur* tastings in April 2010, Bordeaux 2009 received great hype, with critics falling over themselves to laud the wines. Such praise has continued ever since, but for the most part, the chatter has centred around the red wines. So how about the whites? How did they perform in 2009?

The wines James Lawther MW and I tasted in Bordeaux in September 2011 lived up to our expectations and proved that 2009 is a vintage for white wine lovers to be truly excited about. Lawther, the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Bordeaux, who has covered the *en primeur* tastings over the past 14 years, noted that while 'the 2009s don't have the zest and acidity of the '07s, '08s or '10s, the best are fresh and balanced'.

The Sauvignon Blanc suffered a little from overripening in a vintage that better suited red grapes, but when blended with Sémillon, which prefers ripeness, it resulted in some rounded, succulent, fruity wines for drinking in the short to medium term. A handful can even age further.

The tasting showed two distinctive styles: zesty, lighter wines with little or no wood contact; and the serious,

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These wines were the best of those sampled, blind, at a tasting organised by the Syndicat Viticole de Pessac-Léognan in September

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complex oaked wines that need time to mellow. Overall, the oak was well handled in all the examples we've selected. The lighter styles, with just a kiss or no wood influence, let the terroir shine through, while the more sophisticated Pessacs in particular had enough stuffing to accommodate their long exposure to oak.

The white wines of Graves and Pessac-Léognan are often seen as secondary to the region's red wines. Yet some of the most sought-after estates produce almost the same quantity of white as red, with retail prices for the whites sometimes even eclipsing them. In our tasting, the Graves whites were more inconsistent than the sub-regional appellation of Pessac-Léognan, which produced serious wines of greater depth and complexity (supporting the fact that in the 1959 Graves classification, the nine classified whites are all from Pessac-Léognan). However, while the price of white Pessac can stretch to £100, the best straightforward Graves represent excellent value for money at £10 to £20. Our top wines from both areas listed here were harmonious, delicious and packed with flavour – just what you want from a glass of white Bordeaux.

Christelle Guibert is Decanter's tastings director, and James Lawther MW is the DWWA Regional Chair for Bordeaux. The scores listed below are the average of the pair's verdicts, tasting separately, and the notes are compiled from both.

Guibert & Lawther's top 2009 whites

Graves



Château Crabitey ★★★★★ 17.5/20pts
N/A UK +33 5 56 67 18 64
Lively, elegant, fresh and restrained. Citrus aroma and flavour with ripe apple, and nice minerality too. Long, linear and persistent. Well defined. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alcohol:** 13%



Clos Floridène ★★★★★ 17
£15-£23 Christopher Piper, Decorum Vintners, Fine & Rare, Goedhuis, Jeroboams, Marc Fine Wine, Swig, Wine Invest
Fine, complex but discreet nose. Zesty citrus fruit and apple. Oak is present but integrated. Ripe and supple attack then a long, fresh finish. Pure and balanced. **Drink:** 2012-2018. **Alc:** 13%



Château de Chantegrive, Caroline ★★★★★ 17
£15-£23 Alexander Wines, Fine & Rare, Millesima
Great typicity. Pungent aromatic nose of peach, pear and exotic fruit notes. Rich, full and fat on the palate, showing plenty of ripe fruit characters. Middling acidity and decent length. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 13%



Château Toumilon ★★★★★ 17
£10.95 Oliver & Bird
Crisp, fresh and characterful floral and citrus notes on the nose. Good fruit weight and nice complexity on the palate. Dry and minerally with a honeyed nuance on the finish. Good length and balance. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 12.5%

“The top wines from both Graves & Pessac were harmonious, delicious and packed with flavour”



Château St-Robert, Poncet Deville ★★★ 16
N/A UK www.chateau-saint-robot.com
Rich, vivid and expressive. Modern allure. Peach and pear aromas. Attractive note of oak. Broad, ripe palate. Medium acidity but balanced and a long length. **Drink:** 2012-2014. **Alc:** 13.5%

White Graves & Pessac-Léognan 2009

Pessac-Léognan



Château Smith Haut Lafitte ★★★★★ 18
£60-£95 Widely available
Rich, full and intense. Creamy but fresh peach and pear notes. Ripe, opulent palate with exuberant fruit. Middling acidity but balanced. Stylish. **Drink:** 2012-2018. **Alc:** 14%



Domaine de Chevalier ★★★★★ 18
£58-£75 Widely available
A class act. Refined nose of pear and integrated, spicy oak. Very pure. Citrus-pear palate is round, complex and intense. Lingering acidity and beautiful minerality. **Drink:** 2013-2022. **Alc:** 14%



Château Couhins-Lurton ★★★★★ 17.5
£22 Bibendum
Lively, zesty, apple and grapefruit nose, highlighting the Sauvignon. Hint of integrated oak. Good depth of fruit on the palate. Good weight, and well balanced. Long, fresh and persistent. **Drink:** 2012-2018. **Alc:** 13%



Château Brown ★★★★★ 17
£21-£30 En Primeur, Fine Wine Shop, Soho Wine Supply
Foral-honeyed nose and tropical fruit. More citrusy Sauvignon palate. Lovely texture but powerful, rich and zesty. Good balance and length, oak is still very much present but will soften with time. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alc:** 13%



Château Latour Martillac ★★★★★ 17
£25-£30 En Primeur, Fine & Rare, Millesima, Swig
Ripe, fresh and harmonious. Lemony, with a hint of herbaceous as well as pear-apple aromas and flavours. Taut and long now with a nice freshness to it. Should evolve well. **Drink:** 2012-2018. **Alc:** 13.5%



Château Malartic-Lagravière ★★★★★ 17
£53-£56 Widely available
Discreet citrus-apple nose with spiciness from the oak. Full and fat palate. Round, pure, long and vivacious. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alc:** 14%



Château Olivier ★★★★★ 17
£23-£24 En Primeur, Fine & Rare, Millesima, Swig, Uncorked
Great typicity showing the white Bordeaux character of apple and pear fruit, and minerality. Fresh and precise with good acidity and a long, lively finish. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alc:** 13%



Château Carbonnieux ★★★★★ 16.5
£25-£27 Widely available
Precise and fresh with stony minerality. Lighter in weight than others. Elegant and fresh palate, but has length, persistence and nice minerality on the finish. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alc:** 13%



Château La Garde ★★★★★ 16.5
£28 Berry Bros & Rudd, Champagnes & Châteaux, Swig
Aromatic Sauvignon nose of grapefruit and a hint of boxwood. Palate is lively, fresh and long, with some spicy oak characters on the finish and a nice, zesty minerality. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 13%



Château La Louvière ★★★★★ 16.5
N/A UK www.andreurlurton.com
Zesty and elegant, Sauvignon-based nose. Grapefruit notes on the palate allied with a pure, soft texture. Good length and line and real freshness on the finish. A very elegant style. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alc:** 13%



Domaine de la Solitude ★★★★★ 16.5
£27.49 Corking Wines, D Byrne, Good Wine Shop, Millesima, Theatre of Wine
Precise and herbal with lemon and apple fruit and creaminess. Elegant yet weighty. Apple-pear aroma carried on to the palate with a honey finish. Decent length. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 13%



Château Bouscaut ★★★ 16
£27 Fine & Rare
Creamy, vanilla-citrus nose with hints of tropical fruit. Palate is ripe, full and fat. There's good fruit weight but the oak is a touch pervasive at the moment. Nice nervy minerality on the finish. **Drink:** 2012-2016. **Alc:** 13%



Château de Rochemorin ★★★ 16
£15.75 Bibendum
Round, fresh and balanced. Open and fruity in style. High acidity with vibrant and fresh apple and lime fruit. Good length. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 13%



Château Larrivet Haut-Brion ★★★ 16
£27-£32 Bancroft, Bibendum, Christopher Piper, En Primeur, Fine & Rare, Slurp, Swig, Wine Invest
Ripe and round in an attractively fruity style. Citrus-apple aromas and flavours. Oak is present but integrated. A powerful wine though elegant on the finish. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 14%



Château de Rouillac ★★★ 15.5
N/A UK www.chateaurouillac.com
Fresh and balanced, lighter style with lemony aromas. Zesty and elegant with a direct acidity. Correct, though not as complex as the other Pessacs. But still very approachable and enjoyable. **Drink:** 2012-2014. **Alc:** 13%