

JULY 2023

# CHEVALIER

BORDEAUX







## BORDEAUX

For all the preconceptions about Bordeaux, the region is impossible to paint with a broad brush. With over one hundred thousand hectares planted to the vine and more than five thousand domaines or châteaux, it is home to just about every kind of wine producer imaginable. For each majestic château equipped with a team of enologists, board of governors, and stable of marketers, there's a small family domaine focused, above all else, on agriculture and vinifying white, red, and dessert wines that speak to their specific terroirs. And these independent vigneron are made up of both locals, whose families have worked the earth in Bordeaux for generations—Gombaude-Guilhot and Gravelle-Lacoste, for example—and relative newcomers, like the Hubaus of Château Moulin Pey-Labrie, who were drawn to Bordeaux because of its illustrious past and promising future.

While the mention of Bordeaux may conjure visions of grand reds, the region is capable of producing exquisite dry white wines, too. These account for roughly one of every ten bottles that come out of Bordeaux, and the most serious are made south of the city, on the left bank of the Garonne River. Made from Sémillon blended with Sauvignon and the occasional splash of Muscadelle, these *blancs* can be crisp, mineral, and zesty, like Gravelle-Lacoste's Graves, or more saline, complex, and age-worthy, like Alliance's Définition cuvée. Both, it turns out, are perfectly suited to fresh seafood or *apéro* hour.

The reds, meanwhile, range from Gombaude-Guilhot's classic, mineral, and generous Pomerol (right bank), with notes of blackberries, pepper, and cocoa, to Château Aney's Cabernet-driven Haut-Médoc (left bank), which evokes blackcurrant, black cherries, and tobacco.

All six wines in this month's club show the diversity to be found in Bordeaux from some of the most vibrant, forward-thinking, and terroir-focused family domaines in the region.

—TOM WOLF



## 2021 GRAVES BLANC ♦ CHÂTEAU GRAVILLE-LACOSTE \$23

BORDEAUX IS OFTEN thought of as red-wine territory. One of France's most renowned wine regions, it boasts many of the most coveted Cabernets and Merlots in the world. Yet this slice of the country's Atlantic coast also produces very worthy whites that are perfect as apéritifs or paired with the local catch, like cod. If you want to sample the region's best *blancs*, look no further than Graves, an appellation south of the left bank's prestigious châteaux.



Although the view here is not as awe-inspiring as it is in various other wine regions—Bordeaux is relatively flat—the ground is hallowed, with clay-and-limestone soils that are ideal for growing Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscadelle: grapes that are used for both sweet Sauternes and dry Graves. All three varieties feature in this white from Hervé Dubourdieu's Château Gravelle-Lacoste.

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## 2021 BORDEAUX BLANC "DÉFINITION"

♦ DOMAINE DE L'ALLIANCE \$48

IN FRENCH, *alliance* is the word for both a wedding ring and a union or pact. The estate is aptly named, considering that Daniel Alibrand, an Atlantic coast fisherman from Tours, and Valérie Alibrand, a native Bordelaise, dreamed of one day getting married and producing world-class Sauternes and dry, whittled whites. Valérie inherited old vines from Fargues, a quiet village halfway between Sauternes and Langon, and fourteen vintages later, they've upheld their alliance in all senses of the word.



Producing organically farmed, chiseled wines that far exceed what seems possible for white Bordeaux, this couple inspires us year after year. Made from hand-picked and vigilantly sorted Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc, the deceptively saline *Définition* co-ferments in neutral, open-top *fûts* and, once racked, is left untouched in a cool cellar so as not to disturb the peaceful lees in blissful slumber. Created with love, the resulting wine tastes crystal-clean and is the perfect *définition* of Valérie and Daniel's commitment to terroir-driven wines and the pact they made years ago.

## 2015 HAUT-MÉDOC ♦ CHÂTEAU ANEY \$27

WE FOUND OURSELVES with an uncommon treat on our hands when this red wine arrived in Berkeley last summer. First, it's not often that we are able to import bottles that have aged beautifully over many years at the domaine where they were made. Second, this cuvée represents the only wine we import from the famed left bank of Bordeaux, between Saint-Julien and Margaux in the heart of



the Médoc, where the moderate climate of the riverbank and gravelly soils are perfectly suited to Cabernet Sauvignon—the leading grape in this blend.

The label says Château, and despite the stunning price, this bottling holds up to the noble moniker while also being honest, accessible, and terroir-driven Bordeaux. Eight years old, it is in a magical place today, showing a more velvety and relaxed side than it did when it was first released. Evoking notes of blackcurrant, black cherries, and tobacco, this Haut-Médoc will pair beautifully with lentil soup, rib eyes, or lamb stew.

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## 2017 LALANDE-DE-POMEROL ♦ CHÂTEAU BELLES-GRAVES \$41

A “SATELLITE APPELLATION” to the noble Pomerol AOC, Lalande-de-Pomerol produces reds that, at their best, mimic Pomerol’s robust, earthy flavors at a fraction of the price. While there is more variation in terroir within the two appellations than between them, Lalande tends to have more gravel and sand compared to Pomerol’s heavier clay soils.

Château Belles-Graves—aptly named after its vineyards’ abundant gravel, which is notorious for holding the sun’s heat into the night—sits on the other side of a small river from the renowned estates of Pomerol, and while the hype



and hordes of collectors may not cross the bridge over La Barbanne, quality certainly does. Made from mostly Merlot and a splash of Cabernet Franc, this velvety and refined *rouge* is approachable now despite having years of beautiful life ahead. Its notes of black cherries, stones, and a touch of tobacco, along with its fine acidity, make it a versatile red at table but also wonderful on its own. Fine Bordeaux need not cost a fortune, nor does it need decades of bottle age to be delicious.



2008 CANON FRONSAC ♦ CHÂTEAU MOULIN PEY-LABRIE \$45



A FEW MILES WEST of Pomerol and just above the Dordogne River on Bordeaux's right bank lie the vineyards of Grégoire and Bénédicte Hubau. Unlike this mostly flat part of France dominated by terroirs of clay and gravel, the Hubaus' vines are planted along limestone slopes. When you view them from their home ("château") at the top of the hill, you will immediately understand that this is a site for great wine. In addition to the noteworthy terroir, the Hubaus' Château Moulin Pey-Labrie stands out for the vibrance and freshness of the wines

it produces. Imagine the small, avant-garde farmers typically found in the Loire or Beaujolais transposed onto a Bordeaux landscape, and you have the Hubau family. For decades, they have been widely regarded as pioneers of progressive farming and winemaking in this often-staid region. Grégoire and Bénédicte farm the old Merlot and Malbec vines that make up this cuvée on upper-slope sites rich in limestone. This *rouge* abounds with beautiful aromas of strawberries and cassis along with a certain woodsiness, and it feels deep and soulful—the way old-school Bordeaux should.

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2017 POMEROL ♦ CHÂTEAU GOMBAUDE-GUILLOT \$123

A PROPER CELLAR is a wine's home: a nurturing place of safety and comfort where it can travel through all its life stages, evolving and readying itself for your table. The Laval family has offered from their cellar this Pomerol that is but a few steps into its journey, still youthful and confident and ready to roll for the next several years.

For the moment, watch how it develops in the glass, bursting with scents of graphite, currants, plum, and pomegranate, and sporting a finely tannic backbone and lively acidity. It's just begging for roast meat, chicken, chops—and a deep thirst.





2021 Graves Blanc <i>Château Graville-Lacoste</i>	60% Sémillon, 35% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Muscadell	45- to 48-year-old vines Clay, limestone on fissured rock	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–50° F Decant optional	Orange zest, pear, white apricot Zingy, bracing, mineral	Drink now through 2025
2021 Bordeaux Blanc “Définition” <i>Domaine de l’Alliance</i>	50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Sémillon	50-year-old vines Gravel, clay, sand	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Cherry blossom, sweet citrus, sea spray Saline, chalky, clean	Drink now through 2030
2015 Haut-Médoc <i>Château Aney</i>	65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot	Vines planted in 1976 Gravel	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Blackcurrant, black cherries, tobacco Stony, firm, velvety, succulent	Drink now through 2030
2017 Lalande- de-Pomerol <i>Château Belles-Graves</i>	88% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc	40-year-old vines Clay, gravel	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Dark fruits, stones, leather, forest floor Silky, muscular, complex, refined	Drink now through 2035
2008 Canon Fronsac <i>Château Moulin Pey-Labrie</i>	Merlot	65-year-old vines Clay, limestone, molasse	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Black truffle, plum, freshly turned earth, campfire, bay leaf Supple, elegant, smooth tannin	Drink now through 2030
2017 Pomerol <i>Château Gombaude-Guillot</i>	85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc	40-year-old vines Flint, clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant recommended	Violets, blackberry, milled white pepper, cocoa, ripe bell pepper Rich, deep, powerful, fine but grippingly youthful tannin	Drink now through 2040

front cover: Château Graville-Lacoste. © MICHAËL BOUDOT

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inner panel, right: Xavier Piton. © CHÂTEAU BELLES-GRAVES

far left, top: The Dubourdieu family. © MICHAËL BOUDOT

far left, bottom: Daniel Alibrand. © DIXON BROOKE

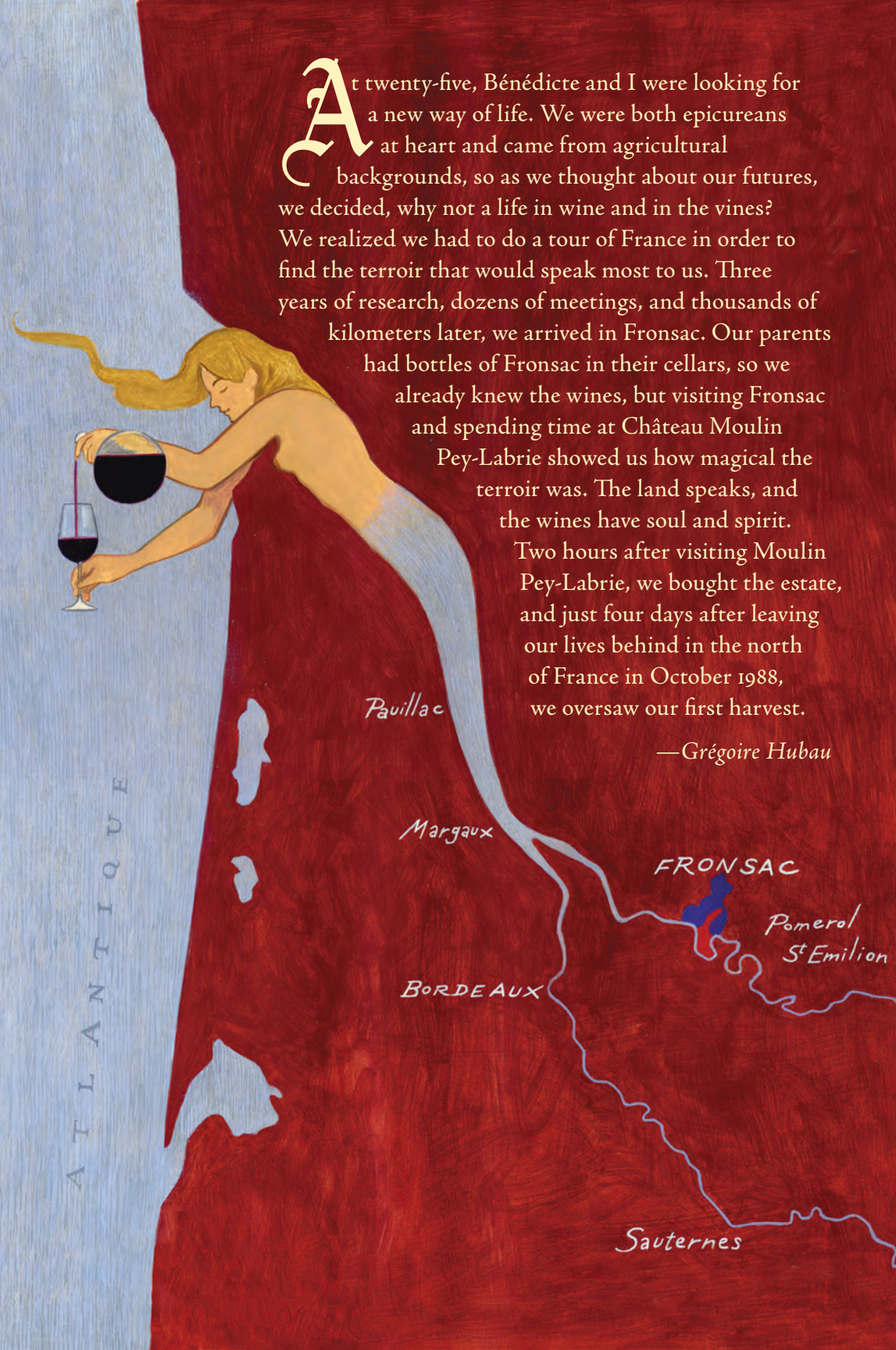
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near left, top: Bénédicte and Grégoire Hubau. © JANE BERG

near left, bottom: Olivier Techer, sixth generation of the Laval family to make wine at Château Gombaude-Guillot. © GARRETT PIERCE

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At twenty-five, Bénédicte and I were looking for a new way of life. We were both epicureans at heart and came from agricultural backgrounds, so as we thought about our futures, we decided, why not a life in wine and in the vines? We realized we had to do a tour of France in order to find the terroir that would speak most to us. Three years of research, dozens of meetings, and thousands of kilometers later, we arrived in Fronsac. Our parents had bottles of Fronsac in their cellars, so we already knew the wines, but visiting Fronsac and spending time at Château Moulin Pey-Labrie showed us how magical the terroir was. The land speaks, and the wines have soul and spirit.

Two hours after visiting Moulin Pey-Labrie, we bought the estate, and just four days after leaving our lives behind in the north of France in October 1988, we oversaw our first harvest.

—Grégoire Hubau