

# A Gift From Nature

Bordeaux En Primeur 2016

*by Hubert Li*







*Library cellar at Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte. (All Photos by Peter Li)*

## Bordeaux En Primeur 2016

When I visited Bordeaux in late March, people talked about the 2016 Bordeaux as having produced wonderful cabernet sauvignon, but having spent a week there to taste the wines, there is much more to celebrate than just the cabernets!

The 2016 vintage is defined by a cool and wet start to the season, followed by a very dry and rather hot summer. Flowering in the early season took place quickly and evenly, indicating a vintage with good production. July and August was very dry and hot (2016 was the driest

summer in Bordeaux since 1893), but the best terroirs had the water reserves in the soil from the earlier season to keep the vines in excellent health. A little rain in mid-September completed the vintage and brought just enough water to the vines for the grapes to fully ripen. Hot summer usually means higher alcohol, but surprisingly not for this vintage, thanks to the hot days and cool nights, so this unique characteristic is like no other vintage before!

This is no doubt one of the greatest vintages since the turn of the century, with the quality surpassing even the 2015 for

some appellations. There is a general consensus among chateaux owners and winemakers that this vintage has the concentration, density and tannin structure of the 2010, combined with only a touch above 13% alcohol for the cabernet grapes that gave wonderful freshness and acidity to the wines, just like the style of Bordeaux wines produced several decades ago. Tannins are smooth to silky among all wines. This is a year when all appellations excel, from the daily drinking wines to the first growths. As with share placements in the stock market, you have

to support your broker on some harder to move stocks to be allocated the hard to get ones. Accordingly, we will be buying this vintage to secure our future allocation on hard to get wines. If you want to do the same, buy selectively, and we will guarantee your allocation of the same wine for the 2017 vintage.





*Jean-Hubert Delon, owner of Chateau Leoville Las Cases.*



*Tasting at Chateau Les Ormes de Pez in Saint Estephe, a property of the Cazes family.*

## The Left Bank

Cabernet Sauvignon is the main grape varietal in many of the classified growths in the left bank, and this year the quality is simply outstanding! At Cos d'Estournel, it is very interesting to compare the 2016 vintage with the 2010, both being equally intense and tannic, but the 2016 is much more elegant old-world style. The blend is 76% cabernet sauvignon, 23% merlot and 1% cabernet franc, and alcohol is at a low 13.0%, which is unheard of for hot vintages, and this gave wonderful freshness to the wine. Their second label Pagodes de Cos has always been produced from the same clearly identified terroir of 35-year old vines, and this continues to reflect the personality of the grand vin. In 2016, the blend is 50% cabernet sauvignon, 46.5% merlot and a touch of petit verdot and

cabernet franc, and this will offer great pleasure for 20 years easily while we wait for the grand vin to age.

Montrose is gorgeous with multiple layers of black fruits, but only time will tell whether this will be better than their fabulous 2014 vintage. Calon Segur can often be quite closed when young, but not for 2016 with its refined tannins and freshness. The wine is big on entry through to mid-palate and the aftertaste lingers for 30 seconds or more.

It is worth mentioning that Lafon Rochet continues to be another wine to watch among the good value classified growths. Elegance is of higher importance than power here and it is a very refined beverage to be enjoyed at leisure. This year, Chateau Lynch Bages is undergoing



*Vat room in Chateau Pontet Canet.*



*Tasting with Alfred Tesseron at Chateau Pontet Canet.*

major re-construction, hence the wine is being served at their other property Les Ormes de Pez in Saint Estephe. It is a joy to taste this wine with great intensity, rich elegant black fruits, spiced up with a touch of tobacco and pepper. What really surprised me is the quality of tannins this year, which gave a much silkier finish even compared to 2009 and 2010. This wine will be on my shopping list for sure.

There is a lot to like about Pichon Lalande this year. This year the blend is 75% cabernet sauvignon, 21% merlot and 4% cabernet franc. I have not tasted a wine so rich here, while maintaining great purity and silkiness. It will be ranked among the best vintages alongside 1982 and 1996. We should not overlook their second wine Reserve de la Comtesse, which contains

54% cabernet sauvignon this year, a relative high percentage among all the second wines, and this explains the intensity and complexity showing here.

Across the road at Pichon Baron, it has a more powerful expression of black fruits and minerals, in trade for more apparent tannins.

Pontet Canet is spectacular this year with their biodynamic winemaking philosophy. The black fruits is incredibly rich and with a round and opulent mid-palate, followed by a finish that lingers on for a minute. Only time will tell if it is as good as the 100-point 2009 and 2010.

Mouton Rothschild is a candidate for wine of the vintage. This is never an easy wine to taste during en primeurs but this year the richness of black fruits is already showing through, incredibly

dense, with the extra sweet touch that is very rare for Mouton, a similar character also found in 2009 and 1982. The quality of Clerc Milon and D'Armailhac kept improving, thanks to more stringent grape selection. Both wines are rich and charming.

Leoville Lascases and Ducru Beaucaillou are the two most impressive wines from the Saint Julien appellation. The former being very muscular and tight as usual during en primeurs, while the latter is more fruit rich and pure, a bigger version of the 1996. The second label of Ducru Beaucaillou: Croix de Beaucaillou, is a serious wine produced from dedicated plots around the chateau and the quality is comparable to a classified growth.

The quality is maintained at the same high

level in the Margaux appellation. D'Issan has produced a big powerful wine while maintaining its elegance and style of this appellation. What I find equally impressive is their second wine, the Blason d'Issan, which is almost as good as the grand vin in every way, and I wonder why they didn't blend them together.

Giscours was a big hit in 2015, and they managed to produce a wine of equally high standards this year, perhaps less fragrant at this early stage, but more dense and pure.

Only at Chateau Margaux the cabernet sauvignon can show so much elegance and precision. Thanks to the relatively low alcohol, the wine showed great freshness and purity just like the 1996 vintage, but with high level of well integrated tannins.





*Tasting with Guillaume Poutier at Chateau Les Carmes Haut Brion.*

## **Pessac Leognan**

The wines from Pessac are also outstanding. Usually I find Haut Brion to be more refined and elegant, whereas La Mission Haut Brion to be more powerful, but interestingly this year Haut Brion has both and this has to be 100-points! What really impressed me too is the quality of the second wines: Clarence du Haut Brion and Chapelle de la Mission, these wines are rich and already so well integrated!

Les Carmes Haut Brion has achieved new heights this year. Allow me to repeat that winemaker Guillaume Poutier, who was previously the winemaker at Michel Chapoutier in Rhone Valley, has joined Les Carmes Haut Brion since the 2012 vintage. He believes in extracting the tannins from the stems rather than from the pips of the grapes as this give

more refined tannins. I can only relate to Petrus for this silky smooth texture, this wine should not be missed!

I also enjoyed very much the Smith Haut Lafitte, which is always a value deal. This year the blend is roughly 65% cabernet sauvignon and 35% merlot. The wine is so dense that looks almost black, with fragrances of red and black fruits, floral notes, smokiness and hints of flint on the nose coming from the minerals extracted from the soil, giving a slightly savory touch to the finish. This wine is utterly charming!

Pape Clement is a heavyweight, with toasty aromas and very rich black fruits; in contrast but equally great, Haut Bailly is very classy, elegant and pure, which gives Haut Brion a run for the money!



*Chateau Petrus, Pomerol.*

## **Right Bank**

Let's not focus only on the wonderful cabernets, we also have some equally impressive merlots this year in Pomerol and Saint Emilion!

Clinet was one of my favourites last year and this year they may have done better. The wine has great purity on the nose, offering aromas of kirsch-soaked cherries with dark chocolate shavings, wild strawberries and delicate toasty notes. The texture is smooth as silk and with a very long finish. Ronan and his team have chosen to raise the percentage of new oak barrels to 70% from 65% in 2015, but without overpowering the fruit. The 2016 vintage has the intensity of fruit like the 2009 vintage, combined with the tannin and freshness of the 2010 vintage, wow!

The Jean Pierre Moueix wines are extremely

interesting as their flagship wines LaFleur Petrus, Trotanoy and Belair Monange are all merlot-based wines but on different soils: namely gravel, clay and limestone. The wines gave equally impressive but very different expressions, and personally, Trotanoy is probably a touch better of the three because of the richness. Hosanna and Latour a Pomerol also very impressive with elegant red fruits and rich mid-palate that you should not miss. May I also introduce you to Bougneuf, what I would regard as a party wine, but quality took a giant leap this year!

I always walk into Petrus with a very high expectation on the wine, but this year it blew me away! The glass bursts with intense but not overpowering nose of candied violets, a unique floral note that cannot be found in any other wine,





*Chateau Cheval Blanc, Saint Emilion.*

and the palate followed through with perfect integration of deep red fruits and a touch of spice, and an ultra long finish, welcome to the world of 100+ points!

The visit at Cheval Blanc this year has been rather special. Have spent time with their commercial director Arnaud de Laforcade, it is amazing to realise how much effort they have put into every stage of the winegrowing and winemaking process, and how meticulously they work to achieve perfection. The 2016 vintage combines the power of the 2010 vintage, and the charm of the 2001 vintage.

Figeac sits on the border between Saint Emilion and Pomerol on gravelly soil, so this is in fact a

Pomerol wearing the Saint Emilion badge. The wine is powerful but pure, offering layers and layers of black fruits, spiced up with a touch of ginger and minerals. According to their general manager Frederic Faye, "this is the best Figeac made in the past 20 years!"

Angelus has once again produced a massive wine, but tannins are ever smooth than last year. Canon was the star of 2015 and prices have doubled since en primeur release, this year it is perhaps not as opulent, but in return there is more depth and freshness, with fragrances of violets and dark chocolates, and notes of fresh figs and peppery spices, this is one to watch! The three luscious wines from Nicolas and Cyrille



*Tasting with Hubert de Boüard de Laforest at Chateau Angelus.*

Thienpont: Pavie Macquin, Beausejour (Duffau Lagarrosse) and Larcis Ducasse are equally impressive and they always represent good value for the drinkers. Canon La Gaffeliere is another wine for the drinkers. La Mondotte is a league above in every way but there is a price to pay.





*Vat room in Chateau Les Carmes Haut Brion.*

## Is 2016 vintage a good deal?

Bordeaux chateaux clearly knew they have a wonderful vintage and the markets around the world have expressed strong interest in it. I would expect moderate price increases from the 2015 vintage, but this will be partly offset

by the weakened Euro against the US Dollar compared to the same period last year. This will be a late en primeurs campaign and we expect to see releases of classified growths from mid-May, possibly running through to end of June.

Reasonably priced wines will sell very fast and you are strongly advised to confirm your order within a few hours of the release before we sell out.



## My recommendations

2016 is a very special vintage where great wines can be found from every appellation; wines are from very good to outstanding. Among the wines I have tasted, my top picks are as follows:

As Robert Parker will no longer rate en primeurs, we will be sharing scores from other wine critics for your reference. For those who have been following our en primeur offers in the past, we guarantee that our prices will be highly competitive as always!

### The Left Bank

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- Mouton Rothschild, Pauillac 100pt
- Pichon Lalande, Pauillac 97-99pt
- Lynch Bages, Pauillac 97-99pt
- Haut Brion, Pessac 100pt
- La Mission Haut Brion, Pessac 98-100pt
- Leoville Lascases, St Julien 97-99pt
- Ducru Beaucaillou, St Julien 97-99pt
- Pontet Canet, Pauillac 97-99pt
- Smith Haut Lafitte, Pessac 95-97pt
- Les Carmes Haut Brion, Pessac 95-97pt

### The Right Bank

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- Petrus, Pomerol 100pt
- Trotanoy, Pomerol 97-99pt
- Belair-Monange, Saint Emilion 97-99pt
- Lafleur, Pomerol 98-100pt
- Clinet, Pomerol 96-98pt
- Angelus, Saint Emilion 97-99pt
- Cheval Blanc, Saint Emilion 97-99pt
- Figeac, Saint Emilion 97-99pt
- Beausejour, Saint Emilion 96-98pt
- Larcis Ducasse, Saint Emilion 96-98pt

And my value picks are as follows:

### The Left Bank

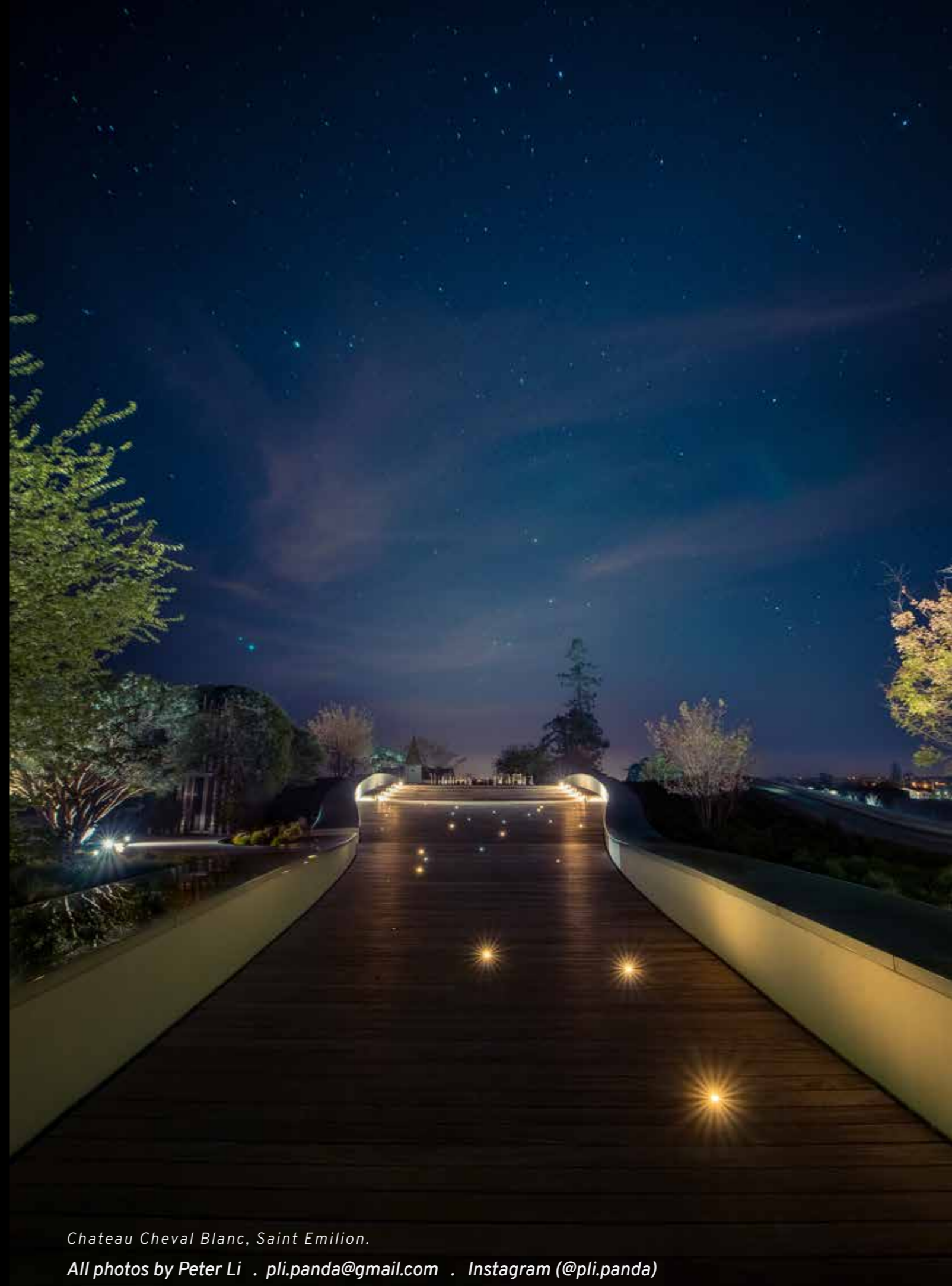
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- Blason d'Issan, Margaux 93-95pt
- Reserve de la Comtesse, Pauillac 93-95pt
- Croix de Beaucaillou, Saint Julien 93-95pt
- Clos du Marquis, Saint Julien 93-95pt
- Petit Lion, Saint Julien 92-94pt
- Chapelle de la Mission, Pessac 93-95pt

### The Right Bank

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- Puygueraud, Cotes de Francs 92-94pt
- Berliquet, Saint Emilion 93-95pt
- D'Aiguilhe, Cotes de Castillon 91-93pt
- Clos d'Oratoire, Saint Emilion 93-95pt
- Bourgneuf, Pomerol 92-94pt



*Chateau Cheval Blanc, Saint Emilion.*

*All photos by Peter Li . pli.panda@gmail.com . Instagram (@pli.panda)*





美酒窖



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