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 > Meet the 'most Burgundian' of Bordeaux's wines

## MEET THE 'MOST BURGUNDIAN' OF BORDEAUX'S WINES

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By [Peter Ranscombe](#) - 19th March 2021



An online tasting with Edinburgh restaurant Fhior reveals new ideas are meeting traditional methods in Bordeaux, writes **Peter Ranscombe**.

IT'S the quiet ones you have to watch.

When he's serving you in Fhior, Stuart Skea is the epitome of discretion.

He'll slide quietly up to your table, whisper wise words of advice about the bottles on his wine list, and then slip away again.

Throughout the meal, he'll come and go to refill glasses, but never once interrupting the flow of conversation – the ideal sommelier.

Let him loose in an online wine tasting though, and it's a whole different story.

Skea's hosting skills were one of the highlights of this month's Bordeaux tasting hosted by Fhior on Zoom.

The Edinburgh restaurant has a hard-won reputation for sourcing the best ingredients for its dishes, with owners Scott and Laura Smith last year extending that ethos to [Root to Market](#), their online produce store.

Skea's wine list follows the same pattern.

He buys his bottles from small-scale producers that make minimal interventions in the winery – [like Blackbook in London](#) – instead retaining the freshness of their grapes.

### 'The most Burgundian of the Bordeaux'

Chateau Le Puy is the perfect example.

Sitting six miles east of the town of Saint-Émilion on Bordeaux's right bank, Le Puy has been in the hands of the same family since 1610.

The chateau practices [biodynamic farming](#), with five horses and a small flock of sheep being used to tend and fertilise the land.

Steven Hewison, Le Puy's Scottish cellar master, joined Skea to lead the audience at home through a virtual tasting of six wines, samples of which were delivered through Root to Market.

Hewison described his wines as "the most Burgundian of the Bordeaux", a line that's clearly struck a chord over the years, especially with the American wine press.

His gentle winemaking techniques and his ageing of the wines on their lees – the dead yeast left over from the fermentation that turned the grape sugars into alcohol – help to bring a pinot noir-like elegance to his creations.

Having sat through more than 100 online tastings during the past year, I was a bit nervous when I saw an hour and a half had been set aside for the event, but I needn't have worried.

Skea skilfully kept the evening moving, asking Hewison questions when needed, and offering his own reflections on the wines too.

### Looking to the future

Hewison said Le Puy has left Bordeaux's appellation d'origine protégée (AOP) labelling system, switching instead to the more general "vin de France" classification.

The move has given him the freedom to plant old grape varieties from South-West France, which he intends to grow on high pergolas, rather than the lower wiring systems favoured in Bordeaux.

He was inspired to plant the older varieties after reading the diary of an 18th century wine merchant, who wrote about using small percentages of the varieties in his blends.

The pergolas will position the canopy of leaves in such a way as to help to shield the grapes from the sun, so they won't develop as much sugar, which will translate through to lower levels of alcohol in the finished wines.

When Hewison arrived at Le Puy ten years ago, his wines were typically around 11% or 11.5% alcohol by volume – now, thanks to climate change warming the environment, they're reaching 14% to 14.5%.

If merlot reaches 15% or 15.5% then it goes "flat", Hewison notes.

His experiments reminded me of the steps [I saw other wineries taking in Bordeaux](#) last March when I visited the region in the days leading up to lockdown.

After tasting Hewison's current wines, I can't wait to see the results of his innovations.

### Château Le Puy Rosé Marie Vin de France 2016 (£47, Root to Market)

Given the success of its red wines, it's easy to forget Bordeaux produces whites and rosés too. This high-end pink delivers bright redcurrant, cranberry, and raspberry on the nose, with red apple joining the red berries on the palate to balance the fresh acidity. It's the shrivelled red apple skin texture that's most impressive though.

### Château Le Puy Duc Des Nauves Côtes De Bordeaux 2017 (£22.50)

A dash of 20% cabernet franc and 10% cabernet sauvignon makes a big difference to the merlot in the estate's "super second" red wine. Pencil lead from the cabernet franc shines through on the nose – it's herbaceous yet ripe. Blackcurrant dances amid the raspberry jam, graphite, coffee, and dark chocolate on the palate, plus there's a graininess to the tannin that would lend itself to pairing with lamb.

### Château Le Puy Emilien Vin de France 2017 (£40)

It was fascinating to compare three vintages of Emilien – the 2017, the 2014 (samples of which had been poured from a magnum or double-sized bottle), and the **2013 (£58, Root to Market)**. Bordeaux has a marginal maritime climate and so the weather has a big influence on the taste and development of each year's wine. The 2017 was my favourite, with pronounced blackberry, black plum, cassis, and liquorice on the nose, leading into a syrupy richness on the palate, with the dark fruit augmented by dark chocolate. The tannins are still noticeable – it either needs longer to age, or a really meaty steak to get the best out of it at the moment. But the concentration to those fruity flavours shows so much promise.

### Château Le Puy Barthélemy Côtes De Bordeaux 2016 (£135)

Again, the Barthélemy – a blend of 85% merlot and 15% cabernet sauvignon – needs steak to show at its best right now, but its tannins are already knitting nicely together. Hewison is drinking the 2001 vintage at present, which demonstrates the wine's longevity. Here, classic Bordeaux damp earth and wet leaf aromas are joined by richer blackcurrant and blackberry than in the Emilien, with some green pepper notes too. On the palate, it hits its stride with the full Bordelais spectrum from blackcurrant jam, cassis, and liquorice through to mocha and dark chocolate, with a warming 14.5% alcoholic hug.

Find out more about Fhior's online tastings – including sessions on Italian and Spanish wines and cheeses – on [Eventbrite](#), and read more of Peter's wine reviews on his drinks blog, [The Grape & The Grain](#).

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