

THE POUR | ERIC ASIMOV

A Farmer's Dozen From Bordeaux

Made by vigneronns and not grand estates,
theses wines are classically refreshing.

SALES OF BORDEAUX in the United States took off last year, rising by 24 percent in volume, according to the Bordeaux Wine Council, a trade group.

The rise spanned all categories of Bordeaux, the group said, from inexpensive, mass-produced wines to the most prestigious bottles. Partly, it said, it was because of the elimination of the 25 percent tariffs on certain wines from the European Union that had been imposed in 2019 by former President Donald J. Trump in a trade dispute. The tariffs were suspended last year by President Biden.

This is great news for Bordeaux producers who have struggled to rebuild their once-robust market in the United States after both the financial crash of 2008 and a series of image problems that damaged the wine's standing, particularly among younger drinkers and sommeliers.

To these people, Bordeaux seemed a stodgy place where the estates were owned by billionaires, banks or luxury goods corporations. They associated Bordeaux with wealthy status seekers and those obsessed with high scores from established wine critics. Bordeaux producers, they thought, were aristocrats more interested in silk cravats than vineyard dirt.

These consumers turned their attention instead to Burgundy, a region seemingly made up of vigneronns, farmers who grew the grapes and made the wine. They were attracted to the sensual pleasures of pinot noir, Burgundy's red grape, rather than Bordeaux's stolid cabernet sauvignon, and the intellectual challenge of understanding Burgundy's fractional differences in terroir — wines from neighboring plots in Burgundy can be quite different — rather than Bordeaux's grand estates.

But apart from what Bordeaux might symbolize in wine's culture wars, I have always believed in the importance of its centuries of history and the greatness of its wines, whether from the most serious of the major chateaus or the best of its small farmers.

Here is the truth: Despite the vast amount of attention paid to the most prestigious and expensive chateaus, most Bordeaux producers are small farmers — vigneronns who farm the vineyards and make the wines. I have spent much of the past decade seeking out Bordeaux vigneronns

whose wines can be soulful and joyous, and I have found a surprising number.

In the waning weeks of winter, I went shopping in New York wine shops for Bordeaux made by vigneronns and found these 12 bottles, which I recommend enthusiastically. Some of these producers are tiny, others midsize. Most farm either organically or biodynamically — Bordeaux as a region was late to this, but I'm seeing more and more major producers moving in the organic and biodynamic direction, which I believe is good for the wines, for the environment and for the health of workers.

Most important, these are delicious wines. Some are classic inexpensive Bordeaux: light, dry and thoroughly refreshing. Others offer a little more substance and complexity. They are almost all red, though I did include one white Bordeaux because I love it.

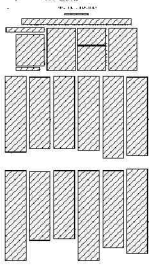
If you are in the camp that has dismissed Bordeaux, I would urge you to give these wines a try. If you already love Bordeaux, these may add a new dimension to your expectations.

While these 12 bottles offer a nice cross section of Bordeaux vigneronns, I did not include some of my favorites, either because I did not see them in the stores or, in the case of Domaine du Jaugaret, a tiny but exceptional St.-Julien, because of the rising cost. I also highly recommend Château Moulin de Tricot, Château le Puy and, if you like Sauternes, Cru d'Arche-Pugneau.

I also did not include any Pomerol, which is a prestigious appellation made up largely of vigneronns. They are absolutely worth exploring.

Here are the 12 bottles, in ascending order of price.

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**CHATEAU LE BERGEY BORDEAUX
2020, 14 PERCENT, \$14**

Here is a great Bordeaux value, a wine made from biodynamically farmed grapes that offers the classic, if not especially complex, refreshment prized by longtime Bordeaux lovers. Château le Bergey is the entry-level label of Château l'Escart, which itself is a fine producer. This is a 60-40 blend of cabernet sauvignon and merlot, fermented and aged in concrete tanks and made for early consumption. It's dry and lightly tannic, with earthy flavors of flowers and red berries. (A Maximilien Selection/ZRS Wines, Brooklyn)



**CHATEAU PEYBONHOMME-LES-TOURS
BLAYE-CÔTES DE BORDEAUX 2019, 14
PERCENT, \$18**

Château Peybonhomme-les-Tours is owned by the Hubert family, which has farmed biodynamically since 2000. The estate makes a range of wines, including Energies, which is aged in amphora. This bottle, the estate's workhorse, is 70 percent merlot, 20 percent cabernet franc and 10 percent malbec. It's an earthy, juicy pleasure, with just enough of a tannic grip to give the wine structure. (M.F.W. Wine Company, New York)



**CHATEAU LA GROLET CÔTES DE
BOURG ORIGINES 2019, 13.5
PERCENT, \$19**

This is Right Bank Bordeaux of the old school: soft, beautifully balanced and approachable, yet lean, pure and refreshing, with enough acidity to give life and shape to the wine. Grolet, also owned and farmed by the Hubert family, is a great value, year in and year out. Origines is 70 percent merlot, 15 percent cabernet sauvignon, 10 percent cabernet franc and 5 percent malbec. (Fruit of the Vines, Long Island City, N.Y.)



**CHÂTEAU DU CHAMP DES TREILLES
BORDEAUX LE PETIT CHAMP 2019,
14.5 PERCENT, \$23**

In Ste.-Foy, on the eastern edge of Bordeaux, Corrine and Jean-Michel Comme farm biodynamically on limestone and clay soils. They make two reds. One is barrel aged and is considered the “grand vin,” and this one, Le Petit Champ, is aged in steel vats. The 2019, 60 percent merlot, 30 percent cabernet franc, 8 percent cabernet sauvignon and 2 percent petit verdot, is pure with a delicate, inviting texture, though the tannins are still fairly firm. (Savio Soares Selections, New York)



**CHÂTEAU FALFAS CÔTES DE BOURG
LES DEMOISELLES DE FALFAS 2020,
14 PERCENT, \$27**

Château Falfas, in the Right Bank Côtes de Bourg area, is a favorite of mine. The top wines of this small estate are superb, but require some aging. Les Demoiselles, the second wine, is made with the younger vines. It’s full of fresh, pure, beautifully focused fruit flavors, yet tannic enough to provide clear but unobtrusive structure. Falfas has farmed biodynamically since 1988, one of the first in Bordeaux’s recent history to do so, and practices minimalist winemaking in the cellar. Demoiselles is 75 percent merlot and 25 percent cabernet sauvignon. (Selection Massale, San Leandro, Calif.)



**CHÂTEAU MASSEREAU VIN DE FRANCE
CUVÉE TRADITION 2018, 13.5
PERCENT, \$27**

Château Massereau makes both sweet wines and dry reds like this one. This cuvée is generally 60 percent merlot, 30 percent cabernet sauvignon, with the remainder split between cabernet franc and petit verdot. Massereau used to be labeled Bordeaux Supérieur, but withdrew its wines from the appellation after running afoul of the staid bureaucracy. It now bottles the dry wines as Vin de France. Regardless, it is pointed, precise, savory and refreshing, structured but not tannic, with a slight herbal edge. (Camille Rivière/Fruit of the Vines)



**CHÂTEAU AUNEAU L'HERMITAGE
GRAVES BLANC CUVÉE CANA 2018, 13
PERCENT, \$30**

The virtues of dry white Bordeaux are a hard sell, possibly because good examples from the best areas, Pessac-Léognan and Graves, are expensive and not easy to find. I love white Bordeaux and I love the succulence of the sémillon grape. (Cuvée Cana is 50 percent sémillon, 35 percent sauvignon blanc, 10 percent sauvignon gris and 5 percent muscadelle, an unusual blend in a region where sémillon and the other grapes have lost ground to sauvignon blanc.) Like chenin blanc, sémillon has a floral, honeyed flavor, a mineral tang and a luscious texture that keeps me rolling it around in my mouth because it feels so good. Auneau l'Hermitage farms its vineyard organically on gravelly sand and clay. (Rosenthal Wine Merchant, New York)



**MAISON BLANCHE
MONTAGNE-ST.-ÉMILION 2018, 14.5
PERCENT, \$42**

The Despagne family farms its Montagne-St.-Émilion vineyard biodynamically and makes its wines with minimal artifice. Depending on the vintage, this wine can be anywhere from 20 percent to 50 percent cabernet franc, with the rest merlot. The 2018 is dense and concentrated, with complex flavors of dark fruit, licorice and spices. It's structured and should age for years. (Selection Massale)



**CLOS DU JAUGUEYRON HAUT-MÉDOC
2017, 12.5 PERCENT, \$45**

Clos du Jaugueyron is one of my favorite small Bordeaux estates. Its proprietor, Michel Thérion, farms about 17 acres biodynamically, and his wines are deliciously pure. The Haut-Médoc is 60 percent cabernet sauvignon, 33 percent merlot and 7 percent petit verdot. It's lightly tannic, with floral, stony flavors, and is a pleasure to drink. Jaugueyron also makes a superb Margaux. (Selection Massale)

