



This month we will conclude our study of how what happens in the soil affects the finished wine. To demonstrate this I have selected two wines that are both from Bordeaux, which you might think would be very similar. However, the two chateaux own vineyards that are planted on very different soils, which changes the makeup of the grapes they can grow, as well as the type of wine they can produce.

I am consistently impressed with the incredible quality and value offered by Bordeaux, both red and white. This statement often surprises customers because the only wines they think of from this region are those from the *classified growths*. These are wines produced by the chateaux included in the Classification of 1855, which are sub-divided into five tiers, called, you guessed it, growths. This group only consists of 61 chateaux, but they represent the elite properties of the region, such as Chateaux Lafite- Rothschild and Margaux. Of course they are priced accordingly, with even 5th growths (the lowest classification) selling for more than \$100 a bottle. A quick search of the web tells me that 2015 Chateau Lafite- Rothschild is roughly \$1300 per bottle.

Here we will celebrate the impressive quality of non-classified wines, which offer considerably better value. Both of these wines are from actual wineries, which in this price range is rare in Bordeaux, and offer an excellent example for a very reasonable price.

### 2016 Chateau Bellevue Claribes Bordeaux (\$15)

This is not my first time featuring this chateau- it was also a club selection in 2014, and has been a consistent weekly feature for every vintage since the 2010 release. They are an overachiever and market leader in estate- grown and bottled Bordeaux and continue to do so for only \$1 more than the first feature six years ago.

Chateau Bellevue Claribes is owned by Michel Maroy Fontana, who farms this spot near the village of Gensac, between the cities of Libourne and Bergerac. This part of Bordeaux is called the *Entre-deux-Mers*, which means *between the seas*, because it is bordered by the Dorgogne and Garonne Rivers. These two rivers meet just north of the city of Bordeaux and form the expansive Gironde River. As these rivers were formed during the end of the ice age, they have carried soil and rock from the Central Massif to the east, creating rolling hills of gravel, sand and clay. Until twenty years ago the quality wines of this area were white, as it was considered too cold for the red varieties to properly ripen. Thanks to improvements in viticulture and a warmer climate, most of the region has since been replanted with red varieties. Despite the increase in quality, the wines of this area are still only entitled to the basic designation of Bordeaux. Ironically, during a recent tasting with one of my favorite negotiants from Bordeaux, he presented a white wine from the Entre-deux-Mers region, but it was also labeled simply as Bordeaux. When I asked why they chose the lesser designation for their wine, he explained that everyone knows Bordeaux, but few know Entre-deux-Mers, and the name makes no sense anyway. "They are rivers, not seas!" So much for prestige...

Fontana's vineyards lie on south-southwest facing slopes, which give the best sun exposure. The soils are mostly clay on limestone, which favors Merlot vines. The vines for this wine are up to 45 years old, so their roots go deep and add a good bit of minerality to the wine. The blend for 2016 is 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. All of the fruit for this wine was hand harvested, and fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks. The wine is then aged in neutral oak barrels for eight months before bottling.

When you open this bottle, make sure to decant it for a few minutes before enjoying. The nose is a combination of fresh black raspberries, damson plums, graphite, vanilla custard and violets. In the mouth this wine is moderate weight, with a light sense of tannins that rise up near the finish, with a touch of minerality and acidity. This wine is good now, but you can also age it for two to three years, and serve with everything from fajitas to ribeye.

### 2015 Chateau Miqueu Haut-Medoc (\$20)

This property lies in the northern portion of Bordeaux, on what is called the "left bank." This name is taken from the perspective of standing at the congruence of the Dordogne and Garonne Rivers, at a point called Bec d'Ambés, facing north. The left bank encompasses the Medoc and Haut Medoc, while the "right bank" describes the wine regions around the city of Libourne, to the east. Much like "between the seas" the names have less to do with geographical accuracy as they do a romantic notion of marketability.

All of the *classified growths* are found on the left bank- in 1855, when they were ranked, the right bank was not considered an area for fine wine. The chateaux stretch from the communes of Pessac-Leognan to the south, in the suburbs of the city of Bordeaux, to roughly fifty miles north culminating around the village of St. Estephe. This part of Bordeaux is where the gravel collected during the great floods after the ice age, creating deep banks that lie on top of limestone and clay. Being closer to the Atlantic ocean, which has a warming effect on the area, the producers here grow slightly more Cabernet Sauvignon. This is the only part of Bordeaux where the Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot ratio is higher, as the rest of the regions favor Merlot.

Chateau Miqueu is a fairly big property (over 100 acres) located north of the commune of Pauillac, near the village of Lesparre-Médoc. This area lies fairly close to Chateau Lafite- Rothschild but farther from the Gironde River. Consequently, the wines show great power and structure and, even at this price, offer great potential to age. This chateau

is run by Charles Ferré, who is the fifth generation of his family to manage the property. It is truly a family affair, as they do all of the farming, winemaking and cellar work, with several generations active in selecting the final blend as well.

For this vintage the wine is 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, and 5% Petit Verdot. All of the grapes are hand harvested, destemmed, and fermented in stainless steel tanks at low temperature. The wine is then blended and aged in concrete vats for fifteen months.

When you open this wine, give it a good half-hour or even more to let the bouquet develop. Then the nose delivers the classic Bordeaux aromas of fresh blackberries, black currants, pencil lead, fresh cut ivy, espresso roast coffee beans and soy sauce. On the palate this wine is denser than the Bellevue Claribes, with the Cabernet Sauvignon contributing a firm sense of tannins and faintly verdant note to the finish. This wine will be best enjoyed in 2020 or longer, but will show fine now if decanted. Drink with standing rib roast or slow roasted pork belly.

## Roasted Pork Belly

For many years I have made my own bacon and pancetta and it used to be hard to find the pork belly. In fact, my first few efforts I resorted to ordering the cut from friends of mine who own the Ravenous Pig. Today you can find them in Costco, Publix, Whole foods and Fresh Market, and I bet several other stores too. For this recipe we skip the curing and smoking, which makes it bacon, and simply flavor and roast the cut to tender deliciousness. As you will see by the lack of ingredients, this is a recipe that is more about technique than anything else, so please read carefully for good results.

### Belly

**1 (3-pound) skin-on center-cut fresh pork belly, about 1 1/2 inches thick**

**Kosher salt**

**2 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar**

**Vegetable oil**

### Mustard Sauce

**2/3 cup Dijon mustard**

**1/3 cup cider vinegar**

**1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar**

**1 tablespoon hot sauce**

**1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**

needed to equal 1 cup and transfer to 12-inch skillet. Arrange pork belly, skin side down, in skillet (strips can be sliced in half crosswise if skillet won't fit strips whole) and place over medium heat until bubbles form around pork belly. Continue to fry, tilting skillet occasionally to even out hot spots, until skin puffs, crisps, and turns golden, 6 to 10 minutes. Transfer pork belly, skin side up, to carving board and let rest for 5 minutes.

4. While the pork belly rests, whisk ingredients for the mustard sauce together. Flip pork belly on its side and slice 1/2 inch thick (being sure to slice through original score marks). Invert slices and serve with the mustard sauce.

## Cote de Boeuf

I never thought it was possible to be sick of a charred ribeye until my last trip to France. In Bordeaux I think they cook this cut, which is a ribeye, for most meals. Their preparation left me a little wanting, with raw shallots sliced on top, but I kept them because they are traditional with Bordeaux. Use if you like, or leave them off.

**1 côte de boeuf, (ribeye) 4 to 5 lb.**

**Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling**

**Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**6 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed**

**3 fresh thyme sprigs**

**2 fresh rosemary sprigs**

**2 shallots**

1. Remove the côte de boeuf from the refrigerator and sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper. Let stand for 1 hour to allow it to come to room temperature.

2. Preheat an oven to 400°F (200°C).

3. Drizzle the beef with olive oil

4. Preheat a large cast-iron fry pan over medium-high heat. Add a drizzle of olive oil to the pan. When the oil is hot, add the côte de boeuf and sear, without moving it, until the meat is well browned on the bottom, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn the meat and sear the other side until well browned, 2

to 3 minutes more. Arrange the garlic, thyme and rosemary around the côte de boeuf.

5. Transfer the pan to the oven and roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the meat, away from the bone, registers 125°F for very rare to rare, 20 to 25 minutes, or until done to your liking.

6. Peel and slice the shallots very thin. Slice the Transfer to a carving board, cover loosely with aluminum foil and let rest for 15 minutes. Carve the meat from the bone, and cut against the grain into slices 1/2 inch (12 mm) thick. Arrange on a warmed platter, cover with shallots and serve immediately.