

2017 Chateau Pontey Lamartine Graves Blanc (\$20)

For two years in a row I have traveled to Bordeaux in early April to attend the Union des Grand Cru (UGC) tastings, where the great chateaus of the region unveil the newest, just harvested vintage. The purpose of this week of tastings, of which roughly 10,000 people attend, is to assess the new vintage in advance of the futures campaign that takes place in May. For those not familiar with the futures campaign, it is when the new vintage of Bordeaux is sold two years in advance of release. It is a practice that has occurred for decades and allows the chateaus to be paid for their new vintage even when it is still maturing in barrel.

My participation in the UGC tastings is arranged by an importer we buy from based in Dallas. They assemble thirty or so buyers and divide us into groups each day, with each assigned to a van led by a representative of a negotiant from the region. They are responsible for organizing our day with appointments to visit the famous chateaus of each area of Bordeaux, and take in a UGC tasting where the smaller properties of the appellation show off their wines too. It is an immersive way to learn the character of each commune by seeing and tasting a comprehensive selection from each area. While each chateau's intention is about selling futures, this is not really our wheelhouse. Selling futures is a risky and expensive proposition and I feel our resources are better used elsewhere. For me the real work is done first thing in the morning when our assigned negotiant takes us to their offices for a showing of their portfolio of petite chateau that are not sold on futures.

It is important to understand that buying Bordeaux is unlike any other category of wine in the world. Over the past two hundred odd years the trade of Bordeaux has developed to include several layers of middle men who buy the wine from the chateaus shortly after it is finished fermenting, but up to two years before it is actually released. There are also courtiers who negotiate for either the chateau or the negotiants, making arrangements for the price and terms of delivery. Despite the tens of millions of dollars these middle men do each year selling these expensive wines, they also distribute high quality, value oriented selections as well. After all, during slow economic times it is this category that sells well, not the wines that are hundreds of dollars per bottle. Each day in Bordeaux my travel companions and I start the day at a different negotiant who shows us their stable of "petite chateau" offerings. This is the small, but deep pond in which TWM is most at home.

An example of this is Chateau Pontey Lamartine, an exceptional property in the Graves region, whose wines are sold by the negotiant La Vintage. This is an address where I find an extraordinary number of great value wines each year. La Vintage is a relatively new negotiant, founded in 2008 by Didier Miqueu, who came to the business after a career in finance. He is helped by managing director Loic Maillet who in 2003 was named best UK Sommelier and joined the firm in 2014. Their facility lies in a nondescript industrial park south of the city of Bordeaux, very near the center of the commune of Pessac. Although they represent chateaus from all of the Bordeaux region, they have a specialization in wines from the Pessac-Leognan and Graves appellations. These communes produce very powerful long lived wines, and are unique in that most properties produce both red and white examples. Our white wine selection this month is from the Graves appellation, made by one of the regions most important winemakers, Dominique Haverlan.

While not a household name in the US, Dominique Haverlan is a juggernaut in the communes south of the city of Bordeaux, specifically in Pessac-Leognan and Graves. The two regions were one until 1987 when the northern, higher elevation communes of Pessac and Leognan separated to become their own appellation. Dominique owns several chateaus in both areas and is seen as one of the most visionary winemakers in the region. Chateau Pontey Lamartine is new to his stable and located in the village of Portets, very close to the Garonne River. The soils of Portets are dominated by a thick layer of gravel that lies atop a base of clay and sand. The name Graves in French actually means, *gravelly land* and perfectly describes this rocky area. The combination of poor, rocky soil with a water retaining clay base gives the wines of Graves great weight and structure, even for white wines. Although based on Sauvignon Blanc this wine is a much richer and powerful example than typically seen by other international producers.

Haverlan farms roughly 30 acres for Pontey Lamartine, producing both red and white wine. The white wine is 60% Sauvignon Blanc and 40% Semillon, fermented in both stainless steel tanks and oak barriques, then reassembled and aged for a year primarily in tank. He also allows the wine to rest on the lees for several months, stirring it back into the wine to add additional texture and body.

When you are ready to serve this wine I would suggest decanting it for a half-hour before serving and consume at cellar temperature, 55-60 degrees, instead of refrigeration cold. Then it reveals a nose that is quite ripe, with tropical notes of banana and ripe carambola, followed by citrus tones of mandarine orange and lime parfait. On the palate it displays

moderate acidity that frames the rich fruit, providing structure into the long finish. Serve this wine with butter poached shrimp over angel hair pasta, or crab stuffed flounder.

2016 Chateau Mazetier Bordeaux “Tradition” (\$14)

I found my second selection at another negotiant, called Twins, on the last day of my trip this past year. Twins is also a newer negotiant, founded by Alain Moses after two decades as a *courtier* in the Bordeaux trade. Alain chose to name his company after his two boys, the twins, Anthony and Sebastien. Today the boys run the company but thanks to Alain’s contacts and experience they are quickly becoming a force in Bordeaux, assembling an impressive portfolio that stretches even to producers in the Rhone and other parts of France as well.

The building that Twins occupies is located in a two story building just north of the city of Bordeaux, along side a popular park and lake. The popularity of this area is confirmed by the employees of Twins, who joke about amorous couples who act out their love among the bushes and trees of the park, not realizing that they are in full view of those on the second floor. When we visit this address each year my companions and I make always chuckle about couples having a “French Country Picnic” while we are tasting. For me it is particularly funny because my wife also calls a dinner comprising of a rotisserie chicken and bagged salad greens as a “French Country Picnic.” At Twins this phrase takes on a whole different connotation. (And people think the Bordeaux wine trade does not have a sense of humor.)

For our feature the Twins have found this fantastic estate, located on the east side of the Garonne River. Chateau Mazetier was established in the 1930’s by Joseph Pallaruelo, who started with twenty acres of vines. Today the property has grown to fifty acres and is managed by Joseph’s grandson, Pascal, and his wife Karine. Their Tradition cuvee is primarily a blend of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon with small quantities of Cabernet Franc and Malbec. Of the 400+, under \$20 red Bordeaux I tasted on my trip this wine earned my highest score, rising above the rest for complexity at this price range.

When you open this wine please decant it for a half hour before serving so the bouquet develops. The wine then shows fresh plump blueberries and blackberries, cinnamon, violets, pencil lead and pipe tobacco. On the palate it shows moderate tannins and acidity, with good concentration and surprising length for the price. Drink this wine with pot roast, hamburgers or even a French Country Picnic (the rotisserie chicken kind.)

Flounder stuffed with crab meat

My apologies for only producing one recipe this month, but defining the complex terms of the Bordeaux trade, and a French Country Picnic, took more space than I planned. While this is an incredible dish to serve with the Graves white I do not recommend it for red Bordeaux. (It does however work nicely with red Burgundy or Pinot Noir.) There are no secrets to this straightforward dish although the second time I made it I also grated a teaspoon of lemon zest into the mayonnaise mixture used as the topping, with good results.

1 1/2 pounds flounder fillets
1 cup crabmeat - drained, flaked and cartilage removed
1 tablespoon finely chopped green bell pepper
1/4 teaspoon ground dry mustard
1/4 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
ground white pepper, to taste
3 crushed saltine crackers
1 egg white
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
1/4 cup butter, melted
1 egg yolk
5 tablespoons mayonnaise
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1 tablespoon fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Rinse the fillets and pat dry with paper towels.

Combine crab meat, green pepper, mustard powder, Worcestershire sauce, salt, lemon juice, white pepper and the crushed saltines. Combine the egg white and 1 tablespoon mayonnaise. Stir this into the crab meat mixture.

Brush the flounder fillets with melted butter. Place in a lightly greased, shallow baking dish. Spoon the crab mixture over the fillets and drizzle with any remaining butter.

Bake the fillets at 400 degrees for 15 minutes.

While the fish is baking, lightly beat the egg yolk in a small bowl. Stir in 5 tablespoons of mayonnaise. Remove fish from oven and spread this mixture over the stuffing; sprinkle with paprika and parsley.

Increase oven temperature to 450 degrees and bake until golden and bubbly, about 6 minutes.