

RICHMOND HILL WINES

# 2022 Bordeaux Report



# 2022 RHW BORDEAUX REPORT

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After having multiple attempts cancelled by the covid pandemic, in April of this year our team returned to Bordeaux for the En Primeur tastings for the first time since 2019. The last vintage we tasted from barrel was 2018, and we were given our first glimpse into how the producers are adapting to the increasingly warmer growing seasons. With extreme weather conditions becoming the norm rather than the exception, the importance of vineyard management is at an all-time high. The 2022 vintage amplified this concern, as France dealt with scorching heat waves and extreme drought conditions that pushed the vines to their physical limit. Drawing on experience, the best producers were able to avoid the mistakes made in similarly hot vintages like 2003. The old adage that stressed vines produce the best fruit has never been more true than in 2022. We undoubtedly tasted the strongest wines ever produced by countless Chateaux this year, and 2022 is a vintage that immediately ranks among the best in the last 40 years.

*"The 2022s are some of the most memorable young wines I have ever tasted in Bordeaux. The best 2022s are magnificent, viscerally thrilling wines that show what is possible with thoughtful approaches to viticulture and winemaking."* – Antonio Galloni, *Vinous*

*"... 2022 has produced some genuinely unbelievable wines that are worthy of hyperbole."* Georgina Hindle, *Decanter*

To understand the success of 2022, it's important to look at the differences between this vintage and the equally hot and ultimately unsuccessful 2003 vintage. The 2022 vintage began with a dry and mild winter that led to a very warm spring and early budbreak in April. Water was already scarce, but a June rainfall helped replenish the soils. Little did we know, this would be the last significant water of the year for most parts of Bordeaux. The extreme heat began in mid-June, followed by additional heat waves in July and August.

In 2003, the spring was rainy and cool, and the heat arrived immediately after, putting the vines into a state of shock. The heat in 2003 was also relentless, and the nighttime temperatures remained above 30 degrees Celsius for extended periods. In 2022, the daytime highs were similarly extreme, but the nighttime temperatures were average, which gave the vines an opportunity to recover. This recovery period was crucial in preserving acidity and freshness.

The most important distinction between 2003 and 2022 is how producers generally approached vineyard management. In 2003, it was very common to de-leaf the vines to allow more sun exposure, which encourages ripeness. De-leafing can also increase the risk of sunburnt grapes. It was also less common to plant cover crops, like grasses and flowers, between the rows of vines, for fear these plantings would steal much needed nutrients from the vines.

Now, canopy management is crucial in Bordeaux, and producers maintain as many leaves as possible in hot vintages to moderate sun exposure and reduce the risk of burning or overripening fruit. Widespread use of cover crops has also become a best practice, because the cover crops compete with the vines for surface moisture, therefore forcing the vines to send their roots deep into the soils to find water. This is incredibly important in drought conditions. The cover crops also assist with aeration, and promote biodiversity and microbiological growth, all of which play a vital role in the overall health of the vineyard.

By the time fruit was harvested in 2003, most vineyards were brown and the fruit was beginning to raisin. While there were certainly exceptions, mainly in the cooler vineyards of Pauillac and St. Estephe, most of the wines presented with very low acidity and extremely overripe flavours.

In 2022, successful producers experienced the exact opposite. The vineyards were lush and green at harvest time, and most enjoyed their longest ever harvest period taking advantage of near perfect conditions. Due to the hydric stress, the berries were small and concentrated, with prominent tannins. This was managed in the winemaking process by limiting extraction, and incorporating press wine to balance the tannin profile. The result was plush, vibrant wines that had the power of a hot vintage, and the freshness of a moderate vintage. Alcohol levels varied depending on each individual approach, and we saw wines as low as 13.5% (Le Carmes Haut Brion), and as high as 15% (Troplong Mondot). Both wines were among the best of the vintage, and the major difference in alcohol degree highlights the flexibility producers had during harvest.

### **Region by Region**

We are always asked if a particular vintage favoured the Left bank or the Right bank. With modern advancements in viticulture and winemaking, this question has become less and less relevant. In 2022, there were phenomenal wines produced in every commune, and there were also curious disappointments. We found the appellations of St. Emilion, Margaux and St. Estephe to be the most consistent, but the best wines of the vintage were scattered across all major appellations.

In St. Emilion, the clay subsoil kept the vines well hydrated through even the driest periods of the summer. Many of the top wines of the vintage emerged from this appellation, including Figeac, Cheval Blanc, Troplong Mondot, Canon and Beau Sejour Becot. There were also exceptional values produced at Laroque (new to our futures program), Grand Mayne and Saintayme. If you are targeting wines \$100 or less, St. Emilion will offer the most quality in 2022.

Pomerol was more varied, but the old vines of the elite producers excelled in the tough conditions. Sadly, quantities of most of these wines are so small that we did not have enough stock to supply even our allocation holders. Nonetheless, Vieux Chateau Certan, La Conseillante and Evangile all produced wines that exceeded our highest expectations. Early readers of this report should note the addition of Chateau Seraphine to our offer. This relatively new estate is quickly emerging as one of the wines to watch in Pomerol, and we received our first futures allocation this year.

Pessac-Leognan was also varied, but we did see the top terroirs produce absolutely stunning wines. Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge was a standout for us, but fantastic red wines were also produced at Haut Bailly and Domaine de Chevalier. One of the wines of the vintage emerged from Chateau le Carmes Haut Brion in Pessac. They have been overperforming for the last decade, and in 2022 they produced what most (including us) have tagged as a top 3 wine of the vintage. If you were unable to get an allocation during our pre-offer, we strongly recommend requesting a new allocation for 2023. This has been a must-buy in almost every recent vintage.

Margaux was a star in 2022. One of the best wines of the vintage for us was Chateau Brane Cantenac, who produced a wine that will stand toe to toe with the Margaux royalty of Palmer, Rauzan Segla and Chateau Margaux. Other top value performers in Margaux were Chateau d'Issan and Chateau Giscours, who both produced one of their best wines ever.

St. Julien and Pauillac were both responsible for some of the best wines of the vintage, along with a few disappointments. The 2nd Growths were very strong in 2022, with some rivaling the quality of the 1st Growths. We highlighted Branaire Ducru and Pedesclaux as our top value targets in these regions, Ducru Beaucaillou, Leoville Poyferre, Duhart Milon and Pontet Canet were also magnificent.

St. Estephe is an appellation that thrives in hot vintages. St. Estephe is situated on a gravelly plateau above Pauillac, and the climate is typically a few degrees cooler in this northernmost Medoc region. Unlike most of the Medoc, St. Estephe's soils also feature clay, which is incredibly useful in dry vintages. In 2022 the wines of Montrose, Cos d'Estournel and Calon Segur were all magical. St. Estephe is also responsible for a few of the top values of the vintage, with Phelan Segur and Tronquoy standing out on our list. Our longtime clients know that we have been big fans of Phelan Segur for the better part of the last decade, and they again produced an exceptional wine. Until this year, Tronquoy (formerly known as Tronquoy-Lalande) has never been sold as futures. Tronquoy is situated in the heart of St. Estephe, and managed by the team of Chateau Montrose. At \$55 per bottle, this is one of the great value buys of the 2022 vintage.

In our tastings, we did not find as many wines in the Haut-Medoc appellation that passed our threshold for inclusion in our offer. This expansive region is mainly situated further away from the estuary, and results were inconsistent. One wine that struck us was Madame de Beaucaillou. This very well priced wine (\$34) is produced by the team at Ducru Beaucaillou. Madame de Beaucaillou will offer immediate drinking pleasure, and it perfectly showcases the opulent style that Ducru is known for.

The Satellite regions of the Right bank are well worth considering in 2022. Castillon and Lussac-St. Emilion feature clay and limestone soils, and the vines did not suffer from lack of water. Exceptional wines were produced at prices far below their Grand Cru rivals in St. Emilion and Pomerol. RHW favourite, Domaine de l'Aurage, was again delicious in 2022. This wine is produced by the Mitjavile family, owners of the St. Emilion cult winery, Tertre Roteboeuf. Another standout in the right bank satellites was Bel Air Cuvee Jean & Gabriel in Lussac St. Emilion, where Cabernet Franc thrived in 2022. This is an estate that we fell in love with after the 2016 vintage, and it has featured prominently in our futures offering every year since.

While we were thrilled with quality and potential of most of the red wines that we tasted, the same cannot be said for the white wines of 2022. This is a vintage where we were highly selective with our white wine purchasing, sticking to the most consistent producers in cooler terroirs. Sadly, there were very few white wines that we think will offer long-term aging potential outside the legendary and vintage-defying white wines of Mission Haut Brion, Haut Brion, Smith Haut Lafitte and Domaine de Chevalier. This is not to say the white wines of 2022 were not enjoyable and well made, but this is a vintage that heavily favoured red wines for overall quality. If you are considering white wine for futures buying, we would recommend sticking to the top end of the quality spectrum in 2022. The short list of “value” white wines is highlighted by Chateau La Garde and Petit Smith Haut Lafitte (2nd wine of Smith Haut Lafitte), as well as the absolutely beautiful Suduiraut Vieilles Vignes Blanc.

2022 was a good year for Sauternes, with most showing a lighter more elegant profile. The Sauternes of 2022 will not require decades of aging, and should be drinkable within 5-10 years of release.

### **The year of the 2nd wines?**

For those who have been receiving our allocation offers throughout the campaign, you’ve likely noticed that we are very high on the 2nd wines in the Medoc this year. During many of our visits, the producers seemed as excited with the quality of their 2nd wines as they were with their Grand Vin. This was the case at Brane Cantenac, Ducru Beaucaillou, Montrose, Cos d’Estournel and countless others. We don’t often feature 2nd wines prominently in our offer, as we rarely find they offer much in the way of long-term cellar potential or value. However, due to the incredibly high quality of the grapes in 2022 this is a year that we invested heavily in a number of 2nd wines. We highly recommend considering Baron de Brane (Brane Cantenac), Pagodes de Cos (Cos d’Estournel) and Croix Ducru Beaucaillou (Ducru Beaucaillou).



## **The Prices**

We are all aware of the global impacts of inflation over the last year, and the wine market was certainly not spared. Nearly every Chateau raised their price between 5-25% in 2022, with some notable increases as high as 35-40%. There were additional factors under consideration for some producers, including upgrades in classification and dramatically reduced yields. Overall, the average price increase from 2021 is 17%.

## **What did we love?**

There are dozens of wines that we absolutely loved in 2022, but we felt Chateau Figeac and Chateau Cheval Blanc produced the two highest quality wines of the vintage. Figeac was upgraded to St. Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classe "A" in 2022, and they have made a wine well worthy of the highest classification available on the Right bank. Cheval Blanc is always hovering near perfection, and they again produced a wine that left us speechless.

Our other favourite wines were scattered across Bordeaux, with Le Carmes Haut Brion, Rauzan Segla, Brane Cantenac, Troplong Mondot, Ducru Beaucaillou and Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge leaving a lasting impression. For value, Tronquoy, Grand Mayne, d'Aiguilhe and Baron de Brane (2nd wine of Brane Cantenac) were our top picks, but there is no shortage of excellent options between \$30 and \$100 in our offer.

Questions or comments about our 2022 Bordeaux Futures Campaign  
can be directed to [bordeaux@rhwines.ca](mailto:bordeaux@rhwines.ca).