

Photograph: Bonnaud Guillaume



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Finding Bordeaux AOC gems in challenging vintages

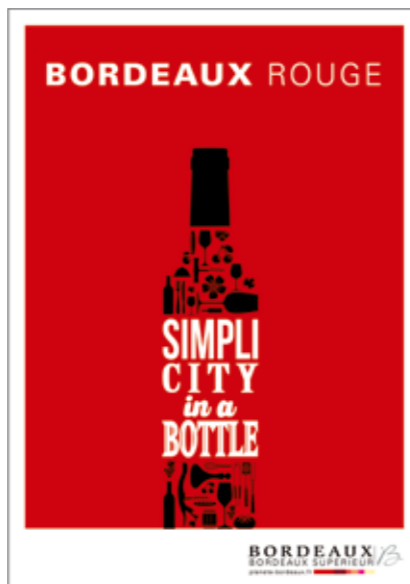
2017 may not be in the same category as top red Bordeaux vintages like 2005, 2010, 2015 or 2016, but one can find excellent values. A terrible late April frost wiped out at least 40% of the potential crop: the lowest quantity of red Bordeaux produced since 1991. The frost damage was so widespread that the government allocated funds to help estates that had been especially hard hit. Public spending helped pay for new vine plantings to replace those destroyed by frost, for example.

But for properties that were able to make wine, many 2017 reds are ripe, bright and smooth, as the tasting notes show. International wine consultant and harvest observer Bill Blatch said it best: many have an "underlying gentle nature" that brings forth "charm, moderate alcohol levels and pleasing aromatics". Some with more noticeable tannins will require another year in bottle before optimal drinking.

While frost was the culprit in 2017, aggressive mildew hit vineyards in 2018. Furthermore, a summer hailstorm devastated some vineyards, too. What mattered most for producers who successfully managed the mildew and escaped the hail was the dry and rather hot summer and harvest period that led to splendid reds. The high temperatures with dry weather conditions were excellent for being rot-free, as well, but

proved more challenging for a lack of enough balancing acidity for many dry whites, which seem to lack the panache and balance of the 2017 vintage and the zingy energy of 2014, 2010 and 2008.

However, vintners who picked earlier or harvested grapes from colder soils were able to retain freshness, crafting better-than-expected whites. Colder clay soils especially retained enough acidity to bring about fine whites with body and enough energy, as the tasting notes attest. And the prices are more than promising.



WINES TO TRY Reds 2017

Château Bel Air Perponcher 2017 90
Up to £10 **The Wine Society, The Exhibition Co-operative**

81% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Cabernet Franc. The best wine of the Bordeaux AOCs assessed at this tasting and for good reason. Located near the Erganne, a tributary of the Dordogne, and very close to Saint Emilion vineyards, the wine conveys a sumptuous ripe plum like nose, akin to Saint Emilion. The full bodied palate is fresh and elegant, with ripe red and blackberry fruit. The Cabernets (19%) lend structure. **Drink** Until 2027

Château Bastian Réserve 2017 89

www.savigneux.com
50% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Lovely notes of ripe plum and blackcurrant, and one of the top 2017s from the Bordeaux AOC category. I like the wine's svelte grip and more clearly ripe profile. Lovely wine, and highly recommended for restaurants seeking an elegant Bordeaux that is most economically priced. The owners live in the picturesque estate, a 14th century farmhouse on the left bank of the Garonne River. **Drink** Until 2023

Château La Freynelle 2017 89
£10-15 **Tees Ltd**

70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. Justifiably winning the Médaille d'Argent at the Concours des vins à Paris for this vintage, I cannot but add praise and mention how well the smooth ripeness of the 70% Merlot is balanced by the more structured but also suave Cabernet Sauvignon tannins. Although I prefer the 2015, this vintage also merits your attention! Crafted by the talented Véronique Barthe. **Drink** Until 2023

Petit Verdot by Belle-Vue 2017 89
£15 **Richard Dawes**

100% Petit Verdot. Inky dark in color, the wine exudes aromas spicy, rich and almost gamey. If you visit Bordeaux, it is worth a detour to taste at the lovely property of Château Belle-Vue, whose Haut-Médoc vines border the appellation of Margaux (just near Château Giscours). The grapes for this Bordeaux AOC are taken from old vines, planted as early as the 1930s, and bring forth a 100% Petit Verdot with personality and tannic zest. **Drink** Until 2026

Réserve du Château Le Mayne Turon 2017 89

Up to £10 **Bros Holding, Hong Kong**
40% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. Seductive from the start, the blend includes 30% Cabernet

Franc and 30% Cabernet Sauvignon that come across ripe and refined, with the Merlots adding opulence. The gold and black label on the slightly oversized bottle may seem pretentious but the wine is delicious! **Drink** Until 2023

Ad Vitam Aeternam 2017 88

www.vin-advitam.fr
90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. A full on array of ripe fruit, blackberry and plum - and mint aspects for nuance. The whopping 15% alcohol is felt, but not painfully so. There is structure however, so a rather serious wine, even it should be served on the cooler side and more for hedonists. **Drink** Until 2023

Cadiot 2017 88

Up to £10 **Private Cellar**
100% Petit Verdot. This is a worthy wine that in past vintages won medals at international competitions in Lyon and in Vienna. The nose combines ripe fruit with smoky spice and burgeoning animal notes. The palate shows personality, grip and ripe fruit. Medium finish. **Drink** Until 2023

Château Beauregard-Ducourt 2017 88

www.ducourt.com
50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Merlot. The nose displays an almost buttery richness, with ripe red fruit, followed

through on the palate where the plum flavor aspects from the 50% Merlot take prominence at this stage over the Cabernet Sauvignon, which lends structure. This is a fine red wine indeed from Bordeaux AOC. **Drink** Until 2023

Château de Crain 2017 88

www.chateau-de-crain.com
60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc. Coming from a château with a rich history dating back to the 14th century, the estate is crafting tasty wines in the 21st. A deep nose of dark fruit with toasted touches fits the Bordeaux profile perfectly. The palate has more than expected grip for the appellation in 2017, and you get a wine with medium weight and a medium finish that is both ripe and fresh. Nice! **Drink** Until 2023

Château Ferreyres Bellevue 2017 88

£10-15 **Baccus Vins UK**
80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Pithy in its ripeness, this refreshing wine yields damson and cranberry, overlaid by subtle notes of milk chocolate. The pleasingly expressive nose is followed by a rich palate cast in fine structure from the 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. A great match for a homemade cheeseburger, with quality meat and cheese. **Drink** Until 2023 ➤



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Château Paradis Casseuil 2017 88
£15 **Waddesdon (distributor) Bucktrout**
(customer)

70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. One of the most - if not the most-refined aromas of all the Bordeaux AOC tasted here. The medium bodied palate is refreshingly ripe and the acidity beckons further drinking. Acquired by Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite) in 1984, the 23 hectare vineyard is spread over the three communes of Casseuil, Caudrot and Sainte-Foy-La-Longue in the Entre-Deux-Mers appellation, 50 km from Bordeaux A versatile match for either roast organic chicken or lamb kebab on the summer grill. **Drink** Until 2022

Bordeaux Supérieur rouge

Château Pierrail 2017 90

£10-15 **Booths**
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Lovely dark red color invites aromas of both graphite and ripe black fruits, with toasted notes. One of the most successful wines of the vintage, coming from an historic estate dating its 17th century origins to the famous Segur family. The vineyard enjoys fine southeast solar exposure and a microclimate tempered by the nearby Fonchotte tributary. **Drink** Until 2026

Dame de Coeur du Chateau Peyfaures 2017 90

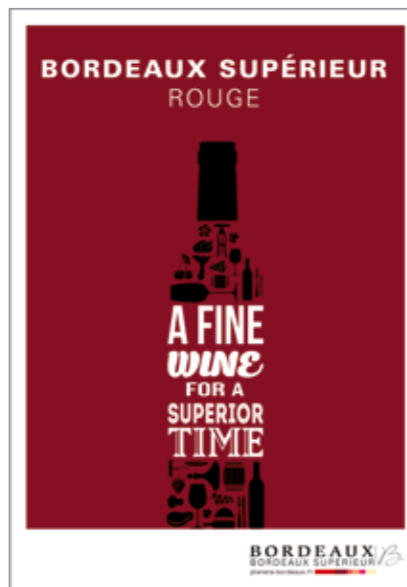
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. A gorgeous label of a lady with flowers - the Dame de Cœur. And the wine is none too shabby, with an enveloping nose of ripe strawberry and plums that precedes a rich yet structured palate. The 14.5% alcohol on the label reflects the warmth of the wine, but there is never a sensation of heat or hard tannin. The 20% Cabernet Franc makes for (much) needed freshness, so you end up with a fairly "big" wine that remains juicy and sumptuous overall. Perhaps the inclusion of a parcel of 40 year old vines helps raise the game here. My only complaint would be that the over sized bottle is not eco friendly. **Drink** Until 2026

Chateau La Verriere 2017 90

£10-15 **Jascot**
85 % Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. A lovely wine exhibiting much balance with nuanced notions of blue and red fruit, fresh and even baked. The palate has



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verve to keep you interested through to the finish, which has more lift than many other 2017s tasted. **Drink** Until 2026

Château de Marsan 2017 90

Up to £10 **Ellis Wine (London)**
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. A top wine of this tasting. Some three days of cold pre-fermentation maceration gently extracted color and fruit, and it shows in the wine. I like the supple tannin and fruit expression, indeed matched by some lifting aromas of freshly cut grass (but not the dreaded "green" word!). Medium bodied and medium finish, all very refined. Enjoy with roast turkey. **Drink** Until 2022

Château Fleur Haut Gausseus 2017 89

£10-15 **Berry Bros & Rudd**
85% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Malbec. This has heft and power and up front rich and ripe fruit. The mid palate sustains the attack and you can tell that the tannin lends structure for some cellar aging. Promising wine! **Drink** Until 2026

Château Lamothe-Vincent Héritage 2017 89

£10-15 **The Real Wine Company**
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet-Sauvignon. You have to love the ripe and rich palate in this wine. 2017 is not a "star" vintage in Bordeaux, and yet this estate managed to convey more juiciness and mid palate excitement than many others. **Drink** Until 2026

Château Le Gardera 2017 89

Up to £10 **Ellis Wine (London)**
Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot. One of the more successful organic wines in this series (organic since 2010), with lovely fruit purity combined with pepper spice on the nose. The palate is focused and fresh, with a fascinating blend of five Bordeaux grapes lending complexity to the tasting. **Drink** Until 2026

Château Penin Les Cailloux 2017 89

£15 **Les Caves de Pyrene Ltd**
100% Merlot. Among the smoother expressions encountered at this tasting, this 100% Merlot wine is velvety on the

attack, with juicy plum aromas. The tannin kicks in on the finish, reminding you that this is a young vintage, but one can enjoy it with roast turkey and gravy or crispy duck and pancakes. **Drink** Until 2026

Château Recogne 2017 89

Up to £10 **Majestic**
78% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Carmenère. Near the hills of Fronsac overlooking the Dordogne, the 100 hectares of vines from this estate cover sandy-clay slops and take advantage of a subsoil rich in iron oxide. The 78% Merlot delivers a deep-coloured wine with ripe plum and spice. I like the structure, yet rather rounded tannins bring forth a pleasurable wine that would match well roast duck or lamb. **Drink** Until 2026

Bio Full Malbec 2017 88

www.bordeaux-vineam.fr
100 % Malbec. Without added sulfites and made organically, this estate has arrived with a pure expression of Malbec that comes across peppery and bright in fruit expression. There is a pleasing linearity to the finish, with fine lift. And the acidity makes it a good choice for pasta and cheese or pizza. **Drink** Until 2021

Château Beausoleil 2017 88

www.vignoblesbourdillas.com
90% Merlot, 10% Malbec. I like the grip and balance of this wine, the 10% Malbec adds spice and structure to the softer expression of Merlot that completes the blend. An agreeable red for your barbecue. **Drink** Until 2021

Château Bellevue 2017 88

www.famille-damecourt.com
70% Merlot, 20% Malbec, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Smooth and elegant expression from no less than five grapes used for the blend, including Malbec and Petit Verdot. I like the vivid depth of ripe fruit, already on the nose. The palate has juiciness and flesh, and enough acidity for your roast game or stew. An added benefit: a lovely label and a gorgeous 17th century estate located high on a hill in Sauveterre de Guyenne: well worth the visit! **Drink** Until 2022

Château de Lagarde Cuvée Prestige 2017 88

www.maison-raymond.vin
60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. One of the better wines in this series, with focused ripe

fruit aspects. There is a bit of high toned acidity, but that makes the wine a good match for your cow milk based aged cheeses for example. **Drink** Until 2022

Château de Seguin Cuvée Prestige 2017 88

£10-15 **Laytons**
83% Merlot, 17% Cabernet Sauvignon. The Old School label looks like it came from the 1970s, but I like its aromatic palette of red and black fruits, along with toasted notes. The attack is frank and clean, with a certain tannic edge coming from the 17% Cabernet Sauvignon to make it a keeper, and a good match for grilled meats or sausages. **Drink** Until 2022

Château Grand Jean 2017 88

www.vinobles-dulon.com
55% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Malbec. A very good red in this series, as it has enough supple and ripe fruit to match roast duck with apricots. The up front richness of the wine is supported by tannic structure that lends itself for a bit of aging as well as for rich food pairings. Nice! **Drink** Until 2023

Château Majoureau Hypos 2017 88

www.chateau-majoureau.fr
90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. A plush nose of ripe Merlot, of which 90% makes the blend, this wine was aged 12 months in oak and it also comes across with vanilla and toast. The full-bodied palate includes dark and red fruit. A good match for grilled meats, game or hard cheeses. **Drink** Until 2023

Château La Mothe du Barry Cuvée Design 2017 88

www.vignoblesjoelduffau.fr
100% Merlot. This has some fine fruit purity with a nice zing of acidity that would pair well with your beef brisket for example. The 35 year old vines lend structure and density to this 100% Merlot wine that is certified organic to boot! **Drink** Until 2023

Château Maison Noble Cuvée Prestige 2017 88

£10-15 **C'est Vin**
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon.

Made from 30 year old vines, this wine has personality and vivid ripe fruit flavor. The oak component is well integrated and tasty and the medium bodied palate comes across juicy and rich. The tannins are just a tad raw, but that seems to be the case with some 2017s... Give it a year in your cellar before opening. **Drink** Until 2026

Grand Vin de Reignac 2017 88

www.reignac.com
67% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. You really cannot go wrong with this wine. It is one of the most consistent reds of Bordeaux, year in and year out. The palate is smooth and reflects ripe fruit. The finish is medium and suave, even if the tannins need time to soften, but this is normal. **Drink** Until 2026

La Grande Cuvée du Château Vermont 2017 88

www.chateau-vermont.fr
90 % Merlot, 10% Petit Verdot. Sumptuous aromas of forest strawberry and dark, ripe plum precede a juicy attack on the palate leading to a smooth finish. Sure, the tannins are tad raw, but chalk it up to youthfulness. Open in one year and it should be excellent for your roast beef. **Drink** Until 2026

La Tourbeille Cuvée Le Sceptre 2017 88

£10-15 **Direct sales & VIN Wine Merchants**
100% Merlot. A select blend of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in oak for 12 months, the wine conveys rather dark fruit and a full bodied aspect. I like the juicy mid palate even if the tannins are a tad raw in this vintage. Give it time, as there is underlying opulence. **Drink** Until 2026

Petit Soleil 2017 88

www.grandissime.com
90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc. A sweet and inviting nose is hard to resist. Sure, you have 14.5% alcohol but it seems that the extraction of tannin was judicious as the wine does not come across as hard or too raw in tannin. The 90% Merlot lends opulence and even juiciness. Indeed, the finish is smooth and not drying. **Drink** Until 2023