

THE BORDEAUX WINE REGION IS A NATURAL WONDER, WITH HUMAN HELP

ANGUS HUGHSON
THE AUSTRALIAN
MARCH 06, 2015

SOME fine wine regions are born into greatness, products of a superb natural environment and climate that, given a great variety or two, create wines for the ages. Others, equally spectacular, are a product of circumstance. Champagne, long known for its mediocre dry wines, only rose to the top of the heap once the art of sparkling wine production had been perfected.

Bordeaux, the world's most famous wine region, is another that has progressively built its reputation through manmade improvements to the land and refinements to the winemaking style. Its history as a wine region of note goes back centuries. Yet while the terroir is magnificent, many of Bordeaux's most hallowed vineyards had to be reclaimed relatively recently from marshes along the Gironde River.

One of the most beautiful wine towns you could ever visit is Bordeaux's romantic and Romanesque town of Saint-Emilion, located on the Northern bank of the Dordogne River. Almost 2000 years ago the Romans settled here and, as they did all over France, established vineyards to supply their own considerable wine needs. The poet Ausonius owned a prominent villa here, and wrote extensively about the local drop.

It was an aristocratic marriage in 1154 that began Bordeaux's monumental rise to the top. The recently divorced local duchess Eleanor of Aquitaine married King Henry II of England. For the next 300 years Bordeaux came under the rule of English kings, during which time it firmly established itself as the wine of choice for England, a market where it still features prominently today.

History smiled again on Bordeaux in the early 17th century. Its Left Bank along the Gironde River, close to the Atlantic and the thriving town of Bordeaux, was wild and untamed, the lowland marshes left for animals to graze on. Then King Henry IV of France hired Dutch engineers to have these marshes drained. As the



Clos Cantenac Saint-Emilion Grand Cru 2011, Chateau de Sours Bordeaux rose 2013, Chateau de Sours Bordeaux red 2013. Picture: Nick Cubbin

river fell away it uncovered the famed soils of the Medoc – layers of gravel and sand laid down over thousands of years. Their unique structure make them free-draining while the gravels help to ripen fruit by re-radiating heat during the cool coastal evenings.

It was not only the land that made Bordeaux special but also its grape varieties. Around the same time as the local marshes were being drained a natural crossing occurred between two of its key grape varieties: cabernet franc and sauvignon blanc. The result was the now ubiquitous cabernet sauvignon – a thick-skinned red grape variety, with high fruit concentration and tannins that make a perfect base for long-aged red wines around the globe. It also happened to be perfectly suited to Bordeaux's gravel-based soils.

Grand chateaux dot the Bordeaux landscape; some are the summer retreats of foreign billionaires; others



belong to barons of the industry that still drives the region's fortunes, such as Martin Krajewski of Clos Cantenac and Chateau de Sours. Having made his money in London, Krajewski bought out his partners in Chateau de Sours before purchasing Clos Cantenac, a Saint-Emilion Grand Cru, both of which make modern impressions of the classic Bordeaux style. The Chateau de Sours property dates back to the 14th century, though its particularly impressive chateau was built in 1792.

Backed by a state-of-the-art winery, Chateau de Sours has quickly risen to be among one of Bordeaux's rising stars, particularly for its still and sparkling rosés,

which are quite uncommon in the area. None of its wines reach the astronomical prices of the top wines for the region but they are all honest, well-made and impressive examples that show why Bordeaux remains the most famous wine region in the world – almost two millennia since the Romans planted its first vines.

Clos Cantenac Saint-Emilion Grand Cru 2011

The cooler 2011 vintage was challenging, making for an elegant, early drinking vintage. You'll find leafy violet and cassis fruits on a mid-weight palate well matched by new French oak; soft tannins give a juicy and savoury finish.

Chateau de Sours Bordeaux Rosé 2013

Despite advancements in the new world, rosés from France are still hard to beat. This elegant and dry style with its pretty pink hue has layers of raspberry, strawberry and floral fruits with an attractive herbal lift. Crisp, bright, light-bodied and youthful, it is all that good rosé should be.

Chateau de Sours Bordeaux Red 2010

2010 was an outstanding vintage in Bordeaux. This well-priced red has a largely Merlot base that shows in plush blackberry and graphite fruits supported by old small French oak maturation. In the mouth it is elegant and balanced finishing with tannins that will match well with lamb.