

Decanter

Bordeaux 2014: one to watch

Sauternes & Barsac

By Ian D'Agata

THE WINES OF Sauternes and Barsac are among France's most famous. And the good news for wine lovers is that the 2014 vintage is exceptional for these wines, characterised by amazing total acidities and a noble rot bonanza (a very lemony rather than marmaladey botrytis that further contributed to the impression of high acidity). Much like 2007 or 2011, it is the wines of these communes that are very clearly the best of Bordeaux in 2014.

And thanks to the high acidity, it's a vintage of truly unique Sauternes and Barsac, in which the average 130 grams per litre of residual sugar seems almost too low; many wines finish as if they were highly concentrated dry white wines (sometimes almost too dry), not unlike richer-styled, aged white Burgundies. In fact, total acidity sampled in Sauvignon Blanc berries was higher than ever in 2014: by comparison, 4.6g/l in 2010, 5.6g/l in 2011, and 7.6g/l in 2014.

If I have one caveat, it's that some wines taste as if they were made with higher percentages than usual of Sauvignon Blanc – not a good idea. It is Semillon that makes for truly great Sauternes and Barsac.

In 2014, a cold and wet end of April hampered flowering, contributing to very low yields – another characteristic of the vintage: 'When I tell Bordeaux red wine producers that my yields were lower than 10hl/ha, they can't believe it!' Bérénice Lurton of Château Climens said. Summer was neither particularly sunny nor warm, ensuring very high acidity in the white grapes. However September to October were near perfect, recording the fourth highest average temperatures since 1896; three successive spells of rain were each followed by two to three weeks of warm, dry weather allowing for development of noble rot and sugar concentration by evaporation. But the heat and paucity of rainfall delayed the appearance of large volumes of noble rot: estates delayed most of their picking until the last two weeks of October. A minority of estates (including Château d'Yquem) were able to pick 50% of their total harvest by early October, allowing for wines marked by even greater freshness and very pure noble rot.

In ultimate analysis, the 2014 Sauternes and Barsacs are highly refined wines that



Above: *Decanter's* Ian D'Agata (right) assesses a wine at La Tour Blanche in Sauternes

D'AGATA'S CHOICE: 5 most improved*

■ **Ch Filhot, Sauternes 2CC 18.25 (94)** (right) see p44

■ **Ch de Malle, Sauternes 2CC 17.75 (92)** see p44

■ **Ch Romer du Hayot, Sauternes 2CC 17.75 (92)** see p44

■ **Ch Lamothe-Guignard, Sauternes 2CC 17.5 (91)** see p44

■ **Ch Caillou, Sauternes 2CC 17.25 (90+)** see p44

* These wines may not necessarily be better than in 2013



dance lightly on the palate. They lack the supple richness of the 2009 or 2001 vintages, but are more politely styled and devoid of heaviness, making for some of the easiest to drink Bordeaux sweet whites in memory. They will be absolutely ideal restaurant wines, enjoyable not just as aperitifs but with the whole meal as well.

Outstanding

■ **Ch d'Yquem, Sauternes 1CS 19.25 (97)**

Utterly great Yquem! My wine of the vintage – and the *Decanter* team's top-scoring wine of 2014. A laser beam of acidity (3.6 pH) and lemony botrytis lifts and extends very pure

aromas and sweet flavours (134g/l residual sugar) of tangerine, vanilla, pineapple and minerals. Less rich than the 2001 and '09, but purer and fresher. I wonder if 25% Sauvignon Blanc isn't just 5% too much? 2022-2075

■ **Ch Climens, Barsac 1CC 19 (96)**

One extremely fine lot after another, all marked by an extremely pure lemony botrytis. Bright and crisp, with lovely sweetness and mind-boggling precision. Chopping between the various barrels to make the final blend will be even tougher than usual this year. 2021-2055

■ **Ch Doisy-Daëne, l'Extravagance Barsac 2L 19 (96)**
Extremely rich, almost decadent, very perfumed wine but with lovely balance and creamy white peach and lead pencil notes that last and last. 2020-2045

■ **Ch Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 1CC 19 (96)**

Very rich, complex wine offering lemony and smoky botrytis, melon, honeyed pineapple and apricot. Dense but suave, this is the biggest Sauternes of the year, in the typical LP style. New owner Silvio Denz of Lalique fame has started off with a bang. 2020-2050

■ **Ch des Fargues, Sauternes 18.5 (95)**

Intense pineapple and honeycomb on the nose with loads of marmaladey botrytis. Rich but suave in the typical Lur Saluces style, with caramel apple and grilled mango flavours finishing long and thick. Not overly sweet thanks to searing acidity. 2018-2040 >

Ch La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 1CC 18.5 (95)

A blend of 83% Semillon, 12% Sauvignon Blanc and 5% Muscadelle: dense peppery tropical fruit, honeyed crackers and minerals. Then an almost dry and mouthcoating palate with tannins providing backbone – rich, but not overtly sweet. The Sauvignon Blanc was harvested earlier than usual to preserve aromatic freshness and acidity. 2020-2045

Ch Rieussec, Sauternes 1CC 18.5 (95)

Refined nose of nectarine, peach, crystallised ginger and sweet spices. Layered, intense and suave, with long-lasting flavours of ginger, sweet spices and tropical fruits. Very harmonious: a standout Rieussec. 2018-2045

Highly recommended

Ch Coutet, Barsac 1CC 18.25 (94)

Ripe tropical fruit, vanilla and herbs intermingle with smoky botrytis. Dense, rich flavours of custard and toffee apples, saffron and a hint of noble rot bitterness. Long finish. 2020-2050

Ch de Rayne-Vigneau, Sauternes 1CC 18.25 (94)

Deep aromas of tropical fruit, honey and balsamic herbs. Rich, dense and suave, with marmaladey, botrytis-laced flavours of grilled bananas, honeyed peach and spice. 2018-2035

Ch Filhot, Sauternes 2CC 18.25 (94)

Intense spicy botrytis note, glazed kumquats, Bourbon vanilla, tropical fruit and herbs. Rich, dense and juicy with mouthwatering peppery acidity making it seem not very sweet. The best young Filhot in years. 2022-2045

Ch Nairac, Barsac 2CC 18.25 (94)

Aromas of pear nectar, quince and vanilla mingle with marmaladey botrytis. Almost shrill acidity lifts and extends citrus and tropical fruit flavours. This manages the neat trick of being rich and ripe yet refined. 2018-2032

Ch Suduiraut, Sauternes 1CC 18.25 (94)

Marmalade botrytis and smoke mix with ripe peach and honeyed pineapple. Complex and rich, with mouthcoating flavours of ripe peach, mango, honeycomb and tapioca. Rare unctuous quality for Suduiraut in 2014. 2020-2045

Ch Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Sauternes 1CC 18 (93)

Brooding aromas of tropical fruit and spice need plenty of aeration and speak of the 95% Semillon in the blend. Mouthcoating tannins. Very sweet (at 145g/l RS – one of the sweetest 2014s), rich style, but balanced. Great stuff from this estate. 2020-2035

Ch Doisy-Daëne, Barsac 2CC 18 (93)

Marmaladey botrytis bolsters ripe citrus and honeyed tropical fruit aromas and flavours. Rich, tactile and obviously sweeter than the average 2014 Sauternes, but laser-like acidity keeps it dancing on the palate. 2018-2035

Ch Guiraud, Sauternes 1CC 18 (93)

Tropical and orchard fruits are lifted by spicy botrytis notes, crystallised ginger and lemon verbena. Balanced and refined, yet bigger than

D'AGATA'S CHOICE:

5 personal favourites

■ **Ch d'Yquem, Sauternes 1CS 19.25 (97)** (right) *see p43*

■ **Ch Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 1CC 19 (96)** *see p43*

■ **Ch de Fargues, Sauternes 18.5 (95)** *see p43*

■ **Ch La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 1CC 18.5 (95)** *see p43*

■ **Ch Coutet, Barsac 1CC 18.25 (94)** *see this page*



usual but remarkably fresh thanks to vibrant acidity. 2020-2040

Ch Haut-Bergeron, Sauternes 18 (93)

Lovely density to the notes of sweet tropical fruit and lemony botrytis. Insiders know this property offers great wines and great value. It has vines in both Barsac and Sauternes, so there's a bit more complexity here. 2018-2030

Ch Rabaud-Promis, Sauternes 1CC 18 (93)

Ripe banana and vanilla aromas mingle with lime and honeyed baked apple. Big, rich and dense, with a lovely sugar-acid balance (a high 150g/l RS but almost 7g/l total acidity). There's noteworthy purity to the spiced orchard fruit flavours. 2018-2030

Ch Raymond-Lafon, Sauternes 18 (93)

Fresh lemony botrytis, green fig and pear notes then orange zest and melon to lift (thanks to 20% Sauvignon Blanc in the blend). Poised and extremely well made, with sneaky concentration. It's lighter than the usual style but will match a variety of dishes. 2018-2035

Ch d'Arche, Sauternes 2CC 17.75 (92)

Enticing nose of honeycomb, peach and grilled mango. Rich dense and suave, with a peppery note and very good extract. 2018-2028

Ch de Malle, Sauternes 2CC 17.75 (92)

Lemon verbena, ginger, and fresh botrytis lift. There's lovely acid-sugar balance and atypical concentration, considering the 30% Sauvignon Blanc. Its usual refined style but the most impressive young de Malle in years. 2018-2030

Ch de Myrat, Barsac 2CC 17.75 (92)

Aromas of pineapple, peach, sage and smoky botrytis have a saline edge. Very lively acidity gives focus to the tactile stone fruit, mango and papaya flavours (only 118g/l RS). 2018-2030

Ch Romer du Hayot, Sauternes 2CC 17.75 (92)

White flowers, minerals, nectarine, pear and

peach notes are complemented by powdered stone and honey. Not the biggest wine of 2014 but impeccably balanced, with a lovely sweet and sour quality that lingers impressively. 2018-2030

Ch Sigalas-Rabaud, Sauternes 1CC 17.75 (92)

Delicate saffron, lemon verbena, juniper and yellow apple aromas mingle with lemony botrytis. Fresh and juicy, with lifted fresh citrus and spicy stone fruit flavors. Doesn't seem sweet at all but finishes long with building sweetness and intriguing notes of crystallised ginger. Outstanding example of lighter-styled Sauternes. 2018 2030

Ch Bastor-Lamontagne, Sauternes 17.5 (91)

Peach and nectarine nose and palate, lifted by hints of white flowers and lemony botrytis. Finishes with a saline edge. 2018 2035

Ch Doisy-Védrières, Barsac 2CC 17.5 (91)

Fresh, subdued nose of lemony botrytis, fresh citrus fruits and green fig – the blend's 15% Sauvignon Blanc is almost too noticeable.

Lovely floral lift to stone fruit and papaya flavours, extended by lively but harmonious acidity. A trace of alcoholic heat. 2018-2030

Ch Lamothe-Guignard, Sauternes 2CC 17.5 (91)

Honey, roast barley, vanilla and crystallised ginger fill the captivating nose. Peppery acidity and lemony botrytis lift rich tropical fruit and fresh citrus flavours. Noteworthy clarity and cut. Best young LG in years. 2018-2025

Ch Caillou, Sauternes 2CC 17.25 (90+)

Orchard fruit, honey and mango. Lovely 100% Semillon wine of impeccable balance (only 120g/l RS). One of the best young Caillou's in memory. 2018-2025

Ch Broustet, Barsac 2CC 17 (90)

Graphite and white pepper complement apple jelly and nectarine aromas and flavours. Tactile and juicy with edgy acidity and hints of lemony botrytis. Best Broustet in years; the hard work by Jérémy Gravière and the new owners is paying off. 2020-2028

Ch Cantegril, Sauternes 17 (90)

Lead pencil and stone fruit notes with lovely balance. Very fresh and clean in the typical Dubourdieu style. 2018-2022

Recommended

■ **Ch La Clotte-Cazalis, Sauternes 16.75 (89)**

■ **Ch Tuytens, Sauternes 16.75 (89)**

■ **Domaine de L'Alliance, Sauternes 16.75 (89)**

■ **Ch Les Justice, Sauternes 16.5 (88)**

■ **Ch Liot, Sauternes 16.5 (88)**

■ **Ch Partarrieu, Sauternes 16.5 (88)**

■ **Madame de Rayne, Ch de Rayne-Vigneau, Sauternes 2L 16.5 (88)**

■ **Ch Latrezotte, Le Sauternes de Ma Fille, Sauternes 16.25 (87)**

■ **Ch Romer, Sauternes 2CC 16.25 (87)**

■ **Les Charmilles de Tour Blanche, Ch La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 2L 16.25 (87)**

■ **Ch de Veyres, Sauternes 16 (86)** □

Full tasting notes for all the Recommended wines, along with all the latest price news, can be found on Decanter.com/bordeaux-2014