

Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

When the conditions are right and noble rot works its magic, these neighbouring regions produce some of the world's finest sweet wines. Ian D'Agata reports

SAUTERNES AND BARSAC are the world-famous sweet wines of Bordeaux, though this part of France produces other similarly luscious wines (such as, Loupiac, Cérons, Saussignac and Cadillac) that can also be outstanding in many vintages. Rarely, however, do they reach the same lofty heights – or prices.

In those vintages in which weather conditions are just right, Sauternes and Barsac are home to unforgettable wines. I still remember a 1967 Suduiraut – one of the first great wines I ever tasted in my life; it went a long way in forging my desire to become a wine writer.

The Sauternes region is located 40km southeast of the city of Bordeaux, in the southern end of the Graves wine district. Though it is commonplace to refer to all the sweet wines made there as 'Sauternes', in fact there are five different communes: Sauternes, Barsac, Preignac, Bommes and Fargues. While all the wines made in the region can be labelled Sauternes, producers in Barsac may label their wines under the Barsac appellation, should they choose to do so. This is not a bad idea as Barsac's silty, alluvial soils tend to give wines of greater freshness and lightness than the other communes – all known for creamier, rounder wines.

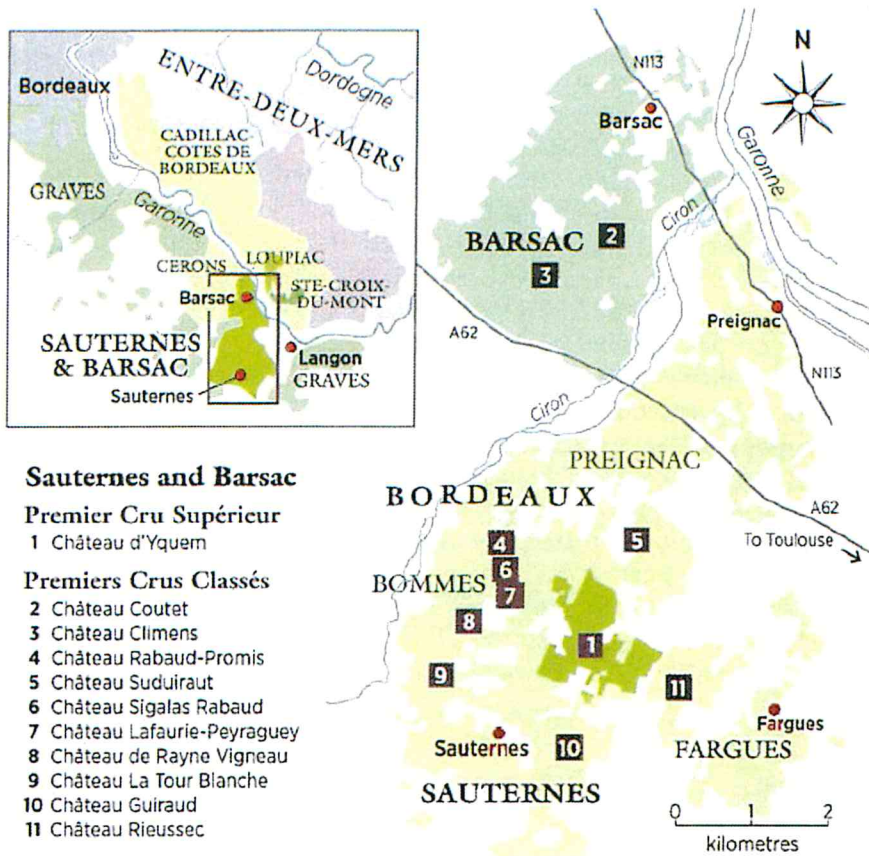
Noble rot

Much like Bordeaux' famous châteaux classification, Sauternes and Barsac have their own ranking, which was also presented at the 1855 World Expo in Paris.

Just like the Médoc, the Sauternes region is subjected to the same highly variable maritime climate, and so vintages are all-important. Perhaps even more important than in the Médoc, as the area is famous for the presence of noble rot – a fungus (*Botrytis cinerea*) that awakens under specific weather and geographical conditions. Primarily this is when the different water temperatures of the two rivers (the Garonne and its tributary the Ciron) mix, giving rise to morning mists. Additionally, on warm, sunny days grapes can dry and concentrate without being ravaged by grey rot or other diseases.

If and when all this occurs, noble rot can then attack the grapes, contributing greater concentration, acidity and complexity to the wines. It also adds recognisable aromas and flavours, ranging from hints of varnish to nail polish, intense tropical fruit notes and smoke, that may not be to every wine lover's liking. Therefore, knowing a little about each vintage is important in picking wines that will prove most suited to your palate.

The 2011 and 2013 vintages are two of the best for Sauternes and Barsac since 1990; only 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2014 are most likely superior (especially 2001). The 2011s are opulent rich wines characterised by great freshness and an endearing, easy-drinking quality, while the 2013s are marked by a noble rot bonanza, though it is a vintage of more uneven quality and lacking the high peaks of 2011.



Sauternes and Barsac

Premier Cru Supérieur

- 1 Château d'Yquem

Premiers Crus Classés

- 2 Château Coutet
- 3 Château Climens
- 4 Château Rabaud-Promis
- 5 Château Suduiraut
- 6 Château Sigalas Rabaud
- 7 Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey
- 8 Château de Rayne Vigneau
- 9 Château La Tour Blanche
- 10 Château Guiraud
- 11 Château Rieussec

Sauternes & Barsac: know your vintages

2014 Outstanding year of pure wines marked by lemony botrytis and high acidity.

2013 Very good year but uneven quality; for the most part, top names did well.

2012 Difficult year in which many estates did not make their grand vin. Barsac wines fared best.

2011 Opulent, very precise wines with a light-on-their-feet quality.

2010 Discreet and ageworthy wines with high acidity, but very well balanced. More delicate than 2009 and 2011.

2009 Rich, decadent and opulent. Some blowsy and over the top, others among the best Sauternes ever made.

Sauternes & Barsac: the facts

Grape varieties Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris and Muscadelle

Area under vine 2,000 ha

Cases produced 480,000 a year

Estate size Fewer than 20 estates own more than 20ha; 160 estates own less 5ha

Classed growths (1855 Classification) Premier Cru Supérieur (1 - Château d'Yquem); Premier Cru (11); Deuxième Cru (15)

Ian D'Agata is an award-winning wine writer who covers Sauternes and Barsac en primeur for Decanter >

The results

When high residual sugars were balanced by zingy acidity, these wines showed why they are so highly regarded – the 2011s just pipping the 2013s in quality. John Stimpfig reports on a successful tasting

THERE WAS NO question that our tasters were upbeat about the quality and value of these two sweet wine wine vintages, noting that they were certainly superior to their dry red equivalents in Bordeaux. However, they were less optimistic about Sauternes' popularity and future among drinkers and collectors. 'It's still a very tough sell,' commented Xavier Rousset MS. 'People just aren't buying it. And that is such a shame because drinkers are really missing out. The decline in sales of Sauternes is in no way a reflection of quality.'

'Overall, I thought this was a pretty strong tasting, with few poor wines and plenty of good ones,' he added. So too did Stephen Brook and Sebastian Payne MW, who concurred that these are two very good years book-ending the lacklustre 2012 vintage.

Comparing the two, Brook noted that the 2013s had 'a sort of solidity', whereas the 2011s had 'more raciness and flair'. Payne agreed 2011 was better than '13, but also commented on the fact that 'We gave two Outstanding to 2013 and only one to 2011, which I can't easily explain. That's the nature of blind tastings!'

'If the growers did have a problem in 2011, it was

'I wish we could persuade more consumers to buy these remarkable wines' Sebastian Payne MW

because the fruit had too much botrytis,' Brook said. 'At Yquem, they even picked some non-botrytised fruit to give it some freshness. The 2013s weren't at the same level because it was such a difficult growing season.'

According to Payne, '2013 was more up and down because, while there was noble rot, there was also grey rot. And some of the wines were not clean to taste. The key to success was often the healthiness or otherwise of the raw material.'

All three tasters picked up on an ongoing trend in Sauternes regarding rising sweetness levels. In particular, Brook drew attention to the fact that in both vintages sugar levels were sometimes up to 180 grams per litre – almost double what they were 25 years ago. However, that didn't concern him unduly, providing the wines

The scores

33 wines tasted

3

Outstanding

12

Highly recommended

16

Recommended

2

Fair

0

Poor

0

Faulty

were balanced. 'I gave some of my top scores to wines with very high residual sugar, providing they had sufficient counterpoint freshness,' he said. 'Without this acidity, the wines tended to be more one-dimensional and much less interesting.'

The panel did debate what was behind this. Brook argued that higher sugar and lower alcohol levels might make the wines more accessible when younger. 'I do think that the initial sugar kick makes most of these wines attractive when young. For instance, I think you could drink most of them from 2016 or 2017. This never used to be the case.'

But will they age as well as their forebears? Again, it came back to balance. 'The best wines will keep for 40 years unless they lack acidity in the first place. They might be a problem to sell, but there's no problem at all in ageing them,' said Payne.

'I wish we could persuade more consumers to buy and open these remarkable wines, which the producers make out of love because they certainly don't do it for financial gain,' added Payne. 'For me, Sauternes is and always will be one of the great wine styles of the world because the wines are so glorious to drink and keep for such a long time. And they are such ridiculously good value for money.'

**Entry criteria:
producers and UK
agents were
invited to submit
the 2013 and 2011
vintages of their
Sauternes and
Barsac grands crus
classés**

The tasters' verdicts

Stephen Brook



Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996 and has won a clutch of awards for his writing on wine. The author of more than 30 books, his works include Complete Bordeaux, now the definitive study of the region and in its second edition. Brook also fully revised the last two editions of Hugh Johnson's Wine Companion.

Brook's verdict

'Sandwiching the less-than-distinguished 2012 are these two fine years. The 2013 vintage may have been a nightmare for red wine producers, but the combination of warmth and humidity suited Sauternes just fine. Even so it wasn't an easy vintage, with uneven ripening, and some grey rot among the noble rot. Overall 2011 was better: an easy harvest, with high acidity from the cool summer plus abundant botrytis in September.

'This was a very impressive tasting, with just a few disappointing wines, and nearly all of those from 2013. But the style of Sauternes has been changing. Some 25 years ago, 120 grams of residual sugar would have been considered unusually high; today 150g/l – even 180g/l – is common. As a consequence alcohol levels are lower (13.5% rather than 15%), but very high sugar can be problematic if it's not balanced by acidity. Fortunately many top wines achieved exactly that. These are Sauternes moving in the direction of German trockenbeerenauslesen, yet without losing the opulence and typicity of Sauternes. The 2011s can be bought with confidence. The 2013s require more careful selection.'

Sebastian Payne MW



Payne joined the wine trade in 1970 and three years later started at The Wine Society as promotions manager. In 1977 he passed the Master of Wine exams and in 1985 was appointed chief buyer. Having stepped down as chief buyer in 2011, Payne remains an integral part of The Wine Society's buying team, as well as writing for the Society List and website.

Payne's verdict

'I'm constantly amazed and delighted at the fine quality of many Sauternes châteaux in recent vintages. This tasting was a reminder that the reputation of white Bordeaux – in this case, the great sweet wines – should not rest on the received opinion of claret vintages.

'Both 2013 and 2011 are relatively weak for claret but this is not the case for Sauternes, and it would be a shame if these wines slip out of the limelight. The 2011 vintage is the riper, fuller-bodied year, but there are great successes in the fresher, more lively 2013s from châteaux who picked and selected in the short window of opportunity when noble rot was at its best. The fine Yquem and Climens, capable of developing for decades, need most time in bottle to show their worth and were underrated here (see p108). Lamothe Guignard looks a bargain in 2011, if not in 2013, and Caillou surprised me for the first time in many years. I did not note a preference for Barsac or Sauternes in either year.

'The great Sauternes will last comfortably for three decades or more but my shortlist is for wines that look great value here.'

Xavier Rousset MS



Rousset became the youngest Master Sommelier in the world in 2002, when working at Bristol's Hotel du Vin. Head sommelier at Le Manoir aux Quat Saisons from 2004, Rousset and head chef Agnar Sverrisson launched Texture in London in 2007, winning a Michelin star in 2010. Their second venture, 28°-50° Wine Workshop and Kitchen, launched in 2010. Rousset is currently working on new projects for 2016.

Rousset's verdict

'Overall, a very high standard for both vintages, with 2011 the better, showing great concentration, good acidity and fine balance. Wines from top estates probably need more time to fully express their potential and complexity, and to allow the oak to better integrate (in some cases it was too obvious, making the wine unbalanced and that much heavier when so young).

'The 2013s are also good but less homogenous and many top estates were disappointing, such as Guiraud, Coutet and Lamothe Guignard which had high scores in 2011, while their 2013 struggled.

'I wonder why Sauternes, which is facing a sales crisis, doesn't focus more on producing half bottles? Prices would be even more competitive and consumers would not need to feel guilty in enjoying 375ml with their meal. Having said that, even at a 750ml bottle price, Sauternes is already among the best-value wines in the world.'

Decanter

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Outstanding 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



Château La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 2013

Decanter average score: 18.75/20pts (95+/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: Stephen Brook 18.5 Sebastian Payne MW 18.5 Xavier Rousset MS 19

£42-£55 Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Fine & Rare

Founded by Jean St-Marc du Latourblanche, the estate was gifted to the French government in 1909 with the agreement that a wine school was to be created on its grounds, and so the La Tour Blanche School of Viticulture and Enology was born. There are about 40ha, planted mainly to Semillon (83%) with a little bit of Sauvignon Blanc (12%) and Muscadelle (5%). The wines of La Tour Blanche are known for their great richness and sweetness.

Stephen Brook Fine apricot nose, with considerable purity of fruit and integrated oak. Lean and precise, very sweet but has balancing acidity to give a surprising raciness. Not an especially voluptuous style, and the fruit is slightly candied, but it's svelte and delicious.

Sebastian Payne MW Quietly confident, properly luscious Sauternes with a creamy palate. Quite discreet but will last well and give enormous pleasure.

Xavier Rousset MS Elegant with very pretty fruit and weight. The oak is well handled which shows on the long and complex palate. Very pleasant indeed.

Drink 2016-2040 Alcohol 13.5%



Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 2013

18.5 (95) SB 18.5 SP 18.5 XR 18.5

£35-£36 Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare, Paramount Vintners

Now owned by Laliqne magnate Silvio Denz, the estate was a fortress in the 13th century and takes its current name from Sieur Raymond Peyraguey, who purchased the property in 1618 and from M Lafaurie, who bought it in 1796. The estate boasts 41ha under vine, of which some are exceptionally old, planted in the late 1920s. Semillon is most planted (93%), with a little Sauvignon Blanc (6%) and Muscadelle (1%). The wines are admired for their unique balance of power and elegance.

SB Discreetly oaky nose dominates the underlying pineapple and apricot fruit. Very sweet attack, silky and almost racy, with fine purity. This has finesse and poise, and the balance and acidity should ensure a good evolution. Slightly exotic and candied with very good length.

SP Creamy and rich, this has considerably more depth than most in this vintage. For me, this is the star of the tasting.

XR Nose and palate of mango, quince and apricot. Balanced with well-integrated oak; rich but still has real finesse and character.

Drink 2017-2040 Alc 13.5% >

Outstanding (continued) 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



Château Doisy-Daëne, Barsac 2011 18.5 (95)

SB 18.5 SP 18.5 XR 18.5

£45-£55 Corkr, Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler

In the late 1880s, owner Jacques Emmanuel Daëne added his family name to that of the vineyard's (Doisy). In 1924 it was bought by Georges Dubourdieu and the estate is now being run by Denis Dubordieu, one of Bordeaux' most famous consulting winemakers, as well as an esteemed University of Bordeaux oenology professor known the world over for his important research work. The 16ha vineyard is

planted to 80% Semillon and 20% Sauvignon. The wines are noted for their refinement and grace, often showing a mineral, almost-Riesling like quality. In exceptional years, a top cuvée is made, L'Extravagant.

SB Smoky apricot and passion fruit nose, very stylish, with nicely judged oak. Sleek and seductive, this has gorgeous fruit and vibrant acidity. Very concentrated and intense, with distinct but classy oak, a silky texture and great persistence. Very long.

SP Intensely sweet but fresh too. Ticks all the boxes, and makes for a very good wine.

XR Great nose and the complex palate is equally harmonious despite a high level of residual sugar. This plus a lovely lengthy finish shows this was created by a skilled winemaker.

Drink 2016-2040 Alc 13%

Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Château Rieussec, Sauternes 2011

17.75 (92) SB 18 SP 18 XR 17.25

£33-£38 Bordeaux Index, Fine & Rare

Lush, waxy, stone-fruit nose, with some honey and botrytis tones. The natural acidity will keep this alive for many years. Very rich, succulent and velvety, with grip, structure and lots of finesse. **Drink 2017-2040 Alc 14%**



Château Guiraud, Sauternes 2011

17.75 (92) SB 17 SP 18 XR 18

£50-£58 Berry Bros & Rudd, Cru Wine World,

Fine & Rare

Lush apple compote and apricot nose with a kiss of oak and a hint of lanolin. Unctuous texture – rich and powerful – but with enough fruit and acidity to balance. A unique, luscious but lively style. **Drink 2017-2040 Alc 13.5%**



Château Lamothe Guignard,

Sauternes 2011 17.75 (92) SB 18.5 SP 18.5 XR 16

£15.50-£17.50 Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Fine & Rare Firm, oaky nose, with ample stone fruits and mango lurking beneath. This has finesse and class yet is easy to appreciate. A stunning wine with fine concentration and acidity with a long, pineapple finish. **Drink 2016-2045 Alc 14%**



Château Coutet, Barsac 2011

17.5 (91) SB 18.5 SP 17.5 XR 16.5

£41-£48 Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima

Voluptuous apricot and pineapple nose that is quite lifted and aromatic. Racy with great purity of fruit and concentration but not too dense. Tangy with excellent balance and a fine future. Delicious! **Drink 2016-2035 Alc 14%**



Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Sauternes

2011 17.5 (91) SB 17.75 SP 17 XR 17.5

£34-£36 Bordeaux Index, Corkr, Fine & Rare, Millésima

Reticent nose of apple and apricot. Palate of unctuous texture with honey and ginger notes. Very high acidity makes for an invigorating drink. The spicy finish lingers, and ensures it will develop nicely. **Drink 2016-2035 Alc 13.5%**



Château Suduiraut, Sauternes 2013

17.25 (90+) SB 17.25 SP 17.5 XR 16.75

£41.83-£45 Bordeaux Gold, Cru Wine World, Fine & Rare, Millésima

A rich style with lots of botrytis and an oily texture. Discreet mango and peach nose while the palate has good underlying acidity with a marked pineapple character. Will age well. **Drink 2016-2035 Alc 13.5%**



Château Doisy-Daëne, Barsac 2013

17 (90) SB 17.75 SP 16.5 XR 17

£27.50-£28.33 Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Millésima, Lay & Wheeler

Elegant apple and apricot nose, with some honey and oak in the background. The palate is waxy with well-integrated oak and some floral notes. Has a persistent finish despite modest acidity. **Drink 2016-2028 Alc 13.5%**



Château La Tour Blanche,

Sauternes 2011 17 (90) SB 17.25 SP 17.5 XR 16.5

£29-£35 Corkr, Fine & Rare, Millésima

Has real class and fine balance between acidity and richness. A lean palate, sleek with exotic fruit and mint. Long, spicy and precise with brooding fruit that will resurface with some time. **Drink 2016-2030 Alc 14%**



Château Doisy-Védrines, Sauternes

2013 17 (90) SB 16.5 SP 17.5 XR 17

£21-£24 Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare, Millésima

Heady, waxy nose shows botrytis, honey and ripe stone fruits. A good interpretation of the vintage, this is surprisingly forward and approachable with a lovely texture and finesse. Finishes long with a real zing. **Drink 2016-2030 Alc 13.5%**

Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Château Caillou, Sauternes 2011

17 (90) SB 16 SP 18 XR 17

£20.50 corkr

Delicate floral nose with intense flavours of mango, quince and ginger. Rich and svelte palate with good acidity to give plenty of cut and bite. Where else in the world can you find such a luscious wine with such a lovely finish? Drink 2016-2040 Alc 13.5%



Château Suduiraut, Sauternes 2011

17 (90) SB 18 SP 17.5 XR 15.5

£39-£56 Corkr, Fine & Rare, Millésima, VinQuinn

Opulent nose of apples, apricots and honey. Rich and creamy palate in a voluptuous style but with enough underlying acidity to keep it fresh. You can almost taste the skins of the grapes bursting with extract and life force. Drink 2017-2050 Alc 13.5%



Château Doisy-Védrières, Sauternes 2011

17 (90) SB 16.75 SP 16.5 XR 17.5

£26-£28.50 Fine & Rare, Four Walls Wine Co,

Haynes Hanson & Clark, Lay & Wheeler

Charming apricot nose which is not sumptuous but elegant. Sweet but lean, with silky, textured stone fruits and pineapple. Not a heavyweight but lively and balanced, with a candied finish. Drink 2017-2030 Alc 13.5%

Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SB	SP	XR	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Sauternes 2013	16.75 (89)	17.5	16.5	16.5	Heady nose of peaches and honey. Voluptuous palate with integrated oak and distinct botrytis. Fine balance of crisp acidity and seductive fruit.	13.5%	2016-2030	£25-£27	Fine & Rare, Millésima
Château de Myrat, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	19	15	16.5	Smoky with sumptuous fruit and a creamy, unctuous palate that is fleshy and concentrated. Built to last with great intensity and excellent length.	13%	2016-2040	£21	Corkr
Château d'Yquem, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	15.5	17.5	17.5	Still sleeping but full of promise, and just now a little veiled by oak. Luscious and characterful enough to emerge triumphant as a polished performer.	14%	2018-2040	£277	Bordeaux Index, Cornay & Barrow
Château de Myrat, Sauternes 2013	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Fresh, aromatic nose with a herbal side. Sweet, intense palate, with a silky texture and a bright minty note to balance the opulent apple and apricot fruit.	13%	2016-2028	£18.92-£22	Bordeaux Gold, Millésima
Château Filhot, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Fruit compote nose with a lively palate of ginger, tropical fruits and positive acidity to balance. Lots of fruit and extract makes for a rich palate.	13.5%	2016-2035	£21-£24	Bordeaux Gold, Fine & Rare
Château Rayne Vigneau, Sauternes 2011	16.75 (89)	17	17	16	Lanolin, apricot and peach aroma. Full of extract and splendidly rich though has enough acidity to stay fresh. True Sauternes character coming through.	13%	2016-2035	£27	Corkr, Fine & Rare
Château Climens, Barsac 2011	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Heady nose with a dominant apple character and a creamy-textured broad palate. Shows solid fruit with bags of flavour and spice. Will deliver in time.	13.5%	2016-2035	£82	Bordeaux Index
Château Climens, Barsac 2013	16.25 (87)	16.25	17	15.5	Aromatic and expressive with a silky palate and good fruit intensity. Stone fruits and wax linger with a hint of mandarin. Has good extract and length.	14%	2016-2030	£87	Bordeaux Index
Château Broustet, Sauternes 2011	16.25 (87)	16.75	16	16	Quite oaky on the nose but has ample underlying peach and passion fruit tones, giving it an exotic sheen. This is a food wine.	12.5%	2016-2035	£19	Fine & Rare
Château de Rayne Vigneau, Sauternes 2013	16 (86)	15	15.5	17.5	Honey, wet wool and floral notes with a rounded and forward palate. Shows great potential with a long and elegant finish.	13%	2016-2030	£27-£32	Bordeaux Gold, Millésima
Château de Malle, Sauternes 2011	16 (86)	16.25	15.5	16	Lush, honeyed apricot and mango nose. An upfront style with immediacy of fruit and enough acidity to give it lift and persistence.	13%	2016-2035	£24.50	Corkr, Fine & Rare
Château de Malle, Sauternes 2013	15.75 (85+)	17	14.5	16	Expressive nose of floral and peach. Broad but intense on the attack, with opulent fruit, integrated oak and far better acidity than most.	13%	2016-2030	£23.50-£24.50	Bordeaux Gold, Corkr, Fine & Rare
Château Coutet, Barsac 2013	15.5 (85)	15.5	16.5	14.5	Ripe but somewhat earthy nose, with little overt botrytis character. Has a voluptuous texture but needs more precision. Sweet and piquant finish.	13.5%	2016-2030	£24.75-£33	Bordeaux Gold, Berry Bros & Rudd, Corkr, Fine & Rare, Justelini & Brooks, Millésima
Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 2011	15.5 (85)	14.5	16	16	Super-ripe pear notes with a sweet and juicy palate. Has texture and medium length but needs just a bit more personality to be great.	14%	2016-2030	£31-£37	Fine & Rare, Millésima, RU Wines, Vinco
Château Guiraud, Sauternes 2013	15.25 (84)	15.5	16	14.5	Nose is quite evolved and exotic with touches of apricot and obvious Sauvignon Blanc fruit. Quite juicy and straightforward with good acidity.	13.5%	2016-2030	£38.46-£46	Berry Bros & Rudd, Corkr, Cru Wine World, Fine & Rare, Paramount Vintners, R&B Wines
Château Lamothe Guignard, Sauternes 2013	15 (83)	16.5	14	14.5	Burnished and complex nose, showing honey, peaches and passion fruit. Rich and velvety, with good depth of fruit and concentration.	14%	2016-2022	N/A UK	www.chateau-lamothe-guignard.fr

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Château Filhot, Sauternes 2013 14.75 (82)

■ Château Broustet, Sauternes 2013 14.5 (81)

Decanter

Sauternes and Barsac 2011 & 2013

My top three Sebastian Payne MW

■ **Château Doisy-Daëne 2011** A tribute to the consummate skill and attention to detail of Denis Dubourdieu. Intensely sweet with high residual sugar, this is beautifully balanced with great fruit, acidity and freshness. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2016-2040

■ **Château Lamothe Guignard 2011** When this small property gets it right, as it evidently did in 2011, this proves to be one of the bargain buys of the region. It has finesse, class and sex appeal, all at a good price. A smart buy. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2016-2045

■ **Château Guiraud 2011** The new ownership team has made a great estate finer and more consistent by cutting back production of its first wine. A high proportion (35%) of Sauvignon Blanc in the blend gave lift. Certified organic this year. **18 (93)** Drink 2017-2040

My top three Xavier Rousset MS

■ **Château La Tour Blanche 2011** What a great surprise! While I have tasted and sold many bottles of La Tour Blanche over the years, I wasn't expecting the level of finesse and elegance from this 2013. Very subtle use of oak, lovely texture and great depth. Well done! **19/20 (96/100)** Drink 2016-2040

■ **Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey 2013** I've always been impressed by this estate and the 2013 is another good vintage. Silvio Denz bought the domaine in 2014 with a quality-focused, long-term vision. This will potentially be a game-changer for this estate if the ambitions of the new ownership are reflected in the quality. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2017-2040

■ **Château Doisy-Daëne 2011** I really enjoyed this rich, complex and delicate style - a real stand-out for me in this tasting. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2016-2040

My top three Stephen Brook

■ **Château Doisy-Daëne 2011** This second growth excelled in both vintages, but the 2011 was exceptional: vibrant, textured, intense and very long, with exquisite balance. Denis Dubourdieu and his two sons show complete command of the Sauternes style and this wine, though approachable now, will live for decades. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2016-2040

■ **Château La Tour Blanche 2013** A triumph in 2013, and almost as good in 2011. Because it doubles as a wine college, this first growth is often overlooked, but in 1855 it was considered the finest wine after Yquem. Now we know why. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2016-2040

■ **Château Lamothe-Guignard 2011** The Guignard brothers bought this run-down second growth in 1981 and turned things around. Not every vintage succeeds (the 2013 failed to excite), but this is both unctuous and elegant, and buying a bottle won't require a bank loan. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2016-2045