

Big and bold: Bordeaux reds 2018

Compared to the 2017 vintage, 2018 yielded bigger wines – sometimes a bit heady – as alcohol levels counted among the highest ever recorded.

The best estates managed to achieve balance with needed freshness. Especially for Merlot – a grape variety that does not tolerate over-maturity as well as Cabernet Sauvignon – it was important to ensure freshness. Indeed, with climate change, high alcohol is becoming a recurring problem, even in Entre-Deux-Mers, stresses Thibault Despagne, of Vignobles Despagne, which crafted two excellent red wines in 2018, reviewed among scores of others for this article.

Compared to the 2017 vintage, whose cooler August nights yielded inherently more balanced reds, “we especially needed to keep an eye on acidities to avoid their rapid loss”, explains Fabien La Peyre of the eponymous estate in the heart of Entre-Deux-Mers at Saint-Hilaire-du-Bois, known for its fine limestone soils. “We harvest at night”, he adds. In any case, his Cuvée Burdigala not only evokes the old Latin name for Bordeaux, but counts among the best red wines tasted for this article.

Many observers look upon 2018 as a

Janus like vintage with the worst start to the season ever experienced in Bordeaux including endless rains, which required vigilance against mildew. The rare and short treatment windows demanded much flexibility and mobilization of workers, who took no weekend or holiday breaks.

At least that proved to be the case for the estates that worked hard to make fine wine at the level of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur AOC. But then, as Despagne recalls, came a “dream summer and late season which allowed us to harvest ideally ripe grapes à la carte”, he recalls.

Like other properties that succeeded in maintain freshness, Despagne practiced such methods as proper vine trimming to maximize freshness; lighter leaf stripping so as to minimize solar exposure and soil work that better maintained humidity to lessen the impact of heat stress. As a result, even with at least 75% Merlot in his blends, he achieved balance with 14% alcohol. I enjoyed many of the wines tasted for this article. Not quite as refined overall as in 2016, but reaching greater heights than in 2017, 2018 yielded quite a few stars. And at these affordable price points, some of these wines constitute worthy purchasing for Bordeaux hunters.

BEST BUYS

Bordeaux rouge 2018

Petit Verdot By Belle-Vue,

AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 91

Over E15 Fine and Rare

100% Petit Verdot. Under the same owners as the superb Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel Château Belle-Vue (AOC Haut-Médoc), this Bordeaux - 100% Petit Verdot - demands patience. The solar vintage ripened the Petit Verdot very well and the complex aromas no doubt come from the over 75-year-old vines: seashell freshness, dark blackberry, black pepper spice, fresh earth and violet floral aspects. But the palate has impressive tannic grip that requires a carafe for at least one hour before serving. An impressive wine, that would go well with Beef Wellington or steak in a mushroom sauce. **Drink 2021-2030**

Château Bastian Reserve,

AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 90

https://savignons.com/

50% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc. An enchanting nose of brambly red berry, juicy plum and hints of oak-derived spice greet the taster, followed through with a rich palate of ripe red and black fruit, overlaid by a touch of eau-de-vie, displaying vintage warmth. A solar year, but like the balance. Enjoy with pan seared duck breast. Along with their new white wine, this consultation from the legendary Jean-Claude Bernoret, this is a must for importers.

Château Bel Air Perponcher, AOC

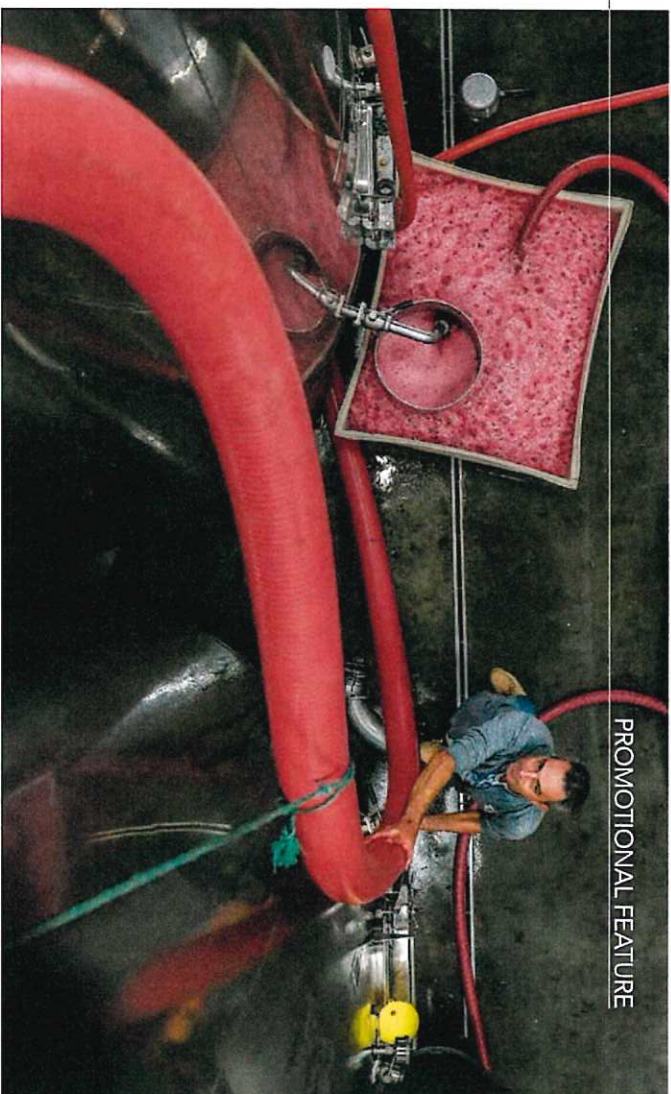
Bordeaux rouge 2018 90

E10-E15 The Wine Society

80% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. An excellent representation of Bordeaux AOC justifiably featured by The Wine Society. Succulence is a word that comes to mind to describe both the aromatics and the palate: for a solar vintage, the wine is balanced and juicy as well as rather rich. Like the ripe fruit and subtle spice: a wine that can match a variety of foods, from Coq au Vin to Comte. One of the top wines of all the Bordeaux AOC!



Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud



Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud

tasted for this article. And worth a visit: the main building on the estate is a 16th century fortified house, which overlooks the Engenne river valley in the north of Dordogne.

Damnation Du Château Reques

Mauriac, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 90

Over E15 Virgin Wine

85% Cabernet Franc, 15% Merlot. What a title! With its vivid black and red label, the label befits a swanky club. But more importantly, the contents are very good: a panoply of red and black fruit, with touches of blackberry jam and subtle toasted oak provide aromatic pleasure. The attack is frank leading to a medium bodied, rather juicy wine, nicely structured and nicely fresh. The 85% Cabernet Franc ripe and delicious indeed. The tannin is rather high, so best to serve with fatty red meats for balance, such as steak on a grill or shishkebab.

Château Des Léotins Cuvée Petit

Verdot, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

www.vignobles-limeau.com

100% Petit Verdot. Near optimal ripeness achieved here for Petit Verdot in the solar 2018 vintage. The wine is at once vivacious and rich, with a uniquely earthy and spicy expression often associated with this grape. Medium body, with a rather long finish. Aged 10 months in new French oak. Nicely balanced. Great to pair with potato au gratin or rich cheeses or even a fondant au chocolat.



BORDEAUX

Château Theuley,

AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

E10-E15 Charles Taylor Wines, The Wine Society

70% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. An ever reliable producer of quality Bordeaux, the 2018 vintage does not disappoint. For one of the hottest summers since 1900, the 2018 vintage would make you think of jammy wines, but here we have a deft expression of both ripeness and freshness: soft, plummy fruit with some brownie cake on the nose. The palate follows through with baked cherry-like the French cake Clafoutis – along with spice. A juicy Bordeaux to drink upon release. Bravo!

Château Tour De Mirambeau,

AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

E10-E15 Rastliffe and Brown

75% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Justifiably a success in the UK already, the 2018 vintage of this estate has a Right Bank profile, combining mainly Merlot and Cabernet Franc and then 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. The aromas are more damson and plum than cassis or cherry. Both supple and substantial for its appellation, the wine would as easily match grilled T-Bone steak as a rich onion terr. And if in Bordeaux, the estate is worth a visit: located in Rauzen, a medieval village in the Entre-Deux-Mers region famous for the subterranean cave carved out by a river that runs underneath the limestone terroir.

Domaine de Château Marchand Bellevue,

AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

E10-E15 www.vignobleslindurug.com/

100% Merlot. An excellent Merlot wine that is fruit forward, balanced and charming. Cold pre-fermentation at 8°C, no doubt contributes to a cooler fruit extraction. Careful control of fermentation temperatures maintains freshness in a solar vintage with 14% alcohol. Aged in new oak for 18 months, the integration is excellent. An ideal pairing with red or white meats preferably grilled. At the end of the meal, try with Camembert or cranial cheeses. Another wine for UK importers to try.

Semper Viva de Suan, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

www.chateau-suan.com
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Pure fruit aromatics and the absence of sulfur accentuates that impression. The Latin "Semper Viva" (Always Alive) is apt. Indeed, Chateau Suan began its conversion to organic farming in 2008 and since the 2014 vintage, all products are certified Ecocert and wines are produced under the direction of the famous wine consultant Michel Rolland. The 80% Merlot lends suppleness and the Cabernet more structure. Medium bodied and smooth, a lovely wine that deserves UK distribution.

Valmengaux En Jarre, AOC Bordeaux rouge 2018 89

Over E15 Bancroft Wines
90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. "A special limited edition wine with a subtly sumptuous aspect that exudes ripe plum fruit, earthy richness and baked fruit. Only 3,200 bottles made from wine aged in earthenware jars that enhance the aromas and fruit flavours. Made from a strict respect for organic specifications, which forbid the use of weed killers and chemical insecticides. Natural fermentation triggered only by indigenous yeast on the grape skins and in the cellar atmosphere.

AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018

Château Fleur Haut Gausseus La Vinière, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91
Over E15 Fidda, Morris & Verdin
100% Malbec. A top wine tasted for this article. A solar vintage like 2018 can ripen Malbec, and at "La Vinière" - one of the single-grape varieties of Château Fleur Haut Gausseus - success is achieved. Crushed tobacco, blackberry, pepper spice and blueberry enchant your senses. The palate has density and richness, with excellent acidity keeping the balance. Enjoy with prime rib and pommes au grain or roasted rack of lamb.

Château La Peyre Cuvée Bordigala, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91

www.facebook.com/chateaupeyre/
50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Petit Verdot, 25% Malbec. Supple yet packed with aromas and flavours of cassis, plum, wet stone, and spice, this is a star of the series: aged exclusively in amphorae and made from old vines of Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec.

ripened this younger Petit Verdot, the solar vintage will give you very nicely. The palate is juicy and close to full body. The wine could use another two years of aging but would be enjoyable today with roast lamb and thyme for example. This could (should) be marketed to high end UK merchants. The label alone - Cuvée Bordigala - evokes the old Latin name of Bordeaux and the shape of the bottle reprises a 19th century form. Bravo!

Château Sainte Barbe, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91

<https://chateau-sainte-barbe.fr/>
85% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon. Part of the Grand Cercle, this is easily a top wine from the tasting. The purity of the fruit in the aromatic profile is very impressive, with black berry and red currant, as well as pleasing oak derived spice. The palate reveals some freshly ground coffee bean along with ripe juicy plum. The finish tightens up a bit, so give it time. And kudos to the informative back label.

Château Vermont, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 91

90% Merlot, 10% Petit Verdot. Already known in the late 19th century as a top wine from Entre-Deux-Mers, I can say with confidence that the 2018 ranks among the best for this article. Made from 90% Merlot coming from the best parcels of the vineyard and the oldest vines, the wine exudes breed: a noble aroma of dark fruit, liquorice, plum and spice. The attack has vitality, the mid palate fine density, and the finish is long with lift. A wine to enjoy on its own, or to accompany a grilled duck breast with chutney.

Château La Verrière, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 90

E10-E15 Jaxen
85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. One of the top wines tasted for this article, this estate proves yet again how to make a wine of finesse and density for its bargain price point. Aromas are already rather complex, combining a certain "fresh" earthiness, red fruit, liquorice and floral aspects. The palate is at once fleshy and harmonious, with lift on the medium plus finish. Drink 2020-2026

Château Bolaire, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89

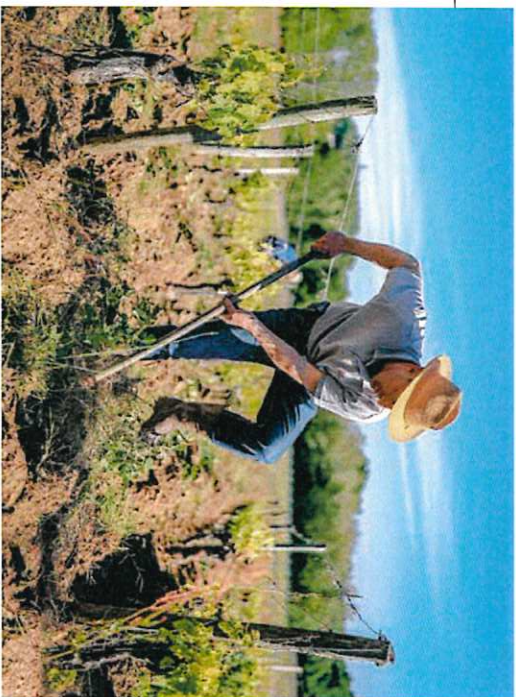
E10-E15 Fine & Rare
50% Merlot, 50% Petit Verdot. 2018 was a vintage suitable for Petit Verdot, which ripened well. This wine exudes spice, ripe black and red fruit and has the tannic structure for several years bottle aging, but it is already fine today. Enjoy with grilled duck breast in an orange sauce. The estate belongs to the Mulliez family, also owner of Château Belle-Vue (Haut Medoc). And the strong presence of Petit Verdot is a signature of Mulliez vineyards.

Château De La Cour D'Argent, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89

E10-E15 Wine Trail
95% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc. Like so many other wines tasted, a deep colour reveals quite a bit of aromatic punch: dark red berry fruit, some marachino cherry, too. Almost liquorice of cherry. The palate has pleasing density and richness but well framed by tannic structure. A wine that punches above its weight" in quality. Fermentation in thermostatically controlled 200Hl stainless steel vats, long (30 days) vat fermentation, delestirage (the juice is removed and poured back over the cap) and pigeeage (the cap is forced into the juice). Aging 14 months in barrels which were only used once before.

Château De Prenchère Cuvée Raphaël, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89

Over E15 Peter Oberme Wines
65% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon. Here we have a Bordeaux that clearly merits a generous score. The nose is subtle and clean, with notes of plum and cassis and fine dark chocolate. The palate is supple and smooth, with fine tannins, and a successful integration of 25% new oak for the 12 month aging. Some "nitric-oxygenation" - sending fine bubbles through the barrels - has broken down the tannins a bit more, and it works here.



Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud



Château Lauduc Prestige, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89

<https://www.lauduc.fr>
75% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc. A deep nose of ripe red and black fruit, coming from the predominant Merlot, enchant the taster. An explosion indeed of fruit and spice, so the word opulence comes to mind. The palate has fine tannic structure and backbone to create a fine wine overall. Needs a bit of time in a carafe before service. Given the decent production, a wine that would be of interest to the UK market, as it has earned numerous international competitions.

Château Pascaud, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89

www.jalouste-beaullieu.com
100% Merlot. One has to admire the sheer floral aromatics of this Bordeaux Supérieur. Combined with subtle toasted notes and dark fruit, the wine is full-bodied, yet well structured for bottle aging. I like its clearly fragrant nature, and fine long finish.

Château Pertignas Cuvée Vin Des Copains, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 89

[E10-E15 David Matheson \(Guernsey\)](http://E10-E15 David Matheson (Guernsey))

and rich, reflecting the solar vintage. A wine that you can almost chew, it could be a fine by the glass selection. Spicy and succulent, with a long finish.

Château L'Orsieur Vieilles Vignes, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88

www.vignoblegeromhin.com
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. The attractive aroma combines both floral and fruit, leading to a juicy ripe red and black fruit flavoured palate. Smoothly textured and supple, this medium bodied wine is perfect for your summer barbecue or a fillet of veal in a creamy mushroom sauce.

Château La Paillette, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88

dparsieur@orange.fr
75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. Like many 2018s, the aromas leap from the glass and this is no exception: much juicy blackberry, dark chocolate, violet. A savoury and juicy palate invite drinking, and this would be a fine by-the-glass selection for a bar, or for you.

Château Les Gravères De La Brandille, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88

E10-E15 Stone, Vine & Sun
65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc. An excellent Bordeaux, evoking juicy plum, blackberry liquorice and dark chocolate. The vines are 40 years old, yielding quality fruit. The palate in 2018 is rather supple and soft, not without tannin but perhaps not as structured as in 2016. The wine is made with much care: leaf clearing permits for better ripeness and aeration against rot, the grapes are harvested nicely ripe, and then de-stemmed for a cold maceration to optimise excretion while maintaining freshness.

Château Maison Noble Prestige, AOC Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 88

www.chateau-maisonmabile.com
80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. The nose exudes a certain regal aspect: ripe red and black fruit but also wet stone. The palate is juicy and ripe, albeit well structured with noticeable tannin to stand up to your dinner. A wine that is made with much care, from harvest to bottling, and it shows.

Photograph: © Guillaume Bonnaud



BORDEAUX
BORDEAUX SUPÉRIEUR
plane.te-bordeaux.fr

| Nom de votre cuvée | AOC et millésime | NOTE DEGUSTATION |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Château Fleur Haut Gausseus La Yminière | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 91 |
| Château La Peyre Cuvée Burdigala | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 91 |
| Château Sainte Barbe | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 91 |
| Château Vermont | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 91 |
| Petit Verdol By Belle-Vue | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 91 |
| Château Bastian Réserve | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 90 |
| Château Bel Air-Perpochet | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 90 |
| Château La Vertière | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 90 |
| Dérivation Du Château Riquès Mauriac | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 90 |
| Château Boiaire | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château De La Cour D'argent | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château De Parenchère Cuvée Raphaël | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Des Lédins Cuvée Petit Verdol | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Lauduc Prestige | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Pascal | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Pertignas Cuvee Vin De Copains | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Thieuley | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Tour De Mirambeau | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Dojnen de Château Marchand Bellevue | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Sempor Vins de Siau | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Valmingaux En Jarre | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Vieux Château Renaissance Des Vignobles Turaut | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 89 |
| Château Hoslin Le Roc Grande Cuvée | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château La Paillette | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Les Gravières De La Brandille | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château L'Oiseau Vieilles Vignes | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Maison Noble Prestige | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Bdx Revolution | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Big Fuli | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Calherine Lucas de Château la Peyere | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Champ De Fleuret des Vignerons de Puissequin Lussac Saint-Emilion | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Aux Grèves De La Laurence Réserve Traditionnelle | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Beausoleil | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Belle Garde Cuvée Elevée En Fût De Chêne | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Bragestone | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Briot | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Buisson Redon | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Castagnac Cuvée Raphaël | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Gazeau 1560 | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Chateau Clos Moulin Pontet | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château De Beauregard-Durcourt | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château De Bonhose | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château De La Vieille Tour | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château De L'Alibrade | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château De L'Halandailh | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château des Arras Cuvée Hestia | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Fayau | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Ferréres | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Grand Jean | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Haut Sorillon | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château Jéhin | Bordeaux rouge 2018 | 88 |
| Château La Brande | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 | 88 |

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|---|-------------------------------|
| Château La Feynelle | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château La Levrette La Petite | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château La Rampe | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Lamoignon-Vincent Liberte | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Landereau Cuvée Classique | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Le Chêne De Margot | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château le Grand Verdus Génération | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Les Bértrands | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Mazzeier | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Millard | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Minvielle Les Rochers | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Moutte Blanc | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Panchille Alix | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Penin "Grande Sélection" | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Petit Feylon Cuvée Sarah | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Piconat Tradition | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Perral | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Pilet | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Recougne | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Roc Meynard | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Rossignol | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Tour De Gilet | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Château Tour De Goupin | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Château Tour De Château Bonnet | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Dominus de Château Bonnet | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Fleur De Caillet De Château Lecourt Caillet | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Grand Vin De Reignac | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Isauri Cabernet Franc | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| La Croix D'Ardi | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Le Barry de Château La Mothe du Barry | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Leo By Léo De Maison Bertrand Ravache | Bordeaux Supérieur rouge 2018 |
| Recto de Château Frans Baudron | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Rouge Tradition | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| The Natural Circus de Château de Chairenon | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |
| Vine de Château Roquetfort | Bordeaux rouge 2018 |