



# Bordeaux Cheat Sheet: Overview

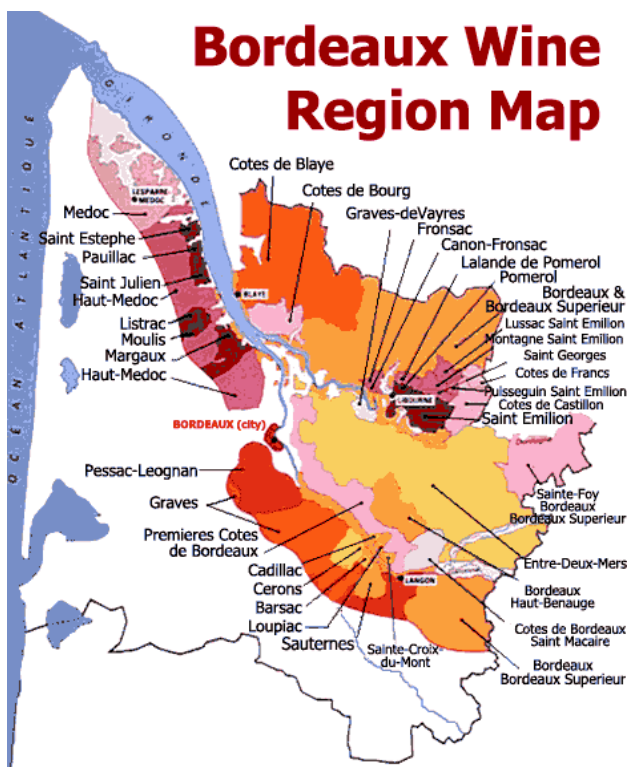
Advanced Study Material Series  
www.velvetropewines.com



Velvet Rope Wines Education

## Overview

The Bordeaux region of France is the second largest wine-growing area in the world with around 300,000 acres under vine, more than in all of Germany and ten times the amount planted in New Zealand. It spreads some 60 miles around the city of Bordeaux, the region's main city. The climate in Bordeaux is generally oceanic and temperate with short, mild winters, hot summers, long autumns and a high degree of humidity generated by the Atlantic Ocean.



### Names to Know

- ✚ The six highest quality wine districts in Bordeaux are **Médoc, Graves, Sauternes, Barsac, Saint-Émilion, and Pomerol.**
- ✚ **Pauillac** is considered one of the best appellations of Bordeaux. The great châteaux of Pauillac are **Château Lafite Rothschild, Château Latour and Château Mouton Rothschild.**
- ✚ **Sauternes** is world-famous for sweet wines such as **Yquem, Raymond-Lafon and Rieussec.** **Barsac** is famous for outstanding sweet wines such as **Château Climens and Château Coutet.**

*"One of Bordeaux's greatest virtues is its extraordinary longevity. The finest Bordeaux wines, if purchased in pristine condition and stored properly, are nearly immortal in terms of aging capacity."*

- Robert M. Parker

## Viticulture and Varietals

The geological foundation of the region is limestone, leading to a soil structure that is heavy in calcium. The soil of Bordeaux is composed of gravel, sandy stone, and clay. Bordeaux wines are created by blending different grapes: **Merlot, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Cabernet-Franc, Petit Verdot, Malbec (locally called "Cot"), Carmenère; Sauvignon, Sémillon, Muscadelle, Ugni blanc, Colombard, Folle blanche, Merlot Blanc, Ondenc, Mauzac.** The region's best vineyards are located on the well drained gravel soils that are frequently found near the Gironde River. An old adage in Bordeaux is that the best estates can "see the river" from their vineyard and a majority of the land facing riverside are occupied by classified estates.

## Key Regions and Wines

Bordeaux has 57 appellations, about 9,000 wine-producing châteaux, and 13,000 wine growers. The Gironde estuary dominates the regions along with its tributaries, the Garonne and the Dordogne rivers, defining the main geographical subdivisions of the region:

### Left Bank

On the left bank of Garonne, in the west and south of the region.  
Home of the famous wine regions **Graves and Médoc.**

### Entre-Deux-Mers

French for "between two waters," the area between the rivers Dordogne and Garonne, in the center of the region.

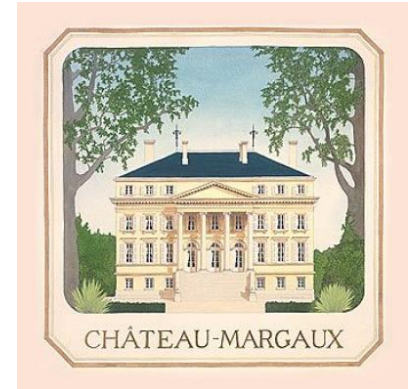
### Right Bank

Situated on the right bank of Dordogne, in the northern parts of the region, around the city of Libourne.

## Classification

There are four different classifications of Bordeaux, covering different parts of the region:

- The **Bordeaux Wine Official Classification of 1855** covers red wines of **Médoc** (and sweet wines of **Sauternes-Barsac**). The highest tier of classified growths – Grand Crus Classés – are so-called first growths, the well-known “**Premier Cru**” (“**1er Cru**”). Today, there are five:
  - **Château Lafite Rothschild**, Commune de Pauillac, Haut-Médoc
  - **Château Latour**, Commune de Pauillac, Haut-Médoc
  - **Château Margaux**, Commune de Margaux, Haut-Médoc
  - **Château Haut-Brion**, Commune de Pessac, Graves. The only Château situated in Graves rather than Médoc, and therefore the only Château on the list allowed to sell a dry white wine under the same name and appellation as the red wine.
  - **Château Mouton Rothschild**, Commune de Pauillac, Haut-Médoc.
- The **1955 Official Classification of Saint-Émilion**, which is updated approximately once every ten years, most recently in 2006. There are three categories, the highest being **Premier Grand Cru Classé A** with two members: **Château Ausone** and **Château Cheval Blanc**.
- The **1959 Official Classification of Graves**, initially classified in 1953 and revised in 1959.
- The **Cru Bourgeois Classification** lists some of the high quality wines from the Left Bank Bordeaux wine region that were not included in the 1855 classification. The original Cru Bourgeois list was drawn up by the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce and Chamber of Agriculture in 1932, selecting 444 estates. A 2003 revision was overturned by the French government in 2007, so currently this classification is not in use, a ban which is set to be lifted by 2009.
- There is no official classification applied to **Pomerol**. However, some Pomerol wines, notably **Château Pétrus** and **Château Le Pin**, are considered as being equivalent to the first growths of the 1855 classification, often selling for even higher prices.



## Did You Know?

- Originally, **Château Mouton Rothschild** was excluded from First Great Growth status in 1855 – likely because the vineyard had recently been purchased by an Englishman and was no longer in French ownership – Mouton was elevated to "first growth" status in 1973, after decades of intense lobbying. This is the only change to the original 1855 classification, excepting the 1856 addition of **Château Cantemerle** – *which we will be tasting tonight!*
- The irony of the jab at the British (see above) is that Bordeaux wines really only began to take off after Bordeaux became English territory in the 12th century, spurring exports and ensuring the ubiquity of **claret** in England.
- The term **claret** is most common in the United Kingdom, elsewhere it is called "red Bordeaux". It was coined from **clairet**, a now uncommon dark rosé which was the predominant style of wine exported from Bordeaux until the 18th century, first made in **Pessac Léognan**.
- **Pomerol** is the smallest wine producing area in the Bordeaux region and more of a community where vineyards are family-shared and ranking is not welcomed. There typically aren't huge chateaux, however Pomerol hosts one of the most famous of all: **Pétrus**. This is 9 times smaller than Lafite so despite lack of ranking, very rare and precious.
- **Saint-Émilion** is the oldest wine area of the Bordeaux region and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It produced wine long before vines were even planted in Médoc.
- **Bordeaux is the reason for the INAO's** (the governing body of AOCs) **existence**. Due to the popularity and lucrative nature of Bordeaux wines, other areas in France began growing their own wines and labeling them as Bordeaux. As profits in the Aquitaine region declined, the vigneron demanded that the government impose a law declaring that only wine from Bordeaux could be labeled with this name. The Institut National des Appellations d'Origine (INAO) was thus created.
- The name Bordeaux derives from the French “au bord de l'eau” which means "along the water" and makes reference to the Gironde estuary (the biggest in Europe) and its tributaries, the Garonne and the Dordogne Rivers.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bordeaux\\_wine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bordeaux_wine)

Copyright ©2009 Velvet Rope Wines, Inc. | [www.velvetropewines.com](http://www.velvetropewines.com)