

Drink

Bamboozled by bordeaux?
Then follow *Susy Atkins*' advice
and try a *cru bourgeois*

Red bordeaux can bewilder. Top, cult labels are terrifyingly expensive, the cheapest often disappoint, while chunky clarets need long cellaring to soften them up. Then there's the classification system - the first-to-fifth tiers of classed growths (*crus classés*) - to negotiate.

So it pays to know about *cru bourgeois*, a group of bordeaux reds just below classed-growth status, but which, in a good year, can offer pretty serious drinking, often for less than £20. Wines from properties

throughout the Médoc, on Bordeaux's Left Bank, are eligible for a *cru bourgeois* title, but must pass a quality check at the winery and then be approved in a blind tasting by an impartial panel.

Impartiality is key today, but in 2007 the *cru bourgeois* title was annulled after a court found ties among panellists to classified châteaux. In 2009 it was reinstated with more rigour and independence.

Frédérique de Lamothe, the director of the Alliance des Crus Bourgeois du Médoc, points out, rightly, the diversity in style among, in a typical year, more than 250 *cru bourgeois* wines, depending on appellation, vintage and château style.

The superb 2009s are becoming scarce, but the 2010s are especially impressive and rich (see below). The 2011s are simpler (Lidl's minty Château Panigon 2011 is still a steal at £8.99), and 2008s more mellow (try Château Rousseau de Sipian 2008, from Cambridge Wine Merchants at £15.99). The official *cru bourgeois* insignia is on every bottle that has passed through selection. It's a great place to begin a journey into classier, if not classed-growth, bordeaux.

Tipple Tip

NEW CASE NOTES

Tesco has announced that it has added a number of new bordeaux wines from the exceptional 2010 vintage to its Wine by the Case range. From *cru bourgeois* to first growths, cases cost from £84, and are certainly worth checking out tesco.com/wine

TRY THESE



Château Labadie 2010 Cru Bourgeois, Médoc (*The Wine Society, £11.50*) Amazing value, punching above its weight with lovely juicy, concentrated fruit, plum and blackcurrant, a seam of oak running through it. For steak

Château Le Vieux Fort 2010 Cru Bourgeois, Médoc (*Waitrose, £13.49*) There's an impressive, almost meaty, savoury edge to this, and a strong heart plump with cassis, and a whiff of cedarwood. Decant to serve with roast lamb



Château Sénéjac 2010 Cru Bourgeois, Haut-Médoc (*Berry Bros & Rudd, £16.50; Majestic, £23 or £18 each for two or more until 2 February*)

Impressively full-bodied but well-balanced claret – rich, ripe with luscious cherries and cassis, held together by firm tannins and with notes of wood, spice and fresh mint. Will evolve well over the next few years



Stella 75