

Decanter

Vintage report

Sauternes & Barsac 2011

Stephen Brook reports on a vintage that has yielded delicious wines in both Sauternes and Barsac – perfectly balanced between opulence and acidity. A must buy for sweet wine lovers

AS HAPPENS QUITE frequently, a year that was far from outstanding for red Bordeaux turned out to be a winner for the region's top sweet wines. The spring was mild, although hail in April affected yields badly in the village of Sauternes itself and Bommes. Flowering was exceptionally early, around 20 May, but then the weather cooled off, and July and much of August were mostly cloudy, cool and damp. In such conditions, unwelcome rot made an appearance and had to be removed. Rain during the last week of August provoked botrytis, and very warm weather continued into September, so that the sunshine was able to concentrate the increasingly botrytised fruit. ➤

'Barsac seems to have succeeded particularly well in 2011'



Photographs: Mike Prier; Ben Appeldoorn/Alamy

Above: pickers at Château Nairac enjoyed a very warm September spell





Brook's top Sauternes & Barsac classified growths



Château d'Yquem, Sauternes 1GCC
19/20 (96/100)
£284-£298 *Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima, Nicholls & Perks, R&B*
Tasted from cask. Lush apricot nose. Fine attack

thanks to high acidity. Very sweet and pungent, with intense apricot fruit. Not a fat style, with great elegance, and shows lots of energy and spice. Long. **Drink 2018-2060 Alcohol N/A**



Château Climens, Barsac 1CC 18.5 (95)
£62.50(ib)-£84 *Armit Wines, Fine & Rare, James Nicholson, Millésima*

Complex, poised nose of apricot and quince. Fine attack, intense and very concentrated, with considerable force and drive. Taut and full of tension, this is for the long haul. Disappointing last year, magnificent now. Very long. **Drink 2016-2050 Alc 13.5%**



Château Coutet, Barsac 1CC
18.5 (95)
£51.66-£53.30 *Armit Wines, Fine & Rare, Millésima*

Elegant peachy nose, with ample botrytis and integrated oak. Creamy and sumptuous, highly concentrated, this is a majestic wine with both power and freshness. Has energy and persistence and fine balancing acidity. **Drink 2015-2050 Alc 14%**



Château Clos Haut-Peyraguey, Sauternes 1CC
18 (93)
£35.86-£40 *Fine & Rare, Millésima*

Heady ripe mandarin and apricot nose. Very sweet and intense on the palate but with high acidity to give it finesse and drive. Tight, youthful, citric, imposing and long. **Drink 2016-2045 Alc 13.5%**



Château Guiraud, Sauternes 1CC 18 (93)
£38.34-£49.20 *Berry Bros & Rudd, Millésima*

Discreet apricot and mandarin nose. Fine attack of freshness and purity. Silky and intense, with fine acidity to lift the fruit. Needs time to develop complexity. Fine potential and good length. **Drink 2016-2045 Alc 14%** ➤



Château Rieussec, Sauternes 1CC 18 (93)
 £30(ib)-£58.34 **Armit Wines, Bordeaux Index, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima**
 Tasted from cask. With a muted nose, this is distinctly oaky now. Good attack, sleek and creamy, it may not be nuanced now but it has precision and drive, and complex flavours of ripe citrus and apricots. Very long, one with a lengthy future ahead of it. **Drink 2016-2050 Alc N/A**



Château Suduiraut, Sauternes 1CC 18 (93)
 £40.41(ib)-£56.46 **Armit Wines, Fine & Rare, Millésima**
 Heady apricot and mango nose. Concentrated and creamy, with density and weight of fruit. The oak is integrated and the wine is harmonious in a rich rather than racy style. Long. **Drink 2016-2050 Alc 13.5%**



Château de Rayne Vigneau, Sauternes 1CC 17.5 (91)
 £36 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Millésima**
 Reticent but oaky stone fruit nose, with ample botrytis. Lean and fresh, sleek and silky, this is showing precision rather than depth of fruit. But it does have finesse and persistence. **Drink 2015-2040 Alc 13.5%**



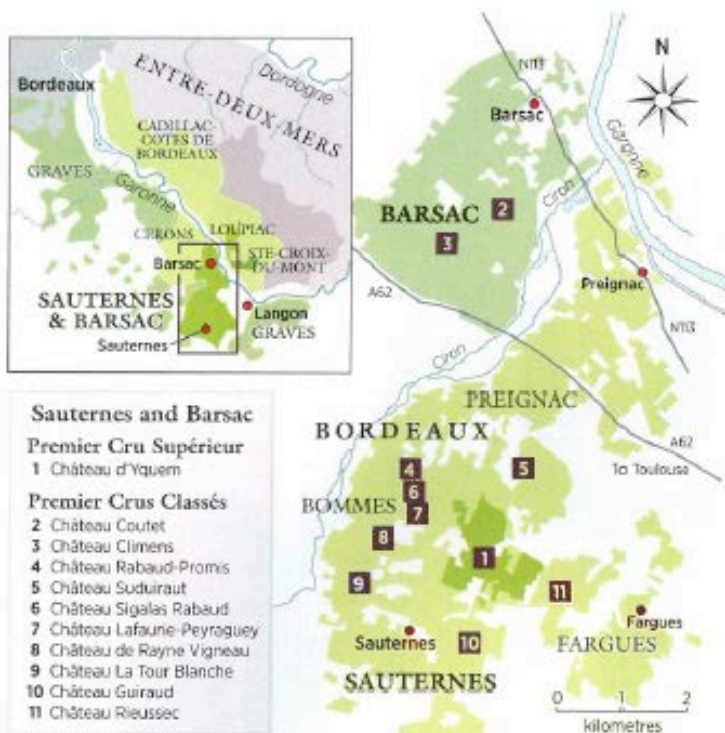
Château Doisy-Daëne, Barsac 2CC 17.5 (91)
 £24.16(ib)-£31.40 **Armit Wines, En Primeur**
 Clean citric nose, lightly candied and oaky. Concentrated and precise with fine acidity, this is silky, charming, impeccably balanced and long. **Drink 2015-2040 Alc 13%**



Château La Tour Blanche, Sauternes 1CC 17.5 (91)
 £43.34-£51.40 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Millésima**
 Juicy apricot and pineapple nose, lashings of upfront fruit. Very concentrated, velvety and imposing, with a slight lack of freshness and acidity, but it does have impressive density of fruit. **Drink 2015-2040 Alc 14%**



Château Sigalas Rabaud, Sauternes 1CC 17.5 (91)
 £38.46 **Fine & Rare**
 Smoky apricot and mandarin nose. Good attack, sweet and pungent, this is supple rather than racy, with purity of fruit and a long, spicy finish. **Drink 2015-2040 Alc 14%**



'Is this a vintage to buy? Absolutely. Even the richest wines are not heavy, thanks to the acidity'

The harvest got under way from 12 September, and the best grapes were picked over a period from 20 September to 5 October. Nairac, by contrast, picked its entire crop in a single *trie* from 21 to 30 September. The grapes had ripened and concentrated to such an extent that the risk was the cuvées would be too rich and heavy. Yquem coped with this problem of balance by including in the blend some mature bunches that had not developed noble rot. The final balance of the wines was assisted to a great extent by the acidity that the cool summer had preserved. ➤

Below: wines from Château de Rayne Vigneau show 'finesse and persistence'





Château de Myrat, Barsac 2CC 17 (90)

£23.50-£26.46 **Christopher Piper, Fine & Rare, Millésima**
Orangey nose with ample botrytis. Rich, concentrated and full; a weighty and unctuous style, but it

doesn't lack acidity or persistence. Long finish.
Drink 2015-2038 Alc 13%



Château Filhot, Sauternes 2CC 17 (90)
£17.40-£18.16 **En Primeur, Fine & Rare**

Charming apricot and pineapple nose. Lean, zesty and lifted, with precision and charm. Not much depth of fruit but it does have excellent balance and vigour, with good crystallised fruit on the finish.

Drink 2015-2035 Alc 13.5%



Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey, Sauternes 1CC 17 (90)

£34.86 **Fine & Rare, Millésima**
Muted nose with smoky oak, mango and passion fruit. An opulent style with ample creamy fruit and good

acidity. A touch obvious and one-dimensional but needs time. **Drink 2015-2038 Alc 14%**



Château Dolsy-Védrines, Barsac 2CC 16.5 (88)
£24.16-£28.86(ib) **Armit Wines, Bordeaux Index, Fine & Rare**

Opulent, orangey nose. Suave, concentrated and citrusy, with considerable

weight and a piquant finish. Not quite harmonious yet. Good length. **Drink 2015-2035 Alc 13.5%**



Château Lamothe-Guignard, Sauternes 2CC 16.5 (88)

£18.20 **Fine & Rare**
Peach, orange and mango nose, showing weight and complexity. Bright and fresh, with upfront fruit. Has

fair acidity but lacks some drive, although it seems balanced with good length. **Drink 2015-2030 Alc 14%**



Château Nairac, Barsac 2CC 16.5 (88)
£43.34-£44.46 **Fine & Rare, Millésima**

Broad orange and peach nose. Rich but has balancing acidity, spicy and assertive, with integrated oak. Quite

long, yet lacks some force on the finish.

Drink 2015-2035 Alc N/A >



'The vintage should lie between the opulence and charm of the 2009 and the tension and minerality of the 2010'

Bérénice Lurton of Château Climens (right)



Barsac seems to have succeeded particularly well. Climens, with its well-drained soils, reported no grey rot and began the harvest on 8 September. The bulk of its crop was picked by 21 September, and it was all over by 29 September, the same day that the harvest had begun in 2010. Climens' yields were generous at 20 hectolitres/hectare, and other Barsac châteaux reported similar yields.

Producers were highly content with the quality of the wines. At Yquem, cellar master Dr Sandrine Garbay compared the vintage to 1997 and to 2009, while at Dolsy-Védrines, Olivier Castéja claimed >

Top: with their fine acidity, Château Guiraud's wines illustrate well the purity and freshness of the year

Unclassified Sauternes & Barsac 2011s



Château Raymond-Lafon, Sauternes 18 (93)

£27.90-£31.67 Farr Vintners, Millésima, Z&B

Toasty, elegant, apricot nose. Creamy, full-bodied and concentrated. Velvety but not heavy, with fine

balancing acidity. Fresh and persistent. **Drink** 2015-2040 **Alcohol** 13.5%



Château de Fargues, Sauternes 17.5 (91)

£61.60(ib)-£90 Armit Wines, Millésima, Nebuchadnezzar

Tasted from cask. Closed but oaky nose. Concentrated and dense, showing power and force, with excellent depth of

fruit. Quite toasty and at present lacks some drive on finish. **Drink** 2015-2040 **Alc** N/A



Château du Mont, Cuvée Jeanne, Sauternes 17.5 (91)

N/A UK www.chateau-du-mont.com

Splendid botrytis nose of mandarins, apple compote, and apricot, with judicious oak. Medium-bodied, with

racy acidity, showing poise and elegance. Textured and very long. **Drink** 2015-2035 **Alc** 12.5%

Château Simon, Cuvée Exceptionnelle, Barsac 17.5 (91)

N/A UK www.chateausimon.fr

Apricot nose, with smoky oak. Intense and linear, with lively acidity. Admirably concentrated and balanced, and should evolve well. **Drink** 2015-2035 **Alc** 14%

Château de Veyres, Sauternes 17 (90)

£10.50 (375ml) Bordeaux Gold

Juicy mandarin and apricot nose. Lively attack; silky and concentrated, with a bracing orange-zest cut. Nicely balanced and long. **Drink** 2015-2028 **Alc** 13.5%

Château Roumieu-Lacoste, Sauternes 17 (90)

N/A UK +33 5 56 27 16 29

Lush nose with apricots and apple compote. Creamy and voluptuous but has good underlying acidity to cut the rich stone fruits. Vigorous and long. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



Clos Dady, Sauternes 17 (90)

£25.55 Exel

Restrained peachy nose. Good attack. The fine acidity refreshes the rich stone fruits. Quite pungent and oaky, with fairly good length. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

Photograph: Kristel Richard/AlCorners Images

For a list of UK stockists, please turn to p120



'Producers were highly content with the quality of the wines. At Yquem, cellar master Dr Sandrine Garbay compared the vintage to 1997 and to 2009'

that he preferred this vintage to the acclaimed 2001, as did Xavier Planty at Guiraud. Residual sugar levels were high, as so often in recent vintages, but luckily there was sufficient acidity to prevent the wines from being cloying.

Bérénice Lurton of Climens is enthusiastic: 'I have the impression of a tremendous but still underground vibrancy... The vintage should lie between the opulence and charm of the 2009 and the tension and minerality of the 2010.' Aline Baly of Coutet finds the 2011s 'of a stunning purity and power. The wines are marked by a beautiful balance and express each château's terroir.'

Is this a vintage to buy? Absolutely. There are, as always, different styles, with some properties favouring finesse over richness, while others opt for density of fruit instead. But even the richest wines are not heavy, thanks to the radiant acidity. The best wines are definitely worth cellaring and should age effortlessly. **W**

Stephen Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter for 18 years and is the author of The Complete Bordeaux



Above: Dr Sandrine Garbay of Château d'Yquem (top) has crafted a 'lush' wine with 'lots of energy and spice'