

Decanter

Bordeaux 2009: high praise and notes of caution

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Adam Lechmere in Bordeaux

As en primeur week gets into its stride, reactions to the much-hyped 2009 vintage are already splitting into two loosely-defined factions.

Bordeaux has made a quantum leap and produced a truly 'modern' vintage, Steven Spurrier told **decanter.com** today.

At the same time there have been more mixed reactions – particularly in comparison to the first – acknowledged – 'vintage of the century', the 2005.

Speaking in St Emilion, where he had been tasting the 150-plus wines of the Cercle du Rive Droite grouping, Decanter's consultant editor said 'the 2009 was the best vintage that Bordeaux had ever produced'.

'The wines are seamless: their richness, tannins, acidity and freshness all combine to produce truly elegant and balanced wines.

'This is modern Bordeaux. It has made a quantum leap and jumped over the New World to make modern, but not "international" wines,' Spurrier said.

He drew a distinction between a wine that is made using modern methods – in terms of selection, vineyard management and so forth – and a wine that is made to appeal to as wide an international audience as possible, thereby losing its regional character.

'It is quite clearly Bordeaux. It underlines the fact that no other region can make wines quite like this.'

The veteran critic made clear this is only the first full day of the En Primeur tastings in Bordeaux, and that he had only tasted the Right Bank and the Cru Bourgeois of the Medoc – which he was impressed by.

Referring to the great expectations that have surrounded this vintage since at least last summer, he said that it was like going to see a film that had been excessively hyped, and enjoying it. 'But you're still only in the first 20 minutes.'

Hong Kong-based critic Jeannie Cho Lee MW has already tasted three of the five First Growths: Haut-Brion, Margaux and Latour.

She described them to her Twitter followers as 'stunning wines with amazing density', but each with their own 'personality and terroir expression'.

She was particularly impressed with the 'phenomenal' Haut-Brion ('second wines are excellent, too'), and said that her tastings at Margaux properties were 'consistently good', with Châteaux Margaux and Palmer displaying an 'impressive combo of power with finesse'.

Elsewhere in Bordeaux Alexandre Thienpont at Vieux Chateau Certan in Pomerol compared 2005 and 2009, saying that both 'had excellent qualities' but expressed a modicum of disappointment in the quality of the Cabernet Franc this year, using it in only 10% of the blend, as opposed to 25% in 2005.

At the same time journalists such as French blogger Jean-Marc Quarin are suggesting the 2009 may not have 'the balance and freshness of the 2005.'

At the tasting of the J-P Moueix stable of St Emilion and Pomerol wines in Libourne, Christian Moueix of Petrus said that 2009 had been a vintage that demanded time and money to get right.

'It is difficult and expensive to take care of vines even in an easy vintage,' he said, suggesting that not everyone could afford to maintain their vineyards to the extent needed to make the best wines.

Moreover, Moueix said, the rainstorms that came in the middle of harvest on 19 and 20 September would have diluted grapes that were not already picked, leading some producers to over-extract to compensate.