

Bordeaux



Classifications & Terms

Content

Page	Area
3	Introduction
3	Classifications
4	AOC Structure
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other Bordeaux Classifications
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grand Cru Classés en 1855
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graves Classification
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saint-Emilion Classification
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cru Bourgeois Classification
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cru Artisan Classification
10	Terms
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bordeaux Blend/Style
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Claret
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cru Classé
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• En Primeur
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• INAO
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Left Bank & Right Bank
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meritage
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Terroir

Introduction

Whilst it would be nice and easy if all French wine regions had exactly the same classifications and terms, they don't. Bordeaux is that bit more challenging as it has more than most! To compound things further, some are unique to Bordeaux only and others merely apply to specific areas within Bordeaux. You can start to appreciate why some folks do find this classic wine region baffling and a tad intimidating. Like anything in life, once you understand it, it's much easier. We hope this helps you crack Bordeaux and that you too can enjoy even more of the fabulous wines from this brilliant region!

Classifications

Labels give you a heads up on what to expect in the contents of a bottle, not just quality but other things too i.e. it could be the colour, sweetness, if it is still or sparkling etc. Wines are categorised by means of the classifications shown.



Let's start with the main quality classification. France's Appellations of Origin was established in 1935 to combat against fraudsters and help guarantee authenticity. Administered by the INAO, it was devised and developed to protect wines (and spirits) regarding their definition, protection and control. The Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) stands for “a product for which the principal steps for production are done following a well-established technique within the same geographical area and gives the product its characteristics”. Each appellation has specific regulations to abide by in the vineyard and winery in terms of permitted grapes, maximum yields, colour of wine, alcohol strength post fermentation, vinification methods and so on.



The Bordeaux wine region has 60 appellations that can be broken down into sub regions, appellations and sub-appellations. So, in ascending order of importance and quality, plus increasingly tighter vineyard and vinification regulations, these are:

AOC Structure			
Bordeaux AC (Red, white and rosé wines. Grapes can be sourced from around Bordeaux)			Around 50% of region's production
Bordeaux Supérieur AC (Red and sweet wine. Typically, from older vines and wines aged for a minimum of 9 months)			
Bordeaux Communes/Villages AOC (Key communes listed and wine colours/styles shown)			
Left Bank Key AOCs		Right Bank Key AOCs	
The Médoc		The Libournais	
Médoc AC	Haut-Médoc AC	Saint-Estèphe AC Pauillac AC Saint-Julien AC Margaux AC	St Emilion AC Pomerol AC Fronsac AC Castillon Côtes de Bordeaux AC St Emilion Grand Cru AC Canon Fronsac AC
Graves & Sauternais		Blaye & Bourg	
Pessac-Léognan AC Graves Supérieures AC Graves AC Sauternes AC Barsac AC (sweet)	Blaye AC Côte de Blaye AC Blaye - Côtes de Bordeaux AC Bourg - Côtes de Bordeaux AC Côtes de Bordeaux AC		
Entre-Deux Mers (Translates to between 2 seas e.g. between the Dordogne and Garonne rivers)			
Cadillac AC Côtes de Bordeaux (R, W & Sweet) AC	Entre-Deux-Mers AC Premières Côtes de Bordeaux AC		

Other Bordeaux Classifications

Below are the other Bordeaux classifications. These are listed in order of seniority:

Grand Cru Classés en 1855 (Applies to the Médoc & Sauternes)

Based around reputation and price at the time, Napoleon III invited the producers of the Médoc and Sauternes to present their wines at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855. The idea was to establish a classification.

The cru classé (classed growth) classifications were awarded as follows:

- 60 from the Médoc and one from Pessac-Léognan in Graves were awarded a classification over 5 categories for still **red** wines:
 - 5* Premiers Crus e.g. first growths (appears as Premier Grand Cru Classé en 1855 on labels – see opposite)
 - From Pauillac in the Médoc, Châteaux Latour, Lafite (now Lafite Rothschild) and Mouton Rothschild
 - *Château Mouton Rothschild was elevated from a Deuxièmes Cru in 1973. This has primarily been the only amendment.
 - From Margaux in the Médoc, Château Margaux
 - From Pessac-Léognan in Graves, Château Haut-Brion
 - 14 Deuxièmes Crus e.g. second growths
 - 14 Troisièmes Crus e.g. third growths
 - 10 Quatrièmes Crus e.g. fourth growths
 - 18 Cinquièmes Crus e.g. fifth growths
- 27 crus from Sauternes and Barsac were awarded a classification over 3 categories for **sweet white** wines:
 - 1 Premier Cru Supérieur e.g. superior first growth bestowed on Château d'Yquem
 - 11 Premier Crus e.g. first growth
 - 15 Deuxièmes Crus



This Grand Cru Classé en 1855 classification remains valid and in use today to denote a wine of quality and prestige worldwide. This classification does not form part of the AOC structure.

Graves Classification (Applies to Graves)

Applying to Graves only, this single level classification (e.g. no hierarchy) was established in 1953 by the INAO at the request of the Syndicat de défense de l'appellation des Graves. This classification is not included in the AOC structure.

Originally 16, now 14, châteaux/domaines, which were all based in Pessac-Léognan, were awarded cru classé (classed growth) status for their wine. Appearing on the label as Grand Cru Classé de Graves (see opposite), these are as follows:

Red and White Wine

- Château Bouscaut,
- Château Carbonnieux
- Domaine de Chevalier
- Château Latour-Martillac
- Château Malartic-Lagravière
- Château Olivier

White Wine only

- Château Couhins
- Château Couhins-Lurton
- Château Laville Haut-Brion



Red Wine Only

- Château de Fieuzal
- Château Haut-Bailly
- Château Haut-Brion is the only Bordeaux château to have achieved classification recognition twice e.g. it also holds Premier Grand Cru Classé en 1855.
- Château La Mission-Haut-Brion
- Château Pape-Clément
- Château Smith-Haut-Lafite
- Château La Tour-Haut-Brion

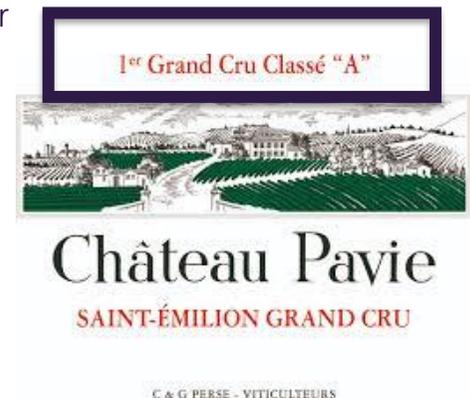
Saint-Emilion Classification (Applies to the Saint-Emilion)

In 1954, one year after the Graves Classification was founded, the INAO established the Saint-Emilion Classification. This time at the request of the Syndicat de défense of the appellation of Saint-Emilion. This 2-tier classification (i.e. Premier Grand Cru Classé and Grand Cru Classé) applies to Saint-Emilion in the right bank of Bordeaux only and is included in the AOC structure. Additionally, the ruling included that this classification had to be reviewed every 10 years (remains valid today).

Under the authority of the INAO together with the Ministries of Agriculture and Consumption, a new practise was published in the seventh classification in 2022. 85 estates were named under the following categories:

Premier Grand Cru Classés (A - distinction):

- 2 e.g. Châteaux Figeac and Pavie
 - Originally Châteaux Ausone and Cheval Blanc however they both withdrew from this classification system in 2022.



Premiers Grands Crus Classés

- 12 Bs e.g. Premier Grand Crus Classés

Grand Cru Classés x 71

Cru Bourgeois Classification (Applies to the Médoc)

During the Middle Ages, middle- or upper-class people (bourgeois) of Bordeaux acquired some of the Bordeaux's finest properties. They were originally termed 'Cru des Bourgeois' and enjoyed privileges aplenty, including the exemption from all wine sales tax! This came to an abrupt halt in the French Revolution.

Under the guidance of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce and the Gironde Chamber of Agriculture, the Bordeaux wine merchants created a list of the cru bourgeois and established the Cru Bourgeois Classification in 1932. Applying to red wines from the Médoc region only, this classification does not form part of the AOC structure.



Since inception, the Cru Bourgeois Classification has had a somewhat bumpy road with the introduction of 2 and then 3 tiers (i.e. Cru Bourgeois Supérieur and Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel) and then their subsequent annulment in 2007. The system was developed more shrewdly and sensibly where around 240 to 260 wineries (typically family owned) form the Alliance des Crus Bourgeois. This represented around 4 of every 10 bottles produced in the Médoc and the regulations were (and still) geared around quality and value necessitating an

annual assessment of every wine. In 2020 the three-tier hierarchy was reintroduced with reviews every 5 years e.g. Châteaux can be promoted or demoted. The wines retaining/achieving classification are awarded the appropriate Cru Bourgeois Classification. The 2025 reclassification was judged stricter and included written documentation, winery visits and mandatory tastings of 5 consecutive vintages by a panel of 5 of the 30 approved tasters. The results are published.



Crus Artisan Classification (Applies to the Médoc)

The production of artisan (*made in a traditional or non-mechanised way using high-quality ingredients*) cheeses, breads, spirits (the list seems endless) has been soaring for some time now. Artisan wine is no different, in fact, the Médoc has had these small production wines for nearly 2 centuries! Typically, these small Cru Artisans estates were owned by blacksmiths, coopers (barrel makers) and wheelwrights (wooden wheel makers).

The Crus Artisan Classification was established in 1989 by the Syndicat des Crus Artisans du Médoc. Like most artisan production, the assessment requirements focus on small estates (e.g. less than 5 hectares) located in the Médoc where the owner/manager is actively involved in the viticulture and vinification, including bottling on site, of AOC wines. In 1994, the EU sanctioned the inclusion of the words 'Cru Artisan' on the label.

Applying to the Médoc area only, there were 44 Cru Artisans, in 2025 there were only 39, and the estates selected are reviewed every 5 years now.

Terms

Like any industry, the wine world uses loads of jargon. A word or phrase used here or there in magazines, websites, tastings and so can leave you trying to fathom out or guess what it means. Here's a helpful guide for some Bordeaux terms to help you understand and clarify what they mean.

Bordeaux Blend/Style

Bordeaux blend/style is just a reference to the types of wines made in Bordeaux e.g. red still wines are a blend of red grapes like Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc etc. and white wines a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Muscadelle. Many wine regions around the world create wines in a Bordeaux style (see Meritage).

Claret

Claret can be traced back to the 12th century and was originally used to distinguish the lighter coloured wines from the coastal region from the deeper coloured wines from the upcountry regions. Now it just generally refers to Bordeaux red wine.

Cru Classé

Cru is typically referred to as growth but means a recognised vineyard. Classé means classed e.g. categorised. In Bordeaux, the term cru classé depicts a wine ranked as one of the finest traditional wines.

En Primeur

En primeur applies to all fine wines, not just those from Bordeaux, and is a bit like financial hedging. An investor is given an opportunity to purchase wine early whilst it is still in barrel. The aim is that once the wine is bottled and marketed, around 18 months later, the release price will hopefully be significantly higher than the en primeur price giving the investor a good return on his/her investment.

Like any hedging, there is no guarantee of profit though. En primeur gives the Château/producer some initial cash injection to offset against costs as well as tying them into the merchant, ties in the Château/producer.

Grand Vin

With no legal meaning. In Bordeaux it indicates a Château's premier wine e.g. their finest wine usually made with their best grapes, maturation methods etc.

INAO

Institut National des Appellations d'Origine is a public body responsible for management and control of the regulations to produce AOC and AOVDQS wines.

Left Bank & Right Bank

The Gironde Estuary splits Bordeaux in two and this is just a reference to which side of the estuary the wine commune, village etc. is.

Meritage

Meritage is a term used by a group of new world wine makers. Established in the late 1980s by a group of American wine makers, they pay homage to Bordeaux by crafting their wines in a similar fashion.

Terroir

Terroir just means the natural environment and conditions (i.e. includes things like soil, topography, and climate) where the grapes are grown as well as the taste and flavour characteristics that are imparted into a wine by the environment where it has been produced.



t: +44 (0)1904 778830 | **e:** hello@wineschoolofexcellence.co.uk | **w:** www.wineschoolofexcellence.co.uk

 wineschoolyork  wineschoolofexcellence