

Project

‘Les Côtes de Bordeaux’



Submitted by

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President of the Association of the ‘Côtes de Bordeaux’

In spring 2008 the appellation ‘Côtes de Bordeaux’ will be launched for the first time with the vintage 2007 after a long process of negotiations and a past history of 23 years.

The ‘Côtes de Bordeaux’ is a coalition of 5 appellations within the district of the Gironde, created to build up a ‘common trunk’ to empower synergy, increase value and to benefit of a communication more efficient and expressive than the single appellations would be able to! The idea is to use what the appellations have in common: the term ‘Côtes’ and the affiliation to the ‘Wines of Bordeaux’.

In 1985, 5 of the 6 appellations of the group ‘Côtes’, aware of their difficulty to communicate globally, decided to establish the ‘Association des Côtes de Bordeaux’. The appellation of ‘Graves de Vayres’ did not have the term of the ‘Côtes’ and has been excluded from the beginning.

The 5 appellations are: **Premières CÔTES de Blaye, CÔTES de Bourg, Premières CÔTES de Bordeaux, CÔTES de Castillon and CÔTES de Francs.**



Premières CÔTES de Blaye:

Blaye, which has given its name to the appellation, is situated on the right bank of the Gironde, some 50 kilometres downstream from Bordeaux:

Area: 6,500 ha spread on 42 villages

Soil : clayey-limestone, clayey-gravelly, clayey-silicious and clayey

Subsoil : iron hard pan

Climate : temperate, humidity influenced by maritime air masses, sunny (240 days per year)

Grape varieties: (90%red, 10%white)

Red : 70 % Merlot, 20% Cabernet-Sauvignon, 10 % Cabernet Franc and Malbec.

White : essentially Sauvignon, Muscadelle and Semillon.

CÔTES de Bourg: Bourg-sur-Gironde, which has given its name to the appellation is situated some 30 kilometres downstream from Bordeaux. It is spread over 3 lines of hills, the rolling countryside is reminiscent of certain parts of Switzerland, hence the name ‘Little Switzerland upon the Gironde’:

Area : 3,800 ha spread on 15 villages

Soil : limestone, rich in marine fossils with sandy gravel deposits, occasionally overlaid by brown-red marl

Climate : temperate climate resulting from water masses (Dordogne and Gironde River and the Atlantic being less than 100 kilometres away), preventing hail and frost

Grape varieties: (99.5%red, 0.5%white)

Red: 68% Merlot, 27% Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon, 5% Malbec

White: 35% Semillon, 45% Sauvignon, 20% Muscadelle

Premières CÔTES de Bordeaux: the region forms a narrow stripe of vines 60 kilometres long and just 5 kilometres wide, from the North of Bordeaux to Langon:

Area : 3,400 ha spread on 37 villages

Soil : gravel topped limestone slopes, clayey-limestone on top of hills and gravel with silicious elements at foothills

Climate : temperate nearby river, slopes facing south/south-west with high sunshine

Grape varieties: (mainly red)

Red : 55 % Merlot, 25 % Cabernet Sauvignon, 15 % Cabernet Franc, 5 % Malbec.

White : 70 % Sémillon, 17 % Sauvignon, 13 % Muscadelle.

CÔTES de Castillon:

The region borders on the hillsides of St-Emilion in the West, the river Dordogne in the South and the Dordogne department in the East:

Area : 3,000 ha spread on 9 villages

Soil : alluvial soil along the river Dordogne, sand and gravel or clay turning into clayey limestone or marl on hillsides

Climate : oceanic climate (temperate) mild and damp, with a continental tendency

Grape varieties:

ONLY Red : 70 % Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10 % Cabernet Sauvignon

CÔTES de Francs:

The commune of Franc is on the border of the Dordogne, about 10 kilometres to the north of Castillon la Bataille. The vines are growing on both hillsides and in valleys; the grapes are ideally exposed to the sun on slopes running down to the river, protected from frost and benefiting from humidity and good drainage.

Area : 500 ha spread on 3 villages

Soil :chalky limestone

Climate : continental, dry, rough in winter and hot in summer. Vineyards facing East are well sheltered from hailstorms and rain which are passing along the River Dordogne

Grape varieties: (96.7%red, 3.3%white)

Red : 50 % Merlot, 25 % Cabernet Franc, 25 % Cabernet Sauvignon

White : 60 % Sémillon, 20 % Muscadelle, 20 % Sauvignon

Considering the history, the region of Bordeaux and especially the 5 CÔTES have been an important showplace for events influencing the development of wine styles and the trade: Bordeaux's vineyards have a 2000 year history of cyclical growth and recession which shaped geography and the wines' renown.

The Romans planted the first vines but the real wine boom only began in the early Middle Ages when Eleanor of Aquitaine married Henry II, Plantagenet in 1152. The marriage was a veritable blessing for the wine region as the House of Plantagenet (ruling the Kingdom of England from 1154 to 1485) opened up the London market to Bordeaux wines. The wines were greatly prized and entire boatloads were shipped to England. The wines formed the luxury consumption of the aristocracy at a time when the Médoc vineyards barely existed. The English occupation of Aquitaine was terminated with the *Battle of Castillon* in 1453, putting an end to the 100 Years War.

After the English defeat, Bordeaux sought new buyers in northern Europe. Dutch and German merchants filled the gap left by the English and began to establish a commercial presence generating vineyards in the Médoc area by reclaiming the land.

In the 17th century, the wines of the 5 Côtes enjoyed a new boom but have been overlooked unjustly in the 1855 classification at the time of the Universal Exhibition.

Today the CÔTES growers' objective is to catch up with their neighbours, getting on a par with the leading growths. Over the past years, the wines have made a remarkable progress with enhanced quality. **The aim is not only to achieve consistency BUT also to acquire renown creating a solid basis for the wine trade.**

The deep historical roots are still reflected in the medium size of the estates that are mostly family-owned with an average of 15 to 20 hectares. The profession of a wine grower in these lesser known regions, is still a profession of producer rather than one of a salesman. For this reason CÔTES wines offer an outstanding value for money and prices have remained stable. **As supermarket shelves nowadays are filled with mass products and brands, real quality and authenticity delivered by the CÔTES is a great advantage!**

RED wine is the major part of production with 90-100%. The red wines are described as fragrant and ripe with loads of personality, distinctive fruitiness and velvet tannins. Even in difficult vintages CÔTES wines have substance and concentration!

To assess value and the position of the CÔTES in the product range BORDEAUX, the wines can be described as an alternative situated between the generic offer and the 'Grands Crus'. The wines present an excellent price-performance ratio tailored to a wide range of consumers. The Association of the CÔTES addresses especially 2 types of target groups: the big amateurs, who do not always want to spend enormous amounts of money and the new consumers, who enter the wine market on entry level and want to up-grade!

The 'CÔTES de Bordeaux' represent around 16% of the total Bordeaux production BUT with 86 952 HI sold outside the French border in 2006, they have a share of only 5% of the total Bordeaux export. 87% of the wines are sold in France, 13% are exported. Of the exported volume, 62% are marketed in the European Union with Belgium and Germany being the most important markets. Wine sales have particularly progressed in giant multiple grocers on France's retail market in the past 10 years (+ 40%).

The disproportion between production and export in relation to the entire Bordeaux market has led the coalition to rethink their situation, to enter into negotiations with the syndicates of all 5 appellations and to come up with a plan of action before they took the decision to launch the new appellation 'CÔTES de Bordeaux' in spring 2008!

Rethinking their situation brought up some major problem areas:

- ✍ The CÔTES have a good level of awareness in France, especially the most important in volume BUT a very poor level of awareness and legibility within the export sector; consumers do not associate the AOCs with Bordeaux!
- ✍ Too many appellations without any hierarchical structure
- ✍ Indefinite image of AOCs, some are 'Côtes de' others 'Premières Côtes de..' and the difference to the basic Bordeaux is not always clear
- ✍ For the export within France, the AOCs amalgamate with Bordeaux BUT for the export beyond the borders, the AOCs are not identifiable (Côtes du Rhône? Languedoc? SouthWest? Bergerac?)
- ✍ Only 10% of the production is exported
- ✍ No adoption of AOCs by the trade, fault of clear legitimacy and missing recognition
- ✍ Insufficient volume and renown to create brands

To tackle the mentioned problems, the coalition decided to create a common trunk, therefore the AOC Côtes de Bordeaux has been designed. To keep an individual identity to each 'terroir', each producer is allowed to attach the respective commune:

BLAYE, Côtes de Bordeaux

CADILLAC, Côtes de Bordeaux

CASTILLON, Côtes de Bordeaux

FRANCS, Côtes de Bordeaux

Before any implementations, the boards of directors of the 5 syndicates had to validate a 'catalogue of duties' to fix the rules of production. Geographic areas, vinification, grape varieties, yield per hectare and the alcoholic strength have been determined. Also density of plantings and the height of the leafage have been regulated!

On 25th October 2007 the project has been presented to the CRINAO (Comités Régionaux de l'INAO), in February 2008 it has been accepted by the CNINAO (Comité national de l'INAO) and finally in spring 2008 the appellation will be launched with the vintage 2007!

Finally the appellation of Côtes de Bourg decided not to participate in the project and does not have the right to use the terminology 'Côtes de Bordeaux'.