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SWEET BORDEAUX
SURPRISING RANGE,
LONG OVERLOOKED

SESSION BEERS
KEEPIN' IT LIGHT



The sweet Bordeaux appellations are unique in that they are defined largely by climate, rather than soil. The convergence of two rivers—one cold, one warm—creates the fog that induces *Botrytis cinerea*, or noble rot.

REVISITING SWEET BORDEAUX

LONG OVERLOOKED, THESE UNIQUE LATE-HARVEST WINES HAVE SURPRISING RANGE—AND UTILITY

BY CHRISTY CANTERBURY MW

Like all of Bordeaux, this prestigious region's sweet wines have been looking for love lately. But whereas top reds and whites have only been lonely for a few years, even the best sweets have been forlorn for a while. Sales of Sauternes, Barsac, Cérons, Cadillac and their brethren are slumping. They're out of vogue.

Adding insult to injury, the French government now threatens to build a railway through Sauternes' historic vineyards. You hadn't heard? Not surprising. Wine lovers often rally against terroir-changing events: witness Germany's failed Mosel Bridge project. (Granted, the bridge failed for structural reasons, not because of wine folks' pleas. Still, the wine community was up in arms.) Yet, the racket hasn't been raised very intensely for sweet Bordeaux wines.

It's puzzling. Here is why the crowd should roar.

Terroir Specificity

Bordeaux's sweet wine diversity comes from two rivers. The closer a property is to the intersection of the Ciron's chilly waters and the Gironde's warm waters, the more its Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc and sometimes Muscadelle vines will be infected with the noble rot that concentrates the grapes for these wines. Uniquely, it's climate, rather than soil, making the wine. Driving through southeastern Bordeaux in late fall is like driving through a steam bath. Eric Monneret of Château Lapointe in Pomerol previously worked at Château Raymond-Lafon in Sauternes. He remarked he often couldn't see the front of his hood when driving to work there.

The properties closest to this convergence produce the most concentrated and unctuous wines, especially on the western side of the Gironde, where the Ciron approaches from the southwest.

Here, top properties only make about one glass per vine. Conversely, the further away the property, the lighter the wines.

The Bordeaux Wine Council separates the terroirs into two categories: "Mellow and Fruity" (Bordeaux, Haut-Benauges, Bordeaux Moelleux, Bordeaux Supérieur, Côtes de Bordeaux Saint-Macaire, Francs Côtes de Bordeaux, Graves de Vayres, Graves Supérieures, Premières Côtes de Bordeaux and Sainte-Foy-Bordeaux); and "Unctuous and Intense" (Barsac, Cadillac, Cérons, Loupiac, Sainte-Croix-du-Mont and Sauternes.) Like Mariah Carey, there's more (vocal) stylistic range than you might expect.

Most in-the-know drinkers have sipped a Sauternes or Barsac or two. But, how about a Bordeaux Haut-Benauges or Sainte-Foy-Bordeaux? The "Unctuous" category carries the big stars, but their intensity, higher (14%+) alcohols and generous new oak flavor influences make

SWEET BORDEAUX REGIONS

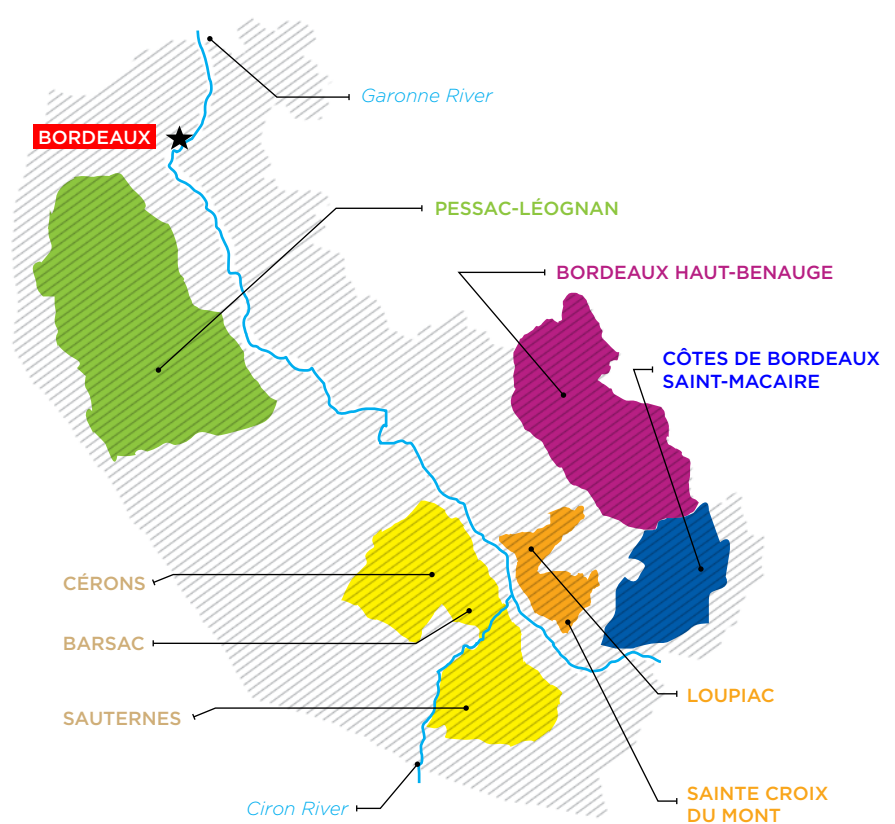
The Bordeaux Wine Council separates the sweet wines of Bordeaux into two categories. Properties closest to the intersection of the Garonne and Ciron rivers gain the greatest benefit from the area's fog; they produce the most concentrated and rich wines. Conversely, properties further away from the rivers produce lighter wines, which the council calls "Mellow and Fruity."

MELLOW AND FRUITY

Bordeaux Haut-Benaige
 Bordeaux Moelleux
 Bordeaux Supérieur
 Côtes de Bordeaux Saint-Macaire
 Francs Côtes de Bordeaux
 Graves de Vayres
 Graves Supérieures
 Premières Côtes de Bordeaux
 Sainte-Foy-Bordeaux

UNCTUOUS AND INTENSE

Barsac
 Cadillac
 Cérons
 Loupiac
 Sainte-Croix-du-Mont
 Sauternes



them harder to pair with a large array of foods. "Mellow" wines are lighter with less viscosity and lower alcohol, making it easier to enjoy a second glass of these.

Stylistic differences create a broad price spectrum. It isn't unusual to see leading Sauternes estates' half bottles going for several hundred bucks—if you can get your hands on them. By contrast, 750mls of mid-weight sweet Bordeaux can sell for as little as \$20, sometimes less.

At the Table

Importantly, opportunities to sip sweet wines crop up long before dessert. A small sip of something sweet at the

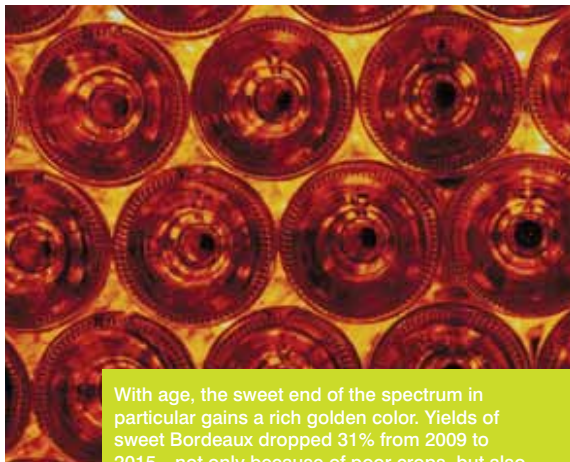
A small sip of something sweet at the beginning of a meal is an easier sell; by the end, it's easy for most stuffed diners to resist sweet wines.

beginning of a meal is an easier sell. By the end, it's easy for most stuffed diners to resist sweet wines.

For starters, there's the traditional foie gras and Sauternes combo, but happily plenty of other dishes work beautifully, too. In Cadillac last December, I was

impressed by Château Biac's butternut squash soup with caramelized apples brilliantly executed by Youmna Asseily. Madame Asseily also recommends cream of broccoli soup with Roquefort as a starter followed by a Thai Green Curry Prawn main for a lighter meal that can easily accompany a 750ml bottle of a mid-weight sweet Bordeaux wine.

It's time to branch out, enjoy and support these delicious Bordeaux sweet wines. Their uses vary far more than we think traditionally, and so do their prices. Besides, there's more than discovery at stake here. Vintage variation aside, sweet wine production is declining. From 2009 to 2015, yields dropped 31% as châteaux produce more dry whites. Let's put some corks in this style drain! ■



With age, the sweet end of the spectrum in particular gains a rich golden color. Yields of sweet Bordeaux dropped 31% from 2009 to 2015—not only because of poor crops, but also due to an increase in dry wine production.

