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# Bordeaux bargains 2014



## Part 1

By **Panos Kakaviatos** for [wine-chronicles.com](#)

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Like most of you, when I cannot actually do so, I sometimes dream of enjoying Haut Brion, Latour, Petrus and Le Pin. Or Leoville Las Cases, Palmer or Ducru Beaucaillou. To take some examples of very pricey Bordeaux.

But most of us mere mortals cannot afford these treasures too often if at all. Sky-scraping price tags in recent years have far surpassed the intrinsic qualities in bottle.



Tasting through mostly 2014s of the Grand Cercle

I still buy (some) classified growths, because they can constitute *relative* bargains in a given vintage (2014 is a good, recent example), but I understand why people get bored with the dough... when it comes to Bordeaux.

Late last year, I had the pleasure of tasting through many fine – and thoroughly affordable – Bordeaux wines from the 2014 vintage that was recently bottled: both red and white. Two tastings revealed excellent wines, with modest price tags.

Thanks to the **Alliance de Crus Bourgeois** and the **Grand Cercle of Bordeaux**, consumers can find much to love in Bordeaux, without needing to put off more basic household needs.

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A most gorgeous setting to taste!

Both groups provided superb tasting conditions during my visit to Bordeaux, and I cannot thank them enough for the opportunity to have tasted through so many wines – especially some 150 samples provided by the Grand Cercle, and in a gorgeous location, to boot: **Château de la Rivière in Fronsac**. Host Xavier Buffo was very kind to have the bottles ready for me to taste for an all-day tasting. Many thanks to the team of the Grand Cercle, who organized the logistics for the tasting event, especially to Anais Azorin.



With Xavier Buffo of Chateau de la Riviere

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## PART I: Grand Cercle de Bordeaux

Since 2013, the **Grand Cercle** brings together 138 estates from the Right Bank (Cercle Rive Droite) and 57 from the Left Bank (Cercle Rive Gauche). Tasting through the wines yields an excellent bird's eye view of a given vintage given the sheer diversity and complementarity of appellations and terroirs and wine professionals within the group.

The choice of vintage 2014 was rather easy. The high acidity and fine ripeness make it a natural for whites. But it can also be very good for reds – and somewhat under the radar.

### An underrated vintage

Caught up in the hype of 2015 (in some parts of Bordeaux, misplaced hype), prices often went up for that vintage. 2014 did not tempt Bordeaux to raise prices, even if it followed the rather dismal 2013 vintage. Indeed, Bordeaux punters found that 2013 prices were not low enough, so there was less of an incentive to raise prices too high in 2014. By contrast, 2015 provided that very incentive.

### New French wine adage

Qualitatively however, 2014, much like 2008, is underrated. In some ways I find 2014 a better version of 2008. 2014 is a case to modify the famous French wine buying adage *grand vin, petite année; petit vin, grande année*. Savvy consumers realize that there are “in-betweens” and that bargains can be had in “better-than-expected vintages and underrated wines.” In French, that could be then: *Très bon vin, très bonne année*.

So, in 2014, we find friendly prices and better than expected quality – on a general level. Not all the wines I tasted pleased me: whether in terms of style (sometimes too “modern”, too much oak, heavy handed winemaking) or in terms of ripeness (not as ripe as one would expect). But many lovely wines can be purchased off the shelf.

### Tasting Notes

My complete notes from the Cercle tasting are **listed here in Cellar Tracker**, but below selections of some of my overall favorites from the mammoth tasting, so you can go right to the good stuff. All of the wines below merit consumer attention, so that in my informal rating system they are all in bold (as particularly liked) with some in **red and bold** for liked even more.

Malartic Lagraviere **Margaux** Mundus Vini  
Olivier Humbrecht Pauillac Pessac-  
Léognan Pichon Baron Pinot Blanc Pinot  
Gris Portugal **Red** Riesling Saint Emilion  
Saint Julien Smith-Haut-Lafitte White **wine**  
Yquem Zind Humbrecht

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One of my absolute favorites out of some 150 wines. Great job in 2014, affordable price. Bravo.

#### Right Bank Reds

- **2014 Château Fonplégade** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru (10/1/2016)

Well, here we have a minty fresh start to this wine, very appealing nose. The palate shows substance and leads to a rather long finish. Is it just a touch drying? Yes. But in the end, the juicy mid palate and very endearing aromatics win. Nice job! **(92 pts.)**

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- **2014 Château La Vieille Cure** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, Fronsac (10/1/2016)

Wow! What a gorgeous nose. Rich deep red and black fruits. Some endearing cinnamon like spice, oak derivation that WORKS! The palate is smooth, opulent and yet has lovely acidity that balances things very well. Here we also have 14.5% alcohol and it is very well integrated! Long finish. Bravo! **(92 pts.)**

- **2014 Château Sansonnet** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru (10/1/2016)

Quite a serious wine! There is much density and weight here, and I just wonder about the use of new oak, as it has high alcohol 14.5% and a certain extraction of new oak tannin with that level of alcohol that does appear (a bit too much for me) on the finish.

Nevertheless, one appreciates the sheer mid palate substance of this wine. Bravo! **(92 pts.)**





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▪ **2014 Château de la Rivière** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, Fronsac (10/1/2016)

What a nuanced nose! Forest freshness, with ripe fruit and a touch of spice. Bravo! The attack is brisk and smooth at once, mid palate is juicy, but just a but drying on the finish – alas! – which detracts from the final score... Going back to the Vieille Cure, you can feel the alcohol, but in the end, the delivery of the VC is fuller and more complete. In any case, it is fun to compare and contrast. La Riviere, at 13.5%, has a bit more freshness but is just not quite as complete a wine... **(89 pts.)**

▪ **2014 Château Sainte Barbe** – France, Bordeaux (10/1/2016) Chocolate nose, pleasing fruit as well with a touch of damson. The palate is smooth, there is a decent integration of the oak, and the fruit is a bit more compote, jammy than fresh. Structure from the tannin that is present but not protruding. Medium finish. A good example for Bordeaux drinkers who seek fine wine at a low cost. Bravo! **(89 pts.)**

▪ **2014 Château Bellefont-Belcier** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru (10/1/2016)

Here we have a more modern style that in 2014 seems to have found happy acidity to balance things out well. Rich, plum fruit. Yes, some oak derived aspects. There is lots of mid palate opulence. I would say that with just a lower new oak contingent, the wine would be even fresher and more elegant, but the style has its many fans! **(88 pts.)**

▪ **2014 Château La Marzelle** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru (10/1/2016)

Voila! Here we have freshness and tannic structure along with a Merlot opulence that come together to make a rather compelling Saint Emilion. 13.5% alcohol. Bravo! **(91 pts.)**

▪ **2014 Château Laroze** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru (10/1/2016)

Quite a nice showing here! There is freshness on the nose – and even more on the palate. This is not a vintage like 2015 where you get more chances of maximum ripeness, but Laroze does well in 2014. But the more I try this, the more I ... want to drink it! **(91 pts.)**



Pomerol



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▪ **2014 Château Le Prioure** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru

(10/1/2016)

Lovely, floral and fresh with a smooth palate that has lift on the finish. 75% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Franc. Nice job indeed. **(90 pts.)**

▪ **2014 Château Rol Valentin** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, St. Émilion Grand Cru

(10/1/2016)

The nose is seductive. Lindt milk chocolate, damson, blackberry. The attack is creamy and assertive. The mid palate is dense, and the finish is just a touch drying, perhaps the highish alcohol (14.5%) and new oak. Overall, however, one of the better 2014s from this Saint Emilion series. **(90 pts.)**

▪ **2014 Château Vray Croix de Gay** – France, Bordeaux, Libournais, Pomerol (10/1/2016)

Lovely floral aromatics, violet and white flower too. The palate is gouleyant as the French say – smooth and drinkable. Maybe it lacks the opulence of a riper vintage like, say, 2015 or 2009, but it conveys pleasure and modest extraction – and Heaven Knows Why – not much new oak tannin. Bravo for that! **(90 pts.)** ...

**Entre-Deux-Meres and Bordeaux AOC Reds**

▪ **2014 Girolate** – France, Bordeaux (10/1/2016)

Somewhat espresso like, torrefaction (roasted) aspect on the nose. The attack is smooth yet brisk, too. A touch lactic on the palate? Overall quite pleasing. Not too thick (and the 14% alcohol very well integrated), and the vintage's acidity lends freshness, yet structure for longer term aging. A somewhat conservative score. **(90 pts.)**



A taster's view





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Another view from the lovely chateau

#### Whites of various appellations

- **2014 Girolate Blanc** – France, Bordeaux (10/1/2016)

Rich and engaging white. Apricot and peach. There is a juiciness to this wine, that is appealing. Bravo! They did a great job with red – and with white. Freshness and richness. **(90 pts.)**

- **2014 Château Hostens-Picant Blanc** – France, Bordeaux, Entre-Deux-Mers, Sainte Foy Bordeaux (10/1/2016)

This is rather good, a bit spicy and rich and fun to drink. What more do you want from an unpretentious and inexpensive producer of white Bordeaux? Nice job! **(88 pts.)**

- **2014 Château Mont-Pérat** – France, Bordeaux, Entre-Deux-Mers, Premières Côtes de Bordeaux Blanc (10/1/2016)

There is freshness and briskness, but maybe just a bit of austerity? Anyway, you can enjoy this but maybe with a rich sauce to cut the acidity. **(88 pts.)**

- **2014 Château Le Sartre Blanc** – France, Bordeaux, Graves, Pessac-Léognan (10/1/2016)

Exuberant notes of citrus, grapefruit rind, orange, and lip smacking delicious. Echoing flavors that remind wine lovers that 2014 white – almost all over France – is delicious. **(91 pts.)**

- **2015 Château la Rivière** – France, Bordeaux (10/1/2016) Here I add one 2015 that merits attention as it comes from a producer far better known for the reds. This white – from magnum – has lovely richness and energy, from the 2015 vintage, that one can really enjoy this with scallops and even lobster with butter and lemon. No Semillon, but the Sauvignon Gris lends a certain exotic aspect. As one says in French: *une belle surprise!* Only 5,000 bottles. **(91 pts.)**

Stay tuned for **Part 2** for bargain Bordeaux, which will focus on the Left Bank category of cru bourgeois wines, from the Alliance des Cru Bourgeois.