

The world's best wine magazine

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Decanter

Passion for Pinot

Burgundy 2018
& New World stars

WINE TRAVEL SPECIAL

Bordeaux: top winery visits

Where to stay in Napa

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PLUS • Low- and no-alcohol wines • Northern Rhône 2010 • Prosecco

Full organic certification is due in 2020, and in the vineyard things are obsessively tracked and recorded to ensure precision viticulture. The number of plots, for example, stood at 24 when director Hervé Berland arrived in 2011. Today there are 110, the result of dividing and sub-dividing to ensure that all the tiny differences between the plots are respected throughout the growing season and at harvest. You will leave astonished by how much expense, effort and expertise goes into making the greatest wines of Bordeaux.

There is no fee to visit, but you do need to book your tour in advance.

www.chateau-montrose.com

AFTERNOON

Château Pontet-Canet

Pauillac 5CC

Just a 15-minute drive south and you cross over into Pauillac, home of the iconic classified estate of Pontet-Canet. You'd be forgiven for thinking that you've stepped back in time, as owner Alfred Tesseron and director Jean-Michel Comme have gone resolutely old-school. Farming is organic, as at Montrose, and also biodynamic, with all biodynamic preparations made on-site. There are even eight Breton draft horses used for vineyard work across at least half of the 81ha estate – if they aren't out working, you can visit them in their well-kept stables. Cellar work is equally traditional. Everything is manual, from destemming and sorting at harvest, to filling cement vats made out of the sand, clay and gravel taken from the surrounding land during the construction of a cellar extension. No electricity is allowed anywhere near the vats, except for LED lighting, and everything is powered by geothermal energy.

There is no fee, but visits here are typically reserved for professionals only, though they may be extended to wine-tasting groups, sommeliers and collectors – it's definitely worth trying. www.pontet-canet.com



Above: Château de La Rivière stands on 100ha of parklands

Below: a Breton draft horse in the vineyard of Château Pontet-Canet

Historic vs newly created

DE LA RIVIERE & GEORGE 7

Over its 2,000 years of winemaking history, Bordeaux has continually reinvented itself, helped by constant innovation and new arrivals. Nothing brings that home more clearly than a day visiting one of its oldest and one of its newest estates. And Fronsac on the Right Bank is a lovely place to do this, with views over the Dordogne and Isle rivers.

MORNING

Château de La Rivière

Fronsac

Among the oldest châteaux in Bordeaux, this stunning property was constructed in 1577 by Gaston de l'Isle on the remains of a defensive camp built by Charlemagne. It's hard to miss, as it stands tall over the countryside on 100ha of parkland and gardens that are worth a visit. Best of all are the 8ha of limestone caves that are still used for ageing the wine. They offer a brilliant way to get up close to the limestone terroir that dominates not only Fronsac but





also St-Emilion, Castillon and beyond. A range of visits are geared to different audiences, including families. You can even order a picnic to eat in the beautiful courtyard. Although it's a French-run estate, the owners are Chinese, so you might also want to try the pu'er tea ceremony (€25) to learn the history of this traditional tea, with a tasting.

Open Monday to Friday all year, plus Saturdays from May to October. Visits are by appointment only. A cellar tour and tasting costs €9, while a cellar tour and a tasting of individual grape varieties to show Right Bank and Left Bank differences is €25.

www.chateau-de-la-riviere.com

AFTERNOON

Château George 7

Fronsac

For something completely different, head to the tiny Château George 7, created only a few years ago by British owner Sally Evans, who changed career to become a winemaker armed only with a WSET Diploma and a positive attitude. It's not easy to find completely new estates in Bordeaux, and it's fascinating to

Above from top: Château George 7 is a recent addition to Bordeaux; Sally Evans, owner of George 7, cycling in Fronsac

hear about her journey: finding a run-down farm, converting it into a house and equipping an empty cellar building. As for the château name, George means 'tiller of soil' in Greek; it's also a reference to the English patron saint. And the 7? It's possible that Prince William's son George may one day take the name George VII, so Evans used this part of the name to 'pay tribute to the old while venturing into the new', as she puts it. The château opened for business in 2017, although the first vintage was almost entirely wiped out by frost, making 2018 the true inaugural year. You get to see real hands-on winemaking here – with a bit of help from her consultants, Evans picks the grapes, prunes the vines, and lugs the barrels around. Thank goodness it's only 3ha at this stage. She is also very happy to share her experiences and motivations with others who might be looking to get into winemaking. She can also help you arrange an electric bike tour around Fronsac – particularly useful, as there are some steep slopes in this appellation.

There is no fee for visits, which can be arranged on any day of the week subject to availability, strictly by appointment.

www.chateaugeorge7.com ➤