



ROTTEN LUCK: Sauternes 2013

by Neal Martin

Usually, I urge readers to go out and buy Sauternes at the end of my report, but instead...go out and buy Sauternes. Go on. You know you want to. Of course, at time of writing, when my palate is still recovering from being marinated in mellifluous honey, I have no idea how wide consumers will have to open their wallets. But the headline is that 2013 mirrors 1967, 1997 or 2007, years when rotten luck for the Left and Right Banks is good fortune for those whose lives depend upon *pourriture noble*. Whilst dry red winemakers faced calamity as rot prepared to invade vineyards quicker than the Russian army in Crimea, this same galloping rot was a blessing for the *Sauternais*.

The Growing Season

Lest we forget that the Sauternes winemakers suffered the same *sturm und drang* as everyone else in 2013. Springtime

"Fargues," where they had to wait another ten days for grapes to achieve full ripeness. Three days of rain from September 28 to 30 was followed by a hot first week in October – perfect conditions for noble rot that swept through the vineyards, botrytis rapidly progressing from the *pouri plein* to the crucial *pouri rôt* stage. Cue mass smiles, un-furrowed brows and mass picking up of *secateurs*, as châteaux conducted their first and second *tries* that formed a solid foundation for their wines. The grapes tended to be small, the fruit imbued with crisp acidity that predicated what you might call "zippy" Sauternes wine, citrus fresh with livewire acidity. The harvest stopped around October 4, when there was a violent storm (40mm of rain) and even some localized hail. Thereafter, botrytis formation was staggered and piecemeal as the weather alternated between sunshine and showers. A warm dry period between October 12 and 23 offered a window for picking, then there was another between October 21 and 24.

Toward the end of the month, growers told me that the fruit was sufficiently concentrated, but complexity had been stymied by the soggy conditions. So lots from third and fourth *tries* could lend final blends more weight; however, you had to be prudent and not water down overall complexity or the tensile zippiness. Most Sauternes producers appear to have used these lots to positive effect, although the blending process will continue for some estates throughout the early part of 2014. However, Nicolas Tari at Château Nairac opted to discard these later pickings *en totale* in order to preserve that freshness and poise, so that his wine is more in keeping with the style of the growing season.

I tasted through the wines non-blind at Château Nairac (the venue rotates every year.) This is important because, unlike the reds, which have completed their *assemblages*, the Sauternes samples are unfinished and may not include some lots, which of course you need to be aware of. Indeed, I was forewarned that the warm winter had retarded the development of the *cuvées*, and some held the view that as of March, the wines tasted as if it was January in terms of evolution. I had to take this into account when assessing the samples.

The 2013 Sauternes definitely has the potential to be a very good, possibly excellent vintage, although it does not possess the flair or the concentration equal to 2009 or possibly even 2011. On the other hand, Sauternes is the best Bordeaux appellation of 2013. The growers were less affected by the difficult growing season, and those crucial first pickings in late September were ideal for top notch Sauternes. Sure, it was a challenging harvest when the picking windows were non-negotiable. Therefore, properties where pickers could march in

inclemency provoked late budding and uneven flowering, *coulure* affecting the Semillon more than the Sauvignon Blanc, albeit not to the same devastating degree. Coupled with a dose of mildew, vineyard managers had to undertake *nettoyage* i.e. cleaning up the vineyard to get rid of unripe bunches and berries. The tide began to turn during a blissfully hot July and an equally warm August when there was no heat spikes, although the heat was not enough to make up for the lag of the early season. September wavered between sunshine and rain and still the season hung in the balance: grapes were green, bunches irregular and the spectre of grey rot lurked round the corner.

Then the "rotten luck." Summer conditions descended at the end of September and most growers began picking around September 26 or 27, except for around the sub-region of

and out of the vineyard at exact moments produced the best wines (although I do find it amusing these moments are always Monday to Friday.) This year, there is nothing to suggest Barsac is superior to Sauternes or vice versa. Instead, you have to take each château as it comes.

The good news for Yquem lovers is that unlike the 2012 – it exists. Pierre Lurton and his team have fashioned a wine that wants to make a statement that it is back, back, back! It is a little higher in residual sugar (140gm/L), unctuous and lascivious. While it does not quite have the finesse of the 2011 or the astonishing and overlooked 2009, it is a powerful proposition with enormous depth and breadth, a wine that wants to make up for last year's absence. Meanwhile, Denis Dubourdieu has conjured a few droplets of his deluxe L'Extravagant de Doisy-Daëne this year, an extraordinary wine that brilliantly offset its 210gm/L residual sugar with its razor-sharp acidity, deceptively giving the impression that there is less sucrosity. His Château Doisy-Daëne 2013 also displays wonderful precision, which seems to have influenced Doisy-Védrières that is much tauter and more linear in style, dare I say, more like Doisy-Daëne. Both are very fine Barsac wines.

The growing season appears to have favored those with the best terroirs, the likes of Suduiraut, Coutet, Climens, Doisy-Daëne, Lafaurie-Peyraguey and Rayne-Vigneau all turning in splendid wines that are full of tension and breeding. You are not overwhelmed by their power of unctuousness, but thrilled by their tautness and tension, often with a pleasant saltiness on the finishes. There are also promising wines from less well-known estates such as Château Broustet and for the n'th year running, Domaine de l'Alliance. Some properties lacked a little weight and felt a touch hollow, so it is not a clean sweep of success, yet you will find more pleasure here than in other Bordeaux appellations.

As I have lamented countless times, Sauternes remains a style of wine desperately seeking an appreciative audience. The effort that goes into their creation means that they deserve one, yet consumers remain fickle about drinking these wines. I do sincerely hope that prices will remain realistic. If the *Sauternais* wish to widen their audience, which they must do to remain viable, they have to encourage consumers to buy and drink them first, and not be dissuaded by prices that too often seem excessive, given that you can easily buy older vintages, unjust though that situation is. Given that many consumers will be skipping the 2013 Bordeaux primeur campaign apropos the red, it should not cost too much to fill your cellar with this most magical golden elixir.

So go buy.



2013 CHATEAU D'ARCHE	(89-91)
<p>The Château d'Arche has a light bouquet that is missing some complexity compared to its peers. The palate is more promising, especially on the entry, with attractive mandarin and orange zest</p>	<p>notes. The acidity is well-judged and the wine finishes with the aplomb I wish was expressed aromatically. Perhaps this will develop during <i>élevage</i>, so I remain positive.</p>
2013 CHATEAU BASTOR-LAMONTAGNE	(90-92)
<p>The 2013 Bastor-Lamontagne has a fresh, vibrant bouquet with scents of pineapple, citrus peel and apple, perhaps a little light and more malic than expected, yet fresh and focused. The palate is expressive and</p>	<p>harmonious. There is impressive tension here, the acidity cutting straight though the lightly honeyed fruit, and it finishes in some style, with a long spicy aftertaste. This Sauternes has good potential.</p>
2013 CHATEAU BROUSTET	(90-92)
<p>The 2013 Broustet, which is raised in 100% new oak, comes from five pickings. It has a pure, confident and well-defined bouquet that soars from the glass: honey and quince at first, later joined by white peach. The palate</p>	<p>is zesty and bright, with great animation and energy in the glass, finishing with composure and focus. Bravo! This is a name to look out for in the future as there are numerous improvements being carried out at the estate.</p>
2013 CHATEAU CAILLOU	(84-86)
<p>The 2013 Caillou has a rather stony, slightly taciturn bouquet at the moment, with light white flower scents reluctantly emerging. The</p>	<p>palate is balanced with a spicy, quite structured opening, although it is missing some concentration toward the linear finish.</p>
2013 CHATEAU CLIMENS	(94-96)
<p>"We started the harvest on the 27th of September, which was not as late as we thought," Berenice Lurton told me. "The maturity was quite late due to the bad spring – or not even any spring at all – with poor flowering. During the summer, it could not catch up. The ripeness was quite late, but botrytis arrived quickly and we were prepared. We were incredibly lucky, because we finished the first picking under good conditions on the 3rd of</p>	<p>October at 7.00pm, the night when a lot of rain fell at Climens. We stopped for eight days and then made a quick picking in a few plots, but there was not much to pick. The weather became fresh and humid, so botrytis was everywhere, but the problem was that it was not concentrated, so on Friday, the 18th of October, we inspected the vineyard and decided we could not pick. We were quite anxious, because</p>
<p>rain was predicted. But exactly like 2012, we had a perfect weekend with a lot of wind on Saturday and a perfect Sunday that was enough to concentrate the berries on the first plots. We finished in a few days on Thursday at midday and then it started raining again in the afternoon. So the windows for us were amazingly small. There were sixteen lots in the beginning, and the first micro-blends were good so there are now eight lots. When we were blending, we could not really see what was from the beginning and the end of the harvest."</p>	<p>blend will manifest itself, a task becoming easier now that I have tasted through individual lots for several years. Clearly, the first <i>tries</i> contain zesty citrus fruit with crisp acidity and strong botrytis character, the second <i>tries</i> lending the structure and the Barsac/Climens character. I noticed a "marine" influence on the final <i>tries</i> picked on October 21 and 23, although here there is a slight attenuation. Putting all this together, I foresee an assured, perhaps slightly lighter but tensile Climens, with the more heavily botrytized fruit delivered toward the end. Quality is certainly on par with a very good vintage, the most impressive lots destined to form major components of the final blend. This ought to be a classic Climens.</p>
<p>Cropped at ten hectoliters per hectare, this represents the first certified organic Château Climens. As usual, I have to conjecture how the final</p>	
2013 CHATEAU CLOS HAUT-PEYRAGUEY	(91-93)
<p>The Clos Haut-Peyraguey, now within the stable of Bernard Magrez, is slightly deeper in color than its peers. It has a gentle, slightly nutty and smoky bouquet that unfolds nicely in the glass. The palate is</p>	<p>viscous on the entry with mellifluous honeyed fruit. There is plenty of botrytis here, good acidity with a concentrated, almost Climens-like finish. This is very fine and could merit a higher score after bottling.</p>
2013 CHATEAU COUTET	(93-95)
<p>The 2013 Coutet has one of the most complex aromatics you will find this year – a smorgasbord of citrus fruit, lime zest, orange blossom and white peach that is beautifully interwoven with compelling <i>mineralité</i>. The</p>	<p>palate is extremely well-balanced, very intense and linear right from the start, with wonderful tension toward the finish that exhibits just a hint of spice. In other words, this is everything you expect from a great Coutet.</p>
2013 CHATEAU DOISY-DAENE	(93-95)
2013 L'EXTRAVAGANT DE DOISY-DAENE	(96-98)
<p>Denis Dubourdieu has created a fine Doisy-Daëne, with attractive white peach and honeysuckle on the precise bouquet, which exudes wonderful transparency. The palate is very well-defined with fine acidity, the oak deftly integrated. It gradually builds in the mouth: harmonious and refined with great composure towards the long and satisfying finish. This is one of the finest Barsac wines of the vintage.</p>	<p>210gms/L residual sugar. It has a typically audacious bouquet of "thick" honeyed fruit that is richer and more decadent than anything you will find this year. The palate is unctuous on the entry with pure honeyed fruit interlaced with orange zest and peach. The acidity is well-judged, maintaining the equilibrium so crucial to this wine, while the finish has the weight of a German TBA. This is utterly irresistible, Denis Dubourdieu fashioning a decadent wine that is effortlessly counterbalanced by the razor-sharp acidity.</p>
<p>There are just three barrels of the L'Extravagant de Doisy-Daëne, a blend of 65% Semillon and 35% Sauvignon Blanc that delivers</p>	
2013 CHATEAU DOISY-VEDRINES	(91-93)
<p>The sample of 2013 Doisy-Vedrines was showing a little reduction on the nose when I first tasted it. The palate is promising, however, perhaps more linear and less honeyed than recent vintages, but that is compensated by</p>	<p>greater tension towards the middle and finish. You might describe this as a more streamlined Doisy-Vedrines, dare I say one that is more like Doisy-Daëne in style, with wonderful <i>mineralité</i> on the finish.</p>
2013 CHATEAU DE FARGUES	(92-94)
<p>The Château de Fargues has a gorgeous bouquet that is going to be wondrous after bottling, mineral-rich, tensile honeyed fruit that is less flamboyant than recent vintages and yet amazingly well-focused. The palate has a spicy tincture on the entry, laser-like precision, with a</p>	<p>zesty, citrus-driven finish. This is a more delicate, understated Château de Fargues, but left alone in the glass over several minutes, it really begins to blossom and gain weight. This should be outstanding after bottling.</p>
2013 CHATEAU FILHOT	(86-88)
<p>Every year I want to find positive things to say about Château Filhot but find myself unable to. Here, the 2013 seems to be missing concentration on the nose, which is marked by an odd adhesive</p>	<p>aroma. Things improve from here. The palate is nicely balanced, so there is a good start. The acidity is well-judged, but it needs to muster more complexity and length on the finish to be really convincing.</p>

2013 CHATEAU GUIRAUD	(90-92)
The 2013 Guiraud has a generous bouquet of rich honeyed fruit interlaced with quince and hints of marmalade, though I would like to see more <i>mineralité</i> and tension by the time of bottling. The palate is	well-balanced with a spice-tinged entry, touches of Seville orange and mandarin emerging with time. There is good depth here, fine density with plenty of sinew toward the saline-tinged finish.
2013 CHATEAU LAFAURIE PEYRAGUEY	(92-94)
The Château Lafaurie Peyraguey has a mineral-led, citrus-driven bouquet that is tightly wound at first – delicate touches of orange blossom and apricot emerging from the glass. The palate is well-balanced and attired with a mellifluous, spicy entry. There is certainly	good weight and concentration here, the finish long and satisfying, perfectly controlled. This is always a dark horse Sauternes and in 2013 they have produced something a little bit special.
2013 CHATEAU LAMOTHE	(84-86)
The 2013 Lamothe has a light honeysuckle and orange zest scented nose that needs aeration to really coalesce. The palate is viscous on the entry and spicy on the back palate, but the finish seems a little	smudged, and it is missing some finesse at the nascent stage. Hopefully that will develop during <i>élevage</i> , but at the moment, it feels somewhat disjointed.
2013 CHATEAU LAMOTHE-GUIGNARD	(86-88)
The 2013 Château Lamothe-Guignard has a slightly smudged bouquet with touches of dried honey and wax resin. The palate is	sweet and honeyed on the entry with lime zest and orange rind, although the finish is missing the focus and delineation of its peers.
2013 CHATEAU DE MALLE	(90-92)
The 2013 de Malle has a more floral nose compared to its peers, hints of white flowers infusing the minerally citrus fruit. The palate is well-balanced with a fresh, slightly viscous entry. There is plenty of	honeyed fruit cut through with penetrating acidity that lends the finish great tension. There is a sense of completeness to this Château de Malle – a Sauternes to keep your eye on.
2013 CHATEAU MYRAT	(88-90)
This sample came from four barrels blended one week previously. The nose is a little disjointed at first, possibly because the lots have not married as well as could be. The palate is medium-bodied with	fine delineation, light and delicate, with honeycomb and fresh pineapple toward the finish. Fine...but not memorable.
2013 CHATEAU NAIRAC	(90-92)
Harvested from September 26 until October 11, Nicolas Tari elected not to blend in the final lots of into his blend, but after trial blends he decided to keep just the two <i>tries</i> in order to maintain a more elegant style. As such, it has a zippy, light but focused bouquet with citrus peel	and white flowers. The palate is vibrant in the mouth with quite penetrating acidity that combines well with those unfettered citrus notes threaded from start to finish. Very fine.
2013 CHATEAU DE RAYNE-VIGNEAU	(92-94)
2013 MADAME DE RAYNE	(86-88)
The 2013 Rayne-Vigneau , picked from September 21 until October 30 over four <i>tries</i> , is being blended from 28 lots and sees 40% new oak. It is still showing quite conspicuous oak on the nose, although there is clearly sufficient honeyed fruit to support it. With continued aeration, it reveals attractive but subtle almond and spice scents. The palate is well-balanced with a lively honeyed entry. This is already very cohesive, with fine delineation, and the finish is very composed, with a saltiness lingering on	the aftertaste. It is a classic Rayne-Vigneau that should give a lot of pleasure after bottling. The second wine of Rayne-Vigneau sees about 30% new wood. The 2013 Madame de Rayne has a light apple blossom bouquet and touches of chalk dust. The palate is medium-bodied with pleasant viscous fruit on the entry, well-judged acidity and a delicate honeyed, perhaps slightly abrupt finish that demonstrates commendable length of a second wine.
2013 CHATEAU RIEUSSEC	(94-96)
2013 CARMES DE RIEUSSEC	(88-90)
The <i>grand vin</i> from Château Rieussec is a blend of 95.5% Semillon and 4.5% Sauvignon Blanc picked between September 26 and October 31 over four <i>tries</i> through the vineyard (although some blocks took more than that). The nose is a little closed at the moment, with light honey and a touch of marmalade. The palate is very well-balanced, very tense and focused with superb <i>mineralité</i> toward the lightly viscous finish. This is a	classy number, a pretty Rieussec in the making. The second wine of Rieussec, the 2013 Carmes de Rieussec is a blend of 83% Semillon, 9% Muscadelle and 8% Sauvignon Blanc. It has a lovely lemon curd, apricot and vanilla-scented nose with modest vigor. The palate has an edgy entry, with touches of citrus peel infusing the viscous fruit, and a dash of spice toward the finish.
2013 CHATEAU ROMER DU HAYOT	?
The Château Romer du Hayot is very non-descript on the nose, while the palate is missing much complexity and feels smudged and yeasty	on the finish. This seems to fall below its peers. Judgment reserved.
2013 CHATEAU SIGALAS RABAUD	(92-94)
The Sigalas Rabaud has an intriguing bouquet of candied orange peel, almond and popcorn scents that are already alluring. Give it a few more minutes in the glass, and these are overtaken by mineral scents. The palate is supremely well-balanced with good depth. The	acidity is well-judged and, returning after ten minutes, one finds greater tension and complexity on the finish. Perhaps keeping a few tricks up its sleeve, this is one to watch out for after bottling.



2013 CHATEAU SUDUIRAUT

(93-95)

The 2013 Suduiraut has one of the more flamboyant bouquets of the vintage, one that is actually reminiscent of de Fargues. There are copious Satsuma and dried honey scents, hints of beeswax and almond that keep your snout in the glass. The palate is very well-

balanced with a viscous entry, just a touch of marmalade and quince coming through, and then blossoming toward the weighty finish that shows just a touch more oak at the moment. This is an excellent Suduiraut.

2013 CHATEAU LA TOUR BLANCHE

(92-94)

The La Tour Blanche has an introspective bouquet at first, one that is atypical of the estate. Give it some aeration and there are attractive chalky scents emerging, accompanied by citrus peel and linden. The palate is very well-balanced with a touch of pepper on the entry. This

feels cohesive in the mouth, demonstrating well-judged acidity and a linear, zesty finish that leaves you with a twist of sour lemon. This is a very well-crafted La Tour Blanche, refined and intellectual.

2013 CHATEAU D'YQUEM

(95-97)

A majority of the 2013 Château d'Yquem was picked between September 25 and October 2, augmented by a second *trie* on October 11 after rains had provoked botrytis and then a third *trie* from October 21 and 24, before a final pass through the vineyard at the end of the month. Winemaker Sandrine Garbay told me that all the lots were used, but only 40% of the crop made it into the final blend, which equates to around 70,000 and 80,000 bottles. During assemblage of different lots, the blend ended up 30% Sauvignon Blanc, a little higher than usual, and 70% Semillon, while the residual sugar comes in at 140gm/L, which is a little higher than average. The reason is that the fermentation stopped naturally at this level, therefore the alcohol is a

tad lower than average at 13.1 degrees. Firstly, you notice the color, which is a touch deeper than recent vintages at this stage. The bouquet is quite honeyed and rich for Yquem at this early juncture, with subtle scents of peach skin, white flowers, and a puff of chalk and frangipane. The palate is viscous on the entry, all about the texture at first, coating the mouth with luscious botrytized fruit. There are touches of Seville orange marmalade, fresh apricot, a hint of spice and passion fruit. This is imbued with impressive depth and weight, perhaps an Yquem that is determined to make an impression after last year's absence. It might not possess the finesse of a top flight Yquem, but it has immense power and persistency.