

Classe Action

Perhaps the most puzzling terms on French wine labels are premier cru (or 1er cru, same thing) and grand cru. These have slightly different meanings in different parts of France, but in general they refer to a specific vineyard that has come to be appreciated as producing better fruit than neighboring vineyards. This is the case in Champagne, Alsace and Burgundy.

In Bordeaux the term refers not to a specific vineyard, but to a chateau, an important distinction because a vineyard is immutable, whereas a chateau can buy and sell vineyards and may be an entirely different entity than it was 150 years ago. The chateaux* have been ranked, or classed (classé) and this ranking appears on the label. The oldest of these rankings (the 1855 list of Medoc, Graves and Sauternes) have historically been of interest only to the wine trade, but came into more widespread use as new markets opened up in 1950's America and eventually Japan.

Their use as a sales tool inspired other Bordeaux regions to try their hand, and classifications now exist for the Graves and St Emilion regions.

These lists are shamelessly scanned from Tom Stevenson's Sotheby's Encyclopedia of Wine a well written and very readable book that I think every wine enthusiast should own. I especially like the historical information he attaches to the modern names of the chateaux, and his explanation of the St Emilion classification. Sorry if the scans are not totally readable...feel free to support Tom and buy his book!

*often stately homes of the aristocracy, but not necessarily. There is no requirement for an actual building, and some modern "chateaux" are simply garages, leading to a new term for small production winemakers in the region "garagistes"

THE 1855 CLASSIFICATION OF THE WHITE WINES OF THE GIRONDE

PREMIER CRU SUPÉRIEUR

(Superior First Growth)

Yquem, Sauternes

PREMIER CRUS

(First Growths)

Latour Blanche, Bommes

(now *Château La Tour Blanche*)

Peyraguey, Bommes (now two

properties: *Château Lafaurie-*

Peyraguey and *Château Clos*

Haut-Peyraguey)

Vigneau, Bommes (now *Château*

Rayne-Vigneau)

Suduiraut, Preignac

Coutet, Barsac

Climens, Barsac

Bayle, Sauternes (now *Château*

Guitraud)

Rieusec, Sauternes (now *Château*

Rieussec, Fargues)

Rabeaud, Bomme (now two

properties: *Château Rabaud-*

Promis and *Château Sigalas-*

Rabaud)

DEUXIÈME CRUS

(Second Growths)

Mirat, Barsac (now *Château*

Myrat)

Doisy, Barsac (now three

properties: *Château Doisy-Daëne*,

Château Doisy-Dubroca, and

Château Doisy-Védrines)

Pexoto, Bommes (now part of

Château Rabaud-Promis)

D'arche, Sauternes (now *Château*

d'Arche)

Filhot, Sauternes

Broustet Nérac, Barsac (now two

properties: *Château Broustet* and

Château Naillac)

Caillou, Barsac

Suau, Barsac

Malle, Preignac (now *Château de*

Malle)

Romer, Preignac (now two

properties: *Château Romer* and

Château Romer-du-Hayot,

Fargues)

Lamothe, Sauternes (now two

properties: *Château Lamothe* and

Château Lamothe-Guignard)

Note that the whites (all of them sweet wines) are only firsts and seconds. There are no third, fourth or fifth growths. Also, Yquem has a superlative on it's ranking ("superieur") that none of the reds have, essentially putting it in a class by itself. This is why we sometimes read that there are six levels in the 1855 ranking, and sometimes five. Six appears to be more accurate.

THE 1855 CLASSIFICATION OF THE RED WINES OF THE GIRONDE

PREMIERS CRUS

(First Growths)

Château Lafite, Pauillac
(now *Château Lafite-Rothschild*)
Château Margaux, Margaux
Château Latour, Pauillac
Haut-Brion, Pessac (Graves)

SECONDS CRUS

(Second Growths)

Mouton, Pauillac (now *Château Mouton-Rothschild* and a First Growth since 1973)
Rauzan-Ségla, Margaux
Rauzan-Gassies, Margaux
Léoville, St.-Julien (now three properties: *Châteaux Léoville-Las-Cases, Léoville-Poyferré, and Léoville-Barton*)
Vivens Durfort, Margaux (now *Château Durfort-Vivens*)
Gruau-Larose, St.-Julien (now *Château Gruaud-Larose*)
Lascombe, Margaux (now *Château Lascombes*)
Brane, Cantenac (now *Château Brane-Cantenac*)
Pichon Longueville, Pauillac (now two properties: *Château Pichon-Longueville-Baron and Château Pichon-Longueville-Comtesse-de-Lalande*)
Ducru Beau Caillou, St.-Julien (now *Château Ducru-Beaucaillou*)
Cos D'estournel, St.-Estèphe (now *Château Cos d'Estournel*)
Montrose, St.-Estèphe

TROISIÈMES CRUS

(Third Growths)

Kirwan, Cantenac
Château d'Issan, Cantenac
Lagrange, St.-Julien
Langoa, St.-Julien (now *Château Langoa-Barton*)
Giscours, Labarde
St.-Exupéry, Margaux (now *Château Malescot-St.-Exupéry*)
Boyd, Cantenac (now two properties: *Châteaux Boyd-Cantenac and Château Cantenac Brown*)
Palmer, Cantenac
Lalagune, Ludon (now *Château La Lagune*)
Desmirail, Margaux
Dubignon, Margaux (no longer in existence, but some of these original vineyards now belong to *Châteaux Malescot-St.-Exupéry, Château Palmer, and Château Margaux*)
Calon, St.-Estèphe (now *Château*

Calon-Ségur)

Ferrière, Margaux
Becker, Margaux (now *Château Marquis d'Alesme-Becker*)

QUATRIÈMES CRUS

(Fourth Growths)

St.-Pierre, St.-Julien (now *Château St.-Pierre-Sevaistre*)
Talbot, St.-Julien
Du-Luc, St.-Julien (now *Château Branaire-Ducru*)
Duhart, Pauillac (at one time *Château Dubart-Milon Rothschild*, but now *Château Dubart-Milon*, although still Rothschild-owned)
Pouget-Lassale, Cantenac (now *Château Pouget*)
Pouget, Cantenac (now *Château Pouget*)
Carnet, St.-Laurent (now *Château La Tour-Carnet*)
Rochet, St.-Estèphe (now *Château Lafon-Rochet*)
Château de Beychevele, St.-Julien (now *Château Beychevelle*)
Le Prieuré, Cantenac (now *Château Prieuré-Lichine*)
Marquis de Thermes, Margaux (now *Château Marquis-de-Terme*)

CINQUIÈMES CRUS

(Fifth Growths)

Canet, Pauillac (now *Château Pontet-Canet*)
Batailley, Pauillac (now two properties: *Château Batailley and Château Haut-Batailley*)
Grand Puy, Pauillac (now *Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste*)
Artigues Arnaud, Pauillac (now *Château Grand-Puy-Ducasse*)
Lynch, Pauillac (now *Château Lynch-Bages*)
Lynch Moussas, Pauillac
Dauzac, Labarde
Darmaillac, Pauillac (now *Château d'Armaillac*)
Le Tertre, Arsac (now *Château du Tertre*)
Haut Bages, Pauillac (now *Château Haut-Bages-Libéral*)
Pédesclaux, Pauillac (now *Château Pédesclaux*)
Coutenceau, St.-Laurent (now *Château Belgrave*)
Camensac, St.-Laurent
Cos Labory, St.-Estèphe
Clerc Milon, Pauillac
Croizet-Bages, Pauillac
Cantemerle, Macau

The 1855 classification was put together by the wine brokers of Bordeaux. It was meant to accompany a map of the region which was to be presented at the Paris Exposition.

The brokers based their list on the prices that the wines were sold for, and in a few days had a list of 57 wines. All the red wines were from the Medoc (with one exception) because the right bank wines and the wines from Graves were much less in demand and much lower in price. The wines were divided into 5 groups, with a large price difference between the firsts and the seconds, a smaller gap between the seconds and the thirds, and then a more or less even drop off in pricing, with somewhat arbitrary lines between the groups.

The only white wines classified at that time were the sweet whites of Barsac and Sauternes, in the south of the region. This price based system has been a self-fulfilling prophecy. With the top wines able to afford better equipment and more skilled labor they have mostly been able to stay at the top of the pile.

3rd growth Marquis D'Alesme Becker has recently (2009) changed hands. The new owners are merging their existing vineyards with their new purchase to make an expanded property, and dropping the word Becker. If the 1855 ranking were done today this chateau's current pricing would drop it from the list altogether.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF ST-ÉMILION

St-Émilion wines were first classified in 1958, with the intention that the classification be revised every 10 years according to the performance of properties during the previous decade. Three basic categories were established: *premier grand cru classé*, *grand cru classé*, and *grand cru*. Of the 12 châteaux that were classified *premiers grands crus classés*, Ausone and Cheval-Blanc were placed in a superior subsection. The rest were listed alphabetically, not qualitatively, as were the 64 *grands crus classés*. The classification was revised in 1969, 1985 (some six years late), and again in 1996—which brought the reclassification period back to that anticipated. Beware the distinction between

grand cru (unclassified growths) and *grand cru classé* (classified growths) because the difference is considerable. In St-Émilion, *grand cru* merely indicates a minimum alcoholic strength 0.5% higher than that required by the basic St-Émilion appellation, and a slightly lower yield. Any producer may apply for a *grand cru*, and hundreds do so. It is not a classification, but merely an adjunct to the appellation, and would be more accurately conveyed as a new appellation called St-Émilion Supérieur, since the difference between *grand cru* and *grand cru classé* is akin to that between basic Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur.

ST-ÉMILION CLASSIFICATIONS OF 1958, 1969, 1985, AND 1996 Incorporating vineyard soil classification

<p>PREMIER GRAND CRU CLASSÉ CLASS A</p> <p>1 Château Ausone Soil: <i>Côte and St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>22 Château Cheval Blanc Soil: <i>Graves and ancien sand</i></p> <p>PREMIER GRAND CRU CLASSÉ CLASS B</p> <p>3 Château l'Angélus⁷ Soil: <i>Pied de côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>4 Château Beau-Séjour Bécot^{3,7} Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>5 Château Beauséjour (Duffau Lagarosse) Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>6 Château Belair Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>7 Château Canon Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>8 Château-Figeac Soil: <i>Graves and ancien sand</i></p> <p>9 Clos Fourtet Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and ancien sand</i></p> <p>10 Château la Gaffelière Soil: <i>Côte, pied de côte</i></p> <p>11 Château Magdelaine Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau, côte, and pied de côte</i></p> <p>12 Château Pavie Soil: <i>Côte and St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>13 Château Trotteville Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>GRAND CRU CLASSÉ</p> <p>14 Château l'Arrosée Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>15 Château Baleau (now Château Côte de Baleau)^{3,7} Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>16 Château Balestard la Tonnelle Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>17 Château Bellevue Soil: <i>Côte and St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>18 Château Bergat Soil: <i>Côte and St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>19 Château Berliquet² Soil: <i>Côte and pied de côte</i></p> <p>20 Château Cadet-Bon^{1,8} Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>21 Château Cadet-Piola Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>22 Château Canon-la-Gaffelière Soil: <i>Pied de côte and sandy-gravel</i></p> <p>23 Château Cap de Mourlin Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p>	<p>- Château la Carte⁴ Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and ancien sand</i></p> <p>- Château Chapelle-Madeleine⁵ Soil: <i>Côte and St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>24 Château le Châtelet⁹ Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>25 Château Chauvin Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>26 Château Clos des Jacobins Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>27 Château la Clotte Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>28 Château la Clusière Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>29 Château Corbin Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>30 Château Corbin Michotte Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>31 Château la Couspaude^{1,8} Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>32 Château Coutet¹ Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>Château le Couvent⁶ Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>33 Couvent des Jacobins³ Soil: <i>Ancien sand and pied de côte</i></p> <p>34 Château Croque Michotte³ Soil: <i>Ancien sand and graves</i></p> <p>35 Château Curé Bon la Madeleine Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>36 Château Dassault³ Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>37 Château la Dominique Soil: <i>Ancien sand and graves</i></p> <p>38 Château Faurie de Souchard Soil: <i>Pied de côte</i></p> <p>39 Château Fonplégade Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>40 Château Fonroque Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>41 Château Franc-Mayne Soil: <i>Côte</i></p> <p>42 Château Grand Barrail Lamarzelle Figeac⁹ Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>43 Château Grand Corbin⁹ Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>44 Château Grand-Corbin-Despagne⁹ Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>45 Château Grand Mayne Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>46 Château Grandes Murailles^{1,8} Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>47 Château Grand-Pontet Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>48 Château Guadet St-Julien Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>49 Château Haut-Corbin</p>	<p>Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>50 Château Haut-Sarpe³ Soil: <i>St-Émilion and St-Christophe plateaux and côtes</i></p> <p>51 Château Jean Faure³ Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>52 Château Laniote³ Soil: <i>Ancien sand and pied de côte</i></p> <p>53 Château Larcis Ducasse Soil: <i>Côte and pied de côte</i></p> <p>54 Château Larmande Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>55 Château Laroque⁸ Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>56 Château Laroze Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>57 Clos la Madeleine⁹ Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>58 Château la Marzelle (now Château Lamarzelle) Soil: <i>Ancien sand and graves</i></p> <p>59 Château Matras³ Soil: <i>Pied de côte</i></p> <p>60 Château Mauvezin Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>61 Château Moulin du Cadet Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>62 Clos de l'Oratoire³ Soil: <i>Pied de côte</i></p> <p>63 Château Pavie Décèsse Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>64 Château Pavie Macquin Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau, côte, and sandy gravel</i></p> <p>65 Château Pavillon-Cadet⁹ Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>66 Château Petit-Faurie-de-Soutard Soil: <i>Ancien sand and côte</i></p> <p>67 Château le Prieuré Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>68 Château Ripeau Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>69 Château St-Georges (Côte Pavie) Soil: <i>Côte and pied de côte</i></p> <p>70 Clos St-Martin Soil: <i>Côte and ancien sand</i></p> <p>71 Château Sansonnet⁹ Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>72 Château la Serre Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>73 Château Soutard Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>74 Château Tertre Daugay³ Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau and côte</i></p> <p>75 Château la Tour Figeac Soil: <i>Ancien sand and graves</i></p> <p>76 Château la Tour du Pin Figeac (Owner: Giraud-Belivier) Soil: <i>Ancien sand and graves</i></p>	<p>77 Château la Tour d' (Owner: Moueix) Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>78 Château Trimoulet Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>- Château Trois-Mou Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>79 Château Troplong Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>80 Château Villemaur Soil: <i>St-Émilion plateau</i></p> <p>81 Château Yon-Figeac Soil: <i>Ancien sand</i></p> <p>See opposite for an explanation of soil types.</p> <p>Notes</p> <p>¹ One <i>premier grand cru classé</i> and six <i>grands crus classés</i> demoted in the 1985 revision.</p> <p>² This property was not in the original 1958 classification, nor was it included in the 1969 revision, but was awarded <i>grand cru classé</i> status in 1985.</p> <p>³ These properties were not in the original 1958 classification, but were awarded <i>grand cru classé</i> status in the 1969 revision.</p> <p>⁴ These two properties were merged with <i>premier grand cru classé</i> Château Beau-Séjour-Bécot in 1979. Wines bearing both labels can be found up to the 1978 vintage, and it is possible that they might reappear sometime in the future, particularly as the expansion of Château Beau-Séjour-Bécot vineyard was primarily responsible for its demotion in the 1985 classification.</p> <p>⁵ This property was merged with <i>premier grand cru classé</i> Château Ausone in 1970. Wines with this label can be found up to the 1969 vintage.</p> <p>⁶ This property changed hands prior to the 1985 revision and did not apply to be considered; it was not demoted, but simply ignored.</p> <p>⁷ Two properties were promoted to <i>premier grand cru classé</i> (B) in 1996.</p> <p>⁸ Four properties were promoted to <i>grand cru classé</i> in 1996.</p> <p>⁹ Eight properties were demoted to <i>grand cru</i> in 1996.</p>
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I think Tom means that St Emilion Grand Cru is analagous to Bordeaux Superieur... even the experts are confused!

THE CLASSIFICATION OF GRAVES

The only Graves property to be classified in 1855 was Château Haut-Brion. The Syndicat, for the defense of the Graves appellation, wanted to create its own classification, but was prevented from doing so until the 1921 law was changed in 1949. The first classification was not made until 1953, and this itself was later modified in 1959.

Distinction is made between red wines and white wines, but no attempt at ranking between the various growths is made—they all have the right to use the term *cru classé*. It can be seen from the 1,320 acres (535 hectares) of classified properties listed below that this represents not much more than 13 percent of the total 1,745 acres (4,350 hectares) of delimited vineyards planted in the Graves and Pessac-Léognan appellation.

RED WINES	COMMUNE	AREA CURRENTLY UNDER VINE	AREA CURRENTLY UNDER VINE
Château Bouscaut	Cadaujac	96 acres	(39 ha)
Château Carbonnieux	Léognan	124 acres	(50 ha)
Domaine de Chevalier	Léognan	82 acres	(33 ha)
Château de Fieuzal	Léognan	96 acres	(39 ha)
Château Haut-Bailly	Léognan	69 acres	(28 ha)
Château Haut-Brion	Pessac	106 acres	(43 ha)
Château La Mission-Haut-Brion	Pessac	52 acres	(21 ha)
Château Latour-Haut-Brion	Talence	12 acres	(5 ha)
Château La Tour-Martillac	Martillac	69 acres	(28 ha)
Château Malartic-Lagravière	Léognan	91 acres	(37 ha)
Château Olivier	Léognan	94 acres	(38 ha)
Château Pape-Clément	Pessac	74 acres	(30 ha)
Château Smith-Haut-Lafite	Martillac	109 acres	(44 ha)
TOTAL AREA UNDER VINE		1,075*ACRES	(435 HA)

WHITE WINES	COMMUNE	AREA CURRENTLY UNDER VINE	AREA CURRENTLY UNDER VINE
Château Bouscaut	Cadaujac	20 acres	(8 ha)
Château Carbonnieux	Léognan	104 acres	(42 ha)
Domaine de Chevalier	Léognan	12 acres	(5 ha)
Château de Fieuzal	Léognan	20 acres	(8 ha)
Château Couhins-Lurton	Villenave	13 ha	(32 acres)
Château Haut-Brion	Pessac	10 acres	(3 ha)
Château La Tour-Martillac	Martillac	25 acres	(10 ha)
Château Laville-Haut-Brion	Talence	10 acres	(4 ha)
Château Malartic-Lagravière	Léognan	17 acres	(7 ha)
TOTAL AREA UNDER VINE		250*ACRES	(100 HA)

*Note—These figures are not precise conversions of the hectare totals, but are column totals and differ because of rounding up.

Couhins was split into Couhins and Couhins –Lurton. Both properties are now Cru Classe for white wines, but Couhins is missing from this list. It should be there. Also Couhins-Lurton has acres and hectares confused...maybe a late change to the manuscript? Chevalier is generally regarded (along with the rarely seen white Haut-Brion) as the best of these.