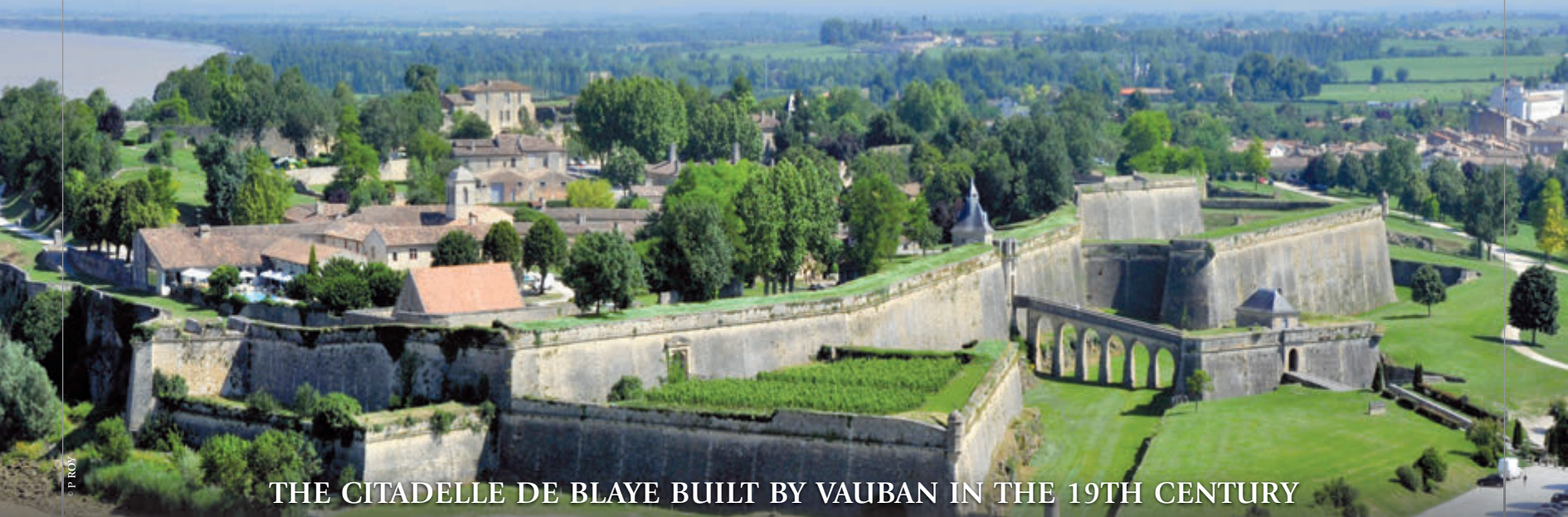


Côtes de Bordeaux - aiming for gold

A wine producer from a classed growth in the Médoc confided in me: when he feels like a glass of red in the evening after work, he does not open a bottle of his own wine but prefers to enjoy an 'easier-drinking' wine. He usually chooses from a group of wines called the 'Côtes de Bordeaux'.

BY NICOLLE CROFT



THE CITADELLE DE BLAYE BUILT BY VAUBAN IN THE 19TH CENTURY

You may not have heard of Bordeaux's newest appellation, but the chances are that you will soon. With increased competition from Bordeaux-style blends from around the world, a recent marketing initiative has brought together four Bordeaux appellations with similar attributes to help the consumer more easily identify a source of 'accessible' Bordeaux. The new 'family' consists of the Blaye, Cadillac, Castillon and Francs appellations whose sunny vineyards grow on the slopes of the Garonne and the Dordogne Rivers.

Wines from these regions have recently been gaining notoriety and feature, for example, in the best-selling Japanese Manga comic books

'Drops of God' by Tadashi Agi. The brother and sister writers tasted thousand of wines to draw up their shortlist for the story's 13 mystery wines and their choice included Château Mont-Perat, Château Poupille and Château le Puy.

What is special about these wines?

Some of the world's finest wines are made from vineyards that grow on 'côtes' or slopes (Côte d'Or in Burgundy or Côte Rôtie in the Northern Rhone for example). The grapes bask in sunshine during the day, promoting ripening, and the soils are well-drained. Often temperatures are kept cool by proximity to a river - three primary ingredients for producing fine wine.

What are the common traits within this new family?

To start with, similar soil or 'terroir'. Their wines are mainly made from the fruity, supple Merlot grape. They can be enjoyed young, make excellent food wines and at around 5 to 15€ (retail price in France) they are indeed a good source of Bordeaux wines that 'go easy on the pocket'. The size of the average property is small (around 10 hectares) and the majority are family-owned.

Vine soil specialist Kees Van Leeuwen estimates that around 30% of the soil found in the four Côtes Appellations is technically superior for growing vines than the soils of many more highly-rated vineyards such as generics or Grand Cru St Emilion.

How did the amalgamation come about?

The original idea took seed in 1985 and became a fully-fledged appellation in 2009, officialised by France's appellation body INAO (Institut National des Appellations d'Origine). Hence, on October 31, 2009 a new family of wines was born in Bordeaux formed of four existing 'terroirs', each with a common backbone. The original appellations still exist but have been renamed.

From the 2009 vintage, producers have had to introduce new names, all of which include 'Côtes de Bordeaux' in their appellation.

- Premières Côtes de Blaye has become Blaye Côtes de Bordeaux
- Premières Côtes de Bordeaux Rouges has become Cadillac Côtes de Bordeaux
- Côtes de Castillon has become Castillon Côtes de Bordeaux
- Bordeaux Côtes de Francs has become Francs Côtes de Bordeaux
- An additional Côtes de Bordeaux appellation was added for those not wishing to put a specific appellation on the label.

FACTS AND FIGURES: AOC COTES DE BORDEAUX

- Amalgamation of the four appellations of Blaye, Cadillac, Castillon and Francs
- Accounts for 14% of total Bordeaux production, equating to 535,000 hectolitres
- 1,500 wine producers (out of 7,800) 19%
- 97% red wine (mostly Merlot) and 3% white wine (mostly Sauvignon)
- Export represents 18% of total volume (35% increase in 2012)

1. Belgium	25%
2. China	19%
3. Japan	9%
4. USA - Canada	7%
5. Germany	6%
6. Hong Kong	5%
7. United Kingdom	5%



THE COTES DE BORDEAUX INCLUDE FOUR APPELLATIONS

A FAMILY OF FOUR DIFFERENT APPELLATIONS

The concept of combining similar geographical areas is not new to those who live in Europe. Patricia Zabalza, the new director of the Union des Côtes de Bordeaux explains: "What it does is create a single, clear voice to market the supple, affordable wines of the Côtes de Bordeaux as a collective brand. It improves that all-important exposure, particularly in export markets. There is a clearer, more recognisable identity. The fact that the word Bordeaux has become part of the appellation helps deliver the message, especially abroad. It is a single family but within the union there are 'brothers' and 'sisters' with different characters. These differences are respected but we can benefit by working together. The Union works with the four growers' organisations which are responsible for organising activities within their own appellation, for example the wine tourism programme which is very active in the Côtes".

It is early days still, she admits, but already an obvious synergy, an exchange of ideas and a collective dynamism are taking root.

"Our key aim is to increase export volumes". Bordeaux as a whole exports 37% of its wine; in the Côtes de Bordeaux exports account for only 18%, although the figure grows every year. In 2012 it grew by 35%".



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THE ROLLING VINEYARDS OF THE APPELLATION OF CADILLAC - CÔTES DE BORDEAUX SOUTH OF BORDEAUX

Who is the typical Côtes de Bordeaux grower and how does he/she work?

They are a diverse group of producers, both men and women. The majority of properties are family-owned, some have been for several generations whilst others have been bought recently by people not previously involved in wine. There are many young producers taking over family estates who have returned with travel experience, diplomas in wine making, a good awareness of social media and linguistic competence, all strengths their parents were often lacking. A growing number of vineyards are organic.

A NEW WAY OF SELLING - DIRECT

Today fewer and fewer vineyards in Bordeaux are family-owned, less than 45%. Many family properties have been sold to insurance companies, banks and other institutions. In the past, Bordeaux's 'petits châteaux' wines were sold via the 'Place de Bordeaux', the 'stock market' of Bordeaux wine, by the city's 200 or so wine merchants. Today, although this may still account for a percentage of sales, many 'petits châteaux' producers cannot afford to lose out on their profit margins and therefore try and sell direct to the market.

These small family wine producers have to perform multiple roles. They are not only wine makers but are also responsible for selling their wine. Yes, these are Bordeaux's real wine makers, the ones with soil on their shoes and wine-stained hands!

BORDEAUX'S 'PETITS CHÂTEAUX'

The wines of these smaller, independent producers easily get lost in the crowd. They compete against the second wines of well-known châteaux or smaller vineyards of already famous families like the Cathiards and Lurons or properties belonging to the wine merchants themselves.

The Union's rôle is to clarify communication, improve exposure and provide support in export markets via trade fairs across the world such as Vinexpo Hong Kong, ProWein in Germany and the World Wine Meetings in Chicago.

WELCOME SUPPORT

In the current economic climate and with world wine markets at saturation point, there is an obligation for this group of small, independent producers to be dynamic, extremely persistent and clear about what makes their wine different. The 'Union des Côtes de Bordeaux' supports their individual activities in export markets. At the end of the day though, the producers feel that the recipe for success lies very much in their own hands.

BORDEAUX'S 60 APPELLATIONS: CONSUMERS 'SPOILT FOR CHOICE'

Going against the flow within the 'Côtes de Bordeaux', Château Le Puy of 'Francs, Côtes de Bordeaux' has asked appellation body INAO for a small plot of 5.6 hectares with its own distinctive limestone terroir to be granted its own appellation, AOC Le Puy. If the move is approved, it would be the first single-vineyard appellation in Bordeaux.

Bordeaux can be daunting for the average wine drinker to understand. With no less than 60 different appellations, any move designed to facilitate consumer choice has to be a step in the right direction.

BLAYE - CÔTES DE BORDEAUX

- **Vineyard location:**
about 45 km north of Bordeaux, opposite the Médoc
- **Appellation since 1936**
- **Total Area:** this is the largest of the four appellations with 6,500 hectares shared between 42 villages
- **Average vineyard size:** 15 hectares
- **Average annual production:**
red wine: 320,000 hectolitres - white wine: 15,000 hectolitres
- **Number of wine producers:** 700

• Co-operatives: 3
• Grape varieties: red - 70 % Merlot, 20 % Cabernet-Sauvignon, 8% Malbec and 2 % Cabernet Franc
• White - mainly Sauvignon, Sémillon and Muscadelle
• Recommended châteaux: Haut Grelot, Segonzac, Haut Bertineries, Les Bertrands, Cantinot, Haut Colombier, Haut Meneau
• Tourist information office: +33 (0)5 57 42 12 09
• Contact: Syndicat Viticole - 11, cours Vauban - 33390 Blaye Tel. +33 (0)5 57 42 91 19 - Fax +33 (0)5 57 42 85 28
• Website: www.blaye-cotes-de-bordeaux.com
• Wine Events
‘Blaye au Comptoir’: in February in Bordeaux and in October in Paris, the wine growers of Blaye present their wines to customers in restaurants and wine bars
‘Le Printemps des Vins de Blaye’ (April 13 & 14, 2013): an opportunity for wine consumers to meet over 80 wine producers in the historic setting of Blaye Citadelle
Vins de Blaye marathon (May 12, 2013)
Mountain bike race in Blaye (May 19, 2013)
Harvest at ‘Clos de l’Echauguette’ whose 33 ares are tucked away in a corner of Blaye Citadelle

FROM THE GROWER’S PERSPECTIVE

For Thomas Herter of Château Segonzac, Blaye Côtes de Bordeaux, who exports 95 % of his wine, the changes have been positive. “Having the name Bordeaux in the appellation undeniably helps in new markets. It is only a problem for producers who have yet to make the export ‘leap’ and this initiative will help them to achieve it. In traditional markets we constantly come face-to-face with our customers so it is easy to explain”.

He welcomes the added support provided by the Union which works in conjunction with the appellation’s growers’ organisation and the CIVB. “But at the end of the day”, he says, “it is up to the individual producer to be dynamic and become the face behind his or her wine”.

Julien Bonneau of Château Haut Grelot, another young wine producer, shares this viewpoint. “In traditional markets such as the home market, the ‘Premières Côtes de Blaye’ appellation was well-liked. In new markets, though, it was not recognised. The direct connection with the word Bordeaux is more meaningful to the Chinese or Canadians, say. They don’t need to know exactly where it is”. Julien Bonneau owns 58 hectares including 26 hectares of one of Blaye’s most highly-rated white wines.



CHÂTEAU SEGONZAC IN BLAYE-CÔTES DE BORDEAUX RUN BY THOMAS AND CHARLOTTE HERTER

CADILLAC - CÔTES DE BORDEAUX

• Vineyard location: on the right bank of the Garonne, it lies between Bordeaux and Langon along a thin 60km-long strip, just 5km in breadth in the widest parts
• Appellation since 1937 (Pre 2009 as Premières Côtes de Bordeaux)
• Area: 2,653 hectares shared between 39 villages (Sainte Croix du Mont and Loupiac joined the production area when the AOC Côtes de Bordeaux was established).
• Average vineyard area: 12 hectares
• Average annual production: red 100,298 hectolitres
• Number of wine producers: 240
• Co-operatives: 2
• Grape varieties: red only - 55 % Merlot, 25 % Cabernet-Sauvignon, 15 % Cabernet Franc and 5% Malbec
• Recommended châteaux: Brethous, St Nicolas, Clos Chaumont
• Contact: Syndicat Viticole - 1104-106, rue Cazeaux-Cazalet - 33410 Cadillac Tel. +33 (0)5 57 98 19 20 - Fax +33 (0)5 57 98 19 30
• Website: www.cadillaccotesdebordeaux.com
• Wine Events
Open days in Cadillac (May 18 & 19, 2013) when many wine properties open their doors to the public and vintage cars are displayed in historic locations
‘Balades en Cadillac’ (August 24 & 25, 2013): 2 days of celebration centred on street art, music and circus to discover the vineyards Cadillac Côtes de Bordeaux
‘Les Balades en Patrimoine’ (September 14 & 15, 2013): many wine properties open their doors to the public for visits
‘Balades en vendanges à Cadillac’ (September 22, 2013): walks in the vineyards during harvest time
• Worth a Visit
Vine and wine museum A brand new museum housing many original, educational ideas to bring wine making and tasting to life over 200m²
Maison des Vins de Cadillac - Musée de la Vigne et du Vin www.closiere.com



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CATHERINE PAPON OF CHÂTEAU PEYROU AT CASTILLON - ONE OF THE MANY WOMEN WINEMAKERS IN THE CÔTES

FROM THE GROWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Catherine Negrevergne of Château Monjon La Gravier in Ste Eulalie has chosen to replace 'Premières Côtes de Bordeaux' simply with 'Côtes de Bordeaux' on her classy labels which illustrate the property's splendid 19th century charterhouse. Her two hectares of vines grow on a south-facing slope forming a tiny enclave in the urban sprawl of Ste Eulalie. It is on the far northern boundary of the former 'Premières Côtes de Bordeaux' area now technically renamed 'Cadillac Côtes de Bordeaux', after the town of Cadillac over 50km away! It made no sense to her, nor to her customers apparently to add the name 'Cadillac'. She markets her wines mainly in France.

The renaming of the 'Premières Côtes de Bordeaux Rouges' (the appellation dates back to 1936) is probably the most criticised change. It is a red wine only appellation. Cadillac itself is a sweet white wine appellation which still exists in its own right (along with the sweet white Premières Côtes de Bordeaux Blancs).

Chantal Larnaudie, ex-lawyer turned wine producer is representative of a new breed of grower in the Côtes. Her father bought the 50-hectare Château St Nicolas in Cardan near Cadillac in 1994. She took over in 2005 leaving her profession as a lawyer in "a change for the better" as she says despite the difficult economic climate. She too has had to change the appellation from 'Premières Côtes de

Bordeaux' but chooses to put the full 'Cadillac Côtes de Bordeaux' appellation on her labels. "The change certainly needs explaining in traditional markets", she explains "but I am confident about the long term benefits and am expecting the Union to promote exports in the future".

Dutchman Pieter Verbeek, owner of the 15-hectare Château Clos Chaumont for the past 22 years, thinks grouping together 'Côtes de Bordeaux' is a good idea. His property lies in the defunct 'Premières Côtes de Bordeaux', now called 'Cadillac Côtes de Bordeaux'. He says: "It is up to the leading properties to group together, be dynamic and show the way and to build a recognisable high quality brand that will raise profile and encourage the others to follow suit". The work involved in producing their wine is comparable to that of a St Emilion Grand Cru Classé (they even employ Angelus's Hubert de Bouard de Laforest as their consultant). Closer inspection of the label of their 'Grand Vin' reveals however that they chose to put 'Grand Vin de Bordeaux' on their front labels and 'Cadillac- Côtes de Bordeaux' solely on the back label. "Bordeaux is more meaningful than Cadillac at the moment to a buyer in China", he explains, particularly when the wine sells for 25€ a bottle! "There is still a lot of marketing to do to change this conception".

Now entering his final year of conversion to organic, 6th generation grower Vincent Lacoste is positive about the 'Côtes de Bordeaux' changes. He represents the 6th generation of his family to run Château de Cranne, a 45-hectare estate north-east of Cadillac. He has 30 hectares of red vines which he markets as 'Côtes de Bordeaux' choosing not to use Cadillac for fear of confusion with his sweet Loupiac wine which grows over 9 hectares. He also produces 6 hectares of dry Bordeaux Blanc. He finds the concept of the 'Côtes de Bordeaux' appellation "easier to present and explain to customers". He exports 50% of his wines.

CASTILLON - CÔTES DE BORDEAUX

- **Vineyard location:**
located 45 km east of Bordeaux, bordered on the west by the St Emilion area, to the south by the Dordogne river and to the west by the Dordogne department
- **Appellation since 1989**
- **Area:** 3,000 hectares shared between 9 villages
- **Average vineyard area:** 8 hectares
- **Average annual production:** red 160,000 hectolitres
- **Number of wine producers:** 360
- **Co-operatives:** 1

- **Grape varieties:** red only - 70 % Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet-Sauvignon
- **Recommended châteaux:** Fontbaude, Ampelia, Moya, Brehat
- **Tourist information office:** +33 (0)5 57 40 27 58
- **Contact:** Syndicat Viticole - 6, allées de la République - 33350 Castillon-la-Bataille - Tel. +33 (0)5 57 40 00 88 - Fax. +33 (0)5 57 40 06 31
- **Website:** www.cotes-de-castillon.com
- **Wine Events**

2012 futures: the first opportunity to taste the new 2012 vintage of Castillon Côtes de Bordeaux (April 8 to 12, 2013)

Historical tasting weekends based around the world famous 'Bataille de Castillon' light and sound re-enactment (July & August)

• Worth a Visit

Comptoir de Genes

An unexpected location in the heart of Castillon country. A restaurant, wine shop, bar and specialist grocery all rolled into one that boasts 100 different Castillon wines (and others) that you can enjoy with your meal. The wines are selected by owner Anne Marie Galineau
contact@comptoirdegenes.com
www.comptoirdegenes.com Tél. 00 33 (0)5 57 47 90 03

Le Chai au Quai

The magnificent, fully renovated 19th-century Le Chai au Quai stands proudly on the banks of the Dordogne river in the heart of Castillon-La Bataille. It is a working winery and cellar for the famous Brit Tony Laithwaite who runs one of Britain's largest on-line wine clubs. It is a shop and houses a collection of his wines for sale. In fact his wine experience began in Castillon and he has remained loyal to these roots ever since. Tony and his wife Barbara have owned a small award-winning Castillon property, Chateau LaClariere Laithwaite, since the 1980s and their eldest son, Henry, makes the wine at the property and at his own Castillon Verniotte. The family recently purchased neighbouring Chateau Du Bois.

FROM THE GROWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Pierre Rebaud of Château Moya (a newly created up-and-coming property owned by the Canadian Curl family) thinks the amalgamation has caused unnecessary confusion. A dynamic growers' organisation in Castillon, run by a number of 'movers and shakers' (particularly from neighbouring St Emilion), "meant that the appellation was already building a strong reputation. By joining forces with the rest of the Côtes", he believes, "the appellation lost some of its individuality and authenticity".

Oenologist Catherine Papon from 4.5-hectare Château Peyrou has not seen any change at all "on her small scale" following the name

87
/100

CÔTES DE BOURG

Château Macay

Vintage 2010

Beautiful vibrant red. Fruity nose redolent of ripe blackcurrant. The palate is supple, fresh and idiosyncratic, driven by more of the same delicious aromas. The finish introduces a hint of firmness that guarantees good ageability.



FULL CONTACT DETAILS FOR THIS ESTATE CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 114

change although she believes it is good overall for the Castillon appellation. "The most important factor for my customers is to produce a quality wine at a good price". She purchased the property in 1989 before the influx of producers from nearby St Emilion (such as Château d'Aiguilhe, Stephen Neipperg and Stéphane Derrenencourt at Domaine de l'A). She is responsible for making the wine, now 100% organic, and markets her 40,000 bottles directly to markets in Northern Europe such as Belgium and Germany.

"There is everything to be gained from the new union", states Jean-Pierre Toxé of 12-hectare Château Pillebois. He attended a wine fair organised by the Union des Côtes de Bordeaux in China and finds the resultant synergy beneficial. "It puts producers like me with relatively small volumes in a strong position. It makes sense to join forces". He currently exports 10% of his output to Hong Kong, China and the USA and looks to the Union to help grow these sales.



JEAN-PIERRE TOXÉ AND HIS TEAM,
"WE HAVE EVERYTHING TO GAIN FROM
THE UNION CÔTES DE BORDEAUX"



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**FRÉDÉRIC MARQUE, FOURTH
GENERATION OWNER OF
CHÂTEAU PUYFROMAGE**

FRANCS - CÔTES DE BORDEAUX

- **Vineyard location:**
50km north east of Bordeaux, 10km east of St Emilion. The smallest of the Bordeaux appellations, it resembles a small independent state and occupies the highest slopes of the Gironde, halfway between the valleys of the Isle and the Dordogne. The limestone plateau of St Emilion continues along the valley to this point.
- **Appellation since** 1967
- **Area:** 500 hectares shared between 3 villages
- **Average vineyard area:** 6 hectares
- **Average annual production:** 29,000 hectolitres, white - 1,000hl
- **Number of wine producers:** 77
- **Co-operatives:** 1
- **Grape varieties:**
Red: 70 % Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet-Sauvignon
White: 60% Semillon, 20% Muscadelle, 20% Sauvignon
- **Recommended châteaux:** Puyfromage, Puy, Puygeraud
- **Tourist information office:** +33 (0)5 57 40 27 58
- **Contact:** Syndicat Viticole - 33570 Francs
Tel. +33 (0)5 57 40 66 58 - Fax +33 (0)5 57 40 68 13
- **Website:** www.cotesdefrancis.com
- **Wine Events**
'Balades Gourmandes' in Francs, Côtes de Bordeaux (June 9, 2013): farmers' market and giant picnic.

FROM THE GROWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Some forward-thinking properties started direct selling their wines some time ago and have gained a head start. These include Château Puyfromage, an estate with 45 hectares of vineyards in 'Francs, Côtes de Bordeaux'. It exports over 90% of production, equivalent to around 250,000 bottles, and already sells primarily to Canada, Northern Europe including Belgium, Africa and China (since last year). Fourth-generation owner Frédéric Marque says: "We initially made the decision to sell direct to our customers in order to have closer contact. The label changes have had no impact at all as the château name of Puyfromage has become a brand in its own right in these markets and has a loyal following, though it is helpful to have Bordeaux clearly as part of the appellation".



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**THE DÉSCOURVIÈRES FAMILY:
HERVÉ AND FRÉDÉRIQUE AND
THEIR THREE SONS**

WAS CÔTES DE BOURG MISSED OUT?

Initial discussions by the Union des Côtes de Bordeaux included Côtes de Bourg, a fifth appellation that also fulfilled the set criteria. Producers of Bourg however decided not to join and "to go it alone".

Hervé and Frédérique Descourvières, newcomers to wine production, bought the 33-hectare estate Château Macay in early 2012. They kept the existing team and recruited Olivier Dauga and his team as consultants, Hervé is in charge of sales. Towards the end of 2012 he attended no fewer than 14 wine fairs in Asia, the United States and Europe organised by Ubifrance and Sopexa. During the early stages of his learning curve, he is keeping his views on the 'Union des Côtes de Bordeaux' very much to himself...