

LALANDE-DE-POMEROL, LIBOURNE'S WELL-GUARDED SECRET

BY CAMILLE BERNARD
PHOTOGRAPHS:
COURTESY OF THE ESTATES,
QUENTIN SALINIER

Founded just over 25 years ago in response to increased demand for Rioja wines internationally, family-run bodega Criadores de Rioja has always kept a watchful eye on overseas markets. Its wines encapsulate a fusion of tradition and modernity and the winery has successfully kept abreast of changing demand and consumer patterns. With its appeal continuing to extend way beyond national borders, it offers a fine illustration of the vitality of this famous Spanish appellation and its ability to reinvent itself.

CHÂTEAU BELLES GRAVES SURROUNDED BY ITS VINEYARDS



LIBOURNAIS
APPELLATION



IRON OXIDE SOILS IN THE VINEYARDS OF LALANDE-DE-POMEROL

A treasure hidden by its neighbouring appellation, Lalande-de-Pomerol shows stunning potential and a unique rendition of Merlot. Despite its proximity to the illustrious Pomerol appellation, it is often sidelined on Bordeaux's wine scene. This does not stop the winegrowers who put their heart and soul into growing vines here, however, from crafting wines that display undeniable quality. We spoke to some of them to find out more.

Thirty kilometres from Bordeaux, in the wine region of Libourne, the Lalande-de-Pomerol appellation extends over 1,100 hectares under vine divided between the namesake village and Néac. A 'satellite' of the prestigious Pomerol appellation, with only the river Barbanne separating the two, it covers soils which, like its illustrious neighbour, encompass gravel, clay and sand.

Basking in a temperate ocean climate, these vineyard sites produce wines displaying elegant classicism, which are as delicate as they are age-worthy.

Although these delicious pours compare favourably with those produced by their more renowned neighbour, they nevertheless struggle to shine out from behind its shadows. Their low-key profile makes them an appellation that deserves to be (re)discovered without further ado, if only for the pleasure of savouring wines produced by passionate, committed winegrowers who redouble their efforts to promote their vineyards.

To gauge this, we met some of them who are not only fully aware of their appellation's potential, but also aspire to a level of recognition commensurate with their commitment and their winegrowing expertise. Join us on a journey to the heart of a wine region with an assertive personality, and the cradle of wines which, once discovered, are never forgotten.



XAVIER PITON, OWNER OF CHÂTEAU BELLES GRAVES AND CHAIRMAN OF THE LALANDE-DE-POMEROL PRODUCERS' ORGANISATION

CHÂTEAU BELLES GRAVES: "THE MOST STABLE RIGHT BANK APPELLATION FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS"

"Château Belles Graves is a family-run estate bought by my grandfather in 1938", explains current owner Xavier Piton, who joined the winery in 1988. He "gradually extended the property to its current 17 hectares" and now farms the vineyards "using sustainable techniques strongly inspired by organic and biodynamic farming". Because he chooses not to impose any constraints but rather to leave himself "as many options as possible to seek out the most appropriate solution as and when, and the most suitable for people", Piton "accompanies" his vineyards whilst being mindful to "let them express themselves". And in an area where vines have been grown since the 15th century, he draws the quintessential qualities from a vineyard where the soils are clay-gravel in places and flint-dominant gravel in others, with occasionally some clay-silt. Depending on the vintage, these geological nuances produce up to three Lalande-de-Pomerol labels.

The wines are deliberately very different from each other. "The wines are the result of the constant conversations we have with our private customers and importers, which means we can produce wines that people enjoy". This ability to "keep our finger on the pulse" also promotes "excellent customer loyalty". In fact, Piton admits that, in addition to the marketing skills of his farm, the strength of the entire appellation lies in "the very people-centric approach of the most stable Right Bank appellation of the past 20 years, despite the challenges involved in raising awareness levels due to the small volumes it produces".

CHÂTEAU LA PETITE DUCHESSE: "WE HAVE NEVER STRUGGLED TO SELL LALANDE-DE-POMEROL WINES"

The third-generation representative of a family of winegrowers located on Bordeaux's Right Bank, Lucie Champagne heads up a 55-hectare property, "including 15 hectares in the Lalande-de-Pomerol appellation area". On top of the 20-hectare vineyard that used to belong to her grandfather and only produced Bordeaux, newer additions include "8 hectares belonging to the Libourne-Montagne viticulture college which we bought in 2008". Lucie knows the vineyard well because she did practical work there as a college student. Château La Petite Duchesse focuses on farming 15 hectares of vines owned by the Champagne family in the AOC Lalande-de-Pomerol area.

The family had to wait until 2010 to buy a winery and make its wines under the appellation because "it was forbidden to produce AOC Lalande wines alongside AOC Bordeaux". However, it says, "we have never struggled to sell Lalande-de-Pomerol wines even though we are relative newcomers to the appellation".

The comment is borne out by Lucie's assertion that she does not have "a single bottle of Lalande to sell starting in August". Admittedly, she says, the sales price of the wines has not changed since they began selling them, but their price tag alone is not the only reason for their marketing success. With a strong local rooting, spearheaded by "a sales outlet we have owned and run in Saint-Médard for over 40 years", the Champagne family's wines "resonate extremely well with private customers".

CHÂTEAU CASTEL VIAUD: "THE WINES RESONATE VERY WELL WITH PRIVATE CUSTOMERS"

"The history of Château Castel Viaud dates back to the post-war period when my grandfather, after being demobilised, began farming vineyards alongside the land on which he farmed a variety

LIBOURNAIS APPELLATION

THE VINEYARDS AT CHÂTEAU LA PETITE DUCHESSE



THE TASTING ROOM AT CHÂTEAU CASTEL VIAUD



**LIBOURNAIS
APPELLATION**

of crops”, recounts Laurent Courty, who is tasked with running the family estate. After structuring the vineyards and reaching a total 12 hectares in Lalande-de-Pomerol, “a series of acquisitions and some leased land brought the present-day area under vine up to nearly 16 hectares”.

Comprising fine gravel over a sub-soil containing iron oxide, “which lends our wines a very aromatic style driven by black cherry, kirsch and wild strawberry notes”, the soils in Castel Viaud’s vineyards offer the perfect location for Merlot, complemented by 10% Cabernet franc and 10% Cabernet-Sauvignon. Because the crop is entirely destemmed “to lower the tannin content in our wines”, the three Lalande-de-Pomerol labels are “fruity and appetising”, matching the “house style” and more importantly, resonating with “current consumer trends favouring this style of wine”.

In fact, although Courty sells some of his wines to trading companies, claiming he has “no difficulties in selling them compared with other appellations, the balance of production resonates extremely well with private customers to whom we sell directly, but also via wine merchants and duty free outlets in airports”.

**CHÂTEAU VIEILLE DYNASTIE:
“LALANDE-DE-POMEROL IS AN
APPELLATION NOT TO BE MISSED”**

The fifth generation of a family of winegrowers traditionally focusing on production of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur, Frédéric Borderie joined the family-run company in 2005.

The Borderies’ vineyards sweep across nearly 40 hectares, mainly devoted to producing the generic appellation before he arrived on the property. “By buying Château Vieille Dynastie in 2011, we were able to secure some vineyards in Lalande-de-Pomerol”, explains Borderie. One of the unique features of this 6.5-hectare unbroken vineyard is its “entirely gravel-sand soil which is very conducive to growing Cabernet franc and Cabernet-Sauvignon that thrive on it, whereas Merlot can actually suffer”. Aware of the need to “combine technical efficiency



CHÂTEAU CASTEL VIAUD
SURROUNDED BY ITS
VINEYARDS



THE LALANDE-DE-POMEROL
APPELLATION VINEYARDS
BELONGING TO VIGNOBLES
BEDRENNE



THE RECEPTION AND SALES
FACILITIES FOR VIGNOBLES
BEDRENNE

THE BARREL CELLAR AT CHÂTEAU CASTEL VIAUD



THE VINEYARDS AT CHÂTEAU VIEILLE DYNASTIE



LIBOURNAIS APPELLATION

with respect for the environment”, Borderie grows his vineyards based on HVE 3 standards and limits the use of chemical inputs whilst promoting biodiversity. By farming sustainably, the vineyards have all they need to produce “the most wholesome grapes possible”. The fruit, which produces two Lalande-de-Pomerol labels, is “harvested as early as possible to lend freshness to the wines, which we want to be palatable”. Borderie firmly believes that “Lalande-de-Pomerol is an appellation not to be missed because its shortcoming of the past is its quality today”. He focuses on making supple wines. Using stainless steel, concrete, barrels and even amphorae for his Eléonore label, Borderie pulls out all the stops to position his wines in a market that he deems favourable to an “appellation that now enjoys a great reputation in France and abroad due to the upward push from consumers looking for quality wines at affordable prices”.

VIGNOBLES BEDRENNE: “POMEROL’S REPUTATION BUT WITHOUT THE PRICE TAG”

One Lalande-de-Pomerol winery cannot be missed, and that is Vignobles Bedrenne. And there is a good reason for that: “The property’s reception facilities are located in the very heart of the village of Lalande-de-Pomerol, opposite the church”, explains Chloé Corfias tasked with marketing and sales at this family-run property.

Now run by Monique Bedrenne and her son Rémi, “Vignobles Bedrenne were inherited from Monique’s parents, restructured by her father to produce a single unbroken area under vine”.

FRÉDÉRIC BORDERIE, THE OWNER OF CHÂTEAU VIEILLE DYNASTIE



MONIQUE AND RÉMI BEDRENNE,
THE OWNERS OF
VIGNOBLES BEDRENNE

Of the property’s 13 hectares, “the Lalande-de-Pomerol vineyards cover approximately 9 hectares with a mix of sand, gravel and blue clay soils”. Merlot, in particular, thrives here and accounts for 90% of the varietal range. Carefully tended to with no chemical inputs, the oldest vines are between 45 and 70 years old and produce “three wines with different styles”. The La Croix de la Chenevelle label echoes the classic Lalande-de-Pomerol style, showing elegance, roundness and fine tannins”, whereas “Modius reveals a more complex, structured backbone instilled by the blue clay it is grown on”. Lastly “the sulphite-free label Halictus is appetising and fruity”. This variety of styles, where a classic wine (La Croix de la Chenevelle) sits comfortably alongside two more modern wines has allowed the property to “grow increasingly in export markets, particularly the United States where Halictus sells very well”. Locally, “our wines enjoy great exposure and benefit from the reputation of Pomerol, but without the price tag”.

LALANDE DE POMEROL: A WORTHWHILE ALTERNATIVE

AOC Lalande-de-Pomerol may not enjoy the reputation of AOC Pomerol, or the requisite volumes for garnering substantial visibility at international level – as the appellation’s chairman Xavier Piton points out – but because it combines quality and accessibility, it resonates particularly well with private customers who like the consistency of the wines and the sincerity of the winegrowers. So, compared with the sometimes elitist and inaccessible image of Bordeaux’s Grands Crus, Lalande-de-Pomerol wines offer a worthwhile alternative. This is something that has not gone unnoticed by its winegrowers. Striving to promote their vineyard sites whilst producing authentic wines, they have successfully carved out a prime place for themselves in the hearts of their customers, securing long-term loyalty from them.