

DOING BORDEAUX...

Fabulously!



The stunning Georgian columns of Chateau Margaux
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► **In the words of a well-known foodie, if you are going to do something, then do it fabulously! I love Bordeaux, so when TourOchateaux found me on Instagram my interest was piqued.**

TourOchateaux is the brainchild of Patrice Guenot. In 2014, Patrice combined his 2 passions of wine and Harley Davidson motorbikes by offering tours of famous Bordeaux chateaux on his motorbike. Patrice's family has a vineyard in Saint Emilion ensuring he grew up with a wine culture. "I have been fortunate to marry my two great passions in life to create a unique business", says Patrice.

TourOchateaux won 2017 and 2018 Certificates of Excellence from Trip Advisor and has expanded with a fleet of Harley Davidson Road King Classic machines. These bikes have specially adapted passenger backrests

and are quite comfortable – I assure you, after 250 km on the back of Patrice's bike!

For my planning – I simply asked Patrice if we could visit Cos d'Estournel, then asked him which other unique chateaux he would recommend. He came back with the proposed visit schedule. Once I confirmed his excellent choices, he arranged all appointments. My first every ride on a Harley Davidson - excitement mixed with anxiety. After collecting



The absolute pinnacle for any
sommelier – Château d'Yquem
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Chateau Cos d'Estournel

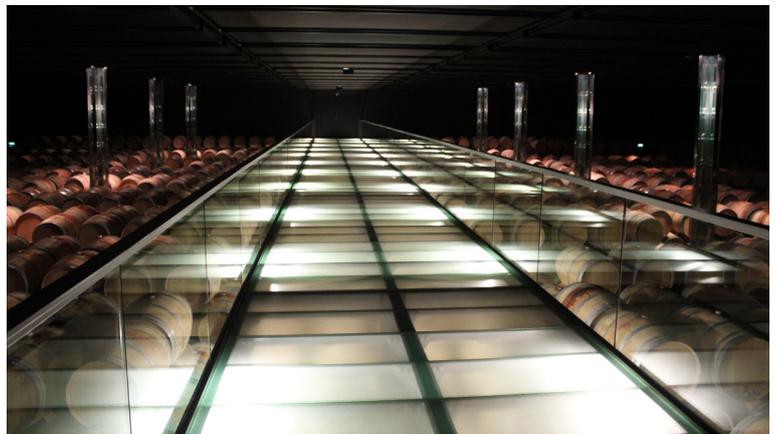
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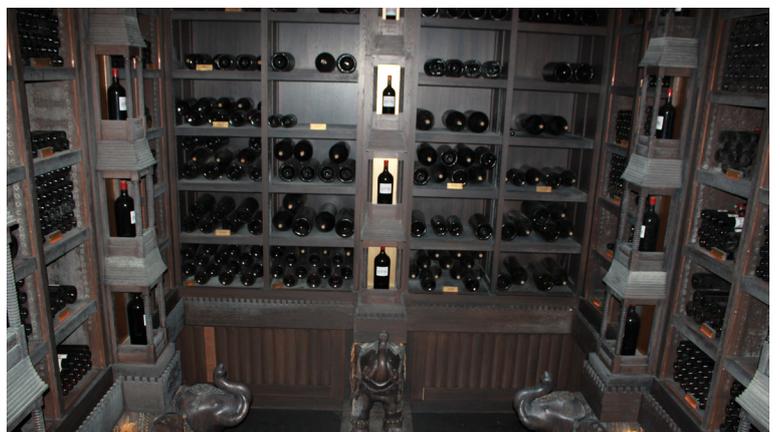
▷ me from my hotel in Bordeaux, Patrice gave me a quick orientation to gain my confidence. We headed off to our first stop, Chateau Cos d'Estournel in Saint-Estèphe.

The first thing I notice as we motor along is how we avoid traffic jams – cars move out of the way to let us past. “This machine has a 1700 cc engine and 3 big headlights. If that does not encourage drivers to move over, I simply give them a few revs – that gets the point across”, says Patrice.

Cos d'Estournel is a second growth as classified in 1855, and one of my favourites. It has a unique and distinct Oriental look. “Cos” means hill of stones, and Louis Gaspard d'Estournel inherited this family chateau in 1791. Located between the Gironde estuary and the Atlantic Ocean, the breezes ensure a clean crop each year. The gravely soils are ideal for Cabernet Sauvignon whilst Merlot is grown on the clay soils of the valley. The chateau was built from sandstone (most Bordelais chateau are limestone), and



△ Barrel room at Cos d'Estournel. Copyright Neil Allanby



△ Wine museum at Cos d'Estournel with wine dating back to 1870.

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has always been a wine cellar – there are no windows. The cool, constant interior temperature is ideal.

Back in the early 1800's, Louis Gaspard decided to do his own bottling ensuring quality control. In not using the local negociants he was consequently locked out of the English Claret market. So Louis started selling his wine to India, then an English colony, and travelled widely to the sub-continent. The chateau soon sprouted tall pagodas and its elephant statues. Louis became known as the Maharajah of St Estèphe.

The 2008 Cos d'Estournel is a blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot and 2% Cabernet Franc. Very rich and powerful, aromas of black fruits, liquorice, spice and subtle smoke, with a long finish. I long for dinner of pot-au-feu roast, in an oak panelled dining room with a log fire on a cold rainy winter's evening.

We continue to our second destination, passing such great chateaux as Lafite (previously owned by Thomas Jefferson, 3rd American President), Latour (which converted to biodynamics 6 years ago), Pichon-Baron, (so majestic), Palmer (elegance personified), and Margaux (with its stunning Georgian columns and immense driveway).

We arrive at Chateau les Carmes Haut-Brion, in the appellation of the now trendy Pessac-Léognan. Following the 2 excellent Bordeaux vintages of 2009 and 2010, many chateaux have made major investments, and Carmes Haut-Brion is no exception.



△ Chateau Carmes Haut Brion.

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Carmes Haut-Brion is unique being the only chateau within the boundaries of Bordeaux city, now with architecture designed by Philippe Starck. The cellar design was conceived as a raw metal blade falling from the sky plunging into the terroir. There are 3 underground levels moderated by the surrounding water ensuring constant temperature. Each year an artist is commissioned to decorate one of the underground cellar's terracotta egg-shaped vats – the first one by Ara Starck, daughter of Philippe.

The 2011 Carmes Haut-Brion has a high portion of Cabernet Franc providing floral elegance and finesse, with added fullness coming from Merlot and structure from Cabernet Sauvignon. This supple, round, medium-bodied wine can be enjoyed now.

We progress to Chateau de Reignac in the Entre-Deux-Mers region with its beautifully restored 17th century chateau, its very special greenhouse designed by Gustave Eiffel, and its 16th century carrier-pigeon



△ Carmes Haut Brion cellars designed by Philippe Starck. Copyright Neil Allanby



△ Ana Starck decorated vat at Carmes Haut Brion. Copyright Neil Allanby



Chateau de Reignac
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△ Pigeon house now tasting room at Chateau de Reignac
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Arriving fabulously at Chateau d'Yquem
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△ Gustave Eiffel designed greenhouse at Chateau de Reignac
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▷ house (where the tasting room is now located). There is a scent garden with living plants providing scents we can appreciate in their wines. Entre-Deux-Mers is located between the Dordogne and Garonne Rivers, having both clay soils (like the Bordeaux left bank) and limestone soils (more like the right bank). The famous Michel Rolland is their consultant oenologist.

The Grand Vin de Reignac (sold as Bordeaux appellation) consistently out-classes many of the Bordeaux Classified Growths, including some First Growths, for a fraction of the price. The elegant, powerful and refined 2011 Grand Vin is a blend of 70% Merlot, 25%

Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Cabernet Franc.

Our final stop is the absolute pinnacle for any sommelier – Chateau d'Yquem in Sauternes, the greatest sweet wine in the world and according to the 1855 Classification the greatest wine of all Bordeaux.

Nestled between the Landes forest, the Garonne Valley and the cool Ciron River, Yquem is subjected to morning mists followed by dry, hot afternoons. This allows attack by the fungus Botrytis Cinerea in its benevolent form, Noble Rot. Semillon grapes are particularly susceptible due to their thin skin. Botrytised grapes dry out; water

evaporates and concentrates the sugars.

The critical stage is harvest, occurring over a 3-week period. There is extreme attention to detail with multiple passes through the vines. Grapes picked each morning are vinified separately to those picked the same day in the afternoon, resulting some years in 38 to 40 different pressings. Grape pickers are directed which grapes to harvest ensuring correct balance of sugar content for the subsequent wine – post adjustment is not possible. Yields are extremely low, with a maximum 9 hl/ha. By comparison, Bordeaux red wine is often made with 40 hl/ha yield.



Guest reception area at Chateau d'Yquem
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◀ Barrel room at Chateau d'Yquem
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2015 Chateau d'Yquem was an excellent year yielding an exceptional sweet, golden wine with extraordinary longevity. It is a blend of 75% Semillon and 25% Sauvignon Blanc. New oak barrel ageing occurred for 6 months at 20°C then a further 15 months at 14°C. The aromas in tasting Chateau d'Yquem are numerous and complex, and must be experienced for oneself at least one in a lifetime. The wine is silky, rich, long with good acidity and great balance ensuring it is not at all heavy - an absolute delight. Best served at 9°C it will match exotic fish and seafood,

fruit and almond tart desserts and strong cheeses.

We conclude the day returning to Bordeaux passing via Saint Emilion, the photogenic Chateau Angelus, the new cellars at Chateau Cheval Blanc inspired by sails on the green seas, and the austere Chateau Petrus.

It has been a magical day that I will treasure forever, and I thank Patrice for his great knowledge, planning and generosity of time. I can now truly say I have done Bordeaux fabulously!

THE DISCREET SOMMELIER

Neil Allanby

Wine Educator and Writer

Neil Allanby is a wine educator, personal sommelier and writer now living in Melbourne. He spent 12 years living in France, including 5 years in the Rhone Valley. In 2014 he set up The Discreet Sommelier, believing the purpose of wine is to bring pleasure to everyone and his goal is to cut through the snobbery of wine.

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