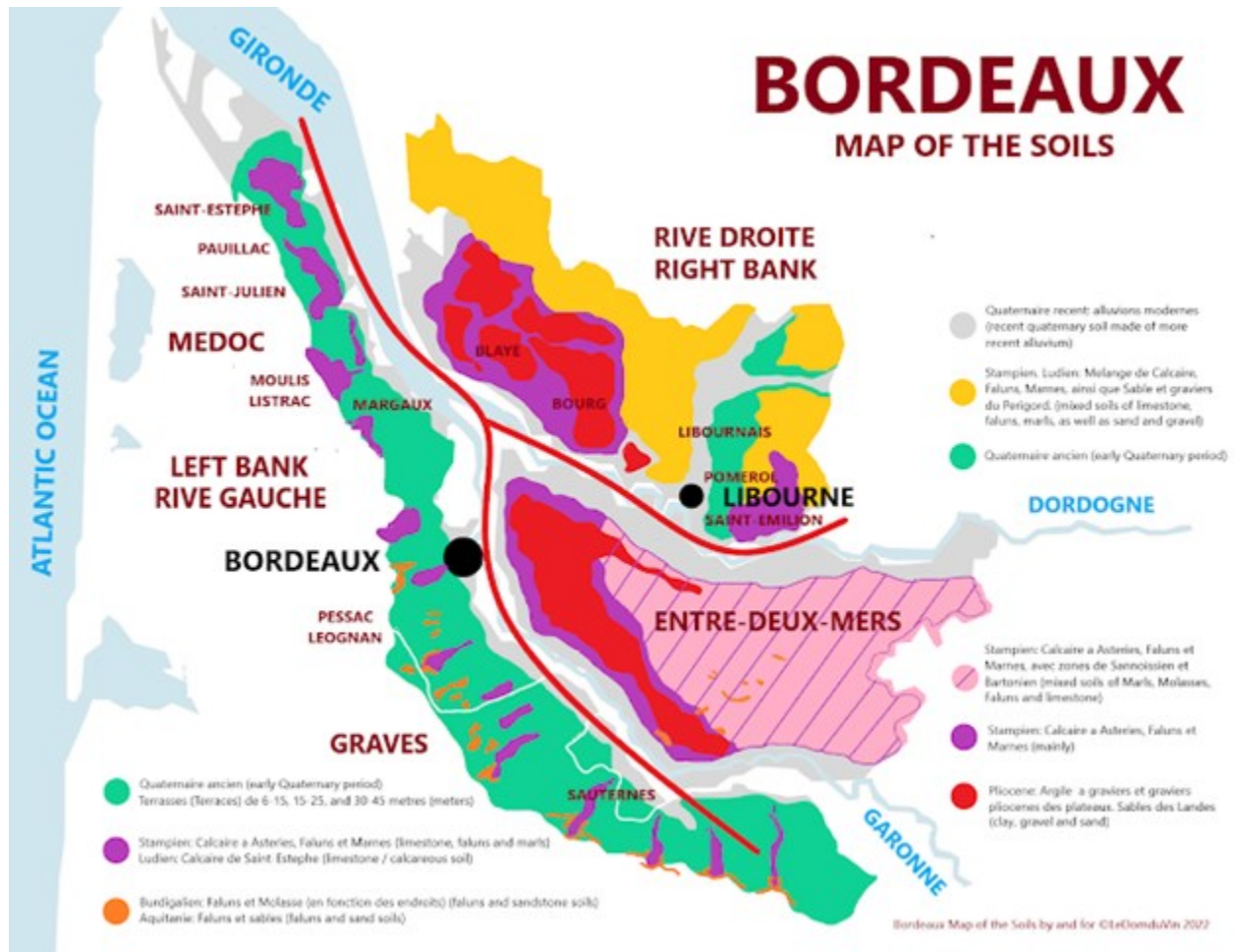


## Bordeaux Geography and Geographic Classifications

Looking at the map of France you will see that Bordeaux is just off the Atlantic Ocean in southern France, about 100 miles north of the border with Spain. In the center of that map you will see the city of Bordeaux, a lovely small city to visit and walk through. All of the Bordeaux region was totally under water millions of years ago when the glaciers melted, and when that water receded it left the Gironde River flowing north into the Atlantic.



The soil conditions that are on the Eastern or right side of that river are very different from those the glaciers left on the Western or left side. So when grapes were planted centuries ago, it was found that certain grapes made much better wine on the left side or the Left Bank as it is called, and other grape vines grew better on the Right Bank. But this was not uniform and the norm is that each red wine vineyard grows 2-4 different grapes. On the Right Bank Merlot is the most common grape followed by Cabernet Sauvignon and then Cabernet Franc with a small but growing amount of Malbec. On the Left Bank Cabernet Sauvignon is the most common grape followed by Merlot, then Cabernet Franc, and sometimes some Petit Verdot.

Bordeaux is all about Location, Location, Location. Each location is controlled by an appellation d'origine contrôlée or AOC. Each AOC defines a set of standards that a

vineyard must follow to be able to put that AOC name on their label. The three most common requirements are:

- All the grapes are grown in the geography defined by that AOC
- The wine is produced in a facility located in that AOC
- The vineyard is meeting the yield requirements of that AOC. Yield means pruning the vines to produce fewer grapes with then have more flavor in each grape so them make better wine, but less of it.

The initial or lowest level of AOC is just Bordeaux. Grapes can come from any of the 53 named appellations in Bordeaux. There are several styles allowed in Bordeaux AOC, including red, white, rosé, sweet, and sparkling wines. Plus, only certain grape varieties are allowed.

Bordeaux Supérieur is a bump up from the basic Bordeaux AOC wines with more rigorous standards. Bordeaux Supérieur wines come from grapes sourced throughout the Bordeaux wine region but are generally considered of higher quality. Bordeaux Supérieur can only be used on bottles of dry red Bordeaux and sweet white Bordeaux. This appellation includes all the same grapes allowed in Bordeaux AOC. There are more rigorous grape quality standards (such as minimum ripeness) in order to use the "Supérieur" name on a label.

Wineries are allowed to add "Grand Vin de Bordeaux" to the label to indicate the wine is their pride and joy – their top quality wine! But this is just their opinion, no independent judgement has been made to award that title. "Grand Vin" is just a marketing term. Each geographic level that is higher quality is smaller and has more restrictions.

On the Left Bank coming in from the Atlantic, the area in various shades of red is Medoc. The lightest red, just pink, is just Medoc. In the middle of list and at the very end you will see Haut Medoc that is a little darker – this AOC is a step up from just Medoc. Then the next level up is a town name. Pauillac is the most famous town name with 3 of the 5 First Growths from that town. I will talk about what does First Growth means in the next blog post. Right next to Pauillac is St. Julian where a number of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> growth wines are from. Continuing down the left bank the next large area is a mixture of oranges and yellow colors and is called Graves with some smaller, higher level AOCs within the Graves AOC. The very first one, Pessac-Leognan is primarily red wines. The rest of Graves is primarily white wines close to the bottom you will see the most famous of their white wines, the delicious sweet dessert wine - Sauterne.

Moving across to the Right Bank you again have several levels of larger areas with smaller AOCs inside it. The two most famous of the towns on the Right Bank are Pomerol and Saint-Emilion. St. Emilion has another AOC inside it called St. Emilion Grand Cru and I will talk about that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> blog post.

The large tan area in between the Garonne River and the Dordogne River is called Entre-Deux-Mers which translates to between the waters and two of the recommended wines on this blog are from there. It is also producing some very good white wines,

several of which were on my recommended list in the earlier blog on White Bordeaux wines.

What I would like you to take away is a general rule that when you look at the label the smaller the location named, probably the better the wine and the higher the price for it. Going up in quality you start with Bordeaux and Bordeaux Superieur, then move up to a smaller region containing multiple towns, e.g. Medoc or Graves. The name of a town is the top of the geographic list. If you want to remember some town names that have very good wines at multiple price points St. Julian and St. Emilion would be the two to remember. Within three of those geographies, Medoc, St. Emilion, and Graves, there have been judgements that gave some of the wines in that area a special ranking, most commonly Grand Cru Classe. When and how those judgements were made, and the ranking that was given out, differ in each of them. I will talk about them at a high level in the downloads that will be part of the next two blog posts.