

Ep 182: What is En Primeur with Bordeaux Expert, Jane Anson (Part 1)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your Host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back to a really interesting episode on Bordeaux. And so, of course, I have Jane Anson on the podcast. She is a renowned wine writer and journalist. She is known for her expertise in Bordeaux wines, has released really comprehensive books. If you haven't got 'Inside Bordeaux', this is your Bordeaux Bible that you have been looking for.

So, in this episode, we'll be talking about En Primeur and what it is and why it's such a significant event in Bordeaux. What are some of the key factors to consider when you're evaluating a Bordeaux wine during En Primeur tastings? How the prices typically compare to the eventual release price of the wines and how that might actually affect purchasing decisions.

But it's not just about En Primeur, we are talking about Pétrus, one of the iconic wines of Bordeaux going up into space, and how that affects the wines. We'll also jump across to China because, well, there are some pretty impressive wines being made over there with Bordeaux varieties and one specific wine called Ao Yun which you may want to know about. This is an excellent episode, so all it leaves me to say is thank you to my incredible sponsor [Wickham's Wine](#). Their link to their online retail website is in my show notes.

And don't forget, if you use the code "EATSLEEP10" you'll get 10% off your first order. And I have checked and they have got some lovely Bordeaux wines and some from the wonderful 2016 vintage. So, go on there, grab yourself a bottle, pour yourself that glass and enjoy this episode.

Janina Doyle 00:02:22 So what I want to ask you, the first question, was there any pivotal moments? Was there any time which sent you to Bordeaux, the reason you became a wine writer, the reason why you focused on the Bordeaux region?

Jane Anson 00:02:37 I got to say there was not a sudden wake up Damascene conversion moment. I've been a journalist ever since I graduated. I spent one year teaching in Japan, but as soon as I left Japan, I went to Hong Kong. I was in Hong Kong at the time of the handover, totally awesome, being a journalist then.

So, doing things from sub-editing at the South China Morning Post and the Eastern Express. Eastern Express no longer exists. And then, working for many travel magazines and came back to London, did a masters in publishing and then started to kind of head up these big websites at the time of the first

'com' boom when you'd work for a website and there'd be 11 different channels of different content and all that kind of stuff. So it was super fun.

And I'd started to, I guess you could say I was interested in wine. I'd had a really important trip to South Africa, just a couple of years after apartheid had finished, when it was really a moment for me where it opened my eyes to how interesting wine can be as a subject, as a writer, because it brought together all of these different politics and history. And it was just such a fascinating time to be in South Africa.

And I think, at the time, I went and visited the wine lands, but I wonder if I'd have gone and visited something else in South Africa, maybe I would have been writing about that. It was just such an important trip for me to be there.

Yeah, so then in London, got married, had my first baby and thought, you know what? I think maybe I'll take a year or two off. I was working full time at the time in offices and I thought, okay, I'll take a couple of years off and just go and we'll live abroad, but we intended fully to come back to London. And we thought, of course, and pre-Brexit, so it was super easy going to Europe.

So, we moved to France and honestly, we chose Bordeaux mainly because – well, we knew there was good wine here and I'd become interested in writing about wine. And it seemed it was either going to be Burgundy, Champagne or Bordeaux. And in the end we decided Bordeaux is on the right side of France for getting back to London. Super easy. An hour flight.

And my husband, Francis, was a real Bordeaux fan. He was the one much more than me that was really into Bordeaux wine. I was probably more into Italian wine or South African wine. Then we moved here 20 years later and somehow the longer we stayed, the more interesting it became.

After a couple of years here, I think we suddenly thought, hang on, this is actually a really great place to live and it's so fascinating being in a region where wine is the main thing, and that's what we're writing about. So, you just felt so much a part of the fabric of the region.

Janina Doyle 00:05:17 I love that. So, okay, we can thank Frances for actually really liking Bordeaux. Well-done. But in terms of actually wine mentors or people that maybe helped you that, yeah, I don't know any influential figures in the industry that helped you dig deeper into Bordeaux, kept you in Bordeaux?

Jane Anson 00:05:37 Absolutely. I think we all need those figures and we all need to be open to what people are kind enough to share with us. When I first moved here, luckily I knew so little about wine and about Bordeaux that I wasn't intimidated to ask questions.

And because I had a journalist background, that's what your job is, to ask questions and to keep on asking questions and to not be embarrassed about things you don't know. So, I think, I was open to learning.

One person who had a huge influence on my career was Adam Lechmere actually, who now is the publishing director of Academy Du Vin Library, because he was the editor of Decanter.com. So, when I first moved here, I basically knocked on the door of Decanter. I must have sent them an email, but I don't really remember how it happened.

But I basically knocked on the door of their little – I think they were in South Kensington at the time.

Janina Doyle 00:06:29 So physically. You physically knocked on the door.

Jane Anson 00:06:32 They, and I went up and met Adam in the office and he basically gave me my first gig of working for Decanter at the time as a stringer, so as a freelance journalist doing news for them. I can definitely say Adam kind of let me get my foot in the door of writing about wine in a more serious way.

And then, on this side, it was Jean-Michel Cazes. Jean-Michel Cazes who passed away sadly last year. He was the owner of Lynch Bages. He was somebody who was so kind and very, very, very, not just welcoming, but helpful in terms of these are the things, Jane, that you should be looking at if you're wanting to learn about Bordeaux wine.

He gave me a couple of very useful textbooks, history books about Bordeaux. Maybe he gives those to many different people, but I read them all. I'd made the decision at that point that I'd committed to wanting to learn more. So, I did a lot of those things.

There's a guy called Professor Denis Dubourdieu who also is no longer with us, but he was a professor at the Institute of Oenology here, also a chateau owner and also a consultant. He was somebody also extremely helpful to me, very open, happy to share his knowledge. And through him, I then studied at the Institute of Oenology doing a thing called the 'Duad', which is a diploma, a tasting diploma. It lasts for a year, taught in French, just brilliant. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

It is kind of a smaller version of doing an oenology degree. So you do a lot about the chemistry of wine, all the things that happen during the growing season to make wine taste the way it does. But you're also doing weekly tastings of the different chemicals, the different molecules that are in wine.

So, you're given this lineup every single week of maybe 10 different glasses that look like they have nothing in them, but they all have different smells and all they might be different tastes and you're isolating how a wine is made.

Oh, my God, it was amazing. It was amazing. And I'm now teaching at the Duad. Just the last two years, I've been teaching at Duad. So, that felt like a real full circle moment for me. Thank you. Yes, so he was amazing. And then just one last person, although there are many, many, many, but one last person I should mention, also through Decanter.

In 2014, Sarah Kemp, who was the Publishing Director of Decanter, she asked me if I wanted to join their team as being part of the – I was already on board a correspondent by then, but she asked me to come on board as the En Primeur taster. And two years after that, I became the sole En Primeur taster. So, Sarah really just believed in me. So she was somebody who had a big influence on my career as well.

Janina Doyle 00:09:15 I think it's so important when you have those people, I think, like you just said, so kind to just give up their time and to share their knowledge. So, has that kind of partly been maybe the reason why you've set up this Bordeaux Mentor Week. Has that been a bit of their inspiration?

Jane Anson 00:09:33 Absolutely it has been. When I left Decanter, in 2021, after 18 years with Decanter, I decided to leave and set up my own website, easy to remember – Janeanson.com. But I did it because, well, I felt it was just, it was the right time.

I've been here for long enough that I knew I had very good knowledge of this region. I'd written a couple of books by that point, especially this big Inside Bordeaux book which came out in 2020. And I started to look around and I thought there isn't a site out there which deals just with Bordeaux and this is such an important region globally.

There are quite a few about Burgundy, but there wasn't one about Bordeaux. And it seemed like the right time and that I was somebody who could do it. But I wanted right from the start for it to be about something more than just another website with another person talking about what wines they like.

I wanted it to be really something more interesting and important in terms of the part of the community. Yes, as you said, I straightaway thought I want to do something which is giving back at the same time that I'm trying to launch something, I want to kind of help other people to also find their path.

And so, I asked a friend of mine who's called Chinadu Rita Rosa. She's a Nigerian wine importer here. She's a really fantastic woman. And I asked her what she thought about us joining together and running this mentor week, which was always not for profit. Basically, it's underwritten by a few charity foundations, such as the Gerard Basset Foundation and the IWSC Foundation. Both in the UK.

And they have helped us to pay for the flights and transport around the region for these groups. First year it was six, I think, in the second year it was seven, this year it's the third year it's eight. So, people from around the world don't have to be young, but they tend to be. I think the oldest we've had so far has been 32 or 33. And the youngest, somebody who's been 19. Most people who come in their 20s.

But what we're looking for is people who are starting their career. They've already shown that they have interest in wine, but there's something that is holding them back from being able to move on to the next part of their career. So, whatever barriers it might be or a bias or it might be financial restraints. So, there's many different reasons.

And so, they apply and it's just been the most rewarding thing I think I've ever done. Among the people that we've had so far, we've had wonderful people who work in wine stores in Puerto Rico, in India, in Nigeria. They might be Young Sommeliers from South Africa. They're really all over the world. It's just been incredible. I think we've had 65 different countries, people from 65 different countries applying to come on this week.

And our next one this year is in September. So, it's great. It's like a real bootcamp. They basically spend the week getting to know all the different aspects of the Bordeaux system. And our aim is not in any way for them to leave as ambassadors for Bordeaux. It's not about that. It's about them coming to Bordeaux and learning the many insights that you can get in Bordeaux, which is gonna help them with their own careers back wherever they would like to be.

And we aim to make this more of a long-term program as well. So, from this year, the Wine Scholar Guild is giving them access to their Bordeaux study program. So, that will help on a longer term for them to increase their knowledge about this region. But also a couple of wine estates are offering to help them maybe do a two-week work experience in the wineries or longer. We try to make it not just about the week here, but this is the starting point for them to continue their careers.

Janina Doyle 00:13:14 Amazing. And to be honest, I even just looked at the little bit of the itinerary and I'm like, wow, it's really behind the scenes. It's a little bit of wine making, it's tasting, it's understanding, I guess, Le Place de bordeaux...

Jane Anson 00:13:26 Yeah. And because I've been here so long, I really make sure that they meet people who really know what they're talking about. And also I screen out to make sure it's people who are also, like I said before, who are kind, who are open, who are not going to be holding anything back, but who truly want to share. So, the networking opportunities are pretty cool.

Janina Doyle 00:13:46 Honestly, I love it. Wine has to be shared. We should be sharing it with everybody and making sure that everyone can be as involved in wine as possible. Actually, I love it when I get to segue. I get to now go to your book. That's where you're sharing all of your knowledge. I mean, you've contributed to loads of books. You've written other books as well, but is the pride and joy the Inside Bordeaux book?

Jane Anson 00:14:09 Well, Inside Bordeaux is something where, I'm gonna show you something kind of hilarious here just listening to this rather than looking, I'm showing my cover, which is 100% come off of my Inside Bordeaux because I use it personally so much. Because who the hell can remember all of the facts that are in that book? I certainly can't.

So, I find it so useful. I always have it and I'll flick through to remember certain things about estates. Yes, I think this was really a lot of work. It was three years full in terms of research from beginning to end, research and writing, but it was also the 10 or 15 years that I'd been here before that.

So, I love that book, but I have to say, I think the book that I'm the most proud of in terms of how it changed my career is the first wine book that I wrote. So, I've been a contributor to various other books. I've written a few travel books, but the first wine book I wrote that's called Bordeaux Legends, which came out in 2010 or 2011. I can't remember exactly.

That book I'm proud of because I had no publisher, I had no background. I had got an agent, but the agent didn't actually end up getting me a publisher, so I just did it myself.

Janina Doyle 00:14:24 Good for you.

Jane Anson 00:14:25 I just feel, I know I look back and I think, I can't believe that I did it.

Janina Doyle 00:14:29 Yeah, this is me. This is what I did.

Jane Anson 00:14:31 Yeah. It's a book about why the first growth became the first growth. So, why these five chateaus out of the 7,000 chateaux in Bordeaux. Why were they the ones that became those 1855 first growths?

I thought, why is this book not being written before? There are individual histories of all of those five chateaux, so Lafite, Mouton, Margaux, Haut Brion and Latour, but there'd never been one looking at how they were together. Anyway, so doing that.

And then, when I finally got a publisher who actually, I should say, Haut Brion put me in touch with somebody in Paris that's called the Les Éditions de La Martinière. They had no influence on it except to say, here's a number in Paris. So, I went to them.

Anyway, and the woman at, she's called La Martiniere said to me, okay, if you can sell 2000 copies of this book, then we will kind of agree. We want to have a pre-sale before we agree to publish it. And I'm a writer, I had no idea how to sell anything, but I was so determined that this book was going to be published that I just picked up the phone and I called various negociants and various wine shops and different countries and basically hand sold 10 books at a time, then 20 books, then maybe 50 books.

And eventually, I got to the 2000 number that I had to get to. I think I got to about 1850 and Caren took pity on me and said, okay, okay, we'll do it. We'll publish.

Janina Doyle 00:16:56 Well, no, that makes me so happy.

Jane Anson 00:17:00 Yeah, it was great. And I love that also because, I think, for everybody who wants to write books – it's something which so many of us, it's such a dream. It was such a dream for me since I was little. And to think you can get there, sometimes you just have to be very bloody minded about it, but you can get there.

Janina Doyle 00:17:14 Yes. So, the moral of the story is reach for the stars, which allows me now to ask you about tasting Pétrus up in space. I mean, I don't know. I don't know if I was going to be able to do it. So, now we get to talk about Pétrus. I'm so jealous. I heard about Pétrus going up into space for, I think it was like 14 months. This is the 2000 vintage, which is a pretty good vintage as well. So, when it came back down to earth, you got to taste it, right?

Jane Anson 00:17:54 This is amazing. You work in wine, it can take you all over the world. Such an incredible thing to work in just from the amazing people you meet and who knows where you're going to end up. But this is not something I ever would have imagined I was going to end up doing.

So, I think I was probably sat exactly where I'm sat now, because this is at my desk with my computer, where I spend a lot of my time. And I got a phone call from a friend of mine who's a negociant. And he said, "I've just put your name forward for an unusual tasting. Just be prepared. You're going to get a call."

Anyway, I got a call and was not told what the wine was. We didn't know what the wine was until after the tasting. But I was told it was an important wine and it had spent 14 months up on the International Space Station. And so, me like you, like all of us, have the International Space Station, the pictures of the astronauts floating around and whatever.

It was just completely insane to think that this was going to happen. I talked about doing the Duad at the Institute of Oenology here in Bordeaux. It was connected to that. And that's really why they asked me above other journalists, because they knew that I had followed this very particular kind of

tasting, which you learn during the Duad, which is called this triangular tasting, where you have three wines in front of you, two are the same and one is different. And that's a very typical way of tasting at the Institute of Oenology.

So, it's all blind, but you know that two are the same and one is different. And all you have to do is identify which one is different. So, that is how we approach this wine in space because what they were trying to see was, was there any – obviously they also did chemical analysis and they did a lot of studies into it, but they wanted to know from a tasting point of view, was anything different?

So, there were 11 of us at the tasting. There were two people who had put money in, so part of the people who'd funded the trip. There was this guy called Nicolas Gaume, he was the creator of this whole idea. Now he is kind of seen as the French Elon Musk, basically. He'd done a lot of startups in tech. And at some point along the way, had the crazy idea to send wine up into the International Space Station. And a partner of his did it with him.

So, there were these two who were from the company. Then there was the Mayor of Bordeaux, a guy called Pierre Hurmic. So, he'd somehow got in on the tasting, but as you would if you were in Bordeaux and you were the mayor of the city. Then there were, I think, three or four scientists, so people who worked at the Institute of Oenology. And then me, probably missing a couple, but basically that's what it was. I was the only journalist there.

We had this wine come in and we had them in front of us, these three wines and half of us had two space wines and one earth wine and the other half had two earth and one space. We didn't know obviously which one of us had what and we just had to taste. Although, obviously we did tasting notes, but our main job was to say which wine is different.

I'm very happy to say that I could tell quite quickly which wine had been in space. Not everybody in the room did, but I think that's why there weren't that many professional tasters. About half of us were professional tasters and half weren't.

And for me, it seemed pretty obvious that the one – I didn't know if it was space or earth, but I knew one looked more mature than the others. It looked like it was a little bit older than the other two. So, I picked that one as being the space wine and it was the space wine. And then, afterwards we were told it was Pétrus 2000.

Janina Doyle 00:21:22 Okay, amazing. My question, so you said, this one tastes older, more mature. Why would with zero gravity, why would you decide that an older, more mature style is the one from space?

Jane Anson 00:21:35 Well, I guess I was deciding it was different. I mean, I might have had the two space wines in my room and one was younger. I mean, sorry, and one was earth. It's just I had to choose which one was different. I chose one that was different. And it turned out that space was probably a more accurate way to put it.

But now that I look back on it, maybe it's so hard to know and they haven't yet released the full results of the actual chemical analysis. But I assume, it could also be because no matter how careful they are, think of the force that's going up as you're leaving the earth and you're going up to the International Space Station. That is a huge amount of movement and power and force.

Janina Doyle 00:22:17 Severe bottle shock.

Jane Anson 00:22:18 Severe bottle shock. So yeah, so you would imagine that that could have some impact on why it seemed a little bit more mature than the Pétrus had stayed on earth. I don't know. What I do know was it was fabulously fun to be part of that tasting. It was really. Not many things you can say as a once in a lifetime, but that was definitely a once in a lifetime experience.

Janina Doyle 00:22:37 Amazing. Well, I know that they ended up selling at least one bottle at I think Christie's auction, but also with an earth Pétrus 2000. So, whoever got that. Wow. And what would be amazing is almost to resist and then try and taste it in, I don't know, another decade or 20 years. And like, what happens then? Because that's just so unusual. It's not a known thing, is it?

Jane Anson 00:23:01 No, it's not. And what's interesting actually since then is Nicolas Gaume, the guy who I talked about, the French Elon Musk, he has now set up, I can't remember the name of it now, but a company that deals with space tourism.

So, he's remained in the space area. I mean, they sent little vines up into the space station as well. So a lot of the idea was to look at climate change and how to make sure we can build more resistant plants. And so, there's certainly some scientific value. The International Space Station and NASA wouldn't have accepted it if that wasn't the case. But I also think it was a brilliant piece of media for him to then launch his space tourism program.

Janina Doyle 00:23:45 How curious, how interesting. Now for anybody who actually were talking Pétrus and they're thinking, hang on a minute, so this is an amazing wine, what is Pétrus? What for you, obviously it's a hundred percent Merlot, which I love as well because Merlot sometimes doesn't get as premium reputation as it should and this wine certainly shows that. But what for you is special about Pétrus in your opinion?

Jane Anson 00:24:06 Yeah, you know, it's funny when Pétrus was chosen as the wine, I thought it was a very smart choice. There are very few wines in the world that you can choose that would have that kind of media impact.

I guess in Bordeaux, is there really another one, Lafite, et cetera, perhaps, but something about Pétrus, it's also quite small production. I think one of the reasons that I appreciate Pétrus so much is that it is a real reflection of a place.

Often Bordeaux can be accused of these huge sprawling estates, do they really have a sense of place? I would argue yes in most cases, but Pétrus, you don't really have those arguments. It is relatively small, about 10 hectares, 11 hectares, but it is on a plot of land, which is almost entirely this very unusual kind of very dense, sticky clay, which is quite different from the rest of its appellation.

The appellation is Pomerol. Pomerol itself is an appellation that everybody loves. But Pétrus is on a specific kind of soil which you just don't find anywhere else in Pomerol. There's a couple tiny little spots of it in other parts of the region, but very, very little. There's a very famous estate that's right opposite Pétrus that is called Le Fleur. And I love it if only we could all afford it, which sadly most of us can't.

But if you can taste Le Fleur against Pétrus, you understand a lot about Terroir. You understand a lot about the influence of a place because you can walk between those two estates within really one minute, two minutes maximum, but Le Fleur has got much more gravel and clay in its soil and then Pétrus has this pure, pure clay.

And you see the difference. Le Fleur is much more ethereal in many ways. It's quite serious. And then Pétrus is this dense, gorgeously sexy, incredible, incredible wine, which is so close and yet they're so different. And you taste them both. I say the same thing if you go on the left bank in Pauillac, if you taste Latour against Lafite, same thing, Latour has much more clay in its soil, still with gravel, but much more clay. Lafite is almost pure gravel.

And same thing, you see, Lafite is very elegant, full of finesse, kind of takes its time, will age forever. Latour is much more of a powerhouse. And again, same thing, these two very famous wines, they're both seen as the same level, often the same price, and yet their taste is so different, same appellation. And I think those two pairs of wines in Bordeaux are a great way to talk about the fact that Bordeaux does have a sense of place.

Janina Doyle 00:26:36 Yeah, incredible. Yeah. Just because you touched on this very special sticky kind of clay in the textbooks, they say blue clay. I've not been. Is it actually got a blue tinge? Is there something blue about it?

Jane Anson 00:26:50 Yeah, there is. I love that question. And you will find everybody in Bordeaux will say they have a bit of blue clay. I mean, if I had a euro for every chateau that told me they have blue clay in their vineyard, most of them will have...

They might have some blue clay to be fair, they might, but it'll be at a lower level. It won't be the same. The thing about Pétrus is the extent of it that they have and the true depth of it. But yes, you'll genuinely see bits of blue. You might see bits of red and other types of clay. Some of them, they're just gorgeous colours.

One of the things I did with the book, I put a big emphasis in the book on terroir and soils and what impact it has in the glass. What matters really is what does that mean in terms of how the wine is going to taste?

Anyway, so I spent a lot of time in soil pits with various experts kind of looking and trying to understand it. And yes, some of them are just gorgeous. These myriad colours, like a rainbow of clay underneath the earth. It's lovely.

Janina Doyle 00:27:46 Amazing. But okay, before we go into En Primeur and Bordeaux, the actual main subject of this episode, I just want to hop across to China just for a second. Why not? Because of course, they are actually doing some really interesting things all across China now. But there is this very famous wine, which I am yet to taste, which is a Bordeaux blend, Ao Yun.

But again, it's a completely different climate, different altitudes. And I know that you've obviously tasted this wine. So, this is probably another perfect example. You can take the same grape varieties, but terroir is super important. So, tell me when I was asking you about certain wine memories you brought up with this Ao Yun wine. For you, what are your thoughts on this Chinese Bordeaux blend?

Jane Anson 00:28:30 I think one thing that I've been so grateful again to wine and to Bordeaux wine with my career is it managed to bring back, like, I'd lived in Hong Kong before. I travelled quite a lot in China when I was in my twenties. And then you come to Bordeaux and who would have thought but about the same time that I came to Bordeaux or maybe five years later, China became a bigger and bigger part of the Bordeaux story.

And you suddenly had from 2008 onwards, particularly, this great influx of Chinese money coming in, which we can talk about with the En Primeurs later because it had a big impact in En Primeur. Anyway, and then all of a sudden, again, maybe five years later than after that, the story of Chinese people coming into Bordeaux to be buying, and then all this wine being made in China.

I actually just earlier this year was at the first Chinese wine awards that were being held in. I was a judge in the awards and we tasted wines from maybe 80 or 100 different wine estates around China. Super, super interesting things happening right now in China in the wine industry.

But yes, particularly with Ao Yun – Ao Yun is owned by LVMH. So, right from the start, they had the money which you needed to be able to invest in making what they call the Chinese first growth. So, they were looking to make a Chinese first growth and spent a couple of years looking at every site, really, truly dozens and dozens and dozens of different sites around China, studying the climate, studying the soils, seeing where could possibly work, and ended up at this just, I don't think, I've ever been anywhere as beautiful when looking at vineyards, this incredible place called the Meili Mountains.

They're up in the Himalayas at about 2,000 metres, 2,200 metres. It was just such an adventure, the trip. We flew from Bordeaux to Paris, Paris to Beijing, Beijing to somewhere in Yunnan and then from Yunnan up to Shangri-La. The name of the place is called Shangri-La, which itself is kind of a made up name truly from the novel, which they gave to this place wanting to help the tourism. I don't know when they named it, maybe 15, 20 years ago. I'd have to go back and read my own article to remember when they named it.

But anyway, and then when we arrived at Shangri-La, we then drove up another four hours up into the mountains. We had oxygen in our car in case any of us got sick because it was so high. We didn't. We were totally fine. Then we arrived. It was just so beautiful. All the villages had these kinds of Buddhist prayers. It's very close to the Tibetan border. Obviously, we're not allowed to say that when you're there, but very close to the Tibetan border.

So, you had all these wonderful prayer flags at the outskirts of all of the villages. We walked around and it was just wonderful. And that was at the beginning – I think the first Vintage was 2013 and I was there in 2015. So, they hadn't released the first wine yet at that point when I was there.

Jancis Robinson had been, and I was the second, the second journalist, I think, at this point. Anyway, it was just a wonderful project and I followed it ever since. The thing that's been interesting for me, and I think it's kind of reflected the way the wine world has changed a bit, is that it started off as being a very good Cabernet, but quite maybe Napa style, a lot of oak.

It was never overpowering. I thought it was good from the beginning, but I didn't necessarily get a feel for where it was from. It felt like a very good, high quality cabernet sauvignon. But if you taste it today, and really from 2019 onwards, they started stripping a lot of that back and realised what's the

benefit of them being there? The benefit is this incredible altitude that they have. And also, it's all organic because everything has to be done by hand, everything has to be done themselves.

The guy Maxence, who's making the wine, is like the handyman of all handymen, because if anything breaks, he's got to be able to fix it himself. You can't get a plumber in if something goes wrong, you can't get an electrician in. He had to be able to do all of these things himself.

So, you're surrounded by this natural beauty, and now you taste the wine, and you can tell all of the different kinds of herbs, and you feel that there's a Cabernet which has got this incredible influence of altitude and of its biodiversity and where it's from.

So, it's a beautiful wine. I really, really think it's very good quality. And I feel like it's so much better now. It's only been a decade really, and I love the progression. And I think it's really been by saying, let's let the place shine. Again, it's coming back to that idea of they have such a singular identity to this estate. Don't cover it up by putting in too much new oak and making it like any other cabernet.

Janina Doyle 00:33:15 Anybody who wants to try this wine, I googled and depending on the vintage in England, might be able to find one or two for £250, but otherwise it's about £350. So a little bit of an outlay.

Jane Anson 00:33:27 Actually, that's a good point. Something they've just done in the last year or so, is they've introduced village wines. So, the wine itself is from four different villages, and they're all at different altitudes, all Cabernet Sauvignon. I think there might be a couple of other varieties now, but basically it's 100% Cabernet Sauvignon.

Anyway, there is a cheaper entry, but they look, think of it like they say, like a Burgundy Cru. So you can get wines from each of those four villages plus the Ao Yun, which is the main one. So, that is a way to get a taste of it without having to spend £250.

Janina Doyle 00:33:57 Great. Great advice. I'm going to look at that afterwards. Now, moving back to Bordeaux, we're recording this just after what has probably been your busiest, craziest, I would say week, but probably month. And that is because of En Primeur.

Now, some people listening who are just wine lovers will go, actually, what the hell is En Primeur? Why is it so significant? Can you explain its importance to everyone listening?

Jane Anson 00:34:25 It's basically a way to buy Bordeaux wine as a future. So, to buy Bordeaux wine before it is bottled, you'll be buying the wine about six months after it's been harvested and turned into wine but while it's still in barrel at the Chateau.

So, you're buying it. It ends up being approximately 12 months before it's going to be released to the market. The aim, in theory, is about cash flow for the Chateau. That's really where it started to get, because again, these are big estates. They are storing the wine themselves at the estates until it's bottled and then sent off.

So, that's an awful lot of inventory that they are keeping at the estate. And so over time, buying En Primeur was a way to ensure cash flow. For those of us who are buying, for us, the idea would be that we can secure the wines we want at a good price in theory and have access to wines that maybe we couldn't otherwise get.

Janina Doyle 00:35:20 In theory, we're smiling and laughing at that point.

Jane Anson 00:35:22 Yes. Let's think, Bordeaux En Primeur as it stands now, really started in the early 1980s. So if we look back at how many years is that? 40 years about. There have been some vintages when people have made a lot of money from this system.

So, people who are purchasing are buying at a good price and then the wine has gone up hugely, but it's becoming more and more difficult to do that. And in the last five years, particularly with the financial crises that we've lived through over the last five years, there probably isn't a single vintage that you can't buy today at the price it was released at En Primeur.

So, if that happens too much and for too long, it negates the whole point of having En Primeur. It becomes about cash flow for the Chateaux, but not with the other half of that bargain, which is that those of us who are buying the wines get a good price.

Janina Doyle 00:36:10 It's still going on though. Is that because the hope is that the world settles and things kind of go back to the way they were?

Jane Anson 00:36:19 Yeah, it's still going on because in a way it works. It's a good way to buy wine. So, if we think again, go back to that number, maybe 7,000 chateaux in Bordeaux, there's only about 200, 250 that are sold En Primeur.

So, this is not the whole of Bordeaux. Most Bordeaux wine is sold the way that every other wine in the world is sold, which is once it's in bottle, it goes to a shop or you buy it directly from the estate and that's how it gets to you. But it's these bigger, these kinds of classified chateaus or these more famous chateaus that sell in this way.

I often think of En Primeur as being like you're at the beginning of the tennis season and you've got the ATP rankings and some well, some tennis players are going up, some tennis players are going down, some have had injuries, some are coming back. It's a great way to take a look at those main chateaux in Bordeaux and kind of take a health check. Who's doing well? How have they done in this latest vintage? Who's bought? Who's sold? Who's got a really cool new winemaker?

It's a really great way, if you're an observer of the Bordeaux wine scene, to check in, download a lot of information really, really quickly and keep up-to-date. So, I think in the last five or 10 years, there are a couple of chateaus like Pichon Comtesse, Carmes Haut-Brion, Troplong Mondot, Chateau Canon. Those four estates that have seen their fortunes dramatically rise over the last decade. That doesn't mean they're new estates. They've been there for many centuries, particularly Pichon Comtesse, but they've had exciting things happening to them. And you've seen it through tasting the wines every year En Primeur, and you've seen it through prices, and you've seen it through the buzz of the market.

So, it's a nice way to check in. And from Bordeaux's point of view, and I don't know if they always appreciate this, it is such a gift for them because, again, comparing it to other things, it's like the fashion week in Paris or Milan or New York or whatever, it's a time when everybody is looking at this region and talking about it.

So, it's a fantastic PR press move for Bordeaux. And it's why it can be so frustrating when they can get the prices so wrong. And just to bring this back into China at this point, when things really started to come off the wagon was when the Chinese market came in so strongly and so quickly.

So 2008, Hong Kong got rid of all taxes on wine, and there was a general financial crisis in the world, obviously we all remember. So, just at almost exactly the same time, Bordeaux had two fantastic vintages, 2009 and 2010. And they had this new market which was hungry for wine and had the money to pay for it. And everything just went completely crazy.

Bordeaux put up their prices a lot for 2009 and then almost doubled them again in some cases for 2010 to the point that they were crazy prices and they're still recovering. Honestly, they are. They made a big mistake by thinking, great, we've got a new market. We're not going to worry about any of our old markets. We're just going to basically take what we can. And it was a very, very, very stupid miscalculation.

So 2010, which is a wonderful vintage, most of the prices now are just back up. They dropped so much once the Chinese kind of realised that they were being taken advantage of a little bit, I would say, honestly. And anyway, Chinese politics changed. So, many things have changed in China. So, there was much less of a demand and the prices dropped. Really, I think that those two years, 09 and 10 changed people's view of En Primeur and became much more cynical about En Primeur. And we're seeing the results still.

Janina Doyle 00:40:04 I would say it's so for me, you know, I'm like, hey, I love wine and culture and history and people. And you think actually, this is Bordeaux, the model, the intricacies, there's so many parts to the puzzle, cogs in the wheel. For me, even being in the industry for well over a decade, that as you're talking to me, I'm like, what? Really? Okay. So, so many questions come up, but we won't have time to go through them all.

Jane Anson 00:40:30 I agree. It's so interesting. No, I know you're right. And the thing that I really do like about living here is exactly that. There's so many different parts of the wine world where a lot of them are modelled on what has happened here over the centuries.

So, one of the things that I wanted to do with the mentor week is to give this kind of fast track way to get a lot of this information, which then helps put so many other wine regions into context. And you're like, oh, now I understand why they're doing this, that, and the other. And maybe they can avoid some of the mistakes that have been made here. I don't know, it brings so many different threads of the wine industry together.

Janina Doyle 00:41:08 Explain to me and everybody listening, "The Week." So, we can just understand what you do and how does it work? Because as far as I believe, you can go and visit individual chateaux. But you can also go to kind of, I don't know, what a hall and taste loads there as well. Like how does it work that week? What do you do?

Jane Anson 00:41:29 My goodness. So, it is in April. It's normally the last week of April and maybe 5000 wine professionals from around the world come. You have to have an invitation. So you can't just kind of rock up to En Primeur. You have to be a professional of some description. Most people are wine buyers. There are probably around 150 journalists. Most people are wine buyers who come. And a lot of sommeliers probably come as well.

Anyway, and so for that week, there's various different groups who will organise joint tastings. So, as you say, you'll probably go to a hall and you will have 150 different wines or 200 different wines in that hall and you can taste it all and take your notes.

The big estates, the classified estates, the ones like Lafite, Latour, they never join these joint tastings, they ask you to go to the Chateau and taste directly with their winemaker. And again, you have to have an appointment. You're probably starting to make the appointments in January for April. If you leave it too late, you're not going to get the appointments that you want. You've got to start very early.

So, for me, my April looks like this. I start tasting at least two weeks before that main week because I have to write a report where I'm covering maybe 800, maybe 1000 wines, but probably about 800 wines. And I cannot do all of that in a week. No way. There's just no way. So I start normally two weeks before and my day will start at maybe half seven. I'll probably get to a Chateau for half eight will be my first thing and I'll be tasting through till 6:30 or 7 at night.

And you will go from Chateau to Chateau and each Chateau you're tasting may be four or five different wines. I don't drive. I'd like to say because even if you're coarse you're spitting of course you are but it's still you're still tasting a lot of wines in a day.

So, for the last couple of years, I've had this wonderful, wonderful, wonderful woman called Julia who works for Wine Searcher, who has been with me for the En Primeur. And so, she's driving and she's also helping with all the logistics because for each one of these wines, you have to know their blend, you have to know the alcohol, you have to know how much oak, how long have they been in oak for.

Because what I'm doing is I'm not tasting these wines for my own interest. I'm tasting them because my subscribers want to know which ones should they buy? Is it worth investing the money in them? Which ones have done best in that particular year?

So, a lot of my work will begin even before those tastings when I'll be looking at what was the weather like, what parts of Bordeaux had the most rain, who had the least rain, who might have done well. So, you're kind of trying to get a lot of background before you start the tasting. And then, you have all of this technical information that you're putting together with what the wines taste like.

And then, at the end of those three weeks of pretty intense tasting, I will then start writing my report. This year, because wines were coming out very quickly, I wrote the report and turned it around in seven days, published it a week later, and then I can relax. The hardest bit is writing the report. That is for sure.

Janina Doyle 00:44:29 Okay, so say when you're tasting the wines, considering these are super, super young wines and you're rating them and saying, hey, should you buy this wine or not? How are you evaluating them? What are the key factors? What is the criteria for you to be considering?

Jane Anson 00:44:44 So the number one factor is not do they taste good today? Because as you say, they're not finished. They're still in the barrel. And they are probably, for most of these wines, won't be drunk for another 5 to 10 to 15 to even 20 years.

So, I think number one thing is in many ways, it's crazy tasting En Primeur. I do also taste when everything is in a bottle. So, I'll do a second tasting in bottle. But because of the way this Bordeaux system works, and again, because of the amount of money that is tied up in Bordeaux. I do believe that it's an important role to have someone who's independent, who's coming in and saying what they're like, because of course, every Chateau is going to say their wine is fantastic and they dodged all the bullets of too much rain or hail or whatever. Of course they are.

And so, I hope that there is a value of somebody who is independent. My website, I don't have investors. I'm not being paid to taste. That's really important to say. My website is purely on subscriber. That's where I get my income from. It's the subscribers to my site. So that's who I am answering to, is to my subscribers and what they think.

So, what I'm looking at, this is where the Duad, that tasting diploma is just so helpful, because what you're looking at is the structure of a wine. So, a young wine, particularly a wine like a Bordeaux wine, there's going to be a lot of tannins, which are the things that give the wine. They might be a bit drying sometimes when they're young, but they give that wine structure, they give the ability to age.

You've got acidity in a wine. This is an area which is by the ocean. One of the reasons that Bordeaux wines can last for 40, 50, 60 years is because this is an oceanic climate. If there's water, there's probably going to be freshness and acidity in your glass. And we're relatively Northern. Things are changing, of course, with climate change but it's a relatively – you're kind of on the most northerly part of Southern France, I think is not a good way to think about Bordeaux. In theory, again, that gives wines which are fresh and which can age.

So, you're looking at tannins, you're looking at acidity and you're looking at fruit. You want the wine to have structure because it's young, but that means nothing if there's not enough fruit for it to taste good and for it to age over the long term and still have fruit in the wine.

So, you're kind of like an architectural question like how is that wine? What's the shape of the wine? There's your little triangle of acidity, tannins and fruit. How's that fitting together? One of the things you're looking at is, is anything jumping out too much? Like, is the alcohol too high? If there's too much alcohol, then everything might feel a bit hot. Then you're thinking that's going to drown out the elegance and the fruit over the long term.

You're trying to think not about what it's tasting like today, you're projecting yourself forward of how it's going to age. And it is not easy, but honestly, it sounds like it would be so fun to taste wines for three weeks nonstop, but it is really a job. It's hard and you have to take breaks. You have to have water. You gotta drink water.

I'm somebody who likes to have bread or crackers while I'm tasting as well because I don't want too much tannic buildup. It's fun and you see people from around the world that you haven't seen since the last En Primeur. That's a lovely social part of En Primeur. But most nights I want to go home, drink water and collapse on the sofa.

Janina Doyle 00:48:05 And I fully support that honestly, because as well for me, after tasting 50 wines at a tasting, everything's fluffy and furry and nothing I drink or eat kind of takes that away from my mouth.

And you said about getting a driver. Yes, we're not swallowing, but actually I always get, if I've done a really serious tasting, a little bit of a headache. I must be consuming a little bit. I don't know whether the alcohol just, I don't know, goes to my head, but it's always a very enjoyable experience to taste amazing wines. But it's really hardcore, isn't it?

Jane Anson 00:48:37 Yeah, definitely. And I think we should not pretend otherwise. There's alcohol in the wines that you're tasting. And so, being sensible about it is definitely important.

Janina Doyle 00:48:45 My question, I think maybe kind of going back, and I don't know how, is there an answer now, the prices in which the chateaux decide to release their wines at the time after En Primeur, how does that compare to full on release when they're actually available to buy? How does it change? I don't even know how to ask that question because I'm just so confused about it all.

Jane Anson 00:48:09 Let's think about how they arrive at their prices? So, the chateaux will have started to think about the price right from the moment of the harvest. So, that will be like their first question is, is it a good year?

We wish that would be the only question, but it's definitely not. So, they're starting to think at the time of harvest, what yield is it? Like, how much wine have they produced? Is it a good wine? Is the quality good?

And then, between that point and En Primeur, they're starting to think, okay, what's the general wider market like? How much could the market bear? So like, has there been a massive crash like in 2008? Has there been Covid, like in the 2020 for the 2019 vintage? What's happened globally?

So, one of the things I always say to people who are interested in Bordeaux, is they need to also be interested in economics. They need to follow what is happening globally in economics because the thing that's also interesting about Bordeaux is where the top wines go tends to be wherever the dominant financial centre is at that time, and you see it throughout history.

So 2008 is a great example of that. 2008, we had this global financial crisis, but at the same time, Hong Kong dropped its tax on wine and the Chinese market came in. And the Chinese market made up for the fact that most other places in the world were not buying because of the 2008 financial crisis. So, there's a great example of how politics came into the prices of Bordeaux.

Today, we've had Covid and we've had a general economic crisis, and China is not there for Bordeaux anymore. You've seen after Covid, the numbers of imports from Bordeaux to China, or exports from Bordeaux to China, haven't come back to where they were. And so, prices that Bordeaux is releasing at right now, they're much more conscious of the fact that there isn't a magic bullet out there in the world which is coming in to take everything.

So, I don't think we're going to see a huge difference in price between where it's being released now and what it's going to be like in another year's time when it's on the market, which is why you're not seeing it. Even though they're really good prices this year and the wines are, generally speaking, there are some delicious wines, but we are not seeing a massive rush for, oh my God, I've got to buy En Primeur because everybody knows the financial system being what it is right now, prices are not going to rise over the next year. So, there's less urgency to buy Bordeaux.

What was happening in 2009 and 2010 was it felt like there was an urgency to buy because of this big market. China sat there. So, they felt that they could raise their prices and people would buy. And to be fair to them, they probably thought they were going to keep rising, but that wasn't what happened. They priced too highly and prices dropped as a result.

What's also fascinating about all of this pricing question around En Primeur is that a lot of it is really for psychological reassurance, not for anything else, because most of us, we're not going to resell those wines.

Most people, if we're buying, say if I buy a case of, I don't know, Leoville Barton, which is a delicious wine and relatively at a reasonable price. If I buy that, I'm not looking to resell it, I'm looking to keep it and drink it myself. But all the same, you don't want to know that it's dropped 50% in price since you bought it. But I think really the amount of En Primeur that's resold is pretty tiny. And yet we're all so bothered about what the prices are.

Janina Doyle 00:52:35 Isn't that funny? So, what do you think in conclusion, with all of this going on, the economics, the politics, what's the future of En Primeur? Is it going to continue? Is it important for Bordeaux?

Jane Anson 00:52:45 The hard thing is they've got so used to it as a system. They've got so used to that idea of everybody looking at Bordeaux at one time in the year, which is very helpful for how Bordeaux is sold through the rest of the year.

But at the same time, the Chateaux haven't helped themselves because they're keeping more and more wine back at the estates to sell later. One of the reasons they're doing that is so that they can price their wines more highly because they're limiting the amount that's going out onto the market.

I didn't even finish, sorry, about how they're going to be pricing. So, they're pricing about the global economic, but they're also pricing about how is their brand sat compared to all the other brands. So, if you're a St Julian and you want to know how are my neighbors pricing and how do I look compared to my neighbour? And so, those other questions are also what comes into this pricing question.

Yeah, so they're not helping themselves by all of that. It cannot continue if they don't allow other people in the chain to make any money. The reality is, if Berry Brothers have to spend two months putting all of their top salespeople on selling Bordeaux, there has to be some margin in it for Berry Brothers.

The way that it's working at the moment is if the Bordeaux Chateaux are taking too much of that margin out at the beginning, then you're not going to be able to convince these merchants around the world to spend the amount of time that it takes to call all of their top collectors and say, do you want to buy XY chateaux?

So, I do think it is a dangerous time right now for the En Primeur system. And I think Bordeaux should really wise up and understand how important, how good they've had it really for the last four decades and what a benefit to Bordeaux it is having this system. Yeah, we'll see when it works, it's really fun and it's a great way to buy.

Janina Doyle 00:54:36 Watch this space.

Jane Anson 00:54:37 Watch this space, definitely.

Janina Doyle 00:54:38 Okay, interesting. Yeah, let's talk in a decade.

Janina Doyle 00:54:45 Now, stay tuned for next week as Jane talks about the Bordeaux Pirates, some of the smaller wineries that we need to know about, who's pioneering the organics and biodynamic winemaking practices, what trends are happening that we don't know about, and lesser known grape varieties that are being planted and being experimented with. So a real insider's look into the Bordeaux wine region.

And so, I shall leave you with just a wine quote as we finish off. And this is from Nick Mason, who was an English drummer famous for being in the band Pink Floyd. And he said:

“Buying a Ferrari is like buying Chateau Pétrus. If you like fine wines, it is the safe choice.”

Sadly, I can't afford either. But remember, in next week's episode, we'll learn which ones have great value and ones we can purchase. Now, if you are loving these episodes, don't forget to subscribe, like, leave a comment, leave a rating. All of this helps the podcast become far more discoverable and share it with your wine-loving friends. Wishing you an absolutely gorgeous week. Love and light to you all until next Monday, wine friends. Cheers to you!