

Château Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge 2009

CSPC# 749551

750mlx12

14.5% alc./vol.

Grape Variety
Appellation
General Info

64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 1% Petit Verdot
Pessac-Léognan

Château Smith-Haut-Lafite has been transformed during the last decade from being a perennial underachiever to being one of the leading estates in the Graves region. For many years it was owned by the Bordeaux négociant Eschenauer - in 1990 it was bought by former Olympic skiing champion, Daniel Cathiard. He cut down on the amount of chemicals and herbicides used in the vineyards, and fully modernised the winemaking facilities. The proportion of new oak barrels used in the maturation process was increased and a trio of eminent oenologists (including the ubiquitous Michel Rolland) were hired as consultants.

Vintage

The temperatures in 2009 were close to those in 2005, and rainfall was similar to 2000 – two great examples with regard to crucial ripening parameters! Summer was relatively dry with beautiful sunny days and cool nights. Thanks to deep rooting and meticulous work in the vineyard to find the best possible equilibrium between the soil and the vines, vine growth came to a halt on the 20th of July and a long, fine ripening period began. With the help of satellite photos, we now have a map showing how each plot ripens. This enables us to organise picking at peak maturity and to harvest grapes of uniform ripeness. Assisted as well by two new technologies (optical sorting of the fruit and destemming by vibration), we were able to obtain exactly the desired degree of extraction.

Vineyards

The 55 hectares of vineyards are located on a gravel ridge to the east of Château Haut-Bailly. The red wine is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (55%), Merlot (35%) and Cabernet Franc (10%).

Harvest

The harvest began on 25 September in plots of young Merlot vines and finished on 14 October with Cabernet Franc. The excellent initial impressions we had from tasting the grapes were soon confirmed in the fermentation vats. The new wine was deeply coloured, almost black. It had great concentration with powerful, complex, elegant aromas of red and black fruit, spices, herbs, cedar, liquorice, clove, and graphite...

Maturation

Aged in barrel on the lees for 18 months (65% of the new barrels were made at the estate's own cooperage), and only racked once. Duration of ageing adjusted to each wine.

Tasting Notes

This complexity was also present on the palate, and the wine soon proved to be rich, powerful, balanced, and refreshing. With time, power and concentration have become its hallmarks – but not at all at the expense of finesse. The tannin is incredibly rich and there is a beautiful, long aftertaste. The aromatic complexity on the nose carries over to the palate, which features superb red fruit and spicy flavours (clove, liquorice, and cinnamon) as well as subtle overtones of graphite, gunflint, and violet... 2009 red Smith Haut Lafitte displays a rare combination of power, richness, outstanding elegance, and delicate tannin.

Production

10,000 cases made

Cellaring

Drink 2012-2052

96 points - James Molesworth, Wine Spectator - March 31, 2012

95-98 points - James Suckling, Wine Spectator - Web Only 2010

100 points - Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #199 - February 2012

96-98+* points - Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #188- April 2010

93 points - Neal Martin, Wine Journal - January 2012

94-96 points - Neal Martin, Wine Journal - May 2010

96-98 points - Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate in Asia - July 2010

96 points - James Suckling, JamesSuckling.com - Web Only 2012

93-95 points - Roger Voss, Wine Enthusiast - September 8, 2010



Scores/Awards **94(+?) points** - Stephen Tanzer, ST's International Wine Cellar - July 2012
92-95 points - Ian D'Agata, ST's International Wine Cellar - May/June 2010
16+ points - Jancis Robinson, JancisRobinson.com - April 20, 2010
17.5 points - Chris Kissack, The Wine Doctor - October 2011
16.5-17.5+ points - Chris Kissack, The Wine Doctor - March 2010
18 points/5 stars - Stephen Spurrier, Decanter.com - April 2010

Reviews *"This is really loaded, with crushed plum, blueberry, cassis, fig and blackberry paste flavors all melded together, along with notes of tar, pastis and violet. Very long and dark, but polished and pure, with terrific fruit offset by a great tug of earth on the finish. Should cruise easily in the cellar. Drink 2015 through 2035. 10,000 cases made."*
- JM, Wine Spectator

"Clean. Blackberry and lightly toasted oak with coffee and cedar. Full-bodied and a very, very powerful structure. Blockbuster. Massive and dense yet remains agile. A triumph for this estate. Score range: 95-98"
- JS, Wine Spectator

"The finest wine ever made by proprietors Daniel and Florence Cathiard, the 2009 Smith-Haut-Lafitte exhibits an opaque blue/purple color in addition to a glorious nose of acacia flowers, licorice, charcoal, blueberries, black raspberries, lead pencil shavings and incense. This massive, extraordinarily rich, unctuously textured wine may be the most concentrated effort produced to date, although the 2000, 2005 and 2010 are nearly as prodigious. A gorgeous expression of Pessac-Leognan with sweet tannin, emerging charm and delicacy, and considerable power, depth, richness and authority, it should age effortlessly for 30-40+ years. Bravo!"
- RP, Wine Advocate

"One can't say enough about what proprietors Daniel and Florence Cathiard have accomplished at this estate since 1990. Regrettably, I am old enough to remember how horrible the wines were before the Cathiards purchased the property. They have fashioned one of the most consistently outstanding wines, both white and red, over the last two decades, and their 2009 probably eclipses any previous performance. An opaque purple color is followed by an explosive nose of graphite, black currants, licorice, incense, and a hint of black tea. The wine hits the palate with extraordinary density, unctuousness, and richness, yet it never comes across as heavy or overbearing. Deep and full-bodied with sensational concentration as well as remarkable purity and precision, this brilliant wine possesses the high, but sweet tannins that are a hallmark of the vintage, and exceptional delicacy allied to massive power and richness ... a rare combination indeed. This prodigious effort should drink well for 30-40 years. Bravo! (Tasted five times.)"
- RP, Wine Advocate

"Tasted at the UGC in London and also at Wine Future Hong Kong. The nose is very lifted with plump red-berried fruit, blackberry and cassis that comes across quite New World in style. The palate is full-bodied with huge tannins, luscious with plum and savoury. Two impressions here: the sample in London coming across a little forced, but the sample in Hong Kong demonstrates more finesse and natural balance, with fine precision and minerality towards the structured finish. Tasted November 2011."
- NM, Wine Journal

"Tasted at the chateau. Picked between 25th September and 17th October, 64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot cropped at 32 hl/ha, this has a very sleek, well defined bouquet, very pure with dark berried fruits, just a hint of coca and dark chocolate powder. Very focused, very linear at the moment but developing a lovely saline/estuarine character towards the finish. The palate is full-bodied with very silky tannins, harmonious, sensuous, very good weight and acidity, layers of ripe black, coca-tinged fruit with a sense of nonchalance and self-assured swagger towards the finish. Very pure, very long on the finish, leaving the mouth tingling with pleasure. This is a very assured Smith Haut Lafitte. Tasted April 2010."
- NM, Wine Journal

"There was a little VA on the nose of this barrel sample, otherwise it provided an excellent intensity of warm raspberry, Chinese dried plum, earth and game aromas plus a whiff of sandalwood. The rich, fleshy, full bodied palate has crisp acidity and very fine, firm tannins. Long finish."
- LPB, Wine Advocate in Asia

Reviews *“Intense aromas of blackberries with hints of green coffee beans and spices. Turns to currants and blackberries. Full bodied, with gorgeous velvety tannins and a long, long finish. The texture and fruit to this wine is captivating. Try after 2022”*

- JS, JamesSuckling.com

“93-95 Barrel sample. Robust and rich wine, balancing well the rich fruits, flavors of plum juice and sweetness along with very firm, solid tannins.”

- RV, Wine Enthusiast

“Good bright red-ruby. Enticing aromas of blueberry, flowers, graphite and charred, nutty oak, plus a sexy suggestion of floral white fruit. Like liquid silk on entry, then concentrated and lush in the middle, with red plum, tobacco and mineral flavors given definition by lovely harmonious acidity. Utterly seamless wine with suave tannins. Voluminous and intense but not a powerhouse. Finishing flavors mount slowly and stain the palate without leaving any impression of weight. Conveys a beautiful impression of site and vintage. The most complete young Smith Haut Lafite I've yet tasted at this early stage; perhaps my score will ultimately prove to be conservative.”

- ST, International Wine Cellar

“Deep ruby-purple. Aromas of smoky plum, blackberry syrup, cinnamon and canelé (a Bordeaux specialty made from a caramelized batter containing rum and vanilla) are very ripe but not exaggerated, and nicely lifted by floral and mineral top notes. Very fresh in the mouth, with almost delicate but very deep flavors of dark berries, cedar and minerals. Finishes long and pure, with noticeable saline and grapey nuances. This highly successful wine manages a tricky balancing act between super ripeness and just the right amount of freshness; in fact, this seems almost understated to me even though it boasts an extremely high IPT of 100 and possesses outstanding depth and substance. It also relies much less on oak for weight and structure than a couple of recent vintages, and therein lies a good measure of its success. Should be one of the red wine stars of '09.”

- ID, International Wine Cellar

“Moderate and rather cool and intriguing on the nose. Some sweetness at first and then slightly inky. The tannins are far from the most supple but they just about do the trick without being too drying on the finish. Just a little bit gawky, and there's some alcohol on the finish.”

- JR, JancisRobinson.com

“Perfumed and as expressive as always, dark berries alongside the red fruits with a blacker, darker, riper rather than crunchy streak. A really supple character on the palate, a good substance but there is also a fleshed-out weight to it, a core of grippy tannins, and a fresh seam of acidity cutting through it. The tannins do have rather a robust feel to them, and on a second taste they clearly have a slightly drying effect on the palate, dominating the finish too. This has been worked quite hard, but there is plenty of promise here. From a tasting of 2009 Pessac-Léognan at two years of age. 17.5/20 (October 2011)”

- CK, The Wine Doctor

“A very dark and creamy wine with a bright cherry red-pink hue at the rim. The nose suggests lovely fruit concentration, very delineated and fresh, but plainly also rich and ripe. Dark in character, although with good floral tones. Lots of lovely substance on the palate, presented in a firm and bold style, with extracted tannins which dominate the palate. It has a good sense of balance though, with a layer of sweet but crunchy dark fruits alongside, and good acids too. An impressive wine full of character with really good potential. From my 2009 Bordeaux primeur assessment. 17.5-18.5+/20 (March 2010)”

- CK, The Wine Doctor

“Dense red, fine rich and wonderfully succulent and briary wild fruits nose, rich, robust vineyard fruit with internal spice, energy and depth.”

- SS, Decanter.com