

Château Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge 2015

CSPC# 801722

750mlx12

14.5% alc./vol.

CSPC# 832572

750mlx6

14.5% alc./vol.

Grape Variety

63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot.

Appellation

Pessac-Léognan

Classification

Grand Cru Classe

Website

<http://www.smith-haut-lafitte.com/en/smith-haut-lafitte-vin-rouge.html>

General Info

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.

In July 2011, Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte purchased a majority of the vineyard property belonging to the neighboring estate, Chateau Le Thil. Out of the 42.5 acres of vines, 28.7 acres, the chateau and 20 acres of parkland went to Smith Haut Lafitte. Much of that land is located next to Smith Haut Lafitte and was actually part of the original estate that was owned by Lodi Duffour Dubergier. In essence, this reunited the original vineyards. Le Thil belonged to his nephew, from whom the de Laitre family is descended. The remaining vineyard land was sold to Les Carmes Haut Brion.

Vintage

2015 Pessac Leognan is easily the best red wine vintage for the appellation since 2010. 2015 Pessac Leognan springs from a mild winter and a dry, sunny and warm spring. Bud break took place in the middle of April and the flowering that occurred at the end of May was fast and easy. 2015 Pessac Leognan was like the rest of Bordeaux during the summer as June and July were hot, dry months. Very little if any rain fell in the region. The lack of water blended with the hot, dry conditions in some vineyards caused stress to the vines, which in turn shut down their growth cycle to protect themselves. While this was not a replay of 2003, it looked like the drought was going to cause problems for the growers.

However, the late July rains saved the day for 2015 Graves and Pessac Leognan wines and things began returning to normal. The weather in August was cooler than usual, helping preserve the aromatic potential of the grapes. The rain that fell August 3 and August helped produce grapes that were perfectly ripe and healthy. August ranged from warm to cool temperatures during the day with cold nights, helping the grapes gain much needed freshness. It is also important to note that in Pessac Leognan, the months of September and October were drier than much of Bordeaux, especially in the northern Medoc. In fact, Pessac Leognan actually received much less precipitation than usual on an annualized basis.

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%). Average vine age is 38 years

Harvest

After a first picking day of young vines on the 25th of September, the true harvest started in very good weather conditions on the 4th of October with the Merlots; the juices offered good balances and beautiful aromatic freshness. The weekend of the 6th and 7th of October, with no previous warning sign, a warm and humid depression, of tropical type, troubled our tranquility: mushroom started to be found in the property woods... and botrytis spots appeared.

Sure, of the proper maturity of our grapes, we decided to take immediate measures to react to these weather conditions and called in 200 harvesters. The harvest pace doubled, allowing us to qualitatively pick the grapes before they could be affected.



Harvest	Our very selective harvest reception area (de-stemming through vibration, both optical and manual sorting) assured us the perfect quality of the grapes transferred to the vats: no botrytized grape could have passed through this draconian process... Under that sustained pace, harvest finished on the 17th of October with the Cabernet Francs
Vinification/ Maturation	Whole uncrushed grape berries fermented in small oak vats at 28°C and extraction with manual <i>pigeage</i> (punching down the cap). 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. Aged in barrel on the lees for 18 months (65% new barrels, made at the estate's own cooperage) and only racked once. Duration of ageing was adjusted to each wine.
Tasting Notes	Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte 2015 is a very dark red wine, almost black. The nose expresses a bouquet of black fruits and very fresh red fruits. Through swirling, the nose appears more complex with notes of spices, cedar, liquorice associated with notes of violet and a touch of flint stone. The mouth is straightforward, dynamic, powerful, dense, classy. Tannins are concentrated, unctuous and silky. They give the wine great length and beautiful texture. We find again in mouth the crunchy and ripe fruits and an additional spicier dimension with liquorice, citron, clove and a wonderful finale of floral and mineral notes.
Production	10,000 cases made
Cellaring	Drink 2018-2045.
Scores/Awards	<p>96 points - James Molesworth, Wine Spectator - March 31, 2018</p> <p>94-97 points - James Molesworth, Wine Spectator - Web Only 2016</p> <p>97 points - Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate Interim Issue - February 2018</p> <p>95-97 points - Neal Martin, Wine Advocate #224 - April 2016</p> <p>95+ points - Neal Martin, Wine Journal - March 2018</p> <p>97-98 points - James Suckling, JamesSuckling.com - April 2016</p> <p>96 points / Cellar Selection - Roger Voss, Wine Enthusiast - April 2018</p> <p>94-96 points - Roger Voss, Wine Enthusiast - April 2016</p> <p>17.5+ points - Jancis Robinson, JancisRobinson.com - May 2018</p> <p>18 points - Jancis Robinson, JancisRobinson.com - October 2017</p> <p>18 points - Jancis Robinson, JancisRobinson.com - April 2016</p> <p>96 points - Stephen Spurrier, Decanter.com - April 2016</p> <p>98 points - Jane Anson, Decanter.com - November 2017</p> <p>97 points - Jeff Leve, thewinecellarinsider.com - May 2018</p> <p>97 points - Jeff Leve, thewinecellarinsider.com - July 2017</p> <p>96-98 points - Jeff Leve, thewinecellarinsider.com - April 2016</p> <p>96-97+ points - Jeremy Williams, winewordsandvideotape.com - March 2016</p> <p>96 points - Tim Atkin, MW - timatkin.com - April 2016</p> <p>16.5 points - Farr Vintner - March 2016</p> <p>92-95 points - Derek Smedley, MW - April 2016</p> <p>95 points - Jeannie Cho Lee MW, asianpalate.com - May 2016</p> <p>95 points - Antonio Galloni, Vinous - February 2018</p> <p>93-96+ points - Antonio Galloni, Vinous - April 2016</p> <p>96 points - Jeb Dunnuck MW - February 2018</p> <p>17.5+ points - Matthew Jukes, MW - April 2016</p> <p>94-96 points - Falstaff Magazine (score only) - May 2016</p> <p>19 points - La Revue du Vin France (score only) - June 2016</p> <p>18 points - Bettane & Desseauve (score only) - April 2016</p> <p>18 points - Gault & Millau (score only) - June 2016</p>
Reviews	<p><i>"This pumps out some serious blackberry, boysenberry, raspberry and black currant fruit flavors, with the texture of compote and a racy edge thanks to a terrific bolt of graphite that runs throughout. Waves of anise, roasted apple wood and tobacco drive the finish, with the fruit keeping pace easily. Destined for a long life. Best from 2025 through 2045. 10,000 cases made."</i></p> <p>- JM, Wine Spectator</p>

Reviews *“Ripe and succulent in feel, with warm plum and blackberry confiture notes leading the way. Picks up singed alder and tar details through the finish, gaining extra depth. Very pure, but with ample grip in reserve. A serious wine. Score range: 94-97”*
- JM, Wine Spectator

“This vintage is a blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot, matured in 65% new oak barrels. Medium to deep garnet-purple, the 2015 Smith Haut Lafitte has a totally dazzling nose of exotic spices—star anise, fenugreek and Sichuan pepper—over a core of chocolate-covered cherries, wild blueberries, plum preserves, violets and earthy wafts of truffles, moss, tilled black soil and forest floor. Medium to full-bodied, beautifully balanced and packing a lot of flavor into a relatively modest package, it fills the mouth with spice and herb-laced black and blue fruit layers, supported by very ripe, very finely grained tannins and seamless freshness, finishing with epic length. This is already a show-stopping, heart-pounding beauty, but should also age incredibly!”
- LPB, Wine Advocate

“The 2015 Smith-Haut-Lafitte is adorned with a special label to celebrate the 650th anniversary of the château and the 25th vintage made under the ownership of Daniel and Florence Cathiard. It is a blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot, picked between 23 September until 12 October with the Cabernet Franc. Matured in 65% new oak (although technical director Fabien Teitgen mentioned that he could have added more if he felt it would benefit), it has a very intense, blueberry and crème de cassis scented bouquet, a touch more opulent than its peers with hints of freshly shucked oyster shell developing with aeration. The palate is medium-bodied with filigree tannin couched in gorgeous, satin-textured black cherry and cassis fruit, tinged with cedar and pencil shavings. It lingers very long and sensually in the mouth, completing a sophisticated and powerful Smith Haut-Lafitte that should age in splendid fashion.”
- NM, Wine Advocate

“The 2015 Smith Haut Lafitte has a lush and generous bouquet with black cherries, raspberry and rose petal scents, those shucked oyster shells that I noticed out of barrel surfacing with aeration. There is wonderful purity here and it blossoms with aeration. The palate is medium-bodied with a gentle grip on the entry, layers of red berry fruit, allspice, cedar and tobacco with a structure and insistent finish that suggests it will age over many years. This is a sophisticated young Smith Haut Lafitte, precocious in talent and bound to age with style and class. This is a seriously fine Smith Haut Lafitte that I feel will get better and better with age. One to watch.”
- NM, Wine Journal

“This is a very polished and precise young wine with beautiful depth and intensity. Full and sexy. It shows blueberry and black currant character with walnut and chocolate undertones. The tannins have a lovely texture. Joy to taste. Barrel Sample: 97-98”
- JS, JamesSuckling.com

“This wine is dense in expressive, dark fruit and solid tannins which give it a rich, enveloping feel. With its spicy score and crisp acidity, there is great potential for aging. Drink from 2025”
- RV, Wine Enthusiast

“94–96. Barrel Sample. There's huge potential here, now only just hinting at its rich fruits and concentrated tannins. Dark and very firmly textured, it is going to be rich as well as finely balanced.”
- RV, Wine Enthusiast

“63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Deep crimson. Fragrant and fresh with lots of tannins – far, far more than in the 2017! Just chock-a-block with everything. A wine to hang on to but good and dry with Graves freshness. No one should be disappointed with this anniversary bottling.”
- JR, JancisRobinson.com

Reviews

“Cherry oak and plenty of dark fruit on the nose. Rich, powerful and still beautifully balanced between the fruit and the structure. Long, chewy, dark finish. Great promise. (JH)”

- JH, JancisRobinson.com

“New black label to celebrate the Cathiards' anniversary and that of the property. Very dark. Comfortable base and lots of perfume. Round and sweet. Tense and tight. An excitingly taut package that promises well.”

- JR, JancisRobinson.com

“63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Organic. A wonderful wine of great impact and rich, grippy tannins but the density imperceptibly lightens towards the finish, so you are left with the impression of freshness even though the liquorice, black cherry and cassis flavour persists. Smith Haut Lafitte has clearly stopped chasing the ripest fruit, instead going for the most aromatic, at perfect phenolic maturity. 3.7pH, 65% new oak.”

- Decanter.com

“This is exceptionally good, with extremely well-placed damson and cassis fruit, a brush of caramel, smoked bacon and bitter chocolate. There's layer upon layer of flavour here, all spliced together by the most beautiful, juicy acidity. This is a Smith Haut Lafitte that has improved during barrel ageing and will deepen even further in bottle. Bright, grippy acidity gives those fine tannins a bounce, and overall the texture is silky but with teeth lurking beneath. As of 2017, 40% of the vineyard is biodynamic, accounting for almost the entirety of the grand vin. And a black and gold label this year, continuing the trend! (JA)”

- JA, Decanter.com

“With a depth of color impossible to miss, the wine opens with smoke, licorice, blackberry, cassis, and wet forest aromatics. Rich, fleshy and concentrated with all the right stuff, the wine is ripe, sensuous, silky and polished. The finish delivers smoked fruits, ripe tannins and length of flavor, which keeps right on going. This will age seamlessly for decades. With bottle age, this could score higher, as it develops.”

- JL, thewinecellarinsider.com

“A seriously great wine from Smith Haut Lafitte. The wine has taken on additional nuances over the past year. It has filled out, softened and expanded. Dense, plush and character filled, this is one of the top wines ever produced at the property.”

- JL, thewinecellarinsider.com

“With a good depth of color, this wine pops with black cherry liqueur, blueberry, licorice, smoke, truffle, cigar box and espresso notes in the bouquet. A fine purity of fruit with sweetness and ripe berries give you a wine that is not as flashy as 2009 or 2010, but there is focus, finesse, elegance, polished tannins, concentration and intensity of flavor, with the ability to age and improve. The wine was made from a blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot and 2% Cabernet Franc. Reaching 13.75% alcohol with a pH of 3.7, the harvest took place from September 22 to October 12 and the Grand Vin represents just 40% of the harvest. Because 2015 is the 25th vintage for the Cathiard family, and it's the 650th year that wine has been made at the estate, the wine will be placed in a special bottle with a sharp looking black and gold label! 96 - 98 Pts”

- JL, thewinecellarinsider.com

“Lovely colour; deep at centre; healthy looking; seductive aromas – oodles of ripe fruit; cassis; some chocolate notes; supple entry; wonderful fruit tones – real beauty here this year; surprisingly supple wine. Between 09/10 the estate believes. Lovely stuff for me. Opulent. Gorgeous. [63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc 2% Petit Verdot, 65% new oak]. Tasted Smith Haut Lafitte. Drink 2019-2035. 7/4/16. 96-97+”

- JW, winewordsandvideotape.com

“Right up there with the best Left Bank reds in 2015, this is the latest in a line of impressive releases from Smith-Haut-Lafitte. Grassy, aromatic and herbal, with blueberry and blackcurrant sweetness, tangy acidity and a core of serious, well integrated tannin embellished by stylish, perfumed oak. Drink: 2025-35”

- TA, timatkin.com

Reviews

"Daniel and Florence Cathiard transformed this property in the early 1990s and have been making very individual, sexy wines since then which combine flavours of classic earthy Graves with silky and seductive new oak from barrels produced by their in-house cooper. The 67-hectare vineyard is planted with 69% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 1% Petit Verdot. In 2015 the percentage of Cabernet is a bit higher than normal and there will be a special black label to celebrate 25 years of ownership by the Cathiards. They believe that their 2015 is similar to the 2009 (but with less concentration and high acidity) and also similar to the 2010 but with less power and more finesse. Deep blueish-purple colour with an exotic, ripe nose of blueberry, blackberry and creamy vanilla from new oak. The palate has a mouth filling texture from structured, yet ripe tannins, giving great volume and a supple texture. Juicy and powerful with layers of black cherry and blackberry fruit. Long, spicy and complex on the finish with real lift from sweet vanilla and cherry blossom. Plush and ripe, this is modern but very well made."

- Farr Vintners

"Depth on the nose the palate has brooding richness layers of black fruits. Sweet and ripe in the middle fleshy and supple but there is balance with bilberry under the rich black cherry and chocolate. Sweet and ripe at the back yet the finish is stylish lighter and long."

- Derek Smedley MW

"Beautiful, elegant red with lovely savory spices, dark berries and earth. The wine has lovely focus and detail with freshness. The blend is 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot and a bit of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. A gorgeous wine with lovely balance and lifted flavors that will have a long life ahead."

- JCL, asianpalate.com

"Explosive and powerful in the glass, the 2015 Smith Haut Lafitte is going to need time to come into its own. Black cherry, gravel, smoke, bittersweet chocolate, leather, licorice and savory herbs effortlessly fill out the wine's ample frame. The 2015 is an especially dark, concentrated Smith Haut Lafitte. Swaths of tannin carry the wine into a huge finish accented by hints of raspberry jam, chocolate, leather and tobacco. Today, the 2015 is more power than finesse. It will be interesting to see how things develop from here. 95+ points. (AG)"

- AG, Vinous

"The 2015 Smith Haut Lafitte is superb. Dark, powerful and towering, the 2015 exudes richness and a level of intensity in all directions that is remarkable. This is an especially dark, brooding Grand Vin built on serious depth, intensity and structure, and yet there is more than enough richness in the fruit to balance things out. The extreme heat of the year appears to have baked out some of the aromatic nuance. It will be interesting to see if that dimension opens up. For now, the 2015 is massively shut down. Readers will have to be especially patient, as the 2015 won't be ready to drink for some time. Both en primeur samples I tasted were less expressive than the separate components were when I tasted them from barrel in late January 2016, so I won't be surprised at all if the bottled wine comes in at the top of this range. Tasted two times."

- AG, Vinous

"Dark and meaty initially, with power and richness, this is tempered by subtle tannins and serious length. The oak is epic, and this heightens the fruit immeasurably. This is a very successful Smith Haut Lafitte and it is a wine which will start to drink sooner than expected but also live for longer than hoped for, too."

- MJ, matthewjukes.com

"Another wine from the Cathiard family I was able to taste on multiple occasions is the 2015 Smith Haut Lafitte and its brilliant stuff readers should snatch up. Offering a huge nose of chocolatey dark fruits, roasted herbs, graphite and flowers, this big, rich, opulent beauty has building tannin, loads of structure and great mid-palate. It will drink nicely for 20+ years."

- Jeb Dunnuck