

Château Smith Haut Lafitte 2020

CSPC# 848132

750mlx6

14.2% alc./vol.

CSPC# 852073

750mlx6

14.2% alc./vol.

Grape Variety

65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 1% Petit Verdot

Appellation

Pessac-Léognan

Classification

Grand Cru Classé

Website

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

Sustainability

Certified organic with the 2019 vintage, this year marks a waypoint—rather than a stopping point—in Smith Haut Lafitte's agronomic journey. The Cathiard family banished herbicides at this address in 1991, radically reducing chemical treatments and suffering the consequences for several years in the form of much diminished yields (today, happily, materiel and techniques are more sophisticated). In addition to organic methods, cover crops have been deployed on the vineyard's central blocks and western band, where soils are less well drained. Hedges have been planted to encourage biodiversity, and ultraviolet treatments are being trialed as an alternative to copper sulfate. In addition to such initiatives, the technical team is adapting to a warmer climate: that means picking a touch earlier, certainly, but more importantly, adapting in the vineyards, with somewhat lower canopies and an end to deleafing to retain fresh, vibrant flavors. Winemaking, too, is a little gentler: cool but protracted macerations, with periodic punch-downs, for reds and whole-cluster pressing with an inverted press for whites. This has brought new structural elegance and energy to the estate's wines. It surely helps that as much as possible is done in-house: since 1995, the Cathiards have their own nursery for their own massale selections, in partnership with Bérillon, and barrels are made in the château's own on-site cooperage too, favoring the forests of Tronçais and Jupilles for reds, Loches (which brings tension) for whites. All this is symptomatic of the attention to detail and seriousness that the Cathiards, and their technical director Fabien Teitgen, have brought to this estate; and the result, in 2019, is one of the finest wines they've produced to date."

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.

Winemaker

Fabien Teitgen

Vintage

Winter 2019/2020 is mild and wet. The vine's growth cycle begins very early (it is the earliest year after 1989). In Spring, constant rainfall encourages mildew to appear, so we are doubly attentive. Flowering is very early too and occurs as usual. From mid-June and until mid-August, an exceptionally hot, dry period sets in, during which we note three periods of heatwave. As a result, we decrease work carried out in the vineyard, especially leaf-thinning, to protect the wholeness of the grape bunches and to preserve aromatic freshness. From 11th August, steady rainfall enables the grape to perfect its ripeness. Harvests of white grapes are early and gathered in very good conditions. Temperatures are above seasonal averages, ideal for completing the ripening of all the red grape varieties, which entered our fermenting rooms in excellent health.



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	Harvest started as early as 9 September until 30 September.
Vinification/ Maturation	Whole grapes are fermented at 28°C in small wooden vats with extraction by manual punching down. Aged 18 months in barrels (60% are new barrels produced in our in-house cooperage), with aging on lees. After being racked a single time, wine is aged according to its profile.
Tasting Notes	The color of the wine is dark red, almost black with blueish hues. Very expressive on the nose with red fruits and black fruits flavors. A good swirl in the glass releases a large range of flavors and spices. Star anis, liquorice as well as empyreumatic notes and flint stones from the gūnzien gravels. It goes very wide and powerful on the palate at first, then the well-defined structure and smoothness of the wine gives it all its balance, fresh and full body.
Serve with	Best served at 15.5 degrees Celsius. The cool, almost cellar temperature gives the wine more freshness and lift. Best served with all types of classic meat dishes, veal, pork, beef, lamb, duck, game, roast chicken, roasted, braised, and grilled dishes.
Production	10,000 cases made
Cellaring	Drink 2024-2036
Scores/Awards	<p>95 points - James Molesworth, Wine Spectator - March 2023</p> <p>95+ points - William Kelley, Wine Advocate - April 2023</p> <p>98-100 points - Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate - May 2021</p> <p>98 points - Lisa Perrotti-Brown, The Wine Independent - March 2023</p> <p>99 points - James Suckling, JamesSuckling.com - January 2023</p> <p>99-100 points - James Suckling, JamesSuckling.com - May 2021</p> <p>96-98 points - Roger Voss, Wine Enthusiast - June 2021</p> <p>17+ points - Jancis Robinson, JancisRobinson.com - April 2021</p> <p>98 points - Georgina Hindle, Decanter.com - January 2023</p> <p>97 points - Jane Anson, Decanter.com - May 2021</p> <p>97 points - Jane Anson, janeanson.com - January 2023</p> <p>98 points - Jeff Leve, thewinecellarinsider.com - March 2023</p> <p>97-99 points - Jeff Leve, thewinecellarinsider.com - May 2021</p> <p>93-95 points - Farr Vintners - May 2021</p> <p>97 points - Antonio Galloni, Vinous - February 2023</p> <p>95-97 points - Antonio Galloni, Vinous - June 2021</p> <p>100 points - Jeb Dunnuck MW - March 2023</p> <p>97-100 points - Jeb Dunnuck MW - May 2021</p> <p>95 points - Jean Marc Quarin (score only) - March 2023</p> <p>97-98 points - Yves Beck (score only) - June 2021</p> <p>95-97 points - Peter Moser, Falstaff Magazine - May 2021</p> <p>100 points - Vert de Vin (score only) - May 2021</p> <p>93-94 points - Michael Schuster, The World of Fine Wine - May 2021</p>
Reviews	<p><i>“Exotic and lush in feel, with well-steeped plum, boysenberry and blackberry fruit flavors rolling through, scored with hints of espresso crema, dark tobacco and black licorice along the way. Very polished in feel, but with a late flicker of savory and a subtle tug of earth to keep this honest in the end. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot. Best from 2026 through 2037. 10,000 cases made.”</i></p> <p>- JM, Wine Spectator</p> <p><i>“The 2020 Smith Haut Lafitte is more structured and introverted than its 2019 predecessor, unwinding in the glass with aromas of cassis and plums mingled with notions of pencil shavings, violets, and minty new oak. Medium to full-bodied, deep and concentrated, its velvety attack segues into a multidimensional mid-palate that's framed by rich, generously extracted tannins that assert themselves on the long, youthfully firm finish. This is a strong effort that's true to the house style and which will reward a little patience.”</i></p> <p>- WK, Wine Advocate</p> <p><i>“A blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot aging in 60% new barriques, the very deep purple-black colored 2020 Smith Haut Lafitte makes an impactful entrance, opening with flamboyant notes of blackcurrant pastilles, chocolate-covered cherries, and molten licorice, leading to nuances of ground cloves, woodsmoke, crushed rocks and dusty soil. The medium to full-bodied palate bursts with opulent black fruit preserves and shimmering mineral sparks, framed by exquisitely ripe and fantastically firm tannins and seamless freshness, finishing with epically long-lasting earthy and savory layers. This is the</i></p>

Reviews

singular voice of Smith Haut Lafitte at its finest, and wow-oh-wow is it worth a listen. This 2020 has an alcohol of 14.5% with a pH of 3.65. The tannins this year were a little higher than 2018 and 2019. A little less than a third of production went into this grand vin.

"The first part of the year was aquatic," commented Winemaker Fabien Teitgen. "The vines began to grow very early, on March 8th. But after we had good flowering. There was some mildew, but there was not too much damage. Because we are organic and biodynamic, we can only use very little copper mixed with plant infusions. This is the phytotherapy part of biodynamics. We try lots of things and we keep what works. When you are certified, you have to work very fast, even on Saturday and Sunday. Our workers live close by and are very dedicated. "We were not so much impacted by the drought. It's true, the summer was very dry. But the first part of the year gave water to store in our deep clays. The second part of the year was very sunny and warm. Even where our clay is five to six meters down, this gave us the ability to continue the ripening process. We have an early terroir with this storage of water. We ended harvest before the end of September. "The Cabernet berries were very small—we would have liked to have had a little more juice. By the time we were picking the Cabernet, the rains came. There was no bursting (of berries) for us. The timing of the water was good. Then, we had to be very careful with the extraction—there was a lot of tannin. So, we did much less pigéage. There is no press wine in the blend this year. "It was really a great pleasure to do this vintage. The grapes were very expressive straightaway of the wines. The aromas in the winery were incredible." It is clear from tasting the range of wines from Smith Haut Lafitte that they were indeed situated in a sweet-spot location and possessing just the right sort of terroir to hit the absolute heights of greatness this vintage has to offer, with all the hurdles skillfully managed by Teitgen and his team. These wines are truly breathtaking. Bravo!"

- LPB, Wine Advocate

"The 2020 Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge is a blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Deep garnet-purple in color, it storms out of the glass with powerful scents of creme de cassis, wild blueberries, and redcurrant preserves, followed by suggestions of cedar chest, charcuterie, cast-iron pan, and black truffles, with a touch of menthol. The full-bodied palate is densely laden with black fruit layers offset by mineral and red berry accents, supported by firm, grainy tannins, and plenty of freshness, finishing long and earthy."

- LPB, Wine Independent

"Extremely fresh and deep in the nose with raspberry and blackcurrant character, as well as stone, fresh green tobacco, and ink. Full-bodied with a dense center palate and gorgeous fine yet steely tannins. It calms down at the end with berries, citrus and some lavender. Salty at the end. Very mineral. Flinty. From organically grown grapes. 65% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot, 4% cabernet franc and 1% petit verdot. Give it four or five years to come around."

- JS, JamesSuckling.com

"So much blackcurrant, graphite, and iodine character. Full-bodied. Incredible quality to the tannins. They are polished yet powerful. It's so long and complete with such depth and toned muscles. Vertical. Very fresh and energetic. Will it be better than the famous 2015? Maybe the best ever. From organically grown grapes. 65% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot, 4% cabernet franc and 1% petit verdot."

- JS, JamesSuckling.com

"This is a very fine wine, packed with tannins that are rich and suspended in the wine with its smoky edge and ripe blackberry fruits. The wine is direct in its fine, fragrant freshness and in its texture that gives power and concentration. Obviously for long-term aging."

- RV, Wine Enthusiast

"Full bottle 1,355 g. Cask sample taken 22 April. Harvest started as early as 9 September and went on until 30 September. 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 1% Petit Verdot. 60% new barriques. Pioneer of biodynamics and sustainability in Bordeaux. Mid crimson. Nuanced, complex nose suggests masses of ripeness and intense aromas. Interesting dried-bay-leaves note on the nose followed by some slight leafiness. Rich, polished palate – structured juiciness. Then pretty dry on the finish – not quite as luscious on the palate as the nose suggests. Masses of sandy-textured tannins on the finish. Will need lots of time. Drink 2029 – 2045."

- JR, JancisRobinson.com

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“Vivid dark purple in the glass, but a remarkable clarity too. Fragrant black cherries, plums, cassis and perfumed aromas with blueberries, balsamic touches, and white pepper. Rich, round, grippy and captivating, slightly plush but also tight, where you get a soft chalky, wet stone grip with lively acidity balanced by strict and spiced liquorice-touched fruit. You feel the leanness here, but it's so well defined with clarity and precision. A sleeping giant right now, definitely not yet fully expressing itself but slowly grows to a long finish. There's something so utterly seductive about this wine, it's overt, forward, upfront, confident, and powerful no doubt, this will need a while before it should be opened, but it's a shining thoroughbred. Refined and purposeful. There's a bit of magic in this bottle.”

- GH, Decanter.com

“Powerful on the attack, dense and concentrated at first then brighter on the retro-olfaction with layers of spice, liquorice, and flowers. Intense but beautifully precise, with iris and peony aromatics coming in strongly as it opens in the glass. A ton of nuance and complexity, really takes its time, delivering a masterclass in restrained Pessac glamour. Average yields 30hl/ha for the reds. 1% Petit Verdot completes the blend. 60% new oak. Harvest started on September 9 - 30. Drinking Window 2030 – 2050.”

- JA, Decanter.com

“Inky colour, charcoal, slate, cocoa bean, blueberry, espresso, grilled sandalwood, espresso, all delivered slowly but surely with punch and power. Palate-hugging confident tannins, this is a brilliant wine that edges slowly through the palate, gathering layers and complexity as it goes. 60% new oak. Harvest September 9 to 30, technical director Fabien Teitgen. 60% new oak. Harvest started on September 9 to 30. As I said En Primeur; this is a masterclass in restrained Pessac glamour.”

- JA, janeanson.com

“The impressive dark hue provides the introduction to the equally dark-fruited profile on the nose and palate. The wine is all about its richness, intensity, length, and palate presence, which somehow, remains perfectly balanced, with all of its layers of blackberries, smoke, espresso, black cherries, licorice, smoke and chocolate. What is important to pay attention to here is the purity in the fruit, the lift, balance, and freshness on the palate, and of course, the length which goes on for close for over 50 seconds! The finish blends power with polished, elegant, creamy tannins and a showy display of sweet, black cherries, plums, chocolate, and spice. As I mentioned in my barrel notes, previously, in some years, it felt like you were tasting a wine made in the cellars. But that is no longer the case at Smith Haut Lafitte, as now, you are clearly tasting a wine produced in the vineyard. Drink from 2025-2055.”

- JL, thewinecellarinsider.com

“Incredibly dark in color, the aromatics spring from the glass with smoke, tobacco leaf, blackberry, cassis, licorice, flowers, cocoa, and cigar box notes. The wine is full-bodied, rich, lush, opulent, and intense. All that power is harnessed by freshness, intensity, and lift. There is a beautiful sense of purity and vibrancy not found in previous vintages. With textures of silk and cashmere, with layers of perfectly ripe, seductive, black, and dark red fruits accompanied by Valrhona chocolate, the seamless finish stays with you, expanding for close to 60 seconds! This is clearly the best wine Smith Haut Lafitte has ever produced! The reason is simple. Previous vintages at times felt like they were made in the cellar. Here you taste a wine that was produced in the vineyard. Blending 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot, 14.5% ABV pH of 3.65. The harvest took place September 12 through September 30, yields were only 32 hectoliters per hectare. To celebrate 30 years of ownership at the estate, the 2020 will be produced with a special one-time-only black and gold label.”

- JL, thewinecellarinsider.com

“The 2020 is a blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. The wine will be aged for 18 months in 60% new french oak barrels from yields of 30hl/ha. Three quarters of the vineyards here are now biodynamically farmed - the remainder will follow in the next year. Harvest began on 9th September, which is the third earliest on record. All the fruit was in before the end of September. Deep ruby-purple hue. The nose is fragrant with violet and sweet plum, but also accented with exotic cinnamon and anise from the oak. The palate is very refined, with juicy red fruit to the fore. Underneath there is an edge of cassis too. The tannins are ultra refined, giving a cashmere texture. There is real persistence to the fruit, suggesting good potential once the oak fully integrates.”

- Farr Vintners

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"The 2020 Smith Haut Lafitte is every bit as captivating as it was from barrel. Ample, rich, and explosive, the 2020 offers up an exciting mélange of dark fruit, chocolate, spice, gravel, leather, and dried herbs, with a touch of new oak that adds raciness. This towering, vertical Smith Haut-Lafitte won't be ready to drink for a number of years, but it is super impressive. Even with all of its intensity, the 2020 retains terrific freshness and energy."
- AG, Vinous

"The 2020 Smith Haut Lafitte is a thrilling wine of grandeur and spellbinding beauty. The aromatics literally soar out of the glass, perhaps driven by a touch more Cabernet Sauvignon in the blend. A vertical, explosive wine, the 2020 possesses tremendous energy. It is a rapturous wine that will delight readers for years to come. A move towards gentler extractions, with less oak impact, allows the purity of the fruit to come through loud and clear. Inky dark cherry, plum, mocha, dried herbs and lavender are all amplified in the 2020, but what I admire most is a total sense of harmony. I can't wait to see how it ages, as evolution has at times been the sole Achilles heel here."
- AG, Vinous

"Absolutely pure gold and reminding me of the 2009 (or is it the 2010?), the 2020 Château Smith Haut Lafitte sports a dense purple hue to go with incredible aromatics of blackberries, blueberries, scorched earth, wood smoke, and acacia flowers. One of the most concentrated, rich, and sexy wines in the vintage, this massive and extraordinarily opulent 2020 shows the vintage's pure, elegant profile yet backs it up with sensational levels of fruit and texture. Based on 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, and the balance Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, it already offers pleasure given its wealth of fruit, but it deserves 7-8 years of bottle age and will evolve for 40-50 years. Not enough can be said about the quality of these wines. Bravo to Florence and Daniel Cathiard, as well as to director Fabien Teitgen, for another incredible achievement."
- Jeb Dunnuck

"Possibly ranking with the top two or three wines of the vintage, the 2020 Smith Haut Lafitte is a blockbuster that reminds me of a hypothetical mix of the 2009 and 2010. Based on a blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, and the rest Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, its dense purple hue is followed by a monster bouquet of ripe black fruits, scorched earth, charcoal, and graphite. All of these carry to a full-bodied Pessac-Léognan with flawless balance, loads of ripe, polished tannins, a dense mid-palate, and a great, great finish. It's one of the gems in the vintage and should be snatched up by readers. Give bottles just 4-6 years in the cellar, count yourself lucky, and enjoy over the following 20-30 years."
- Jeb Dunnuck

"Deep ruby, opaque core, purple reflections, bright rim. Delicate floral scents, ripe cherries, cassis and liquorice, fine touch of fine oak, nuances of orange zest; an inviting bouquet. Powerful, juicy, ripe plum and cherry fruit, voluptuous texture, vivid, ripe tannins, lingers for a very long time, fine savouriness to the finish. Certainly, one to cellar."
- PM, Falstaff Magazine

"Great purity and intensity with inky dark fruit – blackberry, cassis, and floral notes with fine oak integration just a hint of toast. Ample and concentrated palate with fine nuance and layers, powerful yet elegant with a tremendous length and complexity, this will be something really great!"
- AL, Tasted.com

*"(65% CS, 30% M, 4% CF, 1% PV; 40% GV; 14.5% ABV; 60% new)
Crisply red and blackcurrant ripe; elegant and beautifully contained within its large scale, wears its alcohol with great ease. Long, refined, complex, aromatic, elegant, complete, and impressive, a beautiful performance. And remains very Graves in its gravelly, minerally character. A sort of finer 2010? Lovely. 2028–40+."*
- MS, The World of Fine Wine