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Bordeaux begins to lose 'stuffy' image

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Panos Kakaviatos

Bordeaux is making efforts to dispel its 'too stuffy' image with the second edition of its Open Doors event.

Over 1,000 people came to the annual event, called 'Le Weekend des Grands Amateurs' at Quai de Chartrons last weekend – twice as many as last year's opener.

Top Bordeaux chateaux representatives gathered to pour their just-bottled 2004 vintage for guests coming from 21 different countries.

Many came from traditional Bordeaux markets like the UK, US, Belgium and France, but others also came from as far away as Australia, Korea, Mexico, Lithuania and Singapore.

'I used to think Bordeaux has too stuffy an image,' said a French guest from Brittany who came to discover the region for the first time. 'But this makes the wine so much more accessible.'

For €53, visitors tasted wines and had the chance to meet owners like Jean-Michel Cazes of Château Lynch Bages and the recently-named Decanter Man of the Year, Anthony Barton of Châteaux Langoa and Léoville Barton.

Most châteaux poured an older vintage (between 1996 and 2003) to compare with the 2004.

Some participants also visited the châteaux on Sunday in exchange for a €15 tour pass – or paid €130 for dinner at one of five châteaux on Saturday evening.

Most guests were pleased with the opportunity to see Bordeaux opening up to tourism – though some were frustrated by being unable to buy wine they liked.

'I really wanted to buy some wine but I couldn't buy a single bottle because of this negociant system,' one visitor said.

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The only way I can see Bordeaux "opening its doors to the world" is by it adopting the Australian/New Zealand model, putting cafes/restaurants and cellar door shops. By this I don't mean the "tres expensive" winery spa's and up-market watering holes for the super rich – I mean a set up like those at say Sileni in Hawkes Bay.....

They should also encourage cellar door sales.....cellar and vineyard tours (as in many same Burgundy properties)....free tastings and even have English speaking people on site at the larger properties...a welcoming and educational stance would help as well as being open during August!

I have often visited France and its wine growing areas but I always avoid Bordeaux like the plague – it's just too up-tight. Burgundy and most of the Rhone are great as are small growers in Champagne – a phone call and then you really get looked after.

I wish them luck but don't hold out that much hope – their attitude of being global supreme is just too entrenched.

Keep up the good work – you are producing a top quality magazine – thank you.

Andy Whiteman, Portgate, Devon, UK

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