

LE PETIT CHEVAL

BLANC



Creating a new wine, inventing a white Bordeaux, is an exciting project - and a very unusual one for a wine estate famous for its great red wines! It unquestionably took audacity and even a bit of impertinence to undertake such an adventure. It is true that Cheval Blanc has never lacked audacity... I like to remind people that Jean Fourcaud-Laussac opted for a totally atypical proportion of grape varieties 150 years ago, closer to the Médoc than to Saint Emilion, when he planted a proportion of two thirds Cabernet Franc and just one third Merlot...

The idea of creating a white Bordeaux germinated in 2008. After all, did not the very name of our château predestine us to go in this direction? It also seemed that such a venture was entirely in keeping with our wine-growing vocation. This idea soon developed into an actual project taken to heart by everyone at the estate. Sharing their ideas, adding to their talents, and combining their expertise, the entire Cheval Blanc team contributed to the birth of Petit Cheval Blanc. We wanted every member of the château team to be involved in this project. So, we worked together to create Petit Cheval Blanc. We invented its identity, defined its profile, chose its personality, and forged its character. We then went on to give it the best possible upbringing, every bit as demanding as that of its famous older brother... The name we chose, Petit Cheval Blanc, bears witness to its prestigious lineage and proves our attachment to both its origin and its destiny.

Therefore, the entire château team is proud to present the newest addition to the family. This Petit Cheval Blanc broadens Château Cheval Blanc's horizons and makes us even more excited, thrilled, and passionate about the future.

PIERRE LURTON

PETIT CHEVAL BLANC



BIRTH OF A PROJECT



The story of Petit Cheval Blanc began in 2006, when Château Cheval Blanc acquired Château La Tour du Pin. Planted with Merlot and Cabernet Franc, and a little over eight hectares in size, this *grand cru* produced red wine entitled to the Saint-Émilion Grand Cru appellation. The oldest plot of vines dated back to 1950. The two estates are separated only by a small road leading from Saint Emilion to Pomerol.

The former La Tour du Pin vineyard rapidly underwent a profound restructuring. After close observation, it was found that 1.3872 hectares out of eight had a superb potential for red wines, with a terroir exactly like Cheval Blanc's. This part of the vineyard was therefore absorbed into that of the Château Cheval Blanc in 2012.

The rest, six and a half hectares, had a very different, but just as interesting profile. The terroir was less dry there. This normally constitutes a handicap for red wines, but is an asset for whites. Becoming aware of this fine potential was the start of everything, and a radical conversion was decided upon: a white Bordeaux would be made at Château Cheval Blanc.





Tests were conducted in 2008 to determine the potential of the soil. Sauvignon Blanc was top grafted on two small plots totalling half a hectare. Viticultural techniques took the characteristics of each plot into account: the age of the vines, their sun exposure, and the grape variety. This tailor-made treatment followed through in winemaking in order to fine tune the final blend. The estate was renovated at the same time. A veritable nature sanctuary was also established, with a vegetable garden, fruit trees, beehives, a hen house, etc.

Setting out to create a white Bordeaux, the château team was entirely free to do as they saw fit because this had never been done before.

The only question they asked themselves was this: if Cheval Blanc were white, what would it be?

Or, more precisely, who would it be?

The answer soon became obvious: it should have the same characteristics as Cheval Blanc. Like Cheval Blanc, it should not just flatter the palate. It should be of uncompromising quality: pure, long, deep, and with good ageing potential - a rare quality in a white wine...

In short, the white wine should be made just as rigorously and reach the same heights as the red.

It was thus only logical to call on the Cheval Blanc technical team to achieve this goal. Of course, implementing such an ambitious project was time-consuming and delicate. We had to cope with errors, failures, and disappointments along the way, constantly calling ourselves into question... This was all part and parcel of a steep learning curve leading to a simple conclusion: there is no magic recipe for making white wine at Cheval Blanc. Humbled by this experience, we patiently tried our hand at making white wine in five different vintages. However, none of them met our expectations, and they have stayed ageing in the château cellars, and will never be on the market. These five vintages show our willingness to wait as long as it took to attain the quality we were seeking! Everyone at the estate knows that the hallmark of a truly stellar wine is its ability to age...

Our efforts and patience finally paid off: in September 2016, Château Cheval Blanc will be introducing 2014 Petit Cheval Blanc on the market. This vintage is one the estate can truly be proud of. Everyone on the château team is delighted with this wine and proud to be writing the start of a new chapter in the history of Cheval Blanc...



2006 ACQUISITION OF CHÂTEAU LA TOUR DU PIN
2009 FIRST SAUVIGNON BLANC SAMPLE LOTS AND FIRST BOTTLES PRODUCED

2016 SEVEN PLOTS OF WHITE WINE VARIETIES IN PRODUCTION
2016 THE FIRST VINTAGE (2014) IS RELEASED IN SEPTEMBER



THE TERROIR

Petit Cheval Blanc is the result of our very demanding ambition, a specific microclimate, and a propitious terroir. The soil producing this white Bordeaux is rich, varied, and complex. Part of the estate (about two hectares) has clay soil. The rest is more sandy, more moist, and less subject to water stress than Cheval Blanc. In fact, the terroir's water supply is especially suitable to the production of great white wines!

We mapped out the vineyard in minute detail and did soil surveys over several years to learn about the terroir's various facets and to understand the potential of each plot. Thanks to this detailed cartography, the outline of vineyard plots was redrawn based on the type of soil. The goal was simple: in order for the vineyard to produce its very best, it was essential to know each and every part of it intimately.

The next step was to find the perfect harmony between the terroir and the vines. We adapted the appropriate grape varieties and rootstock to each plot. With a view to making the best possible wine, the bywords in making this choice were diversity and complementarity. We also made a major effort in selecting the most suitable vine plants to match the soil in each plot - a very delicate task.



GRAPE VARIETES

Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon: the varieties we chose for Petit Cheval Blanc correspond to the traditional blend for white Bordeaux. Our white wine proudly reflects its Bordeaux roots. However, we have our own vision of what these two grape varieties should do at Cheval Blanc. In much the same way that we use mass selection to propagate vines at Cheval Blanc to have exactly the quality we want, we meticulously chose white wine vines of various origins to produce fruity, complex wines. Our vineyard thus contains no fewer than six different clones of Sauvignon Blanc and three of Sémillon.





SAUVIGNON BLANC



This classic white wine variety in Bordeaux is also typical of the Loire Valley. It does well on sandy soil. At Cheval Blanc, we planted Sauvignon Blanc on several different terroirs: clay soil, as well as sandy soil with varying degrees of water supply. The combination enables us to obtain different facets of the same grape variety, which tends to express itself according to the water stress it is subject to. Sauvignon Blanc has very compact bunches with small berries that retain a great deal of freshness. In addition to freshness, this variety contributes to minerality and crispness in the wine, as well as good, but not excessive acidity.

SÉMILLON



This variety was planted on one hectare located in the upper part of the estate, with the highest clay content. Sémillon needs moderate water supply to release all its aromas. Clay soil is therefore ideal. The bunches are less tight, larger, and more spread out on the vine than Sauvignon Blanc. The berries are also bigger. Sémillon gives the wine its roundness, “sweetness”, richness, silky texture, and volume on the palate. It therefore serves as a foil to Sauvignon Blanc’s tight, mineral tangy side. Furthermore, Sémillon enhances the wine’s ageing potential and complexity. Planted in 2016, this Sémillon will soon be producing grapes. Its upcoming inclusion in the blend would undoubtedly contribute to making Petit Cheval Blanc even better thanks to added complexity.

OUR VINES

Petit Cheval Blanc benefits

from the same care and attention as the neighbouring vines at Cheval Blanc. For example, the same person prunes each plot year after year, “sculpting” every vine based on his observation and judgement, deciding on the total number of buds to leave according to each vine’s vigour and potential. The vines need to be attached by hand to the horizontal guide wires three times a year. This is generally done in May, June, and July to keep pace with vine growth.

The vines are topped (*écimage* in French) for the first time during this flowering period. This consists of trimming the uppermost part of shoots in order to limit vertical growth, as well as to facilitate aeration and take advantage of sunshine. Leaf thinning takes place after *nouaison*, or fruit set, in late June and early July.

Cheval Blanc’s vines are oriented north-south. Leaves around the grape bunches are thinned on the east-facing side to take full advantage of the rays of the rising sun.

Everything is done to free the area around each bunch and to aerate it. However, care is taken to leave a leaf just above, a sort of “cap” to protect the grapes from scorching heat when the sun is directly overhead.



Tillage removes weeds, as well as mixing and aerating the soil. This is very important since it forces the vine roots to sink deep into the ground to find nourishment. Furthermore, it makes the vines less prone to nutritive deficiencies, as well as excess or insufficient water supply. A millimetre of rain only penetrates one centimetre of soil. Here, as at Cheval Blanc, no herbicides are used.

The white wine grapes are picked about ten days before the red wine ones. The harvest is done plot by plot, depending on the degree of ripeness in each one. In other words, the grapes are picked “à la carte”.

We are very demanding at Cheval Blanc and have a rather unusual approach to evaluating ripeness. We only pick grapes that are fresh, juicy, crunchy, and *al dente*.

They must have lively acidity, but no trace of greenness. They must be neither flabby nor syrupy sweet. Grapes are picked only when they have reached the exact desired degree of ripeness. The wine’s concentration and power depend on this key factor.

All the work done throughout the growing season is at stake.



FERMENTATION AND AGEING

The grapes are brought to Cheval Blanc's farm, which has retained its original name of La Tour du Pin, and is surrounded by Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon vines. Production, ageing, and bottling take place in the middle of this privileged natural environment.

The grapes are pressed as soon as they arrive at the cellar. Great attention is paid to the way that pressing is done. The juice is very gently extracted thanks to a horizontal pneumatic winepress.

Pressure must be gradual in order to obtain must without any herbaceous characteristics.

This juice is further clarified by straining it through the pomace as a sort of natural filter.

These operations take place over several days because grapes from each separate plot necessitate a day and a half of pressing. Keeping in mind the different ripening times in each plot, that makes a total of ten days entirely devoted to pressing.

In order to separate the juice from the must deposit (which could give the wine a herbaceous taste), it is put into small temperature-controlled vats for 24 hours. The juice is put into barrel as soon as fermentation starts. During the winter, each barrel is tasted every week by the technical team, who decide if the wine should undergo *bâtonnage* (lees stirring) or not. This consists of putting the lees into suspension with the help of a stainless steel rod, in order to "nourish" the wine. The team also decides whether or not to add sulphur to certain barrels. Once again, conclusions reached from tasting are essential.

White wines are said not to benefit from long ageing, so generally spend six to nine months in barrel. However, we chose a different path, as odd as this may seem: Petit Cheval Blanc ages over two winters, i.e. sixteen or even eighteen months. This long barrel ageing enables a white wine not only to take nourishment from the lees, but also to become stable, deposit its lees, and become purer.

A crisp, tight, and pure wine becomes richer and rounder thanks to barrel ageing. This process gives the wine, whatever its colour, an impression of sweetness as well as unique aromas and richness.

A further key factor adds to this ageing on the lees: the influence of oak. Only new oak, which we choose with the greatest care, can give roundness to the wine. Only a few experts working with rare raw material - coopers in Austria, Sancerre, and Burgundy - are able to meet our specific needs. We have also decided to use large (1,500-3,000 litre) oak vats for Petit Cheval Blanc which add an aromatic component to the bouquet, but do not overwhelm it.

During this long ageing period, the wine is left largely undisturbed and receives very few additives. The Cheval Blanc technical team is vigilant, but stays in the background, intervening only to assist in obtaining clarity and stability. Grapes from every plot, and thus from every grape variety, are separately fermented. After ageing, the wines are blended in a huge stainless steel vat. This "white wedding" evens out, streamlines, and clarifies the wine before bottling.





THE PETIT CHEVAL BLANC STYLE

Tasting an outstanding new wine always makes your heart beat faster. It is like opening the shutters and discovering a new world of smells, sensations, and emotions.

Petit Cheval Blanc transports us to one of these unique and exciting new worlds, one full of great aromatic complexity that is, however, never overbearing.

The fruity nose features hints of apple, pear, bergamot, lemon, and grapefruit zest. There are also nuances of lychee, mango, passion fruit, as well as white flowers, lime blossom, and flowers.

No one instrument predominates in this subtle symphony of aromas. Echoing Cheval Blanc's extremely precise balance, Petit Cheval Blanc reflects the elegance and complexity of its noble origins.





Petit Cheval Blanc is tremendously fresh, vivacious, crunchy, and juicy. This great white wine has an impressively long aftertaste and a real presence, but also a certain reserve. It is full, generous, and rich on the middle palate. There is no hardness or any metallic hint to upset the harmony. Starting with its first gallop, Petit Cheval Blanc is already surprisingly delightful, full of freshness and floral aromas.

A new dream and a new history is born.

And this passionate adventure has only just begun.

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