

Design of the times

Not wishing to be left behind by the rise of modern New World wineries, many Bordeaux properties have embarked on ambitious projects to reinvigorate their estates, blending history and modernity to stunning effect, says Peter Richards MW

IN 1988, THE Châteaux Bordeaux Wine and Architecture Exhibition was an attempt to stir the bordelais into action in the face of New World dynamism. Architect Jean Dethier noted how wine architecture could be a force for modernisation, democratisation, hospitality and brand image. Bordeaux, he warned, needed to remedy its ‘cultural amnesia’.

The awareness of how architecture and wine can work together has arguably never been stronger in Bordeaux than it is today. Take the city itself – the eye runs from the stately grandeur of 18th-century riverfront façades to the cavorting swirls of the Cité du Vin cultural centre: a celebration of wine in arrestingly modern architecture. Such audacity is in evidence all across the region.

Roman architect Vitruvius defined the three fundamentals of architecture as beauty, usefulness and permanence. Château Margaux embodies all three, its iconic neo-Palladian château now flanked by the sober yet elegant

new winemaking facility by Foster & Partners. (‘So coherent, so refined’ was how the late Paul Pontallier described Margaux’s architecture to me.) Other examples of successful architectural regeneration – both historic and modern – can be found at Châteaux Lafite, Talbot, Pichon Baron and Beychevelle.

Château Le Pin took the *tabula rasa* approach, replacing a nondescript house with a sleek new edifice (retaining the emblematic pine trees, of course). Sustainability – an issue that deserves more prominence in wine design – was a factor in Cheval Blanc’s impeccable new winery, which is designed to save energy as well as facilitate precise winemaking.

The term ‘château’, intimately linked to Bordeaux, is an expression of ambition in both architectural and wine terms. The properties profiled here represent the new generation of winery design, tangible proof that Bordeaux’s ‘cultural amnesia’ has long been forgotten.

Peter Richards MW is an award-winning writer and broadcaster whose first book, Wineries with Style, focused on the architecture of wine around the world and won the Gourmand World Wine Awards

Château Pédesclaux

Pauillac

You notice Pédesclaux from afar. Above the vines of Pauillac rise a conspicuous dark box winery and a classical 19th-century château that seems to be encased in ice. The striking design by architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, completed in 2014, means the two buildings reflect each other both metaphorically and literally. The play of light is quite something, especially at sunset and sunrise. The winery is deceptively bulky – the land falls away so the true, significant scale of the building is only evident from the back. It’s enough to handle the 300,000-bottle production and more. Owners (since 2009) Jacky and Françoise

The modern winery at Château Pédesclaux

Lorenzetti have acquired vineyards in different terroirs around the appellation (growth and replanting is ongoing) so the 58 double-compartment conical steel tanks enable precise vinifications. The idea is not to use pumps but to harness gravity – at the heart of the winery are ‘elevator vats’, which can weigh up to 10 tonnes when full, hoisted up or down as required between the levels for winemaking, barrel ageing and bottling.

• Visits by appointment 9am-12.30pm, 2pm-6pm; November to March, Monday-Friday; April to October, Monday-Saturday

www.chateau-pedesclaux.com ➤

Château Marquis d'Alesme Becker

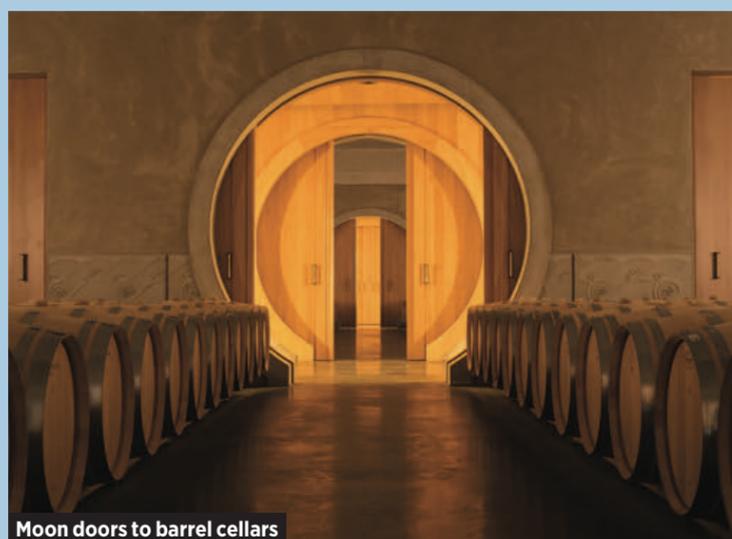
Margaux

East meets west in this thoughtful yet ambitious new development. It's right in the heart of Margaux – the entrance is opposite the town hall and the estate runs down towards Château Margaux. The elegantly proportioned classical exteriors pay homage to this context, but inside it's a different story. The Perrodo-Samani family, who also owns Château Labégorce, is Franco-Chinese and the interiors playfully allude to this. Above the vat room, a floor-to-ceiling window affords grand views over the vineyard and Margaux church, while intricate brass balustrades incorporate dragon-scale motifs, and bas-reliefs on the concrete walls make reference to elements such as earth, water and air. The entry hall ceiling features wicker designs modelled on a motif from the Forbidden City (architect Fabien Pédelaborde travelled widely for research), while moon doors give way to interconnecting barrel cellars. Construction of the complex took five years, involving 23 local companies, and the estate reopened in 2016. Tranquil landscape gardens provide the finishing touch.

• Visits by appointment May to October, Monday-Friday, 10am-7pm
www.marquisdallesme.wine



Château Marquis d'Alesme Becker



Moon doors to barrel cellars



The 'elegantly proportioned' classical exteriors

Château d'Arsac

Margaux

THE SPLASHES OF colour are visible from a distance, injecting intrigue into the landscape. Monumental artworks litter the grounds at Arsac, the 'life's work' of Philippe Raoux, who bought the dilapidated Margaux property with no vines in 1986 and has since worked tirelessly not only to re-establish the vineyard (now 108ha) but also create an artistic and architectural opus. Architect Patrick Hernandez helped with the latter vision. 'Some people want to build then cease to evolve; I prefer works in progress,' enthuses Raoux, whose aim is to buy one new artwork every year, 'as if each were an extension of the architecture – like building a new wing every time.' The overall effect, combined with Raoux's gentle passion, is inspiring and uplifting – playful in a landscape of formality. 'I want this to be a happy place,' muses Raoux. At every turn the eye is caught, from the château's glass-tiled roof to the stainless steel 'windows' and door of the Klein Blue cuvée.

• Visits via Bordeaux tourist office or by appointment, Monday-Friday at 2.30pm
www.chateau-arsac.com ➤



Skywatcher sculpture by Rotraut Klein Moquay

'The splashes of colour are visible from a distance, injecting intrigue into the landscape at Château d'Arsac'



Artworks in the grounds of Château d'Arsac

Photographs: Jean-Bernard Nadeau/Cephas; Jarry-Tripelion/Getty



The 'provocative architecture' of Jean Nouvel

Château La Grace Dieu des Prieurs

St-Emilion

It's highly unusual to encounter Chardonnay in St-Emilion amid the Merlot. 'We wanted to do something different,' says estate director Laurent Prospero with a smile – and disruption seems to be the name of the game at this unique property owned since 2013 by Russian businessman and chess fanatic Andreï Filatov. The provocative architecture is by Jean Nouvel. Only the historic Gironde château was kept (though renovated), and the idea was to recreate a classic farmyard. The circular cuvier is encased in an aluminium print depicting the life of a wine estate; inside, the floor depicts a colourful image of Yuri Gagarin, endlessly reflected in the stainless steel tanks. Art is important here – Filatov is founder of the Art Russe foundation and each vintage bottling has 12 alternative labels featuring different artworks from the collection. The strains of Rachmaninov echo through the facility as well as the circular barrel chai and the quarry-like tunnels below: maturation by music.

• Visits by appointment only
www.lagracedieudesprieurs.com ➤



Vat room



Circular cuvier

Photographs: Pascale Bayle; La Grace Dieudes Prieurs

Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion

Pessac-Léognan

Barely 30 minutes away from Bordeaux city centre, the Carmes estate is a peaceful haven featuring vines, trees, a château – and a stunning new €11m winery. Renowned French designer Philippe Starck teamed up with architect Luc Arsène-Henry to reinvigorate this historic estate, dating back to 1584 but owned since 2010 by urban developer Patrice Pichet. Despite its jutting, space-age design, the winery sits well in its context, the muted metal exteriors (made from Alucobond aluminium composite with resin) soberly reflecting the surroundings. This co-habitation of modern and traditional is a key theme in the building, with the interiors cleverly drawing the outside in. Construction wasn't easy, given the underground Peugeot

Photograph: Tim Atkin

watercourse – excavations and foundations had to go down 25m – but water now features in the reflective moat and there's a closed-loop water recycling system. Inside the gently curvaceous walls all is impeccable, from the underground barrel and amphora cellar to the vat room featuring painted cement tanks, tasting room and roof terrace. **D**

• Visits Monday-Saturday 9.30am-12.30pm,
2pm-6pm

www.les-carmes-haut-brion.com

