



PESSAC-LEOGNAN

Les Carmes Haut-Brion

This little walled property of 5ha, a Carmelite foundation, is close to Haut-Brion and thus within Bordeaux's city limits. The Chantecaille family of négociants owned it from the 19th century and built the château, and from 1997 it was run by Didier Furt, who had married into the family. Its typicity derives from the fact that Cabernet Franc is the dominant variety, closely followed by Merlot, the remainder being Cabernet Sauvignon. The band of clay below the sandy, gravelly topsoil suits Cabernet Franc as well as Merlot.

I often admired Furt's robust wines, and although he preferred them young, they aged well. They could be somewhat rustic, and there was undoubtedly a lack of consistency. In 2010 Carmes was purchased by property developer Patrice Pichet, who lived close by and clearly had his eye on the estate.

He was keen to build a new winery. But that wasn't easy here: he didn't want to pull out vines, and the estate's small park was listed and couldn't be built on. The only space available was the stream that traversed the vineyard. Architect Philippe Starck came up with the solution. He created a small island, and built the winery on and below it. The site

Above: Philippe Starck designed the Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion winery to resemble a ship's prow cutting through the water

determined the shape, which resembles a ship's prow built from aluminium panels.

A beautiful new winery doesn't confer greatness on a wine, although it's a useful tool. Pichet also hired Guillaume Pouthier as technical director; he had worked with Chapoutier in the Rhône. He introduced optical as well as manual sorting, partial destemming, light extraction with manual punchdowns, and aged wine in 80% new oak.

Furt made excellent wines in 2008 and 2009, but in succeeding years the wine gained in texture, polish and opulence; it's imposing but elegant, the tannins increasingly fine-grained. Even the 2013 was a success, though more forward in character. Only 35,000 bottles are produced, but it's worth seeking out.



Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion, Pessac-Léognan 2014 95

£60.19 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Fine & Rare, L'Assemblage**

Opulent blackcurrant and black cherry nose, with admirable elegance. Lavish and concentrated, an imposing wine, with a long, spicy, intense finish refreshed by a touch of mint. It may be an atypical Graves but it has terrific length and a polish that the previous owners never

quite achieved. **Drink 2020-2040 Alc 13.5%** >