

Les  
Cailloux  
BORDEAUX



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## The importance of 'Les Cailloux'

Two centuries ago, the proprietor of a leading Bordeaux château stunned the Court of Versailles by wearing a waistcoat studded with gems of a rare luster. King Louis XV was so taken with their beauty that he exclaimed, "Messieurs, here must be the richest man of my kingdom." "I am the the richest man," replied the proprietor, "for I am wearing the diamonds of my soil, and from the diamonds I make nectar." The nectar was the wines of Bordeaux.

The diamonds were the plain quartz stones of the Bordeaux top soil, cut and polished like gems. In their more familiar, unpolished form, the egg-shaped stones are called cailloux (pebbles). Dragged to Bordeaux in great abundance by glaciers that have since retreated to the Pyrennes, the cailloux today are known to be a key to the greatness of the Bordeaux soil and its wines.

Many, if not most, of Bordeaux's greatest chateaux are located above deep beds of cailloux.

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## Vineyards

In the Medoc, all but a handful of the 62 classified growths are located in communes with the highest concentration of cailloux: Margaux, Pauillac, St. Julien and St. Estéphe. Indeed, in parts of Margaux, the topsoil is so stony that it is white. In Graves, (from "gravier," or gravel), first growth Haut Brion and rival La Mission Haut Brion sit on the deepest beds of stone -- so deep in fact that workers digging a new cellar at La Mission Haut Brion a few years back were stymied by loose stones that ran 18 feet deep.

Across the Dordogne, in St. Emilion, Château Cheval Blanc and Figeac command a central position atop the section of St. Emilion called the graves. (Not to be confused with the Graves commune previously mentioned; the other part of St. Emilion is called the côtes. Only two wines of undisputed first rank do not appear to owe a major debt to the cailloux, Pétrus and Ausone. Pétrus produces a great, if atypical, Bordeaux on a scant 30 acres of predominantly clay soil. Ausone manages quite well from soil that is mostly sand and lime. The uncanny success of Pétrus, however, may be explained by its cepage, one that is unique among the first growths. It is 95 percent merlot, a grape variety particularly well suited to clay. For Ausone, its position near the very top of the St. Emilion cotes may be the key. That position provides quick runoff of surface water, providing well drained soil. Such quick drainage is also believed to be the principal benefit of the cailloux.

FRANCE



In the Médoc, wine produced on soil with few cailloux tends to lack elegance and refinement. Indeed, wine from newer, alluvial soil, called palus, is never entitled to a classification above Bordeaux Superior. At all levels of the Bordeaux hierarchy the debt to the cailloux remains great.



Though the quartz diamonds that so impressed Louis XV are now collected in a Bordeaux museum, the Bordelaise have continued to pay their respects in other ways. The most visible are the several châteaux named in honor of the cailloux.





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**Les Cailloux  
Bordeaux Blanc**



**Les Cailloux  
Bordeaux Rouge**



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