

Saturday Morning: Larcis Ducasse 1945-2017

BY NEAL MARTIN | OCTOBER 06, 2020

Last September, twelve months or, in other words, a lifetime ago, I had the opportunity to taste through several decades of Larcis Ducasse. It seemed a more productive way to spend a Saturday morning in Bordeaux, instead of lazing on a beach in Arcachon devouring my weight in oysters or mooching around the city's chichi boutiques. I was eager to attend this biannual tasting since I was unable to materialize at the last edition, though Vinous readers can refer to Antonio Galloni's account in his report published in [March 2017](#). I thought that it would be interesting to compare respective observations of overlapping vintages bearing in mind they are different bottles and tasted two years apart.

Usually, I deep dive into the history of the property, though on this occasion, I will spare you a history lesson as it was covered this in the aforementioned article. However, I will add a couple of anecdotes from proprietor Jacques-Olivier Gratiot, who has overseen the estate since 1990.

The family has traditionally not been directly involved in the winemaking. They have resided in Paris. Previous generations came down to Saint-Émilion on vacation to lend a hand with the harvest. "There was a great warmth in the growing season," Gratiot recalled, as we tasted the 1945. "Many estates suffered because of the lack of rainfall. But, in those days, there was a well in the vineyard, so it was not such a problem for us. The first 'crushing' was done in wooden tubs (known locally as *bastes*). Pickers would push bunches down as much as possible so that they could put in more grapes. These would be carried on the back to a horse drawn cart and then to the vat-room. There was always a risk of oxidation and there was no de-stemming in those days."



Proprietor Jacques-Olivier Gratiot has overseen the estate since 1990.

In this period, Larcis Ducasse was a very different estate to the present one. Revenues were paltry, so much so that parts of the vineyard were given over to more profitable fruit trees, not uncommon on the Right Bank, up until the Sixties. Gratiot recalled how his mother was obliged to sell her car because they did not have enough money at the end of the month. Back then the sway of power resided with merchants who would come down to select the barrels they wished to bottle. The practice only finished in 1971 under incoming EU rules.

Whereas many Saint-Émilion estates such as Angéhus and Ausone began to invest and modernize during the Eighties, Larcis Ducasse remained stuck in the past with outdated *modus operandi*. It needed a change of personnel to propel the estate forward and fulfill the potential of its terroir whose neighbors include Pavie-Decesse and Troplong-Mondot, amongst others. That came with the appointment of Nicolas Thienpont in 2002 along with consultant Stéphane Deroncourt, incidentally both present at this tasting, subsequently joined by the talented David Suire. One of the first improvements undertaken was the installation of drainage channels and the replacement of some parcels of Cabernet Franc with Merlot. There was also greater focus picking phenolically ripe grapes obliging harvests conducted piecemeal according to the optimal ripeness of each plot. However, the second wine, *Murmure de Larcis Ducasse* was only belatedly introduced with the 2010 vintage. "Fruit was harvested from the lower vineyards located on the flatter soils than at the top," Thienpont explained. "It was easier to pick. You could crop at 55hL/ha compared to 20hL/ha."

The Wines

With respect to the wine overall, there is no question that Larcis Ducasse has dramatically improved in the last 15 years, achieving the potential commensurate with a vineyard occupying one of the most enviable terroirs in Saint-Émilion. That said, I did notice that the **2015 Larcis Ducasse** displayed an odd malodorous oxtail-like tincture on the nose that did not correlate to previous showings. I will leave a question mark against my score for now. The **2004 Larcis Ducasse** is a serious over-performer in one of the decade's middling growing seasons and as such, probably represents outstanding value. I am not a huge fan of the vintage, yet this punches well above its weight and in fact, it came across more like a 2005. A couple of cases of this overlooked gem would not go amiss in your cellar.

The older vintages are more inconsistent and attest a property that for many years was overdue investment. The triumvirate of great growing seasons, **1988**, **1989** and **1990** were missed opportunities, the bottle of 1989 I found muddled and fungal, clearly past what must have been a low peak. Though the 1990 Larcis Ducasse is better, it is beginning to dry on the finish and in the context of other 1990 Saint-Émilions it lacks sophistication.



Amongst the venerable vintages, the **1959 Larcis Ducasse** stood out with its maraschino cherry scented bouquet. It epitomizes this vintage that tends to be a little more consistent in Saint-Émilion than Pomerol (largely because it was not quite so decimated by the late spring frosts three years earlier that necessitated wide scale re-planting - readers can look forward to further insight into this vintage in the near future.) It trounced the **1961 Larcis Ducasse** that I found a little volatile on the nose, despite some improvement with aeration. It never quite kicked on like the best 1961s and felt a little fatigued on the finish. In the context of Right Bank 1961s, it is not terrible by any means – it is more like an “also ran” and marked one of the rare occasions where side-by-side I prefer the follow-up vintage. Indeed, the **1962 Larcis Ducasse** displayed much more vigor and cohesion, ditto the very commendable **1966**, almost Burgundian in style with hints of menthol. Of course, tasting 1945s is always a privilege, especially when it comes from perfect provenance like this, although having accreted quite a number of tasting notes from this *année de victoire*, I do not rank it amongst the finest as it lacked a bit of flesh and grip on the finish, and does not have the finesse of a top performing 1945 that are more consistent on the Left Bank.

This was a fascinating tasting of what is presently one of the appellation's strongest and most consistent performers, not to mention one of its best values. Its reputation suffered by being late to the party in terms of modernization, though it has caught up and perhaps even overtaken the 'opposition'. To reiterate, Larcis Ducasse continues to represent great value compared to some of its peers not a great distance away.

It was certainly a constructive way to spend a Saturday morning in Bordeaux. I can eat oysters another time. If only I could taste a 1945 every Saturday morning.

[See the Wines from Youngest to Oldest](#)

Vintage ↑ (Hover for Commentary) Producer Name Tasting Notes Score Author Drinking
Window Release Price Review Date

2017 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2017 Larcis Ducasse was picked from 18 September until 2 October. It has a very well defined bouquet with tightly wound black cherries, raspberry and bilberry fruit, touches of iodine developing in the glass, comparatively intense for a 2017 vintage. The palate is medium-bodied with supple tannins, fine acidity, but just missing that "spark" that would elevate it higher. It has fine density and gentle grip with touches of brown spice and mint towards the finish. It finishes in rather "serious" fashion with moderate length. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 91 Neal Martin 2022 - 2038 Not Available Oct 2020

2015 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2015 Larcis Ducasse has a strange nose with oxtail scents, dried blood aromas infusing the black fruit. The palate is rich and opulent with layers of red berry fruit and much more representative of the bottle tasted last year. There is no way I can score this but will taste another bottle. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin ? Neal Martin Not Available Oct 2020

2014 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2014 Larcis Ducasse is obviously very young on the nose but there is a lot of potential: blackberry, wild strawberry, pain d'épices and just a touch of meat juices. This has character although, it feels very backward. The palate is medium-bodied with supple tannins and fine acidity, a little chewiness to contend with on the entry, tobacco, cedar and a touch of leather developing towards the finish. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 93 Neal Martin 2022 - 2040 Not Available Oct 2020

2012 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2012 Larcis Ducasse remains quite deep in colour. It has an intense bouquet, although it has eased off the accelerator in recent years, exhibiting scents of blackberry, briary, sage and hints of iodine. There is a touch of precocity in situ, but it feels nicely contained and focused. The palate is medium-bodied with succulent ripe tannins, leaning to what one might describe as a "modern" style of Saint-Émilion. Velvety smooth in texture, there is a luxuriant carapace of new oak, but that is proportionate to the fruit concentration underneath. Afford it another three to five years in bottle. Excellent. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 93 Neal Martin 2020 - 2045 Not Available Oct 2020

2010 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2010 Larcis Ducasse is a wine that tasted stupendous from barrel, but I subsequently encountered two perplexing showings blind after bottling. Fortunately, this replicates that initial showing. It is beautifully defined on the nose with dark cherries, dark chocolate, raspberry and touches of vanilla. It is vigorous and seems to be opening its first few chapters. The palate is medium-bodied and fresh as a daisy, fine tannins, very cohesive with a lovely sapid finish that lingers in the mouth. Superb grip with a candied element that becomes more evident with aeration. Superb. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 95 Neal Martin 2025 - 2055 Not Available Oct 2020

2009 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2009 Larcis Ducasse has an outstanding bouquet with black cherries, wild strawberry, dried herbs, touches of orange zest, veins of blue fruit emerging with time. The palate is medium-bodied with supple tannins that disguise the weight and heft of this Saint-Émilion. Very well balanced with savory, meat juices,

curry powder and light leathery notes towards the persistent finish. This is just superb...but I wonder where it will be in ten years time? Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 94 Neal Martin 2019 - 2021 Not Available Oct 2020

2008 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2008 Larcis Ducasse has a precocious bouquet that you might mistake for a 2009: kirsch, mint, star anis, black cherries and a touch of Xmas cake. It just comes across a little too strong for my liking and I still find some VA here, perhaps more so than the previous bottle tasted a year ago. The palate is actually better with grainy tannins, firm grip and a pleasant chalky texture. I find this a little reserved and serious on the finish where I would have liked more flesh. There needs to be more vivacity here. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 91 Neal Martin 2020 - 2036 Not Available Oct 2020

2005 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2005 Larcis Ducasse is blessed with one of my favourite bouquets with redcurrant, cranberry, orange zest and rose petal aromas - really effervescent and engaging. The palate is medium-bodied with succulent tannins, very harmonious and almost Burgundian with tobacco and cedar towards the structured and persistent finish. This is superb and it will give many years of drinking pleasure. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 95 Neal Martin 2021 - 2050 Not Available Oct 2020

2004 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 2004 Larcis Ducasse is surprisingly deep in colour. It boasts a really lovely bouquet considering the vintage, one you might suspect belongs to a richer growing season like 2005: blackberry, raspberry coulis, mint and a touch of juniper berry and sandalwood. The oak is nicely integrated here. The palate is medium-bodied with supple tannins and well judged acidity, impressive in terms of fruit intensity: blackberry, cranberry and strawberry mixed with tobacco and black pepper. Very cohesive with a gentle grip on the finish, you could broach this 2004 Larcis Ducasse now, but it will unquestionably give another couple of decade's drinking pleasure. Punches above its weight. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 93 Neal Martin 2020 - 2045 Not Available Oct 2020

1998 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1998 Larcis Ducasse is a vintage that I have not tasted for a very long time. To be honest, I find the nose a little frail and one-dimensional considering the precocity on the Right Bank that year - light red fruit, rose petals and leather, but little in the way of vigour. The palate is medium-bodied with fleshy tannins, moderate weight but surprisingly think for a 1998 and this property, with a four square finish that does not stick in the memory. I wonder how much this 1998 has left in the tank? Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 87 Neal Martin 2019+ Not Available Oct 2020

1990 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1990 Larcis Ducasse has an open knit bouquet that lacks the vigour, touches of singed leather and orange rind. The palate is medium-bodied with leathery red fruit, slightly dry tannins with some fatigue on the finish. It sadly epitomizes an estate that needed a kick up the backside...and that would eventually come. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 87 Neal Martin 2019 - 2021 Not Available Oct 2020

1989 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1989 Larcis Ducasse has a rather fungal, confected bouquet that suggests some overripe fruit in the vat. It just lacks vigour and seems monotone. The palate is medium-bodied, rustic and confected with dry tannins, very mealy in texture with a green, fungal finish. Sub-par. Bottles should be drunk by now. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 75 Neal Martin 2019+ Not Available Oct 2020

1988 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1988 Larcis Ducasse has a strange bouquet with strong wood varnish aromas (it actually reminded me of my dad when he was painting his boat!) That ebbs a little with time but it still seems volatile. The palate is medium-bodied with grainy tannins, hard in texture with a rather tough leathery finish that suggests it will not repay further cellaring. Drink up. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 85 Neal Martin 2019 - 2020 Not Available Oct 2020

1983 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1983 Larcis Ducasse is a vintage that I have not seen before. It has a relatively simple bouquet with slightly smudged red fruit, cedar and tobacco, although I noticed how it gained clarity with aeration. Pretty rather than cerebral. The palate is medium-bodied with light tannins that are in proportion to the modest fruit concentration that has clearly faded in recent years. Earthy tones, cold black tea and touches of white pepper define the finish that is running out of puff. That said, it is still perfectly enjoyable even if bottles should be consumed in the near future. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 87 Neal Martin 2019 - 2025 Not Available Oct 2020

1971 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1971 Larcis Ducasse has a simple and slightly enervated bouquet with rustic red fruit, ferrous in style with strong scorched earth and leather aromas. The palate is medium-bodied with finer tannins than expected, good acidity, bay leaf and sage infusing the red fruit with just a bit of dryness coming in towards the finish. Fine, but drink soon. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 87 Neal Martin 2019 - 2021 Not Available Oct 2020

1967 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1967 Larcis Ducasse is a vintage that I have tasted once before. It has a very well defined bouquet with black fruit, black tea, clove and bay leaf - frankly one of the best Saint-Émilion 1967s you will find. The palate is medium-bodied with fine tannins, plenty of freshness, quite linear in style with only a touch of dryness on the Earl Grey-tinged finish. But other than that, this 1967 is as good as it comes. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 91 Neal Martin 2019 - 2024 Not Available Oct 2020

1966 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1966 Larcis Ducasse is a vintage that I have encountered once or twice before, both leaving a positive impression. It has retained a deep, clear colour with a minimal bricking on the rim considering its age. The bouquet is very satisfying: brambly red fruit, menthol, something almost Burgundian as I have observed before. The palate is medium-bodied with grainy tannins that have dried a little in recent years. It is an understated 1966 without the structure of others born this year. Raspberry, cedar and light balsamic notes form the slightly austere finish in keeping with the vintage, a peppery residue lingering on the aftertaste. I would drink bottles over the next four to six years. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 91 Neal Martin 2019 - 2026 Not Available Oct 2020

1962 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1962 Larcis Ducasse is one of the very few instances where the vintage surpasses the 1961: fine definition, red berry fruit, briary, mint and a touch of leather develop with time. This seems to have more focus and vigour. The palate is thoroughly pleasurable: saturated tannins, fine acidity, fresh and lively with red cherries, crushed strawberry and a touch of spice towards the cohesive finish. Delicious - just like the previous bottle I tasted. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- Neal Martin 90 Neal Martin 2019 - 2027 Not Available Oct 2020

1961 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1961 Larcis Ducasse is deep in colour with very little bricking on the rim. I find the bouquet a little disjointed and volatile compared to other 1961s that I have tasted (at least in this bottle). It does not deliver the complexity or bravura aromas that the best Right Banks offer, although it does improve with aeration to offer camphor, black olive and touches of eau-de-vie. The palate is medium-bodied with soft tannin, fleshy red fruit mixed with leather and sage, but it sags towards the finish. I have encountered numerous superior bottles of Right Bank 1961 than this example. A second bottle was even more fungal and I scored it lower! Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- **Neal Martin 87? Neal Martin 2019 - 2023 Not Available Oct 2020**

1959 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1959 Larcis Ducasse has a lovely bouquet, perhaps even better than the 1945, boasting vivacious maraschino cherries, blackberry, brown spices, leather and cedar. This is beautifully defined if not as flamboyant as some of its peers. The palate is medium-bodied with a fleshy opening. It is not a deep or precocious 1959 and I suspect that it has passed its peak in graceful decline. But I cannot resist its charming cola and clove-tinged finish and it is certainly one of the best vintages of this era. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- **Neal Martin 94 Neal Martin 2019 - 2030 Not Available Oct 2020**

1945 Larcis Ducasse Larcis Ducasse

The 1945 Larcis Ducasse is very deep in colour with a thin tawny rim. The bouquet is not as immediate as other 1945s that I have tasted. Rather, it gradually unfurls to reveal attractive red berry, cola and mint plus a touch of Christmas cake. The aromatics display vigour and precision that belie its age. The palate is medium-bodied with firm tannins, dark berry fruit intermixed with allspice and cloves. It is not as fleshy or finessed as some other 1945s, but overall, a Saint-Émilion endowed with density. Tasted at the Larcis Ducasse vertical in Bordeaux.

-- **Neal Martin 91 Neal Martin 2019 - 2030 Not Available Oct 2020**