

# HIGHBROW LIVING

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A Monthly Brief on Nigeria's Luxury Real Estate Markets



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PROPERTY OFFER: EXTRAORDINARY MANSION IN ABUJA | HOMEWORK: ELEGANT HOME OFFICE DESIGNS

In Nigeria, we are blessed with such a wide array of formidable cooking styles and diverse tastes. So, for a sublime dining experience, that I know for food to not be a problem, but you do not want to serve your food with it is a wrong choice of wine. You do not want to see that will take away from the taste of your food instead of enhancing it. So, let's dive right into some ways of avoiding such a mistake and take you through the various food categories and the wine matches.

**Rich and Oily food:** We are a nation of the best palm oils and many of the dishes in Nigeria consist of oils in one form or the other. So we need a full-proof choice, when cooking all the usual African soups, Egusi soup, Moin moin, etc. with a sense of the aroma (libad) that goes with it. The way to go is to have a wine, high in acidity and full-bodied to be able to cut through the fatty taste and cleanse the palate through the meal.

What to do: Because of its high acidity, medium body, and low level of oak maturation, this wine is perfect for an amazing dinner that will enhance the Nigerian dining experience. It is quite easy to find and all you need to do is decide if you want Old World Pinot Noir like Bourgogne or a New World Pinot Noir, like Pinot Noir from Oregon.

**New World wine:** California (Santa Barbara, Sonoma etc), Chile (Cachapoal Valley, Aconcagua), New Valley & Marlborough, New Zealand (Marlborough, Central Otago), and of course, in South Africa of which is a beautiful region of Walker Bay produce some amazing Pinot Noir.

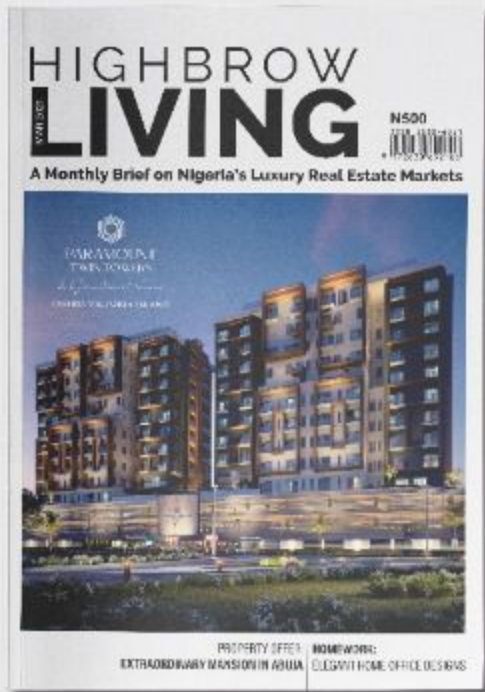
**Lighter food:** Call it whatever you want but this is the food that puts African food on the map and as my wife would say "that's an old-fashioned way" because of this being light, I have two suggestions.

If you do not like the burning sensation in your mouth while eating a hot meal, I will suggest a low-alcoholic wine with heat and food flavors that will help reduce the heat but still increase the enjoyment of the food.

**Champagne:** The bubbles of champagne are important in highlighting the taste of the spices, so the high-acidity level blends perfectly with the spices. Finally, allowing the cooling effect of the champagne to appease the heat built a sense of calm or a slight champagne will get you started off to a good start... Champagne Anytime!







# Tasting of Naija & Lebanese food in the GEM of Bordeaux

by Chinedu Rita Rosa



Photography credits - Roger Das

When my friend Hela Mansour, the owner of Bordeaux Walking Tours (top tour guide, specialist in Bordeaux & Aquitaine Region) told me that we had been invited to the renowned Château Biac, I was very excited because this meant I would get to share with you my readers, a rare and insiders experience into this family-owned Château which I knew was going to be an amazing journey!

This family calls themselves “accidental winemakers”, having had no intention to go into wine production, buying the property was supposed to be a purchase of a family holiday home which Youmna and Tony had planned to be their luxurious retirement project. But if there is anything that is true about wine in my personal experience “If you have lived it, you can’t leave it”.

Driving into this magnificent estate, there is this sensation “of leaving the rest of the world behind” said Youmna. This was immediately

apparent for I also saw something that made me very welcome and at home, a Lebanese flag!

Yes, Château Biac belongs to a Lebanese family and you can not miss this fact because the owners are the first people we met as we drove in. Even in this time of a global pandemic, Youmna Asseily, “the force” as I have privately named her, was all smiles and warmth, while Tony Asseily, her loving husband was on a mini tractor working on another amazing project of Youmna’s, aimed at improving the beauty and the accessibility of the grounds in the Château.

This unique Château overlooks the plain of the Graves appellation, “with a natural amphitheater overlooking the Garonne River from a height of 92 meters, one of the highest vineyards in the Bordeaux region, with the extra plus of the river reflections in maintaining the heat of the sun that protects against frost and increases the ripeness of the grapes.

This 9.5 hectares of picturesque location is not only stunning to behold but the vines have a special story of their own.

The vines for the white wine came from Château d’Yquem, whilst those for the red came from the very finest Châteaux in St Emilion”.

Bordeaux varietals (wine grapes) such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot (which was introduced in 2007, quite rare in the Côtes de Bordeaux) and for their white wines they have Semillon for the sweet wine and Sauvignon blanc for the dry white wine.

The quality of this terroir was confirmed by Professor Denis Dubourdieu (The late former President of the Faculty of Oenology) “it has the best terroir of the Côtes de Bordeaux and



Photography credits - Roger Das

one of the most interesting ones in the region” that gives Château Biac a rare advantage of having soils particular to the left bank “Gravel soil” and to the Right “Clay and Limestone” and Côtes typical soil of clay and chalk with high-density gravel, which is perfect for Bordeaux wines.

All that was needed to complete a dream Château was the Winemaking experts and in this, Youmna and Tony struck gold.

They were joined by Christine Sourdes who is their dry white and sweet wine consultant (she consults also for Château Guiraud and Chateau de Myrat), but when they got a legend in the winemaking world, Patrick Léon who was technical director of the Mouton Rothschild wine estates (including Opus One in California and Almaviva in Chile) and his long-time collaborating agricultural engineer, Gilles Rey, to join the Château Biac team, there was no doubt they were ready for success.

But the best moment as parents and owners, was when Yasmina the eldest daughter became the Sales and Marketing Director in 2013 and again in 2019 when Gabriel their son took up the Technical Operations of the estate.

Now there is no doubt that Youmna and Tony finally accept the hard-earned title of a premium winemaking Château with a fantastic team of brilliant people from the wine world and every businessman and woman’s dream of having their children taking an active role in creating and keeping a legacy of excellence.

It was not difficult to start up a conversation and I can say I felt right at home by the second minute!

Here is a woman who is known for her organizational, artistic, culinary skills and just an all-around fabulous person.

I felt very much at home in Biac as a Nigerian, a familiar family dynamic, where a beautiful grandson, Luca was being put down for a nap, filled with love and laughter, good food, and plenty of amazing wine which brought us naturally to the subject of food and wine pairing in less than an hour.

A date to cook and have our local dishes paired with the wines from Château Biac was immediately agreed to. We both have a passion for pairing and tasting our traditional foods with wines from Bordeaux and all over the Wine World. Yes, you get to read about the tasting adventure in

this same edition!

Tony Asseily, who is a lovely gentleman, had given us ladies time to chat away that whole day, while he kept busy at making sure Youmna's new project of creating a Mediterranean-themed oasis dining area was being implemented. But I finally got to see his passion in winemaking displayed when it was time to talk of the wines of Château Biac.

Tony has an apparent love, knowledge of the history of Château Biac and its wines. He has a hands-on approach and as he speaks, you could feel the sense of achievements and the pride he feels for his home and business.

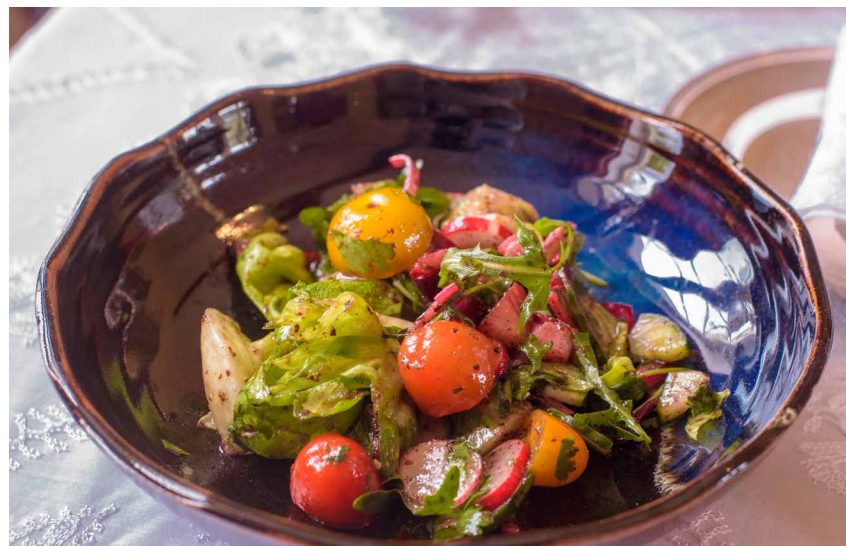
This comes from the fact that this couple had not planned to be wine-makers but have totally embraced their beautiful yet laborious world of winemaking and they have been personally involved in every single aspect of renovations and improvement in their property, their touch is everywhere.

This was an unforgettable visit and it won't be my last one because Youmna and Tony are now part of my family! (You know how we Lebanese and Nigerians do! hahaha) but if you want to visit this gorgeous gem of Bordeaux, you will get a personal tour of their property, taste their wines, and even spend beautiful moments in the extended guesthouses in the Château.

I have never been to a Château that really reflects such warmth, modesty, and honesty with just the beauty and facts of being a hardworking, but happy owner of a really magnificent wine-producing Château and home.



Sheikh el mehshe (Stuffed eggplants)



Youmna special Lebanese Salad



Iranian crusty rice

## THE WINES OF CHATEAU BIAC

**Château Biac:** There is no set recipe for this explosive wine, every year the wine is determined by the best of the elements provided (the grapes, the weather) the vintage is created with the one thought of getting the best wine that the grapes in the vineyard can produce. So every Vintage is Unique!

**B De Biac:** Comes from the same plots, but is made in a more ready-to-drink fruity and fresh approach, but has all the force and complexity of a Biac wine.

**Secret De Biac:** "The Rolls Royce of Cadillac sweet wines" the grapes picked for this golden nectar, are chosen meticulously one by one in several passages dictated by the presence of the Noble Rot: Botrytis (evaporation of water in the grape, concentration of sugars, acids, and flavors) with heightened aromas of dried apricots, white peaches, and white flowers. This is indeed a secret weapon of Chateau Biac and is only made when all the elements are perfect so this is definitely a treasure. With a 99% semillon & 1% sauvignon blanc

It took less than an hour for Youmna Asseily to agree and commit to a Lebanese/Nigerian food and wine tasting date! I was thrilled and I got to share this day with my friends who were as curious as we were to see the success of this multi-cultural tasting.

In attendance was highly acclaimed Wine Journalist, Jane Anson who writes a monthly column in Decanter Magazine and is the author of Bordeaux Legends, an accredited wine teacher at the Bordeaux École du Vin.

Hela Mansour (my African sister) Guide extraordinaire of Bordeaux Walking Tours and finally Tony Asseily, owner of Château Biac.

With these fantastic ladies and gentleman, we were ready to dive into this adventure of wine pairing and tasting that has never been done before, by 2 women who have a genuine love for Food, Wine, and Life!

In my quest to demystify wines, I have always thought about the taste of foods and the pairing with wines from all regions. I want everyone, my fellow Nigerians and Africans to know that every food has a wine match and we will find them all!





*Spicy puff with a sprinkle of cinnamon and brown sugar and Mhalabiyeh (milk pudding with apricot coulis sauce)*

## WHY ARE WINES ALWAYS PAIRED WITH WESTERN FOODS IN MAGAZINES?

Youmna's response was a direct echo of my thoughts and beliefs.

"Although one might raise a doubtful eyebrow at the mention of a Nigerian Lebanese food pairing with classic Bordeaux blend wines, the experience of our lunch proved otherwise that food and wine, when carefully selected and made, go together in a fresh outlook on new taste experiences..."

After all, Bordeaux has always dealt with exotic places as an international harbor for centuries: rum in the Caribbean, spices from the east, etc..."

So here I am again, taking my Najja essence to a renowned Château in Bordeaux with wines that are in my opinion, perfectly suited for our multicultural tasting party!

**TIP:** The flavor of the wine should not be more or less powerful than the

flavor of the food, which is why it is called a Match!

We started with **B de Biac** with a blend of 77% Merlot 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Cabernet Franc, a fruity, fresh, balanced, and well-blended tannins. Very easy to drink and a perfect start.

**Nigerian Dish:** This wine was perfect for **Chicken Suya** which was slightly spicy and had the crunchy elements of the roasted peanuts and also went perfectly with the **Suya lamb ribs**, releasing the lovely aromas from the smokey and Umami flavors in the spices, this was a definite hit! While the **roasted plantain** brought the smokey/sweet taste of Africa's most versatile comfort food.

**TIP:** When you want your wine to be versatile enough to pair it with red or white meat, have a wine with a higher percentage of Merlot, the Cabernet



Sauvignon gives it the power, while the Cabernet Franc gives moderate spiciness to the wines.

This combination gives you a wine that will not be overpowering but fresh and fruity enough to balance with the flavor of red meat and gentle enough tannins that will not overpower your white meat.

**Lebanese Dish:** The **Château Biac** 2013 56% Merlot, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc, 8% Petit Verdot was a blend that sparkled with the Lebanese dish **Sheikh el Mehsheh** (aubergine confit and stuffed with a light spiced meat sauce and crunchy rice, the slow cooking method applied).

This dish was filled with amazing oriental flavors and moderate spices but the wine balanced it out nicely with Petit Verdot giving it that added structure and elegant complexity. Hints of oak and vanilla complemented the light sweetness in the sauce.

**Nigerian Dish:** When pairing this

Nigerian special dish, Ayama's special sauce, rice with fried plantains, I knew immediately that the best match would be Château Biac 2014 with a blend of 85% Merlot, 10% Petit Verdot, 5% Cabernet Franc.

This wine packed a serious punch, and could cut through the taste of palm oil and spices, with ripe fruity flavors that combined perfectly with the red bell peppers & fried plantains.

**TIP:** The longer and hotter the cooking method, the more intensely flavored the finished dish will be, so the bigger and more powerful the wine you can match it with!

**For Desserts:**

**Nigerian:** I made **puff-puff** with nutmeg, sprinkled with cinnamon and brown sugar, this is one of my favorite comfort food and I was sincerely happy because it is the first time I have tried to pair it with wine.

"The Rolls Royce of Cadillac" **Secret de Château Biac** 2012 is a 99%

Semillon and 1% sauvignon blanc sweet wine blend of Spiced nose, delicate aromas of vanilla, cinnamon. Generous and round on the palate, with bitter orange aromas, this wine was a revelation and the reaction was totally shared by all and I can now tell you with 100% certainty, that this is a match that I will be showcasing more in the future.

**Lebanese: Mhalabiyeh** Lebanese milk pudding with dried apricot coulis paired with **Secret de Château Biac** paired brilliantly: as sweet wines go, secret is not heavy to drink and retains the freshness one might expect from the high position where the vines used in creating this fabulous wine is cultivated".

**TIPS:** I am not too fond of sweet wines, so if you are like me, make sure you buy sweet wines that have some acidity, this will reduce the overly sweet and syrupy taste.

Make sure your sweet wine is always sweeter than your dessert.

We look forward to continuing in this tasting journey and discovering more "aha" and "oh yes" moments!

There is so much more about Château Biac that I will be sharing with you in the near future, but if you would like to know more about the wines and the history of this amazing Gem of Bordeaux, get in touch with me.

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## *What is your dream wedding scenario?*

I have always loved weddings and for me, the idea of romance and promises of the future with the one you love is an inspiring, beautiful story that we want to cherish forever. And as an event planner my first thoughts are always LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!!

Believe me, I have searched high and low for properties around the world's finest wine region, Bordeaux and across France to find the best dream locations that will not only be beautiful, but have all the Key points that make a wedding memorable. Then came the day I walked into this estate, I was overcome by a sense of joy, serenity and yes love, the beautiful stone walls and magnificent edifice is a sight to behold. The team onsite made me feel at home immediately, there was no doubt about it; Château de la Ligne entangled my heart, a real *coup de coeur!*



Situated just 30 minutes from the Bordeaux International Airport, the train station as well as downtown Bordeaux, so not only do you get to have your dream wedding in a glorious Chateau but everything leading up to that special day! Shopping, dancing and sightseeing with every detail handled by an event planner and concierge services provided by the Chateau for the duration of your stay.

Château de la Ligne (chateau on the line) is a 17th century castle with a 3 hectares garden that can rival the very best in the world. 11 hectares of beautiful vineyards where ceremonies can be held and your guests can be transported into a magical moment of pure beauty and history.

A large outdoor heated swimming pool with beautiful white umbrellas and lounge chairs that depicts a picturesque scene of pure relaxation.

What I love most about this Chateau is the instant feeling of welcome and warmth you get from Barry and Lisa, a super friendly young Irish vibrant couple, I can't say enough! They believe the Chateau is your home as soon as you walk in and will do everything to make sure your event surpasses your dream.

Barry Duffy, the enigmatic Managing Director oversees this lovely Chateau and is married to Lisa who is the daughter of Mr Terry Cross, a Belfast Businessman



that purchased Chateau de la Ligne on Saint Patrick's Day 2000, talk about Irish luck!

This makes this Chateau a truly Irish run family Chateau that has earned them a place with the famous Original Irish settlers in the wine region of Bordeaux called the "oie sauvage" wild geese!

This inside look into one of the most romantic and best equipped Chateau for the wedding of your dreams was a blast, not only does this Chateau give you all the necessary WOW factor, but it has the Wines and Spirits to make your wedding an unforgettable and definite success! And it's secret weapon that does not exist

in any other chateau in Bordeaux

"An Irish Bar" yes! This Chateau has a bar that serves Guinness Stout and other Traditional Irish and international delights. And to top it up, Chateau de La Ligne produces award winning wines which are famous for their excellent reds (Château de la Ligne Grande Reserve and Cuvée Prestige) Bordeaux Blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, a Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon blend white wine (Marquis de La Ligne Bordeaux Blanc) and of course a Rosé that would make a delightful addition to a summer wedding, but best of all a Crémant de Bordeaux (Sparkling wine made in the Traditional Champagne



style in Bordeaux) which will rival any champagne and truly give your wedding the sparkling and celebratory ambience that will make your wedding a really unforgettable experience! These wines are made with the expert advice of viticultural and agronomical consultants Mr Gilles Pauquet and Mr Stephan Toutoundji, who are also consultant oenologists to Château Cheval Blanc (le Grand Cru Classe in Saint-Emilion), talk about class!

With your arrival to the chateau, another thing you can look forward to are the gorgeous rooms that every romantic getaway dreams are made of, with ornate antique furniture, spacious, luxurious bathrooms that makes you feel like a real princess, the views from the bedrooms are ones from the best movie scenes.

There are rooms to accommodate 34 of your closest family and friends, with an Orangery that leads directly into a colourful garden, where the wedding reception and setting is decorated to your taste and design, the orangery can accommodate 30 to 180 people comfortably with a dance floor, Music (Live or DJ) and sitting arrangements and perfect catering for every discerning taste buds.

Nature plays a big role to calm the nerves of the bride and groom to be, yoga classes can be organised in the early hours of the morning for the bride and friends or a sparkling wine (Marquis De La Ligne Crémant) and Irish Brunch, a continental breakfast, Asian brunch and a Nigerian lunch or brunch, this Chateau is the one place where all this is possible in Bordeaux because they know what it is to be on a true destination wedding, where your culture can be celebrated too.

A proper Naija wedding or any wedding for that matter will not be complete without dancing the night



away, and here at the Chateau De La Ligne, you certainly will be having the party of your life and celebration that will never be erased from the memories of your guests and families. The beauty and luminescence of the chateau walls in the dark, gives you a sense of being in a fairytale land with the flower gardens as a backdrop and maybe a full moon.

After a full day and night of celebrations, you can take the time to relax by the pool side with cocktails and spend extra days, basking in the success of the most important celebration of your life. At this point the Chateau is still yours for as long as you want it, but if your guests are leaving and you want to stay behind and have a honeymoon at the same location, you can move into one of their beautifully furnished gites with swimming pools. In the coming days you can go on Wine tasting tours to Saint Emilion, Bordeaux Centre, Renowned Restaurants, wine shopping and clubbing in town with certified tour guides who will introduce you to the secrets and beauty of Bordeaux, the possibilities are endless.

Chateau De La ligne is so much more than I can put on paper but believe me, if you make this your destination wedding or celebration location, the guarantee is that you will have the time of your life, The Welcome Is Real!

