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Bordeaux 2016 Vintage Report

April 2017



"2016 Bordeaux – unquestionably a very fine vintage"

2016 is unquestionably a very fine vintage in Bordeaux, combining quality, quantity and a very classic style.

An incredibly wet spring was quite worrying for winegrowers at the time (danger of fungal diseases), but later proved to be a godsend. The soil's water reserves were largely reconstituted, enabling the vines to cope with the exceptionally dry, hot summer. The grapes finished ripening during beautiful, relatively warm weather, with very little rain and cool nights. This unhopd for, simply incredible weather for Bordeaux made it possible to harvest deeply coloured, aromatic grapes with beautiful acidity.

Although the year 2015 ended on an especially dry, sunny note, 2016 kicked off with three months in a row of greater than average rainfall. Despite this grey, wet weather, temperatures were mild. In fact, the winter of 2016 was the mildest since records began.

That is why the first signs of vegetative growth (swelling buds) that appeared in late February gave the discomforting impression of extreme precociousness. However, temperatures dropped to the seasonal average starting on the 20th February and even less in the second ten-day period of March.

Cold temperatures in March and waterlogged soils due to heavy precipitation in the early part of the year delayed bud break, which began the last week in March (one week later than usual), but earlier than 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2015, and later than 2011 and 2014.

Cool temperatures beginning in late February lasted until May. As often happens at that time of year, there were alternating warm and cold periods, with a large temperature range that did not facilitate regular vine growth. Despite the rather early bud break, the weather until late May delayed vine growth. Phenolic development was also slower than usual. This situation was compounded in some regions by frost on the last three days of April that caused major damage in localised areas. This meant that by late May the precocious vegetative growth was no longer the case and phenolic maturity was comparable to 2014.

After a gloomy winter and rainy spring, there was some apprehension about flowering. Depending on the soil type and water retention capacity, some vines showed normal development, whereas others with a skimpy leaf canopy or on cold clay soil were behind. This is why coulure like in 2013 was feared.

Flowering began during rainy weather in the last days of May. However, there was a providential window of dry, warm weather between 3rd and 11th June. Mid-flowering in our reference vineyards took place around 11th June, i.e. 8 days later than the 20-year average. The change in the weather fortunately avoided widespread coulure. The end of flowering in certain late-ripening plots was slightly perturbed by a final rainy period that caused some millerandage. Fruit set occurred 8 days later. The bunches were relatively homogeneous and the number of seeds greater than average – the sign of good pollination. After three days of rain in mid-June, beautiful weather finally set in and proceeded to last for quite some time. This definitively changed the nature of the vintage. High temperatures in the last ten days of June enhanced berry development. These grew very quickly - "pea size" by the end of the month.

The remarkably fine weather in late June continued into July and August. A few very hot days around 15th June degraded the herbaceous aromas, without bringing growth to a halt. Rainfall was infrequent and light, while temperatures were normal and there was slightly more sunshine than usual. Due to heavy winter rains, the lack of water stress during the vegetative growth the rather large size of the berries. Bunch closure took place about 20th July, as in 2011 and 2015.

The water balance in late July was not conducive to stopping vegetative growth definitively or triggering véraison in a significant way, except on clay-gravel soils. The grapes first began to change colour in the last days of July on terroirs prone to early ripening. However, seeing as vegetative growth had not completely stopped, véraison got off to a slow start. It took until the first week of August for colour change to become noticeably widespread. Water stress was accentuated by the absence of rain. The situation was comparable to 2010 midway through véraison. The weather at this point was propitious to achieving the end of véraison.

The month of August featured real summer weather. It was very hot (5°C more than usual) with a remarkable amount of sunshine (+30% compared to an average year). Fortunately, minimum nighttime temperatures were close to the 30-year average, and even less on some nights. This wide temperature range between day and night guaranteed the formation of colour and tannins while limiting the degradation of aromas and acids in the grapes. The absence of major precipitation caused excessive water stress in some locations, especially in plots of young vines, ones with high yields, and ones with shallow soil.

In late August, a few instances of scorching were noticed in vines that had undergone excessive leaf thinning and everyone began wonder about the danger of inhibited ripening. A heat wave arrived in early September, with average temperatures of 30-32°C. The first 13 days of September were the hottest since 1950, reaching a record 37°C in Sauternes on 12th September.

A storm arrived from the Basque Country late in the afternoon of 13th September. It rained throughout Bordeaux the following night, with varying intensity depending on the region. A depression lasting three days brought as much as 40cm of rain in some parts of Bordeaux. However, the sun returned on 20th September and, with it, fine weather that lasted until the end of the harvest. This rainy period, followed by sunshine, gave a new impetus to ripening. Cabernet Sauvignon and late-ripening Merlot grapes benefited particularly from this.



Once again, the month of September was decisive for the quality of the vintage. October was dry and sunny, with cool nights making it possible to wait serenely for the best time to pick all grape varieties. The rain in early September gave a boost to maturity, which nevertheless took more time than usual to be reached. The sunshine and relatively cool nighttime temperatures were conducive to the unusually large accumulation of phenolic compounds, as well as the preservation of aromas and acidity. These weather conditions stopped grey rot from developing, except in certain parts of Bordeaux where significant rain in early September forced winegrowers to pick early.

Despite the heat in June and July, the 2016 vintage was not particularly early. The dry white wine harvest began in the Graves and Pessac-Léognan appellations at the very beginning of September, about one week later than in 2015. After a remarkably dry month of August, the grapes were in perfect condition, without a trace of grey rot. Although they quickly attained sufficient sugar levels, their potential fruitiness, which had stayed in the background for a long time, also came to the fore at the end of ripening. The showers in mid-September did not have a major effect on the grapes, which could be harvested without any need of urgency. Yields were very satisfactory, especially for Sauvignon Blanc, where such prolific production had not been a feature of recent vintages.

The freshly picked grapes had lower sugar levels than in 2015, but in keeping with the previous 5-year average. Total acidity was slightly lower than in 2013, 2014, and 2015, and similar to 2011. The balance between sugar and acidity gave rise to hopes that 2016 would be a good vintage for white wines, especially those from soils where they are traditionally successful (limestone, clay-limestone, and clay-gravel), which are conducive to retaining good acidity.

The red wine harvest began with earliest-maturing plots of Merlot in the 3rd week of September, but most grapes were picked in early October, i.e. one week later than usual. Harvesting of the Cabernets and Petit Verdot went on until just after mid-October during sunny weather. The red wine grapes in 2016 possessed a reasonable degree of potential alcohol and an outstanding phenolic composition.

As opposed to other French regions adversely affected inclement weather conditions, the vintage in Bordeaux was generous. Because water stress manifested itself rather late, the berries were comparable in weight to 2015, but lighter than in 2010. The very low malic acid content – the lowest since 2009, except for 2011 – was due to the mild, dry summer weather.

Alternating cool nights and sunny days in September were conducive to the remarkable accumulation of colour and tannins. IPT content was higher than in 2015 or 2009, and close to 2011. Extraction took place slowly and varied according to grape variety. Extractability was greater for the Cabernets than for Merlot – proof of excellent maturity in the later-ripening varieties. Colour was deep and the tannin in the seeds was most often ripe and of high quality in 2016.

Due to the lack of rainfall until mid-September, botrytis took its time to appear and so grapes in Sauternes and Barsac were essentially already highly concentrated. However, rain showers on 13th and 30th September triggered the development of noble rot on these perfectly ripe grapes and their concentration was enhanced by the return of fine weather. Picking during the second trier, constitutes the lion's share of the best part of the harvest, which lasted until early November. The quantity of wine made at several estates reached a record high.

The wines:



The 2016 dry white wines exhibit plenty of ripe fruit, with less acidity than the three previous vintages, but are, nevertheless, sufficiently well-balanced. The Sémillon wines were especially successful in 2016, adding weight and texture to the blends. The best dry whites are pure, clean with plenty of ripe fruit, and will give immediate pleasure. However, they will not age as well as the top white wine vintages, such as 2012 and 2014.

The best wines of Sauternes and Barsac are extremely pure. Very rich with intense spiced fruit overtones, they display a style that emphasises power rather than bright aromatics and freshness. 2016 is the fourth successful vintage in a row, unheard of in Sauternes, and what is more it combines both quality and quantity.

At this early stage of their maturation, the 2016 red wines give every indication of being outstanding. The aromatics are pure, perfumed, fruit-driven but also floral, and certainly ripe. They have a fine intensity of colour and excellent fruit concentration, whilst combining the tannic power of great vintages with a delightfully velvety texture. Their relatively high level of acidity gives them an admirable freshness and tremendous balance. This bright acidity lends the palate a precision and deftness of touch. 2016 may prove to be more 'classic' than 2009 or 2015 and seems to have excellent ageing potential. All grape varieties performed well, though the sheer quality of the Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the defining hallmarks of the vintage. The offerings from the northern Médoc communes of Saint Julien, Pauillac and Saint-Estèphe are undeniably of great quality and could turn out to be one of their greatest vintages for many a year. The best wines are significantly denser and more concentrated than in 2015.

We will be sending out individual offers with tasting notes as the wines are released.

Neil Sommerfelt MW, Fine Wine Buyer

April 2017

*Report based on information kindly provided by Dr. Axel Marchal, Dr. Valérie Lavigne and Prof. Laurence Gény.

What is 'En Primeur'?

'En Primeur' is the first offering of an estate's wines and allows you to purchase them whilst they are still in barrel, several months before they are released to the market.

The price paid at time of purchase is 'in bond', which means that it excludes Duty and VAT. As we're not permitted to charge taxes in advance of wines arriving into the UK, these are payable on release according to the duty and VAT rates in force at the time of delivery based on the original cost of the wines.

So what are the benefits of buying 'En Primeur'? Firstly, the En Primeur price is usually much cheaper than buying once shipped and released onto the UK market. Also, buying 'En Primeur' allows you to buy highly sought after wines, which are only available in very limited quantities and may be impossible to find after release.

H2Vin Bordeaux 2016 En Primeur Offer

We will be sending out individual offers with tasting notes as the wines are released.

- The wines will be shipped in the Late Spring/ Early Summer 2019 at the producers' discretion based on bottling dates.
- Prices quoted will be in bond (London City Bond) per case of 12 bottles (75cl), unless otherwise stated. Duty and VAT will be charged at the rate in force at the time of delivery. Delivery will be charged at cost.
- Each producer will decide on the case size at the time of bottling; therefore, some cases of 12 (75cl) may come in 2 x cases of 6 (75cl) or 1 x case of 12 (75cl). Please note that cases cannot be split.
- As always we will do our best to honour last year's buyers' repeat requests as fairly as possible. Please bear in mind that there will be strict limitations on this year's stocks, especially the very top châteaux, so all wines are offered subject to availability.

If you would like to know more about our Bordeaux 2016 En Primeur offering or to register your wish list, then please don't hesitate to contact us on 020 3478 7376 or email us at info@h2vin.co.uk.

To see our full portfolio, please visit our website at www.H2Vin.co.uk