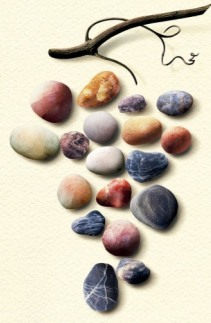


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PRÉCIEUX TERROIR  
SAINT-ESTÈPHE  
GRANDS VINS DE BORDEAUX



Crédit photo Visionair-Georges-Henri Cateland©

# SAINT-ESTÈPHE 2018

“HERE COMES THE SUN...”

*The response of a great terroir*

O.D.G. de Saint-Estèphe



*2018, what a memorable year for our wine growers. Given the surprising weather conditions, this vintage can be considered a sort of miracle, and the wine will no doubt be exceptional. The first months of the year were really difficult and the very rainy spring was leading us to expect the worst. Then the summer brought perfect, beautiful weather that lasted right through to October, turning the tables and offering the chance of a great 2018 vintage after all. The French proverb “After rain comes sunshine” sums up this year very well. It is indeed the return of the sun and heat that saved the vintage, placing it among the best and endowing it with outstanding freshness and concentration. Once again, the Saint-Estèphe soils have demonstrated their unique capacity to take advantage of any contradictory weather conditions, by using the generous water supply accumulated through the very rainy winter to relieve the thirsty vines through the summer drought !*

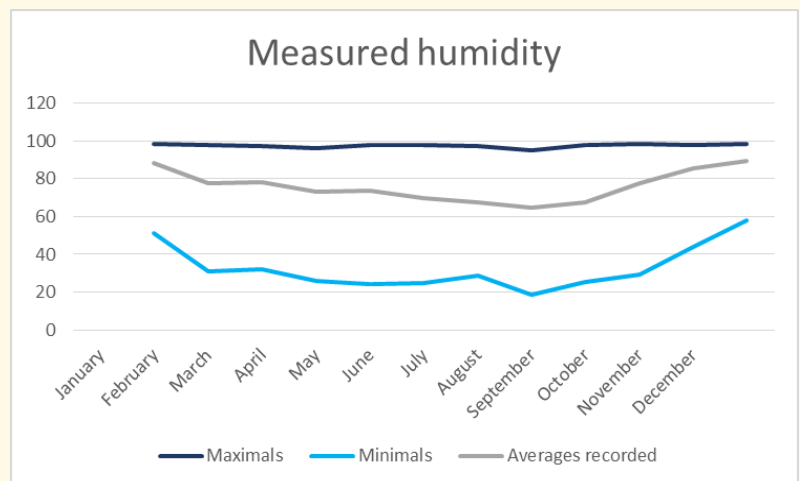
*Some properties registered lower yields due to the pressure on the health of the vines during the wet spring. The final average yield was nevertheless within the norms of the last decade and there was no incidence on the quality. The harvest was early and long, taking place in absolutely ideal conditions. It was a pleasure to taste the sun-packed, flavoursome grapes. They boasted great colour and were perfectly ripe. In the vinification cellars, the richness and structure of the harvest meant the extraction was easy. In the end this was an ideal vintage, and one we shall be delighted to follow for many years to come !*

*Bernard Audoy, President of the O.D.G. of Saint-Estèphe*

## A rainy winter

January brought heavy rainfall, reflecting the tendency of this 2017/2018 winter that was to total 450 to 500mm. The temperatures were however very mild, more than 3°C over seasonal averages. February was colder (2°C below averages). The overall weather conditions for this winter were finally close to the averages of the last thirty years.

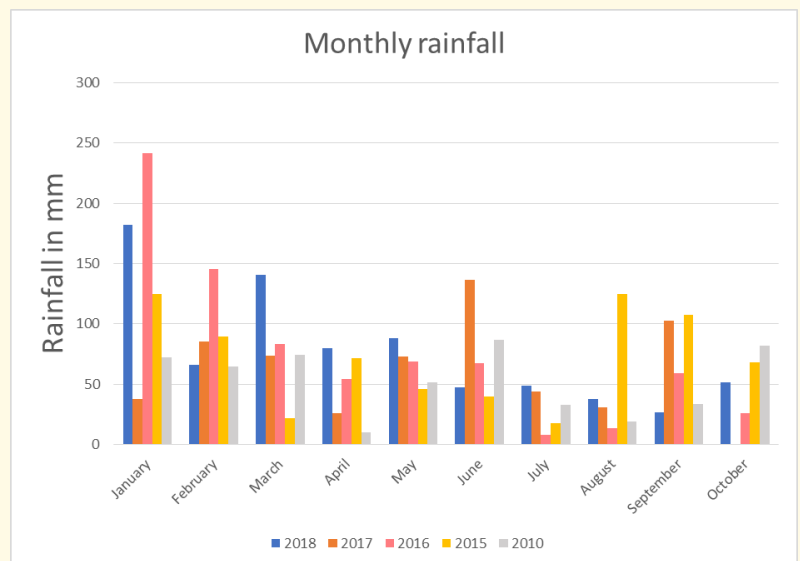
The winter and spring rainfall was in fact very beneficial to this vintage as the soils were able to stock water that would allow the vines to face the harsh summer drought, contributing to a good ripening process.



## The spring of all dangers

The spring was late, mild and wet. The first buds showed in the first two weeks of April. Spring temperatures were 2°C above seasonal norms. Despite the humid weather, the flowering observed at the beginning of June took place smoothly and there was a good even blossoming over the appellation’s vineyards. It has to be noted, however, that the rainfall was well above seasonal norms. The equivalent of one average year’s rain had fallen in just 7 months !

This combination of humidity and warmth provided ideal conditions for the proliferation of mildew, a permanent menace to any vineyard. A careful eye was kept on the plots and vine growers worked non-stop to keep the illness at bay. It was a stressful time for all.



Vine care and soil care tasks are necessary at such times, always keeping in mind the strict requirements of eco-responsible farming.

Saint-Estèphe was lucky to be spared when hail hit the Médoc three times in May and July.

## “After rain comes sunshine”

Fine weather began to show in mid-June but we had to wait until July to see the tables really turn. Summer settled in, with occasional heat waves. The vine growers were smiling again, at last the Bordeaux miracle had come. Mother Nature had operated a complete U-turn and hope was restored. The colour change at the end of July was beautifully regular.

This summery weather dried the soils and the risk of illness in the vines disappeared. Properties that had experienced attacks of mildew were impacted in the quantity but not the quality.

With the alternation of hot days and cool nights, a good water supply in the subsoil and the beautiful sunny weather, the ripening process could take place in excellent conditions.

## A “solar” ripening

The high level of sunshine allowed an even ripening. The grapes were sun-packed. The summery weather observed in August continued through September and October, concentrating colour and aromas in the fruit. The ripening capacity of this 2018 was truly impressive.

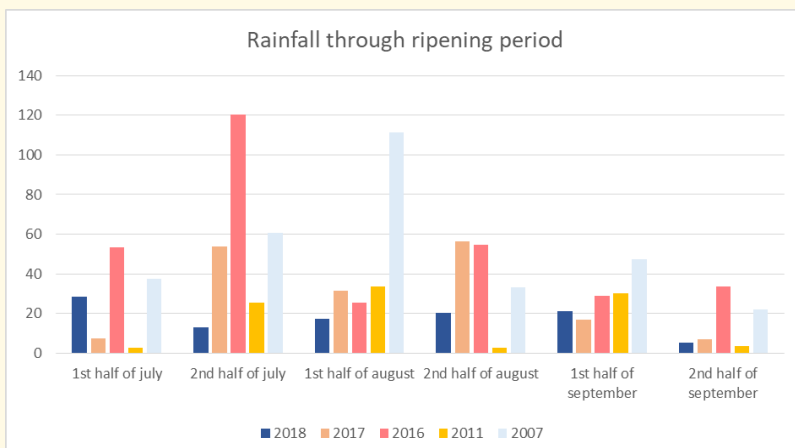
The *terroirs* of Saint-Estèphe, characterised by limestone soil over a clayey subsoil, reacted beautifully to the extreme conditions, restituting the water accumulated through the wet period when needed during the summer drought. Moreover, the limestone soils allow the vines to resist more easily in the event of hydric stress.

## An early harvest for this great vintage

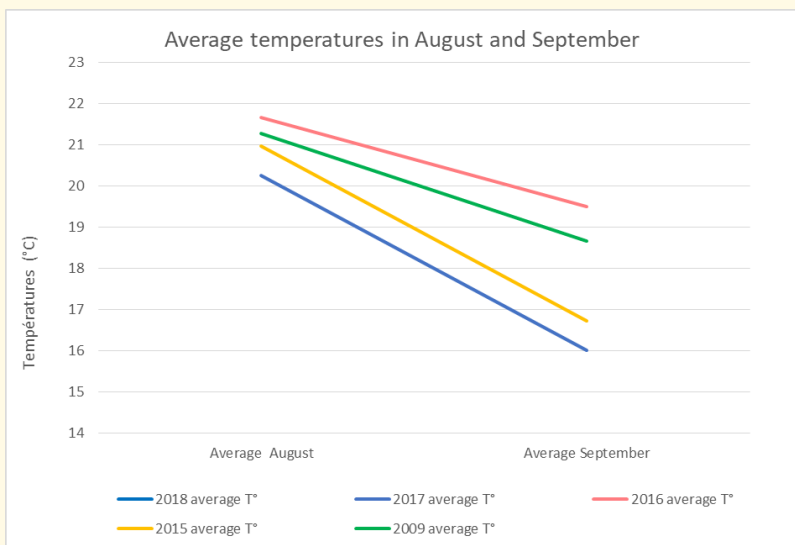
The 2018 harvest was very early, taking place in optimum conditions with a bright and sunny, serene atmosphere. What a magnificent Indian summer we had ! All the châteaux in our appellation recorded the longest harvest of the last 30 years. The Merlots were mostly picked in mid-September and the Cabernet Sauvignons in early October. The clement weather allowed us to wait for the perfect moment to crop each plot.

The grapes boasted the best characteristics : phenolic as well as aromatic richness and early maturation of the skins.

The berries were small with thick, very ripe skins that delivered an intense colour. The pips were so ripe that they were almost black, offering round, plump tannins during extraction. There is a clear conviction here in Saint-Estèphe : 2018 is a great vintage !



Crédit photo Christian Braud©



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# THE 2018 VINTAGE IN SAINT-ESTÈPHE AS SEEN BY AN EXPERT

Christophe Coupez, Director Oenocentre-Pauillac

2018 : “Per-fect!” (as Bruce Willis said in *The Fifth Element* by Luc Besson).

Let’s forget the six months of incessant rain, a real nightmare for the vine growers. At least it replenished the water tables. The vineyard was thus able to live through the dry, hot summer with little damage. The Indian summer prolonged the dream conditions. The harvest was simply ideal.

The much-awaited colour change took place at the beginning of August. The start was quick in most cases and then the later grape varieties, such as Petit Verdot, slowed things down. At this stage, the 2018 vintage looked like it would be an early one. The sugar levels were still low and the malic acid levels were high.

We began ripeness tests at the end of the colour change phase. These suggested a possible harvest date for the Merlot before mid-September or at the end of the month according to objectives. The optimal ripeness of the Cabernet Sauvignon was expected late September or early October, bearing in mind the need to pick before any risk of degradation in the health of the crop.

We noted the absence of any green vegetal character in the grapes and also their unbelievable aromatic persistence. During the fifteen-minute drive between vineyards, the succulent ripe red and black fruit jelly aromas remained on our taste buds! This exceptional character augured well for very aromatic wines if this quality could be transferred from the skins to the juice during vinification.

The ripening process continued smoothly thanks to perfect weather conditions. The white grape varieties arrived at full ripeness shortly before the first reds. The sugar content progressed quickly and was high at harvest-time. The malic acid dropped considerably. Often below 1 g/L during the Merlot harvest, it reflected a rare level of ripeness. The tannins were more refined and tastier with every day that passed. We observed that the skins were extremely thick and resistant, and the grapes were small.

The colour, shy at first, soon became more intense as we progressed in the ripeness tests, promising very dark red wines.

The winemakers confirmed this as soon as the grapes had macerated a few hours in the vat before the beginning of alcoholic fermentation. They had rarely seen such deeply coloured juices.

The must in fermentation was soon as intensely aromatic as we had expected when tasting the grapes, again reminiscent of fully ripe red and black fruit syrup. The long persistence of these notes suggested a higher concentration in odorous molecules.

The alcoholic fermentations were slow and the temperatures remained relatively low. The must was naturally low in yeast assimilable nitrogen. Respect and mastery of the traditional basic principles of vinification would allow a successful completion of the process. The extraction could be accomplished using a gentle approach to maintain the balance. We soon found the break point where the wines were concentrated and harmonious, letting the fermentations finish peacefully. The macerations were then shorter and at a moderate temperature to avoid any risk of losing this precious harmony given the high alcohol levels.

Despite a generally high level of concentration, the wines were elegant and pleasant to taste. After running off the vats, the press wines were showing the same characteristic smoothness and elegance as the free run wines.

The malo-lactic fermentations were then in full swing. As the level of malic acid was low from the beginning, the impact on the analyses would be limited. The “finished” wines have retained their generous fruity character. The next step is to carefully age them in barrel to preserve their wonderful natural qualities.

To conclude, this 2018 vintage is extremely fruity and complex with an unctuous texture and a well-balanced structure. This is the result of a long, slow harvest. Mother Nature allowed us to wait patiently and serenely for the optimum maturity of each plot. Unfortunately, the yields went from one extreme to the other throughout the Bordeaux area. Luckily the Saint-Estèphe micro climate coupled with the dedicated work of the vine growers resulted in a generally satisfactory volume here despite the modest size of the grapes this year.

It is generally agreed that the unique Saint-Estèphe soils convey distinction and elegance in hot, dry vintages. It is logical, therefore, that in a year such as this we are close to perfection !



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