

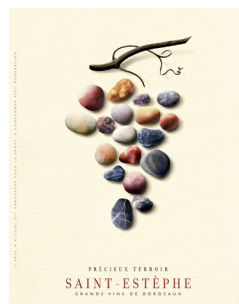


Crédit photo Visionair-Georges-Henri Cateland

# SAINT-ESTÈPHE 2020

## YIN AND YANG

*THE RESPONSE FROM THE TERROIR*



SAINT-ESTÈPHE WINEGROWERS' ASSOCIATION  
O.D.G. de Saint-Estèphe

2020 ended the decade on a high. It is a perfect example of Bordeaux know-how and is a great, classic, complex, rich and unctuous vintage, which ticks all the boxes. It is one of the finest early-ripening vintages. An over-achiever, it succeeded in making the most of extreme conditions to reach the perfect balance. While the entire vintage was marked by warm weather, making it one of the five earliest in the past twenty years, variations in rainfall, which required a great deal of vigilance in the vineyard, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. 2020 will also be remembered for the unprecedented health crisis, which compelled the wine sector to adapt its vineyard operations at all costs. The emergence of the #lavignenattendpas (the vines don't wait) hashtag sums up the dilemma faced by winegrowers. Nature does not lock down! Consequently, while the first lockdown in France, announced on 16 March, disrupted usual operations, measures were soon put into place so that work could resume in compliance with health regulations. The crisis, the social and economic impacts of which are still unknown, will leave its mark. While sales are picking up today, they cannot compensate for losses in export and catering markets. The success of the 2020 vintage rekindles hope and confidence and we look forward to inviting you to taste it very soon.

Basile Tesseron, President of the Saint-Estèphe Winegrowers' Association

## A mild winter and an early growth cycle

The winter was very mild. While the French economy almost ground to a halt, the opposite was true for the vines, which grew very quickly. Particularly mild winter temperatures were conducive to early bud break, which occurred on 20 March, i.e. fifteen days earlier than usual. We all remember the fine, sunny days during France's nationwide lockdown.

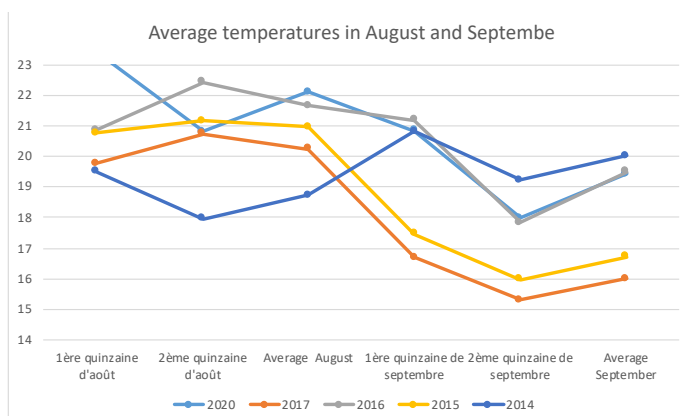
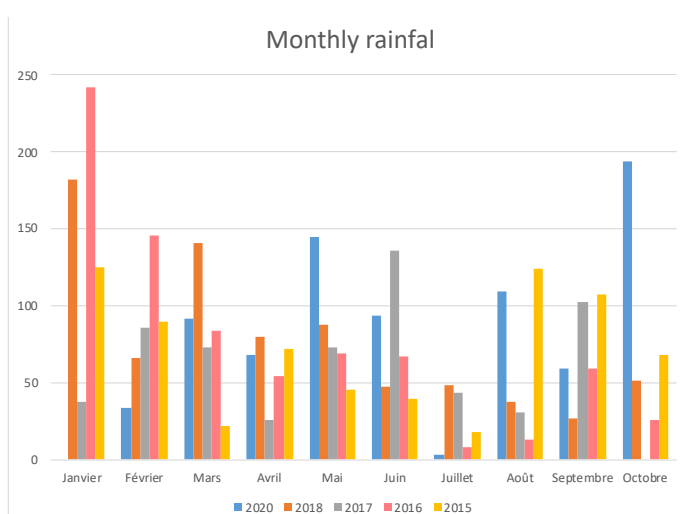
## A sunny, wet spring, with even flowering

Several cool, wet spells in April and May did not adversely affect the growth cycle. Consequently, flowering was smooth, even and three weeks earlier than usual, around 20 May. Fruit set was quick and regular, with no shot berries or millerandage (abnormal fruit set) although the warm, humid conditions increased the risk of mildew.

## A hot, dry summer

The hot summer was marked by heatwaves from 20 June to 10 August, with record temperatures exceeding 40°C, although the vines did not suffer from water stress.

The first grapes changed colour mid-July in drought conditions. This period of intense heat caused the vines to partly lose their head start secured during bud break. The summer heat lasted throughout August, during the day and at night. The limited temperature variations caused the vines to rapidly consume their malic acid and gradually build up sugar and colour (anthocyanins). Thankfully, the balance between sugar and acidity was restored in late August with





the return to cool nights. The accumulated sugar was redistributed in the pulp and the anthocyanins in the grape skins.

The first ripeness analyses revealed high sugar levels and low acidity. The warm, wet conditions led to traces of *Botrytis cinerea* mid-August although fortunately fungal development stabilised and did not spread.

A rainy spell before 15 August provided welcome relief. In the lead-up to the harvest, everything looked perfectly fine, suggesting excellent winemaking potential. The grapes had thick, crunchy skins and were in perfect condition.

### An early harvest – with masks on!

Initial ripeness analyses confirmed the huge potential of the 2020 vintage, which ripened 10-15 days earlier compared to 2019. The hot, dry conditions produced small grapes with thick, fairly impermeable skins.

In light of the health crisis, winegrowers began preparing for a harvest like no other! For the first time, it was not the quality that worried them – they already knew it was excellent! They were most concerned about how to organise the harvest, classified as a high-risk event. Estate employees, as well as the many seasonal workers who flock to the appellation each year, had to comply with special precautions and social distancing measures, alongside other limitations.

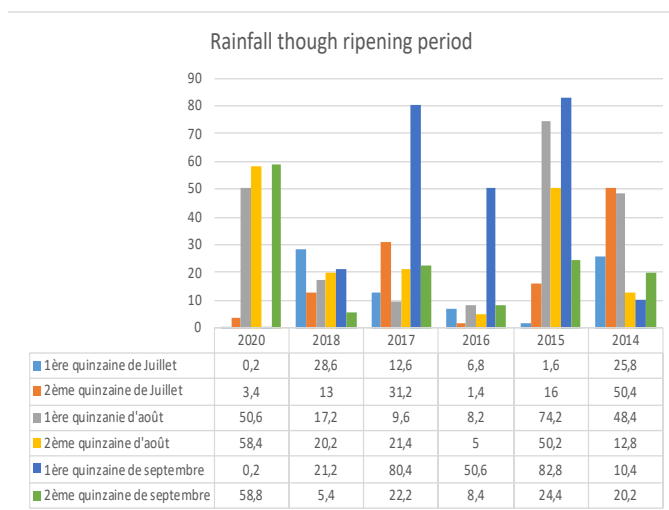
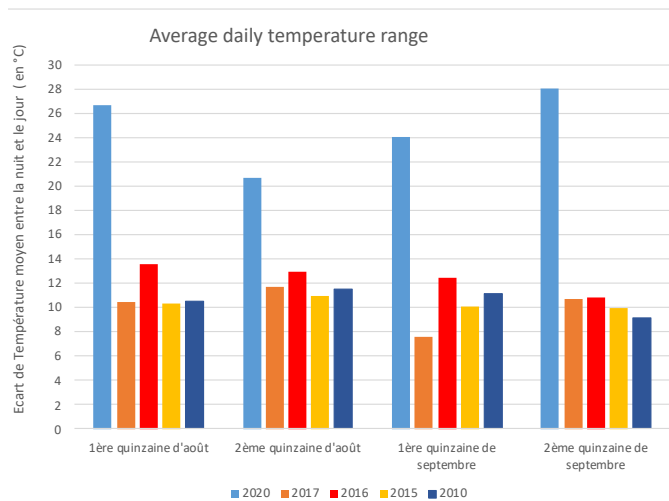
Picking began two weeks earlier compared to “usual” vintages, shortly after mid-September, yielding low volumes due to the size of the berries. Several factors accelerated the decision to bring forward the harvest date: a week of cool, wet weather forecast for late September, as well as drought conditions which increased the alcohol content and lowered acidity.

Despite the small size of the berries, which were still heavier than last year, the quality was wonderfully even from one plot to the next. The threat of *Botrytis*

*cinerea* did not abate, although it was contained and did not spread, partly thanks to the thickness of the grape skins.

### Perfect balance and outstanding aromatic expression

The Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot are incredibly aromatic. The juices are deeply-coloured and incredibly concentrated. Extraction revealed ripe and intense aromas, while the quality of the tannins is very promising. Initial tastings suggest a very traditional vintage, characterized by freshness and superb balance. 2020 ranks among the great sunny vintages, oozing richness and spicy notes.



# WINEGROWERS' IMPRESSIONS

## Vincent Millet, Manager at Château Calon Ségur, 3<sup>rd</sup> Classified Growth.

The 2020 vintage was marked by a very wet and mild winter, eliciting an early start to the growing season. Flowering took place under ideal conditions. From flowering until the first days of the harvest, the vineyards endured five heatwaves, with no rainfall between mid-June and the first ten days of August. In spite of this, the vines showed no signs whatsoever of severe water stress (no defoliation or blocked ripening), undoubtedly thanks to water reserves accumulated over winter and spring. Once again, the high clay content in most of our soils played a key role in ensuring a good water supply. The Merlots and Cabernets were picked ten days earlier compared to recent vintages. The wines are full-bodied and juicy on the palate, with floral, spicy notes and smooth, rich tannins, culminating in a long and aromatic finish with a salty tang.

## Vincent Bache-Gabrielsen, Managing Director at Château Lilian Ladouys, Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel.

2000, the hottest year since 1900! To help us adapt to the hottest year on record since 1990, we relied both on our expertise of the terroirs and the resilience of our vineyards, which are currently undergoing a conversion to organic agriculture. Thanks to high rainfall during winter and spring, the soils stored sufficient water reserves and were thus able to counterbalance the effects of drought conditions during summer. Very early on, we had to intervene in the vineyards and create a favourable microclimate by thinning the leaves to improve resistance to mildew. In 2018, we decided to focus on Saint-Estèphe's greatest terroirs, which primarily consist of deep clay gravel (representing 80% of our vineyards). This decision proved fully worthwhile this year, with flowering occurring a week earlier in gravelly soils compared to our clay-limestone plots. Early flowering coupled with summer heat led the harvest to start several days earlier compared to the 2019 vintage, in order to preserve "al dente" grapes. Picking thus began on 5 September, finishing on 30 September 2020. After intense cooling of the vats, gentle fermentation was the motto for this vintage. Our team strived for precision winemaking in order to reach the desired balance, which the outstanding tannic potential of the grapes could have disrupted. Beautifully intense, the Merlots dominate the blend, as was the case in 2019. Balance and emotions are thus the watchwords of 2020 Château Lilian Ladouys!

## Pascal Friquart, Managing Director at Château Tour Saint-Fort, Cru Bourgeois.

With temperatures 2 to 3°C above average, the winter of 2019-2020 was the hottest since the start of the 20th century. The beginning of the growing season was marked by weather conditions propitious to early bud break. In addition, waterlogged soils and mild temperatures increased the threat of mildew, powdery mildew and snails. Correctly managing plant protection treatments during spring was crucial yet difficult to implement on saturated soils, with the risk of crop loss due to mildew. After a very wet late April and early May (over 120°mm of rainfall in 2 days), fine, warm weather returned. Flowering then unfolded smoothly, almost a month earlier compared to 2019. From mid-June onwards, hot, dry conditions finally settled in, lasting until September. This led to water stress in the most well-drained soils. A rainy spell mid-August accelerated véraison (colour change) and prevented the grapes from shrivelling. The terroir was really crucial this year, since the quality of the soils played a key role in the vintage. They had to be able to store very high precipitation in spring, and release it during hot, dry conditions which lasted over two months. The head start to the growing season in spring led to an early harvest, which took place from 21 to 30 September. The harvest began with the Merlot grapes, which displayed superb balance, while rainfall slightly hampered the end of ripening for the Cabernets. Initial tastings are promising and provide hope for an elegant, fruity wine with a fine tannic structure.



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