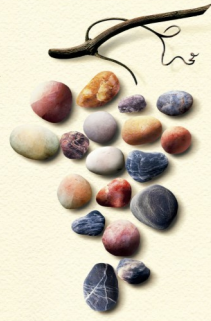


Number 2– March 2018



PRÉCIEUX TERROIR
SAINT-ESTÈPHE
GRANDS VINS DE BORDEAUX



Crédit photo Studio Pixell-Guillaume Daveau©

SAINT-ESTÈPHE 2017

THE KINDNESS OF THE RIVER

The response of a great terroir

O.D.G. de Saint-Estèphe



2017, in Saint-Estèphe, warded off the supposed bad luck of “years ending in 7” despite the pessimism brought by the unwelcome spell of frost in late April and the rain before the harvest that stayed in our memories.

This is a vintage that deserves a closer look if we are to understand its true nature and its complexity. If we can't claim regularity of this vintage 2017 over the Bordeaux vineyards generally, given the fickle and unfair nature of the weather conditions for some, we can say that Mother Nature was gentle with the Saint-Estèphe appellation, allowing both quantity and quality for this vintage. With the terroirs renowned for their excellent wines, the entire appellation was spared from the frost that hit the area on 27th and 28th April. The yields declared were thus practically identical to those of 2016.

Another important characteristic of this vintage is that the key steps in the growth cycle occurred early. In fact, 2017 is one of the earliest vintages ever, partly thanks to the lovely month of June that enabled a remarkable phenolic regularity from the flowering right through to the harvest. Despite more difficult weather conditions at the beginning of September, the quality was really there and the Saint-Estèphe wine-growers are proud to show their new baby ! The 2017 will have to find its place on the market after the excellent 2015 and 2016, but we are ready to wager that this vintage, with its promising ageing potential, will mature quietly and delight our palates in the years to come !

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

Dry and contrasting winter weather followed by an early and regular bud-burst

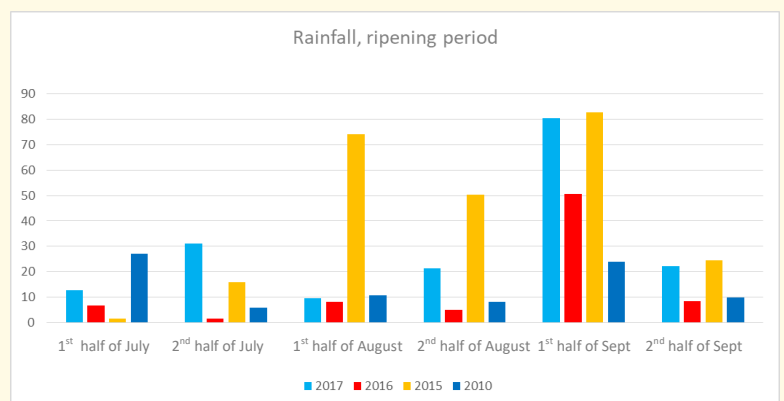
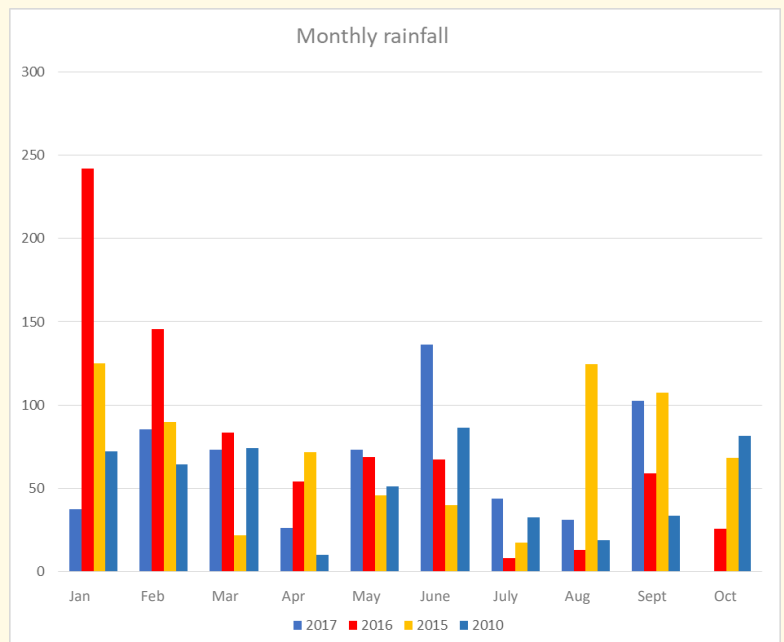
2017 was marked by a **lack of rainfall** that began in the autumn of 2016. The first part of the winter was cold with temperatures 0.7°C below averages of the last 17 years whereas the second part saw temperatures 2°C above these averages.

This mild spell began in February and triggered an **early bud-burst** that was first observed around 26th March and continued in these warm weather conditions to 20th April.

The Saint-Estèphe vineyards are spared from the April frost

At the end of April, the warm weather gave place to a much colder spell. The region's wine-growers were worried for their buds, given the early development of the vines this year. On 27th and 28th April their fears were shown to be justified when temperatures as low as -6°C in some zones meant considerable frost damage on certain Bordeaux vineyards.

In Saint-Estèphe, there was a moment of careful observation and then of relief ; **despite the intensity of the frost, there was no impact on the vineyard.** The reason for this lucky escape is very simple. The proximity of the river offers a protective micro-climate, and the vines are planted on top quality terroirs located on gravelly slopes and plateaux.



An early, even flowering over all the grape varieties

The months of May and June were beautifully hot and sunny. This magnificent weather continued through to the 25th June to allow a **quick and even flowering similar to that of 2005**.

The dry winter and spring accentuated the phenomenon of low water supply, which was monitored as early as 20th June before the bunch closing. Even the appellation's clayey soils showed an early yet not excessive hydric restriction, meaning particularly beneficial conditions for the future quality of the grapes. Welcome rainfall at the end of June eliminated the risk of any hydric stress in the plants.

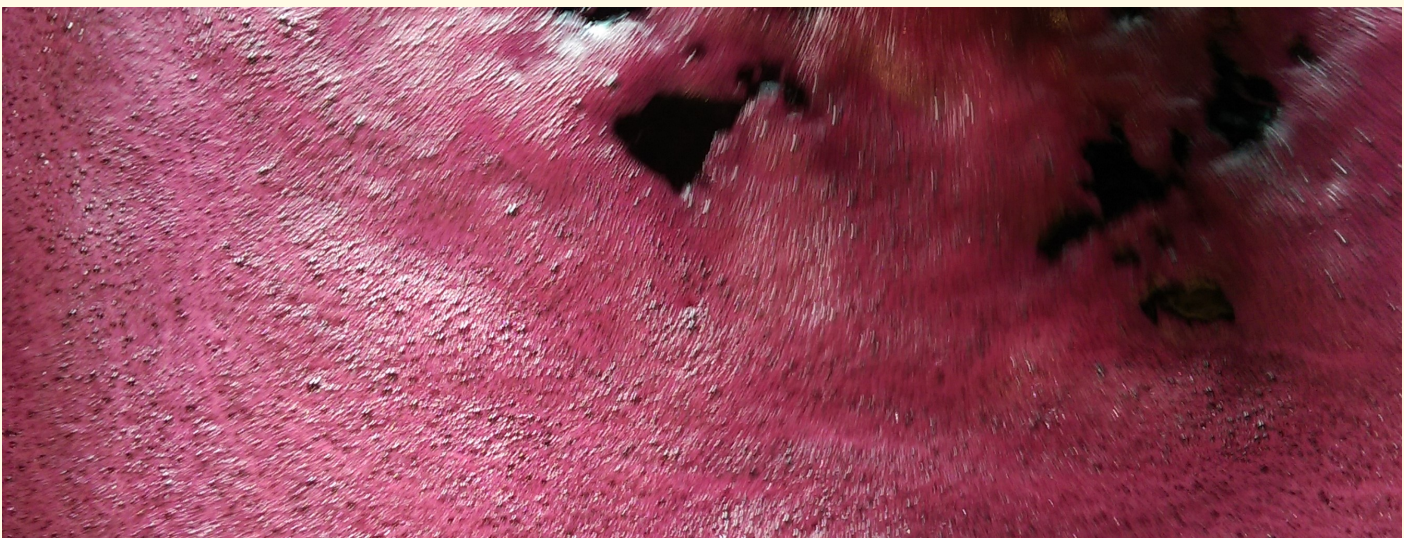
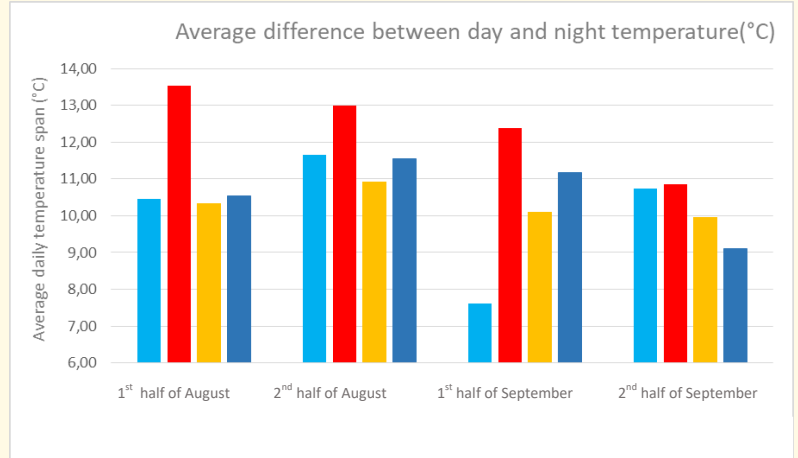
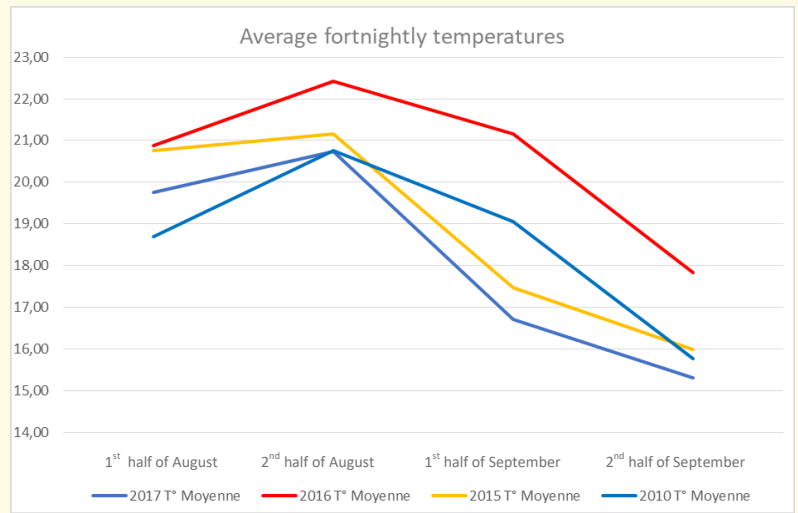
A dry summer and an early colour change

Just like the blossoming, **the colour change was also regular** and 8 to 10 days earlier than average. The summer was dry and offered very good conditions for the maturation of the pips up until the end of August.

The hydric restriction that characterised 2017 had a very positive effect on the quality, allowing the skins to thicken and the phenolic richness to develop.

Early, tailor-made harvest

Despite rainfall during the first two weeks of September that meant a rigorous organisation for the picking, the quality was there. The earliest plots of Merlot were picked just before the 15th September. The Cabernets followed and the last grapes were brought into the cellars at the end of the month. The alcoholic fermentations went smoothly and the maceration brought a plumpness and a nice balance to the different vats. The malolactic fermentations began quickly. **The wines are richly coloured, well-balanced and dense, offering a great potential for ageing.**



THE 2017 VINTAGE IN SAINT-ESTÈPHE AS SEEN BY AN EXPERT

Antoine Médeville, Consultant Oenologist with Oenoconseil

The 2017 vintage was born in a very specific meteorological context : firstly, there was particularly dry weather in the autumn of 2016 and up until the beginning of 2017, resulting in a 46% deficit in rainfall, and also average temperatures 2°C higher than normal from February. The bud-burst was therefore early, exposing the vines to the risk of spring frost. This arrived in the nights of 26th and 27th April.

Luckily, thanks to its geographical location close to the Gironde estuary, the Saint-Estèphe appellation's 1250 hectares were almost entirely spared from this catastrophe : the river saved the day with its auspicious warming effect.

The weather conditions were kinder thereafter: there was an early, quick and even blossoming at the beginning of June, then some rain at the end of the month compensated in part for the considerable lack of water experienced since the beginning of the year. With Saint-Estèphe's characteristic deep layers of clay, the vines showed no signs of suffering from hydric stress. The growth cycle continued to the colour change, also early this year beginning late July for the Merlots planted on gravelly slopes in the East of the appellation. More generally, the colour change was as regular as the flowering had been over the appellation, recorded mostly at the beginning of August for the Merlots and Cabernet Sauvignons, 10 to 15 days ahead of 2016.

Conscious of the early nature of the vintage (one of the earliest of the last two decades) we decided to begin monitoring a plot of young Merlots on a gravelly terroir from 9th August. The potential alcoholic degree was already 11 % vol. and the potential anthocyanins were most promising. The summer was hot with no excessive heat waves and it stayed quite dry until the harvest so the grapes were able to ripen quickly. The berries were full of sugar and the acidity levels decreased through August. All this, along with cool nights from 6th August, resulted in grapes boasting an excellent potential in anthocyanins.

A notable characteristic of this year was that the phenolic maturity was ahead of the technological maturity. This rare but interesting phenomenon had to be taken into account when deciding on the picking dates.

The beginning of September brought some rainfall. The first harvesters were forced to wait for a few days but these showers allowed the acceleration of the ripening process, especially in the skins and pips.

The harvests began at the beginning of September and had finished all over the appellation in the last days of the month. The Cabernet Sauvignons made the most of the nice weather in the last two weeks of September to reach a very good maturity. The alcoholic and malolactic fermentations occurred quickly this year and the first tastings to decide on the blend or pre-blend were soon organised. The top batches were rapidly identified. The gravelly terroirs seem to have given the best results in this vintage. The Saint-Estèphe 2017 wines promise to offer a lovely expressive fruity character with good balance and roundness.



Crédit photo Visionair-Georges-Henri Cateland©

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