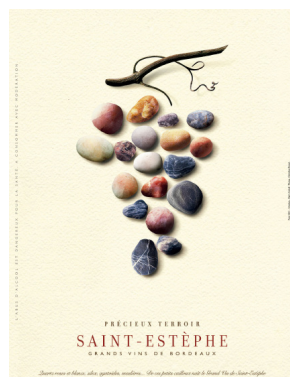




Photo Catherine di Costanzo

SAINT-ESTÈPHE 2023

A perfect balance



The response of a great terroir

O.D.G. de Saint-Estèphe



2023 was a warm and early-ripening year, perhaps even signalling a new kind of vintage marked by a tropical growing season! This vintage will be remembered for its summer temperatures which, although not excessive, were much higher than the thirty-year average over a lengthy period that lasted for more than four months, from late May to mid-October. The year nevertheless got off to a bad start due to challenging weather conditions. Rarely had the threat of mildew attacks been so high! Spring and summer rainfall led to fears of the worst, forcing us to step up our vigilance and efforts. However, this rainfall, which was essentially in the form of thunderstorms, remained slightly lower than average and varied greatly depending on the geographical area. In the end, the success of the vintage was clearly down to very warm conditions in late August and early September. In fact, the grapes not only held up but also benefited from these heatwaves to perfect their ripening while preserving acidity. A blessing! Once again, our cool and well-drained soils proved their great potential, demonstrating their resilience and ability to adapt to extraordinary weather conditions. In the end, the 2023 vintage was a pleasant surprise. It is well-balanced and admirably combines concentration and freshness. A Saint-Estèphe which falls within current consumer trends – ripe on the palate and refreshing on the nose – yet also worth ageing.

Jean-François Delon, President of the Saint-Estèphe Winegrowers' Association

A MILD WINTER OVERALL

Despite a cool month of February, the winter was rather mild and rainfall was close to average, with alternating dry and wet periods.

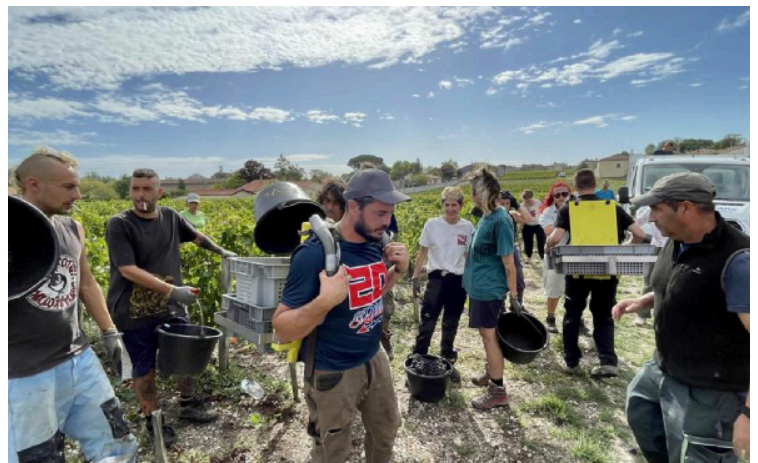
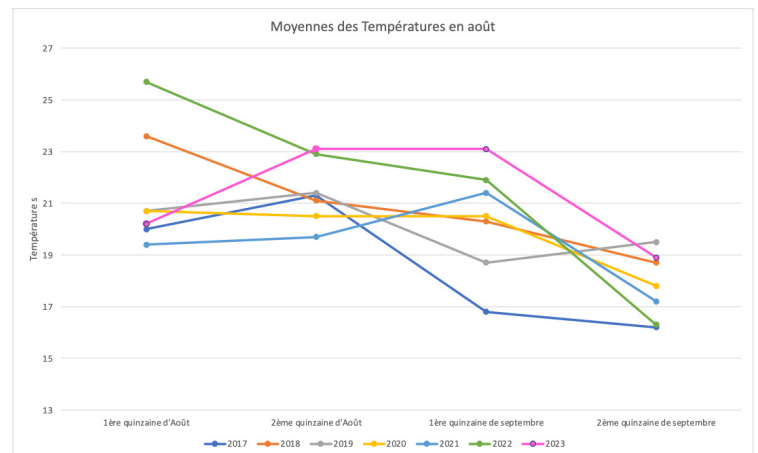
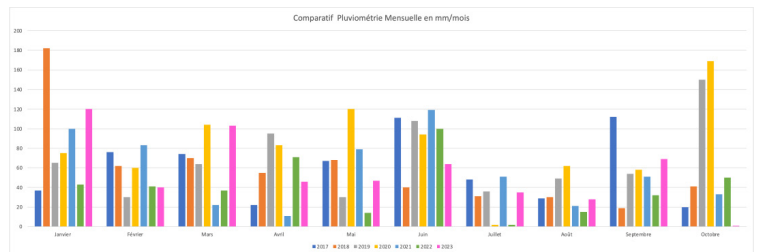
A SPRING FRAUGHT WITH DANGER

Spring was full of contrasts, shifting between very mild and cooler temperatures. These conditions caused bud break to occur later than usual, allowing most plots to be spared from frost in early April. Bud break unfolded at the beginning of April in early-ripening areas and mid-April in later-ripening ones. While frost in early April impacted a few Merlot grapes in sensitive plots, the Saint-Estèphe appellation did not suffer any serious damage. Still, the cocktail of rainfall and heat meant that the threat of mildew remained high throughout the growing season. However, cumulative rainfall between April and mid-June fell within the seasonal norm and 2023 even saw a slight drop in rainfall with 866 mm recorded, marking a 15% decline compared to average (-60 mm). The lack of variation in day- and night-time temperatures increased humidity.

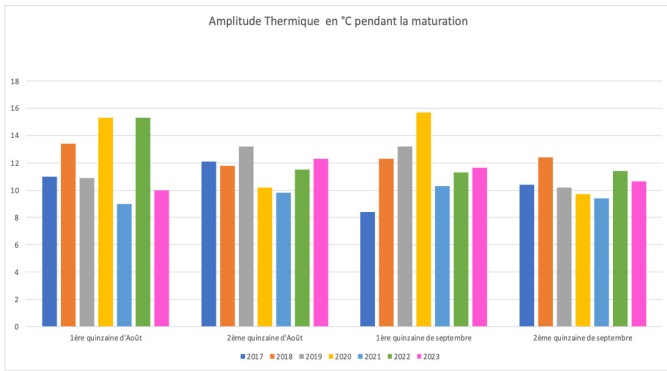
Flowering unfolded over just a few days in late May during a spell of warm, dry weather, with no shot berries. Very good fruit set followed.

A TROPICAL-LIKE CLIMATE

Heavy rainfall struck the Médoc and the Bordeaux vineyards on 20, 21 and 22 June, although very unevenly depending on the geographical sector.



@Sud-Ouest Journal. Crédit photo J.L. Vendanges 2023 au Château Domeyne.



These successive thunderstorms occurring in tropical conditions characterised by warm nights and days sparked fears of mildew. These challenging conditions required winegrowers to be extremely vigilant in the vineyards. In the end, they were spared the worst! Despite the presence of mildew in very localised areas, the vines fared well!

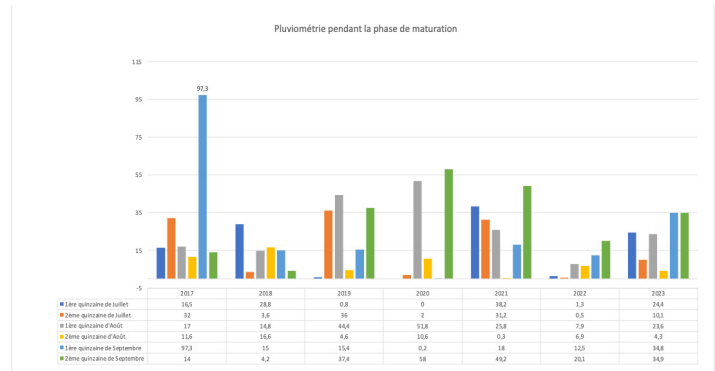
Véraison (colour change) was long, lasting one month due to continuous vine growth and the high quantity of bunches. It was observed in the first ten days of July, with mid-*véraison* occurring as of 20 July in the earliest plots.

The Saint-Estèphe appellation, which invested in an anti-hail system in 2023 to protect the entirety of the vineyards, was spared by the risk of frost. Rainfall in the last ten days of June caused the berries to swell. Their weight was very high, significantly higher compared to the same phenological stage in 2022, foreshadowing a plentiful harvest. Ripening unfolded smoothly despite the unsettled weather conditions.

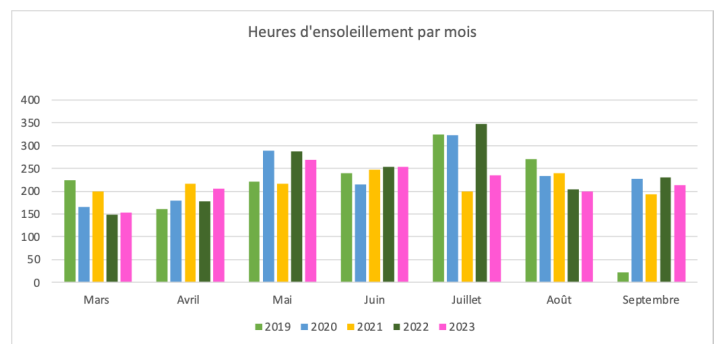
HIGH TEMPERATURES WERE BENEFICIAL TO PERFECT MATURITY

The weather conditions were reversed at the end of the growth cycle with a first heatwave in the latter half of August followed by a second heatwave between 4 and 7 September.

This radical shift changed the face of the vintage. The often-feared heatwaves proved to be beneficial to the grapes, allowing the ripening process to be completed. The subsequent water stress allowed the tannins to ripen quickly, since the vine stopped growing to focus on the grapes. In addition, the dry conditions favoured the development of the tannins but preserved the pH, which consequently maintained the freshness of the fruit. In 2023, sunshine levels were remarkably high, exceeding those recorded in 2022 and 2021 in the months of July, August and September. Such above-



average sunshine significantly increased the quality of the grapes. Ripening was completed in very high temperatures yet the grapes held up. Apart from a few young vines which suffered from heat, no shrivelling was observed. The cool terroirs of Saint-Estèphe once again demonstrated their ability to cope with extreme weather conditions.



AUGUST TEMPERATURES IN SEPTEMBER

2023 was an early vintage. The harvest was long and warm, lasting over a month depending on the degree of ripeness from one estate to the next. The Merlots were picked during the first ten days of September and the Cabernets from 18 September onwards. Winegrowers who feared that the harvest conditions would be too warm were quickly reassured by the grapes' high quality and satisfied by their quantity. The generous size and abundance of the berries helped the grapes counterbalance the effects of extreme temperatures.

BALANCE AND FRESHNESS

The quality far exceeded winegrowers' expectations. The Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc grapes displayed high sugar levels. The wine is clear-cut with good acidity and bursting with fruit. In many ways, the 2023 vintage is similar to 2018, particularly in terms of its balance and phenolic richness. It is a smooth and refreshing "tropical" vintage, with excellent ageing potential and an intense aromatic signature.

THE 2023 VINTAGE AS SEEN BY WINEGROWERS

The fine development of bunches in early spring suggested satisfactory yields. Mid-season rainfall at our organically-certified estate impacted volumes due to mildew but not the quality of the vintage! Summer saw generous sunshine and exceptionally high temperatures. The clay-limestone plateau where the Côte vines are grown responds very well to these climate conditions and results in very fine wines in warm years.

2023 was no exception, and the Merlot revealed exceptionally generous fruit. Cabernet Sauvignon harvested in optimum conditions produced ripe, complex tannins with a rare finesse and tannic intensity reminiscent of the finest vintages. Our Petit Verdot, produced in significant quantities, was immensely pleasurable during tasting. The resulting blend confirms all these qualities and appears to be on par with the finest vintages.

José Bueno, Managing Director of Château de Côte, Cru Bourgeois Supérieur.

At Laffitte Carcasset, our gravelly plateau from the third terrace efficiently drained excess water during spring, while the mildew threat required the extreme vigilance of our teams. We managed to contain this risk and harvest healthy grapes.

We benefited from a warm summer with significant temperature variations. Cabernet Sauvignon particularly thrives in these harsh conditions.

This emblematic grape variety of the Médoc accounts for up to 60% of our 2023 vintage.

The word that best describes this vintage is “generosity”, not only in terms of quantity but also quality. Initial tastings suggest a rich and delicious 2023 with velvety tannins. Notes of raspberry and chocolate dominate the nose while well-balanced tension provides beautiful length on the palate. 2023 is undoubtedly a fine Château Laffitte Carcasset vintage.

Pierre Maussire, Managing Director of Château Laffitte Carcasset, Cru Bourgeois Supérieur.

The 2023 vintage was already looking promising at the very start of the growing season.

The prospective crop was excellent. Flowering unfolded in the latter half of May and benefited from very favourable weather conditions.

Rainfall in late spring required our technical teams to be particularly vigilant, especially in our organic vineyard.

In the end, the mildew threat was contained and a sunny month of August ensured the good ripening of the grapes.

The harvest began on 13 September, with a wonderful Indian summer making it possible to pick each plot at optimum ripeness.

The resulting wines are fairly traditional in character with a wonderfully fruity expression and a great deal of complexity and freshness. All in all, a very fine vintage is on the horizon.

Christophe Congé, Managing Director of Château Lafon Rochet, Grand Cru Classé.