

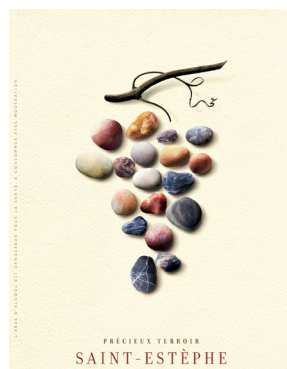


Crédit photo Visionair-Georges-Henri Cateland

SAINT-ESTÈPHE

2021

A CLASSIC FROM THE MODERN ERA



The reflection of a terroir

O.D.G. de Saint-Estèphe



Every vintage is different. While the 2021 vintage does not appear to be as sunny as the 2020 and 2018 or as magnificent as the 2016 and 2019, it is still worthy of a place in the cellars of all great wine connoisseurs! If we had to compare it to one of its predecessors, it would be tempting to rank it above the 2014 and 2017 vintages, which it resembles in some respects, all whilst boasting distinctive nuances that set it apart. But above all, 2021 is a high-quality vintage that makes us proud and gives us hope. Of course, this winegrower's vintage certainly put our nerves to the test. The strong threat of vine diseases due to the weather conditions gave us no respite but thanks to hard work, expertise and great care in the vineyards and cellar, we created a successful vintage that required patience and meticulous sorting. Spared by the spring frost and hail, Saint-Estèphe once again fared well, with identical yields to the previous year. Thanks to its natural assets, including well-drained soils and proximity to the river, alongside our winegrowers and winemakers' high-quality work, ever-improving knowledge and technical expertise, 2021 turned out to be a well-balanced vintage, with good concentration, freshness and fruity notes. In early 2022, following a two-year health crisis, we are preparing for a new challenge due to the economic impact of the war in Ukraine. In light of such uncertain prospects, we will continue to promote our wines as a symbol of civilisation, hospitality and cultural exchanges. Jean-François Delon, Président du Syndicat Viticole de Saint-Estèphe.

Jean-François Delon, Président du Syndicat Viticole de Saint-Estèphe.

AN ALTERNATING MILD AND COOL WINTER

The year started out wet, with alternating spells of mild and cooler weather. The months of January and February were wetter than 2020 and 2019, with 180 mm of rainfall, without exceeding levels recorded in the same period in 2018, when precipitation was significantly above average.

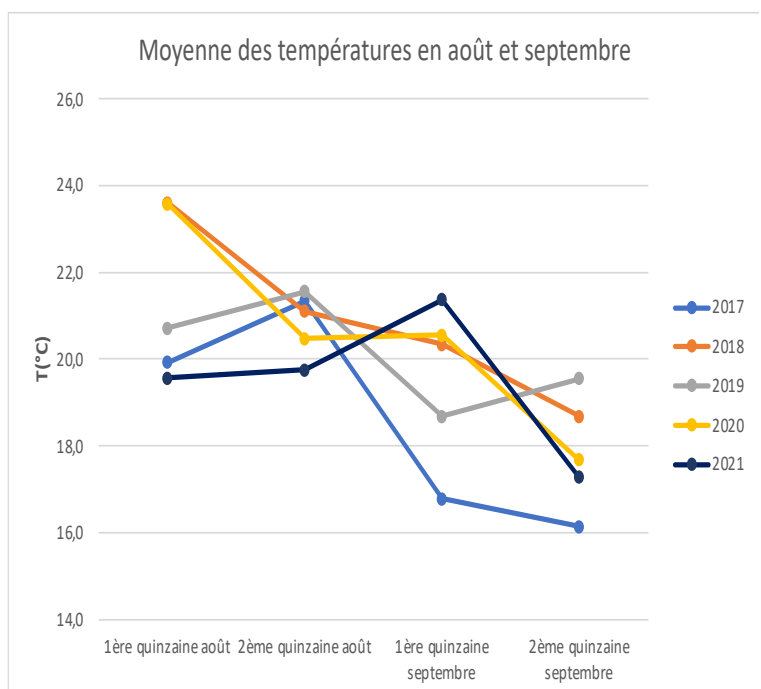
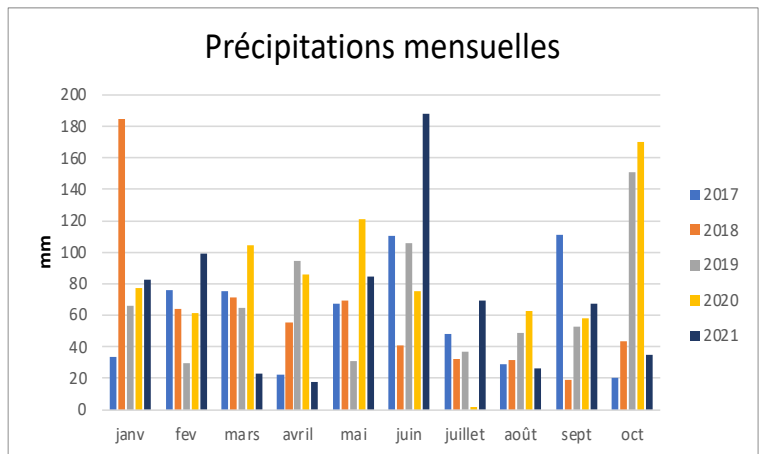
A SPRING THAT BLEW HOT AND COLD

Temperatures were almost summerlike at the end of March, triggering bud break as soon as the first days of April, slightly earlier than the thirty-year average, although not as untimely as in 2020, when it was 8 to 10 days earlier than usual.

While bud break was relatively homogeneous, early April saw a highly aggressive spell of frost, which affected all French vineyards. Temperatures dipped below -5°C in the Bordeaux region during the nights of 7 and 8 April. All appellations in the Médoc were impacted, yet to varying degrees. In Saint-Estèphe, for instance, while several isolated plots on lower terraces were struck by frost, the rest of the vineyard was spared thanks to its proximity to the estuary.

DISRUPTED FLOWERING

May was marked by cool temperatures and high rainfall. In spite of this, mid-flowering was recorded in early June, in line with the thirty-year average.



Ten days of dry, sunny weather lasting until 16 June were followed by rainy and stormy conditions. There was a high risk of hail and several plots were affected, although most of the appellation was spared. The other danger for winegrowers was relentless rainfall which led to fears of coulure (shot berries) and millerandage (abnormal fruit set) and, consequently, the threat of mildew. There was serious concern over the risk of low yields.

SLOW VÉRAISON (COLOUR CHANGE)

This fear became a reality due to variable weather conditions throughout July. Beautiful summer days were interspersed with rainy days during bunch closure. As expected, the excess heat and rainfall led to mildew attacks on the leaves. Consequently, véraison, like flowering, was slowed down and disparities appeared between vine plots and even within the same plot. However, mid-véraison observed on 12 August accelerated around the 15th thanks to very high temperatures.

THE YEAR OF THE WINEGROWER

There was a high risk of Botrytis cinerea developing in the vineyards, which required winegrowers to remain particularly vigilant. They were fully aware that their efforts in the vineyards with regard to viticultural practices and prophylactic measures, would play a key role in ensuring a high-quality vintage. Every effort was made to facilitate full ripening by optimising vineyard operations such as leaf thinning. August was fairly dry, with a great deal of sunshine at the end of the month. This made up for lost time and enhanced ripening while mid-September rainfall led to juicy berries.

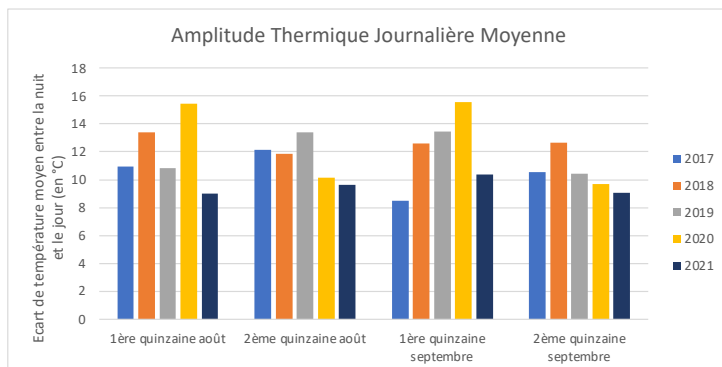
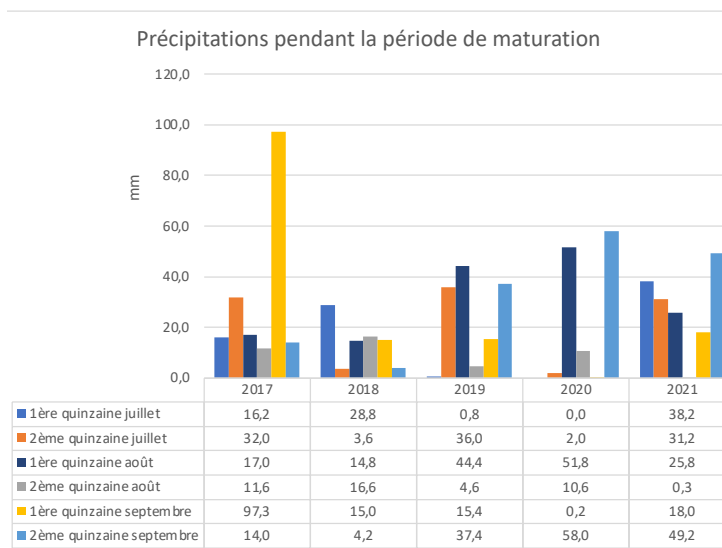
A LATE HARVEST

Waiting until phenolic ripeness to produce the best wines possible, while keeping an eye on the weather and managing the mildew threat became the watchwords of all winegrowers. Fortunately, sunny, dry and cool conditions in the first half of October were propitious to the optimum ripening of the Cabernet grapes, which even exceeded their high-quality potential. As a result, it was possible to wait until the ideal time to harvest each plot at optimum ripeness. The harvest began in late September/early October with the picking of the Merlots, followed by the Cabernets around mid-October.

A WELL-BALANCED WINE

The first tastings revealed wonderful ripeness with an unusual balance between alcohol and acidity

compared to previous years. The Merlots are fresh, well-structured and aromatic. Meanwhile, the Cabernet, which was harvested in ideal conditions, is the big winner this year, with its deep colour, spicy aromas and black fruit notes enhanced by smooth, noticeable tannins. The year was not easy, but the efforts of winegrowers and winemakers to extract the full potential of the grapes thankfully resulted in a high-quality 2021 vintage. The unusual weather conditions account for its distinctive characteristics and unique identity, with good balance between alcohol and acidity similar to previous vintages, but with greater maturity.



THE 2021 VINTAGE IN SAINT-ESTÈPHE AS SEEN BY EXPERTS

Michel Rolland et Julien Viaud, laboratoire Rolland & associés.

The tale of a turbulent year

The start of the 2021 growth cycle was turbulent at the very least. However, the Indian summer offered a wonderful opportunity to end things on a high and the vintage is sure to remain engraved in winegrowers' memories.

AN INCERTAIN AUGUST

Mid-August marked the final stage of colour change, with significantly cooler and duller weather from the end of June onwards. There was almost a total absence of water stress during this period. The grapes, like many other fruits, were still bland and watery in late August, with high acidity and water levels, as well as skins lacking flavour.

A CHALLENGING START TO THE RED WINE HARVEST

Mid-September was marked by ten days of unsettled weather. It rained regularly and temperatures were unusually high.

The meticulous work all year round in the vineyards paid off. The grapes benefited from good air circulation, and the vines, whose vigour was carefully controlled, coped well with these few days of capricious weather. It is true that overall, we look primarily for flavourful grapes with attractive tannins that are not overpowered by aggressive acidity.

A COMPOSED MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

Most of September was hot, with highs not seen since 1911.

Botrytis cinerea was frequent, but of very low intensity in the vineyards and did not become widespread. As another case in point, the much-anticipated porcini mushroom season also failed to take off this year!

The first Saint-Estèphe Merlots were harvested in late September. There are always two key dates: when the harvest begins and when it ends. And this year, picking was a series of fits and starts, requiring winegrowers to sometimes act quickly, and sometimes hold back.

At that time, 2021 looked typically oceanic, and not at all sunny like its predecessors. The aim was not to seek freshness and liveliness to balance out the power that should naturally be present. On the contrary, the grapes were highly acidic and lacked concentration. Time was needed for the herbaceous notes to fade away and be replaced by crucial fruity aromas.

...FOLLOWED BY A FINE STROKE OF LUCK IN OCTOBER

We were incredibly lucky with the weather in October, with some much-welcome warm days exceeding 20°C. The grapes were able to shed their excess water and gain concentration. The sun and heat melted away the herbaceous notes we had observed a few weeks earlier. The skins became thinner while the seeds lost their bitterness in favour of ripeness.

We harvested the Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc grapes with a smile under the October sunshine.

In the cellar, we carefully managed ripeness. We sought to re-concentrate the juice, focusing on very gentle extraction at the start of fermentation. We chose post-fermentation maceration, leaving the wine to infuse and varying the duration and pumping-over intensity to define textures and aromas. What guided us in these less concentrated wines was the desire to preserve the charm of the fruit we had noticed when we tasted the grapes in October. We wanted to find an enticing tannic structure without insisting on the power that was not naturally present.

A BOLD AND COMMITTED VINTAGE

2021 is clearly a daring, bold and committed vintage. We had to take risks – probably more than in recent years – and bravely resist the temptation to harvest all at once during the late September rainfall.

Such risks have paid off, since the 2021 vintage combines a velvety texture, delicious flavours, and the typical freshness associated with Bordeaux wines nowadays.

O.D.G de Saint-Estèphe - Place de l'église, 33180 Saint-Estèphe

Tél : +33 5 56 59 30 59

carine@saint-estephe.fr www.saint-estephe.fr