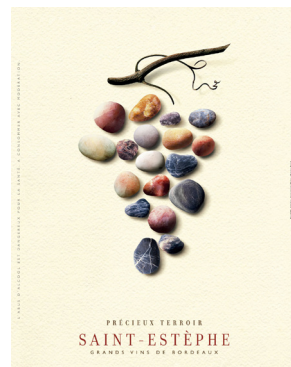




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SAINT-ESTÈPHE 2022

TOTALLY UNPRECEDENTED!



The reflection of a terroir

O.D.G. de Saint-Estèphe



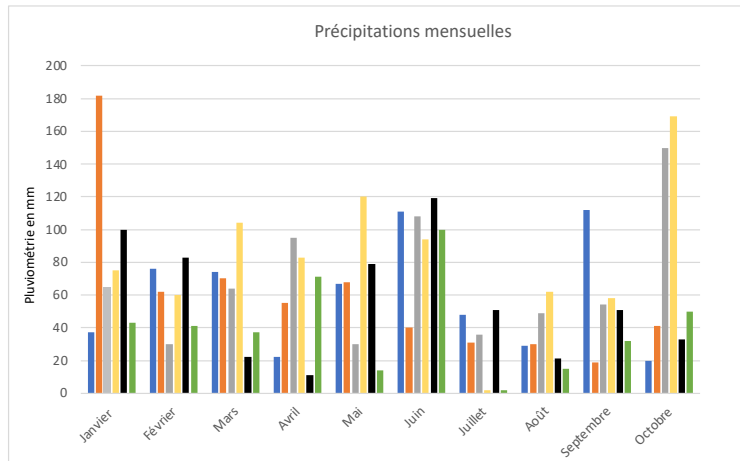
The colour, the tannins, the texture and the balance we saw during the harvest period seemed to promise a vintage of spectacular quality. Six months on, the wines are living up to that promise! Already a record-breaking vintage which witnessed the earliest ever harvest, 2022 produced wines of exceptional quality, endowed with remarkable smoothness and balance. But of course, the year was not without its challenges. 2022 involved much battling against the elements, in challenging conditions. First came the hailstorm which battered the north-eastern part of Saint-Estèphe in June, damaging a few plots of vines, followed by heatwave after heatwave from June to September, a timely illustration of the realities of climate change. Marked by droughts and high temperatures, the vines were ahead of schedule at every stage of the growing season, from bud break right through to the harvest. In living memory there has never been a year quite like it! Ultimately the vines won the battle, demonstrating their extraordinary ability to adapt and give the very best of themselves, even when dealing with rather extreme weather conditions. The clay-rich subsoil of Saint Estèphe, combined with the smart choices made by the winegrowers, played a major role in this victory. The grapes were relatively small on account of the heat and the lack of water, but they nevertheless achieved a degree of maturity and concentration that was quite simply astonishing.

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

A MILD, DRY WINTER

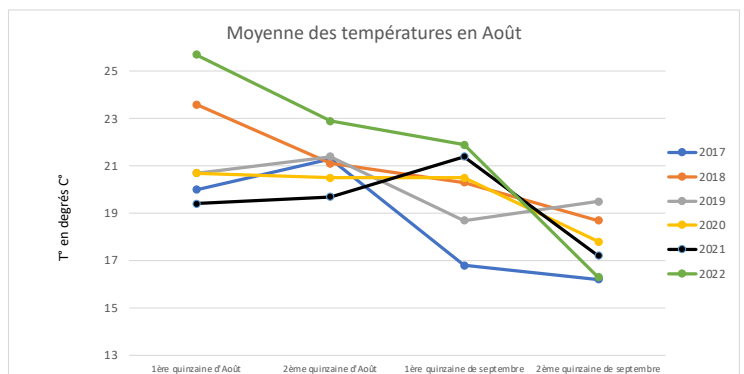
Between the months of September 2021 and February 2022, cumulative rainfall was 150 mm below the thirty-year average, the sign of a dry and very sunny winter. Temperatures were mild, too. With the exception of an unusually crisp January, the mean monthly temperatures were above average.

These conditions combined to get the growing season off to a very early start, and would be felt throughout the entire phenological cycle. Bud break was observed around 25 March, leading to fears that the late spring frosts could ravage the early-budding vines.



A DISEASE-FREE SPRING

As it happened, the appellation did not see any serious damage as a result of the frosts which arrived in early April. By and large, the frosts were light and well-managed by the winegrowers, who in recent years have become hardened experts in frost resistance. But the battle with Nature's whims was not over yet: by the time the risk of frost was safely out of the way, the first heatwave of the season was already upon us, from 8 to 22 May.



The winemakers had never known summer to come so early, and this heatwave set the scene for a sun-drenched growing season which would be marked by successive periods of extreme heat all the way through to the harvest.

May was both exceptionally warm (+3.2°C) and dry (-76% rainfall) compared to the thirty-year average, leading to early, rapid and homogeneous flowering of the vines. The first flowers were spotted in Saint-Estèphe around 20 May. The hot weather continued in June, peaking in the week of 13-20 June when temperatures topped 40°C! With such intense heat, a far cry from the



conditions seen in 2021, the winegrowers were at least relieved that there was no need to worry about diseases or parasites. The vines were on top form, raising hopes of an excellent crop.

A RESILIENT WINEGROWING REGION, WELL-EQUIPPED TO RESIST HOT SUMMERS

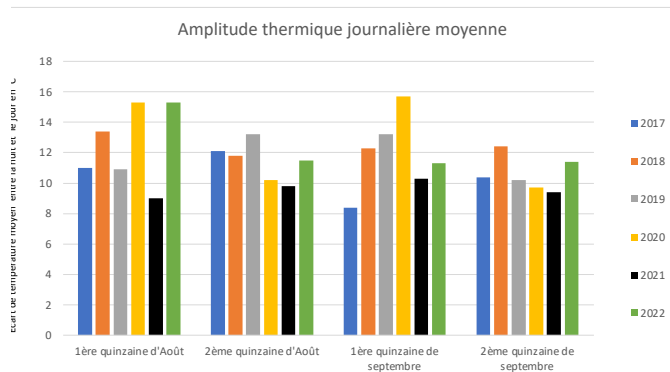
As was to be expected, the high temperatures led to some violent storms. On 20 June a hailstorm swept across much of the Saint Estèphe appellation, causing some estates to lose between 30 and 80% of their crop. In the wake of this devastating but fortunately limited incident, the winegrowers of Saint Estèphe were determined to take active measures to protect against future climate challenges. In the spirit of solidarity, they approved a collective anti-hail system which will be in operation by April 2023, throughout the entire appellation.

Some limited rainfall in June was not enough to make up for the dry months which came before, but the sizeable water reserves built up in 2021 – a speciality of Saint Estèphe’s clay-rich subsoil – played a major role in the vines’ admirable resilience in the face of successive heatwaves. The work undertaken to nurture life in the soils, and the depth of the roots – combined with the vigilance of the winegrowers, and smart decisions like foregoing the usual leaf thinning – proved to be highly effective against drought. Colour change in the grapes was homogeneous and earlier than usual, around mid-July. The vines were on fine form and the leaves stayed green well into October, illustrating their extraordinary ability to adapt to climate change.

RIPENING IN THE SUN

The excessive heat and water stress as early as June onwards had some unexpected consequences: the grapes were actually better-prepared to resist the heatwaves that arrived later in the summer.

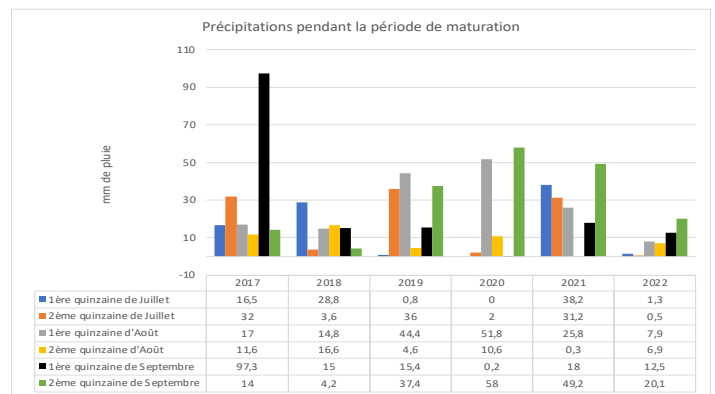
The skins were thicker, which helped to minimise the scorching and shrivelling we might have expected to see in July and August. The summer of 2022 was the hottest recorded so far this century. One positive side effect of the drought was that it prevented diseases from developing in the vineyards. The vines suffered but survived, remaining healthy throughout.



Fortunately, rainfall in early August allowed for good levels of acidity. The individual berries were small, but highly concentrated in phenolic compounds. Blessed with unbelievable tannin-anthocyanin ratios, low total acidity and high sugar levels, we had never tasted such a promising crop of grapes.

AN IDEAL HARVEST AND A HISTORIC VINTAGE

The cool mornings and warm afternoons of September allowed the grapes to ripen slowly but surely, as the winegrowers waited for the perfect moment to pick.



As the harvest began, they had time to appreciate the unprecedented circumstances and exceptional character of the upcoming vintage. It soon became clear that the lack of water had not impeded the ripening process. Even the Merlot vines, usually more sensitive to heat, yielded perfectly fresh and well-balanced fruit. The Merlots were picked in the first days of September, dictated by the demands of different soils and locations. The last grapes were brought in by the end of September. The first Cabernet grapes were picked in mid-September, and the last in the first days of October. The harvest was stress-free, with perfect conditions throughout. The grapes were small, certainly, but highly concentrated and endowed with a wonderful balance between sweetness and acidity.

In the cellar, the wines proved to be deeply-coloured, packed with dark berry aromas as well as an array of floral and spicy notes. On the palate, the tannins were soft, silky-smooth and very sweet. The quality was superb across the board: Merlot, Cabernet and Petit Verdot all produced deeply-coloured wines with great tannic clout, tempered by the smoothness, richness, freshness and the sense of balance which are the hallmarks of a great vintage. The winemakers’ mastery of the extraction process played a crucial role this year, revealing the full potential of this highly promising vintage.

The Saint Estèphe terroir, with its uniquely complementary blend of gravel and clay-limestone soils, once again demonstrated its extraordinary ability to adapt to climate change. 2022 was a vintage like nothing our winegrowers had ever seen before, a year that was truly out of the ordinary. Totally unprecedented!

The 2022 vintage as seen by winegrowers

In a year defined by unprecedented weather conditions, we were able to count on the exceptional resilience of the Cos d'Estournel terroir, and in particular our oldest vines, which demonstrated their incredible adaptability. They still demanded unwavering vigilance on our part, and we helped out in the vineyards wherever we could: we worked the soils regularly in order to lock in as much moisture as possible, and our leaf thinning has never been so precisely tailored.

Naturally, the harvest was early. We started on 7 September, 10 days earlier than in 2021, and finished on 23 September. We constantly analysed the technical readings, but ultimately the decision on when to start the harvest was taken by tasting the grapes, informed by our detailed understanding of the terroir.

The Merlot is very concentrated, with great intensity and a velvety texture, whereas the Cabernet Sauvignon brings a sense of nobility, great energy and freshness, totally defying the extreme weather conditions.

Dominique Arangoits, Technical Director, Château Cos d'Estournel, Grand Cru Classé.

For all wine lovers, 2022 Saint Estèphe will live long in the memory as a truly exceptional vintage. I will always remember it as a vintage of extremes, and one which gave me a few sleepless nights as a young winegrower. After spending the whole winter pruning the vines, they began budding very early when the spring got off to a magnificent start. A few cold nights in early April had us fearing the worst, and looking out for the dreaded frost. A handful of vines were affected, but the vast majority of the crop was unscathed and the potential for a great year was already plain to see. Once that stress was out of the way, the vines made the most of the rainy spell and grew rapidly, keeping us winegrowers on our toes. And then, on the evening of 20 June, a hailstorm swept over our beautiful village, lashing the vines and dampening our spirits. We lost some of the harvest in terms of quantities, but the quality was never in doubt.

Mother Nature then decided to take pity on the vines, and on us, and gave us an incredibly warm and dry summer. This led to an early harvest, with grapes of exceptional quality. The Merlots were able to display the full depth of their fruit, while the tannins of the Cabernet Sauvignon were simply magnificent. The vintage swung from one extreme to the other, from frost to extreme heat, but I will always remember it as one of the finest in my young career.

Maxime Saint-Martin, owner of Château Graves de Pez, Cru Artisan

While the region was sweltering through the endless summer, the vines gave us winegrowers a superb lesson in resilience. Not only did they adapt, but they actually showed their true colours in the face of adversity, giving us a vintage which is astonishingly well-balanced. We ended up with these little grapes packed with enormous potential, an extraordinary harvest in terms of its density, with extremely healthy grapes, well-balanced like never before.

The entire team at the château was bowled over by the incredible concentration of the juices and the intense colour they revealed as soon as they entered the vats. We pumped over the juices very gently, to make the most of this vintage which is as powerful as it is sumptuous. And the quality of the press wine just goes to show the immense quality of the berries and the pips. That is often the telltale sign of a truly great vintage.

2022 is an unprecedented vintage with an imposing tannic texture and generous, smooth fruit. It has all the attributes of a wine with excellent ageing potential.

Isabelle Davin, œnologist, Château Le Crock, Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel.

After a largely uneventful winter, the rest of the year was marked by wildly different weather conditions;

- morning frosts which disrupted bud break in some of the early-ripening Merlot plots,
- some ferocious hailstorms in June, hitting the vines right in the middle of their growth cycle,
- heatwaves which left us with a significant water deficit.

However, abundant sunshine and the clay-limestone soils helped to boost the resilience of the vines. In spite of these complex conditions, the vines adapted by reducing the size of their grapes, and digging deep into the clay, gravel and limestone subsoils to find the water they needed. The vines were in great shape at the end of the summer, and the harvest went off without a hitch. The sun-kissed character of the vintage really emerged during the fermentation process. Of course, the pH readings were high, indicating low acidity levels, but the solid, high-quality tannins more than made up for it. That wonderful alchemy is the essence of 2022, quite simply a magical vintage!

Vincent Ginestet, owner, Château Domeyne.