



## 2015 A Vintage On a Knife Edge

And so a new vintage is born in the vineyards of Aquitaine; and it is indeed of noble birth. After many long months of uncertainty about its quality, we now know that this is at the highest level. And the variable meteorological conditions experienced over the season have resulted in an excellent compromise between volume and character.

It all starts with flowering, which occurs early this year. The earlier sectors enjoy favorable conditions, although the tardier zones are affected by rain which impacts yields to a greater or lesser extent. Overall it is homogenous and finishes quickly.

The hot, dry weather in July is cause for delight in all those who love ripeness. Goodbye vegetal characters - hello fruit. Veraison begins at the end of the month, and these optimum conditions encourage its rapid and uniform progress, to the point where maturity inspections are set under way at the beginning of August. The juices are already deeply colored.

In parallel, INRA (the French Agricultural Research Institute) has published its monitoring data for the vintage's resistance to *Botrytis Cinerea*. The indications are encouraging, allowing us to believe in the real prospect of this becoming a great vintage.

For it has the makings of something very special; a budding potential in the context of a precocity that is still difficult to pin down.

But when the rains fall, more or less heavily depending on the sector, the saying "There Will be Blood" seems appropriate in the face of the forthcoming vinifications. Some first cases of *Botrytis Cinerea* develop, then dry out and stop their evolution. Certain berries, under the pressure of all the water they have absorbed, split open as if slashed with a blade. Drops of juice lie on the skins like so much spilt blood. In some cases white down appears. But the vines demonstrate astonishing resistance and their sanitary condition remains stable. The most vulnerable terroirs are those on porous sandy soils in zones that have endured huge quantities of water.

September sees a period of weather that swings between rain, which is variable depending on the area, and dry, windy weather, alternately blowing hot and cold. Sugar levels progress quickly on both the right bank and the southern left bank, but remain more restrained north of Pauillac.

The first Merlots to come in seem somewhat diluted. The task of extracting tannins looks like being difficult. But a rain-free week later they have developed concentration and show superb balance. Yields are looking good in the early maturing sectors, if more modest in the North.

As the first malolactic fermentation is completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, the grapes still on the vine continue to progress without deterioration. The Merlot from Saint-Emilion finally develops aromas and the Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot are showing immense promise. In a dry year pulp maturity generally outpaces that of the skin but, after the rain, the situation is inverted. Time is needed for the flesh to develop taste although the tannins and aromas are already at their apogee.

At the end of September the soils are dry and *Botrytis Cinerea* activity is arrested. The sumptuous aromas first encountered in the grapes now appear in their turn in the musts and then the wines, and the ripe tannins in the grape pellicles lend a velvet touch to the fermenting wines.

Rapidly the decision is made, quite intuitively, to opt for elegance over power in managing the extractions. This proves to be a judicious choice as certain vats that have been the object of a little too much zeal start to show green characters which, fortunately, will later be eradicated by maceration. In spite of what are sometimes elevated sugar levels, fermentations finish satisfactorily with low volatile acidities. Post fermentation maceration adds richness and volume to wines that are already extremely harmonious. Conditions are perfect for the aromas to express all their complexity. 2015 is decidedly a stunning vintage, with a ripe and gourmand profile. The words 'creamy', 'velvety', 'smooth' and 'silky' crop up spontaneously time and time again in tastings. The Merlots and the Malbecs are exceptionally generous, with magnificent aromas. The Cabernets and the Petit Verdots are powerful with muscular tannins. They express a level of ripe fruit that is very rarely attained.

And we should not forget the whites, with their combination of opulence and freshness. Ageing on lees rapidly reveals exquisite aromas that we have already had a foretaste of in the grapes.

Levels of precipitation between August and September vary greatly from one sector to another. Whilst hundreds of millimeters of rain are registered in some places after episodic storms, no more than a few dozen fall in others. 2015 was within a hair's breadth of disaster, but nature decided otherwise. The harvest is a globally satisfactory compromise between quantity and quality, in spite of the huge differences across the different terroirs and the amounts of water that they received.

With its diversity of its expression 2015 is a difficult vintage to define. Certainly better than 2011 or 2012, it will no doubt not receive the same unanimous acclaim as did 2010. It is not quantitatively as generous as 2004, as we had for a moment hoped for. On the other hand, it could provoke debate in the same way as 2009 and 2014 with which it shares good aromatic and tannic maturity. There is absolutely no doubt that visitors will derive enormous pleasure from the primeurs, as the technicians will do beforehand, during their preparation. In the meantime, the final stages of winemaking and the start of the maturing phase are already the source of much excitement.

The team

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Translated by [Traduction Vins & Spiritueux](#)