

## 2017 - A winemaker's vintage

As the old saying goes: *not all great vintages are early, but all early vintages are very good*. This was certainly the case for 2017. Anyone who attended VINIV's harvest event will remember just how early the 2017 vintage was, as harvesters throughout the region parked their tractors by the first week of October, a full two weeks ahead of usual timing.

We recently lined up VINIV's 2017 blend components for a critical review and tasted wines from all sectors of Bordeaux with the world's wine trade during the *en primeurs* in early April. Here is an early overview of the vintage as well as how VINIV's partner properties have fared.

As so aptly stated by John Stimpfig of Decanter Magazine: *"Bordeaux 2017 will be remembered for the fierce frost that ravaged vineyards, particularly on the Right Bank and the southern areas ... However, that is not the whole story."*

Indeed, he is right. As VINIV and members of the wine trade worked their way through the *en primeur* tastings in early April, the consensus is that 2017 is, in fact, very good and an interesting complement to the exuberant 2016 vintage.

Wine Spectator's Bordeaux critic, James Molesworth, sums it up best when he says, *"A view of the 2017 vintage begins to come into focus: ripe, fresh, clean and direct wines that are more modest in terms of concentration, with lighter-bodied but ripe tannins and good acidity. A solid vintage..."*

Decanter's Bordeaux critic, Jane Anson, provides a complex review of the vintage in her first impression notes, finding it hard to compare the 2017 to any one vintage – the closest being 2001, 2014 and perhaps 2012 due to the *'elegance and florality'* of these wines. Moreover, she emphasizes the overall fruit character of these wines by saying: *'Don't look for overripe fruit this year. There was clearly less solar influence than in 2015 and 2016. This was an extremely dry summer, but it was less sunshine than usual, particularly in July, so non-frosted vines have a fruit character that is savoury and succulent rather than generous or particularly exuberant.'*

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The 2017 vintage started, continued and ended ahead of schedule. Other than a short-lived, but excruciatingly intense heatwave in mid-June, the rest of the summer was dry, relatively sunny, but fairly cool, leading to *veraison* (when the grapes turn from green to red) being noted as early as July 6<sup>th</sup> – ten days sooner than the norm.

It is important not to underestimate the impact of the two episodes of frost last April (20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>), the likes of which Bordeaux hasn't seen since 1991, and which has left overall volumes down by 30%. However, much of the damage was focused on the lesser-quality appellations of the Right Bank and Graves.

As a result, we adapted our list accordingly and removed two vineyards in the Graves and Margaux, as they lost a significant amount of fruit. All other vineyards remain on the list for 2017 and were harvested under ideal conditions.

In Saint-Émilion and Canon-Fronsac, the wines from vineyards located on the top of the limestone slopes benefited from excellent growing conditions. Our vineyards located next to Château Pavie, Troplong Mondot, Faugères and Valandraud are all highly expressive in pure fruit, which is a hallmark of the vintage. As for our Merlot from Château Clinet (from our vineyard called L'Église), we recently selected barrels for ageing following a comprehensive tasting with the property's owner, Ronan Laborde. Again, the wines present both freshness and impressive fruit with slightly less concentration than the 2015 and 2016 vintages.

Much of the buzz during the *en primeur* campaign focused on the Pauillac and Saint-Estèphe appellations, with wines from Châteaux Lynch-Bages, Pichon Baron, Haut Batailley and Ormes de Pez received very positive feedback. The VINIV vineyards of L'Enclos, Grande Catelie and Demi-Lune belong to or adjoin these properties.

As for Margaux, James Molesworth provides a great review of Château Dauzac, the source for our vineyard called Grande Cabane. He names Dauzac in the same breath as Châteaux Margaux and Palmer saying that "*The wine here (Dauzac) is notably bright, purer and more energetic, and this is now a winery to seriously watch.*"

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We are also delighted to introduce a new parcel from Margaux, called La Louise, a name inspired by the small stream running through the property. This plot adjoins the vines of Château Lascombes and Château Malescot Saint-Exupéry.’

All in all, 2017 looks to be the excellent year for VINIV winemakers to work with such a wide array of individual parcels.

Stephen Bolger