

VINTAGE FACT SHEET

2012

THE 2012 GROWTH CYCLE

The winter was cold, April was cool and very rainy, and the growth cycle started late and only really got underway when it turned warmer in mid-May as the vines began to flower. The Merlot grapes did so quickly and quite evenly during the very fine week at the end of May. Then the temperatures fell by 10 to 12°C again at the beginning of June, so that we feared poor fruit setting and the appearance of “hens and chickens” (*millerandage*), which is what happened as the days passed by. We already knew that the harvest would not be enormous and that the differences in flowering time would generate delays in ripening before the harvest.

The vines caught up the time they had lost in the two previous years of drought and grew very fast, spurred on by heavy rainfall in April and bringing us extra work to control the growth. In spring, the conditions made the vines very prone to downy mildew, so we had to be on continuous alert.

July alternated cool and very hot temperatures of 34 and 35°C (93 to 95°F), which scorched the fruit.

July's average temperature in the Aquitaine region in 2012 was identical to that of 2011 and 2008 and 2°C lower than 2009 and 2010.

The canes hardened at the beginning of August, as announced by the French term (*aoûtement*) for the phenomenon ('August' in French is *août*), when the lack of water began to be felt. Then the weather turned very hot from 12th to 24th August and the Merlot started to slowly change colour, while the Cabernet experienced a more uniform onset of ripening. Later, we cut the greenest bunches off the vines, since they would never have been ripe for the harvest.

I had the feeling that this vintage would be liable to botrytis attack, because the leaves were still very green. Only 16 mm of rain fell in August, just one third of the usual precipitation.

In the first two weeks of September, the grapes ripened slowly because of the very dry conditions and with favourable temperatures and fine weather. The fruit was very clean and disease-free.

In mid-September, the temperatures became cooler and 50 mm of rainwater fell between the 21st and 27th often in the form of fine rain, but sometimes as a downpour. The dry soil drank up all the water. At this point, the grape skins were thick, firm and quite hard, but the rain was going to speed up ripening, so we knew we would have to harvest quickly but did not know when. The vines woke up progressively as the water trickled down to their roots.

At the beginning of October, the first signs of botrytis appeared on the young, more fragile vines. Phenolic ripeness had not quite reached its height, the final constituents needed a few more days, while the weather forecast announced 24 hours of southerly winds starting Friday and temperatures up to 27, 28, 24 and 27°C (81, 82, 75 and 81°F) over the coming four days. We decided to take a gamble and wait to start

picking after the weekend, so I set the beginning of the harvest for Monday 8th. The die was cast. We were hoping the southerly wind would dry up the botrytis. But we lost! The so-called southerly turned out to be a damp squib. From 27 September to 12 October, we only had four rain-free days! With damp regularity, rainfall varied between 0.2 and 3.8 mm per day, while the average maximum temperature was 22°C (72°F), in other words tropical conditions, ideal for botrytis to flourish.

THE HARVEST

So, we chased botrytis for the whole week that we harvested from 8th to 16th October. The irregularity of the onset of ripening and thence of full ripeness saved us from total catastrophe, because since botrytis only develops on grapes, whose skins have become tender, the attacks were progressive and gave us time to harvest.

THE WINE

2012 is clearly a Merlot year, because for Cabernets to be great we need a sunny autumn. This is good for our Saint-Emilion wines that are predominantly Merlot – Laroze had 70% in its blend. 2012 is not a vigorous vintage. It has medium body with lovely fresh aromas, it has lustre and is smooth with a long soft finish. This wine came into its own during its 15-month ageing in wood.

2012 facts and figures

MID-FLOWERING DATES	Merlot: 31 st May	Cabernet: 1 st June	
MID-VERAISON* DATES	Merlot: 8 th to 13 th August	Cabernet: 14 th & 15 th August	
HARVESTING DATES	Merlot: from 8 th to 13 th October	Cabernet Franc: 10 th to 16 th October	Cabernet Sauvignon: 13 th and 15 th October
WINE YIELD	38 hectolitres per hectare		
LENGTH OF BARREL AGEING	15 months		
% OF NEW BARRELS	50% new barrels	50% 1-year-old barrels	
BOTTLING	May 2014		
NUMBER OF BOTTLES expected	1 st wine: 85 000 blles	2 nd wine: 20 000 blles	
% 1 st and 2 nd WINE	1 st wine: 81%	2 nd wine: 19%	
BLEND	66% Merlot	28% Cab. Franc	6% Cab. Sauv.
PERCENTAGE ALCOHOL	13,5 %		
DATE OF BOTTLING	June 2014		

*The date at which 50% of the grapes in each bunch have changed colour, indicating that ripening has begun.



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