

VINTAGE FACT SHEET

2010

THE 2010 GROWTH CYCLE

Weather report:

It was a long cold winter with temperatures well below zero still in the week from 7 to 13 March and morning frosts down to minus 7°C (19°F). This suited us fine, because it delayed the start of vine growth and lessened the risk of damage from morning frost in April. This year the April full moon was due to fall late, around the 28th and a last cold snap was always capable of surprising us when it came.

Last winter was what I call a “good winter”, one which was cold and that lasted until late on in the year. I do not monitor rainfall from October to February, because the pluviometer breaks with the formation of ice, but I get the impression rainfall was average.

It only became really warm in April for about ten days, giving vine growth a good start. The vines had hitherto found it hard to quit their wintry appearance. This warm spell was quickly followed by a return to cold weather at the end of April and the beginning of May, which was chilly and lasted longer than usual and substantially stopped vine growth. We escaped frost at the end of April, but only just, around the full moon on the 28th. May only warmed up in its second half, but we did not see the clear, vigorous return to growth of the vines that we like to see at that time of year. The vines began to flower in the last week of May at Laroze, whose *terroir* is warm and early. The Merlots flowered when the weather was damp and still cool for the season, but then the following week the fine weather (finally) returned with normal temperatures and some wind which was good for proper fertilisation of the flowers. The earliest flowering Merlot suffered from poor fruit set and *millerandage* (hens and chickens), the later Merlot was better and the Cabernet flowered magnificently. The Merlot flowered slowly.

At the same time and this is what worsened the vine's slow return to growth, water reserves became imbalanced quite early. There was a serious lack of water in March, April and May with 30% less rainfall than average, which is enormous. It represents a missing 100 mm of rain in the first quarter of the year. One of the consequences was very poor mineralisation of the organic matter distributed in the spring on the plots of the vineyard that were lacking in vigour. They were not able to take advantage of it at the time when they most needed it, so growth was quite irregular in mid-June with a lot of bunches of fruit on canes that were sometimes not long enough and which did not have enough leaves to feed all the grapes properly. There were not enough food resources for the abundance of bunches on these vines, which had suffered from lack of water and warmth at the crucial moment. The extended winter and the early drought in spring were the key features at the beginning of this 2010 vintage, which would have a variable effect depending on how the following seasons manifested themselves and the characteristics of the different *terroirs*.

The hydric stress that we look forward to in August to ensure proper ripening of the fruit, arrived a month and a half too early and this would not be without consequence depending on the coming weather patterns.

Every year has its own idiosyncrasies, which must be identified and understood properly by the winegrower, if (s)he is to reduce the impact on the quality of the fruit and optimise that of the wine. This is what our work is all about and is at the very heart of the passion that drives us in our close collaboration with Nature and in the way we act in conjunction with Her.

In mid-June, happily the rain returned and gifted us with 68 mm, helping us catch up a part of the water deficit, which went from minus 100 to minus 70 mm. Then the heat hit us at the end of June and the beginning of July with temperatures 5 to 7°C above the seasonal average. It was 35°C (95°F) on 1st July. Just for fun, I took the temperature of the surface of the soil and measured 60°C (140°F)! The vine leaves were between 35 and 40°C (95 to 104°F). Obviously to put up with such heat, the vines have to transpire a lot of water. The grapes growing low down on 3-year-old vines were burnt in the first 6 to 7 cm (2¹/₂ inches) above the soil.

Starting on 21 June, we carried out leaf removal on the most shaded sides of the rows. The heat wave continued with 36°C (97°F) on 8 July. The men started work at 5.30 a.m. de-earthing the vines to avoid manipulating the soil in the full heat of the day. July was also very dry with 16.5 mm of rainfall instead of a seasonal average of 52 mm. We had to water the young vines by hand, stock by stock. The leaves on other young vines were already burning, because their root systems were not deep enough to draw up enough water on the very hot days. By the end of July, we had cumulated a total rainfall deficit of 140 mm since the beginning of March. This was no longer recoverable and the vintage was going to be affected by drought, which justified the cultivation choices we had taken at the beginning of June to limit the vines' water needs. The very hot spells at the beginning of July and the very sunny weather throughout the month contributed to the development of thick grape skins rich in polyphenols, as was the case in 2009. The manual thinning of the fruit, which was started at the end of July, took 3 times less time than usual, because the bunches were not so tight and not very big. This weather-induced failure of the fruit to develop affected the Merlots evenly, thinning them out naturally. The bunches of Cabernet, less affected by setting problems, were more regular and in naturally limited quantities. At the end of July, the temperatures returned to normal and the nights were more refreshing, which helped the vines survive better. Then in these conditions at the very beginning of August, the initial colour change of the grapes heralding the onset of ripening began.

26 August 2010: August has been cool and dry until the 20th when the temperatures went up again. Very hot dry weather ensued and the vines in certain sensitive plots began to lose their lower leaves. Rainfall up to the 26th August was only 12 mm, one fifth of the normal rate. The bunches swelled slowly, some becoming tight in places, and we began our leaf removal and fruit thinning campaigns on the 9th for three weeks with a small team, who tailored their work to the specific needs of each plot, because the onset of ripening was far from uniform and all the late-ripening bunches had to be removed. This work is especially important this year and has to be done well in order to make a very high quality wine. At this stage, it is vital to enable air to circulate around the fruit in case the weather goes bad and rot sets in. So we have scheduled one last campaign of leaf removal in September to have as much air as possible around the bunches, so they can dry quickly after any rain.

13 September 2010: we had 20 mm of rainfall at the beginning of the month, which was not very much, but was enough to give the vines some respite. Now the very high temperatures are over and the vines require less water. The slightly cooler

nights also produce some dew. This could be enough to fuel the ripening of the grapes, which are gradually getting bigger.

17 September 2010: we are starting to taste the grapes to decide the harvest starting date. These first impressions are very promising; the grapes' skins are thick, they are still crisp and packed with amazing colour. Sugar content is high and the fruit seems to have good acidity. What is also surprising is the quality of the pips, which are very ripe; many of them already have that slight hazelnut taste, which will contribute sweetness to the wine. I think this came from the drought, which prevented the vines from growing again in August and put them in the conditions for early ripening. The grapes are small and concentrated. At this point, the potential quality of this vintage appears even higher than the previous year. Are we going to have two high quality vintages one after the other like 1989 and 1990?

27 September 2010: The rain that fell last Thursday and Friday (23 and 24 September) amounted to 13 mm, which is a relief for the vines as they end their growth cycle. I have noticed a slight swelling and softening of the grape skins, which is a good sign. The weather turned clearly colder on Friday 24 and this should continue the whole week with minimum temperatures around 5°C (41°F) and maximum temperatures no higher than 21°(70°F), which is about 5 degrees lower than the seasonal average. This will not speed up grape ripening, so it looks like we are heading for a late harvest date. A little warmth would speed up progress to optimal ripeness, otherwise we will have to wait longer.

THE HARVEST

6 October 2010: we will start picking the Merlots this Friday 8 October at Laroze, then we will work on Saturday and pick again on Monday. The rain we had on Monday 4 was very beneficial and kick-started the vines. The ripeness of the grape skins has also improved, which we thought was hitherto insufficient.

The idea is certainly not to break all records for late harvests, but to pick fruit with skins softened by their perfectly ripe condition, so that once they are in the tanks they will release the colour, tannins and aromas that will give the vintage its identity. In view of the lovely potential for quality this year, it would be a pity to miss the opportunity by going too fast, even if it is not easy to wait, when many others have already started harvesting around us.

11 October 2010: We will finish picking the Merlot grapes on Wednesday 13. We will then see if we start on the Cabernet Franc, or if we wait a little longer. The Cabernet Franc grapes have developed very nicely over the last few days since the rain. The 10 mm of rain that fell this weekend will do them good.

This morning we tasted the juice of the first tanks of Merlots which is just beginning to ferment. These tanks are already full of colour, which shows that the skins were really ripe, and the aromas are top quality to make a truly great wine. The ripe fruit is very perceptible, which is very promising. However, the yields are very low.

15 October 2010: The temperatures have dropped and at night are around 5°C (41°F), while during the day the maximum varies between 17 and 20°C (63 and 68°F). This cool weather, which is normal in this season, slows down grape ripening, but the very bright, sunny days keep the vines developing sufficiently to gradually progress.

The bunches of fruit up to now are very healthy.

22 October 2010: We started picking the Cabernet Franc again on 20 October and finished on 21, including the Cabernet Sauvignon.

We celebrated the Gerbaude festival on 22 with the 58 people, who helped with the harvest, around a buffet lunch. We were relieved and delighted that we had been able to wait for the fruit to become really ripe. Our reward was being already able to taste wine in the making in the tanks with tender ripe tannins, just as we like them.

THE WINE

We have in our hands a fine vintage with remarkable colour, good acidity and tannins that are just right. All we have to do now is craft a great wine!

2010 facts and figures

MID-FLOWERING DATES	Merlots: 1 st June	Cabernets: 1 st June	
MID-VERAISON* DATES	Merlots: 7 August	Cabernets:	
HARVESTING DATES	Merlots: from 7 to 13 October	Cabernet Franc: 20 October	Cabernet Sauvignon: 21 oct
WINE YIELD	38.5 hectolitres per hectare		
LENGTH OF BARREL AGEING	On-going		
%AGE OF NEW BARRELS	60% new barrels	40% 1-year-old barrels	
BOTTLING	2012		
NUMBER OF BOTTLES expected	First wine:	Second wine:	
%AGE 1 st and 2 nd WINE expected	First wine: %	Second wine: %	
BLEND (approximate)	% Merlots	% Cab. Franc	% Cab. Sauv.

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



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