

Bordeaux 2018 Vintage Report

A game of two halves...

At the risk of sounding clichéd, 2018 was very much a game of two halves – before and after July. The winter and start of the growing season was extremely wet, which left many anticipating a challenging vintage. Mildew affected many châteaux and led to significantly reduced yields in places. Notably, Château Palmer (a strong contender for pick of the vintage) took the drastic step of not making any of their second wine Alter Ego and their Grand Vin volumes were reduced from around 10k to 6k bottles. The overall picture scarcely improved throughout the late spring, and it wasn't until the mid summer that the game turned on its head.

From mid-July all the way through to mid-October, there was heaven-sent, warm and dry weather. It was remarkable that after such a wet start to the year, the summer was so sunny and rain-free. Crucially, by the late summer when châteaux were making choices on harvest, the grapes had matured in optimal, dry conditions and were free of disease. Berry sizes were often small, which meant yields were in some cases down. This has given the wines a **unique concentration and tannic structure**, alongside intensified sugars, which has resulted in higher percentage alcohol. However, the high alcohol was barely noticeable in many of the wines we tasted owing to the impressive **freshness and balance**. The freshness of the wines seems to be rooted in relatively low pH values this year, which also gives **strikingly bright and vibrant colours**.

One important point to make is that owing to the lack of rain in September and October, there was great scope for winemakers to decide on grape picking dates. This has had a significant impact on the style of the 2018s. Those who picked late have more muscular and richly proportioned wines, while picking earlier has produced fresher and slightly lighter wines. The key, as ever, was marrying up the two extremes.

Selected highlights

It's a year where it's difficult to generalise but for me, the Northern Médoc excels on the Left Bank. In particular, **Pichon Lalande** has produced a truly astonishing wine. Equally, having tasted **Rauzan-Ségla** on three separate occasions, I think it has the potential to become one of the great wines from this Château. From a price versus quality standpoint, it's hard to imagine that any will offer greater value for money than **Château Capbern**. Now under the regal Calon-Ségur stable, this is a property that has truly harnessed the unique vintage characteristics and made a wine of formidable quality.

On the Right Bank, it would be very hard to look past a masterful **Vieux Château Certan**, and **Figeac** was mesmerising. Both of these will again be highly sought after in 2018 - please contact us for details. For those of you looking for value, the commune of Fronsac seems to be as good as it's ever been, with emerging customer favourite **Château Dalem** being the stand-out wine.

Many producers I spoke with in Bordeaux are, quite rightly, extremely bullish about these wines. We have been spoilt over the last five years with a succession of good to great vintages from Bordeaux and now in 2018, we have something genuinely exciting in our midst.