

Figeac, Saint-Emilion, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021

### **CHÂTEAU FIGEAC 2021**

Harvesting dates: 22<sup>nd</sup> September to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021

**AB** So much has happened in the vineyard during the Bordeaux 2021 vine cycle –spring frosts, problems with the flowering, excess rainfall resulting in disease, together with leaf hopper damage to the leaves and outbreaks of botrytis. How have you managed to deal with all that?

**Frédéric Faye** The reality that everyone acknowledges here is that 2021 is a very heterogeneous vintage. Some growers had serious problems, others very few. Some produced less good wine, others produced good or very good wines. It was a complex year. It was what I call a marathon vintage. Figeac came through it unscathed, and with great results, but it was incredibly demanding on our teams.



**AB** First things first, did you have a normal-size crop?

**Frédéric Faye** We did, thanks to the massive, tireless efforts of the crew. The marathon started in spring with the frosts, which we succeeded in keeping at bay. We then had a huge amount of rain in June, which led to outbreaks of downy mildew everywhere in Bordeaux. We stuck with our strategy of 90% ‘bio-control’ with eco-friendly sprays to protect the vines. It worked. The key here was the commitment of the teams in the vines, who worked round the clock and even volunteered during the weekends. It’s easy to forget that we then had a period of drought, which despite all the rain, stressed the young vines.

**AB** There isn’t much your crew can do if it rains during the flowering...

**Frédéric Faye** Amazingly, our vines flowered during a window of sunshine. We had no fruit set problems. Mother Nature smiled on us.

**AB** It didn’t even rain during the Merlot flowering?

**Frédéric Faye** Not at all. This is one reason why at Figeac this year we have produced a yield of over 38 hectolitres per hectare, which is very reasonable.

**AB** Almost normal!

**Frédéric Faye** It wasn’t all plain sailing though. The veraison of the Merlot was complicated. It went on for three weeks. As a result, bunches had different degrees of ripeness.

AB **Did the Merlot stay that way till the harvest?**

Frédéric Faye **What we noticed as we approached the harvest was that in the Merlot the pips were pretty ripe and the tannins were ripe enough. And the skins were thin, because we didn't have very hot weather in the summer. It was therefore important to bring in the Merlot before the health of the grapes deteriorated.**

AB **How satisfied are you then with the ripeness of your Merlot?**

Frédéric Faye **When the Merlot first came in, we were uncertain. And then, when we tasted the first wholly fermented vats, we got a really nice surprise. Although the degrees were lower, 12 to 12.5, there was really pretty fruit and good tannins. In fact, the slowness we noticed in the ripening concerned the juice rather than the pips, which were already ripe.**

AB **What will the final alcoholic degree be after incorporating the Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon?**

Frédéric Faye **It isn't all in yet, but we're expecting 13°. The two Cabernets are magnificent.**

AB **What was your harvesting strategy with the Cabernets?**

Frédéric Faye **As much as we decided to pick the young vines and the Merlot relatively quickly, we chose to wait for the Cabernets. It was a risk, because quite a bit of rain was forecast. In the end, hardly any rain fell, although there was a bit of moisture in the vineyards, which was a concern, but then an anticyclone with its east wind and sunshine set in, and this is still with us today. We're now bringing in wonderful, healthy Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon.**



Healthy, ripe 2021 Cabernet Franc on the Figeac sorting table (13/10/21)

**AB You've had quite a bit of luck this year!**

**Frédéric Faye The toughest aspect has been managing the stress, not so much of the vines but of the people working in them. 2021 required super-human efforts from our team to get over that marathon finishing line.**

**AB That was the important factor this year, the human factor...**

**Frédéric Faye We growers plan according to the weather reports. But this year the forecasts were often wrong. The best strategy was to ignore the forecasts and spend as much time as possible in the vines, inspecting the fruit and leaves on a daily basis and thinking on our feet. At Figeac, each plot is allocated a team, so each team knows its vines intimately. This helped enormously.**

**AB You must be very satisfied with the team's work...**

**Frédéric Faye There were times when everyone was impatient and stressed. The Manoncourt family were very supportive; they trusted us to make the right decisions. Production costs were heavy this year; the work was very labour-intensive. But the family's only criterion was quality. And we were confident we could make a really good vintage. We've done it before in difficult conditions –we made a really good 2013. Figeac was one of the best in that vintage.**

**AB Tireless work was crucial but also that bit of luck with the weather!**

**Frédéric Faye That's true. But don't forget the importance of terroir. We couldn't have achieved success without a great terroir.**

**AB Perhaps it was also an advantage having such a high proportion of the two Cabernets in the vineyard. Merlot was the tricky one this year...**

**Frédéric Faye I agree. Compare the veraisons: Merlot, as I said, took three weeks to complete. The two Cabernets took just five days, which means that their ripeness was much more even.**

**AB Which of the Cabernets, Franc or Sauvignon, is better in 2021?**

**Frédéric Faye They're both superb.**

**AB Has there been a particular strategy to adopt in the vinification this year?**

**Frédéric Faye We've followed our Figeac recipe of no sulphiting of the must and then a pre-fermentation cold soak to enhance fruit character. The fermentations this year are going smoothly and pretty quickly. And as for the macerations, it's really a question of lot by lot.**

**AB How advantageous has it been to vinify in your new state-of-the-art cellars for the very first time?**

**Frédéric Faye There are so many advantages? Where do I begin?**

**AB Name just one.**

**Frédéric Faye Undoubtedly, the wide range of vat capacities, which allows us to separate out lots of different volumes and to work with ever greater precision. We are now able to separate one single plot into three different vats.**

**AB How many vats do you have in this new cellar?**

**Frédéric Faye Forty. Which is almost double what we had before.**

**AB And what is the range of capacities?**

**Frédéric Faye From 50hl to 124hl, each of the vats corresponding to plots in our vineyard. Eight of them are in oak and the rest are in stainless steel.**

**AB Have you kept your traditional pigeage technique, using wooden grills to push down and immerse the cap of skins?**

**Frédéric Faye We most certainly have! We believe in this technique. It provides a long, gentle and refined extraction.**

**AB Some of your colleagues are predicting that 2021 will be similar to 2014. How do you see it?**

**Frédéric Faye I'm confident that at Figeac it will be much better than 2014.**