

Cheval Blanc, October 5<sup>th</sup> 2021

### **CHÂTEAU CHEVAL BLANC 2021**

Harvesting dates 21<sup>st</sup> September to 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021

**AB** Now that the harvest is almost done, how would you sum up this 2021 vintage?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Generally, across Bordeaux, it's a very uneven one. The pattern is really mixed. You can find growers that have done pretty well and are happy, while there are others who are really disappointed. Some vineyards have had healthy foliage, and others have been hit by downy mildew or frost or attacked by pests. And strangely, there are vineyards which look perfectly healthy but have produced very low yields, and then others that have suffered and have somehow produced large crops.



**AB** On the whole, Bordeaux châteaux are reporting small crops. What's the situation at Cheval Blanc?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** It's a medium to low yield. We've still got some of the crop to come in, and right now, what we've harvested amounts to a yield of about 30 hectolitres per hectare. It's actually going to end up a bit lower than that. We'll probably end up with 27 to 28hl/ha, which is not very big obviously, but not dramatically small either.

**AB** What was the main reason in Bordeaux for these low yields?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Some vineyards were hit by frost, which wasn't the case at Cheval Blanc, by the way. Fruit set problems after a less than perfect flowering had an impact. Then of course, because of the high rainfall in June, there was fungal disease. Nobody escaped it. In our particular case, we lost some crop after an outbreak of downy mildew on the Merlot at the beginning of July.

**AB** The Cabernets were OK?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** They were unaffected. In any case, the Cabernets are more resistant to downy mildew.

**AB** What's left to come in? The Cabernet Franc?

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **5 hectares of Cabernet Franc, a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon and some very late-ripening Merlot.**

AB **How much did those wet conditions in June and July impact on the profile of the wine? Is there some dilution?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **The rain obviously had an impact. Dilution perhaps is not the appropriate word. But clearly the tannins don't have the density or the concentration of a great vintage. Alcohol levels are more moderate, too.**

AB **Sometimes, Bordeaux refers to these 'lesser' vintages as 'classic' years. Would you describe 2021 as a classic Bordeaux vintage?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **It's certainly not a classic year, for the simple reason that the growing conditions weren't 'classic'.**

AB **Are the tannins an issue in 2021?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **The quantity of tannins doesn't come into the equation in 2021. It's the quality of the tannins that will be key. Our aim as winemakers will be to work to bring out refined, delicate, spherical tannins and avoid any rusticity in them. The really pleasing feature of the 2021 is its fruit character. So we'll also focus on preserving the freshness of the fruit, too.**

AB **During the build-up to the harvest there were mutterings of another 2013. That talk has now stopped, since finer weather has set in. Does 2021 have anything of the 2013?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **It's always difficult to compare vintages, especially at such an early stage, but I can categorically state that there's no comparison with the 2013 vintage. 2021 has much more to offer. The aromatics are really good. The fruit is very attractive, as I said. On the palate, there'll be less tension than we're used to. The texture will be 'looser'. But it's a ripe vintage.**

AB **No vegetal notes?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **Not at all. Nothing green. Come to think of it, if you're looking for comparisons, 2021 reminds me of 2004. Or perhaps even 2014.**

AB **In some vintages, small crops enable better ripening and concentration of juices in the berries. That didn't appear to happen in 2021. Was this simply due to a lack of sunshine and not enough hot weather?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **Because of the rain, the vines continued to shoot beyond the beginning of the ripening process. This slowed down the ripening, as the vines were trying to do two things at the same time. What made matters worse was that the vine leaves were then attacked by leaf hopper pests, which further slowed the process.**

AB **You mentioned in summer that you expected to start the picking on 15<sup>th</sup> September. When did you actually start?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **We put it back to 21<sup>st</sup> September, for the very reasons I just mentioned.**

AB **Cheval Blanc is renowned for its early-ripening terroir. What risk is there for the remainder of your crop to come in, bearing in mind that outbreaks of botrytis are occurring here and there?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **Botrytis is lurking, yes. We're OK right now, we're botrytis-free, but we'll make sure we get a move on anyway and bring it in quickly.**

AB **What have you learnt from this very tricky vintage?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **2021 has reminded us that when nature produces a challenging growing season like this one, it doesn't matter who you are, how good a vine grower or winemaker you are, it's the same problems for everybody. 2021 wasn't the year of the 'good vine grower' or the 'good winemaker' or indeed of the best terroir. 2021 was all about nature. It was nature that decided how things would be, and there was little we could do about it.**

AB **A lesson in humility?**

Pierre-Olivier Clouet **Yes, and a reminder that sometimes we just have to accept things as they are. After all, all things considered, we can't complain after a run of six wonderful Bordeaux vintages. If you take a look in our vineyard archives, you'll see that many years ago, it was the reverse situation; we often had to wait six years before a great vintage came along!**

