

Pomerol, 11th October 2021

CHÂTEAU BEAUREGARD and CHÂTEAU PETIT VILLAGE

Harvesting dates: 22nd September to 13th October 2021

AB Everyone in Bordeaux is reporting a particularly exhausting and challenging year because of the weather conditions. Was it more difficult for organic producers, such as yourselves?

Vincent Priou No, it was the same for everyone. We have 12 years' experience of organic farming now. By working well and adapting to the conditions in 2021, organic growers didn't suffer more than growers working conventionally.



AB Working well meaning spraying more frequently?

Vincent Priou More frequently and also at the right times, and being in the vines ready to react at any time.

AB Do you think that those working conventionally are less vigilant?

Vincent Priou Not necessarily of course, but if you're using chemicals, there's a risk of becoming over-confident and assuming that your vines are protected when they're not.

AB With a few exceptions, yields were quite low in 2021. What is your crop size estimation?

Vincent Priou At Petit Village, the crop is relatively large, maybe even larger than 2020. At Beauregard, we were lower. It's a bit too early to say, but we're probably down by a third at Beauregard.

AB What was responsible for the shortfall?

Vincent Priou Firstly, as from the budding, the potential crop size was only average. Then there was what I call a 'pernicious' spring frost. Pernicious, because at the beginning you don't see the damage. That was the case in a Beauregard plot close to Libourne. However, generally speaking, in Pomerol this year we were well protected from frost damage, but the vines were nevertheless stressed by the cold snap.

AB Did this stress affect the crop size?

Vincent Priou The vines, as a result, weren't in great condition for the flowering process. This problem was compounded by unsettled weather during the flowering which led to poor fruit set. Then quite a bit of rain fell which caused outbreaks of downy mildew. The whole resulted in a small crop.

AB Presumably, the sorting was drastic...

Vincent Priou This year we made full use of our optical sorting line. We eliminated efficiently all the berries with millerandage and those dried out by downy mildew. We'd already done a sorting in the vines, but a thorough precision sorting made sure all the fruit going into the vats was ripe and healthy.

AB What percentage of the crop would you say was discarded through sorting?

Vincent Priou I reckon about 10%.

AB As you said earlier, Beauregard has been organically-farmed for the last 12 years. Did you use the same vine-growing strategies at Petit Village as you did at Beauregard?

Vincent Priou Yes, because Petit Village is in its first year of conversion to organic farming. As soon as the new owners took over Petit Village, organic farming was introduced. It's actually a bit easier at Petit Village, because being on the top of the Pomerol plateau the vines are better ventilated.

AB How about the wine? It would appear that alcoholic degrees are lower than usual. Often you say that at Beauregard degrees are never exceptionally high...

Vincent Priou Yes, although in recent vintages, we've had 14°. In 2021, we're at 12.5 to 13. That's not low for Bordeaux, but we've recently become accustomed to 13.5 to 14.5.

AB During the vinification, you have to be careful not to over-extract when alcoholic degrees are high. With lower alcohol, did you push the extraction a bit more in this vintage?

Vincent Priou Well, because there was some unevenness in berry ripeness and the pips and skins were lacking that optimal ripeness, we needed to exercise caution. We pushed the extraction at the beginning of the fermentation, but as soon as the density fell to 1030 or 1020 we went very lightly. We didn't want the tannins of the pips to come through in the wine. We've been very 'hands-off' during the maceration period too. We're now getting some nice volume and flesh coming through.

AB 40 years ago, with the same growing conditions, the result would have been very different, would you agree?

Vincent Priou Oh yes. We would have harvested earlier, for sure, to avoid risks. And there were no sorting machines. We would have picked unripe grapes.

AB However, 2021 is far from a super-ripe year. Is it ripe enough?

Vincent Priou Yes! You feel it's ripe, and there's very nice fruit. It's aromatically ripe. The tannins are just ripe. The tannic structure is lighter. There's freshness and good balance. There's nothing vegetal.

AB How would you rate this 2021 vintage? It clearly isn't one of the greats. Would you describe it as one of those 'lesser' vintages?

Vincent Priou It's what I would call an 'intermediary' year. One to drink early.

AB Such as which other vintage?

Vincent Priou 2012 or perhaps 2008 or 2004. Perhaps a mix of all 3.

AB Not bad. At one stage, some growers were anticipating another 2013!

Vincent Priou At one point yes, because the weather forecast was much worse than it actually turned out to be. The rain didn't really materialise and botrytis was kept at bay. Botrytis was the problem in 2013. Whereas this year, it didn't come and we were able to wait.