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WINE MERCHANTS



BORDEAUX 2022  
VINTAGE REPORT



# BORDEAUX 2022 VINTAGE REPORT

Heralded as ‘exceptional’ by many, 2022 is an individual vintage standing apart from the others due to the extremes encountered during the growing season.

If, like myself, you listened to the weather reports coming from Bordeaux last summer you would be excused for expecting another 2003. Five heatwaves affected the region in the summer. Temperatures up to 43C were recorded in some communes. There were drought conditions throughout July and August.

So what happened? How did the Bordelais turn it around?

The answer:  
Vegetation and canopies in and around the vineyards.

The resilience of the vines. 2022 is a vintage of respect, in the capacity of nature to deal with extremes. Fittingly this primeurs was the first where it was obvious that universally Châteaux have adopted more natural growing environments for their vines, embracing cover crops, mixed vegetation and canopies in and around the vineyards.

Pristine was the past, biodiversity is the future. In the words of Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion

‘This was a year of ...Waiting. Patience. Worry. Wonder.’



CHÂTEAU LAROQUE, SAINT EMILION.



**Smith Haut Lafitte - ‘There are some vintages that stand out like milestones and leave their mark on history. A series of challenges, like the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, marked out the 2022 vintage.’**

## VINTAGE 2022

Winter 2021/22 was the coldest in ten years. The Spring season started just a few days early with bud break in late March. Frost affected a small number of properties, Quinault L'Enclos was reduced to yields of just 18hl/ha due to an affected vineyard.

The affects were minimal for most. April was cool and wet, raising the water tables for the coming season. As Summer arrived flowering was recorded on 16th May at Lynch Bages, in settled conditions that continued until the first heatwave in mid June. It is the belief of many that his heatwave allowed the vines to mount an armoury of solar protection. Thickening the skins on the berries and slowing the green growth to concentrate ripening on a smaller scale.





These reduced vines, their berries protected against the sun by thick skins were effectively set up to march on against the following four heatwaves.

What differed to other extremely hot years, such as 2003 were the cool nights, allowing acids to slow their descent and the flavours to catch up with the sugars in the grapes. Estates like Haut-Bailly in Pessac-Léognan and Figeac in Saint-Emilion enjoyed some rain in August thanks in part to the hedges and woodlands that surround their vineyards. Microclimates of the



CHÂTEAU CANON

## WEATHER STATS

-  In Pauillac 16 days in July and August were recorded above 35C, 2 were over 40C
-  In Saint Emilion JP Moueix recorded temperatures above 40C over 7 days in June and July. Some rain fell on areas at the end of June (80mm)
-  Margaux saw just 40mm of rain from July till the end of harvest
-  Rainfall for the year was on average half the normal average of 944mm in Bordeaux



Edouard Mouiex - 'I'd compare 2022 to 1982, at the time the vintage was judged as too low in acid to be considered great. Similarities run through both.'



These atypical vintages are now part of the Bordeaux story. What's interesting are the mitigating factors that have been highlighted as precursors to success in these trying vintages. A lot of discussion focussed on the soils.

Limestone helped preserve precious pHs in the resultant wines. Clay offered sponge-like absorption and associated release of water. The famous blue clay of Pomerol, which edges the vineyards of Figeac was said to be critical to their vines in 2022. In the image to the left taken at Haut-Bailly in August, you can see the drought conditions taking their toll on trees and the vineyard soils, but green vines stand out in their vibrancy. The roots diving deep to collect water. Château Pavie in Saint Emilion enjoys an elevated position, they recorded night time temperatures of just 9C in July and 4.5C in September, helping to preserve aromatics and freshness in the wines.

Altitude is not something mentioned a lot in Bordeaux (it being particularly low - the Médoc sits at 10m above sea level). Troplong Mondot perched on a hill in Saint Emilion at 110m enjoys the associated benefits seen at Pavie of cool nights during hot spells.



Despite being delayed by a prolonged veraison (thanks to heat wave number 4), the start of harvest was the earliest ever for most Châteaux. This was tempered by it also being the longest. September rewarded the vineyards with sunny, autumnal days, no rain and a relaxed window to pick the fruit. This meant for many, harvesting in tries, selecting only the perfectly ripe fruit amongst rows over a number of days.

At Pontet Canet they went so far as to cut any imperfect grapes out of the bunches in the vineyards. This precise management of the harvest, along with the intense sorting enabled the cellars to see near perfect fruit arrive at their doors.

Universally, it has been acknowledged that the vines resilience and adaptability is the backbone of the success of this vintage.

## WINES MADE IN THE VINEYARD

What was exciting this year was the full adoption of cover crops and more sustainable practices in the majority of vineyards. Broad beans, mustards and wild flowers littered the vineyards. Trees were noticed planted amongst the vines at Cheval Blanc.

At Pichon Baron they attributed their pH of 3.6 to the green cover that has been used in the vineyards since 2018. This was reflected at Les Carmes Haut-Brion who found that the freedom given to the laterals and cover crops attributed to the acidity and salinity of their wine this vintage.



CHATEAU CLERC MILON

**Alfred Tesseron Pontet Canet 'The trick of the vintage was not to work hard in the winery, but to let things happen. You had to be very very light, looking for equilibrium'**



EARLY SIGNS OF LIFE AT CHÂTEAU LATOUR

## IN THE CELLARS

While the heroes of the tale of 2022 are the vines, it must be recognised that the world class cellars in Bordeaux, famed for their outward extravagance and futuristic designs (Lynch Bages we may be looking at you here..) were also on the right track. 2022 was all about cooler ferments and gentle extraction. 100% new French oak is now rare and fruit is allowed to define the wine. It is a pleasure to behold. Temperatures pre, during and post ferment were played with to secure aromatics. Conseillante pulled the wine right back to 5C post ferment to retain fragrant tones in a vintage that they call their best this century. At Haut-Bages-Liberal Claire Villars Lurton put full berries into the vat enabling almost semi carbonic maceration with no pumping over to achieve their fragrant expression.

Palmer went against the grain, enjoying the big ripe tannins, taking full advantage of them with battonage and press wine additions that were greater than other years. Palmer was one of our wines of the vintage, so don't judge too soon...



AMPHORA - GONZAGUE LURTON'S AMPHORAE AT CHÂTEAU FERRIERE

While vintage 2022 has many greats, it's certainly not a heterogenous vintage. Alcohols are higher than we would like in some wines, pH's are also raised, opening the door to bacteria if conditions allowed. In my mind, this vintage is a turning point for the Bordelais. They have a new awe for their vines, proven in battle against the extremes of climate change. A new wave of understanding has driven a more holistic approach in the vineyards. It's no longer just about the vines. Montrose painstakingly number the birds, hedges, trees and drains in their holdings, others do the same. 2016 in Barolo marked a year when the 'stars aligned'. Winemaking practices and vineyard expression formed as one. 2022 in Bordeaux gives me the

same feeling. True, it's an 'exceptional' vintage in that it's 'atypical'. But the careful tannin management, extraction of fruit and importantly expression of terroir has resulted in some excellent wines that will drink in the short, medium and long term. There is something here for everyone. Will you buy 2022 en primeur? Well, that's up to you. But we get the impression that those wines that got it right in 2022 aren't going to hang around for those on the sidelines.

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