

2010: An embarrassingly good vintage

Back in November, many owners were already quietly confident that their '10 was better than the already legendary '09 but, coming hot on the heels of the hallowed 2009s, they seemed embarrassed to say it too loudly. Today, half of Bordeaux is less timid in assessing '10 as great as, if not greater than '09, whilst the other half is more reserved in such a judgement. But there is one point of total agreement: it is totally different from its predecessor.

Both vintages have enormous concentration and high alcohols. Both have great power and weight. But there the similarities end: The 09s are, superficially anyway, softer wines made from gentle, progressive weather, with gradual concentration coming from perfect summer ripening, followed, continuously and without interruption, by further concentration from a perfect autumn. The year had gone through the gears seamlessly with no jolts.

The '10s on the other hand are robust wines made from more aggressive and extreme conditions and their concentration comes from more extreme dehydration. They are the product of drought, of a more irregular sugar build-up in summer and a sudden re-concentration at the finish. And, most importantly, they get their higher acidities from the cooler August-September minimum temperatures and from the cooler autumn.

Add to all this the 2010's later spring water replenishment, in June as opposed to April, all just a bit too late to get a gradual start to the vegetation, the yo-yo June conditions for the flowering and the consequent need, as in 2000, for the season to catch back up as from July, and a parched dry summer that knocked it back into shape, and the harsher, very robust and strongly tannic style of the '10s begins to be explained.

And what caused such a cold winter, such erratic conditions in early summer and such a hot and dry high summer and autumn? I apologise for this but once again we have to go back to the South-Central Pacific where we left off last year with a mild El Niño system that had unexpectedly developed in June 2009 and had ended up creating a slight wobble in the air flows over the Atlantic, producing Bordeaux's fine regular Bordeaux summer of that year. This had been an unusual result. Historically, strong El Niños produce cool summers in Europe: The poor Bordeaux summers of 1925-26, 1972-1973, 1987-88 correspond exactly to strong El Niño events; and one of the strongest of all times in 1789 is supposed to have caused the crop failures and bread shortages that sparked off the French Revolution. In 2009, it had not been strong enough to inflict such disastrous weather on the whole of Europe, only the North and East, whilst the South-West was spared.

This El Niño event continued up to June 2010, some say also aggravated by an almost total absence of solar activity (no nice auroras to admire in the Arctic this year), and over the winter it had the effect of displacing the Icelandic low pressure systems further East, which in their turn sucked Arctic air down round them, anti-clockwise, into Europe. Hence the very cold winter.

When, in May-June, it was succeeded by the strongest La Niña since 1973, there was a short period of erratic conditions during the transition, disturbing Bordeaux's month of June. Thereafter, as it got ingrained, its effect rolled eastwards over the American Continent, resulting in exactly the opposite conditions to 2009: a cold and dry South American winter, a miserable Californian summer, heat-waves in the South and East of USA, and finally the warmest ever North Atlantic sea surface temperature, which, when joined by an unusually warm Labrador current descending from the fast melting polar ice cap, strengthened the unsettled summer westerly winds. These came in on a more southerly track than usual, over Ireland, Southern Britain and the Channel, leaving the retreating Azores high pressure system

to benefit only the South-West. Northern Europe had a miserable summer, and could hardly believe it when we said in October that, down in Bordeaux, we were parched from drought.

Winter 2009/10

We couldn't know it at the time, because we didn't know that we were going into such a dry year, but the very high early winter rainfall was to become the saving grace of the vintage, storing up in the depths of the soil a reserve of dampness that would become crucial in the dog days of summer that were to come.

As soon as the '09 harvest was over, some tight low pressure systems moved very slowly over England and then got stuck over the Channel, spinning off wheels of rain-bearing stationary fronts. During the first 11 days of November, it rained and rained, and again at the end of the month, bringing twice the average precipitation for November: 204mm against the average 106.

December, with 92mm and January with 78mm, were par for the season and kept the water tables nicely topped up. From then on, apart from normal rainfall in March and a very wet June (when it came a bit too late – 2 months later than last year), we were to experience continuous drought all through the rest of the vineyard year.

November was unusually warm, 2°C above normal, and the yellow leaves stayed stuck to the vines well into December, a month which started off warm, but then which careered into a sudden cold snap from 13th to 21st December. On 17th, when Eastern Europe was at -30°C, we hit a “mere” -7°C, still very chilly by Bordeaux standards. The prevailing winds had changed from the warm southerlies of November to very cold continental easterlies and northerlies for December, January and February, all three months returning average temperatures well below the average, so that this became the coldest January since 1992 and Aquitaine felt like East Germany. On January 6th, snow fell, an unusual occurrence in Bordeaux, and it stayed on the ground for a full week (however not quite so extreme as in Britain). Over the whole winter, we had 40 days of freezing temperatures as compared to the average 22, more than enough to ensure that the vines remained dormant and a good antidote to any bugs that might have been having any malicious intentions.

Spring 2010 and the budding

With winter receding, we started to go into an even more irregular weather pattern, certainly a product of the nascent La Niña system, which elsewhere would culminate later in the year in the disastrous crop failures and mine floodings in the Southern hemisphere and the devastating hurricanes in NE Australia. Meanwhile, in France, some equally erratic things were starting to happen. On February 28th, a freak hurricane “Xynthia” slammed into the coast just North of Bordeaux, claiming 59 lives in the Vendée. There followed an uncanny freezing calm that descended on Bordeaux for the first two weeks of March, as the Atlantic high pressure systems, so typical of good Bordeaux summers but not winters, ballooned over the whole of Europe, sucking Arctic air down through Scandinavia. There were 10 frosts over this period: It was a very unusually long period of frost so late in the winter, the likes of which we had only been seen before in March 1971. It similarly was responsible for the season's lateness which would never be caught up.

It ended rapidly on 17th March with a return of those low pressure systems over the Channel, bringing warmer, damper and then rainier conditions up to 4th April. 63 of March's 68mm of rain fell now. These should have been perfect conditions for activating a strong budding. But it had been just a bit too cold, and continued quite cool well into April. We saw a few swellings trying to push through the dry wood before the end of March showers, but it was only when this damp cool period ended and the warmth accelerated that the budding could really get under way. Most of the bud break was to happen therefore mid April,

between 4-8 days late, and quite spun-out (although less so than last year). However much everyone realises that the flowering rather than the budding dates determine the earliness or lateness of the rest of the vineyard year, there were some concerns that we really were getting a little too late. In addition, April and May continued in the same irregular vein as March, both months starting showery and cool, then crescendoing into unusual heat before dropping back to cool again. It was at this time that the vine started to do what it was going to do all year: produce short periods of intensive growth, interspersed by long periods of consolidation, totally different from its progressive development of the previous year.

Most buds had burst by mid April, and by the end of the month, the Right Bank and the warmer gravel soils had good growth, with shoots of 25 cm or so, whilst the Left Bank and cooler central area vineyards were still a sea of little flecks of pale green, looking like an impressionist landscape, barely out to two leaves. Such disparity was very noticeable and we were still quite late but nevertheless the mood was positive. The mid-April and mid-May night-time temperatures were very low but there had been no sign of spring frost; there was absolutely no pressure from disease, most properties still only on their 2nd spraying as late as end May; and the “sortie” was well-set and plentiful so that you could now see a good number of regularly-spaced and healthy-looking bunches.

Early summer 2010, and the flowering

With the drought continuing through May, it was now time for the vines to flower, and after such yo-yo conditions of April and the persistent drought continuing throughout May, the prospects were not perfect. The vine seemed not only thirsty but also confused by such changeable conditions. From 21st May, egged on by sudden heat, it tried hard to flower, and in many cases succeeded, especially for the Merlots and Sauvignons and then the scorching weekend of 5th June brought on a further bout of very rapid flowering of both Merlots and Cabs. It all started to look as though it would be OK after all. But then suddenly the Sunday 6th night temperature spiked back down to a horrible 10°C and, as from Monday morning, a jumble of weak stationary fronts brought a series of cool nights and grey, showery days. Many flowers of this period ended up infertile (“coulure” or “shatter”), whilst those bunches that we had previously thought had set successfully, especially the older Merlots, now ceased to develop and became “millerands” (aborted).

There seemed to be no particular geographical reason for successful or unsuccessful flowering. Both banks, all central and outlying areas got hit indiscriminately. It was more a question of each flower’s individual evolution at certain precise moments such as that Sunday night cold snap or during certain phases of the previous yo-yo conditions. But as usual, it was the Merlots rather than the Cabs that got hit. This event became a big factor in the reduced yield of the vintage and of any disparity of potential quality at the end..

On a more positive note, the lateness had been partially caught up and we were now about on the same schedule as 2009, late but not seriously late. Secondly, there was excellent air circulation amongst the bunches – especially the millerand ones - all already looking unusually big and long, probably due to rapid growth from the hot, damp week immediately before the flowering. This would make for a much safer situation if the weather turned damp. Thirdly, the big rainfall of mid June (91mm – the average for the whole month being 63mm) had re-invigorated the soils. We would have preferred it earlier, as in April the previous year, but were happy with what we got, as this was to be virtually the final precipitation of the vineyard year. It was the most defining moment of the vintage: without it, the vines would have totally shut down during the long summer drought that was to come.

High summer

With the June rains out of the way, 2010's mid-season turbulence started to steady in Bordeaux and from 20th June right through the rest of the summer, the Azores high pressure system brought its permanently hot North-Westerly air flows into the region, protecting it from the series of depressions that continued to slam through the British Isles and Northern Europe. Bordeaux was thus shielded from this worsening turbulence of world weather that drowned thousands in the floods in Pakistan and China, that produced the violent heat-waves in the US and that made the Californian "May gray" and "June gloom" persist into July and August.

The end of June spike of heat was impressive, with daytime temperatures suddenly up at 28°1 for those final 10 days, compared to an average of 23°5. This provoked violently fast growth of the vine's hitherto unprolific foliage, necessitating a more urgent "levage" (lifting the foliage onto the wires) and more "écimage" (topping) than usual.

The heat and, above all, the drought continued all through July and August, which between them registered 534 sun hours, 2 hours more than for 2009's exceptional summer and 50 hours above the average. During these two months, there were only 11 days when it rained at all, and then only very slightly, totalling just 32mm against an average of 114mm. So this really was total drought, more so even than in 2005, when the odd thunderstorm had alleviated the situation and a little more so than in 2009 with its occasional shower or two.

As in 2009, however, the heat was never excessive, apart from the occasional spike of 35°C+ and it came in from the moister ocean rather than from the drier East. There were 44 days over 25°C, pretty close to the 30 year norm of 38.1 days, there were 17 days over 30°C (the norm is 12.7 days) and only 3 days over 35°C. So we were far from the brutal scorching conditions of 2003, 1990 and that all time record 1921.

The main difference to '09 was that July was the hotter month of the two, with average temperatures at 22°4C against the norm of 20°8, whereas August was considerably cooler: 20°8C against a norm of 20°9C. In 2009, it had been the other way round, with the temperatures rising progressively during July and August, accounting for a much more gradual ripening. In 2010, with the greater heat coming earlier, the sugar build-up was accelerated a bit prematurely and, as in 1998, seemed to trap some of the more acidic elements into the concentration process. Then the cooler August, and especially the very cool nights of mid-August, often down to 10-11°C, preserved that freshness of acidity as the grapes moved towards total ripeness. Combined with the shrinking effect of the drought on the berries (they often lost 30% of their weight through dehydration at this time), this element of acidity got exaggerated and went on to become a salient feature of the 2010 vintage's style of fresh and often aggressive tannins for the reds and enhanced aromatics for the whites.

The "véraison" (colour change) was noted between 4th and 12th August, the drought conditions encouraging the vine to temporarily abandon its foliage and devote all its attention to its fruit. So the cycle caught up its lateness a little, now down to about 4 days later than the norm, further suggesting, in spite of the terrific build-up of sugars, that this hot, dry year would also be late and therefore bear little resemblance to similarly dry but very early harvests such as '90 or '03.

During the summer, the usual vineyard work continued, but with less crop-thinning than last year. The first green harvest of late June / early July was generally lighter than usual, since a lot of the Merlot had already been lost to coulure and millerandage, and the spacing of the grapes had been naturally more satisfactory anyway. The second culling, at the véraison, when any laggard bunches and grapes are weeded out, was also quite light, except for some of the millerand bunches.

There was little need for pest-control. Oidium and grey rot were at an all time low and it was so dry that few felt the need for anti-botrytis treatments. The cochylis and eudemis

moths were a bit of a problem, especially the 3rd generation at the end of August, but nowadays these are treated more and more by sexual confusion than by spraying. This was becoming an easy year for properties on their final qualifying year to get bio certification.

September-October and the harvest

Coming off such a dry period, with lawns yellow and roadsides like savannah, it was amazing to see the vines such a beautiful dark green, like Las Vegas golf courses, showing no signs of stress – apart from recently planted vines which had often keeled over and occasionally others on lighter soils or exposed at the end of the rows whose leaves had started to shrivel and bunches to raisin.

The summer had been arid but the vines had never really shut down, certainly largely because the heat had been neither too dry nor too extreme. It was just a question of lack of rainfall: almost nothing since mid-June. But at this time, many were worried about the effect of such drought if it were to continue into the autumn.

The forecast for 6th-9th September was for the remains of hurricanes Danielle, Earl and Fiona to bring some alleviating rain, but they all veered off to the North, leaving Bordeaux with a few small showers, gratefully received and very invigorating, but only of much use for the dry white harvest which had started on 31st August for the earliest Pessac-Léognan estates, on Monday 6th for the Entre-Deux-Mers Sauvignons and on 13th for most Sémillons. Apart from these little useful showers, the dry white harvest was undertaken in totally dry and often hot conditions, generally up until 24th. It is a tribute to the cool nights of August that, unlike the previous year, these hot, dry conditions would make these white wines as fresh as they would be rich.

The traditional Equinox disturbance had been very light. This year, it was rather the spring tides of 12th that influenced the weather. The locals had said that if there was to be high pressure at the high tides, the fine weather would stay...and they were right: it did.

Now it was time to prepare for the red harvest. Back in August, they had mostly been preparing for a 22nd September start, but, as the drought wore on and the tannins evolved so slowly, most pushed the programme back by a week. The feeling mid-month was that, although the sugar readings were already at almost 14° for the Merlots and 13° for the Cabs, this was not the kind of vintage that could be harvested at will as in '05 or '09. Unlike both these vintages, there had just been too many difficulties: lateness of the harvest, coulure and millerandage at flowering, straggly bunches, irregular véraison, high acidities, stressed vines. In addition, just before the harvest, the tannin levels were getting out of control (often 50-70% more than 09) and the total acidities very high (often at 4,5 g/l in relation to 3,5 last year).

As usual, the traditionally earlier-ripening vineyards of Pomerol and Pessac-Léognan now started picking: around 22nd or 24th, during a second period of very light refreshing showers, and the rest during the much cooler week of 27th. The musts came in black and dense, very sweet, and bursting with tannin. For the rest, it was an “à la carte” harvest that was generally delayed another week

With these Merlots just about finished and the superb conditions continuing for the St Emilion and Médoc Merlots that were just starting, September finished almost totally dry with just 23,8mm of precipitation versus a norm of 90,3mm, and also hugely sunny with 243 sun hours versus a norm of 182. The thunder-storms of 7th and 8th were to be the only rainfall of the year to produce precipitation irregularly and the differences were significant: only 8mm on Pessac-Léognan and the mid and South-Médoc, but up to 30mm on Northern Médoc, St Estèphe, Fronsac, parts of St Emilion and Southern Graves and Sauternes.

The forecast had always been for a lot of rain over the first ten days of October. Bordeaux was supposed to be about to bear the brunt of the very deep depressions swirling across the North Atlantic, the remnants of several Caribbean tropical storms. In the end, the

only really rainy day was Monday 4th October, with between 20 and 30mm in all regions of Bordeaux, followed by 10mm on 10th. Apart from these two days, the weather was overcast but not wet. Hurricane Otto, predicted as the villain of the piece, decided to veer away from the usual clockwise track and to wander aimlessly about in the mid-Atlantic, where it ended up dying out, close to the Spanish coast of all places, actually pushing the high pressure system towards Bordeaux. We should build a monument in the Place des Quinconces for Otto.

This was the final clincher for the second half of the harvest. The vines were now refreshed from these two days of rain and, in very warm temperatures (the first 10 days of October were a full 5°C over the norm), could function once more. After a few days, and the Merlots safely in, a cool, drying Easterly air current blew into Bordeaux and, as in '86, these fine, cold, dry days allowed the Cabernets to re-concentrate and to be harvested in the best possible conditions. The cold nights – on 18th down to freezing – totally prevented any rot risk, and the fine cool days allowed the final touches to be put on the Cabs. Most finished by mid-month, and when the rains returned on 23rd, it was all safely in. These 3 weeks of October had gone from very warm to very cold but above all, the month finished with an incredible 180 hours of sun hours (the norm is 134).

Vinification

The IPTs (total tannin counts) were absolutely enormous. But, unlike the gentler more progressively-evolved tannins of 09, these tannins were the result of hydric stress, of the dehydration of the juice that left more thick hard skins than juice. There were also some raisined grapes amongst them So there was a real potential for harshness and everyone had to be very careful with their extraction. Anyway, extraction came so quickly that it was quite clear from the start that there simply was no need to work the skins too hard. Most eliminated the first and last “remontages” (pumpings-over), reduced the daily number from 5 to 3, didn't do “délestages” (whole tank wooshing), reduced any “pigeage (cap-plungeing).and most labs encouraged a 10% reduction in fermentation temperatures. Bitterness was never a problem: generally the grapes had only 2 pips each, the norm being 3,5. The problem was quite simply hyper-tannin. The fermentations went much slower than last year, yet there was generally very good control of brett and volatile acidity, always dangerous with so much alcohol around.

The malolactic fermentations were generally very difficult to get started, and once started, to finish, in spite of, or maybe also because of, the high total acidity. Many said the acidities were more tartaric than malic. Some of the malos only finished in early March. The Burgundians can be proud of us.

One of the challenges of this vintage was the elimination of “millerand” grapes. Often the harvesting machines or the de-stalkers would not do this properly, and those who are equipped with vibrating sorting tables really won out; Manually, it was an extremely laborious process and, especially lower down the scale, not everyone was prepared to do it, and ended up with a touch of herbaceousness in the wine. Several estates now have electronic optical sorting capability, and they are pleased they had it, although murmurs can be heard around Bordeaux, especially from the old guard, saying that this just adds to the boring uniformisation of modern claret.

The wines

2010 reds

These are solid wines and happily so – at current prices, we have to provide maximum bang for the buck! High sugars once again produced highly alcoholic wines, mostly slightly less than 09 but sometimes in parts of the Right Bank and in most of Pessac-Léognan, even

more. But if they have all the power of the 09s, they have nothing of the opulence and thickness of the 09s. They are much more rugged, have an incredibly strong tannic surge and there is more acidity in those tannins. Tasting them in any number is a challenging exercise, especially as the wines were much later developers and sometimes are only just through their malolactic. Distinguishing between the different forms of the enormous tannins is a detailed and tiring exercise this year, and in addition, allowance has to be made for the press wines which are often not yet incorporated in the blend. (Because extraction was so light, the press wines are usually excellent and will be used quite extensively). The extra difficulty is that the cult of reductive *élevage* continues, mainly on the Right Bank and little information is given about which of the samples come from unracked barrels and which from racked ones - often very recently - maybe for fear of complicating each year's conveniently simplified hierarchy of the wines. Why rock the boat? "Don't ask, don't tell"!

The word going round is that these will be long-lasting wines, making the 09s look like a softer more rapid version. The jury is out on this, but it could be that nothing is farther from the truth: Bordeaux often has an initial preference for the harder, more traditional vintage. The same was said about the '83s versus the '82s at the start. So why should it be any different this time? And why should the initially more strongly tannic vintage be necessarily the longer lasting anyway? After all these are monster tannins that may never settle down, or maybe they will? Or maybe they will continue harsh all their lives?

Other great pairs in Bordeaux's history also seem to always have one softer and the other harder, but in the end the softer ones have about the same longevity as the harder ones 1995-1996, the first drought-driven then softened by late season rain, the second cooler and more tannic; 1985-1986, the first another drought vintage softened by late rain, the second a classic vintage of Cabernet re-concentration in October; the deep, mellow, soft-tasting 1929s preceded by the similarly rich but very tannic 1928s (so I am told); the soft and ripe-tasting 1900s coming hot on the heels of the just-as-generous but harder 1899s; and the 1869-1870s, equally concentrated but the first more balanced and softer, the second densely tannic and slow developing...

The strong nature of these '10s would seem to point to a similarity to '00 or '05. Yet this similarly dry, hot year had a better first half, in spite of all its problems, than the 2000s for which the sun only really started shining from mid-July. The comparison to '05 holds better, with its more similar drought conditions, the same number of sun hours in July and the same high but not excessive maximum temperatures in August-September. But '10 was a drier year still than '05 with 40% less rain in July-August, with higher maximum daytime temperatures in July but considerably lower ones in October and many more sun hours during the re-concentration period in September-October. All of this meant that the '10s have more of everything than the similarly-styled '05s. Their sugar concentration is greater, their tannins are far higher and seem to have more acidity in them, with more strictness of structure for both Cabernets and Merlots, and the whites have a more nervous kind of power and the Sauternes a more vibrant and aromatic style.

In terms of individual vintages, if, by its velvety texture, '09 has a lot in common with '82, '47 or '29, then '10, with its strong tannins, is more in the vein of '05, '00, '86, '49 and '45, but with more sheer alcohol than all of these.

Merlot? / Cabernet? Left bank / Right Bank?

Cabernet Sauvignon and Franc are quite clearly a major success. In some cases, in spite of their high alcohol levels (generally between 13 and 14°), they may not all have achieved the total ripeness of last year before the wintery nights of mid-October were upon them and there are some with a little - not disagreeable - marmalade touch to the tannins. But generally they were absolutely ripe, having been picked further away from the early October

rainfall and taking full advantage of the second drying concentration period of mid-October. They are nicely aromatic but above all, if not over-tannic, have a firm, tensile, strong structure of great breed.

The Merlots are once again very rich, in some cases as alcoholic or even more so than 09, sometimes over 15° and mostly over 14°. This is tough to explain, as they were more handicapped than the Cabs by poor flowering in June and by becoming ripe close to or during the October showers. Maybe part of the explanation is to be found in their looser, less populous bunches that allowed the vine's vigour to be channelled into fewer grapes. More importantly, most pre-harvesting grape analyses showed that they dehydrated more than the Cabs, often losing 30% of their weight over the summer versus the Cabs' 10%. And finally, the Merlots are usually grown on the denser limestone or clay soils which were precisely those that retained the most moisture during the drought thus allowing better functioning of the vine during the dog days of summer. Whatever the reasons, the sheer alcoholic power of the Merlots puts them closer in style to 09 than the Cabs.

2010 dry whites

This is clearly going to be a tremendous vintage for whites. They are less fat but just as alcoholic as those other dry vintages 05 and 09. Yet they are more aromatic and vibrant, as bright and fresh as the 08s but with all the weight of the 05s and 09s. The Sauvignons are especially aromatic, some to the point of a Kiwi gooseberry kind of floweriness. The Sémillons too are very concentrated and surprisingly aromatic (more in the grapefruit range of flavours), even more so when grown on the more water-retentive clay or limestone soils.

The cool nights of August trapped acidity and freshness of flavour into the grapes as they were approaching full ripeness. Then, just as most were preparing to harvest, there were those few early September days of moisture that re-awoke the vines for the final push and, by 20th September, most had finished, under the most ideal conditions possible, an unhurried and relaxed harvest. The vintage was not marred by any frost, as in '08, or by any hail-storms, as in '09, so there was more produce to select from, and the result is that they seem finer-tuned.

Yields

After the budding, there was a natural excess of bunches, stemming from the perfect "aoûtement" of the previous year's wood, which is where the embryos proliferate if the conditions are favourable then. But after the bud-burst had confirmed this large potential crop, from then on, it gradually got whittled away, first by a difficult flowering resulting in coulure and millerandage, very heavy in parts; then by an uneven fruit set; then by weight loss in the grapes, and by the June-July green harvesting that was calculated for normal sized grapes, before it was known that they would dehydrate by as much as 30%; and finally by a very strict final selection. All this meant that the harvest often went from a potential 50-55 ho/ha right down to a final 30 or 40 during the vineyard year. Vey generally, top estates, which go to great lengths to weed out everything that is slightly imperfect, have produced between 10 and 30% less than last year, whilst lesser estates and many generics are about the same. Sauternes is the odd man out here, having been blessed with both excellent wines and a large harvest, most ending up with a total production, including second wine, on the maximum yield of 25 ho/ha. So we may be able to maintain primeur allocations of Sauternes this year, but certainly not quite the same amount of reds.

2010 Sauternes

Less dense and less opulent than their monumental predecessor, these 2010 Sauternes and Barsacs make up for that by being the prettiest vintage of all time, with lovely, floral, uniformly pure and totally fresh-styled wines that are all the same beautifully lush and sweet.

As in 09, and also 05, the summer drought produced an exceptional build-up of sweetness in the grapes, giving the concentration a similar head-start. But this time September remained almost totally dry, so the skins remained hopelessly thick and hard and it took a long time for the botrytis to do anything with them. So the similarity to those two vintages ended here, the 05 and 09 having botrytised fast and massively early in October, the 10s, with half the September precipitation of 09, which was already half that of 05, getting spread out over a full 7 week period with the bulk of the best of it late rather than early in October.

So there they were mid-September looking at lovely golden, rich grapes, without an ounce of bad rot to be seen, but no noble rot either. It was then that the showers of 6th-9th September loosened things up a bit, and were followed by a crescendo of heat up to 30°C on 15th which brought on some isolated patches of full botrytis and also some excellent shrivel. So very slowly a small and laborious first picking was generally undertaken as from 15th and became generalised from 28th. These first pickings produced a very small quantity of concentrated musts of up to 24° potential, with a clean, incisive apple / citric character.

By the end of the month, the botrytis had virtually dried up again, and many stopped harvesting completely. The showers of 3rd, and the 30mm of rain on 4th October, followed by a succession of very warm days up to 12th, produced a sudden onrush of widespread botrytis, but the moist oceanic air flow prevented it from concentrating properly and a lot of it stuck at “pourri plein” without being able to concentrate properly to the optimum “rôti” stage. Some managed to do a 2nd and 3rd picking by carefully selecting out small quantities of individual “rôti” amongst the “pourri plein” from about 8th to about 17th but there was not much of it and again, it was a very laborious process.

This was not a particularly happy time for the Sauternais who were now well into their fourth week of picking, with not that much to show for it. The “pourri plein” was mostly already over 20° and some was picked at this time, more out of impatience than anything else.

Then suddenly, it all flipped to “rôti”. The wind had gone round to the East on 12th, producing the same drying effect as for the final ripening of the reds. At last, for those who had had the patience to wait, the second half of the month provided the best of the crop, and also the most volume, usually around 80% of the total. The musts came in as fresh and pure as the first ones, but now with much more richness and the added complexity of aromas that can only come from such full botrytis.

Many finished after this, picking a little wider to reduce the sweetness a bit, but quite a few continued on into November, picking right up to 4th and even, for one or two to 6th. These were not always the best pickings. The quite heavy rainfall of 23rd-24th October often fell on botrytis that was too old and tired and, with a few exceptions, there was a drop in complexity as well as in sweetness and acidity, especially after the further showers of 29th.

The wines are still in their separate lots, but generally the hallmark of the vintage, after the opulence of 09, is one of grace and charm, less concentrated, less persistent but immensely pure and fine, generally with a much more delicate balance of barely 14° alcohol and 120–135 g/l residual (but there are a couple at 160-165 as last year) and above all with a refreshing acidity from the cool summer nights and also from the often freezing nights of later October.

They seem to combine very neatly features of all the last three vintages: the complexity (without the absolute power) of 09, the spiciness (without the frost devastation) of 08 and the absolute purity of 07. This vintage is probably capable of long ageing, but as we wait all those years for the massive 05s and 09s to be ready, will provide greater earlier enjoyment while still all fresh and primary.

Conclusion

So ended, for the second year running, an extreme vintage. Exceptional pairs of seasons always seem to coincide with very turbulent global meteorological conditions, In 2010, globally, the weather went crazy. The re-assurer Munich Re had to deal with 950 natural catastrophes, as compared to the 30 year average of 615. They caused 295,000 deaths and 97 billion Euros of damage...and the Australian floods are not yet in the figures, nor any earthquakes or tsunamis.

Bordeaux was no exception. It was a violent vineyard year that tested the vine's resistance to chaotic conditions: during its grape formation, to extreme drought during ripening and to a high variation of hot and cold temperatures at the end - totally the opposite of the previous year's just as excessive but very regular cycle. 2010 is a vintage born of extremes but the extremes went the right way. They could have gone the other way. Those 1000km wide anomalies in the American summer were often down to 200 km by the time they reached Europe. Maybe the butterfly effect exists - but for Bordeaux, in reverse... The bad summer and autumn weather was never far away; and it would only have taken a slightly southward track in a transatlantic depression system to wreck the whole scenario (as in '76). While Bordeaux was baking, Northern Europe was under water. It had been a very close call... or maybe it's just that someone up there still likes us....

Appendix 1: The year's monthly rainfall and temperatures

	<u>Rainfall</u> 2010 mm	<u>Normal</u> <u>Rainfall</u> mm	<u>Rainfall</u> 2005 mm	<u>Temp °C in relation</u> <u>to normal</u>		<u>Sun hours 2010 as a %</u> <u>of normal</u>
				<u>2010</u>	<u>2005</u>	
<u>Winter</u>						
11/09	203	108	205	+ 2.9°	+ 2.7°	
12/09	92	107	68	+ 0.2°	- 0.9°	
01/10	78	92	32	- 2.6°	+ 0.5°	
02/10	54	82	38	- 0.9°	- 2.7°	
03/10	68	70	38	- 0.5°	+ 0.2°	
Total	495	459	381	- 0.2°	- 0.1°	
<u>Spring</u>						
04/10	27	80	90	+ 2.4°	+ 1.5°	+ 41 %
05/10	41	84	16	- 0.3°	+ 1.7°	- 13 %
06/10	102	64	32	+ 1.1°	+ 2.7°	+ 2 %
Total	170	228	138	+ 1.3°	+ 2.0°	+ 19 %
<u>Summer</u>						
07/10	15	55	20	+ 1.6°	+ 1.5°	+ 16 %
08/10	17	60	14	- 0.1°	+ 0.3°	+ 5 %
Total	32	115	34	+ 0.8°	+ 0.9°	+ 11 %
<u>Autumn</u>						
09/10	24	90	56	+ 0.2°	+ 0.5°	+ 33 %
10/10	93	94	55	- 0.2°	+ 3.0°	+ 34 %
Total	117	184	111	+ 0.0°	+ 1.8°	+ 34 %
Total	814 mm	878 mm	664 mm	+ 0.3°	+ 1.1°	+ 20 %

(Figures are as registered at Mériqnac)

Appendix 2: Diary of the 2010 vintage's harvest

<u>Date</u>	<u>Temp°C</u>	<u>Weather</u>	<u>Rainfall</u>	<u>Harvesting dates</u>			
<u>September</u> (Norm: 12°5 - 23°7)				<u>Dry white</u>			
31/08 T	12-26°	s		I			
01/09 W	13-30°	s		I			
02 Th	16-30°	s		I			
03 F	15-27°	s		I			
04 Sa	12-28°	s		I			
05 Su	13-32°	s		I			
06 M	18-26°	c/dr	1 mm	I			
07 T	17-23°	sh/s	3 mm	I			
08 W	14-23°	sh/s	5 mm	I			
09 Th	14-24°	sh/s	1 mm	I			
10 F	13-25°	s		I			
11 Sa	14-29°	s		I			
12 Su	15-25°	s		I			
13 M	11-25°	s		I			
14 T	11-28°	s		I			
15 W	11-30°	s		I			
16 Th	15-20°	dr		I			
17 F	11-22°	s		I			
18 Sa	10-22°	s		I			
19 Su	6-22°	s		I	<u>Merlot</u>		
20 M	7-25°	s		I	Pessac-L/Pomerol		<u>Sauternes</u>
21 T	15-29°	s		I	I		1
22 W	15-28°	sh/s	2 mm	I	I		1
23 Th	15-25°	sh/s	6 mm	I			1
24 F	15-19°	sh/s	2 mm	I			1
25 Sa	11-18°	s		I	<u>Merlot</u>		1
26 Su	8-17°	s		I	St Em/Médoc		1
27 M	7-18°	c/s		I	I		1
28 T	5-21°	s		I	I		1
29 W	7-22°	s		I	I		1
30 Th	14-20°	sh/s	3 mm	I	I		1
<u>October</u> (Norm: 9°5 - 18°8)							
01 F	11-24°	s/c		I	I		1
02 Sa	13-29°	s/c		I			1
03 Su	16-27°	s/sh	1 mm	I	<u>Cab Franc</u>	<u>Cab Sauv</u>	1+2
04 M	14-17°	r	25 mm	I	I	I	1+2
05 T	12-24°	s		I	I	I	1+2
06 W	14-25°	s/c		I	I	I	1+2
07 Th	14-26°	s/c		I	I	I	2
08 F	17-26°	s		I	I	I	2
09 Sa	18-25°	sh/s	3 mm	I	I	I	2
10 Su	16-18°	r	11 mm	I	I	I	2
11 M	16-23°	s/c		I	I	I	2+3

				<u>Cab Franc</u>	<u>Cab Sauv</u>	<u>Sauternes</u>
12 T	13-23°	s		I	I	2+3
13 W	10-19°	f/s		I	I	2+3
14 Th	6-17°	f/s		I	I	2+3
15 F	4-15°	s		I	I	2+3
16 Sa	6-15°	s		I	I	2+3
17 Su	6-16°	f/s			I	2+3
18 M	0-14°	f/s			I	4+5
19 T	5-16°	c/sh	1 mm		I	4+5
20 W	10-16°	s			I	4+5
21 Th	4-15°	s				4+5
22 F	4-18°	s				4+5
23 Sa	6-18°	c/sh	16 mm			4+5
24 Su	10-12°	r/s	12 mm			4+5
25 M	5-13°	s				4+5
26 T	1-13°	s				4+5
27 W	2-18°	s				4+5
28 Th	8-17°	f/c/s				4+5
29 F	9-18°	r	19 mm			4+5
30 Sa	10-18°	s/sh	3 mm			4+5
31 Su	11-15°	f/sh:s	1 mm			4+5
First few days of November: very warm (15-20°) for end of Sauternes harvest						4+5

Figures are as at the Met Station in Mérignac.

(but generally it was just about the same for everybody this time)

Bold type = the main days of harvesting

c = Cloud f = Fog sh = showers
s = Sun r = Rain dr = drizzle

Bill Blatch, Bordeaux, March 2011 (bill@vintex.fr)

with special thanks to statistical experts:

C.de Graaf, Marge Inavera and Dale Neverno

**The 2010 vintage at the beginning of ageing :
another very great one for both red and white wines
Professor Denis Dubourdieu**

After the much-awaited and much-vaunted 2009 vintage, which has fully lived up to expectations, could Bordeaux really be blessed with another great vintage the following year? Considering the weather patterns over the summer and analysis of the grapes during the 2010 harvest, the cautious answer was "Yes, maybe". However, once fermentation finished, the answer became "Yes, probably". And now that the wine has been put into barrel, malolactic fermentation is over, and the strategy for the final blend almost decided at the end of February, we can answer that 2010 will most certainly be a great and even a very great year for both red and white wines.

As an introduction to this vintage appraisal, it is always useful to refer to the five conditions that "make" a perfect vintage for red Bordeaux.

- (1) (2) Early, rapid flowering and fruit-set during weather that is sufficiently warm and dry to ensure pollination and predispose toward simultaneous ripening.
- (3) The gradual onset of water stress thanks to a warm, dry month of July in order to slow down and then put a definitive stop to vine growth during *véraison* (colour change).
- (4) Full ripening of the various grape varieties thanks to dry and warm (but not excessively so) weather in the months of August and September.
- (5) Fine (dry and medium-warm) weather during the harvest making it possible to pick at full ripeness without running the risk of dilution or rot.

Even though flowering in Merlot was not ideal due to slightly cool, wet weather in June that caused *coulure* (shot berries), *millerandage* ("hens and chickens"), and low yields, 2010 fits all the above conditions thanks to a remarkably dry summer (but without any heat waves) that continued into a sunny, medium-warm autumn with average precipitation. The vines underwent greater and more widespread water stress in 2010 than in 2009. In that respect, 2010 is more similar to 2005 than 2009.

The moderately warm daytime temperatures and cool nights in August and September encouraged the synthesis of aroma precursors and maintained good acidity in the grapes. This means that 2010 was also a very great vintage for white wines, i.e. for both Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon grapes.

The development of noble rot at the right time, as soon as the grapes are ripe, i.e. sufficiently sweet, but potentially fruity and still retaining good acidity, determines whether a vintage is great in Sauternes and Barsac. This calls for alternating periods of mist or fog (conducive to the spread of *botrytis*) and drier, warmer, or more windy periods to concentrate the grapes. While not as tremendously concentrated as 2009, 2010 will undoubtedly be a great vintage for sweet white Bordeaux and a fitting end to an outstanding decade with an uninterrupted run of good-to-excellent vintages, the like of which has never before been seen in the region.

Early and fairly quick flowering in early June followed by satisfactory fruit set in all grape varieties except for Merlot (affected by *coulure* and *millerandage*)

Marked by three cold waves in mid-December, early January, and mid-February, the winter of 2010 was as grey, long, and harsh as that of 2009. Subsequent to a cold winter and a month of March close to the seasonal average, it was impossible for bud break to happen early. This occurred from early to mid-April, just a few days later than in 2009 and 2008. However, the vines made up for this slight delay thanks to a sunny, warm, and remarkably dry month of April (Tables I-III). May was also relatively dry, but somewhat more cool and overcast than in 2009. Flowering began in late May and mid-flowering in Merlot and Cabernet took place from the 4th to the 7th of June. While flowering in almost all the red and white vine varieties led to satisfactory fruit set, Merlot was affected by *coulure* (shot berries) and *millerandage* (hens and chickens), probably because of the cold night on the 7th of June followed by fairly heavy showers the next day and again in mid-June (figure 1). As usual, old Merlot vines, often affected by viral diseases, suffered the heaviest crop losses. The disrupted flowering of Merlot is the only shortcoming of the 2010 vintage.

**Table I: Rainfall (mm) from March to June 2009 and 2010
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

	2010	2009	Average 1971-2000
March	68	31	70
April	27	116	80
May	41	78	83
June	102	75	63

**Table II: Sunshine (hours) from March to June 2009 and 2010
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

	2010	2009	Average 1971-2000
March	187	221	180
April	250	160	177
May	193	235	222
June	102	293	225

**Table III: Average minimum and maximum temperatures
from March to June in 2010 and 2009
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

	Average minimum temperatures			Average maximum temperatures		
	2010	2009	average *	2010	2009	average *
March	4.3	4.9	4.6	14.4	15.3	14.5
April	8.3	7.4	6.6	19.8	13.4	16.5
May	10.4	12.3	10.3	19.9	22.2	20.5
June	14.3	15	13	24.5	25.6	23.5

* Average 1971-2000

The temperature increased starting on the 20th of June, marking the beginning of a summer that was particularly dry, but not excessively hot, which determined the character and success of the 2010 vintage.

A hot, sunny, and dry month of July entailing a slowing down and stoppage of vine growth at the beginning of *véraison* (colour change)

July 2010 was warmer than that same month in either 2009 or 2005, but without a heat wave as such since the maximum temperature only went above 30°C on three or four days (Table IV and figure 2). July 2010 also had slightly above-average sunshine and, significantly, was much more dry (figures 3 and 4) than usual. Precipitation during this month (less than 20 mm) was only a third of that in July 2009 and even less than in July 2005. Water stress thus gradually set in starting in late July 2010. This brought about a complete halt to vine growth between the onset of *véraison* and mid-*véraison*. In 2009, because of greater rainfall in July, this condition *sine qua non* for successful red wine vintages in Bordeaux was only satisfied on soils with the lowest water reserves (mainly gravel and certain clay soils) i.e. the finest *terroirs* in Bordeaux. The halt to vine growth at the appropriate time was much more widespread in 2010 than in 2009.

Mid-*véraison* (colour change) occurred about the 6th of August for Merlot and around the 11th of that same month for Cabernet Sauvignon, i.e. 3-4 days later than in 2005 and 2009, and 4 days later than in 2008 or 2004.

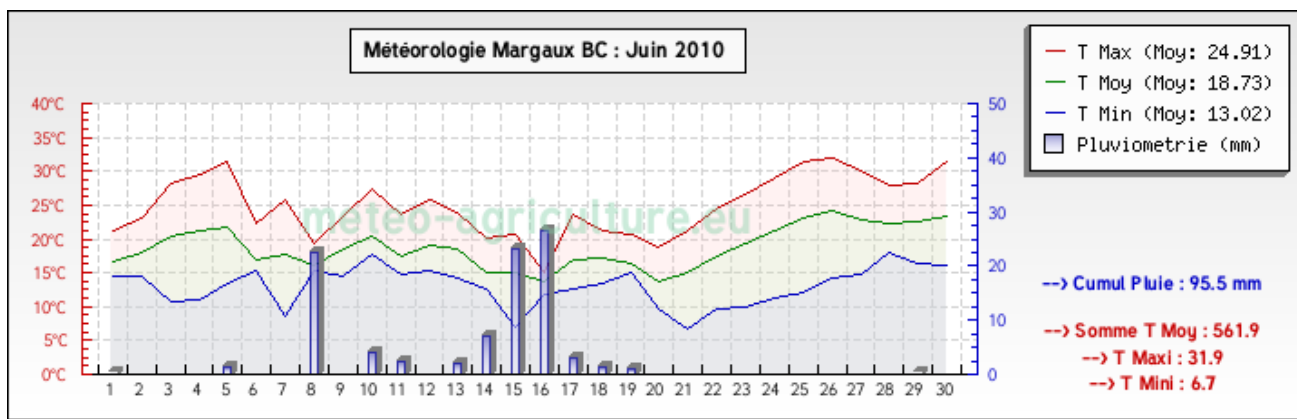


Figure 1: Daily temperatures and precipitation (mm) in June 2010 during flowering and fruit set (statistics from the Margaux weather station)

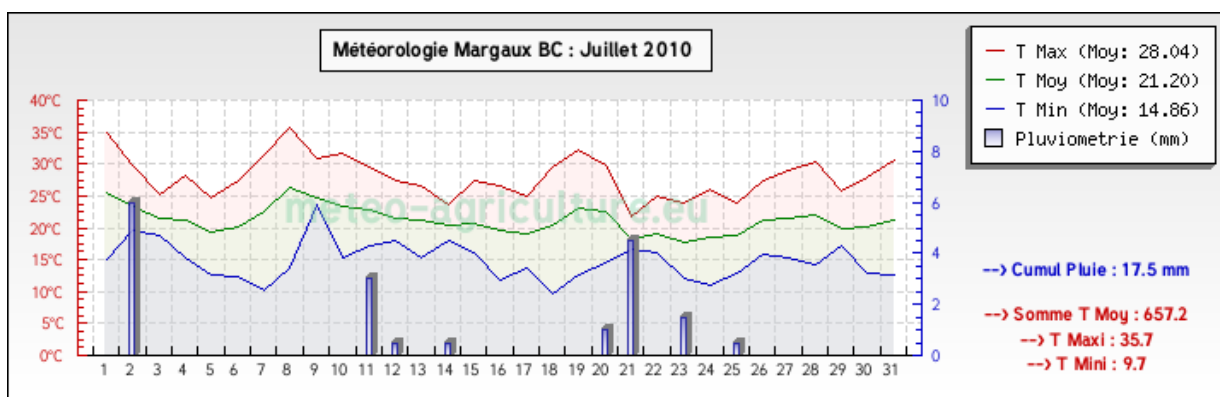


Figure 2: Temperature and precipitation (mm) in July 2010 in Margaux

Table IV: Average minimum and maximum temperatures from July to October 2009 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

	Average minimum temperatures				Average maximum temperatures			
	2010	2009	2005	average *	2010	2009	2005	average *
July	16.6	15.9	16.8	15.1	28.2	27.1	27	26.4
August	14.9	16.2	15.1	15.2	26.8	28.5	27.3	26.6
September	12.3	13.2	13	12.5	24.4	25.7	24.1	23.7
October	9.2	10.9	12.6	9.5	18.7	20.8	21.5	18.8

* 1971-2000 average

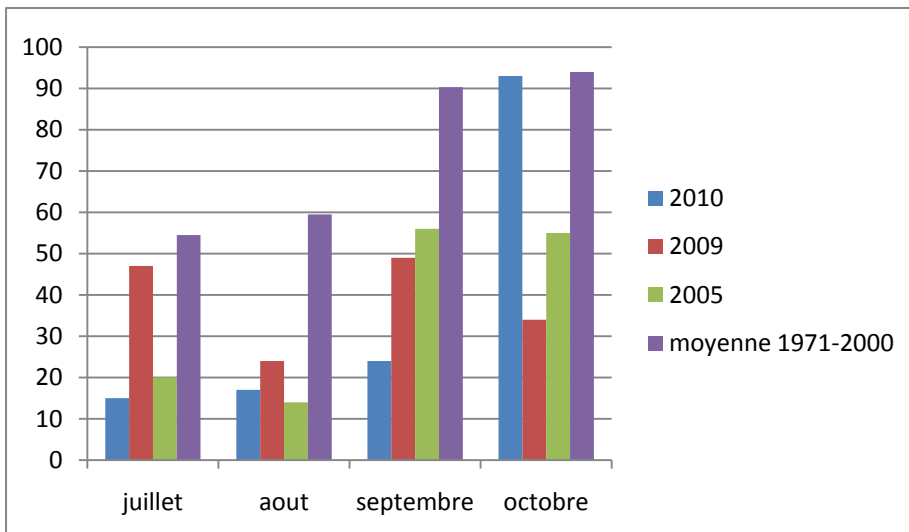


Figure 3: Rainfall from July to October in 2010, 2009, and 2005 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

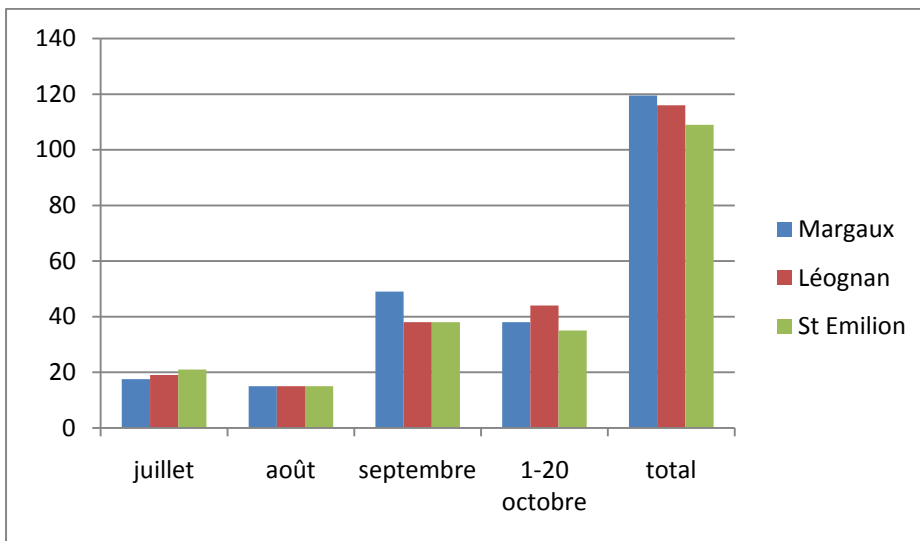


Figure 4: Rainfall (mm) in July, August, and September 2009 in various communes

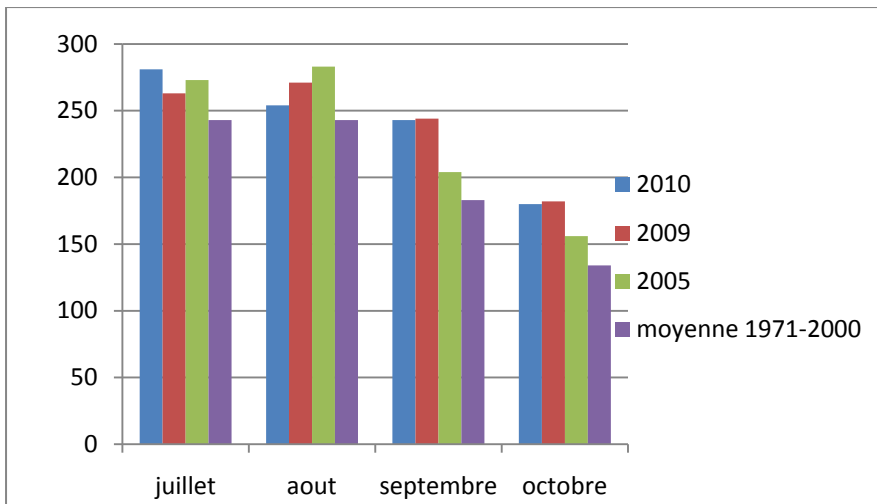


Figure 5: Sunshine (hours) from July to October in 2010, 2009, and 2005 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

Ideal ripening for all grape varieties throughout Bordeaux thanks to exceptionally dry weather in August and September, without excessive heat.

In 2009, only the Médoc was spared by August storms, and the Libourne region experienced significant rainfall around the 20th of September. In 2010, August and, to an ever greater extent, September were very dry in all Bordeaux appellations (figures 3 and 4). Precipitation in August amounted to less than a third of the average over the past ten years, and September rainfall was hardly a quarter of this average. With just 50 mm of precipitation from July to September, the 2010 vintage was the driest of the past decade (figure 6), even more than in 2005, which had nearly twice as much rain over the same period.

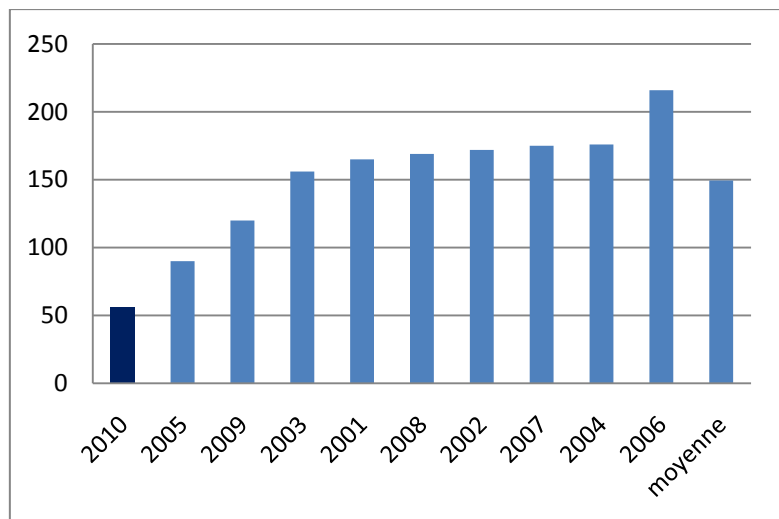


Figure 6: Ranking of vintages by order of precipitation from July to September over a 10-year period (2001-2010). (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

August 2010 was cooler than the same month in 2009 or 2005, while remaining close to the 30-year average (Table IV). The sum of average daily temperatures in Margaux in August 2010 was 605°C compared to 650 in 2009 and 625 in 2005. There were 6 very hot days in 2010, 8 in 2009, and 7 in 2005. The temperature was less than 15°C on 21 nights in August 2010, compared to 18 in 2009 and 22 in 2005 (Table V).

Table V: Sum of average temperatures, number of very hot days, and number of cool nights in August 2005, 2009, and 2010

	Sum of average daily temperatures (°C)	Number of very hot days (maximum temperatures > 30°C)	Number of cool nights (minimum temperatures < 15°C)
2005	625	7	22
2009	650	8	18
2010	605	6	21

L
ess
warm
than in
2009,
Septe

mber 2010 had maximum temperatures comparable to 2005, but markedly cooler night time temperatures (Table IV).

Sunshine in August 2010 was close to the seasonal average. On the other hand, September and October 2009 were much sunnier than usual (figure 5).

The vines resisted the drought conditions astonishingly well, especially in vineyards with ploughed soil. Ripening was only stymied in a few plots with young wines on very permeable soil on the Left Bank.

Due to *coulure* in Merlot, vineyard operations such as leaf thinning and bunch thinning were done even more meticulously than usual. It was wise removing bunches of Merlot and Cabernet Franc with berries affected by *millerandage* (“hens and chickens”) because these aborted berries were less sweet, more acidic, and had less colour than normal ones. They also displayed more astringent, herbaceous flavours. Furthermore, even normal berries inside bunches with *millerandage* were less desirable than berries from normal bunches. It is never a joyous thing to remove bunches during green harvesting in plots where the yields are already very low due to *coulure*. This is nevertheless what it took to make the best of this vintage.

In a nutshell, summer and early autumn 2010 were drier and less warm (except for July) than 2009 or 2005. The limited rainfall from July to mid-October was certainly the key factor in the success of 2010 red wines because in an oceanic climate with wet winters like Bordeaux, every dry summer produces very great vintages with no exceptions to this rule. The reverse, however, is not necessarily true. Good wines are sometimes made in years with average rainfall in the month of August and September provided that July was dry enough to put a stop to vine growth at *véraison*, as was the case in 2008. The relatively cool, sunny weather that prevailed during ripening in 2010 was propitious to preserving fruit and acidity. This was decisive for both the quality of white wines and the style of red wines.

Ideal conditions from beginning to end of the harvest making it possible to pick each plot and each grape variety at optimum maturity

Picking of white wine grapes began on the 2nd of September in the most early-ripening plots of Sauvignon Blanc and the harvest was widespread from the 6th to the 15th. Sémillon grapes at estates in the Graves and Pessac-Léognan appellations were picked between the 15th and the 20th of September. The 2010 white wines had sugar levels comparable to 2009 and 2005, with slightly higher acidity, close to 2008, provided they were picked at the right time. When the grapes were tasted, the aromatic potential of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, especially from limestone and clay soils, seemed greater than in 2009. However, great care needed to be taken in selecting juice out of the winepress because the potassium content of the skins was very high. In order to maintain acidity, skin contact had to be limited and the juice separated fairly early.

The earliest-maturing Merlot grapes were picked on about the 21st of September and the Cabernets in the first half of October. These dates are fairly similar to 2009. All of the 2010 red wine varieties had two outstanding characteristics indicative of their excellent quality: the berries were both very small and deeply coloured, and had greater anthocyanin content than in 2009 or even 2005 (figure 7 and 8).

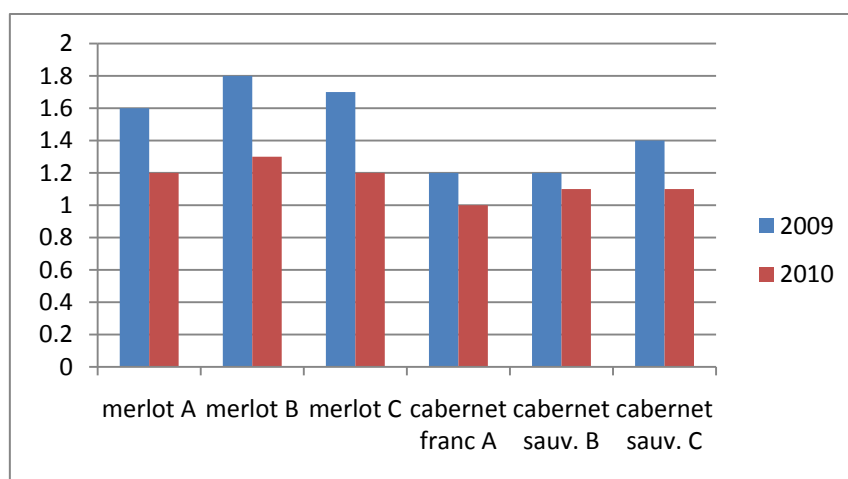


Figure 7: Weight of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes in 2009 and 2010 in plots of classified growth vineyards in Saint Emilion (A), Léognan (B) and Pauillac (C)

The sugar levels in 2010 red wine musts were generally and significantly higher than in either 2009 or 2005, especially for the Cabernets. As a rule, acidity levels in the various grape varieties in 2010 were higher than in 2009 or 2005. In those plots where appropriate green harvesting took place, the grapes displayed bright fruit and were devoid of any herbaceous character.

As in 2009, the harvest dates for the same grape variety on comparable *terroirs* varied significantly according to the estate, some of which were looking for a degree of over ripeness resembling raisining, while others chose to avoid this. The style of wine thus depends considerably on what choice was made in this respect.

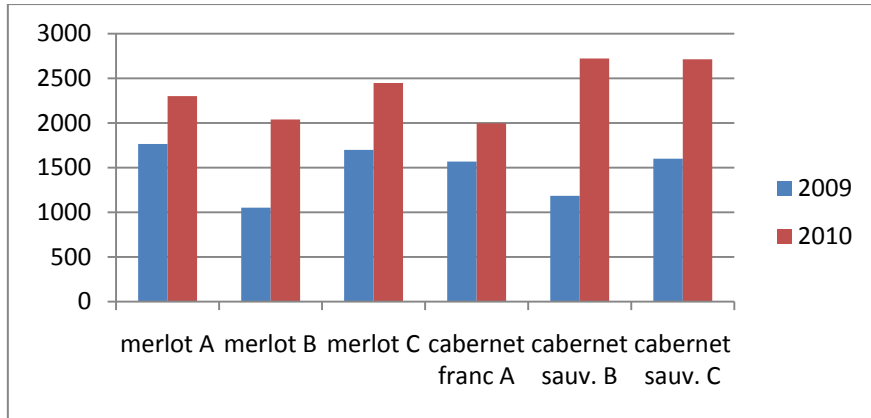


Figure 8: Total anthocyanin content (mg/L) of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes in 2009 and 2010 in plots of classified growth vineyards in Saint Emilion (A), Léognan (B), and Pauillac (C)

In the Sauternes region, the harvest did not really begin until late September. The onset of *botrytis* depended on the *terroir* and the estate (Figure 9). Noble rot became widespread in October further to showers on the 3rd and 4th, and then again on the 9th and 10th of that month. The resulting concentration over the following two weeks without rain was remarkable (20-22 degrees potential alcohol), but not as impressive as the 2009 vintage. The sugar content was greater in those vineyards where *botrytis* arrived early and was therefore able to concentrate the grapes in the first two weeks of October, before the temperature dropped.

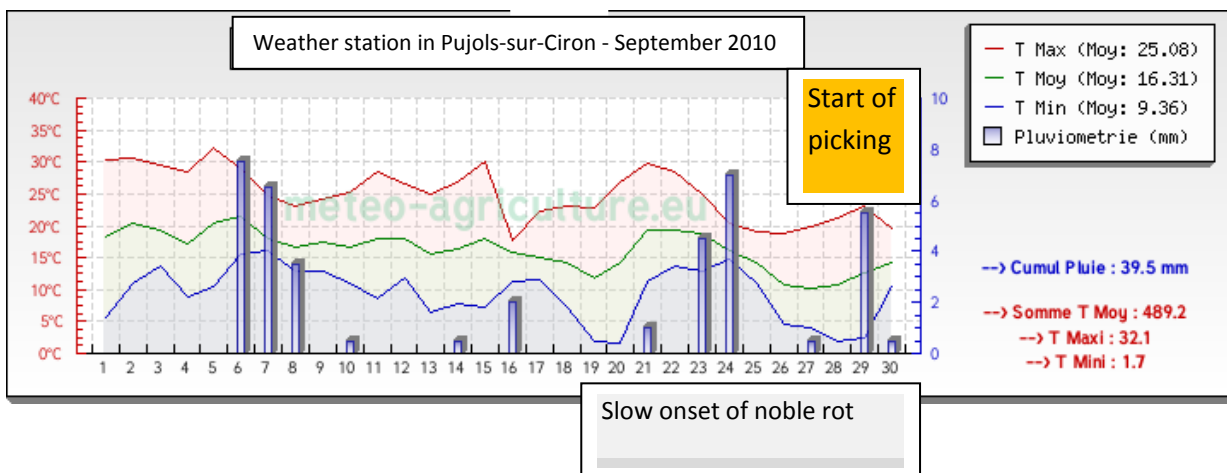


Figure 9: Temperatures (°C), precipitation (mm) in September 2010 in the Sauternes region: beginning of picking at the end of the month

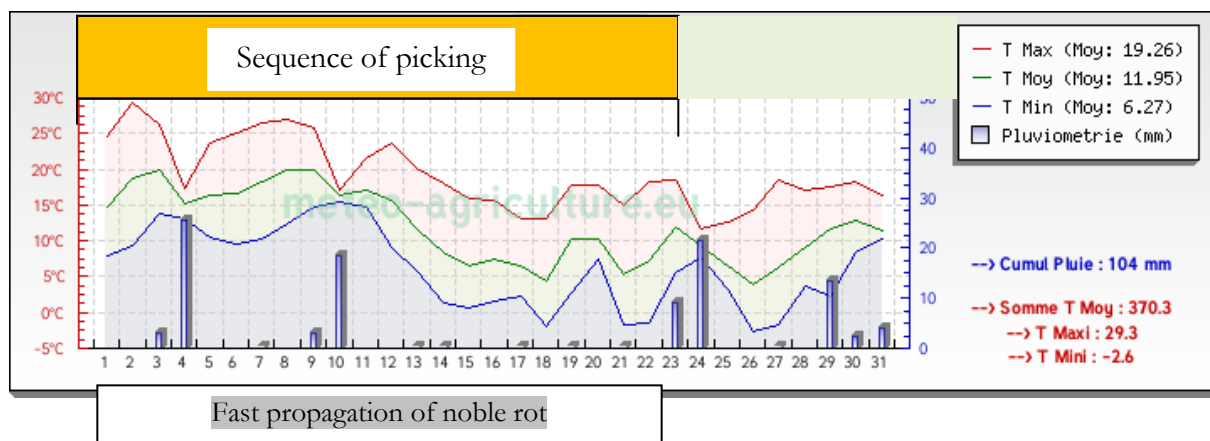


Figure 10: Temperatures (°C), precipitation (mm) in October 2010 in the Sauternes region

Great white wines and very great red wines

It is now possible to evaluate the 2010 dry white wines. These have bright fruit and are remarkably smooth. They are even more complex than the 2008s and 2007s, and more vibrant than the 2009s.

2010 Sauternes and Barsac 2010 are aromatic, concentrated, tasty, and without heaviness. They are hardly any less powerful than the prodigious 2009 vintage, but may be more "digestible".

The 2010 red wines have all the hallmarks of a very great Bordeaux vintage on both banks, and for both Merlot and Cabernets. It is premature to describe the wines in detail, but their deep colour, complexity, intense fruit, freshness, and tannic density already indicate enormous potential. Liquid beauty!