



## **SAUTERNES AND BARSAC GRANDS CRUS CLASSES 2011: THE PROMISE OF A GREAT VINTAGE**

**T**his year, Sauternes is on course for a hat trick. After 2009 and 2010, 2011 looks like being one of the great, if not one of the very great vintages.

**I**t has been literally an 'extra ordinary' year in terms of the bizarre weather patterns we witnessed. The sky danced to the three-four time rhythm of a waltz and so did we, with our hopes and fears taking turns around the floor!

**T**he dance started well enough – superbly well, in fact, with a remarkably clement spring. All that was put paid to, however, by a violent hail storm on the 25th of April, Easter Monday. In a few short hours, hail fell on the vineyards around Bommès with devastating effects on properties such as La Tour Blanche, Rayne Vigneau, Guiraud, Lamothe and Lamothe-Guignard. Thankfully it came before flowering so that it affected yields (down by 30% to 80% on some properties) but not the quality of the grapes and the resulting wines.

**J**uly and August were frequently overcast during a summer that alternated rain with cold spells. The mood was far from joyful just before the harvest, with some outbreaks of undesirable rot that were quickly removed with an initial round of selective picking.

**A**nd then the music changed. September brought endless days of gloriously warm (at times, even heat-wave hot) sunshine and brought smiles back to the faces of growers, who watched their crop ripen to perfection. Noble rot, together with dry conditions resulted in remarkable levels of concentration in the berries.

**T**he new wines are truly impressive with fresh acidity and richness in perfect balance. By luck and good fortune, 2011 can take its place among the fabulous (odd-numbered) vintages of 1893, 1937, 1967, 1997, and 2001.

**T**o give a true picture of the 2011 vintage, we have spoken to some of the growers and winemakers who were at the dance...

*Francis Mayeur, Technical Director of CHÂTEAU D'YQUEM  
Premier Cru Classé Supérieur de Sauternes*

I think fast and furious would be my take on the 2011 harvest. Things started happening in the vineyard between August 24th and 26th, when 29 millimeters of rain brought on noble rot in the beautifully ripe grapes. From that point on, things began to move fast and the challenge was to predict just how the ripening would progress. We started to pick on September 5th, which makes 2011 the fourth earliest year ever at Yquem, after 1893, 1960, and 1997. We went through the vineyard in four selective pickings or tries, breaking off to allow the concentration in the berries to reach optimal levels.



Château d'Yquem

© Vincent Bengold

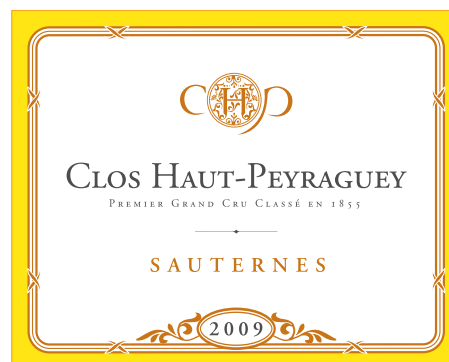
Picking on September 5th and 6th enabled us to clean up some plots and bring in the first batches of grapes but the first trie across the entire estate began in earnest on September 12th.

Even at this early stage the quality was very promising with good alcohol levels and very pleasing, fresh acidity. We stopped for four days then picked again on September 21st, 22nd and 23rd; this trie probably constituted the heart of the 2011 Yquem, producing extraordinarily fine juice. After a brief rest on Saturday September 24th, we began again on the 25th and picked right through to the 28th September. During this sprint, we were bringing in grapes with a potential alcohol of 220 to 230, as well as what we term baies dorées – golden ripe grapes not fully botrytised – to ensure we got perfect balance in the final blend. The final trie ended on October 5th; only in 1934 and 2003 have we finished harvesting so early at Yquem.

In terms of vinification, there is little to say, (fermentation was fast and trouble-free), except to note the amazing aromas in the cellar. The vat house was heady with complex, intense aromas that confirmed the excellent impression we had of this vintage during the harvest. The quality of the fruit and the balance are superb, reminiscent of 1893 or 1997. Without a doubt, this will be one of Château d'Yquem's finest vintages.

*Martine Langlais Pauly, Owner of CLOS HAUT-PEYRAGUEY  
Premier Cru Classé de Sauternes*

**I**t all happened so fast, we really had to be on our toes this year. Botrytis and concentration in the grapes spread at an amazing pace. I am obsessive about picking at just the right time – when the grapes are not so concentrated that the fermentation drags on bringing with it the risk of volatile acidity – so I decided to increase the size of my team of pickers. After that it was full speed ahead. We had a fairly comfortable yield of around 18hl/ha and the fermentations were over in a flash, ending in the first week of October.



**W**e did a lot of tests ahead of the main fermentation period, using a small press, which provided us with essential and invaluable information about the maturity on each plot. Tests established the levels and a few “golden grapes” rich in sugar and flavour were added to the very concentrated grapes that had been “roasted” by the botrytis to lower the potential alcohol and obtain the optimum balance.

**I**tasted all the batches last week and was surprised by how clean and fresh they are. They are brilliantly balanced and very powerful. I never like talking about a vintage too early but I really think we have some lovely wines this year.

*Pierre Montégut, Technical Director of CHÂTEAU SUDUIRAUT  
Premier Cru Classé de Sauternes*

**W**hat a year of contrasts. A warm sunny, spring was followed by cool, damp conditions in July, and rainfall after the 15th August – heavier in Sauternes than in Barsac – caused an early breakout of botrytis. In the run-up to the harvest, growers were apprehensive, to say the least. What a relief when the beginning of September brought

the sunshine and hot, dry, sunny weather that saved the vintage.



©Vincent Bengold

Château Suduiraut

**O**ur first trie on September 12th, got rid of the berries that were too dry, affected by botrytis or imperfect and, yes, we lost a lot of grapes. The second trie, however, provided us with a magnificent crop of rich, concentrated, top-quality grapes. Euphoria reigned. The third trie was good, bringing in the remaining grapes

and enabling us to reach 12hl/ha. We picked every day and finished on October 5th, exactly one month earlier than in 2010; the vines finally gave the impression they had

caught up with the advance they had shown in the spring.

The amount of richness and concentration in the grapes resulted in slow fermentations, which lasted for five to six weeks. Fermentation was stopped in mid-October and we will be ready to taste and assess the wines properly in mid-December. Today, they are certainly very promising – opulent with good balancing acidity. They have everything to make really great Sauternes, on a par with 2010 – even perhaps with 2001.

*Bérénice Lurton, Owner of CHÂTEAU CLIMENS  
Premier Cru Classé de Barsac*

We have had an extraordinary run of luck in the past few years, with a string of really great vintages of which, I am delighted to say, 2011 is one.

But it has not been plain sailing. A miserable summer produced pockets of grey rot and frankly even up to a few days before the harvest we were not hopeful. The return of blue skies and hot, sunny weather did much to rectify the situation and certainly lifted our spirits but the fact was the vines had suffered in the chilly summer temperatures. The result was uneven ripening, with variation from plot to plot, row to row, plant to plant and even within the bunches.



©Frédéric Dénésure

Bérénice Lurton

Dealing with a situation like this meant harvesting with precision, care and a light hand; the challenge was to find the right balance and avoid too much concentration that can actually be problematic.

The key to getting batches of balanced grapes was to calculate how the ripening process would advance and, somehow, keep one step ahead of the vines.

We have just stopped the fermentation so at this stage the wines are still a little thick and chewy from the mutage. Nevertheless, they are showing wonderful potential: I was expecting delicate wines this year but here we are with rich, powerful Sauternes that have depth and energy. These will be great wines.

*Denis Dubourdieu, Owner of CHÂTEAU DOISY-DAËNE  
Second Cru Classé de Barsac*

Just incredible! I am astonished at the levels of concentration we've achieved in 2011. They are way beyond our expectations and at 250 potential alcohol, they have gone through the roof.

**W**e've been looking into the whole question of what is the style of Barsac for some time now. The quicker noble rot spreads before the grapes are completely ripe, the purer, fresher, more aromatic and more vibrant is the sweet wine. In fact, recent experiments have shown that noble rot does not just lead to concentration in the berries, but that the attack on the fruit by the fungus, a unique phenomenon in nature, results in a strange reaction, with the grape going into defense mode by overproducing aroma precursors. The grape, of course, has no hope of defending itself against the botrytis but the effects are dramatically evident in the resulting wine. If, on the other hand, noble rot attacks grapes that are too ripe, there is no reaction. In 2011, the conditions were ideal and once again Sauternes has shown it is not a 'late harvest' wine region.



**W**ith a cool summer, followed by hot weather in September and the odd storm to bring on the onset of botrytis, we looked to be on course for a classic vintage. Then, within a matter of days, the temperature had climbed to 32°C – almost a heat wave. The result of this was fiercely intense concentration in the grapes and an urgent need to get harvesting – for the first time ever at Doisy-Daene, we even picked on a Sunday.

**T**he first trier cleaned out the vineyard and filled a few barrels, the second provided us with the main part of the harvest, while the third brought in another 5%. Although the fermentations were fairly long, there were no real problems.

**A**t the moment, it is still early to give a true assessment of the 2011 wines but they certainly show phenomenal richness, concentration, depth and freshness. This opulence is unparalleled. I think it is safe to say we are looking at a very great vintage indeed.

*Olivier Castéja, Owner of CHATEAU DOISY-VEDRINES  
Second Cru Classé de Barsac*

**T**he harvest began on September 7th – the earliest ever recorded at Doisy-Vedrines. The rain that fell in the middle of August and the fine weather that came towards the end of the month sped up the onset of botrytis, which intensified the sugars and flavours in the grapes. In fact, the days and nights were dry but as the fungus had already taken hold of the fruit in a spectacular fashion, humidity was not essential for its development.



©Vincent Bengold

**W**e went through the vineyard with one selective picking and had planned to stop for five days. However, given the phenomenal amounts of concentration we were seeing in the juice (250 to 260 potential alcohol) we started again after only 48 hours.

**F**ermentation was quick and trouble-free and although it is too early to talk about the quality and character of the wines, we can certainly say that the juice is superb: rich, complex and pure, with extraordinary fruit and higher acidity than in 2003. Personally, I have never seen juice with such even quality. 2011 is a very uncharacteristic, unusual year so comparisons are not easy. At this stage, the wines are very much like the 2001s and 2010s. Having said that, I arrived at Doisy-Vedrine in 1973 and I can honestly say I have never seen a vintage quite like 2011.

*Nicolas Heeter-Tari, Owner of CHÂTEAU NAIRAC  
Second Cru Classé de Barsac*

©Vincent Beigold



Château Nairac

**I** can only echo the sentiments of my fellow growers: 2011 did not look like a great vintage. Almost tropical conditions had led to outbreaks of grey rot and sour rot, so we were almost incredulous at the complete turnaround in the weather at the end of August and beginning of September. Our first trie (to basically clear the vineyard of any damaged grapes) took place over September 12th and 13th. The harvest

started in earnest on 21st September and we picked in one trie that lasted for nine days. Given the hot, sunny weather, the advance of botrytis and the increased concentration in the berries, we had to be constantly on the alert.

**W**ith musts that are exceptionally rich and low pH levels, I think we can safely say the balance of the 2011 wines is assured. I can hardly wait to taste the new wines but, ironically, the most urgent thing now is to wait!

*PRESS CONTACT*

*LETTRES DE CHÂTEAUX - MARIE-STÉPHANE MALBEC*

*TEL.: +33 (0)5 56 44 63 50*

*E-MAIL: MARIE-STEPHANE.MALBEC@WANADOO.FR*