Pomerol, 4th January 2018

AB   Just a brief recap on the effect of the spring frost at La Conseillante, how much did you lose in the end?

Marielle Cazaux   15%.

AB   Which varieties were hit?

Marielle Cazaux   Merlot and Cabernet Franc, one plot of each.

AB   And would these plots normally have gone into the First Wine?

Marielle Cazaux   Sometimes, they would have, in very great years. In 2016, for example, they both went in.

AB   Was the crop size normal then?

Marielle Cazaux   We harvested 34 hl/ha, compared with 39hl/ha last year. It's a bit down, but not bad at all.

AB   Was this slightly lower yield more due to the frosts or to the drought conditions?

Marielle Cazaux   For the crop that usually goes into "Duo", it was more a question of frost damage. For La Conseillante the major reason was drought, and in fact the situation could have been far worse. Given the severity of the drought, we might have expected much lower yields, but the flowering and setting processes went so well that we had around 10 to 15% more berries per bunch, and this made up for some of the losses from drought.

AB   The rain played an important role during harvest time. Some growers picked before the September rain; others decided to wait for more ripeness. What did you do?

Marielle Cazaux   You know, lab analyses are there as a guide. The important information for me comes from tasting the berries, and on September 5th, what I tasted in some plots was perfectly ripe, and so we started picking, before the rain came. There were other plots where the

extractability was less good before the weather changed, and some rain was needed to soften the skins. So, for those vines, we waited and ultimately finished the harvest in the first week of October, almost one month after we began it.

AB   An "à la carte" picking as it's sometimes described today?

Marielle Cazaux   A relatively small estate like La Conseillante, in which small plot by plot vinifications can be done, is able to stop and start according to precise ripeness parameters. But, as I said, the moment to pick is decided after tasting berry samples. The real laboratory is your mouth.

AB   Presumably you do systematic lab analyses, as a back-up at least?

Marielle Cazaux   It's funny you should ask that question, because during every harvest, at some stage, I wake up in the middle of the night in a sweat wondering if I'd actually done the lab analyses of the berries that had just gone into the fermentation vat. Because yes, I do them systematically, but they're obviously not as important to me as tasting the berries.

AB   How high is quality in 2017 at La Conseillante?

Marielle Cazaux   We recently tasted all the lots with Michel Rolland, as a first step towards looking at the blend, which we'll look more closely at in February. Quality is high, and we'll be able to produce a good amount of First Wine. Although it's early days to say, there will most probably be a small proportion of "Duo", and we need of course to make some "Duo" because we have a market for that. The overall quality is consistently very good. There is real homogeneity.

AB   Whatever the soil type of each lot?

Marielle Cazaux   You know, we expect great things from our top clay soils and our gravel terroir, but even in the intermediary soils, the quality is consistently high. There's good body from the clay soils, lovely elegance from the gravel soils. But right across the vineyard all the plots have performed at an equally high level.

AB   How do you think La Conseillante 2017 compares with other vintages?

Marielle Cazaux   Clearly, it's not on a par with 2016. As for 2015, it's difficult to compare with 2017, because 2015 is like 2009 in its high alcoholic degree and high pH. Right now, I'd say that 2017 is a classic Bordeaux with great aromatics, somewhere between a 2014 and a 2016 – perhaps a 2014 plus. However, on an aromatic level, it certainly compares with 2016.

AB   It's surprising that 2017 is not an alcoholic vintage. In August, there were reports of potentially very high alcoholic degrees…

Marielle Cazaux   I think there were isolated cases, in plots of very old vines in certain terroirs. At La Conseillante I reckon that the overall degree will be a moderate 13.5. As far as acidities are concerned, they're really good. We're averaging pHs of around 3.55. So that's a really nice balance between alcohol and acidity.

AB   How about tannins?

Marielle Cazaux   The wines have good tannins, although not with the same levels of concentration as the 2016. There's good backbone. So when you add up those parameters of alcohol, acidity and tannins, you get a very good classic Bordeaux. All is in good proportion; it's not a vintage of extremes.

AB   A promising vintage at La Conseillante then?

Marielle Cazaux   Yes, and to prove it, there's an interesting fact that I'd like to share with you. The first blend we do is always the press wine. We tasted blind all 22 barrels of press wine including the different types of press. We classified these samples into qualities A, B and C. Three or four of us, including Michel Rolland, took part in this tasting. For the 2017 vintage we put 9 barrels in A (the best), 9 barrels in B and 4 barrels in C. Usually, in great vintages, all of A would go into La Conseillante, 80% of B would also go into La Conseillante, with 20% of B going into Duo. And C would be sold off in bulk. The fact that we have so much A and B in 2017 is a sure sign that we have a great vintage. In fact, the proportions of A B and C are very similar to those of 2015 and 2016.