

Ausone, January 4th 2018

AB Back in September, when you'd harvested the Merlot but not yet the Cabernet Franc, you were confident of producing a very good 2017 vintage at Ausone but nothing exceptional. How do you see the quality of the vintage now that the malo-lactics have finished?

P Vauthier Remember that at Ausone we were lucky enough to produce a normal crop, and we were looking forward to a very good quality vintage. At our other Saint-Emilion estates, where the April frosts hit hard, our main concern was whether we would produce any 2017 at all.

AB And how has 2017 turned out there?

P Vauthier Sadly, in the 2017 vintage, there practically won't be any Simard, Haut Simard or Fonbel. There's hardly any to speak of compared with normal vintages.



AB How many bottles do you think you might produce?

P Vauthier At Fonbel, it will be around 10,000 bottles, instead of 130,000. Simard will be about 40,000 instead of 200,000. And at Haut Simard, there won't be any at all.

AB Do those low figures represent what was not frost-damaged? Or with the addition of some of the second generation crops too?

P Vauthier We waited as long as possible for the frost-affected vines to produce a second generation crop, but in the end most of the fruit wasn't perfectly ripe, and so we've sold a lot of the wine made from those grapes in bulk.

AB And can you confirm that Ausone will produce a normal number of bottles?

P Vauthier Yes. Also at Chapelle (about 5,000 to 6,000 bottles) and at La Clotte, while Moulin Saint Georges will be about 20% down because of the frosts that affected the lower part of its vineyard.

AB Does that mean that only those four wines will be presented en primeur in April?

P Vauthier That's right.

AB So what is your opinion of the quality of the wines produced from those vineyards that didn't get hit?

P Vauthier 2017 is definitely an attractive vintage. It's "Bordeaux classique" in style.

AB Is it still too early to give a more precise description?

P Vauthier Right now, I'd say it's a 2014 plus. I don't think it's on a par with 2015 or 2016.

AB Which confirms what you were saying at harvest time...

P Vauthier Well, yes. But you know, when it comes to Ausone I can change my mind. Ausone does evolve quite a bit during the ageing process, so I'm not going to rule out a really excellent vintage there.

AB Experience has led you to reserve judgement...

P Vauthier It can be a tricky wine to taste at first, and it often tastes better as it ages. But if you ask me my opinion I can only describe what I taste at that particular time. And at this stage, I'd say that it has a classic, aromatic Bordeaux profile.

AB This year, the primeurs tastings are a week later than normal, so Ausone will have a little more time to evolve before it's tasted...

P Vauthier Yes, and the malo-lactics finished early, well before Christmas, so that helps too.

AB How happy were you with your Cabernet Franc in this vintage? It seems like a really good Cabernet year...

P Vauthier There will definitely be a higher proportion of Cabernet Franc in the Ausone blend. Possibly as much as 60%. I'm anyway a great fan of Cab Franc and always really pleased when it's a good vintage for it. It was a slightly early year, which suited it. It was beautifully ripe.

AB And in Chapelle, you have a fair bit of Cabernet Sauvignon. I bet that's good too.

P Vauthier Yes, and you know what? With each new vintage I like our Cabernet Sauvignon better!

AB Could it one day go into the Ausone blend?

P Vauthier Hmmm, good question. A couple of years ago, I'd have said no way. Today I'm thinking why not one day, when the vines are a bit older?

AB What do you think has changed your mind about the Cab Sauvignon?

P Vauthier The better ripeness levels we're getting nowadays.

AB If 2017 is a classic Bordeaux vintage, the parameters must be nicely in balance...

P Vauthier Yes, they are. The alcoholic degree is not excessively high, the tannins are beautifully supple, and the palate is quite round and fleshy, while the acidities are at very good levels.

AB And with today's trend of carrying out gentle vinifications, the wines are more pleasant to taste when very young. Does that augur well for the primeurs?

P Vauthier We're very careful to hold back on extractions. We need a good tannic structure in the wine, but we don't want over-extraction. The tannin-ripeness should be "al dente". No over-ripeness in the grapes and no over-extraction in the wine.

AB In concrete terms, how do you achieve the right level of extraction at the Vauthier estates?

P Vauthier Of the 30 days that the skins are in contact with the juice or wine, we only do pump-overs (or other extraction techniques) for the first four days.

AB That's what some people describe as "infusion".

P Vauthier That's right. We only extract as far as 1030 density. Then we do nothing for the rest of the vinification.

AB Is there any disadvantage in holding back on the extractions?

P Vauthier Perhaps the wines can be less impressive during the primeurs tastings. But Ausone has always tasted less impressive during the primeurs than at the end of its ageing period.

AB But you always get high scores from the primeurs!

P Vauthier Because I think the primeurs tasters are really professional and understand what we are seeking to achieve. We never get distracted by these issues. We vinify all our wines in the same way. Ausone has more structure than the rest, but they all have a particular style that reflects our winemaking philosophy.