BORDEAUX 2007
CAN PRICES GO UP AGAIN?

VINTAGE 2007: BUT WHAT ABOUT THE WINES? by Jane Anson

Forget about death, Swiss watches and tax returns, it's the optimistic Bordeaux winemaker that you can really rely on. And they're out in force again for the 2007 vintage.

Everything in the vines started well, with an April 3.5°C hotter than average, and ended well, with the sunniest September and October for 60 years. But there were three uncomfortable months in between, with cool weather, rain and widespread mildew and rot outbreaks which reduced harvest volumes by an average of 30%. Overall, it didn't rain much more than average - around 930mm from October 2006 to the end of September 2007 - but it was spread over more days, and fell during the usually dry July and August. September, by contrast, had precipitation levels of 36.8mm (53.5mm lower than average).

'There were few smiling faces at the end of August,' says Thomas Duroux at Château Palmer in Margaux, 'and we were a day or two away from writing off this year. But things turned round right at the end of the month, and just got better and better from there on in.'

Séverine Bonnie at Château Malartic Lagravière in Pessac Léognan echoes the sentiment: 'September and October definitely saved the vintage.'

But haven't we heard it all before? It's tough to believe winemakers who claim each vintage was more classic or more exceptional than the last. 2001? Unfairly overshadowed by the 2000. 2004? Difficult but surprisingly good. 2006? As sublime as 1982, according to the Figaro. And that's ignoring the standouts of 2000, 2003 and 2005. Can one northerly vineyard, on the 45th parallel and just 50km from the Atlantic ocean really produce outstanding wines year after year? And with prices spiralling ever higher, even in 'classic' rather than 'outstanding' years such as 2006, it's even more difficult to believe the prognosis coming out of Bordeaux itself.

There is one thing that everyone seems to agree on with the 2007 vintage: we are going to see big swings in quality, depending on care taken in the vineyard during the season, money available for treatments, and picking dates. As Jean-Baptiste Buorotte of négoceant Audy says: 'Vintage 2007 will be that of the provident producers. It was definitely a year to throw out the rulebook - Château la Dauphine in Fronsac saw grapes on clay soils ripening before those on lighter structured soil, Château Cantenac Brown in Margaux had Cabernet Sauvignons ripening before Merlot on some plots.'

In St-Émilion at Château Pressac, grapes on the valley floor were ripening before young vines on the plateau, again the opposite of a 'normal' year. Owner Jean-François Quenin recalls: 'You had to be enormously attentive to the vines, even if you couldn't fully explain what was happening - act first and explain afterwards.'

Jean-Claude Berrouet at Château Pétrus, often a reliable and honest voice, says: '2007 will not be my best vintage ever, but it is far from the worst. I was
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