



2021 -back down to earth

“The 2021 vintage reminds me of a time when global warming wasn’t yet being talked about.” Philippe Delfaut – General Manager

It was a complex year -something of an obstacle course.

The fight against spring frosts

Above all, the period of frosts in early April (on the 7th to be precise) will remain in our memories. All French vineyards were hit by these frosts, which led to fears of very low yields and, in some cases, almost non-existent crops. **Each of the different prevention measures to fight against frost is tricky to fully master, and results can fall short of expectations.** And yet, during these episodes, we are seeing more and more lanterns being placed along the vine rows, bales of hay being lit, anti-frost towers being positioned among the vines and helicopters hovering over the vineyards! It’s as if we were trying to defeat nature at all costs. But nature, in 2021, would soon call us to order. It was only the beginning.

At Château Kirwan, the vines hit by frost covered an area of 2.5 hectares (just over 6 acres), some 2km from the core section of our vineyard. 90% of the crop in these 2.5 hectares was destroyed. The rest of our vines however are close enough to the Gironde estuary to enjoy a natural protection from frosts, which is a huge advantage!

Keeping downy mildew at bay

Though catastrophe had been avoided, we weren’t yet out of the woods. 2021, as far as vine cycles go, was certainly no walk in the park. **The very wet weather during May, June and July led to severe attacks of downy mildew right through to the end of July. Once again, there were crop losses, in the region of 10 to 20%, depending on the grape variety and the plot.** Merlot, in the more vigorous plantations, was the hardest hit; while Cabernet, which is only moderately prone to downy mildew, was spared, as was Petit Verdot, which is also little prone to this fungal disease. **To keep attacks at bay, we were constantly at the ready to protect the vineyard with organic copper-based sprays and biocontrol products.** In parallel, we meticulously removed any lateral shoots and suckers and carried out a de-leafing of the vines, together with a trimming of the vine canopy. These operations thinned out the foliage and provided good ventilation for the vegetation, and **as a result slowed down the development of downy mildew** and ensured a better spray efficacy.

A need to be patient

Drier weather set in during August, though we couldn’t really talk about a summer, since **temperatures remained below the seasonal averages, and the sky was often cloudy with only intermittent spells of sunshine.**

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In this context, the **ripening** process was **long and drawn-out, which explains the quite late harvesting dates (starting around 23rd September)** in the earliest-ripening vineyards –which was our case. The grapes ripened slowly, and the sugar-levels and acidities, below those recorded over the last years, were somewhat similar to the vintages made 20 years ago. **The malic acid levels were very high, and therefore the malo-lactic fermentation played a very important role this year.**

Although the water deficit stress remained moderate during the ripening process, the four weeks of dry weather between the beginning of August and beginning of September enabled the skins and the pips to ripen well. **The phenolic quality was most definitely there –there’s absolutely no vegetal character in evidence.**

Careful management of the juices

The only issue was the large size of the berries, especially in the Merlot. The vines on **soils that had been well supplied with rainwater during the vine cycle and underwent only moderate water constraint during the ripening ended up with large-sized berries, sometimes 20 to 25% bigger than in recent years.** Though the skins had a high degree of phenolic components, tannins and anthocyanins, the volume of juice was large, and this needed to be taken into account during the vinification.

To favour concentration, we decided to carry out “saignées” (vat bleedings) in batches where the size of the berries looked too large. Concentrating is fine, but it was also essential to **extract gently to ensure that no hardness was created in the wine. At Kirwan, our policy is always “measured extractions”.** Elegance and balance are more important than muscle! This is why we prefer to perform this **very gentle extraction using the R’pulse system**, instead of the classic pump-overs. The principle of the system consists in injecting a strong flow of air, or CO² coming from the fermentation, at low pressure, under the cap of skins, in order to break up the cap and immerse it in the must, in a similar way to the “integral vinification” method.

The alcoholic and malo-lactic fermentations took place simultaneously, as is the custom at Kirwan, and we ran off the wine into barrels at a very early stage.

TASTING NOTES

Having been bottled in May 2023, the wine today offers lovely fresh fruit with mingling aromas of cherry, strawberry and raspberry. These are complemented on the palate with subtle notes of spices. The wine displays a profile of tension and great precision. The palate is smooth, and the tannins are beautifully soft. The oak is discreet and very well-integrated. The finish is long and flavoursome rather than tannic. While there isn’t the opulence or the sweetness of the previous vintages, the balance and finesse are remarkable.

This is a gourmet wine and one for those who love good taste.

24/11/2023 Philippe DELFAUT

In figures...

Harvest: from **23rd September to 8th October**

Yield: **33hl/ha** (identical to 2020)

Blend: **73 % Cabernet Sauvignon**

13 % Merlot

8 % Cabernet franc

6 % Petit Verdot

Alcoholic degree: 13

pH: 3.63

IPT: 65

12 days of harvesting

5600 hours of picking / sorting

21 days of vatting

Ageing: **16 months**, 45% new barrels

Bottling date: 3rd May 2023