



2017 : A HIGH-RISK VINTAGE

2017 was a year fraught with danger. There was much worry and little rest until the last days of the harvest. Although we obviously regret the major decrease in production, we are also proud of the obstacles we overcame at La Dominique, where we managed to adapt to considerable challenges.

Tricky weather was not the least of these... 2017 was, on the whole, very dry before the rainy period in September. There were just 360 mm of precipitation i.e. 20% less than the annual average. Record lows were recorded on three nights: the 21st, 26th, and 27th of April. We had to act very quickly to limit frost damage and to save grapes in the finest plots. A helicopter was mobilised and fires were lit. Plots of Cabernet Franc (a late-ripening grape variety, therefore less susceptible to frost) were relatively spared by the frost, and Cabernet Franc vines propagated by mass selection on clay soil resisted best of all.

Flowering was quick and regular on first generation grapes, guaranteeing more even ripening down the line. Although optimism returned at that time, it was necessary to be very vigilant in the vineyard. Long weeks were spent carefully observing the vines in order to nip all sorts of vine diseases in the bud. We also made sure to adapt to the situation in each individual plot. Green harvesting was done to avoid the possible development of grey rot. Véraison (colour change) took place very early and evenly starting in late July and fruit set occurred without the least water stress.

Then something happened to complicate things: rain on the 16th and 17th of September upset the calendar and precipitated the harvest. Once again, the byword was adaptation, and we made sure to fine-tune the picking order in each plot – row by row, and vine by vine. Picking thus took place in several goes. Everything was influenced by our fear of botrytis. We picked Merlot from the 15th to the 26th of September, Cabernet Franc from the 26th to the 29th of September, and Cabernet Sauvignon on the 29th of that month. It was important to pinpoint the best dates for Cabernet Franc depending on the type of soil (clay, gravel, clay and gravel). The second generation grapes, which had changed colour later, were also harvested two to three weeks later. In order to ensure quality, we sorted the grapes four times: first in the vineyard prior to harvesting, then again when picking, once again as soon as the grapes arrived at the cellar prior to destemming, and finally on a vibrating sorting table. We must pay homage to the meticulous work done by our team of thirty faithful pickers.

Fermentation called for several strategic choices. Today, winemaking procedures and techniques can fortunately be modified according to the quality of the grapes. Their small size in 2017 meant that the ratio of skin to juice facilitated extraction and maceration. Pigeage (punching down the cap) was not practised to avoid a violent mechanical effect on the grapes. Pumping over was done twice daily, but only once a day midway through alcoholic fermentation.

Even though it is too early to say with complete certainty, the 2017 vintage at La Dominique – made from a highly unusual blend of 60% Merlot and 40% Cabernet Franc – gives every indication of freshness and crunchy fruit.

The fine acidity provides an excellent counterpoint to the alcoholic degree. "Small production, but very high quality", analyses Gwendeline Lucas, the dynamic manager of Vignobles Clément Fayat.

Professionals are welcome to sample the wine during the En Primeur tastings in spring 2018.