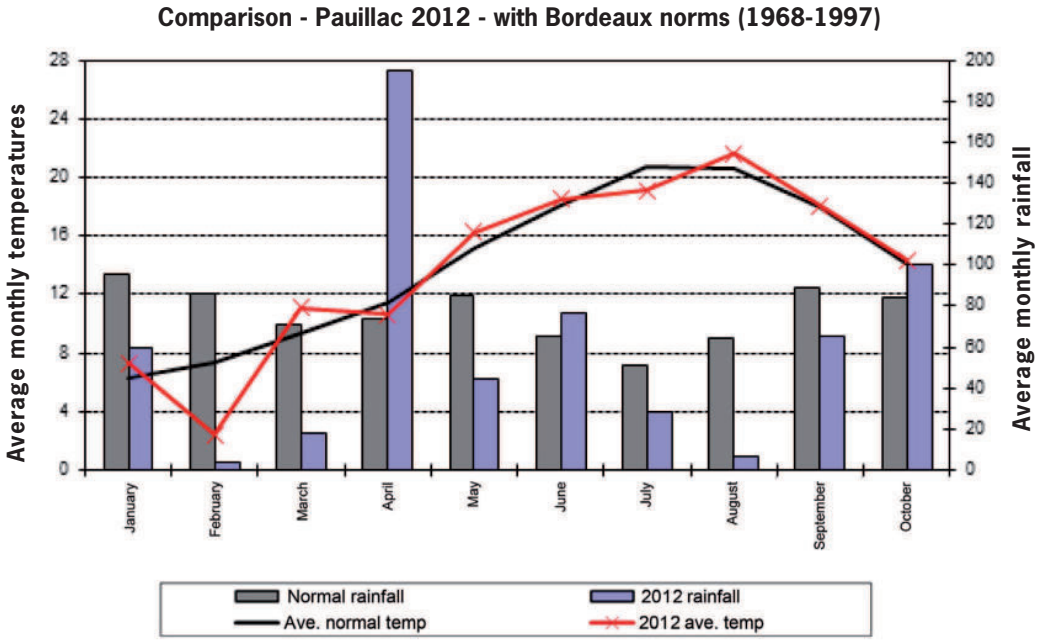
2012 Vintage

“All’s well that ends well.”

Going both from mild to cold and wet to dry, this variable winter failed to make up the water deficit that had accumulated over several years (35 mm between January and March as opposed to the average 130 mm). Following the coldest and driest February since 1956, the mild March prompted a slightly early budburst: 30th March for the Merlots and 4th April for the Cabernets.

This advance was only temporary, for the cool rainy spring considerably slowed down the vegetative growth, incurring a delay of around ten days to the “separated cluster” stage. Under these circumstances, flowering was very protracted, becoming complicated for the Merlots, with cases of coulure and millerandage (irregular ripening), whilst for the Cabernets, which were later, flowering went normally. The damp conditions between April and June were therefore ideal for the development of considerable parasite pressure, especially from mildew and oidium. Berry formation was also significantly uneven.

Figure 1



DOMAINES
JEAN-MICHEL CAZES

Figure 2

Phenological stages of the vine at Chateau Lynch-Bages

VINTAGES	varietals	begining of bud burst (March)	A mid- flowering (June)	difference A to B	B mid- veraison (August)	end of veraison	difference B to C	C beginning of harvest (LB)	difference A to C	1st veraison of berries	end of harvesting
LYNCH-BAGES	M	29-Mar	05-Jun	63	5-Aug	17-Aug	48	23-Sept	111		29-Sept
2009	CF	03-Apr	06-Jun	days	9-Aug		days	5-Oct	days	16-July	
	CS	07-Apr	09-Jun	66	12-Aug	24-Aug	55	7-Oct	121		12-Oct
LYNCH-BAGES	M	06-Apr	07-Jun	62	7-Aug	17-Aug	50	27-Sept	112		30-Sept
2010	CF	08-Apr	09-Jun	days	11-Aug		days	6-Oct	days	19-July	
	CS	15-Apr	11-Jun	65	14-Aug	24-Aug	55	9-Oct	120		14-Oct
LYNCH-BAGES	M	28-Mar	12-May	62	25-July	07-Aug	48	13-Sept	110		14-Sept
2011	CF	02-Apr	14-May	days	28-July		days	20-Sept	days	30-Jun	
	CS	06-Apr	18-May	65	1-Aug	13-Aug	51	22-Sept	116		28-Sept
LYNCH-BAGES	M	30-Mar	01-Jun	73	14-Aug	24-Aug	50	4-Oct	123		5-Oct
2012	CF	01-Apr	02-Jun	days	16-Aug		days	11-Oct	days	23-July	12-Oct
	CS	04-Apr	04-Jun	76	20-Aug	30-Aug	53	13-Oct	129		18-Oct
Average over	M	23-Mar	1-Jun	66	6-Aug		46	22-Sept	112		17-Oct
The last 17	CF	27-Mar	4-Jun	days	11-Aug		days	29-Sept	days	19-July	
years :	CS	2-Apr	7-Jun	67	13-Aug		48	1-Oct	116		8-Oct
1995 to 2011											

Summer got back into full swing from 15th July onwards, bringing hot, dry weather with the occasional peak in temperature until 24th September. With only 7 mm of rain in two months, the water shortfall continued to increase. Some of the plots suffered one of the worst water deficits of the last few years. These particular climatic conditions brought about local difficulties, prompting disparities in maturity with small berries. Following a similar pattern to the flowering, veraison remained slow. These conditions therefore led one to predict a less copious harvest than in 2011. The lack of extreme temperatures helped finally make up for some of the time lost at the start of the cycle, reducing the gap by 15th September from three weeks to two weeks. Green harvesting was carried out towards the end of August to cut the clusters that still displayed end-of-cycle heterogeneousness. In the end, the gap between the maturity of the clusters gradually disappeared as harvesting approached.

Our soils, consisting as they do of a combination of deep gravels and a sizeable clayey layer, allayed the negative effect of the considerable water deficit. They helped maintain a regular level of sugar even in very dry conditions, sometimes verging on water stress. The last maturity checks revealed a satisfying accumulation of phenolic compounds along with a lovely richness in the berries. The skins, for the Cabernets in particular, remained thick with little juice, hence resulting in a marc/juice ratio that fosters good colour extraction.
The grapes remained very healthy until the last week of September, but rain at the end of the month hastened the start of harvesting. Indeed, the damp and the mild temperature led to the development of grey rot, notably on the more sandy soils. Furthermore, the 40 mm of rain during the harvesting period did nothing to compensate for the smallness of the berries, leaving our parcels with only moderate yields.

Addendum

Figure 3

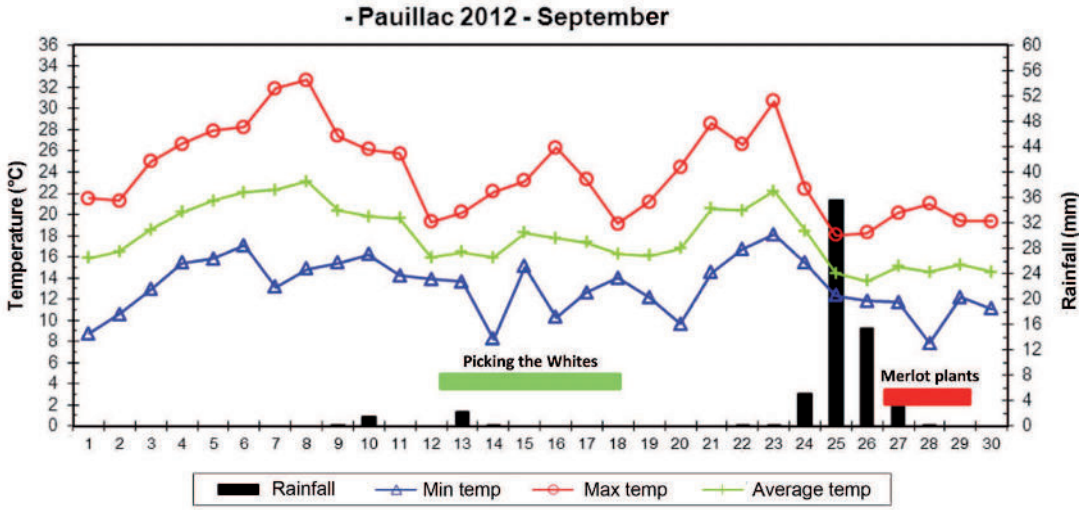
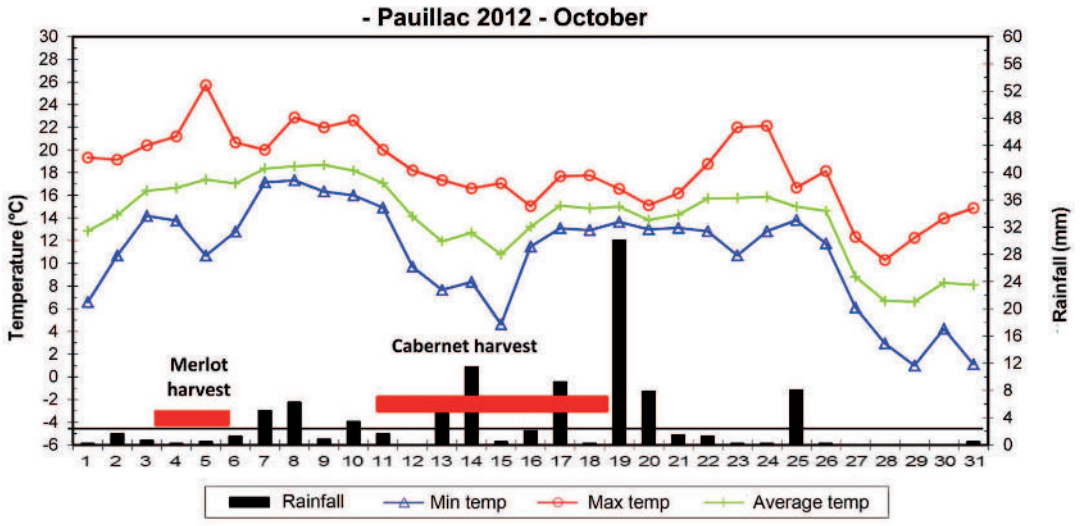


Figure 4



Canopy management (leaf thinning and green harvesting), along with good phytosanitary protection notably against botrytis – paid off in the end, enabling us now to consider a more relaxed picking schedule, thereby bringing the later Cabernets to perfect maturity.

CHATEAU
LYNCH BAGES

2012

Harvesting began at Chateau Lynch-Bages on 27th September with the Merlot, immediately after a short rainy spell. This stimulated ripening and prompted a slight growth in the berries. The old Merlots waited a few extra days before being picked between 4th and 5th October, thus according them optimal maturity.

Early October went on to see a drop in temperatures and the onset of wet weather. This led to harvesting restarting for the Cabernet Franc on 11th October and for the Cabernet Sauvignon on 13th October (almost 20 days later than in 2011). The maturity of the grapes picked was at last homogeneous with a good phenolic potential and considerable acid/alcohol balance. Meanwhile, the increasingly persistent rain led to the speeding up of the harvesting. Four teams of over 200 pickers enabled this rate to be kept up without a break until the end of harvesting on 18th October. Parasite pressure due to Botrytis was kept to a minimum thanks to the prophylactic measures undertaken early on during the summer (treatments and canopy management), as well as to strict sorting instructions given at the time of picking.

The harvest reception system has once again undergone profound changes. In fact, two extra reception lines were set up, their main characteristics being the use of a new “de-stemming// sorting” system followed by the installation of a sorting table manned by 10 people. The harvest thus benefits from two manual and one mechanical sorting, delivering a perfectly clean crop at the time of vatting.

Yields remained fairly mixed in relation to grape varieties and the age of the parcels. In general, the plants and the Cabernet Sauvignon situated on the most precocious terroirs therefore suffered the most from the water deficit and saw a 20% drop in yield. The yield for the earliest Merlots remained within the normal range. The property’s agronomic yield ended up at 39 hl/ha.

Following several days of maceration, when extraction operations (delestage and pumping over) intensified, dark colours and a fine tannic structure developed: signs that pellicular maturity has been achieved. Taking less than 10 days, the alcoholic fermentations passed rapidly, owing notably to the lower alcoholic content compared to recent years. After 20 days of fermentation in vats, running off began on 25th October for the first vats of Merlot.

Malolactic fermentation of over a third of the lots took place in barrels, the rest being carried out in vats. These latter fermentations were relatively rapid, ending in the first week of December. Pre-blendings could then be conducted with a view to racking into barrels as early as possible.

After the first tastings we can safely say that the 2012 vintage delivers classic-style ripe, balanced wines, boasting intense colours and a very decent tannic structure. The doubts concerning the consequences of a mixed and irregular vegetative cycle could now be swept aside.