

Ausone, October 5<sup>th</sup> 2018

**AB** You're not one to hype the quality of the vintage. On the contrary, you tend to play things down at this stage of the wine-making, well aware that there can still be surprises in store right up till after the malo. However, given the journey you've been on since the soaking wet spring with the threat of disease in the vines that you had to keep at bay, through to the glorious summer and early autumn, which have maintained the vines in perfect health, surely you can now feel very satisfied with the quality of the grapes coming into the cellar, no?

**P Vauthier** There's no doubt in my mind that 2018 will be a very good, probably excellent vintage. Some are already comparing it with 2016, and I understand that. But we shouldn't kid ourselves. We needed more rain in the summer than we actually got. In the end, I have to say, the conditions were a bit better in 2016.



**AB** This lack of rain in August has meant that quantities of juice are lower in the Merlot. But couldn't that be a factor of very high quality?

**P Vauthier** At Ausone, the Merlot yield is down. It's still too early to say exactly by how much. On the other hand, our Cabernet Franc is sufficient to make up the difference. So, the quantity won't be an issue. As for quality, yes it has benefited from a naturally smaller crop, but it's not always as simple as that. We're always searching to bring in grapes that are perfectly balanced in terms of alcohol, tannins and acidity. These parameters are key and need to be closely monitored as the harvest approaches to make sure that we vinify grapes that are optimally balanced.

**AB** So how are these balances looking in 2018?

**P Vauthier** As I said before, I'm confident that 2018 will be a very good to excellent vintage. However, the perfectionist side of me says, OK the alcohol is in balance...

**AB** That's never excessive at Ausone...

**P Vauthier** No, high alcohol is never an issue at Ausone. For some reason, our terroir never produces alcoholic wines? This year it will be no more than 13.5, once again.

**AB** What about the tannins then?

**P Vauthier** They're nicely in balance because we've had the perfect conditions to wait for them to ripen.

**AB** And the acidity?

**P Vauthier** That is a slight concern. In drought conditions we keep an even closer eye on that parameter if we want to be sure of attaining the perfect balance we strive for.

**AB** In 2016 the fresh, attractive acidities were a feature of that vintage. Are they lower than in 2016?

**P Vauthier** What's amazing is that when you taste the vats you get a very nice sensation of freshness and aromatic fruit. It's as if the acidities were higher than they actually are. Objectively speaking, they're not at ideal levels. However, having said that, you know, these levels can change during the vinification. In fact they often do.

**AB** You're not over-worried?

**P Vauthier** Not at all. It's just me being my usual cautious self.

**AB** So how far have you got with the harvest? Is all the Merlot in the vats now?

**P Vauthier** Yes, it's all in now.

**AB** What about the Cabernets?

**P Vauthier** We're still waiting. The gap between the Merlot and the Cabernets is a bit wider this year.

**AB** What impression do you have of the profile of this vintage? Could 2018 be categorised as a "sunny" vintage, a *millésime solaire*, like 2009 or even 2003?

**P Vauthier** There are aspects of that, yes. When you look at the small quantities of juice compared with solids, the small, lightweight berries, the weather conditions since July. But on the other hand, the temperatures haven't been extreme, and the nights have been mostly cool. And as I said, tasting the vats right now, you get freshness, red berry fruit rather than black. It's an interesting vintage.

**AB** Another interesting point is that the vines don't appear to have suffered, as they have done in certain hot years...

**P Vauthier** You're absolutely right. Once the downy mildew scare was behind us, the vines have been in really great shape. No disease, no trace of botrytis. It's absolutely perfect for planning

and carrying out a precision harvest. Actually, a bit of rain has been forecast for the next two days, and that would be very welcome for the Cabernets. They need freshening up. It wouldn't do them any harm at all.