

Figeac, 4th October 2018

AB You've clearly got a spring in your step. The harvest must be going well...

Frédéric Faye I must say, I'm very pleased with the results so far.

AB No worries about the long summer drought in Figeac's warm terroir?

Frédéric Faye We got 38mm of rain in September. That did the vines the world of good. They were at risk of being over-stressed. But thanks to that rain they remained in conditions of what we call hydric constraint, which is a beneficial light stress. Which was exactly what we were hoping for.



AB How did the three grape varieties perform during the summer?

Frédéric Faye The veraison of the Merlot went evenly but slowly because of the lack of rain. The Cabernet Franc was even slower, 3 weeks, and uneven. We had to green harvest it carefully to even it out -the Cabernet Franc hates drought. On the other hand, the veraison of the Cabernet Sauvignon went evenly and very quickly, just 5 days. Unsurprisingly, this is the variety that's the happiest in these conditions.

AB A bit disappointed with the Cabernet Franc then?

Frédéric Faye The green harvesting was vitally important, but in the end it was that rain at the end of the summer that really helped the Cabernet Franc and enabled it to ripen well.

AB Did you get sufficient rain to preserve normal potential yields?

Frédéric Faye Contrary to what you may think about the warm Figeac terroir the vines don't suffer that much from these drought conditions. We're expecting nice normal yields this year, not because of the number of bunches but because of good-sized berries. If there was an impact from the drought, it was the slower ripening in the more gravelly parts of the vineyard.

AB Will we be seeing any impact from the drought on the profile of the Figeac 2018? Is it a “sunny” profile?

Frédéric Faye Actually it isn't. Alcohol will be up to 14°, so not excessive. The Merlot has come in at about 14.5, and the Cabernets are expected to be under 14. But the character of the vintage is not a sunny one. The juices are fresh and aromatic.

AB How do you explain that?

Frédéric Faye I'm sure that the way we worked the vineyard helped. We didn't de-leaf the vines too much. We protected the fruit from direct sunlight. That helped preserve fresh fruit character in the grapes. The acidities are really good.

AB No comparisons then with very “sunny” vintages like 2003 or even 2009?

Frédéric Faye Oh no! It's actually far more like a 2010 or 2016. When you compare temperatures it's not that surprising. In 2018, we had mostly quite cool nights during the summer. That also plays a big part in helping acidities.

AB What stage are you at in the picking?

Frédéric Faye All the Merlot is in vat. We finished it on Monday 1st October, and we'll now be bringing in the Cabernets.

AB And how's the Cabernet Sauvignon shaping up?

Frédéric Faye Superb! Caviar!

AB The ripening has been smoother in the Sauvignon than in the Franc?

Frédéric Faye As I said before, we had some initial concerns (like at other properties) even up till a couple of weeks ago. But the Franc is coming along very well now. It's going to be a very good Cabernet Franc year.

AB How important has the choice of picking dates been?

Frédéric Faye Quite tricky this year. The skins are thick, so you didn't want to rush in too quickly. You needed to wait for the skins to soften. However, if you waited too long, you ran the

risk of losing some of the aromatics and ending up with jammy port-like characters. You needed to pick for freshness above all.

AB Producers are talking about the ripeness of the pips in 2018...

Frédéric Faye They're incredibly ripe! By the end of August/beginning of September, the pips in all three varieties had turned brown. I've rarely seen that. They were already perfectly ripe. The skins however, needed time.

AB What implications did these factors have for the wine-making?

Frédéric Faye This is hugely important. Not only are there quite high levels of alcohol, there is also great polyphenol richness. The tannins are of excellent quality, but they need to be extracted carefully. If we over-extract, we'll get blockbuster wines. So, extraction techniques during the fermentation are going to be very gentle, and fermentation temperatures need to be lower than usual. Light infusions will be the order of the day. We've so far done quite a few 6-day pre-fermentation cold soaks at 6 to 8°C to favour the expression of fresh fruit. Then after that we are going very carefully and gently with the rest of the vinification.

AB Why aren't growers comparing the 2018 with the 2010? You've talked about quality tannins, good acidity, high alcohol, polyphenols –all of these were features of the 2010. Why are producers comparing the 2018 with 2016, rather than 2010?

Frédéric Faye Maybe it's because we are approaching this vintage in a way that is more like what we did in 2016. At Figeac, we have really improved the vineyard since 2010; our team has gained experience, and perhaps we just feel that we have the potential to make another 2016. It has a familiar feel. 2010 was a great vintage, but maybe today we'd vinify it differently. I'm very confident however that Figeac 2018 will go down as another great year.