

**AB** All your different lots have finished their malo-lactics and begun their ageing in barrels, do you still think that the 2018 vintage is close to the 2016?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Yes, I do. 2018 had a warm and quite dry ripening period, and yet the profile of the wines is fresh, taut, great aromatics with floral red berry fruit. And for me that's also 2016.

**AB** And both of them very high in quality?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Clearly.



**AB** So 2018 is another great "Bordeaux classique"?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** They are both constructed with the same classic components of freshness, complexity, delicacy, balance, power, length of flavour and good acidity. This is the expression of Bordeaux classicism, unlike exceptional vintages such as 2015, 2009, 2005 and 1990, which went beyond that classicism and expressed opulence. 2018 is an academic vintage.

**AB** Interestingly some great growers have found that this 2018 vintage has recently developed an opulent side, as if 2018 had a touch of 2009 or 2015. You don't get that impression?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** No, I don't. What comes through for me in the 2018 is balance, tension and precision. There is power, but it isn't a "sweet" power. The aromatic power isn't black fruit. It's crisp, taut, straight, fresh fruit character. Like 2016, and with similarities to 2010, 2001 or 1998.

**AB** Are the acidities similar to 2016?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Pretty much the same, although the pHs stood up better in the Merlot than in the Cabernet Franc in 2018.

**AB** Traditionally in Bordeaux, no two vintages are the same. 2018 cannot be a carbon copy of the 2016. Or can it?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** It's still very early days, although we did begin our pre-blending very early. Out of the 47 lots we vinified we only have 12 left to pre-blend. What we do notice is that compared with the 2016, the 2018 is more up-front. There's more aromatic intensity, it's a bit sexier. It has a little more charm and accessibility.

**AB** How does that sexy charm manifest itself?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Through its crisp fresh floral notes. It is immediately expressive and shows no austerity at all.

**AB** And the 2016 at the same stage?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Quite similar but a bit more academic. It held back more. The 2018 has a little more to say for itself. But the two vintages are very close.

**AB** You mentioned in October that everything was good in 2018. Growers are raving about the Cabernet Franc again...

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** 2018 was excellent in each of our different terroirs. For example, our Merlot on gravel performed well, expressing everything we expect from that grape on that terroir. The Cabernet Franc on clay, the same. Every part of the vineyard performed as we wished. So we've got really excellent, quite early-harvested Merlot and fantastic late-harvested Cabernet. We got wonderfully juicy, crisp, fruity and floral Merlot and then the texture, tannins, depth, power and creaminess of the Cabernet. Yes, it was a great year all round and with superb Cabernet Franc.

**AB** I know it's not so important, but what about your Cabernet Sauvignon?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Very nice! As you know, we've got less experience with this variety. It's planted on very gravelly terroir. The berries were really tiny and took an age to ripen. It's going to bring some interesting floral notes of roses and peony to the whole, and of course quality tannins. It will definitely be going into the First Wine.

**AB** Did the dry end of season weather affect yields? Some growers have complained of lower than expected levels of production.

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** No, we didn't suffer that. We'll be over 40hl/ha.

**AB** Do you think that this will go down for you personally as one of the best Cheval Blanc vintages since you joined the estate?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Oh, that's an almost impossible question to answer, because there are so many recent vintages that have been outstanding, and they're all so different, and each stands out in its own way. On a personal level, I think it's not so much whether a vintage is better than another, it's each time gaining a deeper understanding of the growth that matters to me.

**AB** Winemakers often feel a deep affection for a vintage for different reasons...

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** 2018 is a great example of that. It's no doubt a great vintage, but I'm sure the whole crew will keep a special memory of it because of the huge efforts we had to make in the vineyard at the beginning of the vine cycle with all its challenges. They will look back and feel a real sense of achievement. Personally, I'd say that it was hugely satisfying to see in 2018 each plot perform at its absolute best. And that's as pleasing as the overall quality of the vintage. I'd also add that it was also a very pleasing year for our white wine, Le Petit Cheval Blanc, particularly as we're now moving up in volume to 20,000 bottles. That also gave us a lot of satisfaction.

**AB** And if 2018 turns out to be one of the greats, all the better!

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** Well, to kind of answer your question, I'd say that 2018 will be up there with the 2016, 2015, 2009 and 2010.

**AB** Turning to the second wine of Cheval Blanc, Petit Cheval, will it be tricky to separate the lots to make a First and Second Wine in 2018?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** It's been a long time since we had such a great Second Wine. Here I can be more categorical: for the Second Wine, Petit Cheval, 2018 is probably one of the greatest vintages ever produced.

**AB** Is it always made with the same lots?

**Pierre-Olivier Clouet** No, that's the feature of Petit Cheval. The 54 different lots of Cheval Blanc have on at least one occasion been part of the First Wine over the last five years. There's no pre-selection of plots for Petit Cheval. It's all a question of tasting each of the 54 lots and finding the right harmonies to make each blend.