

Ausone, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2019

**AB** During the harvest, you were optimistic about the 2018 vintage, but not as excited as some of your colleagues on the right bank. You were still waiting for the Cabernet Franc and hoping for some rain to help it along. The conditions in the end were perfect for Cabernet Franc, and now that the malo-lactics are finished are you more excited about this vintage?

**P Vauthier** In my mind, there's no doubt that 2018 is a very good, indeed an excellent vintage. But I haven't changed my view that 2016 is superior. Not by much but it's a little better than 2018.

**AB** You were a little surprised that with relatively low acidity in the 2018 the lots tasted during the harvest had nice freshness. How have those lots evolved since the malo-lactics?



**P Vauthier** The pH levels are quite high in 2018, but that freshness I mentioned is still clearly there. It's a bit of a mystery for me, but it's great that we have it in the 2018, when acidities appear to be on the low side.

**AB** When you say quite high pHs, can you be more specific?

**P Vauthier** At Ausone, we're usually around 3.50. In 2018, it's 3.65.

**AB** That wouldn't be considered high in many other places in Saint-Emilion and certainly not in Pomerol...

**P Vauthier** I know, but it's high for us.

**AB** How is the 2018 showing today?

**P Vauthier** The lots are balanced, fresh with really good tension. All the wines we produced at the family estates show these characteristics. It really is a fine attractive vintage with good structure and nice length of flavour on the palate. This a vintage that consumers will find immediately appealing, I'm sure of that.

**AB** How about volume? Growers in Bordeaux had to contend with disease in spring and then drought in summer. Quite a few properties were down on volume, weren't they?

**P Vauthier** Across Bordeaux it varies greatly, but at our properties, even though we were sick of the rain and had to keep an extra close eye on the vines, we ended up with normal quantities. Luckily, after a long summer drought, the rain arrived at the end of the season, and that was very welcome. It helped the berries to gain a bit of weight.

**AB** You never talk up a vintage, it's not your style, and you've consistently said that 2016 is superior to 2018; and yet 2018 appears to have excellent qualities, some of them actually similar to 2016. Why aren't you more excited about the 2018?

**P Vauthier** Because I'm trying to put this vintage into perspective. The trouble in Bordeaux is that if you don't say that the vintage is outstanding there's a risk that some people will interpret that as an indication that the wine is not excellent or not very good.

**AB** Can't they work it out for themselves?

**P Vauthier** Of course they can, but it's helpful if we give them a real perspective. It's tricky because when you consider the quality of the 2012 and 2014 vintages. They were very good Bordeaux vintages, but we didn't rave about them, and they've been a bit overlooked. Yet when you get people to taste these two vintages today they realise just how good they were.

**AB** Are you raving about the 2018 vintage then?

**P Vauthier** 2018 is definitely an excellent year!

**AB** For a long time during the vine cycle, you weren't really expecting an excellent 2018 vintage, were you?

**P Vauthier** There were challenges at the beginning of the cycle, but as the summer went on conditions were more comfortable, and in the end we were able to wait for the final ripening free of any stress and pick exactly when we wanted. There wasn't one single berry that wasn't healthy enough to go into the vats. The grapes were in exceptional conditions of health and ripeness. That was quite amazing.

**AB** What is it then that the 2016 has that the 2018 doesn't have?

**P Vauthier** The 2016 is a dazzlingly bright vintage, very straight, very elegant. The 2018 has these aspects too but to a lesser degree. That's how I see it at this particular moment. But who knows? We need to keep an eye on how it evolves. It could change. The 2016 in fact is now even more impressive than it was en primeur. That's the sign of a great vintage. The 2018 has also gone up a notch in quality since it was made, so let's wait and see.

**AB** You wouldn't say that there's a clear difference in taste profile between these two vintages?

**P Vauthier** They do have a lot in common. They both have great freshness, roundness, tannins, fruit and length on the palate. The 2018 is perhaps a little less structured than the 2016.

**AB** Some growers feel there's a touch of 2015 or 2009 in the 2018...

**P Vauthier** I'm not so sure. Each vintage is different of course, but I cannot say that.

**AB** And some say their 2018 is better than their 2016. Is that just hype?

**P Vauthier** Some properties may have done better in 2018 than 2016, but it doesn't mean that the 2018 is necessarily a better vintage. Some properties are working better than two years ago, getting greater precision or because they've improved their vineyard or winemaking. Our Château La Clotte is a good example: the 2017 was a bit better than the 2016, everybody recognized that. That's a reflection of the progress we've been making there in the vineyard.

**AB** In a few weeks' time we'll have the opportunity to discuss the blend for Ausone. Presumably, the Cabernet Franc that you were still waiting for during our harvest interview fulfilled your high expectations?

**P Vauthier** Everything was good in 2018. The rain came and, as hoped for, enhanced the ripening of the Cabernet Franc. The small young plots that go into La Chapelle were great. Everything was very satisfactory.

**AB** Another great Cabernet Franc year then?

**P Vauthier** Fantastic Cabernet Franc. It's the future, I'm convinced. Especially with climate change kicking in. Fifteen years ago its ripening could be tricky, but not today.