

Pomerol, 19th January 2019

AB The last interview we did was during the 2018 harvest. All the Merlot was in, but you were waiting for the Cabernet Franc and some rain to soften up the skins. Duly the rain arrived. Did it do the trick for your Cabernet Franc?

Alexandre Thienpont It worked out perfectly, so much so that 2018 is a really great Cabernet Franc year.



AB You just needed to be patient...

Alexandre Thienpont In hindsight, yes. But at the time it felt like a calculated risk. We were among the last to bring in the Cabernet Franc, and we're delighted that it paid off. Luck was on our side.

AB Just how good is that Cabernet Franc in 2018?

Alexandre Thienpont To the extent that it's an absolute must in the blend. We haven't had such high quality since 2011. It's the perfect foil for the Merlot this year, which in this vintage is pretty powerful and concentrated. The Cabernet Franc proves the perfect partner. It's lush with an amazing, cashmere texture that tames the exuberance of the Merlot. The blend of the two is so obvious and necessary. There's always synergy between these varieties, but in 2018 that synergy is wonderfully enhanced.

AB Will all of your Cabernet Franc go into the blend?

Alexandre Thienpont The whole lot, yes.

AB So what's your verdict on the vintage as a whole at VCC?

Alexandre Thienpont I'm usually reticent at this stage about making judgements about the vintage, but this year I have to say that after tasting the lots the day before yesterday, I was really wowed. It's rare for me to rave about the quality of a vintage at such an early stage, but I was knocked out.

AB You mentioned back during the harvest that a few vines at VCC had been identified as being impacted by the drought. Not all of the crop was perfect...

Alexandre Thienpont We had carefully marked out those odd vines. The wine made from these vines definitely won't go into the First Wine. It was a similar case in 2016.

AB More and more precision work in the vineyards. Precision is the new mantra...

Alexandre Thienpont It is. The whole vineyard is now managed on an intra-plot basis. We have GPS monitoring the vines to inform us of the tiniest details, and when it comes to the harvest our pickers are trained to carry out their work on the basis of the information we have on each area of each plot.

AB The climatic conditions have helped produce good structure in the 2018. Has that hot, dry summer weather impacted on the acidity levels?

Alexandre Thienpont The acidity in the lots is very correct. No problem there.

AB Is this vintage anything like 2010?

Alexandre Thienpont In 2010 we didn't have the Cabernet Franc that we have in 2018.

AB What percentage of Cabernet Franc will be in the blend, do you reckon?

Alexandre Thienpont At least 30%. That's twice as much as we had in the 2010.

AB 2010 was in fact quite difficult to taste at this stage of the year...

Alexandre Thienpont Well, the 2018 just rolls along the tongue. So velvety and lush. Such sensuality. It's a superb vintage.

AB In comparison with the taste profile of past vintages, where would you place your 2018?

Alexandre Thienpont Somewhere between 2010 and 2015! Or perhaps a blend of 2010 and 2009, or else 2016 and 2015!

AB You wouldn't have predicted that back in June/July 2018!

Alexandre Thienpont Not at all. Actually, the conditions up till July reminded me of the 2000 growing cycle. But then the miracle happened.

AB In terms of volume, most growers are reporting lower than usual production. What is the situation at VCC?

Alexandre Thienpont We're slightly down on average production. But it's not really significant. I'm not going to complain when many of my colleagues in Bordeaux have suffered quite heavy losses, not just in 2018 with disease by the way but also in 2017, through frost.

AB Pomerol came off lightly both in 2017 and 2018...

Alexandre Thienpont Yes, as an appellation we've been privileged.