

## Evaluation of the 2015 vintage at the beginning of ageing: Professor Denis Dubourdieu

We have really great pleasure in announcing that 2015 is an outstanding vintage in terms of both quality and quantity. In fact, all five conditions necessary for a great red wine vintage in Bordeaux were perfectly aligned.

These are important to remember, because they determine what constitutes a "perfect" vintage in Bordeaux - which does not happen more than once a decade. The last such year was in 2005. A great year calls for:

- 1) and (2) - Early and relatively quick flowering and fruit-set during weather that is sufficiently warm and dry to ensure pollination and predispose towards simultaneous ripening,
- (3) The gradual onset of water stress thanks to a warm, dry month of July in order to slow down and then put a definitive stop to vine growth during *véraison* (colour change), If this fine weather only arrives at the end of ripening, it will be more advantageous to the Cabernets than to Merlot,
- (4) Full ripening of the various grape varieties thanks to dry and warm (but not excessively so) weather in the months of August and September,
- (5) Fine (dry and medium-warm) weather during the harvest making it possible to pick at optimum ripeness without running the risk of dilution or rot.

Successful dry white wines call for sweet fruity grapes in good condition, with sufficient acidity and skins that are not very tannic. This balance is easy to obtain on suitable terroirs if summer is temperate and without excessive heat or drought conditions after *véraison*. This was the case in August 2015. Heat was moderate and rainfall above average, but not to the extent that this restarted vegetative growth.

The quality of noble rot is obviously what makes a great vintage in Sauternes and Barsac. Botrytis appeared early in 2015 and over two thirds of the crop was picked by the end of September. The harvest was over by mid-October.

### Even and homogeneous flowering and fruit set

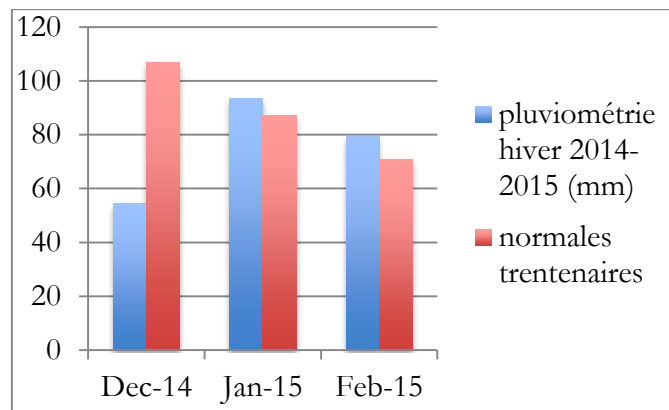
**Table I: Average minimum and maximum temperatures (°C)  
during the 2014-2015 meteorological winter  
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

	Average min. temp.		Average max. temp.	
	Winter 2014-2015	Average 1981-2010	Winter 2014-2015	Average 1981-2010
<b>December</b>	<b>3.8</b>	3.8	<b>10.0</b>	10.5
<b>January</b>	<b>3.1</b>	3.1	<b>10.3</b>	10.1
<b>February</b>	<b>2.5</b>	3.3	<b>10.6</b>	11.7

With 24 days of frost, compared to 20 in an average of 20, and just 9 the previous year, the winter of 2014-2015 was relatively rigorous. Although December was twice as dry as usual, rainfall in January and February were close to seasonal averages (Figure 1).

The average maximum temperature in March was 14.5°C, compared to the norm of 15.1 (Table II) Bud break only began in mid-April, i.e. fifteen days later than in 2014, but 10 days ahead

of the ten-year average (Tableau II). Most of our comparisons are established using the 2005 and 2010 vintages (judged excellent at the time, as they are today) as references.



**Figure 1: Precipitation (mm) during the 2014-2015 meteorological winter (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

**Table II: Average minimum and maximum temperatures (°C) from March to June in 2015, 2010, and 2005 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

**Table III: Rainfall (mm) from March to June in 2015, 2010, and 2005**

	Average minimum temp.				Average maximum temp.			
	2015	2010	2005	1981-2010	2015	2010	2005	1981-2010
<b>March</b>	<b>6.2</b>	4.3	4.5	5.4	<b>14.5</b>	14.4	14.5	15.1
<b>April</b>	<b>9.0</b>	8.3	8.4	7.4	<b>20.0</b>	19.8	17.8	17.3
<b>May</b>	<b>11.6</b>	10.4	11.5	11.7	<b>21.3</b>	19.9	22.7	21.2
<b>June</b>	<b>14.7</b>	14.3	16.0	14.1	<b>27.3</b>	24.5	28.1	24.5

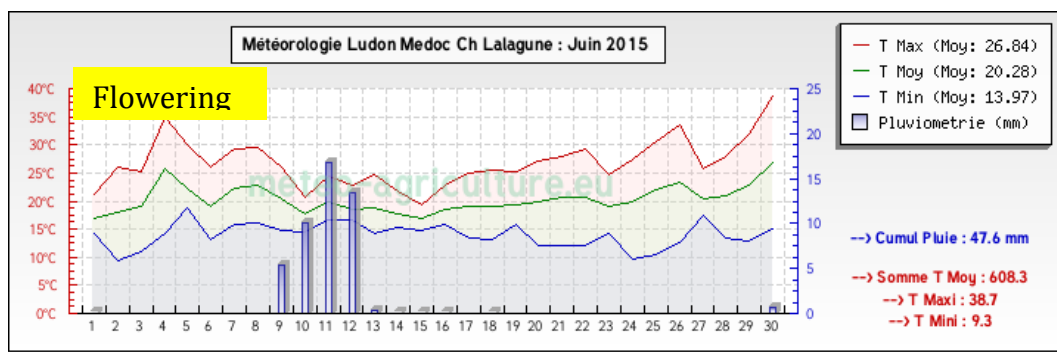
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

	2015	2010	2005	Average 1981-2000
<b>March</b>	<b>40.2</b>	67.8	38.2	65
<b>April</b>	<b>26.9</b>	26.8	90.4	78
<b>May</b>	<b>33.3</b>	40.7	16.2	80
<b>June</b>	<b>43.8</b>	101.5	32.5	63
<b>March-June</b>	<b>138.8</b>	146.3	177.3	286

**Table IV: Sunshine (in hours) from March to June in 2015, 2010, and 2005**

	2015	2010	2005	Average 1981-2000
March	118	187	177	170
April	197	250	159	182
May	202	193	252	217
June	301	102	270	239
March-June	818	732	858	808

May was warm, dry and sunny (Figure 2, Tables III and IV). Flowering took place during the first few days of June, on the 4<sup>th</sup> for Merlot and the 6<sup>th</sup> for Cabernet. This was very even, homogeneous, and over in less than a week (Figure 2). Fruit set was similarly as quick as flowering. The month of June was warm (Figure 2), with an average maximum temperature of 27.3 °C. It was also dry, with just 43.8 mm of rain, as well as exceptionally sunny, with 301 hours of sunshine (Tables III and IV). These figures are comparable to 2005 (maximum temperature of 28.1 °C, 32.5 mm of precipitation, and 270 hours of sunshine).

**Figure 2: Daily temperatures and precipitation in June 2015 in Ludon-Médoc**

There was just 50 mm of rain spread over 4 days once flowering was over and fruit set had started. This short wet period was conducive to increased berry size.

*Thus, at this stage, the first two conditions for a great red wine vintage in Bordeaux – flowering and fruit set that are early, even, and homogeneous during fine, dry weather – were perfectly satisfied.*

### **Late July was very hot and dry, which halted vine growth.**

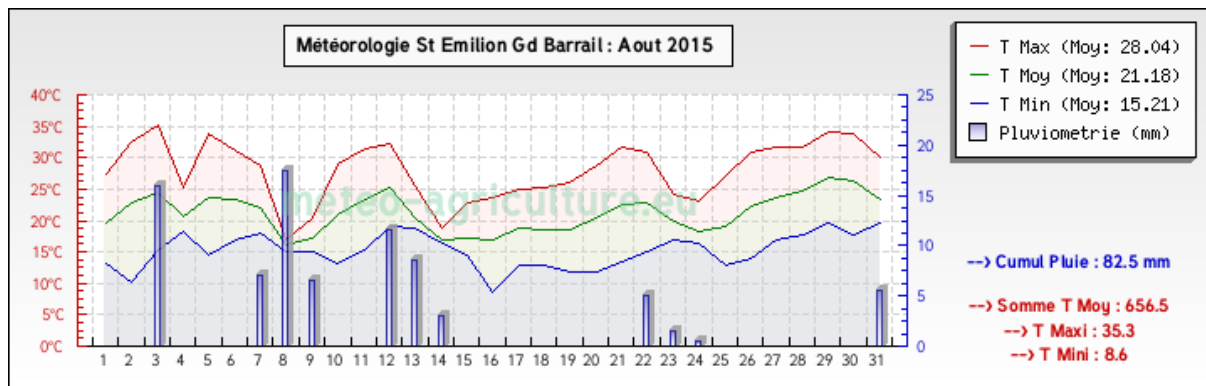
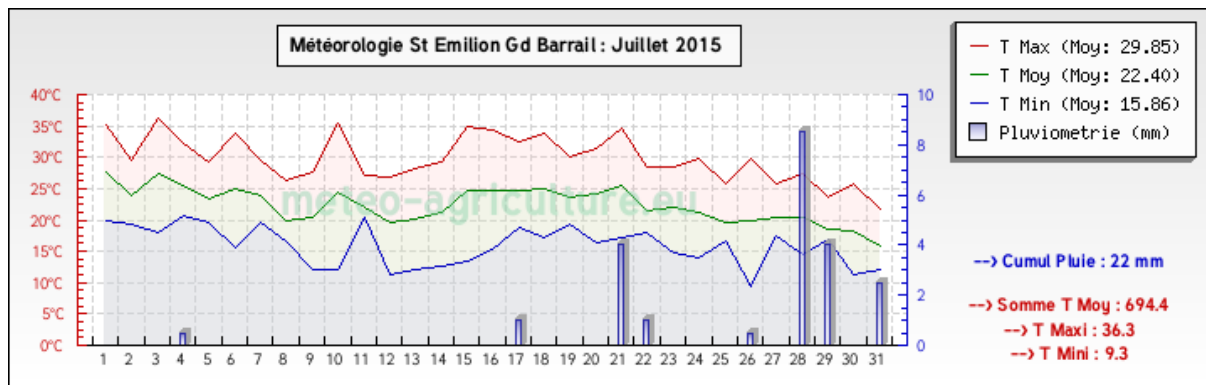
July 2015 was hot and dry. Water stress arrived at just the right time. Mid-véraison (colour change) was observed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August. 90% of véraison was finished by the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month (Table V, Figures 3, 4, and 5). Only young vines on shallow soils showed any sign of suffering from the drought conditions.

*Therefore, the third condition for a great red wine vintage in Bordeaux was perfectly met in 2015.*

**Table V: Average minimum and maximum temperatures from July to October in 2015, 2010, and 2005 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

	Average minimum temp.				Average maximum temp.			
	2015	2010	2005	1981-2010	2015	2010	2005	1981-2010
July	14.7	16.6	16,8	15,8	29.1	28.2	28.1	26.9
August	16.3	14.9	15,1	15,7	27.9	26.8	27.7	27.1
September	12.2	12.3	13	12.9	22.7	24.4	24.1	24.0
October	9.4	9.2	12,5	10,4	18.4	18.7	21.5	19.4

Beginning  
of  
véraison  
of Merlot



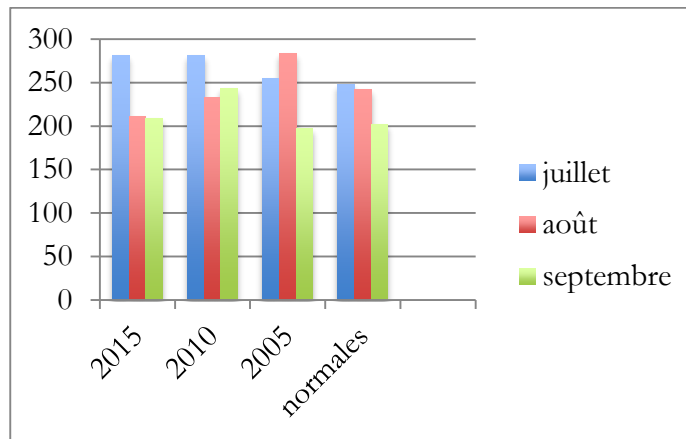
Véraison of  
Merlot and the  
Cabernets

**Figure 3: Average temperature and precipitation in July and August 2015 in Saint Emilion**

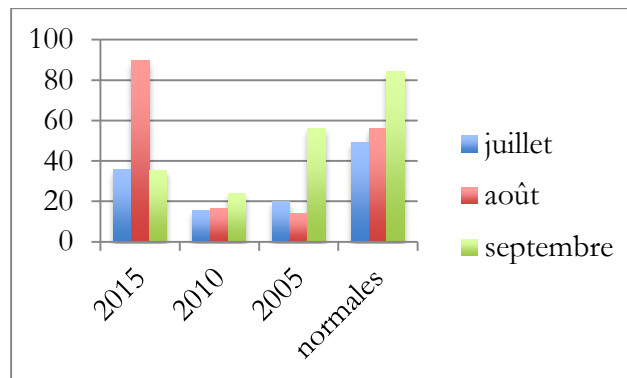
### Conditions unfavourable to renewed vegetative growth after véraison

The duration of sunshine in July, August, and September was close to seasonal norms (Figure 4). The weather was exceptionally dry from July to September in 2010, as it was in 2005, with slightly above more rainfall in September (56 mm), but much less than the seasonal average (84 mm). August 2015, on the other hand, was relatively wet (89 mm) However, vegetative growth did not start up again - a sign that water reserves were extremely low.

Other than Saint Estèphe, with 118 mm of rain compared to the usual 35, September 2015 was dry, but not excessively hot. Furthermore, the maximum temperature did not go above 30°C even one day that month (Figure 6).



**Figure 4: Sunshine (hours)  
in July, August, and September 2015  
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

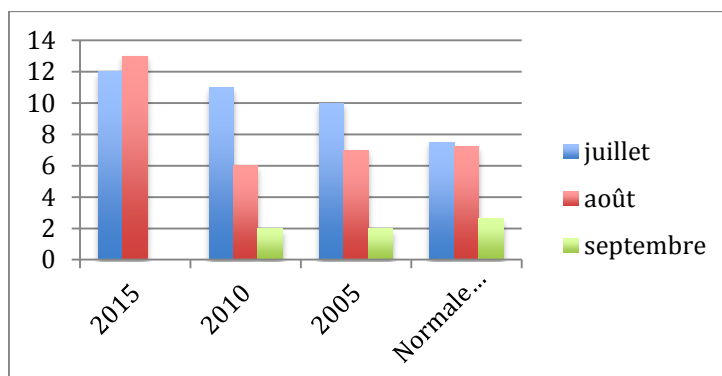


**Figure 5: Rainfall (mm) from July to September in 2015, 2010, and 2005  
(Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

*Therefore, the fourth condition for a great red wine vintage in Bordeaux was once again met in 2015.*

A fairly early harvest, during fine weather, enabled all grape varieties to ripen completely.

Picking in the Graves and Pessac-Léognan appellations began the last few days of August and lasted the 12 first days of September. The weather was dry and not too hot. The average maximum temperature was 1.3°C less than the seasonal average (Table VI, Figure 7).



**Figure 6: Number of very hot days (over 30°C) from July to September (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)**

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc juice that came out of the press was very aromatic and had higher sugar levels than in recent years, along with lower acidity than 2014 (an exceptionally acidic vintage) and comparable pH (Table VII). The Sémillon crop was rather plentiful.

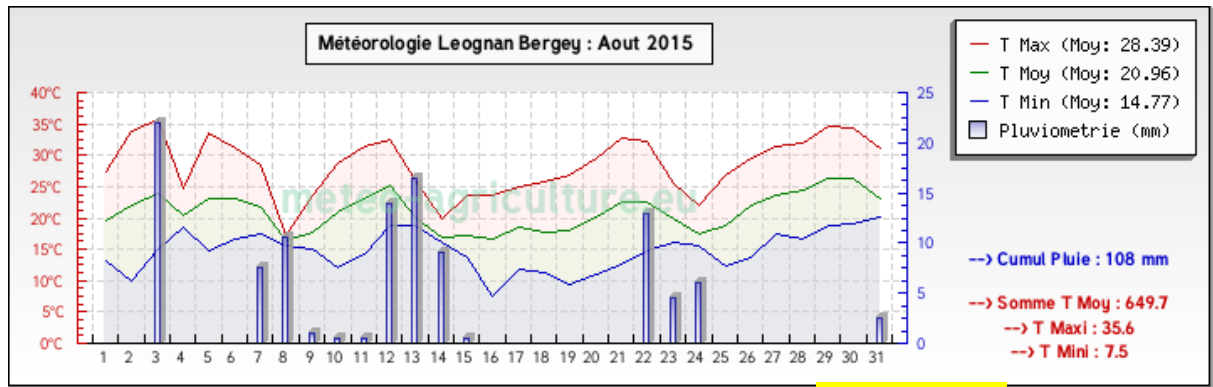
The picking of red wine grapes began with Merlot on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September and lasted a dozen days. Harvesting of the early-ripening Cabernet grapes overlapped with that of Merlot. Picking for all varieties ended on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October during fine weather (Figure 7).

*Obviously, the fifth and final condition for a great red wine vintage in Bordeaux was once again satisfied in 2015.*

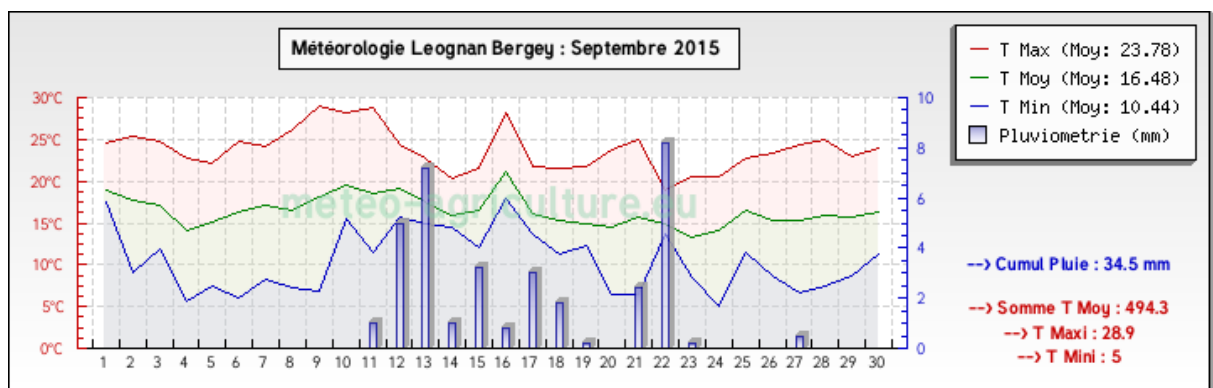
At harvest, the weight of Merlot berries in Saint Emilion and Léognan were comparable and close to average (with the exception of 2014 when the berries were unusually large). The grapes were heavier in Pauillac. The Cabernets were smaller, and fairly close to normal size (Figure 8).

Total anthocyanin content in Merlot and the Cabernets in our reference vineyards, although variable depending on location, was always lower compared to 2010 (a vintage with remarkably deep colour), but greater than 2009. This content was low in Saint-Emilion and Léognan, and relatively high in Pauillac (Figure 9)

The early appearance of noble rot is a key factor in successful vintages in Sauternes and Barsac. Good late-ripening vintages are in the minority. The 2015 crop was both plentiful and very early-ripening. For instance, figure 10 shows the chronology of picking at a wine estate in Sauternes. 80% of the crop was harvested by the end of September.

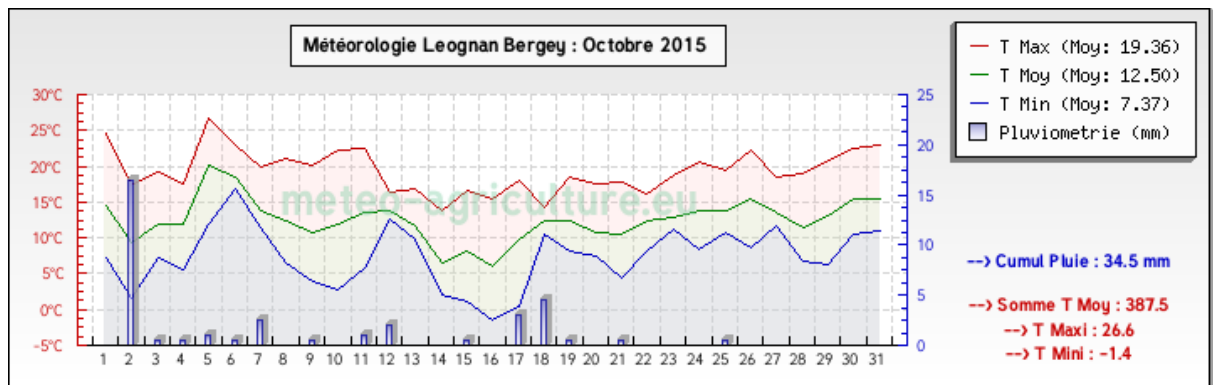


Harvest  
Dry white



Harvest  
Dry white wines

Harvest  
Reds



Harvest  
Reds

Figure 7: Daytime temperatures and precipitation in September and October 2015 in Léognan

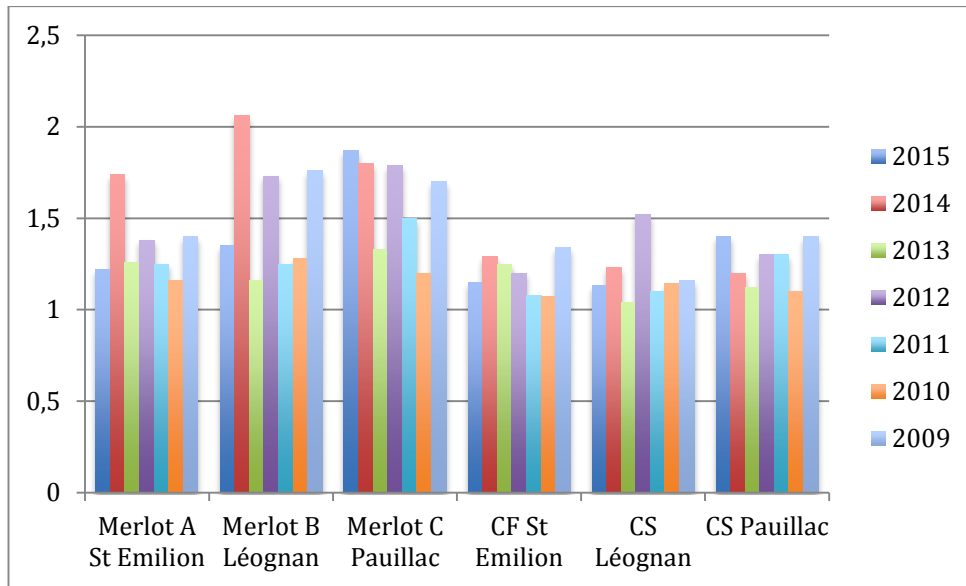


Figure 8: Weight of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes from 2009 to 2015 in plots of great growth vineyards in Saint Emilion (A), Léognan (B), and Pauillac (C)

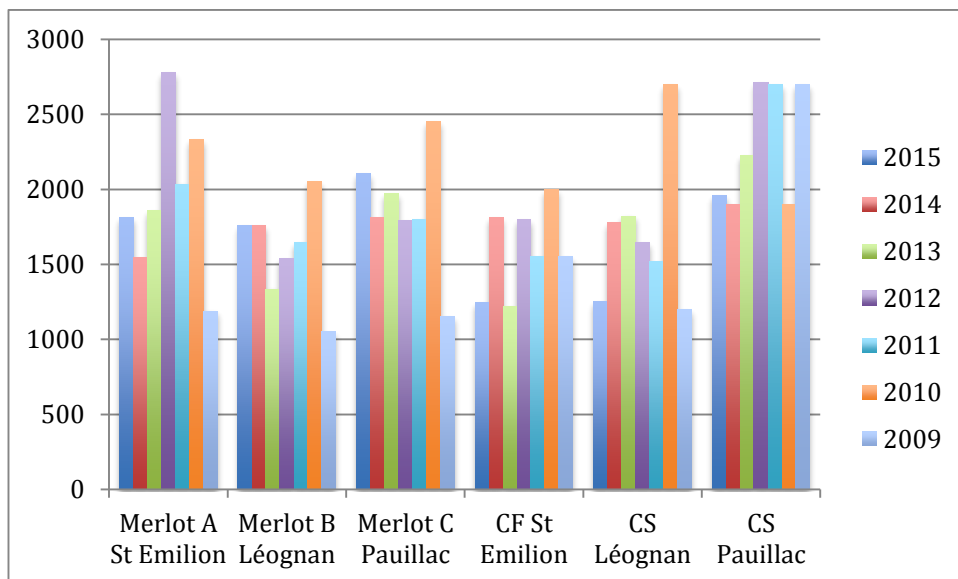


Figure 9: Total anthocyanin content (mg/L) of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon berries from 2009 to 2015 in plots of classified growth vineyards in Saint Emilion (A), Léognan (B), and Pauillac (C)



**Table VI: Harvest dates for dry white wine grapes in the Graves region in 2010, 11, 12, 14, and 15**

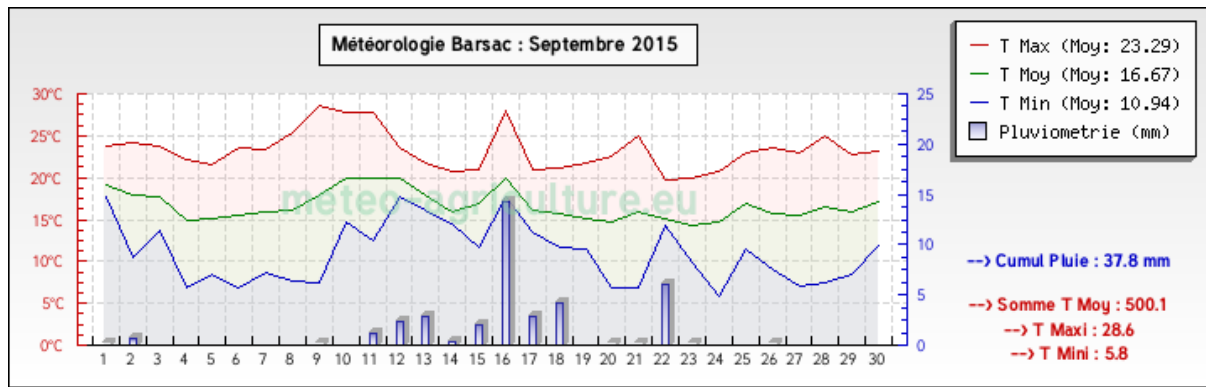
	Sauvignon Blanc	Sémillion
2010	2 - 15 September	15 - 20 September
2011	22 - 31 August	1 - 5 September
2012	3 - 10 September	10 - 18 September
2013	10 - 22 September	21 - 25 September
2014	6-12 September	12 - 20 September
<b>2015</b>	28 août - 6 septembre	5 - 11 September

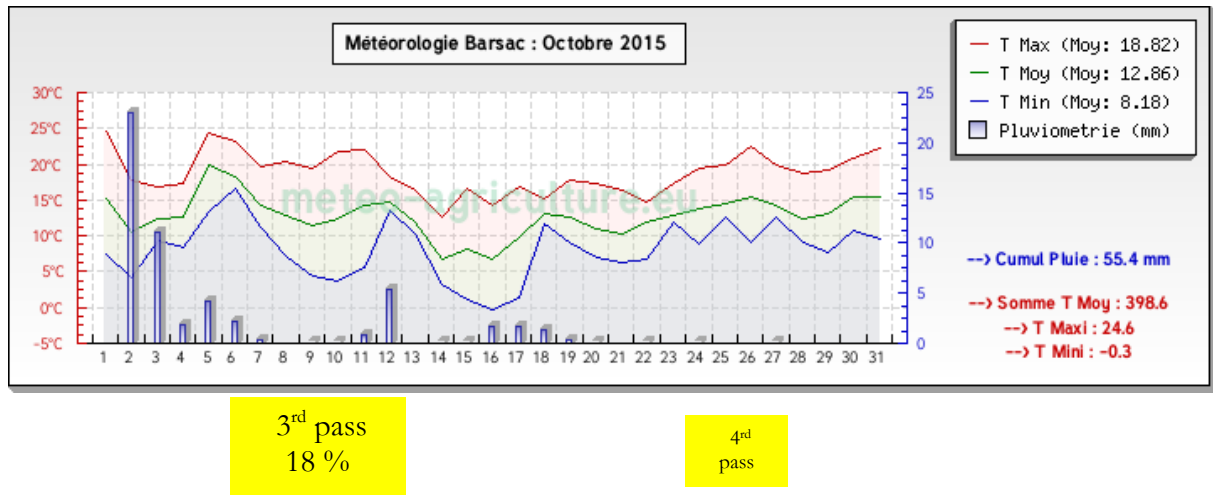
**Table II: Example of the composition of Sauvignon Blanc grapes from a plot with limestone soil in the Graves region in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015**

	Potential alcohol (%)	Total acidity (g/l)	pH
2010	12.6	4.6	3.15
2011	11.6	5.6	3.05
2012	12.9	5.3	3.05
2013	12.4	6.0	2.90
2014	12.4	7.6	3.05
<b>2015</b>	13.0	6.3	3.00

1<sup>st</sup> pass  
20 %

2<sup>nd</sup> pass  
60 %





**Figure 10: Daytime temperatures and precipitation in September and October 2015 in Barsac**

**Chronology of the development of noble rot and progression of passes (example).**

**In short, the 2015 harvest was a very successful for all grape varieties and all colours.**

The dry white wines are tremendous - fruity, concentrated, and more round than the 2014s.

The sweet white wines are sumptuous - focused, pure, fresh, rich, and elegant.

The red wines are delicious. They possess the charm and inimitable grace of great Bordeaux.