



VINTAGE 1997

SUMMARY

A year of one excess after another: exceedingly hot weather, early ripening, and a very long harvest with numerous waves of picking. 1997 Yquem displays rare complexity and ageing potential.

Wine lovers who age this wine sufficiently will be richly rewarded.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

The first flowers that appeared on May 5th gave every indication of a very early-maturing crop. However, heavy rain and cold temperatures in late May and early June slowed down flowering tremendously (the last vines flowered on June 15th), leading us to expect a corresponding staggering of ripeness during the harvest.

In fact, weather conditions were very unusual throughout 1997. It was exceptionally dry in September and October, with just 30 mm of precipitation (20 mm of which fell on September 1st), in contrast to 140 mm in a normal year.

Rainfall in 1997 was the same as 1936, 1945, 1978, and 1985, the only comparable years since 1927. As for temperatures, 1997 was extremely hot. Accumulated total temperatures from February 1st to October 31st were the highest in 50 years, even more than 1947, 1949, 1961, and 1990. The mean temperature from August 1st to October 31st was 1.5° C above average.

This warm, dry weather meant that the onset of botrytis was rather slow, helped by several foggy intervals and two light showers over two months. Sugar levels were considerable thanks to the high temperatures and (occasionally strong) east and south-east winds.

HARVEST

The grapes had reached 20 degrees potential alcohol by September 4th, and we started harvesting at virtually the earliest date in the château's recorded history. We picked in four waves, until October 10th. The weather was warm with an easterly wind and not a drop of rain fell during this time.

The vintage was not at all easy. Gnats, very numerous due to the heat, began to damage the grapes, some of which developed acetic acid. Pickers needed to be extremely careful in order to eliminate all contaminated grapes.

Light rainfall on October 10th and 11th gave a new boost to botrytis, and thanks to the fine weather which followed we were able to carry out a fifth and sixth wave of picking.

The seventh wave in early November brought an end to the harvest, which was very spread out (two months) and long (32 working days).

This wine is full of promise. The vintage was not only plentiful, but also very concentrated. It is extraordinarily complex due to the many different waves of picking.

The highlights of this atypical growing season can be resumed as follows:

- grapes ripe on the vine from the end of August to November 1st
- fruit harvested at temperatures of 30° C on September 30th and -3° C on October 31st
- flowering that lasted from the 5th of May to the 15th of June
- extremely dry weather in spring and autumn
- heavy downpours in June
- tropical temperatures in August

In brief, pickers needed to be extremely conscientious in picking grapes from August through to November.

TASTING NOTES

Even though somewhat closed-in at the beginning, the bouquet is nevertheless very attractive ' well-focused and concentrated.

With aeration, it reveals extraordinary complexity with mineral overtones giving way to hints of marmalade followed by vanilla, menthol, and apricot nuances.

The wine starts out quite assertively on the palate with mineral flavours and a rich, complex flavour profile. Perfectly balanced., this wine's incredible complexity will become more accessible in a few more years' time.

(tasted on September 16th 2003)