

Quintanilla de Onesimo, Spain, 17th March 2016

AB It's primeurs time. You've obviously been busy tasting your lots of Rocheyron in Saint-Emilion before rushing back down to Ribera del Duero. How are you feeling right now about the 2015 vintage?



Peter Sisseck Very excited. It's a particularly interesting vintage for me.

AB Why is that?

Peter Sisseck Because the wines express the differences in terroir in a very precise way and show off vineyards that have been very well worked.

AB Does that mean that some areas are showing less well?

Peter Sisseck It's a bit patchy because extreme weather conditions affected some areas in Bordeaux more than others.

AB Are you referring to the north of the Médoc?

Peter Sisseck I haven't actually tasted any 2015s from up there, but I've heard that despite the rain they've made very decent wines, which is good news for everybody. Bordeaux always needs the Médoc to make a good vintage.

AB The good news for you personally is that the right bank of Bordeaux has performed very well in 2015...

Peter Sisseck Yes, in particular in our part of the limestone plateau. It's the sweet spot this year.

AB How would you describe the Bordeaux 2015s you have tasted?

Peter Sisseck I haven't tasted extensively, but what comes through is harmonious balance. The wines are dense and tannic, but not overly tannic, if the extraction was judicious.

AB We discussed before the importance of picking dates, and you mentioned that although your terroir was late-ripening, you decided not to wait too long. Did you get that decision right?

Peter Sisseck It was more important than ever to pick each plot at the right time. We harvested our Cabernet Franc quite late in the end for that very reason. The results are really good. Rocheyron is nicely balanced and has integrated the oak very well.

AB Growers' ideas of ripeness differ. How would you describe the ripeness of Rocheyron in 2015?

Peter Sisseck It's what I call a modern ripeness – ripe but fresh and not heavy in any way.

AB How does the 2015 vintage compare with 2009 and 2010?

Peter Sisseck It's closer to 2009. The best 2010s had low pHs and quite high acidity. Some of these can even be quite spiky. 2015 though has some of the lushness of the 2009.

AB Would you agree that the 2015 has more aromatic precision than the 2009?

Peter Sisseck Yes I would, and I come back to what I said earlier, the 2015 wines are more terroir specific.

AB What example can you give?

Peter Sisseck Well, Rocheyron is located partly on the plateau and partly on the slope going down to Boutisse, and each area has produced distinct wines.

AB Despite the July drought conditions, yields were satisfactory in 2015. Was that the case at Rocheyron?

Peter Sisseck We were more than happy. All the effort we've put in to work organically and biodynamically has paid off. We've been rewarded.

AB Let's turn to Pingus and your other wines in Ribera de Duero. You were careful to pick at the right time and avoid an alcoholic year like 2011 with its compact tannins. How has the 2015 turned out?

Peter Sisseck 2015 in Ribera was a year in which you had to think on your feet, both in the vineyard and in the cellars –unlike 2014 in which you could take a back seat. We actually decided to leave higher yields, and we picked early.

AB How much higher?

Peter Sisseck 10 to 15%.

AB What effect did that have?

Peter Sisseck It slowed down the ripening and helped the vines cope with water stress. That, combined with an early harvest, helped produce lovely elegant wines. We managed to avoid what could have been heavy wines. We hardly did any extraction. We just carried out a gentle infusion, and the result is a beautiful vintage.

AB Was this change in strategy an obvious one for you?

Peter Sisseck Not at all. I had my doubts.

AB Twenty years ago, the general trend was very different. It was more about super-ripe, concentrated blockbuster wines.

Peter Sisseck It's easy to criticise in hindsight, but in Bordeaux for example there had been a run of diluted, unripe vintages in 1992, 1993 and 1994, and these didn't help the garagistes that had just arrived on the scene. You could understand why they then went for that concentrated style of wine. And this set the trend for the 2000s and even left its influence on the 2009 and 2010 vintages, a few of which maybe could have been made better.

AB In what way is Bordeaux 2015 comparable to 2009?

Peter Sisseck They have similar pHs...

AB Which Ribera vintage would you compare with the 2015?

Peter Sisseck It depends. Those producers who picked late, had water stress in their vines, and didn't vinify accordingly have very probably made wines comparable to the 2011 vintage. We gambled on a different approach and succeeded in producing silky, balanced, transparent wines. It's going to be interesting to compare. We could well be misjudged and accused of making "city" wines, so to speak. Our wines will resemble the 2009 vintage, in my opinion.