

**The Bordeaux 2009 vintage has just started ageing:
good dry whites, great reds, and extraordinary sweet whites**
Professor Denis Dubourdieu

The reputation of a new vintage in Bordeaux depends both on the potential quality of the wines and the market's expectations. There were no great expectations of the 2006, overshadowed by 2005, the 2007, made after a dismal summer, or the 2008, released in the midst of the global financial crisis. The 2009, arriving after a lovely summer and magnificent harvest, at a time when the international economy is convalescing, has attracted considerable interest.

In fact, 2009 met, almost perfectly, the five conditions required for a great red Bordeaux vintage.

- (1) (2) Early flowering and fruit-set, at the beginning of June, in hot, sunny, and relatively dry weather,
- (3): Early colour change as well - starting in late July – although it followed a period that was not dry enough to stop the vines' vegetative growth in all areas,
- (4): full ripening, thanks to hot weather with variable rainfall in August and September and particularly dry weather in the Médoc,
- (5): finally, a "dream harvest" in late September and October, under unusually dry conditions.

As a reminder: the excellent 2005 met these five conditions perfectly; the very good 2006 vintage met the first three; the difficult 2007 vintage was only saved by the fifth condition; and, finally, the very good 2008, met the third and fifth conditions perfectly but not the fourth. So, will 2009 be a textbook vintage like 2005? It is difficult to answer that question today. It will certainly be similar in many vineyards, but probably not everywhere, for two reasons. Firstly, the stoppage of vine growth before colour-change was less clear-cut and generalised than in 2005 and, secondly, in some areas, the vines may have suffered so badly from drought in August that ripening was affected.

Making dry white wines with ageing potential requires sweet grapes, with adequate acidity, low tannins, and high concentrations of aroma precursors. An excessively hot climate and extremely dry soils after colour-change are unfavourable factors. The greatest white wines in France come from terroirs on limestone subsoil that minimise water stress to the vines, located in continental climates with cool nights. Naturally, the cool August weather in 2006 and, even more so in 2007 and 2008, produced great vintages for dry white Bordeaux. As August 2009 was hotter than the three previous years, it was generally less propitious for developing acidity and powerful aromas in Sauvignon Blanc, but the grapes still turned out very well, thanks to the cool nights in August and September. Sémillon grown on the right terroir developed outstanding power and complexity.

Great sweet white wines are dependent on good conditions for noble rot. These were excellent in the Sauternes area in 2009, thanks to rain from 18 to 20 September, followed by a long period with morning fog and warm afternoons. This ideal climate caused rapid,

widespread development of *Botrytis cinerea* on very ripe grapes and the highest concentrations ever measured in such a large harvest. Such extensive rot noble, a real-life illustration of the Sauternes legend, will certainly be remembered as the key factor in this 2009 vintage.

Early, rapid flowering and fruit-set at the beginning of June in a summery climate.

At the end of a hard winter with terrible storms that damaged the Landes forest, a warm, dry, sunny March prepared the vines for general bud-break in the first few days of April, hardly any earlier than in 2008 (Tables I, II, and III).

Table I: Rainfall (mm) from March to June, in 2008 and 2009 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

	2009	2008	average*
March	31	102	70
April	116	78	80
May	78	151	83
June	75	78	63

*:
1991-2000
average

Table II: Sunshine (in hours) from March to June, in 2008 and 2009 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

	2009	2008	average*
March	221	106	180
April	160	181	177
May	235	204	222
June	293	236	225

*: 1991-2000 average

Table III: Average of the minimum and maximum temperatures from March to June in 2009 and 2008 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

	average of min. temperatures			average of max. temperatures		
	2009	2008	average*	2009	2008	average*
March	4.9	6.3	4.6	15.3	13.2	14.5
April	7.4	7.5	6.6	13.4	17	16.5
May	12.3	12	10.3	22.2	22	20.5
June	15	14	13	25.6	23.8	23.5

* 1971-2000 average

April was particularly wet and cloudy, leading to mediocre vine growth. Warmth and sunshine in May were beneficial to the vegetation, which easily made up for lost time. Unfortunately, violent hail and thunderstorms on 9, 11, 13, and 25 May caused considerable damage in many areas: from Portets to Beautiran in the Graves, around Martillac in Pessac Léognan, as well as in many vineyards throughout the Entre-Deux-Mers, Côtes de Castillon,

Saint Emilion, Margaux, etc. Altogether, 15,000 hectares of vines lost from 30 - 100% of their potential harvest. It is unusual for hail to affect such a large area.

Flowering started in relatively dry, warm, sunny weather in late May and continued under excellent conditions (figure 1), thus avoiding shot berries and poor fruit-set, which had been widespread in 2008. Mid-flowering occurred on 5 June, i.e. approximately the average date for the last ten vintages.

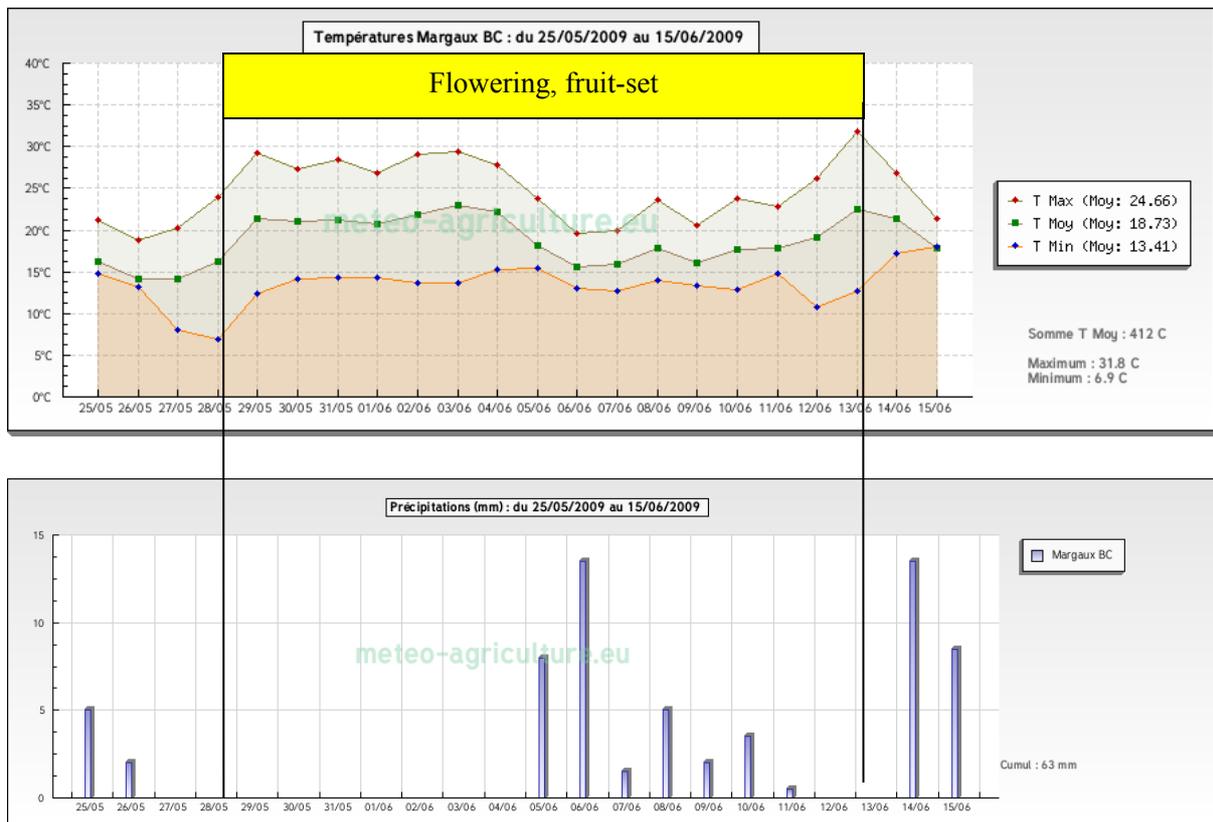


Figure 1: Daily temperatures and rainfall just before and during flowering and fruit-set in 2010 (Margaux meteorological station)

A hot July with normal rainfall led to a slow-down in vine growth at the beginning of colour-change

July was hotter than usual, with maximum temperatures comparable to those in 2005 (Table IV), while figures for sunshine (figure 4) and rainfall (figure 3) were relatively normal. Thunderstorms each week until 22 July each produced under 10 mm rainfall (figures 2 and 5), resulting in total rainfall for July 2009 more than double that of 2005 or 2008. Dry weather in the last ten days of July brought moderate water stress, slowing vine growth before colour change, especially on terroir with low water reserves (gravel).

Colour-change started in late July and continued during the first ten days in August, with estimated mid-colour change on 3 August, as in 2005, ten days earlier than in 2008, but average for the ten last vintages.

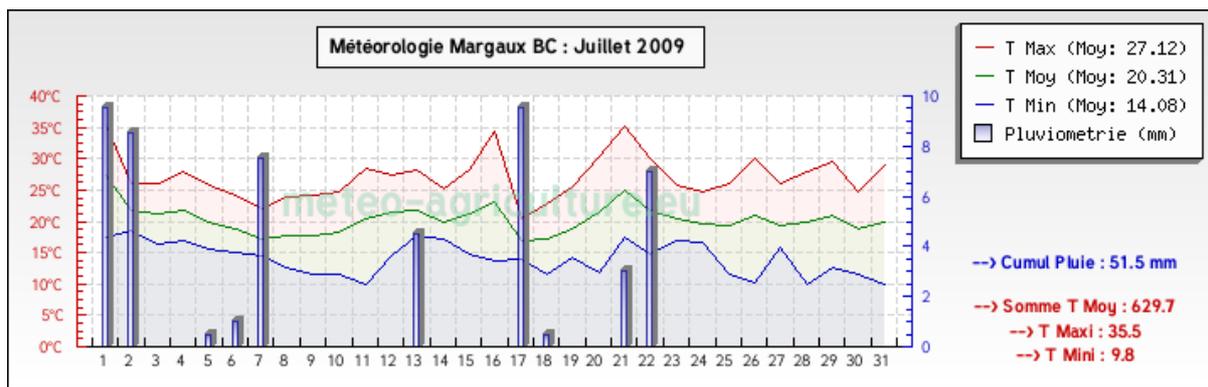


Figure 2: Temperatures and rainfall (mm) in Margaux in July 2009

Table IV: Average of the minimum and maximum temperatures from July to October 2009 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

	average of minimum temperatures			average of maximum temperatures		
	2009	2005	average*	2009	2005	average*
July	15.9	16.8	15.1	27.1	27	26.4
August	16.2	15.1	15.2	28.5	27.3	26.6
September	13.2	13	12.5	25.7	24.1	23.7
October	10.9	12.6	9.5	20.8	21.5	18.8

*1971-2000 average

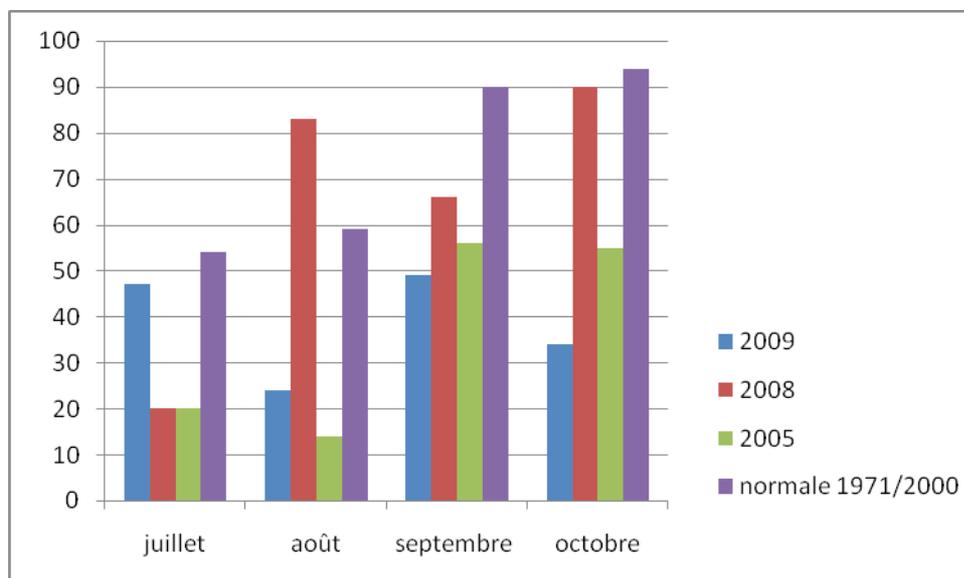


Figure 3: Rainfall (mm) from July to October in 2005, 2008, and 2009 (Météo France Bordeaux Mérignac)

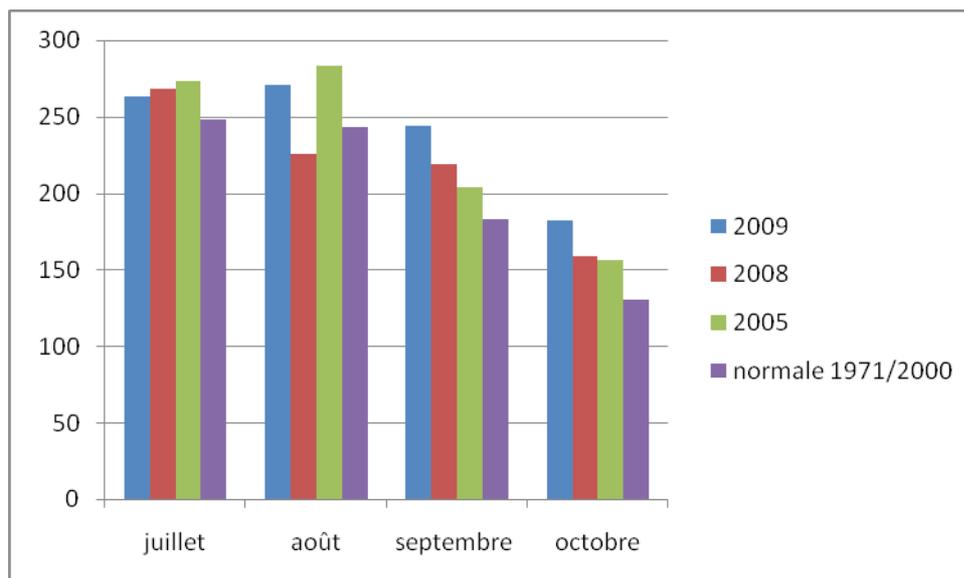


Figure 4: Sunshine (hours) from July to October in 2005, 2008, and 2009 (Météo France, Bordeaux Mérignac)

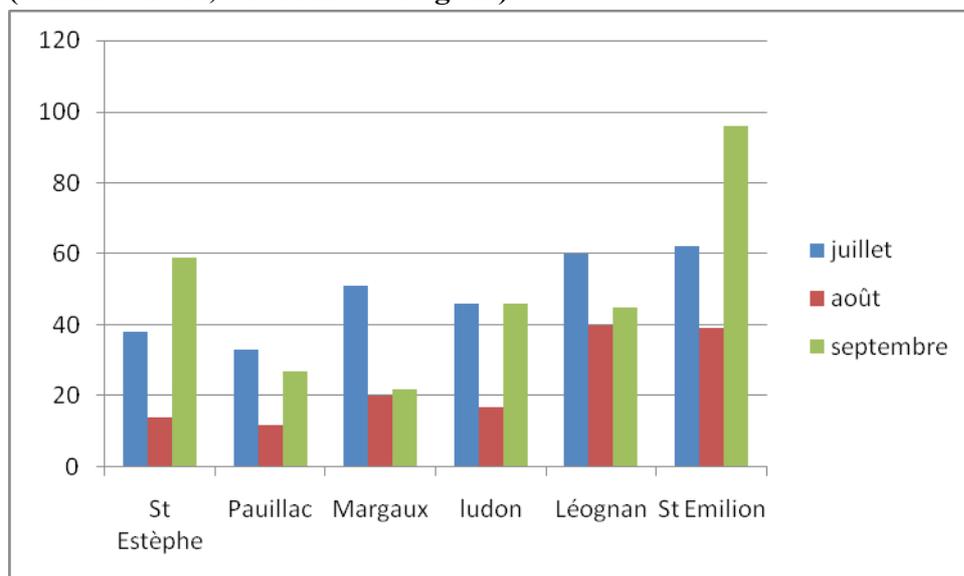


Figure 5: rainfall (mm) in several locations in July, August, and September 2009

Full ripening thanks to hot August and September weather with variable rainfall

August was hotter than in 2005 (Table IV:), with maximum and minimum temperatures higher by 2 and 1°C, respectively, than the seasonal average. This did not mean that the heat was overpowering in summer 2009. The temperature only exceeded 30°C on 6 days (compared to 18 in 2003 and 7 in 2005). It dropped below 15°C on 18 nights (4 in 2003 and 22 in 2005). These cool nights protected the grapes' fruity aromas, acidity, and colour. August 2009 was much sunnier than usual (figure 4), with huge variations in rainfall (figure 5). Stormy downpours on 1 and 8 August triggered a new spurt of vine growth, except in the Médoc, where August was particularly dry (under 20 mm rainfall). As a result, some grapes grown on gravel terroir really suffered from drought, especially young vines in vineyards with cover crops or insufficiently ploughed soils.

Ripening continued in a hot, dry sunny climate until 15 September (figure 3 and 4, Table IV). Nights were even cooler (figure 5), promoting the accumulation of pigments, maintaining acidity levels, and developing aromas.

A brief wet spell occurred from 18 to 20 September. It was more intense in Saint Emilion, leading to fears that grapes would split, but more moderate and beneficial elsewhere. It brought relief to vines that had been suffering from severe water stress, plumped up grapes that had been starting to shrivel, and accelerated both the degradation of malic acid and the ripening of the tannins. This rain, followed by a week of morning mist and fog in the Sauternes area, was also a decisive factor in the early, extensive spread of noble rot, which developed perfectly in the long sunny, hot, dry period that continued until 20 October, giving excellent results.

This "dream harvest", without any serious threat of grey rot, making it possible to pick each grape variety and plot at peak ripeness.

Picking for dry white wines started at the very end of August on the earliest plots of Sauvignon Blanc and continued throughout the first half of September. The composition of the grapes used in 2009 white Bordeaux compared to 2008 may be summarized as follows: the weight per grape was lower, PAC (potential alcohol content) was slightly higher (+ 0.5%), acidity lower (- 0.5 g/L), and pH higher (+0.1).

The harvest in Sauternes was exceptionally early and short. It started, as usual, with a wave of picking to tidy the vines, carried out this year between 10 and 17 September. Then there was a pause, while the noble rot developed, following the rain on 18 to 20 September and the mist on the following days. The sweet white wine harvest itself started on 28 September and was completed on 20 October when it started raining again. Picking required surprisingly few waves, two or three at the most. The grapes were so botrytised that they reached exceptionally high concentrations for such a large harvest (23 - 25% PAC): sugar content this high had never before been recorded in Sauternes.

As usual when the weather is fine and the risk of rot is low, the harvest strategy for the reds varied a great deal from one estate to another. Some winemakers are convinced that the wines will be better if the grapes are picked as late as possible, while others feel that, after an optimum period for harvesting, the wine's freshness, aromatic quality, and the ageing potential typical of Bordeaux are jeopardised. As a result, some estates started to pick their Merlot when their neighbours had almost finished harvesting their Cabernet. The Merlot harvest on the earliest-ripening plots started on 18 September, had begun by the 23rd in most vineyards, and was not finished until October on some estates. The Cabernet grapes were mainly harvested during the first two weeks in October.

In 2009, all the red grape varieties were generally free of herbaceous character, with higher sugar concentrations than in 2005, total acidity and malic acid concentrations comparable to those in 2005, but lower than in 2008, together with generally lower average concentrations of anthocyanins and tannins than in 2005, 2006, and 2008, apart from a few exceptions. The weight per grape was also average, but higher than in 2005.

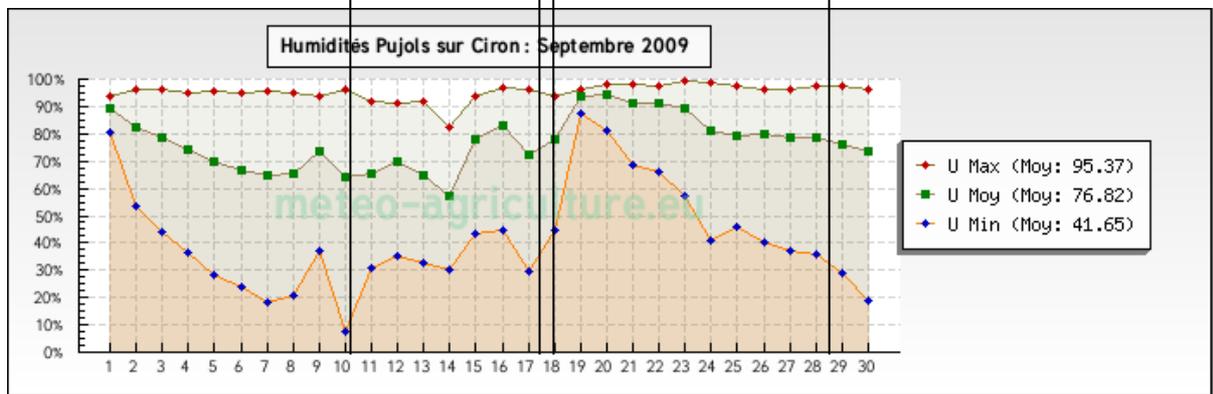
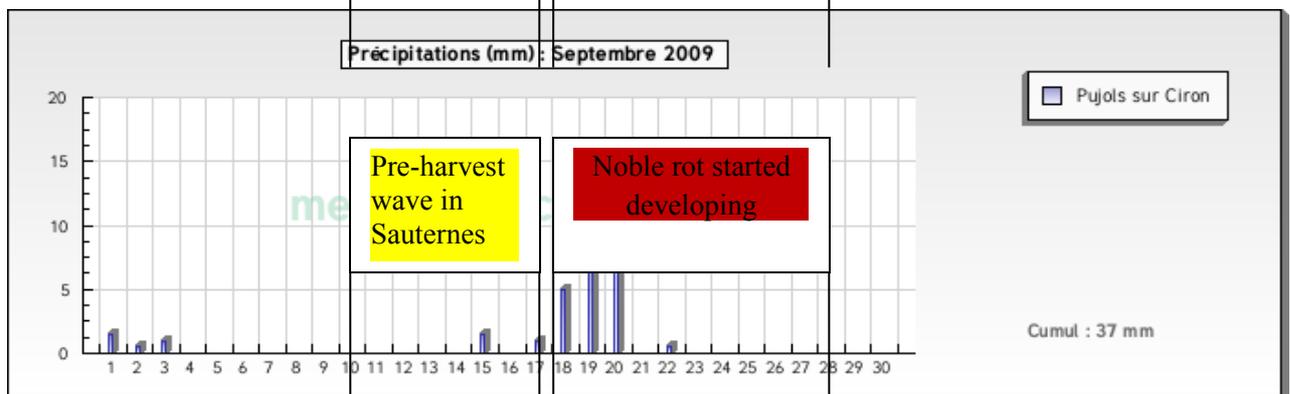
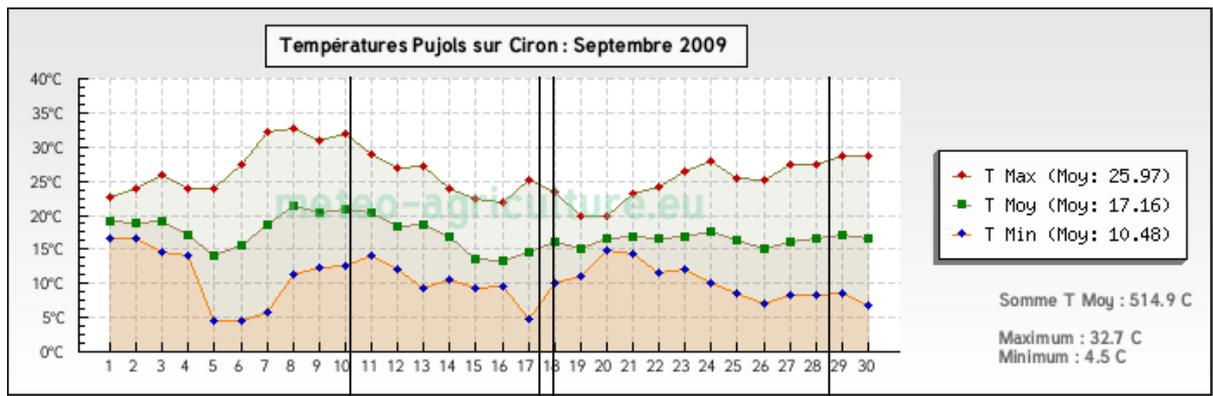


Figure 5: temperatures (°C), rainfall (mm), and humidity (%) in September 2009 in Sauternes

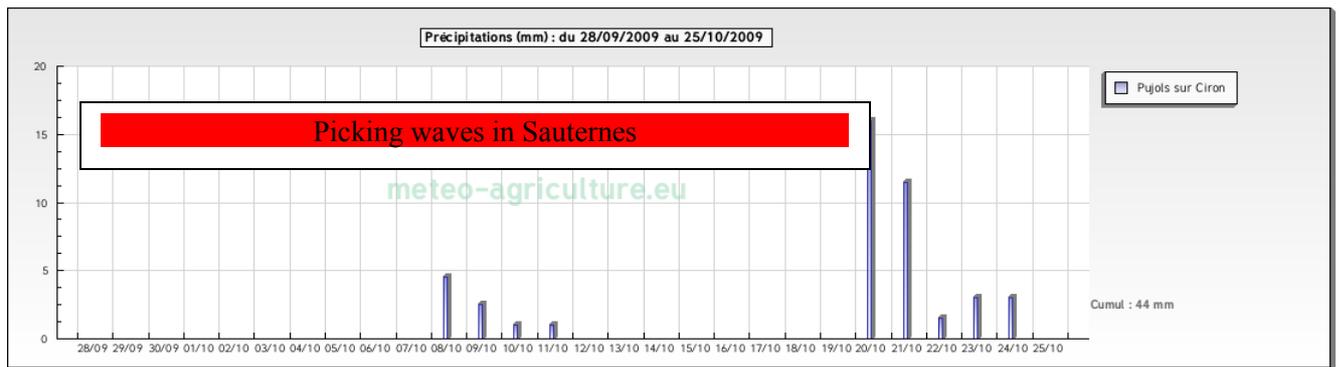


Figure 6: rainfall from 28 September to 25 October 2010

Powerful dry white wines, great red wines, and extraordinary sweet white wines

Certainly, the maximum temperatures in August were slightly too high for the Sauvignon Blanc to develop the same amazingly intense aromas as in 2007 and 2008. Wine tasters who find the exuberant character of this grape variety excessive in some cases will be pleased with the powerful, complex, flavourful Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc in 2009. This year, the Sémillon grown on limestone soils developed remarkable powerful and richness.

In early January, it is premature to attempt an accurate description of the red wines from the latest vintage, as fermentation has only just finished and they have spent hardly any time in barrel. However, the deep colour and stunning fruit, as well as the quality and smoothness of the tannins of the 2009s are immediately apparent, indicative of a very good, or even a great year, where the wine expresses the quality of the terroir with great clarity.

The great sweet white Sauternes and Barsac wines are impressively rich and powerful, with great purity and depth. They are, without any exaggeration, absolutely fantastic!