



2003 Vintage

Exceptional climate conditions for the 2003 vintage

The vine needs water in winter and through into early Spring until the flowering period. From then on, to make an exceptional vintage, the plants must be short of water through to harvesting time.

The year 2003 matched this profile perfectly.

A cold winter and mild spring with plenty of rain. Summery conditions from the end of May onwards. After a first hot spell in June, the heat lasted throughout the summer, becoming particularly intense over the first fortnight of August.

2003 was a vintage like no other, resembling neither 1947 nor 1976, **with all existing temperature records being broken**. These exceptional conditions made 2003 **the smallest harvest since 1991**. Total rainfall between April and September was close to average values (but with irregular spells of heavy rain).

Budburst on 03/04 - **Flower buds** on 05/05 - **Flowering** (two weeks earlier than average) took place from 26 May to 7 June.

The vines were to stay ahead of schedule through to the harvests. A storm on 15 July had no harmful consequences for the vines because the training wires were well maintained and the branches firmly attached, preventing them from snapping in the strong westerly winds. Lastly, the north-south planting layout reduced the impact of the gusts coming in from the ocean.

After leaf-stripping on the east-facing side of the rows, from 15 July (**mid-point in the colour change**) we started green harvesting, first at Riou de Thailas then at Fougas with a fifteen-strong team. Thinning was completed in early August. The bunches were large but with tiny grapes.

The colour change finished on about 1 August at Riou de Thailas and 7 August at Fougas for the Cabernets.

To try to make up for the effects of the drought and heat, we ploughed the soil regularly on the sandiest part of the estate at Riou de Thailas.

The rain that fell in the second half of August and early September reactivated the phenol ripening process that had been blocked by the weather conditions of the two previous months.

By the end of August, the grapes were revealing flavours of apricot at Riou de Thailas and dried figs at Fougas, while the pips had almond and walnut flavours.

The harvests were conducted in sunny conditions (**and exceptionally early – three years ahead of average**, the earliest since 1890!) on 8 and 9 September at Riou de Thailas, and on 11, 12, 13 September for the Merlot at Fougas and the 22, 23, 24 for the Cabernets. The healthy, tasty grapes had uniform ripeness levels.

The wines are rich in colour with average acidity levels, good length on the palate and beautiful flavours.