



**CORNEY &
BARROW**
INDEPENDENT WINE MERCHANTS-1780



ETS. JEAN-PIERRE MOUEIX

THE 2019 VINTAGE: VASTER THAN THE EMPIRE

“Summer vaster than the empire”
Saint-John Perse, 1920

AN INTENSE, BYRONIC VINTAGE, FORGED IN THE SUMMER HEAT

Born in Guadeloupe and educated at the University of Bordeaux, Alexis ‘Saint-John’ Perse was a French diplomat who won the 1960 Nobel Prize for Literature. This multifaceted son of the French empire wrote the line above in an abandoned Taoist temple near Beijing.

Édouard and Christian Moueix’s choice of quote for this year’s tasting brochure acknowledges the warm, sunny summer months as the key to the 2019 vintage, but also places us in a global context. As recent events show, whether virus or civil unrest, we are all connected now, for better or worse. In the same way, the success of this crop depends on factors stretching far beyond the corner of south west France from where it comes.

Adam’s notes are based on a tasting with Édouard Moueix last week in Libourne. Along with Will Hargrove and Joe Muller, we did a quick pre-quarantine dash, there and back in a day.

2019 is a vintage of substance. It has no shortage of tannin, but – and this is crucial to the success of the Moueix properties this year – that tannin has been managed

sublimely, extracted so sensitively, that only after tasting several samples do you realise the build-up in your mouth. What is more, the fruit density and its succulence in combination with fresh acidity, make for truly harmonious wines.

After a mild winter, spring was by turns sunny and rainy. Having dodged frost on 13th April, it was the rain in early June that first left a stamp on the vintage. Flowering suffered as a result and Merlot bunches averaged just 120 grapes (compared to the usual 200). It was to be a lower-yielding year.

The summer once again dealt a blow to climate change deniers, proving exceptionally sunny and warm, only just falling short of 2018's historic record for sunshine hours. 2019 can be seen as a continuation of the modern line of sun-forged vintages. However, unlike years such as 2015 and 2009, which are defined by their lush fruit, 2019 seems to have more in common with the phenolic richness of 2018, 2010 and, for those with longer memories, 2005.

On the fast draining gravel plateau of Pomerol, hydric stress set in as early as mid-July. Saint-Émilion held out better thanks to its retentive limestone soils. Fortunately, some 3.5cm of gentle rain on 26th July came to the rescue, inducing a quick and even *véraison* (colour change). In Édouard Moueix's words, "this moment marked the qualitative turn of the vintage."

At the end of August, Merlot berries weighed 1.2g on average (versus 1.5g in a 'normal' vintage), indicating "exceptional concentration but low yields". Volumes harvested were 20% below average in Pomerol and 10% below in Saint-Émilion. Harvest took place under fair skies, from 17th September to 3rd October.

And so what of the wines? There are vintages that seduce from the off, before they are even bottled. This is not one of those years. It is more elemental, with something of the Byronic hero about it, brooding and iconoclastic yet capable of profound expression – a visceral vintage, whose raw materials are truly impressive, but which demands patience.

The 2019s will come into their own during the course of their maturation, or *élevage*, that deeply French term for breeding, rearing or schooling, which also evokes a process of learning to live. 2019 is a vintage where a deft hand in the cellar can make all the difference. I can think of no better school for the ferociously talented class of 2019 than Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Guy Seddon". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'G' being particularly large and stylized.

GUY SEDDON
June 2020