Harvests 2026 – Les Sept Pierres – Ardèche - Rhône

It was the final day of harvest at Les 7 Pierres when we arrive at the estate and we are lucky enough to lend a hand for a little while. It is Saturday, September 12, and today the Riesling and the final parcel of Syrah are being harvested under the morning sun, without excessive heat.

François farms 2 hectares of vines, planted with the red varieties Cinsault, Grenache and Syrah, and the white varieties Viognier, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling. The latter may come as a surprise here, but it is a choice made from the heart, in tribute to his grandmother Charlotte, who was once a winegrower in Alsace.

2026 is a warm, sun-filled vintage, yet contrary to expectations, yields are respectable: 25–30 hL/ha for the white wines and 35–40 hL/ha for the reds. These are, of course, still small yields, but they rank among the highest the estate has achieved since the beginning of the venture.

The main reason is François's ability to irrigate his vines following the installation of a hillside reservoir on the estate, situated at a low point in the vineyard. It fills during the heavy autumn rains.

In the Ardèche, as elsewhere in France, autumn and winter were very wet and mild. Budbreak came early, although vegetative growth was slowed somewhat by cooler temperatures in April. Rain continued until mid-May, and at that point the vineyard had no shortage of water.

Afterwards, however, the weather turned dry and remained so until the harvest in early September. It is these extremely long periods without rainfall that are problematic and difficult to manage, particularly on François's highly free-draining decomposed granite soils.

One positive aspect of these very dry years is the extremely low pressure from fungal diseases and, consequently, the limited number of treatments required to protect the vines. François carried out his final treatment on June 1, very early in the growing season.

This year, he paid particular attention to the crucial stage of shoot thinning. This resulted in well-aerated vines, with the grape bunches evenly and harmoniously distributed, allowing them to achieve complete and uniform ripeness.

It is a time-consuming task, but when done properly it saves time later and improves grape quality, while potentially even making the following year's pruning easier.

2026 is a particularly important vintage for the estate, as it marks its first vintage with official organic certification. From the very beginning, when François established the domaine in 2013, the vines have been farmed organically. This is particularly important to François, who also works as an adviser to winegrowers on organic viticulture.

Beyond certification itself, François is driven by the microbial life of his soils—an essential asset in helping the vines access the nutrients they need to grow and build up their reserves. Compost teas are generally applied in the autumn to stimulate this microbial activity.

We tasted the first barrels of 2026 Syrah, recently racked and transferred into barrel. This year, the free-run wine has been kept separate from the press wine. The fruit is intense and fresh, with delicious floral notes. Alcohol levels are looking very reasonable: the Grenache is reaching around 14% ABV, while the Syrah is barely at 12%.

At François's estate, 2026 promises to be a vintage of excellent quality.