

October 15th, 2018

## **2018 Harvest report**

At the time of this writing, the harvest is over and, as every year, the great painter of the Autumn has settled in our vineyards. Every morning, we discover, a little more numerous and more intense, these trails of pure gold that his brush painted on the vineyards overnight. While in the wineries and in the cellars the tumultuous fermentation of the grapes is giving birth to the wine, the vineyards are preparing for their winter death in this invasive soft and quiet golden tide.

Now, as vineyards and the grape growers are finding peace again, it is important to look back at the turbulence and disorders that affected them throughout the year, and try to bring out the key-factors that contributed to the « building » of this 2018 vintage. A vintage which, as the preceding thousand or so, will be unique, with its own life, not resembling any other... The tasting of fermenting musts has already shown this.

This year again, according to our northern and continental climatic conditions, of which extreme variability we have to regard as normal, there was obviously a homeric struggle in the story that the winegrower lived with his vineyards from March to September... these six months were full of uproar and sometimes fury that must be read as an odyssey. The episodes that seemed in disorder became coherent when the wine, after finishing fermentation, came out of the wine press and suddenly translated them into aromas and tastes that were both familiar and totally new.

Within six months, the following events succeeded one another: the rapid, almost crazy, growth of vine shoots in the Spring, then the appearance of grapes, their fragrant flowering, their « véraison » in summer, their ripening thanks to the full attention of their mother, the vine, and lastly the relief of the harvest... and the peace that followed...

For the greatest part of these six months, we were under the impression that the weather conditions were dragging the vines and us into a crazy ride that we had never experienced so lively before. Even if the hostility of nature was evident and the obstacles in front of us well-known (mildew, heatwaves, storms, humidity and the resulting acceleration of vegetation) their virulence created a scenario that left us breathless at the time of the harvest, one of the most precocious of these last fifty years.

For those who still deny global warming, it is to be recalled that in the '70s the average harvest starting date was October 5th. The average date of these last ten years is September 15th. 2013 remains the only recent vintage that we harvested in early October, on a date that was considered as normal thirty years ago. Even if the progress of vine cultivation and especially of yield control can be part of the explanation, global warming is of course the main factor behind this increase in early ripening.

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Winter was cold with negative temperatures in February and March and we had snow until early April. But, surprisingly, budburst occurred as soon as April 10th, in other words early, even if it was 15 days later than in 2017 (this trend was to reverse in summer and 2018 finally gained a short advance over 2017).

It rained a lot in March. Snow melted and important reserves of water formed in the soils and were useful for the rest of the year.

April was beautiful, but very hot with summerlike temperatures up to 33°C. Everything was going fast. By the end of March, pruning was hardly finished and canes hardly tied that disbudding was necessary. We were even obliged to lift vine-shoots up before ending disbudding, which is extremely rare. As a consequence the team had to work relentlessly, even on days off.

In April, vegetation kept on developing extremely quickly. Nicolas Jacob's vineyard team had great difficulty in keeping pace, but they held out despite the rainy and hot weather that brought storms and disrupted work, but also accelerated life around the vineyards - this mysterious and ardent life, result of the combined actions of fauna, mushrooms, bacteria and other microbes surrounding roots and feeding them to produce vine shoots, leaves and grapes with the exaggerated help, this year, of the sun, rain and winds... a bustling, but often discordant orchestra that finally found harmony in the wine, translator of the symbiosis of all those elements.

May and June humid conditions made it difficult to apply the necessary treatments. Rains were frequent until mid-June and in order to be able to treat and plough, it was important not to miss the very rare « windows » of fine weather that permitted the soils and the vineyards to dry.

The pressure of mildew was strong in Vosne-Romanée, the strongest we had known in recent years and the leaves and grapes there were severely « bitten » despite all the efforts we made to protect them. Fortunately, the Côte de Beaune, the Corton and even the sector immediately next to Flagey Echezeaux were almost completely spared.

Uneven rainfalls were another characteristic of the year. Benevolent gods watered the Côte de Beaune at the good times, for instance in August, whereas in Vosne-Romanée the few rainfalls came at wrong times, when the mildew spores were developing, encouraged by morning frosts. Despite all the attention, the quality of men and materials, the attack broke out and one morning we discovered that some grapes were beginning to dry and roast as if they had been attacked by an invisible fire.

The attack was contained, but it had a negative impact and in August, next to the grapes that were ripening, we noticed the dark stains of those that had roasted. At the time of the harvest, those dried parts would be removed. That is the role of sorting. It would be carried out with the greatest care in the few affected areas so that only healthy grapes should end up in the vats.

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From mid-June, the trend completely changed. Without any warning, the North wind blew clouds away. Rains stopped and a dry, very dry season began with two heatwaves in August and spikes up to almost 40°C on some afternoons.

In the meantime, flowering occurred very early, in late May, a week ahead of 2017. It was rapid despite humidity and grapes were visibly getting bigger.

By August 15th, sugar contents were already very high, but phenolic maturity was not at the same level and it was essential to wait before harvesting until both maturities, that of sugar and that of phenolic elements (skins, seeds and stems) had converged in the harmony of a balanced maturity. This phenomena of « disconnection » that warm regions are used to, is rare in Burgundy. This element would be taken into account at the time of deciding on the harvest date.

We were amazed at the ability of the vineyard to resist heat. They did better than in 2003 thanks to the water reserves that had accumulated in Spring and to the few storms that brought some water that, even if in small quantity, was sufficient for photosynthesis to function and maintain the sap link between the vineyard and the grapes.

We were all the more surprised to see how the vineyards resisted in 2018 (and it was another important factor in the « building » of the vintage) as the North wind bringing beautiful, dry and warm weather kept on blowing every day from June onward. As a result, we had sun, but it also dried our vineyards. The latter however resisted all the more easily as over the years the biodynamic treatments have increased their autonomy to defend themselves against the excesses of nature.

From August 20th, as is normal at the end of the maturation cycle, the ripening of grapes accelerated. The grapes were magnificent and the berries that we tasted were sweet, juicy and some were « figgy » which is a sign of high ripeness. Skins were thick and black, but aromas were not yet up to our expectations.

The last week of August was hot, but bearable with seasonal temperatures. In a cloudless sky, full maturity was reached at last. On August 31st we began harvesting our Corton (Clos du Roi, Bressandes and Renardes ) - it has been the first time since 2003 that we began so early. Then on September 3rd, one day earlier than in 2017, the picking started in Vosne-Romanée in the following order: Richebourg, Romanée-st-Vivant, Romanée-Conti, Grands-Echezeaux to end with La Tâche on the 12th.

As for Montrachet, it benefited from exceptional climatic conditions: it was spared from diseases and the grapes ripened in a regular, complete and even perfect way. Harvesting took place on September 7th. It was beautiful with quantities that we had not seen for a long time.

The wine that has just finished fermentation is full of promises. It already shows both on the palate and in the nose the characteristic honey and this typical “gras-sec” contained by a delicate minerality that makes of the Montrachet a unique wine.

**SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE  
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We will remember this harvest as luminous and almost ideal, due to the beautiful weather that we enjoyed, apart from a small storm on September 7th, on the eve of picking the Romanée-Conti. But we will also remember its difficulties due to the severe sorting in some vineyards and the impression we had to be constantly on « the razor's edge » because of heat and the extremely rapid progression of ripening that resulted.

We cannot help thinking of 2003, the last scorching and ultra-precocious vintage. But contrary to 2003, the heatwave was not so long and the few regular storms brought additional water to the vineyards, besides the Winter and Spring rains. That is the reason why we harvested very ripe grapes that were swollen with juice. Quality is great and quantity is good, without being exaggerated, especially in Vosne-Romanée where the vineyards were hit by mildew. We realized, even before fermentation, that what we had lost in quantity, had surely been gained in quality as far as the density and expression of the wine are concerned

Vinifications were perfectly carried out by Alexandre Bernier and his team. Musts fermented in vats between 18/21 days. Their richness in sugar, increased by the figgy thick-skinned berries, was such that we had to keep them in assemblage vats for a few days to enable them to finish the fermentation of their sugars.

Everything is over now. I am writing in front of the still radiant vineyards. La Tâche has just been put into barrels. All the other wines have already been taken down to the cellars where, if one keeps silent, one can hear the barrels quietly babbling like babies in their cradles.

Our high percentage of old vines and the efforts we put up to keep their production in balance with the vintage have resulted in reasonable, even low yields for the red wines in Vosne-Romanée: 18hl/ha for Romanée-Conti. They are more generous in Flagey: 32hl/ha for Grands-Echezeaux and a little more for Corton: 35hl/ha.

No need to be a great expert to be aware today that the vintage is exceptional as regards both red and white wines. It is too early to express a definite opinion about what will be the final characteristics of the wines, but we cannot help finding in them the fruit of 2015 and the extreme ripeness of 2003. This might offer us a new 1947, a legendary vintage if any... but let's remain cautious and content ourselves with the joy of this harvest that nothing in the Spring indicated as finally being so luminous and promising!