

October 1st, 2017

2017 Harvest report

*Now will I sing thee, Bacchus... Hither hast, O Father of the wine-press... viny autumn laden blooms the field, and foams the vintage high with brimming vats. Hither, O Father of the wine-press, come, and stripped of buskin stain thy bared limbs in the new must... »
VIRGIL, Georgics, book II.*

On this first Sunday of October, the weather is turning cooler. The summer is beginning to make way for the mildness of autumn. The vineyards seem relieved to have released their fruit to the harvesters. Peace is reigning and we have the strong impression of a birth whose celebration is everywhere: in the calm and in the lightness of the atmosphere, in the beauty of the landscape and above all in the warm light coming from the vineyards and changing from gold to light brown then to red and vice-versa. The leaves take their time to fall to the ground. The great painter of the burgundian autumn is at work in the heart of a luminous and even luxurious season that is the consequence of an early harvest.

In the wineries, on the contrary, the passage from the must to the wine is tumultuous... « foams the vintage » and when for the « pigeages » we are entering like Virgil with « bared limbs (in) the new must... » fermenting up to 34/35°C, we are happy to have found again for some time the warmth of the mother's breast.

It is the right time to look back and try to find in our memories and notes the elements explaining some of the factors that were essential to shape the 2017 vintage in its final form. Even if the elements that the poor human analysis manages to measure are few, besides so many that constitute together the alchemy of the terroir, it is important to try to understand how and why nature gave us this year, for once, such a plentitude of beautiful black grapes that were full of rich juice and sugar.

2017 has indeed produced a superb harvest both in quantity and quality, which we had not seen for a long time.

For the first time in a long time also, the winter was cold. In January, for several weeks on end, the vineyards remained covered with a white coat of frost. But there was no snow !

April was very dry and rather warm. As a result, the budburst was very early, from the end of March. The vineyards had leaves by April 6th and with no surprise they were in great danger when the morning frost was threatening at the end of April.

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Being conscious that another frost would be catastrophic, after the severe one of last year, the « vigneron » in all the villages of Burgundy gathered together every day, at dawn, between April 27th and 29th, to burn straw in front of the vineyards and create a cloud of smoke that could protect them from the biting frost. Thanks to this solidarity, frost receded.

The second essential episode in the history of the vintage was the flowering. It is the flowering that mainly decides the volume of the crop. It took place this year very early (end of May), very fast (hardly 3 days) and in warm weather. As a result, the flowering of all the berries was complete and even the rain, that sometimes disturbed it, did not cause millerandage. Therefore, at the end of May, without any sudden attack, of hail for instance, we could expect to harvest a good quantity of grapes in early September.

June was extremely hot, up to 39° C on the 21st. As a result, some of the berries were burnt, but this heat was especially favourable to the thickness of the grape skins, which was to be positive for the vineyards when in June and July successive storms hit the vineyards and provoked the reappearance of the usual enemies : mildew, oidium... The berries that had grown under the effect of rain could resist and remained thick and solid.

By late July/early August, at the veraison stage, that is the moment when the vineyards stop developing their vegetation to concentrate on the ripening of the grapes, we could observe big berries that were sometimes compact, but healthy.

During the entire period, Nicolas Jacob and all the team, the « vigneron » as well as the « cavistes », had to face the exceptionally fast development of the vegetative organs of the vineyards, some of the vine shoots growing 10cm in a single day. Nature challenged us to perform in record time all the essential works: from disbudding to tying-down, this last being very delicate as the vines were fragile due to their ultra-rapid growth.

August was dry and warm. The ripening of the grapes accelerated especially as regards the increase of sugar. At the end of the last week of August, the sugar contents were such that we could have harvested at the end of the month, but it was important to wait as the phenolic ripening, which contributes to the final aromas and characteristics of the wine, was not achieved. The soils were too dry to unblock the situation.

Luckily, at the end of August, very hoped for rains arrived to perfect this ultimate ripening that is essential to the final quality of the vintage.

Traditionally, the harvest is earlier in the Côte de Beaune than in the Côte de Nuits. It was the case this year again. We started harvesting in the warm chalky soils of our Corton vineyards on September 4th. The grapes were superb, healthy and full of sugar.

We waited until September 6th to start with La Tâche (on 6th and 7th) in Vosne-Romanée.

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The Romanée-Conti was harvested on the morning of the 8th and the Richebourg in the afternoon. It rained on the morning of the 9th, so we stopped for the whole day. Then, we went on in the following order: end of the Richebourg on the 10th, Romanée-St-Vivant on the 10th and 11th, Grands Echezeaux on the 12th and Echezeaux on the 13th. We were stopped again by rain on the 14th and we ended with the last plots of Echezeaux on the 15th.

The Montrachet that was hit by frost last year (up to 90%) was very vigorous this year. As is normal in such conditions, the vines having not produced any grapes in 2016, regained their strength and the will to produce... to our delight ! The harvest took place on September 7th. The yield is not excessive, but abundant. The grapes are perfectly healthy and ripe. Fermentations are proceeding very well and we are very optimistic about this vintage of Montrachet.

The « Paulée » was celebrated on Saturday the 16th. It was a very special one: Bernard Noblet's last harvest. Having been our cellar master since 1986 when he succeeded his father, André Noblet, it was essential to underline his remarkable career and mark the important dates with the wines that we served: 1978, the year when he arrived at the Domaine, 1985, the year when he made his first vinifications (it was actually 1986) and the highlight... 1957, the year of his birth!

Our wonderful team of harvesters, brilliantly led by Nicolas Jacob, will remember the picking as being an easy one. The grapes abandoned themselves to the harvesters who had not much work at the sorting table, except with the dried grapes that had been burnt by the sun or those that were already withered. After each rain arriving before or during the harvest, we feared that botrytis might develop or even explode, as it sometimes happens at the end of the season, but finally the harvest we brought into the winery was in perfect sanitary condition.

We are very thankful to our vines for being so generous!

In a vintage like 2017, when we can easily be overwhelmed by the generosity of nature and allow ourselves too much leeway, the control of the yield is a key factor. Once more, our selections of fine types of pinot noir and chardonnay, that is, low or medium productive, are a major element in this control, as well as the age of the vineyards that is for each vine around 50 years.

With such a beautiful and sound harvest, the vinification had to respect the quality of the grapes. The destemming that we usually perform after the last sorting in the winery, just before vatting, was minimal. Sometimes there was none, the Romanee-conti for instance was vinified with whole clusters.

During the few days of maceration before fermentations started, the colours were dark red. Then fermentations began and from the first pumping-over, lively pink foams appeared. They are usually the promise of a rich and generous vintage.

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It is an exceptional vinification campaign that we are experiencing at the time of this writing, since Bernard Noblet, with his successor Alexandre Bernier and his team, has to vinify 24 tanks this year, that is almost twice as much as last year.

As a conclusion, the end of devattings and the maturing in oak barrels will give us more information on the specific characters of these 2017s. But in the meantime we can say that the spring promises have been kept: the crop is exceptionally abundant, without being excessive, thanks to the natural control of yields that was carried out by our vineyards team. The crop is exceptionally healthy as well and we can expect a very good quality.
