

October 13th, 2010

2010 Harvest Report

The vigneron's work throughout the year is nothing other than a dialogue with his natural environment. The dialogue often becomes a combat in order to lead the vineyards and the crop towards the harvest and away from the precipices that lurk and have names such as: Mildew, Oidium, Botrytis... and many others.

Rarely has a vintage been so close to the precipice and then managed to save itself so successfully as the 2010. At the moment that we are writing these lines, it is with joy and tranquillity that the village streets of Burgundy, somnolent under the sun, are filled with the rich scents that emanate from the fermentation vats while the vines, relieved of their fruit, and at peace, prepare themselves for the autumnal sleep and the gestation of the next vintage.

The beginning of the growing season was uneventful until the flowering, even though the wind on Palm Sunday - that according to tradition becomes the prevailing wind of the year - was a west wind. In other words, a wind that brings clouds and rain, contrary to the much desired north wind that provides dry weather and luminosity. In the end, the western and north-west winds were the dominant winds in 2010.

Let us review the **significant events** of the year, which required more than ever before: skill, experience and rapidity of intervention. If we wished to compare this vintage, full of challenges and traps, to a Homeric epic, we would say that the first quality of the vigneron was not the heroism of Achilles or Hector in the Iliad, but the prudence, craftiness and obstinacy of Ulysses in the Odyssey.

The **flowering** has always a major influence on the construction of a vintage: it is at this moment that, according to whether the climatic conditions are favourable or not, the vine is going to fertilize all or many of the clusters and berries it carries or only a few. In both cases, the influence will be decisive on the yield as well as on the quality of the wine.

In early June, when the flowering started, rain and low temperatures were prevalent and caused *coulture* (aborted berries) and *millerandage* (small berries with thick skins) In addition, the flowering that spread out over a good week had the effect of creating differences in ripeness between vines, between clusters and even between berries in the same cluster.

This type of flowering that reduces the quantity of grapes to ripen is often favourable to quality, especially when the weather conditions are difficult as in 2010. **This not very fertile and uneven flowering was the first significant event of the vintage.** It will not determine the final quality, but will have a strong influence on it.

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In June and July, an alternation of hot, but never scorching, and humid periods led to the development of mildew and early botrytis. As is normal with organic agriculture, the anti cryptogamic fight had to be extremely thorough and continuous. Since it can only prevent or protect, but not cure, the risk of defeat was always present. As a consequence, both experience and close observation were essential.

The fight against the enemies of the vineyards belongs to Nicolas Jacob, our vineyard manager, and his team. They did a remarkable job, and the vineyards entered the veraison process (change of colour of the grapes) and the month of August in a very satisfactory sanitary condition.

August was outstandingly humid and cold – precipitations reached record levels and ripeness progressed slowly. This was the **second significant event: climatic conditions were unfavourable from August** throughout September with heat and storms succeeding one another, but **the qualitative structure of the grapes** (small berries with thick skins) **confirmed itself and even consolidated**. Thanks to their solid structure, the grapes could stand the botrytis that set in at the end of maturation.

By early September, as we were approaching the harvest, planned for the 20th, it was hard to be optimistic. The weather remained uncertain with western and southern winds bringing with them humid heat and storms. We were in a situation typical of northern vineyards: as often the case at the end of the vegetative cycle, the heat coming from the south boosted the ripening of the grapes, but also brought storms that favoured the development of botrytis. Even though the grapes were well resistant thanks to their structure, botrytis and maturation were progressing at the same time. As a consequence, before deciding on the harvest date, the vigneron had the difficult task of finding a happy medium in order to harvest ripe grapes without there being too much damage.

On September 12th, a violent hail storm destroyed a part of the Santenay vineyards. This storm also brought a lot of rain to the Montrachet area, which, combined with heat, resulted in a spectacular development of botrytis in the white wine vineyards.

Luckily, Vosne-Romanée was not hit and could still benefit from sunny days. Once more the Pinot Noir showed its capacity to produce sugar very fast, just before reaching full maturity. This maturity was physiologically reached on September 20th. But as the vineyards had never experienced during the course of the year the stress of dehydration so useful for a complete ripening of phenolic compounds, we decided to let the grapes benefit from the sun until they reached full maturity.

It is rare that the weather during the 8/10 days of harvest does not concentrate all the climatic characteristics of the growing season. That was indeed the case in 2010, a "cyclothymic" year, if ever there was one.

On September 22nd, we harvested very healthy grapes in Corton and the following day it was the turn of Montrachet. Perhaps because of the storm that broke out on the 19th, maturity was very high and the percentage of noble rot significant.

On Friday, 24th, while we were starting the harvest in Vosne-Romanée, storms arrived and brought in a single day very important quantities of water to the vineyards. Humidity set in and remained until

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September 30th when the Sun returned. As a result, the progression of botrytis was regular, **but the maturation gained at the end of the vegetative cycle was definitely acquired as well as the resistance of the grapes with small berries and thick skins.** We can look at this as the **third significant event** of the vintage. Nevertheless, **due to the progression of botrytis, a severe selection was necessary.**

Once again, our experienced team of harvesters performed their traditional "haute couture" work. On the one hand they left aside for a second picking the vines bearing big or not ripe enough berries. On the other hand they eliminated from the grapes the parts that had been affected by botrytis. As a result, after Bernard Noblet and his team had put the finishing touches on the pickers' work on the sorting table, only the perfectly ripe and healthy grapes were kept for the vats

The vineyards were harvested in the following order:

September 22nd	Corton
September 23rd	Montrachet and Richebourg (beginning)
September 24th	stop in the morning - afternoon : Richebourg
September 25th	Richebourg (end) and Romanée-Conti
September 26th	La Tâche (beginning)
September 27th	La Tâche and Romanée-St-Vivant (beginning)
September 28th	Romanée-St-Vivant
September 29th	Romanée-St-Vivant (end) and Grands-Echezeaux (beginning)
September 30th	Grands-Echezeaux (end) and Echezeaux (beginning)
October 1st	Echezeaux
October 2 nd	Echezeaux (end) and second picking
October 5th	end of second picking

Given the harvest proceeded in cold weather, the natural pre-fermentary macerations that resulted permitted the thick skins of the grapes to slowly release tannins and anthocyanins. At the time of this writing, after around 17 days of vatting for the first vats harvested, the wines show good colour and an excellent tannic structure which should give them a strong aging potential. The acidities are exceptionally good and, as mentioned above, the fermentation aromas are noble.

The Montrachet that has started its fermentation in vats should be sumptuous.

We cannot say much more at present; we have to wait a little longer before we can confirm our first impressions.

Le Domaine de la Romanée-Conti