

BURGUNDY VINTAGE REPORTS 2012 – 2007

The last few vintages of Burgundy really tell a story. For, in Burgundy, it is almost never the case that any two vintages are the same. This is due to the fickle nature of the weather. Sun, rain, frost, freezes, hail, and wind can all have a positive or negative effect on the harvest depending on when they occur. These weather patterns can also cause the onset of various diseases that can affect the quality and quantity. And, many times the crop is impacted negatively or positively by changes in the weather in the last few days or weeks before harvest. This accounts for the variability of Burgundy versus wines from warmer New World areas where the weather is almost always warm with little variability around the time of harvest. In Burgundy, it is not that unusual to have “miracle” vintages which are saved by a late warm spell. And, thankfully, recent vintages have been spared the conditions that caused some of the really poor vintages of the early years prior to the 1980s.

Below is a brief **UNDERGROUND** commentary on recent Burgundy vintages:

2012

The 2012 vintage in Burgundy was, yet again, different. The weather into July was, in a word, terrible! But, there was a big change from mid-July into September when the weather was the exact opposite and well nigh perfect with warm, mostly sunny weather. The terrible weather conditions into July did result in a crop that was severely reduced. However, the weather from then on produced a crop of very healthy grapes. That is the good news. But, the bad news is that the production is very low. Some have called it the lowest production ever. In some vineyards production was down as much as 90%. Some growers have called 2012 “classic”. Others are saying it is better than any of the most recent vintages. For me, like all vintages at this very early stage, it is impossible to know precisely how the wine will evolve. But, what I do know is that there will be producers who make a very high quality wine in very limited quantities. This, in turn, will result in higher prices. For consumers, that gives all the more appeal to the 2011s which are just now starting to be offered for sale.

2011

This vintage was characterized by terrible weather followed by good weather just in time for

harvest. Hence I call **2011 THE SURPRISE VINTAGE**. The winter brought very cold weather with a warming trend in February and March. The summer arrived in April leading to the belief that the harvest would be early. Then the summer was punctuated with cooling trends and some days of late rains. This led to some rot. The harvest started in late August/early September in warm dry weather. The quantity, like 2010, was again below average. Several growers compare the harvest to 2007. And some have also said that it did not have as many problems as 2007 with a higher overall quality for the reds. For me, it is a better vintage than 2007 for the red wines. Many of the 2011s have beautiful balance and lots of fruit. They will have a lot of early appeal, but are likely to keep better than most people expect. In short, the vintage does not look to be at the level of either 2009 or 2010 and there is surely more variability. But, there are some 2011s that compare favorably to the 2009s and 2010s. And, given the very small crop of very high quality fruit in 2012, 2011 is a vintage to buy as the 2012s are expected to be in very short supply and also very expensive. For the white wines, it also looks to be a very good vintage, but a more variable vintage. Some of the best wines are similar to 2007, but with more fruit. Others are lighter and without the structure for long term aging. Nonetheless, they are nice wines that will have early appeal.

2010

An early freeze affected many vines in parts of Burgundy and some vines were lost. Spring came late, but warm weather followed until June when the weather cooled. July warmed up again, but August was variable with many cool days and some rain. By September the weather warmed up again and the harvest began (To read the DRC 2010 harvest report go to <http://www.undergroundwineletter.com/2011/12/along-the-burgundy-trail-vintage-2010/#DRC>). Very simply, the 2010 vintage is another great vintage for the best producers of Red and White Burgundies. Yet, compared with the 2009s, the wines are completely different. In fact, I cannot recall two such vintages back to back at such a high level, yet so different, in my 30 or so years of tasting Burgundies from barrel. And, I would also add that I don't know of any vintage quite like the 2010. For the red wines, some have said that perhaps it is a combination of 2000 and 2001. Others have said that it is somewhat like 2001 or 2008. And still others have said maybe like 2006 or a combination of 2008 and 2005. These 2010 comparisons may very well prove to be somewhat valid. But, for me, the 2010 Red Burgundies, at this stage in their evolution, defy comparison. What I can say is, at the best producers, the wines have a purity and freshness in the fruit that is truly remarkable. The wines are bright and vibrant and brimming with fruit that has a zesty crispness. They have great charm and flavor with silky tannins. It can also be said that the 2010 vintage includes the combination of a warm vintage with ripe grapes and a cool vintage with freshness. It is this combination, along with low yields, which produced wines of remarkable

purity, freshness, balance, flavor and vibrant acidity for both the red and white wines. It is for that reason that I call the 2010 vintage **THE VINTAGE OF YIN AND YANG**. And, always for me, it is this combination that gives me great pleasure.

2009

This is the real story of recent years for Red Burgundy. Here it looks to be a great vintage. The 2009 vintage is by far the best since 2005 and one of the three best vintages, the others being 1990 and 2005, that I have ever tasted from barrel. Some have also compared in to 1999. Going further back, perhaps 2009 is like 1959, although I certainly did not taste the 1959s from barrel! Whether it turns out to be as good as 2005, 1990, or 1959 remains to be seen. And, how the 2010 vintage will compare is yet another story to be determined. The 2009 Red Burgundies have tremendous fruit and depth. The 2009 whites are also attractive. But, for me, maybe not up to the 2007, 2008 and 2010 vintages which are my favorite recent White Burgundy vintages. But time will tell. Interestingly, it is just the opposite for Red Burgundy. The weather conditions at harvest were ideal. Warm sunny days began in August and continued well into the fall. But, it was not always easy even in 2009 as April, May, June, and July were subject to rains which necessitated protecting the vines from mildew. However, with the warm weather beginning in August the vines produced a crop of excellent fruit which some growers compare to the best they have ever seen. However, for some who picked late there may be some over ripeness. However, the general consensus for recent vintage comparisons seems to be 1999 and 2005 for both for quality and quantity. This is very high praise indeed. And, I think Aubert de Villaine, Co-Director of Domaine De La Romanée Conti, said it best when he summed up 2009 by saying “*We would like to make wines like 2009 every year. But, if we did, we would not be in Burgundy!*”

2008

This year was characterized by difficult weather conditions throughout the year. June, July, and August had frequent rains. In September the rains let up, but came back the second week of September. Botrytis set in very quickly and had the rain continued, the harvest would have been a disaster. But there was a “Burgundian miracle” as the rain stopped, a north wind set in to dry the grapes, and the weather warmed to promote ripening and intensify sugar and acidity. In that regard, the vintage can be compared to 1996. It is a successful year for 2008 reds, but most will require patience. For me, the whites are better. They are wines that can be compared to a blend of 2006 (rich and rounded) and 2007 (racy and mineral driven with breed and backbone to give them a long life).

2007

The year 2007 was not unlike 2008 in that it was saved by a late warming trend in the latter part of August and September. In the spring, it looked like it would be a warm summer and an early harvest. Some were thinking of 2003. But the rains came in May and continued until the end of August. The harvest produced Pinot Noir grapes that were fully ripe, but also some bunches with unripe grapes and botrytis. Many top growers were able to deal with these problems in the vineyard and others resorted to sorting after the harvest. So, while it was possible to produce lovely balanced red wines with great early appeal that are somewhat like the 2000s, it was also possible to produce wines that are rather thin and uninteresting. Selection here is the key. The opposite is true for the whites. The white wines are more consistent and are racy, mineral driven, and very pure. The year 2007 is one of my favorites of recent White Burgundy vintages just behind 2008 and 2010.