

BURGUNDY VINTAGE REPORTS 2014 – 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 **THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER** commentary on recent Burgundy vintages:

2014

The 2014 Burgundy vintage was once again different. In Burgundy different is normal. And weather conditions can vary remarkably from appellation to appellation. In the case of 2014 there was a mild winter followed by a warm spring. In June there were storms that brought hail to a few areas with Beaune, Pommard, and Volnay being the most impacted. After the storms there was a heat wave followed by cool temperatures and rain in July. In August veraison (ripening of the grapes) began and in September the harvest began in dry and sunny weather except for a brief and mild storm with no hail or heavy rain which occurred on the 19th. All in all the weather conditions were very good and were described by one vigneron as “not too hot, not too cold”. Quantities also were generally very good and up from the past 4 vintages.

With reference to the wines it seems that the edge has to go to the whites where there is wonderful fruit, a lot of richness, and good acidity. But, make no mistake; the best of the reds are also lovely. They should be very appealing young. However, the legacy of 2014 is not likely to be the wines from the vintage, but that the vintage preceded 2015. In that

respect, I believe that 2014 will be known as the In Between Vintage sandwiched between 2013 and 2015. In 2015 there was a lot of buzz very early on owing to the harvest conditions where “perfect” grapes were the norm. And during our visits when the discussion turned to the 2015s, some were somewhat cautious yet said it would be excellent. Others were more exuberant and things like “the greatest modern vintage” and “the best vintage since 1929” were heard. Vamos a ver. We will reserve judgment until the wines have developed and are close to being bottled. That is the time of our annual Burgundy visit in November. And, this year it will be the 2015s. At that time we can get a reasonable look at the potential of the 2015 vintage.

So for now, my conclusion is that 2014 is a lovely Burgundy vintage with early appeal yet with the ability to age for many years. However, as an “in between” vintage, initial demand for the wines may be somewhat muted. The red wines seem to be along the lines of the 2000s and 2002s with slight differences. And, well selected, the wines should give a lot of pleasure just like the 2000s and 2002s. Both of these latter vintages I have been drinking from the beginning and continue to do so today. They are lovely. And, if not impacted by Premox, the White Burgundies should be relatively long lived. Following my usual practice, I will again buy the same wines from the same producers in the 2014 vintage as I have for many, many previous vintages. Remember, that is one of the magical things about Burgundy – every vintage is different. Vive la différence!

2013

It can be said that all vintages in Burgundy are different, but often they are really different. The 2013 vintage falls into the latter category. The weather was up and down and variable as it often is. And, there were problems at harvest which caused sorting to be absolutely essential to making great wines. In short, there were a lot of nervous growers throughout the entire cycle. But, a real distinction of 2013 is that it goes down as one of the latest vintages in history. And, it was late both from the standpoint of the harvest and vinification. In fact, the malolactic fermentations were so late that many fermentations finished during or just before the 2014 harvest began. This resulted in a very different tasting perspective in early November at the time of our visit. You see, at this time the malolactic fermentations usually have been finished for some time. Therefore, the producers usually have already tasted the wines many times. This year many of the producers had either not tasted the wines since the malolactic fermentations had finished or had tasted them only once or twice. So the results of the tastings were not only new to us, but new to nearly everyone. And, before tasting the wines after the malolactic

fermentations, many producers were very nervous. It was looking like that it might be termed the Nervous Vintage.

As mentioned earlier sorting was absolutely essential to making the best wines in 2013. This made for some outstanding results as the tastings after the malolactic fermentations revealed many wines that are beautifully balanced and very pure yet with richness and depth. This is indeed the magic of Burgundy. But, it should be recognized that my notes and opinions on the vintage are based on a tasting of wines from mostly producers that we have long considered as some of the best in Burgundy. We did hear comments about problems with the vintage such as rain at harvest and lady bug infestations amongst other things. So, given the ups and downs of the weather and other problems, it is entirely possible that there were notable underachievers. Indeed, our tastings revealed a few. But, it should also be noted that this is often the case in Burgundy. And, all things considered, for me, it was yet another Surprise Vintage. And, the surprise was not only that the 2013s were better than expected (like the 2011s), but that many of the wines were some of the greatest Red Burgundies I have ever tasted from barrel. This was the real surprise! So I would say this about the vintage: **2013: THE GREAT SURPRISE!** In the end some called it a “terroir driven” vintage others a “transparent” vintage and others a “great” vintage. Along the way there were descriptions such as a “nervous” vintage which was previously mentioned as well as a “difficult” vintage and a “frightening” vintage. In short, it was not uniform.

Comparing 2013 with any previous vintage is difficult. Here’s the introductory comment from the 2013 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Harvest Report: In my previous harvest reports, I often compared the changeable weather conditions that govern the birth of a vintage by referring to “ups and downs”, “a chaotic course”. I sometimes used the words “fight” or “adversity “. No year more than 2013 deserves to be described in this manner. And from the perspective of the lateness of the vintage the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and others compare 2013 to 1978 and 1979. The 1978 vintage I first tasted only after the wines were bottled. Glowing reviews of the 1978s appeared in the early issues of **The Underground Wineletter** including the first ever reviews of the great 1978 Henri Jayers (to read those articles and Retrospective Reviews from Volume II, Number 1 August/September 1980 to Volume II, Number 6 June/July 1981 [click here](#)). I thought at that time that the 1978 vintage was outstanding. And, that not only were the best wines really great, but that they would evolve and develop over a long period of time. That has happened. The best of the 1978s have been a pleasure to drink for over 30

years and are still superb today. I can only hope that some of these 2013s will evolve in the same manner. The vintage may not be as consistent as 1978. After all, our evaluation of the 1978 vintage was after tasting over 400 different Red Burgundies after they were bottled! We shall see. But, what I know from the 2013 barrel tastings is that the best of the wines have a purity and balance combined with flavor and finesse that I have rarely encountered in all my years of tasting Burgundy from barrel. So now all we have to do is see how the 2013s turn out after bottling and then follow what promises to be a long evolution over time. It should be quite a journey and one I look forward to. But, as always, it is important to keep in mind the caveat that selectivity is extremely important.

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 [Along the Burgundy Trail Vintage 2010](#)). 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.