

SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE
DU
DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI

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October 23rd, 2012

2012 Harvest report

In some years the birth of a vintage is easy. The *vigneron's* intervention is quiet and rare, as that of the crew of a sailboat navigating by calm weather. But it is not rare that the road towards the birth of a vintage looks like war, a constant fight to keep the boat afloat without too much damage. That was the case in 2012, a unique vintage - but which isn't? - and those who were in the front line will remember for a long time the fights that Nature imposed on us by putting forward its best "soldiers": mildew and *oidium*.

March was dry however and almost like summer (average of 22°C), which caused an early budburst, even earlier than in 2007, a year of reference for precocity. We could already see ourselves harvesting in August! But what we kept in mind during this outstanding month was the thunder that rumbled on March 26th. This situation was exceptional, but premonitory to what gods had in store for Nicolas Jacob, our vineyard manager, and his team.

From April, we saw a complete change in the weather: cold (- 2° C on April 13th) and humidity set in. As a result it was impossible to enter the vineyards to do the ploughing and with all the rain grass grew like crazy. For the same reasons, it was extremely difficult to apply the treatments: we had to watch out for the smallest "window" of dry weather to give the vines the needed protection. Despite constant attention, mildew appeared and even struck very hard causing a loss of the crop that was difficult to evaluate. Oidium also developed with those favorable conditions. Even hail came hitting the whole Côte de Beaune and especially our Montrachet, on June 30th. Flowering began around June 9th and, due to the cold temperatures, spread out over one month. *Coulure* was, as we could expect, significant.

What was the assessment of those three months when it rained every three days! :

- the crop was already reduced because of *coulure* and oidium and there was a risk of differences in ripeness as the flowering was very spread out ;
- but at the same time *coulure* created a noticeable percentage of *millerandage* berries, which is always a factor to quality ;
- the vineyards were vigorous and healthy ;
- another positive point: after a fast beginning, like a sprinter, the development of vegetation was slower and as a consequence we could do all the manual works, pruning for instance, without hurrying and with efficiency ;
- and of course the growing season returned almost to normal. From the flowering we were aware that the harvest would take place only at the end of September.

In late June, there was a last "eccentric" episode: a few scorching days "burnt" the young berries that were the most exposed to the sun resulting in a reduction of the crop. We knew that an additional sorting at harvest time would be necessary to eliminate these berries.

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In July, at last, Nature became wiser. We had losses, but the enemy was retreating. Thanks to milder conditions, we could resume ploughing, sometimes three consecutive times, in

order to free the vineyards from the invading grass.

The last treatments were performed in early August as a precaution. We only had to hope for better weather, closer to what we are used to.

This is what finally happened.

August was warm and beautiful with a heat wave and storms around the 15th. Each time, although the wind was often blowing from the South, the beautiful weather returned. The vineyards, thanks to the rainy weather that had preceded, could generously feed the grapes. The work of photosynthesis was favored and the production of sugar increased rapidly. On the eve of the harvest we could observe the following:

- the clusters had small grapes with very thick skins and a lot of *millerandage*,
- quite a number of the grapes exposed to the sun had “burnt” during the heat waves, especially in June. On some grapes, one or two berries remained green. These would be removed at the harvest,
- there was no trace of botrytis at all.

To sum up, the grapes were healthy and we could wait until full ripeness. This is exactly what we did, running the risk of going beyond the 100 days that normally separate the midflowering from the harvest.

We finally began the picking in Corton and a few other young vineyards in Vosne-Romanée on Friday, September 21st, with a small team and the “big harvest” started in Vosne-Romanée on September 24th. Unfortunately there was a change for the worse in the weather on Tuesday and on Wednesday, it rained all day long. We of course stopped the harvest and waited with anguish as we feared the attacks of botrytis the day after... But it did not come!!

Two phenomena allowed preserving the grapes from any attacks: the skins of the grapes were thick and resistant, and temperatures were cold, very cold for the season, which kept botrytis from developing. The harvest was in a perfect sanitary state.

Of course, as usual, we had to perform a selective picking: let fall the “burnt” berries was the main work. In other words, selection was easy and we saw a beautiful crop filing past on the sorting table, one of the most beautiful in recent years. As the weather was cool, we had no problem at all when the grapes were brought into the winery. The temperature was around 15°C. Fermentation started slowly and progressively after a few days of maceration.

Fermentations have lasted for three weeks now under the “loving” supervision of Bernard Noblet and his staff. First devattings started with Romanée-Conti that, considering its level of maturity, was the first one to be harvested. The wines are promising with beautiful colors, fresh and delicate fragrances.

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A separate chapter is necessary for the Montrachet, as the Côte de Beaune has been hit by hail twice and grapes have consequently suffered a lot. The harvest took place on September 28th before ending the harvest of red wines. The grapes were spoilt by botrytis, oidium and hail and a very selective sorting had to be made. The crop is very small, the smallest of these last years. We can count on an excellent quality, but the yield is barely half of normal.

The yields of red wines are approximately 20hl/ha, that is around 25% less than usual. In comparison, in 2009 the yields were 30hl/ha.

In such a year, we realize more than ever - if need be - the importance of luck and gambling in the success or the failure in the face of a vintage. Repeating what I said last year, it is essential to wait until the grapes are fully ripe. It was easier this year with healthy grapes. But in both cases, we had to wait until full maturity and we were fortunate enough that the weather conditions were our ally: the cold permitted the grapes to go through the heavy rains that we experienced on Wednesday September 26th without being attacked by botrytis.

It is obvious that the loss of the crop that resulted from the mildew attacks and heat waves was significant. But this was also a factor that favored quality. This natural thinning reduced the yield, but enabled the healthy grapes to ripen more fully. It is very likely that we would not have reached such a maturity and quality if we had not lost a part of the crop. The harvest proceeded in the following order:

Corton September 21st

Romanée-Conti September 22nd

Grands-Echezeaux September 23rd, 24th & 25th

La Tâche September 25th & 27th

Richebourg September 27th & 28th

Montrachet September 28th

Romanée-St-Vivant September 28th & 29th

Echezeaux September 29th & 30th