

## 2007 – detailed report from the Loire

8 Jan 2008 by JR

Chinon- based brokers Charles and Philippa Sydney send the following report on the 2007 vintage in the Loire.

Back in 2002 I quoted Pierre Couly, 'doyen' and mentor of Chinon who said we shouldn't worry about the crummy summer as it was only 'the first three and the last three weeks that matter'. Pierre was right then – and he's surely right again this year, with its great spring, awful summer and wonderful 'arrière saison'.

But that's hindsight. At the time, Phil and I did wonder about taking a sabbatical - especially as we returned from holidays on the 20 Aug, watching the clouds close in, the rain get heavier and the temperature drop as we crossed France: 20° at Perpignan, 16° at Cahors, 14° at Poitiers... Ouch!

Then the sun came out and with it a nice steady wind to dry out any outbreaks of rot – ideal weather conditions that stayed with us. Great conditions for those who'd invested the time and care in running the vines properly – 2007 was a great year for showing off the benefits of grassed through vineyards, spring de-budding and summer de- leafing.

Those who didn't get it right – and also the vast majority of organic and biodynamic producers – were heavily hit by mildew, resulting in tiny yields of unripe grapes. 2007 is also a great year to show off the benefits of using the [viticulturally] sustainable rules of *la lutte raisonnée!*

During harvest, the growers were smiling, even if there was a clear touch of 'fingers crossed' to comments about the similarities to 2002 and 1996. Although the grapes were healthy and degrees high, acidities seemed high too.

The reality is of course more complex and reflects clearly my earlier comments about vineyard management.

Where things are good, the wines are way better than in 2002, reflecting changes in the way the vines are run, giving much greater ripeness than before. However, yields across the region are low, often down to 40 hl/ ha or even less.

In **Muscadet** the best wines are rich, concentrated and balanced – infinitely better than 2006. If not a 'great' vintage, 2007 is in that line of 'classic' Loire vintages like 1996 and 2002.

The **Anjou** Chenins as always cover a multitude of facets, with 'base' wines being as lean and miserable as ever. However, those growers fully committed to the new idea of hyper- ripe barrel- fermented dry whites have made some stunningly fresh and concentrated cuvées. Along the slopes of the Coteaux du Layon and Aubance, the better producers made some of the most glorious moelleux cuvées, though to be honest, in some cases their main problem was keeping potential degrees down as pickings were coming in at 22°, 23° and even more!

For Claude Branchereau at the Domaine des Forges, 2007 is almost too good... with over 140 hectolitres coming in at over 24° potential (that's over 200 gm/ litre natural residual sugar) but with yields well below 20 hl/ ha, one understands his 'we could have done with 2° less ripeness and 4 hl/ ha more wine!'

In **Chinon**, **Bourgueil** and **Saumur**- Champigny the reds are a surprise. Although we saw growers waiting as long as possible before picking – and then picking selectively, rejecting those bunches that were unripe or which had started to shrivel - we didn't really believe they would achieve the phenolic maturity needed to take Loire Cabernet Francs beyond that green herbaceousness and give them that pulpy fat and fruit we've seen in recent vintages. Tasting the wines with the best growers has been a real treat as even where wines have been picked at below 13°, the maturity is there and we've still got that great jammy fruit, depth and balance. Again, 2007 walks on 2002.

Up river in **Vouvray** and **Montlouis**, the heavier tuff soils meant growers had to pick early, so even the best producers stuck largely to making dry and demi-sec wines, with moelleux like Alex Monmousseau's Réserve cuvées a rarity. Where the vines were not treated sensibly (and this includes organic producers), there was a lot of mildew and grey rot. Where the work was done, growers have made some delightfully fresh, elegant wines – and over in Montlouis, Jacky Blot and a number of go- ahead youngsters have made some truly superb barrel- fermented dry Chenins.

To the south in the Haut Poitou and east in the Touraine, Sancerre and Pouilly, there are some great **Sauvignons** – nicely *typé* and concentrated (low yields helped here, even if that's certainly going to affect prices in Sancerre!). 2007 is lovely in the Touraine, Haut Poitou and Pouilly, a little leaner in Sancerre where they had (even) more rain over the summer. To my mind, this isn't a great vintage – but it is (again!) a real Loire classic.

A year for critical enjoyment, then, 2007 is way, way better than ever we had reason to expect – hence our christening 2007 'The Great Escape'.

Enjoy!