

## Loire 2008 update

28 Jan 2009 by Charles Sydney

Charles Sydney, courtier en vins de Loire, sends this update to his [September vintage report](#) now that he has tasted many of the wines.

To summarise this remarkable harvest, 2008 is just like 2007, only with both more and less of it! In fact we did think of calling this the 'Grand Petit Millésime'.

**Less**, obviously, as a result of a dramatic spring frost in the Muscadet that cut yields by half – sometimes by much more – and of devastating summer hail that swept across swathes of Pouilly Fumé and the more unfortunate villages in Sancerre. But even vineyards that escaped these two scourges suffered from reduced yields, leaving the Loire as a whole 25% - 30% down on a normal year's harvest.

**More**, though, because quite frankly 2008 is a bigger, better vintage than 2007 (as always, I'm talking about wines from those growers with the courage to gamble with the weather and wait for maturity), with wines that have more concentration of fruit and bigger breadth of structure.

In **Muscadet**, despite the tiny harvest, quality is high, although some growers (not ours!) were in such a hurry to harvest after the constant rain of end August and early September that their wines show signs of rot and the high acidity of unripe grapes. The better growers picked any parcelles that had started to show signs of rot, then waited – and were rewarded (as was the whole region) with fine sunny and cool weather right through September and October, allowing them to pick at a ripeness and acidity at least on a par with 2007.

For the dreadful summer had one big advantage here in the Loire – it slowed the maturity of the grapes to such an extent that when the sun did come out in the 2nd week of September, we still had those essential 3 weeks left before harvest... Leading to harvesting in the glorious autumnal colours that have given the vintage its name of 'The Golden Harvest'.

The **Sauvignons** of the Touraine, the southern Loire, of Sancerre and Pouilly are excellent - more precise, more aromatic and more concentrated than 2007, with comparable acidities. Again, better growers are comparing this to 1996 and 2002, but beware all the same – there were problems of mildew and therefore of a lack of maturity with growers unwilling or incapable of treating the vines properly. Interestingly, the best wines seem to come from growers who were happy to stop and start picking as and when each parcel ripened – and it was notable that Pinard, Bourgeois and Dagueneau (where Didier's son Benjamin looks to equal his father in his search for quality) were among the first to start picking and the last to finish!

Here in the middle of the Loire, the **reds** are altogether bigger wines than last year and the best Chinons, Bourgueils and Saumur- Champignys attained fine phenolic maturity, giving deep colour, pulpy ripe fruit and structure. The Malbecs of the Touraine and the Pinots of Sancerre and the central vineyards are also showing promise.

The only exception to this rule is with the **Chenins** (Chenin grapes pictured above), where the early promise of a truly great sweet wine vintage was wrecked by a month's rain that started end October just as the grapes were really starting to concentrate – giving some of the lowest degrees in 10 years! That said, and more importantly, the dry barrel-fermented Chenins of Anjou and Saumur have more fruit and purity even than the excellent 07s. And Jacky Blot, our star in the Touraine, rates 2008 as a great vintage for the dry Chenins of Vouvray and Montlouis.

Finally, whatever happens to prices in the UK, this is not the growers' fault. The vast majority of our producers have again held prices and any increases are due to the combination of a voluntarily low £ to euro exchange rate and to iniquitous increases in duty that make for 44% tax on a £4.99 bottle – and just 16% on a bottle worth £49.99!

Whatever - it's a good vintage – enjoy it!