

Old vines triumph in 2007 - Burgundy and the Rhône

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Machine Source: Inexpensive California importer of some of top growers in Burgundy and the Rhône such as Henri Jayer (in his day), Domaine Larozy and Chateau Pichay, sends the following report of the 2007 harvest in Burgundy, which I thought might be of interest

BURGUNDY

There is a saying in Burgundy, September but in win (September makes the wine), it applied in 1978 when the entire summer was overcast with cool temperatures, and by the end of August, the grapes looked like little green English peas. This year, as the growers came back from their short vacation in anticipation of an early harvest, they were depressed, totally undone, almost despondent. The weather had been cool, grey, and rainy with a low of 10° C and a high of 15° C.

After a very hot April with August temperatures which advanced blooming by a month, the growers were planning the harvest between mid-August and early September. The last day vendanges (just of harvest) was declared on 15 Aug, giving the growers a larger margin of time. As Lalou Bea-Leroy (owner of heretofore estate) said, "This is the year where microclimates have to be taken seriously."

Beginning 25 Aug, the weather warmed up and the sun finally came out. Temperatures rose to 20-25° C. The grapes started turning red immediately and the sugar content rose simultaneously. My first visit on 2 Sep was to Dominique Cornin in Charente, who could see the positive results of his four years of biodynamic farming paying off. His grapes were golden and sweet, with a sugar level between 11.5° and 12.5°, as well as good acidity. The soil was turned over at the foot of each vine and green grass in the middle of the row, absorbing the excess moisture. Of course, each vineyard was harvested according to its degree of ripeness. As for Jean-Thierry of Les Clos, he was, as usual, waiting another couple of weeks to harvest, taking a chance with the weather, but noting that the sugar would continue to concentrate.

Going to Côte de Nuits, Arnaud Moret began harvest 1 Sep and had left his Geneva Les Clos St Jacques for Stavelay the 8th. In looking at his vineyard, he had removed some leaves to allow the bunches to ripen. The old vines had a lot of milleridge, rough skin, and were very dark in colour. Some vines had milleridge, some didn't, but since he was using a sorting table with a float of his crew handpicking each grape, there is every chance that the result will be very positive. Emmanuel Rouget also finished his harvest 5 Sep.

By 6 Sep, Lalou Bea-Leroy had harvested all of her reds, with the exception of Muscadet and Aubey-Georges. Christophe Perrot-Minot had left his Grand Clos for the end of that week and also had a second sorting table so as not to miss any defective bunches. In Côte de Beaune, Sébastien Gay in Chigny-les-Beaune finished harvesting 6 Sep, Claude Chevillard in Ladoix was waiting to harvest his whites until later, and Nicolas Rossignol in Volney had also finished his harvest and was very excited about the 2007 vintage.

After a visit to the Côte de Nuits and Dru Noyon's starting new winery in Cuis de Noyon, I came back to Burgundy and drove to Meursault and Chassagne-Montrachet under perfect summer weather. Everyone had big smiles on their faces. They were waiting for more opening and right so. In Meursault, François Jubbard and son Antoine picked from 4 Sep until 11 Sep, finishing with Puligny-Trévi. There was no milleridge. François reminded me that he never uses weedkillers and had cut the grass between rows a week before harvest. The alcohol varied between 12.2° and 12.6°. Small bunches with a tough skin will result in a smaller quantity, but better quality, with a lot of aromas, high acidity and a lot of malic acid. His first fermentation started naturally on the fourth day with no addition of commercial yeast.

Michel Noyon-Coffinet and son Thibault in Chassagne were busy emptying fermenting tanks and transferring to barrels. They started their Pinot Noir on 6 Sep. Their Clos St-Jean was mixed with milleridge, while that Morgat was a bit healthier. They claim to have lost close to 20% of their yield after sorting out the grapes.

Meanwhile, I called Jean-Thierry, who was waiting weather week or so to harvest, believing in his lucky star. He started harvest on 17 Sep. On 25 Sep, with warm, sunny fall weather, Jean took me to his Burgundy vineyard. The grapes looked great, with a tough skin and less juice, but the quality is there.

On Monday, 24 Sep, I went back to Domaine Larozy. Lalou had already transferred her whites into new barrels. This year, however, there is no François Pinot "Aïcha", but instead Cécile "Toussain". The quality of the wood was impressive. She offered to taste a couple of appellations. The new wines tasted so good for their age that we went from Nuits les Bouteilles to Corton, Clos de la Roche, Maugny, and finally Richebourg. There were fantastic food aromas, a great purity of fruit, amazing colour and soft tannins. She produced 17 more barrels than in 06! She claims she had almost no milleridge. Her Clos-Chaillange was harvested on the 19th.

For years, vineyards were embarrassed by the appearance of Lalou's vineyards (biodynamically cultivated for more than 20 years). A couple of them, one being Nicolas Rossignol whose Volney vineyards is below here, told me that her Sarcosites du Milieu was looking fantastic. André Pouchard made the same remark, so Lalou and I drove to her Volney vineyards and then to her Muscadet vineyard. They were in excellent condition! I had to take a picture.

Lalou explained that 20 years ago, her best biodynamic consultant, François Bouché, had advised her to replace her sickly looking Volney vineyards vineyard. She refused and decided to give it a chance. In fact, she also claimed that her Romane St-Vivert was almost as good! She is quite pleased with the result now. But, 20 years is what it took! Bouché!

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After consulting with Emmanuel and Françoise Reynaud, I was driving to Châteauneuf on Sunday the 15th in order to harvest the Grenache Blanc on Monday. The next morning the harvest was postponed as it was raining to everybody's delight. Châteauneuf, like the rest of the Rhône Valley, had had a very dry summer. Not a drop of rain. Monday night, a storm brought 13mm of rain in Châteauneuf and 18mm at Châteauneuf de Fossumin. Emmanuel postponed again, not worrying about mildew since the rain would dry the grapes, which it did. Since we were not harvesting, Françoise and I walked to the vineyard of Laurence Fournel (Dorn de Puygnet, west to Ripon and behind Châteauneuf de Fossumin. She was on the tractor sorting our grapes, quite pleased with the size and the ripeness, but she was saying her best vineyards had been vineyards for her and harvested over 20 days with 20 Sep. Finally, the next morning, we went and cut some Grenache Blanc at Ripon. The bunches were beautiful and I looked here and there to see their sweetness.

Emmanuel was determined to wait longer for his red Grenache and decided to pick Syrah and Crouzet, and finally the Grenache at Fossumin. Challenging the weather report, he was determined to wait another ten days for his Ripon Grenache and had been picking grapes the last week of October until the 10th. He informed me that Grenache always takes longer to open. Laurence and Emmanuel both agreed that we were on the way to a great vintage. The way they talked about the quality of their harvest was like listening to new parents at the birth of their first child. Just as in Burgundy, they were concerned about the ripeness due to the drought and the lack of sun. There was no vegetable garden at Ripon this year...The bees are dying and it was a very serious concern for everyone.

Going up to Tain l'Hermitage, Gilles Rubin also complained at first of the cool summer, but September was glorious and he harvested as late as the last week of September. Gilles was quite pleased. Bernard Burgard, who had a scare with a hailstorm in June, fortunately was not affected on his side of the mountain where his vineyard is located. Again, he was pleased with the result. Good vintage, but not as outstanding as Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

It is very apparent that in 2007, the cool summer affected everyone and "September made the wine." Micro-climates came into play and the savvy vintner had to carefully determine the date of harvest. A gamble for sure, but it worked.

Following are additional remarks about the vintage.

Young vines are more susceptible to mildew. Older vines have a lot of milleridge, meaning very small bunches with little juice but great concentration. Good vineyard management is the key to quality. For Burgundy, there will be a decrease in production of 15% - 20% from 2006. I predict that this vintage will produce some exceptional wines. This is the year when the serious, talented vintner will make a difference.