2010 vintage report - Loire

21 Mar 2011 by Charles Sydney

As has been remarked on our Members' forum recently, the Loire is a seriously underestimated source of wonderful wine - especially nowadays. Chinon-based wine broker (and talented amateur photographer) Charles Sydney reports on yet another successful vintage there - the first of three reports on last year's growing season we will be publishing this week.

After another cold winter and a perfectly normal summer, picking started in Muscadet mid September on almost exactly at the same date as in 2009. One month later, all the dry whites and reds were in and even the stickies in the Layon were all safely in before the end of October. Now that is fast!

In our preliminary report, we were pretty upbeat, comparing 2010 with 2009 and the better reds with 2005. But what are things actually like? The answer lies in the name we've chosen - 'The Angels' Vintage'. Angel because it's good, but 'Angels' in the plural, because (once again, only more so) the good growers came out smiling - while there's too much acidity in the wines of growers who either over-cropped or who picked early to beat the two or three days of rain that seemed to go on forever.

We thought of 'Demons' too - a recurring 'hic' this year is the mind-boggling stupidity of creating yet more appellations when we could happily halve the existing number. This year's crop include a number of *communale* crus for wines that don't actually need to come from the villages themselves. Saumur-Le Puy-Notre-Dame and Touraine Oisly and Chenonceaux spring to mind. A self-destructive protectionism echoed in St-Pourçain, where the INAO ruled that all reds should include an obligatory 40% Gamay to have AOC status… pushing us to reclassify our La Grille Pinot Noir as Vin de France so as to make better wine.

Muscadets from the better domaines are at least as good as last year - maybe even better - and they have great ripeness, concentration and balanced acidity. Pierre Sauvion's comment of *ravi content* summed it up nicely. Unfortunately, since the 2008 frosts, things haven't been easy here - we expect nearly a third of all growers to fold this year - so some vineyards weren't looked after, leading to outbreaks of rot that then dried, boosting degrees and giving strange eau de vie aromas.

In the **Touraine** and up in **Sancerre** and **Pouilly Fumé**, picking started a week later than last year. Rain around 24 September put the frighteners on some growers but gave clear proof of the advantage of grassing through the vines as water went into the grass and not into the grapes. The best Sauvignons are delightful - to oversimplify, look at somewhere between 2002 and 2008 in style, wines with lovely *typé* aromas and great freshness. 'Angels' such as Jacky Marteau and son Rodolphe in the Touraine, André Figeat in Pouilly, Bertrand Minchin in Menetou and Sancerre's Vincent Pinard and his sons all made wines that have come in nicely over 13%, giving concentration and depth while retaining the hallmark intensity and balance of their wines. Less committed growers let yields run high and even where they picked with high degrees, the wines are lean and frankly a little mean. Sorry, 'mineral'.

In **Chinon**, **Bourgueil** and **Saumur-Champigny**, picking started earlier than last year (a couple of days of rain set off some rot in more fertile vineyards) but the same 'angels' waited, and benefited from an extra two weeks of bright sunny weather and cooling winds. They've made wines that are certainly better than the 2009s and have much of the fruit and sweet natural ripeness of the 2005s. Add the growing move away from extraction and you'll see loads of wines worth looking at this year! They're picking Jackie Blot's Bourgueil in the picture above.

For the Chenins, as always there's a big difference between **Vouvray** and the Layon, with a touch more rain in Vouvray soaking into the richer soil and causing problems early in the harvest - though even here the sun and wind more than saved things in the second week, giving some growers the chance to make some fine and pure moelleux to add spice to some fine dry and demi-sec wines.

In the **Coteaux du Layon**, things could hardly have been better. A few days of rain could have pushed things either way, but the sunshine throughout October concentrated things wonderfully. We have some fabulous dry whites - and some of the most impressive liquoreux stickies we've seen in ages as *passerillage* and botrytis combined to give huge ripeness and purity. *Un millésime béni* says Claude Papin (whose first *trie* grapes are shown here) and he ought to know - he's one of the angels!