

DOMAINE
DE VILLAINÉ

Propriétaire à Bouzeron et Rully

Bouzeron, 11 décembre 2024

What a strange vintage that was 2023!

It seemed to us at the beginning that all would be well, that applying all our knowledge to produce great wines would not be too difficult. We kept in mind the 2022 vintage where the weather had accompanied us like an ally in choosing the right date to harvest and to search for a harmonious maturity of our grapes.

It was not the case for two reasons:

First of all, the weather had never been as temperamental, forcing us to question a large part of our habits. Facing these climatic surges, which are difficult to predict, was our traditional approach still as appropriate as before to produce great wines?

We had to agree to come out of our comfort zone, to question our practices and our approach, to seek new ways to best respond to new climatic challenges.

The yields were another cause for reflection.

Indeed, Burgundy with the 2023 vintage, has never have produced so much wine (1,900,000 hectolitres for 32,301 hectares, or a ratio of 58.82hl/ha)

Was this the goal of all the practices that we implement each year: to produce even more at the risk of making the song of the terroir inaudible, stifled by the sounds of technology and grapes without a soul?

This generosity, which is sometimes characteristic of a vintage, should not be confused with the abundance of the fruits.

It is of course not the route that the domaine has chosen. All our energy has been spent on the service of our vines, to provide at every stage of the “construction” of this vintage, the most accurate and precise reflections. All of this, so as to master the production of the fruits of each vine without exhausting them, so they can age and transcribe their terroir for as long as possible.

The story of this vintage ultimately is not just about having worked with or against the forces of nature. But rather to having applied what all the vinegrowers have agreed to do for such a long time in Burgundy : expressing the terroir, by transforming the sunlight, the heat, the atmosphere of a place into a living and intoxicating thing that we call wine.

THE WEATHER

We had left each other, after the 2022 harvest, happy and relieved.

We were able to carry out our first biodynamic preparation (500P)

Then, while the wines were looking for and finding their way to the cellar, the weather of the first 2023 quarter was also generally milder than normal.

This enabled us to carry out work in the vineyard under good conditions, in particular the manuring of our biodynamic compost, the holes used for the autumn’s plantings, the ploughing in order to prepare our terroirs for the winter frost, the repairs of trellising and the last bottlings thanks to the low atmospheric pressures.

It should be noted that during this period, from January until the end of February, little rainfall disrupted our work, and we found ourselves in water deficit of 80%, which will have its importance much later in the season at the time of flowering, even if March would be rather rainy.

This mild weather in January until the beginning of April, alternated often between moderate and slightly cooler periods.

These temperatures, significantly higher than normal, accompanied by warm sunlight from 29th February marked the end of the wintry rest of the vine and the resumption of its growing cycle

The very first green tips were noticed in the first days of April in some of our Pinot Noirs, notably in Bourgogne Côte Chalonnaise La Fortune et Rully 1er Cru rouge « Champs Cloux ». Then the other vines followed and mid-bud burst was reached between 9th and 17th April.

This warm, bright and dry weather encouraged the beginning of flowering during Pentecost weekend (27th - 29th May). This flowering spread quickly to finish in good conditions by mid-June even if the lack of rainfall at the beginning of the year leads to some coulure phenomena (unfertilised flowers which do not produce fruits), mainly on the Chardonnay.

The summer months, from May onwards, were marked not only by periods of calm, favourable to the normal cycle of the vine, and to the work of the team but also by activities of storms, more active than in recent years and at times, more violent but fortunately without significant impact in Bouzeron, Rully and Mercurey.

The first real heatwaves occurred at the beginning of July with a peak during the week of the 2nd. We decided not to work the soils to preserve the maximum humidity on the surface and to encourage the roots to search for the needed energy in the world down-under, to resist the weather that had become more extreme above.

The grass management at this time was difficult and I could never thank the team enough to agreeing to till by hand the entirety of our vines.

This weather alternated between periods of heat and violent storms which forced us to juggle between vineyard work and the ultra-rapid growth on one side, and on the other, the phytosanitary treatments combined to herbal teas and plant decoctions as a way to control diseases (mildew and oidium).

Overall, we were able to keep up, and even if the pressure of disease remained intense- demanding a constant vigilance from the team, the vines held up and we remained confident.

Véraison, the moment when the berries go from green to bright red for the Pinot Noir, and to a translucent yellow for the Aligoté Doré and the Chardonnay grapes, properly started in the last days of July. This was a sign that the ripening of the grapes was underway.

It was slowed down by some meteorological shocks between periods of high heat and storms bringing a little freshness and rain before the storm cycle started again.

It was only in the last few days of August, with the more noticeable return of rainfall and more moderate temperatures that the ripening followed a good rhythm.

The sugar levels progressed nicely and warmer weather at the beginning of September boosted the accumulation of sugar in the berries as well as contributing to a reduction in the total acidity levels.

We began sampling on August 30th and tasted the fruits very regularly to establish the moment when maturity and balance between sugar concentrations, total acidity level, and accumulation of anthocyanins would be optimal.

We decided to start the harvest on September 8th with healthy vines. We felt that they [the wines] were rather relieved to pass the baton and to give us ripe grapes, ready to reveal each of its terroirs.

Harvest finished on September 22nd with the Aligoté Doré in Bouzeron.

We hope this weather, even if changeable, was successful in letting the heat of the air, the sunlight, the memory of the water feeding the vine, its grapes and the living being underground- which are different from plot to plot, to promote the expression of each of our terroirs through all the wines from the domaine.

We thank you in advance for the trust that you give us, please accept our warmest regards,

Pierre de Benoist