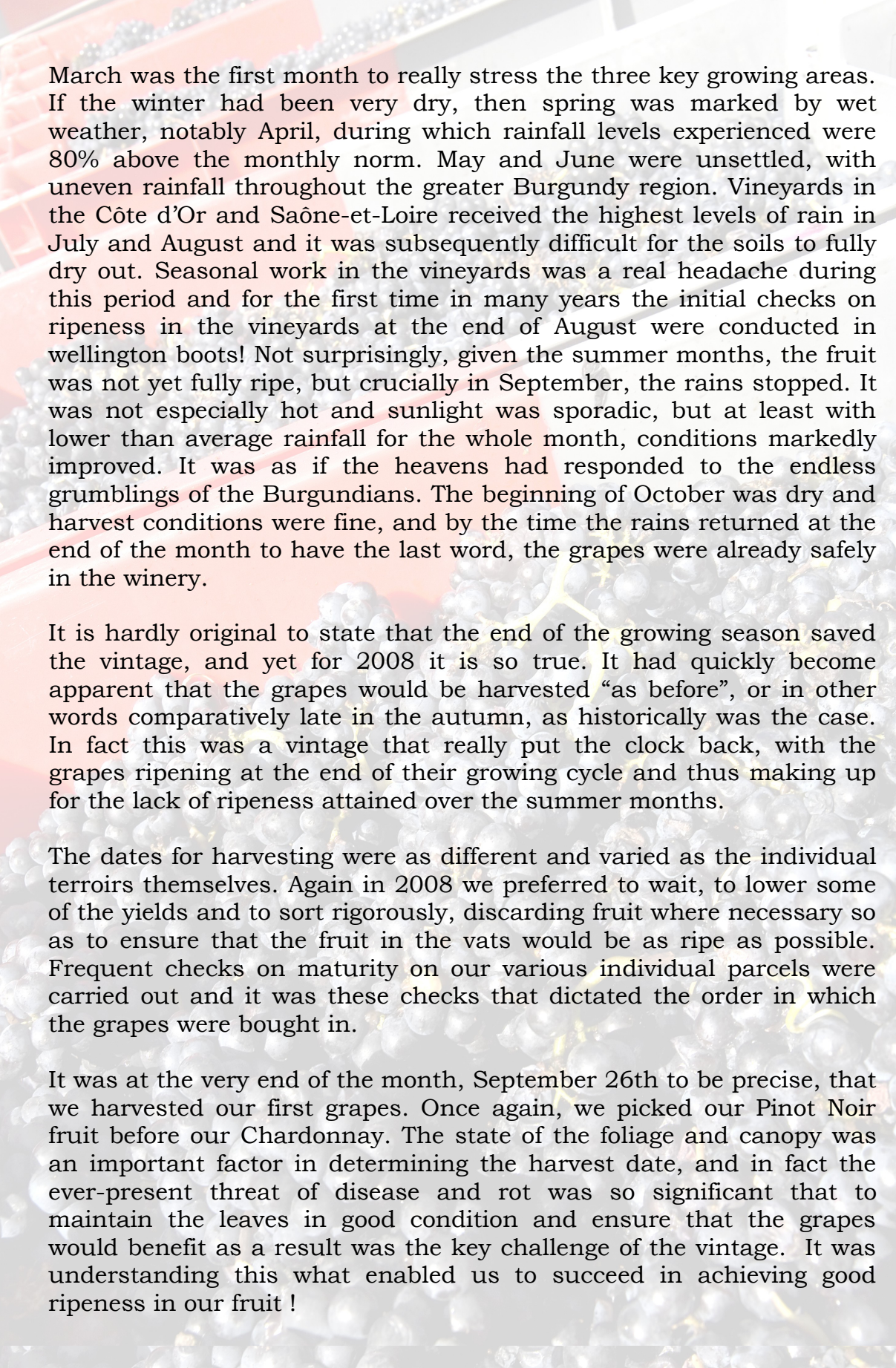


The 2008 Vintage

☞ Climate ☞

- ❖ From December to February the onset of winter was looming. The mildness of January was therefore notable, with temperatures exceeding 2.5° Celsius above the seasonal average. February was categorised as “hot”, with the abiding memory of the temperature reaching almost 20° Celsius in Auxerre on 24th February 2008.
- ❖ This early spring did not become a “real” spring however until the end of March, and the month was cooler than normal with frequent frosts in the last week. We had to wait until mid-April for the temperature to rise to its usual level and the memory of a cold, grey Easter, throughout which the wearing of scarves and overcoats was required, remains with us. The end of April was a little warmer in general, but even the closing days of the month were marked by a slight coolness. Finally the weather in May convinced us that the sun was still there! We even had average temperatures that were almost 6° Celsius above the seasonal norm and heralded the start of the summer. The weeks from the 8th – 24th May were especially hot, but June was mixed, with the first fortnight relatively cool and the last two weeks of the month experiencing temperatures which frequently rose to above 29° Celsius.
- ❖ Repeated cloudy spells meant that the weather in July and August was below expectations, and in both the Côte d’Or and Saône-et-Loire the temperatures were below the seasonal averages, with only the Yonne about on target. It was, in summary, a cool summer, and one that ended with a September that was equally cool. It was a worrying time as we headed for a traditional, historic October harvest, but fortunately the October weather was fine.
- ❖ The winter of 2008 was exceptionally and abundantly sunny, up to and including February. Conditions during this period were pleasant but Nature quickly redressed the balance, with the resultant weather in March and April overcast with little sunlight and luminosity. Vineyard growth was slow to start, with bud burst towards the end of April marked by little sunshine. Despite pockets of stormy weather, May temperatures were above average, especially towards the start of the month – would this be a good omen for June? Apparently not as sunshine levels were down on average over 30%, the lowest levels seen in just over a decade. This very much set the tone for the rest of the summer, with cloudy, overcast weather and a distinct lack of sunshine up to and including the start of September. The traditional pattern of an October harvest would follow.

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- ❖ March was the first month to really stress the three key growing areas. If the winter had been very dry, then spring was marked by wet weather, notably April, during which rainfall levels experienced were 80% above the monthly norm. May and June were unsettled, with uneven rainfall throughout the greater Burgundy region. Vineyards in the Côte d'Or and Saône-et-Loire received the highest levels of rain in July and August and it was subsequently difficult for the soils to fully dry out. Seasonal work in the vineyards was a real headache during this period and for the first time in many years the initial checks on ripeness in the vineyards at the end of August were conducted in wellington boots! Not surprisingly, given the summer months, the fruit was not yet fully ripe, but crucially in September, the rains stopped. It was not especially hot and sunlight was sporadic, but at least with lower than average rainfall for the whole month, conditions markedly improved. It was as if the heavens had responded to the endless grumblings of the Burgundians. The beginning of October was dry and harvest conditions were fine, and by the time the rains returned at the end of the month to have the last word, the grapes were already safely in the winery.
 - ❖ It is hardly original to state that the end of the growing season saved the vintage, and yet for 2008 it is so true. It had quickly become apparent that the grapes would be harvested “as before”, or in other words comparatively late in the autumn, as historically was the case. In fact this was a vintage that really put the clock back, with the grapes ripening at the end of their growing cycle and thus making up for the lack of ripeness attained over the summer months.
 - ❖ The dates for harvesting were as different and varied as the individual terroirs themselves. Again in 2008 we preferred to wait, to lower some of the yields and to sort rigorously, discarding fruit where necessary so as to ensure that the fruit in the vats would be as ripe as possible. Frequent checks on maturity on our various individual parcels were carried out and it was these checks that dictated the order in which the grapes were bought in.
 - ❖ It was at the very end of the month, September 26th to be precise, that we harvested our first grapes. Once again, we picked our Pinot Noir fruit before our Chardonnay. The state of the foliage and canopy was an important factor in determining the harvest date, and in fact the ever-present threat of disease and rot was so significant that to maintain the leaves in good condition and ensure that the grapes would benefit as a result was the key challenge of the vintage. It was understanding this what enabled us to succeed in achieving good ripeness in our fruit !


The 2008 Vintage

❧ Growth Cycle ❧

2008 - *Not as late as all that, just “as before” !*

- ❖ If the winter in Burgundy was very mild and rather dry, this was not the case in spring. After a relatively cool first fortnight in April, the most advanced vineyard parcels began their growth cycle around the 17th April. A few frosts did cause some damage, especially in the Yonne, but then temperatures rose steadily, to a point that was almost summery over the weekend of 26th – 27th April. Bud burst took place almost universally amongst the various parcels at this point, with beautiful warm weather, although this was the latest recorded date for 14 years.
- ❖ May and June were cool and the vines therefore grew slowly. It took several sessions to complete the tying back and tying in and full flowering only came around 10th June for the Chardonnay sites and 15th June for the Pinot Noir. The lack of sunshine, and the resulting coolness, retarded both the levels, and the development of flowers, thus not only was the number of eventual bunches lower than in 2007, but their were fewer berries and uneven bunch ripeness and maturity.
- ❖ The wet, early summer necessitated strict treatment of green fruit. Indeed in 2008, green harvesting was carried out early, at the beginning of July, so as to allow the vines time to dry out properly between showers and to prevent localised humidity from developing and remaining amongst the rows of vines.
- ❖ As in 2007, in vineyard sites prone to disease, where the cold winter weather had not completely neutralised fungal elements, in spring the pressure was on to deal with any issues relating to disease at the start of the growth cycle. Usually, such sites are nicely dried out in the summer months, but in 2008 the months of July and August were too wet to eliminate these problems. Mildew was especially serious and in evidence on the foliage, even on vines that had been treated, lightened and thinned out by green harvesting.
- ❖ During the whole growth cycle the soil struggled to dry out completely between showers, making general access to work in the vineyards difficult. It was necessary for us to find a compromise between restricting production and confronting the onset of disease, whilst working in areas where soils had dried out sufficiently. We realised very quickly that for the vintage to be a success, it was imperative that the canopy was kept healthy so as to allow for good levels of photosynthesis, and the resultant good ripeness of fruit that this would facilitate.

- ❖ By 15th August the onset of ripening was far from complete, indeed not even yet halfway there. Independent of other factors such as bunch weight, aspect and even vine age, the onset of the ripening cycle was out of step due to the autumnal conditions experienced during the summer. Ripening was both slow and variable, not just in general in the three main areas of Burgundy but also within individual plots. Accordingly, checks on ripeness levels only began during the first days of September and the first results (based on tasting of the berries) confirmed that the fruit was not yet ready and that we would have to wait.
- ❖ End of August, a time where the condition of the foliage is a key determining factor. In certain parcels where leaf thinning and a general loosening had taken place however, completion of ripening was jeopardised chronologically by the fact that the harvest was clearly a long way off, and it was necessary for the vines to have a longer than usual hang time. This was still a difficult message to get across to certain growers, but we encouraged them to make a last treatment in mid-August. Then, at the beginning of September, we conducted a continual aeration of the vines (including further reduction of unripe fruit, aeration of individual bunches and de tangling from trellis wiring).
- ❖ At the start of September mildew, oïdium and general botrytis were all prevalent in varying degrees in the vineyards. No single treatment strategy was entirely effective and the early signs of botrytis were seen almost universally. That said the incidence of the disease and its respective severity in certain parcels varied hugely, although in general it was the Chardonnay fruit that was most affected.
- ❖ Most fortunately, dry, fresh, sunny weather and a strong north wind with an element of chill returned between mid-September and mid-October. This permitted significant reduction in disease levels and a great improvement in overall vineyard health. Indeed the harvest would have been far harder had it not been for the north wind that, in certain sectors, really saved the day.
- ❖ Once again then, 2008 was a vintage where a compromise between the state of general vineyard health and phenolic ripeness of fruit was crucial. We knew that we would have to sort and discard fruit rigorously, so we focused on ripening the fruit which we preserved as much as possible.
- ❖ The tasting of berries was also key in allowing us to formulate our decisions and overall strategy. The development of fruit flavour in the flesh of the grape, the texture of the tannins (in skins and pips alike) and the facilitation of the extraction of phenolic elements, not least colour, all had to be combined together.

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- ❖ Our harvest at Corton André began on 26th September 2008 : the Pinot Noir grapes displayed variable ripeness and their condition required careful, meticulous sorting, with up to 12 sorters per table selecting only the ripest and healthiest fruit.
 - ❖ The Chardonnay crop was harvested at roughly the same time, although time pressure was actually more relevant for this varietal given its overall general condition. Some pressings were whole bunch and cycles were kept short and pressure levels on the gentle side.
 - ❖ Vinification took place in very good conditions. The strict sorting of fruit from the harvest was undoubtedly the key determining factor in ensuring fine quality in both the white and the red wines.
 - ❖ The élevage of the wines commenced and continued at a gentle pace in our cellars. We began tasting the wines for the first time in December 2008 so as to gain an initial impression of the vintage : there were some nice surprises :

The Whites

Fresh and pure with citrus aromas and enough vitality to show a lovely balance between alcohol and acidity. The natural alcohol levels are correct and the wines show good terroir definition.

The Reds

Beautiful deep colours and plenty of complexity in evidence. Respective acidity and tannin levels differ considerably, thus the macerations were conducted in a reasonably delicate fashion, with the emphasis on soft tannins, ripeness of fruit and good colour. As élevage got underway we noticed soft fruit aromas (strawberry, blackberry and raspberry) and tannins which the barrels would develop and soften.