

The 2009 Vintage

☞ Climate ☞

- ❖ The winter of 2008-2009 in Burgundy lived up to its name as from December to February the temperature was below the seasonal average. This was especially so in January and February with particularly cold conditions (up to 4° Celsius below the seasonal norms).
- ❖ Spring established itself gently and the month of March was in line with the normal seasonal pattern. We had to wait until April however to see significant rises in temperature, but these levels exceeded seasonal norms by almost 2° Celsius, across the region. It should be made clear however that these increases in temperature were not entirely uniform or regular during this period. Indeed during these two spring months, variations between maximum and minimum temperature readings fluctuated significantly from day to day and on the diurnal range. As we entered May these fluctuations continued and there was not less than 8° Celsius of variation between two consecutive days throughout this month. The relevance of this will become clear when the vegetative growth cycle of the vines during this period is analysed. As it was, the month of June turned out to be the spring month closest to seasonal norms with an average temperature of about 18 – 20 ° Celsius, with little significant day to day temperature variations.
- ❖ Summer finally got fully underway with radiant sunshine, and the high summer temperatures were to last throughout July and August. July temperatures followed seasonal norms, but temperatures in August were 3° Celsius above average. The region of Burgundy enjoyed a hot, sunny summer in marked contrast to the previous 3 years, which had seen cooler and more variable day to day weather.
- ❖ Conditions in September were very much in line with this hot summer and the average temperatures were 2° Celsius above the monthly norm. It wasn't until October in fact that the temperatures returned to what might be described as a "normal" level and by this stage the vines were already extremely well advanced. These conditions were uniform across the region and all three departments of Burgundy enjoyed the benefit of this superb Indian summer.
- ❖ The vintage overall was characterised by superfluous, higher than average, levels of sunshine, especially in the months of January, May, June and again more especially in August. July was the exception that proved the rule with lower sunshine levels and plenty of cloud cover, but overall the 2009 vintage was an extremely sunny one, in sharp distinction to the previous summers.





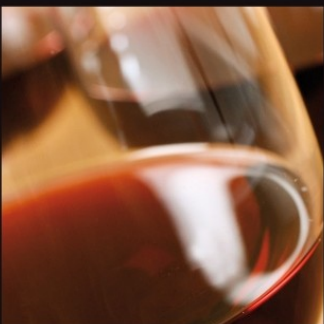
- ❖ If the winter was cold, then it was also equally dry. This was especially so in January, and February also, during which little rain fell and general water levels were low, even in deficit. The onset of spring did not reverse this and indeed the rainfall levels in March were 50% below the seasonal norm, although the weather in April (colder and less sunny) was more usual for the time of year. During the summer months it did not rain often, but occasional storms brought abundant, indeed necessary, rain. In general these storms would have sufficed to bring the rainfall levels up to the required volumes, but it should be noted that rainfall was hugely variable from one department to another. Mâcon for example received twice as much rain as normal in June, whilst for the same month the Yonne was well below average and the Côte d'Or just above the norm. The three months of August, September and October were dry, and this reinforced the effects of the fine summer and the overall quality of the season.



- ❖ Thanks to the clement and settled climatic conditions during the whole of the ripening phase for the grapes, the picking decisions and harvest dates were reasonably easy to make in 2009. Indeed the hot, dry summer, along with the benefit of balanced water levels allowed us to take our time and harvest the fruit gradually at levels of perfect ripeness. Despite the perfect conditions we still focused very carefully on the order in which plots were picked and did not deviate from our normal practise of checking and re-checking ripeness levels in all of the separate parcels.




- ❖ Around the **beginning of September, the 10th to be exact**, we harvested our first grapes. The Pinot Noir fruit was actually picked after the Chardonnay, as acidity levels in the Chardonnay grapes needed to be preserved, given that they began to drop after 15th September, and much care was required at this level. Of course all the grapes went over the sorting table as normal, but very few had to be discarded and it became evident very quickly that the overall harvest was both abundant with extremely good quality of fruit, excellent ripeness, richness and concentration. With brimming vats the wine making for the vintage got underway with a drumroll.





The 2009 Vintage


❧ Growth Cycle ❧

2009: When Quantity rhymed with Quality

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The coolness of the second fortnight in March was soon forgotten, as from the very start of April temperatures rose quite significantly and the growing cycle continued without further delay. From 6th April onwards, following three days of summer weather, the first budding occurred in the most advanced sites of the Côte de Beaune and then very quickly the first flush of leaves appeared. Bud burst for the Chardonnay fruit occurred on or around the 11th April for the Côte de Beaune sites and the Mâconnais and around a day later on 12th April for the majority of Pinot Noir sites in the Côte d'Or and Saône et Loire. We were following, at this stage at least, a similar growing pattern to that experienced in the 2005 vintage.
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Fluctuations in May and June temperatures led to flowering in two stages. The fine weather at the end of May actually initiated flowering in quite a number of parcels, especially in those vineyards that were most advanced, and these areas completed flowering reasonably quickly in sunny conditions. The cooler weather at the beginning of June however not only delayed the onset of flowering but it also lengthened its duration in some parcels, and in these specific areas the flowering cycle was not quite as smooth. The mid-flowering stage was reached around the 28th – 30th May in the Côte de Beaune (for both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay) and a few days later in the Côtes Chalonnaise and Mâconnaise. There were some similarities at this stage therefore with the growing cycle of the 2003 vintage.
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The start of the summer was affected by quite heavy rainfall (especially around the 14th July) and the berries swelled quickly with the increased water. The days which followed without rain were nevertheless quite hot, thus decisions on thinning fruit were made sparingly, so as to minimise the risk of scorching or hydric stress. That said, given the relatively high load on the vines, it was necessary for us to put in place a policy whereby the excess bulk of grape clusters was removed.
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With regard to disease, mildew was more active than oidium, largely because the spring rains, coupled with higher than usual spring temperatures provided fertile conditions for this fungus. Once again, variation in rainfall levels across the different parcels influenced our decisions regarding treatments, but things settled down from mid-July onwards, when the sun and dry conditions prevailed. This weather continued and we were able to cut the number of treatments in the vineyard significantly and to space these treatments out also.





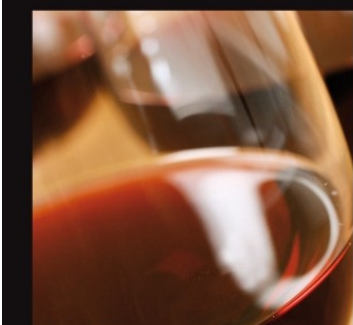
- ❖ By mid-August, thanks to a fine summer, ripening was already 75% complete across the whole of the region. The different stages of flowering progressed extremely smoothly given the near-perfect climatic conditions and full, 100% ripeness was attained in the first few days of September. The leaf canopy, which was exceptionally healthy, had facilitated intense, steady photosynthesis both on the Pinot Noir and the Chardonnay and this allowed both varietals to gain in maturity and concentration.



- ❖ By the end of August therefore, as detailed above, the condition of the foliage was perfect. No parcel was out of step and the competition of ripening was smoothly anticipated. Already the number and size of the bunches had led us to believe that the yields overall would be abundant, and as everything was ripening well we did not have to intervene. During the first few days of September sugar levels rose quickly and between the 5th – 15th September, even those few vines that were behind schedule caught up without difficulty.



- ❖ We could already see the principle features of such a fine vintage, but we needed to acknowledge the challenge presented by nearly all of the fruit, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay alike, attaining ripeness in both the Côte de Beaune and Côte de Nuits at exactly the same time ! The Hautes Côtes at least was more in line with its usual harvest date.



- ❖ In order to help us decide in which order to harvest the various parcels, we used what is still the best method of evaluation, our eyes and observations and specifically a tasting of the berries. This allowed us to appreciate the full development of flavour in the fruit, the nuances of tannins, texture, influence of skins and pips and other relevant phenolic compounds.



- ❖ Henceforth, the continuing summer conditions obligated us to take particular care with the Chardonnay fruit. Certainly these grapes took longer to develop their varietal aromas and they also showed some slight signs of susceptibility to over ripening, with their colour changing quite quickly from golden to golden brown. They were rich in juice but the skins were quite delicate and fragile and we had to be vigilant so as to avoid oxidation of the juice through the skins. We therefore picked the Chardonnay without delay, but we had more leeway with the Pinot Noir as these grapes continued ripening and their respective tannins continued to develop. Tasting of this fruit gave us very intense varietal aromas with good levels of grip, depth and concentration. The skins of the fruit remained strong, indicating the good structural tannins that were to come, even from the brown pips which hinted at elements of toast and hazelnut and an overall, complete ripeness.



- ❖ Our harvest **at Corton André began on 10th September 2009** ; the Pinot Noir grapes displayed extremely fine and uniform quality and their condition led us to conduct only the lightest of sorting. The fruit was ripe, healthy and plentiful.



- ❖ The Chardonnay crop was harvested at roughly the same time, although the general condition of the fruit necessitated a little more urgency. Whole bunch pressing, gentle and with reasonably short cycles was conducted and this light treatment programme continued throughout.



- ❖ Vinification took place in very good conditions. The degree of extraction was undoubtedly the key determining factor in ensuring fine quality and balance in 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 2009 so as to gain an initial impression of the vintage :

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 in fact reasonably high although the wines show good terroir definition.

The Reds :

Beautiful deep colours and plenty of complexity in evidence. The levels of acidity are quite low but there are plenty of concentrated, firm tannins with plenty of grip.



Given this, the macerations were conducted in a manner designed to accentuate the ripeness, even softness, of the tannins (exemplified also by the pips), yet to respect and reflect the overall harmony of the vintage. As élevage got underway we noticed soft fruit aromas (strawberry, black-berry and raspberry) and high tannins which the barrels would develop and soften.