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BURGUNDY 2002 HARVEST....ALIVE & GREAT!

(By Martine Saunier – Monday, September 23, 2002)

It is always premature to proclaim the quality or mediocrity of a vintage before it is crushed and resting in a cask. However, the 2002 vintage shows, in every way, the promise of a sensational vintage and here is why:

On September 10, I witnessed horrendous storms in the Rhône Valley (I will give you a briefing later on that region) and some very unusual and spotted thunderstorms in Burgundy, but nothing in comparison.

Burgundy had a Spring without frost and an early blooming season that slowed down with cooler weather, allowing some millerandage (great). *Véraison* started mid July with healthy thick-skin grapes – a good sign, so that too much rain can't break the skin. The month of August was rather cool with a little bit of rain. The 2002 crop was not as abundant as the 1999's, yet, wineries still practiced green harvest in August and early September.

Then, a series of thunderstorms spoiled and dampened the enthusiasm. As Henri Mayer said: "the cool air from the British Isles met the warm air from Spain and huge storms unferled in the Languedoc, Rhône Valley, Beaujolais and Mâconnais." The Côte Châlonnaise was hit by storms that affected the vineyards on the flat land but hardly those on the hillsides. **Danjean-Berthou** claims 12.5% natural alcohol and ideal weather conditions during harvest – sunny, with a cool north wind, allowing the grapes to dry.

I witnessed a storm outside my window that faces directly the Charolaises mountains and, on the left, the villages of Pouilly Solutré and Davayé. We had torrential rains and, the next day, I called **Dominique Cornin** in Chaintré on the edge of Beaujolais – not a drop! In fact, his harvest is over and he is quite exctatic about his 2002 vintage – natural alcohol of 11.5% to 12% and fantastic acidity. Of course, he harvested at the right time. If you harvested as of today, your alcohol would be too high and your acidity too low.

There were some serious damages in the Beaujolais region. You could only produce a good wine if you had a sorting-out table. **Patrick Brunet** has discarded 25% of his crop, but he is very pleased with the quality.

Paul janin lost 20% of his crop. Very ripe grapes, harvested also during the sunny period – 12.5% natural alcohol and perfect pH/acidity.

In the Côtes-de-Beaune, **François Jobard** is currently harvesting and is very excited about the healthy state of the grapes – 12.8% to 14% alcohol and great acidity. "We have the perfect ingredients, the quality of the vintage only depends upon the winemaker's skills!"

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Michel Morey of **Domaine Morey-Coffinet**, does not complain either. The pH is impeccable. There is no rot because of the north wind. Chassagne-Montrachet received 1/10 of an inch and another 2/10 inches of rain in early September, followed by a sunny and cool weather. A serious storm at Aloxe-Corton and Ladoix, a few miles away, did not affect Chassagne or Meursault – very good maturity 12.5% to 13.5% of natural alcohol. Michel started with Pinot Noir last Thursday (September 19th) and will harvest his Bâtard-Montrachet and La Romanée today and tomorrow.

Domaine Monthélie-Douhairet and **André Porcheret** are also extremely pleased. Small crop and some vineyards were affected by a storm, but the sorting out table helped discard 15% of the undesirable bunches. Confirmed natural alcohol of 12.8% and 6.20 acidity – very pleased.

Claire Forestier of **Domaine Bertagna** started with her Vougeot Blanc and was ecstatic with the quality of the grapes. Then, Clos-St-Denis was absolutely perfect. The only vineyards that suffered from the storms are those of Hautes Côtes-de-Nuits, above Nuits-St-Georges.

Henri Jayer/ Emmanuel Rouget have just finished harvesting the Nuits-St-Georges, Echezeaux, Cros-Parantoux and Vosnes with respectively 12.5%, 13% and 13.5% natural alcohol (no chaptalisation necessary) and a pH/1.20 -- acidity 6.41 -- 25 H/Hectare. The Bourgognes Red and Passetoutgrains will be harvested in the next couple of days. Very ripe and healthy.

Christophe Perrot-Minot started his harvest on Wednesday the 18th. No appellation with less than 13% alcohol 25H/28Hectare average – exceptional quality!

Lalou Bize-Leroy of **Domaines Leroy and D'Auvenay** declared herself very pleased with the quality. Healthy grapes, perfect weather conditions, great acidity and pH. She just finished harvesting today, very relieved to know that her grapes are already fermenting. She has warned me of the small quantities, but that is no news.

Going north, **Domaine Jean-Marc Brocard** started harvesting this weekend. Julien gave me a report of very ripe grapes, great sugar content, superb acidity. Only the village of Irancy was affected by a hailstorm two days ago.

To resume, the key factors that played for a very promising and most likely outstanding vintage are: Two weeks of perfect September weather with a temperature of 20° Centigrade and a north wind that dried up the grapes, allowing perfect maturity that, in turn, resulted in perfect acidity and pH. It was a last minute blessing. There is a limerick in Burgundy that goes:

"August makes the must
September makes the wine."

Another good news from **Stanislas Henriot** of Champagne Joseph Henriot, is that Champagne is also having a superb harvest, promising a vintage year!