

2008: Another Miraculous Harvest *by Martine Saunier*

Every one talks about the year of the 13 moons greatly affecting the climate: too hot, too wet, too stormy, too cold. In fact, this is a year of uncontrollable weather affecting every region of France.

I arrived in Burgundy on September 1st, having calculated the dates of my trip according to the date of blooming season. If you add 90 days, you get almost the correct date of harvest.

Well, it was all wrong. The summer was wet and cold until September 8th. Every one was depressed. Some even had hail storms. Mildew and oidium were rampant. The conscientious winemakers treated their vines relentlessly, giving up vacations with their family. Every time a new rainfall washed out the previous treatment, they sprayed again. Lots of *millerandage* and because the weather was very cool, the tiny grapes did not get much juice. Some had to remove the bunches affected by hail. The vineyard work was very intense. I took a walk in the vineyards surrounding Vosne-Romanée the second week of September. Imagine a puzzle of patches of vineyards, some in great condition, some half destroyed by mildew and oidium, some totally and hopelessly stripped of their leaves, with sickly looking grapes. I am talking about Grand Cru and Premier Cru alike.



Mildew affected vineyard in Vosne-Romanée



Grapes in Champagne

Strolling through my wineries' vineyards, I was impressed. I took pictures of healthy grapes which needed some more sunshine to get their sugar level up. Miracles happen...and by September 13th, the weather forecast was for dry weather, with north wind and cooler temperatures for the season. Within a week, hopes were high. The "*ban des vendanges*" in Burgundy was declared September 2nd, giving total freedom to the wineries to decide for themselves the date of their harvest. In such weather, you realize how much micro climates have their importance. Each vineyard had to be evaluated separately.

My first visit was in Chouilly in Champagne on September 16th. I saw some very healthy chardonnay going into the press. The producer was thrilled and predicted a great vintage.

Rémy Gresser in Alsace was just picking up his grapes for Crémant, waiting for more ripeness for their Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Gewurztraminer.

Driving down the Rhone valley, **Bernard Burgaud** and **Gilles Robin** complained about a heavy downpour, but rejoiced at the strong mistral. Same with **Emmanuel Reynaud**. We walked through the vineyard of Pignan, covered with white flowers. What a difference from 2007, with a severe drought! Obviously, he was not in a hurry as Grenache always takes more time to ripen. It will be a very small harvest, he predicted.



Andlau (Alsace)

Meanwhile, in Chaintre, **Dominique Cornin**, who is now officially recognized as a biodynamic grower, started on September 22nd. Pouilly-Fuissé Clos Reyssié, belonging to the Hospices de Beaune, had been affected by a bad hale storm. What could be saved from disaster was very little. On the other hand, the area of Chaintre and Chevrières produced healthy grapes with good acidity and alcohol level of 12° to 13°.



Jean Thévenet

Jean Thévenet (Domaine de la Bongran) of course had decided to wait until October 6th. The forecast being in his favor, he decided to take a chance. The little rainfall on Oct 2nd and 3rd did not affect his decision. Temperatures were unusually low for this time of the year: low 40s in the am and low 60s in the pm.



Emmanuel Reynaud in Pignan

Nicolas Rossignol started on September 24th, with his Bourgogne rouge vineyard old vines. He uses small boxes easy to handle. I was very impressed with the quality of the grapes. At the exception of Volnay Santenots badly damaged by hale, he was enthusiastic about the vintage. Time will tell.



Volnay-Chevret (Nicolas Rossignol)

Sébastien Gay started his harvest on September 26th, with a very much improved winery, giving himself more space to work with. I found him at the sorting table

looking over the Chorey les Beaune grapes. This vineyard and also part of Aloxe Corton had been hit hard by a hale storm. After a first selection taking out all the bad bunches, the grapes went to another table for a second hand sorting. The harvest was over last Saturday, and fermentation is on the way. His Beaune and Savigny appellations were fine, showing great fruit, sugar between 12.2° and 12.8°, and perfect acidity. The Chorey, in spite of being damaged by hale, showed 12.5°.



Nicolas Rossignol

Christophe Perrot-Minot started September 25th in his new modern winery across the highway. Very efficiently planned, and practical, his vats were transferred from his very cramped cellar in Morey St Denis. Because of the diversity of his appellations, each vineyard was harvested according to its degree of ripeness. On the sorting table, he and Jerome Gay, his assistant winemaker, were the last to sort out the bunches as they rolled into the destemmer. Every bunch looking perfectly healthy was cut in half. If pinkish inside, you discard!



Vat of Richebourg

Lalou Bize-Leroy was doing the same and was extremely pleased in spite of a very small harvest. Her vineyards, were very criticized for their bad appearance in previous vintages, starting in 2007, and are now the talk of Burgundy for their healthy appearance. Believe me, this is recognition!

As for **Arnaud Mortet**, I was there on the sorting table the first day of his harvest September 26th. He had purchased new equipment: sorting table, crusher, wine press. Very impressive! I had visited his vineyards earlier and was most impressed with the healthy look of the grapes. Arnaud now has a team of young workers totally dedicated to the maintenance of the vineyards. It showed, and I can imagine how much attention to detail during this wet and cold summer had to be given to the vineyard. The harvest was over October 4th. He is delighted with the crop. He came in with a perfect lab report waiving it in the air, like a young student excited by a top grade A+! He mentioned that his Fixin and Marsannay vineyards had the highest quality grapes and alcohol content. This was confirmed later by **Cyril Audoin**. Of course, some of the



Leroy's Sorting Tables



Mortet's Sorting Table

vineyards were hit by hale storms, but in very specific locations.

Emmanuel Rouget harvested the week of September 22nd, quite content. He was so busy with his vineyard maintenance in the summer that he was just bottling his 2006. Following the 2007 barrel tasting, we sampled the 2006 Vosne-Romanée Cros Parentoux. All excellent wines...



Mortet's Grapes

Chablis forecast is for a great vintage. The region has much less rain than Côte de Beaune and Côte de Nuits, therefore fewer problems with oidium and mildew. As I am writing, they are still harvesting. **Julien Brocard** is delighted with the acidity and natural sugar and a touch of botrytis: "Great juice!" he exclaimed. Their new winemaker, Nadine Goubin, who is also consulting at Domaine Jacques Prieur in Meursault, is very surprised by the ripeness and the quality of the grapes ahead of those of Côte de Beaune.

To sum up, it is a very complex vintage, where vineyard maintenance had top priority. Results depend upon it. The consumer will have to find out who has performed well. As Christophe Perrot-Minot claims, after eliminating the unripe grapes, we have top quality juice and it should be another good vintage.

I am sorry to say that 2009 will be another 13 moons year...maybe this time a drought!?! Who knows? No matter what, there are always enough good grapes to make quality wines in any vintage. Just think what the harvest would have been like some 40 years ago! New equipment, technology, and vineyard maintenance make all the difference.