



# 2018 VINTAGE

## CÔTE D'OR

Winter arrived late, with a very cold and relatively dry spell in February. But **the end of 2017 and the month of January 2018 were mild and notably rainy**, which allowed for ample replenishment of water reserves in both the soil and beneath ground.

March saw the return of copious rainfall, and cool, and the vines took their time in awakening. It wasn't until we saw the first real evidence of sunshine in early April that spring set in for real, bringing with it the first signs of budbreak. At this point the cycle was neither late nor early, allowing for **growth to develop in perfectly bright, sunny conditions**.

This brightness proved to be the hallmark of the vintage, with **remarkable levels of sunshine prevailing from April through to September**.

As the month of May rolled past, the vines grew like, well, vines thanks to **conditions that were both hot and humid**. Numerous thunderstorms literally created an electric atmosphere throughout France towards the end of spring. We saw the odd sprinkling of hail here and there, but the damage caused was negligible. Up until this point, there was little evidence of fungal diseases in the vineyards.

Flowering occurred in ideal conditions over the course of a few days towards the end of May/beginning of June, **promising homogenous ripening**.

The end of the vegetative growth cycle took place in hot and often very dry conditions across the region. Isolated localised thunderstorms in July brought with them a sprinkling of rain. In the Côte de Nuits, **the south of Nuits Saint-Georges was struck twice by hailstorms**. Luckily, however, there was little damage to the vineyards. **The vines remained healthy and the sun shone consistently throughout summer**.

Veraison kicked off during the early part of July and lasted for nearly six weeks. The unusual extension was caused by the high summer temperatures and the lack of water in certain appellations (Mâconnais, Chablis).

Ripening was a long, slow process, therefore, and by the end of August, **the berries were still fairly firm and the skins were thick**. Some of the younger plants and those with little access to water reserves began to suffer, but by and large the vineyards coped well with the conditions as these had prevailed for several months already and the vines were largely acclimatised.

During our vineyard visits at the end of August we saw that **the grapes were in a near-perfect state of health and that yields promised to be generous for both reds and whites**. Skins were thick and it was important to give them the time necessary to ripen fully. Luckily the weather forecast allowed us to do so with confidence.

We began picking right at the end of August (Thursday 29/08), with the first bunches harvested from some early ripening parcels in Volnay, Meursault and then Beaune. These areas had ripened ahead of schedule, and the Pinot was right at the end of its maturation cycle. From 4 September onwards, we began the harvest proper, particularly when it came to the Chardonnays.

**There was barely any need for triage**, and it took us a fortnight to pick the entire domaine.

**The whites:** The excellent levels of ripeness seen in the juicy Chardonnay grapes lead us to expect **great white wines that will be both rich and opulent**. The management of the malolactic fermentation will be key to ensuring that the finished wines are balanced, with appropriate levels of freshness.

**The reds:** **This level of concentration is rare indeed**. Colours are deep. Malolactic fermentation took place early, on the whole, and the tannins have an incredibly supple character, **the result of perfect levels of ripeness at harvest**. The noses are perfumed and expressive, with notes of fresh fruits. The water reserves in our soils and the excellent yields have helped us to create wines whose character pays testament to an ideal vintage – particularly towards the end of the ripening cycle and the fortnight of harvest.

FRÉDÉRIC BARNIER



# VINTAGE

## F U I S S É

### **Living on our nerves.**

**The start of winter 2018 was a gloomy one:** the weather was rainy and sullen, with frequent squalls and disturbances... Thanks to the level of rainfall, which was among the highest recorded in Burgundy between 1959 and 2018, **this winter will long be remembered, not least of all for the level of saturation in the soil.** Although temperatures were exceptionally mild in January, February's frozen kiss set the final seal on winter, bringing with it an extreme – if late – cold snap.

This miserable winter was followed by a spring whose start bring to mind the first verses of Paul Verlaine's poem, 'It's raining in my heart, like it's raining on the town... Oh, hear the song of the rain', rather than those of Victor Hugo, 'Here come the long days, the light, love, delight! Here comes spring! March and April, with their sweet smile'.

**But despite the relatively chilly weather in March, an early heat spike resulted in budbreak around, 15 April,** more or less the average for the past decade. This was, by coincidence, the beginning of a period of mild, dry weather that allowed us to plant (on the morning of 23 April) our small parcel at Tournant de Pouilly, which has been left fallow for several years. As the days passed, we noted with delight that, after several years of poor yields, we had a healthy bunch set.

**May brought with it some mild weather, allowing the vines to gain a week of growth** (on the decade's average), a lead that was maintained right through to veraison on 20 July. In the Mâconnais, the month of May brought with it some heavy localised rainfall – in some places more than 100mm – but Fuissé itself wasn't touched, which, in turn, meant that we avoided any risk of downy mildew.

We were blessed by the gods in this vintage, **as we didn't have to deal with the attacks of powdery mildew that threaten Chardonnay** in particular (the vintage is particularly susceptible to infection). The expected outbreak didn't happen, in the end, largely thanks to weather conditions that were unfavourable to fungal development. On the other hand this year, as in 2017, accumulated water levels **helped the plants grow exponentially** during the warm periods that followed the rainfall. Growers found that they needed to be everywhere at once in order to trim the leaves and raise the canopy – vegetative growth was so extreme that we found no respite from the task. Alas, this pattern is increasingly the norm – so much so that it barely rates any comment in the region...

In total contrast to the gloomy winter, **summer 2018 was the second-warmest summer since 1900**, with a heatwave taking place during the post-veraison period towards the end of July through to mid-August. Rather ironically, given the start to the growing season, we found ourselves wishing for rain... There were significant disparities

in weather across the Mâconnais. Without leaving the region, we could observe levels of rainfall that doubled by going from one village to another... **Furthermore, right from the start of August, we began to be concerned for our young vines planted on schist in Fuissé: we were powerless to help as the leaves turned yellow and the grapes withered.**

On 15 August, we began to monitor levels of ripeness. On 20 August the first pickers began their work in the commune but... at the Domaine, **we decided to wait.** The first to begin picking in 2015 and 2017 in order to maintain levels of freshness, in this heatwave year we found ourselves biding our time! The lack of water was felt most profoundly in Fuissé, where ripening was completely blocked. **Late-ripening Vergisson, on the other hand, was the commune that saw the greatest amount of rainfall, and as a result proceeded at a normal pace.**

By the 25th of August, with no rain forecast for the next three weeks, we were left hoping for a miracle.

On 28 August, in order to save our thirsty vines, **we decided to use a small team to pick our three parcels planted on granitic soils...** Then we waited, holding our breath... One day followed another, tension climbed... The sky remained obstinately blue, the afternoons were torrid.

1 September. Still waiting, with no certainty of success – just the hope of change, despite cloudless skies and parched soils.

**Oh! Blessed respite! The first few days of September brought cool nights.** We might not have had any rain, but the drop in temperatures offered some relief. Over the course of two nights, we saw the features of the vineyards change and the grapes plump up. We could, at long last, begin picking. **Our job was still a delicate one, thanks to very uneven levels of ripeness that dictated a convoluted route through the vineyards, travelling backwards and forwards between Fuissé and Vergisson.**

On 12 September, we stopped picking in order to allow the last vines **to complete their ripening.**

On 20 September, we picked up our secateurs once again in order to complete **the longest harvest period in the history of the Domaine.**

We took the risk of wait, following the maxim of author Ronald Wright, 'When you have many choices before you... and you can't make a decision between them, always take the path that requires the most courage...' We hope, in time, to see our patience rewarded.

**The wines of this vintage are, today, delicate and refined,** not unlike those of 2017, and whose hallmark characteristics of elegance, tension and generosity were totally unexpected after such a tumultuous growing year.

AUDREY BRACCINI



Domaine J.A. Ferret