



BURGUNDY 2013 VINTAGE

Burgundy 2013 was yet another small crop. The fourth in as many years. Some of it will be very good, in both red and white. But for some producers it was a disaster. As we always do, let's start with a run-down of the weather conditions over the growing season (what the locals tellingly call 'the campaign').

Winter was wet and hung on stubbornly. March snow gave way to a few spring-like days, and everyone thought the worst was over. But no. April was cold and wet. May was the wettest on record. We posted photos of ducks swimming in the flooded vineyards. And winter gloom and temperatures persisted.

June was better, but just. Flowering started in the early part of the month, but with the cool wet conditions it was erratic and irregular. Lots of coulure and millerandage as a result. These aborted grapes would be one of the reasons for a small 2013 yield, and would come in to play in the final outcome at harvest.

Summer arrived late in the month. But even the warm temperatures and relatively fine weather did little to dispel the feeling of instability. There was nothing consistent to make you feel like you could just settle in to grape growing.

Then in the third week of July, high pressure and high humidity built up to a series of storms, the most violent of which tore out of the Savigny valley on the 23rd. Like a military gunship, the hail storm swept across the Savigny vines, hit Pernand on the west side of the Corton Mountain and headed south across Beaune, Pommard and Volnay. Producers tell us it lasted almost half an hour. It was the second year running that Pommard and Volnay were ravaged.

The humidity continued into August, and producers up and down the Cote nervously watched the sky. The big fear now was that damaged grapes would rot of mildew and odium, so preventive spraying intensified. If there was a bright spot in the growing season, it was the dry spell in mid-August. The damaged grapes shriveled and dropped off the vine, making the inevitable sorting at harvest more manageable.

Yields were tiny, even in the areas not ripped by hail. But the quality of the fruit was good going into September in the Cotes de Nuits and the white wine production south of Beaune, as well as in the Chalonnaise, Maconnais and Chablis.

Most of the harvest came in in the first weeks of October, the latest Burgundy vintages since 1991 and 1978. Maturity arrived at the end. Slowly at first, just like Pinot Noir and Chardonnay like it to be. But that slow maturity turned into a gallop, especially for the whites. From Macon to Chablis, the quality of 2013 whites comes down to crucial decisions about when to pick in the final few days.

Two months prior to harvest, the mood was gloomy. And granted, those poor producers who got slammed in July will suffer for years. (Some say that another small crop in 2014 could force some out of business.) But there is quality in many cellars. The reds will be highly variable, but the best wines (from domains that sorted the harvest carefully as it came to the cuverie) are fresh, deeply colored and beautifully ripe, with balance that seems apt for long aging. As always, you have to know who made the wine. There is more consistent quality in the whites across the board. Some say an excellent exciting year.