



BURGUNDY 2014 VINTAGE

2014 was a year for maxims in Burgundy. One was the 'don't count your chickens' warning. And another, a keystone in Burgundy wine making, was 'September makes the wine'. Simple truths to heed.

After three very small harvests, Burgundy urgently needed to fill its cellars. And despite some heart-breaking setbacks and a growing season that was jumbled in disorder, a decent amount of wine was produced. Not enough, of course. But 'correct', as the French would say.

There was no winter to speak of, followed by a mild and sunny period from February through April that saw some rain, but less than normal. The vine got going early, and talk was of a late August harvest.

But May was cool and rainy, which slowed the development. The vine began to flower in the last week of May in the southern part of the region. So at that point, counting the traditional 100 days from flowering to harvest, picking would start in early September. The weather during the flowering period was sunny and warm with just enough rain for this critical period to unfold and to finish.

And then early June was hot. Summer hot. As June was in 2003, some have said. This speeded things up. The flowering in the northern part of the region, and in those vineyards at higher altitudes, got a kick that would help them to phenolic maturity later.

With these conditions, fruit began to appear soon thereafter, and by the end of June small grapes had formed and clustered. The hot dry conditions however led to both millerandage (unevenly formed bunches made up of normal grapes and thick-skinned seedless berries) and coulure (buds that never flowered), both of which reduce the overall crop, but which can give concentration to the remaining fruit.

Flowering and fruit set was certainly among the earliest of the past twenty years, with as much as a week head start on what would be considered normal here. And if you compare 2013 to 2014, we were three weeks in advance.

Then disaster struck. At the end of June, a series of violent hail storms ripped through the region. One in the Cote de Nuits, where parts of Nuits and Chambolle-Musigny were hit with 20% crop loss. The other two in the Cote de Beaune: the first, widespread, ranging from Meursault in the south and on up to the Corton Mountain and Savigny les Beaune, caused substantial damage; the other, painfully localized, tore through the premier cru hillsides of Pommard and Volnay. The latter was the newsmaker, with up to 80% crop damage in some sectors, but also because this was the third consecutive year that Pommard and Volnay had been seriously damaged. There have been subsequent financial worries for small producers who were not insured.

Yet, despite these disasters, from Macon to Chablis there was a serious crop on the vines. Weather in July was mixed. Hot and sunny, then cloudy and cool. Constant rumblings of thunder in the distance kept everyone on edge.

Hail damage often leads to mildew, so vigilant vineyard work was crucial as the rains came and August turned cool, wet and gloomy, more like winter than the previous winter had been. Maturity stalled on the vine. And with the ever-present risk of rot cast a pall on the chill August air.

As we reached September, with fingers crossed, Burgundians put their hopes in the maxim that 'September makes the wine'. Because in 2014, it was make or break. We needed a glorious September, and that's exactly what we got. Light, warm northerly winds. Warm days, cool nights. Everything needed to salvage the potential mess that August had served up. In the end, we had the best harvest conditions that we have seen in many years.

Picking started on 8 September in the south, around the 15th in the Cote and Chablis, and finished around the 26th in the Hautes Cotes.

The crop came in healthy. There was no rot. And with normal sorting work in the winery (mostly where there had been hail damage) we brought in one of the healthiest harvests in recent years. The whites are balanced and intense. The reds show good ripe fruit. Some say the best vintage since 2009. A miracle!