



BURGUNDY 2017 VINTAGE

If 2016 tested the faith and resolve of wine makers in Burgundy, 2017 has to be seen as recompense, and as a miracle of sorts.

While the rest of wine-growing Europe suffered crippling late-spring frosts in 2017, Burgundy for the most part (for once!) survived.

A mild winter and an accelerated spring left the Burgundy vineyards in a vulnerable position when, in the second half of April, temperatures across France barely rose above freezing for two weeks.

Three hard-frost nights pretty much did in Right Bank Chablis once again. But as the rest of Burgundy survived the first week, the growers found the will to fight back. And on the night of April 27th, a year and a day after the 2016 frost that took 80% of the 2016 harvest, a severe frost was forecast for the length of the Cote d'Or.

It's now a part of local legend how, on the following morning, we awoke in a thick cloud of smoke. In the early hours, from north to south, the vigneronns had mobilized to set alight dampened bales of hay, sending up a cloud cover to filter the first burning rays of dawn. And it worked.

The air was thick, and driving was tricky. A customer at the butcher shop in Meursault jokingly asked for a smoked chicken. And, of course, the authorities were up in arms over the pollution risks. But the crop was saved, and there has been ever since a spirit of cooperation and solidarity not often seen in farming communities.

After the freeze, May brought in an extended period of warm dry weather. No mildew or oidium to speak of, no thunderstorms or hail. Sunny periods, but no lack of rain. And the vines went in to flower at a very-normal first week of June. Pretty much ideal.

July had a couple of heat spikes, and a hailstorm hit the fancy vineyards in Morey St Denis on the 10th. But nothing worse. August was warm; the lead up to the harvest at the end of the month, hot and dry.

The first grapes were picked in the Cote de Beaune in the last few days of August. And most everyone was out picking in the first week of September.

There was (as there often is in Burgundy) serious disagreement in 2017 about when to pick. Do you pick early to preserve the acid-sugar balance and freshness? Or do you hang in there and wait for a little rain to kick-start a stalled photosynthesis, and thereby achieve the holy grail of phenolic maturity?

It's hard to say who was right. There are very good wines coming from both camps. But there are iffy wines too. And that's the key to understanding 2017.

Picked early, the best wines, both red and white, are fresh, fruit-driven and floral with long minerality. The iffy wines seem not have adjusted for the solid levels of tartaric acid which left them tart rather than bright, dry and tannic rather than juicy.

Picking late did not seem to have an effect on the balance between alcohol and acidity. But then, there was no 'over maturity' in 2017. The extra phenolic maturity seems to mean more density and riper tannins, with no sign of flabbiness.

The whites shine, particularly in hard-done Chablis (where there is better balance even than the marvelous 2014s). In the rest of Burgundy, the whites have the tension of 2014 but the open flattery of 2015.

The reds are juicy and crisp and open, and the regional appellations will be ready to drink soon. More serious appellations will be considered 'typical', in the best sense of the word: classic wines from a vintage that Burgundians will love. They are likely to be lost in the hub-bub that the 2018s will bring. But the yields were good in 2017, so you will be able to find them for a while. And you'll do well to seek them out.