



2007: a highly precocious year but decidedly northern in character

Vine and climate 2007: a year of extreme and unexpected weather

An unseasonably mild and sunny autumn and winter were followed by **record-breaking temperatures** in April, with warm, dry conditions more typical of July. This combination of conditions led to early vine growth, with budburst occurring several days earlier than average (8 April for the Chardonnay and 11 April for the Pinot Noir and the Pinot Meunier). All of the **vineyards then saw explosive growth**: by the end of April, **vine development was at least a month ahead of the 30-year norm.**

As every Champagne winegrower knows, such exceptional conditions often mean a difficult growing season saved only by bouts of intense vineyard activity: early spring flowering can lead to overly rapid ripening, causing a loss of acidity and freshness. As it turned out, these effects were mitigated by a welcome surprise in the latter part of the year.

The summer, by contrast, was cool and windy ...

Flowering occurred in May under changeable, unpredictable weather conditions. Warm temperatures were often accompanied by windy conditions due to unsettled oceanic influences and abundant rainfall in particular, bringing all of the vines into flower three weeks ahead of the 30-year average: 25 May for the Chardonnay, 28 May for the Pinot Noir and 1 June for the Pinot Meunier.

Flowering continued into July, confirming the old saying in Champagne, 'May blossom, July blossom' ('fleur de mai, fleur de juillet'). No question, the difficult weather this season did favour prolonged and therefore very even flowering, with isolated cases of berry shatter that were confined to ancient vines and had no significant impact on yields.

The summer months were marked by thundery outbreaks in June followed by cool, variable weather in July and August. Much to our surprise, **these conditions favoured a slow, gradual rate of ripening which** has had a noticeable effect on the quality of the wines.

The last week of August saw a welcome return to dry, windy but still cool weather that brought the grapes to maturity, ready for harvesting, even in late-ripening plots.

Ripening and harvests 2007

Peak ripeness is a particular feature of the Louis Roederer style and one that we encourage through careful pruning aimed at limiting yields to no more than two kilograms per Chardonnay vine and 1.5 kilograms per Pinot Noir vine. In bumper years when the vines are laden with fruit, our main task is therefore the elimination of clusters. Disbudding, the removal of fruit-bearing canes and green harvesting are just some of the techniques used to bring yields under control and promote ripening.

The rate of ripening in 2007 was as astonishing as the erratic weather, slowing down significantly towards the end. On the eve of picking, the berries were more typical of ‘classically’ harvested October grapes than an early-ripened August crop.

Due to the unusual weather conditions, the rate of ripening did vary between and even within parcels, which made it particularly difficult to decide on a **harvesting plan**. Some parcels had to be harvested in batches as grapes in different places reached the desired level of ripeness.

Picking went ahead under ideal conditions, starting with the **Marne Valley Pinot Noir vines on 27 August, followed by the Côte des Blancs Chardonnays on 30 August then the Montagne de Reims Pinots Noirs on 31 August.**

A useful indication of ripeness in terms of Champagne vines is the average interval between flowering and harvesting. In 2007, this **exceeded 100 days**, with some of the parcels taking a full 105 days to ripen. These figures represent a significant increase over recent years (upwards of 94 days on average) and come close to the rates that would have been current 20 years ago.

Weather conditions in 2007 plainly favoured a **‘classically’ Champagne pattern of ripening: slow, gradual and entirely consistent with a northern environment.**

Harvesting lasted 10-13 days in each of the three vineyard areas and employed more than 500 people. The pickers were able to work faster than usual due to the particularly heavy clusters this year. Careful sorting at the picking stage and then again at the winery was essential in certain parcels for the elimination of substandard berries (insufficiently ripe grapes from late-flowering vines, prematurely wilted grapes or those spoiled by the wet August weather).

On arrival at the winery, average potential alcohol registered about 10 degrees, with an average acidity of 8.3 g/l and a malic acid content of seven grams per litre – values typical of northern-grown grapes and close to those recorded in 1982, 1988 et 1995!

Preliminary tastings suggest that this is a highly aromatic vintage – delicacy offset by palpable freshness – but with an acidity content that is likely to require malolactic fermentation for the base wines used in the blending of our Brut Premier.