



2008: not an easy vintage – but a good one!

Vine and climate 2008

Vines throughout the region enjoyed a longer-than-usual dormant period due to the exceptionally mild, albeit unpredictable winter, sometimes accompanied by strong winds. Bud-break occurred relatively late compared with the past ten years – 19 April for the Chardonnay, 26 April for the Pinot Noir and 27 April for the Pinot Meunier – raising hopes of a rather more ‘textbook’ growing season than of late.

Spring brought cool, wet, thundery weather that favoured vine growth but also encouraged the spread of mildew. The battle between man and mould was eventually won in mid-July but not without an almost super-human effort on the part of the growers. It then took them another four weeks to stamp out oïdium which this year affected Pinot Noir as well as Chardonnay vines.

The vines flowered on 14 June for the Chardonnay and 16 and 17 June for the Pinots Noir and Meunier respectively. However dull weather and low temperatures interfered with fruit set, leading to a fairly high incidence of berry shatter and millerandage and some spectacular cases of fruit failure: barren tendrils replaced what should have been clusters, especially among Pinot Noir vines. The upshot was a more classical yield in terms of volume and weight, characterized by smaller clusters than in previous years.

Not an easy vintage, that’s for sure, but a particularly valuable learning experience at a time when the environmental stakes have never been higher and our entire vineyard policy is undergoing a rethink. It’s in difficult times like these that empirical assessment becomes particularly important: seeing how different measures perform, whether based on biodynamic farming and grassing-over or on the phasing out of fertilizers in favour of more natural, organic alternatives.

The summer was cloudy and dry except for outbreaks of rain on 7, 22 and 25 August. This, combined with cool temperatures, slowed down vegetative growth, concentrating the vines’ energies into ripening – which galloped ahead from mid-August onwards, producing grapes in peak condition.

Ripeness and harvests 2008

September brought a ridge of high pressure that surprised us all: cool nights were followed by dry, sunny days except for occasional outbreaks of heavy rain around the middle of the month. The sun shone continuously from 13 September onwards.

Harvesting commenced on 15 September in the Marne Valley (Pinot Noir), 16 September on the Côte des Blancs (Chardonnay) and 20 September in the Montagne de Reims (Pinot Noir). Weather conditions were exceptional: sunny and dry enough to promote slow, even ripening and good initial sugar concentration, but cool enough to keep the fruit in perfect condition. Grapes from most of the house parcels achieved a minimum acidity of 5-6g/l, particularly important for the Roederer style. The time from flowering to harvest was slightly longer than in previous years (99 days compared with 95 days) and more consistent with a vineyard at the northern limit of viticulture. Total yields (house vineyard) were of much the same order as in 2002: 12,700 kg/ha (maximum authorised yield, 12,400 kg/ha). The grapes showed a good balance of sugar and acidity: 10.4° natural alcohol – which is close to the target level of 10.5° – and 8.1g/l acidity.

Cool nights helped the musts to settle naturally in preparation for a slow fermentation process. This was still underway at the time of writing, but preliminary tastings suggest that the finished wines will do justice to their vintage.

This year also saw the coming on stream of new facilities that will allow us to raise the bar even higher: three new pneumatic presses in our Côte des Blancs vineyard and, most important, a brand new winery in the Rue de Savoye, purpose-built for single-varietal, single-parcel vinification.