



THE 2006 HARVEST

A year full of contrasts, sure to produce some very fine wines

Vines and weather 2006

Following a late spring characterized by fairly wet, cool conditions, bud burst occurred a week later than the 25-year average: this year, 21st April for the Chardonnay, 25th April for the Pinot Noir and 26th April for the Pinot Meunier.

Growth got off to a difficult start due to unseasonably cool weather in May. Repeated thunderstorms accompanied by hail and heavy rain produced impressive mudslides in our Marne Valley vineyards.

June brought warm, sunny weather, critical for good blossom development. Temperatures higher than average (18.5°C compared to 16.6°C) promoted excellent flowering, with no incidence of bud failure. With ideal conditions, the vines reached full flowering some 2-3 days earlier than the 25-year average for Champagne (19th June): this year, 15th June for the Chardonnay, 17th June for the Pinot Noir and 18th June for the Pinot Meunier.

Warm sunny weather continued into July with some of the hottest weather for Champagne in living memory. Mean temperatures of 23.8°C (5°C above the 30-year seasonal average) set a new record for the entire month.

Following the July heat wave, August brought a sharp drop in temperature (2- 3°C below the seasonal average) and was unusually wet for the time of year. The cold and rain nevertheless provided the vines with welcome relief from the torrid heat of July. Water shortages and ripening problems were avoided and the ripening cycle got off to a good start.

September, always an eagerly-awaited month in Champagne, saw a miraculous return to warm, dry weather that favoured final ripening. A constant breeze also helped to slow the spread of botrytis caused by the rain in late August.

The pattern of rainfall was one of the key features of the 2006 vintage. Summer rains soon made up for the water shortages at the start of the growing season, with August alone registering 2-3 times the normal rainfall. Fortunately, since the wet weather came right at the end of the growing season, it had no diluting effect on the berries.

Ripeness and harvests 2006

Optimum ripeness is one of the characteristics of the Louis Roederer style and depends on strict crop control, restricting yields throughout our vineyards to no more than 2kg per vine plant for the Chardonnay and 1.5kg for the Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Careful pruning is never more essential than in bumper years like 2006 when good ripening depends on reasonable crop levels. Much of the winegrower's time will be taken up with green-harvesting using various techniques such as thinning, short pruning and bud removal.

This served to accelerate ripening which in 2006, despite the late August rains, galloped ahead at the rate of 1.2-1.5 degrees per week depending on grape variety – exceptionally high by any standard.

That said, the highly uneven rainfall in the summer months did lead to huge contrasts in ripening between sectors and between vineyards (by a ratio of 3:1) and even (depending on soil type) from one vineyard plot to another.

Harvesting went ahead under ideal conditions, commencing on 14th September with the Chardonnays in the Côte des Blancs, followed by the Marne Valley Pinot Noir on 15th September then the Montagne de Reims Pinot Noir on 18th September.

Picking continued for just 13 days in each of the three vineyards, providing employment for more than 500 pickers. The speed of this year's harvests was due to the exceptional weight of the clusters, with ultimate success depending on two key operations:

- Ripening assessment prior to harvesting, carefully monitoring the rate of maturation in each vineyard plot. This included tasting the grapes and testing them for sugar, acidity and in particular for malic acid content.
- Sorting the grapes after harvesting (especially important this year) so as to remove any botrytized berries.

On arrival at the Roederer winery, the average sugar level at harvest was more than 10.3 degrees, with mean acidity of 6.9 g/l. These levels were close to those recorded in 2002 and 1989, both outstandingly good years.

Early tastings are highly promising, showing clean aroma, rich fruit and a finesse and balance rarely seen at this early stage. Even so, all three grape varieties retain their own, distinctive personalities.

An astonishing year 2006 – blending it is going to be a real pleasure!