

2009

Vintage Report



"It is uncanny how vintages ending in a '9' conspire to produce fabulous quality."

Overview

With two highly challenging vintages in the immediate past, I think it is safe to say that the whole of Burgundy was hoping, and needing, a successful vintage both in terms of quality and quantity. Most vigneron are delighted with how the 2009s have turned out thus far, particularly those fortunate enough to own the better sites in the Côte de Nuits and Beaujolais. The economic environment remains highly challenging. Having weakened slightly earlier this year the Euro has recovered slightly so the pressure on export prices is still a concern. However, if the recent Bordeaux campaign is anything to go by, demand will be frantic, especially for the top red and white wines where volumes will be even more miniscule than in the last couple of years.

2009 is a great vintage for red wines and only marginally less so for whites. There is depth, purity and balance in the reds and a voluptuous richness in the whites that will make them attractive from the outset. Despite this, and in marked contrast to the Bordelais, I am relieved to report that prices are, by and large, no more than those for the 2005 vintage where quality is similar. Again, the top terroirs have come up trumps and there is excellent value to be found throughout the quality spectrum. Down in Beaujolais we are looking at some truly sensational results where 2009 promises to reach new heights of quality as I am sure you will agree when you taste the wines. The weather as in 2005, and in total contrast to the previous year, the weather pattern in the run up to the 2009 vintage was largely favourable. With a fine April, flowering was early and even, with the potential of a plentiful crop. June was unseasonably hot, especially at night. There was some drought stress in the Côte de Beaune and by July the ripening process was advancing at a pace. There were intermittent bouts of dampness that gave rise to a degree of disease pressure but nothing to the extent of the previous three years. Hail damage was confined to Morey and Gevrey in the Côte d'Or but was considerably more damaging in parts of Pouilly where up to 50% of the crop was lost. August was again hot and dry with the moderately sized crop set fair for a fine harvest as September approached. Sugar accumulation advanced relatively quickly at the expense of malic acidity which needed to be carefully managed in the cellar. Unlike 2006 the harvest date was not too critical with the majority of growers starting on the 10th September under ideal conditions. For once the triage table was largely superfluous with perhaps only 10% of the crop being discarded.

The Wines

As in 2005, there was ample thickness and colour in the Pinot Noirs so extraction happened easily despite the relatively low acidity. After 22 – 26 days on the skins, the reds have a striking dark cherry redness and the tannins are beautifully silky. In marked contrast to last year all the wines were much easier to assess in the cellar such is the richness and generosity of ripe fruit throughout. Strangely however the alcoholic fermentations were very sporadic and some casks needed to be seeded to kick start them to dryness. Despite the low level of malic acidity, Jacques Lardière has decided to put the whites through full malolactic conversion. This relatively low acidity has given some of the whites a suppleness and generosity of fruit which makes them easy to appreciate already. Those vineyards on slightly higher ground do still have a leanness and elegance to them so there are differing styles to suit all palates. The reds too are generous of fruit and silky of tannin with a wonderful balance and natural concentration that will see the best develop beautifully for many.

By Philip Tuck MW



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