



Olivier Leflaive

PULIGNY-MONTRACHET - FRANCE

THE 2018 HARVEST

The fall of 2017 was dry until the end of October, allowing the winegrowers to work the land and enable the abundant rain in November and December to penetrate deep into the soil. **January 2018** was also very wet, with 350mm of rain and the mildest temperatures since 1945. **February**, however, was dry and fairly cold; some 2-3° below seasonal norms.

Rain returned in force in **March** with 110mm falling across the month, compared to an average of 50mm. This allowed reserves to be built up, which were greatly appreciated later in the season. Right from the start of **April**, the weather turned unusually mild. This led to rapid budburst across the region in the middle of the month. The shoots grew so fast that it took just a week for the vines to show three full leaves, and no longer be under threat from frost.

May was also striking, with almost constant sunshine and very warm temperatures. Fungal diseases such as downy and powdery mildew cropped up in places, but in general were very well contained. We nonetheless had to remain vigilant and spray regularly with sulfur. **FLOWERING** occurred between 22-30 May, indicating a very early harvest.

June saw the hot and sunny weather continue, with extremely favorable conditions. A few rainstorms struck at the right time to stop the vines suffering any hydric stress, which began to threaten towards the end of the month in some sectors. **BUNCH CLOSURE** occurred on the Côte de Beaune around 30 June.

Then in **early July**, the first signs of **VERAISON** were seen on those vines that had not suffered from lack of water. Sunshine was at a maximum and growth slowed in places, particularly in terms of the younger vines or those on shallower soil. Inversely, the older vines and those on deeper soil really benefitted from the water reserves established earlier on in the year. A few rain showers of 15-20mm in **mid-August** helped the grapes advance in terms of ripening. As 20 August approached, some of the whites in those areas that ripen early had attained the levels we wanted for harvest, unlike the Pinot Noir grapes which appreciate the heat and need more time. The days were hot and sunny.

As in 2015, we opted to start harvesting at an easy pace on **27 August**, taking advantage of the exceptional weather and adapting our picking to avoid the heat. Picking ended with the most late-ripening vines on **15 September**.

KEY EVENTS DURING THE 2018 SEASON:

The first half of the fall of 2017 was very dry and the second very wet. Water reserves were good. The mild and rainy winter brought no frost or long cold periods. Spring and summer were dry, hot, and sunny. Between April and September, rainfall was down 30% on average, but the soil was cool. Without exception, there was no disease on the leaves or grapes. In 2018, the average temperature was higher in Dijon than in Marseille. Harvesting of both reds and whites was very even and overall, yields were generous, despite the heat.

CHABLIS WHITES:

These wines are typical of their *terroir*. Some underwent hydric stress when *véraison* began, obliging the vines to adapt and draw deep from the earth. The rain in early August allowed the foliage to recover and meant that by early September, the juice was beautifully balanced. Once again, a choice had to be made, and we opted not to harvest too late in order to maintain the style of the wines.

CÔTE CHALONNAISE WHITES:

The vines on the Côte Chalonnaise enjoyed a trouble-free year. As everywhere across the region, some vines were a little thirsty and had to draw deep into the soil for hydration and strength. The wines of Rully and Montagny are now revealing great fruit and freshness. The balance post-malolactic fermentation is very satisfactory and there is no heaviness, despite the winemaker's concerns given the high temperatures experienced over the year.

CÔTE DE BEAUNE WHITES:

Yields were very good for the white wines. Good flowering the previous year combined with an excellent forecast all raised hopes, but what winemaker could have predicted such high-quality grapes right through to the end of the season? One should not complain.

Evaluating and judging a vintage as one emerges from the winter is always a tricky task, and the 2018 is no different. Granted, fermentation finished a few weeks ago, but getting the right balance between *terroir*, barrels, lees, and outside temperatures is always a challenge.

It is universally understood that the Chardonnay grape does not like high temperatures. Although a many of our wines are indulgent with lovely fruit, others are much less so. These more austere wines will require careful aging for a longer period.

The 2018 vintage is not an easy one and we would not dare to compare it with any other. That said, it is no less fascinating to work with. We will use our experience of the 2015, 2006, 2003, and 1999 vintages in order to hone our style.

CÔTE DE BEAUNE REDS:

It's been many years since winegrowers on the Côte de Beaune have seen Pinot Noir vines bursting with fleshy, aerated bunches and no deviation whatsoever like they did in 2018. The harvest was good across all the villages in the region. Pinot Noir grapes like heat and light so it was a perfect season, exceptional even. Slow and gradual phenolic maturity resulted in very colorful, structured wines with perfectly honed tannins. The lack of rain ensured satisfactory acidity.

We were cautious in our extraction, with *pigeages* in moderation to turn the cap of pips and skins back into the juice, and we monitored fermentation temperatures closely. Our cool cellars meant we could delay the malolactic fermentation, and they are only just beginning now. Like all very mature vintages, we must be patient, but this one is most certainly going to be a key vintage in the future.

**By Franck Grux, Philippe Grillet and the technical team at OLIVIER LAFLAIVE
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