



Olivier Leflaive

PULIGNY-MONTRACHET - FRANCE

## THE 2016 HARVEST

The 2016 vintage was a difficult one. The fall and the start of winter 2015 **saw very little rainfall with just 19 days of limited precipitation leaving water reserves down 30% on the norm. And if you spend Christmas on the balcony, you'll be huddled around the fire at Easter, as the proverb goes!**

However, from **January to March**, mild weather set in, with heavy rainfall that more or less compensated for the autumnal deficit. There were no cold spells or morning frosts to report. Laboratory analysis on grape formation on the vine suggested grape development would be very good for the forthcoming harvest. The winegrowers' union showed similar results for all sectors across the Bourgogne winegrowing region.

The buds started to emerge on **10 April**, when the soil was heavy with water. Rain and cool weather slowed growth and the vines had barely reached the two-leaf phase by the end of the month. Hail struck on 11 April on the vines of the Mâconnais, with Pouilly-Fuissé and Saint-Véran suffering significant damage.

From **26 to 28 April**, temperatures fell significantly at night, down to -3 or -4°C. There was a lot of humidity and the light and a few rays of sunshine did the rest. The famous springtime black frost hit hard. It was desolation for the vines on the plain and the lower part of the slopes in the villages of Chassagne-Montrachet, Meursault, Volnay, Pommard, Beaune, Chorey-lès-Beaune, Savigny-lès-Beaune, and Pernand-Vergelesses. Across the board, the tiny shoots were blackened and the buds destroyed. The frost came too late in the season for there to be hope of saving anything. In the immediate aftermath, the losses were estimated at between 80-90% where the frost had struck. Only a few vines on the slopes – mainly *premier* and *grand crus* – were left unscathed, although those in Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet where Chevalier, Montrachet and Bâtard did not produce much this year. It was a similar story for Corton Charlemagne.

In **mid-May**, the gray and rainy weather didn't help us get back on track. It still felt like winter in the vines that had been hit by frost. The winemakers had to get rid of the buds that had dried out to allow the crown of secondary buds to create fresh shoots for the 2017 harvest. Then it hailed in Chablis on 13 May! At the same time, we had to fight hard against outbreaks of downy and powdery mildew.

Around **10 June**, hot and dry weather settled in, kickstarting photosynthesis and energetic vine growth. **Flowering** began on 22 June in the best exposed sectors, and continued for two weeks in good weather.

**July and August** were very hot and dry. The vines made up for the time lost in the spring, and we experienced periods of hydric stress on the undamaged vines on the slopes. **Veraison** struggled to begin because of that stress – the soils had hardened and the vines found it hard to assimilate.

In early **September**, a few showers helped loosen things up and the grapes quickly ripened. Given the low yield in many plots and the differences in ripeness between varieties, we decided to start picking on **20 September**, finishing up on **8 October**.

We were lucky to have calm and bright weather during that time, with no rain. We had two teams of pickers – fewer in number than normal – and we harvested slowly, sorting the good from the bad grapes as we went.

#### **CÔTE CHALONNAISE WHITES:**

The vines of Rully and Montagny more or less escaped the frost and enjoyed a normal season. High temperatures in August caused some hydric stress but the end of the season was perfect. The wines were lovely and balanced, with good aromatic dynamism and very fresh overall.

#### **CHABLIS WHITES:**

Having already been hit by frost and then hail, lots of the vines went on to suffer hydric stress in August, due to the lack of springtime rain. Ripening was mixed, and for many different reasons, we produced extremely limited amounts of wine this year.

#### **CÔTE DE BEAUNE WHITES:**

The growth cycle reminded us a little of what happened in 2013, but then the problem was hail rather than frost. The wines differ greatly from one village to the next, depending on whether the vines were hit by frost or not. Yields varied from normal in Puligny (45-50 hectoliters per hectare) or very low in Meursault and Chassagne-Montrachet (6-12 hectoliters per hectare). And for obvious reasons, some of our wines were not produced in 2016.

In general terms, and because malolactic fermentation is still continuing as we write, we can say the wines are low in residual sugars and fairly dry. Acidity is not very high, which leads us to think we may not allow full malolactic fermentation to take place for all wines. The fattiness and silky character of the wines is emerging well after a few stirrings, which will help polish its overall texture. As is often the case, a comparison with other vintages is tricky and somewhat premature, so we'd rather save that for a later date.

#### **CÔTE DE BEAUNE REDS:**

Our vines in this sector were hard hit by the frost and here again, some of our wines will not be produced from the 2016 vintage. After 2012, 2013, and 2014, 2016 has also produced yields of 8-15 hectoliters per hectares. Pinot Noir is a little slower than Chardonnay to reach phenolic maturity, and harvesting took place in late September through to early October.

The grapes were well proportioned with ripe and healthy skins and fairly dark pips. After a week of low-temperature maceration, we vinified with caution, without excessive *pigeages* or extraction over a period of 14-20 days.

Our 2016 wines have a lovely color, distinctly fruity aromas, and pleasant, smooth tannins. It's just a pity that volumes are so low!

**By Franck Grux, Philippe Grillet and the technical team at OLIVIER LAFLAIVE  
Puligny-Montrachet, 28 February 2017**