



SANCERRE
POUILLY FUMÉ
MENETOU-SALON
QUINCY
REUILLY
COTEAUX DU GIENNOIS
CHÂTEAUMEILLANT
POUILLY SUR LOIRE
CÔTES DE LA CHARITÉ
COTEAUX DE TANNAY

Press Release

2017 in Centre-Loire – a year of contrasts

2017 is the latest in a succession of early harvests.

As winter drew to a close with temperatures worthy of late spring, nature snowballed ahead. The vines continued to reach each milestone early, right up until harvest - despite very variable conditions which changed month by month and area by area.

The 2017 growth cycle

Winter 2017 was cold and dry, with rainfall some 60% lower than the norm. Temperatures varied, starting out lower than the seasonal norm in January, then rising in February ready to usher in an unseasonably warm spring. By the end of March, and for the first few days of April, temperatures were worthy of mid-May. Vine growth surged ahead, and the first buds began to appear at the beginning of April, 8 – 10 days earlier than the 10-year average.

Unfortunately, the second half of April was blighted by freezing weather, and growers spent around 10 nights battling the frosts. Temperatures plummeted to lows of -5°C; it was an unequal struggle.

Centre-Loire's vineyards, like vineyards throughout France, are now paying a heavy price. Damage levels vary, but every vineyard has been hit to some extent. Châteaumeillant was decimated, and Pouilly-Fumé was again seriously affected.

April will be memorable not only for its heavy frosts, but also for low rainfall, some 70% below the seasonal norm; but once again, our growers picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and got back to work.

Growers spent 2016 battling with record levels of rainfall; May 2017, by contrast, was dry: cold and grey for the first couple of weeks, then the exact opposite towards the end of the month, with temperatures reaching record highs on May 27th and 28th.

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Conditions such as these encourage growth, and the vines began to develop rapidly. Nature set a blistering pace, and growers had no choice but to keep up. There was no time to relax as the frozen vines made up for lost time.

Mildew made only a tentative appearance at the end of May, and oidium was also relatively understated; favourable conditions in winter and spring followed by rapid vine growth had played a major part in mitigating the dangers. This again was in complete contrast to last year, and proof that weather is not always the enemy.

Flowering started at the beginning of June under favourable conditions – warm temperatures with limited rainfall. The vines raced through their phenological milestones, and it looked as if ripening would be fairly uniform.

Then came the heatwave. For the entire two weeks between July 10th and 25th, temperatures regularly soared to 30°C and above, while water was in short supply – down by 40% compared to the norm. Although not critical, the situation gave cause for concern. Vine growth slowed.

The hot weather persisted throughout July, with two peaks in temperature from July 4th – 7th and July 17th – 19th. Rainfall varied across the different areas, and cumulative totals were, in many cases, the results of heavy storms, some even including hail. This also had an impact on production potential.

The rainfall brought much-needed water to some areas, but other sectors – those which had escaped the storms – were beginning to show signs of hydric stress.

Veraison began in the first days of August, under these very divergent conditions. Vine growth had not stopped completely, however, and veraison got off to a slow start.

Ripening

Ripening progressed in very distinctive weather conditions: light August showers alternating with sunshine and giving way to more heatwave temperatures towards the end of the month.

This weather encouraged the berries to swell, and helped develop sugar levels. The few extremely hot days reduced acidity and ensured the absence of unwanted 'green' flavours. Meanwhile, nights remained cool, helping to preserve fruity flavours.

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Low rainfall affected certain areas throughout the season, and in these zones lack of water began to have a major impact. In areas with plentiful rainfall on the other hand, berries began to bloat and burst, or were damaged by wasps, raising concerns that the fruit may rot. Vigilance on the part of the growers went up a notch with every passing day – as did their unease.

September arrived – and so, suddenly, did autumn. Temperatures fell, bringing a return to normal conditions Grape health stabilised, and growers were given the chance to wait for their fruit to reach optimum ripeness.

Harvesting

The grapes continued to ripen under close scrutiny, and there was tension in the air as harvesting started. Picking began with Pinot Gris in Reuilly in the final days of August. In other appellations, Sauvignon harvests started on September 12th, while red varietals were mainly picked between September 19th and 22nd. Once again, Sauvignon Blancs didn't disappoint – grapes were healthy and quality was excellent. For red varietals the situation was a little more variable, and grapes needed rigorous sorting to maintain wine quality.

Harvesters finally laid down their secateurs in October – this is one of the rare vintages where Centre-Loire harvests have been spread over 3 months.

First Impressions

This year's whites are very elegant, with notes of citrus and white-fleshed fruit; minerality and a touch of liquorice add to their charm. They are full and rounded, underpinned by an appealing edge of freshness.

Rosés are generally fairly pale in colour, their dominant flavours of grapefruit and blood oranges beautifully balanced by a delightful edge of vivacity on the palate.

Reds are intense in colour, and show flavours of red berry fruits. Extraction and vinification has been tailored to suit the needs of this year's vintage; the results are well-honed, smooth, supple tannins.

In short – Centre-Loire's 2017 wines are made for enjoyment.

Fabrice DOUCET (SICAVAC)

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