



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

2018: a record year for Centre-Loire

Having braved the unusual weather conditions, 2018 is a unique, early vintage - a vintage shaped by extraordinary extremes of weather, ranging from record levels of spring rainfall to summer heatwaves.

The Wine-Growing Year

Winter was dank and gloomy, with limited sunshine and abundant rainfall. Spring started where winter left off – with pelting rain - and any longed-for improvement to the weather failed to materialise. The first 10 days of March were very cold, verging on freezing. After a brief respite in February, the rain came back with a vengeance. Unlike 2017, nature seemed reluctant to get going. April was marked by unseasonably high temperatures. The warmer weather encouraged budbreak, which took place around mid-April. From then on, things became frantic on the weather front. Temperatures soared; the period from 18th – 22nd April was marked by intense heat, with extremely hot days and mild nights. April 21st went down as the hottest April day on record. In the space of a few days, the vineyards had not only caught up on themselves compared to 2017, but had galloped ahead by a few days. The end of the month saw a return to cooler temperatures, a painful reminder of 2016 and 2017's frosts. Winegrowers braced themselves to do battle with the elements yet again; but there was no need. The danger passed. May also featured copious amounts of rainfall, predisposing the vines to mildew across all areas. Thankfully, in most cases the attacks were not severe. We could tell even now that water shortages would not be a problem for this vintage. It was a record year for rainfall, and in some areas cumulative totals were already approaching the annual average. The vines began to flower at the start of June. Conditions were good. It was clear that 2018 was to be an early vintage.

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Mid-June saw a radical change in the weather. Summer arrived at last, with temperatures reaching heatwave proportions – the start of a new growing season. July brought more of the same, with temperatures again above the seasonal norm; summer 2018 was the hottest since the heatwave of 2003.

Prolonged drought was another feature of summer 2018, the driest since 1945; but low rainfall turned out to be an effective remedy for the continuing mildew, which was proving very stubborn.

Things eased a little towards the end of the growing season. The more sensitive vines continued to show signs of water stress, but on the whole the soils had retained enough water to ensure the vines were adequately supplied.

Such were the conditions at the start of veraison, which kicked off in the last few days of July in the earliest parcels. However, growth had not halted completely by then, so progress was slow.

Ripening

The grapes ripened in sunny, summer conditions. Good moisture levels helped the vines cope with the dry weather, save for a few parcels with particularly free-draining soils or shallow-rooted vines. The wet spring had its advantages after all! One of the consequences of heatwave temperatures during ripening was a reduced level of malic acid in the fruit, which also ensured the absence of unwanted 'green' flavours. Sugars continued to accumulate well and the 2018 vintage began to take on its own distinctive character.

The vigneronns were generally in good spirits, their main worry being the potential impact of the summer drought on berry weight.

Harvests

September's fine weather helped to maintain the quality potential of the harvest. No substantial changes were predicted, and vigneronns could look forward to optimum ripeness across the whole vineyard.

Harvesting started early, with Pinot Grigios being picked in Reuilly at the end of August. For reds, picking started on September 5th. High temperatures at the beginning of the month had caused the berries to start shrivelling; sugar concentration rose rapidly, and the speed of harvesting rose accordingly.

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Sauvignons were picked from September 10th. Harvesting in Centre-Loire was staggered this year due not only to differing ripeness levels, but also to harvest potential.

Another major feature was that harvesting took place in unusually sunny conditions, the sunniest since 2003. Temperatures were well above the seasonal norm, regularly reaching 28 and 29°C, and the afternoon sun proved exhausting for both grapes and harvesters. Schedules were rearranged, and night-time or early-morning harvests became the new norm.

First Impressions

2018 shows every sign of being a sun-driven vintage.

Whites are still a little reticent but show fruity aromas, including distinct notes of pear and mandarin. They are supple and delicate, balancing sweetness with freshness; aromatic profiles are already beautifully precise. Texture and mouthfeel may need tweaking, but all in all, the 2018s are already very pleasing. All we need now is a bit of patience.

Rosés are intensely coloured with well-expressed aromas of fresh red fruit and a deliciously refreshing palate.

Reds are both smooth and powerful, showing a deep ruby-red colour with a hint of violet. Ripe red fruit is the overriding flavour, with a note of spice giving them the distinctive freshness of a Loire red. The palate is structured, with well-rounded tannins.

In conclusion, the 2018 vintage is set to be all about elegance.

Fabrice DOUCET (SICAVAC)

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