

PRIVATE
CELLAR



Burgundy 2017
~ Vintage Report ~





Burgundy 2017 - Vintage Report

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'On est contente – it is a long time since we said that!' These were Marion Javillier's opening words when we visited in late November. The Burgundians have put on an incredibly stoic face over the past eight years as natural disasters piled misery on their vineyards with a dull regularity, but now that they have two good vintages under their belts, 2017 and 2018, they are allowing themselves to be more honest about just how tough this decade has been.

The 2017 Growing Season:

A relatively dry early winter was followed by average rainfall in February and March, with temperatures which rose early; Olivier Lamy went so far as to call it a 'hot' spring compared to normal. The relatively dry soils warmed up quickly and allowed budburst to happen much earlier than usual although a cold snap at the end of April brought things to an abrupt halt, bringing frost to some less fortunate vineyards and the threat of frost right across the Côte d'Or.

After the destruction wrought by frost in 2016, the growers were ready for action in 2017; most villages came together and placed damp 600kg straw bales strategically around the vineyards and organised alarms so that when the temperature reached danger levels the bales could be lit. The aim in this situation is to produce smoke, not heat, so that when the sun rises the next morning the rays don't reach the frozen leaves and turn them to mush, instead allowing them to thaw naturally. On 25th April, the alarms sounded and the fires were lit; frost damage was avoided, although no-one was entirely sure if it was because of the countermeasures or if it wouldn't have happened anyway, but there were no regrets for the time spent protecting their crops. Some areas, like St Aubin and Maranges, were less fortunate because the angle of the slope and wind direction pushed the smoke on an unexpected course, and these areas did see a significant loss in yield.

Having been a good two weeks ahead of the norm, the cold weather in April pushed the vines back to around where they should have been. Flowering started at the end of May and was swift and smooth, not to mention abundant – plants which had had no flowers in 2016 compensated by producing more flowers the following year, something not seen for some time. June was cool to start with, then hot and dry with no water in the Côte de Beaune until mid-July; in Vosne it was some 2°C warmer than usual during June. July saw intermittent rain, then August was hot and dry right until the end, with heavy rainfall coming at the end of the month to relieve the by now thirsty vines.

At almost every Domaine we visited, the white harvest began in the final days of August, normally a hot year indicator, however the analyses for 2017 show it to be anything but, with correct acidity and none of the baked flavours associated with overripe / overly hot fruit. Some reds were harvested in the first couple of days of September, whilst the majority were brought in between the first and second weeks, when there had been some rain resulting in some vines taking up more water than they perhaps needed.

The Quality Question:

It is human nature to want to compare a new release to something we already know, and nowhere is this more prevalent than in the wine regions; everyone is always on the lookout for the next 1947. In Burgundy, the question has two parts because the requirements for a good white vintage are not the same as those for a good red harvest. We were told by many growers that 2017 was an '*année solaire*', confirmed by the early harvest, yet the wines retain the energy, freshness and acidity of a cooler, later-picked vintage. There was a divergence of opinion as to which white vintage 2017 most resembles, with some describing it as having the racy freshness of 2014 and some of the weight of 2015, whilst Domaine Leflaive compared it to 2007, a vintage which has stood the test of time, and 2017 could replicate its ageing potential. What is clear is that the wines have an incredible degree of purity allied with plumpness and, more than even in 2016 or 2014, show the differences between the individual *climats* and *crus*. Most growers recommend drinking their 2015s before the 2016s, and both before the 2017s.

For the reds the picture is more varied, however all of the wines have a beautiful immediacy of fresh berry fruit, with no overripe or jammy flavours to be found; tannins are there and supple but not hugely structured, offering wines which will drink very well in the medium term but without the structure to make very old bones. Several growers remarked on how the reds developed in barrel over the months, with Géraldine Godot of Domaine de l'Arlet scarcely daring to admit that she hadn't liked them at all at the time of going into barrel, only to find the wines growing in breadth and stature each time she tasted; whilst the barrel is part of the refining process, it is not normally responsible for such a positive, wholesale change in quality and complexity. What the wines lack in backbone they make up for in charm and deliciously direct Pinot flavours, a perfect recipe. The most frequent comparison was 2007 ++, but many growers felt that there was no directly comparable recent vintage. What is sure is that they will drink well from an early age and are unlikely to close down; whilst they may age gracefully in the longer term, they are just so delicious now that it seems unlikely they will be allowed to do so.

Market Conditions:

Over the past several years, Burgundians have been hit by the double whammy of small or even non-existent vintages and growing global demand for their wines. It would be a fool who did not increase their prices to compensate for the short harvests and the new appetite, but even so the price increases have not been on the sort of scale witnessed elsewhere in *en primeur* campaigns. *Grands crus* remain as expensive as ever, but given that most growers produce no more than one or two barrels of any *grand cru*, it is clear that the lack of economies of scale as well as pressure to perform at the top puts additional cost pressures on the grower. Nonetheless, and despite 2017 being a good vintage, many growers have held their prices or even reduced them because they know they have a copious 2018 vintage in the cellar which will allow them to make up some of the financial ground lost over the past eight years. And with this in mind, we encourage you to fill your cellars too.

To discuss the vintage, learn more about the wines and for help in preparing your wish list, please call us on 01353 721 999 or contact your usual sales person using the details on the following page.

The Burgundy 2017 vintage is offered in bond and will be shipped in the spring and autumn of 2019.
Please let us know at the time of ordering if you would like to store your wines with
Private Cellar Reserves LLP or take delivery of the wines Duty Paid.