

# The Burgundy Briefing

news, views and tastings

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Issue 5, May/June 2006

## Vintage Report

### 2003 Vintage:

In such a warm vintage it is difficult to pick at optimum polyphonic ripeness. (Gouges recalls the average temperature July was about 35°C with some peaks at 42°C, and in August a little bit warmer, with some peaks at 43°C.) This is the typical challenge for the New World pinot producer, as the sugar accrues more quickly than the skins can ripen, but not something the French are accustomed to. It is easy to be left with baked flavours, low acidity and green tannins. The Burgundians also faced drought and dehydration, although those who waited were rewarded by a little rain at the end of August and the beginning of September.

Things were not normal from the beginning. Charles Rousseau comments that "the vintage was marked by the heat during the whole vegetative cycle. The vine blossom was affected by the drought. Many clusters had coulure and millerandage and the yield lost was 30% of the potential even at flowering." He highlights the problem of "less maturation than expected," as a consequence of high temperatures and lack of water which affected the metabolism of the plant. The vintage was 48% less than normal here.

For Philippe Senard, it was the first time he had picked so early (26<sup>th</sup> August-2<sup>nd</sup> September). Some growers began harvesting in mid August, cutting short their holidays. Ewan Faiveley, who took over from his father in 2004, recalls telephoning his father and telling him "To come back right away."

Ewan Faiveley tells me it was "a vintage to take risks; to follow your intuition"... He describes it as very challenging, "we were scared could begin in the vineyard it was so hot. If temperature was not controlled it would have been a disaster." They took the textbook approach, harvesting early, cooling the grapes down to 5 –6 degrees and holding back on extraction.

I asked Frederic Drouhin if deeper soils and cooler sites fared notably better in 2003. "Heat more than drought affected the vines in my opinion. Areas which always have deep soils with vigorous vines and lots of vegetation have been helped because of the shelter the foliage provided. But the advantage was more in terms of crop level than quality because the grapes on the shaded side of normal vineyards on the slopes did not suffer much. Only the sunny side burned and dried berries. This being said, the areas that usually have little earth or sandy subsoil struggled more than others for water but these vineyards are not necessarily on the slopes; the flat north side of Beaune, some areas of chorey and below the aloxe corton village come to my mind as examples but are not unique. Cooler areas like the hautes cotes indeed had a temperature advantage. So did areas that look north on the cote."

In Burgundy I have heard it said that 'we' have an overly British approach to the 2003 vintage. The British love Burgundy for its refined qualities, for its finesse and the 2003 vintage does not conform.

When I first tasted red Burgundy back in February 2004, the fruit tasted chunky, black and spicy and more like the Syrah than Pinot Noir. Alcohol levels at 14% upwards made the vintage seem heady and unbalanced. By November 2004, the 2003s I tasted with Clive Coates on his last trip for The Vine, appeared less porty. The alcohol was less apparent and the harmony and balance much improved. By January 2005 and en-primeur tastings in London the reds were looking much more like Pinot Noir from Burgundy.

### **Style**

This will never be an elegant, refined vintage – the perfume, texture, tannins and balance of Pinot Noir is distorted. However the best wines are very appealing with sumptuously rich fruit and decent structure.

Gregory Gouges describes the style of their Nuits Saint George. "The 2003 style is rich, very well-balanced because of an early picking, slightly syrupy, but this feature is characteristic from this specific vintage."

Frederic Drouhin comments on Drouhin's whites. "They are quite aromatic with more exotic flavors than white flowers flavors. They are quite rich, round, supple, with a lower acidity than normal. The terroir nuances are not very obvious but they are quite sexy, appealing and very affordable even for the Grands Crus."

Terroir character is often masked in 2003. Where it is apparent, it is worth noting (see Les Domaine Familiaux de Tradition tasting notes)

### **Tannins**

The tannins of pinot noir, which can be so svelt and fine, are not typical in 2003. Because of the problems of a short hot season, the tannins can be very aggressive. Those who picked at the optimum time for the vintage and extracted judiciously have achieved good tannin ripeness, together with the balance and harmony necessary to age their wines. For example Domaine Rousseau handled the vintage in a masterly fashion and produced elegant, supple wines. Most adapted their winemaking methods, turning to *rémontage*, instead of the traditional *pigeage*, which is arguably more aggressive (although extraction is as much about how it is managed, as the method employed). At Domaine Gouges they usually do two *pigeages* per day.

In 2003, they did no *pigeage* at the beginning of the winemaking, just one pumping over per day, except for the last 3 days, where they reverted to one *pigeage* per day. Many, like Philippe Senard moved to three-quarter destemming, Gouges completely destemmed, and Rousseau like so many they decreased the *cuvaison*, in their case to 10 days compared to an average of 15-20. Senard who also shorted the *cuvaison* remarks, "I remember 1976 when many of us made too long a vinification and produced hard wine."

High levels of new oak are noticeable on some of the wine. Where barrel orders are placed in May prior to the vintage, domaines may well have found themselves with rather a surplus when the vintage came in at up to 50% of the normal yields and therefore used up to twice the new oak usually used in the hope that the rich fruit would cope.

Drouhin's describes the vintage "as a vintage of "white gloves". This means that the winemaker had to put on white gloves when entering the winery on day 1 and still had to have its gloves white when closing the winery. It is a vintage where it was not necessary to look for maceration or extraction as all the potential were already there in the berries. The winemakers that try to extract color and tannins produced wines with strong back bones but lost the balance and the lush."

### **Acidity**

The other more interesting effect was on acidity. Acidity in this vintage is an interesting point. It is low, but perhaps not as low as expected for the reds and if producers preserved sufficient acidity in 2003, it was possible to make relatively elegant wines and balanced ones. Renaud de Villette at Domaine d'Angerville is among those who noticed an increase in the acidity from the analysis during fermentations. The Burgundians were not alone in claiming increased acidity. Christian Seely, recently checked the figures for Pichon Longueville in 2003 and confirmed a slight increase. Jean-René Matignon, the Technical Director at Pichon Longueville, explains it thus: There is a gradient of acidity in the berry especially when the weather is dry: lower acidity close to the skin and higher acidity close to the pip. During the maceration process (reds), the first juice extracted has low acidity. With the daily pump over and the start of the alcoholic fermentation the juice with higher acidity is extracted and the total acidity goes up. Also the alcoholic fermentation can produce small quantity of acids (malic, succinic, lactic, pyruvic and citramalic).

I cannot say even the best wines are vibrant, but they are balanced.

### **When should one drink this vintage and how will this it age?**

The whites are ready for drinking now and some of the wines are already showing some evolved characters. They are undoubtedly opulent wines...the acidity is low and they have a ripe, open, somewhat topical personality. The lower acidities will not make them long keepers.

Reds: Some wines are overwhelmed with plummy to stewy fruit and lack the structure for longer ageing, although they are very attractive now. Some have been so careful with extraction, that the wines may not have enough structure. In many the acidity is too low, Others have extracted too much.

For the wines where balance has been achieved: While some of these reds are ready, those with harder tannins might need the rest of this decade to come round, others a couple of years. They will be drinking before the 2002s. As for ageing capacity given the higher than normal pHs, one would have thought limited. However the wines with balance, not just ripe fruit, should develop over the next ten, maybe twenty years. I would certainly not make any rash statements that these wines will not age.

Note: There is an odd dichotomy in some wine, ripe fruit on the palate together with some secondary characters on the nose. The brie-like notes of a mature Chablis, the savoury characters of Pinot.

### **Two opposing views from the producers:**

Frederic Drouhin: "For the whites I will not recommend to hold the wines very long. Maybe 5 to 7 years for the Grands Crus. For the reds this is another story, I believe the small villages could be enjoyed now on their youth and for the next 7 to 10 years. For the top Grands Crus I personally believe they could behave like the 1947 which means they could keep in decades. The wines are packed with so many nutrients, they show a good natural equilibrium (we did not acidified many of our wines) so that I don't believe the wines will go wrong."

Gregory Gouges advises drinking their 2003s in 3 to 4 years and comments on their ageing potential. "I think these wines have less ageing potential than the other wines; Maybe the NSG and Clos des Porrets will mature beneficially during 4 to 5 years, and 6 to 7 years for les Saint Georges. Usually our wines have a very long potential ageing, sometimes 30 years with a careful cellaring, to develop on elegant and "soft" aromas, with a very good complexity. Whereas 2003 won't beneficiate in the time, because it is a wine already very good to drink. Round, soft with good but soft tannins, and a quite low acidity, these wines are able to be drunk more easily than the wines we used to produce on a classic vintage."

When to drink

For those that love fruitiness, then many smaller wines are accessible now, other you will have to wait 2-4 years for the tannins to integrate, also if you are chasing some complexity. Drouhin suggests drinking the 2001, 2000, 1998 and 1997 before and for a bit of complexity on the whites drink after the 2001 and 2000.

## **Quality**

Once you accept that Pinot Noir this year is different, you can start appreciating its virtues.

Where the fruit is contained, it can be lovely. The best wines are juicy, luscious with velvety tannins. Examples include Domaine Germain. Roumier cleverly retained elegance and rein in the vintage character. The warm vintage worked well for Domaine Trapet – fleshing out the domaine's rather lean style.

However predicting who has made the best wine more difficult than one might expect. There are some hard tannic volnays and some much more accommodating wine from Gevrey-Chambertin and Morey St Denis.

The whites can be poor and flabby or splendidly rich and rather delicious. I would advise enjoying its fruitiness and drinking up.

Although 2003 does conform to expectations, or I must admit, to my palate, this does not make it a bad vintage. It will find favour with lovers of Californian pinot noir (not New world pinot in general. It is very different from the chalky pinots of Central Otago). The vintage deserves a place in any serious cellar for comparative tastings, curiosity value and enjoyment. These conditions may never happen again. Also some of these wines should age very well.

## **A few vigneron comments**

Philippe Senard "The 2003s are for me a rather special, mainly because they are not tasty and do not even look like classic Burgundies. It does not mean they are bad. They are just different!"

Gregory Gouges, "The quality is the same that in the other years, but it is just completely different in style for Pinot noir."

Frederic Drouhin "It is a vintage where the terroir nuances are not that very obvious (a Chablis Les Clos is similar to a Chablis Vaudésir, a Volnay is similar to a Pommard). So for the purists they will be disappointed. For the general consumer which represent the vast majority they should LOVE the vintage because it is so SEDUCTIVE."

At Faiveley they have "never seen such a controversial vintage." It had great results in the US, no impact in the UK and made quite a good impression in France. They are holding back a decent chunk of stock – the biggest inventory they can - in the expectation of the vintage being another 1947. They predict that the 2003s will live a lifetime.

To see how the 2003s fare in the market place in the UK, turn to the market report for 2005 in this issue.