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HARVEST 2006 PREVIEW

By Martine Saunier

A relatively cold and wet winter, followed by a late spring with no frost... a blooming season on schedule... it seems that no one had to worry! July was scorching, then August was cold, overcast and wet, with unseasonably cool temperatures from the Mediterranean coast to Chablis.

Upon my arrival in Macon, I immediately wanted to hear about the harvest from **Dominique Cornin**. He was a total pessimist, complaining that *veraison* had stopped because of the cold weather in August, and that after two days of heavy rain, mildew had developed. By September 6th, the temperature had risen to 90°F and changes for the better occurred very quickly—miracles happen sometimes! The grapes gained in sugar content, and by September 15th Dominique was a happy winemaker tasting his first grape juice of Beaujolais Blanc. You could already guess what to expect: very smooth, subtle elegance, and incredible length. We looked at each other and both had the same remark: “It is better than the 2005!”

Christophe Perrot-Minot was invisible until September 18th. He was “pre-harvesting” for the last two weeks, removing grapes damaged by a hail storm at the end of July in parts of Chambolle-Musigny and Gevrey-Chambertin. Naturally, not all appellations were damaged with the same intensity, and overall he removed about 20% of his crop. But Christophe was unusually calm, setting up a new and improved *table de tris*, with two caliber grills to separate the small grapes from the larger ones for his “Cuvée Ultra” *Vieilles Vignes*. We drove to his vineyard of Morey-St.-Denis “La Riotte” where he picked grapes from different parts of the vineyard into small plastic bags. We ate a few as we walked up and down the rows: not ripe yet, hard skin, but we noticed lots of *millerandage*—so important for the quality of the vintage. Then we went to Mazoyeres-Chambertin, where the grapes showed more ripeness and hardly any noticeable damage from the hail. Strangely, you could recognize how different the grapes of those two appellations taste. Next was Chapelle-Chambertin, seriously hit and chewed-up... not a pretty sight. Then back to the winery, where the collected grapes were crushed in Christophe’s mini-press and analyzed immediately by his assistant oenologist, Jerome Gay, and a couple of trainees from Dijon University. The harvest took place the week of the 25th. A small yield, but *great* quality, due to a natural alcohol content of 13.5% with perfect PH.

Arnaud Mortet and Claire Forestier were also busy picking sample grapes. We walked up and down Lavaux-St.-Jacques, Au Vellé, En Champs and En Songe, next to the cemetery where Denis is resting. Each vineyard showed a different level of maturity. It’s a puzzle... one has to decide the best day to harvest. Ultimately, they started the week of the 25th under warm and sunny weather with no rain in sight.

Cyril Audoin and Arnaud Mortet both harvested their Marsannay “Les Longerois” on September 28th.

Lalou Bize-Leroy started her whites and reds in the Côtes de Beaune on September 20th and was through by September 28th. She was absolutely *thrilled* with the quality, but the yield is very small: for

example, she quoted 11 hectoliters/hectare for her Vosne-Romanée “Les Genavrières.” Her Nuits villages (Bas de Combe, Les Lavières, Les Allots) will be blended in one cuvée, as there is not enough to vinify them individually. She claimed that her Nuits-St.-Georges “Les Vignerondes” is exceptional. She also noticed that her first fermentation started as low as 10°C—she could not recall that having happened in all her 50 years of wine making.

On September 9th, **Sébastien Gay** was debating whether he should get a *table de tris*. I told him bluntly that it was not a choice but a *must*. By September 18th the table was delivered, in spite of an upset father, as a cement platform had to be built in a hurry. Sébastien and I triumphed! Now that the harvest is over and in spite of an early removal of bad grapes (they still had to discard 20%), the quality is there to prove it.

Monday 13th, I drove to Chateau Rayas. **Emmanuel Reynaud** was picking his white Grenache: very sweet and tasty. He has enlarged the winery with the addition of two large cement vats and a new connection to the wine cellar to transfer the wine by gravity into the casks. Chateauneuf had one inch of rain during the weekend, but the *mistral* blew to dry the vineyard, avoiding mildew. **Laurence Feraud** at Pegau was also harvesting her white Grenache and her *vins de pays*. Syrah, Cinsault, and Mourvèdre were next; red Grenache was last, as of September 28th, with natural sugars of 14 %-15%.

To sum up, it seems that the 2006 will see some excellent cuvées from the talented and serious winemakers. I will be back at the end of November to assess the vintage. Always hard to follow the hyped 2005s, but remember, we always find gems in any vintage.

Sadly, during harvest, **Henri Jayer** passed away on Wednesday, September 20th, as I was flying back to California. His demise was expected after a long and painful battle with cancer. Henri has been my mentor for 33 years. Following my first tasting of his 1972, even before his great vineyard of Vosne-Romanée “Cros Parantoux” came into production, my palate had a revelation of what great Burgundies should taste like. His barrel tasting of 1978 will never leave my memory, and I will be eternally grateful for all the time we spent together discussing winemaking and vineyard management over a good meal prepared by his wife, Marcelle, accompanied by some of his best wines. He loved America, which discovered him before France. We will never forget him.