

DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI



2010 VINTAGE REPORT

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THE 2010 HARVEST REPORT

by Aubert de Villaine

Throughout the year the vigneron's work is nothing other than a dialogue with his natural environment.

It is a dialogue that often turns into a struggle to guide the vineyards and vintage toward the harvest and away from the precipices that lie in wait for them, with names such as Mildew, Oidium, Botrytis . . . besides many others.

Rarely has a vintage brushed so close to the precipice as the 2010 and, in the end, recovered its health with such success. At the moment when we are writing these lines, it is with joy and tranquility that the village streets of Burgundy, somnolent beneath the sun, are filled with rich scents emanating from the fermentation vats, while the vines, relieved of their fruit and at peace, prepare themselves for their autumnal sleep and the gestation of the next vintage.

The beginning of the growing season was uneventful until flowering, even though the wind on Palm Sunday — the wind that, according to tradition, will become the prevailing wind of the year — was a west wind, which is to say, not very favorable. A west wind brings clouds and rain, quite the contrary to the much desired north wind that brings dry weather and bright sunshine. In the end, west and northwest winds would be dominant in 2010.

Let us review the striking events of this campaign which, as never before, required of the vigneron his skill, experience and rapid intervention in synchrony. If one wished to compare a vintage like this, filled with challenges and snares, to a Homeric epic, one would say that the foremost quality of the vigneron was not the heroism of Achilles or Hector in the Iliad, but the prudence, cunning and obstinacy of Ulysses in the Odyssey.

Flowering always has a major influence on the construction of a vintage, because it is at this moment that, depending upon whether weather conditions are favorable or unfavorable, the vine is going to fertilize all or many of the clusters and berries it carries or only a few. In both cases, flowering's influence will be a determining factor on the volume of the harvest as well as on the quality of the wine.

When flowering began in early June, rain and cool temperatures prevailed. As a result, there was *coulure* (shatter or dropped berries) and *millerandage* (partial crop failure with mixed-size berries with thick skins). In addition, flowering stretched out over a good week's time, which resulted in an uneven evolution towards maturity from vine to vine, from grape cluster to grape cluster, and even from berry to berry within the same cluster.

This type of flowering, limiting for quantity since it diminishes the load of grapes to ripen, is often favorable to quality, notably when weather conditions are difficult, as was the case in 2010.

Thus, the uneven and not very fertile flowering season was the first significant event of the vintage. It will not determine the final quality but will have a strong influence upon it.

In June and July, we experienced an alteration of hot or very hot periods — but never scorching — and humid periods, favorable to the development of mildew and early botrytis. As is normal with organic viticulture, the anti-cryptogamic struggle had to be so much the more attentive, continuous and without respite, since it can only prevent or protect against, but cannot cure. In this regard, the risk of defeat is always present, far more so than with the conventional chemical option. Therefore, experience and observation were of prime importance.

The struggle against the enemies of the vineyard is the domaine of Nicolas Jacob, our vineyard manager, and his team. They did a remarkable job, so well that the vineyards arrived at veraison (the stage when the Pinot Noir berries change color to red) and the month of August in a very satisfactory, healthy state.

August was exceptionally cold and humid — precipitation reached record levels for the period — and maturation, starting from a veraison that clearly showed the unevenness initiated during flowering, advanced with a slower rhythm. **This is the second significant event of the vintage: most certainly, climatic conditions were very unfavorable during the month of August** and continued into September with alternating high temperatures and storms succeeding one another. But the qualitative structure of the grapes, affected by *millerandage* which produced small berries with thick skins, was confirmed and even consolidated. Thanks to this firm structure, the grapes proved to be resistant to botrytis which raged at the end of maturation.

Be that as it may, in early September, at the approach of harvest that we anticipated would begin on September 20, it was hard to be optimistic. The weather remained uncertain, governed by west and south winds that brought recurrent humid heat alternating with rainstorms. We were in this classic situation of the northern vineyards when often, at the end of the vegetative cycle, weather conditions install a well-known scenario as the warm southern winds furnish the finishing touches to the maturation of the grapes. But this heat is the source of storms that favor the growth of botrytis.

THE 2010 HARVEST REPORT *(continued)*

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Even though the grapes in 2010 were resistant, thanks to their structure, botrytis and maturation were both progressing. It was up to the vigneron to determine by the date of harvest the golden mean between harvesting ripe fruit and an acceptable percentage of deterioration.

On September 12, a violent hail storm destroyed part of the Santenay vineyard, and in the course of this same storm, Montrachet received a downpour which, aided by the ambient heat, resulted in a spectacular development of botrytis in the white wine vineyards.

Fortunately, Vosne-Romanée was spared these heavy perturbations and profited from sunny days that allowed the Pinot Noir to demonstrate once again its capacity to produce sugars at an accelerated rate just before reaching full maturity. This maturity was physiologically reached on September 20, but as the vines had never known the stress of dehydration over the course of the entire year which is very helpful for the complete development of phenolic compounds, we decided to let the grapes ascend one degree more under the still-powerful sun, towards an optimal maturity.

It is rare during harvest, that is to say, during the eight to ten days when one harvests the fruit of a year's labor, that the weather does not concentrate all the climatic characteristics of the growing season. This was indeed the case in 2010, a "cyclothymic" year, if ever there was one.

On September 22, we harvested very healthy grapes in Corton, and on the following day, it was the turn of Montrachet, where, perhaps due to the storm of September 19, the grapes reached a high level of maturity and showed a significant percentage of noble rot (botrytis).

On September 24, while we were beginning the harvest in Vosne-Romanée, storms broke out and in a single day brought very important quantities of water to the vineyards. Humidity set in and remained in place until the first rays of sun which we did not see again until September 30. This resulted in the steady progression of botrytis, but, and this is the third significant event of the vintage, the maturation gained at the end of the vegetative cycle was secured, as well as the resistance of the small berries and thick skins. Nevertheless, the progression of botrytis required a severe selection during harvest.

Our team of harvesters performed their "haute couture" work, in which their experience makes them past masters. On the one hand,

they left aside for a second picking the vines bearing large or less ripe berries; on the other hand, they eliminated from the good clusters the grapes attacked by botrytis. Thus, it was a harvest of perfectly ripe and healthy grapes which, after Bernard Noblet and his team finished the selection process on the sorting table, was put into the cuves.

The vineyards were harvested in the following order:

Corton	September 22
Montrachet and Richebourg (begin)	September 23
Richebourg (stop in morning; begin in afternoon)	September 24
Richebourg (finish) and Romanée-Conti	September 25
La Tâche (begin)	September 26
La Tâche (finish) and Romanée-St.-Vivant (begin)	September 27
Romanée-St.-Vivant	September 28
Romanée-St.-Vivant (finish) and Grands-Échézeaux	September 29
Grands Échézeaux (finish) and Échézeaux (begin)	September 30
Échézeaux	October 1
Échézeaux (finish) and begin second picking	October 2
Finish second picking	October 5

The harvest proceeded in rather cold temperatures; lovely natural pre-fermentary macerations set up that permitted the thick skins of the grapes to slowly release their tannins and anthocyanins. At the time of this writing, after 17 days of cuvaison for the first harvested, the wines show a pretty rose mousse with pump-overs, red colors and, on the nose and in the mouth, a fine tannic structure. The acidities are sterling quality, and the fermentation aromas are noble.



Romanée-Conti vines in winter

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TASTING NOTES FROM THE DOMAINE

General characteristics of the vintage: The 2010s are classic wines with beautiful structure and surprising concentration, given the difficult conditions of the growing season. The aromas are already expressive and show a freshness that is a sign of the long ageing potential of the vintage.



CORTON 2010

The nose is pure, delicate and already open. In the mouth, the texture is delicate, the finish is soft and supple. This is a wine that can be enjoyed while still young.



ÉCHÉZEAUX 2010

The nose is rich and full. The mouth is pure and delicate, but also deep and fat, with a touch of spices. A long life for this wine.



GRANDS-ÉCHÉZEAUX 2010

The nose is pure and delicate. The mouth is fresh and transparent, with a touch of violets. Elegance is the dominant impression. This wine already presents an air of seduction.



ROMANÉE-ST-VIVANT 2010

Very expressive on the nose, with complex aromas. In the mouth, there is firmness, power and length. Tannins are firm but also smooth and agreeable. A great Romanée-St.-Vivant.



RICHEBOURG 2010

The nose is dark but fleshy. In the mouth, this wine is even more powerful than the Romanée-St.-Vivant, but also more closed. A wine with great cellaring potential.



LA TÂCHE 2010

A well-balanced wine that combines elegance and fine tannic material. This balance underlines the purity and transparency of this classic La Tâche.



ROMANÉE-CONTI 2010

The nose is extremely fine, but reserved, as is normal for a young Romanée-Conti. A touch of violets on the finish augers a long cellaring potential. In the mouth, the wine shows its length, an impression of refinement and elegance, with an airy side that is typical of its terroir.



MONTRACHET 2010

On the nose, aromas of honey that are characteristic of this terroir. In the mouth, the minerality gives an impression of freshness and transparency.