

# DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI

2018 VINTAGE OFFERING



WILSON DANIELS

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DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI  
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## 2018 VINTAGE HARVEST REPORT

At the time of this writing, the harvest is over and, as every year, the great painter of autumn has settled in our vineyards. Every morning, we discover, a little more numerous and more intense, trails of pure gold that his brush painted on the vineyards overnight. While in the wineries and in the cellars the tumultuous fermentation of the grapes is giving birth to the wine, the vineyards are preparing for their winter death in this invasive soft and quiet golden tide.

Now, as vineyards and the grape growers are finding peace again, it is important to look back at the turbulence and disorders that affected them throughout the year, and try to bring out the key-factors that contributed to the “building” of this 2018 vintage. A vintage which, as the preceding thousand or so, will be unique, with its own life, not resembling any other... The tasting of fermenting musts has already shown this.

This year again, according to our northern and continental climatic conditions, of which extreme variability we have to regard as normal, there was obviously a Homeric struggle in the story that the winegrower lived with his vineyards from March to September... these six months were full of uproar and sometimes fury that must be read as an odyssey. The episodes that seemed in disorder became coherent when the wine, after finishing fermentation, came out of the wine press and suddenly translated them into aromas and tastes that were both familiar and totally new.

Within six months, the following events succeeded one another: the rapid, almost crazy growth of vine shoots in the spring; then the appearance of grapes; their fragrant flowering; their *véraison* in summer; their ripening thanks to the full attention of their mother, the vine; and lastly, the relief of the harvest... and the peace that followed...

For the greatest part of these six months, we were under the impression that the weather conditions were dragging the vines and us into a crazy ride that we had never experienced so intensely before. Even if the hostility of nature was evident and the obstacles in front of us well known (mildew, heatwaves, storms, humidity and the resulting acceleration of vegetation), their virulence created a scenario that left us breathless at the time of the harvest, one of the most precocious of these last fifty years.

For those who still deny global warming, it is to be recalled that in the '70s the average harvest starting date was October 5. The average date of these last ten years is September 15. 2013 remains the only recent vintage that we harvested in early October, on a date that was considered normal 30 years ago. Even if the progress of vine cultivation and especially of yield control can be part of the explanation, global warming is of course the main factor behind this increase in early ripening.

Winter was cold with negative temperatures in February and March and we had snow until early April; but, surprisingly, budburst occurred as soon as April 10, in other words early, even if it was 15 days later than in 2017 (this trend was reversed in summer and 2018 finally gained a short advance over 2017).

It rained a lot in March; snow melted and important reserves of water formed in the soils that were useful for the rest of the year.

April was beautiful but very hot with summerlike temperatures up to 33°C. Everything was going fast. By the end of March, pruning was hardly finished and canes hardly tied when disbudding was necessary. We were even obliged to lift vine shoots up before ending disbudding, which is extremely rare. As a consequence the team had to work relentlessly, even on days off.

Nicolas Jacob's vineyard team had great difficulty in keeping pace, but held out despite the rainy and hot weather that brought storms and disrupted work, but also accelerated life around the vineyards – this mysterious and ardent life, a result of the combined actions of fauna, mushrooms, bacteria and other microbes surrounding roots and feeding them to produce vine shoots, leaves and grapes, with the exaggerated help this year of the sun, rain and winds – a bustling, but often discordant orchestra that finally found harmony in the wine, the translator of the symbiosis of all those elements.

May and June humid conditions made it difficult to apply the necessary treatments. Rains were frequent until mid-June and in order to be able to treat and plough, it was important not to miss the very rare “windows” of fine weather that permitted the soils and the vineyards to dry.

The pressure of mildew was strong in Vosne-Romanée, the strongest we had known in recent years and the leaves and grapes there were severely “bitten” despite all the efforts we made to protect them. Fortunately, the Côte de Beaune, the Corton and even the sector immediately next to Flagey Échézeaux were almost completely spared.

Uneven rainfalls were another characteristic of the year. Benevolent gods watered the Côte de Beaune at the right times, for instance in August, whereas in Vosne-Romanée the few rainfalls came at the wrong times, when the mildew spores were developing, encouraged by morning frosts. Despite all the attention, the quality of men and materials, the attack broke out and one morning we discovered that some grapes were beginning to dry and roast as if they had been attacked by an invisible fire.

The attack was contained, but it had a negative impact and in August, next to the grapes that were ripening, we noticed the dark stains of those that had roasted. At the time of the harvest, those dried parts would be removed. That is the role of sorting. It would be carried out with the greatest care in the few affected areas so that only healthy grapes should end up in the vats.

From mid-June, the trend completely changed. Without any warning, the North wind blew clouds away. Rains stopped and a very dry season began with two heatwaves in August and spikes up to almost 40°C on some afternoons.

In the meantime, flowering occurred very early, in late May, a week ahead of 2017. It was rapid despite humidity and grapes were visibly getting bigger.

By August 15, sugar contents were already very high, but phenolic maturity was not at the same level; it was essential to wait before harvesting until both maturities, that of sugar and that of phenolic elements (skins, seeds and stems) had converged in the harmony of a balanced maturity. This phenomena of “disconnection” that warm regions are used to is rare in Burgundy. This element would be taken into account at the time of deciding on the harvest date.

We were amazed at the ability of the vineyard to resist heat. They did better than in 2003 thanks to the water reserves that had accumulated in spring and to the few storms that brought some water that, even if in small quantity, was sufficient for photosynthesis to function and maintain the sap link between the vineyard and the grapes.

We were all the more surprised to see how the vineyards resisted in 2018 (and it was another important factor in the “building” of the vintage), as the North wind bringing beautiful, dry and warm weather kept on blowing every day from June onward. As a result, we had sun, but it also dried our vineyards. The latter however resisted all the more easily as over the years the biodynamic treatments have increased their autonomy to defend themselves against the excesses of nature.

From August 20, as is normal at the end of the maturation cycle, the ripening of grapes accelerated. The grapes were magnificent and the berries that we tasted were sweet, juicy and some were “figgy,” which is a sign of high ripeness. Skins were thick and black, but aromas were not yet up to our expectations.

The last week of August was hot, but bearable with seasonal temperatures. In a cloudless sky, full maturity was reached at last. On August 31, we began harvesting our Corton (Clos du Roi, Bressandes and Renardes) — it was the first time since 2003 that we began so early. Then on September 3, one day earlier than in 2017, the picking started in Vosne-Romanée in the following order: Richebourg, Romanée-St-Vivant, Romanée-Conti, Grands Échézeaux, ending with La Tâche on the 12th.

As for Montrachet, it benefited from exceptional climatic conditions: it was spared from diseases and the grapes ripened in a regular, complete and even perfect way. Harvesting took place on September 7. It was beautiful with quantities that we had not seen for a long time.

The wine that has just finished fermentation is full of promises. It already shows both on the palate and in the nose the characteristic honey and this typical “gras-sec” contained by a delicate minerality that makes the Montrachet a unique wine.

We will remember this harvest as luminous and almost ideal due to the beautiful weather that we enjoyed, apart from a small storm on September 7, on the eve of picking the Romanée-Conti. But we will also remember its difficulties due to the severe sorting in some vineyards, and the impression we had to be constantly on “the razor’s edge” because of heat and the extremely rapid progression of ripening that resulted.

We cannot help thinking of 2003, the last scorching and ultra-precocious vintage. But contrary to 2003, the heatwave was not so long and the few regular storms brought additional water to the vineyards, besides the winter and spring rains. That is the reason why we harvested very ripe grapes that were swollen with juice. Quality is great and quantity is good, without being exaggerated, especially in Vosne-Romanée where the vineyards were hit by mildew. We realized, even before fermentation, that what we had lost in quantity, had surely been gained in quality as far as the density and expression of the wine are concerned.

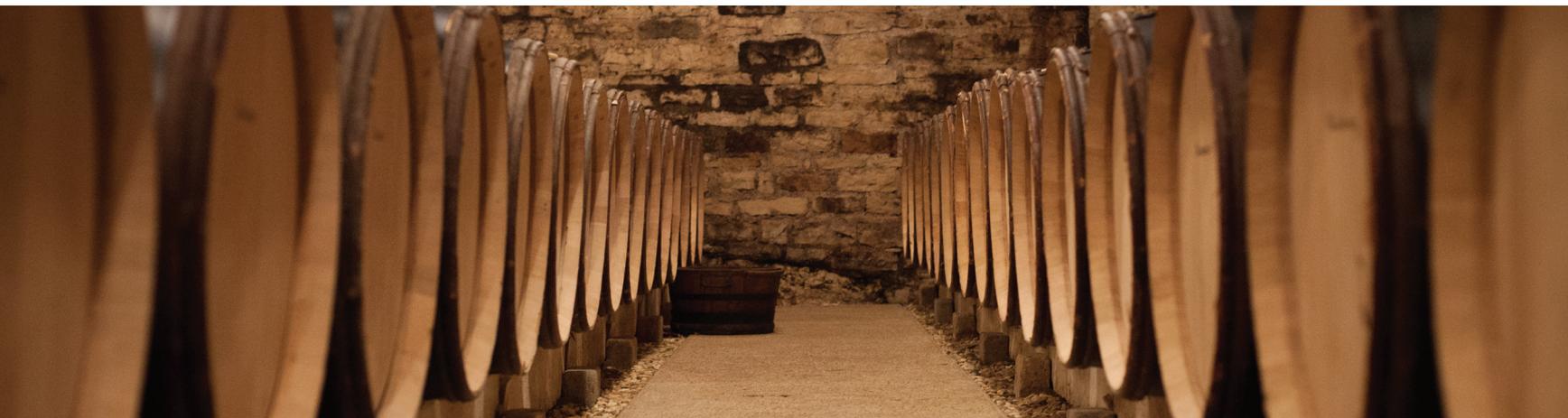
Vinifications were carried out perfectly by Alexandre Bernier and his team. Musts fermented in vats for 18-21 days. Their richness in sugar, increased by the figgy thick-skinned berries, was such that we had to keep them in assemblage vats for a few days to enable them to finish the fermentation of their sugars.

Everything is over now. I am writing in front of the still radiant vineyards. La Tâche has just been put into barrels. All the other wines have already been taken down to the cellars where, if one keeps silent, one can hear the barrels quietly babbling like babies in their cradles.

Our high percentage of old vines and the efforts we put into keeping their production in balance with the vintage have resulted in reasonable, even low yields for the red wines in Vosne-Romanée: 18 hl/ha for Romanée-Conti. They are more generous in Flagey: 32 hl/ha for Grands Échézeaux and a little more for Corton: 35 hl/ha.

No need to be a great expert to be aware today that the vintage is exceptional as regards both red and white wines. It is too early to express a definite opinion about what will be the final characteristics of the wines, but we cannot help finding in them the fruit of 2015 and the extreme ripeness of 2003. This might offer us a new 1947, a legendary vintage, if any... but let’s remain cautious and content ourselves with the joy of this harvest that nothing in the spring indicated as finally being so luminous and promising!

— *Aubert de Villaine, Co-Director*  
*October 15, 2018*





## CORTON

Since November 11, 2008, the Domaine has consented to lease the AOC Corton Grand Cru vineyards of Domaine Prince Florent de Merode, for a total of 2.2746 hectares in the climats of Clos du Roi, Bressandes and Renardes. Clos du Roi: 0.5721 hectares; Bressandes: 1.1944 hectares; Renardes: 0.5081 hectares



## ÉCHÉZEAUX

Of all the Domaine's wines, this is the most forward. It opens up sooner than the others, with a ravishing clarity of expression, uncomplicated and cleanly etched; a caressing softness cloaks a steely skeleton which permits it to evolve with elegance. He is the younger brother of Grands Échézeaux, the glorious elder whose fortune Échézeaux aspires to equal. It sometimes comes very close when it speaks with the muscular language of the conquistadors. Surface area: 4.6737 hectares



## GRANDS ÉCHÉZEAUX

It is "Grands" before being Échézeaux. It is a country gentleman, aristocrat and dreamer, who idles willingly with the unhurried step of his horse in a forest filled with the scents of sundry mushrooms, moss, decaying leaves and of furtive small game, which spill forth in a multitude of shifting alliances. All of that is expressed with feeling, in a refined language — musical, concise and pure like the message of a Mozart quartet. Surface area: 3.5263 hectares



## ROMANÉE-ST-VIVANT

Romanée-St-Vivant is flirtatious; one cannot help loving it. Behind this grace resides a strength in such perfect balance that, at first, it is imperceptible. Surface area: 5.2858 hectares



## RICHEBOURG

This immediate neighbor of la Romanée-Conti escorts Her Majesty with good-natured ribaldry. It is a king's musketeer who likes company, likes to laugh and to sing, to feel that the somewhat brutal strength of his athlete's body is admired. Surface area: 3.5110 hectares



## LA TÂCHE

Nothing evokes La Tâche so much as the wonderful portrait of Richelieu by Philippe de Champaigne, which expresses the Cardinal's fiery and angular authority, a nervous hand posed on the hilt of his sword, while the sword itself is drowned in a luxurious cascade of ermine and velvet. La Tâche is elegance and rigor. Beneath the frequent firmness of its tannins, passion is aflame, restrained by an implacable, courtly elegance. Surface area: 6.0620 hectares



## ROMANÉE-CONTI

"As if, in this square of earth, the gods had bequeathed us a memory of the fascinating vestige of a timeless perfection." —Richard Olney

The wine of Prince de Conti, she is velvet, seduction and mystery. It is the most Proustian of all great wines: Concealed in the secret perfume of fading rose petals of a Romanée-Conti 1956, is it not the intense and pure sensation of the recaptured past which arrests and enchants us? Surface area: 1.8140 hectares



## MONTRACHET

"Incontestably of the first order of white wines from the Côte d'Or and probably of all the white wines of the world." —Dr. Lavalley 1855

Le Montrachet is a wine of unparalleled complexity, its elegance and power make an exceptional wine. Surface area: .6759 hectares



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SINCE 1978

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