

2020 Vintage Update - Tuesday, September 22, 2020

Beaujolais wines: no shortage of ripeness and freshness

The year 2020 has been unprecedented for everyone, and in every field, including winegrowing. It's a "vintage of extremes" when you take into account the weather conditions, drought and earliness of the harvests (2nd earliest vintage, behind 2003, since the ripening network was set up in 1992). Like for the populations "in lockdown", the vine managed to adapt to cope with these complicated times. The Beaujolais vines withstood the severe drought; their health remained outstanding. Once again, the gamay variety proved its adaptability to climate change. In this year of very early ripening, the Beaujolais growers had to get organised to make sure their vat rooms were ready as early as August 20th, the mandatory minimum start date for harvesting set in 2020 in the Beaujolais region: each grower can decide when their grapes have reached their peak, based on altitude, orientation and their individual wine philosophy. In this unique context, winegrowers had to work twice as hard to accommodate the 25,000 pickers in the best possible conditions, as Beaujolais remains one of the only vineyards, along with the Champagne region, where the majority of harvesting is still done by hand.

After a very mild winter leading to early budburst, in late March, the months of April and May were also warm, dry and very sunny. June weather varied more, first cold and rainy then scorching hot, dry and very sunny. The flowering stage began very early, around May 20th. The end of flowering was reached on average on May 30th, which explains the very early ripening. Veraison started on average around July 18th. At that stage, heterogeneity was already quite significant. July was relatively warm, especially the last ten-day period, and very dry, with rare, erratic rainfall (3rd driest July since 1964). August weather varied, going from warm or even very warm for the first 20 days, then cool as of August 28th. Rainfall was highly irregular, with the average being far below normal but quite variable from one vineyard to the next.

"The year 2020 was special in every respect. We didn't really have a winter, then our vines faced a lack of water and drought... Mother Nature is queen and we have to adapt to her by revising the way we work. That includes ploughing the soil to force the vines to go look for their resources deeper down, keeping in mind the leaf area index, and making sure moisture is kept in the soils... We have to be aware of global warming!" said Paul Labruyère, winegrower at Domaine des Cadoles (Moulin-à-Vent, Brouilly, Régnié).



The 2020 harvest was marked by differences from one plot to the next, due to the wide range of terroirs from north to south, each with its own resistance to drought (depending on the age of the vines, orientation, etc.) and the limited rain having fallen in various places. Hydric stress indicators had never been so prevalent. The great wealth of Beaujolais terroirs gave rise to different stages of ripening and the growers had to adapt.

Most growers harvested very ripe, attractive grapes, despite limited phenomena of scorching spotted on some grapes after the heat wave in late July as well as very high maximum temperatures in the second 10-day period of August. Harvesting lasted almost a month and took place in fairly favourable conditions: *"The grapes picked had reached nice phenolic ripeness, which can be seen in the vats with nice structure and dark colours for the gamay grapes, offering aromatic elegance with a black fruit tendency. That nice ripeness was excellent for vinifying elegant, round rosés. As for the chardonnay variety, growers had to bring into play their know-how and high precision to harvest the grapes at an optimal balance and preserve their freshness. The alcoholic fermentations are now ending and the malolactic ones beginning. They will help soften up the wines, which will get from a few weeks, for the Festive Beaujolais, to a few months or years, for the Expressive and Exceptional Beaujolais, to assert their singularity and offer a diversified range of Beaujolais, in the image of the vintage,"* said Bertrand Châtelet, Director of SICAREX Beaujolais, (Beaujolais Institute of oenological and viticulture research).

Jean-Luc Longère, grower at Domaine Longère (Beaujolais-Villages): *"The chardonnay grapes were generous after nice flowering. The bunches were attractive with just the right amount of acidity for freshness. A key word this year: patience. Harvesting took a lot of organising since the grapes needed to get more concentrated and take on nice golden, almost coppery, reflections. Fermentations went very smoothly and malolactic fermentations will get underway soon."*

"Following the heat waves, which had put a halt to ripening, the rain on August 10th allowed the grapes to develop in the right direction. The request for patience from our technical team was reiterated by our wine cooperatives and made it possible to reach nice ripeness. The old vines and deep soil produced nice results. Regarding vinification, it took some adapting since each area, depending on altitude, soil depth and vine age, had different characteristics. The first tastings are offering round reds, with a very deep colour and fruitiness. The rosés are small aromatic explosions. As for the whites, we're still waiting for the malolactic fermentations to be over since the chardonnay harvests were later this year due to the drought," said Sylvain Flache, president of the Vignerons des Pierres Dorées wine cooperative.



In terms of quantity, the 2020 harvest is low compared to the average in recent years. **As for quality, there is no lack of it!** It offers nice balance and lovely freshness! The Beaujolais growers got to show off their know-how by composing with nature - a perfect combo! The first juices tasted are crisp and easy-to-drink, marked by lovely freshness and ripeness.

"We've been experiencing an atypical year in every way. Fortunately, working the land and living in the countryside allow us to keep a little common sense and our feet firmly on the ground. What if this were to become the luxury of the future? So far, we seem to be headed towards a great vintage in Beaujolais. Once again, the gamay grape variety has shown its ability to adapt to climate variations. That's reassuring and it will be a positive point in the future, and in this global economy in turmoil, now dominated by uncertainty, we'll do everything we can to ensure that Beaujolais wines continue their climb. The figures for the past two years confirm that we're on the right track," concluded Dominique Piron, president of Inter Beaujolais, the Beaujolais wine council.

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About Beaujolais wines

Located a stone's throw from Lyon and the south of Burgundy, the Beaujolais vineyards stretch out over nearly 14,500 hectares of vines claimed in 12 Beaujolais appellations where over 2000 estates, 9 wine cooperatives and 200 négociants thrive. The 12 Beaujolais appellations stand out thanks to the expression of their wines whether Festive, Expressive or Exceptional, the 100%-red crus in the north: Brouilly, Chénas, Chiroubles, Côte de Brouilly, Fleurie, Juliéna, Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent, Régnié, Saint-Amour as well as Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages in the south, produced in all three colors and in vin nouveau.