

DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE-CONTI

2013 VINTAGE OFFERING



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THE 2013 HARVEST REPORT

by *Aubert de VILLAINÉ*

In previous harvest reports, I have often spoken of combat and adversity, referring to the frequently capricious meteorological conditions that govern the birth of a vintage as a “chaotic course,” or comparing them to “mountain switchbacks.” The year we have just lived through deserves to be described in these terms — perhaps more than any other year in recent memory.

In the vigneron’s memoir, 2013 will leave, in effect, the recollection of navigation in a tempest, without knowing until the last moment what the weather gods had in store for us. But clinging to whatever could save us from the wreck, we finally arrived safely at port. And the same gods who seemed so attached to our loss would certainly have been angry had they been deprived of the great wines which, in spite of their actions, or perhaps because of them, have just been locked up in our cellars!

The beginning of spring was unpleasant, with a catastrophic month of May due to exceptionally low temperatures and a great deal of rain (almost 350 mm in three months, compared to 250 mm for the same period in 2012 — which was already a great deal). Consequently, it was an extremely rare day when the vines were bathed in sunshine.

This resulted in significant *coulure* (shatter or dropped berries), due to *filage* (undeveloped grapes) or unfertilized flowers at bloom time. Flowering was very late: mid-flowering was reached only on June 25, which in 2012 was on June 10, and in 2011, on May 19!

This was the most difficult period, when we had to do battle every day and be ceaselessly vigilant in order to intervene at the right moment to win the struggle against diseases, mildew especially, that were threatening the vineyards. Our team accomplished this under the supervision of Nicolas Jacob, with total devotion to the work, taking advantage of the rare, propitious days.

July and August were milder, with hot periods — at certain times we even had the “dog days” of summer. We experienced heavy storms in July. For the second year in a row, the Côte de Beaune, from Meursault to Aloxe-Corton, was hit by severe hailstorms.

The fruit on many vines was totally annihilated. Fortunately, luck was on our side: the Côte de Nuits was, in effect, spared.

The return of sunshine and the beautiful summer that followed were of major importance. These conditions compensated for the considerable lack of heat and sun that we had experienced during springtime. The vineyards were thus somewhat able to make up for lost time and to ripen rapidly at the end of the season, as is often the case in Burgundy, where Pinot Noir and Chardonnay can gain up to more than one degree of alcohol per week.

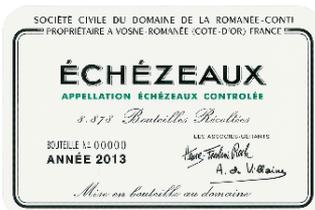
This was the case in 2013, that, nevertheless, remains to be ranked among the late years compared to standard dates of the harvest — vintages such as 1978 or 1979. The quality of those two magnificent vintages underlines the advantages that a long growing season can have, when the grapes bask in more gentle sunlight and benefit from slow ripening, a harbinger of complexity in the wines.

In late September, despite or perhaps because of all these vagaries of chance, the 2013 crop looked very good both in Vosne-Romanée and Corton, reduced in volume, certainly, but of healthy quality, with a majority of small but not too compact clusters with a good proportion of *millerand* berries (of mixed berry size): in summary, grapes built to make great wines. The Montrachet that had been lightly touched by hail was more sensitive to botrytis.

By September 30, our white and red grapes along the Côte de Beaune had reached maturity. For the Côte de Nuits, it was necessary to wait a little longer.

Meanwhile, abundant rain showers arrived at the last moment “to make mischief” for the section of white wines on the Côte de Beaune and set off an explosion of botrytis in the Chardonnays. Thus, we harvested our Montrachet on October 2, more hastily than usual. The quantity of the harvest is very slight, but we should obtain rich, opulent wines, as is the tradition for the Domaine’s Montrachet.

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Even if the Pinot Noir vineyards were assaulted by botrytis to a much lesser degree than the Chardonnay, it remains that the progress of this fungus, encouraged by the humidity and warm weather, influenced our harvest decisions. Therefore, on October 3, we decided to harvest the Corton.

Unfortunately, on October 5 and 6, copious rains, at times tempestuous, precipitated the appearance and development of botrytis in Vosne-Romanée. We started picking on October 6, as scheduled, fearing that the botrytis might explode. Fortunately, in the following days, nature came to our rescue, offering exceptionally cold weather, almost winter-like on some days. The development of botrytis slackened, then stopped, and we could end the harvest with regained serenity under a merciful sky.

At last the famous and long-desired “Burgundian miracle” set in. Between the beginning and the end of our harvest in Vosne-Romanée, despite the cold and damp, one saw gains in sugar levels that we had no longer expected. This was the proof that, even during these difficult conditions, the grapes had continued to ripen. The small yields due to *coulure* had certainly much to do with it.

The vineyards were harvested in the following order:

- On October 2: Montrachet
There was much botrytis, and consequently, very selective sorting was necessary to keep only the “noble rot.”
 - On October 3: Corton
The health and clean condition of the fruit was excellent: beautiful, small but fully ripened crop.
 - On October 6 (afternoon) and 7 (morning): Grands Échézeaux
Botrytis was present but piercing cold temperatures stopped its progression.
- Then, the harvest continued in dry, almost wintry conditions:
- On October 7 (afternoon); 8 and 9 (mornings): La Tâche
 - On October 8 (afternoon): Romanée-Conti
 - On October 9 (afternoon) and 10 (morning): Richebourg
 - On October 10 (afternoon) and 11 (all day): Romanée-St-Vivant
 - On October 12 (all day) and 13 (morning): Échézeaux

During the entire harvest, a severe sorting of the grapes had to be performed, and this sorting process slowed the pace of the pickers. But in the end, if the harvest unfolded rather rapidly, lasting hardly a week in Vosne-Romanée, it was because the crop was very small, even smaller than in 2012, which represented a little more than half a normal crop.

Once again, the quality of the sorting will prove to be essential to the quality of the finished wine. Our teams, whether harvesters in the vineyard or our staff who completed the work at the sorting table, as you know, are perfectly polished and experienced performers. Nothing but the finest grapes arrived in the *cuves*, so Bernard Noblet and his team in the *cuverie* could work with the peace of mind that comes with naturally easy vinifications.

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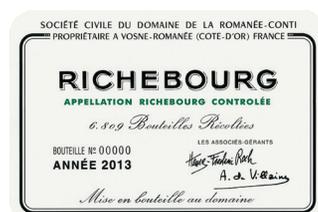
The grapes were harvested cold, and maceration lasted for five to six days; fermentations started peacefully and progressed slowly but actively, producing beautiful pink foam during the *pigeage* (punching down the cap).

We have confirmation that the quantities are much reduced, but the wines have beautiful dark colors, fine aromas, with good acidity in the mouth and supple tannins. Finally, with the 2013 vintage, one has wines that are among the most balanced of any from recent years, but we must wait, as usual, for the malolactic fermentations to have a more definite opinion.

Here are the approximate yields in 2013:

- Romanée-Conti: 18 hl/ha
- La Tâche: 19 hl/ha
- Richebourg: 17 hl/ha
- Romanée-St-Vivant: 18 hl/ha
- Grands Échézeaux: 22 hl/ha
- Échézeaux: 16 hl/ha
- Corton: 20 hl/ha
- Montrachet: 27 hl/ha

Aubert de VILLAINÉ
Co-Directeur
November 18, 2013



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with good acidity in the mouth and supple tannins.”*

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