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COMMENTAIRES MILLESIMES

Comments on the Vintages and Wines of Joseph Drouhin 2009-1985

As wine ages, its intrinsic character and aging potential will change from year to year. This is the reason why we revisit these vintages at regular intervals to examine how they have evolved and to offer some advice regarding their conservation and consumption.

Frederic Drouhin, October 28, 2010

The 2009 Vintage

Overview - *Taking its place among the greatest...*

2009 is showing its breed and will rightfully take its place among those vintages ending in “9” (in the last century all years ending in “9” were very good with one exception, 1939), and among the other no less famous 2005, 1978, 1961...

The growing season

The winter of 2008/2009 lingered in Burgundy. The temperature started rising only during the first two weeks of March. Spring moved in for good at the beginning of April and the weather at that time became unseasonably warm. The amount of rain was normal.

With such mild conditions prevailing, bud break spread to all the vineyards. In the space of four days, there were green shoots all over Burgundy. The recorded dates of this bud break are in many ways identical to 2005, on the whole 10 days earlier than for 2008. At the end of April, you could count up to four or five leaves fully developed on the vines.

In May, the growth was slowed down by some light rain and cooler temperature, but by the middle of the month, the weather had turned warmer and sunnier than usual. The vines then grew at a faster pace, with two to four new leaves unfolding every week. Flowering occurred on May 21st in the Chardonnay areas as well as on a few Pinot Noir vines. The dates for mid-flowering were May 28 for Chardonnay in Côte de Beaune, and May 31 for Pinot Noir in Côte

de Nuits. Compared to 2008 these dates are, significantly, 13 days earlier, similar in fact to what we saw in 2003. The setting of the berries (“nouaison”) began during the first week of June. By the end of the month, all the vines of Côte d’Or had reached the important stage of berry touch (also known as cluster tightening).

June and July were more humid than usual, with rainfalls at times heavy but of short duration. As a result, the growth of the vine was slowed down and “véraison” (turning of the color) got under way only at the end of July. The summer, both hot and sunny, came in early August, providing ideal conditions for maturation which by August 24th was practically all done. The grapes were ripe, healthy and homogenous, without any trace of rot. Picking began in Côte d’Or on September 7th under excellent conditions. It was over by the 21st. In the Yonne area (Chablis), it went from September 12 through 26.

Owing to this spread out period, we were able to pick and choose the best times for harvesting. Coming after 2007 and 2008 which saw lower volumes, 2009 marks a return to the norm.

Vinification

The vinification of the wines went without any problem since the grapes were ripe and healthy. Regarding the reds, the proportion of whole bunches being used was higher than usual, thanks to the excellent condition of the stalks. The vinification lasted from two to three weeks depending on the appellations.

The bottling started in the summer and will be completed by the end of 2010.

The wines

Chablis: This is a classic vintage with a beautiful balance between acidity and minerality.

White Wines of Côte d’Or: The wines are very aromatic with a lot of style and balance. They already show a certain softness and floral aromas and can even be enjoyed at this early stage. Nevertheless the *Premier Crus* and *Grand Crus* should be kept 5 to 15 years.

Mâconnais: Ripe, soft, with notes of honey and acacia. Very seductive and easy to drink.

Red Wines of Côte de Beaune: Very nice, well-marked ruby color; the bouquet is reminiscent of red fruit along with a seductive and ripe taste, due to the excellent maturity of the berries. They could be enjoyed right now but could be kept another 10 to 15 years.

Red Wines of Côte de Nuits: The wines have a majestic character and an intense depth of color. Their different styles and appellations are easily discernable. They have a firm tannic structure but the tannins themselves are ripe and tasty. Should they be drunk now or put away? The choice is difficult as they can be enjoyed now or cellared 30 years or more.

Beaujolais: It is an exceptional vintage. From the simple Beaujolais to the Cru appellations, all wines present the same characteristics: an intense, dark, almost black color with blackberry flavors and spicy notes. Their pleasant fresh character makes them well balanced.

2008

Overview - *A good vintage in general, a great vintage in Chablis*

This is a very classic vintage for Burgundy.

The growing season

Autumn and winter were rather dry and mild; spring was cool and humid, followed by a summer resembling 2007. By mid-September, the weather in Burgundy turned extraordinary and allowed harvesting to take place under ideal conditions.

Depending on the areas, the overall quantity is lower: 5% to 30% less than in 2007. On the other hand, the quality level is high – and in Chablis even exceptional.

The wines

Chablis: In 2008, all the conditions were met to have one of the greatest vintages in the last 25 years. The gradual ripening of the grapes resulted in a homogenous harvest, which in turn produced wines combining minerality, good concentration, balance and intensity of aromas. All the wines in the range are impressive and their aging capability is certainly noteworthy, especially for the Grand Crus.

This 2008 vintage also marks the 40th anniversary of the Drouhin Domaine in Chablis, which has now become Domaine Vaudon.

White Wines of Côte d'Or: As the malolactic fermentation proceeded slowly, the wines were able to gain in complexity of aromas and fullness of taste. They reveal a floral character and their structure is quite lively. They are long on the palate. The various characteristics of the *terroir* are already in evidence.

Red Wines of Côte d'Or: The color is typical of Pinot Noir: a nice red hue, with medium intensity and bright sparkle. The tannins have a very fine texture. The aromas are seductive, reminiscent of red berries and spice. On the whole, the quality of the Côte de Nuits wines is more consistent than in the Côte de Beaune. Both Côtes nevertheless have one feature in common: the volume of the crop was one of the smallest on record, with yields averaging only 25 hectoliters per hectare.

2007

Overview - *A year full of contrasts, with a glorious finish*

Overall this is a vintage which will appeal to all Burgundy wine lovers. The refined and restrained style of Burgundy is perfectly reflected in this classic vintage which can be drunk after the 2006's, but before the 2005's.

The growing season

The least one can say is that 2007 was a year when the seasons were turned upside down. The weather was subject to different moods. Unstable conditions were in fact the recurring theme throughout the year.

The first three months of 2007 were on the whole very mild, with temperatures higher than normal by 2°C (3.6°F). The amount of rain was adequate. April was much warmer than usual, with the average temperature for the month a record-breaking 16°C (60°F), nearly the same level habitually seen in June. This was the warmest April since 1922. A humid and mild May was followed by a very stormy June.

July will go down as one of the rainiest month in the last 30 years. August was cool and wet.

In September the vineyards enjoyed beautiful weather with sunshine above average. Picking started at the very beginning of September in ideal conditions: dry, windy, sunny weather under bright clear skies. This excellent climatic situation allowed the grapes to ripen quickly and to gain in flavor, while preserving a good acidity level. At the Joseph Drouhin domaine, picking was spread over a period of three weeks. The crop was smaller than in 2006 and was actually one of the smallest in the last 10 years.

The wines

Chablis: shows good mineral quality and acidity.

White wines of Côte d'Or and Côte Chalonnaise: They display a more floral style with a good texture (*gras*). They can be drunk now, although they could be kept for another two to three years.

The wines of the Mâconnais: They are floral with honey flavors and should be consumed at this point.

The reds of the Côte de Nuits: They show a very refined structure but they are still closed on the nose and require some more aging.

The reds of the Côte de Beaune: These are more elegant with more fruit and an acidity slightly higher than in 2006, a sign of their slower evolution.

2006

Overview - *Seductive and full of charm*

The white wines are ample and rich, with a nice velvety texture (“*gras*”). The acidity is not pronounced, hence their charm. For the reds, there is a great variety in terms of quality, with more or less structure according to the appellations.

The growing season

Like many other wine regions of France, Burgundy had to deal with widely contrasting weather that year. The budding was delayed by a long and rigorous winter. Although some very warm

weather in spring and early summer encouraged a steady growth for the vine, August with its wet and cool days was responsible for a notable slowdown.

Picking started at a normal date for most of the region: it was September 18th in Côte de Beaune but two days before that in Chablis, owing to the early ripeness and concentration of the grapes there - quite a rare occurrence for such a northerly region.

The grapes were harvested over a two-week period, instead of the more usual three. Our intent was to bring in berries that had an optimum balance between sugar, fruit and acidity. The fermentation started evenly and under good conditions, helped by the high sugar level and the abundant indigenous yeasts.

The Wines

The whites from the Maconnais and Chablis: These should be drunk now.

The whites of Côte d'Or: They are very seductive and can be enjoyed now or kept another 2 to 3 years. The same is true even for the Grand Crus.

The red wines of the Cote d'Or: The beautiful ruby colour so characteristic of Pinot Noir is still in evidence in some wines. The bouquets are well defined, pure and reminiscent of red berries. In the Côte de Beaune, the 2006 vintage seems to have produced wines of breed and elegance, whereas in the Côte de Nuits, the style is fleshier and the structure firmer. These wines are nevertheless a pleasure to drink and reflect all the qualities of Pinot Noir on Burgundy terroirs. One will enjoy them whether one drinks them now or in the future.

2005

Overview - *A beautiful vintage!*

All conditions were there to produce an exceptional vintage.

The growing season

The summer was dry with sunny days and cool nights. A light drizzle on August 19 brought some relief to the drought. The vines were in exceptionally healthy conditions owing to the wind that blew from the north most of the summer.

The first grapes arrived at the cuverie in perfect condition: the berries of Pinot Noir had an intense bluish hue, were full of sugar and had uncommonly thick skins. The Chardonnay grapes had tiny golden berries and were just as concentrated as Pinot Noir.

From Beaujolais to Chablis, the quality was high in every appellation, with a slightly lower yield for our Domaine vineyards.

The fermentation went through under excellent conditions.

The Wines

The white wines: The wines are rich, intense, ripe, with floral and honeyed flavours. They are well balanced even if the acidity level is slightly lower than usual. The regional and villages wines can be enjoyed now but the Grand Crus are still closed and will improve if cellared a little longer.

The red wines: A magnificent intense red colour. They have great structure and balance, still closed. They need more aging.

2004

Overview - *A good surprise*

As the old Burgundy proverb goes, “September makes the wine,” and September 2004 made the point again.

The growing season

The weather in that year gave the *vignerons* (growers) many causes to worry. If spring was magnificent, summer was most unstable: hail storms in some areas, a pale sun, some coolness in August.

Fortunately, September brought back nice days and more than a ray of sun. A summer-like weather with a warm and dry wind enabled the grapes to mature and to remain healthy.

The harvest started at a rather early date: September 13 in Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, September 20 in Côte d’Or and September 29 in Chablis. Contrary to 2003, the yields were more generous (the yield in 2003 was 30 to 40% lower than in 2002!): our production was 10% higher than the average of the last 10 years.

The Wines

Chablis: The wines have great purity, displaying the usual mineral character and acidity. They are still in their infancy and could be kept another 2 to 5 years, except for the Chablis village appellation which should be drunk now.

White Wines of Côte d’Or: Here too, a great purity of taste. The wines show great style and elegance and their bouquet is starting to open. On the palate, the wines feel ample and well focused, with floral aromas. A good balance between texture and freshness emphasizes the fruit and gives them great personality. The greater appellations could be kept 3 to 8 years.

Red Wines of Côte d’Or: The reds show the colour normally associated with Pinot Noir. The bouquet is reminiscent of little red berries, with the first hints of fall-like undergrowth. On the palate, the wines are rather elegant with a refined tannic structure. They demonstrate all the qualities of Pinot Noir and of the Burgundian *terroirs*. This is a vintage that can be enjoyed now.

2003

Overview - *An atypical vintage*

For Burgundy, as well as the rest of France, this vintage was truly exceptional. We can only say: “What a vintage!” With whites worthy of the fabulous 1947 and 1959 and reds equal to 1865 and 1929, this 2003 vintage is entering the Burgundian Hall of Fame.

The growing season

Intense heat and very dry weather were responsible for one of the earliest *ban des vendanges* on record: August 19 for Côte d’Or! Burgundy had not seen this in 150 years.

It was also one of the smallest harvests of the last few decades. The yield at our Domaine, for instance, was 20 to 40% lower.

Extreme care in the vinification of this vintage was also *de rigueur* as it required as much wisdom and as light a hand as possible. There was no way the technique used in 2002 could be applied to this 2003 vintage.

The wines

Chablis: The wines are rich with a rather velvety texture (*gras*) for the appellation. With their exotic flavours recalling mango and grapefruit they are perfect to drink now.

White Wines of Côte d’Or: The wines present the same characteristics throughout. They are ripe, soft, “*gras*” (with a velvety texture) and easy to drink. Their aromas are remarkably intense and even surprising: flowery flavours mingle with notes of honey and grilled almonds. To drink now.

Red Wines of Côte d’Or: We have never seen such aromatic intensity. On the nose, there is an explosion of red and black berries such as cherries and black currants, with spicy undertones of liquorice. On the palate, the wines have the same richness and fleshy texture while keeping a supple and appealing tannic structure. These 2003s are remarkable and could very well achieve the same status as the 1947s - another great vintage of the last century.

2002

Overview - *A great Vintage*

This is a great vintage, for whites and reds alike, from Chablis to Beaujolais

The wines

Chablis: A felicitous blending of mature fruit, freshness and the typical minerality of Chablis. Each wine is representative of its own appellation and terroir. They should all be drunk now.

White Wines of Côte d'Or: For most appellations, the bouquet is charming and the wines display good balance and *gras* (velvety texture). They can be drunk now but the *Grand Cru* wines deserve another 3 to 5 years.

Red Wines of Côte d'Or: Intense in colour, deep, fleshy, fruity and marvellously structured, these wines show beautiful aromas of fruit and undergrowth (*sous-bois*). The wines are evolving favourably and can be consumed now or within the next 10 years.

2001

Overview - *A Very Good Beginning*

The climatic conditions were very similar to 2000 with uneven conditions in temperature and rains throughout the year. Normal volumes, close to average.

The Wines

White Wines of Côte d'Or: Intense yellow straw colour. Closely resembling 2000, the wines have a very pretty nose with hints of fruit and honey. To drink now.

Red Wines of Côte d'Or: More intense colour than the 2000s; more depth in Côte de Nuits than in Côte de Beaune. Expressive nose with spicy and fruity notes. The wines have found the right balance between fruit and tannin. They can be drunk now.

2000

Overview - *Charm and Elegance*

The season was very uneven: rain in February, drought in March; April was humid and cool while May was dry and hot. A few storms in some of the villages of the Côte. After a rather cold July, the weather returned to normal at the end of the summer.

The Wines

White Wines: The crop was superb. More acidity than in 1999 emphasizes the flowery notes. All appellations are very pleasant to drink now.

Red Wines: Very pure, expressive Pinot, refined, full of charm, seductive, supple, flowing, fruity, easy to drink. These wines were most charming when young but are now reaching their maturity. They should be drunk and enjoyed now.

1999

Overview - *Abundance and richness*

Like other wines from a twentieth-century vintage ending in the number 9, this is a fine vintage for Burgundy.

This last vintage of the twentieth century witnessed exceptionally good conditions during the growing season, with higher than usual temperatures. The crop was abundant, healthy and ripe.

The wines

White Wines: Open on the nose, the aromas have evolved towards hints of grilled hazelnut and honey. All are ready to drink now.

Red Wines: As with the 1990s and the 1961s, we do hope that you have put some good bottles aside for yourself and your children. At this point, the wines are still closed in. Their balance, acidity and tannin contribute to their slow evolution. The lesser *villages* can be drunk now.

1998

Overview - *Surprising*

The wines

White Wines: The wines are now at their peak; they are fully open, with great texture and aromas of ripe, somewhat exotic, fruit. Some may start to fade.

Red Wines: We are surprised by the way they have evolved. We obviously rushed to judgment when they first came out. Admittedly closed and tannic when young, the 1998s have now reached a nice balance. They can be drunk now.

1997

Overview - *A Supple Vintage*

An atypical year in terms of climate, remembered for its glorious Indian Summer and warm temperatures, especially during the harvest. The result was wines of great suppleness.

The wines

White Wines: The wines are deep and seductive on the palate; very ripe aromas and flavours. To be drunk now.

Red Wines: Colour verging on orange. The aromas are reminiscent of ripe fruit and sometimes spice. Supple tannins impart to these wines a remarkable velvety softness. Should be enjoyed now!

1996

Overview – *Fruit and Liveliness*

This vintage is characterized by a higher acidity level than usual. The wines are therefore lively and evolving slowly.

The wines

White Wines: Superb, refined and with a great bouquet. Evolved aromas and high acidity, with a discrepancy between the two aspects in some wines. The terroir characteristics are well defined. It is preferable to aerate the wines 20 minutes before serving.

Red Wines: Good colour with some orange hues. Nevertheless they are still a little closed and their evolution is slow. They should be decanted. Their aging potential is 2 to 8 years.

1995

Overview - *Structured*

The wines

White Wines: Good evolution. The wines are still well-balanced with fresh notes of honey and almond paste. The aromatic complexity expands as the wine sits in the glass. To drink now.

Red Wines: Good colour and structure; long on the palate: a good vintage. The tannins, a little hard at first, have softened up but the wines have retained a certain firmness. Beautiful aromas of spice, undergrowth or even liquorice. Should be drunk within 3 years or so.

1994

Overview - *A difficult year with great variations*

The wines

White Wines: The aromatic intensity is weak. Round on the palate, the wines should be drunk now.

Red Wines: Nice colour, with some orange hues. The tannins are still somewhat firm but there are some very pleasant secondary aromas: wet leaves, mushroom, spice or stone-fruit. All levels of appellation can be enjoyed now.

1993

Overview - *Lively and Full of Dash*

The wines

White Wines: This vintage is the opposite of 1992. The white wines have evolved slowly and can now be drunk. Decanting recommended.

Red Wines: The colour is not too intense, with some orange hues. Freshness is still dominant but the aromas have evolved. To be consumed now although the higher appellations can be kept longer.

1992

Overview - *Surprising*

The wines

White Wines: Fleshy and rich wines, with low acidity. They have now evolved towards buttery, creamy notes. To be drunk now.

Red Wines: Colour not too intense, with some orange hues. A vintage for the Burgundy lover: very pure, with lovely Pinot notes. These are light wines which have retained the softness and suppleness of their youth. To be drunk now with delicate dishes (caution: avoid spices).

1991

Overview - *In the shadow of 1990*

This is a forgotten vintage, overshadowed by the exceptional 1990

The wines

Red Wines: They show good colour, have flesh and balance. They now display nice aromas (spices, mushroom...). They are evolving well and should be drunk now.

1990

Overview - *Exceptional*

This is an exceptional vintage for the white as well as red wines.

The wines

White Wines: The wines are still remarkable. Overall, they have reached their peak. Very aromatic, they will actually gain in intensity as they open up in the glass. Rather powerful, they should be served with somewhat rich dishes. Can be drunk now.

Red Wines: These intense-coloured, well typed wines, closed in their youth, have now opened. Their aromas are marvellously complex, with fruity notes mingled with secondary flavours. The tannic structure is ripe. Long on the palate.

1989

Overview

A great vintage for the white wines.

The wines

White Wines: aromatic, fleshy and full of charm, these wines should be drunk, except for the *Grand Crus* which keep improving.

Red Wines: A good year which displays more charm than 1988. The wines have evolved well by now and are quite supple. Intense aromas of ripe fruit, spices and undergrowth.

1988

Red Wines: Orange hue with some sediment. Intense bouquet with secondary notes and spice. The tannins are still firm and lively. Can be drunk, except for the *Grand Crus*.

1987

Red Wines: The red wines are fading away and have kept their dry character. Terroir prevails in certain wines, which makes them all the more interesting.

1986

Red Wines: Light in colour, very evolved. Generous bouquet. Not too deep. Dry tannins. Should be drunk now.

1985

Overview - *Haunting*

Red Wines: Pretty colour, with orange hues, very evolved. On the nose, complex, animal and spicy notes. Full but without being heavy, well-balanced, refined and long on the palate. Soft tannins. A very good year, evolving faster than anticipated. The wines throw a lot of sediment: keep the bottle standing up 24 hours before serving. The wines should be drunk now.

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