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THE ADDRESS FOR FINE WINES

VINTAGE REPORT: 2017

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Aside from the big frost scare at the end of April, 2017 was a relatively stress free vintage compared to the challenging but ultimately successful 2016 vintage.

Remarkably, the incredibly rare occurrence of rain, then frost, then brilliant early morning sunshine that wiped out large swathes of crop in a few short hours in 2016, re-appeared for the 2nd time in 2017 on the same day. Growers in Chassagne who had lost as much as 80% of their production in 2016, were forced to set alight bales of straw in the early hours of the morning to create a smoky barrier between the burning sun and the vulnerable frozen buds. It was touch and go but it worked, although drivers on the nearby motorway had an interesting drive to work through the dense smoke!

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WHITES & REDS

WHITES

2014 is the new bench mark vintage for white Burgundy, seemingly blessed with an almost perfect mix of *matière* and tension. BUT, 2017 is not too far behind.

Overall acidity levels were not terribly high post harvest but there wasn't a huge amount of malic acid so that once malolactic fermentations had finished (generally quite quickly) the pH levels remained good, providing a real sense of freshness and energy through the wines.

Growers were expecting a decent size crop when they looked at the bunches on the vines but there proved to be less juice in the grapes than expected. However, whilst they were disappointed that yields weren't a little higher, the increased intensity of the juice that there was more than compensated. The wines have good levels of dry extract which is what gives them added body and real presence and drive on the finish, where it really counts. There is lots of fruit, which gives the wines an approachability, but one should not be deceived by how lovely these wines already are. The early malos mean the wines have come together more quickly than in some vintages, making them what the Burgundians would call *en place*.

This evident harmony provides a real glimpse into the future but should not be mistaken for a sign of a short term vintage. These wines are concentrated, balanced, and utterly beguiling. As always picking dates were important and most began picking between the 26th of August and September 1st, depending on site and vine age. Getting these dates right ensured that many of the wines had a chiselled electricity coursing through them which accentuated the purity and complexity of the fruit flavours and allowed terroir to speak.



REDS

The run of good red vintages continues. Since 2009, only 2011 has looked a little compromised by its vintage neighbours and even that is beginning to drink quite deliciously and show its potential. Incidentally, don't give up on 2013, just give it time. It will prove itself, have no fear. The only difficulty with 2017 is trying to compare it to something else. Like the white wines, the malos happened relatively early, save for in the very coldest of cellars, and the wines are already showing such charm. Svelte tannins are the order of the day, and lots of bright fruit. There is complete maturity yet the fruit is generally red rather than black and often blue which is great. So not the power or warmth of '09 or '15, more richness than 07, more ripeness than '11, showier than '10, '14 and '16 (3 truly great vintages). I am still a little too young (thankfully) to have tasted the '85s en primeur but supposedly they, too, were delicious from day one and they went on to drink beautifully in the medium to long term. So perhaps some comparisons can be made there, but, as is perhaps appropriate in a quickly evolving region that is witnessing both climate change and regular generational change, this appears to be a unique vintage that borrows qualities from others but maintains its own individuality.

The challenge with the 2017s will be knowing just how long they will last. They are so well balanced and seamless that many will be bottled slightly earlier than usual to capture this beautiful purity and transparency. It's difficult to envisage them shutting down dramatically post bottling yet their harmony could well see them age with such grace and poise into old age. Quality should never be purely about longevity anyway but I have a sneaking suspicion that these wines will surprise to the upside in terms of their drinking window. Look at the 2007s which are surely not in the same league yet continue to put on weight and offer lovely drinking.

Harvesting generally began around the 6th September and the key to making top quality wines was controlling yields. Vines that were heavily frost-affected in 2016 were always likely to be on the front foot in 2017 with the potential to over produce so vigneronns needed to adapt their viticulture to stay on top of things. For example, some who don't normally green harvest did so in 2017. Those with old vines perhaps didn't need to as they tend to regulate themselves with respect to yields. Gentle extraction, fluid use of stems, careful use of oak; all these elements have been tweaked to work with the style of the vintage, not against.

Over the last month I have tasted some truly beautiful red wines. Just how good they prove to be only time will tell but they they will clearly bring much joy and offer much potential.

