



• L O N D O N •  
est. 2006

# 2018 BURGUNDY

## Vintage Report

---

Jason Haynes  
*Burgundy Buyer & Director · Flint Wines*

“Picking dates seem to have become so important in recent years and in 2018 they were absolutely crucial.”

Now that the evenings are beginning to draw in and the BBC's *Strictly* is almost in full swing, mid-October is the time to head off to Burgundy and see what the region's latest vintage has to offer! After discussing the merits of 2018 with various growers on and off for the last 12 months and having tasted a good number of wines since the spring, it's never quite possible to arrive in Beaune with a completely blank canvas. Who knows what may be in store, so it's vital to keep an open mind and give these wines a chance to state their case. I arrived just over 4 weeks ago with a month of tastings ahead of me, anxious to block out any preconceived notions of what might be in store.

It's no secret that 2018 was a gorgeously sunny vintage across most of Europe. Even here in the UK, we were blessed with endless weeks of perfect picnic weather. No-one likes the idea of global warming, but we all seemed to enjoy the relentless sunshine that kissed us all from June through to September, and Burgundy was no different. 2018 was the warmest year on record in the region. However, one must delve a little deeper into this grandiose statement to really understand the vintage, as the subtleties of the weather in 2018 are key to its character.

Back in the spring, no-one realised how influential the heavy rain that fell would be in shaping the vintage. By the end of May, the water table was well and truly topped up. What a blessing this proved to be as then barely a drop fell over the next four months. The reason it was the hottest ever year was not due to huge spikes of heat that were seen in 2003 and earlier this year, but

constantly warm days and nights with temperatures consistently in the thirties and twenties respectively. Cooler nights help allow the vines to breathe, and with the lack of big heat, spikes meant that they weren't suffocating, to begin with. It was hot, but generally, the vines were able to adapt. There were patches of hydric stress, but the older vines with their deeper roots were able to feast on the water reserves from spring. Flowering went well and apart from very localised hail in Nuits-St-Georges at the end of June and more significantly again in mid-July (the Sunday France won the world cup) growers were able to embark on their annual summer holidays with leaving their vineyards in good shape.

Now the key to the success of this vintage was what they did when they returned home. Picking dates seem to have become so important in recent years and in 2018 they were absolutely crucial. While some started earlier and, more worryingly, some started later, the sweet spots for starting picking appear to be from the 25th August through to the 1st September for the whites and the 2nd September through to the 8th for the reds. It can take some domaines a fortnight to harvest depending on hectares, how geographically spread their vines are and the size of their picking team. Consequently, the 2018 harvest stretched across almost 6 weeks from start to finish. This extended period explains why there is some variation in the style of the wines, although clearly viticulture and vinification techniques played a strong part, as they always do.

The big surprise for me is that the white wines are

terrific. Chardonnay is less fragile than Pinot Noir and able to adapt better to heat. It can also fashion something special with yields that would make its red counterpart blush. No-one was expecting the bountiful yields that the Chardonnay produced, but arguably it was the abundance of the crop that shaped the character of these Bourgogne wines and was, in part at least, responsible for the quality and classicism that one finds up and down the Côte de Beaune. The fruit came in great condition, leaving the sorting tables redundant. As we always say, just because you throw away 20% of your crop, it doesn't make the other 80% any more concentrated. Equally, if you keep all the fruit you harvest because it's so healthy, it doesn't mean the juice is diluted. What is so remarkable about these wines is their freshness and drive. They have a wonderful salty quality to them which gives them a mouthwatering, lingering finish. The pH is pretty low, and there is some dry extract, too. Growers were struggling to hide their delight at the vintage, and their uncontrollable smiles were infectious. Here is a lovely vintage with for once, some volume behind it. Nature has been generous, and for many, they have made a once in a lifetime vintage.

Since last year, all the hype about 2018 focuses on the red wines. As just discussed, the whites should not be forgotten in this vintage as they are great. But there is no doubt that the best red wines are very special. Admittedly, there are domaines that picked too late and allowed the vintage to dictate to them (there are some horror stories of wines at 16 degrees alcohol) but those that got it right (keeping levels at between 12.5 and 14) have made stunning wines that sit very

comfortably in the finest ever decade in Burgundy's history. Phenolic ripeness was discussed at length in most cellars and finding the optimum balance of sugar, acid, and phenolic ripeness was certainly challenging. But those talented growers with a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve were certainly up to the challenge. pH levels were a little higher than usual, especially in wines with a lot of the whole bunch, but there is still balance, harmony and beautiful tannins. It seems likely that the wines will close up post-bottling, the 2015 vintage is beginning to now, and levels of polyphenols are quite similar to that vintage. The strong fruit content is quite deceptive in the sense that the fruit currently coats the powerful structure of the wines but once the puppy fat has diminished the sheer density and power of the wines comes to the fore and ensures a long life. Gevrey-Chambertin seems to have flourished in this vintage with our three main growers (Pierre Duroché, Arnaud Mortet and Charles Magnien) all having produced a superlative range of wines while the Gevrey's from domaines not based in the village stand out. For example, Romain Taupenot's village Gevrey is the best he has made to date.

Volumes of the red wines are not as plentiful as those of the white wines, especially in the Côte de Nuits, and inevitably the demand for the top estates will be mad, resulting in a demand over supply imbalance, greater than usual. Prices are beginning to trickle through, and it appears that there will be some limited increases, although the stronger £ will help to negate many of these.

---

"Nature has been generous,  
and for many, they have  
made a once in a lifetime  
vintage."