



2023

MILLÉSIMÉ

DERENONCOURT CONSULTANTS

AN ULTRA-TRAIL
VINTAGE

CLIMATIC HAZARDS,
WHAT WAS AT STAKE

THE KEYS TO SUCCESS



PRIMEURS 2023 EVENTS

TERROIRS

Monday 15th April 2024 from 4pm to 8pm
Hôtel Plaza Athénée
27 Av. Montaigne, 75008 Paris

LA GRAPPE

Thursday 23rd to Wednesday 24th April 2024
from 10am to 6pm
Château de Malleret
470 Chem. Malleret,
33290 Le Pian-Médoc

Registration :
maryne@derenoncourtconsultants.com



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Designed and produced by: Julien Lavenu, Frédéric Massie,
Simon Blanchard, Romain Bocchio, Hannah Fieghenschuh,
Léo Baillet, Benjamin Massie, Loïc Biais, Yari Cordioli,
Pauline Lagarde, Stella Delmond, Céline Triqueneaux and
Maryne Lemoine.

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EDITORIAL

by Frédéric Massie, Julien Lavenu, Simon Blanchard

With 2023, a new chapter in the life of Derenoncourt Consultants was begun. After a two-decade collaboration with Stéphane, which was as inspiring as it was successful, we find ourselves today in the midst of new challenges.

The changes in the climate are having an increasing influence on our work. We are having to adapt daily in order to preserve the quality and authenticity of our wines; while in parallel, commercial upheavals are creating new challenges.

Our role has developed beyond that of simply providing technical advice. As witnesses to the transformations taking place in our time, we have developed into stakeholders.

We are constantly on hand to partner our vignerons through these periods of reconstruction, and to define and ultimately express with them what gives them their identity and bring out the genius of their vineyard site.

In this vintage report, we welcome you into our world to explore the twists and turns along modern viticulture's road. We take you behind the scenes of our collective efforts in which we seek to preserve tradition while embracing the future.

We'll walk you through the screenplay of this 2023 vintage, the quality of which will erase the memories of how hard we had to fight to achieve it. The richness and diversity of the wines will simply amaze you!



THE KEY FACTS AND FIGURES BEHIND AN ULTRA-TRAIL

WINTER

A GENERALLY MILD WINTER



RAINFALL

Significant rainfall between November and March.



COLD SPELL

The second half of January and in early February.

SPRING

EVEN BUDDING



Between the usual dates from late March to early April.

FROST



4th-5th APRIL

Two nights of frost impact, limited areas affected.

TROPICAL WEATHER CONDITIONS



Warm spring (both days and nights) and rainy (above average total rainfall and very high relative humidity)

FLOWERING



Between 22nd May and 10th June. An early, quite even flowering taking place in good weather conditions. Large potential crop size.

EXPLOSIVE VEGETATION GROWTH



Both vines and weeds had sufficient rainfall, warmth and nutrients to favour their growth. Some localised hailstorms.



RECORD DOWNY MILDEW PRESSURE

Between mid-May and the veraison period, very variable impacts from downy mildew outbreaks on the crop and foliage. Mosaic downy mildew remained active on the foliage until mid-August.

SUMMER

VERAISON



The veraison process took place between the last week of July and 10th August.

2 HEAT-WAVES



from August 18th to 24th
and from September 4th to 7th.

END OF VEGETATION GROWTH



LATE AUGUST

Water deficit stress in the young vines and vines on fast-draining soils.

RIPENING



Alternate episodes of hot, dry weather with occasional rainy-stormy spells.
Wide variation in grape berry growth depending on terroir and local weather conditions.



HARVEST

Hot, sunny weather conditions.

During the last week of August and the first 10 days of September for the dry whites.
From 8th September for the first of the Merlot and then up to 26th September.
Between 23rd September and 10th October for the Cabernets.
Up till 15th October for the sweet whites, with few passes.

THE KEYS TO SUCCES

"An ultra-trail vintage demanding great stamina, determination and the ability to push oneself to the limit to try and overcome the difficulties that came relentlessly, one after the other."

More than ever, this was a vintage in which being adaptable, flexible, efficient, and ready to question accepted vine-growing practices was essential.

IN THE VINES

This was a vintage requiring substantial human and mechanical means in order to ensure:

- * Frequency of sprays to renew the vines' protection from disease
- * soil maintenance
- * the performing of appropriate canopy management tasks at the right time to maintain the vines in good health.

IN THE CELLARS

- * that efficient sorting systems were in place.
- * that vatting times and extractions were adapted to the potential of the grapes and the profile of wine sought.
- * that aromatic brightness of fruit and sapidity in the wines were preserved

Chance played its part. Rainstorms led to very variable localised total rainfall at key moments, with direct consequences on vine disease pressure and therefore the quality and quantity potential of the crop.

MARCH

BUDDING
bud-break for the earliest vines
from March 30th



APRIL

FROST
4th & 5th April
Impacts were light. Big potential crop size

WARM SPRING
High relative humidity

MAY

FLOWERING
from 22nd/23rd May
fast flowering, hot, dry weather



JUNE

EPISODES OF RAIN

JULY

VERAISON
From 10th July for the earliest vines
with mid-veraison point on 24th July,
and up till 10th August for the others



AUGUST

RIPENING



HARVESTING OF WHITE GRAPES

INTENSE HEAT
18th to 24th August

SEPTEMBER



HARVESTING OF RED GRAPES

INTENSE HEAT
4th to 7th September

OCTOBER



2023 VINTAGE

“Once again, the movie of the vintage kept us on the edge of our seats. The climatic storyline of the 2023 took us to a cliff-hanger ending.”

The winter period was nothing out of the ordinary. Bud-break in the vines occurred during the last days of March. Water reserves in the soils were good; the winter cold had been helpful, too. In January, a few days of warm weather gave us a fright, but that was nothing new. The bottom line was that the vines were ready to awake from their dormant period within the usual time-frame. The scene was set for the actors to take the stage.

Then a warning shot was fired on 4th and 5th April, but this again was no more than a fright. It was just the cold and our fear that got us trembling during those early mornings in the vines. We are well-prepared for spring frosts nowadays –not invulnerable, but much better equipped. The result was that the 2023 crop was unaffected by spring frosts.

Very soon, the real enemy was identified. The spell of tropical weather that descended on the whole of the region gave downy mildew the ideal opportunity to invade. Relentless waves of rain interspersed with hot, sunny spells provided the perfect conditions for downy mildew to break out. To make things worse, black rot was also threatening. It was the perfect scenario for vine disease to set in.

“Spring was a period of continuous stress; we were constantly making prognoses.”

How soon could we spray the vines again? When would the latest downy mildew contamination break out? How much of the crop would be lost? Could we even keep it at bay? Or would we end up losing the totality of a crop that had looked so abundant? As the actors suffocated on the stage, the audience sat ever-closer to the edge of their seats.

Every vine cycle has its share of uncertainties and doubts. Each of them calls into question our vine-growing techniques, both those we practised before and those of the future. Humility was the order of the day. In 2023, with such unfavourable spring conditions, every vigneron wondered if they'd be able to produce a crop. Organic farming of course was badly affected, but conventional vine-growing wasn't spared either. The slightest turn of events could wipe out a whole production.

Let's have a close look however at the context in order to understand how downy mildew pressure, more feared than actually endured as it turned out, affected the region's wines.

Although rain showers were very frequent during spring, total rainfall was actually moderate, despite

what vigneron who were constantly donning their waterproofs might have felt. In fact, it was more humid and warm than wet.

The flowering process, which was completed in a flash during a period of dry weather as from May 20th was exceptionally good.

In a number of isolated cases, downy mildew did in fact destroy the whole of a vigneron's crop, but overall the region's vines were well-protected.



“At the end of the flowering, enhanced by a context of vine energy and vigour, the potential crop size was considerably large.”

Downy mildew pressure nevertheless persisted throughout the whole of the vine's growth cycle. Over this hovered the horrifying spectre of total crop loss. Unsurprisingly, very few wine estates risked a green harvesting during this period or even some minor adjustments to the crop size. Not only would this have tempted fate, it would also have entailed extra costs. It was better to be safe than sorry, and once fruit set had been completed, a large potential crop was in evidence.

The successful control of crop yields played an essential role in the 2023 vintage. It ensured the wines' depth and gave them length of flavour. More than ever, it provided their texture and substance and their degree of seriousness.

Late June sounded the death knell for the few plots still on borrowed time. The stormy spells of the second half of June also proved disastrous for some estates which till then seemed to have been spared. It was tough on them, but the vintage nevertheless advanced, for those who were still in the game.

Available water reserves were substantial in mid-July, and the veraison process kicked off very early half-way through the month. At last something was working in our favour! But water deficit stress took time to set in and stretched out the process. Consequently, uneven ripening was already perceptible, and this needed to be taken into account for the harvesting. The ripening process ensued in dull weather conditions in early August; there was a lack of brightness, warmth and sunlight. The spring weather conditions had led to vigorous vegetation growth, a heavy crop load and an energy in the vines that was more conducive to leaf development than fruit ripening. A late harvest seemed on the cards, but in late August the situation abruptly changed.

The first of two heat-waves descended on the Bordeaux region between August 18th and 24th just a few days before the first pickings of the white grapes. Temperatures soared, and in the cellars harvest preparations were rushed forward, while cellar workers were summoned back from their holidays. The sudden change had taken everyone by surprise! In the same way that vegetation growth had suddenly stopped, so the ripeness came in the grapes. Now, vines with shallow roots or which had gorged themselves on the heavy spring rains were suddenly showing signs of suffering. The shock was quite brutal for young plantations or vines on fast-draining soils. There was evidence of vines shutting down and defoliation.

“The heat-wave was however very welcome for most of us. It burned off any vegetal aromas, lowered malic acid and ripened the pips, which were very abundant in this vintage.”

The heat accelerated the ripening, rapidly concentrated those juices that were still a little fluid and opened an optimal narrow harvesting window for the whites between the last week of August and the first week of September.





THE TASTE OF 2023

For the white grapes, the alcoholic degrees off the press were of a reasonable level, and the wines showed aromatic freshness and complexity. Explosive in flavour, they offered both harmonious balance and outstanding complexity.

The first red grapes were harvested on 8th September, which was just after the arrival of the second heat-wave on 4th September. The withered or mummified effects on the berries resulting from successive attacks were visible in every vine plot and regardless of vine-growing strategy. There were numerous damaged berries within the bunches.

"The technical and human means available had a considerable impact on the quality of the raw material vinified."

But there was one final hurdle for the vigneron to overcome. A series of grapevine moth attacks broke out in the region in September. Vineyards in Entre-Deux-Mers, the southern part of the department, and Blaye, Bourg and Côtes de Bordeaux were hit by the attacks. These pushed hesitant growers into picking earlier, further increased crop losses and complicated sorting processes.

Rainstorms during the ripening period added to the heterogeneity of the situation. While ripeness was achieved in all the grape varieties, the general situation varied. Though scenarios differed and gave a wide range of results, the ripening of the grapes was generally successful. Everywhere, the tannins were ripe and of high quality. The grapes showed full technological and phenolic ripeness.

"The wines of this vintage are generally harmonious and dynamic."

Concentration and alcoholic degrees were moderate. The wines displayed restrained power and expression, leaving space for more subtle notes that resulted from a slow ripening of the fruit, an energetic platform and a tactile reading of the identity of the soils.

Great terroirs shine through in this type of vintage and produce similarly high quality wines to those of the great vintages but with a more classic profile, such as 2000, 2001 or 2005.

"All in all, the 2023 vintage demonstrates once again the technical prowess that our region is capable of achieving through self-sacrifice and determination. With the help of course of a measure of good fortune, which plays its part in the dream of making great Bordeaux fine wines –a dream to which we have allowed ourselves to aspire once again."

Stéphane Derenoncourt

After 25 years at the helm of Derenoncourt Consultants, the desire to take a step back and also acquire a broader perspective, through the experience gained over the years, pushed me into closing the chapter, begun 10 years ago, on the partnership and finally the handing over of the business.

A young team, led by 3 historic partners, will now take over the destiny of the consultancy, after working alongside me for 20 years.

These have been years of passionate commitment to partnering others, respecting their taste. Complementing solid scientific training brought by study with learning on the job, since life in the field cannot be learned in books. Loving science, loving oenology, in order to know how to exist without it and reveal terroir. Communicating and cultivating the art of transmitting know-how. Committing, passing on the message and being able to read the times and their evolutions.

It is this complex blend that creates the vision necessary to ensure the long-term future of companies.

Wishing the best of luck and limitless energy to the whole team.







Derenoncourt Consultants



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derenoncourtconsultants.com



11 Lieu-dit Fillol,
33350 Sainte-Colombe
Phone : + 33 (0)5 57 24 60 29
maryne@derenoncourtconsultants.com