



> 2018
HARVEST
REPORT FOR
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RHÔNE VALLEY

2018 – an unexpected annus mirabilis!

Who would have predicted that this 2018 vintage would cause such joy and rank among the remarkable Rhone Valley vintages that have come one after another since 2015? The year has produced some originality, primarily the Saint-Joseph, Côte-Rôtie and Ermitages wines whose flawless maturation offer an ode to Syrah.

At the start of 2018, we steeled ourselves for the vagaries of the year's weather, convinced that the run of good vintages would be broken. So, we braced ourselves for Nature's whims to strike during the wine-growing season and subject us to strenuous work right through to the end... In the end, an understatement, for over and over again we really had to dig our heels in.

Early winter... The rain arrived just in time to replenish the water stocks depleted in 2017. It brought relative mildness for a month of January and set a new tone – with 110 mm already recorded...

The Méal plot was pruned on 18 January, followed by other sectors, and the pruning sealer. At this time of year we usually explore the bare hills to identify which walls need rebuilding, which water runnels need maintenance and which vine stakes need changing. That leaves us enough time to decide on forthcoming planting projects, schedule the old terraced vines removal and prepare the slope for the next generation: the transmission.

At long last February arrived and the temperatures turned wintery, dropping to -8°C in Tain l'Hermitage.

Spring on the horizon, things got going... slowly: growth seemed unmoved and spring was dragging its feet. And it rained, oh how it rained... more than 130 mm fell in March.

From north to south, the vine planting projects somehow move forward, and here and there in the northern Rhone, we see holes in the middle of greenery... planting was underway.



At our Saint-Étienne Estate in Montfrin, Côte du Rhône, the first tiny spring flowers were already blooming, ladybirds start courting their mates and we can see the first saps gushing out of the vines.

At Ampuis, the works on the Neve slope come to an end and it is time to sit the last stones in the walls that will stand there for a century, like the imprint of the passage.

By mid-April, the bud burst was well on its way on the Greffieux (Ermitage), and the first leaves make their appearance with above average temperature, a daily record high of 30°C! And then, with a roll of drums, the vegetation shot up. Heat, water, what more could we ask for? Vines bobbed about in a frenzy, taking on their splendid green leaf mantles.

In the "North", we were in a mad rush to get the green work started. Under pouring rain, we can catch a glimpse of spring that finally unfold with the first poppies colouring the lush green plots. From then on, the pace is quickening.

On 8 May, the inflorescence were visible to the naked eye, but we have to wait a couple of weeks (27 May) until we are able to pick up the fragrance of the sweet pollen exhilarating the grapevine flower in the Méal and the Murets (De l'Orée). The caps stay on and will have a hard time to fall of the berries... But that had no bearing on this vintage. Storms returned on 30 May and resulted in some flower drop, affecting the Syrah grapes on the Crozes Hermitage plains.

Meanwhile, in the south... At the beginning of June, we have to tackle the mildew that resulted from the spring rains in the early-ripening plots – already more than 600mm of rain at mid-year. The initial onset of leaf mildew went almost unnoticed because it was already on the grape cluster, nearly as big as peas at that stage. It was a rapid attack that left the berry quality unscathed, but will reduce grape quantity. We had all hands on deck to try to control the fungus, hoping the Mistral – notable by its absence thus far – would start to blow.

We overshot our planting schedule because of the rains. But as luck would have it, the stored rain proved invaluable for getting through the summer...

Summer... At Valliguières (Domaine Roc Folassière), we noticed a few patches of flower drop on the Grenache in the middle of June, but the vegetation had fully recovered from last year's frosty spell and the plots were thriving.

Early in July at Saint-Barthélémy-de-Vals (La Combe Pilate), the vegetation just wouldn't stop growing and topping followed on row after row. The water proved to be more than beneficial. Viognier bunches developed well, heralding a good harvest.





After the terrible mildew episode in the Châteauneuf-du-Pape vineyards, and its continued resistance in spite of hostile weather conditions (the Mistral blowing and temperatures above 30°C), the growers' efforts paid off, as the Grenache berries started to plump out.

Across Coirons at the Mirabel, the atmosphere is calm and comforting, spared from the turmoil in the south. The perfect balance, a haven of calm... and the Viogniers flourished.

Stillness returned to Montfrin (Domaine Saint-Étienne) in the middle of July, and the heat warmed the smooth pebbles and the Valliguières limestone (Domaine Roc Folassière).

At Chasses-sur-Rhône (Lucidus), a small amount of mildew flared up, but the heatwave on the schist slope and the lack of rain quickly put paid to that.

On Côte Brune (Côte-Rôtie), the Syrah was really thriving and promising a great harvest. However, over on Côte Blonde there was evidence of dodder creeper on a few vine plants. This parasitic plant can crop up in very dry years, often after rainy winters, given its sensitivity to weather variations. Their twisting tendrils around the vines really was a strange sight! They had to be detached to free the vine... Another example of plants' ability to act as a weathervane.

The Condrieu of Limony slope and its steep hillside was already showing signs of the heat that filled the air. The temperatures were rising, really rising... telling us that a scorching summer was in the offing.

Veraison begins... A brief hailstorm over Saint Péray left its mark on the branches, but spared the grape clusters. However, it opened the way just enough for a mild mildew attack.

The Granits slope (Saint-Joseph) stands proud with its new wall and the ground was tilled ready to plant new vines on the far side a few months later.

On le Clos (Saint-Joseph), veraison was underway... however, the Marsannes on l'Hermitage showed little sign of it.

The latest from the Méal: unprecedented green at that time of summer... lush and promising for the harvests. On the Greffieux, the first berries already reddened in the sun.

Countdown... 11 August: the day before yesterday, a storm burst and a Cévenol episode (a meteorological phenomenon that mainly occurs in the Cévennes and its surrounding areas. It consists of very violent and highly localised storms) passed





through and moved up the Rhône Valley... Strange for this time of the year... But after over 3 weeks of sweltering heat, rain fell on the grapes, doing a power of good and bringing them to full maturity. The Marsannes finally started to change colour, taking on golden hues... just perfect in the lead-up to the final ripening phase.

17 August: we start the daily rounds in the vineyards to monitor the final phases of maturation and to pick at exactly the right time.

Easy does it: no sense in rushing. The Marsannes is turning golden slowly in the sun and the Roussannes follow the same leisurely progression in the south. Who would have thought that given the intense heat, ripening would take so long? We tasted the grapes, realising that initial impressions and berry colour could be deceptive, as the grape pulp was taking its time. Fortunately, the whites, protected by their hardening skins, maintained their acidity levels. Decision time was upon us!

This year, we started with Méal, at dawn on 23 August. The crew met at the top of the hill for cutting instructions to bring in the first Marsannes. We took our time, allowing the sun to rise far beyond the Murets hills and shed its morning light on the slopes. The buckets filled up and the first baskets were brought out. Game on!

The rains set the grapes free and they started to come on well. Every new day the taste sharpened, by which originates the characteristics of the upcoming wine. The tastings give a clear picture of fine tannins and good acidity levels in the reds, which will be crucial for age-worthy wines.

The Grenaches at Valliguières (Roc Folassière) are superb, and on the Agasse, the old vines already bore an exceptional fruit.

30 August, in Châteauneuf-du-Pape: the vegetation show no sign of stress despite the heat. The Grenaches are taking their time and ripening slowly. In the scorching heat, we have to be patient, no point in hurrying.

In the meantime, we begin to harvest roussannes at Saint-Étienne Estate in Montfrin. The reds will follow a few days later. The berries had ripened while maintaining acidity and it looks luscious, thanks to the water reserve in the clay under the pebbles.

31 August, at Esteban (Combe Pilate): a final tour of the vineyard as the picking team rolls in. We begin picking Viogniers for this atypical sparkling.

On the granite slopes of the Bessards, the pace starts to pick up, everything speeds up under the persistent heat, and when we need to move, there will be no time to lose if we want to avoid the overripeness.

The last tour on Condrieu slopes for a progress report of Viogniers. We were surprised by the freshness brought by lemony notes of cardamom. Then, on 4 September, without a doubt, Chery was harvested.





At Ampuis, on the Côte-Rôtie, the skins ripened and they are almost ready. With the help of the heat, the pulp is bringing out more intense colour. As the weather hold up... with more sunshine to come, we decide to put off a few more days to achieve the optimum... the excellence.

5 september on the Ermitage, the Marsannes of De l'Orée on the Murets hill were collected... They have beautiful golden skin with good acidity in the pulp that we want to preserve to keep the balance.

The day that made a tremendous success of the 2018 vintage: 6 September.

10mm of rainfall after a succession of scorching days, and more days in the cards, the rain set everything off. Now we had to get moving or we would miss out on the vintage and that bellyful of sunshine; the daytime temperature reached and sometime rose above 30°C daily. However, biodynamics were clearly on our side, helping keep the overall balance of the plants and the fruit.

7 September: we harvested the white Granits on the Saint-Joseph slope while keeping a very close eye on the progression of ripeness as temperatures start to soar. So, day in day out, the pickers keep pace with the sun collecting the berries before it is too hot to preserve the mineral expression of the wines.

3-2-1, GO! The picking race is under way

10 September: in the wee hours, the white Ermite, unfettered and protected at the top of the Hermitage hill, made the very best of the heat. Tasting the berries confirmed us that its bright minerality and salinity could get even better. The grape pickers arrived to collect the Marsannes and then work their way down to the red Méal where the deep black berries contrast with fresh notes of eucalyptus and exotic fruits.

11 September: trip to Côte-Rôtie to gather La Mordorée (La Côte Brune, La Côte Blonde) and Neve. The berry tasting go incredibly well. The refined skins and inky, purple pulp on our fingers indicate an exceptional vintage.

Next stop: the Saint-Joseph hill with its red Granits, whose pips were already roasted, before proceeding to Le Clos.

12 September: unstoppable, Les Greffieux and its berries with unusual aromas for this Ermitage.

13 September: The Varogne (Varonniers) hill had enjoyed superb ripening in the shadow of Les Bessards. At the same time, we started harvesting on the Crozes Hermitage plains.





14 September: le Pavillon and its slope is majestic, the small berries on the granites are just perfect.

15 September: La Combe Pilate's Viogniers show an exceptional maturity and a well preserved acidity despite the heat, thanks to the altitude.

16 September: we harvested l'Hermitage reds from the foothills (Monier de la Sizeranne) and whites (Chante-Alouette) from East to West. On Saint-Péray, we are also going to harvest Lieu-Dit Hongrie.

17 September: escorted by Anne Sophie Pic's team of sommeliers, we started harvesting the Saint Péray Lieu-Dit Payrolles at dawn. The grapes already displayed incredible salinity.

18 September: l'Ermite (Ermitage)... With great promise as the berries were so beautifully coloured, and tannins already releasing great potential.

20 September: la Couronne de Chabot (Alléno & Chapoutier) up above Tournon, superbly ripe.

We took a short break after the frantic race across the hills, only to start again on 25 September to finish the harvests of the northern Rhone Valley by Cornas (Temenos), whose grapes had ripened to perfection. Perched on the heights of the Ardèche, they had really taken advantage of the sun and heat.

The Châteauneuf-du-Pape harvest started on 11 September with the Syrahs. Then we waited, somewhat impatiently, for the Grenaches. It doesn't take long to harvest because the yield is low. However, the grapes are perfectly ripe with fine tannins and strawberry notes on Croix de Bois, that contrast with a certain degree of austerity on Barbe Rac. This bring the year's harvest to a pleasant conclusion after a complicated growing season. However, it is worth struggling till the end for the exceptional and remarkable potential of the Grenaches. So, it was only on 27 September that Croix de Bois made its way to the cellars, followed by Barbe Rac on 1 October. Much patience to pull off the perfect maturity of Grenaches.

And thus, as the heat blazed on relentlessly, the 2018 vintage came to a close!

What a terrific year!!! Such intensity, with uncertainties from north to south through an exceptionally hot September, and the end with that final sprint to make 2018 such a lovely, promising vintage.

A vintage that we had to be reactive to alleviate the soaring temperatures, but allows us to have great age-worthy wines owing to good acidity level and silky tannins. The works in the cellar also needed to be adjusted to avoid over-extraction and to keep the balance. Indeed, 2018 will surprise by its individuality, of which will prove to be an incredible wine growing year.





Monday 29 October – the last vat was drained... Barbe Rac – and before we end this vinification process over a meal with the winemaking team, here are a few words about our wines that are coming into existence in our cellar...

Saint-Joseph white Les Granits: the wine is in full development yet the first notes of finely toasted reduction have revealed. The nose has elegant notes of fennel and fresh hazelnuts. Very good balance on the palate with anise tones and a hint of bitterness that gives a good tension.

Saint-Péray Lieu-dit Payrolles: fermentation with wild yeasts continues gently, but the profile has already asserted itself with a strong tension and exceptional salinity. This suggests an excellent potential.

Hermitage Chante-Alouette: very fresh notes of pineapple and rose, all with a slightly toasted reduction on a fine bitter structure.

Ermitage De L'Orée: behind a fine lees reduction, tension is fully emerging. The power of the Marsanne on the entry elaborates the mid-palate smoothness. The persistent finish sets off wonderfully the fine bitterness. Stunning!

Ermitage white Le Méal: a moderate and sharp Méal by its mineral tensions and celery note. The acidity is outstanding for this terroir, the balance is close to perfection, and a persistence that is already unmistakable. Our personal favorite!

Ermitage white L'Ermite: monolith granite, the wine takes on the spicy notes that blend to perfection with those of crushed stones and graphite. The minerality expresses magnificently, an exceptional wine with salinity and a fine expression of its terroir.

Condrieu Côteau de Chery: the vintage squares the circle with just the right degree of ripeness. The high notes of coriander and bergamot combine wonderfully with a fine and mouth-watering palate.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Croix de Bois: the superb Grenache with fine aromatic complexity and strawberry and raspberry notes. The tannic structure is evolving and is going to be very silky without harshness. A very good aging potential and a great floral finesse are expected. A Croix de Bois that plays an elegant hand.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Barbe Rac: more emphasis on density, with notes of garrigue and liquorice, sophisticated. This year, Barbe Rac offers us a more austere development, combining all the elements of a great age-worthy Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Crozes-Ermitage Les Varonniers: utterly black with great depth and typical graphite notes. The strength is incredible, yet controlled. The tannin structure is silky, the wine is remarkable!





Saint-Joseph Les Granits red: powerful, dark, singular. Balance is given by pencil lead reduction, bitumen and ink notes, fabulous potential!

Saint-Joseph Le Clos: the elegance and aromatic complexity of the wine blend to perfection with a dense yet silky tannic structure. The obvious connection to the opposite hill (Hermitage) continues to assert itself from year to year.

Côte-Rôtie Neve: the nose is rich with red berry and floral notes. The palate is fresh and very elegant, shows a silky, beautifully balanced tannic structure.

Côte-Rôtie La Mordorée: this year, the classic floral expression of the Côte Blonde embellishes soft tannic density on the palate, symbolizing an accomplished vintage. More austere but no less elegant, the Côte Brune offers a series of spices and black fruits, amongst them, blueberries dominate.

Ermitage Les Greffieux: coy during vinification, the terroir and its typical exotic notes are beginning to expose at the beginning of aging. Fresh aromas with satin tannins. Behind its restrained pageantry, the brilliance and complexity of the future wine are stirring under the surface.

Ermitage red Le Méal: particularly sleek for this solar vintage, iodine notes emerge from the wine to complement its more traditional notes of blackberry sauce. The freshness preservation gives a great balance and a rare elegance.

Ermitage Le Pavillon: austere and sophisticated, the wine remains introverted. The nobility of tannins is impressive by the tension it creates. The aromatic structure with hints of China ink, graphite and black pepper suggest that the best is yet to come.

Ermitage red L'Ermité: amazingly deep, the nose exhales graphite, blueberry and sweet spice notes. The tannins are delicately structured, the palate both straight and full, it already lingers incredibly. Our personal favourite!

