

2020

A gift from Nature



Instagram : @domainebelargus



Saint-Lambert du Lattay, November 2020

Dear friends,

The **third harvest** for Team Belargus has just ended, with a few botrytised Chenins from Quarts-de-Chaume.

Autumn is setting in, the days are shrinking and the vines can enter their resting phase. In the cellar, we are delighted by the pretty “gurgling” of the barrels, while some of the dry wines having already finished their fermentation. It is now time to look back at this year 2020 which was so special, in the vineyards too!

This year let's not be afraid to say it: **Nature has spoiled us**. At each stage she brought us exactly what the vines needed, even affording herself the luxury of respecting the seasons! Plentiful water in the spring, dry and hot weather in the summer and even some saving rains before a harvest... done under a perfect sun. In the end, we get a vintage whose keyword will undoubtedly be **balance**. Successor of the tiny - but great - 2019 vintage, this new fresh and crunchy vintage also gave us the pleasure of filling up the cellar.

However, don't think it was easy for the Team ... and let us tell you all about the “**making-of**”!

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2020 began like all vintages, chasing its predecessor. While the perfumes of the 2019 fermentations were still filling the cellar, the weather gave us a wonderful opportunity to work the soils, with even more precision than the previous year.

Of men and animals

Towards the end of the fall, our path crossed that of Béranger Arnould, a young shepherd who was looking to settle and graze his herd of 130 sheep in the region.



Béranger posing proudly in the middle of his “babies” on the Chaume hill.



A shepherd committed to organic and ancient breeds, Béranger made his herd available to us, which we made **travel from hill to hill** throughout the winter. Excellent workers, his "Ardenne reds" have thus grazed relentlessly the fatty grass and offered us what is most precious to a farmer, and which we will here elegantly call "amendment".



Our team of brave ewes grazing in the "Quarts" plot in Quarts-de-Chaume.

Our winter sports ...

This peaceful and radiant autumn gave way to a mild and rainy winter, with more rainy days than frost days! After the trauma of 2019, we chose to spread the pruning work over several months, keeping the most frost-exposed terroirs as late as possible in the season.





Working on the famous “Coteau des Treilles”, or how to never be cold while working.

Spring, on the other hand, was not easy. Like last year, frost was our main focus from mid-March until the beginning of May. Despite morning temperatures regularly approaching zero **we were luckier than in 2019**, saved by sustained winds and very low humidity that kept our tender buds from freezing.

We focused our control efforts on a few terroirs: we have lit our candles five times throughout the frost period, succeeding in protecting the “Clos des Ruchères” and the magnificent “Veau” hillside on Quarts-de-Chaume.





The south-east facing “Veau” hillside on the rump of Quarts-de-Chaume, in the early morning of 4 April 2020.

Spring work

The period which followed was restless for our vineyard team, with **long weeks at full-speed** to catch up with the vines that were growing at an incredible speed.

The “green work” season (disbudding and leaf stripping, in particular) was particularly intense and did not end until mid-July. Amaury and his team, supported by a dozen motivated seasonal workers, led this season brilliantly by pampering our finest plots as they should. We also continued our in-depth work in the vineyards: pampering vines, replacing stakes, threading, etc.



Team choreography: Amaury, our vineyard manager, leads the “pole dance”.



Clément is concentrated in “Les Ruchères”, while Camille (lovingly) ties each vine to its stake. Essential work to keep our hillsides in shape!

2020 also marked the **arrival of a new toy**: a brand new, beautiful tracked vehicle... A hybrid creature, half tractor / half tank, this “chenillard” is a stocky and powerful beast. It is the only machine capable of climbing on Coteau des Treilles, e.g. to remove the harvest boxes from the steep vineyards.



Manon gladly gave up her tractor to try out the new toy!



Summer, season of all promises

The dry and sunny summer did not hurt our vines like it did last year. On the contrary, thanks to the water reserves formed during the spring, they kept a brilliant green and gave birth to beautiful bunches after a perfect flowering. Obviously, **the 2020 vintage was promising to be early!**

After several hot and sunny months, we were beginning to fear blockages of maturity... but **Nature had a final gift in reserve for us**: some fine and regular rains from mid-August onwards came to relax the berries and swell our clusters of Chenin, which were able to ripen for another two precious weeks.



Two of our greatest schist terroirs on the eve of the harvest. On the left, “Le Veau” in Quarts-de-Chaume. On the right, the “Clos des Ruchères” in Savennières.

Ready for the big moment of the year

The start of the harvest was given on Monday, 31 August. We started with our plot called “La Fresnaye”, a beautiful gravel terroir in the village of Saint-Aubin de Luigné, giving birth to aromatic and fruity wines: previously made as a single-plot in the “Pithon-Paillé” range, this is now one of the plots which goes into the composition of our “Anjou Noir” cuvée, produced for the first time in 2019.



The troop is heading towards "La Fresnaye", to open the harvest ball on 31 August 2020.

Our protocol for monitoring ripeness "plot by plot" was often disconcerting this year, with extreme heterogeneity, rather slow sugar levels and low acidity (but with good pH). The harvest team thus took a pause and only resumed after a week's break, starting with the Coteau des Treilles. This allowed the rest of the vines to reach their optimal maturity, this **holy grail of "al dente" Chenin** which guides all our efforts.

Overall, the dry wines' harvest went off without a hitch, under a radiant sun. **The grapes reached perfect maturity, retaining magnificent balance** and low alcoholic degrees (between 12.5° and 13.5°, lower than the average of recent years). In some ways, this balance is reminiscent of the 2012 vintage, a fresh vintage with good "drinkability". As every year, the last dry Chenin grapes were harvested on "Clos des Bonnes Blanches", our coldest terroir.



Our amazing team: around thirty motivated grape pickers, offering sufficient "strike force" to project ourselves every day on a plot that has reached its optimal maturity.



We run, we have fun ... this is also the harvest spirit!



Adrien, our winemaker, in "combat" mode at the end of the harvest.



***Botrytis*-time !**

A few weeks later, the grapes metamorphosed on the Quarts-de-Chaume hill. Under the action of our magic mushroom, *botrytis cinerea*, the berries concentrated in sugar and turned into real honey hives.

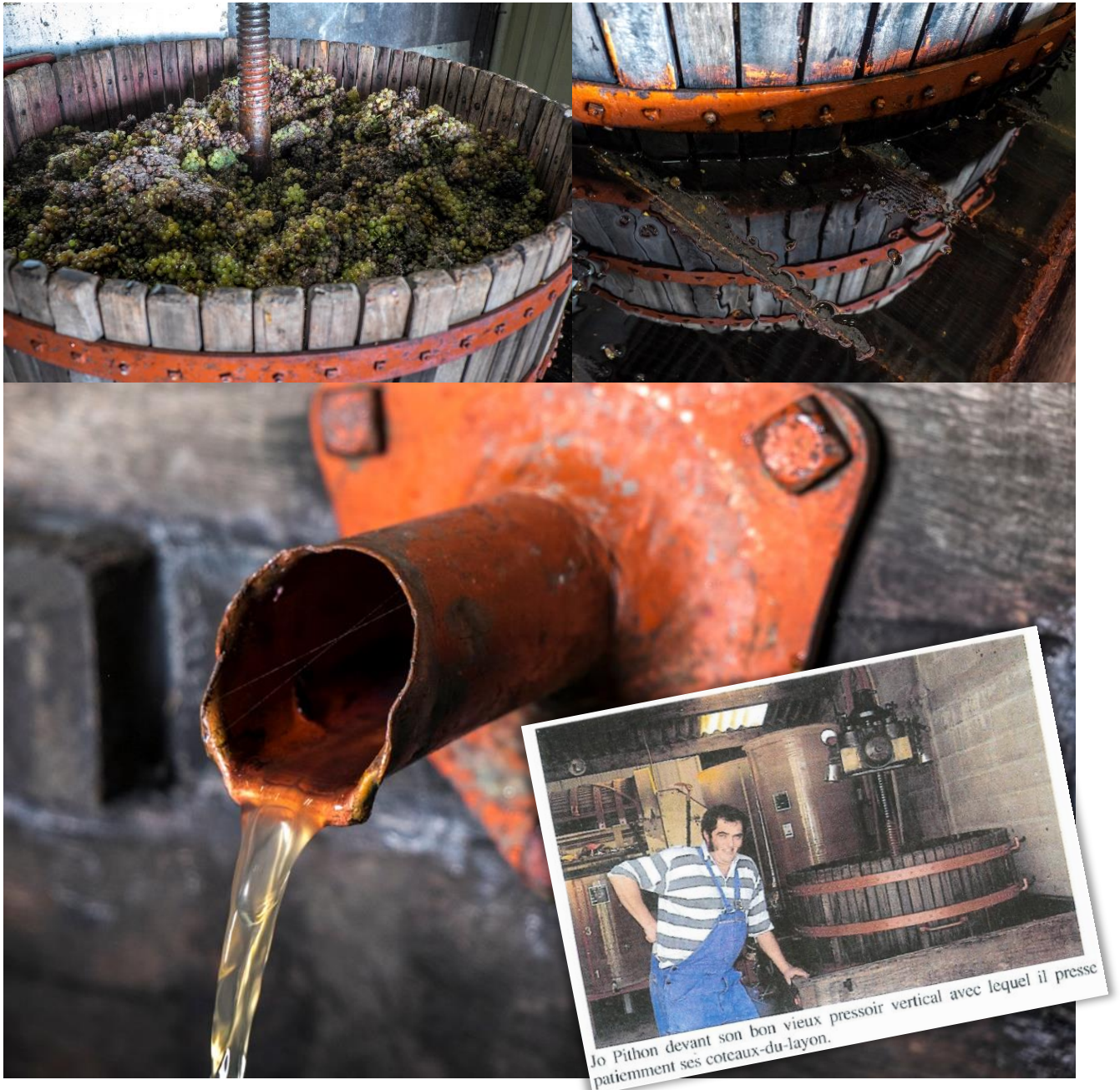


Chenin, this magical grape variety, at its different stages of maturity.



This year, we chose to focus on “Les Rouères”, our great puddingstone terroir in Quarts-de-Chaume. The Chenin clusters were magnificent, ranging from beautiful golden to “rotten roast” colours.

To extract these precious juices (only a few barrels produced), **we decided to revive Jo's old wine press**. His son Jules kindly lent it to us, even offering us on-the-job training. The precision and smoothness of this press mode is unmatched, even by modern technology: the delicately squeezed juices pass through the entire “cake” of clusters, thus coming out very clearly filtered (as you can see below).



The vertical press gently extracts this Chenin “nectar”...

Jo Python: “This photo was taken in 1996: I had just picked up this wine press, which was already old at the time, from a winegrower in the village. It was spinning like a clock!”



What an emotion to reproduce these ancient gestures! And to experience together the birth of these nectars, which will delight us for many decades.

It is our duty to **perpetuate the tradition of the great sweet wines from Anjou.**

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Voilà! This is what we wanted to share with you on this 2020 vintage, which the whole team will remember for a long time.

In short: what a year! And as always, Nature decides... At the very moment when this nasty virus reminded humanity of its weakness vs. the natural forces, Nature was reminding us, on our modest scale, that it still knew how to be benevolent.

We will continue to respect it, through our choices and in our every-day actions.

Hoping that all is well for you and your loved ones, we invite you to come and visit us at the Domaine. We would love to taste together this exciting new 2020 vintage in barrels...

And now, looking forward to hearing from ***you***!

Team Belargus

PS : meanwhile, our brave Franck was waxing, waxing...



DOMAINE BELARGUS

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