



2021

Heroic year



@domainebelargus



Saint-Lambert du Lattay, January 2022

Dear friends of the Domaine,

We have just entered winter and the cellar still echoes with the bubbling of fermentation: this year's *Quarts-de-Chaume* are in full swing, a true ode to life.

2021, besides being a late vintage, put the team to the test. If each year marks a new story, new challenges, new battles, this 2021 vintage will have been **by far the most trying** for Team Belargus (as for the whole of the French vineyard, btw).

In the end, **we lost 70% of the harvest (as in 2019 – Yayyy ;-)**, but we are proud and happy to have been able to vinify each of our plots separately, even if some will only represent two or three barrels. We even managed to produce a potentially exceptional sweet cuvée. In short, a vintage to be remembered...

So, let us tell you more about this extraordinary vintage!

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Let's start with the first season, the one that deals the cards, setting the tone for the vintage: winter 2021.

Half a winter... it's not enough!

That winter had started well: we had long episodes of cold until February, leaving us beautiful moments of tillage. We took the opportunity, for example, to replace some missing vines on the *Coteau des Treilles*.

This cold and wet wave also facilitated grazing work on the Layon vineyards. As every year now, we have worked with **Béranger Arnould, the "itinerant shepherd"**. By starting as soon as the leaves fell and pushing until bud break, Béranger was able to graze his sheep at least twice in each plot, thus providing the land with maximum agronomic benefit.



Béranger's sheep at work on the Coteau des Treilles. These ancient breeds (Roux Ardennais and Roussin de la Hague) live outdoors "year round", without any fixed sheepfold.



Among the (many) benefits of the winter period: the constitution of water reserves in the soil. Sometimes it even overflows ...

Unfortunately, **winter passed quickly**, with temperatures starting to rise in mid-February. So yes, we got a nice tan, but when we take out the T-shirts, the vines start to bud, very/too early.

It was therefore obvious we risked a **scenario identical to 2019**, and history repeated itself...



When pruning in a T-shirt in February, there is something to be worried about ...



Deadly spring

After winter comes spring ... Since immemorial times, winegrowers have been waiting for this beautiful season, but since global warming has become a reality, **they fear it!**

At this stage, our vines are animated by the vital sap and bring out their first buds (Chenin being one of the grape varieties with the earliest bud break). So the spring frosts were deadly, once again. From the end of March to the beginning of April, **our Team spent precisely 15 nights standing**, fighting alongside our vines. Mother Nature has no schedules: she tested us even more than in previous years...



The beauty of evil, on Instagram...

There were too many freezing nights for us to protect our entire vineyard. Day after day, the uninjured areas therefore became increasingly rare, until only remained the **3 hectares of Quarts-de-Chaume** that we were protecting with candles (*Le Veau, Les Quarts and Le Douet*), around *LEcharderie*.

2021 : worthy successor of 1991

This wave of frost is reminiscent of the one that ravaged the French vineyards **exactly 30 years earlier**, the infamous 1991. According to Jo, it was the only “real” frost vintage in his entire career... So what to say, what to think, when we see that Anjou has suffered 4 major frost episodes over the last 6 years: 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2021. The list starts to get long!



War scene in Le Veau, in the early morning.



Phoney spring

And as if this spring start had not been harsh enough, some cool days followed one another, preventing the vines from growing with ease...

In this spring of 2021, the very frequent rain pushed us to treat often, more than we would have liked. Diseases watched us from the corner and were ready to attack the vine at the slightest looseness. **So we didn't give up an inch:** the pace was intense, but we held out against the mildew !



Despite the hyper-activity of spring, we found the time to spread some biodynamic preparations.



Bloopers - 2021 (extracts). Or rather: the real daily life of a wine estate.



In the summer, we work!

Summer finally came. This is the ideal season to pamper our vines: taking care of our young plantations, managing grass cover (very abundant this year!), etc. Enough to keep our Team busy ...



The brush cutter for Manon, the mass for Clément. There is something for every taste ...



The winch: our new toy, ideal for the "Belvédère des Treilles" plot. Even Jo wanted to play!

In mid-August, **the sun is finally setting!** It will stay until the end of the harvest, which gives a smile and hope to all of Team Belargus. The maturity of the berries developed nicely, and we accompanied our vines which also regained a little serenity.



2021 : the ultimate harvest *by selections*

Harvest time. Started in mid-September, they unfolded to the jerky rhythm of a jazz improv'. Why ? Because many of the clusters were from a second generation of buds, which emerged after frost. Beyond the natural heterogeneity of Chenin, the climatic vagaries of 2021 reinforced the heterogeneous shoots. On each vine, there were **almost as many levels of maturity as there were clusters !**



Adrien, O Adrien, do you see maturity coming? Victory! I think it's coming ...

Now please slip into the gloves of our harvesting team, who had to make several passages ("*tries*") in each plot in order to harvest, each time, only the ripe grapes. **Crazy... and painstaking work!** But that was the price to pay **for any hope of "doing great"** this year.

Fortunately, our team of harvesters was simply excellent: attention to detail, commitment and a good sense of humour... all the ingredients were in place to live **a great experience together!**



Our Quarts-de-Chaume vines are ready to be picked... but cluster by cluster.



As regards sorting, we have gone a long way this year: up to 3 “tries” for the dry *Quarts-de-Chaume*... not counting the 2 other “tries” for the sweet wines. This makes a **total of 5 “tries”**: A new record!



Simply out of the question that we lose a single cluster this year; Big Brother Team is watching!

Time to start preparing the 2022 vintage

Once the dry harvest was over, we planed some **autumn work**, such as planting (this year, a new square planted at “La Fresnaye”) or “shoeing” operations under the row (with a horse in the “*Bonnes Blanches*” area) to prepare the vines to rest.



Never a dull day in the Vineyard Team !

This year, we have also launched an original project in our “*Zerzilles*” vineyard. In partnership with the Chamber of Agriculture, we decided to plant **an experimental vineyard to work on climate change**. A lot of issues tease us: the rootstocks, the heights of the vine and the foliage, the pruning, etc. These are all parameters that we are going to study closely and that could allow us to fight against the climate disturbances we are facing. Something we'll report back to you one day...



Sweet reward

Then finally, a few days after the at the end of harvest meal, heavy rains marked **the arrival of autumn**, a period that we particularly like in *Anjou Noir* ... So, despite the loss of 70% of the harvest, we chose to take the risk of producing sweet wines. Simply because these wines fascinate us...

The regular short rains, followed by three weeks of good weather, with just the necessary amount of breeze to concentrate sugar in the berries, **made us happy** with the prospect of harvesting a few botrytised grapes.



In search of the famous "noble" rot.



Weird encounter in "Les Rouères".

We finished the harvest as a Team, on October 27th, on the *Quarts-de-Chaume* hillside: that day, the approach was "**berry by berry**" (i.e. a bucket for yellow berries, a bucket for "rotten" berries). The yields were tiny... especially as we had to share with a few greedy wild boars who came to feast just before the harvest... But the quality ended up being great (23 degrees potential), so we were thrilled!

Through this concentrated nectar, we will be able to keep **an eternal trace** of this vintage.

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Game, set and match! We had to fight, but thanks to drastic sorting, we believe we have won our bet in 2021: not without sweat, but with **the hope of a great vintage**: that of a vineyard that struggled and a team that held on. After a good start of fermentation, the wines look promising. It is still too early to fully taste the potential of these new wines, but once again we have confidence.

Hoping that all is well for you and your loved ones, we invite you to come and visit us at the Domaine. This would allow us to barrel taste this unique 2021 vintage in the making...

And now, we look forward to hearing from ***you***!

Team Belargus



Some other souvenirs from the year 2021



Jo turning 65



Auger contest



Making Les Treilles great again



Adapting the press to the vintage



Princely visit



Les Treilles' engraving



First harvest at the "Belvédère"



Les Ruchères' worksite



100/100 Robert Parker



End of harvest meal



Terracotta jar trials



Giant pad



Belargus at the Elysée Palace



Wine Trip in Bordeaux



PS : If you ever wondered how Franck (our Sales Director) occupies his days... pictures speak louder than words!



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