

A vibrant rainbow arches across a cloudy sky, its colors vivid against the grey and white clouds. Below the rainbow, a dirt path leads through a field of tall, dry grass towards a vineyard. The vineyard is situated on a gentle slope, with rows of grapevines visible. In the background, there are more trees and a small cluster of buildings on a hill. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, capturing a moment of natural beauty.

2022

Miracle vintage



@domainebelargus



Saint-Lambert du Lattay, January 2023

Dear friends of the Domaine,

Winter is here and Mother Nature is resting. This is the perfect time for us to look back on the last vintage.

The years go by and, for sure, they are not alike! No need to be Homer to write an epic: let us just tell you the many surprises and adventures that marked this 2022 vintage... **the fifth (already) for Team Belargus.**

The year 2022 was the **perfect illustration of what climate change has in store for us**: intense, violent, unpredictable weather phenomena, putting the nerves of winegrowers (and more broadly, of all farmers) to the test: spring frost, historic drought, infernal temperatures, wildfires... we had it all last year!

But 2022 also meant for Belargus a growing team (15 people now), a magnificent off-season, sumptuous grapes... and in the last mile, **harvests of anthology, done by successive selections for nearly 2 months**, and wines that eventually bear the promise of a great vintage.

In short, **a small miracle!** ... that we were eager to tell you.

... ..

Let's start with the resting season, winter, the one that allows Nature to build its reserves – and without which it could not go very far. Unfortunately, for a few years now, winter has tended to disappear...

« Make Winter Cold Again »

The 2022 winter, like most of its predecessors, was particularly mild. Indeed, the days when the temperature fell below 0°C can be counted on the fingers of one hand... Sad news, when you know how important it is for plants to be able to rest for some months.

Nowadays, barely descended into the roots at the end of autumn, the sap already rises up again (leading to the famous “weeping vine” phenomenon). This makes vines begin their new cycle at high speed, without having had enough time to rest – and being very exposed to spring frost.



For Team Belargus, winter is naturally the season for pruning, but also for “fixing” the vineyards: renovation of trellises, plantations, ground work... The absence of strong cold also creates longer working periods!



Removing old vines under the “Treilles” cabin



Manure throwing competition on the “Belvédère”

And of course, like every year in November, the vineyards and their yummy grass saw the arrival of our friend **Bérenger’s flock of ewes**, to the delight of the big ones... and the little ones (lambs)!



*Bérenger’s sheep and their new-born lambs grazing at the bottom of “Les Rouères”
in Quarts-de-Chaume or on the “Coteau des Treilles”*



But a few weeks later, spring was already here, and Team Belargus had to prepare to fight against frost...

A spring of *fire and ice*

Bis Repetita at the beginning of 2022: the frost came early, closing – once again – its icy jaws on the young buds emerging from winter rest. Several nights in a row the Team fought, lighting candles and braziers to save the most sensitive plots, especially on the *Quarts-de-Chaume* hillside. While Jo Pithon had only experienced two episodes of frost in 40 years of viticulture, 2022 was **the 5th episode of heavy frost in 7 years in Anjou**. No comment...

At the end of April, the affected areas amounted to three-quarters of the vineyard... like last year! At the time, the team was devastated, thinking they had once again lost most of the harvest.

Thankfully, this episode came very early in the season, allowing the second-gen buds to come out, with a speed and intensity that (pleasantly) surprised us. And what's more, they turned out to be bearing fruits... **Mother Nature had not finished surprising us...**



The (painful) month of April, which mobilised the whole Team for long days... and even longer nights!



The “*Saints-de-Glace*” period (finally) over in May, the season’s work continued... Despite a flowering phase taking place without a hitch, spring remains a difficult challenge to take up. Intuition is then key: should we treat this afternoon or tomorrow? Will the predicted rain fall? Will the wind pick up? Etc.

And as soon as the good weather returns, of course, **we pamper all our terroirs...**



Above: our latest plantation, on the “Zerzilles” terroir (Quarts-de-Chaume)

Below: Grégoire learning how to master the caterpillar tractor on the gentle slopes of “Le Veau”





Deadly *summer*

Like winter, which is eaten away by spring, spring itself is now often eaten away by summer. In short, as the older say: "There are no more seasons!"

From the month of May, rain became scarce... The soils quickly dried out and cracked. A long period of drought began which lasted until August. The vine's response to water stress is to slow down and then block its growth and vegetative functioning. At the height of summer, the grapes were small and no longer ripening. Adding to this lack of water were episodes of intense heat (tenfold on our steep, south-facing plots made of black rocks, which become real ovens in these circumstances). The most exposed grapes literally dried out (*échaudage*), and the vines seemed hopelessly blocked in August.

As the culmination of this infernal summer, the yellowing vegetation caught fire: **a major fire threatened part of the vineyard** in the *Beaulieu-sur-layon* village. Unheard of in the region and at these latitudes! A few hundred meters closer, our plots would have been ravaged. They were finally spared by a miracle, but 150 hectares went up in smoke. Global warming reminds us how small the planet is, and that we are all concerned by this phenomenon of wildfires: from California to Bordeaux... and now in Anjou. 😞



On August 9th, a fire broke out a few hundred meters from our "Les Broses" plot. Fortunately, more fear than harm!

The real miracle of this year 2022 occurred at the end of the summer: **rain made a salutary return on August 15th**. Perfect timing! The vines became green again, and the grapes started to ripen and grow. Although some bunches did remain blocked, the harvest was looking promising...



2022, a year for selection(s): *let the perfectionists come in!*

The team of pickers was called on **September 8th** to start harvesting for dry wines. We had to come to terms with this vintage, certainly “miraculous” but above all unlike anything seen before!

Chenin is a grape variety with very heterogeneous maturity: on the same vine, some bunches can be golden yellow and others completely green! If you add to that a spring frost (and therefore two generations of bunches) and grapes blocked by drought, you end up a daunting cacophony. To harvest only grapes at the right maturity, harvesting by successive selections was essential this year. While the fear of rain pushed many people to speed up their harvest, we took the opposite decision: **we decided to harvest EVERYTHING by sorting (“vendanges par tries”) ...** which led us to stretching our harvest for dry wines over the whole month of September. Twice the normal duration!



Early morning start on our “Frêne Blanc” plot at the bottom of Quarts-de-Chaume, with Jacques (the veteran of the Team, on the right) carefully watching

To produce dry wines with finesse, we look for beautiful golden-coloured grapes, with moderate sugar content, rich and complex aromas, enhanced by this beautiful acidity that Chenin gives us. The team of pickers was cheerful but serious: they quickly learnt how to taste the berries, to evaluate the colours, to spot (i.e. to smell) the berries affected by bad rot (grey, sour or acid). In short, it was a **goldsmith work!**

Record broken in the “Les Quarts” plot: in 2022, the Team made **a total of 6 harvests there, just for dry wines. A real madness!...** But in the end, we brought in magnificent grapes, harvested under the sun.



To harvest only ripe grapes, it was better to double-check this year!



Two ways of climbing "Les Treilles": walking... or driving

Well supervised by a focused and benevolent Team Belargus, **our super team of pickers sent (literally!) tons of cases to the cellar...** enough to make the presses crack! The days went by, and we almost couldn't believe the volumes: we first told ourselves that we would surely reach 60%... or maybe 70% of a normal harvest... and then, why not 80%... but eventually, what if we got closer to 100%?... All this galvanised the Team! And even more so when Amaury, our vineyard manager, learnt the birth of his first child, little Léon. It was then decided: these 2022 harvest will be of anthology!

This year has also proven **exceptional on a human level**: what a team and what an atmosphere! In total, we led a group of about thirty pickers of all ages, with a great diversity of backgrounds. Those who have been coming back for a few years trained the young ones... and surely motivated them to come back!



Happy harvest, radiant faces!



Small miracles follow one another, *like in a movie*

After a **perfect** month of September, the following weeks followed an Angevin winegrower's dream scenario: **small rains, at the beginning of October, allowed Botrytis to settle.** Morning mists and bright sunshine from 11 a.m.: here is the magic of the Layon Valley! The first days of October allowed us to harvest our ***Layon*** cuvée. Since 2018, we had not had the opportunity to make it, for lack of grapes or favourable conditions... We know that will make some clients very happy!

A few rare days of rain punctuated the slow sugar concentration process. This diversity of atmospheres kept everyone on their toes, despite the gradual departure of seasonal workers and the fatigue of the bodies... **It was critical to hold on, as the off-season looked so promising.**



A typical October morning, on the banks of the Layon river: the morning mists blur the contours of the landscape and the fading autumn sun ignites the vineyards' foliage, accompanied by the joyful trills of the Lulu lark

As concentration increased, it became time to produce "true" sweet wines (*liquoreux*). On the *Quarts-de-Chaume* hillside, Botrytis was reinforced by the combined action of the sun and wind, allowing the grapes to dry up and often become raisins. The potential degrees climbed easily to reach the **25° potential** that we are looking for in our ***Quarts-de-Chaume Grand Cru***... What a terroir to give life to sublime sweet wines!



A magnificent bunch of fully rotten grapes in "Les Rouères": no need to even sort!



Mother Nature's *ultimate* gift

The conditions were so exceptional in 2022 that the Team devoted the end of October to create once again **Ultra**, our **cuvée of extreme concentration** (at least 30° potential...). To make it, sorting is taken to its climax: the raisins are selected grain by grain. Manually selected on the grape clusters, they are first sorted in the vineyard, then sorted again on a table at the winery. After the exceptional 2018 vintage, **Ultra 2022** will exist!

To produce a single barrel, it (only) took **50 crates of berries sorted one by one, by hand!** A real ant work... commensurate with the passion of Team Belargus!



It takes a touch of madness to make such concentrated sweet wines...

#OMGTheyAreReallyCrazy

Meanwhile, *at the winery...*

Like the vineyard team, the cellar team has been reinforced in 2022 and included **4 people for this harvest**. This was necessary to manage the pressings and to monitor the fermentation process. Under Adrien's leadership, the Team has gained in precision, isolating the pH of the different pressing batches (head, heart and tail) as accurately as possible. In a vintage with medium acidity, this **surgical precision** seemed essential to us in order to reach true balance.

The work was intense because many selections in the vineyards also meant a large amount of pressings... Overall, **no less than 62 pressings** took place during the entire harvest!

The harvest period also implies significant logistics to maintain the form and the good morale of people. Anne-Sophie and Franck took such great care of the whole Team, preparing yummy lunches and **tasting sessions each evening**, to let the pickers taste wines coming from the plot harvested during the very day. Always a great moment of exchange, allowing us to share our passion for terroir wines ("*vins de lieux*").



End clap for the 2022 epic

On October 27th, we finished the harvest... started on September 8th. **These almost two months of harvesting have been epic** and have lifted the hearts of the whole Team: despite the frost and the drought, we achieved an almost full harvest!

This vintage of contrasts & challenges made Team Belargus experience a real **emotional “roller coaster”**. This year's juices were born from the bite of frost and the scorching kiss of the sun. However, after the alchemy of fermentation, the wines carry the promise of an exceptional year, in terms of volume and quality. And when tasting our sweet wines, it is even possible that we will qualify this vintage "of anthology" in a few years...



No comment.

This little miracle is above all the fruit of the work of a **(Dream) Team Belargus** which is growing, getting more mature and settling down... a close-knit, dynamic and caring team. In short, a top team!

And this energy is amplified by you, dear friends of the Domaine, who are kind enough to follow our adventures... As lovers of terroir wines, far from the "label drinkers", you are actors in this great collective adventure in which we are taking part: that of **the renaissance of Anjou Grands Crus**. Thanks again for your support!

#AnjouPower

#LoirePower

Team Belargus

PS : If you fancy having your T-shirt next year... we are taking pre-registrations for the 2023 harvest! 😊





TEAM BELARGUS ◦ *Portrait Gallery...*



ADRIEN

Damn it, will it fit or what?!!



AMAURY

A true doting father...



ANNE-SOPHIE

... loves being photographed



AUGUSTIN

There are more than vines in life!



BAPTISTE

Two-bucket harvesting: fingers in the nose!



BRUNO

... touched by divine intervention



EDWIN

Live from the vineyards... of Montmartre ;-)



FRANCK

Fangio going to run some errands



GRÉGOIRE

... easy peasy on his metal horse



IVAN

...found his grandfather's tractor, at last!



JO

No retirement for the brave



LYNDSEY

EVERYTHING must be spotless



MADELEINE

Planting is a dirty job... but someone's gotta do it!



THOMAS

...found where this minerality comes from!



TRISTAN

Striking a pose



XAVIER

Our proud Argentinian "Gacho"