

2023

Loire style



@domainebelargus



Saint-Lambert du Lattay, January 2024

Dear friends of the Domaine,

Far from episodes of drought, the Loire has regained its majestic river face this January: on the “last wild river in Europe”, the sandbanks have disappeared; the alders and willows covering the banks plunge their roots into the bubbling water; boats navigate again without hindrance along the meanders, bathed in this intense light, unique in the world.

In short, we are starting the year in a **Loire-style atmosphere** (“*ligérienne*”, as we say in French), like the wines that will be born from the 2023 vintage. Far from the sunny vintages of recent years, this vintage “ending in 3” will undoubtedly be heterogeneous and will undoubtedly perpetuate the adage according to which certain years lead to so-called “winegrowers’ vintages”.

Clearly the most technical (and anxiety-provoking) vintage since the creation of the Domaine, 2023 was particularly cool and humid, with more than 700mm of rain over the year (compared to 400mm the previous year), and notably 100mm at the start of September which could have compromised *everything*... Tasting the juices, however, it seems to us that Team Belargus came out brilliantly, thanks to increased attention to the vineyards and thanks to delicate but profitable choices.

So, here is the story of our **6th vintage**, a real little odyssey that we couldn’t wait to tell you about. Starting with the peaceful, numb calm of winter, to the rhythm of pruning...

° ° °

A short winter, announcing a boasting spring

Although mild, the winter of 2023 was marked by a few episodes of frost, necessary for wild plant seeds to break dormancy. A rainy episode in December 2022 re-moistened the soil. The first in a long series... From the first months of the year, we expected an early awakening of vegetation!



On the rocks overlooking the Coteau des Treilles, the graceful “Gagée de Bohème” flowered remarkably early in January.



In the cold of winter, morning frosts are perfect to perform soil work, providing good support for mechanical tools and a means of oxygenating microorganisms.



Thomas pampering our Quarts-de-Chaume terroirs.

If Belargus is an estate with more than 20 hectares of vines, it also has a little hidden treasure: almost **10 hectares of wasteland, meadows and wooded areas**. Augustin, our Biodiversity Manager, has made it his playground. Throughout the seasons, he is teeming with ideas and implements them with the Vineyards Team: trees and orchards, hedges, streams, animal presence, beehives, etc... the list is long!

In the 20th century, monoculture led to the over-specialisation of farmers, who gradually abandoned these “non-productive” spaces that form the valleys, hillsides or ditches. Today, to **reintegrate viticulture into a landscape** and as an element of a beautiful and complex ecosystem, it is necessary to rediscover these beautiful peasant gestures such as the maintenance of hedges or even the grafting of fruit trees. The winter period is notably dedicated to tree planting.

Around our plot of La Gordone, we have **several “forgotten” hectares**, where growing vines would be difficult due to clay soils and a particularly frosty situation. We have undertaken to gradually reopen these wastelands to revive these plots, so rich in biodiversity. We started with the planting of 80 trees of local varieties – apple, pear, plum, peach, almond, cherry and fig trees. This is the first step in establishing **one hectare of orchard** which will be grazed by sheep, and which will also support a small apiary. A pond was also dug in the middle of this metamorphosing space.



Winter work(s) and “slush workshop” in our Gordone orchard.



Like every year, our shepherd Béranger came to graze our vines. The pruning work continued until the end of March, to protect the plots most exposed to frost.

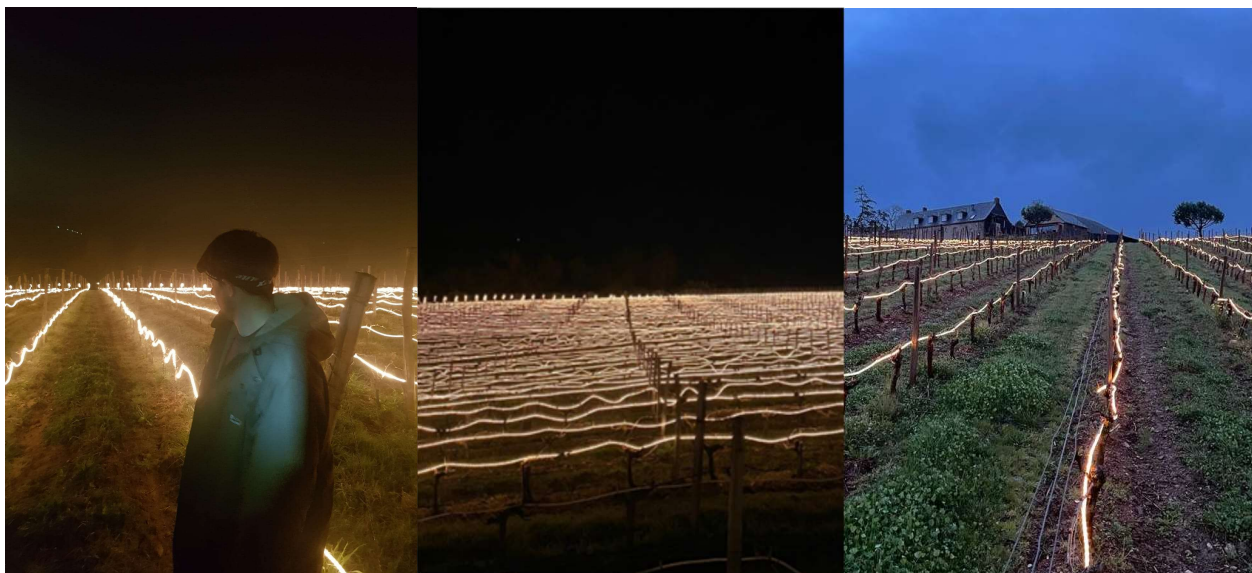


Spring frost, *as usual*

The threat of frost looms over us every year. The vegetative cycle of plants seems truly disorganised these days, with for example cherry trees flowering at the beginning of March. On the Domaine's vines, the first buds developed on 21 March... followed by a first episode of frost on 31 March!

To no longer relive the long sleepless nights of recent years, we have invested in **new heating wire technology**, tested on a few hectares in Quarts-de-Chaume. A sort of “garland” of infrared LEDs, this device consumes 4 times less electricity than conventional heating wires, and above all allows us to avoid using candles and other highly polluting devices.

The installation of these 33 kilometres of wire was a Herculean task, masterfully carried out by the Vineyard Team and our “Swiss army knife” Bruno. The first risky nights gave us the opportunity to test this rather impressive system. The first results have been positive so, if the coming years confirm it, we will deploy it over larger areas.



Amaury can be proud of his technological “find”... which will protect us effectively (🍷 🍷 🍷) and smoothly in the future.



This year, we only suffered a few nights of frost, causing damage to unprotected plots (Gordone and Bonnes Blanchés, in particular). But the Quarts-de-Chaume plots held up well. The **“two-step” pruning** technique was certainly beneficial! Like the Phoenix, Chenin has a certain capacity to come back and surprise us: even the plots where the bite of the frost was particularly strong quickly showed their resilience, with an impressive regrowth.

A crazy spring



The infernal equation of 2023: RAIN + SUN = (lots of) WEEDS on our steep hillsides...

The growth of the vines, but also of the wild weeds, was powerful and rapid. Spring works came at a breakneck pace. Under the pressure of heavy rains and strong heat at the end of spring, downy mildew and powdery mildew developed very aggressively, requiring us to be **very rigorous and precise in our treatments**. This is one of the most perilous springs we have had to face since the creation of the Domaine.

Nowadays, the brutal and changing nature of weather phenomena strikes us: from a gloomy and cold week, we pass without transition to a heatwave with extreme temperatures. These sudden oscillations put the vines (and the Team!) to the test. Miraculously, **an almost perfect window allowed flowering without incident**, thus bringing 100% of the flowers to the state of clusters. In June, when we were observing the load in the vines, we were beginning to say to ourselves: “How promising!” »





Late spring, birth of a new « *haut-lieu* » for Domaine Belargus!



La « Pierre Couverte » de Montbenault. (source : [Wikipedia](#))

Despite the operational tornado that was this spring, in 2023 we brought to fruition a project on which we have been working discreetly for several years: the planting of a magnificent plot in the village of Beaulieu-sur-Layon. Surrounded by vineyards and located on a gently sloping hillside, this plot has the particularity of housing in its centre **a small dolmen, a “covered stone”** which reinforces the energy emanating from this peaceful place. It bears witness to a very ancient human – and surely spiritual – activity, which could date from the **4th millennium BC... i.e. 6,000 years ago**.

This energetic “*haut-lieu*” is made up of a pretty wooded area plunging into a hillside of greenery, at the bottom of which a stream flows. After gentle clearing, we were surprised to discover a **dry-stone surrounding wall**, right up to the edge of the stream. By preserving the trees and hedges that adorned this place, we set up **three small plots of Chenin planted in stakes (“échalas”)**, leaving enough areas of brush for the many surrounding birds.

Geologically, the vines are planted on a very homogeneous and dense subsoil of **Spilites** (these basaltic lavas also to be found on the top of Coteau des Treilles), promising tense, chiselled and powerful wines. The planting required the collection of several tens of m³ of blocks of rock. All these stones have been carefully gathered... for a use that we will reveal to you in due course. ;-)



Setting up this plot was a huge project, with extremely physical work (e.g. removing the stones was done by hand) but the result is worthy of our efforts... and we can't wait to take you to discover this magical place!



The season ended quite late, with the first green harvests at the end of July. It must be said that there were a lot (= too many) grapes hanging! After an almost flawless treatment season, the harvest was saved and looked to be the most promising since the creation of the Domaine in 2018. Clusters of good size and quantity... But what followed was less fun....

A little sunny summer ... and harvests that became *long overdue!*

After a well-deserved vacation, preparations resumed without delay: leaf stripping, more green harvests, major cleaning of the cellar, etc. Quickly, the team was ready to fight!



However, this summer **the vines decided to take their time**, for once! The modest temperatures and large quantity of grapes slowed down photosynthesis. A sort of “**phony war**” set in: the degrees were not rising... At the end of August, we took the first maturity sample. Verdict: Not ripe! And the rain was becoming more and more frequent... From the beginning of September, no less than 105mm of water will fall on us, making these harvests the rainiest in the last 10 years.

While many people around were speeding up to “save the harvest”, **we took the risk of waiting for the return of the sun**, predicted around mid-September. The conditions were unprecedented: the degrees were barely around 12° (well below the usual average), but we were tasting delicious, ripe berries. Thus, the Team kept a cool head and began **what we now know how to do best... sorting**. These “*tries*” seemed truly essential to us, as the differences in maturity were immense and rot was spreading at great speed. It looked certain that, this year, we would beat all our sorting records!

We decided to launch the assault on 11 September. The first day of harvest took place in the rain. The next day and the day after were not so different... so, between two cutting sessions, we were stripping the leaves and removing the first spots of rot. Fortunately, the seasonal workers' Team was exceptionally patient and courageous. Without knowing it, we embarked for 2 months of harvest...



After a morning stretching session, the sorting goes on endlessly... to bring only the most beautiful grapes back to the cellar.



With an unprecedented level of attention, **we harvested for dry wines during 6 long weeks (a record!).**

Without any real conviction, we left quite a large number of bunches on the vines least affected by rot – **to try to make sweet wines, as we do every year.** This effort was in vain: around fifteen days of rain fell again on the region in October, bringing more than 150mm of additional water. Impossible to produce a great sweet wine this year! We will have to console ourselves with 15 Hl of Coteaux-du-Layon. But at least we will continue, this year again, the tradition of Anjou sweet wines.

What to think of this “*vintage in 3*”?

In 2023, Mother Nature was generous at flowering, but she finally showed herself to be cruel at harvest time: the drastic sorting will ultimately have deprived us of 30% of the harvest. 2023 will therefore be an average vintage for Belargus, even though we could (should!) have filled the cellar.

Overall, **this 2023 vintage clearly put us to the test** (unaccustomed as we had been in recent years, with so much sunshine)... but it did not so much move the “old hands”, who had experienced dozens of similar vintages, spent waiting for maturity to come and/or harvested between rains.

After tasting the first juices though, we already love its **Loire soul**. This vintage “like the good old days” will give birth to elegant and highly drinkable wines, low in alcohol, which will improve magnificently with age. Perhaps in a few years it will remind us of the 2013 vintage, certainly difficult but which gave birth to some shining Chenins ten years later... so, patience!

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This “2023 odyssey” also allowed Belargus to reach **new levels in Team cohesion.**

The Team has begun to regenerate, with a smooth transition between Amaury (who is leaving to join his wife at Domaine de la Bergerie) and Thomas, who has enthusiastically taken over the position of Vineyard Manager. Some new faces, like Marine (supporting Adrien in the cellar), or Esther (who joined the Vineyard Team to create an R&D function) bring renewed energy... making us **ready for new adventures in 2024!**



Team Belargus enjoying its annual “Wine Trip” (this year in Alsace).

More than ever, we are determined to work hard to **express the quintessence of our ancient terroirs**, and to introduce them to as many people as possible. Thank you again for your benevolent support: you are also key players of the Anjou Renaissance!

#AnjouPower

#LoirePower

Team Belargus



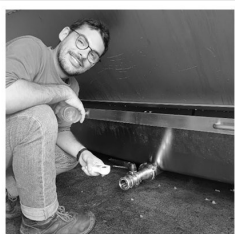
Augustin's corner ◦ *The Team's naturalist ...*

With his phone always at hand, Augustin watches for – and often captures – the soul of Nature that surrounds us. Thanks to him, native fauna and flora once again become (rightly!) an endless source of wonder for us, on a daily basis. We wanted to share some of his observations in 2023 with you. *Enjoy!*

JANVIER  18 January 2023 Flowering of the Gagée de Bohême (<i>Gagea bohemica</i>), protected species of the Coteaux du Pont-Barré Natural Reserve.	FÉVRIER  13 February 2023 Planting a diversified hedge around our plot of "La Gordone".	MARS  23 March 2023 Observing the first "goganes" (as they are called in the region) in the meadows bordering the Layon river.
AVRIL  2 April 2023 Flowering of the wild tulip, <i>Tulipa silvestris</i>, who loves the company of vines.	MAI  1 May 2023 Observation of a green and yellow snake (<i>Hierophis viridiflavus</i>) on one of our Savennières plots.	JUIN  12 June 2023 Installation of our first 5 beehives... on "Clos des Ruchères"
JUILLET  16 July 2023 Nice « Rosalie des Alpes » on Les Treilles (sublime beetle with long antennae, protected on a national scale).	AOÛT  3 August 2023 Harvest of Roman Chamomile, emblematic plant of the region and the village of Saint-Lambert du Lattay.	SEPTEMBRE  25 September 2023 Belargus Herbarium: creation of the first boards and menus for the Belargus Paulée.
OCTOBRE  11 October 2023 Last Belargus observed that year... of course on Les Treilles!	NOVEMBRE  1 November 2023 Vulcain butterfly gorging on sugar on a botrytised grape cluster.	DÉCEMBRE  2 December 2023 Wild sage plant, one of the (very) rare days where the temperature was negative in Anjou.



TEAM BELARGUS ◦ *Portrait gallery...*



ADRIEN

Not a drop to waste!



AMAURY

King of the mustimeter



ANNE-SOPHIE

... goes to Hollywood



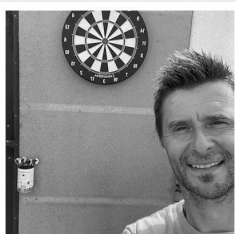
AUGUSTIN

Balsamic project



BAPTISTE

... loves planting stakes



BRUNO

Chief handyman



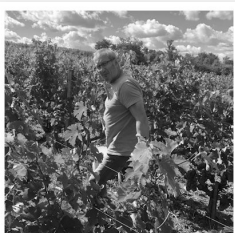
EDWIN

... living the High Life !



ESTHER

Elected Miss Fenwick



FRANCK

Raised in the great outdoors



IVAN

... directed by his son!



JO

Beneath the "Rangen de Thann"



LYNDSEY

Herbarium workshop



MARINE

... who loves precision



THOMAS

Harvesting under the sun...



THOMAS

Nice moustache !

*... and soon a new face
in the Team !*