

## **AY, CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE - CHAMPAGNE BOLLINGER**

**“It’s not over until it’s in the press..”**

This rather wise expression is often uttered by winemakers, especially those in Champagne. And it’s true: until the grapes are brought in, the uncertainties of nature can compromise the harvest at any time. 2017 – a complicated year for wine-making during which the weather toyed with the nerves of winemakers – really did put this saying to the test!

For Champagne Bollinger, 2017, an unusual and unexpected year, is ultimately a source of pride and hope.

It is unusual, because the first half was especially hot and dry, meaning the vine was way ahead in its usual timing (both budburst and flowering were 1–2 weeks earlier than the decade average).

What’s more, the peak heat that usually comes in August came in July, while August sharply bucked the trend with high rainfall and much colder weather than usual.

Finally, it was unusual in that the famous September “Champagne miracle” (ideal conditions just before harvest, with sunny days, cool nights and a dry wind) did not happen: the nights stayed very mild (sometimes over 20°C at sunrise), the mornings humid and the afternoons very warm. All these factors promote fast maturation, as well as a deterioration in the health of the grapes.

Nevertheless, this year is a source of pride, because in this unusual situation, Champagne Bollinger very quickly made tough decisions.

In the vineyard, the harvest circuit was completely reconsidered and all energy was put into making sure that the black grape varieties were harvested as quickly as possible. This meant a historically short harvest, from 4 to 12 September, meaning in nine days we harvested what we usually would in over two weeks.

Chardonnay, which was very healthy in 2017, and the late Pinot Noirs from the Montagne de Reims, were chosen first to fill our 3,500 casks, which produced a surprising photo at the end of the harvest because, no doubt for the first time in Bollinger’s history, Chardonnay represented over half of the wines vinified in barrels.

Finally, it is also hopeful that the analyses of initial juice are rather reassuring: an average degree of 10.1, clearly present acidity of around 7g/l, and quite low pH. Malolactic fermentation finished without a hitch, and we began tasting particularly early this year (16 October).

The 3,500 casks will be tested one-by-one by the entire tasting team. So far, almost 1,500 casks of Premier and Grand cru Chardonnay have been tasted, and first impressions of the grape are very good. The maturity is very much there, the fruity – and particularly citrusy – aromas are good and the acidity is nicely framed by the richness of the wines.

In the winery, all the Meuniers have been checked and it’s a very contrasting picture, with some lovely wines alongside some much more disappointing ones.

Finally, the Pinot Noirs will soon be tasted and evaluated. This will then give us a fair assessment of the 2017 wines.

