

The 2003 CLOS DE TART

*"Les cigales sont en avance
d'au moins deux semaines : ça
veut dire que le soleil va boire la
moitié du vin"*

*(‘The cicadas are at least two
weeks **early**: that means the
sun will soak up half the wine’)*

Marcel Pagnol

(Manon des sources)

During the summer of 2003, France and, in particular, Burgundy experienced extreme, scorching temperatures sometimes in excess of 104°F. The consequences of this heatwave were considerable : a modest harvest but exceptional wines.

The vines had been hit **first** by frost, **which in April** caused some damage to the young shoots and buds which were ready to bloom. At the end of May, some bunches of grapes were already in flower : flowering was therefore about two weeks earlier than usual. Already the presence of cicadas **chirring** around the flowers had announced this advance.

The Pinot Noir life cycle normally takes place over 5 months, from the budbreak around April 20th until the grape harvest around September 20th. This period was reduced to 4 months as a result of the heat during the summer of 2003 ! After the flowering, the length of time normally necessary for the grapes to ripen of 90 – 100 days was shortened to between 75 and 80 days ! In spite of this, 2003 should not be regarded simply as a drought year, but as an abnormal year, the result of a summer heatwave. With the occasional exception, the vines were not too badly damaged and the foliage remained green throughout the vegetal period thanks to the fact that the vines were deeply rooted in a subsoil which was still cool and humid. **Some of the** grapes, however, suffered from the heat which dried **them up or burnt** them.

In the Côte de Beaune and Côte de Nuits regions, permission to **harvest** was given on August 19th. The 1893 record was therefore broken : earlier evidence of a harvest starting in mid-August dates back to 1420 and 1422, according to Dr. Jules Lavalley in his book Histoire et statistiques de la vigne et des grands vins de la Côte-d'Or published in 1855. The vinegrowers started panicking since most of their grape-pickers were still on holiday and therefore it was difficult to contact them.

At the Clos de Tart domain, the grape samples we took on August 20th indicated a likelihood of only 11 degrees alcohol. Therefore, we had to wait to harvest because the vine had most likely suffered from a lack of water which was not visible on the foliage but which prevented further ripening. We were right to wait before harvesting because at the end of August, a small amount of rain fell : this not only cooled down the atmosphere but also enabled the grapes to start ripening again. In fact, we started harvesting on September 2nd, in other words, two weeks later than the 1976 harvest which, up until this point, had been the earliest recorded harvest in the 20th century. The temperatures, which were higher than 95°F at the end of August, fell to normal levels. This allowed us to harvest grapes which were sufficiently cool to be put in vats without being refrigerated beforehand.

We had never **before** had such wonderful **raw materials** : small bunches **of grapes** in the shape of pine cones, small dark blue/violet **colored** berries, in an absolutely perfect **healthy** state with no trace whatsoever of Botrytis : in short, any *grand cru* producer’s dream **come true** !

Once again, the unusual north-south direction of the rows in our vineyard, in other words, perpendicular to the vineyard slope, enabled us to avoid the berries being burnt too much. During the long summer days, the sun's rays light up one side of the grapes in the morning and the other in the afternoon, thereby evenly distributing the effect of the heat. As a result, the loss in our harvest due to excessive heat from the sun was limited to 25 %, whereas in other vineyards sometimes it affected 70 % of the crop.

These grapes needed a suitable vinification and tailor-made maturing techniques. Therefore, we decided to carry out operations which were less intense than usual : a reduced maceration time, fermentation with lower temperatures, less frequent punching of the cap and shortened [aging](#) times.

Our fears of producing atypical wines in comparison with our Burgundy Pinot noir were quickly put to rest after the malolactic fermentations which, despite a very small quantity of malic acid, took place rather belatedly in August, thanks to an excellent control of temperature in our cellars.

The bottling, [without fining](#) or filtering beforehand, was carried out in our cellars in mid-February 2005.

The principle characteristics of the **2003 Clos de Tart** are :

- a very small production : 21 hectolitres per hectare (= 1.1 tonnes per acre)
- a dark robe, a black cherry [color](#) ; a fair amount of sweet [tannins](#) [thanks](#) to exceptional phenolic ripening.
- [an even](#) higher degree of alcohol than in 2002 and [low](#) acidity due to extreme physiological maturity.
- a wine which is well marked by its vintage (more black fruits than red fruits, extremely [sweet](#), velvety, rich) but true to its soil ([flavors](#) of roses, violets, cloves, spices).
- probably a wine which will improve a great deal by putting down.

In the [Revue du vin de France](#) (Octobre 2004), Michel Bettane wrote : *"The earliest vintage, and probably the hottest and sunniest in the past two centuries, has effectively produced a wine which shows its worth. Only time will tell if it will become as legendary as the vintages of 1865, 1870 or 1899 or, closer to home, 1929 or 1947... the first tastings are encouraging with a body and an intensity which [overshadow all previous vintages.](#)"*

In January 2005's [Wine Spectator](#), Bruce Sanderson wrote : *"How can the vintage be so good ? For the top red wines, 2003 will become **legendary**. It will secure its place in the wine world's lore. It will join other exceptional vintages, like 1959 and 1947."*

Other news from the estate :

- **the vineyard** : partial planting of grass between the rows in order to limit erosion and increase [microbial](#) activity in the soil.
- **the equipment** : purchase of a new, revolutionary, light-weight tractor, a sort of spider with three legs which can circulate without any problem throughout the Clos and which prevents the soil from being packed down.
- **the cellar** : a new, more elegant bottle for the vintages [starting with](#) 2003.