



MAISON FONDÉE EN 1776

LOUIS ROEDERER
CHAMPAGNE

246th HARVEST

Champagne must be earned!

Year 2021

“We craft our champagne wines in this exceptional climate in which frosts, storms and late-ripening are obstacles that, when surmounted by the winegrower's savoir-faire, give rise to the world's finest sparkling wine”

- JEAN BAPTISTE LÉCAILLON, CELLAR MASTER



This 246th harvest at Louis Roederer can be described as difficult, gruelling and, in many ways, disconcerting!

2021 will be remembered as a year of all-out commitment by our vineyard teams and as probably one of the most difficult winegrowing years since 1958!



*I would like to pay tribute to all the hard
work and resilience of our winegrowers,*

- JEAN BAPTISTE LÉCAILLON, CELLAR MASTER

they had to fight what often felt like a losing battle, doing their best to counter the surprise manoeuvres of the Champagne climate throughout this year's growing campaign. Because, this year, the Champagne region reminded us that we are located in a classic, cool and often wet northern latitude.



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PHEMERISIS

OF A « HEROIC » VINTAGE



Winter

Winter 2020/21 gave us a mild and particularly wet January. The water tables were replenishing nicely, which was much needed after the dry trilogy of the 2018/2019/2020 winegrowing years.

The winter work in the vineyards was going well. We were amazed at the quality of our green manures throughout the winter: they enrich our soils by giving our vines a break from monoculture for a few months over the winter and regenerate our soils by "self-fertilising" them, thanks to the dynamics of a restored biodiversity.

Spring

APRIL – MAY

March and April were nippy. The cold spell from **6th April until 3rd May** slowed down growth and delayed the start of vegetation. This year, the spring brought us 12 days of particularly bad frosts. They started **on 6-7th April**, the buds were swelling on the vines when some polar air masses descended on the region causing a "black frost" that impacted all the vineyards. This was accompanied by snow which aggravated the situation in some places.

By the time of budburst, the vines' development was running 7 days behind the 10-year average: as usual, budburst occurred first on the Chardonnays (**13th April**), followed by the Pinot noir a week later (**20th April**), and lastly the Meuniers (**23rd April**).

On **May 3rd**, the Vallée de la Marne and the Vallée de l'Ardre were then hit by some more localised "white frost", wiping out the Chardonnays in these areas. The pests that feed on the vine's buds took advantage of the slow start of vegetation to feast on the vine's tender buds, especially on those of the late-developing grape varieties such as the Pinot noir and Meunier in the Montagne de Reims. The frost damage was estimated at between 0% and 60% on vineyard plots mainly located in the Vallée de la Marne, the Vallée de l'Ardre and the Vitryat.



For the Champagne region in general, 2021 joins the list of years of heavy frosts, with the loss of nearly **30%** of the crop. Growth was slow and by mid-May the vines were running 10 days behind the 10-year average. This forced us to delay the disbudding and to spread our vineyard work out as much as possible.

The weather finally warmed up from **28-29th May**, which unfortunately allowed mildew and powdery mildew to set in, due to the very oceanic conditions.

Spring

JUNE

The arrival of some rainy spells at the start of June then triggered an epidemic of mildew... but the weather experts on all the specialist websites were still trying to reassure us: they were forecasting a hot, dry summer! So, we had to hold out until flowering, hoping that this dry, sunny weather would slow the aggressive spread of the mildew! Finally, the temperatures began to rise, gradually, and the vines started growing. This late sudden growth of the vegetation rendered the vine particularly vulnerable because it demanded all of its energy and diluted its sap among numerous young shoots.

On June 3-4th, the region was hit by an exceptionally violent storm, particularly impacting the Vallée de la Marne and Reims where the streets were flooded. In Cumières, the land shifted under the force of the rain and the village was submerged in a deluge of mud. In these areas, where the soil was soaked, getting into our organic vineyards to reinforce our plant protection was problematic and we had to wait a few days for the soil to dry out first.



The flowering of the three grape varieties was surprisingly close: we recorded full flowering on the Chardonnays **on 17th June** and the Pinots noirs on the **18th**. Unfortunately, the Meuniers were a little behind and reached the full flowering stage on **June 20th** at the very moment the Vallée de la Marne, the Ardre and the Montagne de Reims were hit by a second storm. The streets of Reims were flooded again.

We were now running 7 days behind the 10-year average but, in the end, we had a fairly classic cycle of 61 days between budburst and full flowering.

Summer

JULY – AUGUST – SEPTEMBER

There was a surge in the mildew epidemic from the last weekend of June, reaching levels never seen before in the Vallée de la Marne and the Ardre ... the Meuniers were badly hit, both on the leaves and the bunches; the Pinots noirs a little less so ... only the Chardonnays in the Côte des Blancs were spared by the epidemic, the severity and duration of which are reminiscent of **1958**. The mildew manifested itself on the bunches in the form of grey rot with a dramatic loss of crop. Everyone was hoping that the dry summer that had been forecast would arrive soon because with such a high level of mildew, only some hot, dry weather would stop the disease.

We paid close attention to the quality of our trellising, which is crucial for ventilating and drying the bunches: we increased the size of our vineyard team and carried out a large-scale leaf removal to enable the bunches to dry. By mid-July, we were already exhausted... Then the French National Holiday (Bastille Day) turned into a little "Waterloo in the vineyards"! The rainfall over 13/14/15th July was unusually heavy, with some areas receiving over 150 mm of water. The streets of Reims were flooded for a third time! The spread of mildew accelerated, this time attacking the young vines, the branches and the young grapes directly in the form of brown rot.

. The organic vineyards in the Montagne de Reims, which had resisted fairly well up until then, were now badly hit, losing up to **50%** of their crop.



The end of the vulnerability of the bunches to mildew with the arrival of drier but cooler weather from **July 20th** gave us a bit of a breather but we still had to keep a close eye on the powdery mildew that was taking advantage of the cool nights to take hold on the Chardonnays. Once again, we had to go through the vineyards to reinforce the vines' protection!

The hot, dry summer forecast by the experts never materialised in the Champagne region. **August** remained cool but fortunately fairly dry. We had to wait until the end of cluster closure for the epidemic to finally come to an end. The powdery mildew was under control. **September** then came in with the fairly classic pattern.

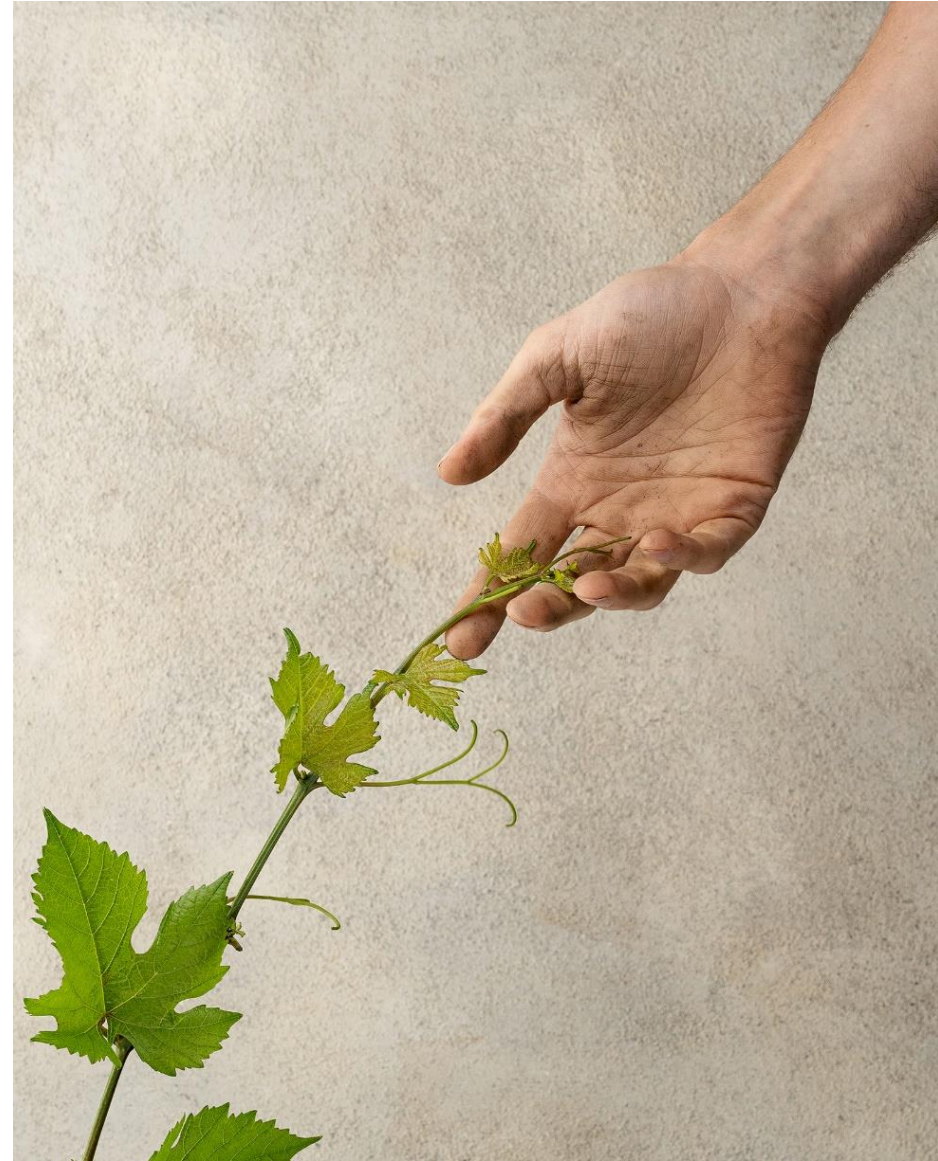
Ripening

It was obvious to us that the success of the harvest would, more than ever, depend on our adaptability and responsiveness!

The ripening phase began classically. The amount of water in the soil and the late mineralisation of the nitrogen was conducive to the development of botrytis on the most vigorous vines: the situation differed greatly from one plot to the next and extra vigilance was therefore required.

At the end of the season, we found ourselves with a very classic ripening process that we had to push as far as possible despite the threat of botrytis!

These ripening conditions reminded us of the 1990 vintage, with all eyes riveted on the development of the botrytis; there was a progressive and steady increase in sugars, without excess; a slow fall off in acidity and a late breakdown of malic acid... but the difference in the speed of ripening of the Pinots noirs and Meuniers, which ripened fairly quickly, in 89 days between full flowering and the start of the harvest (the average period since 2005)... and the Chardonnays, which ripened more slowly, with 93 days (the average period since 1996), ultimately showed us behaviour that was fairly similar to 2012.



*The 2021 Vintage
En route to becoming a
« great classic »!*

All the hard work demanded by this very difficult year appears to have paid off! Our final yield was 7,343 kg/ha. This is down -26% compared to that permitted for the Champagne AOC but is higher than the average for the Champagne region which will probably come in at around 6,500 kg/ha. We indeed lost a lot of the crop on some plots but we also saw some really good results elsewhere and we have every reason to be satisfied.

The entire team answered our call to action and we have demonstrated that our experience in organic growing allows us to hold our own when confronted with extreme weather conditions.

As it did in 2012, the experience gained from this difficult 2021 will allow us to further hone the mastery of our “renaissance viticulture”.



A small harvest must be vinified even more precisely, because every vat counts, and rest assured that our team at the winery is well aware of this. Here again, the team is stepping up, gently assisting the fermentations to ensure they go off as smoothly as possible and enable us to draw out this vintage's finest qualities.

The first wines are on target: purity and intensity of fruit; excellent freshness and a gorgeous texture for the quality terroirs.

We all hope to bottle a bit of Cristal 2021 as a souvenir of this challenging year and the remarkable work of all our teams, this all-out commitment that makes our craft, the adventure of winemaking, so unique and exciting!

Champagne must be earned!

- JEAN BAPTISTE LÉCAILLON, CELLAR MASTER



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LOUIS ROEDERER

C H A M P A G N E

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Champagne Louis Roederer, follow us on Twitter:
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