



Will 2014 make us stronger ?

A report of the 2014 vintage as the wines are fermenting.

« What doesn't kill you makes you stronger ! »

This aphorism from Nietzsche could apply to vintage 2014 if wine wasn't a convivial work which usually inspires pacific unifications rather than violent conflicts !

But God, this vintage was arduous and if it wasn't a proper bloody fight, it was still one hell of a game of chess ! The least we can say is that it was fierce and complex, if not complicated !

I can't find another way to describe such a vintage : illegible and paradoxical at the same time, starting very precociously and eventually late, one of these years full of drawers and mirrors, not stingy with surprises.

I will remember 2014, my 35th harvest, as a really special vintage, an odd vintage with a dyslexic sky and an unpredictable horizon, which was struggling to finish its sentences.

The winter was literally wiped off the map by a much too invasive spring, hiding under its spry adornment a very threatening draught which eventually left plants and land parched to the core !

As for the summer, just born it soon disappeared from our sight, drawn body and soul in an unstoppable deluge which brought, in the single month of July, as much water as the whole first semester of the year !

Yet the rain was quite welcome since vines and hillsides were so thirsty they might never have recovered from an extended draught. Nature seems to have its own conscience and knows how to balance its excesses by itself.

But Nature doesn't give a damn about economic parameters, and the heat excess of June, 33°C in the middle of the flowering, lead to an important *coulure* (i.e. flower abortion). Needless to say any attempt at recovering the yields would have been totally vain !

This explains that in terms of yield 2014 has been as bad as 2013, which sadly keeps worsening the availability of wines...

And this in spite of a superb autumn which was in fact the only summer of the year, and made the pickers' work far more enjoyable while perfecting their suntan... but then again all this was hiding a much more tricky problematic !

See, the vanished summer had delayed the ripening while favouring a small fly, unknown up to this point, a *drosophila* with red eyes straight out of Japan, bearing the backfiring name of *Suzukii*.

The drosophila, more commonly known as vinegar fly, is a scourge for grapes that it pierces to lay its eggs, and contaminates with acetic bacteria which turns the juice into vinegar. And that is, we must admit, the worst and ultimate degradation a wine can deal with !

The sudden arrival of Suzukii lead to a real wave of panic in the vineyard, and most producers rushed in their parcels to harvest grapes that were still green and had enough acidity to clean copper pots !

From that point on the fear of losing everything was their only advisor in this collective tsunami. It was really difficult to keep a cool head and wait for the acidity to civilise itself. It is exactly what we did though, at the risk of losing part of the mummified grapes, not into a pillar of salt like the wife of Loth, but into balsamic vinegar.

Happily the Suzukii will only attack coloured fruits and somehow spares whites grapes. This might look like politically-very-incorrect ostracism but it had the huge advantage of leaving Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Muscat and Riesling unaffected, which sum up for a good 2/3 of the surface of our vineyard.

The opening of the harvest was announced for the 15th september for still wines, but we waited until the 20th to pick our reds and then proceed with the whites from the 23rd september on, in order to refine the ripeness and tame the acidity.

Suzukii spared our vines thanks noticeably to repeated applications of horn silica, or 501, which strengthened the skins and prevented the perforations.

Only the Gewurztraminers, picked last and therefore exposed much longer to the flying enemy's fire, have required to sort meticulously, reducing even more the already low crop.

But eventually our patience was rewarded thanks to this extraordinary Indian summer which literally transcended the grapes and turned this 2014 harvest in a glorious harvest.

The juices flowed from the press carved like high-level athletes with firm acidity and dry extract, robust and muscled with no alcohol in excess, in short all that is needed to make great wines !

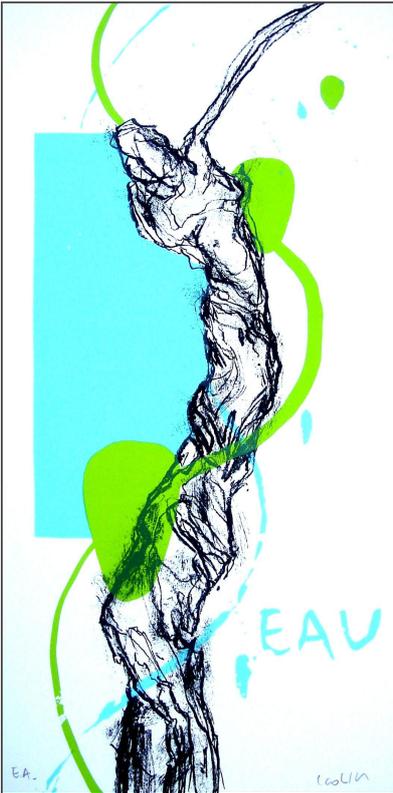
The last vintages are here to remind us that great wines cannot exist without struggle... Great wines that can carry their liquid light much further than just the Present.

Is this the way Vintners live and their Wines follow them in the distance like revolved Suns.

André Ostertag, Vigneron
Epfing, le 1er décembre 2014

2014 : first impressions after the spring bottling

One swallow might not make a summer but at the domaine the Sylvaner always gives a good clue about the personality of the new vintage, and judging by how good the freshly bottled Vieilles Vignes de Sylvaner taste, 2014 looks very promising !



And yet the growing season had been pretty complicated : remember this cold summer that upset a lot of visitors, well this freshness actually helped to build very ethereal wines, with precise structures and a subtle refinement. A world away from the vulgar and stifling monsters engendered by the excess of heat.

And since a wonderful indian summer then took the place of the autumn, full ripeness was achieved and the acidities had the time to soften.

As a result the 2014s are firm and brawny, with very textured and particularly tactile mouthfeels, and beautifully smooth and lively.

Les Vieilles Vignes de Sylvaner is a perfect summary of all that and it is always with great excitement and emotion that we sip the first bottles of this wine every year.

Because it is the first one to emerge from the dark bowels of the cellar and reveal itself in this young spring light, the Sylvaner shows the real quality of the work carried out during this two-year cycle it takes a vintage to be made, the first in the vineyard and the second in the cellar.

What about the other wines we bottled along with the Sylvaner then ? Well, the Pinot Blanc is especially classy, the Muscat has an oriental fragrance of bergamot and orange blossom and is stretched by the saline *finale* of the Fronholz, and the Gewurztraminer Vignoble d'E is much more structured and spicy than usual as it has been reinforced by the vines of the Fronholz this year.

These first 2014s are in the lineage of cool vintages like 2013, 2012 and 2010 which is very encouraging for what's left in the cellar.

Indeed let's not forget that a good part of the wines, all the Rieslings among them, are still fermenting. Let's then take stock together again in September for the final installment of this beautiful vintage !

In the meantime, have fun with the first 2014s that I think are simply delicious.

2014 : Very last impressions after the autumn bottling

The more I taste my 2014s the more they remind me of a group of high-spirited colts.

Right before the bottling, the wines were superb, agile and unworried just like these young colts frolicking through their meadow, suprised by every new sensation their bodies perceive.

Then comes the time of the bottling, a tough experience for young undisciplined wines.

It's like the moment when the colt is freed from the meadow that sheltered him all his youth, but to discover what's on the other side of the fence, he must tolerate the halter of men and then the colt stiffens inevitably, he tenses up heart and soul and rebels desperately.

The 2014s had a similar reaction to the bottling, and their delicate innocence vanished into a general clenching which blocked the wines .

But slowly they released tension, retrieving their self-confidence, first the *Vins de Fruit* and then the others, seemingly following a hierarchic order, the greatest and often the proudest last, the Muenchberg barely deigning to loosen one eyelash.

This is why my 2014s remind me so much of these young and proud colts, these future purebred ready to defy space for endless and fantastic cavalcades.

2014 is undoubtedly a purebred vintage, with a lot of character and class, one that will comfortably withstand time. It is a sculptural vintage, made of muscle and *finesse*, with an incredible energy, a palpable and reinvigorating energy, capable of cheering up even the most demotivated ones.

« What doesn't kill you makes you stronger » was my very first impression about this vintage. In the end, after having overcome many ordeals, 2014 turns out to be built to really last.

André Ostertag, 24 november 2015