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2005 Vintage Report Card: Part 1

A preliminary look at quality in the wine regions of Europe and the United States

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Another harvest is over, and the newest wines are aging in winery cellars. Although it's too early to thoroughly assess quality, *Wine Spectator's* editors have provided a snapshot of the conditions and expectations in key regions and given each of them a preliminary grade.

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Austria

Grade: **B**

A rainy September complicated the 2005 vintage for many Austrian vintners, especially coming after a late budbreak and a cool, humid summer. However, six weeks of warm, dry weather--from early October into November--allowed many grape varieties to mature nicely, especially Riesling and Grüner Veltliner in Wachau and Kamptal.

Fred Loimer in Kamptal said his Grüner Veltliner benefited from the warm harvest period, showing a good balance between acidity and sweetness. Other white wine vintners were also enthusiastic. "Quality seems to be very exciting, with a high acidity and good structure. In sweet wine, 2005 might become a great year with extraordinary maturation potential," said Alois Kracher, who specializes in dessert wines from Neusiedlersee.

Many red wine vintners said their berries were small and featured intense flavors. Thick-skinned varieties such as Blaufränkisch avoided rot and showed good acidity, though sugar levels were low.

On the down side, yields were much smaller than normal, in some cases just half the historical average.

—Kim Marcus

France

Region: **Alsace**

Grade: **A-**

Vintners in Alsace are optimistic about the 2005 vintage, thanks to an excellent growing season and optimal weather during harvest. The only drawback is the quantity of the crop: The year's consistent warmth and sporadic rainfall resulted in yields that were slightly below average.

After initial tastings of the newly fermented Rieslings, Gewürztraminers and Pinot Gris, Etienne Hugel of Hugel & Fils said the wines are "...showing great aromatic purity and class on a par with the finest vintages."

A dry winter was followed by good weather in the spring, with flowering during the first week of June in most areas.



Jon Wyand

Bordeaux may have another classic vintage—the young wines show fresh acidity and ultraripe fruit.

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Hot and sunny days followed, promoting abundant development in the vineyards, which many growers countered with a green harvest in late July. A cool spell in August helped maintain high acidity levels. Then a warm, sunny period began at the end of August and lasted through October. Picking for dry wines began on Sept. 22, and grapes were harvested in excellent health, with good maturation and fresh acidity.

Fans of Alsace's sweeter wines, *vendanges tardives* and *sélections des grains nobles*, also have something to look forward to, according to Jean Trimbach of Trimbach. "A superb Indian summer--misty mornings and sunny afternoons--provided ideal conditions for the production of VT and SGN....," he said.

—*Alison Napjus*

Region: Bordeaux

Grade: A+

The superlatives coming out of Bordeaux are like a growing tidal wave. It's hard to remember when a new vintage has been more widely praised. Even modern classics such as 1989, 1990 and 2000 did not receive as much early acclaim as 2005.

"I have never seen more perfect grapes harvested," said Alfred Tesseron, owner of Château Pontet-Canet, who has overseen more than five decades of harvests at his Pauillac estate.

Bordeaux harvested under near-perfect conditions, following a warm, sunny growing season. Many winemakers believe the cool nights during August and September helped maintain balance in the grapes, even though some had potential alcohol levels of more than 15 percent.

The 2005 wines will be most noted for being ultraripe yet superfresh. In other words, the wines have loads of ripe fruit and tannins, along with high acidity levels—a very rare combination for Bordeaux. The vintage could be a combination of 2000, 1990 and 1989, with just a dash of 1982. I have already tasted numerous vats of 2005s, and they show glorious and pure fruit, round and refined tannins and a wonderful freshness, giving them super aromas and definition.

"It's hard to think of a vintage that tastes so good so soon," said Thomas Duroux, general manager of Château Palmer, the third-growth Margaux estate. "What amazes me is the quality of the fruit. It is just so pure, both Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, as well as the Petit Verdot."

White and sweet wine producers are equally enthusiastic. The latter report that botrytis developed nicely in October, concentrating the grapes to a level very close to that of the 2001 vintage, already a modern classic.

Just how great 2005 is will become better known in public tastings this spring in Bordeaux.

—*James Suckling*

Region: Burgundy

Grade: A

Burgundians are thrilled with the prospect of a very promising vintage in 2005. The quality of the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, the two main varieties, is high. Dry weather during the summer culminated in beautiful conditions during the September harvest, resulting in ripe, healthy, balanced grapes.

"2005 is the best fruit I have dealt with in my 23-year wine career," said Etienne de Montille, proprietor of Domaine de Montille in Volnay. "Everything is there: acidity, ripeness, fruit, tannins and color."

The grapes reached maturity with potential alcohol levels of 12 degrees to 13.5 degrees, and sorting was almost unnecessary. Yields were generally below average to average. Both Claire Forestier, winemaker at Domaine Bertagna in Vougeot, and Antoine Vincent of Château Fuissé in the Maconnais noted that localized hailstorms reduced portions of their crops. Chablis had lower yields (due to lower-weight grape clusters) and more rain than the Côte d'Or.

Chardonnay may have a slight qualitative edge over Pinot Noir, which was affected by drought conditions during the summer. Bernard Hervet, managing director of Bouchard Père & Fils in Beaune and William Fèvre in Chablis, said, "The quality of the grapes we harvested was probably the most beautiful we have seen since 1989: small golden berries with a perfect sanitary state, excellent maturity, magnificent skins and perfectly mature pips."

Pierre-Yves Colin, of the Côte de Beaune's Domaine Marc Colin and the small négociant Colin-Morey, said the wines should have complexity and the typical mineral character of the region.

—*Bruce Sanderson*

Region: Champagne**Grade: B+**

The 2005 harvest looks very good overall and potentially excellent, for Chardonnay in particular. The quality appears high enough to produce vintage Champagnes, although some houses said it was too early to decide.

The Chardonnay ripened beautifully, achieving slightly higher maturity than Pinot Noir, with Pinot Meunier lagging behind. Harvest took place during excellent weather-sunny days and cool nights. As a result, acidity levels, which are important for Champagne, were preserved, but they are slightly lower than desirable. Potential alcohol levels averaged 10 degrees at harvest-higher than normal for the region, according to the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne. Didier Gimonnet of Pierre Gimonnet in the Côte des Blancs, where Chardonnay is planted almost exclusively, witnessed an average of 10.5 degrees and a peak of 11.6 degrees.

Mildew was a problem in some vineyards in August. High yields were also an issue, not so much because there were too many grapes on the vines, but because the bunches were roughly 50 percent larger than average.

—Bruce Sanderson

Region: Languedoc and Roussillon**Grade: B**

The regions of Languedoc and Roussillon, best-known for their Syrah- and Grenache-based reds, experienced their driest growing season in almost 30 years. Then heavy rains hit many areas at harvest. Vintners who escaped the worst of the rain reported making balanced, minerally whites and elegant reds.

A cool spring was followed by a hot, dry and early growing season. Rain at the end of August helped relieve drought-induced stress in many vineyards. As the harvest began in early September, very heavy rain fell in the northern districts of Aude, Herault and Gard. The rain largely missed the western districts, especially near Limoux, best known for Chardonnay and sparkling wines.

Robert Eden, co-owner of the Comte Cathare group in St.-Chinian and Minervois, said he was able to harvest some high quality Grenache, though his Syrah will be on the softer side. For the Minervois wines, he said, it "was not an ideal growing season-very dry and then too much rain too late. Yes, after the rains there were winds to dry out [the vines], and yes, we have some delicious wine in the making, but no, it was not a classic [year]."

Bruno Lafon of Domaine Magellan, which is near Beziers, said that vineyards planted on sloped terrain could make wines of potentially high quality. "We have the concentration of 2003, with its generous flavors, and the excellent balance of 2004," said Lafon.

—Kim Marcus

Region: Loire Valley**Grade: A-**

Loire vintners are thrilled with their 2005 harvest, as a warm, dry growing season and ideal harvest conditions produced lower-than-normal yields and exceptional quality. Red and white varieties fared well, as did all the region's appellations.

"The maturity is superb. The acidity, exceptional," said Didier Dagueneau, whose domaine in Pouilly-Fumé is a standard-bearer.

For sweet wine producers, "There was quite a good quantity of botrytis-even more than we had time to harvest," said Catherine Delesvaux of Delesvaux in Anjou, comparing the vintage to 1997 in quality and yield.

The growing season conditions were extremely dry-"the driest I have ever seen," said Savennières-based vigneron Nicolas Jol-but temperatures were lower than in the wild 2003 vintage. The warm days were offset by cool nights, providing perfect ripening conditions through September and into October. Ripening was very even in 2005, unlike 2003 when the Sauvignon Blanc suffered in the heat while the Cabernet Franc excelled.

The weather may have provided almost too much of a good thing. Top growers reported that it was key to pick before the grapes became too ripe. "We have found two kinds of wine," Thierry Germain of Domaine des Roches Neuves in Saumur-Champigny said of 2005. "Those with ripeness but freshness, and those that are overconcentrated with unbalanced alcohol."

Despite the potential for swings in quality, experienced vignerons were particularly enthusiastic about the vintage.

"This year is my 36th harvest," said Sancerre producer Alphonse Mellot. "And I have no memory of such quality."

—James Molesworth

Region: Rhône Valley
Grade: A

Thanks to good weather that held through September, the Northern and Southern Rhône are set for their third outstanding vintage in a row. White and red varieties fared well in the third consecutive year of drought, as temperatures were cooler than in 2003 and 2004 and the vines did not experience as much stress. However, the crop was smaller than normal.

"The vineyards [were] very healthy and ripe, with very good acidity," said Paul Amsellem of Domaine Georges Vernay in Condrieu.

Little to no rain fell from the end of April through August, but growers reported that the nights were cool, which preserved the acidity levels in the grapes. Scattered rains fell in early September—more in the south than in the north—helping to replenish the parched vines. The mistral, the strong wind that blows through the Rhône, picked up afterward and kept the grapes dry and healthy while concentrating flavors.

"The grapes found their perfect acidity levels and phenolic maturity," said Isabel Ferrando of Châteauneuf-du-Pape producer Domaine St.-Préfert. "I have never before seen such nice colors."

Although it's still early, Yves Cuilleron, who owns a domaine in Condrieu and is a partner in Les Vins de Vienne, compared 2005 to 1990 and 1999, both classic years in the Northern Rhône. "I think it is truly a great vintage," said Cuilleron.

—James Molesworth

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2005 Burgundy Barrel Tasting

A preview of this monumental year finds ripe, fleshy reds that show terroir in spades, plus high quality whites

Bruce Sanderson

Posted: Friday, March 02, 2007

The quality of the 2005 vintage for red Burgundy is stupendous. It is simply the best young vintage I have tasted in my 17 years working in the wine business. While the wines are still resting in bottle or barrel in Burgundy cellars, I urge you to place your pre-arrival orders with fine-wine retailers to claim a share of this treasure trove.

The 2005 red Burgundies are ripe, vibrant and balanced, especially the tannins. The wines have a juicy, fleshy midpalate—what I call sappiness—and the flavors are long. Better still, the wines reflect their individual *terroirs*. The high quality is remarkably consistent across all appellations, from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy.

Based on my recent visits and tastings in the region, I give the vintage a preliminary rating of 95 to 100 points, or classic, on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale.

In late January and early February, I visited more than 30 top domaines and négociants, tasting more than 500 wines. (While I was there, I chronicled my tastings in numerous [blogs](#); I also wrote a [preliminary report](#) based on my visit last June.) There wasn't a bad wine in the lot. I tasted the wines non-blind, in either the cellars or offices of the domaines and négociants. Although some wines were bottled, the majority were barrel samples and not finished wines. In my accompanying cellar notes, I have used a score range to indicate potential quality.

"We have never seen this complexity and purity in Pinot Noir," said Nadine Gublin, enologist at Domaine Jacques Prieur. "It's hard to speak of perfection, because that's impossible, but for me, [2005] is the most perfect expression of Pinot Noir. 2005 has the color of 1990, the ripeness of 2003 and the purity of 2002."

The whites are very attractive also, with ripeness and opulence. A mid-July hailstorm hit Chassagne-Montrachet, reducing the crop, but the wines from these *crus* tend to be more concentrated. (When yields are reduced, the remaining berries are able to achieve added ripeness.) The wines from Puligny-Montrachet show the district's typical finesse, and I also tasted some delicious wines from St.-Aubin and Corton-Charlemagne.

But the reds are the story in 2005.

Unfortunately, the '05s will be expensive due to strong demand and the weak dollar. Plus, prices at the source, for négociants buying grapes or wine, are 30 percent to 45 percent higher. For example, Mommessin's 2005 Clos de Tart, a *grand cru* from Morey-St.-Denis, costs 50 percent to 75 percent more than the 2003, based on pre-arrival offerings, even though there will be about 30 percent more wine available compared to the earlier vintage.

Mark Lartigau, director of European estates for importer Diageo Château and Estate Wines, expects the prices from their growers to increase 5 percent to 10 percent for the whites, 10 percent to 15 percent for the village wines and *premiers crus* and 20 percent or more for the *grands crus*. "That will be reflected in the retail prices here in the United States," he added.

Martine Saunier, a West Coast-based importer, reports that prices from her growers are "very uneven," ranging from no change to increases of as much as 40 percent.



Mick Rock/Cephas

The wines of Gevrey-Chambertin are among the best in Burgundy's Côte d'Or region.

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"The demand is extraordinary, unlike any vintage I've seen in 20 years in the business," said Geri Tashjian, owner of the specialty retailer Burgundy Wine Company in New York. "We have long-term clients and people we don't even know calling to be put on the mailing list for the 2005s."

That makes the less famous appellations more appealing. You can purchase Bourgogne and appellations like Côte de Beaune, Côte de Nuits-Villages, Chorey-lès-Beaune, Santenay and Marsannay with confidence.

What made the 2005 vintage was excellent weather throughout the growing season. If anything, it was a bit dry, but there was enough rain at the right times and, most importantly, yields were not too high. "Like so much in '05, the yields were just right," explains Jeremy Seysses, whose Domaine Dujac and Dujac Fils & Père vineyards averaged about 2.5 tons per acre.



Jon Wyand

David Croix of Camille Giroud

"The weather was perfect," recalls Mounir Saouma, coproprietor of the boutique négociant Lucien Le Moine. "We didn't have to ask [growers] for any special treatments in the vineyards. If anything, it was a little too hot during the harvest. As a result, fermentations can be quick, extractions quick and the wines can become reduced."

The only cautionary note concerned the drought. "I've been careful with the extraction because of the drought," said David Croix, winemaker at négociant Camille Giroud. "I was thinking of '76, which had dry tannins, so I was softer in extraction." Indeed, the '05s have plenty of tannins, but the ripeness is also there. "The maturity of the tannins in 2005 reds was fantastic," added Saouma.

Many vintners compare 2005 with 2002, but feel the more recent year has an extra dimension. "2002 was made in September," Croix said. "2005 was made all season. To me, that's the difference between a very good and a great vintage."

The best 2005s will age well, if Burgundy lovers can hang on to them. They are wines of finesse and balance, with detailed flavors and length. But they are not blockbusters in the sense of volume and power, like the 2003s.

"I'm a little concerned about people's image of 2005," reflected Christophe Roumier, owner of Domaine G. Roumier. "It's not what they think. The wines are not big and rich, they are very classic, you see it in the range of aromas and flavors, with long aging potential."

Regardless, fans of Pinot around the world will be clamoring for their favorite 2005s. Twenty years from now, we will be better able to assess where this vintage stands among Burgundy's greats.

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