



2021

INTRODUCTION

Charles Gaskain has been a fruit grower for 49 years and he describes 2021 as the worst year that he has ever known. There have been worse years in terms of frost or hail but in terms of “wrong weather” throughout, 2021 wins the prize. The weather kept fluctuating from one extreme to another which made it a real challenge.

Stephen Skelton MW in his annual harvest report (available on www.englishwine.com) summarises the year “as one with a late start, indifferent summer and a problematic growing season. For some vineyards this resulted in high levels of disease leading to poor, even very poor yields with some vineyards choosing not to pick at all”.

Against this backdrop it is a remarkable achievement that at Domaine Evremond we actually picked a larger tonnage of grapes in 2021 than we did in 2020 and that the grapes were in remarkably good condition. We had hardly any issues with mildew. We were definitely the exception to the rule as we kept hearing stories from many of our vineyard friends across the south of England about the problems that they were facing from both downy and powdery mildew.

In his excellent report Stephen refers to data collected from 75 separate vineyards that shows an average yield of around 5.24 tons per hectare whereas at Evremond our average tonnage was just over 8 tons per hectare. This fantastic result in a very difficult year is a tribute to the amazing work done by Mark Gaskain, Jason Streatfield and all the vineyard workers at Gaskains supported by Christelle Rinvell, The Taittinger Vineyard Director. Christelle made frequent trips from France to support Mark and Jason.

THE GROWING YEAR

Pruning started in January with the selection of this year’s main Guyot cane. When temperatures fell below 0° the pruning team stopped as the wood became too brittle. Pruning continued throughout February and into March.

Temperatures in March were around normal although at the end of the month we had a very warm spell for the time of the year when on the last day of the month the temperature at Kew Gardens reached 24.5°

As soon as April started it turned very cold with the temperature dropping below zero for 3 nights on the trot. It was these 3 nights of hard frost that devastated vineyards across France. We were fortunate to escape any damage as the vines had barely burst their buds.

April turned out to be the coldest April since the 1960s. During the frost risk period the Gaskain team help protect the vines with the application of a frost protection supplement.

During April Alexandre Ponnvoy and Louis Picard came over to supervise the installation of more tanks in our temporary winery in preparation for the blending of the 2019 and 2020 harvests to create our first Non Vintage wine.

May was very wet but we were fortunate to be able to plant the Appleby Vineyard adjacent to Shottenden Road in dry conditions. It was a pleasure to have Volker and his team back for the 3 days of planting. We planted 3.3 hectares. 11,000 Chardonnay vines, 3000 Pinot Noir and 3000 Pinot Meunier.

June recorded another milestone for Domaine Evremond with the bottling of our first Non Vintage wine under the guidance of Christelle, Alexandre and Louis. We bottled over 130,000 bottles that are now in Mark Gaskain's cold store where they will remain until the planned disgorgement some time in 2024.

June was the wettest June on record and Mark and Jason and the team were very active in the use of the mechanical weeders to keep the grass and weeds under control in what were ideal growing conditions.

July saw a mini heat wave which added to the disease risk from both downy and powdery mildew. Flowering happened in the first part of July and it was clear that harvest would be at least 10 days later than 2020.

August was just dull ! the dulllest on record. It was very cool and the vines made little progress with no sign of Véraison until the very end of the month / the first week of September. Mechanical leaf removal started towards the end of the month on the west facing side of the vines.

HARVEST

We started harvesting on Saturday 16th October. In 2020 we started picking on Tuesday 6th October, so we were a full 10 days later.

Christelle was at Evremond for the entire length of the harvest and Alexandre and Louis were with us for most of the time. This is a huge commitment from the Taittinger team and hugely appreciated. In addition we were very fortunate to welcome back "Monsieur Pompier" our friend Pascal Ruiz and he was joined by Agathe Seneclause who had recently returned from China where she had been running a winery for 2 years. Louis's brother Axel was also part of the winemaking team that worked flat out into the early hours of the morning every night for the 7 days of the harvest.

Mark and Jason had a team of over 60 pickers to allow us to crack on as fast as possible to get the crop into the winery in the best possible condition. There was a real threat of rot developing due to the onset of rain so late in the season.

Harvest started with the Pinot Meunier block and we harvested 3 tons more than last year and it was the same story with Pinot Noir where we harvested 9 tons more than in 2020. Surprisingly we actually picked less Chardonnay. The totals by variety were

Chardonnay	49 tons
Pinot Meunier	28 tons
Pinot Noir	91 tons

So our total harvest was 169 tons , 10 tons more than we picked in 2020 which is a remarkable achievement. The grapes came into the winery in very good condition. The sugar levels were a little down on 2020 which was no surprise given the lack of sun during most of August.

A very big thank you to everyone that made this a successful despite the very testing conditions that God threw our way. I have to make a special thanks to Christelle, Alexandre and Louis who have numerous trips over to Chilham despite the added complications caused by COVID and the need for multiple PCR tests at home and in Kent. Merci mes amis!



PATRICK MCGRATH

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