

It is the most exciting time of the year for wine lovers: between August and October is Europe's harvest time.

I think it's important that I begin by explaining what conditions make a legendary vintage like the vintage of 2005. Firstly, the weather plays a critical part in the development of the vine. For example, in 2005 in France we had a lovely spring with very little rain combined with a good amount of sunshine and no frost. This type of weather is perfect for the early development of the vine.

The summer was a repeat of the spring but naturally with warmer weather and most importantly there was no rain during harvest time. These perfect vintage conditions weren't isolated to France in 2005 but were repeated across the world. That is why we can enjoy extremely good wine from 2005 but of course as you know this comes with a price.

This year during my wine trips to Europe I discovered with regret that most parts have experienced challenging weather conditions during 2008. Principally this occurred during the spring with a late cold snap and too much rain.

Obviously we know how frost can damage a spring garden and the result is exactly the same on the vine. However, the rain can be far more devastating, harming the vine with many different problems such as mildew. This is even worse for those producers who grow organically as there is no natural solution to the difficulties produced by excessive rain. The vineyards recognised this in 2008 and as a result many are concentrating their efforts on producing a high quality grape in lower quantities.

However, don't despair, as 2008 was a very good year in many other places. After meeting producers from the southern hemisphere at my wine dinners I can assure you that confidence couldn't be higher south of the equator. These wine makers experienced a very good vintage with some of the positive weather conditions associated with the great vintage of 2005. You won't have to wait long before you can sample the fruits of their labour as harvest time finished between February and April and the first bottles will be in the UK as early as October.

Before making a full judgement we need to wait until all the wine from 2008 has been bottled and tasted. However, as a small tip at this stage I would say that European wines will be light and excellent to taste as young wines and southern hemisphere wines will, on the other hand, have a full bodied structure which makes them age better and have better investment potential.

I will look forward to having the 2008 vintage on my wine list and discussing this issue with you when all the facts are known. In the meantime, thank you for all the feedback on Nico's Notes I have received so far.

A Votre Santé  
Nico