

I'm sitting here writing surrounded by manic pickers. Or should that be manic picking? In the next few hours we have to crush another load of our red variety Rondo, and a full pressload of whites. By the time you read this we will have had to fit in a pressload of muscaty white grapes, some more red, a ton of Pinot Noir, and a further pressload of white.

Suddenly it all has to come in. I can't remember a growing season ending so suddenly - from ripening warm humid to torrential downpour and then forecasts of nothing but chill winds. Plan A has been ditched (leave the grapes on to squeeze out that extra big of ripeness and flavour) of favour of Plan B (get them off before they rot!)

Just to give you an idea of the tightrope we all walk growing grapes. The bumper crop on the reds was looking like giving us 3-4 bottles to the vine in late September. Early October downpours when the soft-skinned grapes are at their most vulnerable and half that super crop is just food for butterflies.

Our main white variety - Madeleine Angevine - looked healthy 10 days ago, but very little is left as I speak

On the bright side there are still heavy crops of the late varieties - the Pinots and the Seyval which are our sparkling wine varieties. We're rushing forward picking dates for those too. It's early days but once again it looks as if we are going to be desperately short of our dry white wine range, and well stocked with fizz, rose & red.

The network of growers around the South West has gone into overdrive too. There are the usual suspects exaggerating their crops and potential in the hope of a quick headline. But mostly we all know this is a very tricky autumn. Winemaker Juliet is just returning from a quick survey of some grapes growing at Silverton and we are advising growers from Dorset to Kent to drop everything and pick now!

It's amazing how even after 17 years of doing this, a season can throw something completely new at you. It can also must rub in the most obvious grape-growing truth of all - never mind how warm it's been in July and August, September is what counts most. But if you want to see it all going on, the vineyard is remaining open Weds-Saturday till half term and Fridays-Sunday till Xmas.

We even plan to offer cafe customers a taste of the freshly fermenting juice alongside some special harvest menus as they do throughout the German wine world. They call it storm parties - because the fermenting wine is cloudy....With more and more vineyards around I think we need our own term. Suggestions please to roger@yearlstone.co.uk

Complete breakdown of the vintage next time unless I've broken down first.

roger