

January 2010

Working in a Winter Wonderland!

From the moment that the last golden and red vine leaves drop onto the crisp, frosty vineyard floor, the race against time to prune begins – la taille de la vigne. From the largest vineyards (which have teams of workers out with their compressor-run secateurs), to our humble little five-hectare vineyard (where two of us work, day in day out, taking turns with an electric secateur and good old-fashioned manual ones), the race is on to beat spring, and the rising of the sap.

Firstly each vine must be cut back to just two shoots – one with two buds and one with between four and ten buds (depending on the health of the vine, and the quantity of production required). A critical step, as one wrongly placed cut will affect at least two years growth! In our vineyard, we cut the vines back heavily; this is one of the ways to keep diseases and pests to a minimum, organically. Sucker shoots from the vine base must also be removed; in many vineyards this is done chemically, but obviously it must be done by hand in an organic vineyard.

Once the vines are pruned, all the growth from the previous year must be removed, this can be a little tricky – as a naturally wild climber, the vine produces tendrils to attach itself. These are surprisingly strong and usually must be cut and can't be pulled free by hand! When all of the prunings have been removed, they are laid in neat bundles in the middle of the rows; we then go through each row with a machine, which crushes the sticks into tiny pieces – thus returning the nutrition to the ground. Next the vines' support system of posts and wires – le palissage, must be systematically checked for damage and wear. Loose or rotten posts must be replaced, hammering new ones into the hard, winter ground. Broken or damaged wires must also be repaired or replaced, ensuring that they are pulled taught and held securely.

Now we are ready to re-attach the one long stem that is left on the vine to the wire – sounds easy? Well, it's really not! The stem must be coaxed to lie horizontally and twisted around the wire, finally secured (with, in our case a bio-degradable hand twisted tie – although there are several systems available). This is another crucial step – each broken stem results in the loss of that vine's grape harvest for the year! It is easiest to bend the stems, as the sap is rising, but of course if we waited until that point, we would never be able to get them all done before the start of the growth! Therefore it is best done in (or after) the rain! Perhaps you have wondered, as you drove past, why we were out there working in a downpour?

On a tiny vineyard such as ours, there are approximately 20,000 vines to be pruned, stripped and tied down!

When we have finished all of this careful preparation, which, of course, must all comply with the many strict AOC regulations, we will be ready for the next season on the vineyard to begin!

Domaine des ANGLIERS

Luckily, the work in the winery is at a minimum at this time of the year. Barrels and vats must be kept topped up, but time itself is the worker here – aging, mellowing and maturing the last harvest's wine. Getting it ready for us to enjoy it at its very best!

Many people assume that the vineyard only needs attention at harvest time, when we pick by hand, but I don't mind this misconception! Working outdoors in such a beautiful region, is an absolute privilege and a pleasure (well, most of the time!); we are located on the hills, les troisiemes terraces, of Puy-l'Eveque, where the views are breathtaking. Not forgetting, that at the end of the day, a glass of Cahors' best awaits!

The only little side effect that I have to be careful of, is trying not to crush people's hands– pruning 20,000 vines does give you a very strong handshake!

Best wishes,
Kim and Lisa Stanton