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Dom Pérignon Battles Climate Change

Dom Pérignon Redefines Champagne in Face of Climate Change

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Dom Pérignon, the iconic Champagne brand, is undergoing a significant transformation under the leadership of its cellar master, Vincent Chaperon. This evolution is set against a backdrop of climate change and extreme weather conditions that are impacting much of France, influencing the production and quality of wine at this esteemed Champagne house.

One of the most pressing challenges for Chaperon is pinpointing the exact harvest date for grapes in each parcel of the grand and premier cru vineyards. This task is critical to preserving the complex style and longevity of Dom Pérignon wines, which are crucial for future P2 and P3 releases. Chaperon explains that due to drought conditions, soils reacted differently based on their moisture retention capacity. For instance, in the grand cru Aÿ, the La Côte parcel, situated directly over chalk and facing south, suffered from heat and dryness, adversely affecting the Pinot Noir grapes. Meanwhile, other parcels with more vegetation maintained a better balance.

The 2015 harvest stood out as the hottest on record in Champagne, surpassing even the notable years of 1976 and 2003. It was also one of the driest, with almost no rain between May and mid-August. The Pinot Noir, which constitutes 50% of the 2015 blend, generally performed better that year. Despite the warmer summers increasing potential alcohol levels, Chaperon prefers to harvest grapes before they exceed 11 degrees of potential alcohol to maintain the desired balance between fruit maturity and necessary structure. This approach resulted in a 30% reduction in the 2015 production.

Since 2008, Dom Pérignon has been adjusting its winemaking approach, prioritizing the separation of wines by "climats" to preserve diverse flavor profiles. Chaperon emphasizes the importance of viewing Champagne as a "vin de assemblage," where blending clear wines, along with dosage and maturation processes, is fundamental. Additionally, the winery has adopted a new tasting approach focused on "tactivity," valuing the wine's texture on the palate more than its aromas.

Chaperon notes that hot and dry years, like 2015, demand greater attention when selecting harvest dates for each parcel. This meticulous approach and strict selection have impacted the quantity of wine produced but have also enhanced the final product's quality. Moreover, Dom Pérignon has increased aging time on the lees and post-disgorgement, allowing the wines to develop greater complexity and accessibility.

Although Chaperon officially took on the role of cellar master in 2019, he began influencing oenological decisions as early as 2018, continuing the work initiated by his predecessor, Richard Geoffroy. Under his leadership, the brand has tackled the challenge of adapting to a changing climate, focusing on sustainability and quality over

quantity.

The winery has implemented a research and development program to identify rootstock varieties more resistant to diseases and extreme weather conditions. They have also developed their own yeast for fermentation, selected from 250 strains. Looking to the future, Chaperon is working on a new project to expand the Dom Pérignon range, although specific details about this initiative have yet to be revealed.

In this era of climatic uncertainty, Dom Pérignon is not only adapting but also innovating. Chaperon's vision is clear: to continue crafting exceptional Champagnes that honor the house's storied legacy while embracing the environmental and viticultural challenges of the present and future. This dedication to excellence ensures that Dom Pérignon remains a benchmark in the world of fine wines, offering connoisseurs an unparalleled experience with each sip.