

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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LATRICIÈRES-CHAMBERTIN AND CHAPELLE-CHAMBERTIN TWO GREAT AND VERY MUCH UNDER-APPRECIATED GRAND CRUS



Upon initial reflection, a pairing of Latricières-Chambertin and Chapelle-Chambertin is not an obvious combination for an article on two of Gevrey-Chambertin's grand crus, as the two *terroirs* are quite different and consequently, so too, are the resulting wines. But, what led me to write a feature on the two vineyards together is that they are a pair of largely overlooked, or at least, under-appreciated, grand crus in the fine firmament of top-ranked vineyards in Gevrey. For this reason, they often represent relatively good values *vis à vis* some of the other grand crus in the commune, as it is quite rare that even the top examples from either cru will fetch the same tariff as a similarly well-made bottling from Griotte-Chambertin or Ruchottes-Chambertin. The conventional, contemporary wisdom regarding the range of grand cru vineyards in Gevrey-Chambertin is that both Chambertin and Chambertin "Clos de Bèze" are truly two of the very greatest grand crus to be found in the Côte de Nuits, with the top examples from these two vineyards ranked in the same rarefied air as the best examples of Musigny, La Tâche and Romanée-Conti. After Chambertin and Clos de Bèze, most Burgundy *cognoscenti* place Griotte-Chambertin and Ruchottes-Chambertin as the next finest grand crus in Gevrey, with partisans giving one or the other a slight edge, depending on their own personal tastes, and then will argue that there is a decided fall off in quality for the remainder of grand crus in the village: Mazis-

Chambertin, Charmes-Chambertin, Mazoyrès-Chambertin, Latricières and Chapelle. All of these are generally accorded “second tier” grand cru status. To paraphrase, the most frequently shared impressions about these grand crus is that they “are really only marginally better than the top premier crus in the commune, and it was simply the market weight of producers in the village of Gevrey back in 1936 which allowed them to find grand cru status in the adoption of the Appellation Contrôlée at that time.” It is not uncommon to hear that the premier cru of Clos St. Jacques routinely produces superior wines to all of these grand crus. However, I strongly disagree with both of these sentiments.

Leaving aside the relative merits of the top examples from Mazis, Charmes and Mazoyrès for another time, I would absolutely take exception with the assertion that both Latricières and Chapelle-Chambertin produce “second division” grand crus, as I find that the finest examples from these two vineyards (and there are lots of them out there!) are truly remarkably complex and refined wines that speak eloquently and quite assertively of the underlying greatness of these two *terroirs*. Despite the truly remarkable examples of mature Clos St. Jacques that I have had the good fortune (and immense pleasure) to drink over the years, I would never rate this vineyard as superior to, or even on a par, with either Chapelle-Chambertin or Latricières-Chambertin. Are they on the same level with Chambertin or Clos de Bèze? No. But, certainly they deserve to be ranked at the same top level as both Griotte and Ruchottes in the village and are amongst my absolute favorite red grand crus in all of Burgundy. I would suggest that many who downplay the quality of these two grand crus do so through a lack of personal experience with top examples of either Chapelle or Latricières and base much of their perspective on the relative merits of the two vineyards on either examples tasted from second division producers or are simply following the herd who seems to have never understood these two marvelous grand crus. Certainly, one of the image difficulties for these two grand crus is that their largest owners are not in the very top echelon of today’s producers; in contrast, in both Griotte-Chambertin or Ruchottes-Chambertin, the largest vineyard holders in these two grand crus are also amongst the greatest domaines in all of Burgundy. However, in Chapelle-Chambertin, the largest landowner is Domaine Pierre Damoy (with 2.22 *hectares*) and in Latricières-Chambertin, it is Domaine Camus (with 1.5 *hectares*). Contrast this with Ruchottes, whose three largest parcels of vines are farmed by Domaines Rousseau, Mugneret-Gibourg and Christophe Roumier. Probably a comment that is emblematic of the general lack of prestige accorded to both of these crus is that of Bill Nanson, who writes of Latricières-Chambertin that “the list of owners is not long, yet we seem surrounded by indifference, as they are not typically owners of the caliber of those found in Griotte for instance.”

But, despite not having a “top ten” domaine as the largest landowner in either vineyard, both Latricières and Chapelle are indeed great *terroirs* and both do have some of the very finest producers numbered amongst their proprietors, even if they are not the largest owners in either vineyard. In Latricières-Chambertin, my favorite estates who produce wine here are Domaine Trapet Père et Fils, Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, Domaine Simon Bize et Fils and previously, Domaine Ponsot. Domaine Leroy also owns a slice of Latricières, which I have enjoyed on occasion, but I do not quite rank the domaine’s example at the summit here. In Chapelle-Chambertin, there are also some truly exceptional producers to be found a bit further down the landowning charts, as Cécile Tremblay and Louis Jadot join the ranks here alongside of Domaines Trapet, Rossignol-Trapet and Ponsot. So, despite not having a superstar domaine as

the largest owner of vines in either vineyard, there are no shortage of superstar producers making wines in both crus, and it is by tasting the wines from these very top producers that one can really get a sense of just how beautiful the wines are from these two grand crus. I set out to do just this on my last spring trip to Burgundy, trying to organize small verticals of the two vineyards as some of these aforementioned producers to further spread the word about the magical qualities of mature and maturing Latricières and Chapelle. Several of the *vignerons* listed above were extremely generous to open a goodly range of wines from one or both of these two grand crus during my last trip to the Côte d'Or, and I have augmented the notes from these verticals at the domaines with several more examples tasted here in New York during the pleasurable follow-up phase of research for this feature.

Neither Chapelle-Chambertin nor Latricières-Chambertin are particularly large grand crus, as Chapelle comprises 5.48 *hectares* under vine and Latricières is 7.35 *hectares*. While both are larger than Griotte-Chambertin, contrast them with the surface area of Clos de Bèze at 15.40 *hectares*, Chambertin at 12.90 *hectares* and the combined grand crus of Charmes and Mazoyrès-Chambertin (both can be sold as Charmes-Chambertin and therefore are often listed together) totaling almost thirty-one *hectares*. In Chapelle-Chambertin, Domaine Damoy (who is also the largest landowner in Clos de Bèze) owns 2.22 *hectares* of the vineyard, or just under a quarter of the entire cru. In Latricières-Chambertin, Domaine Camus is the largest holder of vines, possessing 1.5 *hectares*, and Maison Faiveley in Nuits St. Georges is the second largest owner, with 1.21 *hectares* of vines, so between these two they own twenty-seven percent of the surface area of vines in Latricières. I do not mean to demean the wines from any of these three domaines, but one has to admit that none today have the same cachet as Domaines Roumier, Mugneret-Gibourg or Rousseau in Ruchottes-Chambertin! Happily, there are some truly exceptional *vignerons* who also own parcels in both vineyards, and though their holdings are not as extensive as the largest landowners, Domaine Trapet Père et Fils' holdings of seventy-five *ares* in Latricières and sixty *ares* in Chapelle are pretty well-sized, as are also Domaine Rossignol-Trapet's parcels, which total seventy-six *ares* in Latricières and fifty-five *ares* in Chapelle. So, great examples of both vineyards are not impossible to find in the market, and the relative lack of recognition that the two grand crus currently receive amongst the Burgundy *cognoscenti* generally means that they do not disappear from availability quite as briskly as equally compelling examples of Griotte or Ruchottes.

Jean Trapet, who is one of the most veteran *vignerons* still actively involved in his family's domaine in Gevrey-Chambertin (he is of the same generation as Michel Lafarge in Volnay, and though *officially* retired for many, many years now, can always be found doing some work down in the family cellars when I am visiting!), commented recently that the two *terroirs* are quite different in personality, but both produce great wines in their own way. Monsieur Trapet observed that the warmer Chapelle-Chambertin "is a solar *terroir*", while the cooler Latricières-Chambertin is what he terms "a lunar *terroir*" and that is why they always make such interesting comparisons and contrasts when served together. Jean Trapet was referring to the very different microclimates that the two grand crus possess, as Latricières-Chambertin is located right next door to Chambertin in the heart of the grand cru slope, just to the south of Gevrey's most famous vineyard, but its microclimate is very much influenced by a *combe* (or gap in the hills) above it on the slope, which allows for cold air to stream down over the vineyard with quite some frequency in the evenings during the growing season; this influx of

cooler night air is a very significant contributory factor in the personality of Latricières-Chambertin. Continuing along the slope in a southerly direction, next door, in the premier cru vineyard of aux Combottes, the *combe* in the hills above plays a similar role in this wine's character. In contrast, Chapelle-Chambertin lies in a more protected area, just below Chambertin "Clos de Bèze" on the slope, across the *Route des Grands Crus* that runs between the vineyards in Gevrey, with Griotte-Chambertin here its next door neighbor to the south. This is a much more sheltered, and therefore, warmer microclimate than Latricières. Hence, Monsieur Trapet's alluding to Chapelle as the "solar *terroir*" and Latricières as the "lunar *terroir*." It obviously follows, that the two grand crus do not always excel in the same growing seasons, and even in years where both vineyards produce great wines, they are always very different interpretations of a top vintage, with Latricières almost inevitably the leaner thoroughbred to the more sappy and succulent Chapelle.



Jean-Louis and Jean Trapet with a glass of 2000 Chapelle-Chambertin in their hands.

Beyond variations in microclimates from the different positioning of the two grand crus within the vineyard constellation of Gevrey-Chambertin, there are also fairly dramatic variations of soils as well between Latricières and Chapelle. Latricières-Chambertin has the slightly poorer soil of the two grand crus, as it lies higher up on the slope (just under the tree line that crowns the vineyards here in the southern half of Gevrey-Chambertin), with the thin layer of topsoil soon reaching the limestone "mother rock" below. Its topsoil is not dissimilar to what is found in its next door neighbor vineyard of Chambertin, but the slope is flatter in Latricières than it is in

Chambertin, with Latricières' only perceptible slope up towards the trees at the very top of the vineyard. Consequently, it does not drain quite as well as some of the other grand crus in the commune in wet years and never possesses the "volume" on the palate one finds in a top example of Chambertin. Chapelle-Chambertin has a bit deeper soils than Latricières (as well as deeper than those found in Griotte-Chambertin just next door), with a bit of iron running through the chalky marl (and giving a slight reddish hue to the topsoil), but there is also not a whole lot of topsoil in Chapelle before one reaches the base of hard limestone below. In Gevrey, where it seems that all of the grand crus here are measured in terms of their relationship with either Chambertin or Clos de Bèze, Latricières does not produce as deep and powerful a wine as those next door in Chambertin, due primarily to more gentle ripening brought about by the cooling aspects of lower temperature air drifting down over the vineyard through the *combe* above. Chapelle-Chambertin tends to be a bit bigger and sappier wine than Latricières-Chambertin (particularly in its youth), as it is a warmer microclimate, but its topsoils are a bit thinner than its neighbor of Clos de Bèze above it on the slope, so it too is never quite as powerful of a wine as its more illustrious neighbor just across the *Route des Grands Crus*.

If one looks back to the earliest days of rankings of vineyards within the Côte d'Or, it is interesting to note that Docteur Laval, writing back in 1855, rated Chapelle-Chambertin slightly higher than he did Latricières-Chambertin. Chapelle was designated as a *Première Cuvée* in Gevrey, alongside its neighbor of Griotte-Chambertin, as well as the Clos des Ruchottes, the top sector of Mazis-Chambertin and Clos St. Jacques (Chambertin and Clos de Bèze were one step up as *Têtes de Cuvées*). Latricières-Chambertin was ranked as a *Deuxième Cuvée*, along with the lower halves of Ruchottes and Mazis-Chambertin, as well as Charmes and Mazoyrès-Chambertin. To put this in some context outside of the village of Gevrey, Clos de la Roche was a *Première Cuvée* in neighboring Morey St. Denis in Docteur Laval's book. So, we can see that back in 1855, Chapelle-Chambertin at least was considered the equal of Griotte and the Clos des Ruchottes, as well as Clos de la Roche, and its slight fall from grace in the following century and a half probably has more to do with who owns what in the vineyard these days, rather than with the intrinsic character and quality of the *terroir*. While Latricières-Chambertin was not quite as recognized as Chapelle-Chambertin back in the mid-nineteenth century (and perhaps with good reason- I have never been fortunate enough to taste examples from either vineyard from the nineteenth century), I would argue that as the globe has warmed over the last thirty years, the vineyard of Latricières-Chambertin has been one of the big winners in the Côte d'Or and the wines are even better in the last couple of decades than they have ever been in the past. Perhaps the cooling aspect of the *combe* behind the vineyard that lets in cold night air was a more serious impediment to full ripening (and hence grand cru depth of fruit) prior to global warming, but today, it is probably a distinct advantage and allows Latricières-Chambertin to retain its great mineral drive and refined complexity in even very warm vintages like 2009 and 2015.

So, while neither Latricières-Chambertin or Chapelle-Chambertin can match the depth of their most illustrious neighbors (Chambertin and Clos de Bèze respectively), they can certainly keep pace when it comes to elegance and complexity and these are two of the most supremely elegant wines to be found in all of Gevrey-Chambertin; this is one of the reasons why I rank both vineyards in the very top tier of grand crus in the Côte de Nuits. While I would not put them in my top five of Musigny, Chambertin, Clos de Bèze, Romanée-Conti and La Tâche, I would certainly argue that the finest producers' examples from either vineyard are at the same level of

quality as Griotte and Ruchottes-Chambertin, Clos de la Roche, Richebourg or Romanée-St.-Vivant and amongst the greatest red wines produced in all Burgundy. Of the two, Latricières-Chambertin is typically the more black fruity of the two wines, particularly out of the blocks, as the cooler microclimate and very thin topsoil gives the pinot fruit here a lovely tension and plenty of dark berry and black cherry elements to go along with its intrinsically complex base of soil features. It is also typically the more reticent of the two grand crus when young. Chapelle-Chambertin, with its warmer microclimate and deeper soils is usually the more sappy of the two grand crus in its youth, with notes of red plums and red and black cherries usually defining the fruit element in the wine, often augmented by quite prominent notes of cocoa powder or chocolate and adding a touch of exoticism to young Chapelle. Both Latricières and Chapelle are good, meaty examples of Gevrey as well, with their inherent complexity always quite in evidence from early on in their evolutions and both wines possessing outstanding potential for very long and graceful evolutions in bottle.

While I have included notes on all of the recent examples of Latricières-Chambertin and Chapelle-Chambertin that I have tasted in the last couple of years, the lion's share of the notes that follow hail from three of my favorite domaines who own vineyards in one or both of these two great grand crus: Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, Domaine Trapet Père et Fils and Domaine Cécile Tremblay. The proprietors of these three domaines were kind enough to put together verticals of their bottlings from either Chapelle or Latricières for the preparation of this article. I did ask Louis Jadot's importer (who was arranging my March visit to the domaine to taste their 2016s) about the possibility of showing a few older vintages of their bottling of Chapelle-Chambertin in the spring as well, but it was not possible. Beyond these four important domaines for the two vineyards, I did not ask to taste any other examples of either Latricières or Chapelle during my spring visit to Domaine Ponsot in Morey St. Denis, despite my loving both wines from the Ponsot family, as it was my first visit to the domaine since the administration of the estate was handed over from Laurent Ponsot to his sister Rose-Marie Ponsot, and I thought it would be a bit impolite to ask about a vertical tasting of these two wines when I was just making the acquaintance of Madame Ponsot for the first time. As the notes below will attest, I also love the Latricières-Chambertin bottling from Domaine Simon Bize et Fils, but as I had visited the property to taste their 2016s back in November of last year (before I considered putting together this article), I did not have time to make another appointment during my very crammed spring trip to re-visit a few of their Latricières vintages. So, the following tasting notes are not as broad as they might have been if I had thought to start planning for this article at the time of my trip to the region last November.

Beyond the domaines mentioned above, I do not have a lot of experience with the examples of Latricières-Chambertin or Chapelle-Chambertin from some of the other important vineyard holders, such as Domaine Camus in Latricières or Domaine Pierre Damoy in Chapelle. I drank the Damoy family's example of Chapelle-Chambertin with a bit of frequency in the vintages from 1993 to 1996, but lost track of the wine in subsequent vintages and it has been many years now since I can claim familiarity with their Chapelle-Chambertin. I have never tasted the Latricières from Domaine Camus. I have had some very good (but not great) examples of Latricières-Chambertin from Maison Faiveley in the past, but have not had any since a good, solid bottle of the 1985 back in 2012. My tasting experience with the Latricières-Chambertin bottling from Domaine Leroy (which Madame Bize-Leroy purchased from Domaine Remy in

1989) was quite a bit deeper back in the vintages from 1989 to 1994, but I have not tasted many subsequent vintages (other than the '96) and cannot comment on how the wine is in recent years, though I do note that it was very, very good back in those earliest vintages. Another important landowner in both Latricières and Chapelle is Domaine Drouhin-Laroze, but I do not taste at the estate with any regularity and cannot comment on the relative merits of their bottling versus some of their neighbors. As I alluded to above, Domaine Ponsot used to make brilliant Latricières (their last vintage was the 1994), and I often preferred it to their version of Chambertin in a given vintage. Domaine Ponsot continues to still make stellar examples of Chapelle-Chambertin in the family style of later-harvesting and no new oak.



In the course of organizing the three vertical tastings in March with Domaines Tremblay, Rossignol-Trapet and Trapet Père et Fils, I did not specify which vintages I would like to taste and so each proprietor put together a different range of vintages to compare and contrast. Their wines constitute the bulk of the tasting notes that follow. Accompanying them are other recent tasting notes on wines from the two grand crus, but they are not as thorough as I would like. I did manage to cobble together a tasting of the two vineyards with friends here in New York this autumn, but none of us bought the wines from these two grand crus in the same depth as we did from other vineyards, so our selection was a bit limited (probably by our believing the less than enthusiastic and erroneous commentary about the two vineyards by other wine journalists back in the 1980s and 1990s). Beyond the most recent notes, I have included a few older tasting notes to give some sense of the style and quality of some of the other principal producers in the two vineyards. Consequently, one will find a couple of older notes on Latricières-Chambertin

bottlings from Domaine Remy in Morey St. Denis that go back to 2011, and a few older notes as well on Maison Louis Jadot's Chapelle-Chambertin, as theirs is one of the best examples and I have only drunk the 1985 and 1990 vintages of this in the last year. I never managed to cellar any bottles of the Domaine Leroy Latricières-Chambertin after it made its debut in the 1989 vintage, and apparently, my friends who I taste with regularly made the same decision, as I have not crossed paths with more than one or two vintages of this wine in a long, long time. The following tasting notes are organized first by vineyard, and then chronologically from youngest vintage to oldest. Within this organization, the domaines are listed alphabetically.

Latricières-Chambertin

Latricières-Chambertin is probably the most misunderstood grand cru in all of Gevrey. Witness Remington Norman's comments about the vineyard in his relatively recent Grand Cru book (2011): "Despite its proximity to Chambertin, Latricières possess none of the presence or nobility of its illustrious neighbor." He continues, "in the best hands, it is quite robust, full, sturdy wine, but lacks the complexity and finesse which characterize both Chambertin and Clos de Bèze." I am not really sure what examples he has been drinking, but I would suspect they were not wines from Domaines Rossignol-Trapet, Domaine Trapet Père et Fils, Domaine Simon Bize et Fils or Domaine Ponsot back in the day when they produced a stellar example of Latricières! To look more closely at Mr. Norman's comments, there are virtually no grand crus in the Côte de Nuits that show the same inherent complexity and finesse as Chambertin and Clos de Bèze (other than Musigny, La Tâche and Romanée-Conti), so holding up Latricières as an under-achieving *terroir* on that count is really creating something of a straw-man and makes me think that Remington simply has not drunk all that much Latricières-Chambertin over the years. In fact, the wine is not particularly "robust, full and sturdy", but rather a very transparent, elegant and soil-driven Gevrey grand cru, with a great sense of inherent finesse and breed that defines the wine throughout its long life in bottle. It is probably the most reserved of the Gevrey grand crus out of the blocks (due to its cooler microclimate and thin layer of topsoil), so one either has to be patient and let time work its magic, or pay close attention when tasting the wine young, if one really wants to get a sense of its true quality. The problem is that at most top addresses where Latricières is produced, there are invariably other grand crus in the cellar to steal some of this wine's thunder during cellar tastings, as for example, at both Domaine Trapet and Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, there is always Chapelle-Chambertin and Chambertin itself to be served subsequently in each vintage's lineup, so the Latricières can often be overlooked.

But Latricières-Chambertin is unequivocally a great grand cru, blossoming in due course to offer truly stellar complexity, mineral drive and intensity of flavor. As I mentioned in the introductory section, perhaps it was a slightly leaner wine by grand cru standards prior to the era of global warming, but that is certainly not the case today and I wonder often if assessments such as Mr. Norman's are more a reflection of passed down, perceived wisdom from those olden days, rather than truly a judgment based on extensive experience with the wine from its top producers in recent times. Due to the cooler microclimate here, Latricières-Chambertin is often one of the most black fruity wines in Gevrey and it is rather unique in often having a very distinctive tobacco component to its aromatic and flavor profile when the wine has reached maturity. Notes of Cuban cigars are very often to be found in this wine when it is starting to round into primetime drinking form, and the wine also often gets quite black truffley when it is at its apogee. Needless to say, coupled with its great base of soil tones and beautiful black fruit, these

can combine to make a very complex and extremely satisfying glass of red Burgundy! I honestly do not have a preference between Chapelle and Latricières, as they are both quite unique and distinctive grand crus, but one can understand why Chapelle-Chambertin has been the slightly preferred wines from the age of Docteur Laval all the way down to today, as its warmer location has always produced a more sappy, perfumed and voluptuous wine out of the blocks than Latricières. But, Latricières-Chambertin is truly a great wine in its own right when it is fully mature, which typically will take a couple of decades out from the vintage in a strong year, and the wine easily has the potential to age and evolve gracefully in the bottle for seventy-five years or more.

The Latricières-Chambertin bottling from Domaine Simon Bize et Fils is today one of the finest in the vineyard; it was first produced in the 1995 vintage, as this bottling hails from the same plot of vines that used to be sharecropped by Domaine Ponsot (who produced a wine from this parcel in Latricières from 1978 through 1994). Their parcel is thirty-three *ares* and was planted in three waves, in 1961, 1971 and 1981 and is now farmed by the Bize family under a *fermage* agreement, with the parcel's owner receiving a percentage of the finished wine each year from Domaine Bize. The Simon Bize bottling of Latricières will be raised in anywhere from twenty to fifty percent new oak, depending on the yields each year. The former Trapet family parcels in this grand cru (now split between the Jean-Louis Trapet and his cousins, David and Nicolas Rossignol) are right in the center of the vineyard and run the length of the slope from top to bottom, with both plots essentially the same size, as Domaine Rossignol-Trapet cultivates seventy-three *ares* and Domaine Trapet seventy-five *ares*. The Trapet family originally began producing Latricières-Chambertin ahead of its Chapelle, as the first vintage made here was in 1904. Jean Trapet noted that they shared the vines with the Savot family back in 1904. The Rossignol brothers' parcel was replanted in 1967, and as Jean Trapet was farming both plots at this time, I assume that Jean-Louis Trapet's parcel was also replanted in the same year, but I do not know this for certain. The Rossignol brothers' section is right behind the Faiveley sign on the wall that fronts the vineyard and just to the north of Jean-Louis', with Maison Faiveley's 1.21 *hectares* of vines in Latricières continuing north of the Rossignol parcel (or to the right if you are looking at the vineyard from the *Route des Grands Crus*). The largest holder of vines in Latricières, Domaine Camus and their one and a half *hectares*, lie next to Jean-Louis Trapet's parcel to the south. As Jean Trapet always liked to work with *selection massale* for his vineyards, both the Rossignol-Trapet and Trapet Père et Fils parcels in Latricières were planted from cuttings probably taken from the best family vines in Chambertin. The most northerly section of Latricières-Chambertin, next to Chambertin itself, are split between Domaine Remy (fifty-eight *ares*) and Domaine Leroy (fifty-seven *ares*).

I have had some good *négociant* bottlings of Latricières-Chambertin over the years, with Maison Pierre Bourée once making a very fine example, and Maison Louis Jadot often producing one to complement their own bottling of Chapelle-Chambertin (though it has never been in the same league as their Chapelle). Since the 2013 vintage, Jean-Marie Fourrier has also begun to produce an example of Latricières-Chambertin from purchased grapes that underscores just how serious this *terroir* can be in the right hands. I should mention that Domaine Louis Remy, prior to selling a significant portion of their vineyards in 1989 to Lalou Bize Leroy, always used to make a pretty good example of Latricières-Chambertin- never profound, but good, solid and slightly easy-going structurally- and still does to this day. It is not one of the best

from the vineyard, but it is a good wine. The most recent examples I have tasted from the domaine were their 2002 and 2001 versions, which they showed at a *Les Grands Jours* tasting back in 2011 and I have included those notes below, just to give a sense of the style of the domaine's Latricières in recent times.

2016 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

I was very happy to have a chance to revisit the lovely 2016 Latricières-Chambertin from the Rossignol brothers in March of this year, as I had loved the wine back in November. The wine was raised in forty percent new oak in this vintage and offers up a very red fruity personality (particularly for Latricières) and beautiful purity in its aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, red plums, gamebird, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of mustard seed and a gentle base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with beautiful transparency and balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, refined and very promising finish. 2030-2085. **94.**



David and Nicolas Rossignol- who produce stunning Latricières- in the tasting room at Domaine Rossignol-Trapet.

2011 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The Rossignols' 2011 Latricières is really starting to drink nicely at age seven and is only a few years away from blossoming completely. The classy bouquet offers up a fine mix of black cherries and red plums, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a touch of mustard seed and a nicely discreet

framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure of fruit and transparent down to the soil, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, suave tannins and a long, complex and quite energetic finish. Folks who are down on the 2011 red Burgundies would be well-served to drink a bottle of this beautiful Latricières! 2021-2060. **93.**

2010 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

The 2010 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Trapet is still fairly closed on both the nose and palate at age eight, but shows superb promise with a bit of swirling in the glass. The youthful bouquet offers up fine nascent complexity in its constellation of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, grilled meats, a touch of fresh herbs and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely reserved in personality, with a sappy core, great soil inflection, ripe, suave tannins and a long, pure and very promising finish. This still needs a minimum of five more years in the cellar to start to stir properly, but it is going to be a great wine in the fullness of time. 20123-2075+. **94.**

2009 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

The 2009 Latricières from Jean-Louis Trapet is an excellent example of the vintage, with the wine seeming likely to blossom a bit ahead of the 2009 Chapelle in the Trapet cellars. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a ripe and very pure blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, grilled meats, dark soil tones and the first hint of Latricières signature of cigar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and blossoming nicely already, with a deep and sappy core, excellent soil signature, suave, buried tannins and a long, plush and complex finish. The generosity of the 2009 vintage dovetails beautifully with the more restrained personality of Latricières and the combination of the two has produced a stellar bottle in the making *chez* Trapet. 2021-2075. **94+.**

2008 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The 2008 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet is not quite as open as the lovely 2011, but it is getting closer to its primetime window of drinkability and will end up being a step up from the lovely 2011 version. The bouquet is utterly classic, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a bit of dark berry, the first signs of black truffles, dark soil, woodsmoke, mustard seed, a lovely element of grilled meats and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very pure and complex, with lovely soil signature, excellent depth at the core, moderate tannins and a very long, focused and tangy finish. This is not a crime to drink today, but it is clearly still climbing in quality and I would try to wait at least a handful of more years before starting to drink it in earnest. Fine, fine juice! 2023-2075+. **94+.**

2007 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The Rossignols' 2007 Latricières is starting to drink within its window of peak maturity, but it still has many decades ahead of it, so this is just its first steps within its plateau. The bouquet is complex and wide open, offering up a black fruity blend of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, bonfires, a touch of venison, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely secondary complexity emerging, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and very tasty finish. This is more open today than the 2008, but cannot quite match that vintage for precision or purity. 2020-2065. **92.**

2006 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The 2006 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet is really starting to blossom nicely on the nose and is quite classic in its representation of Latricières aromatics, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, grilled meats, a first touch of the *sous bois* to come, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a bit chewy, with more tannin than either the 2007 or 2008 versions, but fine depth at the core, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and tangy finish. This still deserves another eight to ten years in the cellar to allow the tannins to fully fall away, but it is going to be excellent. Fine juice. 2026-2075+. **93+**.



2005 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

I was expecting the 2005 Latricières from the Rossignol brothers to still be quite closed and reticent, but the bouquet is starting to blossom nicely and is a superb window into this excellent wine's future. The nose wafts from the glass in a bright and complex mix of red and black cherries, grilled meats, dark soil tones, mustard seed, woodsmoke, a bit of spicy oak and just a whisper in the upper register of the forest floor elements that will come in due course. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable balance, ripe, seamless tannins, lovely acids and impressive focus and grip on the very, very long, precise and superb finish. This will be great, great juice in the fullness of time, but patience is still required. 2028-2100. **95+**.

2002 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Remy

The remaining Remy parcel in Latricières-Chambertin is planted with vines between thirty-five and forty years of age, and the 2002 is a lovely bottle. The deep and classy nose offers up a blossoming mélange of cherries, cocoa powder, fresh herb tones, a gentle touch of grilled meat, a complex base of soil and a gently spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and stylish, with a sappy core of fruit, melting tannins, tangy acids and very good grip on the long and complex finish. This is a lighter-styled grand cru, but one that delivers impressive intensity of flavor and very fine length and grip on the backend. Some may crave a bit more stuffing in their Latricières-Chambertin, but I was very impressed by this wine's complexity and length. 2011-2035+. **91+**.

2001 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils

The 2001 Latricières from Patrick Bize is just about into its plateau of maturity and is already beginning to drink very well indeed. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a superb blend of black cherries, red plums, lovely spice tones, autumnal soil elements, mustard seed, woodsmoke and spiced meats. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent in personality, with fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, balanced and vibrant finish. I would opt for giving this lovely Latricières just a couple more years to let the bit of backend tannin more fully fall away, but it must be said that it is drinking very well indeed right now. 2021-2065. **94+**.

2001 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Remy

Not surprisingly, the 2001 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Remy offers up just a bit more signature of soil and a bit more mid-palate amplitude than the lovely 2002 version. The bouquet is a complex and maturing mélange of red and black cherries, coffee, mustard seed, gamebirds, *sous bois* and deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and blossoming beautifully at age ten, with a good core, modest tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and poised finish. Good juice. 2011-2040. **92+**.

2001 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The 2001 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet is into its zenith and drinking with great distinction at the present time. The stellar nose jumps from the glass in a wide open blend of red and black cherries, sweet cigar wrapper, gamebird, a complex base of soil, coffee, summer truffles, mustard seed and a discreet base of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, melting tannins and great length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. High class juice. 2018-2050. **94+**.

2000 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

The 2000 vintage of Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Trapet is now fully into its apogee of peak drinkability and is showing great complexity and refinement on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautifully resolved mix of cassis, black cherries, black truffles, cigar smoke, saddle leather, a complex base of dark soil tones and still a touch of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impeccable focus and grip and a long, elegant finish that still shows a bit of backend tannin to carry the wine decades on into the future. First class juice in all regards! 2018-2040+. **95**.

1999 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Simon Bize et Fils

The 1999 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Bize is a brilliant wine in the making, and it is starting to round nicely into form as it closes in on its twentieth birthday. The wine is quite noteworthy for now starting to show exceptional soil nuances on both the nose and palate, rather than the more monolithic fruit tones that are still frequent with many 1999 grand crus today. The bouquet is flat out stunning, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, grilled meats, a beautiful base of soil tones, cedar and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and particularly soil-driven in personality, with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, tangy and ripely tannic finish. This is still not fully into its plateau of maturity, but it is getting pretty close and is a stunning bottle to drink today. 2023-2075+. **95.**

1999 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

The 1999 Latricières-Chambertin from Jean-Louis Trapet is outstanding and quite a bit younger in profile than the completely *à point* 2000 vintage. The superb nose is still fairly primary, but pure and sappy, jumping from the glass in a blend of cassis, dark berries, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a distinct touch of graphite and a fairly generous serving of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with lovely density and soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins, impeccable balance and a long, nascently complex and potentially opulent finish. In due course, this will probably catch and surpass the lovely 2000 Latricières, but for drinking over the next decade, I have to give a slight nod to the 2000 vintage *chez* Trapet for their Latricières. 2025-2085. **94+.**

1998 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Simon Bize et Fils

Patrick Bize's 1998 Latricières is another outstanding wine, but like many of the top 1998s today, it is still rather chewy in personality and needs more bottle age to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more on the backend. The bouquet is gorgeous right now, as it offers up scents of red and black cherries, grilled meats, dark chocolate, still a nice touch of stems from the whole clusters, a very complex base of soil, cedar and a gentle topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance and a long, complex and still moderately tannic finish. The level of tannins in the 1998 are probably not dissimilar to the 1999 today, but there is not the same density of fruit to buffer them here as in the '99 version, so the overall impression is of a wine that is a bit more tannic. That said, the balance here is just fine and all this beautiful wine needs is more time in the cellar to let the tannins fall away a bit more from the finish. 2023-2065+. **93.**

1998 Latricières-Chambertin - Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

I really like Jean-Louis Trapet's 1998 Latricières, but served alongside the example from Patrick Bize, this comes across as quite a bit more new oaky in personality. Of course, Jean-Louis was using a bit higher percentage of new oak back in the 1990s than he does today, so this does not come as any surprise. The bouquet here is deep, complex and already very nicely expressive, offering up a pure and complex blend of black cherries, bitter chocolate, mustard seed, a lovely base of the vineyard's dark soil tones and a fair bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip and still a fair bit of tannin perking up the long and nicely balanced finish. There is still a trace of wood tannin here on the backend, but there is sufficient depth of fruit to eventually absorb them completely, so all this lovely wine needs is a bit more bottle age to soften up. This is a very, very good bottle, but not quite in the same league as what Jean-Louis is doing

today with his fruit from Latricières, as the slightly lower percentage of new oak in recent years has really taken this wine to another level in recent vintages *chez* Trapet. 2024-2065. **91+**.

1996 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Leroy

The 1996 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Leroy is a bit more marked by its new oak than I would ideally like (but this is true of almost all of Madame Leroy's wines to my palate), but there is depth, breed and complexity here that carries through nicely and the generous serving of new wood is now pretty well integrated into the wine. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, lovely spice tones, a complex base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely soil elements, tangy acids, moderate tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and new oaky finish. This is good juice and one of my favorite 1996s from the domaine. 2022-2075. **93+**.



1985 Latricières-Chambertin- Maison Faiveley

The 1985 vintage at Maison Faiveley represented a transition at the domaine- or at least this has always been my impression. I am not sure of what changed here, but I have never found the 1985s at Faiveley quite in the same league as the wines that were produced here from the 1980 vintage back. The '85 Latricières-Chambertin is a good, solid wine, but it seems to lack just a bit of vibrancy in its bouquet of cherries, mustard seed, coffee, dried herbs, earth and oak

leaves. On the palate the wine is medium-full and slightly dry-edged, with good, but not great depth at the core, modest tannins and good length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. Is it possible that the domaine starting using a higher percentage of new oak between 1980 and 1985, and the wines gave up a bit of freshness as a result during the *elevage*? This is not bad, but it probably should have been a bit better. 2009-2025+. **88.**

Chapelle-Chambertin

While Latricières-Chambertin is relatively homogenous from one end to the other of this grand cru, Chapelle-Chambertin is another matter altogether, as it is really a combination of two different *lieux à dits*: En la Chapelle and les Gêmeaux. The wine from the two vineyards was gradually sold as one (and labeled Chapelle-Chambertin) over the course of the nineteenth century and eventually combined and codified as the single grand cru of Chapelle-Chambertin with the adoption of the *Appellation Contrôlée* in 1936. The original sector of En la Chapelle is the southern sector of this vineyard and this is the larger portion, totaling 3.69 *hectares*, while the northerly sector of les Gêmeaux comprises 1.79 *hectares*. As the name suggests, there was once a small chapel, called Notre Dame de Bèze, in the *lieu à dit* of En la Chapelle, which was burned down in 1830 and freed up an additional two *ouvrées* of land for planting to pinot noir. Though the larger sector of En la Chapelle is the one that lies adjacent to Griotte-Chambertin (which is on its southern boundary), the portion of les Gêmeaux is sometimes considered the very slightly superior portion of the vineyard these days, probably solely because it produces a bit more powerful style of wine. Cécile Tremblay owns forty *ares* of sixty-plus year-old vines here, all in les Gêmeaux, with Claude Dugat's ten *ares* to one side of her parcel and the Rossignol brother's parcel in les Gêmeaux (fourteen *ares*) to the other. Domaine Ponsot owns half a *hectare* of thirty-five year-old vines in les Gêmeaux as well. The Rossignols also own a larger parcel in En la Chapelle, which is forty-one *ares* in size, so their Chapelle-Chambertin bottling is roughly a three-quarters to one-quarter split of the two *climats*. Their vines in les Gêmeaux are older, having all been planted in 1924, and while many of their vines in the En la Chapelle sector also date from 1924, a portion of this parcel was replanted in 2000. Louis Jadot's Chapelle-Chambertin also hails from old vines in les Gêmeaux, from thirty-nine *ares* of vines. These were purchased by the *maison* in 1985 as part of the former-Clair-Daü holdings and the vines are the oldest in the Jadot stable, having now reached ninety-three years of age. In contrast, Domaine Trapet's bottling of Chapelle-Chambertin is all from the En la Chapelle sector of the vineyard, bordering those of the Rossignol brothers in this *climat*. Domaine Pierre Damoy's very large holdings of 2.2 *hectares* in Chapelle-Chambertin (planted in 1947) are also all in the En la Chapelle *climat*.

It is hard to differentiate meaningfully between the wines of En la Chapelle and les Gêmeaux, as the only domaine fortunate enough to own parcels in both sectors is Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, so the opportunity to taste a wine from each *climat* made by the same domaine is very rare. But, happily, the Rossignol brothers are equally curious about the differences between the two *climats* and were generous with their time in fielding my questions about the variations between the soil of the two sectors to try and get a better sense of the differences between En la Chapelle and les Gêmeaux. They observed that "the soil in En la Chapelle is a bit shallower (forty centimeters) in certain places, where an outcrop of stone comes to the surface, than it is in les Gêmeaux." They continued about En la Chapelle, "this stratum of stone is not compacted and allows the vines to draw on water reserves below in years of hydric stress and

also warms up faster after cold temperatures, as it is not as deep as in les G meaux.” In contrast, with les G meaux, “the soil is deeper, has more clay in it and the stone underneath does not rise to the surface” and they note that “when we have done tastings of the two side by side, the wine from En la Chapelle has more finesse and delicacy, while the wine from les G meaux is more black fruity and powerful.” I have had the good fortune to compare and contrast the two *climats* from bottle in the cellars of the Rossignol brothers on one occasion, as they decided to keep a small percentage of each separate in the 2009 vintage and bottled a small number of bottles of each on their own to follow down through the years and see how the two differed with bottle age. My general impressions from that tasting are completely in accord with those of the Rossignol brothers, and it seems quite accurate to describe the wines from En la Chapelle as a bit more perfumed, floral, red fruity and seductively structured than those from les G meaux- at least in their relative youths. The wines that hail from les G meaux tend to be a bit more black fruity in personality out of the blocks, more powerful and a bit more structured than those from pure En la Chapelle, and they probably take a few years longer to fully reach their apogees. But, it should be emphasized that these are only moderate variations between the two sectors. However, it does seem that there is certainly a difference between the two, but as is the case for instance with variations between Bonnes-Mares bottlings hailing from plots of vines on the *terres rouges* or *terres blanches* section of the vineyard, they are still first and foremost examples of Bonnes-Mares or Chapelle-Chambertin, and their differences are quite modest in comparison to what they share in common from the overall personality of the entire grand cru.



As Domaine Trapet was the precursor of both Domaine Rossignol-Trapet and Domaine Trapet Père et Fils, it is not surprising that the two domaines today have almost all of their parcels in each grand cru adjacent to each other. In Chapelle-Chambertin, rather than split the tiny parcel in les Gêmeaux when it was time to form the two distinct domaines in 1990 (when both Jean Trapet and his cousin, Jacques Rossignol “officially” retired), the vines in les Gêmeaux were given to the Rossignol brothers, while Jean-Louis Trapet was compensated with the slightly larger section in the *climat* of En la Chapelle. So, today, Domaine Rossignol-Trapet farms fifty-five *ares* here (between the two *climats*) and Domaine Trapet Père et Fils farms sixty *ares* (all in En la Chapelle). According to Monsieur Jean Trapet, the Trapet family first started producing a Chapelle-Chambertin in the vintage of 1919, as they partnered with the Truchtet family in this year to start making this grand cru and eventually purchased these 1.15 *hectares* of vines. The portion of the vineyard in En la Chapelle that eventually became Jean-Louis Trapet’s is not quite as old as the sector of les Gêmeaux farmed by his cousins (but still old vines), as this was all replanted right after World War II ended in 1945 and is wines in En la Chapelle are now seventy-three years of age.

As I mentioned in the introductory section, getting back to comparing Latricières and Chapelle, Chapelle-Chambertin is the more sumptuous and generous of the two grand crus out of the blocks, reflecting the warmer location and slightly deeper soils of the vineyard. The wine (even if it hails solely from vines in les Gêmeaux) is often a bit more red fruity than Latricières in its fruit profile, with notes of red plums often quite evident, to go along with both red and black cherries. It is generally only in the cooler vintages that the wine takes on a more black fruity cast, though as I mentioned, I often find examples of Chapelle-Chambertin that hail solely from vines in the *climat* of les Gêmeaux to be a bit more black fruity in personality than those from En la Chapelle. Almost all examples of Chapelle-Chambertin are also quite singular in their pronounced aromatics of cocoa powder or chocolate, which seems to really be derived from the *terroir* here, rather than a reflection of a particular growing season. The wine can have the grilled meat aspect of other Gevreys, but more often than not, I find notes of gamebird in Chapelle, rather than the more beefy elements of other Gevrey grand crus. Like Latricières-Chambertin, the soil elements in Chapelle always seem to be dark in tone, as opposed to the quite vivid limestone soil elements one finds in neighboring Griotte-Chambertin. The top examples of Chapelle are also quite floral wines, with notes of violets or rose petals often quite prevalent when they are young, with perhaps more violets in examples from les Gêmeaux and more roses from En la Chapelle. On the palate, as mentioned above, the wine is quite a bit more sappy and velvety out of the blocks than the more soil-driven and slightly leaner and overtly-structured wine from the vineyard of Latricières. Chapelle-Chambertin is a wine at the best addresses that is always properly structured (as a Gevrey grand cru ought to be), with more weight and inner core than top examples of Clos St. Jacques for instance. It is often very seductive out of the blocks, though its ultimate complexity only emerges with at least a couple of decades of cellaring. Interestingly, when it is fully mature, it can also show some of Latricières-Chambertin’s tobaccoey and black truffley overtones, which one would not expect, as those elements are generally not present in the wine when it is young. In a top vintage, Chapelle-Chambertin will easily last seventy-five years or more in bottle. It is truly one of Gevrey-Chambertin and Burgundy’s very finest grand crus and its lack of recognition in the marketplace today is not emblematic of the inherent quality of the *terroir* here- witness Dr. Lavalley’s ranking- but rather simply the limitations of previous commentary on the vineyard that were treated as sacrosanct.

2016 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

My last note on this wine was out of barrel from a visit in November of 2017, so I was very happy to see the recently-bottled wine included in our vertical in March of this year and include the note here. The 2016 vintage of Chapelle-Chambertin from the Rossignol family is outstanding wine in the making and this is clearly destined to be one of their finest vintages, once the wine has had its requisite time sleeping in the cellar. The bouquet is beautifully red fruity as well in 2016 (this is also a hallmark of the domaine's 2016 Latricières and is quite unique to this vintage), jumping from the glass in a perfumed blend of red plums, cherries, cocoa powder, complex soil tones, venison, a touch of vanillin oak and a nicely smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and supremely elegant, with a sappy core, lovely transparency, fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance on the long, complex and seamless finish. Absolutely stellar juice. 2030-2085. . **94+**.

2014 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Cécile Tremblay

Cécile Tremblay has been using more whole clusters in the second decade of her winegrowing career (her first vintage was 2003), and today, she routinely includes eighty to ninety percent of the stems in her bottling of Chapelle-Chambertin. The 2014 vintage of this wine is absolutely beautiful in its promise, offering up a pure and youthful bouquet of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and lovely balance and complexity on the long and tangy finish. This is still very early days for this wine, but it is very clear that it will be great in the fullness of time. 2028-2075+. **96**.

2013 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Cécile Tremblay

The cooler aspects of the 2013 vintage are seen here in Cécile Tremblay's Chapelle, as this is nicely black fruity in personality and offers up a fine nose of cassis, bitter chocolate, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, still a touch of its youthful stemminess and a refined base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and more reserved than the nose suggests, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a long, primary and ripely tannic finish. This vintage still needs a good decade in the cellar to blossom properly, but it will be excellent when it softens up and comes into its own. 2028-2075. **94+**.

2012 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Cécile Tremblay

The 2012 vintage is not one that I reach for right now, as this low yield and truly stunning vintage has been in deep hibernation for a few years already. This was true of the 2012 Chapelle-Chambertin from Cécile Tremblay, and yet its enormous potential was also manifest when she generously opened a bottle at the domaine in March. The very youthful bouquet is bottomless and loaded with sweet fruit and great soil signature, delivering a constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very sappy at the core, with great focus, length and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a very, very long, still quite primary finish. This has the same potential for elegance and perfume as the stellar 2014 Chapelle here, but even more depth and length! A brilliant, brilliant young wine, but do not touch it for at least another decade! 2029-2100. **97**.

2011 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The 2011 vintage has produced a lovely example of Chapelle-Chambertin from the Rossignol brothers. The wine is pure and nicely open now on the nose, offering up scents of wild strawberries, cherries, a hint of orange peel, cocoa powder, gamebird, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and not quite as forward as the Latricières 2011 *chez* Rossignol, with a nice core, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and grip on the vibrant and promising finish. This still needs another five years in the cellar to really start to drink with generosity, but all the pieces are in place for a fine bottle with a bit more patience. 2023-2060. **93+**.

2011 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Cécile Tremblay

Cécile Tremblay's 2011 vintage of Chapelle is a beautiful wine and is really showing lovely generosity on both the nose and palate at age seven! The perfumed bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of black plums, black cherries, *pigeon*, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and a fine base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite open and succulent on the attack, with a sappy core, great soil signature, modest tannins and superb length and grip on the poised and complex finish. This is still in climbing mode, but the wine is impeccably balanced and it is already all too easy to drink! 2018-2050. **95**.



Cécile Tremblay in her comfortable tasting room at the domaine in Morey St. Denis.

2010 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

Jean-Louis' 2010 Chapelle-Chambertin was showing very well indeed in March of this year, which is not presently the case for a great number of 2010s, many of which are in a state of hibernation. However, this wine was showing enormous potential, wafting from the glass in a deep, refined and nascently complex blend of cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, a beautiful base of soil tones, mustard seed and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in personality, with lovely sappiness at the core, suave tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is not all that far away from really blossoming and should drink with great distinction for a long, long time to come. 2021-2075+. **94+**.

2009 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

Much to my surprise, the 2009 Domaine Trapet Chapelle-Chambertin was a bit more closed down and reserved than its counterpart from 2010. The bouquet is still fairly primary, but shows excellent potential in its mélange of red and black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, a fine base of soil, vanillin oak and an exotic and quite pronounced topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full and sappy at the core, with ripe, seamless tannins, fine focus and grip and superb length on the poised and very promising finish. 2023-2075+. **94+**.

2009 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

Tasting this wine side by side with the 2009 les Gémeaux was a very interesting experiment, and I was quite surprised that I slightly preferred the blended Chapelle bottling. The wine is a touch more evolved on both the nose and palate than the '09 les Gémeaux, but also more complex. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, violets, lovely soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and already quite suave on the attack, with a lovely core and fine soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2045+. **94**.

2009 Chapelle-Chambertin "les Gémeaux"- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

This is the only vintage of les Gémeaux that I have tasted bottled by the Rossignol brothers, and this was sampled side by side with the blended cuvée during a visit the domaine back in November of 2013. To my knowledge, it was never made available commercially and was simply bottled so that the Rossignols could follow it over the years and compare it to their classic cuvée from the same vintage. The les Gémeaux 2009 is a bit deeper and more powerful in profile on both the nose and palate, as well as a bit less evolved than the blended bottling. It offers up a complex and powerful nose of black cherries, black plums, woodsmoke, a touch of venison, dark chocolate, dark soil and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine sense of reserve, excellent focus and grip, chewy tannins and a long, still quite primary finish. This will need more time in bottle to blossom than the blended version, but I have a sense that, though it might end up being a touch deeper, it will never be quite as complex. 2023-2050+. **93**.

2007 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

The 2007 red Burgundies are drinking with so much grace right now that it is going to be difficult to age them over the long haul. This is certainly true of this beautiful Chapelle-Chambertin, which wafts from the glass in a perfumed constellation of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, mustard seed, complex soil tones, cedar and an esthery topnote of cocoa powder. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent complexity

and grip, a lovely core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and vibrant finish. This is hard to resist already, but try to give it just a couple more years in the cellar to open up even a bit more! 2020-2060. **93.**

2006 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

There are some significant remaining tannins in the 2006 Chapelle-Chambertin from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, but the wine is very well-balanced and seemingly only requires more patience. The bouquet is superb right now, offering up scents of red plums, cherries, gamebird, a bit of bonfire, cocoa powder, a nice blossoming note of black truffles, a touch of mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and extremely transparent, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. If one does not mind chewing through a few tannins, this is already very tasty, but in reality, another decade in the cellar should find it right at the peak of its apogee. Given how beautiful the bouquet is today, it would make sense to allow the palate to catch up completely before having at it in earnest! 2028-2075. **94+.**

2005 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

It has been several years since I drank any 2005 red Burgundies, as the vintage has been slumbering for quite a while now. However, if this brilliant '05 Chapelle is any indication, things are starting to stir! This wine has absolutely stunning potential and it is already very evident on both the nose and palate, despite the wine still being too young for primetime drinking. The bouquet is pure and bottomless, offering up a sappy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, dark soil tones, cigar ash, woodsmoke and a dollop of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely rock solid at the core, with great soil inflection, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and a very, very long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. This is still many years away from really drinking well, but its potential is now very, very easy to read. 2030-2100. **95+.**

2001 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Claude Dugat

The 2001 Chapelle-Chambertin from Claude Dugat all hails from the subsection of the vineyard known as les Gêmeaux, which historically was ranked as the filet section of this cru. I do not taste the wines from Monsieur Dugat with any frequency, as I have always found them a bit too new oaky for my tastes, but given the high esteem that his colleagues hold him for his excellent viticultural work, I really wish I liked the wines better. His 2001 Chapelle-Chambertin is okay, but a bit heavy-handed for this outstanding vintage, as it offers up a very new oaky nose of black cherries, cassis, a touch of tariness, woodsmoke and plenty of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a rather four-square personality, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, modestly complex finish. There is a certain sense of heaviness here that one should not find from this most elegant of Gevrey grand crus, and that is the cellar technique coming through. This is okay, but no better. 2015-2035. **88.**

2001 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

In contrast to the magnificent promise of the 2005 Rossignol-Trapet Chapelle, the 2001 is now well into its plateau of peak maturity and is delivering on all of its early potential. The stunning bouquet is perfumed and wide, wide open, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, red plums, sweet cigar wrapper, summer truffles, gamebird, gently autumnal soil tones and a nice, delicate topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied,

complex and displays beautiful mid-palate depth, with superb soil signature, modest tannins and a very, very long, very complex and simply *à point* finish. This is absolutely stunning to drink today! 2018-2050. **95+**.

2000 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

Jean Trapet is a big fan of the 2000 vintage, which he terms an “exuberant year” and his enthusiasm for this lovely Chapelle-Chambertin was palpable during our tasting together in the cellars here. The 2000 Chapelle *chez* Trapet has reached a superb moment for drinking, soaring from the glass in a complex constellation of black cherries, plums, grilled meats, chocolate, a fine base of soil, cigar wrapper and a bit of black truffle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, *à point* and full-bodied, with lovely mid-palate concentration of fruit, excellent soil signature, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and bouncy finish. Fine, fine juice that is now at its apogee, but this has decades of life still ahead of it! 2018-2040+. **94**.



1999 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Ponsot

The 1999 Chapelle-Chambertin from Domaine Ponsot is still a bit adolescent in personality and needs a handful more years in the cellar before it will really start to blossom. Right now, it is in that funky stage where it seems to show just a whisper of oxidation on the nose (but which often disappears with further bottle age in my experience with the Ponsot wines). The bouquet is deep and classically Ponsot in style, offering up a sappy blend of black

cherries, grilled meats, a touch of cinnamon, a fine base of dark soil tones, mustard seed and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerful in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, still quite primary finish. This is still a tad monolithic and needs more bottle age to start to show more detail, but it will be a very good wine in due course. 2025-2065+. **92.**

1999 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

Jean-Louis Trapet's 1999 Chapelle-Chambertin is absolutely superb and still on the youthful side, as is the case with so many grand crus in this vintage. The bouquet is quite black fruity for a Chapelle closing in on its twentieth birthday, as it offers up scents of black cherries, black plums, dark chocolate, roasted *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a bit of toasty oak and hints of both cigar wrapper and black truffle just starting to emerge in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins, good acids and excellent grip on the long, vibrant and very well-balanced finish. 2024-2085+. **94+.**

1999 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet

It had been a couple of years since I last saw a bottle of the 1999 Chapelle from the Rossignol brothers, and the wine continues to age gracefully and move resolutely towards a beautiful apogee of drinkability. It is still at least a few years away from that peak, but it shows all of the hallmarks of a great wine nearing that point, as it wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, grilled meats, dark chocolate, blossoming notes of forest floor, woodsmoke, a fine base of Chapelle's dark soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2023-2065+. **94+.**

1990 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Jadot

The 1990 Louis Jadot Chapelle-Chambertin is a very strong example of this ripe vintage, with the wine still blossoming and not yet quite ready for primetime drinking. The wine is quite fresh on both the nose and palate for a 1990, with only a touch of *sur maturité* starting to poke through on the finish once the wine has spent an hour or so in decanter, and completely fresh prior to this. The bouquet is deep, complex and properly black fruity (this is entirely from les Gêmeaux) in its constellation of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, grilled meats, mustard seed, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and great length and grip on the focused and gently chewy finish. This is a classic Jacques Lardière wine and built for the long haul, so give it another five years or so in the cellar before having at it in earnest. 2023-2085+. **92.**

1990 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Ponsot

The Domaine Ponsot Chapelle-Chambertin from 1990 is an excellent wine and one of the freshest examples of this vintage I have tasted in quite some time. There is no hint of pruniness here, despite Laurent Ponsot probably having picked later than anyone else in this vintage! The bouquet is deep, vibrant and sappy, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, dark soil tones, lovely spice elements and a distinctive note of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, melting tannins and impressive grip and focus on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is truly a great vintage for this wine *chez* Ponsot. 2018-2050+. **94.**

1988 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Jadot

The 1988 Jadot Chapelle-Chambertin is still a tad on the young side, but the wine shows excellent potential and will most definitely reward further cellaring. The nose offers up a complex and blossoming blend of red cherries, pomegranate, orange peel, sandalwood, just a hint of the vintage's rusty pipe character and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure on the attack, with fine mid-palate depth, a bit of firm tannin still to resolve, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. This will be a lovely wine. 2016-2045+. **91+**.

1985 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Louis Jadot

The Jadot firm has owned their parcel in Chapelle-Chambertin now for many years and this is always one of my favorite wines in their stellar lineup. The 1985 is now entering the start of its plateau of peak maturity, but at age thirty-three, it still has decades and decades of life ahead of it! The complex and wide open bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, grilled meats, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still rock solid at the core, with melted tannins, bright acids and excellent soil signature on the long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. This is a lovely wine that is just approaching its apogee, but given the Jadot style, will cruise long for many more years to come! 2018-2060. **94**.

1978 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

I have always loved Jean Trapet's wines and his 1978 Chapelle-Chambertin is utterly stunning and currently at the peak of its powers. The perfumed bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of red and black cherries, cocoa powder, a very complex base of soil, a touch of summer truffle, gamebird, gentle smokiness and a very discreet element of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, deep and very complex, with plenty of fruit at the core, stunning soil signature, melted tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip on the focused, complex and totally *à point* finish. If I were to pick one wine to emphasize just how beautiful and serious Chapelle-Chambertin can be in a top vintage and in the hands of a supremely-gifted *vigneron*, this would be it! I wish I still had a couple of cases of the 1978 Trapet Chapelle-Chambertin in my cellar and could do a tour proselytizing about the wonders of this *terroir* and show this wine as my supporting evidence- I would make an awful lot of friends! 2018-2050+. **96**.

1972 Chapelle-Chambertin- Le Petit Fils de Charles Marchand (Domaine Trapet)

The Le Petit Fils de Charles Marchand label was used especially for the Rotisserie du Chambertin restaurant in Gevrey-Chambertin by Louis Trapet, as the restaurant was one of his finest customers back in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to selling the Rotisserie some of Domaine Trapet's own bottlings to be offered under the Marchand label (as is the case with this 1972 Chapelle-Chambertin), Monsieur Trapet also took care of and vinified a parcel in the superb premier cru of Corbeaux in Gevrey-Chambertin that was owned by the Marchand family. The Corbeaux was labeled as "Gevrey-Chambertin Premier Cru" and only sold via the wine list at the Rotisserie du Chambertin. I can vouch for its excellence in the 1969, 1971 and 1972 vintages that graced the list for many, many years and were still available when it was sold a few years back. The other Marchand wines are identical to those from Domaine Trapet in this era, other than their unique labels, and it is my understanding that the Marchand family

purchased all three grand crus from Domaine Trapet during this epoch. This bottle of '72 Chapelle-Chambertin was very kindly given to me as a gift by the Rotisserie's proprietor when they were selling the restaurant several years ago, as I had been a long-time and loyal customer of the restaurant during my visits to Burgundy. I carried it home and it had been in my cellar for at least seven or eight years prior to my organizing a tasting for this article. It is now a classic 1972 in that it is starting to show some signs of old age, with the vintage's very brisk acidity still quite present, but the fruit now starting to get a wee bit fragile. When we first decanted this wine, it had some volatile acidity elements present on the nose, but with extended aeration it blossomed nicely and eventually was very tasty to drink after about forty-five minutes in decanter. Once it has opened properly, the wine delivers a lovely bouquet of dried cherries and strawberries, a touch of porcini mushroom, cocoa powder, orange peel, *pigeon*, fresh nutmeg, summer truffles and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is fullish, very transparent and still quite tangy, with fine focus and grip, little remaining tannin and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I have the strong sense that the fruit will eventually fall victim to the wall of 1972 acidity that still remains here, so it is probably a very good time to be drinking this wine up, but it remains extremely pleasurable to drink today and is not going to collapse anytime soon. But, be forewarned that it does need some time in decanter to blossom properly. 2018-2035+? **92.**

RECENTLY-TASTED ALSACE WINES



Domaine F. E. Trimbach, as seen from the vines up above the winery in Ribeauvillé.

I am a big fan of the wines of Alsace and often regret that I simply do not have enough time to cover the region and its beautiful wines with anywhere near the frequency that they deserve. This is the price I pay for keeping View From the Cellar a one taster journal, as I cannot cover everything that is deserving of attention, no matter how many hours I spend tasting and travelling. It is one of the great drawbacks to my approach, though I like to think that it has its advantages as well in being the work of a single voice and palate, and rightly or wrongly, at least subscribers know who is responsible and nothing gets watered down in committee! However, I never intended to let so many years pass between articles on Alsace and this feature is now long, long overdue. As I still drink wines from Alsace with some regularity, I have been accruing notes for several years with an eye towards eventually getting my act together and writing this piece, so readers will see that there are plenty of notes below on wines with significant bottle age, as Alsace continues to produce wines that blossom beautifully in the cellar. Given the relative paucity of coverage on the region here and the glaring omissions below of a few of the big names in Alsace wine, perhaps it would be useful for readers to know a bit about my own personal history with the region's wines and why some estates are well-covered in the tasting notes that follow and others are not.

I began selling and drinking the wines of Alsace back in the early 1980s, when I was first starting out my career as a wine retailer. My earliest exposure to these wines were from some of the bigger, high quality houses such as Hugel et Fils and Maison Trimbach, but soon thereafter I was introduced to the very earliest vintages from André Ostertag and Marcel Deiss, so I was expanding my horizons at a pretty good clip in those first early days. Within a year or two, my Alsace section was well-stocked, as it by then included the likes of Domaines Weinbach, Zind-Humbrecht, Schoffit, Albert Mann, Pierre Frick, Albert Boxler and Lorentz. So, by the top vintages of the late 1980s, I had a very good inventory of some of the finest producers in the entire region and a pretty good handle on whose wine styles I liked. In addition to stocking the wines for the shops I worked for, I also had started to put the wines away in my own cellar and was on the way to having a pretty representative selection of Alsace wines in my collection. However, as the 1990s arrived and global warming started to really bite, I started to see more and more wines from Alsace done in the style that was then being made popular by Olivier Humbrecht of Domaine Zind-Humbrecht, which included fairly high degrees of residual sugar in the wines. As these were getting the biggest scores from journalists at the time (and consequently, the highest prices), it is not surprising that many other producers started to emulate this semi-dry style of Alsace wines. While the approach may have made sense from financial and winemaking perspectives (as global warming was certainly producing far riper grapes in Alsace by this time, and *vignerons* were faced with either much higher alcohol or leaving some residual sugar), the new stylistic shift in Alsace wines really did not dovetail nicely with my own palate preferences, and I started to like the wines from some of my favorite domaines far less than had been the case in the drier wine decade of the 1980s. By this time, I was already very well-versed with German wines as well and to my palate, I always felt the Germans and their *terroirs* did a superior job to the Alsace producers in producing off dry or sweet wines. The strength of Alsace was in dry wines.

So, as the years went by, and my retail expertise started to specialize more in other regions, I lost track a bit of what was going on in Alsace and after a while, the only wines I continued to buy regularly for my cellar were the still bone dry Rieslings from Maison Trimbach, which I salted away in pretty good depth. While I lamented the fact that I was falling out of the loop with the region in general, I felt I had pretty good compensation in several vintages of Cuvée Frédéric Émile and Clos Ste. Hune resting comfortably down in the cellar and promising good things to come in the future. As I made the transition to sommelier from merchant, my needs were less broad for the wines of Alsace and I trimmed my selections down to a goodly supply of Trimbach wines and those from producers such as Domaines Albert Mann and Weinbach, though I did continue to pour Trimbach's Riesling Cuvée Frédéric Émile by the glass at Gotham Bar and Grill. After my sommelier days, I spent more than five years working as a rare wine broker, selling old and rare bottlings and Alsace was not a big part of my business, though I did continue to drink my Trimbach Rieslings with quite some frequency. In fact, back in that era, there were a couple of restaurants in Burgundy with deep wine cellars who had a goodly supply of older vintages of Clos Ste. Hune, and I have to suppose that my clients and I drank a significant percentage of those bottles off of the lists in the late 1990s and early 2000s. But, I was not on top of the wine trends in the region in general during those years.

As I am now just about completing the fourteenth year of writing the newsletter full-time, I have been reacquainted with many wine regions that were not really part of my horizon in those

rare wine brokerage days, but have not found sufficient time until quite recently to get back up to speed with the beautiful region of Alsace. However, a very good, small importer, Roy Cloud, last year sent me a bunch of samples from regions that I do not regularly write about, with a note saying that these wines might merit attention and he hoped I would find time at some point to taste them. Amongst those samples were a fine range of wines from Mélanie Pfister, whose wines (once I finally got around to opening them up to taste) were absolutely stunning and reminded me just how much I loved the wines of Alsace back when I had the chance to drink them regularly. Domaine Pfister is not as well-known as a great many of the domaines I used to work with back in my earlier career, but the wines are racy, minerally, very complex and bone dry and they struck a chord with me that finally got this feature up and rolling again after having been on the “to do list” for several years. During the course of tasting Mélanie’s wines and learning a bit more about Domaine Pfister, I found that they are located in the village of Dahlenheim in the Bas-Rhin half of Alsace, which got me thinking a bit more about global warming and its impact on the style of many wines in the region. The Bas-Rhin is the more northerly and less sheltered section of Alsace, as it is not tucked in behind the Vosges Mountains that protect the other half, the Haut-Rhin, from cooler temperatures, and so this more northerly portion of Alsace used to be a bit less favored prior to the era of climate change. However, the Haut-Rhin area under the shadow of the Vosges is the area that started to struggle a bit with the higher sugar levels (at least to my palate) in these warmer days we are doomed to and the advent of a sweeter style of Alsace wine was born here in the very early 1990s and spread as global temperatures continued their seemingly unstoppable march upwards. Becoming introduced to the beautiful and very minerally interpretations of Alsace wines from Domaine Pfister made me realize that there may be a geographical possibility to get out from the dual challenges of high alcohol and residual sugar in the better-known wine villages of the Haut-Rhin by looking for less sheltered vineyards in the Bas-Rhin.

In any case, having been pretty much out of the loop regarding Alsace wines in the last ten years or so, I thought it would make sense to get samples from many of my old favorites as well to properly cover the region in general for this article. This afforded me the chance to see how some of my long-time favorite producers were faring these days and see if things had changed a bit from the decade of the 1990s and early 2000s, when it seemed that the best crus of Alsace were producing sweeter and sweeter wines with virtually every passing vintage (or trying to keep the residual sugar in check and ending up with high octane). Alsace is certainly not alone with learning how to cope with the changed global climate we now live in and as this increase in temperature began around 1990 or so, producers now have had ample experience with how to handle this climate shift and it was very interesting to see the evolution of their winemaking styles from those early days of global warming. I should mention that a few of the better known estates in Alsace do not have their current releases appearing in the notes below, for a variety of reasons. Domaine Weinbach’s importer was waiting for a container with new releases from the estate, so I will report on those a bit further down the road. Domaine Hugel et Fils’ importer has just changed media relations personnel and the new person never got back to me. Maison Trimbach’s new importer promised to send samples, but seemingly forgot, and as I was so inundated with other samples for this issue of the newsletter, I did not circle back to them (they might make good companions for a future piece when the Weinbach wines are in). Domaine Albert Boxler is represented by Kermit Lynch, and as the powers that be there continue to dislike my approach, I did not bother to request Boxler samples. To the best of my knowledge, Domaine

Zind-Humbrecht's wines remain too sweet stylistically for my palate, so I did not solicit samples from their representatives, but it has been many years since I tasted new releases from this estate and perhaps I am off base on this assumption. But, pretty much everyone else is to be found in the notes that follow.

Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois

2017 Pinot Blanc (Auxerrois)- Domaine Henry Fuchs

Paul Fuchs took over for his father Henry a few years ago as the director of the family domaine in Ribeauvillé and he is making beautiful wines. The preparation for this article was my first introduction to his wines and I was very impressed across the board. His Pinot Blanc bottling is made from a parcel of forty-five to fifty year-old Pinot Auxerrois vines, grown on stony clay soils. The 2017 version offers up a beautifully precise and expressive nose of peach, apple, stony soil tones, a touch of citrus peel, musky floral elements and just a hint of conifer bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely generous at the core, with fine backend grip, bright acids and lovely length and bounce on the complex finish. This is finished quite dry, but still only tips the scales at 12.5 percent octane and should age long and gracefully. 2018-2035. **90.**

2016 Pinot Auxerrois “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Paul Blanck

The 2016 Pinot Auxerrois “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Paul Blanck is fairly ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, and still shows a fair bit of residual sugar as well, indicating the sugar levels were quite robust for these grapes. The generous bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of guava, pineapple, lovely, tropical floral tones, citrus peel and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core, solid framing acids for the near-term, and just a whisper of heat poking out on the long and succulent finish. This is pretty tasty in its slightly sweet and big-boned style, but also emblematic of some of the challenges posed by climate change in the Haut-Rhin. My guess is that the Auxerrois was still out on the vines while the family was hustling to bring in the Riesling in pristine condition, and in their places, I would have done exactly the same thing. 2018-2025. **87.**

2016 Pinot Blanc- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The 2016 Pinot Blanc from the talented Barthelmé brothers (Maurice in the vineyards and Jacky in the cellars) is excellent, coming in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offering up beautifully expressive aromatics of white peach, a hint of guava, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, nicely mineral and light on its feet, with excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex finish. I would, of course, prefer this wine bottled under natural cork, but it is showing very well right now and is really a classy example of Pinot Blanc. 2018-2025? **91.**

2016 Pinot Auxerrois “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The 2016 Pinot Auxerrois “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Albert Mann is really a lovely bottle, with deep and generous fruit tones, a fine base of soil and plenty of length and grip on the wide open palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of peach, a touch of pineapple, citrus zest, musky floral tones and a complex base of soil elements. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core, good mineral undertow, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a tad riper than the Pinot Blanc, coming in at thirteen percent, and seems to have just a touch of

residual sweetness on the backend, but it is a lovely example and will drink beautifully for at least the next five to seven years. 2018-2025. **91.**

2016 Pinot Blanc “Auxerrois Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Schoffit

The Pinot Blanc “Auxerrois Vieilles Vignes” from Bernard Schoffit has traditionally been one of my favorite bottlings of this varietal, but my bottle of the 2016 performed a bit strangely. I would not say that there was any TCA issue here, but I did not deem the bottle sound, as the backend showed this odd, slightly rubbery, slightly charcoal element on the short, clipped finish, so something was amiss. I will try to get another bottle and re-taste the wine when the Weinbach and Trimbach wines come in, as this was clearly not representative.



2016 OX (Pinot Auxerrois)- Domaine Trapet d'Alsace (screwcap)

Andrée Trapet and her husband, Jean-Louis share duties at Andrée's family's domaine in Riquewihr, so the husband and wife team spend a fair bit of time on the autoroute between Gevrey-Chambertin and Alsace. Today, Domaine Trapet d'Alsace is directed by Andrée Trapet, who has introduced biodynamic farming methods to her family's fine bevy of vineyards and sought to make classic, dry-styled Alsace wines that retain fidelity to their underlying *terroirs*. The 2016 OX is raised in a combination of older casks and cement eggs and offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, peach, spring flowers, lovely soil tones, citrus peel and a bit of stone dust elements in the upper register (from the cement eggs?). On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core, good soil signature, bright acids and fine

focus and grip on the quite dry finish. Texturally, I can already sense a touch of compromise from the screwcap, but the wine will drink very nicely over at least the next few years. That said, it is a serious example of Pinot Auxerrois and truly deserves a natural cork. 2018-2022+? **89.**

2015 Pinot Blanc- Domaine Pfister

Mélanie Pfister's Pinot Blanc bottling is roughly a fifty-fifty split of Pinot Auxerrois and Pinot Blanc. It is raised in stainless steel and given almost a full year of *élevage*, prior to bottling right before the next harvest. The 2015 Pinot Blanc cuvée is showing beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, tangerine, chalky minerality, white flowers and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and really soil-driven for this varietal, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and very classy finish. The 2014 is more open for current drinking, and it would not be a bad idea to let this 2015 rest in the cellar another year and completely blossom. Very serious juice for this two varietals. 2018-2035. **91.**

2015 Pinot Auxerrois “Val St. Gregoire”- Domaine Saint-Rémy

Philippe and Corrine Erhart are the third generation to farm the twenty-four hectares of vines that comprise Domaine Saint-Rémy, including fine parcels in four grand crus: Hengst, Brand, Goldert and Schlossberg. They now do so biodynamically. Their 2015 Pinot Auxerrois “Val St. Gregoire” is a lovely wine from some of their younger vines, as these are only eighteen years of age and planted on granitic soils. The wine offers up the lovely expressiveness of this varietal, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of peach, a touch of fresh pineapple, lovely floral tones, a fine base of soil and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, fine backend minerality, lovely acids and fine focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is 12.5 percent octane and fresh as a daisy. An excellent example of Pinot Auxerrois. 2018-2025. **91.**

2014 Pinot Blanc- Domaine Pfister

Mélanie Pfister's 2014 Pinot Blanc bottling (remember this is half Auxerrois as well) is a lovely and graceful example, offering up a bright and complex nose of peach, apple, spring flowers, lovely soil tones and a faint whisper of savory elements from the Auxerrois. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and completely dry, with a lovely core, good soil signature, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and quite serious finish. This is terrific wine in full bloom, but with the structure to continue to age nicely. 2018-2028. **91.**

2014 Pinot Auxerrois- Domaine Albert Seltz

The 2014 Pinot Auxerrois from Domaine Albert Seltz is quite a ripe example of this grape, coming in at a hefty 14.5 percent octane. The wine shows its ripeness on the nose, offering up a rather blustery blend of peach, sweet corn, tropical flowers, and a bit of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and long, with a good core and fine length and grip. The wine lacks precision on both the nose and palate at this level of ripeness, but is not hot on the backend and reasonably well-balanced. I would love to see this in a vintage with lower alcohol, just to get a better sense of the cuvée's cut and shape. 2018-2022. **86.**

Sylvaner and Chasselas

2016 Sylvaner “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Henry Fuchs

Paul Fuchs took over the family domaine in Ribeauvillé from his father Henry a few years ago and has moved the estate's farming over to certified organic viticulture. His old vine

bottling of Sylvaner is made from a parcel of sixty year-old vines that are grown on a cool, clay-based site. The 2016 version is nicely ripe at thirteen percent and offers up a very minerally bouquet of lemon, lime, a touch of menthol, very complex, wet stone minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with plenty of mineral dusty soil tones, good acids and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is really an outstanding example of Sylvaner. 2018-2030+. **91.**

2016 Chasselas “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Schoffit

Bernard Schoffit’s parcel of Chasselas was planted in 1940 on a gravelly bed of alluvial soil deposits in Colmar, making this probably the oldest plot of Chasselas in all of Alsace. This has always been one of his great “insider” wines and the 2016 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a very expressive blend of white peach, pear, a hint of guava, beautiful soil tones and a topnote of musky summer flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and succulent at the core, with excellent focus and grip, a nice touch of residual sweetness and a long, bouncy and vibrant finish. This is a flat out delicious wine, but decidedly off-dry in style in the 2016 vintage. 2018-2030. **92.**

2016 Sylvaner de Mittelbergheim- Domaine Albert Seltz

The 2016 Sylvaner de Mittelbergheim from Albert Seltz is nicely ripe for this varietal, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of tart pear, bread fruit, stony minerality, dried flowers and a bit of straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a plump core of fruit, good acids and a long, ripe and fairly complex finish. This is a very well-made example of Sylvaner. 2018-2030. **88.**

2011 Sylvaner Vieilles Vignes “Sono Contento”- Domaine Albert Seltz

The 2011 old vine bottling of Sylvaner “Sono Contento” from Albert Seltz is a ripe wine, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and also carrying a touch more than ten grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is aging very gracefully and offers up a fine nose of pineapple, a good base of wet stone minerality, a touch of *Chablisienne* straw, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a bit of backend heat, fairly modest sweetness at age seven and very good length and grip on the bright and complex finish. This is too high in alcohol for my tastes, which is too bad, as there are some very good elements of age starting to add layers here, but it is fairly hot on the backend. 2018-2028. **83.**

2010 Sylvaner Vieilles Vignes “Zotzenberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Seltz

Albert Seltz’s 2010 Sylvaner bottling from the grand cru of “Zotzenberg” is even higher in octane than the Sono Contento 2011, coming in listed a full fifteen percent alcohol! I do not have any information on its level of residual sugar, but this seems like it has a fair amount. The nose is deep and surprisingly complex at this octane level, offering up scents of marinated peach and pineapple, a bit of guava, discreet soil tones and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly marked by residual sugar, but with good depth at the core, still sound acids and a fair bit of backend heat on the long finish. This seems like a Vendanges Tardives bottling in style, but it is not marked as such on the label. Monsieur Seltz is a huge proponent of Sylvaner and was the driving force behind allowing the grape to be bottled as Grand Cru when hailing from grand cru vineyards, but I have a hard time understanding his passion in the context of this particular wine, as the sweetness and the heat are rather discordant. 2018-2025+? **83.**

Pinot Gris

2016 Pinot Gris- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The 2016 Pinot Gris from Domaine Albert Mann is a fairly ripe customer, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but in this age of global warming, that is pretty moderate for Pinot Gris. The wine is very stylish, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, apple, a touch of wheat, fresh almond, gentle smokiness and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, very good complexity and a bit of backend residual sugar on the long and classy finish. This is all too easy to drink out of the blocks, but should age nicely over the mid-term. 2018-2025. **89.**

2016 Pinot Gris “Rosenberg”- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

The 2016 Pinot Gris “Rosenberg” from Maurice and Jacky Barthelmé comes in at the same octane as the straight Pinot Gris bottling, but the wine is quite a bit more soil-driven on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of apple, white peach, a touch of tangerine, a complex base of soil, gentle, sweet nutty elements and white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and a touch more reserved than the entry level bottling, with a lovely core, good acids and fine focus and grip on the poised and promising finish. This is tasty now, albeit, still pretty primary, and more complexity is bound to arrive with a bit of patience. Fine and quite elegant Pinot Gris, not to mention a touch drier than the above wine. 2018-2035. **90+.**

2016 Pinot Gris “Furstentum” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

The 2016 Pinot Gris “Furstentum” from Domaine Albert Mann is an outstanding young wine, offering up marvelous soil complexity under a veil of pristine fruit and excellent structural elements. The first class nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tangerine, apple, lovely limestone minerality, citrus blossoms and a whisper of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and plenty deep at the core, with outstanding balance, nascent complexity and a very, very long and classy finish. This carries a bit of backend residual sugar as well, though less than the basic bottling and the wine has more than enough mineral drive to counter balance the touch of sweetness. A fine young bottle of Pinot Gris. 2020-2045+. **93.**

2016 Pinot Gris “Hengst” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

The Barthelmés’ 2016 Pinot Gris from the great grand cru vineyard of Hengst is a brilliant wine in the making. This is a bit more reserved than the Furstentum Pinot Gris, but perhaps just a bit more promising for the long haul, as it offers up beautiful precision in its bouquet of white peach, apple, gentle nuttiness, gorgeous, chalky minerality and a floral topnote discreetly redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, vibrant and full-bodied, with outstanding depth in the mid-palate, exquisite focus and grip, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and moderately sweet finish. I have the strong sensation that the limestone minerality here are going to suck up the impression of residual sweetness with extended bottle age, and this wine is going to end up being absolutely stellar. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane, and given the choice between fermenting it up another point or leaving some residual sugar, I like the Barthelmé brother’s strategy to leave a bit of sweetness and let time work its magic. This is very lovely to drink now, if you do not mind a bit of sweetness, but it will cruise along for a very long time and will give the perception of much more dryness eight to ten years down the road. 2018-2045+. **93+.**



The Barthelmé family of Domaine Albert Mann in their vineyards.

2015 Pinot Gris “Tradition”- Domaine Pfister

The 2015 Pinot Gris “Tradition” from Domaine Pfister is one of the riper wines that I tasted from Mélanie, but still quite reasonable for this varietal, as it comes in at 13.5 percent octane in this ripe vintage. The wine is lovely, offering up a complex and quite expressive bouquet of peach, orange, lovely soil tones, a bit of wheat chaff and a potpourri of gently musky spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite dry, with a lovely core, good mineral undertow, a still fairly primary personality, good acids and fine length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This needs some time to blossom, but it will be excellent once it has started to stir from behind its fine structural elements. 2020-2040. **91+**.

2015 Pinot Gris “Im Berg”- Domaine Saint-Rémy

Philippe Erhart also leaves his Pinot Gris “Im Berg” bottling on its fines lees for six to eight months after its initial racking, but he does not practice *battonage* on this wine and the precision it exhibits on both the nose and palate is testament to this. The wine is nicely ripe at thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a classic nose of apple, peach, wheat, a touch of nuttiness, lovely soil elements and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely vibrant, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, lovely grip and length and a complex, classy finish. Fine juice. 2018-2030+. **91+**.

Riesling

2017 Riesling- Domaine Paul Blanck (Screwcap)

The 2017 Riesling from Domaine Paul Blanck is a perfectly serviceable glass of Riesling, but seems rather stuck in neutral on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a mix of apple, a touch of pink grapefruit, stony soil tones and petrol. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and quite solid at the core, with good acids, but a rather simple and clipped finish. My gut instinct here is that a good wine has been lost to its closure already. 2018-2023? **85.**

2017 Riesling “les Fossiles”- Domaine Mittnacht Frères (Screwcap)

The 2017 Riesling “les Fossiles” from Domaine Mittnacht Frères is a good young wine, offering up a bright and youthful bouquet of apple, a touch of tangerine, petrol, salty minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core and soil signature, bright acids, but already there is a touch of pinching on the backend from the closure and the finish is decidedly short. I like the raw materials here quite well, but this seems already (even at this early age), starting to succumb to reduction issues and will need to be drunk with serious alacrity. A pity it is not under cork, but if you decant it now for fifteen to twenty minutes before serving, the wine is quite tasty. But, do not bury it in the cellar! 2018-2020? **86.**

2016 Riesling- Domaine Henry Fuchs

Paul Fuchs “regular” bottling of Riesling all hails from Ribeauvillé vineyards, which are cooler than those in many of the villages surrounding the town. The average age of vines for this bottling is forty-five years-old. The 2016 version is a lovely young wine, offering up a nascently complex nose of apple, tart orange, lovely, chalky soil tones, petrol, dried flowers and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite dry in profile, with a superb core of fruit, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very promising finish. I have no problem drinking this wine today, but it is built for the cellar and will show more complexity when its next layer of nuances have emerged five years down the road. Impressive juice. 2018-2045. **91.**

2016 Riesling “Hagel”- Domaine Henry Fuchs

The granitic vineyard of Hagel lies up above the grand cru of Kirchberg, and though it is not particularly well-known, it is a great *terroir* for Riesling. The 2016 Hagel from Monsieur Fuchs comes in at a very refined 12.5 percent alcohol and delivers beautiful aromatic complexity in its blend of apple, pear, wild yeasts, superb, stony minerality, dried flowers and a discreet topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is young, crisp and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a young Riesling that is less expressive on the palate than the nose suggest, and the wine needs a good four or five years in the cellar to really start to blossom. It should prove to be very long-lived and excellent once it is ready to drink. While giving it time to open up, why not drink Monsieur Fuchs’ excellent “regular” Riesling from 2016? 2023-2045. **92+.**

2016 Riesling “Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé”- Domaine Henry Fuchs

The Riesling “Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé” from Paul Fuchs hails from forty-five to fifty year-old vines that are planted up at the top of the hill of Kirchberg, in one of the coolest section of the vineyard. The 2016 Kirchberg delivers a superb bouquet of apple, sweet grapefruit, wild yeasts, just a whisper of petrol, white flowers, complex minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and deep at the core, with great mineral drive, bright, snappy

acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and perfectly balanced and bone dry finish. This is a long distance runner that is so superbly balanced out of the blocks that it is very easy to drink, but this really deserves extended bottle age to allow it to really blossom completely. Stunning juice! 2023-2060. **94.**

2016 Riesling “Cuvée Albert”- Domaine Albert Mann (screwcap)

I can understand (though not support) the rationale behind putting Pinot Blanc in screwcap, but I would love one of the Barthelmé brothers to draw the line when it comes to Riesling, as this wine is lovely and would age long and gracefully under natural cork! The Cuvée Albert is the entry level Riesling here, hailing from thirty-five year-old vines in the vineyards of Rosenberg in Wettelsheim and Altenbourg in Kienthzeim. The 2016 version offers up a lovely nose of apple, pear, a hint of pink grapefruit, gentle notes of petrol, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and wide open in personality, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is drinking nicely in its youth, but has the potential to age quite well. 2018-2035. **90+.**

2016 Riesling “Tradition”- Domaine Pfister

The 2016 Riesling “Tradition” from Domaine Pfister is very classy and absolutely awash in it is limestone soil element, as the bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of apple, tart orange, petrol, a beautiful base of chalky minerality, a touch of citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, chalky and still quite youthful, with a superb core, great backend minerality, brisk acids and outstanding focus and grip on the nascently complex and very promising finish. This needs some time to blossom, but is going to be excellent in due course and is a superb value! 2022-2050. **93.**

2016 Riesling “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Saint-Rémy

Philippe Erhart’s 2016 Riesling “Vieilles Vignes” is a nicely cool and racy wine, tipping the scales at a very civilized 12.5 percent octane and offering up a really lovely nose of apple, white peach, petrol, a good base of soil tones, a bit of leesiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty muscular in style, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This wine spends six to nine months after racking on its fine lees, with *battonage* done once a month, and this practice seems to have robbed the wine of some of Riesling’s customary purity and precision. The raw materials here are quite good, but the *battonage* has got to go! 2018-2030. **86.**

2016 Riesling Tradition “Lieu à Dit Harth”- Domaine Schoffit

The 2016 Riesling “Harth” from Domaine Schoffit comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely, ripe bouquet of apple, white peach, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a juicy core of fruit, good mineral drive, lovely acids and grip and a long, youthful finish. This is a lovely wine in the making, but it is still a tad youthful and I would decant it for fifteen minutes before serving, if I were inclined to drink it sooner, as this allows the wine to open up nicely. 2018-2040+. **91.**

2016 Riesling “Rangen Clos Saint-Théobald”- Domaine Schoffit

I love the *terroir* of the vineyard of Rangen, and before the era of global warming, this was probably my favorite vineyard in all of Alsace, alongside that of Clos Ste. Hune. But, it is a warmer microclimate and I feel something was lost here as the earth heated up, so some of the racy and mineral precision one could find in Rangen bottlings from the 1980s simply cannot be replicated today. But, Bernard Schoffit continues to make wines loaded with personality from the

Rangen, with his 2016 version coming in at a ripe, but balanced 13.5 percent octane and offering up an extroverted nose of tangerine, guava, beautiful minerality, a lovely, resinous touch of fresh rosemary and musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and moderately sweet, with a fine core, sound framing acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. There is a nice finishing touch of citrus peel bitterness on the backend here that I really like, as it contrasts very nicely with the ripe fruit tones. This will be best drunk up in its relative youth, as the acids are not particularly snappy, but there is a lot to like here right now! 2018-2035. **93.**

2016 Riesling “Sommerberg”- Domaine Schoffit

The 2016 Riesling “Sommerberg” from Bernard Schoffit comes in nicely cool at twelve percent alcohol and carries only about six grams per liter of residual sugar, making for an essentially dry impression on the palate. The nose is still quite primary and reserved, but with a bit of swirling offers up scents of apple, peach, a touch of petrol, lovely minerality and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, young and full-bodied, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, bright acids and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is a young buck and needs several years in the cellar to start to blossom. 2023-2055+. **92.**

2016 Riesling- Domaine Albert Seltz

The 2016 Riesling from Albert Seltz is nicely cool in this vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up lovely purity in its aromatic constellation of apple, sweet grapefruit, a touch of petrol, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a bit of incipient orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent, with a lovely core, excellent balance and grip and a long, classy and nicely soil-driven finish. This is only the basic level bottling of Riesling from Monsieur Seltz, but it is excellent and will age long and gracefully. 2018-2035. **91.**

2015 Riesling “Schlossberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Paul Blanck

Domaine Paul Blanck’s 2015 bottling of Riesling from the superb Schlossberg vineyard is excellent, coming in at thirteen percent octane and bone dry in profile. The youthful bouquet wafts from the glass in a very promising blend of grapefruit, apple, petrol, wet stone minerality, lemongrass, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nascently complex and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, fine, racy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and still fairly primary finish. This is certainly approachable today, but its ultimate complexity is still waiting in the wings and will not show itself for another three to five years. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2045. **93.**

2015 Riesling de Riquewihr- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The 2015 Riesling de Riquewihr from Andrée and Jean-Louis Trapet is a lovely bottle in the making, coming in at very refined 12.5 percent octane and still fermented quite dry in style. The bouquet is still youthful and a tad reserved, but with a bit of swirling offers up scents of apple, sweet grapefruit, discreet notes of petrol, lovely minerality, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely racy in profile, with a fine core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long, balanced and nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but really still a puppy and deserves two or three years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. It is very well-balanced and should age long and gracefully and will probably peak ten to twelve years from now. 2018-2040. **91+.**

2014 Riesling “Tradition”- Domaine Pfister

The 2014 Riesling “Tradition” bottling from Domaine Pfister is from their holdings in the vineyard of Silberberg, which used to appear on the label, but the name was changed in 2011 (primarily to cut down on paperwork). The vineyard’s *terroir* is *argile-calcaire* and gives wines of great structure for cellaring. Mélanie Pfister’s 2014 bottling is outstanding, coming in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and delivering a superb aromatic constellation of apple, kiwi, complex, limestone minerality, petrol, a whisper of leesy complexity and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and extremely mineral-infused, with a lovely core, excellent cut and grip and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This has the structure that reminds me of young Cuvée Frédéric Émile, in a more streamlined profile! Outstanding juice. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2014 Riesling “Engelberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Pfister (Vinolok)

Mélanie Pfister’s 2014 Riesling “Engelberg” is a superb bottle of classic, minerally and completely dry Riesling that is still a puppy and in need of some time alone in the cellar to blossom properly. But, once it has had a chance to open up, it is going to be a great bottle of wine. The bouquet today is still quite primary, offering up a promising constellation of apple, tart orange, petrol, complex, limestone minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core, great mineral drive and a very long, still closed and vibrant finish. The focus and balance here are impeccable and all this lovely wine needs is some time alone in the cellar. 2022-2050+. **93.**



These are the labels from Domaine Pfister. Demand your local merchant orders them- they are stunning wines!

2013 Riesling “Engelberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Pfister (Vinolok)

The 2013 Riesling “Engelberg” from Mélanie Pfister is another absolutely stellar, bone dry Riesling. The vineyard of Engelberg has long been the most famous in Dahlenheim (still extant written praise dates back to 884 AD!), with its south-facing exposition and thin topsoil over a profound base of limestone rock. The 2013 Engelberg offers up beautiful aromatic complexity in its bouquet of apple, white peach, petrol, wild yeasts, a myriad of limestone elements, dried flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a rock solid core, stunning backend mineral drive, a fine girdle of acidity and a very, very long, complex and truly scintillating finish. This is a very, very elegant and minerally example of Riesling from a beautiful *terroir*. 2018-2040. **94+**.

2013 Riesling “Hengst” Grand Cru- Domaine Saint-Rémy

The 2013 Riesling “Hengst” from Domaine Saint-Rémy is a pretty buxom example of this varietal, coming in at a nicely ripe 13.5 percent and offering up plenty of generosity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers scents of tangerine, pink grapefruit, petrol, lovely minerality, a bit of the Hengst vineyard’s signature fresh rosemary and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly broad-shouldered, with plenty of mid-palate concentration, fine focus and grip, good soil signature and a long, balanced and fairly powerful finish. This is a more muscular style of Riesling and it carries this off well, but I have never thought that this was the greatest stylistic strength of this grape. Not bad at all, but I would have loved to have seen it in a more finesseful expression of this great *terroir*. 2018-2030+. **89**.

2013 Riesling de Riquewihr- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

Andrée and Jean-Louis Trapet’s 2013 Riesling de Riquewihr is a very pretty wine, coming in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offering up stylish bouquet of apple, grapefruit, petrol, a lovely base of soil and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and full-bodied, with vibrant acids, lovely focus and grip, a good core and a long, bouncy and nicely mineral finish. This is a very lovely wine. 2017-2025+. **90**.

2012 Riesling “Zotzenberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Seltz

The 2012 Riesling “Zotzenberg” from Albert Seltz is raised in a combination of stainless steel tanks, old *foudres* and *barrique*. The 2012 version is a ripe lad, delivering a full 14.5 percent octane blow. The nose is ripe, but also very nicely precise, offering up scents of apple, pineapple, a touch of petrol, lovely minerality, white flowers and a bit of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe, with a plush core, fine mineral undertow, good focus and grip and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and complex finish. A point lower in alcohol and this would have been outstanding, rather than quite good. Still, for 14.5 percent, this really is admirably focused and minerally. 2018-2030f. **88**.

2011 Riesling de Riquewihr- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

I really liked the 2011 Riesling de Riquewihr from Andrée Trapet, which showed a touch more depth and length and the very good 2013 version. This is from granitic soils and it shows in the mineral drive here, as the nose offers up scents of apple, tangerine, petrol, citrus peel and a fine base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and long, with lovely cut and grip, a fine core and a long, complex and nicely mineral finish. Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **91+**.

2011 Riesling “Bebenheim”- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The Riesling “Bebenheim” from Domaine Trapet d’Alsace is from a parcel of very old vines that are planted on clay and limestone soils in this vineyard. The 2011 version is very good and shows plenty of chalkiness in its aromatic and flavor profiles, with the bouquet offering up scents of apple, sweet grapefruit, orange peel, petrol and limestone soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and carries a bit of residual sweetness on the backend, with good focus and grip and a long, complex and succulent finish. This is a very good wine, but I prefer the cut of the slightly drier Riquewihr bottling in 2011. 2016-2022+. **89+**.

2011 Riesling “Schlossberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

To date, the 2011 Riesling Schlossberg from Andrée and Jean-Louis Trapet is the finest wine I have tasted from their family domaine in Alsace. The stellar bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of lemon, apple, petrol, orange peel, a touch of lemongrass and a beautiful base of Schlossberg’s stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an excellent core, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, very pure and classic finish. Great juice. 2016-2030+. **94**.

2011 Riesling “Schoenenbourg” Grand Cru- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The *terroir* of the grand cru of Schoenenbourg is again, *argilo-calcaire*, rather than granite, so we have a very different expression of Riesling here. The wine is beautiful on the nose in 2011, offering up a complex blend of tangerine, peach, petrol, tons of chalky soil elements, a touch of balsam bough and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch sweet, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and succulent finish. This is another really lovely 2011 Riesling, albeit, stylistically, I prefer the slightly drier Schlossberg. But, the difference in absolute quality between the two is quite small. 2016-2025. **93**.

2009 Riesling “Sporen” Grand Cru- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The 2009 Riesling “Sporen” from Andrée and Jean-Louis Trapet is a marvelous wine. It is quite wide open and ready to drink today, offering up scents of apple, tangerine, a touch of papaya in this riper vintage, great minerality, petrol and candied citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and richer in profile than Jean-Louis’ 2011 grand cru Rieslings, with broader shoulders, but still excellent focus, cut and grip on the long and complex finish. This is very precise for a 2009 Riesling and is most impressive! 2016-2025. **93**.

2007 Riesling “Sommerberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Schoffit

Bernard Schoffit is best known for his superb Rangen de Than bottling, but his grand cru Sommerberg is also excellent. He has forty year-old vines in this granitic *terroir* and his 2007 continues to drink quite nicely, but it is nearing the far side of its plateau and is probably best drunk up in the not too distant future. The bouquet today offers up a fine, tertiary blend of apricot, a touch of guava, honeycomb, good minerality, a touch of new leather and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly sweeter in style, with a good core of ripe fruit, moderate acids and a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long and mature finish. Good juice, but it was probably a bit livelier a few years back. 2017-2025+. **87**.

2001 Riesling “Brand” Grand Cru- Albert Boxler

The 2001 Boxler Riesling “Brand” continues to drink very nicely and has aged very gracefully. The bouquet offers up a lovely, mature mix of tangerine, pink grapefruit, petrol, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite zesty, with a good core, impressive acidity, good focus and lovely length and grip on the *à point* finish. This has the broader shoulders of the Brand vineyard (compared to the Boxler family’s other grand cru Riesling, the Sommerberg), but has aged quite elegantly and is now at its peak and drinking quite nicely. 2017-2035+. **92.**



1998 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach

This particular bottle of 1998 Clos Ste. Hune had aged beautifully and was at its peak when drunk a couple of months ago, with no signs of premox to be found on either the nose or palate. The *à point* nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of green fruit, chalky minerality, orange peel, petrol and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine mineral drive, good acids and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Lovely juice at its zenith. 2017-2030+. **93.**

1996 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach

While I have had my share of premoxed bottles of 1996 Cuvée Frédéric Émile, this particular bottle was still quite fresh and showed very well. The nose is bright and vibrant,

offering up scents of lemon, pineapple, petrol, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and bouncy, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and impressive focus and grip on the slightly short finish. It is only the length on the backend that keeps the score down a bit (and which is a presage of oncoming premox in my book), as otherwise, this wine was everything one could have asked for in a twenty-one year-old bottle of Cuvée Frédéric Émile from a top vintage. But, having owned two cases of this wine at one time in my cellar, I can certainly state that this wine was never short on the finish in its youth and this bottle's shortness was the first sign that premox was imminent. But, at this age, one is lucky to find bottles drinking still this well and we had no trouble draining it promptly! 2017-2023+? **91.**

1995 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)

The 1995 vintage of Cuvée Frédéric Émile was absolutely brilliant in its youth and destined to be one of the greatest Freds produced by the Trimbachs in the last fifty years, but the issue of premox has plagued it since its tenth or twelfth birthday and one is never quite sure what one is going to find when opening up a bottle or magnum. Happily, this magnum was utterly pristine and a great pleasure to drink, as it offers up a bright and vibrant bouquet of apple, tangerine, petrol, salty limestone minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and now at its apogee at age twenty-three, with excellent cut and delineation, bright acids and plenty of grip on the long, complex and zesty finish. Fine, fine juice! 2018-2050. **95.**

1993 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)

The 1993 vintage of Cuvée Frédéric Émile has always been one of the strongest of the decade of the 1990s, vying with the 1995 and 1996 as the finest of this ten years, and the wine has happily seemed to avoid the long shadow of premox, which seems to have started to affect the wines from Maison Trimbach starting with the 1994 vintage. This most recent magnum of the 1993 was stellar, delivering a beautiful bouquet of apple, petrol, orange peel, a touch of menthol, sea salts, chalky minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and sports lovely mid-palate depth, with fine bounce and grip, lovely backend mineral drive and a very long, complex and *à point* finish. This is gorgeous and seems ten years behind in evolution from the very good 1992 version. 2017-2040. **94.**

1993 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)

The 1993 Clos Ste. Hune is certainly a bit of a stylistic outlier from the vast majority of vintages of this great bottling, as the wine ended up going through malolactic fermentation. This always took a bit of its appeal away for me, as it is not a classic expression of this great *terroir*, but the wine has continued to age nicely and is drinking quite well today in its rather unfamiliar guise. The nose offers up a creamy impression in its mélange of grapefruit, tangerine, white soil tones, spring flowers and a nice touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite round on the attack (from the malo), with a fine core of fruit, discreetly snappy acids and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This does not have the same precision and detail as a normal vintage of Clos Ste. Hune, without the malolactic fermentation elements, but it is a good, full wine that is drinking very nicely. 2018-2030. **91.**

1992 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)

I was able to drink this magnum alongside of the 1995 at a recent tasting in April of this year and it was fascinating to see how much more maturity the 1992 was showing at the present time. This is a very good vintage of Cuvée Frédéric Émile that drank well from a fairly early age for this bottling and continues to show very nicely in full maturity out of magnum, offering up a lovey, nutty bouquet of petrol, backed peach, chalky soil tones, orange peel, a touch of barely and a topnote of walnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely tertiary in its complexity, with a good core, still very fine acidity and lovely length and grip on the poised and bouncy finish. Though this is now into its latter stages of development, it continues to have plenty of structural integrity and will drink well for many years to come. 2018-2035+. **91.**

1990 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach

The 1990 Cuvée Frédéric Émile is nicely into its plateau of peak maturity and drinking very well at age twenty-seven. The bouquet is bright, complex and expressive, delivering scents of apple, petrol, salty soil tones, orange peel and a gentle topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and *à point*, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, poised and zesty finish. I have liked this wine since day one and it continues to have plenty of life still ahead of it. 2017-2035+. **94.**

1990 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” Sélection des Grands Nobles- Maison Trimbach

The 1990 Cuvée Frédéric Émile SGN is drinking beautifully today and has many years of life still ahead of it. The bouquet is bright and wide open, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of orange, apricot, honey, a touch of petrol, incipient notes of leather and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with lovely mid-palate concentration, sound framing acids and good soil signature poking out on the long and complex finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2035. **93.**

1990 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach

The 1990 vintage of Clos Ste. Hune has always been one of my absolute favorites and the wine has aged very nicely, though I have the impression that it is still climbing in quality and has not yet quite reached its peak. The beautifully ripe and pure bouquet offers up scents of tangerine, a bit of yellow plums, petrol, chalky minerality, other pit fruit, citrus peel, dried flowers and a touch of upper register menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, lovely complexity, zesty acids and beautiful breed and bounce on the long and classic finish. A great wine. 2017-2040+. **96.**

1989 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune” Vendanges Tardive- Maison Trimbach

The 1989 Clos Ste. Hune VT is now into its peak and drinking with marvelous complexity and breed. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a slightly exotic, glazed constellation of tangerine, guava, petrol, a beautiful base of white soil tones, honeycomb, botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and grip, bright acids and impeccable balance on the very, very long and zesty finish. A great wine that has emerged from its slightly muscle-bound adolescence to show the elegance and limestone signature of a great vintage of Clos Ste. Hune. 2018-2050. **96+.**

1989 Riesling “Herrenweg Turkheim”- Domaine Zind-Humbrecht

The 1989 Riesling “Herrenweg Turkheim” from Zind-Humbrecht is fully mature, but still drinking nicely and with a fair bit of life ahead of it. The beautifully aged nose offers up scents of petrol, apple, orange peel, salty soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate

the wine is pure, full-bodied and now a touch low in acidity, with a solid core, fine tertiary complexity and good length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice from an era where ZH still produced drier styled wines. 2016-2026. **90.**

1988 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach

The 1988 vintage of Clos Ste. Hune is one of my favorites for current consumption, as the wine is at its peak of maturity today. The bouquet is simply superb, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of grapefruit, tangerine, a touch of menthol, beautifully complex, chalky soil tones, a nice, pure touch of botanicals and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth and soil signature, bright, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the long and seamless finish. Just a beautiful vintage of Clos Ste. Hune. 2017-2035+. **95.**



Gewurztraminer

2016 Gewurztraminer- Domaine Albert Mann (Screwcap)

The 2016 Gewurztraminer from Domaine Albert Mann is a lovely bottle of wine, coming in nicely ripe at 13.5 percent alcohol, but still retaining an excellent spine of acidity and backend mineral lift. The bouquet is pretty and inviting, delivering a fine blend of lychee nut, peach, rosewater, lovely minerality and a topnote citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite dry in profile, with a lovely core, good focus and grip and a long, well-balanced

finish. This manages its octane quite well and is really a very tasty bottle of dry, wide open Gewurztraminer for fairly near-term consumption. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2016 Gewurztraminer “Furstentum” Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Mann

Interestingly, the 2016 Furstentum Gewurztraminer V.V. is a half point lower in octane than the Pinot Gris bottling from this grand cru, coming in at a poised thirteen percent. The wine is flat out stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a very refined blend of pineapple, lychee nut, rosewater, lovely limestone minerality, just a touch of meatiness and a gently savory topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, a fair bit of residual sweetness, sound framing acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. This is another Domaine Mann grand cru bottling where I have the sense the perception of residual sweetness will diminish with bottle age, as there is a very nice touch of bitterness on the backend. It is fairly sweet right now, though this beautifully balanced by minerality, and though it is delicious to drink out of the blocks, I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar and let time work its transformation, as I will like it even better when it seems a touch less sweet in style. 2018-2040. **93+.**

2016 Gewurztraminer “Steingrubler” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Man

The 2016 Gewurztraminer “Steingrubler” from the Barthelmé brothers is plenty ripe in personality, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up an extroverted bouquet of tangerine, pineapple, a touch of rosewater, spices meats, exotic spice tones and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and fairly soft in acidity, with a lovely core of fruit, good length and grip and modest sweetness perking up the backend. This is very tasty, but clearly this was a vintage where one had to balance considerations of how much residual sweetness and how much alcohol to settle on for the balance of the wine, as the grapes had plenty of sugar. It has ended up quite nicely, but will be a wine that is best in its relative youth, as it does not have the cut and grip to make old bones. 2018-2025. **90.**

2016 Gewurztraminer “Tradition”- Domaine Pfister

Mélanie Pfister’s 2016 Gewurztraminer “Tradition” bottling hails from the limestone-based vineyard of Silberberg, so this tends to be a racier version of this varietal than many in Alsace. The 2016 version comes in at a ripe, but balanced, 13.5 percent octane and delivers lovely aromatic purity in its youthfully vibrant blend of lychee nuts, tangerine, spiced meats, a touch of balsam bough, lovely minerality and a topnote of rosewater. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite dry, with a rock solid core, superb backend mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the exuberant finish. This is superb, but still youthful, and I would opt for letting it settle in and show some secondary layers of complexity with some bottle age. It is a bit more powerful in personality than the stellar 2013 version (please see below), but it is clearly cut from the same stylistic cloth and will be a lovely bottle when it blossoms. 2020-2040+. **92.**

2016 Gewurztraminer “Herrenweg”- Domaine Saint-Rémy

The 2016 Gewurztraminer “Herrenweg” from Domaine Saint-Rémy is a lovely example, coming in at thirteen percent octane and offering up a fine bouquet of apple, lychee nuts, fresh rosemary, spiced meats, rosewater and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly muscular in style, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and impressive grip on the long and still fairly youthful finish. This will age long and gracefully and is quite impressive, with plenty of pleasure to be had at the present time and a fine future

ahead of it. It is not the most finesseful example one can find, but it is a very, very good bottle of Gewurztraminer! 2018-2040. **92.**

2015 Gewurztraminer de Riquewihr- Domaine Trapet d'Alsace

The 2015 Gewurztraminer de Riquewihr from Andrée and Jean-Louis Trapet is a ripe and nicely precise wine on both the nose and palate. The alcohol level is listed in a range from eleven to fourteen percent, but I would guess this is at least 13.5 percent octane in this ripe vintage. The bouquet is really lovely, offering up a youthful and quite mineral blend of sweet grapefruit, apple, stony minerality, a touch of spices meats, a bit of fresh rosemary and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, nicely mineral, with a rock solid core, fine cut and grip, nascent complexity and fine balance on the long, ripe and fairly powerful finish. This has been fermented quite dry and is fairly muscular out of the blocks as a result, but it has fine constituent components and all it needs is some bottle age to blossom properly. 2021-2045. **90+.**

2014 Gewurztraminer “Hengst” Grand Cru- Domaine Saint-Rémy

The grand cru vineyard of Hengst is often one of my favorites for Gewurztraminer and Philippe Erhart has vines that average thirty-five years of age here. This bottling comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and carries about five grams per liter of residual sugar. It delivers lovely aromatics of lychee nut, tangerine, lovely spice tones, a bit of rosemary oil, complex minerality and a bit of musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite complex, with a good core of fruit, slightly low acids, fine focus and grip and a long, ripe and very tasty finish. For my own palate, I would have liked it a bit drier in style, but then the octane would have ended up higher, and that is not a desirable tradeoff. This is very good, but probably best drunk over the next several years, as the acids are not all that zesty. 2018-2023+? **89.**

2013 Gewurztraminer “Tradition”- Domaine Pfister

The 2013 Gewurztraminer from Mélanie Pfister is an utterly classic example of this varietal, offering up the precision of the old school in its thirteen percent octane profile. The bouquet is precise and very pure, jumping from the glass in a blend of lychee nut, clementine, a bit of sweet grapefruit, rosewater, lovely spice tones, a hint of meatiness and a superb base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive, beautiful balance and a long, classy and vibrant finish. The acids here are very good, but not racy, and I suspect this will be best over the first ten to twelve years it is in bottle, but it is so well balanced that it may well continue to cruise along far past this window of drinkability. It is a beautiful and very elegant bottle of Gewurztraminer. 2018-2030+. **93.**

2012 Gewurztraminer “Tradition”- Domaine Pfister

Mélanie Pfister's Gewurztraminer vines are all planted in the vineyard of Silberberg, which has not been given grand cru status, but which has traditionally been one of the two greatest vineyards in the village of Dahlenheim, where the domaine is situated. The soils here are limestone, which is a fairly rare foundation for Gewurztraminer and which works beautifully. The wine is fairly ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent, but pure and marvelously refined, offering up a classy nose of apple, lychee, a touch of spiced meats (almost chutney-like), chalky minerality and a topnote of rosewater. On the palate the wine is bright, vibrant and full-bodied, with a

lovely girdle of acidity at age six, a rock solid core, fine mineral drive and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. The closing note has a nice touch of bitterness that I really like at the table. This is a lovely bottle of Gewurztraminer that is into its apogee at six years of age, but has many, many years still in front of it. Fine juice. 2018-2030. **91.**

2011 Gewurztraminer “Zotzenberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Albert Seltz

The 2011 Gewurztraminer “Zotzenberg” from Albert Seltz is a far more civilized octane than some of his top Sylvaner bottlings, coming in at an even thirteen percent and offering up beautiful complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is pure and classy, jumping from the glass in a blend of lychee nuts, lovely resinous spice tones, a touch of German deli meatiness, good soil tones and a topnote of rosewater. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and fairly sweet in style, with a lovely core, good mineral drive, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the fairly well-balanced and complex finish. This carries more residual sugar that I would normally like in my Gewurztraminer, but in the age of global warming, one often has to choose between residual sweetness or high alcohol, and I would prefer the sweetness every time. All in all, a very tasty and complex wine. 2018-2040. **91.**

2011 Gewurztraminer de Riquewihr- Domaine Trapet d’Alsace

The 2011 Gewurztraminer de Riquewihr from Domaine Trapet d’Alsace is a lovely wine. Jean-Louis notes that the section of the vineyard where this is planted has more stones in it and less solid granite than where their Riesling vines are planted. This is a very refined wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of apple, lychee nuts, spiced meats, rosewater, citrus blossoms and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and focused, with a very elegant profile for Gewurztraminer, a good core and fine cut and grip on the shapely finish. Good juice. 2016-2025. **90+.**

1989 Gewurztraminer- Maison Trimbach

This is just the “regular bottling” of Gewurztraminer that Maison Trimbach markets under its well-known yellow label, but the wine has aged far better than I might have ever imagined and was still drinking very nicely in the summer of 2016. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very fresh and vibrant blend of rosewater, spiced meats, lychee and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with a good core and fine length and grip on the seamless finish. There is not a ton of complexity here, but this is after all a blended wine originally made for early consumption and to see it still cruising along nicely at age twenty-seven was rather a fine surprise. 2016-2025+. **89.**

Varietal Blends

2016 Cuvée 8- Domaine Pfister

The Cuvée 8 is the brainchild of Mélanie Pfister and was first produced in the 2005 vintage (five years before she “officially” took over for her father André in the cellars here) and is designed to be a blend that exemplifies the best of a given vintage. The *cépages* is Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer and Muscat, with the percentages varying depending on which varietals have excelled in a given growing season. All the grapes hail from the Silberberg vineyard, with the exception of the Muscat, and each varietal is vinified and raised separately prior to blending. The *cépages* of the 2016 version is fifty percent Riesling, thirty percent Pinot Gris, fifteen percent Gewurztraminer and five percent Muscat. It is a touch lower in alcohol than the 2015 version, coming in this year at an even thirteen percent and offers up a beautiful nose of

apple, tart orange, petrol, limestone minerality, a touch of wheat chaff and a complex, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely bone dry in personality, with a superb core, excellent focus and grip and a long, racy and still quite youthful finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but it needs some bottle age to start to properly blossom. 2021-2050. **92.**

2015 Cuvée 8- Domaine Pfister

The 2015 Cuvée 8 from Mélanie Pfister comes in at 13.5 percent octane and is composed this year of a mix of fifty percent Riesling, thirty percent Pinot Gris, fifteen percent Gewurztraminer and five percent Muscat. The wine offers up a complex bouquet of apple, white peach, petrol, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a whisper of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and quite wide open and succulent, with a fine core, lovely minerality, good acidity and a long, focused and classy finish. It is an interesting blend, as the Riesling defines the nose, but the other varietals are front and center on the palate, adding volume and early appeal. A lovely and complex wine. 2018-2028. **92.**



Pinot Noir

2016 Pinot Noir “Le Rouge Est Mis...”- Domaine Mittnacht Frères

The 2016 Pinot Noir from Domaine Mittnacht Frères is biodynamically farmed and Demeter certified, with this vintage tipping the scales at 12.5 percent octane. The wine is a light ruby in color and offers up a youthful bouquet of cherries, a hint of cranberry, woodsmoke, fresh

herbs, a nice base of soil and a bit of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and fairly tannic, with respectable depth at the core, firm structure and good length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This needs some bottle age to allow the tannins to soften, as there is not the same core of ripe fruit here to buffer them out of the blocks as one would find in many examples of pinot noir from other regions, but the wine is fairly balanced and should be pretty tasty once it has had a chance to let some tannin mellow along the way. 2024-2045. **86+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Rosenberg”- Domaine Saint-Rémy

The 2016 Pinot Noir “Rosenberg” from Domaine Saint-Rémy has a touch of new oak on the nose, but offers up a pretty and nicely balanced nose of cherries, a touch of blueberry, chocolate, stony soil tones and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and focused, with a good core, bright acids, moderate tannins and a bit heavier footprint from the new oak on the backend than is evident on the nose. This does not quite have the stuffing to carry its new wood component seamlessly, but probably will absorb it fully with a bit of bottle age, but the overall effect is to slightly bow the shoulders of the wine on the finish, like a person carrying too heavy a load. 2020-2040. **87**.

2015 Pinot Noir “Rouge comes Renard”- Domaine Henry Fuchs

The 2015 Pinot Noir “Rouge comes Renard” from Henry Fuchs in Ribeauvillé is quite ripe in this vintage, coming in at a full fourteen percent octane. The two parcels of vines here hail from the top of the Kirchberg vineyard (which is mostly clay in this section) and the wine is raised in older Burgundy casks for a year prior to bottling. The wine offers up a fine nose of black cherries, pomegranate, a bit of chocolate, soil, woodsmoke and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nascently complex and moderately tannic, with a good core and soil signature, sound acids and good length and grip on the youthful and gently chewy finish. This needs at least a few years in the cellar to soften up, but should be quite tasty. Structurally, it reminds me a bit of an old school example of Sancerre rouge, albeit, with quite different soil signature. 2021-2040. **87+**.

2014 Pinot Noir “Clos de la Faille”- Domaine Albert Mann

Though the domaine has been producing pinot since the 1993 vintage, this is the first pinot noir bottling I have ever tasted from Maurice and Jacky Barthelmé. It is really quite elegantly styled and promising, but the 2014 will need a few years in the cellar to blossom. The Clos de la Faille vineyard is one *hectare* in size and planted on a base of marly-limestone and sandstone and is farmed biodynamically. The bouquet is pure and very impressive, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, raspberries, a touch of cocoa powder, a fine base of chalky soil tones, roses, gentle spice tones redolent of nutmeg, cedar and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with a good core of fruit, lovely transparency, moderate tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Admittedly, I do not taste a lot of pinot noir from Alsace, but this is by quite some wide margin the most impressive example of this varietal I have ever tasted from the region. All it needs is a few years’ worth of bottle age to blossom properly and it will be a delight to drink. *Chapeau!* 2022-2050. **92+**.

THE ANNUAL LOIRE VALLEY REPORT THE FIRST OF THE 2017s, PLenty OF 2016s AND OLDER WINES



As I look back through recent issues to see what I have covered from the Loire Valley, was quite surprised to see that I had not written my annual feature on the region in general in any of the issues from 2017, in which I would have covered the vast majority of the new releases from the 2016 vintage. The six issues from 2017 had a lot of Loire coverage in them, with domaine profiles of Domaine François Cotat and Domaine Gérard Bouley in Chavignol, both red and white features on Domaine Clos Rougeard in Saumur-Champigny, as well as a second part on the 2015 Loire vintage and lots of mature Chinon to start out 2017 in the January-February issue of that year. But, somehow I overlooked the general report on the region which would have included the lion's share of new releases from the 2016 vintage in the Loire Valley. This oversight was completely out of character, as I try to cover Loire wines with great frequency and I find them some of the most satisfying wines in the entire world of wine and they grace my table with great regularity. However, despite lots of historical pieces on some of the top estates in the region during the calendar year of 2017, the broader report got lost in the shuffle. My apologies. I did touch upon the growing season of 2016 a bit when I reviewed the releases from Domaine Huët from that vintage on their own, but the general article managed to fall through the cracks.

No wonder I received so many Loire samples from that vintage, in addition to the new 2017s, when I started rounding up bottles for this feature!

I went into the vintage characteristics of both 2016 and 2017 a bit in the last issue, when I covered the newly released 2017 Vouvray bottlings from Domaine Huët. I will expand upon that in this feature, as I was focusing primarily on the Touraine in general in my comments and did not cover the entire breadth of the beautiful Loire Valley in that feature. Both 2016 and 2017 were badly frosted vintages across the Loire Valley, but beyond substantial frost damage each spring, the two vintages are quite dramatically different growing seasons. The 2016 vintage was one where insult was piled upon injury for the *vignerons* of the Loire, as the spring frosts in late April that affected almost everyone from one end of the region to the other were followed by very difficult growing conditions, as the next two months had lots of rain and mildew and rot pressure was almost non-stop throughout the months of May and June. The flowering period in early June was unsettled and this too adversely affected potential yields in many areas. Finally, the rainy period stopped in July, only to be replaced by drought conditions and the ripening of the bunches, which was already lagging from all of the rain, again fell behind, this time because of hydric stress! August was very similar to July, with the extremely dry weather pattern continuing, sunburnt grapes adding to the list of difficulties, and it was not until September that the weather took a turn for the better, with a reprieve from the drought that got maturation going again and a beautiful Indian Summer allowed most of the bunches that were out on the vines to ripen up pretty well. The finished wines turned out far better than *vignerons* expected back in July or August. But, all in all, I am sure that it was a year that many producers will be happy to forget, as it was non-stop work out in the vineyards for the first half of the year to save the crop from rot and mildew during the rains, and then agonizing over the hydric stress and blocked ripening throughout July and August. The spring frosts did not affect everyone equally, with some losing almost their entire crop, while others (Sancerre was particularly lucky in this respect) only dropping down ten to fifteen percent in production figures from a normal crop, so 2016 was far better for some than others, depending on which sector of the Loire one was located.

If one goes sub-region by sub-region across the Loire in 2016, one finds that Muscadet suffered some of the worst frost damage and *vignerons* that were able to bring in half a normal crop were ecstatic. Some lost as much as eighty percent and estates such as Domaine de la Pépière had to go out and buy production from neighbors (picking the grapes themselves) to have enough quantity to make a proper-sized cuvée. The Anjou was struck less hard by the frosts in April and quantity was only down between fifteen and twenty percent in 2016, with the quality of the chenin blanc grapes very high. In the great red wine regions of the central Loire, Chinon was hammered by the April freeze and yields are around half a normal crop for the luckier producers and even less at some addresses. However, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny were affected far less than Chinon across the river, and like the Anjou, yields were only down by fifteen percent or so, which was considered good luck in the difficult year of 2016. Moving a bit east, Montlouis was frosted far more severely than Vouvray across the river in 2016, so similar numbers to Chinon and Saumur were realized, with Vouvray down from fifteen to twenty percent and Montlouis more than half the crop was lost to frost. On the eastern end of the region, Sancerre was far luckier than its neighbors when it came to frost, so yields were down ten to fifteen percent in 2016, whereas Menetou-Salon, Quincy and Pouilly-Fumé were far more

severely affected by the frosts and at least fifty percent of the crop disappeared from the extreme low temperatures of late April. Menetou fared the worst of these appellations and eighty to ninety percent crop loss was the rule, rather than the exception. Beyond the frost damage of 2016 were also the issues of rot and mildew, which always pose more of a challenge to organic and biodynamic farmers, so the crop reductions caused by the frosts at some domaines were exacerbated by the rainy weather and attendant disease pressures during the first half of the summer.

The growing season of 2017 was also defined early on by severe frost damage yet again, but after the late April plunges in temperatures, the similarities with the previous growing season disappeared. Once the frosts were put in the rearview mirror, *vignerons* across the Loire Valley were quite surprised (given the current spate of bad luck with the weather in the region) to see a very strong and promising growing season unfold in 2017, with sunshine, measured rain as needed and excellent conditions right up to the harvest. As had been the case the year before, the onset of spring was early, with very warm temperatures in March and early April allowing the sap to rise early and budbreak was ahead of schedule, making the young shoots very vulnerable once again to the frosts when they struck towards the end of the month. There were two severe rounds of frost, one around the 20th and 21st of April in 2017, and then again on the 26th, 27th and 28th of the month. As was the case in 2016, damage from the freeze varied significantly, with much of Muscadet again pulverized and yields tiny again. Savennières in the Anjou was hit much harder by the frosts in 2017 than they had been the year before, with quantities more than eighty percent off in much of this region. In the red wines regions, Bourgueil and Saint Nicolas de Bourgueil were much luckier in 2017 and escaped most of the frost damage (after having been hit hard in 2016). However, Chinon was down about twenty percent and Saumur-Champigny thirty percent in 2017. Vouvray was again spared the worst of the frost damage and quantities were about the same as 2016, while in Montlouis, growers chipped in to pay for a helicopter to fly over their vineyards and protect the buds during the first freeze (which helped a bit), but still lost some of their potential crop when the second round of freezing weather came along a week later. In sauvignon blanc country, Sancerre was affected more than in 2016, but still counted as lucky with about twenty percent down, while Menetou-Salon and Quincy had good-sized crops and Pouilly-Fumé was once again badly frosted and yields down sixty to seventy percent.

However, once the hurdle of frost had been cleared in 2017, it was smooth sailing during the rest of the summer in the Loire, with sunny skies, warm temperatures and infrequent rainfall when needed to keep everything growing and healthy. Due to the early and warm spring temperatures prior to the frost, the vines were ahead of a normal schedule (if anyone knows what that still is in this era of climatic uncertainty) and the bunches that eventually came along were in the bloom of health and the harvest looked very promising in terms of quality, no matter how badly the frosts had affected yields in a given region. As the autumn weather remained perfect, growers could gather grapes as they reached optimal maturity in 2017, with Muscadet (and grapes destined for sparkling wines) starting to come in at the end of August and much of the rest of the white wine harvest being done by mid-September. Reds followed the next week and everyone was very content with the potential quality of the vintage, as the grapes showed good sugar levels, good acids and no rot or mildew issues. Everyone from one end of the Loire Valley to the other wishes that they had better quantity, but no one is complaining about the quality of the wines in 2017!



Muscadet

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie- Domaine de Beauregard

The 2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” from Domaine de Beauregard is a superb wine, offering up lovely purity and precision in its bouquet of bread fruit, white flowers, scents of the sea, a fine base of minerality, a touch of leesiness and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a wide open personality, lovely cut and grip, a good core and fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. 2018-2030. **91.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie “le Fils des Gras Moutons”- Claude Branger

The “le Fils des Gran Moutons” bottling of Muscadet from Claude Branger and his son, Sébastien, is from thirty-five year-old vines from a parcel just outside the confines of the well-known Gras Moutons vineyard, where they also have significant holdings. The Branger *Père et Fils* farm their vineyards organically and harvest everything by hand. Their 2017 Le Fils offers up a bright and classic nose of lemon, ocean breeze, beautiful minerality, a nice touch of the lees and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, focused and minerally, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Just a classic bottle of top-notch Muscadet. 2018-2030. **91.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie- Domaine du Haut Bourg

The 2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie from Domaine du Haut Bourg is a good example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a bright blend of lemon, bread fruit, gentle leesy tones, briny ocean scents and stony soil elements. On the palate the wine is medium-full,

bright and wide open in personality, with a good, solid core, zesty acids and good length and grip on the fairly complex finish. Good juice. 2018-2030. **89.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” La Grange Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2017 La Grange Vieilles Vignes from Luneau-Papin is a classic and beautifully expressive example of Muscadet. The bright bouquet wafts from the glass in lemon, green apple, ocean breeze, granitic minerality, a whisper of leanness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, zesty and full-bodied, with snappy acids, a fine core, lovely mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and snappy finish. This is an excellent bottle of Muscadet that is still a puppy and will be even better in a year or two and clearly last twenty-plus years. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **92.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Le Verger- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The Le Verger bottling from Domaine Luneau-Papin is a new cuvée to me and I liked it very well indeed. The bouquet is bright, precise and inviting, offering up scents of tart orange, a touch of lemon, ocean breeze, beautifully sweet nutty tones from the lees, wet stone minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely mineral-driven, with a superb core of fruit, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. Excellent juice. 2018-2040+. **92+.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Clos des Allées Monopole- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2017 Clos des Allées from Domaine Luneau-Papin is outstanding, with a very vibrant and expressive bouquet of pear, bread fruit, lovely sweet nuttiness, a complex base of soil tones, lemongrass and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is still a puppy and should age very long and gracefully. The low yields of the vintage are really felt here in the weight and flavor authority the wine has on the palate, while still staying characteristically light on its feet. *Chapeau.* 2018-2040. **94.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” L d’Or Granite- Domaine Luneau-Papin

Domaine Luneau-Papin’s 2017 Muscadet “L d’Or” Granite is a stellar example of this difficult vintage in Muscadet. The wine delivers beautiful aromatics in its constellation of lemon zest, bread fruit, sweet and gentle nutty tones from the lees contact, white flowers, a touch of straw and a salty base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with superb focus and grip, outstanding energy and backend mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a stellar bottle of Muscadet! 2018-2040+. **94.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Terre de Pierre- Domaine Luneau-Papin

As readers may recall, the Terre de Pierre bottling from Domaine Luneau-Papin hails from the Butte de la Roche vineyard, which is planted on volcanic soils that are extremely rare in Muscadet. The bottling was first launched in the 2008 vintage and this tenth incarnation in 2017 is flat out exceptional. The refined and complex bouquet offers up a fine blend of bread fruit, a touch of pear, complex leesy tones, even more complex minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and mineral-driven, with a superb core, excellent complexity and grip and a long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is the finest bottle of 2017 Muscadet I have yet to taste from the vintage! 2018-2045. **95.**

2017 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie “La Pépie”- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2017 Muscadet “La Pépie” from Domaine de la Pépière was made with a bit of purchased grapes from some of their more seriously-inclined neighbors, to make up for the shortfall of grapes due to the extensive frost damage in the domaine’s own vineyards in the

spring of this year. The wine is a lovely and classic bottle of Muscadet, with a nose that wafts from the glass in a mix of green apple, bread fruit, ocean breeze, stony minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a rock solid core, lovely mineral drive and fine balance and grip on the impressively long and classy finish. This is fifteen dollars a bottle here in the US and a stunning value! 2018-2030+. **91+**.

2017 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine “Clos des Briords” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2017 Clos des Briords “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine de la Pépière is another outstanding example of the vintage, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of lime, a lovely touch of leesiness, spring flowers, complex soil tones, a whisper of menthol and gentle upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full and very mineral in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, bouncy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Fine juice and built to age very nicely indeed. 2018-2035+. **92**.

2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie- Domaine de Beauregard

The 2016 Muscadet from Laurent Grégoire’s Domaine de Beauregard is an excellent bottle. The bouquet is properly briny and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of lime, bread fruit, ocean breeze, wet stone minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is brisk, focused and fullish, with lovely cut and grip, a good core and fine backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. From a difficult vintage in Muscadet, this has really turned out nicely. 2018-2030. **90**.

2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie “les Gras Moutons”- Claude Branger

The 2016 les Gras Moutons from Claude and Sébastien Branger hails from vines all in excess of fifty years of age in this superb vineyard. The wine offers up superb purity and depth on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of lime, a touch of pear, beautiful leesy tones, candied flowers, stony minerality and a bit of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and focused, with a superb core, stunning backend mineral drive and a long, youthfully complex and racy finish. This is stellar Muscadet! 2018-2030+. **93**.

2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Granite- Domaine de l’Écu

The 2016 Muscadet “Granite” bottling from Domaine de l’Écu is a superb example of this challenging vintage, offering up impressive aromatic depth in its bouquet of bread fruit, dried flowers, gentle leesy tones, a touch of candied lime peel and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and intensely flavored, with lovely mineral drive, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and quite wide open finish. This is drinking very nicely today and will keep easily for ten to twelve years. 2018-2030. **91**.

2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie- Domaine Gadais Père et Fils

The 2016 Muscadet from Domaine Gadais Père et Fils (son Pierre Henri is in the process of taking the reins from his father, Christophe Gadais) is from a single *lieu à dit* of les Avineaux, which is all granite. The wine offers up lovely depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of green apple, white flowers, citrus peel, lovely minerality, gentle leesy tones and a bit of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive on the backend and fine focus and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is outstanding Muscadet! 2018-2040. **93**.

2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” L d’Or Granite- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2016 Muscadet L d’Or “Granite” from Domaine Luneau-Papin is a beautiful wine that belies the vagaries of this vintage in the region. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a

sophisticated blend of bread fruit, a touch of pear, lovely wet stone minerality, dried flowers, gentle maritime influences and a hint of sweet nuttiness from the lees aging. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a quite wide open personality, fine cut and grip and a long, mineral-driven and vibrant finish. This is truly astonishing quality, given the challenges that the 2016 growing season hurled at *vignerons* in Muscadet! 2018-2035. **93.**

2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie “les Gras Moutons”- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2016 Muscadet “les Gras Moutons” from Domaine de la Pépière is an exceptional wine that is blossoming beautifully today on both the nose and palate and already starting to show some secondary shadings of complexity in the bouquet, which delivers scents of pear, bread fruit, a bit of sweet nuttiness, white flowers, beautiful salty minerality and a topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite stony in personality this year, with a fine core of fruit, zesty acids and lovely backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. I have the sense that this vintage may not make quite as old bones as either the 2015 or 2017 versions will, but it is lacking for nothing at the present time and is a superb glass of Muscadet. 2018-2030+. **92+.**



2016 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie- Domaine des Quatre Routes

The 2016 Muscadet from Éric Poiron’s Domaine des Quatre Routes is a good, solid middleweight. The nose offers up scents of a bright mélange of green apple, wet stones, ocean breeze, a touch of candied lime peel and white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full,

crisp and nicely soil-driven, with good acids and focus and a long, fairly straightforward finish. This is hand-harvested from vines that average forty-five years of age, so all the pieces are in place, but there is a bit of a spark missing to my palate. Good, solid juice, but I was hoping for just a bit more. 2018-2028. **87.**

2015 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine “Clisson”- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2015 Clisson bottling from Domaine de la Pépière is a stunning young bottle of Muscadet. The complex nose delivers a stellar constellation of bread fruit, a touch of pear, dried flowers, a beautifully complex base of wet stone minerality, discreet leesy tones and very understated topnotes of both menthol and ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very mineral in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and energetic finish. This is a brilliant wine. 2018-2045. **95.**

2015 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine “Monnières-Saint Fiacre”- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2015 Monnières-Saint Fiacre from Domaine de la Pépière is a beautiful wine, soaring from the glass in a vibrant aromatic blend of lemon, bread fruit, gentle leesiness, wet stone minerality, just a touch of ocean breeze and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, focused, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive, bright acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is the first vintage I can recall tasting from Domaine de la Pépière from this outstanding vineyard site and it is outstanding. Simply superb Muscadet! 2018-2040. **94.**

2014 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie “Monnières-Saint Fiacre”- Claude Branger

The Muscadet bottling from the single vineyard of Monnières-Saint Fiacre from Claude Branger is aged for fully two years in its fine lees prior to bottling, which is one of the reasons the 2014 is the current release of this top Muscadet cru. The wine is pure and impressively complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of bread fruit, desiccated pear, gentle leesy tones, dried flowers, lovely stoniness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and mineral, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine balance and a long, complex and still vibrant finish. I love the backend energy here! 2018-2035. **93.**

2014 Muscadet “Sèvre et Maine” Sur Lie “Château Thébaud”- Claude Branger

The single vineyard bottling of Château Thébaud from Claude and Sébastien Branger is the Muscadet they age the longest on its fine lees prior to bottling, as this wine spends thirty-six months in tank before its *mise*. The 2014 Château Thébaud from Messieurs Branger is excellent, offering up a fine bouquet of bread fruit, a touch of tangerine, granitic minerality, ocean breeze, a nice base of gently nutty leesiness, spring flowers and a bit of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a rock solid core, excellent balance and superb grip on the very long and vibrant finish. This too has stellar energy on the finish. 2018-2035. **93+.**

2012 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine “Château Thébaud” Clos des Morines- Dom. de la Pépière

The 2012 “Château Thébaud” Clos des Morines from Domaine de la Pépière was aged fully three and a half years on its fine lees prior to bottling. This is produced from sixty-five year-old vines in the Clos des Morines *lieu à dit*, and was new to the Pépière stable when Marc Ollivier started working with Rémi Branger, as it had been farmed by the Branger family for many years. The 2012 Clos des Morines is a stunning bottle of young Muscadet, offering up a

deep and minerally bouquet of bread fruit, smoke, dried flowers, granitic minerality and a briny topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and elegant in proportion, with a rock solid core, excellent acids and grip, stunning mineral drive and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. A great bottle of Muscadet. 2018-2045. **95.**

Savennières

2016 Savennières “Roches aux Moines”- Domaine aux Moines

The 2016 Savennières “Roches aux Moines” from Domaine aux Moines is a fine bottle in the making, offering up a youthfully complex nose of apple, quince, a touch of wet wool, bee pollen, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great soil signature, fine purity and grip and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a classic bottle of Savennières in the making, which is quite accessible out of the blocks, but has the structure and depth to also age long and gracefully. I should have had some mussels on hand to cook to go with this sample! 2018-2045. **93.**

2016 Savennières “La Bigottière”- Domaine Richou

The 2016 Savennières “La Bigottière” from brothers Damien and Didier Richou is a very tasty example of this superb appellation. The bouquet is precise and pure, offering up scents of sweet quince, apple, chalky soil elements, hints of the honeycomb to come with bottle age, orange peel and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is big, ripe and powerful in personality, with a fine core, good soil signature, solid framing acids and a long, complex and slightly warm finish. This is listed at thirteen percent octane, but I would guess with the very short crop of 2016, this came out a bit riper than that, as it is quite concentrated for Savennières. A very good effort for the vintage, but I would love to see the Richou brothers’ efforts in a more classically-inclined growing season. 2018-2030. **88.**

2015 Savennières “La Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel

The 2015 Savennières “La Jalousie” from Domaine du Closel is a beautifully ripe and utterly classic bottle in the making, offering up a refined bouquet of quince, apple, beeswax, chalky soil tones, a bit of lanolin, incipient notes of honeycomb and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very racy in personality, with superb depth in the mid-palate, impressive, nascent complexity, snappy acids and great balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a great bottle of Savennières in the making, but give it a handful of years in the cellar to start to really blossom. 2022-2050. **94.**

2015 Savennières- Domaine Laffourcade

The 2015 Savennières from Domaine Laffourcade is an excellent example of both its vintage and its appellation. The pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of quince, rocky soil tones, a touch of wet wool, citrus peel and white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, excellent focus and grip, promising youthful complexity and outstanding length on the balanced and still very primary finish. This has all of the constituent components in place to age long and gracefully, but it should be tucked away in the cellar for at least a few years to allow some of its secondary layers of nuance to emerge. 2021-2050. **90+.**

2014 Savennières “Fidès”- Domaine Eric Morgat

The Savennières bottling of “Fidès” from Eric Morgat includes his parcel in the best-known vineyard in the appellation, Roches aux Moines, as well as three other excellently-situated parcels. Monsieur Morgat is one of my absolute favorite producers in Savennières and his 2014 Fidès is absolutely stellar, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of apple, white peach, quince, spring flowers, beeswax and a beautiful base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, stellar transparency and a very long, complex, vibrant and elegant finish. This is as good as Savennières gets! 2018-2040. **94.**



Coteaux du Layon and Quarts de Charme

2012 Coteaux du Layon- l'Echarderie

The 2012 Coteaux du Layon from l'Echarderie is a pretty wine, offering up a bouquet of pineapple, peach, a bit of honeycomb, lovely soil tones and incipient notes of leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and fairly complex, with a lovely core, sound framing acids on the very long, intensely flavored and bouncy finish. I like the balance and grip of this wine very much, and though it is not the most complex expression of Coteaux du Layon I have ever tasted, there is a lot to like here. 2018-2030+. **90.**

2014 Quarts de Charme- Château l'Echarderie

The 2014 Quarts de Charme from Château l'Echarderie is more heavily-botrytized than the 2012 Coteaux du Layon, offering up more honeyed tones on both the nose and palate and

more tropical fruit elements as well. The deep and lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, orange, a touch of mango, honey, chalky soil, hints of the leather to come with further bottle age and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, lovely soil signature, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is an outstanding example Quarts de Charme. 2018-2040. **93.**

Anjou Blanc

2016 Anjou Blanc “Chauvigné”- Domaine Richou

The Richou brothers’ 2016 Anjou Blanc “Chauvigné” is a fine bottle of chenin blanc, offering up a vibrant bouquet of pineapple, quince, chalky soil, white lilies, citrus peel and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is bright, full, complex and very nicely balanced, with impressive depth at the core, bouncy acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is a fine value. 2018-2030+. **90+.**

2016 Anjou Blanc “Rogeries”- Domaine Richou

The 2016 Anjou Blanc “Rogeries” from Domaine Richou hails from a stonier-based vineyard than the Chauvigné bottling, but is also a full point higher in octane in this vintage, coming in at fourteen percent alcohol. However, though the wine is plenty ripe, it manages this very nicely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of sweet quince, pineapple, a bit of lanolin, chalky soil undertow and a gently musky floral topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is full, ripe and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, sound acids and plenty of length and grip on the long, complex and slightly muscular finish. This is a very good bottle, but I prefer the inherent elegant of the Chauvigné bottling in this vintage, despite the depth and length here just a touch superior. 2018-2028. **89.**

2016 Chenin Blanc “Confluence”- Les Arches de Bellivière (Éric et Clément Nicolas)

The 2016 Chenin Blanc “Confluence” from Les Arches de Bellivière, the Nicolas family’s new *négociant* label created to help bridge the gap from two heavily frost-afflicted vintages in a row in the Coteaux du Loire, is made from organically-farmed chenin blanc vines in Bonnezeaux that the Nicolas family decided to harvest early and without botrytis to make a dry wine. It comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of sweet quince, a touch of fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones, white lilies and a bit of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent chalk dusty soil tones, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is nicely racy on the backend and seems likely to age effortlessly for a couple of decades- at least. It will be interesting to see if it follows the pattern of Vouvray Sec for instance and closes down for a few years during adolescence, as I have no point of reference for dry and crystal clear chenin from Bonnezeaux! A very impressive bottle. 2018-2040. **93.**

2015 Anjou Blanc “Clos des Quarts”- Pascal Laffourcade

The 2015 Anjou Blanc “Clos des Quarts” from Pascal Laffourcade is composed entirely of chenin blanc and is vinified completely dry. In the ripe year of 2015, the wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a complex nose of quince, orange peel, a bit of wet wool, a good base of soil tones and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with broad shoulders, a good core of fruit, fine transparency and a long, vibrant and fairly powerful finish. This is a fine bottle that is already quite approachable, but has the structure to also age nicely and should keep at least another ten to fifteen years. 2018-2030+. **90.**

2015 Anjou Blanc “Le Clos des Rouliers”- Domaine Richard Leroy

Richard Leroy is based in the village of Rablay sur Layon, in the Coteaux du Layon appellation, and started his domaine in 1996. His Clos des Rouliers is the smaller of his two vineyard parcels, with a fine southerly exposition and vines that are now

2015 Anjou Blanc “Les Noëls de Montbenault”- Domaine Richard Leroy

The Les Noëls de Montbenault is the larger and older vine parcel from Monsieur Leroy, as these chenin blanc vines are now in excess of sixty years of age. The 2015 version is stellar on both the nose and palate, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of tangerine, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, a whisper of lanolin and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is bright, full and very complex, with marvelous soil signature, a lovely core of fruit, bright, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the laser-like finish. The 2015 Les Noëls de Montbenault is one of the most elegant and complete vintages of this fine cuvée that I can recall from Monsieur Leroy. This is still a puppy and will be significantly better with five to seven years of bottle age on it, but it is already a great glass of dry chenin and is all too easy to drink today! Great juice. 2018-2045+. **94.**



Anjou Rouge

2016 Anjou Rouge “les Châteliars”- Domaine Richou

The Anjou Rouge “les Châteliars” from Domaine Richou is composed entirely of gamay, which they grow in this small parcel planted on schist and quartz. The 2016 is nicely ripe and

expressive, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, gamebird, complex, stony minerality and a topnote of espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. There is really terrific backend energy to this wine! It is really a superb example of gamay and could use a year or two in the cellar to blossom properly. 2019-2035. **90+**.

2015 Anjou Rouge- Château Perray Jouannet

The 2015 Anjou Rouge from Château Perray Jouannet is a blend of cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon and comes in at a nicely ripe thirteen percent in this vintage. The wine delivers a very fine and complex nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of juniper berry, dark soil tones, a bit of tree bark and just a faint hint of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and rock solid at the core, with fine nascent complexity, excellent soil signature and a long, youthful and very promising finish. Top flight Anjou rouge such as this wine need time in the cellar to properly blossom in a fine vintage like 2015, but they can deliver outstanding wines with sufficient time in the cellar. This is going to be excellent and is a flat out bargain, but you will need to tuck it away and let the tannins soften! Serious juice. 2023-2045. **90**.

The Great Red Wines of the Central Loire

I would term both 2016 and 2017 as quite successful years for the wines from the major red wine appellations of Bourgueil, St. Nicolas de Bourgueil, Chinon and Saumur-Champigny, but after tasting a few of the early 2017s, it is quite easy to see the differences between the style of the two vintages. With the difficult growing season on the heels of the frosts of 2016, the red wines from the central section of the Loire have ended up more concentrated than usual and these are really quite powerful wines that will age long and gracefully, but which will need some bottle age to really start to drink with overt generosity. This is especially true of the Chinon bottlings from 2016 that I have tasted, where frosts cut back the potential crop so much more than was the case in Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny. But, all of these regions had very powerfully styled wines in 2016, with excellent depth of fruit, classic soil signature and quite a bit of tannin that will need to be allowed to soften a bit prior to really starting to enjoy the wines at their peaks. In contrast, the 2017 reds I have tasted so far from these appellations have seemed to share similar depths of fruit and transparency, but with even greater purity than found in the 2016s, far more charming personalities out of the blocks and less overtly tannic personalities. To a certain degree it is an unfair comparison, as the early 2017 reds in the market now are those that are generally not the most structured cuvées, but I think the overall stylistic shape of the two vintages can already be gleaned when comparing and contrasting 2016s and 2017s at this point in time. Both vintages have produced truly outstanding wines, but the 2016s deserve and will be far better with some hibernation time in the cellar, whereas the 2017s are probably going to be the more attractive vintage for early drinking, though they too will age very long and be even better over the long haul. It has been a good run of vintages for red wine producers in this part of the Loire, as 2015 was a top flight vintage and 2014 was also very strong and I liked the wines from that vintage quite a bit as well, so there are no shortage of options in the market for lovers of red wines from these fine appellations, except of course in terms of limited quantities produced by the frosts in 2016 and 2017. But, given how beautifully the early released 2017 reds have shown so far, this could well be a legendary vintage in the making.

Bourgueil and Saint Nicolas de Bourgueil

2017 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2017 Bourgueil “la Coudraye” from Domaine Yannick Amirault is a beautiful example of this excellent vintage, offering up superb purity and depth on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a classy constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, Cuban tobacco, dark soil tones, espresso and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully sappy down deep in the core, with fine soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins, good acids and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is stellar. 2018-2045+. **93.**

2017 Saint Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2017 Saint Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine” from Benoît and Yannick Amirault is a lovely wine in the making, with a complex and expressive bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark, espresso, gentle meaty tones and a fine base of gravelly soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the very promising finish. This bottling always needs at least a few years in the cellar to blossom, but all of the constituent components are in place for an outstanding wine with a bit of patience. 2022-2050+. **91+.**

2017 Bourgueil “le Pied de la Butte”- Domaine de la Butte (Jacky Blot)

The 2017 Bourgueil “le Pied de la Butte” from Jacky Blot is a nicely cool customer (twelve percent octane) that is intensely flavored and light on its feet. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex and very pure blend of dark berries, cherries, tree bark, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a discreet framing of cedar and a bit of upper register menthol. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and nicely soil-driven, with a very good core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of Bourgueil in the making, which is already quite approachable, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2018-2040+. **92.**

2017 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif”- Pierre et Rodolphe Gautier

The 2017 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif” from Pierre et Rodolphe Gautier is a lovely bottle designed for early drinking, though it does have some good structure and will have no difficulties keeping ten to fifteen years in the cellar as well. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a black fruity blend of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and modestly tannic, with very respectable mid-palate depth, good soil signature and a long, balanced and complex finish. This is very easy to drink today, but will have no trouble cellaring. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2016 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2016 la Coudraye from Yannick Amirault is a beautiful and quite classic expression of Bourgueil, offering up lovely purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tree bark and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely accessible out of the blocks, with a good core, excellent transparency, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is still a young wine and will only get better as it ages, but is very nicely balanced out of the blocks and already very enjoyable to drink. Lovely Bourgueil. 2018-2045. **92.**

2016 Bourgueil “le Grand Clos”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2016 le Grand Clos bottling from Yannick and Benoît Amirault is a stellar bottle of Bourgueil in the making. The bouquet is pure, complex and very refined, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones, espresso and just a hint of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very suave on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, impressive transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. This is outstanding and even more refined structurally than the very good 2014 reviewed below. Fine juice, but let it have a bit of time alone in the cellar to blossom properly. 2023-2055. **94.**

2016 Bourgueil “Diptyque”- Domaine de la Chevalerie

The Diptyque bottling of Bourgueil from Domaine de la Chevalerie is made for early consumption and the 2016 is a perfectly pleasant, easy quaffer. The bouquet is high-toned and very pretty, offering up scents of cherries, menthol, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones and a nice touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish and bouncy, with respectable, but by no means exceptional depth at the core, very modest tannins and a long, nicely transparent finish. Good juice that may gain a bit in gravitas with a bit of bottle age. 2018-2030. **87.**

2016 Bourgueil “le Haut de la Butte”- Domaine de la Butte (Jacky Blot)

The 2016 Bourgueil “le Haut de la Butte” from Jacky Blot is from a parcel of thirty-plus year-old cabernet franc vines planted on a topsoil of clay and flint over a great vein of limestone. The wine is raised in one to three year-old barrels and bottled unfinned and unfiltered. The 2016 le Haut de la Butte is an absolutely superb wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering lovely purity in its complex blend of red and black cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, chalky soil tones, a bit of gamebird, lavender and just a whisper of oak influence from the older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with excellent focus and grip, a fine core, superb soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and complex finish. This is so nicely balanced that it is approachable out of the blocks, but this is a serious bottle of Bourgueil that is built for extended aging and really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit on the backend and really start to blossom. Great juice. 2022-2055+. **93.**

2016 Bourgueil “Mi-Pente”- Domaine de la Butte (Jacky Blot)

The 2016 Bourgueil “Mi-Pente” from Jacky Blot’s Domaine de la Butte is a superb wine, offering up lovely purity and gentle sappiness in its bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of violet and a judicious framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, youthful and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is fairly structured out of the blocks and needs four or five years in the cellar (minimum) to start to stir, but it is impeccably balanced and will age beautifully if given a little patience. 2023-2055+. **92.**

2016 Bourgueil “Perrières”- Domaine de la Butte (Jacky Blot)

The Perrières is the only bottling from Jacky Blot in Bourgueil that sees any new oak, as this wine is raised in twenty percent new casks and the balance being one and two wine barrels. These two are vines in excess of thirty years of age, hailing from one of the greatest vineyards in Bourgueil. The 2016 Perrières is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and refined bouquet of sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of cigar ash, a superb base of limestone soil elements, a discreet touch of eucalyptus, a bit of meatiness and a gentle foundation of new wood. On the palate the wine is very pure and precise, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced,

with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a very long, very classy finish. 2022-2055+. **94+**.

2016 Bourgueil “Norte Histoire”- Domaine de l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The 2016 Bourgueil “Norte Histoire” from Domaine de l’Oubliée is an excellent example, offering up a lovely, very classic bouquet of dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark, a fine base of dark soil tones and a lovely dollop of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and complex, with excellent soil signature, a perfectly respectable core, moderate tannins and a long, balanced and classy young finish. The 2016 Notre Histoire comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and is approachable out of the blocks, but still a young wine and a few years in the cellars will pay dividends. 2018-2045. **90+**.



2015 Bourgueil “les Quartiers”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2015 Bourgueil “les Quartiers” from the Amirault family is a superb example of the vintage that is still on the young side, but already is quite expressive and its ultimate quality is very, very easy to see. The superb bouquet delivers a constellation of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, espresso, dark soil tones, a touch of cola and a gentle topnote of eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a very long, nascently complex and utterly classic finish. This is a great bottle of Bourgueil in the making, and though it is approachable already at three years of age, it is still a puppy and really should be left alone in a cool corner of the cellar for at least

three or four more years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **93+**.

2015 Bourgueil “Chatrois”- Bertrand Galbrun

The 2015 Bourgueil “Chatrois” from young Bertrand Galbrun is nicely low octane, coming in listed at 11.5 percent octane. Monsieur Galbrun only started his domaine in 2005 and now farms three and a half *hectares* of vines, all of which are under biodynamism. There is a bit of cabernet sauvignon planted in the vines here, so this bottling of Bourgueil can include up to ten percent of that varietal, depending on the vintage. The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, a bit of tree bark, cigar smoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, with fine focus and grip, impressive intensity of flavor, very modest tannins and good length and grip on the wide open finish. This is a lovely middleweight for drinking over the next decade. 2018-2028. **89**.

2014 Bourgueil “le Grand Clos”- Domaine Yannick et Benoit Amirault

The 2014 Bourgueil “le Grand Clos” from the Amirault family, which hails from fifty year-old vines, is an outstanding example of this classic vintage. The wine is youthful, but already quite expressive aromatically, offering up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf, espresso and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins, good acids and impressive length and grip on the vibrant and very, very promising finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still a puppy and will be so much better to drink with at least a handful of years in the cellar! 2018-2045. **93+**.

2014 Bourgueil “Bretèche”- Domaine de la Chevalerie

The Bourgueil “Bretèche” bottling from the Caslot family is made from a chalky vineyard that Monsieur Caslot planted between 1988 and 1992, so this is some of the younger vines that the family farms today. The 2014 is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a classic constellation of dark berries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of limestone soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with lovely depth at the core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins, sound acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. I love the backend intensity and energy here. 2018-2040+. **93**.

2014 Bourgueil “les Galichets”- Domaine de la Chevalerie

The 2014 les Galichets from Domaine de la Chevalerie is an excellent, young Bourgueil. The bouquet is pure and youthfully complex, offering up a fine blend of cassis, sweet dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and classically balanced, with a fine core, very good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. This is still quite primary in personality and needs some bottle age to truly blossom, though it is so balanced right now that it is also very easy to drink in its youth. Still, I would opt for tucking it away for a few years and letting it really come into its own. 2020-2045. **92+**.



Two of my favorite vigneron in Bourgueil, Benoît and Yannick Amirault in their vines.

Chinon

2017 Chinon “le Verre en Vignon”- Chais Saint Laurent

The 2017 Chinon “le Verre en Vignon” from Chais Saint Laurent is a lovely example of the appellation that is designed for early accessibility and is drinking with plenty of style and grace right out of the blocks. The classic bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine mix of red and black cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, open and nascently complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, fine soil signature, modest tannins and fine focus on the long and tasty finish. This will easily keep ten years or so in bottle, but is made to drink early and is already a good glass of Chinon. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2017 Chinon “les Lisons”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2017 Chinon “les Lisons” from Marc Plouzeau is a very classy wine, wafting from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a hint of jellied meats, lovely spice tones, mint and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is young, full, focused and nascently complex, with an excellent core, fine focus and grip and a long, chewy and youthful finish. This has not yet absorbed its now oak and some of the backend tannins are oak-derived, but the wine has plenty of stuffing and should have no troubles integrating its oak with some bottle age. But, today, it is still rather chewy and should be tucked away in the cellar to allow it to settle in. 2022-2050. **92.**

2016 Chinon “Rive Gauche”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2016 Chinon “Rive Gauche” from Château de la Bonnelière is a fine young bottle of Chinon. The nose is still quite primary, but also pure and deep, offering up scents of cassis, tree bark, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones and a touch of leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, nascently complex and tightly-knit, with a good core, a fine sense of transparency and a long, moderately tannic and youthful finish. I really like the shape and balance of this wine, which only needs a year or two in the cellar to really start to blossom. 2019-2040+. **91+**.

2015 Chinon “Coteau de Noiré”- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The “Coteau de Noiré” bottling of Chinon from Philippe Alliet hails from a vineyard planted on clay and chalk and is raised in smaller casks, with twenty-five percent of the barrels new oak. The 2015 Coteau de Noiré is excellent, offering up a ripe and classy bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a lovely foundation of soil tones, just a whisper of menthol and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and nicely ripe and generous on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, suave, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. This will age very well indeed, but it is also very easy to drink right out of the blocks and it will not be a crime to consume a few bottles in the first blush of youth. 2018-2050. **93**.

2015 Chinon “l’Huisserie”- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The 2015 Chinon “l’Huisserie” from Philippe Alliet and his son, Pierre is an excellent example of the vintage. The soils in l’Huisserie are clay and flint, with a fine layer of chalky topsoil. The 2015 version comes in at an even thirteen percent and offers up an absolutely classic bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a complex base of soil, a hint of tree bark and a bit of blossoming upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet from its chalky base, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is nicely structured and is still a fairly young wine (though quite tasty with an hour in decanter before serving) and really deserves three to five years to soften up a bit more. It should age long and gracefully and is a very classy bottle of Chinon. 2022-2055. **92**.

2015 Chinon “le Clos Guillot”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2015 Clos Guillot from the Baudry family is another absolutely outstanding example of the vintage. The wine is nicely cool for this hot growing season, coming in at a very refined 12.5 percent octane and offering up a young and absolutely stellar bouquet of sweet dark berries, a touch of chicory, cigar smoke, complex, gravelly soil tones, a bit of roasted meats and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, excellent transparency, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and great length and grip on the complex and very, very promising finish. This is a young wine and needs time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge, but it is so cunningly well balanced that it is already quite easy to drink in its youth! 2023-2065. **94**.

2015 Chinon “les Grézeaux”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2015 Chinon “les Grézeaux” from Domaine Bernard Baudry is a superb wine in the making. Not surprisingly, given the iconic status of the Baudry family in Cravant-lès-Coteaux, this wine is absolutely classic in all regards, offering up a deep and nascently complex nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, a bit of tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a fine topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very pure in its expression of both ripe fruit and soil, with a rock solid core, well-integrated tannins and a very

long, complex and soil-driven finish. This is accessible out of the blocks, but as is always the case with the les Grézeaux bottling from the Baudrys, this is a wine built for the cellar and its apogee is probably eight to ten years out from today. A dynamite bottle. 2022-2055+. **93+**.

2015 Chinon “Le Clos des Roches St. Paul”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2015 Le Clos des Roches St. Paul from Marc Plouzeau is an absolutely beautiful young bottle of Chinon. This is a very small and prized *terroir* on the Left Bank of the Loire, and Monsieur Plouzeau has produced a very deep and supremely elegant young Chinon from this lovely vineyard in 2015. The bouquet is pure and still fairly primary, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, a bit of tree bark, cigar smoke, a complex base of soil and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamless, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still quite reticent finish. This is a puppy and needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but it is so beautifully balanced that it is really not all that hard to drink in its still unformed youth! I do not believe that these vines are as old as those that Marc Plouzeau farms in les Cornuelles, so there is not quite the same core here, but this is a first class example of Chinon that is going to age brilliantly. 2023-2055. **93**.

2015 Chinon “les Cornuelles”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2015 Chinon “les Cornuelles” from Marc Plouzeau is simply an outstanding example of the vintage. These vines are now fifty-five years of age and Monsieur Plouzeau continues to raise this wine in five-plus year-old *puncheons*, allowing the gravelly *terroir* of les Cornuelles to take center stage. The 2015 version offers up a superb nose of cassis, black cherries, tree bark, cigar ash, gravel, a bit of roasted game, a whisper of Cheval Blanc-like menthol and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, ripely tannic and impressively complex finish. Though this is from a warm vintage, this is utterly classic and soil-driven in personality and shows none of the buxom properties one might expect from such a hot summer. A great young Chinon in the making that could very well age along the lines of the very best examples from the great 1989 vintage! 2022-2060. **94+**.

2015 Chinon “les Peuilles”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The Chinon “les Peuilles” from Domaine Olga Raffault hails from a vineyard near the Vienne River, planted on a plateau of clay and silex soils. The wine is lovely in 2015, offering up a complex and nicely transparent bouquet of cassis, a hint of red berry, menthol, fine soil tones, cigar smoke, tree bark and a bit of roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep,, full and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, ripe, well-measured tannins, fine acids and impressive focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is nicely cool for the 2015 vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent and is a fine bottle of Chinon in the making. Give it a bit of bottle age to properly blossom, but in case of emergency, it is really not all that hard to drink in its youth! 2023-2055. **91**.

2015 Chinon “les Barnabés”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2015 Chinon “les Barnabés” from Domaine Olga Raffault also comes in at a very civilized 12.5 percent octane and delivers a fine nose of sweet dark berries, a bit or red fruit, gentle meatiness, a touch of coffee bean, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature, well-integrated tannins and impressive focus and grip on the long, very well-balanced and complex finish. This is a superb, young bottle of Chinon and should be tucked in a quiet

corner of the cellar for another five or six years before having at it in earnest. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2060. **93.**



2014 Chinon “les Pensées de Pallus”- Domaine de Pallus

Bertrand Sourdais’ Domaine de Pallus is one of my favorite producers in Chinon. The les Pensées de Pallus is Bertrand’s regular bottling of Chinon, as he has decided in the last several years to only produce his flagship Chinon (labeled simply as Domaine de Pallus) in what he considers top vintages, but if the 2014 les Pensées de Pallus is any indication, I suspect we will also see a 2014 Domaine de Pallus. The 2014 Pensées offers up a deep, pure and classic Chinon nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, smoky overtones, a gentle base of cedary wood (from one and two wine casks) and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in profile, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. A superb Chinon that is approachable today, but could do with three to five years in the cellar to blossom completely. Great juice. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2014 Chinon “Grand Vin de Pallus”- Domaine de Pallus

The 2014 Grand Vin de Pallus is a beautiful young bottle of Chinon. It is more structured and reserved than the Pensées, but it will outpace the wine in the long haul, as it is inherently more refined and complex. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash, tree bark and a deft framing of smoky new oak. On

the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, impressively transparent and light on its feet, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. Give this some time, but it is going to blossom beautifully with sufficient bottle age. 204-2060. **94+**.

2014 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The flagship Chinon bottling of “les Picasses” from Domaine Olga Raffault, made from fifty-plus year-old vines in the heart of this excellent vineyard, is outstanding in 2014. This is always a cuvée built for the cellar and the 2014 vintage is no exception. The bouquet is pure and promising, offering up scents of red and dark berries, cigar smoke, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of tree bark, a hint of meatiness and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and beautifully soil-driven finish. This is outstanding juice in the making! 2024-2065. **94**.

2008 Chinon “les Roches”- Alain et Jérôme Lenoir

I have had several bottles of Lenoir les Roches from vintages going back into the decade of the 1980s (all quite good, by the way), but I had not crossed paths with a younger vintage until my recent trip to Germany in May. This is a beautiful bottle of Chinon that is just about ready to fully blossom at age ten, offering up a deep and refined nose of cherry, a touch of bell pepper, gravelly soil tones, gentle notes of tree bark, a nice dollop of menthol and a fine topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely transparent in personality, with a fine core and still a bit of backend tannins to resolve on the long finish. Give this lovely Chinon another couple of years to more fully soften up the remaining tannin and then enjoy the wine over the coming couple of decades. Fine juice. 2020-2040+. **92+**.

Saumur-Champigny

2017 Saumur-Champigny- Domaine Filliatreau (synthetic cork)

I wish Domaine Filliatreau would not use these artificial corks for their wines, as I have not had good luck aging wines under this closure, but have had stellar results aging Filliatreau wines under natural cork. In any event, my sample of the 2017 Saumur-Champigny was under a plastic cork, but is so far immune to its charms. The bouquet here is excellent, offering up a complex and vibrant nose of red and black cherries, espresso, a bit of tree bark, chalky soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with superb soil signature, a bit of ripe tannin and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is more classically proportioned than the powerful Grande Vignolle bottling in 2016. Fine juice. 2018-2040? **90**.

2016 Saumur Rouge “Château Fouquet”- Domaine Filliatreau (synthetic cork)

The 2016 Saumur Rouge “Château Fouquet” from Domaine Filliatreau is pretty ripe by the standards of this bottling, coming in at 13.5 percent with the low yields of the vintage, but the wine is quite classically balanced. The nose is focused and absolutely superb, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of espresso and a lovely topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with ripe, buried tannins, a sappy core, lovely balance and grip and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is excellent and truly deserves to be bottled with a natural cork! 2018-2045+? **93**.

2016 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignolle”- Domaine Filliatreau

Year in and year out, the “la Grande Vignolle” bottling from Domaine Filliatreau is one of my favorite examples of Saumur-Champigny and the 2016 vintage is no exception. The wine delivers excellent aromatics in its blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and classic finish. Due to the frosts, this is one of the most concentrated examples of la Grande Vignolle that I have tasted from the Filliatreau family (it tips the scales this year at 13.5 percent octane) and recalls the outstanding 2005 quite a bit, though it seems likely to need a bit more time in the cellar to blossom than the ’05 did back in the day. 2021-2045+. **92+**.

2015 Saumur Rouge “Eolithe”- Château de Fosse-Sèche

The 2015 Saumur “Eolithe” from Château de Fosse-Sèche is a blend of ninety-five percent cabernet franc and five percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and offers up a beautifully pure and soil-driven bouquet of dark berries, cassis, a touch of juniper berry, tree bark, cigar wrapper and a beautiful base of minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and complex finish. This is a leaner thoroughbred of a Saumur and will age long and gracefully, but is already extremely hard to resist. Outstanding, elegant juice in a ripe vintage. 2021-2050. **92**.

2015 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château Hureau (Philippe et Georges Vatan)

The 2015 Tuffe bottling from Philippe and Georges Vatan comes in at a properly ripe thirteen percent octane in this warm vintage and offers up superb aromatic complexity in its blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of juniper, complex soil tones and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with excellent soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. The Vatanes make some of the best wines in the appellation, outside of Clos Rougeard, and their 2015 Tuffe is outstanding. This is very easy to drink already, despite its good structure, but will also age very long and gracefully and will be even better a decade down the road. Fine juice. 2018-2045. **92+**.

2010 Saumur-Champigny “Lisagathe”- Château Hureau (Philippe et Georges Vatan)

I had not tasted the 2010 Saumur-Champigny “Lisagathe” from Château Hureau in five years, but had to pull a bottle out from my cellar for this report, as I was curious how it was evolving. Which happens to be just beautifully, thank you! The bouquet is pure and now wide open, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of dark berries, cassis, a bit of cigar ash, tree bark, really lovely soil tones, bitter chocolate, tobacco leaf, a hint of cedar and a blossoming note of black truffle. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and still modestly tannic, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Saumur-Champigny that is now drinking with style and grace, but still has decades of life ahead of it. 2018-2040+. **93+**.

2010 Saumur-Champigny- Château Yvonne (Mathieu Vallée)

The 2010 Saumur-Champigny from Mathieu Vallée is still a fairly youthful wine that has not yet quite absorbed its new oak fully and still needs a few more years in the cellar to settle in. The bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, espresso, dark chocolate and a fair bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and nicely balanced, with a good

core, fine length and grip and a quite reserved, sleeping finish. I do not get a ton of soil tones in this wine right now, but it is in hibernation and these may well emerge once the wine starts to stir and blossom. If this is the case, then my score will seem conservative. 2021-2050. **89+?**

Saumur and Chinon Blanc (and Friends)

2017 Chinon Blanc- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2017 Chinon Blanc from the Baudry family comes in at a cool twelve percent octane in this vintage and offers up a very promising, albeit youthful, bouquet of apple, chalky soil tones, sweet quince, orange peel, a hint of the fresh pineapple to come, citrus blossoms and a touch of lanolin. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a superb girdle of acidity, fine balance and grip and a long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it will be significantly better with at least a few years of bottle age on it. A very, very impressive bottle of Chinon Blanc! 2020-2040+. **93.**

2017 Saumur Blanc- Lena Filliatreau (synthetic cork)

The 2017 Saumur Blanc from Lena Filliatreau is a stylish example of dry chenin blanc that is built for early drinking, but has the depth and structural cut to also age quite nicely, if its closure will allow this. The bouquet offers up a youthful mix of quince, lime peel, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with excellent focus and cut, a lovely core and impressive backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This is terrific Saumur Blanc! 2018-2030? **92.**

2016 Existe En Blanc- Domaine de l'Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The 2016 Existe En Blanc from Xavier Courant is a fine bottle of chenin blanc. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in older Burgundy casks, with the 2016 offering up a complex bouquet of apple, quince, a bit of lavender, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb, lanolin and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite ripe in personality, with a fine core, very good soil signature, good acidity and impressive length and grip on the complex and quite extroverted finish. This is good juice-picture a rock solid bottle of Vouvray Sec with the soil signature of Bourgueil and just a touch of oak. 2018-2035. **90.**

2016 Saumur Blanc “Arcane”- Château de Fosse-Sèche

The 2016 Saumur Blanc “Arcane” from Château de Fosse-Sèche is an outstanding wine by any measure, with the complex and very precise bouquet offering up scents of sweet quince, a bit of apple, chalky soil tones, dried flowers, a hint of lanolin, fresh almond and incipient notes of the honeycomb to arrive with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with outstanding cut and grip, lovely complexity and balance and a very, very long, racy and stellar finish. This is an extraordinary bottle of dry chenin blanc in the making. It is approachable today, but really deserves to be aged for four to six years and let its secondary layers of complexity come to the surface. Great juice. 2022-2055. **94.**

2013 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Domaine Guiberteau

The 2013 Saumur Blanc “Brézé” from Domaine Guiberteau is a fine wine in the making, but it is still very young and tight and needs some bottle age to soften up and blossom. The youthful nose is deep and bright, offering up scents of lemon, quince, chalky minerality, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and snappy, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip and a very long, primary and zesty finish. This has a terrific chassis of acidity, but is closed down at the present time and needs to be forgotten in a cool corner of the cellar for several more years. 2023-2050+. **92.**

2012 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Domaine Guiberteau

I am a bit less optimistic about the potential of the 2012 Brézé from Domaine Guiberteau, as this wine does not have the same girdle of acidity as the 2013 and it is not quite as long and precise. The bouquet is still fairly reductive, taking quite some swirling to start to show any nuance, but eventually offers up scents of apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still quite inexpressive from its reduced state, with fairly modest acidity, good focus and grip, but a rather short, clipped finish. This seems like the reduction here may be at least somewhat permanent in nature, and the wine is going to end up being a bit stillborn as a result. It is still okay, but not in the same league as the young, but very promising 2013 version. Maybe it was just our bottle? 2020-2035+? 88+?



2010 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Domaine Guiberteau (served from magnum)

I am not sure if I trust my palate fully in my impression of this particular magnum, as it was served to me at the end of a twelve day trip to Germany, and after tasting that many Rieslings (particularly with so many from the electric 2017 vintage), it is hard to know if your palate needs a bit of a break for re-alignment prior to properly judging a wine such as this. So, please take this note with that caveat in mind! The wine is nicely complex on the nose, but more white Bordeaux-like than Chenin, as it offers up scents of fresh fig, lime, vanillin oak, a touch of grassiness, good minerality and incipient notes of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still quite youthful in its structure, with a good core, but a rather

straightforward and undeveloped palate that does not keep pace with the aromatic complexity here. The finish has good length and grip, but is compact at the moment. This could just be an issue of Chenin Blanc hibernation, in which case, the wine could blossom decisively with further bottle age. But right now, I am a bit confused as to how it is going to evolve with further bottle age- hence the range. 2020-2040. **88-91+?**

Montlouis

2017 Montlouis “Touche-Mitaine”- Le Rochers des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The Montlouis “Touche-Mitaine” from Xavier Weisskopf is from a parcel of thirty-five year-old vines, three-quarters of which Monsieur Weisskopf raises in older casks and twenty-five percent in stainless steel tanks. The 2017 Touche-Mitaine offers up a superb bouquet of quince, lime, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin, beeswax and a gentle topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite dry in personality, with a good core, fine soil signature, bright acids and fine length and grip on the youthful and gently chalk dusty finish. Structurally, this is accessible today, but the wine has not really started to develop any of its secondary complexity and I would be inclined to let it sleep in the cellar for a while and really let it blossom properly. 2021-2055. **90+.**

2017 Montlouis “Remus” Sec- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The 2017 Montlouis “Remus” Sec from Jacky Blot is a fine young wine in the making. The bouquet is still quite youthful, offering up scents of quince, orange zest, chalk dusty soil tones, a bit of lanolin, bee pollen and white lilies. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with respectable depth at the core, good acids and grip and a long, still quite primary finish. This will need some time to blossom properly, but will be a very tasty bottle when it is ready for primetime drinking. 2023-2055. **90.**

2016 Montlouis “Clos de Mosny” Sec- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The vineyard of Clos de Mosny is a blend of clay and flint on a bed of hard limestone, and the flinty aspect of the soil bed is very much evident on both the nose and palate in this lovely 2016. The bouquet is bright and expressive, offering up scents of pineapple, sweet quince, a touch of honeycomb, beautiful silex soil tones, dried flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This too needs time in the cellar to start to drink with generosity, but all of the constituent components are in place for a fine bottle in the fullness of time. 2023-2055. **92+.**

2016 Montlouis “les Hauts de Husseau” Sec- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The 2016 “les Hauts de Husseau” Sec from Domaine de la Taille aux Loups is an outstanding wine, with far more depth and dimension than the 2017 Remus Sec from the estate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of quince, a touch of honeycomb, lovely soil tones, fresh pineapple and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a reserved, youthful personality, good acids and grip and a long, promising finish. This has already seemingly gone into hibernation and will need some time in the cellar to blossom, but will be lovely once it opens up. 2023-2055. **92.**

2015 Montlouis “Négrette”- Le Rochers des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

Xavier Weisskopf is based in Montlouis and his best wines are obviously from this appellation, but, as a side note, I have been very, very impressed with the quality of his Touraine

bottlings as well (please see notes on those below). His 2015 Montlouis “Négrette” is a lovely wine, offering up a complex nose of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin, an incipient hint of honeycomb and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite dry in style, with a fine core, good soil signature, fairly modest acidity for young Montlouis, but fine length and grip on the wide open and very tasty finish. 2015 was a ripe year and this has given fairly broad shoulders to the Montlouis “Négrette”, but there is depth, complexity and breed here as well. Good juice. 2018-2030+. **89+**.

2014 Montlouis “les Quartes” Sec- Benoît et Julie Mérias

The 2014 Montlouis “les Quartes” Sec from Benoît and Julie Mérias is a lovely wine that is starting to show some fine secondary layers of aromatic complexity on the nose at age four. The bouquet is a blend of pear, quince, a touch of beeswax, chalky soil tones and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and quite long, with still a bit of adolescent chalk dustiness hovering on the backend, but with a superb core, lovey cut and grip and a long, soil-driven and complex finish. This is really quite good and will only get better with a bit more bottle age. 2018-2035. **90**.

Vins de France

2016 Vin de France “Clos de la Bretonnière”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The Clos de la Bretonnière is a Monopole vineyard of Monsieur Blot in Vouvray, but the wine was not given the appellation in the 2016 vintage, though I am not sure of the reason for this. Perhaps it is all the new oak in evidence? The vines here are forty-five years of age and Monsieur Blot chose to barrel ferment it and raise it in small barrels, with twenty percent of the oak new in this vintage (and no casks more than four years-old). The wine offers up a fine and fairly new oaky bouquet of quince, apple, a touch of bee pollen, chalky soil tones and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite dry in profile, with a good core, fine soil signature and again, a more than generous serving of new oak sticking out on the backend. There is good length and grip here, as well as good stuffing to possibly absorb the new wood, but I am not in love with the combination shown here of Vouvray and new oak and I hope this was just an experiment that will not be repeated. It is not that the wine is bad by any means, but rather, that it is clearly a very, very good bottle of Vouvray rather subsumed under the influence of new oak. It will need at least a few more years in the bottle to better absorb its oak, as there is a touch of wood tannin sticking out on the backend right now, and should age quite well and maybe one day I will cross paths with this wine and find it has blossomed beautifully! 2021-2050. **85-90** (depending on how open-minded one can be to a very new oaky example of Vouvray).

2016 Vin de France “Venise” Monopole- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The 2016 Vin de France “Venise” from Domaine de la Taille aux Loups is the same story as the Clos de la Bretonnière, with these vines more than fifty years of age and planted in this one *hectare* vineyard on a base of flint and clay. It too was barrel-fermented and aged in small casks, with twenty percent new oak and the rest one to four wine barrels. On the nose, it seems to have absorbed its oak component better than the Clos de la Bretonnière, offering up a complex blend of sweet quince, apple, beeswax, silex soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and again, plenty of new oak influence on the finish, which shows a bit less oak tannin than the Clos de la Bretonnière, but still is fairly woody in personality on the close of the finish. If one is

going to experiment with new oak in Vouvray, it makes sense to do so in a high quality vintage like 2016 to see if the wine can carry the oak, but again, I hope we do not see this too often in the future, as the underlying wine is stunning, but with the oak influence, the 2016 Venise is merely interesting. 2018-2050. **86-91** (again, depending on how willing one is to drink good, dry Vouvray that is distinctly new oaky in style).

2016 Vin de France “Chenin”- Le Rochers des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

This bottling hails from vines in Vouvray and I am not sure why it was not given the appellation. In any event, the wine is excellent, offering up a classic nose of apple, quince, chalky minerality, a bit of orange peel, dried flowers and a just a whisper of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and finished as a Sec, with a fine core, good acids and grip, fine focus and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is very good juice. 2018-2040. **91**.

Vouvray

2017 Vouvray “Cuvée de Silex”- Domaine des Aubuisières (Bernard Fouquet) screwcap

The 2017 Vouvray “Cuvée de Silex” from Bernard Fouquet is a lovely wine that is pretty much a Sec bottling, though with a touch more residual sweetness than one might expect from a pure Sec, but certainly not quite up to a Demi-Sec in this regard. In any event, the wine is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a bright and complex blend of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is focused, vibrant and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. It will be interesting to see how this superb wine ages under its closure, as it possesses the structure for thirty to forty years of cellaring, but I am uncertain how it will do with a screwcap. But, it is delicious right out of the blocks, so one can always minimize the risk and drink this in the first blush of youth. High class juice! 2018-2040+? **92+**.

2017 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2017 Clos du Bourg Sec from Domaine Huët is a superb young wine and probably the slight favorite of these three beautiful dry Vouvray bottlings. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of apple, quince, a whisper of fresh pineapple, beautiful limestone minerality, white flowers, a hint of citrus oil and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with bright, ripe acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2018-2020; 2028-2065. **94+**.

2017 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2017 Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec is a stunning wine in the making. The bouquet offers up a superb constellation of apple, pineapple, quince, very complex minerality, honeycomb, orange blossoms and lanolin. On the palate the wine is pure, nascently complex and full-bodied, with superb depth at the core, bright, seamless acids, laser-like focus and outstanding grip and balance on the long, vibrant and stunning finish. This too will be approachable for a few years and then shut down for an extended period of hibernation, but unlike the Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec, where early sampling would be perfectly understandable, to waste bottles of the 2017 Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec drinking it in its early window of accessibility would border on a crime! This is a legend in the making. 2018-2020.2030-2090. **95+**.

2017 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2017 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec from Domaine Huët is absolutely classic in profile, coming in at an even thirteen percent and offering up beautiful precision on both the nose and palate. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of quince, apple, chalk dust, lanolin, a hint of honeycomb and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and focused, with a rock solid core, great soil signature, excellent balance and a very long, bright and complex finish. This is a very, very elegant young vintage of Le Haut Lieu Sec and the wine will age very long and very gracefully. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2021; 2028-2060+. **93+**.

2017 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2017 Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët is excellent on both the nose and palate, offering up a classic bouquet of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, bee pollen, lanolin and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine transparency, bright acids and very impressive length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is quite approachable in its early youth, but will no doubt close down into a dusty and reticent adolescence in a few years and then be quite unapproachable for a decade, but it looks destined to be quite classically proportioned and will age long and gracefully. 2018-2020; 2030-2080. **93**.

2017 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2017 Sec bottling from the Le Mont vineyard is another gem from Domaine Huët. The bouquet is bright, pure and nascently complex, offering up scents of lemon, apple, quince, bee pollen, chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more closed in personality than the Le Haut Lieu Sec, with a bit of the backend dustiness of shutdown young Vouvray already starting to throw its weight around, but with excellent depth at the core and impressive focus. The finish is long, beautifully balanced and intensely flavored, with great energy and grip. This is dynamite wine in the making but unlike the Le Haut Lieu Sec, I would be tempted to tuck this away in the cellar right away and not drink any bottles during its first couple of years, as I have the sense that this is going to shut down quite briskly and it will be pointless to waste bottles early on, particularly given how much potential there is here for down the road! 2028-2060+. **94**.

2017 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s 2017 Le Mont Demi-Sec bottling is just a touch more honeyed on the nose than the Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec, but as this wine is often more mineral as well (in comparison to the more chalky Le Haut Lieu), the combination works beautifully in this vintage. The nose jumps from the glass in a fine, youthful blend of apple, quince, fresh pineapple, stony soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb, spring flowers and just a touch of youthful chenin wildness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and a bit more powerful in personality than the Le Haut Lieu, with impeccable balance, a great core, superb backend mineral drive and a very long, very refined and nascently complex finish. This is an outstanding wine in the making! 2018-2020; 2030-2080. **94**.

2017 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

The 2017 Le Mont Moelleux is a beautiful wine in the making, with less overt botrytis in evidence and more of a concentrated bouquet from *passerillage* and perfect ripening. The nose drifts from the glass in a very refined and classy blend of sweet quince, pineapple, apple chalky minerality, hints of honeycomb and a lovely topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, racy and full, with superb mid-palate depth, outstanding focus and grip, a very youthful

personality and a very, very long and classy finish. This is extremely 1989-like in personality and a great wine in the making. 2027-2075+. **95+**.

2017 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

Back in Issue 76, I mistakenly reported the 2017 bottling of Première Trie as hailing from Clos du Bourg, but it is actually from the vineyard of Le Mont in 2017. I have corrected it here. The 2017 Le Mont Moelleux Première Trie from Domaine Huët shows a nice touch of botrytis on the complex bouquet of peach, quince, tangerine, honeycomb, lovely soil tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully glazed, with a superb core, excellent focus and balance, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the refined, elegant and very promising finish. This is obviously very, very early days for this superb wine, but in due course, this is going to be pure magic in the glass. Just be patient! 2026-2085. **95**.



The Clos du Bourg vineyard in the mid-afternoon light of November in Vouvray.

2016 Vouvray “Cuvée de Silex”- Domaine des Aubuisières (screwcap)

The 2016 Vouvray “Cuvée de Silex” from Domaine des Aubuisières is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and nascently complex nose of quince, apple, a hint of honeycomb, chalky soil tones and a bit of lanoline in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, good balance and a long, youthful and promising finish. This seems to be starting to close down for a bit of hibernation, and I would opt for drinking it either over the next year, or tuck it away in the cellar for five or six years and then

start to really enjoy it when it starts to really drink within its plateau of peak maturity. 2018-2045+. **90.**

2016 Vouvray “Gros Pierre” Sec- Domaine Florent Cosme

Florent Cosme only started producing wines from his own domaine in the 2011 vintage, so this is still very early days for this thirty year-old *vigneron*. He farms his four *hectares* of vines biodynamically. His 2016 Vouvray “Gros Pierre” Sec is produced from a parcel of forty-five year-old vines, fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and raised in old *foudres*. The wine is lovely on the nose, offering up scents of apple, chalky soil tones, quince, a hint of lanolin and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a very refined example of Vouvray Sec and most impressive for only the sixth vintage on his own from Monsieur Cosme. 2018-2040+. **91.**

2016 Vouvray “la Motte” Sec- Domaine Florent Cosme

The la Motte Sec bottling from Florent Cosme comes from similarly-aged vines (forty years-old) and soils that are also a combination of clay and silex, like the Gros Pierre bottling. The difference in the cellars for these two wines is that the la Motte is raised in four hundred liter barrels that range from four to eight years of age. The 2016 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, quince, spring flowers, a hint of bee pollen and a very, very discreet touch of vanillin from the oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and more reserved in personality than the Gros Pierre bottling, with a good core, bright acids, fine mineral drive and a long, youthful finish. This is going to be quite good, but it seems to already be closing down for a bit of sleep and will want to hibernate in the cellar for a few more years before it starts to stir again. 2022-2040+. **90+.**

2016 Vouvray “Utopie” Demi-Sec- Domaine Florent Cosme

The 2016 Vouvray “Utopie” Demi-Sec from Florent Cosme comes from his oldest parcel of vines, which are more than seventy years of age. The wine is raised similarly to the la Motte Sec in four hundred liter, four to eight year-old barrels. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of sweet quince, a touch of pineapple, incipient honeycomb, flinty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with great mid-palate depth, bright, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. The old vines here really give this wine an extra element of dimension on the palate, with stellar backend energy! Great juice. 2018-2050+. **93.**

2016 Vouvray “le Petit Clos” Sec- Domaine Bernard Fouquet

I was absolutely delighted to see Monsieur Fouquet’s 2016 le Petit Clos Sec bottling under natural cork. The wine is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine constellation of quince, orange, a beautifully complex base of soil tones (this vineyard is planted on clay and limestone, rather than the flint in the wine below), a hint of honeycomb, citrus blossoms and a bit of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and electric finish. This is stellar! 2018-2050. **93.**

2016 Vouvray “les Girardières” Demi-Sec- Domaine Bernard Fouquet (screwcap)

The 2016 Vouvray “les Girardières” from Bernard Fouquet is a Demi-Sec bottling, though this information is not on the label. The 2016 version is very lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pineapple, sweet quince, a bit of lanolin, flinty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced,

with a fine core of fruit, gently dusty soil elements in play on the backend and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is a lovely Demi-Sec. 2018-2040. **92.**

2016 Vouvray Moelleux- Domaine François Pinon

The 2016 Vouvray Moelleux from François Pinon is an outstanding young wine, offering up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of sweet quince, apple, chalky soil tones, white flowers, a bit of honeycomb and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and beautifully concentrated, with excellent complexity, a rock solid core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, vibrant and nicely bouncy, sweet finish. This is quite 1989-like in style and personality. When I first opened this bottle, it showed just a whiff of the chalky dusty element of chenin blanc starting to go into hibernation, but the fruit quickly rose up on the nose and buried that sensation. However, given that it was there for a minute or two, I would guess that at some time in the next year or two this wine will start to close down for its Vouvray period of sleep and will then need five to six years of cellaring before it starts to stir again. So, it would be best to drink a few bottles of this wine over the next year or two and bury the rest until 2025 or so. 2018-2055. **94.**

2009 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Franc de Pied- Domaine Huët

The 2009 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Franc de Pied bottling from Domaine Huët is the current release from this small plot of ungrafted vines. The wine does not have a sweetness designation on the label, but it shows just a touch of sweetness and probably would be classified as a light Demi-Sec if there were one on the label. The nose is still fairly youthful, with a sense of reserve that nine year-old Vouvray will often show, offering up a refined bouquet of quince, lemon, chalky soil tones, beeswax, lanolin and lovely, delicate white floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on its feet, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent focus and grip, bright, seamless acids and simply superb length and grip on the adolescently complex finish. There is certainly a difference between the French roots here and the Le Haut Lieu made with vines grafted onto American rootstocks, as this wine delivers a more elegant profile on both the nose and palate. This is a stunning young bottle of Le Haut Lieu, which is approachable at age nine, but still really in its infancy and will not reach its plateau for another seven to ten years and should drink magically for the next fifty years. A beautiful wine. 2023-2085+. **94.**

1971 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 1971 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët has drunk beautifully for decades, but this bottle at least, was starting to peer over the far side of its plateau and seemed about ready to consider a gentle descent. The bouquet is deep, tertiary and still quite vibrant, offering up scents of apricot, orange peel, quince, chalky soil tones, a bit of barley sugar and a topnote of clover. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, and still reasonably complex, with solid acids, good length and grip and a now quite dry, resolved and complex finish. The structure here is still good, but it is the already quite dry profile of this Demi-Sec that leads me to believe that it is probably best drunk up in the next few decades. That said, it could also just be going through a stage of evolution and might prove to be much longer-lived than another quarter century! 2018-2040+? **91.**

Jasnières and Coteaux du Loir

2016 L'Effraie Coteaux du Loir- Domaine de Bellivière (Éric Nicolas)

Éric Nicolas' 2016 L'Effraie Coteaux du Loir is an outstanding bottle of wine, offering up a deep, expressive and complex bouquet of fresh pineapple, quince, flinty soil tones, a bit of honeycomb, bee pollen and white lilies in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a great core of fruit, superb transparency and mineral complexity, zesty acids and superb focus and grip on the extremely long, complex and energetic finish. Great juice done in a dry style. 2018-2050. **93+**.

2016 Jasnières "Les Rosiers"- Domaine de Bellivière (Éric Nicolas)

The 2016 Jasnières "Les Rosiers" from Domaine de Bellivière is equally outstanding this year, offering up a superb aromatic depth in its complex constellation of apple, quince, a touch orange zest, lovely minerality, a whisper of lanolin, lime peel and a potpourri of spring flowers for a topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and far more reserved in personality than the L'Effraie, with a rock solid core, superb mineral drive and a very long, racy and still quite youthful and primary finish. This is going to be even more precise and soil-driven than the above wine when it is ready to drink, but it will need a bit of bottle age to start to stir properly. It is an absolutely great bottle of Jasnières in the making! 2022-2055+. **94**.



Touraine Blanc et Rosé

2017 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc “Les Devants de Bonnelière”- Domaine de la Bonnelière

The 2017 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc “Les Devants de Bonnelière” from Marc Plouzeau is a superb, young bottle of wine, with significantly more mid-palate depth than is customary with most sauvignon blancs from the Touraine. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a still fairly youthful blend of gooseberry, lime peel, musky floral tones, damp grass and a complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and grassy, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is really, really good sauvignon blanc, with perhaps a bit more Pouilly-Fumé character to it than most Touraine SBs. 2018-2025+. **91.**

2016 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Domaine des Corbillières

The 2016 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc from Domaine des Corbillières is a lovely and gently musky example of the varietal, offering up a vibrant nose of gooseberry, lime, damp grass, chalky soil tones and a bit of orange blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and grassy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine balance and grip and a long, complex and tasty finish. This is wide open in personality and really drinking well right now. 2018-2023. **89.**

2016 Touraine Rosé- Domaine des Corbillières

The 2016 Touraine Rosé from Domaine des Corbillières is made from a blend of Pinot Noir and Pineau d’Aunis, with the vines’ age ranging from thirty to forty years of age. The wine is done by *saignée* method, with a twelve hour skin contact and offers up a bouquet of tangerine, melon, chalky soil tones, a touch of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a bit of chalky dustiness that is quite attractive. The core here is impressive, the wine is focused and really quite impressively long and vibrant on the backend. Fine juice and a stellar value! 2018-2023. **90.**

2016 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Domaine Plouzeau

The 2016 Sauvignon Blanc from Marc Plouzeau is a lovely example and quite expressive on both the nose and palate. The extroverted bouquet jumps from the glass in a pretty blend of gooseberry, lime blossoms, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely balance and grip and a long, zesty and quite serious finish. This is one of the finest and most intensely flavored examples of Touraine Sauvignon Blanc that I have had the pleasure to taste. 2018-2025. **91.**

2015 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Domaine des Corbillières

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc from Domaine des Corbillières is really a pretty wine, offering up bright and nicely ripe nose of gooseberry, lime, fresh-cut grass, chalk and a nice hint of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and succulent on the attack, with a solid core, lovely acids and fine length and grip on the reasonably complex finish. This is a very good example of Touraine sauvignon blanc. 2018-2020. **89.**

Touraine Rouge

2017 “Antidotes” Vin de France Rouge- Bertrand Galbrun

The 2017 “Antidotes” Rouge from Bertrand Galbrun is composed of a blend of sixty percent Cabernet Franc and forty percent Grolleau and comes in at a cool twelve percent octane.

The nose is deep and impressively vibrant, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, tree bark, smoke and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows good mid-palate depth, with moderate tannins, good grip and a long, still quite primary finish. This wine comes in a clear bottle and with a very brightly colored label, leading one to think it is made for early quaffing, but there is depth and substance here and this wine should keep nicely for five to ten years! Good juice and a very good value! 2018-2025+. **88.**

2016 Touraine Rouge Cabernet Franc- Le Rochers des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The 2016 Touraine Rouge Cabernet Franc from Xavier Weisskopf is really a lovely wine on both the nose and palate. It is quite ripe for Touraine rouge, coming in at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage and offers up a beautifully expressive nose of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones and a bit of upper register tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, a bit of ripe tannin and impressive length and grip on the complex and focused finish. This is very well-made wine. 2018-2030+. **89+.**

2016 Touraine Rouge Côt “Vieilles Vignes”- Le Rochers des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The 2016 Malbec old vines from Xavier Weisskopf is a nicely cool customer, tipping the scales at 12.5 percent octane and delivering lovely aromatic complexity in its nose of sweet dark berries, chicory, a touch of tree bark, coffee grounds and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really impressively structured for a Touraine Côt, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and very nicely balanced finish. This needs a bit of cellaring, but it is an excellent example and will be a superb bottle (and a great bargain) once it blossoms. 2020-2040. **90.**

2015 Ante Phylloxera “Franc de Pied”- Domaine de Maulevrier (Marc Plouzeau)

While the Ante Phylloxera “Franc de Pied” bottling from Marc Plouzeau is only entitled to Touraine Rouge AOC status, the vineyard of Clos de Maulevrier lies right on the Chinon border and is for all intents and purposes, a Chinon. There are only thirty *ares* of cabernet franc planted here on its original French roots, with the oldest vines more than two hundred years-old! The 2015 Ante Phylloxera bottling from Monsieur Plouzeau is stellar, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of menthol, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with stunning soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and utterly refined young finish. This is a brilliant wine that deserves time in the cellar to really blossom completely, but it is not going to be an easy thing keeping one’s hands off of bottles of this wine, as it is flat out delicious in its youthful guise! 2023-2060. **94.**

2015 Touraine Rouge Côt “Vieilles Vignes”- Le Rochers des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)

The 2015 Côt “Vieilles Vignes” from Xavier Weisskopf is another very stylish and svelte *vin rouge*, coming in at 12.5 percent and offering up a superb nose of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, espresso and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with fine delineation and balance, moderate, ripe tannins and impressive grip on the long, complex finish. This is high class malbec and a great value! 2021-2045. **90+.**

2014 Touraine Rouge “les Demoiselles”- Domaine des Corbillières

The 2014 Touraine Rouge “les Demoiselles” from Domaine des Corbillières is a blend of cabernet franc, malbec and pinot noir. The 2014 les Demoiselles comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely nose of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of tree bark, cigar smoke and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is pure and surprisingly full-bodied, with lovely mid-palate depth, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and nicely complex finish. I have liked the vibrant sauvignon blanc bottling from Domaine des Corbillières when I have crossed paths with it previously, but had no idea they also made such a serious bottling of *rouge* at such a good price! 2018-2030. **88.**

2014 Ante Phylloxera “Franc de Pied”- Domaine de Maulevrier (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2014 Ante Phylloxera “Franc de Pied” from Marc Plouzeau is a superb, young bottle of very old vine cabernet franc. The youthful nose offers up impressive depth and nascent complexity, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and just a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, fine soil signature, moderate, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the very promising finish. This needs at least a couple of years in the cellar to allow the tannins to fade a bit and the secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. It is going to be an outstanding wine, with breed and elegance when it is truly ready to drink. 2022-2050+. **93+.**

2006 Côt- Clos Roche Blanche (served from magnum)

This magnum of 2006 Côt from Clos Roche Blanche had just a touch of volatile acidity on both the nose and palate and this had to be waited out to get underneath to the beautiful wine lying below. But, with a bit of air, this is easily done and the wine offers up a fine bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, saddle leather, a bit of roasted venison and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still a bit chewy in personality, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is drinking quite nicely, but if the 1998 Côt is any indication, it might make sense to keep this wine still in the cellar for a few more years and let the tannins fall away a bit more (particularly in magnum). Fine juice. 2002-2040+. **91+.**

1998 Côt- Clos Roche Blanche

I have always been under the impression that the Côt bottling from Clos Roche Blanche would age beautifully, but this was the first time I had a chance to put my theory to the test with a twenty year-old bottle. The wine has blossomed beautifully, offering up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, cassis, espresso, a touch of hung game, dark soil tones and a bit of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and complex, with fine focus and grip and still a whisper of remaining tannin on the well-balanced finish. Good juice at its peak, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2018-2030+. **92.**

Cheverny Blanc and Cour Cheverny

The white wines from Cheverny are a wonderful mosaic of the Loire in general, as they can include varying percentages of grapes such as chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, sauvignon gris and Romarantin. In fact, wines made solely from the local grape of Romarantin are given their own appellation here: Cour-Cheverny. The vineyards are located on the outskirts of Blois, about halfway between the cities of Tours and Orléans. In my experience, most bottlings of Cheverny blanc will be generally based on sauvignon blanc, with the other varieties playing supporting

roles, but there are a few bottlings that are one hundred percent Romarantin and which may well be amongst the very best whites made in this region of the Loire. Cheverny blanc offers impressive value, and for the intrepid, there are some amazingly fine bargains to be had here, not to mention some very serious and accomplished producers.

2017 Cheverny Blanc “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin

The 2017 Cheverny Blanc from François Cazin is a lovely wine, offering up beautiful aromatic and flavor complexity and a bright, zesty structural chassis. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, lime, gentle grassiness, complex minerality, spring flowers and a touch of tangerine in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and classy finish. This is flat out delicious! 2018-2025. **92.**

2015 Cour-Cheverny “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin

The 2015 “Vendanges Manuelles” bottling of Cour-Cheverny from François Cazin is plenty ripe in this warm summer of 2015, coming in at fourteen percent octane. The bouquet is bright and pure, offering up scents of candied orange peel, a touch of pineapple, gentle grassiness, lovely minerality, a bit of menthol and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and deep at the core, with really quite good acidity, lovely focus and grip and perhaps just a whisper of heat on the long finish. It is hard to believe that this same wine two vintages ago came in at 11.5 percent alcohol, which very clearly shows what a roller coaster the last handful of vintages have been in some sectors of the Loire Valley! I like this wine quite well, but suspect it will be best to drink in its relative youth. 2018-2025+? **90.**

2015 Cour-Cheverny “Cuvée Renaissance” Moelleux- Domaine François Cazin

François Cazin’s 2015 “Cuvée Renaissance” Moelleux bottling is an absolutely exceptional bottle in the making. This is fairly ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but has plenty of zesty acidity to add cut and clarity to the wine on the palate. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of lime, orange, a touch of menthol, wild fennel, lovely minerality, citrus peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core, snappy acids, lovely complexity and grip and a very, very long and energetic finish. This will age forever, but is already extremely tasty! 2018-2050. **93.**

2015 Cour Cheverny “l’Epicourchois”- Luc Percher

Readers may recall that this bottling of Cour Cheverny from Luc Percher hails from the oldest known Romartin vines in the appellation, which are in excess of one hundred and ten years-old. The 2015 version is a beautiful wine, offering up a deep, pure and nicely ripe nose of lime, a hint of pear, orange peel, stony minerality, a dollop of honeycomb and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, fine acids and a very long, complex and powerful finish. This is a superb bottle of Cour Cheverny, with the heat of the summer giving it relatively broad shoulders, without sacrificing any precision. 2018-2030+. **93.**

Cheverny Rouge

2016 Cheverny Rouge “Vendanges Manuelles”- Le Petit Chambord (François Cazin)

François Cazin’s Cheverny rouge is essentially two-thirds pinot noir and one-third gamay, with four percent côt tossed in to make the blend even a bit more intriguing. The varietals are fermented separately, with the pinot noir de-stemmed prior to fermentation, while

the gamay is done whole cluster in a semi-carbonic maceration style. Monsieur Cazin's 2016 rouge is a beautiful wine, offering up a complex and quite refined nose of cherries, red berries, a touch of dried eucalyptus, lovely soil tones, a bit of fresh herbs, woodsmoke and a touch of gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, a fair bit of chewy tannin, good focus and grip and a long, complex and youthful finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to allow the backend tannin to soften up a bit, but it will be a very tasty middleweight once it has started to blossom. I really like the purity and precision here on both the nose and palate. 2021-2045. **89.**

2015 Cheverny Rouge "l'Epicourchois"- Luc Percher

The 2015 Cheverny Rouge "l'Epicourchois" from Luc Percher is a superb example of the vintage, harnessing the warmth of this growing season and still coming in at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol. Readers may recall that this bottling is made from old vine parcels of gamay and pinot noir, which have been farmed organically for several years. The bouquet is bright, open and nicely black fruity in its complex constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of espresso, dark soil tones, saddle leather and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and focused, with an excellent core, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. There is a touch of volatile acidity here, but it blows off nicely with a bit of time in decanter. This is excellent, if the bit of VA does not bother you! 2018-2035+. **92.**



Coteaux de Giennois

2017 Coteaux de Giennois Blanc- Domaine Clément & Florian Berthier (Ste. Gemme)

The 2017 Coteaux de Giennois Blanc from Clément and Florian Berthier is a lovely bottle of sauvignon blanc, offering up a bright and expressive nose of green apple, gooseberry chalky soil tones, white flowers and a bit of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, good acids and grip and a long, fairly complex and very tasty finish. This is not quite as complex as Sancerre, but it hits a lot of similar notes and is a superb value! 2018-2025. **88+**.

2017 Coteaux de Giennois Blanc- Domaine de Villargeau (Poigny)

The 2017 Coteaux de Giennois Blanc from Domaine de Villargeau is a very pretty bottle of sauvignon blanc. The bouquet wafts from the glass is a mix of lime zest, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a bit of white lily in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and juicy, with lovely focus and grip, good acids, solid mid-palate depth and a good long finish. This hits all the right notes and is a very good value. 2018-2023. **89**.

Quincy

2017 Quincy “Trés Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mardon

The 2017 Quincy “Trés Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Mardon is a fine bottle, offering up plenty of personality in its aromatic profile of gooseberry, tart orange, chalky soil tones, a bit of grassiness, lime peel and a nice touch of citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered in style, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex finish. Quincy is never the most elegant Loire sauvignon blanc, but one does get a lot of bang for the buck here! Fine juice. 2018-2025. **91**.

2017 Quincy- Domaine de Villalin

The 2017 Quincy from Domaine de Villalin is beautifully expressive on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, green apple, chalky soil tones, fresh-cut grass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine acids, good focus and grip and a long, gently grassy and vibrant finish. Good juice. 2018-2025. **89**.

Menetou-Salon

2017 Menetou-Salon- Domaine Clément & Florian Berthier (Ste. Gemme)

This is the first vintage I have tasted of Menetou-Salon from the Berthiers and I was very impressed. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright and complex blend of gooseberry, green apple, lime zest, slightly damp grass and a beautiful base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine intensity of flavor, good bounce and grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is lovely Menetou. 2018-2025. **91**.

2017 Menetou-Salon “Morogues”- Domaine Henri Pellé

The 2017 Menetou-Salon “Morogues” from Domaine Henri Pellé is a fine example of the vintage, with a refined and elegant nose of lime, green apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of cut grass, citrus zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, very good bounce and grip and a long, still fairly youthful finish. This is a fine example of Menetou-Salon. 2018-2025. **90+**.

Pouilly-Fumé

2017 Pouilly-Fumé “les Cris”- Domaine Cailbourdin

The 2017 Pouilly-Fumé “les Cris” from Domaine Cailbourdin is another fine bottle from this consistently excellent producer. The bouquet offers up a nicely grassy nose of lime, green apple, damp grass, flinty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and fully-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and great focus and grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. Very serious juice. 2018-2025. **92.**

2017 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Fille

The 2017 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes” from Serge Dagueneau and his daughter is lovely and quite expressive on the nose, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of gooseberry, lime, superb, flinty minerality, fresh-cut grass and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and not as together as the nose suggests, with a good core, fine acids and plenty of grip on the long and nascently complex finish. One gets the sense that this wine is still pretty young on the palate and needs a bit more time in bottle to snap into proper focus, but all of the constituent components here are quite good and my gut instinct is all this wine needs is a few more months in the bottle to allow the palate to catch up with the fine bouquet. Perhaps the very, very short crop here because of the frosts has made this more concentrated than usual and the wine needs a bit of time to blossom? 2019-2025. **88-90+?**

2017 Pouilly-Fumé “Florilège”- Domaine Jonathan Didier Pabiot

The 2017 Pouilly-Fumé “Florilège” from Jonathan Didier Pabiot is quite refined and stylish on the nose, offering up a fine constellation of green gooseberry, lime, fruit blossoms, lovely minerality and just a dollop of fresh-cut grass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly primary still, with a lovely core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. With the low yields here in 2017, this wine is still a touch bound up in its structural elements, but is nicely balanced and should blossom fairly briskly and offer up very good drinking. 2019-2026. **90+.**

2016 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Clément & Florian Berthier (Ste. Gemme)

The 2016 Pouilly-Fumé from Clément & Florian Berthier is a fine example, with a bit deeper-pitched aromatic and flavor profile from the very short yields, but lovely complexity and bounce. The bouquet delivers a blend of tangerine, a touch of grapefruit, damp grass, flinty minerality, beeswax and a touch of candied citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I like this fairly grassy example of Pouilly-Fumé very much indeed, but it will want drinking up over the next three years. 2018-2021. **90.**

2016 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Fille

The 2016 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes” from the Dagueneau family is really a classic and very stylish example of the appellation, wafting from the glass in a bright aromatic constellation of lime, green apple, flinty minerality, fresh-cut grass, orange peel and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, vibrant acids and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Very classy Pouilly-Fumé. 2018-2025. **92.**

Sancerre

2017 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes sur Silex”- Dom. Clément & Florian Berthier (Ste. Gemme)

The 2017 Sancerre from Clément and Florian Berthier is a lovely example of the vintage, with the flinty soil that this vineyard is planted on giving a nice touch of Pouilly-Fumé personality to the wine. The bouquet is deep and bright, offering up scents of green apple, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, lovely flinty minerality and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, zesty and focused, with a lovely core, good complexity, vibrant acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and tasty finish. Good juice. 2018-2025. **91.**

2017 Sancerre “les Terres Blanches”- Domaine Chevreau (Crezancy)

The 2017 “les Terres Blanches” from Domaine Chevreau is another very expressive and classy example of this lovely vintage in Sancerre. The bouquet is vibrant and loaded with personality, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, a touch of tangerine, lime peel, discreet notes of fresh-mown grass, chalky minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and a bit grassier than the nose suggests, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, good acids and grip and a long, complex and very tasty finish. Some folks may find this a touch too grassy for their palates, but I very much like the extroverted nature of this lovely Sancerre. 2018-2023. **91.**

2017 Sancerre “le Mont”- Domaine Foucher-Lebrun (Alligny)

The 2017 Sancerre “le Mont” from Domaine Foucher-Lebrun is quite refined on both the nose and palate, with the exuberance of this vintage in Sancerre beautifully wound around an elegant coil. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of tart orange, green apple, flinty minerality, fresh-cut grass, a bit of smokiness and a gentle topnote of petrol. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely ripe, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This has a touch less cut than many of the 2017 Sancerres that I tasted for this report, so it will probably be at its best in the next few years, but there is plenty of enjoyment to be had here. 2018-2022. **90.**

2017 Sancerre “Les Grands Monts”- Domaine Isabelle Garrault (Verdigny)

The 2017 Sancerre “Les Grands Monts” from Isabelle Garrault is a beautiful bottle of Sancerre grown on both *terres blanches* and *caillottes* and offering up a bright and sophisticated bouquet of gooseberry, lime, lovely chalky minerality, gentle grassiness and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, complex and nicely grassy finish. Fine juice. 2018-2025+. **91+.**

2017 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés”- Domaine Anthony & David Girard (Menetou-Râtel)

The parcel in the vineyard of “les Monts Damnés” are owned by Girard brothers, Anthony and David, despite their cellars being a few towns away in Menetou-Râtel. These vines were planted by the Girard’s grandfather and now are all seventy years of age! Their 2017 bottling of Monts Damnés offers up a lovely, youthful bouquet of tart orange, gooseberry, complex, limestone minerality, white flowers, a bit of beeswax and a gentle topnote of Chavignol botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and mineral-infused, with a superb core of fruit, great focus and grip and a very long, snappy and youthful finish. This is classic Chavignol and built to age, and though it is very tasty right now, it is still a puppy and deserves a minimum of three or four years in the cellar, to fully unlock its secondary layers of complexity. 2021-2040+. **93.**

2017 Sancerre “la Garenne”- Domaine Fernand Girard et Fils (Verdigny)

The 2017 Sancerre “la Garenne” from Domaine Fernand Girard et Fils is a fine example of the vintage. The nose wafts from the glass in an extroverted blend of gooseberry, lime, damp

grass, chalky soil tones and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely focus and grip and a long, balanced and racy finish. Classic Sancerre. 2018-2025. **91+**.

2017 Sancerre- la Maison d'Anaïs (Bué)

The 2017 Sancerre from the Chaumeau family's la Maison d'Anaïs" is a lovely example of Bué fruit and stainless steel fermentation and *elevage*. The wine offers up a classic nose of gooseberry, lime zest, chalky minerality, fresh-mown grass and white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. Lovely Sancerre. 2018-2024. **91**.

2017 Sancerre "Chavignol"- Domaine Martin (Chavignol)

The 2017 Sancerre "Chavignol" bottling from Domaine Martin is really pretty and refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of gooseberry, a touch of tangerine, complex limestone minerality, a touch of Chavignol botanicals, gentle smokiness and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent balance and grip, bright, seamless acids and impressive length and mineral drive on the zesty finish. This is a lovely bottle of Sancerre. 2018-2028+. **92**.



Sauvignon blanc vineyards in high summer in the beautiful village of Bué.

2017 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The 2017 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes” from Pierre Morin is a lovely wine and a very classic example of Bué Sancerre, with lovely and generous fruit tones, fine limestone undertow and plenty of floral elements mixing with the cut grass. The bouquet delivers scents of gooseberry, lime, chalky soil tones, fresh-culled grass, spring flowers and a hint of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and wide open, with good acids and focus, plenty of depth at the core and a long, complex and zesty finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2023. **91+**.

2017 Sancerre- Domaine Henry Natter (Montigny)

The Natter family ferments and raises their Sancerre in old *foudres*, giving the wine a lovely roundness and elegance on the palate. Namesake Henry officially retired in 2016, with his son Vincent taking his place, but Henry’s wife Cécile is also a trained oenologist and continues to work at the domaine, along with Vincent’s sister Mathilde, so this is truly a family affair. Their 2017 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of gooseberry, green apple, lime blossoms, lovely chalky soil tones, very gentle grassiness and a hint of fresh-culled mint. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and lovely focus and balance on the long, zesty and complex finish. This is very, very good Sancerre! 2018-2025+. **92.**

2017 Sancerre “Cuvée les Coûtes”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The Sancerre “Cuvée les Coûtes” from Pascal Reverdy is from a fifty-five year-old parcel of vines planted on *terres blanches* soils. The 2017 version is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a vibrant and refined blend of tangerine, lime, a touch of green apple, lovely, elegant chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a whisper of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is pure, focused, bright and seamless, with lovely focus, impeccable balance, an excellent core of fruit and a very long, complex and bouncy finish. Classic *terres blanches* Sancerre. 2018-2025+. **92.**

2017 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés”- Domaine Thomas-Labaille (Chavignol)

The 2017 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés” from Domaine Thomas-Labaille is a terrific bottle of Sancerre in the making. The bouquet is pure, focused and complex, delivering a classy blend of gooseberry, lime peel, tart orange, a hint of petrol, complex limestone minerality, Chavignol botanicals, white flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is focused, full, complex and very mineral in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, great cut and grip and a very, very long, racy and utterly refined finish. The 2017 Monts Damnés from Claude and Florence Thomas is delicious to drink today, but it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age. This is easily the best 2017 Sancerre bottling I have yet had the pleasure to taste! 2018-2035. **94.**

2016 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes sur Silex”- Dom. Clement & Florian Berthier (Ste. Gemme)

Clement and Florian Berthier are based across the river from Sancerre in the appellation of the Coteaux de Giennois, from which they make some superb values. They have branched out to produce this fine Sancerre, which is rare in that it hails from vineyards on flinty soils (more often found in Pouilly-Fumé), rather than the customary limestone of so much of the appellation. Their 2016 Sancerre offers up a lovely nose of lime, gooseberry, spring flowers, flinty minerality and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full and focused, with lovely soil signature, a fine core of fruit, good, zesty acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a quite unique expression of Sancerre, as it does not have the cut and mineral drive

of Sancerre from Kimmeridgian limestone soils, but it still has a fine spine of acidity and should age quite nicely over the medium-term. Good juice. 2018-2025+. **91.**

2016 Sancerre “les Terres Blanches”- Domaine Chevreau (Crezancy)

The Sancerre “les Terres Blanches” from Nicolas Chevreau is a special bottling that he produces from two steep slopes of Kimmeridgian limestone, with one parcel all vines in excess of sixty years of age. The 2016 version is a very tasty bottle with a fine spine of minerality running through it. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of gooseberry, grapefruit, chalky minerals, fresh almond, a touch of damp grass and a topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and fairly tightly-knit, with a solid core, a fine girdle of acidity and good soil signature on the long and nascently complex finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but still pretty primary and more complexity will emerge with a year or two in the cellar. 2018-2026. **89+.**

2016 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine Delaporte (Chavignol)

This was a completely new domaine to me, as a friend brought this for us to share from Germany when we were tasting together in Burgundy for a few days in November. The wine is quite young and tight right now, but blossoms with some aeration to offer up a lovely aromatic package of green apple, lime, fresh almond, a touch of menthol, Chavignol botanicals, chalky minerality and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and tightly-knit, with fine mineral drive, a very good core and a long, nascently complex and snappy finish. This is approachable now, but really could do with a bit of bottle age to fully blossom. Good juice. 2018-2030+. **92.**

2016 Sancerre- Domaine Merlin-Cherrier (Bué)

Thierry Merlin farms fourteen *hectares* of vines, with twelve of these planted to sauvignon blanc and two to pinot noir. Virtually everything is in the commune of Bué, with the exception of a couple of parcels in Sancerre proper or in the less well-known village of Veaugues. Of his twelve *hectares* of sauvignon, he has just under one *hectare* in the great Bué vineyard of le Chêne Marchand. His regular Sancerre from 2016 is lovely, offering up a classic Bué bouquet of gooseberry, lime, a touch of beeswax, chalky minerality, fresh-mown grass and a touch of candied citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, truly lovely mineral drive, bright acids and a long, complex and utterly classic finish. Fine juice. 2018-2025+. **91.**

2016 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The 2016 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes” from Pierre Morin is a very pretty and classic expression of Bué sauvignon blanc raised in stainless. The bouquet is bright, pure and classy, offering up scents of gooseberry, lime, chalky soil tones, a whisper of white pepper, white flowers and a lovely topnote of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and very well-balanced, with a good core, bright acids and nice mineral limestone mineral drive on the long and zesty finish. A lovely example. 2018-2022. **91.**

2016 Sancerre “Nuance”- Domaine Vincent Pinard (Bué)

The 2016 Sancerre “Nuance” from Vincent Pinard is a very tasty bottle that is very much emblematic of the village of Bué. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of lime, green apple, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a very nice topnote of cut grass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, fine soil signature, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the wide open and complex finish. This is very tasty right now, but the style of the vintage is going to make this a bottle for early drinking. 2018-2021. **89.**



2016 Sancerre Vieilles Vignes “les Angeslots”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy

The Sancerre Vieilles Vignes “les Angeslots” from the Reverdy family is produced from a parcel of seventy-plus year-old vines. The 2016 version is outstanding, offering up a bright and complex nose of lime, green apple, complex, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a touch of fresh tarragon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, impressive complexity and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. This is crystal clear and most impressive. 2018-2030+. **93.**

2016 Sancerre “Silex”- Domaine Paul Thomas (Chavignol)

The 2016 Sancerre “Silex” from Paul Thomas is a bright and racy example, offering up a complex nose of gooseberry, a touch of grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, chalky minerality and white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, racy acids and good backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. The minerality nicely carries the fruit component here and gives the wine plenty of soil signature from start to finish. Good juice. 2018-2023. **90.**

2016 Sancerre “les Comtesses”- Domaine Paul Thomas (Chavignol)

La Comtesse is one of the most important historical vineyards in the magical village of Chavignol, but this is the first bottling from this superb *terroir* that I have ever tasted outside of the cellars of Gérard Bouley. The 2016 version from Paul Thomas is excellent, offering up a deep and nascently complex nose of lemon, gooseberry, white lilies, a very refined base of chalky soil tones, a nice touch of Chavignol botanicals and a bit of orange peel in the upper

register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with good depth at the core, fine complexity, bright acids and a long, classy and vibrant finish. This is very good Sancerre. 2018-2025. **92.**

2015 Sancerre “le Chant de l’Orme”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The Sancerre “le Chant de l’Orme” from Pierre Morin bottling from Pierre Morin is one of the few that is made with a significant percentage of barrel fermentation, as seventy percent of the blend is fermented in casks and only thirty percent in stainless steel. The wine is bottled unfiltered and the 2015 is excellent, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of lime zest, pear, a touch of candied orange, chalky soil tones, anise and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite round on the attack for Bué Sancerre, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, fairly complex finish. This is a good bottle of barrel-fermented Sancerre, but I find the oak influence takes away a bit from the backend mineral drive I find in all the other bottlings from Monsieur Morin, and I am not sure if this is a trade I am all that delighted to make! Perhaps a bit more bottle age will allow more minerality to emerge? 2018-2030. **90+.**

2015 Sancerre “le Chêne Marchand”- Domaine Merlin-Cherrier (Bué)

The 2015 Sancerre “le Chêne Marchand” from Thierry Merlin is a lovely wine, with the vineyard’s signature *les caillottes* chalkiness front and center in the wine. The bouquet is nascently complex and very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, green apple, just a touch of candied citrus peel, nuanced limestone minerality, very discreet grassiness and a floral topnote redolent of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full and tightly-knit, with a good core, superb mineral drive for the vintage, bright acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and quite elegant finish. In the hot summer of 2015, it had to be quite difficult to retain this type of elegance and girdle of acidity in the finished wine! This could do with a few years in the cellar to properly blossom and will be excellent. 2020-2035. **93.**

2015 Sancerre “Cuvée François de la Grange de Montigny”- Domaine Henry Natter

The 2015 Sancerre “Cuvée François de la Grange de Montigny” from Henry Natter is the family’s old vine bottling, made from a parcel of fifty-plus year-old vines in their vineyards in Montigny. However, the Natter family also makes a selection of the best *foudres* of the old vines to be bottled up as this special cuvée, so not all of the old vines make it into the Cuvée François de la Grange de Montigny each year. Once the cellar selection has been settled on, this wine stays in its *foudres* for nine to twelve months prior to bottling and is designed for long cellaring. The 2015 version is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of lemon, tart orange, lovely botanicals, a great base Chavignol-like of limestone minerality, citrus peel and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite ripe in this vintage, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip, good acids and impressive length on the complex finish. This is still fairly primary in personality and clearly is going to age very well indeed. Impressive juice. 2020-2035+. **92+.**

2015 Sancerre Vieilles Vignes “les Angeslots”- Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The 2015 Sancerre Vieilles Vignes “les Angeslots” from Pascal and Nicolas Reverdy is a nicely ripe and complex example of the vintage, offering up a deep and classy bouquet of tangerine, gooseberry, chalky minerality, citrus peel, a touch of anise and a lovely topnote of fresh-mown grass. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with a wide open personality, excellent depth at the core, good acids and excellent length and grip on the ripe and

complex finish. This shows the vintage's style, but is very well done in this more generous genre and is a pure and classy bottle for relatively near-term drinking. 2018-2023. **91.**

2014 Sancerre “le Chêne Marchand”- Domaine Merlin-Cherrier (Bué)

The 2014 Chêne Marchand from Monsieur Merlin is not quite as ripe in profile as the 2015 version, which allows another aspect of the wine's *terroir* to take center stage on both the nose and palate. The bouquet has a nice yellow fruit profile of lemon, gooseberry, complex, limestone minerality, a touch of candied violets and a fine topnote of discreet grassiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, minerally and quite complex, with a good core, racy acids and excellent cut and grip on the focused and very long finish. This is a tad more sinewy in personality than the 2015, and will never have quite the same depth of fruit as that vintage, but I really like the signature minerality here and nascent complexity, and might eventually prefer this wine, despite it being a tad on the leaner side. It will certainly age very well. 2018-2040. **93.**

Sancerre Rosé

2017 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Paul Thomas (Chavignol)

The 2017 Sancerre Rosé from Paul Thomas is a very pretty and vibrant wine on the nose, jumping from the glass in a fine mix of white cherries, blood orange, chalky minerality, white flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, well-balanced and very easy to drink already, with good acids and mid-palate depth. This is a very nice example. 2018-2023. **89.**

Sancerre Rouge and Friends

2016 Sancerre Rouge “Les Grands Monts”- Domaine Isabelle Garrault (Verdigny)

The 2016 Sancerre Rouge “Les Grands Monts” from Isabelle Garrault is a tasty bottle of pinot noir in the making, but it is nicely structured out of the blocks and will need some cellaring time to blossom properly. The bouquet shows a lovely vein of limestone in its aromatic package of cherries, red currants, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, a touch of fresh herbs and plenty of lovely, chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and soil-driven, with a good, solid core, fairly chewy tannins and good focus and grip on the long, youthful and promising finish. This is an old school example of Sancerre rouge, with good potential, but not a ton of early generosity and it needs a bit of patience to allow its structural attributes to soften up. 2022-2045. **88+.**

2016 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Martin (Chavignol)

The 2016 Sancerre Rouge from Pierre Martin is produced from pinot noir vines in Chavignol, which are pretty rare within the village, as most of the vineyard land is given over to sauvignon blanc, where the white grape excels like nowhere else in the world. The wine is nicely ripe in 2016, coming in at thirteen percent and offers up a fine, youthful nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, espresso, chalky minerality and a discreet topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, young and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the youthful finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom, but it should be pretty tasty once it has softened up a bit. 2022-2040+. **87+.**

2016 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Henry Natter (Montigny)

The 2016 Sancerre Rouge from Henry Natter is a fairly light color, harkening back to the style of the red wines here of yesteryear, but the light color is coupled with a wine of fine depth and intensity of flavor, and once the tannins here back off a bit, it is going to be a very tasty

middleweight. The youthful nose offers up scents of cherries, quince, chalky soil tones, a bit of bonfire and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full and tangy, with good soil signature, moderate tannins, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and promising finish. This will need three to five years in the cellar to blossom properly, but it will be a very good bottle once it is ready to drink. 2023-2050. **89.**

2015 Pinot Noir “les Montées de Saint Lay”- Domaine Dagueneau et Filles

The 2015 Pinot Noir “les Montées de Saint Lay” from Domaine Dagueneau et Filles (one of Pouilly-Fumé’s top estates) is a nicely ripe wine, tipping the scales at a civilized thirteen percent and quite a fine example. The youthful nose is bright and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of fresh thyme, bitter chocolate and a fine base of soil elements. On the palate the wine is bright, full and nicely transparent, with a good core, moderate tannins, lovely acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. Like a good example of Sancerre rouge, this wine will want a few years in the cellar to blossom properly, but it is going to be an excellent bottle once it has had a chance to blossom! 2022-2050. **91+.**

2015 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The 2015 Sancerre rouge from Pierre Morin is a really promising young bottle of pinot noir, coming in at a nicely ripe thirteen percent and offering lovely, succulent fruit to go with the good mineral drive and inherent structure of this appellation’s red wines. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red berries, cherries, chalky minerality, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is transparent, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a fine core, excellent backend mineral drive, fine focus and grip and a long, balanced and still youthful finish. This deserves three to five years in the cellar to soften up its tannins, but it is going to be very tasty when it is ready to drink. 2022-2045. **90.**

2015 Sancerre Rouge “à Nicolas”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

Pascal Reverdy’s 2015 Sancerre Rouge “à Nicolas” is an outstanding bottle of pinot noir, with the ripeness of the vintage nicely displayed with a strong vein of limestone minerality. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, offering up scents of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, chalky minerality, fresh thyme and just a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely sense of mid-palate sappiness, outstanding mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and very promising finish. This is a touch riper than the exceptional 2014 version, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but it has the same fidelity to its underlying soil and should be a very good example with some bottle age. 2023-2045+. **91+.**

2014 Sancerre Rouge “Vendanges Entières”- Vincent Pinard (Bué)

The 2014 Sancerre Rouge “Vendanges Entières” from Vincent Pinard, at least based on the nose, sees a fair bit of new oak during its *elevage*. But it is very well done and nicely supports the serious depth of fruit here. The bouquet is focused and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, black cherries, gamebird, a touch of raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and promising finish. This needs three to five years in the cellar to start to blossom properly, but all of the pieces are in place for a long and graceful life in bottle. Impressive! 2022-2045+. **91.**

2014 Sancerre Rouge “à Nicolas”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The 2014 Sancerre Rouge “à Nicolas” from Pascal Reverdy is one of the finest young examples of red from this appellation that I have ever tasted. The wine is deep, precise and nicely sappy on the nose, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chalky soil tones, bitter chocolate, a touch of gamebird and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. So many young examples of Sancerre rouge that I try are a bit rustic in structure, with rude tannins that demand time in the cellar to be tamed, but this is emphatically not the case with the beautiful 2014 pinot noir from Pascal Reverdy, which has beautifully integrated tannins and a very classy profile. This is very drinkable today, but has the depth and structure to also age very nicely and I can only imagine how good it will be eight to ten years down the road! 2018-2040. **93.**

THE INNER BEAUTY AND LIGHT OF PROPERLY-AGED GERMAN SPÄTLESEN



A troika of beautiful mature Spätlese from dinner one night at the Zeltinger Hof- the Abtsberg is from 1973.

German wine, particularly Riesling, has always been particularly attractive to my palate, and I have been drinking these beautiful wines since my very earliest days as a wine lover. I can vividly recall my arrival in the New York wine market back in 1990, having cut my teeth on German wines while still working in my native Massachusetts, to find that one of America's most vibrant wine markets at that time had really very little use for, or knowledge of the wines of Germany. I at least put an end to that in the shops where I was working at the time, fleshing out our selections of wines from the most recent vintage in Germany and happily adding bottles from some maturing vintages to our lineup, due to the fact that so many of these wines just sat in warehouses here in New York at the time, as it was extremely rare for a vintage to sell through the pipeline before the next one was ready for shipping. In many ways, those were very happy

days for a wine buyer in charge of a retail establishment's selection, as I had my pick of plenty of wines from great vintages such as 1983, 1985 and the like in the early 1990s, as most people at that time here in New York in charge of purchasing for their respective store or restaurant really did not want to dabble in the wines from Germany. When one can put out on your shelves ten year-old wines from a great vintage like 1983 from the likes of Johann Joseph Prüm, Maximin Grünhäuser, Egon Müller and the like, often at prices not more than a dollar or two different per bottle from the current releases, one can make a lot of very, very happy clients! I still recall having my wine cooler in my last retail shop stocked with the 1983 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from Weingut J. J. Prüm for \$14.99 per bottle and if one went up to \$18.99, you could drink the 1983 Gold Kapsel bottling (both conveniently cooled for consumption as soon as you got back to your apartment) and we were able to offer these wines for several months before the stocks eventually ran down at the distributor. Those were indeed heady days.

A lot has changed in the world of German wine since the early 1990s, and today, New York is a very, very good market for these beautiful wines. While prices such as those listed above are now long, long gone, it does not mean that German wines have stopped offering up some of the very greatest values to be found in the international wine market, and outside of a few superstar estates whose wines now are quite expensive, a great many of the very top producers' wines continue to be priced at very, very fair prices and offer up great value *vis à vis* other top wine-producing regions. Beyond the friendly confines of the New York wine market, German wines have grown exponentially in popularity across the US in a great many other wine markets (much of this due to the tireless proselytizing of Terry Theise and his incomparable prose about the beauty of German wine) and it is possible to find a fine spread of options of truly great German wine gracing the shelves and wine lists of hundreds and hundreds of retail and restaurant outlets across the continent these days. Even happier, after long trying to ignore their local wines, the German wine market itself has discovered these wines with a vengeance in the last decade and a healthy and robust domestic market is now a fundamental part of the German wine business. However, within Germany itself, as far as I can tell from my yearly visits there, most consumers continue to love primarily the dry wines produced in wine country, happily drinking everyday wines with no or very little residual sweetness and caring most deeply about the beautiful grand cru bottlings of Grosses Gewächs that have now become the most prized wines within the domestic market.

In the last few years, one can sense when in Germany that this love for dry wines, and particular dry Riesling, has started to branch out a bit up and down the hierarchy from the Trocken bottlings to also discover Kabinetten, for those times when serving a fairly dry wine is called for, but when something lighter and lower in alcohol is a better match for the occasion. So, coming in through the backdoor as it were, wines at the Prädikat level of Kabinett are starting to be rediscovered and a category that looked likely to fall prey to the vagaries of atmospheric heating in this age of global warmth is making a comeback in a big way and it is now likely that this sector of the German wine market will continue to grow and prosper for many years to come. I am delighted to see Kabinett level wines making such a strong comeback, both within the German market and abroad, but the irony of this blossoming of respect for German wines in general these days is that many are overlooking what may well be Germany's most unique and beautiful category of wine: Spätlesen. Spätlese also happens to be my very favorite type of German wine to drink, and more than half of my German collection in my own cellar is

dedicated to this Prädikat level. On my most recent trip to Germany in May, I was chatting with a few winegrowers in the region about how much I love Spätlese and our conversations led to the idea that an article championing the merits of this lovely Prädikat level might prove most useful, as in an era where German wine sales are far more robust than growers a generation ago would have even dreamed to hope for, the beautifully delicate and complex wines at the Spätlese level seem to be getting left behind.

To my palate, these are Germany's greatest wines, though of course, I have plenty of wines at all Prädikat levels and Trocken and Grosses Gewächs bottlings in abundance in my cellar, but deep down, I have always been a Spätlese guy. For me, it is at this level where one finds everything unique and beautiful about German wine (and particularly Riesling, though this comment is not confined solely to that grape variety) displayed in its most glittering form. The interplay of fruit, minerality, floral and spice tones seems to be so precisely defined when drinking a Spätlese, as the wines tend to have just a bit more body and fruit than classically filigreed Kabinetten, and more mineral drive and soil complexity than one can typically find at Auslesen, due to the greater ripeness and/or the interplay of botrytis with wines at this higher Prädikat level. With Spätlese, one can find a beautiful harmonic convergence of all of these elements of complexity drawn out in the most captivating of wines, with plenty of acidity and mineral undertow to keep the gloriously pure and varied fruit tones from dominating the wine. One can sometimes reach a similar stage with Auslesen, but in my experience, this is mostly after a great many years of cellaring, as it takes time and the evolution of the wine in bottle to allow the soil elements to start to mount and take equal billing with the fruit tones of the wine, and for the first several decades out from the vintage, Auslesen cannot really deliver the same glorious interplay of fruit and soil that is found in Spätlese from its first days in bottle. In a different expression, this is also true of the great dry Rieslings of Germany as well, which tend to need extended bottle age to really allow their structures to blossom properly and start to find their own perfect balance between fruit and soil elements, and in their early years, they cannot rival Spätlese for this glorious and dynamic interplay.

One of the winegrowers who inspired me to write this feature was Katharina Prüm of Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm in Wehlen. As she said as we were discussing the topic of Spätlese, "to me, this is the most perfect expression of middle Mosel, of German wine, as it is the most unique wine that we produce and there is nowhere else in the wine world where wines such as these can be crafted." She continued, "with a meal, this is my favorite Prädikat to drink, particularly if only one wine is being served, as it goes so beautifully with such a wide array of dishes." Katharina was discussing this while we were sharing a lunch of white asparagus, prosciutto and potatoes and drinking, yes, a Spätlese, while the beautiful May sun enlightened the outside world and we looked out the windows at the verdant Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard towering up from across the river. It would have been hard to resist her proselytizing for her favorite Prädikat in even the best of circumstances, but happily, I had no need to resist, as I was already in complete accord with her sentiments about this most beautiful of Prädikat wines! I know that some readers might think that Spätlese is a bit too sweet to go with many culinary preparations, and perhaps, when the wines are young and still in their first blush of youth, this might be the case, but one has to remember that this is a Prädikat level where the perception of sweetness diminishes over time and when a bottle of Spätlese has reached a proper age of twenty or thirty years, it is really more of a dry wine than the semi-sweet wine it starts out as when it is

first released. A similar transformation can be found in wines such as Demi-Sec bottlings of Vouvray or Montlouis as well, but I find that with Chenin Blanc, this transition from semi-sweet to perceptibly dry takes many more decades in the cellar to be realized than is the case with German Spätlese. The same can be said with Auslesen, which also eventually reach a point in their evolutions where they are perceptibly dry, rather than sweet wines, but it takes many more decades of bottle age to reach this point than it does with Spätlese.

But, what I have always found during my now long love affair with Spätlese is that one does not need to wait for the wines to start to show a bit less perceptible sweetness to enjoy their beauty, as in the vast, vast majority of good vintages, they start to drink well at an early age and never lose that sparkling vibrancy and pull and tug between fruit and minerality over their long lives in bottle. In fact, if Spätlesen were not so achingly beautiful to drink in its youth, my personal cellar might be far, far deeper with this Prädikat level than it is today, but I have always had tremendous difficulty in not drinking up a significant percentage of the Spätlesen I purchase within the first five years out from the vintage. Resisting the very obvious charms of a great bottle of young Spätlese is not one of the easiest tasks in the world! But, Spätlese ages long and gracefully in the bottle, and as delightful as young wines at this Prädikat level can be, I would suggest that they really start to hit their prime a solid decade out from the vintage and it is not until they are starting to close in on their twentieth birthdays that they really start to peak. This is another confounding aspect of the German domestic wine market today, as there seems to be a very strong fascination with the newest and youngest vintage by many of these relative newcomers to the world of German wine, and I have had winegrowers with five and six year-old Spätlesen still available on their sales sheets at virtually the same prices as when they were released, and they tell me that their German clients almost never take a look at the older wines available, as their belief is that the youngest wines are the best. I am sure that one day down the road the domestic market will start to discover that there is great beauty to be found in older German wines as well, but for the moment, this allows those of us who love more mature examples to still stock up our cellars as opportunity allows.

As I mentioned above, I started working on the research for this piece while I was still in Germany in May of this year, as once the seed had been planted by Katharina Prüm and Johannes Haart (who had also mentioned to me that it would be a great project), I availed myself of opportunities to drink mature Spätlese whenever they presented themselves. And, as I was staying at the Zeltinger Hof for a four night stretch, I managed to visit a nice handful of mature Spätlesen with dinner there on a few evenings, as their stunning wine list is just packed with great wines at this Prädikat level from which to choose! I had already been in Germany for five or six days before I started working on this article, so I missed some golden opportunities during earlier visits to estates to add to the roster of tasting notes below, but perhaps I can do a Part Two on mature Spätlesen next year and add more data points during my winery tastings in the region. Once I was back in New York and starting to recover from my mid-June knee surgery, I organized a couple of mature Spätlesen tastings here with friends who also love German wines, so that we could pool resources and I could start to build a tasting compendium for the article. The following wines are listed in chronological order, from youngest to oldest, and then alphabetically by producer within each vintage subset. I have listed AP numbers when I had them, but a few bottles were served without the opportunity to check the label for the cuvée number and those are listed without their AP number included in the note. I have not made any

effort to differentiate between regions. I hope the notes might inspire readers who are not already in love with Spätlese to start to look at these wines with more interest and keep some tucked away in the cellar and allow them to blossom fully with a decade or two of bottle age. Just remember, you have been forewarned just how difficult it can be to keep one's hands off of them in that irresistible first blush of youth!

2014 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #12

The 2014 Hermannshöhle Spätlese from Weingut Dönnhoff is starting to really blossom nicely at age four and is beginning to drink with real generosity on the palate. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of apple, a touch of white cherry, lilacs, a complex base of slate, gentle notes of citrus zest and a hint of the honeycomb to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed and delightfully open and juicy, with fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish that closes with a superb note of minerality. Lovely juice that is just starting to hit on all cylinders. 2018-2045+. **94.**



The entrance to the Zeltinger Hof hotel and restaurant, with a treasure trove of mature Spätlese on the list.

2011 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The beautiful 2011 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese from Oliver Haag was still on the sales list at the winery when I was there in May and was bargain-priced for its stellar quality! The bouquet is beautiful blossomed and *à point* in its blend of lime, white cherries, mossiness, white flowers, a fine base of slate, gentle smokiness and the first hint of the sweet corn element to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and nicely filigreed, with a lovely

core, superb focus and grip and a long, vibrant and impressively complex finish. At age seven, this wine is just starting to enter its plateau of peak drinkability, where it should hover for the next couple of decades. Stellar Spätlese. 2018-2040. **94.**

2009 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Reinhold Haart AP #13

This 2009 Goldtröpfchen Spätlese had just been put on the sales list at the estate at the time of my late May visit in 2018, as Johannes Haart has started a program of re-releasing an older Spätlese each year now. This is really, really good and is drinking at its peak right now, offering up a fine bouquet of wild yeasts, peach, a touch of currant leaf, bee pollen, a fine base of slate and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with a good core, good backend mineral drive, bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the long and complex finish. A lovely bottle. 2018-2040. **93.**

2008 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #7

This beautiful bottle of 2008 Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr was bottled quite late, as it rested comfortably in tank until the spring of 2014! At ten years of age, it is drinking with great generosity and style, delivering a superb bouquet of white cherries, pear, a fine base of slate, vanilla bean and a lovely topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and succulent, with crisp, zesty acids, a wide open personality, excellent complexity and grip and a very long, pure and soaring finish. This is flat out delicious today and has decades of life still ahead of it. 2018-2045. **94.**

2008 Wolfer Goldrube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Daniel Vollenweider AP #3

Daniel Vollenweider's 2008 Goldrube Spätlese is drinking beautifully at age ten. The bouquet is wide open and vibrant, offering up scents of peach, clementine, a fine base of minerality, orange zest and a touch of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, bouncy and complex, with a succulent core, lovely acidity and grip and a long, focused and classy finish. This is not the most delicately styled 2008 Spätlese, but it hits all the right notes and has decades of life still ahead of it. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2006 Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff (Auction Btlg)

The 2006 vintage was less botrytized in the Nahe than it was in the middle Mosel, but this is still not a classically racy and mineral rendition of the Felsenberg "Felsentürmchen". However, the wine at age eleven is fully mature and wide open, offering up a complex nose of white peach, apricot, honeycomb, a lovely base of minerality, citrus blossoms and hints of the leather to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly broad-shouldered in the style of the vintage, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is just starting to show a salty element to the backend minerality that will become more pronounced as the years go by. Good juice and a very strong 2006. 2017-2040. **94.**

2006 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2006 vintage in the middle Mosel is very atypical, as the degree of botrytis that swept through the vineyards here ahead of harvest left almost everything glazed and this Spätlese is certainly quite defined by its generous level of botrytis. The bouquet offers up a nicely glazed blend of lime, pineapple, *mirabelle*, salty soil tones and just a touch of upper register, Brauneberg smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, sweet and still quite fresh, with a good core, fine complexity and length, but a slightly broad-shouldered finish. This is really a

light Auslese in personality, but that was the nature of 2006 and one is not going to find the same backend precision as in a vintage such as 2004 or 2008. Still, this is tasty. 2018-2035+. **89.**

2006 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Willi Schaefer (Auction Bottling)

The 2006 Auction bottling of Domprobst Spätlese from Weingut Schaefer is a lovely example of the vintage, but it is really more of a light, gently glazed Auslese than it is a classic Spätlese. But that is the nature of the 2006 vintage in the middle Mosel, where there was so much botrytis. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a gently tropical blend of papaya, peach, petrol, slate, orange blossoms, fresh apricot and a touch of honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, adequate framing acids and a long complex finish. Given the level of botrytis in this vintage and that fact that this usually concentrates acids, as well as sugars, I was anticipating just a bit more cut in this wine at age eleven, but it seems just a bit soft to my palate. Perhaps it is just the breadth of the palate with the botrytis? 2017-2040+. **92.**

2005 Schlossböckelheimer Kupfergrube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff (Auction)

The 2005 Auction bottling of Kupfergrube Spätlese from Helmut Dönnhoff is a lovely wine, but the power of the vintage can be sensed here and the lovely filigree of mature Spätlese has still not made its presence felt. The bouquet is beautiful, bouncing from the glass in a lovely blend of white peach, complex minerality, honeycomb, lavender, iris blossom and a hint of the smokiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite precise, with a fine base of minerality, generous, succulent fruit tones, bright acids and lovely grip on the long and complex finish. This is an excellent wine that still has a long life ahead of it, but today, it drinks a bit like a light Auslese, rather than a classic Spätlese. 2018-2040. **93.**

2005 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #8

The 2005 vintage is such a beautiful year in Germany, though the wines are fairly powerful in style and still a tad on the young side to my palate. The Domprobst Spätlese from Willi and Christophe Schaefer is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of fresh apricot, pineapple, orange zest, a fine base of slate, just a hint of honey and a salty topnote of impending maturity. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive, bright, snappy acids and a very long, refined and well-balanced finish. A fine bottle that is starting to blossom nicely at age thirteen, but which will be even better with a bit more bottle age. 2018-2040. **93+.**

2005 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese (Auction Btlg.)- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #1

I bought this bottling in 2006, but missed it in 2005 and profoundly wish it was the other way around, as this wine is aging magnificently and is starting to drink with unquestionable greatness. The bouquet is now nicely into its secondary level of complexity, offering up a pure and vibrant mix of tangerine, yellow plum, beautifully salty minerality, a touch of honeycomb, orange zest and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, pure and complex, with beautiful filigree and backend bounce, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the very complex finish. 2005 is a rather powerful vintage, but the Schaefer Auction Spätlese is very classical in proportion and a quintessential expression of everything that is beautiful with the Domprobst vineyard. Many thanks to Tom Reddick for saving me a taste when he stopped by for a visit! 2018-2045. **97.**

2005 Maximin Grünhäuser Riesling Abtsberg Spätlese - Von Schubert AP #27

The 2005 vintage was not purported to be a strong year for Maximin Grünhäuser and after my visit there in the spring of 2006, I bought six bottles each of my two favorite wines and left the remainder of the lineup alone. However, this bottling of Abtsberg Spätlese was one of the two wines I bought for my cellar and I wish I had picked up more than a six pack, for at age thirteen, this wine was absolutely singing! The bouquet is pure, vibrant and utterly classical in profile, offering up those sweet botanicals of the Abtsberg, to go along with lovely notes of lime, violets, a hint of honeycomb, bee pollen, a beautiful base of slate and upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, complex and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and outstanding length and grip on the poised and very classy finish. This is an absolute classic vintage of Abtsberg Spätlese that is just hitting full stride and will drink gloriously well for many decades to come. 2018-2050+. **94+**.

2004 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2004 Kirschheck Spätlese from Helmut Dönnhoff is at its apogee of maturity right now and is drinking with distinction and succulence. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, white peach, bee pollen, iris blossoms, slate and still a hint of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and seamlessly balanced, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, lifted and zesty finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2035. **93**.

2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

This superb Spätlese was served with a steaming platter of white asparagus at the estate during a quick lunch after finishing up our tasting of the 2016ers, and had no label, so I am not certain of the AP number on the wine. However, I am sure of the quality, which was outstanding, offering a wide open and *à point* nose of pear, white cherry, vanilla bean, bee pollen and a lovely base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and focused, with excellent complexity, a good core and superb focus and grip on the long, poised and elegant finish. At age fourteen, this wine is just hitting its apogee, where it will continue to drink beautifully for several decades to come. 2018-2050. **94**.

2003 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #8

The 2003 Rausch Spätlese from Hanno Zilliken is a very pretty wine that is now into its apogee of peak maturity and is drinking very well. The nose offers up a fine blend of pineapple, salty soil tones, a touch of honeycomb, citrus zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly sweet for this Prädikat level from the Zillikens, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. The acids here are not typical Saar Spätlese, but they are perfectly respectable and will continue to give the wine lift and structure for at least the near-term. 2018-2035. **90**.

2003 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Reinhold Haart AP #15

The 2003 Goldtröpfchen Spätlese AP #15 is, of course, not a classic interpretation of this vineyard at the Spätlese level, given the heat of the summer of 2003, but the wine is aging very nicely and is a tasty drink in its idiosyncratic style. The bouquet offers up a mature and still quite bright blend of yellow plum, honeycomb, esthery overtones, baked peach and a hint of the notes of new leather that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely bouncy (despite quite low acidity), with good focus and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2018-2035. **91**.



2002 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Helmut Dönnhoff AP #8

The 2002 Brücke Spätlese AP #8 is a very, very good wine that is now drinking with impressive generosity and evolutionary ardor at age sixteen. The bouquet offers up a fine mix of apple, a touch of raspberry, complex minerality, bee pollen and lovely savory elements reminiscent of cumin and caraway seed. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and very much defined today by its underlying minerality, with superb acids and focus, impressive complexity and grip and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This wine still has a long life ahead of it, but I could not quite escape the feeling that I liked its style even better when the wine was a bit younger. That said, we shall leave the remaining bottles in the cellar and see what the future brings! 2018-2045. **93.**

2002 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Helmut Dönnhoff AP #11

For many, many years, I always considered myself a Brücke man when it came to the various bottlings from Helmut Dönnhoff, but our recent Spätlese tasting has moved me decidedly over into the Hermannshöhle camp! The 2002 Spätlese AP #11 from this great vineyard is a brilliant wine that is now at its apogee, though it will continue to dazzle for decades and decades to come. The beautiful nose delivers a fine constellation of apple, a touch of white cherry, gloriously complex slate undertones, dried flowers, a hint of lavender, bee pollen and an exotic topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very mineral in personality, with a rock solid core, great focus and filigree, zesty acids and superb length and grip on the vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. This is a great wine by any measure! 2018-2050. **96.**

2002 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #9

Willi Schaefer's 2002 Domprobst Spätlese AP #9 is drinking beautifully today, and at our tasting, it was really quite remarkable for how much it has dried out over its first sixteen years, particularly in comparison to some of the other 2002ers on the table. The bouquet is complex and quite beautiful in its mélange of peach, tangerine, lovely savory elements, slate, dried flowers, incipient Domprobst smokiness and an exotic touch of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, complex and zesty, with a good core, lovely transparency and a very long, bouncy and really quite dry finish. This is really, really good at the table today and has years of life still ahead of it. 2018-2050. **93.**

2001 Schlossböckelheimer Kupfergrube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #7

Helmut Dönnhoff did not own his parcel in the Kupfergrube vineyard for too many years, as he was eventually presented with the possibility of swapping it for more vines in the Hermannshöhle as part of the reorganization of holdings in the region, but he made some really lovely wines from the vineyard during his tenure. The 2001 Kupfergrube Spätlese AP #7 is one of his finest renditions from this parcel, offering up an outstanding bouquet of apple, quince, a touch of orange, plenty of smokiness, esthery notes of bee pollen and a lovely bass-line of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex, fullish and beautifully balanced, with fine depth at the core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Superb juice. 2018-2040+. **94.**

2001 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Helmut Dönnhoff AP #9

The 2001 Brücke Spätlese AP #9 from Weingut Dönnhoff is a step up from the stylish 2002 version. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, delivering scents of apple, tangerine, lovely minerality, smoky overtones, a touch of savory elements and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full, focused and mineral-driven, with lovely cut and grip, excellent balance and a long, complex and still fairly youthful finish. Whereas the 2002 Brücke Spätlese is really at a fine point for drinking, I might be inclined to leave the superb 2001 iteration alone in the cellar for a few more years, as its potential is outstanding. 2021-2060. **94+.**

2001 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #7

The AP #7 Spätlese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr from Oliver Haag is really a superb wine. This is an absolute classic expression of this great slate hillside, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, lime peel, slate, a touch of petrol, fresh mint and the vineyard's telltale topnote of mossiness. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and utterly classic in proportion, with superb mid-palate depth, fine filigree and bounce, laser-like focus and a very, very long, bright and dancing finish. Superb juice. 2018-2045+. **94+.**

2001 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Reinhold Haart AP #8

Theo Haart made absolutely brilliant 2001ers and this bottling of Spätlese from the Goldtröpfchen is no exception. The bouquet is pure, complex and very vibrant, offering up scents of peach, currant, a touch of honeycomb, lilacs, slate, lemongrass and a lovely topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, racy and rock solid at the core, with great soil signature, superb acids and great focus and grip on the long and gently salty finish. This is a perfectly balanced and very classy bottle of Spätlese at its absolute apogee at age seventeen, but with decades of life still ahead of it. Gorgeous! 2018-2050. **95.**

2001 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #5

There is talk in some circles of German wine appreciation that the very elegant vintage of 2002 has eclipsed the initially more highly-touted 2001ers, but in this most recent tasting, we found this to emphatically not be the case. Yes, the 2002ers are very good, but the 2001ers are a cut above in depth, dimension and mineral drive, while still retaining the beautiful elegance that is the hallmark of great German Riesling. The 2001 Domprobst Spätlese AP #5 from Willi Schaefer is a simply stunning wine, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of peach, fresh apricot, a beautiful base of slate, fruit stone, orange peel, lovely savory elements and the first signs of the saltiness of full maturity. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and focused, with a great core, superb mineral drive and great cut and grip on the very long and very complex finish. A brilliant Spätlese! 2018-2050. **95.**

1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #6

Dr. Manfred Prüm's 1998 Spätlese AP #6 from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is still a remarkably young wine for age twenty and actually took some coaxing time in decanter to start to show its true colors! Once the wine starts to blossom, it is easy to see that this is going to be a serious long-distance runner and a truly great Spätlese when it is ready to drink, but that is still at least a few more years down the road. The bouquet starts out quite closed, but eventually offers up scents of white cherry, pear, lovely slate tones, petrol, a touch of wild yeasts, incipient saltiness and a fine topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and beautifully pure, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip, blossoming complexity and a very, very long, vibrant finish. I have the distinct impression that the wines were bottled with a bit more SO₂ back in this era at Weingut Prüm, which partially accounts for still how youthful this lovely Spätlese is on its twentieth birthday. For example, the 2008 reviewed above is far more open and generous today than this stellar, albeit still youthful, 1998. So give it a few more years before having at it in earnest! 2022-065. **94.**

1998 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #9

The 1998 Himmelreich Spätlese from the Schaefer family is really drinking splendidly at age twenty, offering up beautiful filigree and mineral transparency on both the nose and palate. The refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of baked apple and peach, slate minerality, honeycomb, bee pollen, gentle spice elements and a fine, salty topnote of blossoming maturity. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and seamless, with lovely complexity and focus, superb intensity of flavor and impressive length and grip on the fairly dry, vibrant finish. This is beautifully understated in personality, but complex and utterly refined. Lovely juice. 2018-2040. **93.**

1996 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel AP #10

Weingut Johann Joseph Christoffel made such lovely wines in this era, prior to the sale of the estate in the early years of this millennium, and their 1996 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese AP #10 is an absolute classic. The wine offers up the refined, filigreed and ethereal style of this estate in its heyday, with the gorgeous bouquet offering up scents of strawberries, apple, slate, a touch of sweet corn, salty soil elements, lilacs and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and dancing, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids, great focus and grip and a very long, bouncy and complex finish. Just a beauty! 2018-2045. **94.**



1996 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag

I really like the 1996 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese from Weingut Fritz Haag. This is a fully mature, complex and classy wine that offers up a superb bouquet of *mirabelle*, a touch of sweet corn, salty soil tones, a gentle dollop of honey and lovely upper register botanicals in the true Brauneberg style. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and racy, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice at its absolute apogee! 2018-2035+. **93+**.

1996 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP #8

The decade of the 1990s was a truly magical ten year stretch for this great Ruwer estate and I have had more profound Maximin Grünhäuser wines from the '90s than from any other decade in their long and illustrious history. This bottling of 1996 Abtsberg Spätlese was no exception and this wine is pure magic! The bouquet soars from the glass in a vibrant and stunning blend of lime, white cherry, a touch of petrol, beautiful Abtsberg botanicals (mint, cress and gently mossy notes), still a whisper of wild yeasts and a gloriously complex base of slate. On the palate the wine is lean, medium-bodied and very intensely flavored, with stunning transparency and mineral drive, great complexity, bright, racy acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, electric finish. Sheer brilliance! 2018-2050. **96**.

1994 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller AP #14

Egon Müller's 1994 Scharzhofberger Spätlese is now at its apogee of peak drinkability and the wine is beautifully refined and complex on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a stylish mix of peach, yellow plum, salty, slate minerality, orange peel and a hint of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a lovely core, impressive filigree, zesty acids and a long, focused and energetic finish. This is a beautiful moment to be drinking this wine, but it will continue to cruise along for at least the next couple of decades and probably longer. 2018-2040+. **94.**

1993 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #9

The 1993 Herrenberg Spätlese AP #9 is another absolutely superb example of this golden era at Maximin Grünhäus. The nose is beautifully defined by its botanical elements at age twenty-five, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of white cherry, petrol, a hint of wild yeasts, slate and a potpourri of mossy, botanical elements that play off of the fruit tones to truly stunning effect. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very complex, with lovely filigree, outstanding focus and grip and a very, refined, long and zesty finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Spätlese at its absolute apogee, with the inimitable *terroir* of the Herrenberg in full bloom. 2018-2050. **95.**

1993 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese (Auction)- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #7

The 1993 vintage was a great, great year for Hanno Zilliken and his Auction bottling of Spätlese from the Rausch vineyard is now drinking at its absolute apogee. The beautiful nose offers up a mature and still vibrant blend of lime, pear, gentle botanicals, plenty of smokiness, white cherry, sea salts and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and nearly dry now in its resolution, with a fine core, stunning complexity and grip and a very long, focused and still zesty finish. This is an extremely compelling example of how rewarding aging Spätlese can be over the long haul! 2018-2045+. **96.**

1992 Lieser Sussenberg Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser

1992 was Thomas Haag's first vintage as winemaker at Schloss Lieser and predated his eventual purchase of the estate by a few years. This wine has really aged beautifully and is drinking with great style and complexity at age twenty-six, offering up a pure and nicely mature bouquet of lime, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of honeycomb and a hint of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with lovely intensity of flavor, still very good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and refined finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2035. **92.**

1983 Trierer Augenscheiner Riesling Spätlese- Vereingte Hospitien AP #65

The Vereingte Hospitien continues to be one of the largest owners of great vineyards in all of the Mosel, but I have lost track with how their wines are these days and really should pay a visit and taste here. However, back in the 1980s, I drank these wines with quite some frequency and always found them very good. This fine old Spätlese was still to be found on the wine list at the Zeltinger Hof and proved to be at a marvelous stage of its evolution in May. The bouquet is still beautifully vibrant, but also tertiary in its composition of apricot, orange, toasted coconut, salty soil tones and a touch of tea leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with good mid-palate weight, sound acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. At thirty-five years of age, this wine has lost much of its perception of

residual sweetness, but continues to drink beautifully. A lovely wine that is still in its plateau of peak maturity. 2018-2035. **92.**



Looking up at the Scharzhofberg in full bloom at the end of the merry month of May.

1976 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller AP #8

I have to confess that I drank a couple of glasses of this wine over the course of two days, despite the wine being corked. It had been a long time since I bothered to drink a corked wine (the last time had been two full glasses of the 1900 Château Lafite-Rothschild on its eighty-eighth birthday, as I could not let that piece of history go away completely unwanted, despite its corkiness, as there was such a brilliant wine underneath the TCA), but I wanted to get a feel for this 1976 Spätlese and the corkiness here was really quite minor- though enough to remove most of the pleasure from the wine. As Egon Müller is always quite generous during visits to the estate, I have had more than my fair share of older wines from the winery in the last couple of decades, but most of these are Auslesen or above in sweetness level, so I do not get the opportunity to taste all that many mature examples of his Spätlese from the Scharzhofberg vineyard. I did not take a proper note on the wine, given its corkiness, but there were truly excellent and quite lively raw materials percolating under the TCA and I am sure that bottles with sound closures are absolutely stellar and have years and years of life ahead of them.

1973 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP #13

This was another gem found on the wine list at the Zeltinger Hof. 1973 was a very good vintage and one that was lost a bit in the sands of time, as the 1971, 1975 and 1976 vintages have all retained more vintage luster as the years have gone by. But, I have had some beautiful 1973ers over the last decade and this Abtsberg Spätlese was yet another truly delightful wine. The beautiful nose is still bright and energetic, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh apricot, *mirabelle*, salty minerality, clover, a touch of cress and hints of the tea leaves to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, vibrant, long and fullish in profile, with simply perfect balance, lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. Just a great bottle of Spätlese at its absolute zenith, forty-five years out from the vintage and still with plenty of life in it! 2018-2040. **96.**

RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE INDEX

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Wines Covered In This Article:

Robert Barbichon (Gyé sur Seine): *Blanc de Noirs Brut NV; “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut NV; “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV;*

Besserat de Bellefon (Épernay): *“Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV;*

Bollinger (Aÿ): *1975 R. D. Brut Millésime*

Francis Boulard (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville): *“les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2011); les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2013);*

Vincent Charlot (Mardeuil): *2012 “Fruit De Ma Passion” Extra Brut Millésimé; 2012 “Rubis de la Dune” Extra Brut Rosé Millésimé;*

Champagne Corbon (Avize): *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Brut d’Autrefois” NV; 2006 “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2005 “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2000 “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 1999 “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 1998 “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 1996 “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut;*

R. H. Coutier (Ambonnay): *“Cuvée Tradition” Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV;*

Benoît Déhu (Fossoy): *“Cuvée La Rue des Noyers” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2014)*

Delamotte (Mesnil-sur-Oger): *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2008 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;*

Champagne Doyard (Vertus): *“Révolution” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Nature; “Cuvée Vendémiaire” Premier Cru Brut NV;*

Alexandre Filaine (Damery): *“Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV; “DMY” Brut NV; 2011 “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime;*

Gatinois (Aÿ): *“Brut Tradition” Grand Cru NV; “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV;*

Grongnet (Étoges): *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV;*

Charles Heidsieck (Reims): *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Brut Réserve” NV; “Rosé Réserve” Brut NV;*

Olivier Horiot (les Riceys): *“Métisse” Noirs et Blancs Extra Brut NV; 2012 “5 Sens” Millésime Brut Nature; 2011 “Sève de Saignée” Rosé Brut Nature;*

Krug (Reims): *Grand Cuvée “166ème Edition” Brut NV;*

Laherte Frères (Chavot): *Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV; “Ultradition” Brut NV; “Rosé Ultradition” Brut NV;*

Larmandier-Bernier (Vertus): *“Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Longitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Rosé de Saignée” Extra Brut NV;*

Domaine Georges Laval (Cumières): *“Cumières” Brut Nature NV; 2014 “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature; 2013 “Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature;*

Marguet Père et Fils (Ambonnay): *“Shaman 14” Brut Nature NV (magnum); “Shaman 15” Rosé Brut Nature NV; “Shaman 14” Rosé Brut Nature NV; 2013 “Bouzy” Extra Brut Millésime; 2011 “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Millésime;*

Christophe Mignon (Festigny): *Brut Nature NV; Brut Rosé “Pur Meunier” NV;*

Moët et Chandon (Épernay): *1990 Dom Pérignon “Oenothèque” Brut Millésime; 1975 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime;*

Pierre Moncuit (Mesnil-sur-Oger): *“Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet” Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV;*

Moutard Père et Fils (Buxeuil): *“Grande Cuvée” Brut NV;*

Pol Roger(Épernay): *1998 Vintage Brut Rosé;*

Ponson (Coulommès la Montagne): *“la Petite Montagne” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV;*

Salon (Mesnil-sur-Oger): *2007 “le Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime*

Taittinger (Reims): *2007 “Comtes de Champagne” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2013 Brut Millésimé;*

Champagne Tarlant (Oeuilly): *“Zero” Brut Nature NV; “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2000); “Rosé Zero” Brut Nature NV; 2000 “la Vigne d’Antan” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime;*

J. L. Vergnon Mesnil-sur-Oger): *“Murmure” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV; “Conversation” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV; “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; 2011 “O.G.” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Nature; 2010 “Expression” Blanc de Blancs Gr. Cru Extra Brut; 2009 “Resonance” Blanc de Blancs Gr. Cru Extra Brut;*

Vouette et Sorbée: *2009 “Blanc de Argile” Extra Brut Millésime (magnum);*

RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE PART TWO- AUTUMN OF 2018



As I mentioned in the last issue in the article covering my shortened trip to the Champagne region in March of this year, I left off a lot of my favorite producers' current releases from the lineup of samples for that feature, as I simply had too many other samples to work through at the time. Consequently, I was very happy to settle in during the preparation for this issue and start playing catch up on some of these superb Champagne producers and their new bottlings in the market. One of the best things associated with this current round of samples was that we are starting to see the very first of the 2015 base year wines arriving in the new releases of non-vintage Brut and other non-vintage cuvées. From what I have tasted so far, 2015 looks likely to be an absolutely superb vintage in Champagne and may well be the finest year in the region since the outstanding year of 2002. It is still very early days for wines based on the harvest of 2015, as those wines would have only had two to two and a half years aging *sur latte* in the cellars and it is only the very earliest releasers of non-vintage wines who are getting wines out into the market now that are based on the superb 2015 growing season. For example, a top grower such as Benoît Tarlant will age his non-vintage cuvées from the 2015 base year for fully six years on their fine lees prior to disgorging them, so we will not start to see any of those wines until the summer or fall of 2022! But, for producers who age *sur latte* for a shorter period of time, their 2015 base wines are starting to show up and they have been, for the most part, quite impressive. We will see a lot more of these in the coming year or two, after which, we can start

getting ready for the release of vintage-dated wines from 2015. So, there is a lot of stunning Champagne quietly resting in the cellars throughout the region right now and a great opportunity is on the horizon for those who like to cellar Champagne.

It is not only the 2015 vintage in Champagne that is waiting to unleash a rich mosaic of great wines in the coming years, but early reports from gifted producers such as Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon at Maison Louis Roederer and Agnès Corbon of Champagne Corbon in Avize have stated that the quality of the 2018 fruit that came in a handful of weeks ago in the region is also of absolutely stunning quality and the 2018 vintage may even outpace the glorious 2015s in the years to come! So there is a lot of good news from Champagne these days, both for what is coming in the near future and what is currently in the market, as I have never tasted more stunning bottles of Champagne than I have in the last six months. The quality revolution ushered in by Anselme Selosse all those years ago, when he returned to his family's domaine in Avize and fundamentally changed the philosophical foundation of so many previously held positions in Champagne is now in full bloom and the world has never had so many gloriously beautiful options for bubbly from the region. Sure, there are still laggards who feel that intelligent farming is not necessary and vast marketing budgets can cure all ills, but they are really the dinosaurs in the region today and these houses who continue to operate as they have always done are not destined for long-term success unless they start to change how they farm and make their wines. There are simply too many other great Champagne options out there in the present day market for the under-achievers to continue to find a wealth of customers for poorly-made wines from poorly-farmed grapes, no matter how much money they throw at the marketing team. So, change will need to come on a universal basis in the coming years in Champagne, so that the producers who today still cling to the sloppier precepts of yesterday's viticultural and vinification techniques can catch up with the large vanguard of good-farming, good-winemaking estates that are pushing the region's top wines to higher and higher levels of quality with each passing year.

I was chatting with a long-time friend about the current climate in Champagne these days and he said something that really struck a chord with me, when he equated the quality revolution currently going on in the region with what we had both witnessed in Burgundy in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, when the Burgundians laid the foundation of quality that has led to the most successful run of wines and vintages in the entire history of the region in the first years of the new millennium. It was better farming methods, coupled with more auspicious growing seasons, that paved the way for the strict selection and attention to detail in the very top tier of Burgundy domaines from 1985 onwards that has unleashed so many great wines from the cellars here in the last three decades, and producers in Champagne today find themselves in an analogous position and a very significant number are really starting to hit their stride and produce stunning wines at a quality level that would have been inconceivable to the average Champagne producer a generation or two ago. And we are only still seeing the tip of the iceberg in this regard in Champagne, as the wines need time in the cellar before they are ready to be disgorged and shipped and I have little doubt that there are wines currently resting *sur latte* in many a domaine's cellar that will represent a significant step up in quality from what would have been produced there only a decade ago. There are more wines reflective of specific *terroir*, more wines produced from stellar quality *vins clairs*, more wines being given longer time on their fine lees to allow them to really blossom prior to release and an overall sense of patience and artisanal precision and authenticity in a great many cellars in the region these days, so the wines

are only going to continue to get better in the coming years. We are truly living through a Renaissance period for Champagne.

However, there is one aspect of current changes in the region that continues to worry me a bit: the trend to produce more and more wines with little or no *dosage*. I am just not certain how this will play out over the long run with some of these beautiful wines, as I have nowhere near as much experience with Champagne made with very low or zero *dosage* at ages of thirty or forty years of age as I do with wines made with traditional levels of *dosage*. My own palate has evolved rather dramatically over the course of the last decade in this regard, for as I have focused more energy and time on the region of Champagne, I have found that my personal “sweet spot” for *dosage* levels has declined and I prefer slightly drier examples of Champagne than I did ten years ago. But, that said, one has to realize that *dosage* levels are not a flat number, but rather a balancing technique that has to be viewed through the prism of the other structural components of a young Champagne, with levels of acidity and reflective minerality in the base wine also key considerations of where a proper level of *dosage* (or no *dosage*) can be found to make the wine as harmonious as possible to the eventual end-user. There has certainly been a trend to harvest grapes by many growers in Champagne at higher levels of maturity than was the case a generation ago (global warming has not hurt in this regard either), resulting in wines with better sugar to acid balances and riper acids, so theoretically, levels of *dosage* should fall with wines made in this style, as there is less shrill structural constituents in the wines that need buffering with residual sugar.

However, not everyone in Champagne is harvesting riper grapes today than was the case a generation ago, as there is still a very large number of small, absentee owners of vineyard parcels who are not particularly careful when it comes to their farming and just want to get the check in the bank for their grapes (no matter their quality) and be done with the growing season, so not every producer is necessarily working with superior raw materials at the current time. Small landowners continue to be a very, very large and important source for grapes for larger houses and many of these small farmers liked the system just fine as it was before, with large yields, lots of chemical applications in the vineyards and early, risk-free harvesting to get the grapes delivered and paid for with alacrity. The resulting quality of the wines made from their grapes was absolutely immaterial, and this continues to be the case for a sizable percentage of grape farmers in the region. So, the current market trend towards more and more very low *dosage* or non-*dosé* wines, which continue to grow in demand from many in the wine trade, are not always the best solutions for those working with grapes from less than pristine farming techniques. But, less *dosage* is the trendy choice at the moment and from what I am tasting of wines in this category, some producers are moving to lower or no *dosage* for some of their bottlings to take advantage of this trend, despite the fact that their wines are not particularly well-suited for this style, or at the very least, need to be aged significantly longer *sur latte* to tame their acidity, if they are not going to be buffered with a bit more generous *dosage*. The results are more shrill and out of balance wines that can happily claim lower *dosage* for their marketing teams, but which are not an improvement on the wines from these estates from yesteryear that were more generously finished with *dosage* to find their point of equilibrium.

This is not to say that there are not a growing and already very sizable number of non-*dosé* bottlings out there, with producers like Benoît Marguet, Vincent Laval and Benoît Tarlant

immediately coming to mind as amongst the most seasoned hands at producing wines of impeccable balance without *dosage*, but not every producer is skilled enough to pull this off, or more importantly, has the financial resources available to be able to age the wines long enough on their fine lees for the acids to soften up sufficiently and negate the need for *dosage* buffering. *Vignerons* such as Benoît Tarlant, who ages his entry level, non-vintage Brut Zero for a minimum of six years *sur latte* to allow the acids to mellow are the exception, not the rule today, so there remains a real need for at least some *dosage* with many wines. It is important not to dwell solely on the technical details of the level of *dosage* or if there was none used, and rather focus on the overall balance of the wine when it is released. For the reality is that though Champagne ages magnificently and improves with bottle age, the vast majority of bottles (and this is especially true for non-vintage wines) are drunk up within the first year or two of release, so the wines really do need to find a point of balance before they leave the producers' cellars and arrive on the market. These days, as the trendiness of low or no *dosage* continues to grow, I taste more and more bottles that are rather emphatically shrill and brusque in structure out of the blocks and absolutely demand more bottle age, or could have done with a bit more *dosage* to balance out the youthful acidity. This is often particularly evident with chardonnay-based Extra Brut or Brut Nature bottlings, as this grape in Champagne generally needs more buffering of its acids in its relative youth than other varietals planted in the region. Producers need to be pragmatic in this regard, rather than dogmatic, and my hope is that this will be the case despite the growing popularity of the perception that lower *dosage* wines are more desirable.

I fully realize that the perception of balance in a finished bottle of Champagne ready for release from the cellars is as much a matter of personal taste as anything else, and for some, a moderate *dosage* of five or six grams can taste "too sweet" and for others, a brilliantly balanced wine at two grams per liter of residual sugar is going to be "too dry and austere". The more important point than where the wine ultimately lands in terms of *dosage* or receives none is the realization that this is a floating scale and each wine will find its own point of optimal balance with a different level of *dosage* or period of time aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, and *vignerons* and importers need to understand the movable nature of this part of the Champagne making equation and seek to balance each wine according to its needs, rather than try to hit ideal numbers. In this respect, I really like Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon's approach to Brut Nature bottlings at Maison Louis Roederer, as he solely uses fruit from the warmer village of Cumières for this cuvée and only produces it in ripe vintages like 2009, where the acids are not as likely to need buffering with any *dosage*. But, there are other producers who are going to make non-*dosé* bottlings each and every year for market reasons and not all are going to be as successful as others. Or, perhaps a better way to phrase this would be to say that certain growing seasons are going to find a far narrower audience for non-*dosé* bottlings than riper years, and I hope that producers will continue to take this into account in the future. A *vigneron* like Benoît Marguet seems to have the perfect perspective when it comes to *dosage*, which he would generally prefer to not use, or utilize at very low levels, as he will let the dictates of any given vintage and wine decide where the proper level of *dosage* (or no *dosage* at all) will fall, based on their other components of balance in the wine. However, it seems likely that there could be a time where other *vignerons* take the approach that "I just want to show my underlying *terroir* and the vintage's characteristics unadulterated by any *dosage*" and will routinely produce wines without *dosage* and remove one of the most important techniques in the winemaker's tool box in the Champagne region. Inadvertently, this type of approach could also dissuade a significant

percentage of the wine market, who are not yet ready for very brisk Brut Nature bottlings, from drinking and enjoying their wines, as it seems pretty clear that drinking and enjoying wines with little or no *dosage* in Champagne is a bit of an acquired taste and those relatively new to Champagne are probably not going to be impressed by wines from these categories until they have built up some experience. For these reasons, Brut bottlings with judicious levels of *dosage* are always going to have their place in the firmament of Champagne and I hope we do not lose sight of this in the rush to produce more and more bone dry bottles of bubbly.



The following notes are organized as has become customary with my reports on Champagne in recent times, with the wines first grouped by their level of *dosage*, then by *cépages* at the non-vintage level, followed by vintage-dated categories. As the line between Brut and Extra Brut bottlings seems to be narrowing in recent times, with a fair number of wines finished off at Extra Brut levels of *dosage* now labeled as Brut, I have started grouping wines that have no *dosage* together, and listing Brut and Extra Brut bottlings together, than separating out the wines into three different categories. So the first grouping below is of Brut Nature or Brut Zero bottlings (all non-Rosé), followed by Brut and Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs, non-vintage Brut and Extra Brut cuvées and finally, non-vintage Rosés. Following these are sections for vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs, vintage-dated blends (including both non-*dosé* and wines with *dosage*) and then vintage-dated Rosés. All of the vintage wine sections are listed by vintage first,

from youngest vintage to oldest. Within each subsection, the wines are simply organized alphabetically by producer.

Non-Vintage Brut Nature and Brut Zero

Francis Boulard “les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville)

This release of Francis Boulard “les Murgiers” non-vintage Brut Nature is from the base year of 2011 and includes twelve percent reserve wines in the blend. It was disgorged in March of 2016 and is a blend of pinot meunier, pinot noir and chardonnay, according to the back label. The bouquet is excellent and starting to show a bit of secondary layering in its complex blend of apple, peach, a touch of hazelnut, brioche, lovely soil tones, orange blossoms and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with pinpoint bubbles, bright, but integrated acids and excellent mineral drive on the long and classy finish. The only sense one gets that this hails from the 2011 vintage is how the finish ever so slightly tails off, despite its good length, as there is not the same lift of a top year, but this is delicious to drink right now and very impressive. 2018-2035. **92.**

Francis Boulard “les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville)

The new release of les Murgiers from Francis Boulard is from the base year of 2013, with the *cépages* this year composed of sixty-five percent pinot meunier, twenty-five percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. The wine was disgorged in September of 2016 and delivers fine aromatic complexity in its nose of white peach, complex, chalky soil tones, a potpourri of discreet meunier floral tones, bread dough and a nice touch of upper register nuttiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, brisk and shows off lovely mid-palate depth and soil signature. The *mousse* is frothy and the finish is long, nascently complex and bone dry. The wine is very well-balanced, albeit, a bit bound up in its youthful structure today, and will age very nicely. It is approachable now for purists, but for my palate, I would tuck it away for a few years and let it get to the same point of generosity that the base year 2011 version has reached now. 2021-2040+. **92+.**

Benoît Déhu “Cuvée La Rue des Noyers” Brut Nature NV (Fossoy)

The current release of Benoît Déhu’s “Cuvée La Rue des Noyers” Brut Nature is from the 2014 vintage. Monsieur Déhu ages his *vins clairs* for this bottling for eleven months in casks prior to bottling for its secondary fermentation. The cuvée is composed entirely of pinot meunier, which has been farmed biodynamically for several years now and was disgorged in August 2017. The wine shows a bit of its barrel-fermentation on the nose, with a nice touch of vanillin oak to augment scents of white peach, chalky soil tones, brioche, almond and meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, nicely-integrated acidity, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This really has excellent balance for a young non-*dosé* bottling and should age long and gracefully. Classy juice. 2018-2040. **92.**

Champagne Doyard “Révolution” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Nature (Vertus)

As I mentioned last year, Champagne Doyard’s non-*dosé* Blanc de Blancs bottling is made entirely from grand cru fruit from the villages of Oger, Mesnil, Avize and Cramant. The new release is a blend of fifty percent base year 2011 and twenty-five percent each of 2010 and 2009. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the malo is blocked for this cuvée. Happily, the wine aged fully seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is nicely high-toned, though still bright and complex, offering up scents of lemon, pear, chalky minerality, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced for

a Brut Nature, with good, but not great depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the complex and bone dry finish. Like the non-*dosé* wines from Tarlant, Monsieur Doyard's willingness to allow this cuvée to spend eighty-four months on its fine lees allows the acids to relax quite well prior to release and the wine shows beautiful balance as a result. I liked last year's release a bit more, as it was all 2009 and the warmth of the vintage supplied a bit more stuffing to buffer the acids, but this is very good for being half 2011 base year juice. 2018-2035. **91+**.

Laherte Frères Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Chavot)

The current release of Laherte Frères Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in October 2017. The *vins clairs* for this bottling was barrel-fermented and aged in older Burgundy barrels for seven months prior to *assemblage* for secondary fermentation. The base year here is 2015, with fifty percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines from the two previous vintages. It offers up a very classy nose of pear, brioche, delicious apple, lovely soil tones, a touch of fresh almond and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, excellent balance and grip and a long, poised and quite dry, but buffered finish. For a wine that spent such a short time aging *sur latte* and is non-*dosé*, this is really quite shockingly well-balanced and shows what a great job Aurélien Laherte is doing today! 2018-2040+. **92**.

Domaine Georges Laval "Cumières" Brut Nature NV (Cumières)

Vincent Laval has now added a second non-vintage bottling to his lineup, which he calls "Garenne". While the fruit for this bottling does not hail from his home village of Cumières, he has decided that the wine needs to take its reserve wine in the blend from Cumières fruit, so all of the Cumières reserve wine in the cellars is going to the Garenne these days, and his workhorse bottling of Cumières Brut Nature is now effectively a vintage wine, as it no longer has any reserve in its blend. Which means that the current release of his Cumières is all 2015 fruit and it is flat out stunning! The *cépages* is its customary forty percent chardonnay and thirty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine offers up a brilliant young bouquet of white peach, apple, chalky soil tones, white flowers and *patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent cut and grip, stunning backend mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, electric finish. This is by quite some margin the finest bottling of Cumières to emerge from Monsieur Laval's cellars in many years! 2020-2050. **94+**.

Marguet Père et Fils "Shaman 14" Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay) Served from magnum

I had not had a chance to previously taste Benoît Marguet's Shaman 14 bottling, as the first round of pallets of this wine were damaged by a faulty temperature controlled container during shipping. Consequently, (though regular-sized bottles are on the water) the importers had to open a magnum at our recent tasting, which was alright on my end! The wine is a blend this year of sixty-nine percent pinot noir and thirty-one percent chardonnay and was disgorged in March of 2018. Benoît Marguet used no *dosage* for this bottling. The wine is superb on both the nose and palate and has to be one of the best non-vintage bottlings out there, as it delivers a complex bouquet of peach, *patissière*, chalky minerality, raw almond, spring flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with a great core, elegant *mousse*, superb focus and grip and a very long, precise and zesty finish. The structural elements here are beautifully buried in the body of the wine and the zero *dosage* here works perfectly. 2018-2040+. **92+**.

Christophe Mignon Brut Nature NV (Festigny)

The Christophe Mignon Brut Nature now in the market is made entirely out of pinot meunier and was disgorged in July of 2017. The wine offers up a fine and quite complex nose of white peach, apple, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with the acidity nicely rounded out with bottle age. The wine has lovely mid-palate depth, fine *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the long and bouncy finish. This is a very good bottle of Brut Nature. 2018-2030+. **91+**.

Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly)

The new release of Champagne Tarlant “Zero” non-vintage Brut Nature is from the base year of 2010 and spent six full years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in August of 2017. It is composed of its customary blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine offers up a beautifully sophisticated aromatic blend of white peach, apple, complex soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, great soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and precisely focused finish. This is a Brut Nature that has spent enough time on its fine lees that the acids have softened a bit and the wine is drinking with breed and style right out of the blocks. 2018-2040. **92+**.

Champagne Tarlant “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly)

The stellar Cuvée Louis bottling from the Tarlant family is now from the base year of 2000, with the reserve wines composed of the previous four vintages. The *cépages* is its fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, all grown in the single vineyard of les Crayons in Oeuilly. The wine spent a remarkable sixteen years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in December of 2017 and was finished non-*dosé*. The bouquet is beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of peach, apple, hazelnut, warm biscuits, a superbly complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, lovely mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and blossoming secondary layers of complexity on the very long and beautifully balanced finish. This is a great bottle of wine, with the acids here nicely rounded out by its very long aging on its fine lees in the Tarlant family’s cellars. A superb wine with decades of life still ahead of it! 2018-2050. **95**.

J. L. Vergnon “Murmure” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The new release of J. L. Vergnon’s “Murmure” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut Nature is from the base year of 2013, with twenty percent of the cuvée composed of reserve wines. The wine was aged *sur latte* for three-plus years and disgorged in November of 2017. The *vins clairs* had partially blocked malos. The wine offers up a very classy bouquet of apple, pear, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and nicely solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, bone dry and complex finish. This is excellent Brut Nature, but it is pretty stern on the finish and only for true non-*dosé* believers at the present time. The serious girdle of acidity here should relax with another four to six years in the cellar, and some tasters may prefer it then. 2018-2035+. **92**.



Benoît Tarlant, who is my favorite producer of non-dosé bubbly (along with Vincent Laval)- in his tasting room.

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Épernay)

The current release of Besserat de Bellefon’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in September of 2015, which means this lovely wine has also received an additional three years of bottle age and is drinking beautifully today. It spent three years aging *sur latte*, is from the base year of 2011 and was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The complex nose offers up scents of lemon, pear, stony limestone minerality, bread dough, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with good depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still fairly racy finish. This is a lovely *aperitif* weight Blanc de Blancs that is drinking very well today, but has plenty of potential longevity ahead of it. 2018-2035+. **89.**

Champagne Corbon Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)

This bottling was an experiment for Agnès Corbon, as she made it from the family vineyard production in the village of Verneuil, which traditionally had been sold off to *négociants*. As Madame Corbon was producing this from non-Avize fruit, she decided to allow the *vins clairs* to go through malolactic fermentation (not the house style) and the results were superb. The wine is from the base year of 2012 and it was disgorged in February of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The resulting wine is excellent and far more user-friendly out of the blocks than most Corbon wines (which are non-malo and built for the long

haul), offering up a complex nose of delicious apples, pears, fresh almond, brioche, chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and shows fine mid-palate depth, with and refined *mousse*, racy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is drinking very well out of the blocks, but it is still a Corbon family wine and that means that it will age superbly well! 2018-2040. **91+**.

Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current release of Delamotte's non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a lovely wine that is wide open and drinking very well indeed. I am not sure of its date of disgorgement, level of *dosage* or its base year, but at least I can recognize its quality. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, brioche, spring flowers and a nice touch of pastry cream in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely balance and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is very good non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. 2018-2033. **91+**.

Champagne Doyard "Cuvée Vendémiaire" Premier Cru Brut NV (Vertus)

Champagne Doyard's "Cuvée Vendémiaire" is a Blanc de Blancs, though it does not state this on the front label. The wine is a slightly lower pressure bottling from the house, with the *vins clairs* only going through partial malo and the new release was given fifty-six months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of four grams per liter. This is principally from the base year of 2013, with thirty percent of the blend 2012 and twenty percent 2011. Forty percent of the *vins clairs* are barrel fermented and raised in older Burgundy casks. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, a touch of orange zest, lovely limestone minerality, fresh-baked bread, almond, spring flowers and a touch of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. I really like this level of *dosage* for the Doyard bottlings. 2018-2045. **92**.

Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges)

Year in and year out, I really love the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottling from Madame Grongnet, which is one of the great values from the Côte des Blancs. With its sleek silver and green label, it really stands out from the crowd of bottles on the shelf in wine shops. The new release is from the base year of 2013 and was disgorged in November of 2017 after three and a half years aging on its fine lees. The finishing *dosage* is eight grams, but with its racy Côte des Blancs' acids, it seems more like a wine in the four to five grams per liter range. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of pear, apple, bread dough, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a touch of *fleur de sel* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and still quite racy, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely grip and focus on the long, balanced and classic finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040+. **91+**.

Charles Heidsieck Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)

This is the first release in a very, very long time of a non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Charles Heidsieck and the wine is outstanding. The wine is from the excellent base year of 2012 and includes twenty-five percent reserve wines. It was disgorged in 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of ten grams per liter. The wine delivers a beautifully refined bouquet of pear, apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, a hint of almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, dry and complex finish. While this was finished with ten grams per liter of *dosage*, it seems quite a bit drier, as this wine has plenty of good, young chardonnay acidity in its

structural chassis and will age beautifully. A fine, fine re-introduction of this bottling to the Charles Heidsieck stables! 2018-2045. **92+**.

Larmandier-Bernier “Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus)

Pierre Larmandier’s current release of “Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is from the base year of 2014, with forty percent of the blend composed of reserve wines. All of the chardonnay fruit for this bottling hails from vineyards south of the village of Vertus, with soils traditionally dedicated to pinot noir plantings. It was disgorged in April of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The nose is lovely, offering up scents of apple, peach, almond, a fine base of soil and a bit of pastry cream in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, a nicely integrated girdle of acidity and fine complexity and grip on the long and wide open finish. Good juice. 2018-2025. **91.**

Larmandier-Bernier “Longitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus)

The new release of Larmandier-Bernier “Longitude” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Extra Brut is composed of fruit from the villages of Vertus, Cramant, Oger and Avize. The *vins clairs* receive an extended aging in casks and tanks prior to the blending in July following the harvest and then spend a minimum of two more years aging *sur latte*, with the blend always including thirty percent reserve wines from the domaine’s solera started in 2004. It was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up a fine nose of tangerine, pear, chalky minerality, brioche, hazelnut and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent balance and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and bouncy finish. There is a touch of oak influence here on the backend from the percentage of the *vins clairs* that were raised in cask, but it is discreet and quite appealing. This is a very fine bottle of Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs that will age quite gracefully. 2018-2035. **92.**

Pierre Moncuit “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current bottling of Pierre Moncuit “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2014 and was disgorged in December of 2017. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and go through a full malo. The finishing *dosage* for this cuvée is 3.5 grams per liter. The wine is lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apple, a touch of pastry cream, fine limestone minerality, spring flowers and a bit of almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly brisk structurally, with a fine core, lovely *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and quite snappy finish. With the fine structural chassis of all Mesnil fruit, this wine is a bit young right now (except for Extra Brut purists, who will find it delightful already) and could use at least a year or two in the cellar to my palate to allow the acids to relax just a bit more. 2020-2040. **91+.**

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet” Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The Pierre Moncuit Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet that is currently in the market was disgorged in June of 2018 and is from the base year of 2015. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of pear, a touch of tangerine, chalky soil tones, bread dough and white flowers. On the palate the wine is young, bright and full, with a lovely core of fruit, superb mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a fairly brisk, focused and nascently complex finish. This has plenty of promise, but is still quite youthful and could do with a year or two in the cellar to really blossom properly. All of the constituent components are in place to unfold nicely with a bit of bottle age, just to let the acidity relax a bit more. 2020-2040. **90.**

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

This is exactly the same base wine as the Extra Brut bottling, but with seven grams per liter of *dosage* after its disgorgement in April of 2018. However, the Grand Cru Brut NV has already ticked over to the next base year of 2015, while the Extra Brut version in the market remains from the base year of 2014, so we will have to wait a few more months to see this identical wine in its Extra Brut guise. In any case, the 2015 base year version of Brut Grand Cru is very good, delivering a fine bouquet of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness, spring flowers and *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a fairly wide open personality, a pretty good core, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and good grip on the long and classy finish. Despite liking this wine quite well, I have the gut feeling that this should be even better than it is showing right now, as it is from the base year of 2015, whose potential I am getting very excited about (think another 2002 vintage). Perhaps it has not yet fully recovered from its disgorgement back in April and will be even better with another few months in the bottle? If this proves to be the case, add two points to my score! 2018-2030+. **90+**.

J. L. Vergnon “Conversation” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The new release of Conversation non-vintage Brut from the Vergnon family is from the base year of 2012, with twenty-five percent of the blend made up of reserve wines. This release spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in November of 2017 and was finished with a discreet *dosage* of five grams per liter. The nose here is lovely, wafting from the glass in a classic Blanc de Blancs blend of pear, apple, hazelnut, brioche, chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is brisk, full and focused, with lovely depth at the core, excellent soil drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. With the non-malo house style here, even with four-plus years of aging on its fine lees and five grams of *dosage*, the wine is still pretty brisk structurally. It is very tasty, but I might be tempted to tuck it away in the cellar for a few more years and let the acids back off a bit. 2020-2040. **91**.

J. L. Vergnon “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The new release of J. L. Vergnon’s “Eloquence” Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2013, with twenty percent of the blend composed of reserve wines. The wine was disgorged in September of 2017 after a touch more than three years aging *sur latte*. Ninety percent of the fruit for this bottling hails from Mesnil, with the other ten percent from neighboring Oger and the *vins clairs* do not go through malo. The wine offers up an expressive nose of pear, almond paste, chalky soil tones, brioche, a hint of the tangerine to come with further bottle age and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This has lovely promise, but could do with another year or two in the cellar to my palate, so that the acids can relax just a touch more and the wine really come into its prime. 2020-2040. **91+**.

Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

Robert Barbichon Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine)

Thomas Barbichon’s wines seem to be getting even more precise and elegant with each passing year, which may be a reflection of his conversion to biodynamic farming. His new release of Blanc de Noirs is from the base year of 2014 and is composed this year of a blend ninety-three percent pinot noir and seven percent pinot meunier. As is customary, there is ten percent reserve wines in the blend from the previous year. It was disgorged in November of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The bouquet is beautifully refined, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, *patissière*, chalky minerality, a touch of

nuttiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A top flight Extra Brut NV from a *vigneron* who is now unequivocally one of the stars in the Aube. 2018-2035+. **92.**



Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine)

The current bottling of Réserve 4 Cépages from Thomas Barbichon is from the fine base year of 2012 and is a blend of seventy percent pinot noir, twelve percent pinot blanc and nine percent each of pinot meunier and chardonnay. It was disgorged in May of 2017 and has a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The nose is again very pure in its constellation of apple, white peach, *patissière*, fresh almond, dried flowers and a lovely base of the Aube’s Kimmeridgian limestone. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and very elegant in profile, with fine mid-palate intensity, pinpoint bubbles and fine focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. Again, first class non-vintage Brut! 2018-2035. **92.**

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV (Épernay)

The present day release of Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of forty-five percent of pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir. It was disgorged in December of 2016, after three years aging *sur latte*, so this is from the base year of 2013. Its finishing *dosage* is nine grams per liter. The wine is lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a delicately-styled and very classy blend of white

peach, apple, lovely floral tones, brioche and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet, with good depth in the mid-palate, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the poised, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is really a lovely and elegant example of non-vintage Brut. 2018-2035. **91.**

Champagne Corbon “Brut d’Autrefois” NV (Avize)

The new release of Champagne Corbon “Brut d’Autrefois” non-vintage, which is made from their solera. This bottling was disgorged in February of 2016, and as the family routinely allows the wine to age eight years *sur latte*, this was bottled in the spring of 2008. The wine is gorgeous today and has plenty of life still ahead of it as well, but with all of the older wines contributing to this wine’s structural personality, it is drinking splendidly right out of the blocks. The bouquet offers up a complex nose of white peach, pear, toasted almond, pastry cream, lovely soil tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a gorgeous core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, bright, but easy-going acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and very classy finish. Superb juice. 2018-2040. **93+.**

R. H. Coutier “Cuvée Tradition” Brut NV (Ambonnay)

The version of R. H. Coutier “Cuvée Tradition” non-vintage Brut now available is from the base year of 2013, with forty percent of the blend being composed of reserve wines. The *cépages* is eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the wine having been disgorged in May of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and precise, offering up a superb blend of apple, peach, very complex, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness, hazelnut, a nice touch of *patissière* and a discreet topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and impressively wide open (probably from the high percentage of reserve wines in the blend), with a fine core, excellent backend minerality, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a superb expression of Ambonnay fruit and *terroir*, without the customary sense of reserve of so many young wines from this grand cru commune. Fine juice. 2018-2030+. **91+.**

Delamotte Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The bottling of Delamotte non-vintage Brut currently in the market is composed of a blend of predominantly chardonnay, with smaller percentages of pinot noir and pinot meunier included. The wine offers up an excellent nose of apple, pear, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and frothy, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, vibrant acids and elegant *mousse* carrying through to the long and classy finish. This is quite good to drink right now and should age quite gracefully as well. I wish there were some technical details available on the back label or on the website. 2018-2035. **91.**

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery)

The new release of Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2015 and the wine is utterly stunning. It is clearly the finest bottling of Cuvée Spéciale I have yet tasted from the very talented Fabrice Gass. The technical details here are the same as ever, with a *cépages* of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and the wine was finished with its customary *dosage* of six grams per liter (more or less). The wine was disgorged in May of 2018. Nothing is exceptional about this bottling except that it hails from the base year of 2015, which seems likely to shape up to be the best vintage in the region since 2002, and gives this wine an extra dimension on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is very expressive, soaring from the glass in a blend of pear, white peach, a touch of bee pollen, chalky soil tones, *patissière* and a touch of almond in the

upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb cut and grip, exquisite focus, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the racy and perfectly balanced finish. This is a brilliant wine in the making. 2021-2050. **95.**

Alexandre Filaine “DMY” Brut NV (Damery)

The Alexandre Filaine “DMY” non-vintage Brut that has just arrived in the market is also very, very special, as this wine hails from the base year of 2012. The wine was disgorged in May of 2018 and spent five years aging *sur latte* under natural cork prior to its disgorgement. The blend is the same as the in the Cuvée Spéciale, but with the wine spending longer on its fine lees and under cork, rather than crown cap. Typically, Fabrice will finish this with a bit less *dosage*, as it has spent longer in the cellars, with 4.5 grams per liter the customary level for this wine, but I did not specifically check to see if this was the case with this stellar version from the base year of 2012. In any event, the wine is outstanding, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of white peach, apple, brioche, gentle smokiness, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and very, very long on the backend, with a superb core, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the seamless and zesty finish. Great juice. 2022-2055+. **94+.**

Gatinois “Brut Tradition” Grand Cru NV (Aÿ)

Louis Gatinois’ new release of his flagship Brut Tradition is from the base year of 2015 and is its customary blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. All of the grapes hail from the family’s vineyards in the grand cru village of Aÿ. The wine was disgorged in April 2018. The bouquet is pure and classically Aÿ in its generous nose of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of hazelnut, lovely soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and deep at the core, with pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is still a tad on the young side and could use another six months to really blossom, but it is another very strong non-vintage Brut from Louis Gatinois. 2018-2035. **91.**

Grongnet “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV (Étoges)

The current release of Madame Grongnet’s “Carpe Diem” non-vintage Extra Brut is simply brilliant and is from the base year of 2009. The wine is aged under cork on its fine lees for seven years prior to disgorgement, with this year’s version having been finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The *cépages* is its customary blend of sixty percent chardonnay and twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The bouquet shows marvelous complexity in its wide open constellation of apple, peach a touch of orange zest, hazelnut, complex, chalky soil tones and an exotic topnote of dried lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very focused, with a superb core, elegant *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the complex and nicely mature finish. If you love the style of aged Champagne, but do not have the willpower to keep your hands off of bottles in the cellar long enough to let them fully blossom into their secondary stage of development, this is the perfect wine for you! High class juice. 2018-2040. **93+.**

Charles Heidsieck “Brut Réserve” NV (Reims)

The new release of Charles Heidsieck non-vintage “Brut Réserve” is a blend of one-third each chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier- for the base year wines, which hail from 2008. However, forty percent of the cuvée is made up of reserve wines, with these being an equal blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, as the *maison* does not hold back meunier for its reserves. The wine spent eight years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of eleven grams per liter after its disgorgement in 2017. The wine is absolutely superb and clearly one of the best

bargains out there in the world of non-vintage Brut from the *Grandes Marques*, as it offers up a pure and complex nose of pear, white peach, brioche, a touch of fresh almond, complex, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and refined, with excellent mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, lovely acidity and grip and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is terrific bubbly. 2018-2045. **93.**

Olivier Horiot “Métisse” Noirs et Blancs Extra Brut NV (les Riceys)

The Olivier Horiot “Métisse” non-Vintage Extra Brut is composed of a blend of the base years of 2014 and 2015, with twenty percent older reserve wines. The *cépages* of this cuvée is a quite unique mix of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot blanc. The wine was disgorged in March of 2017 and finished with a low *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely nose of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine base of soil, gentle floral tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles and fine focus and grip on the long, still quite youthful finish. With the low *dosage* here, this wine comes across as needing a bit of bottle age to allow the acids to relax a bit, but there is good depth and complexity here and this is going to be a good drink once it has had a chance to blossom. 2020-2040. **90+.**

Krug Grand Cuvée “166ème Edition” Brut NV (Reims)

The bottle of the “166ème Edition” Krug Grand Cuvée that I reported on in the last issue of the newsletter had been delivered to my office on one of the hottest days of the summer. Consequently, though the wine showed very well indeed, I had a gnawing feeling that perhaps the scorching weather might have affected that bottle just a touch and I reached out to the folks at Krug to see if I could get another sample to report on for this article. I was glad that I did, for though the last bottle showed very well, there was more cut, grip and backend energy in this most recent bottle, which arrived on a far more temperate day. As I noted in the last article. The 166ème Edition is composed of a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-nine percent chardonnay and sixteen percent pinot meunier. The wine is from the base year of 2010, but fully forty-two percent of the cuvée is composed of reserve wines, with disgorgement done in the winter of 2017. The bouquet is superb, offering up notes of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of soil elements, orange peel, gentle smokiness and a topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and properly zesty, with an outstanding core of fruit, laser-like focus, refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and impeccably balanced finish. My previous bottle was just a touch more forward in personality, which I now attribute to the heat of its delivery day. Great juice. 2018-2050. **95.**

Laherte Frères “Ultradition” Brut NV (Chavot)

The new release of Laherte Frères “Ultradition” non-vintage Brut is lovely. It is from the base year of 2015, with forty percent of the cuvée made up of reserve wines from 2013 and 2014. The *cépages* is the customary sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. It was disgorged in October of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of around six grams per liter. The wine offers up a youthfully complex nose of white peach, apple, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a lovely potpourri of meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the poised and very well balanced finish. This is still a young wine, but very tasty already. It will age very well and will be even a better drink if it is tucked away in the cellar for three to five years. Impressive non-vintage Brut! 2018-2040+. **92.**

Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Buxeuil)

The current release of the Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2013 and was disgorged in May of 2018. As is customary for this bottling, this is composed of one hundred percent pinot noir, fermented and aged in stainless steel and the *vins clairs* do not undergo malo. The finishing *dosage* is ten grams per liter. The wine is beautifully complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a classy mix of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, a hint of walnut and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, complex finish. I always like this cuvée’s combination of the Aube’s Kimmeridgian limestone soil signature and the one hundred percent pinot noir content, as the combination is pretty unique and very attractive. Fine juice and a good value. 2018-2030+. **91.**

Ponson “la Petite Montagne” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV (Coulommès la Montagne)

The new release of Extra Brut NV from Maxime Ponson is from the base year of 2013 and is composed of a *cépages* of forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir. It was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter after its disgorgement in December of 2017, but seems drier than this, due to the really racy nature of the chardonnay juice in the blend. This young wine offers up lovely aromatics in its blend of apple, white peach, brioche, complex soil tones, white flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost piercing, with a lovely core, superb backend mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and impressive grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. Though this wine spent more than three and a half years aging *sur latte* it is still a young and racy wine and will be even a better drink with a bit of time in the cellar; it will age long and gracefully. 2019-2040+. **91+.**

Non-Vintage Brut Rosé and Extra Brut Rosé

Robert Barbichon et Fils “Rosé de Saignée” Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine)

The new release of Rosé de Saignée from the Barbichon family is one of the most vinous examples of this wine that I tasted for this article, and one really had the sense that one was drinking Gevrey-Chambertin with bubbles! The wine is from the base year of 2012 and was disgorged in December of 2017, having been finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. It is composed entirely of pinot noir and is quite dark salmon in color. The nose is lovely and beautifully spicy in personality, offering up scents of blood orange, cherries, cloves, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones and a touch of meatiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and as I said, very vinous in style, with a superb core, crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is a great wine for the table, but is probably a tad too vinous for my palate to serve as an aperitif. It would be a great match with turkey and other roasted birds. 2018-2030. **91.**

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

The Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé non-vintage bottling is composed of its customary blend of thirty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and forty percent pinot meunier. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter after its disgorgement in September of 2017 and was aged three years *sur latte*. The wine is a lovely pale salmon color and offers up a complex nose of strawberries, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones, rye bread, gentle smokiness and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely racy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is very elegant in

profile and really lovely today, but will only get better with a few years in the cellar. 2018-2035. **92.**

R. H. Coutier Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay)

The new release of R. H. Coutier non-vintage Brut Rosé is also from the base year of 2013 (as is their Cuvée Tradition), with forty percent of the blend being composed of reserve wines. The wine is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with the wine having been disgorged in February of 2018. The *dosage* this year is six grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of cherries, blood orange, chalky minerality, rye toast and a nice touch of clove-like spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and backend minerality, very good balance and a long, youthfully complex and zesty finish. This is a fine example that will be even better with a few years in the cellar, as it is still a tad on the young side. 2019-2033+. **91.**



Looking down at the village of Cumières from the town's vineyards up above it on the slope.

Delamotte Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current release of Delamotte non-vintage Brut Rosé is really a lovely example. My understanding is that the blend is a preponderance of pinot noir over chardonnay, with eighty percent of the blend pinot and twenty percent chardonnay. The lovely deep salmon color comes from skin contact, rather than the addition of red still wine. The *dosage* is seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely nose of cherries, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke

and rye bread. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the wide open, but still youthful finish. This wine will continue to blossom with bottle age, but it is already very tasty and easy to drink. Fine juice. 2018-2030. **91+**.

Gatinois “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ)

I love the wines from Louis Gatinois and his new release of non-vintage Brut Rosé is excellent. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with about seven percent of the pinot noir being still wine from a parcel of sixty-plus year-old pinot vines in Aÿ. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter, after aging three years *sur latte* (which is a year longer than most non-vintage Rosé bottlings spend on their fine lees). The wine is gorgeous this year, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, rhubarb, rye bread, a refined base of minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely racy in profile, with a lovely core, superb backend mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, balanced and complex finish. The current release of Monsieur Gatinois’ Brut Rosé delivers a beautiful synthesis of Aÿ’s exceptional pinot fruit, great minerality and a tightly-knit structural chassis that keep the wine very precise and racy on the palate. It will age superbly well, but is already a delicious glass of bubbly. 2018-2040. **92**.

Charles Heidsieck “Rosé Réserve” Brut NV (Reims)

The Charles Heidsieck “Rosé Réserve” non-vintage Brut is composed of the same blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, but with six percent of the pinot noir being still red wine from the fine village of Riceys in the Aube. The current release is from the base year of 2008 and was disgorged in 2015, after six years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of eleven grams per liter. The wine delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its constellation of wild strawberries, tangerine, brioche, chalky soil tones, fresh almond and a touch of dried rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthfully racy, with a lovely core of fruit, superb mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and outstanding balance and grip on the long and racy finish. This seems far drier than its eleven grams of *dosage* might suggest, as this bottling has a superb chassis of 2008’s racy acidity. It is already very tasty, but it will age superbly well and I would bury it in the cellar for five or six years and really let it relax a bit structurally and start to sing unashamedly! 2018-2045. **93**.

Laherte Frères “Rosé Ultradition” Brut NV (Chavot)

Aurélien Laherte’s new release of Rosé Ultradition is a fifty-fifty blend of 2014 and 2013 juice and is composed entirely of pinot meunier. The blend is done quite uniquely, with sixty percent of the blend fermented as white wine, thirty percent given a short maceration and ten percent of the blend is still red pinot meunier. The *vins clairs* are fermented in a range of vessels—vats, older casks and *foudres*, and the wine was finished with a *dosage* between six and eight grams per liter after its disgorgement in January of 2017. The aromatics here are stunning, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, rhubarb, a touch of tangerine, wheat bread, complex, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and lovely grip on the long, complex and classy finish. This seems quite dry (though not all of the *vins clairs* go through malo for this cuvée) and I would guess we are around 6.5 grams per liter of *dosage* for this example, though it seems even a bit drier than this and will make any fan of Extra Brut quite happy! 2018-2040+. **92+**.

Larmandier-Bernier “Rosé de Saignée” Extra Brut NV (Vertus)

The current release of Pierre Larmandier’s “Rosé de Saignée” Extra Brut is from the base year of 2014 and was finished with its customary low *dosage* of three grams per liter. It was disgorged in April of 2017. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of wild strawberries, blood orange, chalky soil tones, wheat toast, a touch of fresh almond and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, frothy and focused, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and lovely grip and balance on the nascently complex and still quite racy finish. Fine juice, but the acidity of Vertus fruit coupled with the low *dosage* gives this a quite bone dry palate impression today, and so some folks may want to age this for three to five years and let the acids relax a bit more before having at it in earnest. 2018-2040. **91+**.

Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 15” Rosé Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet is very passionate about his non-vintage Rosé bottlings and makes a fairly high percentage of his production as Rosé each year. I have had some truly magical examples from him, including his 2008 and 2009 versions, but his Shaman 15 bottling may be the finest yet! The wine is a blend of seventy-eight percent chardonnay and twenty-seven percent pinot noir and was disgorged in May of 2018. There was no finishing *dosage* used with this base year 2015 bottling. The bouquet is simply stunning, soaring from the glass in a blend of white cherries, tangerine, brioche, chalky minerality and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, laser-like focus and a very, very long, racy and complex finish. This is a stunning bottle of non-vintage Rosé. 2019-2040+. **94**.

Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 14” Rosé Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

I continue to be very impressed with how well Benoît Marguet’s wines show with no *dosage*, as the structural elements are always buried in the wine and the overall sense is of wines that are ready to drink right out of the blocks, despite not having any buffering from *dosage*. The 2014 version of Shaman Rosé is excellent and very close in quality to the 2015 example, as it offers up a pure and complex nose of peach, tangerine, a touch of spice, bread dough, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely structural tension, pinpoint bubbles and a very, very long, poised and classy finish. This is drinking beautifully today and will age quite gracefully. 2018-2035+. **93**.

Christophe Mignon Brut Rosé “Pur Meunier” NV (Festigny)

The Christophe Mignon Brut Rosé “Pur Meunier” non-vintage bottling currently in the market is from the base year of 2014, with half of the blend reserve wines from the previous vintage. The wine is entirely pinot meunier, as the name implies, and was disgorged in August of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a vibrant aromatic blend of strawberries, rhubarb, chalky minerality, dried rose petals, a touch of orange zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and snappy, with its full-bodied format nicely focused and transparent. The *mousse* here is frothy, the wine is focused and nicely balanced, with good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a young wine and will benefit from a bit more bottle age, but it is already quite tasty. It seems a bit drier than its six grams per liter *dosage* would suggest and will certainly appeal to Extra Brut fans as well. 2019-2035+. **91+**.

Pierre Moncuit “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The bottling of Pierre Moncuit non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of its customary blend of seventy-five percent chardonnay from Mesnil and twenty-five percent still wine pinot noir from Ambonnay. The wine was disgorged in December of 2017 and was finished with a *dosage*

of eight grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of strawberries, cherries, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, lovely balance, pinpoint bubbles and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Like all of the recent Moncuit Brut Rosé bottlings I have tasted in the last several years, this wine is drinking nicely already, but will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2018-2033. **91.**

Champagne Tarlant “Rosé Zero” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly)

The new release of Benoît Tarlant’s “Rosé Zero” Brut Nature is from the base year of 2011 and was disgorged in March of 2017, after having spent five years on its fine lees. The *cépages* this year is fifty percent chardonnay, forty-four percent pinot noir and six percent pinot meunier. The wine is pale salmon in color and delivers a superb bouquet of strawberries, rhubarb, blood orange, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh almond, rye bread and a hint of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the poised, complex and beautifully balanced long finish. Though there is no *dosage* here, the wine has spent enough time aging *sur latte* to come into perfect balance and it is now drinking beautifully. Very impressive. 2018-2035. **92+.**

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2014 Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Cumières)

The 2014 Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs is a beautiful bottle in the making. The bouquet is vibrant and utterly compelling, soaring from the glass in a mix of pear, white peach, chalky soil tones, fresh almond, a bit of *crème patissière* and a musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with gorgeous mid-palate depth, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is still very early days for the 2014 Les Chênes from Vincent Laval, but when this wine is fully blossomed, it is going to be a gorgeous glass of bubbly. 2024-2050+. **94+.**

2011 J. L. Vergnon “O.G.” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Nature (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2011 J. L. Vergnon “O.G.” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature is composed entirely of fruit from the *lieu à dit* of Chemin de Flavigny, which sits on the border of Mesnil in the village of Oger. The vines here were all planted in 1965. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malo and the wine spent fully five years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in May of 2017. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of pear, delicious apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, a bit of hazelnut and a dollop of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, still fairly brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and mineral-driven finish. This has the broader shoulders of Oger fruit and is really deep and long for a 2011 vintage wine, with great backend minerality. But, it is bone dry Brut Nature and will be loved best by true believers in the non-*dosé* mantra. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2010 J. L. Vergnon “Expression” Blanc de Blancs Gr. Cru Extra Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The Vergnon family’s cuvée “Expression” is one of their old vine bottlings, as the holdings here average sixty-five years of age. The wine is aged six years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter after it was disgorged in June of 2017. The wine delivers fine aromatic complexity in its constellation of pear, delicious apple, chalky soil tones, brioche

and a nice topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and a bit more youthful structurally than the open nose suggests, with a good core, fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and good length on the finish. This needs a couple of years for the palate to play catch up with the nose. 2020-2040+. **91+**.

2009 J. L. Vergnon “Resonance” Blanc de Blancs Gr. Cru Extra Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2009 J. L. Vergnon “Resonance” Blanc de Blancs millésime hails primarily (eighty percent) from the outstanding vineyard of les Chétillons in Mesnil, with the remainder from a neighboring vineyard also in this grand cru village. The *vins clairs* for this bottling do not go through malo and the wine was aged fully seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in February of 2017 and finished with a low *dosage* of three grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and outstanding, wafting from the glass in ripe and vibrant blend of pear, apple, brioche, almond paste, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely depth in the mid-palate, refined *mousse*, bright, well-integrated acids and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced and quite accessible finish. Superb juice. 2018-2045.

2009 Vouette et Sorbée Blanc de Argile” Extra Brut Millésime (served from magnum)

The 2009 Vouette et Sorbée Blanc de Argile” is a good example of the vintage, with the ripeness of 2009 nicely buffering the low *dosage* of the bottling. The wine was disgorged in January of 2012 and offers up a fine nose of apple, pear, almond, lovely minerality and a topnote of brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, fine backend mineral drive and lift, pinpoint bubbles and a long, beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice that is now drinking at its peak, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2018-2035. **92**.

2008 Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2008 Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a fine example of this very strong Champagne vintage. The bouquet is starting to just show hints of its secondary layers of complexity in its blend of apple, pear, wheat toast, a lovely base of soil tones, incipient nuttiness and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and focused, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the toasty and well-balanced finish. This is a well-made wine that will age very nicely, but its toasty personality makes it a tad one-dimensional today. I would tuck it away for a few more years in the cellar and let some of its other constituent components start to emerge a bit more. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

2007 Salon “le Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

I really love the 2007 vintage of Salon, which seems a tad more accessible out of the blocks than some recent vintages of Salon. The non-malo style of Salon usually makes this wine rather bound up behind its significant structural elements and in need of additional bottle age, even after the wine has spent a decade aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release. However, the 2007 Salon was nicely giving out of the blocks, with perhaps not a completely unimpeded view to the magic that will be available at full maturity, but a clear line of sight to what lies ahead and already quite a bit of pleasure in the glass. The bouquet is deep, bright and complex, offering up scents of lemon, apple, complex limestone minerality, fresh-baked bread and a lovely topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, long and nicely accessible, with a rock solid core, lovely limestone mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. The 2007 Salon

seems likely to age long and gracefully, as is this marvelous *Tête de Cuvée's* calling card, but will not demand ten more years in the cellar prior to starting to drink with generosity. A beautiful bottle. 2018-2055. 96.

2007 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The new vintage of Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs is the 2007 and the wine is simply outstanding. The bouquet is deep, pure and very precise in its constellation of apple, pear, lemon zest, chalky minerality, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, a bit of fresh almond and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is brisk, youthful, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive, utterly refined *mousse*, nascent complexity and stunning length and grip on the still very young finish. As is proper for the vintage differences, the 2007 Comtes is quite a bit more youthful out of the blocks than the very fine 2006 version was, but in the long run, this seems likely to be every bit as impressive with a bit more bottle age. 2022-2065. 96.



2006 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

I have always respected the Corbon family's style of non-malo, classic Avize Blanc de Blancs, which are now routinely age ten years *sur latte* prior to release of their vintage bottlings. However, I never really understood just how brilliant these wines were until I had a chance to drink some mature examples while visiting the estate. They are truly some of the finest examples of vintage Blanc de Blancs one can find, if one waits long enough for them to truly blossom! The 2006 is new release from the *maison* and was disgorged in February of 2017 and finished with a

dosage of six grams per liter. It is still quite youthful structurally, but offers up an expressive bouquet of pear, tangerine, brioche, chalky minerality, fresh almond and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and typically racy, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. Given this fine wine another eight to ten years in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders! 2006 was Agnès Corbon's first vintage flying solo at the helm of the family estate and she clearly hit the ground running! 2026-2060. **93.**

2005 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

The 2005 Corbon Blanc de Blancs is showing a bit more evolutionary complexity on the nose than the 2006 version, but is equally young and racy on the palate. This was finished with a slightly lower *dosage* than its 2006 counterpart, coming in at five grams per liter and was disgorged in February of 2016. The nose is really stylish, wafting from the glass in a blend of delicious apples, pears, almond paste, brioche, smoke, fruit blossoms and limestone minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the vibrant and promising finish. It is still early days for the 2005 Corbon, but this will be excellent when it fully blossoms structurally. 2023-2055+. **93.**

2000 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

Agnès Corbon has decided to make available a small quantity of bottles out of the family's cellars to the market in the last year, to give Champagne lovers an opportunity to see what vintages that are starting to mature taste like, and I was fortunate to be invited to a small vertical of these recent releases. Back in this era, the wines spent eight years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, so this was *dégorgé* in February of 2009. The 2000 vintage of Corbon Blanc de Blancs is starting to blossom beautifully on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of baked apple and pear, hazelnut, a touch of citrus zest, chalky minerality, brioche, spring flowers and that telltale Avize smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite vibrant, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and superb length and grip on the still quite snappy finish. This is fully open and mature on the nose, but at age eighteen, it is still a nicely racy customer on the palate and has decades of life still ahead of it. A lovely wine. 2018-2035+. **93+.**

2000 Tarlant “la Vigne d’Antan” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Oeuilly)

The 2000 Tarlant “la Vigne d’Antan” Blanc de Blancs is drinking beautifully at age eighteen and is well into its plateau of peak maturity. Readers may recall that this is from a parcel of ungrafted, *Franc de Pieds* chardonnay vines planted on sandy soils in Oeuilly. The 2000 version is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and nicely mature blend of pear, sweet hazelnut, a complex base of soil tones, dried flowers and just a bit of buttery oak influence. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully focused, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the still fairly brisk finish. Thought this is listed as an Extra Brut, it is non-*dosé* and may still be a touch too dry for some palates. I would have loved to have seen just a whisper of *dosage* used for this vintage (perhaps two grams per liter) just to buffer the excellent girdle of acidity a bit more. But, that said, the exceptional quality here is manifest. 2018-2035+. **93.**

1999 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

I really like how the 1999 vintage in Champagne has aged and it is one of the more underrated years in the last couple of decades in the region. The 1999 Corbon Blanc de Blancs is a superb example, having been disgorged in February of 2008 and just recently re-released by Agnès Corbon. The bouquet is pure, nicely developed and generous in its constellation of pear, tangerine, almond, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh apricot and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and open, but also still nicely tangy, with a lovely core and soil signature, refined *mousse* and excellent cut and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This wine closes with an emphatic note of blood orange that is really beguiling, and is not to be found in the aromatics! Fine, fine juice. 2018-2045. **94.**

1998 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

The 1998 vintage Blanc de Blancs from the Corbon family is also quite nice and this wine is now fully mature and drinking at its apogee. It is not quite as long or complete as either the 2000 or 1999 vintages that preceded it in our lineup, but there is still a lot to like here on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of pear, hazelnut, apple, a lovely touch of white truffle, pastry cream, orange blossoms and chalky soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and wide open, with good depth in the mid-palate, pinpoint bubbles and good focus and grip on the perfectly respectable finish. This is *à point* today and drinking with distinction and only suffers having come on the heels of the exceptional 1999 version. 2018-2030+. **92.**

1996 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

While all of the preceding vintages of Corbon in our tasting had been disgorged at their customary times of eight to ten years out from bottling (depending on the Corbon family’s protocol at the time), this bottle of 1996 was disgorged in February of 2017 after fully twenty years on its fine lees! I tasted this bottling back in the spring of 2017 from a version disgorged a few months earlier than this particular bottle and it showed beautifully, but was still recently-disgorged and had not yet settled back into complete harmony. This was not the case with this most recent bottle, which was in perfect form and making a very, very strong argument that the 1996s were every bit as brilliant as their early reputation made them out to be (there has been some revisionist thinking in this regard). The bouquet soars from the glass in a pristine blend of pear, apple, a hint of fresh apricot, almond, *crème patissière*, a beautiful base of limestone soil and that signature Avize smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and flawlessly balanced, with a rock solid core, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused and beautifully complex finish. Stellar. 2018-2055+. **95.**

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2013 Champagne Marguet “Bouzy” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet’s “Cru Series” bottlings are not always made entirely from his own fruit, as he will sometimes go out and purchase fruit from other growers who are farming organically to have enough production for a specific cuvée. However, his 2013 Bouzy is all from the family’s vineyards in this commune and is composed of a blend of seventy-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-three percent chardonnay in this vintage. The wine was disgorged in May of 2018 after four years aging *sur latte* and saw no *dosage*. The wine is beautifully extroverted on the nose, wafting from the glass in a wide open blend of peach, a touch of *mirabelle*, chalky soil

tones, dried flowers and *patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core, fine soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, seamlessly balanced finish. This is really good juice. 2018-2045. **93.**

2013 Georges Laval “Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Cumières)

The 2012 les Hautes Chèvres was the first vintage of this Blanc de Noirs, single vineyard wine to be made entirely from pinot meunier, rather than pinot noir. Vincent Laval had to replant his eighty year-old pinot noir vines here after the 2009 vintage, so starting in 2012, he switched the sourcing for this bottling to his oldest parcels of pinot meunier in the Hauts Chèvres vineyard. These range from fifty-plus to more than eighty years of age, so the wine remained an old vine bottling, just switched varietals. However, in 2013, a tiny amount of old vine pinot noir is also included in the blend this year and the wine is excellent. It was disgorged in November of 2017 and offers up a complex aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, white flowers and other Meunier-derived floral scents. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, superb complexity and stunning length and grip on the vibrant and seamless finish. A great wine in the making, but give it another five years in the cellar (if you can)! 2023-2055+. **94+.**

2013 Taittinger Brut Millésimé (Reims)

The 2013 Taittinger Brut Millésimé is composed of its customary fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. The wine is quite refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a precise and classy blend of white peach, apple, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is already quite tasty, but it is still a young wine and will offer more mid-palate generosity and complexity with some bottle age. Good juice. 2018-2045. **92.**

2012 Vincent Charlot “Fruit De Ma Passion” Extra Brut Millésimé (Mardeuil)

The 2012 “Fruit De Ma Passion” Extra Brut Millésimé from Vincent Charlot is an excellent example of this fine vintage. The *cépages* of this bottling is fifty-five percent pinot meunier, forty percent chardonnay and five percent pinot noir. The wine was disgorged in November of 2016 and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. Like all of his wines, the *vins clairs* here are barrel-fermented in older casks and do not undergo malo. The bouquet of the 2012 is bright and nicely expressive, offering up scents of white peach, meunier floral tones, *patissière*, a lovely base of soil tones, incipient notes of smokiness and just a whisper of vanillin oak from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a fine core, good mineral signature, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the focused finish. I like Monsieur Charlot’s style of wines, which are always loaded with personality (albeit, not the most elegant wines in the neighborhood) and this is true of the fine 2012 version of Fruit De Ma Passion. 2018-2040+. **92+.**

2012 Olivier Horiot “5 Sens” Millésime Brut Nature (les Riceys)

Olivier Horiot’s “5 Sens” Millésime Brut Nature is composed of a blend of five different varietals (hence its name): Arbane, Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay. The wines are blended soon after fermentation is finished and then aged in cask for a full year prior to bottling. The 2012 vintage spent three and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a beautifully complex nose of white peach, apple, almond, brioche, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of buttery oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, frothy

mousse and a very long, poised and bone dry finish. I like the balance here quite well, despite its lack of *dosage*, as the ripeness of the acids in 2012 makes for a bit more gentle palate impression and the non-*dosé* style is not quite as brusque. 2018-2040+. **92.**



The entrance to the courtyard at Champagne Marguet in Ambonnay- good things always await inside!

2011 Alexandre Filaine “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime (Damery)

The 2011 Sensuum Vertigo Brut Millésime from Fabrice Gass is superb and one of the very finest examples I have tasted from this challenging growing season in Champagne. I had the pleasure to taste this at the very start of the year and it has not lost a beat since that time. The *cépages* is fifty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier and its *dosage* is 5.5 grams per liter. The additional eight months of bottle age has allowed the wine to settle in very nicely and it now offers up a fine bouquet of apple, peach, chalky minerality, brioche, white flowers and a touch of sweet butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and vibrant, with a rock solid core, excellent focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. There is absolutely nothing “off vintage” about the 2011 Sensuum Vertigo! 2018-2040. **94.**

2011 Champagne Marguet “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)

I had tasted the 2011 Ambonnay Rosé bottling from Benoît Marguet on a couple of occasions in the past and really, really liked the wine, but this was the first time I had the chance to try its non-Rosé counterpart. The wine is a nearly fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay and saw no *dosage* in this vintage. It offers up a lovely nose of white peach, apple, bread dough, a touch of pastry, chalky soil tones and a nice dollop of upper register smokiness.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely mineral in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip, very refined *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is very, very strong for the 2011 vintage. 2018-2035. **91.**

1990 Dom Pérignon “Oenothèque” Brut Millésime- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)

I reported on the first disgorgement of 1990 Dom Pérignon a couple of issues back in the feature on this superb bottling, and was very happy to see the 1990 Oenothèque, later disgorgement bottle make an unannounced appearance at a recent old vintage wine dinner. Like many of the 1990 vintage Champagnes, the original disgorgement of Dom Pérignon has aged fairly briskly (particularly for this cuvée) and is now getting towards the far side of its plateau, but the later-disgorged Oenothèque version is still at its apogee and is drinking with more bounce, mineral drive and precision. The classic nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, flinty minerality, sourdough bread, orange peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and *à point*, with fine focus and grip, still very good *mousse* and lovey length and grip on the wide open, but still quite zesty finish. This is drinking very well and has plenty of life ahead of it, but it is also fully mature now and will not improve with further bottle age. 2018-2035. **93.**

1975 Bollinger R. D. Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 1975 Bollinger R. D. is now quite tertiary in personality on both the nose and palate, but still is drinking very well in its advanced guise and is a lovely bottle. The nose offers up a complex and aged nose of backed peaches and apples, a touch of leather, lovely soil tones, walnuts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still with a vivid memory of the *mousse* that has recently departed, with a fine core, good soil signature and a long, complex and bouncy finish. A lovely old Champagne. 2018-2030. **92.**

1975 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)

This is the original disgorgement of 1975 Dom Pérignon and the wine is still drinking splendidly. It was paired up with the 1975 Bollinger R. D. at a very memorable dinner and the wine performed beautifully. The bouquet is bright and complex, jumping from the glass in a mix of peach, apple, a touch of caraway seed, refined minerality, walnuts, smoky overtones and a bit of classic DP white truffle tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and still quite vibrant, with excellent *mousse* for a forty-three year-old bottle, a fine core and excellent backend mineral drive on the bright, focused, complex and very long finish. This is outstanding and at its apogee today! 2018-2040+. **95.**

Vintage-Dated Brut Rosé and Extra Brut Rosé

2012 Vincent Charlot “Rubis de la Dune” Extra Brut Millésimé (Mardeuil)

The 2012 “Rubis de la Dune” Extra Brut Millésimé from Vincent Charlot is produced from his twenty-eight *ares* of vines in the la Dune vineyard in Mardeuil, with his vines having all been planted in 1955. The *cépages* here is eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent pinot noir, with the grapes spending fourteen hours of maceration with the skins to give the wine its lovely salmon color. The *vins clairs* do not go through malo, but are aged for eight months in old Burgundy casks prior to bottling for the secondary fermentation; the wine was disgorged in October of 2016 and finished non-*dosé*. The bouquet is bright and now blossoming beautifully, offering up a fine blend of cherries, blood orange, a touch of rhubarb, complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness, a touch of cinnamon and a fine topnote of rye bread. On the palate the wine is

bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and quite good length and grip on the complex finish. It is interesting, but the wine shows a lovely note of apple on the finish, though the fruit is not evident in the aromatics. Good juice in a very good place for current drinking. 2018-2030+. **91+**.

2011 Olivier Horiot “Sève de Saignée” Rosé Brut Nature (les Riceys)

The 2011 “Sève de Saignée” Rosé Brut Nature from Olivier Horiot is quite a unique wine, as it is composed entirely from pinot noir grown in the *lieu à dit* of En Barmont, barrel-fermented (with four days of carbonic maceration) and then the *vin clair* is aged a full year in cask prior to its bottling and secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in March of 2017 after four and a half years aging *sur latte* and is non-*dosé*. The 2011 is quite dark salmon in color and offers up a beautifully vinous nose of cherries, rhubarb, blood orange, a bit of clove, complex soil tones, rye bread and dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb soil signature, frothy *mousse* and plenty of brisk acidity perking up the long and complex finish. I love the aromatic and flavor complexity here, but this is a Brut Nature with serious conviction, and one has to be a fan of this style to appreciate the wine fully. I would love to drink a version of this with three to four grams of *dosage* and compare the difference. 2018-2035+. **91.** (add at least two points if you are a dyed in the wool lover of bone dry Brut Nature, as the underlying wine here is stellar).

1998 Pol Roger Vintage Brut Rosé (Épernay)

The 1998 Pol Roger Vintage Brut Rosé is now fully mature and is in a very good place for drinking. The wine is composed of its customary blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay, with fifteen percent of the pinot noir being still *vin rouge*. The complex and now quite tertiary bouquet offers up scents of desiccated cherries, a bit of red berry, caraway seed, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely *à point*, with fine focus and grip, still a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, wide open finish. The wine tails off just a whisper at the very end of the finish now and probably indicates that it would be best to drink it up over the next several years, as I suspect it will soon be starting to peek over the far side of its plateau. Other than the slight hiccup on the finish, the wine has aged very well and is indeed a very tasty glass of Brut Rosé today- particularly when served at the table. 2018-2030+? **92.**

**ANOTHER LOOK AT THE 1996 BURGUNDY VINTAGE-
TIME HEALS MANY WOUNDS.**



I last wrote a big feature on the 1996 Burgundy vintage back in 2011. At that time, I was trying to follow-up the red wines from many of the top vintages in the region at the fifteen year mark and see how the wines were evolving. However, after the rather recalcitrant showings of both the 1996 and 1998 vintages' red wines at age fifteen, I decided that this fifteen year anniversary was not necessarily a good moment in the evolutionary arc of most red Burgundy vintages and decided to choose a different benchmark moment in a vintage's life for catching up with the development of the wines in bottle. To date, I have not really decided on a good birthday for vintage re-visits, but perhaps twenty-two years out would be a good point to restart this series, as this most recent 1996 Burgundy vintage tasting found the wines in a far different place from where they had been only seven years ago. Back in 2011, the reds of 1996 were certainly a mixed bag, with a few showing wonderfully and others far more closed down, with the tangy acids of the vintage seemingly quite elevated and the wonderfully pure fruit that made the wines so attractive in their youths very hard to find. Furthermore, a certain percentage of the reds seemed to already be showing some signs of senility, with overtly autumnal elements of far older wines quite prevalent. It seemed a distinct possibility, with bottles in that state, that the wines' fruit components were in the process of drying out, while the structural chassis of tannin

and strident acidity seemed likely to stay put until the fruit was fully deceased. And, even back in 2011, I never entertained the idea of tackling a chunk of white wines from the 1996 vintage, as in the age of premox, it seemed likely that it would simply be a waste of time and would mostly uncover oxidized wines that were long dead and gone.

With the experience of the 1996 red Burgundies at age fifteen still fairly fresh in my memory, coupled with absolutely no expectations for any sizable percentage of the white wines from the vintage, I really did not know what to expect when I accepted an invitation from David Hamburger of the Wine Workshop (a part of Acker-Merrall and Condit) to be the moderator for a 1996 Burgundy weekend of deep and wide tastings that were held here in New York in the third week of September of this year. I was extremely curious to see at these tastings how the red wines might have evolved since my in-depth look at the vintage back in 2011, but also quite expectant that a great many of the wines which had not shown well at that time might still be quite closed and not yet blossoming. How the red wines that were showing signs of potential collapse and accelerated evolution might show was even more questionable, but I was curious enough to see what had happened in the ensuing seven years to say I would be delighted to speak at this pair of epic tastings- especially when David emailed me the lineup of wines for the two events, which read like a “Who’s Who” of the very top bottlings of (mostly) grand crus from the top producers in the Côte d’Or. However, I was quite surprised when David’s lineup also included a very sizable number of grand cru white wines from the 1996 vintage, and I wrote back to him that it will be interesting to open those wines and maybe we will get lucky and catch a few that had escaped from the long reach of premature oxidation. It would turn out that these whites would turn out to be quite a pleasant surprise, as our failure rate from premox would be far, far lower than I ever would have imagined! More on that later.

Before going into the results of our two large tastings, which comprised eighty-five wines between them, let me first go back and revisit the vintage growing conditions and style of the wines as they were first tasted out of barrel and in the early days after bottling, and then revisit where the wines were back in 2011 when I last drank deeply of the vintage. Perhaps no vintage better typifies the roller-coaster ride that so many Burgundy vintages take us on over the course of their lives than the 1996 Burgundies. The vintage started out basking in the sunshine of widespread enthusiasm and then dipped into a nether world of pessimism for their ultimate shape and future quality. As young wines, alongside the racy and beautifully balanced 1996 whites, the ’96 reds were inundated with nearly universal praise, as these beautifully pure, lithesome and focused wines offered up the grace of a dancer, the chiseled structure of an athlete in their prime, wonderful purity and precision in their expressions of fruit and the youthful transparency that only the greatest of vintages can deliver. Like its white wine counterparts, it was a red vintage of very clean, ripe fruit and very tangy acidity, which early on gave the wines a backend energy that was very exciting indeed. However, as can often be the case with high acid red Burgundy vintages such as the 1996s, the wines closed down hard after a handful of years and really became rather cantankerous to taste, with the acids turning aggressive (and often borderline volatile), and the great purity of fruit that the wines initially showed either vanishing or becoming deeply buried behind the more aggressive structural elements in the wines. They went through a prolonged period that was not dissimilar to what many of the 1988 reds experienced, with the wines developing a rather disappointing, almost “rusty pipe” element on both the nose

and palate that was hardly inspiring during their most reticent periods of adolescence. On their tenth birthdays, many wines had already had their epitaphs written.

The white wines of the 1996 Burgundy vintage have faced different hurdles than the reds since their early days of fruit exuberance, mineral drive, great depth and even greater promise. From the outset, the perfectly ripe fruit, high acids and sleek expressions of *terroir* in the 1996 white Burgundies seemed to promise a vintage of legendary proportions, built for long-term cellaring and destined to deliver one hundred percent on their all too obvious, youthful potential. When this vintage was first released, no one had even heard of premature oxidation problems, though in reality, the 1994 and 1995 vintages were already starting to slide down into the premoxy abyss and were soon to be fading into varying degrees of oxidation and disappointment. But, with 1994 having been a quite indifferent white Burgundy vintage and 1995, though far better than '94, still not without its share of challenges during the growing season, the two vintages' rather early demise was not seen as the harbinger of things to come, but rather as simply the reflection of a poor vintage in 1994 and a vintage that had been misread a bit out of the blocks with the 1995s. All of this would not matter when the brilliantly tensile, dense and perfectly balanced 1996 white Burgundies started to truly blossom. Sadly, the 1996 whites, rather than developing as all great vintages of yesteryear had done, also started to prematurely oxidize around age five or so and would go on to become the poster child of premoxy vintages in the years to come. Which is unfortunate on a number of fronts, as this scourge remains part of the white Burgundy calculus more than twenty years down the road. But, with 1996 now considered the first great white Burgundy vintage to fall to premoxy, it is often forgotten today just how brilliant these wines were young and what enormous promise they seemed to hold in their hands at the time. As Christophe Roumier once said of the 1996 whites, "it is a vintage that had everything- perfect ripeness to the fruit, absolutely no issues in the vineyards during the growing season, great acidity and marvelous *typicité*; this should have been a great, great vintage of white Burgundy for long aging." And so it should have been if fate had been kinder.

1996 was a big vintage in the Burgundy region, as excellent weather in June led to a very healthy and trouble-free flowering. Summer was up and down weather-wise, as it was not particularly hot mid-summer and there was quite a bit of rain in August, but generally the weather was good. Starting in late August and all through the month of September, the sun was out and it was a beautiful Indian Summer that brought to fruition a large, healthy crop of grapes with excellent sugar levels, plenty of acidity and superb promise. 1996 was one of those early autumns in France where the wind blew in from the north each day, keeping sanitation in the vineyards optimal and, as a result, there were absolutely no issues with rot or mildew in this growing season. Growers had the possibility to pick when they wished, as weather was perfect and there was no need to rush to get the bunches off of the vines. The first berries started to be collected by *vignerons* around the 21st or 22nd of September in 1996, with some growers holding off for another week before commencing to allow sugars to creep up a bit more, but as the nights were cool during this month, the sugars were climbing quite slowly at the end of the growing cycle and the acids were staying put. The yields of 1996 ended up being the largest since the 1990 vintage, which was welcome after the very short crops in both 1993 and 1995 in the region. And while yields were large, the ripeness of the grapes was excellent, as most had sugars sufficient for natural alcohol levels of anywhere from twelve to thirteen percent, so there was no concern about underripeness. Acidity levels were high as well, as the cool evening temperatures

kept the acids from dropping as the sugars crept up over the last fortnight of the growing season, so we had a rather rare year that combined both high sugars and high acids.

The red wines out of barrel showed lovely depth of fruit, excellent purity and soil signatures, tangy, well-integrated acids and ripe, moderate tannin levels. Malic acidity was high in the grapes from 1996 and malolactic fermentations were very leisurely in this year. However, the wines showed beautifully out of barrel and in their early years after bottling and no one doubted this was going to be an outstanding vintage for red Burgundy and it was quickly ranked ahead of the chewier, denser and more adolescently-challenging 1995s that had preceded it. The white wines shared similar attributes with the reds, with purity, depth of fruit and stellar minerality being their calling cards and most commentators felt that the whites would eventually rank as one of the greatest white Burgundy vintages of the last fifty years. But, the aging curve for both the reds and whites turned out to be dramatically different from what was initially forecast and both have had their share of doubters in the years that followed. The whites fell into the trough of premature oxidation and never managed to really blossom for an extended period of time prior to this onset, so that the brilliance that they promised out of the blocks remained largely unfulfilled. However, given that premox is a bottle by bottle phenomenon, one can still happen upon a bottle of 1996 white Burgundy that is completely unaffected by the scourge, and when one does so, the enormous potential inherent in the vintage comes roaring through and one can sense what all the excitement was about in 1998 and 1999 when the wines were young!

The red wines of 1996 have also seen their share of ups and downs, as their shut down period during adolescence was about as grumpy and unyielding as one will find in a red Burgundy vintage, with the beautiful fruit seemingly disappearing and the tangy acids of youth getting rather screeching and the moderate tannins also sticking out uncovered during the fruit's absence from the equation. One can go back and read my report from Issue Thirty-Five from October of 2011 to see how the wines showed at that point in time, but generally, with a small handful of exceptions (such as the wines from Domaine Dujac and Domaine Rousseau), the wines were still in the depths of hibernation and rather difficult to taste. Even where all of the constituent components remained in place, the wines were reserved, very tangy and still fairly tannic and not all that pleasant to drink. And, as I alluded to above, there were some wines that seemed already old in their expressions of fruit, lacking vibrancy and seemingly getting somewhat autumnal and tertiary in their aromatic and flavor profiles, but still with very tangy acids. One wondered seriously about their future evolution in bottle!

Seven years have passed since that report and the red wines of 1996 have improved every step of the way, continuing to blossom nicely from behind their structural chassis (which today is acidity as much as it is tannin) and many have begun to show far more freshness to their fruit components than was the case back in 2011. This is not an atypical thing for a red Burgundy vintage to do during its evolution out of adolescence, as the lovely 1985 reds also went through a phase in the late 1990s where they also seemed to be getting "autumnal", only to brighten, deepen and freshen up on the fruit side of the ledger another ten years down the road. So, for the more disappointing 1996 reds at their fifteen year point, their comeback is not unprecedented and is most welcome. Jeremy Seysses of Domaine Dujac had mentioned to me back when I was working on my project for the 1996 red Burgundies in 2011 that "age fifteen is often a difficult period in the evolution in the bottle of a red Burgundy vintage and the wines often do not show

particularly well at this age.” He continued, “John, you really should wait until the wines have passed their twentieth birthdays to do these retrospective reports, as I think you will find the wines taste much better at that age.” And, so here we go, with a stunning lineup of 1996s at age twenty-two, safely past the unpredictability of adolescence and starting to really come into their own, so we are now poised to test Jeremy’s premise.



I learned upon my arrival ahead of the first dinner of this tasting series that David had sourced the entire tasting from a well-known East Coast Burgundy collector, Bryan Jacoboski, who had supplied every single wine for both of our events. I have known Bryan for many, many years and used to taste with him with quite some frequency back in my wine merchant days, so I was very pleased to hear whose cellar our wines were originating from, as Bryan has always been scrupulous about the provenance of his wines and I knew that we were destined to have a most representative lineup of 1996s. What was interesting to me when David, Bryan and I had a chance to chat prior to the arrival of guests for the tasting was that the fairly large range of white wines in the lineup had been included at Bryan’s instigation, and he seemed far more confident about how the wines would show than either David or myself prior to the start of our first tasting. When Bryan noted that he had carefully gone through his cases of 1996 white Burgundies and scrutinized the colors of each bottle, selecting only bottles that seemed to have quite light colors and rejecting any that had any brownish tinge which might indicate premoxy, I held out a bit more hope for what we might find with the lineup of white wines. It turned out that the incidence of

premix in our lineup of 1996s was far below what I might have anticipated and was probably due to the vigilance of Bryan in selecting to send up bottles of whites that had no obvious tinge of brown to their colors. He did note that he found quite a few brownish bottles while carrying out this inspection in the lead up to the tasting, and opened many of these and dumped them down the sink after confirming that they were premixed. So, our results were not particularly representative of the vintage as a whole, due to this careful pre-selection of bottles, but was noteworthy for providing the possibility to taste a pretty good range of sound 1996 white Burgundies and assess their state of evolution at age twenty-two.

Ultimately, we ended up having (to my count) twenty-two out of twenty-eight bottles which showed no signs of premature oxidation, which was a far better success rate than I ever would have hoped for prior to our tastings. However, that said, the wines that showed no signs of premix were not all as stunning as one might have hoped for, given how beautiful this vintage of white Burgundy had shown out of the blocks. Before visiting that aspect of how the wines showed at the tasting, perhaps it would be better to address the question of how one can distinguish between premix issues for a wine and the simple evolution of a chardonnay-based wine that is now already twenty-two years of age. It is a very legitimate point, as in our lineup, we certainly had wines that showed some oxidative characteristics on either the nose and palate that were not symptoms of premature oxidation, but rather just the typical shadings of oxidation that appear in white Burgundies more than two decades out from the vintage. So how to tell the difference between the two? Let us start with those wines that showed oxidative elements of some sort, but which I did not deem to be prematurely oxidized. Examples of this in our lineup would include wines such as Jacques Prieur's Montrachet and both Louis Latour's Corton-Charlemagne and Montrachet. These wines had elements that could be defined as slightly oxidative, with notes like browned butter, sweet corn, apricot and the like, but which still retained sound structural chassis of acidity and were not compromised in terms of either length or complexity on the palate. They just showed some overt signs of oncoming old age in their panoplies of aromatics and flavors, which of course is to be expected in some white Burgundies twenty-two years out from the vintage.

The overtly premixed wines in our lineup were another matter altogether. These wines were completely buried in oxidative elements and were flat out maderized, or were well on their way to being so. But, it is not just the aromas and flavors of overt oxidation that places these wines squarely in the premix camp to my palate, as it is also the structural degradation that the wines exhibited and which is also part and parcel with the issue of premature oxidation. In this case, one finds on the palate that the impression of acidity seems far lower than other wines from the vintage, the length and grip on the backend are either severely compromised or non-existent and the finishes simply fall off of the palate, rather than lingering. Of the bottles in our two tastings that had these issues, there was of course, some variation as to the severity of the symptoms, but all of the wines were completely compromised by a combination of these elements. Examples of this would include Michel Niellon's Chevalier-Montrachet, Domaine Sauzet's Montrachet and Jean-François Coche's Puligny-Montrachet "Enseignères" and Meursault "Rougeots". As I have mentioned many times in the past, premature oxidation is a bottle by bottle phenomenon, so just because our tasting include premixed examples of certain wines and sound examples of others is not an indication that "Wine A is premixed in 1996 and Wine B is not", as we could repeat this same lineup from the same cases in Bryan's cellar and

get different results in a future tasting. It is just the luck of the draw as we found it with this particular lineup of bottles over this 1996 Burgundy weekend.

Due to Bryan's strict selection of bottles of 1996 whites by color, to try and ensure as positive a lineup of white wines during our weekend tasting marathon as was possible, we had a much lower percentage of premoxed bottles than I would expect if our bottles had been selected randomly, rather than carefully by the lightest colors. But, even with that in mind, I should mention that not all of our non-premoxed bottles showed exceedingly well at our two tastings, as there were other issues for some of the 1996 white Burgundies that were not premox-related. Let us start with a discussion of the four Domaine Leflaive wines that were in our lineup: the premier crus of les Pucelles and les Combettes and the grand crus of Bâtard-Montrachet and Chevalier-Montrachet. In this era, the domaine's wines were bottled in a quite reductive phase *vis à vis* the wines of many of their neighbors, and all four, to a lesser or greater degree, showed some signs of reduction still quite present at age twenty-two. In the case of the Chevalier-Montrachet, the reductive nature of the wine was a bit less strong than the other three and I found the wine to be far better for this. The other three wines were really quite reductive on the nose, and all three seemed to have developed less complexity than the Chevalier (or other of our top 1996 white Burgundies) and to have some sense of permanence to their reduction that will continue to define the wines and block some of their development of aromatic and flavor complexity in the years to come. All three wines should remain fresh and vibrant as further years roll by, but I suspect that they are never going to get more complex than they are right now and have paid a price for warding off premox issues by reduction. I should mention that I have found similar "stunted development of complexity" in other white Burgundies that were bottled in more reductive states as well in the last few years, with the most recent bottle in this camp prior to our tasting having been a bottle of 2004 Meursault "Tessons" from Jean-Marc Roulot which I shared a couple of months ago and was equally stunted by reduction.

Beyond the issues of premature oxidation and permanent reduction that plagued some of the white wines in our lineup, there were also several bottlings on display that seemed to have escaped issues with either problem, but had not developed anywhere near as well as I had hoped for and seemed to be relatively lacking in complexity, despite not being overtly compromised by either issue. Some of the examples in our lineup of wines that would fall into this category included Dominique Lafon's Montrachet, Louis Jadot Chevalier-Montrachet "les Demoiselles" and Domaine Ramonet's Montrachet, which was served out of magnum. The wines were quite fresh still for their twenty-second years, with good acids and grip on the long finishes, but had not developed anywhere near the complexity levels of the best wines in our lineup and truly stood out from other wines in their respective flights for their lack of development with bottle age. I am not sure what was the cause of this lack of positive evolution in the bottle for these wines, as I have never really encountered it before with wines of such pedigree (and track records for developing superb complexity with extended aging in previous vintages), and these wines were some of the most mystifying to be found in our entire weekend of exploration of the 1996 Burgundy vintage. They provided food for thought about the vintage in general, and perhaps also offered some other, new permutation related to the issue of premature oxidation in the white wines from this year or some completely new issue with the vintage that has been hidden in the shadows of premature oxidation of the 1996s. I have reflected upon the showing of these wines throughout the preparation of this article and cannot come up with even a plausible

explanation for why the wines showed such a lack of developmental complexity on both the nose and palate at age twenty-two, given how promising they seemed in their early days before the issue of premature oxidation was even heard of, and it may well represent yet another mystery in the evolution of sound bottles of the 1996 white Burgundies.

One issue which I have not yet addressed in this discussion was posed to me by a fellow Burgundy lover on Twitter while I was chronicling my participation in these two epic tastings during the weekend in question. To paraphrase his note to me, “when do we stop talking about premo in a vintage that is twenty-two years old and just start talking about oxidation?” It is a fair question and one that I have not tackled directly in the previous discussion. As I alluded to above, the issue of premature oxidation is one that compromises the wine’s ability to age gracefully and is not just a degradation of the wine’s flavor and aromatic profile through oxidation, but also a collapse of the wine’s structural chassis, with the perception of acidity and grip both diminishing on the finishes and the wine’s length also vanishing. These issues, along with overt oxidation of the nose and palate flavors, are the symptoms of premo, and often the first sign of a wine descending into the first stage of premo will be one of structural degradation, with the wine remaining fresh in terms of aromatics and flavors, but starting to lose grip, bounce and length on the backend. I drank a great many 1995 white Burgundies in this early stage (at breakneck speed I might add) out of my own cellar back in the first couple of years of the new millennium, as they were clearly destined to collapse into premo-induced oxidation in the near future. And it is this structural collapse that puts a particular example of 1996 white Burgundy in the premo side of the ledger in my book, even if the wines are now twenty-two years out from the vintage. In many cases, I would suspect that this aspect of their premature oxidation issues arrived many, many years ago and have been defining the wines ever since. In contrast, there are some wines that simply show oxidative notes from the passage of time and yet, still retain good structural elements on the palate. When one is tasting a large lineup of white Burgundies with significant bottle age, such as we did over the course of this weekend, it is quite easy to spot the difference between the two.

On to the red wines of 1996. Given how difficult some of the wines were in their adolescence back in 2011, I really had no idea what to expect with the 1996 red Burgundies at our two tastings. The results far exceeded even my wildest hopes for the evolution of the wines over the ensuing seven years, as they almost uniformly showed beautifully and were all emerging from their periods of hibernation or were well out from that closed moment in their evolution and in the full bloom of accessibility. As most of our red wine lineup was grand cru, the wines were not necessarily at their apogees of peak drinkability, but the vast majority were moving nicely in that direction and were a great pleasure to drink at this point in their development. The handful of premier crus in our star-studded lineup were all into their plateaus of peak drinkability (with a few exceptions, like the naturally long-lived and slow to evolve wines from folks like Jacques d’Angerville or Michel Lafarge) and strongly suggested that wines at this level across the board in 1996 are now wide open for business and this is a very, very good moment to start drinking these wines with high expectations. At the grand cru level, the wines are in general opening very nicely as well and getting closer to their peaks, but many are not quite there yet and will still be even better with a bit more bottle age. But, the concerns I had for some wines back in 2011 seem to have vanished with more time in the bottle and it was quite

clear that the red wines of 1996 are now starting to deliver on their very early, very exciting potential.



In the process of preparing for my presentations during the weekend of tastings of the 1996 Burgundies, I thought it might make sense to take a look at articles available on the internet from other writers who may have tasted the wines in the interim since I wrote my feature on the red wines of the vintage back in 2011, just to see if things had changed in their experiences since my series of tastings seven years ago. This also allowed me to refresh my memory concerning the growing season of 1996, which I reported on above. Now, I almost never read any other wine writers on any subject whatsoever, as it has been my policy since I started writing *View From the Cellar* to try and rely solely on my own experiences and impressions of the wines that I taste. This is not to demean the efforts of my journalistic colleagues, as there are many whom I feel are serious and seasoned professionals and do outstanding work. Of course, like any profession, there are also dilettantes and posers in our calling who really have no clue, as a career that offers travel possibilities and lots of drinking can appeal to a certain sort of person that may have little regard for accuracy or authenticity. In any case, the reason I try to remain insulated from what others are writing or saying is that the prospect of “group think” (where the group follows the impressions and convictions of the most influential player), is a very real threat in many intellectually-inclined professions and a great impediment to insightful and reflective assessments across a vast majority of fields (witness for example the widespread acceptance of

the existence of WMDs in Iraq in the wake of September 11th, when in fact there were none). As my university degree is in Political Science and History, I was introduced to the concept of “group think” and the serious impediment it poses to the arrival at sound conclusions while studying bureaucracies back in my college days, and I have long seen that this problem is faced by far more professional fields than that of diplomacy. It was very evident as a problem back in the days of Robert Parker’s hegemony of my own field and thus, I studiously try to avoid it by not reading what others are writing today.

However, in the lead up to my speaking at the Wine Workshop’s 1996 Burgundy weekend, I thought it would be useful to see if others had been trying 1996 Burgundies and finding improved results than I had back in 2011. I found one article in particular that stood out, as it was written by Michel Bettane back in 2015. Monsieur Bettane is quite well-respected in certain circles, so I was curious to see if he had found something of material interest four years out from my own tastings in 2011. However, the article ended up speaking mostly of the white wines from the 1996 Burgundy vintage and purported to be an attempt by Monsieur Bettane to respond to some sort of criticism he had received previously (he does not mention from where or when) about his praise for the 1996 whites. It was absolutely useless for my purposes, as he was flat out wrong about the causes of premature oxidation (not to mention sadly ill-informed of ongoing research here) and rather silly to be trying to answer critics who complained of his having praised a vintage of white Burgundy which he tasted in the spring of 1997, long before the issue of premature oxidation ever arose. Of course, since malolactic fermentations were quite slow for the 1996 vintage in general, Monsieur Bettane was probably tasting wines in the midst of malo and trying to make definitive pronouncements on wines at a time when even the most seasoned, hoary old *vigneron* would not do so. But, we all have our own methodologies. What was the most bizarre aspect of the article to me was that he concluded that producers had bottled their 1996s too early on in their evolutions in the cellar, to make room to bring in the 1997 vintage, asserting that many had actually bottled their wines before they had even completed their malolactic fermentations. This was all new to me. It did not help me at all in getting a read on where the reds of the vintage might be in comparison to my tastings on their fifteenth birthdays, but the article was bizarre enough to merit at least a mention here as how little insightful recent commentary can be found on this vintage of Burgundy, as this article appeared in what is considered a serious journal and was really quite devoid of perspective or utility.

Another article that I came across in the not too well populated list of recent articles on the 1996s was one written by Benjamin Lewin called “What’s the Problem With 1996 Red Burgundy?” and which seemed likely to be more useful for my purposes. I do not know Mr. Lewin, but it turns out that he is a Master of Wine and widely published. As his article was written in November of 2015, it seemed like it might cover where the wines were four years out from my tastings in 2011. Sadly, it did not. Essentially, it was a complaint piece by Mr. Lewin that he had purchased a lot of 1996 Burgundy for his cellar and now found the wines excessively acidic. Certainly, the acids had been a big issue when I was tasting the wines at age fifteen and I understood completely where he was coming from in this regard, but it did not provide any details about which wines he had tasted and on which he had based his criticisms, nor when he had tasted the wines. It was rather remarkable for its lack of evidence on any front whatsoever. The first thing I wondered was whether or not he had bothered to take the time to decant the wines, or if he had simply pulled the corks and had at them, expecting the wines to deliver their

most closely-held secrets in the first thirty seconds in the glass? In any case, he offered no foundation for his views based on the wines which he had tasted and when, so I guess we are expected to take it on trust that he did taste a representative sampling of the reds of the '96 vintage, knew what he was doing, and came to a sound conclusion on the poor quality of the wines based on a foundation of research and experience. Like I said, I almost never read anyone's else's wine writing as a point of principal and I think I will not be dipping into those muddy waters again anytime soon.

Which leads me, in round about fashion, to how we handled our 1996s for this epic wine weekend organized by the Wine Workshop. I arrived at the tasting having no idea what the plans were for the service of the bottles and was delighted to be told by David Hamburger and his indefatigable assistant, Lily Freedman, that all of the bottles had been opened and tasted for TCA taint several hours prior the tasting and then were to be decanted fifteen to thirty minutes prior to serving. This sounded like a perfect approach to me for this high acid vintage (where a bit of aeration is often necessary to allow the wines to open up from behind their acids) and which turned out to be the case, as our wines showed beautifully across the board. I should also mention that I had decanted for an extended period of time all of my 1996s during my series of tastings back in 2011, as this is something I do consistently for red Burgundies and other red wines where the acidity plays such a fundamental role in the wine's structure. As most wines for the weekend events were poured from individual bottles and we were eighteen tasters, most of the wines were consumed with the first round of pours and it was only the few magnums in the lineup that allowed for a revisiting of the wines at the end of the evening, but given that we worked through fully eighty-five wines over the course of a Saturday evening dinner and a Sunday lunch, I did not have a lot of energy left for re-tasting wines at the end of the proceedings each day and was more than content to allow my initial impressions of the wines to form the basis of my tasting notes.

So, how did the red wines show? In a word- brilliantly. The issues of dominant acidity and a paucity of fruit, which the more recalcitrant customers had shown back in 2011, were completely gone in these wines and the reds were bursting with pure and often quite nicely red fruity tones, were extremely transparent and precise expressions of their underlying *terroir*, and showed beautiful balance between their tangy acids, moderate tannins and lovely fruit elements. The "rusty pipe" aspect to the acids in some wines seven years ago was nowhere to be found in any of these wines. The sweetness and freshness of the fruit was back from its hibernation and there were very few sightings of autumnal elements in any of the wines, other than in the beautifully complex Pousse d'Or Volnay "Clos de la Bousse d'Or" which was at its apogee and had all of its constituent components in harmony and perfect balance, with its notes of *sous bois* simply a proper tertiary element for this point in its evolutionary cycle. I will let the tasting notes below speak to whether a particular wine was now ready for drinking, but in general terms, the 1996 red Burgundies are starting to show very nicely and their future now seems more than certain to deliver on all of the early promise the wines presented in their formative days. Not all the wines listed below were ready for primetime drinking, but they were in the midst of blossoming and their sheer beauty was already self-evident and their eventual peaks of maturity destined to be long and very rewarding. I should take a moment to address a recurring theme in a couple of the articles I looked at on the 1996 Burgundy vintage, and this is that it is only the grand crus and the very best premier crus that possess enough density of fruit to buffer the

vintage's high acidity. While our wine weekend was heavily-weighted towards grand crus, the observation was certainly not true of the premier crus that made it into our lineup of wines, and this was not my impression back in 2011 either, when I had far more premier crus represented in the rosters of my tastings. I will have to start opening more premier crus to see if this assertion holds any water, but I am quite skeptical that this is the case, based on the caliber of analysis of the articles in which this issue was raised.

The following notes are listed geographically from north to south, as is my custom in many of my Burgundy reports. Within each communal grouping, I list premier crus before grand crus, and generally try to put each category in a qualitative hierarchy based on my perception of the quality of the respective *terroir*. Consequently, I would list a premier cru Champeaux from Gevrey ahead of Clos St. Jacques, so readers can get a sense of my general ranking of the vineyards in Burgundy based on the perceived quality of their *terroir*. Within each specific vineyard grouping, the wines are simply listed alphabetically by producer. As I noted above, the vast majority of these wines were tasted in the Wine Workshop's 1996 Burgundy Weekend events, with a small handful of wines added from recent tastings notes that I have acquired in my travels. At the Wine Workshop events, we had bad luck with a few bottles, as the Joseph Drouhin Clos des Mouches Blanc, Joseph Roty Charmes-Chambertin and Faiveley Musigny were corked, and the Comte de Vogüé Musigny was oxidized. But, given the number of wines we opened, our batting average was really very, very good. Given how closed down the 1996 Burgundy vintage had been back in 2011, I had not been touching any bottles from my own cellar from this vintage, but that policy is not going to last any longer, as the winds of change have swept through this vintage and the 1996s are beginning to really blossom and drink very, very well indeed! I should also mention that I have included notes on wines below that were overtly premoxed during our tastings, just so readers can keep a scorecard of which wines were present and not showing well. I usually do not bother to list notes on premoxed wines in the journal, as premature oxidation is a bottle by bottle phenomenon and hence, notes on a premoxed bottle are really no indication of how another bottle might show. They are included below simply to give a sense of how our spread of 1996 white Burgundies performed at these two events, after they had been selected based on the soundness and vibrancy of their colors in the unopened bottles.

Gevrey-Chambertin

1996 Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos St. Jacques"- Domaine Armand Rousseau

I have always ascribed to the theory that Clos St. Jacques can deliver grand cru quality complexity, but does not quite have the same mid-palate volume as the top grand crus in the village. This was quite apparent in our 1996 tastings, as almost everything served before or after this wine was a grand cru and the differences were self-evident. That said, this is a very, very pretty and stylish wine, wafting from the glass in a classy aromatic constellation of black cherries, red plums, mustard seed, a complex base of soil, gamebirds, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely transparent, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. A lovely middleweight. 2018-2045+. **94+**.

1996 Charmes-Chambertin "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Denis Bachelet

I had expected more of our 1996 reds to have the shape and bounce of Denis Bachelet's promising Charmes-Chambertin, as this wine is still tangy and its structure is defined by its acidity, despite all of the underlying elements starting to really emerge from hibernation. The

wine is still youthful, though the nose is now nicely open and reveals a fine constellation of red and black cherries, grilled meats, dark soil tones, a nice touch of upper register spice and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and tangy, with a lovely mid-palate depth, superb transparency, moderate tannins and a long, lifted and complex finish. This is very tasty in its tangy and youthful complexity and I would have no problem drinking it today, but there will be even more fireworks another five years down the road for this wine. 2023-2060. **95.**

1996 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Claude Dugat

I wanted to like this wine more than I did, but in the end, though it has some very nice elements, it is essentially a rather four-square and simple wine. The bouquet is new oak and nicely sappy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, chocolate, dark soil tones and plenty of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly tannic, with a good core, nice vibrancy and a long, plump finish. I would certainly like to see more complexity here. 2018-2040+. **89.**

1996 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Dugat-Py

Bernard Dugat's 1996 Charmes-Chambertin is a very well-made wine, but it is a bit extracted in style and has swapped a bit of charm for power. The bouquet is black fruity and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, hung game, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly chewy, with a good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, powerful and slightly four-square finish. This may just still be too young for primetime drinking and greater detail will emerge with more bottle age, but this may also just be the size and shape of the wine in this vintage and only more softening will come with further cellaring. Time will tell. 2018-2050. **92.**



1996 Mazis-Chambertin- Domaine d'Auvenay (Maison Leroy)

Madame Leroy's 1996 Mazis-Chambertin is a fine wine. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, grilled meats, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, fine mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, new oaky and classy finish. I really like the style and shape of this bottling. 2018-2050+. **94.**

1996 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Leroy

The 1996 Latricières-Chambertin from Domaine Leroy is a bit more marked by its new oak than I would ideally like (but this is true of almost all of Madame Leroy's wines to my palate), but there is depth, breed and complexity here that carries through nicely and the generous serving of new wood is now pretty well integrated into the wine. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, lovely spice tones, a complex base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely soil elements, tangy acids, moderate tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and new oaky finish. This is good juice and one of my favorite 1996s from the domaine. 2022-2075. **93+.**

1996 Griottes-Chambertin- Domaine Claude Dugat

To my palate, the 1996 Griottes-Chambertin from Claude Dugat carries its new oak a bit better than his Charmes. The nose offers up a similar mélange of new oak and sappy fruit tones, with scents of black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, soil and toasty oak wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tasty, with modest complexity, but a good sense of balance on the long, succulent and moderately tannic finish. In some sort of strange, absolutist world, this is not far off the quality of the Joseph Drouhin Griotte in 1996, but I far prefer the style of the Drouhin version. 2018-2045. **92.**

1996 Griotte-Chambertin- Domaine Joseph Drouhin

The 1996 Griotte-Chambertin from Domaine Joseph Drouhin is drinking very nicely indeed at age twenty-two, which was quite reassuring to me, as the last bottle I tried, back in 2008, was in a shut down and acidic phase that was not particularly enjoyable. However, the wine has come through its hibernation and is now starting to really drink nicely, with lovely complexity on both the nose and palate and a fine sense of resolution to the tannins. The bouquet offers up a beautiful blend of strawberries, cherries, cinnamon, a nice touch of meatiness, *sous bois* and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, transparent and nicely balanced. With a good core, fine focus and detail and a long, meltingly tannic, tangy and complex finish. Fine juice that is now drinking with real generosity, but still has decades of life ahead of it. 2018-2040. **93.**

1996 Chambertin "Clos de Bèze"- Domaine Louis Jadot

The 1996 Chambertin "Clos de Bèze" from Domaine Louis Jadot is an excellent wine in the making, but this is still on the young side and will be even better down the road than it is today. The bouquet is refined and black fruity, offering up scents of cassis, espresso, grilled meats, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent in profile, with excellent mid-palate depth, impressive complexity and a long, tangy and moderately tannic finish of outstanding focus and balance. This is quite approachable today, but there will be a reward for those who continue to leave it alone in the cellar for another five to ten years! 2018-2065. **94+.**

1996 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Domaine Armand Rousseau

The 1996 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze” from Domaine Rousseau is a brilliant example of the vintage. The complex and beautifully perfumed nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red plums, red and black cherries, musky tones, grilled meats, a very complex base of soil and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and beautifully sappy at the core, with superb soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a very long, vibrant and flat out stunning finish. Great, great juice. 2018-2065+. **97+**.

1996 Chambertin- Domaine Armand Rousseau

The 1996 Chambertin from the Rousseau family is equally stupendous. The deep, pure and utterly classic nose delivers a blend of red plums, cherries, wild strawberries, a very complex base of soil, a touch of cocoa, vanillin oak and a topnote of both violets and dusty rose. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly refined in profile, with a great core of fruit, stunning soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins, tangy acids and laser-like focus and grip on the very long and utterly suave finish. This is not as flamboyant as the Rousseau Clos de Bèze, but it is more refined and every bit as magical! 2018-2075. **97+**.

1996 Chambertin- Domaine Trapet Père et Fils

Jean-Louis Trapet only took over the family estate here in 1990 and during the mid-1990s, like many of his contemporaries at the time, he was using quite a bit more new oak for his wines than is the case today. The new oak shows a bit here in this lovely 1996 Chambertin, which is a very good wine, but not quite in the same celestial league as Jean-Louis’ wines today. The bouquet offers up a complex constellation of red and black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, a touch of grilled meats, a fine base of soil and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with fine focus and grip, plenty of length, suave tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is very tasty wine in the making and has decades of life ahead of it. 2020-2060+. **92+**.

Morey St. Denis

1996 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Dujac

The Seysses family made absolutely stellar 1996s, as the Dujac wines showed beautifully across the board back at my tastings in 2011, and an additional seven years of bottle age has done nothing but allow them to open further. Their 1996 Clos de la Roche is a superb wine in full bloom, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of plums, red and black cherries, squab, a complex base of soil tones, cocoa powder and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a lovely core, superb transparency, modest tannins and a very long, very refined and complex finish. A gorgeous wine. 2018-2055+. **96**.

1996 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Leroy

The 1996 Clos de la Roche from Domaine Leroy is a deep and very powerful wine, with its extraction level far beyond any of the other examples of Clos de la Roche in our tasting. The wine is still quite monolithic on the nose at the present time, offering up a sappy blend of black cherries, raw cocoa, soil tones, woodsmoke and slightly resinous new oak in generous quantity. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with firm tannins, tangy acids and a long, extracted and quite unevolved finish. The wine is long and balanced, but still completely primary and one wonders if it will end up being stillborn and never really progress from this muscle-bound state. If it does eventually start to show some developmental complexity, then my score at the top of the range will be applicable. 2025-2075. **87-91?**

1996 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier

The 1996 Domaine Lignier Clos de la Roche showed very well at our event, with its fairly heavy framing of toasty new oak now beautifully buried in the other elements of the wine. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, venison, a great base of soil, woodsmoke and a suave framing of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking very well indeed, with an excellent core, lovely soil signature, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is lovely and showing even a hair better than the bottle I had at the domaine a couple of years ago to celebrate Hubert Lignier's eightieth birthday! 2018-2050. **94+**.



1996 Clos de la Roche “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Ponsot

The 1996 vintage at Domaine Ponsot was a controversial one, as this wine in particular was very light in both color and apparent body when it was first released in bottle and several commentators questioned whether or not Laurent Ponsot had succeeded in this vintage. At the time, Monsieur Ponsot had responded that his 1996s would be just fine in the fullness of time; they just needed some bottle age to blossom. Twenty-two years down the road, he has been vindicated, as this wine showed very nicely at our tasting, albeit, not quite in the same level of the finest vintages of this era at the domaine. But, the light and thin wine of youth was long gone, as the 1996 Ponsot Clos de la Roche is now quite classic in its expression, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, venison, fresh herb tones and

a good base of slightly damp soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, wide open and quite complex, with a plush core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, broad and well-balanced finish. The acidity here seems a bit less pronounced than in many other 1996s, but of course the house style here is for very late harvesting and this would have allowed the acids in the grapes to drop a bit prior to picking. A very, very good wine, but without quite the vibrant magnetism of wines such as the 1991 or 1993 Ponsot Clos de la Roche. 2018-2045+. **92.**

Chambolle-Musigny

1996 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Domaine Leroy

Whether one is a fan of the style or not, one does have to admit that there is a certain sex appeal added to the Domaine Leroy wines from their treatment in the cellar and this is quite evident with this very good bottle of 1996 Chambolle “Charmes”. The bouquet offers up a blend of red and black cherries, chocolate, good soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, sappy at the core and somewhat complex, with good focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, new oaky and slightly over-oaked finish. There is just a bit of backend, uncovered wood tannins here that keep the score down a tad, but all in all, this is tasty, if not all that serious. 2018-2040. **91.**

1996 Bonnes Mares- Domaine Dujac

The 1996 Domaine Dujac Bonnes-Mares is a beautiful wine that is now starting to drink with great style, but it is still early on in its long life in bottle and the wine may be even better further down the road. Today, the bouquet is pure and vibrant, offering up a complex blend of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of mustard seed, a very complex base of soil tones, cocoa powder and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with a fine core, excellent backend mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. It is hardly a crime to be drinking this beautiful wine today, but it has many, many decades still to go and my gut instinct is that another decade from now will bring even more magic in the glass. 2018-2075. **95.**

1996 Bonnes Mares- Domaine Robert Groffier

In contrast to almost every other 1996 red in our lineup, the '96 Groffier Bonnes-Mares seemed to already have peaked and perhaps be starting to slide down the far side of its plateau. The wine is wide open and already showing a hint of oxidation in its simple bouquet of red and black cherries, stewed herbs, damp soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a solid core, a four-square personality and melting tannins perking up the long, simple finish. This is quite pedestrian. 2018-2030+. **85.**

1996 Bonnes Mares- Domaine Louis Jadot

The 1996 Louis Jadot Bonnes-Mares is a fine example of the vintage that (as is the house style here) is a bit behind its brethren in development and still in need of another five years of bottle age, but which should eventually blossom quite nicely. The bouquet is starting to show some fine secondary layers of complexity in its blend of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, venison, lovely soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and still fairly reserved in profile, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Five more years in the cellars should see this wine starting to really blossom nicely and my score may ultimately prove to be a bit conservative. 2023-2085+. **92+.**

1996 Bonnes Mares- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

1996 was the last vintage here where Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier was still flying as a commercial pilot and managing the domaine on a part-time basis, so I was not expecting quite the same level of quality as one finds here today, with Monsieur Mugnier now happily here full-time. However, that was not the case and his 1996 Bonnes-Mares showed beautifully, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, grilled game, a bit of balsam bough and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite refined in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, focused and very promising finish. This is not quite ready, but it is getting close and is going to be excellent. 2021-2060+. **93+**.

1996 Bonnes Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

Christophe Roumier's Bonnes-Mares is a stellar wine in 1996. This is still a half a dozen years or so away from full opening, but it is not reserved today and is very easy to see where it is headed. The excellent bouquet delivers a complex constellation of red and black cherries, *pigeon*, woodsmoke, a very complex base of soil, rose petals and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and complex, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, outstanding soil inflection, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, tangy and classy finish. This is going to be brilliant when it is fully ready to drink! 2023-2085+. **96**.

1996 Bonnes Mares- Domaine Comte de Vogüé

The mid-1990s was not my favorite era at Comte de Vogüé, as the wines were a bit more extracted in these days than they are today. However, despite this very obvious style in evidence in the 1996 Bonnes-Mares, the wine showed very nicely at our tasting. The bouquet is open and quite attractive, wafting from the glass in a mix of plums, pomegranate, venison, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly structured, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This needs more bottle age to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more, but the wine is going to be very good when it is fully blossomed. 20123-2075+. **93**.

1996 Musigny- Domaine Joseph Drouhin

Back in 2011, the 1996 Drouhin wines were mostly closed down in deep hibernation and these were some of the wines that were in that autumnal phase in their fruit expression that I found a bit worrisome. Seven years down the road, it was great to see them emerged from their period of hibernation and showing beautifully. The nose on the 1996 Musigny was still a tad reserved *vis à vis* some of these other reds, but the wine was stunningly open on the palate, sappy at the core and showed great backend energy. The bouquet offers up classic Musigny complexity in an emerging stage of red and black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and modestly tannic, with great sappiness in the mid-palate, lovely focus and grip and a very, very long, complex finish. This is delicious today, but I would try to give it a few more years in the cellar and let the nose fully open up to the same point as the palate is today, for at that point, this will be pure magic! 2022-2065+. **95**.

1996 Musigny- Domaine Leroy

The 1996 Musigny from Madame Leroy was one of the best wines of hers that we tasted in our two events. The wine shares the new oaky personality of all of her 1996s, but here, the wood is balanced by superb soil elements and lovely fruit tones. The bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, dark chocolate, a complex baser of soil tones, woodsmoke and slightly

resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely solid at the core, with quite good transparency, lovely focus and a long, moderately tannic and tangy finish. In comparison to some of her other 1996s, the fruit here seems just a touch lean from its one hundred percent new oak, but in comparison to muscled up wines like her Richebourg, this seems like an attractive characteristic. This is very good and drinking quite well, albeit, with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2018-2050. **94.**

1996 Musigny- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier's 1996 Musigny was also showing beautifully at our tasting. The bouquet is excellent, offering up a vibrant blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, mustard seed, gamebird and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and plenty deep at the core, with superb soil inflection, lovely focus and grip, fine-grained, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is really starting to show well today, but I would be inclined to let it rest just a bit longer in the cellar and let more layers of complexity emerge and a bit more of the tannin fall away. It is going to be a long-lived and beautiful wine, so why rush? 2023-2075. **95.**

1996 Musigny- Domaine Jacques Prieur

I have always felt that the Musigny was the finest bottling at Domaine Jacques Prieur and the 1996 version acquitted itself quite well at our tasting. The wine is a bit new oaky on the nose, but there is fine Musigny character underneath, as the bouquet delivers a fine blend of red and black cherries, plums, mustard seed, complex soil tones, coffee and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, very good soil signature, modest tannins and lovely focus and grip on the quite long and very elegant finish. Fine juice. 2018-2060. **94+.**

1996 Musigny- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 1996 Musigny from Domaine Georges Roumier is another monument to the vintage. The wine is about five years away from really starting to drink in its plateau, but it is blossoming nicely and is very easy to enjoy at the present time. The bouquet is deep, pure, young and very complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of plums, red and black cherries, dark chocolate, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke and gamebird. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, transparent and nicely sappy at the core, with lovely complexity, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and very, very precise finish. This is gorgeous and almost ready! 2023-2075+. **96.**

Vougeot

1996 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Leroy

As readers know, I am a very strong partisan of the virtues of the under-respected, but lovely *terroir* of Clos Vougeot. But, there was nothing here for me to defend in 1996. Some folks will argue that vines down at the bottom of the Clos Vougeot are inherently inferior and should not be allowed grand cru status, and I had always believed that one could do good work down there as well, if one were highly motivated. However, this wine, which does indeed hail from a parcel right next to the *Route Nationale*, is really quite mediocre. The densely extracted and heavily made up bouquet offers up scents of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, chocolate and tons of new oak. On the palate the wine is dense, full and four-square, with a firm core, uncovered oak tannins and a long, simple and slightly resinous finish. It is weird to taste a wine that has fairly sound constituent components (other than uncovered oak tannins) and think, "what a train wreck!" But, I am emphatically not a believer as far as this wine is concerned, despite the

wine being pretty technically sound. While this is drinkable, it is about as far away stylistically from what I value in Burgundy that I hope to never cross paths with it again. 2022-2060. **88.**



The fog lifting from over the church steeple and center of Vosne-Romanée, as seen across the October vines.

Vosne- Romanée

1996 Vosne- Romanée “les Beaux Monts”- Domaine Leroy

I started to have a theory during these 1996 tastings that Madame Bize respects certain *terroirs* more than others, and, as a result, backs off a touch on the cellar treatments for certain wines. I have no evidence for this, but this really lovely '96 Beaux Monts made me think that it is one of the favored *terroirs*. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a very complex blend of dark berries, plums, bitter chocolate, dark soil tones, venison, woodsmoke and new vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, suave tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very classy finish. This is more like it! 2018-2050. **94.**

1996 Vosne- Romanée “Cros Parantoux”- Domaine Henri Jay

It had been a long, long time since I last drank a bottle of the 1996 Cros Parantoux from Henri Jay and I was so happy to see that this wine has developed beautifully with bottle age and is just about ready to deliver on all of its immaculate early promise. The bouquet has an exotic touch of sappiness that is very beguiling, as the aromatics surge from the glass in a blend of plums, raspberries, dark chocolate, Vosne spices, *pigeon*, cinnamon, a gloriously complex

base of soil tones and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, flawlessly balanced and seamless, with a sappy core, great transparency, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, very complex and moderately tannic finish. Sheer brilliance and now nearing its apogee! 2018-2050. **100.**

1996 Vosne- Romanée “Cros Parantoux”- Domaine Emmanuel Rouget

While Emmanuel Rouget’s 1996 Echézeaux had shed some of its tomato character from youth, this was not the case with his Cros Parantoux, which still showed this element on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is an odd mélange of tomatoes, cherries, red berries, damp herb tones and a bit of oxidation. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chunky and lacking in focus and detail, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, pedestrian and simple finish. Some at the table speculated that this bottle was not pristine and that is certainly possible. Either an off bottle or decidedly strange brew. ???

1996 Echézeaux- Domaine Jean Grivot

I wanted to like this wine, but it just lay there in the glass like a dead thing compared to the other ’96 Echézeaux bottlings in the flight. The bouquet is black fruity and quite complex, (but somehow, also quite lifeless) offering up scents of cark berries, cassis, espresso, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, but also a bit heavy-handed in personality and lacking vibrancy and bounce, with moderate tannins and a long, flat finish. I wondered if this might be compromised by a very slight touch of TCA, but as others around the table are far more sensitive to corkiness than I am and they felt unanimously that there was not cork taint here, I have to assume that this is just the wine. There are good raw materials here, but somehow the wine lacks vitality. 2022-2050. **87?**

1996 Echézeaux- Domaine Mayer-Gilles

The 1996 Echézeaux from Domaine Mayer-Gilles was one of the big surprises for me in our weekend tasting extravaganza, as I did not anticipate liking this wine anywhere near as much as I ended up doing! Yes, it is quite new oaky in style and the quality of the oak is not the very finest, but the wine carries its lumber very well indeed and there is a lot to like here. The bouquet is deep, sappy and quite complex, offering up scents of cassis, meaty tones, dark chocolate, a good base of dark soil tones and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with quite good soil signature, tangy acids, still a bit of chewy tannins and a long, well-balanced and impressively complex finish. There is a very slight resinous edge to the expression of new wood here, on both the nose and palate, but this is very minor and the wine is actually very, very good in 1996. It has not quite reached its peak, but it is knocking on the door. 2020-2050. **93.**

1996 Echézeaux- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1996 Echézeaux, which was the first made without the assistance of Jean Mongeard, is an excellent wine, with the acids of the vintage still beautifully integrated in the body of the wine. The lovely nose offer sup scents of red and black cherries, orange peel, bonfires, venison, coffee, forest floor and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and autumnal in profile, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. The balance here is very good and this is a very good 1996. 2015-2040. **91.**

1996 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1996 Echézeaux from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is a very fine example of the vintage. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of raspberries, red and black cherries, Vosne spices, gamebird, a lovely base of soil, a touch of sweet stems and plenty of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip,

moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and nearly ready finish. This is probably only a couple of years away from fully opening and many would be happy to open bottles now, but I would try to hold off for just a few more years and let the tannins fall away just a bit more. A lovely bottle. 2020-2060. **93.**

1996 Echézeaux- Domaine Emmanuel Rouget

The 1996 Echézeaux from Domaine Emmanuel Rouget was a rather odd wine when it was young, as it had this out of place tomato-like element on both the nose and palate that seemed very out of character for the vintage. Twenty years down the road, this element is now more like gentle notes of bug spray, which mingle with the black cherries, herbs, dark chocolate and vanillin oak on the nose. On the palate the wine is plump, full-bodied and quite four-square and devoid of complexity, albeit, still with a good core and fine length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. This lacks for soil elements on both the nose and palate and seems quite stillborn and devoid of complexity for a twenty-two year-old bottle of Echézeaux. Nothing special here. 2022-2045+. **87.**

1996 Grands-Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

DRC's 1996 Grands-Echézeaux is a bit more black fruity and chocolaty in profile than the Echézeaux in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a superb mix of plums, black cherries, chocolate, Vosne spices, a good base of soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and full, with excellent mid-palate concentration, fine focus and grip, seamless balance and a very long, complex and modestly tannic finish. This too is really starting to drink well, but deserves just a few more years to soften up even a bit more. 2020-2065+. **94.**

1996 Richebourg- Domaine Jean Grivot

Etienne Grivot's 1996 Richebourg is quite a bit better than his Echézeaux, but it too is a bit overly-extracted in personality and certainly not in the first division in this tasting. The wine is quite a bit fresher on the nose than the Echézeaux, offering up scents of cassis, black plums, woodsmoke, venison, dark soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and has still not yet integrated its new oak fully (at age twenty-two!), with a good core, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the extracted finish. There is complexity here, but not a whole lot of charm. 2025-2065+. **90+.**

1996 Richebourg- Domaine Leroy

The 1996 Leroy Richebourg is still a very young and primary wine, with good raw materials and this may eventually blossom to offer up far more complexity than it reveals today. The bouquet is deep and rather forceful in personality, offering up a mix of plums, cherries, cocoa powder, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and full, with a rock solid core, rather a four-square personality, good length and grip and a long, chewy and rather dense finish. This may well come around a decade down the road, in which case my score will seem unduly conservative, but this does not seem to be an absolute certainty at the present time. 2024-2060. **92+?**

1996 Richebourg- Domaine Méo-Camuzet

I have long been a fan of Jean-Nicolas Méo's 1996 Richebourg and the wine acquitted itself very nicely at our tasting. The bouquet is deep, pure and still youthful, but also stunning in its potential, as it wafts from the glass in a complex array of black plums, red and black cherries, raw cocoa, Vosne spices, a complex base of soil, duck and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite refined in profile, with a lovely core, great soil signature,

ripe, suave tannins, tangy acids and beautiful balance on the long and moderately tannic finish. Great juice in the making- just add more time. 2025-2075+. **96.**



1996 Richebourg- Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

The 1996 Mongeard-Mugneret Richebourg is one of the great wines of the vintage and if all the '96s were evolving as gracefully as this wine, we would have no reservations with the vintage! The stunning nose is deep, pure and complex, as it offers up a superb constellation of plums, red and black cherries, cocoa powder, Vosne spices, a beautiful base of soil, nutskins, just a whisper of autumn leaves and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and utterly suave, with a lovely core of fruit, seamless balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is already a stunning glass of wine, but I would be inclined to still hold off gratification for another five years and really let it blossom completely. 2021-2070. **95+.**

1996 Richebourg- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1996 Richebourg from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is a very good wine in the making, but this still needs a good stretch in the cellar to blossom more completely. The promising bouquet offer sup scents of plums, black cherries, chocolate, venison, a good base of soil tones and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, tangy acids and good focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. Give it a bit more time. 2025-2075. **93.**

1996 Romanée-Saint-Vivant- Domaine Leroy

The 1996 Romanée-Saint-Vivant from Domaine Leroy is a fine bottle. The bouquet is deep, complex and expressive, offering up scents of cherries, plums, cocoa powder, a fine base of soil, Vosne spices and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core, fine transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very classy finish. A lovely example of RSV that is now starting to really drink with complexity and grace, but has many decades of life still ahead of it. 2018-2060. **95.**

1996 Romanée-Saint-Vivant- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

I really love the wines from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, but I sometimes think that they do not really like the *terroir* of Romanée-Saint-Vivant, as the wine can often be the most charmless of their reds in their stellar holding of vineyards. This is indeed the case with the ham-fisted 1996, which is new oaky and seems to be struggling mightily at the present time to support its new wood. The bouquet offers up black cherries, raspberries, beetroot, spice tones, *pigeon*, dark soil and loads of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, reserved and borderline over-oaked, with a good core, firm tannins (some from the barrels) and a rather overly sturdy, chewy finish. Maybe the wine just needs more time, or maybe it just needed less new wood. Romanée-Saint-Vivant is one of my absolute favorite *terroirs* in the entire Côte de Nuits, but the 1996 DRC version is not one of my favorite examples. 2023-2060. **91+?**

1996 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1996 La Tâche is at about the same stage of evolution as the DRC Richebourg, but more expressive at the same time and it is easier to see exactly the shape of things to come with this superb wine. The bouquet is beautiful, albeit still fairly youthful, as it offers up scents of cherries, plums, beetroot, Vosne spices, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and excellent grip on the very, very long, vibrant and promising finish. I would love to circle back to this beautiful wine in a decade and catch it in full bloom! 2025-2085. **95+.**

1996 Romanée-Conti- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

It is a rare vintage where the Romanée-Conti is drinking well ahead of the La Tâche or Richebourg, but this is the case in 1996! This is an absolutely brilliant wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet soars with celestial grace from the glass in a perfumed blend of red plums, cherries, beetroot, exotic spices, duck, fresh nutmeg, lovely minerality and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and almost silky on the attack, with glorious intensity of flavor in the mid-palate, fine-grained, moderate tannins, tangy acids and stunning length and grip on the very complex and utterly seamless finish. This wine is still in climbing mode and will be even better down the road, but it is awfully hard to resist its charms today! 2018-2075. **98.**

Nuits St. Georges

1996 Nuits St. Georges “aux Boudots”- Domaine Leroy

The nose on the 1996 Nuits St. Georges “aux Boudots” from Domaine Leroy is not bad at all, but the palate is far less reassuring. But, first, the really good bouquet, which is not overly complex, but hits all of its notes cleanly, delivering scents of sappy black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a touch of violets and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is far less satisfying, offering up a deep, full-bodied and sappy impression that is still very primary and really quite extracted and buried under new oak. There are uncovered wood tannins poking out on the finish and I have serious reservations this wine will ever right the ship of balance and

blossom properly. It seems far more likely to just dry out. But, it certainly smells good. 2020-2045+? **87.**

Corton-Charlemagne and Corton Rouge

1996 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Bonneau du Martray

When the 1996 Bonneau du Martray Corton-Charlemagne is good, it is very good. There are plenty of premoxed bottles out there, but ours was in fine shape and showed no hints of the scourge. The bouquet is deep, bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, fresh almond, just a hint of honey, spring flowers, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, long and vibrant, with lovely focus and grip, a good core and a long, complex and *à point* finish. Good juice and a pristine bottle. 2018-2030+. **93.**

1996 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Coche-Dury

This particular bottle of Coche-Dury 1996 Corton Charlie was sound and showed no issues with premature oxidation, but it was oddly lacking in focus and rather discordant on the palate. I hope this was just an indication of the wine in a period of hibernation and it will regain its stunning promise with further aging, as it was indeed brilliant when it was younger. The bouquet was fresh and promising, offering up a properly mature mélange of tangerine, apple, passion fruit, iodine, complex minerality and a fine framing of vanillin oak. So far so good. However, on the palate the wine is full-bodied, powerful and racy, but without the constituent components combining seamlessly, so one has the sense of a wine whose structural elements are a bit at war with themselves. The wine is certainly long and fresh and perhaps more bottle age will help this wine snap back into precision, but it was oddly out of phase at our tasting. It really was a most unexpected showing for a wine I loved in its youth. 2018-2035+. **91.**

1996 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Louis Latour

In my experience, the last great vintage for Louis Latour's Corton-Charlemagne in this era was the 1993, and any vintage from '93 back can be counted on to be a stellar example of this *terroir*. However, from at least 1995 forwards, the domaine seemed to lose its way with this bottling and this 1996 is no exception. The wine is sound and shows no premox issues, but it is not a great wine by any stretch of the imagination, with more toasty new oak than it needs and not enough serious stuffing underneath the wood. The bouquet is new oaky and solid in its evolutionary stage, offering up scents of fresh apricot, pear, almond, chalky soil and a creosote component from the oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, but smothered under its overly-generous serving of new oak, leading to a heavy-handed palate impression that lacks elegance and proper balance. At least it is fresh and this bottle showed no signs of premox, so it will continue to cruise along for many years to come, but it will never delight. The wine is okay, but no better. 2018-2040. **88.**

1996 Corton "Clos du Roi"- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The 1996 Corton "Clos du Roi" from Domaine Chandon de Briailles is drinking quite nicely today, but still has decades of life ahead of it. The bouquet is deep, wide open and quite beautiful in its developed perfume of red and black cherries, gamebird, coriander seed, bonfire, cedar and forest floor. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and nicely tangy, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. This is a classic example of the great *terroir* of Clos du Roi and a Corton that is rounding nicely into form at age twenty-one and has decades of superb drinking still ahead of it. Fine juice that is just reaching the start of its plateau. 2017-2040+. **93.**



Pommard

1996 Pommard “les Croix Noires”- Domaine Lucien Boillot et Fils

I really like the balance today of the 1996 les Croix Noires from the Boillot family, as the acids here remain beautifully integrated into the base of the wine and both the nose and the palate are evolving in a relaxed, classic manner. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, a fine base of the vineyard’s dark soil tones, a touch of chicory and a delicate topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and tangy, with excellent transparency, fine focus and grip and a long, gently tannic and quite complex finish. This is now into its apogee, but has the balance to continue to cruise along beautifully for several decades. A fine example. 2018-2040. **92.**

Volnay

1996 Volnay “Santenots”- Domaine Leroy

To my palate, Lalou Bize has a very strong house style to all of her wines, and this tends to work best to my palate with lesser *terroirs* such as Santenots than it does with more exalted spots such as RSV or Clos Vougeot. Her 1996 Santenots is a very good wine, with more of the extracted Leroy house style working nicely here. The bouquet is a pretty mix of black cherries, plums, chocolate, smoke, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flashy in style, with a good core of fruit, still a bit of chewy tannin and a long, polished and complex finish. This was by quite some margin the most powerful and pumped up

example of Volnay in our tasting lineup, with a heavy veneer of winemaking makeup in evidence, but in this case, it works pretty well. That said, in our lineup of top flight Volnay cuvées, this was quite obviously the last place finisher, though still a good wine. 2020-2050. **91+**.

1996 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I really like the 1996 Santenots du Milieu from Dominique Lafon, but I cannot help to mention that he was using quite a bit more new oak for this bottling twenty-two years ago than he does today, and my gut feeling is that if the vintage came around now, the wine would get a bit less new wood and would be even better for it. That said, there is nothing out of balance here, as the superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cassis, sweet blackberries, bitter chocolate, dark soil tones, *pigeon* and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and almost into its plateau of peak drinkability, with a lovely core, excellent soil inflection, modest tannins and lovely grip on the long and vibrant finish. Fine juice. 2020-2055+. **93.**

1996 Volnay “Clos de la Bousse d'Or”- Domaine Pousse d'Or

This was the last vintage where Gérard Potel was in charge of this lovely domaine and it was great to see that his final Clos de la Bousse d'Or is a superb example of the vintage. The wine is now wide open and fully mature, offering up a complex bouquet of red berries, cherries, *pigeon*, a lovely base of soil, gentle autumnal notes and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. Just a lovely bottle of Volnay at its apogee, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2018-2045. **92.**

1996 Volnay “Clos du Château des Ducs”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

The 1996 Clos du Château des Ducs from the Lafarge family is a really lovely wine that is still a few years away from its plateau of peak maturity, but is blossoming nicely and now quite easy to drink. The complex nose delivers a fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, cassis, charred wood, dark soil tones and venison. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, poised and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with moderate tannins, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Lovely juice that is getting tantalizingly close to its apogee. 2024-2075. **93.**

1996 Volnay “Clos de Ducs”- Domaine Marquis d'Angerville

I love the 1996 Clos des Ducs from Jacques d'Angerville, but true to his style back in this era, it remains a structured young wine in need of quite a bit more cellaring. However, all of the constituent components here are in perfect position for a long and very beautiful plateau of drinkability when the wine is ready, and all that is missing is the passage of more time. The youthful nose is pure and promising, wafting from the glass in a mix of red plums, woodsmoke, a hint of dried eucalyptus, a complex base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of roasted venison in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still quite primary, but very promising finish. Just have patience, as true greatness is lurking here! 2026-2085. **93.**

1996 Volnay “Clos de Chênes”- Domaine Michel Lafarge

The 1996 Volnay “Clos de Chênes” from Domaine Lafarge is a gorgeous wine in the making. The bouquet has blossomed beautifully, though the palate still will want a bit more patience to fully deliver generosity. Today, it is the nose that takes center stage, offering up a lovely blend of red and black cherries, dark chocolate, mustard seed, gamebird, a complex base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and hints of the violets to come with further bottle age. On the

palate the wine is young and superb, with a full-bodied and very well-balanced format, a fine core, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. I love the refined profile of this wine, which still needs further bottle age to really reach its plateau, but which is already showing its excellent potential without any caveats. 2026-2085. **95.**



Meursault

1996 Bourgogne Blanc- Domaine Coche-Dury

This wine was not part of our scheduled lineup, but snuck in as a blind wine in our flight and it showed brilliantly. In fact, this particular bottle was far more impressive than several other of our Coche-Dury wines on this evening. The nose is still a bit reductive (but not as much as the Leflaive '96s), offering up a bright and quite impressive bouquet of apple, passion fruit, hazelnuts, lovely limestone soil elements and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is surprisingly deep and full, with excellent focus and grip, a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature and a long, zesty and perfectly balanced, long finish. Just delightful and a great surprise! 2018-2035. **92+.**

1996 Meursault- Domaine Coche-Dury

Our bottle of 1996 Meursault *villages* from Jean-François Coche seemed to be showing just a touch of structural slippage from premox. The bouquet is lovely, offering up scents of pear, iodine, hazelnuts, chalky minerality, spring flowers and vanillin oak. It is on the palate where the issues hover, as this wine is full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, but little

backend grip and a rather short, clipped finish. I have had much better bottles of this, as well as others that are more overtly premoxed. This one was in the middle and not bad, but not pristine. 2018-2025+. **89.**

1996 Meursault “Rougeots”- Domaine Coche-Dury

The 1996 Rougeots from Coche-Dury was another bottle in our lineup that was premoxed. The bouquet offers up old wine notes of honey, nutskin, leather and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, but also overtly maderized in its flavor spectrum. Premoxed.

1996 Meursault “Narvaux”- Maison Leroy

I have liked Madame Bize’s bottling of Narvaux in the past (the 1990 vintage bottling of this wine particular stands out as being beautifully successful), but this 1996 Narvaux was way out of its league in our tastings. The wine was one of those 1996 whites which had retained lovely freshness and showed no signs of premox damage, but had also failed to develop its customary level of complexity with twenty-plus years of bottle age. The bouquet offers up mature, tertiary notes of hazelnuts, backed peach and apple, a bit of vanillin oak and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and well-balanced, with a good core, very little signs of complexity, but good length and grip on the bouncy finish. Okay wine, but nothing special. 2018-2030. **88.**

1996 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Dominique Lafon’s 1996 Charmes was drinking very nicely at our tasting. This is a very elegant wine, and though Dominique used more new oak for this bottling back in 1996 than he does today, it has carried its wood beautifully and was in perfect harmony and balance at age twenty-two. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones that are starting to get nicely salty with bottle age, spring flowers and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, but lighter on its feet than many in this lineup, with lovely focus and grip, good intensity of flavor and a long, zesty and complex finish. I have had several bottles of premoxed 1996 Charmes from Comtes Lafon, so it was very pleasant to hit one in perfect shape and drinking at its apogee. While this was not the most profound wine in our lineup, I really liked its sense of style and grace. 2018-2030+. **92.**

1996 Meursault “Genevrières”- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils (served from magnum)

The 1996 Bouchard Père et Fils wines we had in our lineup acquitted themselves pretty well in a roster of serious heavy hitters, but the quality of winemaking here back in 1996 pales in comparison to the high quality of the white wines made here today. The 1996 Genevrières out of magnum was very tasty, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, tangerine, nutskin, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp, long and fairly complex, with good, but not great depth and fine focus and grip on the quite tasty finish. This is not first division Genevrières, but the wine is fresh and drinking nicely today. 2018-2035. **91.**

1996 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaine Coche-Dury

The 1996 Perrières from Jean-François Coche can be an epic wine and one of the greatest whites of the entire vintage, if one is fortunate enough to catch a pristine bottle. Ours was not one, but it was not quite as premoxed as the Rougeots or Enseignères poured next to this wine. The bouquet is an advanced blend of apricot, geranium, walnuts, good minerality and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit four-square (particularly for this great wine), with sound acids, but notably advanced flavors that are moving resolutely towards full-

blown maderization. I have had perfectly fresh bottles of this wine and it is mind-blowing, but this one was starting to slide into the morass. Premoxed.

1996 Meursault “Perrières”- Maison Louis Jadot

I am not certain, but this wine seemed likely to have had its malolactic fermentation partially blocked, which is a frequent practice at Maison Jadot. The wine today was fresh and bright, but seemed to have not developed much complexity with its twenty-two years in bottle and was essentially a four-square, simple wine, that played a few notes sweetly. The bouquet offers up mature scents of apple and baked peach, almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and lacking in complexity, with decent mid-palate depth and good length and grip on the overtly simple finish. Nothing special going on here today- maybe it was better in the first blush of youth? 2018-2025. **87.**

Puligny-Montrachet

1996 Puligny-Montrachet “les Enseignères”- Domaine Coche-Dury

Our bottle of the 1996 Puligny-Montrachet “les Enseignères” from Domaine Coche-Dury was showing advanced and had some ill effects from premox. The acids here on the palate were still nicely snappy, but the fruit tones in its full-bodied format were getting old before their time. The nose offers up scents of apricot, nuts, honey, a touch of leather and vanillin oak. The palate is full and long, but fairly maderized. Premoxed.

1996 Puligny-Montrachet “les Combettes”- Domaine Leflaive

This bottle of 1996 Combettes from Domaine Leflaive is a touch less reductive than the Pucelles (please see below), and consequently, it is now fully at its peak of maturity. That said, it is not more complex than the Pucelles, just more open structurally. The nose offers up scents of pear, apple, a nice touch of *crème patissière*, good underlying minerality, a bit of almond and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a solid core, good soil signature and fine length and grip on the fully mature finish. This is not a bad drink, but I have had many vintages of mature Combettes from Leflaive and the wine develops a really lovely sense of candied lemon on the nose in most vintages when it is at its peak of development, and this signature element is conspicuous by its absence. 2018-2030. **92.**

1996 Puligny-Montrachet “les Pucelles”- Domaine Leflaive

The 1996 Domaine Leflaive wines were interesting, in that they were all still fairly reductive. The 1996 Pucelles is quite vibrant underneath its bit of reductive iodine, but is also just a stillborn for this great bottling and not as interesting at age twenty-two as it should be. The bouquet offer sup scents of pear, apple, almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. Lovely aromatics, but essentially the exact same ones it showed when it was young. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, long and vibrant, with a good core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, but not a whole lot of complexity. Of course, I prefer this to a premoxed bottle of 1996 white Burgundy, but that said, this is not a perfect bottle of Leflaive Pucelles and the reduction is somewhat permanent and the wine’s complexity has suffered accordingly. A perfectly pleasant drink, but slightly compromised at the same time. It is a tough white Burgundy world out there these days. 2018-2040. **92.**

1996 Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Leflaive

The most conspicuous 1996 of the four we had in our lineup was the Bâtard-Montrachet, as this wine remained moderately reductive on both the nose and palate and showed no real signs of aromatic or flavor development from its twenty-two years in the bottle. The bouquet is much

the same as it was out of the blocks, offering up a pretty blend of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, a touch of nuttiness, gentle smokiness and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with good soil signature, very modest complexity and good length and grip on the zesty and focused finish. This is good wine, but it is in suspended animation at the same time. 2018-2040+. **92.**



1996 Chevalier-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Maison Louis Jadot

This bottle of 1996 Louis Jadot Chevalier-Montrachet “les Demoiselles” was starting to premoxy, with good acidity and bounce in evidence on the palate, but with the bouquet already starting to descent into overtly oxidative elements. The nose is a mix of baked apples and peaches, nuts, vanillin oak and a leathery sense of oxidation. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and seemingly fresh in structural elements, but with oxidative flavors on the long finish. Premoxed.

1996 Chevalier-Montrachet- Domaine Leflaive

Happily, our bottle of 1996 Domaine Leflaive Chevalier was in good form and this was one of the greatest white wines of our two days of tastings. This too shows a bit of reduction on both the nose and palate (a bit more on the latter), but it seems to have escaped the issue of not developing complexity with bottle age and was absolutely singing. The beautiful bouquet soars from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, lemon, *crème patissière*, complex limestone minerality, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine si deep, full-bodied, pure

and rock solid at the core, with excellent complexity and grip, zesty acids and a very long, very refined and dancing finish. Great juice and a wine that exudes the enormous potential the 1996 white Burgundies once showed across the board! 2018-2050. **96.**

1996 Chevalier-Montrachet- Domaine Michel Niellon

This bottle of 1996 Domaine Niellon Chevalier-Montrachet was one of the most overtly premoxed examples that we sampled at the tasting. It is maderized on both the nose and palate, with notes of apricot, leather and citrus peel on the nose. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and long, but soft and already quite maderized. Premoxed.

1996 Montrachet- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1996 Montrachet from Maison Bouchard Père et Fils is a very good wine and only pales in comparison to the even finer level of white Burgundies being produced here today. But, there is nothing here not to like, as the nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of tangerine, apple, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of sweet corn, browned butter and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core and very good cut and grip on the focused and quite classy finish. Good juice. 2018-2035+. **92.**

1996 Montrachet- Marquis de Laguiche (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I was delighted to have an absolutely pristine bottle of the 1996 Marquis de Laguiche Montrachet from Maison Drouhin. The wine was superb, soaring from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of pear, apple, a touch of almond cream, a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones, incipient notes of sweet butter and a refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and refined, with superb complexity and mid-palate intensity, lovely focus and grip and superb, tangy acids adding lift and precision on the very long and elegant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **95.**

1996 Montrachet- Maison Louis Jadot

Our bottle of 1996 Montrachet from Louis Jadot was bright and tasty, but seemed to have left a bit of developmental complexity on the table and was not displaying the same degree of complexity of many of these other examples. The fresh and vibrant nose offers up scents of pear, apple, chalky, pastry cream and vanillin oak. In fact, it smells much the same as it did very early on in its life in bottle. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a good core, a nice touch of chalky soil and good length and grip on the bright and essentially undeveloped finish. This seems to have had its malo partially blocked and could this be the reason it is somewhat stillborn twenty-two years down the road? It is a good drink, but not a great Montrachet. 2018-2030+. **89.**

1996 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 1996 Montrachet from Comtes Lafon is a very good wine, but I was hoping for even a bit more from it than it showed on this occasion. The bouquet is fresh and quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, fresh almond, salty soil tones and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, reasonably complex finish. There is no signs of premo here whatsoever and this wine is fresh and vibrant, but somehow, I was hoping it would prove to be step up from the very good Meursault “Charmes” *chez* Lafon in this vintage, and at the present time, they are really quite comparable wines. Perhaps more layers of complexity will emerge here with further bottle age? 2018-2030+. **93.**

1996 Montrachet- Maison Louis Latour

The 1996 Louis Latour Montrachet is perfectly serviceable (and our bottle had avoided the plague of premox), but really, rather underwhelming in the context of Montrachet. The nose is evolved properly for its age, offering up scents of fresh apricot, apple, nutskin, chalky soil tones and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, wide open and still nicely zesty, but also pretty remarkably chunky and simple for this exalted *terroir*. There is decent length on the finish, but one does miss the breed and complexity of serious Montrachet. 2018-2030. **87.**

1996 Montrachet- Domaine Ramonet (served from magnum)

While our magnum of Domaine Ramonet's 1996 Montrachet showed no ill effects of the premature oxidation persuasion, it was not quite as good as it should have been. There is a layer of developmental complexity missing in the aromatic and flavor profile of this wine today and I am not really sure what could be the cause. The nose is bright and nicely projected, offering up scents of apple, pear, a touch of peppermint, chalky, a whisper of the corn to come and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with good depth at the core, sound acids and lovely balance on the long, but strangely simple finish. My expectations for this wine were for something magical, but this is merely very good and really lacks a bit of customary Ramonet complexity, particularly for their Montrachet! 2018-2035. **91.**

1996 Montrachet- Domaine Jacques Prieur

Our bottle of 1996 Montrachet from Jacques Prieur was perfectly sound and showed no signs of premox, but for all that, it was not particularly inspiring. The nose offers up a properly tertiary blend of pineapple, apple, a touch of new leather, popcorn and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite simple, with a good core, sound acids and sneaky length, but really very little elegance or complexity on display. One really does expect a bit more from Montrachet! 2018-2030. **87.**

1996 Montrachet- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1996 vintage of Montrachet from the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is one of the greatest white wines I have ever tasted from this estate. As readers may recall, I am generally not a fan of the late-harvested style of this wine, but in the fine Indian Summer of 1996, it appears that this approach worked to perfection! The bouquet is flat out beautiful, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex constellation of pear, apple, a touch of *crème patissière*, complex, chalky minerality, fresh nutmeg, citrus zest and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fresh as a daisy, with a great core, superb soil inflection, bright, zesty acids and stunning length and grip on the very precise and vibrant finish. A brilliant wine with decades of life still ahead of it. *Chapeau!* 2018-2055+. **98+.**

1996 Montrachet- Domaine Etienne Sauzet

This bottle of 1996 Sauzet Montrachet was the most badly premoxed bottle of our wine weekend. Sherry notes of fallen apples and peaches, leather, nutskin and damp mahogany waft from the glass. Full and full-blown maderization define the palate. Bad luck with this bottle, which happened to be notably darker in color than any other Montrachet in this flight. Premoxed.