

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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DOMAINE DES COMTES LAFON
MEURSAULT'S AND THE MÂCONNAIS' GREATEST ESTATE



The Domaine des Comtes Lafon is the greatest estate in the village of Meursault, with unrivalled vineyard holdings coupled with magical winemaking. This is not an old domaine by Burgundy standards, as it was originally formed in 1894 when Jules Lafon married Marie Bloch, whose family were wine merchants and also owned vineyards in the villages of Meursault, Volnay and Monthélie. Today the domaine is directed by his great-grandson, Dominique Lafon. Jules Lafon himself was not a *vigneron* by background, but an attorney who successfully built his fortune and re-invested a portion of his estate in fine tuning his wife's family's portfolio of vineyards in Meursault and the surrounding villages. Consequently, as opportunity allowed, some of the inherited holdings in lesser vineyards were sold off and larger tracts were added in some of Meursault's very finest crus. Today, Domaine des Comtes Lafon comprised 16.3 hectares of vineyards in the villages of Meursault and Volnay primarily, along with a fine plot in Monthélie and a one third of a hectare slice of Le Montrachet itself. With stunning holdings that include 1.75 hectares of vines in Charmes *Dessus* (the significantly finer, more minerally upper section of the vineyard), more than half a hectare in Genevrières *Dessus*, three quarters of a hectare of old vines in Perrières and a third of a hectare in Montrachet, this is a flagship estate in the Côte de Beaune. The Lafons' parcel of Montrachet lies in the Chassagne section of the vineyard, alongside the vines of the

Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. But the domaine's superb Côte de Beaune vineyard treasure chest is not made up solely of these parcels, as it also has a third of a hectare in the fine premier cru of Meursault "Goutte d'Or", the entirety of the superb village level cru of the Clos de la Barre, and various other holdings at the "villages" level in Meursault. While the domaine is most famous for its stunning white wines, there is also an impressive lineup of Lafon red wines, with a plum section of Volnay "Santenots du Milieu" and smaller holdings as well in the village's fine premier crus of Champans and Clos des Chênes.

Since 1999, the Lafon estate in Meursault has been only one of the domaines under the watchful eye of Dominique Lafon, as in this year he began a project in the Mâconnais region. This estate, which is called Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon, has grown from an original seven hectares of vines to now comprise twenty-one hectares of vineyard land in some of the very finest *terroirs* in the Mâconnais. It is now one of, if not the most important, estates in the Mâconnais, and along with other high quality-oriented producers such as Olivier Merlin, André Bonhomme, Jean-Marie Guffens and Jean Thevenet, has helped to reignite interest in this region on the part of the wider world of wine. It seems to me that for many long-time lovers of the wines of Domaine des Comtes Lafon in Meursault, the Mâconnais wines are treated as a distraction that must be politely tasted in the cellars prior to settling in to the business of hand of tasting through the Côte de Beaune wines here, but this is really an injustice to the superb quality and varying styles of the Mâconnais wines produced by Dominique Lafon and his team. This is not to say of course, that the Mâconnais wines here are in the same league with the top Meursault bottlings, but they are wines of distinction and personality that have no problems standing on their own merits if one is open-minded enough to taste them with one's imagination engaged.

Jules Lafon was not of Burgundian background, having been born and raised in the southwest of France, but he quickly became enamored of the very finest wines of Burgundy. He was a man of many talents, an intellectual, gourmand, *bon vivant*, world traveler, art collector and extremely successful barrister, and he was eventually to become the Mayor of Meursault for much of the latter half of his life. Amongst his contributions to life in the Côte d'Or was his creation of the Paulée de Meursault in 1923 as the third chapter of *Les Trois Glorieuses* each November, following the candlelit dinner at the Château de Clos Vougeot and the Hospices de Beaune auction. From the original family vines of the Bloch family, the only ones that remain from the formative years of the estate are the domaine's holdings in Meursault "Clos de la Barre" a bit of Meursault "En la Barre", a portion of the estate's Volnay "Santenots du Milieu", Volnay "Champans", Volnay "Clos des Chênes" and Monthélie "les Duresses", as Jules Lafon was a great lover of the very finest wines of Burgundy, and he sought over the early years of the domaine to sell off less well-situated sites inherited from the Bloch family and purchase tracts in the very finest vineyards of Meursault. These new acquisitions in the finest sections of the top premier crus in Meursault eventually culminated with a purchase of the domaine's sole grand cru, the one-third of a hectare of vines in Le Montrachet in 1918. Jules Lafon eventually passed away in 1940 at the age of seventy-six in his home in Meursault, leaving the estate to his two sons, Pierre and Henri Lafon.

After the passing of Jules Lafon in 1940, the domaine underwent a nadir in its history. Both his sons had been involved in the First World War, which took its toll on both young men. Pierre Lafon passed away at a relatively young age, only four years after inheriting his share of the domaine, and his brother, Henri was an absentee landlord and not particularly interested in the day to day running of the estate. Both brothers were veterans of the trenches in World War I, so perhaps it is perfectly understandable after those horrors that they were most interested in savoring life when they got back home. All of the domaine's vineyards were let out to sharecroppers and the Lafon's fifty percent portion of the production was sold off in bulk, with Henri Lafon eventually planning to liquidate the estate in its entirety. Henri Lafon was far more interested in living a luxurious lifestyle than he was managing a domaine in Meursault. Fortunately, his nephew, René Lafon, was completely opposed to selling the family domaine, and he eventually returned to Meursault on a part-time basis from Paris to take over from his uncle the day to day responsibilities of running the estate in 1956. René Lafon was an engineer by training, and in the very early years of his participation in the management of the domaine, he liked to say that it was only his salary as an engineer which made it possible to keep the domaine operating during the many years of reinvestment that were necessary to breathe life back into the estate's vineyard patrimony. The vines, which had fallen into neglect were brought back into good shape, with massive replanting taking place, and while he continued to pursue his engineering career in Paris, René was able to jointly oversee the making of the estate's wines in conjunction with his cellar master, Henry Belorgey, during these early years when he was only in Meursault part-time. Dominique Lafon remembers from his early childhood, that for several years, while the family still lived full-time in Paris, his father would drive down to Meursault every weekend to work at the domaine.

René Lafon was under constant pressure in the early years running the property, as his uncle had relented in his wish to sell of the domaine only if René could make it profitable (without borrowing or making capital expenditures!), so that the other family members (or uncle Henri's lifestyle) did not suffer from the decision to keep the estate in the family. Progress continued apace at Domaine des Comtes Lafon during the latter half of the decade of the 1950s, and eventually, by the 1961 vintage, the domaine was able to sell all of its share of the production off in bottle, rather than having to sell barrels to *négociants*. They still had other *vignerons* overseeing the upkeep of the vineyards on a day to day basis (primarily the Bouley family in Volnay and the Morey family in Meursault), and it would take many years for these *mettayage* agreements to run their course and the entirety of the domaine's production to again revert back to the Lafon family. René Lafon eventually moved back full-time to Meursault from Paris in 1967 with his wife and family and still lives today in the family house that overlooks the Clos de la Barre. His oldest son, Dominique Lafon, recalls "that I spent the first seven years of my life living in Paris before my parents moved us back down to Meursault." However, Dominique was born in Burgundy, as his mother had been born and raised in Chalon-sur-Saône, and when she was pregnant with her first child, she wanted to be close to her mother and came back down to Chalon for the birth of Dominique. So as Dominique says, "I am very proud to say that I was born here in Burgundy, despite my having been

raised as a small child in Paris.” Dominique decided to pursue a career as a *vigneron* and eventually completed his degree in Viticulture and Oenology in Beaune in 1978, and began to work alongside his father in the early 1980s, after a “*stage*” with Becky Wasserman’s Le Serbet firm. By the 1984 vintage, Dominique was fully ensconced at the domaine, running it alongside his father, and by the 1988 vintage he was solely responsible for the wines.

Dominique Lafon is the first generation of his family to have been formally trained in oenology, as his father before him was an engineer and worked jointly with his cellar master, Monsieur Belorgey at the domaine for the vast majority of the winemaking decisions during his tenure at the head of the estate. Dominique recalls from his days at the university studying oenology, he and one of his close friends, Etienne Grivot from Domaine Jean Grivot in Vosne-Romanée, would be sent down in the cellars by Dominique’s father to taste through the barrels and see if the malolactic fermentations had been completed. Dominique observes “that even back in the late 1970s, many producers did not do an analysis to see about questions of this sort, but would rather just taste through the wines and try to make an informed opinion.” But, by the time Dominique Lafon was studying for his degree in oenology, the reputation of the Lafon wines had already risen to be one of the most renowned domaines in the Côte de Beaune, with only family estates such as Domaines Leflaive and Sauzet in Puligny and Domaine Ramonet in Chassagne ranked at the same illustrious level. This was the era of transition in Burgundy, with more individual family estates beginning to bottle more and more of their production themselves and selling the wines under their own labels, and Domaine des Comtes Lafon was one of the trailblazers in this respect, having taken this step back in 1961. By the late 1970s, the domaine had a loyal following amongst the top Michelin-starred restaurants in France and France’s most important private collectors, as well as a significant presence in the important export markets of England, the United States and greater continental Europe.

As noted above, Dominique Lafon joined the estate full-time in 1984 and solely responsible for all the wines by the 1988 vintage. During the transition, he worked alongside the longtime winemaker here, Monsieur Belorgey, who was already nearing the age of retirement. Dominique recalls that Henry Belorgey was a classic old school Burgundian *vigneron*, and when Dominique would come to him with a question about what he would do if a certain issue popped up in the cellar, the response would be “it all depends, sometimes I would approach the problem in this manner, but if the style of the vintage were different, then I would do something else.” So there were no direct answers to questions from Dominique, as Monsieur Belorgey was trying to allow his eventual replacement to work things out as much as possible on his own and start to develop that intuitive sense that is so important in the cellars. However, even after he had fully retired in 1987, Henry would return to taste a couple of times a year in the Lafon cellars, to check on the progress of the young *vigneron* and to maintain a sense of continuity at the estate. This was certainly important, as during his tenure as winemaker here, the reputation for quality of the Domaine des Comtes Lafon wines had risen to amongst the finest in Burgundy, and the wines I have had the pleasure to taste from vintages of the

1970s and early 1980s are absolutely superb and many are still drinking brilliantly well today.



Dominique Lafon in his breezy Mâcon vineyard of Clos de la Crochette.

Like many young *vignerons* ascending to the heads of their family estates, Dominique Lafon sought to make his mark on the domaine's wines early on in his tenure with the aspiration of taking the Lafon wines from their already high quality level and pushing them to the very top of the white Burgundy hierarchy. He instituted a few changes in the cellars in his early years that were very much *en vogue* at this time, including increasing the percentage of new oak used for the wines rather dramatically, as well as using a fair bit more *battonage* for the white wines in these early years. Similar changes were taking place throughout Burgundy at this time at other domaines where the generational transition of the directorship of the estate had passed to a younger member of the family, but Dominique Lafon was unquestionably one of the leaders of this new generation in Burgundy. His early vintages met with great critical acclaim- with the exception of the tight, razor-sharp and almost hermetically-sealed 1988 whites, which he recalls "were almost impossible to taste they were so austere at the start and really generated very little interest from our clients." But, by the time the 1988s were offered for sale, Burgundy lovers throughout the world were already talking of the extraordinary quality of the 1989 Comtes Lafon wines waiting in the wings and Dominique was quickly becoming one of the brightest young winemaking stars on the international wine scene. I

remember well the flashy sex appeal of the Lafon wines of this era, with the *battonage* adding a luxurious texture to the young wines, as well as beautiful youthful complexity and a young Comtes Lafon wine from this era from 1989 to 1993 or so, was one of the great white Burgundy drinking experiences to be found. Many young Burgundian *vignerons* began regularly visiting and tasting with Dominique, as well as aspiring winemakers from outside of the region, such as Californian, Steve Kistler, who visited to the domaine to try and understand the secrets here that produced such beautifully complex wines right out of the blocks. In fact, a lot of the winemaking techniques that are considered indispensable today with some of California's most highly-praised (at least elsewhere) chardonnays can trace their roots directly back to Dominique Lafon's techniques early on in his career as one of the first winemaking "rock stars" in Burgundy.

However, at least to my palate, not all of wines from this era really stood the test of time as well as one might have hoped early on, and amongst the more conservative palates of the Burgundy loving world, a bit of the luster began to rub off of the Lafon star by the vintages of the mid-to-late 1990s. It was not that the wines were not excellent when young, but the fairly aggressive *battonage* used in the cellars here seemed to produce wines that did not last quite as well as had the Lafon wines from the earlier generation, not to mention some of the wines from other estates. I am not sure of how much of this may have reached the ears of Dominique Lafon at this time, as there has never been a year since Dominique assumed the reins of the estate when there has not been a long line of potential customers waiting their turn for an allocation of Comtes Lafon wines, but certainly amongst the Burgundy-loving circles that I travelled in at this time, the Lafon wines were not spoken of in quite the same reverential tones as had been true a decade previously. In any case, this is all in the past now, as the last dozen years here have seen some important changes in the cellars of Domaines des Comtes Lafon, as Dominique has continually fine-tuned his winemaking approach and today the Lafon wines are once again amongst the most classically-made and beautifully transparent wines to be found in the entire Côte d'Or. As Dominique recalls, "for my first decade in charge here, all the white premier crus were raised in one hundred percent new oak, but today, it is much more like twenty to thirty percent, depending on the style of the vintage, as I much prefer the expression of *terroir* one finds in the wines today with a lower percentage of new wood." *Battonage* is also way, way down here at the estate for the white wines and is hardly used in most vintages today. In the first decade or so of Dominique's tenure, *battonage* would be used once a week for the white wines up until the late spring following the harvest.

The changes in approach in the vineyard and cellars here since Dominique Lafon's first decade extend beyond the few things already mentioned, as Monsieur Lafon is a very intellectually-inclined *vigneron* who is constantly reflecting upon how he can further fine tune his vineyard work and winemaking to improve the overall quality of his already excellent wines. This quest for improvement and added refinement has not slowed down over the course of Dominique's career, and several techniques have been changed as his philosophies have been further fine-tuned. In his early days at the head of the domaine, Dominique was one of the latest harvesters in the area, and it was not uncommon for his teams to be out picking grapes well after the neighbors had already

brought in all of their production from the neighboring plots of vines. As Remington Norman, in his second edition of his fine book on the region, The Great Domaines of Burgundy, notes, back in these early days Dominique “was not especially concerned with acidity levels” in his grapes, as he was seeking riper and more succulent flavors in the wines. This has all changed in the last dozen vintages, and today, Dominique Lafon is often the very earliest harvester to be found in Meursault or Volnay, seeking to bring his fruit in at a point of optimal balance where elegance and the underlying *terroir* can best be delivered in the finished wines. Of course, in an era of global warming, this evolving approach is more and more a necessity to produce truly classic, elegant and soil-driven wines in Burgundy. As Dominique observes, “these days, it seems that the window for picking at optimal ripeness is getting smaller and smaller with each passing vintage, and waiting just a few days to get started picking can make the difference between perfect ripeness and decidedly overripe grapes.” In such an age, Dominique has no interest with waiting for the official *Ban de Vendange* to be declared, as in his view, it often comes too late now. This is a sentiment that is also shared by several other top producers in the village of Meursault, such as Arnaud Ente, who has also accelerated his own picking times in the last several years.

Another of the fairly recent changes at the domaine was the decision to go *biodynamique* with the estate’s vineyard holdings. This was first begun in the Clos de la Barre in 1995 and eventually grew to encompass all of the Lafon vineyards in both the Côte de Beaune and the Mâconnais. This was a very important step, as at the time, Domaine des Comtes Lafon was one of the first (along with Domaine Leflaive in Puligny-Montrachet) to commit to this viticultural approach, which was initially viewed as quite revolutionary, but which has proven with the passing of time to be a highly logical and successful technique for maximizing the health of the vineyards and producing higher and higher quality grapes. Dominique Lafon had always been very cognizant of the importance of excellent viticultural husbandry on the eventual quality of the wines, and much of his early career was devoted to increasing the quality of the vineyard care of the vines that had been let out in *mettayage* agreements, once the vines had reverted back to the domaine. He cancelled the last of the revolving nine year sharecropping leases on the domaine’s vineyards in 1987, so that by 1996, every family vineyard parcel was once again back under the Domaine des Comtes Lafon’s complete control. This is not to say that there were not some very fine Meursault *vignerons* in charge of the Lafon vineyards during much of the era when the vines were leased out to others- Pierre Morey was in charge of the lion’s share of the white wine parcels for a quite a long time and Jean-François Coche had a slice of the Lafon parcel of Charmes under his watch up until 1984- but, not every parcel of vines were tended with the same care as those that the domaine was in charge of themselves in the 1980s. The combination of more classic cellar techniques, a reversion of all of the family vineyards back to the domaine’s care and the institution of *biodynamique* viticulture has culminated in Dominique Lafon currently producing the finest wines of his career and some of the most stunningly beautiful and classically styled red and white Burgundies in all of the Côte d’Or.

The Domaine des Comtes Lafon wines- both the reds and the whites- have always been bottled relatively late by Burgundy standards, with both colors of wine generally bottled close to two years after the vintage. This was true of the percentage of their production that the family bottled themselves dating all the way back to the days of Jules Lafon, and Dominique continues to bottle his wines after at least twenty to twenty-two months of *elevage* in the cellars. However, the Lafon cellars are some of the deepest and coldest in Burgundy, as anyone who has visited in December or January will attest, and the wines evolve quite slowly in this environment. The wines are generally racked once after the alcoholic and malolactic fermentations are completed, with the wines going into tanks for this initial racking, so that the final cuvées of each wine can be assembled. In recent years, Dominique has occasionally put off the initial racking after malo to allow the wines to rest on their fine lees with the CO2 from the malo. After a period of time they are placed back in barrels to continue their *elevage* and will generally not be racked again until a pre-bottling *assemblage* is made (in tanks again) a few weeks before bottling. The Comtes Lafon wines have been bottled unfiltered since at least Dominique's arrival at the domaine (and perhaps quite a bit prior to this), so a long, slow and cool *elevage* is essential to allow most of the impurities to precipitate out of solution. Given the traditionally long *elevage* at Comtes Lafon, Dominique's switch back to a lower percentage of new oak seems to have given the newer vintages of the white wines even more punch and snappiness out of the blocks, and these are now unequivocally white Burgundies that demand a bit of bottle age to really start to show all of their promise.

As touched upon above, the original vineyard holdings that Marie Bloch brought with her marriage to the Lafon family were not all of the highest quality, and Jules Lafon sought over the early years of the estate to sell off these lesser *terroirs* and acquire as opportunity allowed better vineyard holdings. The Bloch vineyard legacy included a fair bit of Bourgogne blanc parcels and Meursault AC, as well as the entirety of the Clos de la Barre, their parcel in Monthélie "les Duresses", part of what the estate now owns in the Volnay "Santenots du Milieu" vineyard, as well as the domaine's Volnay holdings in Clos des Chênes and Champans. Jules Lafon sold off all the Bourgogne blanc parcels and much of the Meursault village level parcels (only retaining the Clos de la Barre and a bit of En la Barre from these early days), and adding superb parcels in the best sections of Meursault "Charmes", "Genevrières", "Perrières", "La Goutte d'Or" and Montrachet. Dominique recounts how the family acquired their parcel in Montrachet in 1918, as at the time, there was an auction where Jules Lafon and another domaine owner, a Monsieur Auguste Fleurot, had agreed to bid together for the one hectare parcel in the Chassagne side of the vineyard and split the plot. Their bid was successful, but back in those days, there was a provision with vineyard auctions that if another bidder came forward with a better price within a week of the closing, then the auction would be reopened. This seemed likely, as another bidder emerged, Léon Roizot, but Jules Lafon engineered a gentlemen's agreement with Monsieur Roizot to split the hectare of vines three ways, rather than in two, so that the auction did not open again and drive up the price of the purchase considerably. Dominique notes that "it was probably a pretty good strategy at the time, but it would be awfully nice to have half a hectare of vines in Montrachet today, rather than only one-third." The Roizot parcel of Montrachet eventually was purchased

by the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti; the Fleurot section has been split several times, with the last tiny slice being purchased by Domaine Leflaive in 1991.

While much of the discussion thus far, as well as the wine world's focus, has been on the Comtes Lafon white wines, this should not take anything away from their red wines, which are truly superb. Much like the white wines here during the early years of Dominique's tenure at the head of the estate, there were some early changes in how the red wines were made that may have been quite "*au courant*" at the time, but which may not have produced quite so classic examples of Volnay and Monthélie as the domaine is now producing. The red wines here had long been a well-kept secret- I can still recall the brilliance of the 1978 and 1985 Volnay "Santenots du Milieu" bottles that I tasted in my early years in the wine trade- utterly classic and velvety, black fruity Volnays of impressive breed and transparent complexity. However, as was the case with the white wines at the time, the percentage of new oak was ramped up a bit for the reds here during Dominique's first decade at the helm, and the wines were vinified in a notably more extracted style during this period as well. I was not a huge admirer of this style of red wines *chez* Lafon, though I should note that the 1998 Clos des Chênes (made in a slightly more extracted style than today's reds) tasted for this report during my visit to the region in March was aging beautifully and really starting to come into its own at age fourteen, so perhaps I was just not patient enough with the Comtes Lafon reds from the vintages of the 1990s. In any case, the first decade of the new millennium saw Dominique adjust back his style of reds to a much more classic level of extraction and a bit less new wood at the same time he was fine-tuning his white wines, and in my opinion the last seven or eight years have seen him produce the most beautiful red wines of his career at the domaine. While the reds here may not be the first wines on peoples' minds when Domaine des Comtes Lafon is mentioned, these superb wines today should emphatically not be overlooked in a rush to latch onto bottles of the Meursault bottlings or the Montrachet.

Of the domaine's parcels of red wine-producing vineyards, by far the most important is the nearly four hectare parcel in the vineyard of Santenots du Milieu, which actually lies over the border in Meursault, but which is sold as Volnay. The Santenots du Milieu section of the vineyard lies within the larger Santenots vineyard, and is the filet section of this fine premier cru and produces superb, long-lived and black fruity examples of Volnay. Of the almost four hectares that the Lafon family currently owns in the vineyard (which is roughly half), one hectare was replanted fairly recently and ranges from ten to fifteen years of age, with the production from these vines blended into the Volnay AC bottling from the domaine. The remaining 2.8 hectares of vines range from thirty-five to sixty years of age and produce a terrific wine. I am most fond of the vintages of this wine produced from 2005 onwards, as it seems to my palate that the fine-tuning Dominique has done with his red wine cellar techniques in the last decade has really come to fruition with the Santenots du Milieu bottlings from 2005 forwards, and this is now one of my absolute favorite premier crus in Volnay. The much smaller Lafon holdings in Champans and Clos des Chênes are also sources for truly exceptional Volnays, but the production levels are much smaller and consequently, these wines are much more difficult to come by.

But, as good as the red wines are here, the fame of Domaine des Comtes Lafon squarely rests on the shoulders of their brilliant white wines. As noted above, there are not many estates that can match the depth and breadth of holdings in top vineyards as the Lafon family can boast of, with great parcels in premier crus Charmes, La Goutte d'Or, Genevrières and Perrières, as well as a small slice of Montrachet. Of the village wine holdings, one should of course not overlook the monopole Clos de la Barre, which is almost always of top premier cru quality, and the various other parcels in *villages* level vineyards contribute to a fine Meursault AC bottling here as well. There is also a small, .43 hectare parcel of vines in Les Plures, which the domaine bottles as Désirée, as this was the name on the *cadastres* back in the old days and Domaine Lafon bottled this wine as Désirée as far back as the nineteenth century, so they have been allowed to continue to use it for the wine even after the name was officially discontinued in 1973. This is a fairly deep soil that is perhaps better suited to reds- in fact most of the plantations in Les Petures are in fact pinot noir and are allowed to be labeled as Volnay "Santenots". Dominique replanted this parcel in 2008, so it is currently not yet in production, but some of the older examples I have tasted have been quite good- though perhaps not quite as fine as the Clos de la Barre, despite its premier cru status.

The domaine's already superb white wine roster was further enhanced in 2011, when the domaine purchased plots and acquired long-term leases on parcels in two more top premier crus, les Bouchères and les Porusots, as part of the sale of the former Domaine René Manuel in Meursault. Domaine René Manuel was purchased by American investors in this year, who have split the vineyards between Domaine Roulot and Domaine des Comtes Lafon in Meursault, while retaining the cellars and estate buildings for future projects. In Bouchères, Domaine Lafon now owns its .32 hectares of vines, in two small parcels, one bought from Domaine Manuel and the other coming from Domaine Roulot. In Porusots, Dominique Lafon now has nearly one hectare of vines in this superb premier cru from which to add to the roster at Comtes Lafon. Of the Porusots holdings, a small slice of about one-tenth of a hectare was purchased outright by the domaine, with the remaining ninety percent exploited on a long-term lease. 2011 will be the first vintages for these two new premier crus at the domaine, which will effectively complete the roster of all the great Meursault premier crus within the Comtes Lafon portfolio. Additionally, Comtes Lafon has also acquired a lease on half of the *villages* level monopole of Meursault "Clos de la Baronne" (splitting this with Domaine Guy Roulot), which will be used to further augment the production of the Meursault AC bottling at the domaine.

Perhaps nothing better demonstrates the evolution in style of the Domaine des Comtes Lafon wines under the fine and ever re-defining career of Dominique Lafon than his discussion of the style of the wines of Meursault- comparing and contrasting them to those of the communes of Puligny-Montrachet, as he notes that "in Meursault, our wines are naturally a bit more powerful in comparison to Puligny for example, and we have no difficulty getting wines with good concentration" and therefore it is my goal to try "and make wines of greater elegance and raciness to marry with the natural intensity of the wines of Meursault." It is hard to imagine this reflection coming from a younger

Dominique in the early 1990s, but it serves to underscore how his winegrowing approach has evolved philosophically as his depth of experience has further shaped his techniques in both the cellars and the vineyards in the last decade. For those who may perhaps have not been totally enamored of the style of the Comtes Lafon wines back in the early days of Dominique's tenure (I certainly went through a stretch where I thought the wines were very well-made in a rather "showy" style that sacrificed potential longevity for near-term appeal), it is high time to revisit these wines and discover just how magically pure, elegant and transparent they have become in the last decade, as one is not going to find better wines anywhere in the Côte d'Or today.

The following tasting notes are broken up by appellation, with brief sketches of each Côte d'Or bottling, and a much fuller exploration of the new Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon Mâconnais wines leading off the section. Many of the wines have been tasted very recently, as Dominique Lafon has been very generous in the last several years in opening mini-verticals of several crus after I have worked through the new vintage in barrel, so that I have been able to accrue a fairly sizable number of new notes in the last couple of years while this article has been a work in progress. He was also extremely generous with his time on my last visit to the region in March, when we spent an entire day together-tasting in the cellars in Meursault, visiting all the new vineyards in the Mâcon and finishing up the day with a visit to the cellars in Milly-Lamartine and conducting an extensive vertical tasting of the Mâconnais wines. Despite all the recent tastings, readers will still find sprinkled in here notes that date back to the first few years of the new millennium, as I have had the good fortune on a few occasions to be in attendance at big tastings where a lot of older Comtes Lafon wines have been poured. Most notably, I had the honor to attend a very deep and comprehensive tasting of the Meursault "Perrières" bottlings of Domaines Lafon, Roulot and Coche-Dury back in the summer of 2004 that was organized by two of New York's most passionate Burgundy collectors, Doug Barzelay and Michael Rockefeller. While the notes may or may not be useful today, I thought I might include them, as several of the very old vintages are not wines that I am likely to cross paths with again with any frequency. I have also included some barrel tasting notes from recent vintages, where I have not tasted the wine recently out of bottle, so that readers do not have to go back through the older issues to check notes on certain wines, but can use this article for reference to most Lafon questions.

No discussion of a primarily white wine-producing estate like the Domaine des Comtes Lafon can take place these days without addressing the issue of premature oxidation. The Comtes Lafon wines have, of course, not been immune to this scourge. Dominique Lafon was one of the first *vignerons* of my knowledge to take active steps to try and address the incidence of premox, once it had begun to appear in the wines in his cellar. By the 2004 vintage, he had already begun bottling all of his wines with corks that were steam-cleaned, rather than cleaned in either peroxide or chlorine-based solutions, had increased the amount of paraffin in the coatings of the corks (rather than using exclusively silicone, which does not give quite as tight a seal along the neck of the bottle), and increased rather dramatically the amount of SO₂ he used at bottling to protect the white wines better as they aged in bottle. He also sought to bottle the white wines in a bit more reductive state than he had in the past. During the course of our verticals over

the last few years, we have of course, hit a handful of premoxed bottles. This is just the luck of the draw with white wines from this era, and I do not think that the Comtes Lafon wines have a track record any different from any of the other top producers in the region in the era from 1995 to 2003. However, I have yet to cross paths with a bottle of Lafon white wine from 2004 forwards that has had any signs of premature oxidation- though of course that was only eight years ago and it is still pretty early days to be seeing any signs of premox from the majority of wines from that vintage. Of the white wines we have tasted together from the earlier vintages, we have had pretty good luck and not hit a particularly high percentage of premoxed bottles, but of course, this is a very small sampling taken from cold cellars, so one would expect to have a bit more luck drawing wines directly from the domaine's cellars. As is always the case with post-1995 white Burgundies, one's personal experiences may vary, depending on the particular bottle, but at least I have had the good fortune to taste some truly exceptional Lafon white wines from the plague years.



The Roche de Vergisson, with the Roche de Solutré in the background, towering over the southern Mâcon.

Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon Mâconnais Wines

Dominique Lafon first began producing wines from the Mâconnais in the 1999 vintage, anticipating (or creating) the trend of a few top Côte de Beaune estates looking south to these fine vineyards to augment their production to meet the demand of new clients. As Dominique observed about his Mâconnais project, “we have gotten better and better here in understanding the terroirs we have to work with in these vineyards and I

think that we are just now getting to the point where the wines are really starting to show their true potential.” Dominique Lafon recounted that his idea to look to the Mâconnais started in the late 1990s, as other vignerons in the region had also moved beyond the borders of the Côte d’Or to explore other opportunities, with well-known producers such as Jean-Marie Fourrier and the Seysses family of Domaine Dujac having gone into the south of France to produce wines. Dominique says that he considered also following their lead and heading down to the south for a new project, but he observed “that I really did not know anything about the terroir there, nor the grapes that I would work with—what did I know about making grenache or syrah?” So he set his sights on the Mâconnais, particularly after tasting some of the wines from Olivier Merlin in the village of La Roche Vineuse. As Dominique recalls, “I had several wines from Olivier Merlin prior to starting to look for vineyards here, and they really were superb—speaking of their terroir and showing the great potential here if one worked carefully in both the vineyard and the cellars.” When he started to look around for vineyards, he reached out for Monsieur Merlin to confirm the quality of the terroir of the vineyards he was considering, as he “really was unfamiliar at the outset of where the good terroirs were in the Mâcon.” When Olivier confirmed that the parcels he was considering were indeed excellent in quality, Dominique purchased seven hectares of vines and began the project in time to produce wines from several Mâcon vineyards in the 1999 vintage.

One has to understand that the Lafon Mâconnais wines are produced quite differently than the vast majority of wines from this region, as the economics of using the Lafon name on the label afford the possibility for several important differences in the production of the wines that is not possible for estates of less renown who cannot command quite the same prices and are often forced by economic situations to cut corners a bit with their wines. As is still the case for many estates in Chablis as well, it is far from rare with many producers to harvest the vast majority (or one hundred percent) of their crop by machine here, and it is pretty rare to find vineyards with controlled yields and organic viticultural methods. Happily, the Lafon Mâconnais wines do not face the daunting economic challenges that force the hands of so many vignerons in the region, so that the yields can be kept conservative, harvesting of the Lafon vineyards can all be done by hand and the domaine’s vineyards have all been converted over to biodynamique principals as they have been purchased by the estate. Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon now owns twenty-one hectares of vines in many of the very top terroirs in the Mâconnais, with a nice spread of parcels in both the northern half of the region and further south in the villages that approach the Pouilly-Fuissé vineyards. As the soils are quite different as one moves south from villages such as Chardonnay in the north towards the two mountains, the Roche de Vergisson and the Roche de Solutré that form the border between the Mâcon and Beaujolais, the spread of vineyards that the Lafon estate now works in the Mâconnais allows for a fine range of quite differently-styled wines. And do not be surprised if one day in the not too distant future a Pouilly-Fuissé will be added to the lineup, if a parcel in one of the great terroirs that lie right at the base of either Roche becomes available.

From the twenty-one hectares of vineyards that are now owned by Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon in the Mâconnais, the estate produces one hundred and twenty thousand

bottles each year. Of this total, forty thousand is made up of their regular Mâcon-Villages bottling, which includes production from some of the less well-situated vineyards, blended with production from the younger vines in their top plots. As Dominique notes, “the Mâcon-Villages bottling is very important for us, as it is made in a very easy to drink and accessible style for bistros and folks that just want a good bottle of wine to drink right away, and because of its popularity, it allows us a certain freedom for stricter selection with the single vineyard wines.” The Mâcon-Villages bottling is raised all in stainless steel tanks and is bottled on the early side to maintain freshness and bounce, with the wine bottled under screwcaps for clients who ask for it in this format (a practice I naturally do not approve of). Dominique calls it a good picnic wine, or good for taking along on a boating trip or for wine by the glass programs, as it is made to be accessible right from the start and deliver lots of uncomplicated pleasure from the moment it arrives on the market. And popular it certainly is, as the nearly empty cellars at the domaine’s facilities in Milly-Lamartine are quick to attest. As Dominique notes, “if we were not moving in the right direction with our Mâconnais wines, it would be easy to know, as the cellars would still be full of wine, but we know it works, because here we are a few months after the release of the 2010s and there is almost no wine left.”

Since 2007, the Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon property has been directed by the dynamic Carline Gon, who arrived at the estate with degrees in both Agronomical Engineering and Oenology and has worked seamlessly with Dominique since she took over managing the day to day affairs of the Mâcon project. Dominique observes that Caroline’s arrival has really made his life easier managing both the estate in the Mâcon and the one in Meursault, as “Caroline understands what I am looking for in our Mâconnais wines and she has become very intuitive in knowing how to attain this style of wine here.” The staff is small at Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon, with Mademoiselle Gon wearing all the hats in the cellar and managing the five vineyard workers the estate employs to tend the vineyards. During most of the year, Dominique Lafon will make the one hour drive south from Meursault to Milly-Lamartine to check on the Mâconnais property once a week, and during the harvest, he goes back and forth between the two domaines every day. When I asked him about the possibility of making a red wine under the Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon label- after all, Juliéna is just over the ridge from Pouilly-Fuissé- he responded that “I do not think I will ever make a red wine here, as with reds you really need to be there every minute to oversee the fermentation- it is a lot like cooking, and you cannot walk away from the stove and expect to produce something extraordinary to eat- as so much of red wine making is a ‘feel’ thing where one has to make decisions every step of the way during the fermentation to get the wines to turn out the way you would like them.”

The Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon lineup currently consists of a straight Mâcon-Villages bottling, which is raised all in stainless steel, a Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine that is raised in old foudres, and several single vineyard bottlings from older vines and the best terroirs Dominique currently owns in the Mâconnais. There are currently five single vineyard bottles of Lafon Mâcon wines: Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”, Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”, Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”, Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four” and Mâcon Viré-Clessé. For the most part, the single

vineyard wines are raised in large, old oak foudres, as Dominique Lafon feels that these larger vessels are the best for bringing out the underlying soil tones in the different Mâcon wines. The two top single vineyard wines, the Clos du Four and the Viré-Clessé are raised in a combination of foudre and Demi-Muids (400 to 600 liter barrels), with only a couple of the Demi-Muids new out of the sixty odd that the domaine currently utilizes for these two bottlings. All the single vineyards are quite different in style. The Clos de la Crochette vineyard in the village of Chardonnay was one of the very earliest vineyards ever planted by the monks from the Abbey of Cluny when they first began producing wine in this region, and it is widely recognized as one of the very finest terroirs in the northern half of Mâcon. The les Maranches vineyard in Uchizy is more terres blanches than the Clos de la Crochette (which contains a fair bit of iron in the soil and which gives this vineyard a reddish haze when unplanted), and the more limestone character of this vineyard produces a much more minerally version of Mâcon.

The Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard” is from much further south in the region than the first two wines, with the vineyard lying right at the foot of the smaller Roche de Bussière, and with a stony white soil that emulates the conditions of the best Pouilly-Fuissé vineyards a bit further south at the feet of the Roche de Vergisson and the Roche de Solutr . This is some of the best terroir in all the M connais and the resulting wine is consistently complex, soil-driven and shows off fine potential for longer-term keeping. The Clos du Four in Milly-Lamartine is one of the warmest climats that Dominique works with here, and consequently, this is the most powerful M con that he bottles, but as Milly-Lamartine lies in the southern end of M con, the concentrated fruit here is always layered over a superb spine of minerality (which is generally not found in the M con bottlings from the northern half of the region). The final single vineyard bottling in the Lafon M con lineup, which was first produced in 2009, is the M con Vir -Cless , which hails from a plot of old vines owned by the Ch teau de Vir . Dominique is very, very excited about this parcel, which is planted with an old selection massale version of chardonnay that produces very small berries with a wonderful juice to skin ratio. It is more elegant, racy and much more minerally in personality than the Clos du Four (though not quite as powerful), and this is currently the top single vineyard bottling here—at least to my palate. As Dominique Lafon observes, “some people may find it odd that our top M con bottling is not the biggest wine in the lineup, but rather the most elegant and racy, but I do feel that this is the finest terroir we work with and it deserves to be recognized as such when we price the wines.”

During our afternoon visit to the winery in March, Dominique and Caroline opened up several older vintages of their wines to see how they were evolving with bottle age. In Dominique’s view, the wines of the M con can keep quite well, but they do not really gain dramatically in aromatic or flavor complexity as they age. This was pretty evident from the wines we tasted—going back to a few 2004s, but I should note that while the bouquets and flavors do not necessarily increase markedly in complexity, it is certainly quite pleasant to enjoy the more fully mature and wide open textural impressions of the wines on the palate once they have experienced a handful of years’ worth of bottle age, and I would still strongly suggest that cellaring wines such as the Buss re “la Monsard”, Clos du Four and Vir -Cless  still makes sense to allow the

wines to fully blossom texturally on the palate. I certainly enjoyed the 2004s the most of any of the wines we tasted at this vertical, as they were really wide open and still bright and zesty. So, while complexity may not mount with these older Mâcon bottlings in the same way that they do with top white wines from the Côte de Beaune (at least before the advent of premature oxidation!), there are still some pretty compelling reasons for allowing at least the top crus here to see some significant bottle age. I have grouped the notes below on the Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon wines by vineyard, rather than by vintage.

Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine

2010 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2010 Milly-Lamartine was bottled just before the harvest in 2011 and was showing quite well at the time of my visit. The nose is ripe and pretty, offering up scents of peach, just a touch of pineapple, pretty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open for inspection, with a good core, sound acids and good length and grip on the succulent finish. Good juice. 2011-2016. **87.**

2009 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2009 Milly-Lamartine had been bottled in July and was showing very well indeed, with the lovely pure fruit of the vintage front and center. The bouquet is a fine blend of pear, apple, lovely soil tones and a delicate touch of leanness coupled with the natural toastiness of Mâcon. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and beautifully balanced, with fine length and focus, ripe acids and very good grip on the finish. A very tasty bottle. 2010-2018+. **89+.**

Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”

2010 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2010 Uchizy is a step up in depth and concentration from the very pretty '10 Milly-Lamartine bottling, jumping from the glass in a classy bouquet of apple, orange zest, a really lovely base of minerality, an exotic touch of fresh guava and a touch of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with lovely generosity on the attack, a lovely spine of acidity and impressive length and grip on the structured and very well-balanced finish. Impressive. 2011-2020. **89+.**

2009 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2009 les Maranches was also bottled in July and was also spot on when I tasted it at the end of November. The nose is vibrant and succulent, as it delivers a blend of peaches, apples, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and tasty, with a fine core of fruit, sound framing acids and sneaky length and grip on the poised and succulent finish. 2010-2018+. **89.**

Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”

2010 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2010 Bussière is another excellent bottle of Mâcon in the making, jumping from the glass in a blaze of peach, tangerine, complex soil tones, dried flowers and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, quite generous on the

attack, with a fine core of fruit, and great backend drive and bounce on the focused and complex finish. Lovely wine. 2011-2020+. **90+**.

2009 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard” is one of Dominique’s favorites for current consumption. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of tart orange, Mâcon toastiness, soil tones and a topnote of fresh lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mineral drive, ripe acids, a fine core and very good length and grip on the ripe and classy finish. This is a bit more powerful than either the 2008 or 2007 versions, but still retains the fine spine of minerality of this vineyard. Good juice. 2012-2025. **91**.

2008 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2008 la Monsard is drinking very well indeed, as it has opened very nicely from its rather tight, youthful profile. The nose is a fine blend of buttered pears, lovely, stony soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a nice base of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and juicy, with a fine core of fruit, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the open and classy finish. 2012-2020. **90**.

2007 Mâcon-Bussière “la Monsard”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2007s were really racy and reserved when I tasted them in the cellars in November of 2008, and as Dominique commented at the time, perhaps a touch too serious for their own good in a market that really wants to drink the wines right away. Today the ’07 la Monsard is drinking beautifully, offering up a still youthful mélange of pink grapefruit, pear, orange peel, lovely minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full and impressively complex, with a very racy and transparent personality and a long, snappy finish. This is really good and still on its way up! 2012-2025. **91+**.

Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”

2010 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2010 Clos de la Crochette is another superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is very pure and soil-driven, offering up a complex mélange of apple, peach, a touch of almond, complex soil tones and a nice touch of wheat toast in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and elegant, with bright acids, lovely focus and very good grip on the long finish. 2011-2020+. **90+**.

2009 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2009 Clos de la Crochette had been bottled at the start of September and was a bit more closed at the time of my visit. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows of the superb purity of the top wines of this vintage, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of white peaches, apples, complex soil tones, toast and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nascently complex and nicely reserved, with fine mid-palate depth, a lovely signature of soil, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. I would give this serious bottle of Mâcon a couple of years in the cellar to allow it to fully blossom. 2012-2025+. **92**.

2008 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2008 Clos de la Crochette was really showing well at the time of my visit to the winery in March, offering up a bright and citric nose of orange, lemon zest, complex soil tones, pears and a nice topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied, long and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely cut and very good grip on the long finish. The redder soils of the Clos de la Crochette produce a very different expression of soil in the wines than is true of the more minerally vineyards in the southern end of Mâcon, but this wine is still very long on transparency. Good juice. 2012-2025. **91+**.

2007 Mâcon-Chardonnay “Clos de la Crochette”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2007 Clos de la Crochette has really come into its own since I last tasted a bottle a few years ago and is a pretty strong argument for letting these wines see some bottle age- particularly in snappy vintages such as 2007. The deep and very classy nose is almost Meursault-like in its blend of apple, pear, a touch of fresh coconut, orange peel and a lovely base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the long and light on its feet finish. Excellent wine. 2012-2020. **92**.



Caroline Gon, Cellar Master at Les Héritiers de Comtes Lafon in Mâcon.

Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”

2010 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The Clos du Four, which is often the most powerful Mâconnais bottling from Dominique Lafon, is supremely elegant this year. The deep, pure and very refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tangerine, apple, stony minerality, orange blossoms and toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent, with an excellent

core of fruit, superb complexity, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Mâcon. 2012-2025+. **91+**.

2009 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2009 Clos du Four is also a bit on the closed side, but this is clearly one of the Mâconnais stars in the cellar this year. The nose offers up a deep and pure mix of apple, pears, a touch of orange zest, strikingly complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe acids, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the transparent and soil-driven finish. Fine juice. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

2008 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2008 Clos du Four is still on the young side and another year or two of bottle age would not be a mistake by any means. The youthful nose offers up a deep and classy mélange of apple, tangerine, stony minerality, citrus peel and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch reserved, with a fine core, snappy acids and a long, focused and well-balanced finish. Good juice in the making, but more generosity will emerge with a bit more bottle age. 2013-225. **93**.

2007 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

In comparison to the still slightly youthful 2008 Clos du Four, the 2007 is now wide open and drinking beautifully. The classy bouquet offers up scents of pear, blood orange, a touch of butter, citrus zest and a lovely base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and ready to drink, with a fine core, sound acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. A lovely bottle. 2012-2025. **92**.

2004 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine “Clos du Four”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

While the 2004 Clos du Four may not have moved a lot in terms of aromatic complexity over the last several years, I really like where it has arrived at texturally on the palate. The complex and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, tangerine, a touch of butter, a beautiful base of soil and a bit of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy, with a great core of fruit, still quite bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the wide open and quite poised finish. High classy juice here. 2012-2020. **93**.

Mâcon Viré-Clessé

2010 Mâcon Viré-Clessé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2010 vintage is only the second for this superb Viré-Clessé bottling *chez* Lafon, and this second release is a beauty for these very old vines. The complex bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully nuanced, offering up scents of apple, peach, clementine, really lovely, complex soil tones, apple blossoms and a youthful touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh, crisp and very intensely flavored, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and a lovely sense of reserve on the focused and perfectly poised finish. This is not as big of a wine as the Clos du Four, but perhaps just a shade finer. Lovely juice. 2012-2025+. **92**.

2009 Mâcon Viré-Clessé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The first vintage of the Mâcon Viré-Clessé from Dominique Lafon is exceptional. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, as it offers up scents of tangerine, pear, apple, spring flowers and refined minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very racy, with excellent mid-palate depth, stylish, round fruit on the attack, bright acids and

great backend mineral drive on the long and perfectly balanced finish. The old vines from the Château de Viré have really excelled in this vintage. 2013-2025+. **92+**.

Monthélie “les Duresses” Rouge (and a bit of Monthélie Blanc)

This fine premier cru of Les Duresses is the last remaining Monthélie rouge bottling to be based on the original Bloch family vineyards that arrived with the marriage of Jules Lafon and Marie Bloch in 1894. At one time, the estate owned several other parcels in well-situated vineyards in Monthélie (in En la Rue-Chavy and Sous-le-Puits-de-Curty), but they were sold off during the times of Pierre and Henri Lafon), and today the domaine owns just over one hectare of vines here in les Duresses. One third of the vineyard was replanted in 1975 and the remainder in 1986, so the vines here are really starting to come into their own again and producing excellent wines. The first vintage I can recall seeing of this wine bottled under the Comtes Lafon label was the 1993, as previously the wine was sold off to négociants. Les Duresses, which is the only premier cru in the village on the Auxey-Duresses side of the commune (all the other premier crus here border either Volnay or Meursault on the other side of town) is located up above the village center of Monthélie on the hillside and is the coolest microclimate that the domaine exploits. It is always the latest picked plot of vines, which Dominique equates to a microclimate more typical of the Côte de Nuits, rather than the Côte de Beaune.

The resulting wine from Les Duresses is invariably quite black fruity, smoky and nicely rustic in style and generally benefits from several years of bottle age to start to blossom. It too has gotten better to my palate in the last decade, as the combination of the younger vines reaching a good age to produce high class wine and Dominique Lafon's more gentle cellar regimen for his reds combining to really bring this wine into its own. These days the wine is aged in about twenty percent new oak each year, and in most vintages, it is an excellent value. The domaine also has a tiny parcel (.15 of a hectare) of young vines planted to chardonnay in small slice of a vineyard just below les Duresses, that only went into the ground in 1996 and which was traditionally reserved primarily for serving to the picking crews during harvest. This tiny parcel produces enough to make three barrels of wine in an average-sized vintage. The chardonnay vines here are worked by horse. These days one can find the Monthélie Blanc from the domaine occasionally on wine lists around Beaune, placed with a few merchants in Paris and even on the odd wine list in New York, as folks have taken a liking to it now that the vines are starting to get a little older. It is a pretty, quite floral wine that is quite marked by its terres blanches soil component, on the few occasions that I have had the pleasure to taste it.

2010 Monthélie “les Duresses”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2010 Monthélie from Dominique Lafon was showing beautifully at the time of my visit, offering up a very refined nose of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, violets, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a good core, lovely acids, refined tannins and outstanding length and grip on the intensely flavored finish. This will want a minimum of five or six years in the cellar to really start to blossom and show off its secondary layers of complexity. A beautiful bottle of Monthélie. 2017-2040. **91.**

2009 Monthélie “les Duresses”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2009 Monthélie was one of the earlier wines to finish up its malo in this vintage and consequently had been racked into stainless steel tank right after the 2010 harvest and would be bottled in early January. The wine was showing beautifully at the time of my visit, as it offers up a complex and pure nose of red and black currants, lovely herb tones, complex soil nuances, woodsmoke and dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine-grained tannins, a lovely core of pure fruit, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. Really a lovely bottle in the making. 2016-2040. **89+**.

2008 Monthélie “les Duresses” Rouge- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2008 Monthélie will be a lovely bottle that should drink well from a few years out after release. The bouquet offers up a perfumed blend of red plums, black cherries, a touch of raw cocoa, lovely soil tones and a fair bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and complex, with a nice core of pure fruit, a fair bit of tannin and sneaky length and grip on the finish. It is quite likely that this wine is showing a bit more tannic than it will be ultimately, as it is still not very far out from the end of its malo. 2014-2030. **87+**.

2007 Monthélie “les Duresses”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Monthélie “les Duresses” is really starting to drink nicely at age five, as it offers up a lovely nose of cassis, espresso, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and black fruity in personality, with very respectable mid-palate depth, melting tannins and a long, tangy and blossoming finish. Good juice that is just entering its plateau of maturity. 2012-2025+. **89**.

2006 Monthélie “les Duresses”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

Like many 2006 red Burgundies, the '06 Monthélie “les Duresses” from Dominique Lafon is still a tad on the young side and a bit caught up in its gangly adolescence, with a bit of tannin and tangy acidity still in need of softening on the backend. The nose is already showing considerable charm in its mélange of red currants, black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, *sous bois* and a nice touch of coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with good mid-palate depth and soil signature, but with a bit of chewy tannin that still needs to resolve. The acids, like so many 2006 red Burgundies right now, do not seem particularly ripe and come across as ever so slightly brusque in nature. Give this wine a couple of more years of bottle age. 2014-2030. **88+**.

2005 Monthélie “les Duresses”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 2005 les Duresses, like almost all 2005 red Burgundies above the level of straight Bourgogne rouge, is still too young to even be thinking about drinking today, but it will clearly be an excellent wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and still fairly primary in its blend of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, espresso, incipient notes of gamebird and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and reserved, with a beautiful core of fruit, tangy, ripe acids, suave, but still pretty substantial tannins (particularly for Monthélie!) and a long, closed and very promising finish. There is excellent length and grip on the backend here, but this very good wine still needs more time in the cellar before it blossoms. It should prove to be extremely long-lived for this bottling. 2016-2045+. **91**.

2001 Monthélie “les Duresses”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 2001 Monthélie “les Duresses” shows a bit of the damage from hail that also hit neighboring Volnay in this vintage. As Dominique observed, the hail here in 2001 was so severe in 2001 that it really took the vines three or four years afterwards to really recover and get back their vigor. The nose on the '01 offers up a really pretty complex blend of cassis, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and venison. On the palate the wine is medium-full and just a bit angular in style (from the hail, no doubt), with sound mid-palate depth and good complexity on the long finish. I would suspect that this wine will get even less elegant as it ages and will never fully escape the shadow of the hail in this vintage (though both the flavors and aromatics do not currently show any signs of taint), and I would be inclined to drink it up over the near-term. It has a lovely nose, but is a bit four-square on the palate. 2012-2018. **85.**

Monthélie Blanc

2006 Monthélie Blanc- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The three barrels of this tasty rarity go primarily to the harvesters each year at Domaine Lafon, with any leftover being snapped up by local restaurateurs. It really is a lovely wine, as it offers up a bouquet of apple, lemon, grapefruit, a nice touch of grassiness and a base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and quite long, without the underlying complexity of the Meursaults and Puligny in the cellar, but nice length and grip on the snappy finish. Tasty juice, in case you were thinking of pitching in a hand in the 2008 harvest. 2007-2012. **87.**

2005 Monthélie Blanc- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

There are only three barrels of Monthélie blanc *chez* Lafon, and this is a wine that has generally not been made commercially available, but was reserved for employees of the domaine during the harvest. However, a couple of restaurants got wind of the existence of the Monthélie blanc, and so it will begin to be seen on wine lists beginning with the 2005 vintage. While this is made from young vines, it is a very tasty bottle. The bouquet offers up notes of green apple, grapefruit, chalk, beeswax and a touch of Monthélie dried grass. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, fresh and straight, with good focus, nice brightness, and good length and bounce on the finish. It is not a deep or complex wine, but it offers up lovely precision within its genre and will make a good drink right out of the blocks. As the vines become older here, the wine will become more serious, and I would not be surprised at all to see it one day highly sought after. But in 2005, it is an eminently drinkable bottle. 2006-2010+. **88.**

Volnay AC

Fully one hectare of young vines in the premier cru of Santenots du Milieu are still used as the backbone for the Volnay AC bottling from Domaine des Comtes Lafon. Beyond this, the domaine also uses production from the young vines in their other two premier crus for this cuvée, and there are no actual Volnay “villages” parcels owned by the domaine. I have consistently liked this bottling since it was first produced, and the last few vintages have been simply outstanding values.

2010 Volnay- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The Volnay *villages* at Domaine Lafon seems to be getting better with each passing vintage and the 2010 is an excellent wine. The nose is deep and sappy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, cocoa, woodsmoke, a lovely signature of soil, floral tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with fine focus, very good depth at the core, moderate tannins and sneaky length and grip on the transparent and tangy finish. There are four new barrels out of fifteen for the Volnay AC this year. 2016-2040. **91.**

2009 Volnay- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2009 Volnay *villages* was in a similar stage of development as the Monthélie “les Duresses”, and was also showing optimally at the end of November. The nose is really beautiful and complex in its mélange of red and black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, a touch of gamebird and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and intensely flavored, with a sappy core, a bouncy personality, modest tannins and lovely tang and focus on the long and classy finish. This will drink very well indeed right from release, but I would be quite inclined to give it five or six years of cellaring in any case, just to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge on both the nose and palate. But be forewarned that it is not going to be easy to keep one’s hands off of this lovely village Volnay! 2016-2040. **90.**

2007 Volnay- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Volnay *villages* was also in tank at the time of my visit, and was not quite as settled in as the Monthélie and was showing a bit four-square from its recent racking. The nose is quite lovely, as it delivers scents of dark berries, black cherries, espresso, lovely minerality and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and quite supple on the attack, with good mid-palate depth and a bit of structure perking up the now rather agitated finish. I am sure this will be very good and quite elegant out of the blocks- once it has settled in from its racking and impending bottling. 2010-2020+. **88-89+.**

2006 Volnay- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The Lafon Volnay AC all hails from younger vines in the various premier crus that the domaine owns, and it is a stylish middleweight in 2006. Aromatically the wine is lovely and classic Volnay, as it offers up notes of red berries, cherries, spice tones, lovely minerality and a pungent topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is medium-full and not quite as concentrated at the core as the Monthélie, but with lovely persistence and focus on the long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This may well put on a bit of weight in the mid-palate with bottle age, and should be a very tasty early drinker. 2012-2030. **87-88+.**

Volnay “Champans”

The Lafon family’s parcel of Champans is one of the original plots that arrived with Mademoiselle Bloch at the time of her marriage to Jules Lafon in 1894. The parcel is located right in the upper corner of the vineyard, near the chapel in the vines and right across the road from the Clos de la Bousse d’Or. Two-thirds of the .52 hectare parcel of Lafon Champans is in very old vines, now having reached their 90th birthday, and the other third is now twenty-three years old and coming into its prime. The old vine section of this parcel are the oldest vines of the estate, having been planted in 1922, and the

domaine uses these great old vines for many of the cuttings that make up their “selection massale” plantings of new vineyards. The section of the vineyard that was replanted in 1989 was planted half on carefully selected clones and half on cuttings from the older vines in the vineyard. While the fame of vineyard of Champans has been eclipsed a bit by a few other premier crus in Volnay in the last half century, back in the latter half of the nineteenth century when Danguy and Aubertin were writing, they ranked Champans amongst the very top holdings in the village as a “Tête de Cuvée”, alongside Caillerets, Bousse d’Or and Frémiet and ahead of such well-known vineyards today as Clos des Chênes, Taillepieds and Clos des Ducs. The soil of Champans has relatively little clay in it- far less than across the communal boundary in Santenots du Milieu for example- with a very pebbly topsoil and a scree that contains a high percentage of weathered limestone, which is known to the Burgundians as “lave”. Dominique Lafon’s parcel in Champans is enough to produce eight barrels in a typical vintage, or two hundred cases, so this and the Clos des Chênes are two of the hardest Lafon wines to come across.



2010 Volnay “Champans”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2010 Lafon Champans is a stunning wine in the making, offering up a nascently complex and very vibrant nose of black cherries, pomegranate, great minerality, coffee bean, woodsmoke, incipient notes of the gamebirds to come and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, quite reserved in profile, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, substantial, but very suave

tannins, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the very primary, but palate-staining finish. Just a superb Champans in the making. 2020-2055. **93+**.

2009 Volnay “Champans”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

As noted above, the Champans 2009 did not finish its malolactic fermentation until the last week of November, but was still showing quite well during my visit on the 30th of the month. The nose is deep and classy, as it offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, gamebirds, bitter chocolate, fresh thyme and a great base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very, very long, with excellent mid-palate depth, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the suavely tannic finish. This was raised in forty percent new wood this year, but has completely and seamlessly integrated its wood component. An excellent bottle of Champans in the making. 2016-2050. **92+**.

2008 Volnay “Champans”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

There are only three and a half barrels out of a customary eight of the Champans in 2008. The wine had been racked a bit sooner than the Clos des Chênes, and consequently was a bit more on form, as it offers up a stylish nose of black cherries, dark berries, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, complex and well-balanced, with a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the Clos des Chênes, with fine focus and impressive length and grip on the moderately chewy finish. A good bottle in the making. 2016-2035. **88-90**.

2007 Volnay “Champans”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Champans was still in barrel and was also singing at the time of my visit. The nose is deep, pure and beautifully perfumed, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, blood orange, chocolate, complex soil tones, woodsmoke, violets and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very elegant, with lovely mid-palate depth, silky tannins, fine acidity and excellent focus on the long, seamless and sappy finish. Another superb bottle of Volnay. 2012-2030. **92+**.

2006 Volnay “Champans”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The malo finished up a bit later in the Champans than in the Clos des Chênes, and consequently the wine was still in a rather grumpy stage and not in a mood to be bothered. Dominique noted that this will be bottled a bit later than the other reds in the cellar, probably in June or July, as it clearly still needs some time to unwind in the barrel. The nose is deep and black fruity, as it reluctantly offers up notes of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of game, herb tones, woodsmoke and a strong signature of Champans soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and structured, with plenty of tannin, sound balance and plenty of grip on the long finish. This should prove to be very good, but it is still very early days to be making a call on this wine. 2018-2035+. **89-92+?**

Volnay “Clos des Chênes”

The Domaines des Comtes Lafon’s parcel of Volnay “Clos des Chênes” is .38 hectares in size and was completely replanted in 1973, so the vines are now a bit more than thirty-five years of age and really into their prime. These were also amongst the original Lafon holdings at the start of the domaine, having originated with the Bloch family, and are situated in the lower, superior section of Clos des Chênes, right above Caillerets Dessus in the very heart of the vineyard. Dominique Lafon’s next-door neighbor here in Clos des Chênes is Domaine Michel Lafarge. Here, in the lower section of the vineyard, the topsoils are a touch deeper than is the case in the upper section of

Clos des Chênes, where erosion is a real problem and the resulting wines can often lack a bit of mid-palate depth and staying power in the bottle. This is not the case with the Lafons' version, which has really begun in the last five or six vintages to show the great mid-palate depth expected of a top example in a prime location in Volnay's greatest terroir. The entire vineyard has a profound base of limestone subsoil, from which it gets its staying power and magical signature of soil at maturity. Certainly the younger vines in the Lafon parcel of Clos des Chênes did not benefit from the more extracted style championed by Dominique for the red wines back in the early 1990s, but this wine has really been absolutely exceptional since the 2005 vintage and clearly is one of the greatest examples of this vineyard produced in Burgundy today. But, that said, the 1998 Clos des Chênes tasted in preparation for this report was really showing well and clearly demonstrates that even though the more refined red winemaking style currently practiced at Domaine Lafon has really paid dividends with the Clos des Chênes, earlier vintages are certainly not to be discounted. The parcel is usually sufficient for the domaine to produce five barrels a year of this wine in a typical vintage.

2010 Volnay "Clos des Chênes"- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

There are only four barrels of Clos des Chênes this year *chez* Lafon- one of which will be a new barrel. As the Lafon parcel of Clos des Chênes was planted in 1973, so these vines are now reaching a very good age. The 2010 is gorgeous, jumping from the glass in a sappy mélange of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of espresso, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine sense of reserve, a sappy core, ripe, fine-grained tannins and superb length and grip on the tangy and very, very transparent finish. A beautiful bottle of Clos des Chênes. 2019-2050. **93+**.

2009 Volnay "Clos des Chênes"- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

In contrast to the first two wines, the '09 Clos des Chênes had not yet been racked and was a tad reduced at the time of my visit, though its ultimate quality was not in question. The nose underneath the bit of reduction is deep and classy, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, currant leaf, espresso, complex soil tones and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very, very long, with a fine core of fruit, wonderful elegance, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the bright and vibrant finish. The '09 Clos des Chênes was raised in twenty-five percent new wood in this vintage, which is dramatically down from where the percentage of new oak would have been here a dozen years ago, and the wine is so much finer and more soil-driven as a result. I never tasted the absolutely great 1978 Lafon reds at such an early age, but I can very much imagine that they were quite similar in style to this refined and nicely reserved 2009 Clos des Chênes. 2016-2040+. **92+**.

2008 Volnay "Clos des Chênes"- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

There are only two barrels this year of the Clos des Chênes in the Lafon cellars, down from a customary five, so one of the barrels is new and the wine is a bit more oaky in personality than Dominique would normally prefer these days. As the wine had only been racked a month ago, it was still a bit unsettled and I have scored it in a range as a result. The bouquet is quite stylish, as it offers up scents of black cherries, bitter chocolate, lovely soil tones, a touch of gamebird and a fair bit of spicy oak. On the palate

the wine is medium-full, long and moderately tannic, with solid mid-palate depth, lovely focus and good length and grip on the soil-driven finish. A very stylish middleweight this should make when it is mature in five or six years. If it integrates its wood seamlessly, my score will seem conservative. 2015-2030+. **88-89+**.

2007 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Clos des Chênes is coming along very nicely, and while it is approachable already, I would still give it another five years of bottle age to allow it to really develop all of its secondary layers of complexity. The classy nose offers up a deep and youthful mélange of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of gamebird, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and a judicious framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still a touch reserved, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and very fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Serious promise here. 2017-2045. **92+**.

2006 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

At the present time, the Clos des Chênes is my favorite red wine in the Lafon portfolio in this vintage. The malolactic here finished up a few months later than in the two wines above (at the end of June of 2007), and the wine is showing a felicitous combination of elegance and intensity of flavor. About twenty percent of the barrels for this wine were new. The bouquet is deep and classy, as it offers up a very fine mélange of pure cherry fruit, a bit of red currant, plum, lovely spice tones, woodsmoke, a touch of vanilla and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and sappy at the core, with excellent intensity, moderate tannins, tangy acids, and a long, complex and very classy finish. A superb bottle of Clos des Chênes in the making. 2015-2035+. **91-93**.

2005 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Like so many 2005 red Burgundies, the 2005 Clos des Chênes from Domaine Lafon is still a puppy and needs several more years in the cellar. The deep, complex and very promising bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, black cherries, currant leaf, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and still quite structured, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, superb soil inflection, suave tannins and a very, very long, tangy finish. This will be great in the fullness of time. 2020-2075. **94**.

1998 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 1998 Clos des Chênes is just reaching its apogee and will now drink at this plateau for at least a couple of decades. The classy and blossoming nose wafts from the glass in a superb mélange of cassis, dark berries, *sous bois*, espresso, a touch of mint, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with melting tannins, excellent focus, lovely balance and a long, meltingly tannic and soil-driven finish. Just a beautiful example of the 1998 vintage. 2012-2035+. **92+**.

Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”

The Lafon holdings in Santenots du Milieu, which total 3.8 hectares (or ten times the size of their parcel in Clos des Chênes!) produce the most important red wine cru at the domaine. While Santenots du Milieu lies over the border in the village of Meursault, it has long been considered one of the great terroirs of Volnay and was ranked as one of Dr. Lavalley’s “Tête de Cuvées” in his ranking of the vineyards of Burgundy in the mid-

nineteenth century- which happened to be Burgundy's first attempt to do so and which was extremely influential in the eventual adoption of the Appellation Contrôlée system in the 1930s. Jules Lafon was particularly enamored of the Santenots du Milieu vineyard and he sought on several occasions to add pieces to the original parcel of vines that had come from his wife's family when they were first married, adding pieces of vineyard land here on several occasions as they came on the market during the course of his life. Today, the 3.8 hectares owned by Domaine des Comtes Lafon constitute more than fifty percent of this vineyard, of which one hectare was replanted very recently and is currently all included in the Volnay AC cuvée. The remaining 2.8 hectares of older vines- ranging from thirty-five years of age up to sixty years- is usually sufficient to produce forty-five to fifty barrels of this wine in an average-yielding vintage. The soils in Santenots du Milieu are quite a bit richer than is the case with either Champans or Clos des Chênes, with an iron-rich topsoil of clay lying above a profound subsoil of hard limestone. The Santenots du Milieu is always a very black fruity and structured young Volnay that takes plenty of time in the cellar to start to blossom, but eventually emerges into a beautiful bottle of Volnay redolent of cassis, dark berries, smoke and a great base of soil. While it has been several years since I last crossed paths with bottles of either vintage, both the 1978 and 1985 Lafon Santenots du Milieu must be ranked amongst the greatest bottles of Volnay I have ever had the pleasure to taste- and I drink and cellar a lot of Volnay!

2010 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The inherent elegance of the 2010 vintage has really left its fingerprints on this stunning Santenots du Milieu from Dominique Lafon. The simply gorgeous bouquet offers up a superb blend of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, stunningly pure, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, woodsmoke and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure on the attack, with superb mid-palate depth, striking transparency, ripe, firm tannins and brilliant length and grip on the poised and beautifully sappy finish. Having been fortunate enough to drink the 1978 Lafon Santenots du Milieu several times, I have a hard time not imagining that the 2010 is the spitting image of that great wine in its youth! 2020-2060. **94.**

2009 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The great elegance of the best 2009s is very much in evidence in this stunning young vintage of Santenots de Milieu. The stunning and very refined nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pure raspberries, black cherries, cassis, espresso, glorious soil tones and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very intensely flavored, with a superb core of fruit, a very transparent personality, fine-grained tannins, bright acids and great length and grip on the complex and still fairly primary finish. This is as fine a young example of Santenots du Milieu as I have ever tasted from Dominique Lafon! 2017-2050. **94.**

2008 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

How short were the crops in the Lafon Volnay premier crus? In a normal vintage Domaine Lafon will have anywhere between forty-five and fifty barrels of Santenots du Milieu, in addition to the production from the younger vines, which get blended off into the Volnay AC bottling. In 2008, there are just twenty barrels of this wine. The wine was obviously raised in more new wood than Dominique would like these days, but it showed

no issues with too much wood and was perfectly balanced when I tasted it. The bouquet is a fine blend of red and dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, soil tones and a framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully focused, with moderate tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the finish. This will ask for eight to ten years of cellaring to fully peak, and should be a lovely bottle of Volnay. 2018-2035. **90+**.



The Lafon family house at the domaine in Meursault, where Dominique's parents still reside.

2007 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Santenots was also in barrel at the time of my visit, and it was uncharacteristically red fruity in this vintage. The bouquet is lovely and very complex, as it offers up notes of cherries, black raspberries, blood orange, cocoa, lovely minerality, a bit of bonfire and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and very pure, with lovely intensity of flavor, great focus and grip, fine tannins and lovely length and bounce on the complex and very poised finish. A lovely vintage for the Lafon Santenots. I would be very surprised if this does not evolve along the lines of the beautiful 1985. 2013-2030+. **93**.

2006 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2006 Santenots du Milieu finished up its malo a bit earlier than the Champans, and was more amenable to being disturbed. The nose is deep and very pure, as it offers up a classic blend of sweet, dark berries, bitter chocolate, game, earth and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and significantly less closed than

the Champans, with broad shoulders, fine mid-palate depth and a long, ripely tannic finish. This is all *terres rouges*, and it has the power that reflects this, but it is a significantly more classic in shape and size than was the case a decade ago for this bottling, with a less extracted personality and a more refined and classic silhouette. Lovely potential. 2017-2035. **90-92+**.

1988 Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I absolutely love this wine in regular format, where it is only a year or two away from its apogee. In magnum, it is at least four or five years behind in development, and though it may ultimately be even better in this size format, patience is still required. The nose is really pretty tight still, reluctantly offering up scents of cassis, tar, tobacco, woodsmoke, herbs, minerals and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and deep, but quite bound up in its structural elements of tannin and acidity today. The finish is long, bright and tannic. This will be a stellar bottle of Volnay, but I would wait at least five or six years before opening it again in magnum. (*This note dates from 2001.*) 2006-2035. **92+**.

Puligny-Montrachet “Champ Gain”

From 1995 until 2007, the Domaine des Comtes Lafon produced a bottling of Puligny-Montrachet “Champ Gain”. The last vintage I tasted of the Comtes Lafon Puligny-Montrachet “Champ Gain” out of barrel at the domaine was the 2005, with this small parcel was moved out of the domaine’s portfolio after the 2007 vintage and this wine is now sold under Dominique Lafon’s own label, rather than under the umbrella of the Domaine des Comtes Lafon. The parcel of Champ Gain is .25 hectares in size, and I assume that it is owned outright by Dominique Lafon, rather than by the family domaine. I have included notes below on the 2005 barrel sample and a bottle of the 2004 that Dominique opened during our March tasting at the domaine.

2005 Puligny-Montrachet “Champ Gain”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2005 Champ Gain is also very successful, but it misses a bit of the amazing mineral drive of the Clos de la Barre, and consequently suffers a bit in following that very soil-driven wine. The bouquet is deep and classy, as it offers up notes of apple, peach, honeycomb, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, round and almost silky on the attack, with a solid core, sound acids, lovely balance, and good length on the classy and refined finish. The '05 Champ Gain will drink well upon release, and though it will not make old bones, it will provide a lot of pleasure during the first decade of its life. My natural inclination towards more mineral examples of white Burgundy have my gravitating towards the above wine, but that does not take away from this very classy and accessible Puligny. 2006-2015. **90**.

2004 Puligny-Montrachet “Champ Gain”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2004 Champ Gain was really showing well in March of 2012, having just reached its apogee of peak drinkability and hitting on all cylinders. The superb nose is a beautiful blend of lemon, white peach, chalky soil tones, a deft touch of vanillin oak and a floral topnote redolent of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very long and zesty, with lovely framing acids, fine focus and mid-palate intensity and a long, complex and very refined finish. This is a beautiful bottle and one of the finest

vintages of the Champs Gains that I can ever recall tasting from Dominique. 2012-2020+. 92+.

Meursault AC

Today, the Comtes Lafon Meursault villages is made up of a combination of various plots of village level vineyards that they family owns- most notably six-tenths of a hectare of forty year-old vines En la Barre (right next to the Clos de la Barre), as well as young vines from their premier crus and Clos de la Barre that Dominique deems too young to be part of their respective cuvées. For example, after the La Goutte d'Or was replanted in 1989, for the first decade the production from the young vines here always went to the Meursault AC bottling. For many years, the En la Barre parcel was the only component of this wine. However, this bottling is a fairly recent phenomenon at the domaine, as prior to Dominique's arrival at the domaine in 1984, there was no Meursault villages bottling, as his father used to blend in the En la Barre into the larger Clos de la Barre cuvée. Dominique tells a funny story about how his father, René Lafon was pissed off at a local négociant who was buying production from vignerons in En la Barre and marketing the wine under a "Clos de la Barre" label in the late 1970s and early 1980s- no doubt, capitalizing on the growing popularity at this time of the Comtes Lafon's Clos de la Barre. Dominique said to his father, "Dad, how can you be upset about this when you are doing the same thing by including the parcel of En la Barre in the Clos de la Barre?" Et voila- the Comtes Lafon Meursault AC bottling was born!

Up until 1995, the Lafon Meursault AC was comprised entirely from their parcel of vines in En la Barre, but as the popularity of this cuvée continued to grow, the family began to look for additional parcels to purchase to augment production. Today, the other villages level vineyards that the domaine owns include just under a half hectare of vines in En Luraules (below La Goutte d'Or) that were purchased in 1996, and a very small parcel in Les Crotots. The domaine has also taken a long term lease on half of the Clos de la Baronne that was originally the monopole of the Domaine Manuel, located inside the lieu à dit of Les Meix Gagnés, on the other side of the village from Clos de la Barre. The new owners of Domaine Manuel have rented out the Clos de la Baronne to Domaines Roulot and Comtes Lafon to share. At this point in time, the productions of the Clos de la Baronne is going to be used to augment the Meursault "villages" bottling here. The Comtes Lafon Meursault AC always drinks very well right out of the blocks and is always more generous in its youth than the more minerally and tightly-knit Clos de la Barre. We opened several older vintages of the village level Meursault in the cellars in March to see how it evolves with bottle age, and not surprisingly, the wine ages beautifully.

2010 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Despite the Meursault AC no longer having the young vine juice from the Goutte d'Or in the blend, I find that this cuvée getting more serious each year. Aromatically, the 2010 is certainly a stunner, offering up a very pretty and vibrant nose of apple, pear, a touch of passion fruit, intense, chalky soil tones, floral notes and a touch of vanillin wood. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, tightly-knit and racy, with a fine core of fruit, superb cut and focus and a long, soil-driven and very pure finish. A lovely

villages that I would give three of four years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to blossom. 2015-2035. **91+**.

2009 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The Meursault AC from Dominique Lafon seems to get better and better with each passing vintage and the 2009 is going to drink beautifully from the moment it is released. The nose is deep, pure and absolutely beautiful, as it offers up scents of apple, passion fruit, hazelnuts, great minerality and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and racy, with lovely focus, a solid core of fruit and lovely length and grip on the stylish and succulent finish. Really a very strong bottle of *villages*. 2010-2030. **90**.

2008 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2008 village bottling from Dominique Lafon will be a beautiful bottle of Meursault for early drinking, but it is beautifully balanced and should have no problems aging well (though I do not know a whole lot of people that will have the self-control not to drink this wine in the blush of youth). The bouquet is deep and very lovely, as it delivers scents of apple, a touch of fresh coconut, tangerine, lovely soil tones and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and suave, with a juicy core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and fine length and cut on the poised finish. Just a lovely bottle of Meursault. 2010-2025. **91**.

2006 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2006 Lafon Meursault AC is cruising along beautifully and really shows how well Dominique did in this quite difficult white Burgundy vintage. The beautiful and wide open nose offers up a fine mélange of apples, passion fruit, almonds, a touch of coconut, chalk and a very gentle dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and juicy, with a lovely base of soil tones, impressive complexity and a long, bright and bouncy finish. Good juice that shows none of the tropical elements so typical in 2006 whites. 2012-2020+. **89**.

2004 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The bottle of 2004 Meursault AC we opened in the cellars was wide open and really showed lovely aromatic and flavor complexity, but it seemed to me to be showing the very first signs of premoxy, as it was losing a bit of length and grip on the finish. The nose is a blend of apple, tangerine, hazelnut, chalk, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still zesty on the attack, with a good core, but with a finish that tails off a bit and really drops off, rather than snapping upwards on the backend. Dominique and one of his assistants who was tasting with us did not feel this wine was showing any signs of premoxy, but for me, it was right on the cusp. I am sure there are snappier bottles out there. ???

2003 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I asked to taste the 2003 Meursault AC, as I was very curious to see how this wine might be evolving as it closes in on its tenth birthday. It turned out to be really lovely and a most impressive example of the vintage! The nose offers up a very pretty blend of apples, pears, almond custard, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, but still quite fresh and with very good backend minerality adding drive and precision on the finish. A delicious 2003 that is drinking very well and may just continue to cruise along at this level for a surprisingly long time. A real eye-opener. 2012-2025? **88+**.

2000 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2000 Meursault *villages* is utterly classic and drinking beautifully. The bright, mature and vibrant nose offers up a fine mix of apple, pear, hazelnut, iodine, a touch of coconut, impressive minerality and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and fullish, with great purity on the attack, a very good core and a beautifully focused, complex and racy finish. This is a fine, fine bottle of Meursault AC that is evolving in pristine fashion. 2012-2030. **92.**

1995 Meursault- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 1995 Meursault AC from Dominique Lafon was also drinking beautifully in March and again, shows no signs of premature senility. This is the last vintage of the *villages* that was solely from En la Barre fruit, as a new parcel was purchased in 1996 to produce a larger cuvée of AC. The deep, complex and mature nose offers up a classy mélange of pear, apple, almond paste, complex soil tones, iodine and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with lovely mid-palate depth, excellent focus and impressive length and grip on the poised and complex finish. A beautiful bottle of village Meursault at its zenith. 2012-2020. **91.**

Meursault “Désirée”

The Meursault “Désirée” was one of the latter parcels of vineyards to be returned to the domaine from the metayage agreements, as 1988 was the first vintage that Dominique Lafon began farming this plot. Meursault “Désirée” is not the official name of the vineyard today, but rather an ancient name that dates back centuries and was used here for this bottling since the early formative years of the estate under Jules Lafon. The actual vineyard name in which this parcel lies is today called Les Plures and it lies in the same band of premier crus as Meursault “Santenots” (or Volnay “Santenots”, if pinot noir is planted). On the northern end of the appellation. Les Plures is entitled to premier cru status as Volnay “Santenots” if pinot is planted here, but white wines produced from it are known as Meursault “les Plures”, if one wishes to have the premier cru designation on the label. As Domaines des Comtes Lafon has always used the designation of Meursault “Désirée” for this bottling (when they have produced it), and having no shortage of premier crus in Meursault, Dominique Lafon has preferred to keep the traditional name for this cuvée, rather than sell it as Meursault “les Plures” in order to sell it as a premier cru. The domaine owns just a half hectare of vines in Les Plures, from which they produced their Meursault “Désirée” from 1988 until 2005. After the 2005 harvest, the parcel was ripped up and replanted in 2007 and is not yet being bottled on its own, with the production from the young vines being currently blended into the Meursault AC. Perhaps it was the rootstocks that the parcel was planted on (one of the more prolific) back in the old days, but I have never found the Comtes Lafon Meursault “Désirée” bottling quite in the same league of quality as the Clos de la Barre, and it does indeed seem appropriate that the domaine has never offered it as a premier cru. As the parcel lies right next to Volnay “Santenots du Milieu”, I would assume the plot was purchased along with one of the tranches of this vineyard that Jules Lafon purchased in the early days of the domaine.

2005 Meursault “Désirée”- Comtes Lafon

This is likely to be one of the last vintages for the Désirée for several years, as the vines are in need of replanting. The bouquet on the 2005 is lovely, as it offers up a mélange of pear, passion fruit, spring flowers, almond paste and a touch of minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, as deep as the above, but more delicately structured, with a generous attack of silky fruit, good, solid mid-palate depth, fine focus, and a backend that is really singing on the long, zesty and complex finish. A very polished example of this cru this year. 2008-2020. **92+**.

2004 Meursault “Désirée”- Comtes Lafon

The 2004 Désirée was already assembled in tank and awaiting bottling when I arrived to taste it in March. The nose was just a touch blocked by its sulfur adjustment, but underneath is a wonderfully pure wine, offering up notes of apples, lemon, beeswax, almonds, minerals and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and wonderfully transparent, with moderate depth, but excellent complexity and focus. The finish is long, crisp and quite succulent. Again, given its recent movement, my score may well prove to be quite conservative. 2006-2020. **90-91+**.



Meursault “Clos de la Barre”

The 2.1 hectare Clos de la Barre monopole is one of the original vineyards from the Bloch family that formed the nexus of Domaine des Comtes Lafon in 1894. The vineyard lies right in front of the Lafon family house and the domaine’s cellars and cuverie, with a thin layer of clay topsoil overlaying a very profound and hard base of

limestone. The resulting wine is always tightly-knit and very minerally in personality in its youth and takes a good seven to ten years in most vintages to really blossom. However, it ages very, very well and is often the quality equivalent of a very good premier cru. Half a hectare of the vineyard, right up by the Lafon family home, was replanted in 2004 (with the production from these young vines currently going into the Meursault AC cuvée), with the remainder of the vineyard split into two parcels of .8 hectares each- one with sixty year-old vines and the other with thirty-five year-old vines. The Clos de la Barre ages very well and often sheds its youthful girdle of minerality as it ages, blossoming into an absolutely classic bottle of mature Meursault, with a complex signature of soil, generous fruit tones of buttered apples and pears, passion fruit and nutty tones seamlessly interwoven. The last bottle of the '82 Clos de la Barre I tasted (from an auction parcel that included Lafon Charmes, Goutte d'Or and Perrières from the same vintage) saw the Clos de la Barre every bit as fine and vibrant as its more illustrious premier cru brethren. In the village of Meursault, where there are several outstanding and ageworthy bottlings of different lieux à dits, the Comtes Lafon Clos de la Barre must certainly be ranked as one of the very finest.

2010 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2010 Clos de la Barre is a lovely, tight and racy example of the vintage. The very pure and classy nose offers up scents of apple, pear, incipient notes of almond paste, very pure, chalky minerality and a lovely base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and snappy, with a good core of fruit, a brisk girdle of acidity, laser-like focus and excellent snap and grip on the very long, transparent finish. This will not be the most concentrated of vintages of Lafon Clos de la Barre, but it may well make up for that at maturity with its precision and mineral drive. 2015-2035. **92.**

2009 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I was very happy to see that the 2009 Clos de la Barre was showing as well out of bottle as it had been back in November of 2010 out of barrel, and this clearly looks to be an absolute classic vintage for this consistently excellent wine. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of passion fruit, apple, a nice touch of fresh coconut, hazelnuts, chalky soil tones and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit fleshier at the core than the very good 2010 version, with fine focus and detail and excellent backend cut and grip on the very intensely flavored finish. This is a superb vintage of Clos de la Barre in the making. 2016-2035. **92+.**

2008 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2008 Clos de la Barre is extremely elegant and refined in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, as it offers up scents of apple, pear, fresh almond, a touch of tangerine, a lovely base of complex minerality and a touch of vanilla. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and complex, with great transparency, fine mid-palate depth and a long, classy and zesty finish. Delicious juice. 2012-2030. **92+.**

2007 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Clos de la Barre was still in barrel and was simply singing at the time of my visit. The bouquet is deep and simply gorgeous, as it offers up scents of passion fruit, apples, fresh almond, great minerality and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and quite a bit more intense than the Meursault *villages*, with bright

acids, excellent focus and a very long, elegant and racy finish that closes with very impressive complexity for a young Clos de la Barre. 2012-2030. **93.**

2006 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

As I was not shown the Désirée this year, I have to assume that it was dug up to be replanted, as Dominique intimated it would be when we tasted the 2006 a year ago. The 2006 Clos de la Barre is stellar, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of pear, apple, a touch of coconut, almond paste, a bit of vanillin oak and a great base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, cut and chiseled, with great intensity of flavor, excellent focus, and a very long, very racy finish that sizzles across the palate. The backend grip here is most impressive. A terrific vintage of this wine- it may well be the finest Clos de la Barre I have tasted since the 1982. 2010-2025+. **92+.**

2003 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I was very surprised how well this wine was showing when I last tasted it in 2008, but I would certainly plan to drink it over the next several years. The nose is really quite lovely and wide open, as it offers up scents of ripe pears, apple sauce, honey, hazelnuts and a touch of caramelized banana in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, round and nicely centered on its minerality, with a full core of fruit, a supple and generous attack and nice crispness on the long finish that closes with a note of white chocolate. Like almost everyone in Burgundy in 2003, the acids here were adjusted, so I would opt for drinking this wine sooner, rather than hoping that the wine will age long-term on its acids. But a very tasty example of the vintage. 2008-2013+? **87.**

2002 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

It had been quite a few years since I last saw the '02 Clos de la Barre, and the wine seemed to be evolving even better than I had initially anticipated. As readers are certainly aware, 2002 is not one of my favorite recent vintages for either white or red Burgundy, as I find the wines rather uncharacteristically fruit-driven and short on *terroir*. But the '02 Clos de la Barre is really a lovely bottle, as it offers up a classic nose of iodine, apples, oranges, lovely minerality, apple blossoms, a gentle base of vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of chalk. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely reserved, with lovely focus and great cut on the long, complex finish. Lovely juice. 2010-2030. **93.**

2001 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2001 Clos de la Barre is quite a bit more evolved and secondary in terms of its aromatics and flavors than the 2002, but it too is a stellar success for the vintage. The bouquet offers up a complex and very refined nose of lemon oil, tangerines, buttered almonds, apples, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and very pure on the wide open attack, with a lovely base of minerality, sound acids and lovely focus and grip on the complex finish. This wine has just reached its apogee of maturity, but should continue to drink beautifully for at least another decade. 2009-2020. **92.**

2000 Meursault “Clos de la Barre”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Again, my last bottle of this goes back a couple of years and at that time the wine was showing beautifully. But this is right in the heart of the premox years, so who knows how other bottles will perform? In any event, this particular bottle was really lovely, as it offered up scents of pear, hazelnuts, orange zest, a touch of honeycomb, great minerality, a touch of coconut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and

classically defined by its minerality, with good mid-palate depth, bright acids, fine focus and very good length and grip on the blossoming finish. This was last tasted in 2008 and was just beginning to reach its peak- good bottles should be outstanding right now. 2008-2018+? **92+**.

Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”

The Meursault “la Goutte d’Or” parcel was ripped up in 1989 and replanted in 1991, and for several years was simply blended into the Meursault AC bottling while the vines were still on the young side. The first bottling made of the Goutte d’Or after the replanting was the 1999, as the eight year-old vines were just beginning to produce a wine of premier cru quality. This is a bottling that has marched upwards in quality with each passing vintage since 1999, but it is only as the vines have arrived in the twenty years of age ballpark that they have again begun to produce wines with the depth and intensity of flavor that was characteristic of this fine cuvée before the vineyard was replanted. I have had the pleasure to taste a few of the older vintages made prior to the replanting of the vineyard- most recently the 1988, and quite memorably, the beautiful 1982, and this can be a great wine. The last several vintages have really started to show some fine character once again, and the Lafon Goutte d’Or is only going to continue to improve as the new plantations continue to age. But, even some of the vintages from the younger vines, such as the 1999 and particularly the 2000, showed very well at the mini-vertical of this cru that Dominique opened up in November of 2007.

2010 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2010 Goutte d’Or is really a beautiful wine in the making, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful mélange of hazelnut, apple, iodine, lovely soil tones, orange oil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, excellent focus and balance and superb length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is the “coming of age” vintage for these vines that were replanted in 1999, and the old quality of the Lafon Goutte d’Or is unequivocally back with the 2010! 2015-2035+. **93**.

2009 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2009 vintage marks the 20th birthday for the replanted vines in Goutte d’Or and the wine is really starting to come back into form. The nose on the ’09 is stellar, as it offers up a complex mélange of apple, oranges, hazelnuts, a lovely, complex base of soil, gentle notes of iodine, a touch of toast and a very stylish framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the pure and suave finish. This will drink very well from the outset, but four or five years of cellaring will certainly pay dividends in terms of multi-layered complexity. Classy juice. 2014-2035+. **92**.

2008 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The Goutte d’Or vines are now twenty years of age here and this cuvée is beginning to come back into its own. The bouquet on the 2008 is really very fine and complex, as it jumps from the glass in a mélange of apple, passion fruit, a touch of iodine, hazelnuts and a complex and classy base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with fine focus and balance and great soil drive on the long and snappy finish. Really a classy bottle. 2012-2030. **92**.

2007 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Goutte d’Or is a tad more fruit-driven than the very transparent Clos de la Barre, but it too is lovely in this vintage. The nose is a potpourri of passion fruit, apple, tangerine, buttered almonds, white soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, succulent and very pure, with a silky palate impression on the attack, a fine core of fruit, lovely framing acids and a wide open, complex and very elegant finish. A delicious bottle of Meursault. 2012-2030. **92+**.

2005 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

After all of the sizzle of the 2006s in the Lafon cellars, it was a bit of an adjustment to go back to a very laid back 2005 Goutte d’Or. Not that this is a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, but in comparison to the 2006, this wine is very easy going and destined for early drinking. The nose is sweet and easy, as it offers up notes of apple, passion fruit, hazelnuts, a touch of beeswax, vanillin oak and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and wide open, with good length and complexity, but a rather gently styled backend. Good juice for drinking in the blush of youth, but I have a hard time imagining it better at age ten than it is today. 2007-2017? **89.**

2004 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

As has been the case since I first tasted the 2004 and 2005 white Burgundy vintages from barrel, I have a strong preference for the 2004 Goutte d’Or *chez* Lafon. The nose is very fine and floral, as it offers up notes of pear, almond, passion fruit, lovely minerality, a discreet framing of vanillin oak and a perfumed topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and racy, without the same core as the 2006, but lovely shape, cut and focus on the long and minerally finish. I really love the grip and snap of this wine, and happily trade a bit of the 2005’s opulence for the sizzle of the 2004. 2010-2030? **93.**

2000 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

Happily, the 2000 Lafon Goutte d’Or is showing no signs of premature oxidation issues and was absolutely singing. The superb nose is deep and complex, as it offers up a classy mélange of apple, tangerine, hazelnuts, iodine, spring flowers, coconut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and racy, with lovely transparency down to the soil, great focus and balance and a very long, racy and beautifully transparent finish which delivers great grip and cut. A very impressive showing. 2007-2020. **93.**

1999 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

This is the first vintage of La Goutte d’Or bottled on its own after the replanting in 1989, and when last tasted in 2008, this particular bottle of the wine was showing still very young and promising. As is the case with any white Burgundy from the premo era, other bottles could of course be showing decidedly less fresh. In any case, this bottle offered up a fine nose of apple, pear, orange zest, hazelnuts, vanillin oak and a great base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with bright acids, good mid-palate depth and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. A very lovely bottle. 2008-2020+? **91.**

1988 Meursault “La Goutte d’Or”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

Dominique Lafon was very surprised when I told him how much I have been enjoying the 1988 white Burgundies that I have been tasting of late, as he had not had an example of the vintage in many years. He went off to fetch a bottle of the ’88 Goutte

d'Or, which was the last vintage made with the old vines in this parcel before they were grubbed up and replanted, and the wine was showing so beautifully that he went off to grab a bottle of the '88 Perrières as well to see how that was evolving. It was like discovering buried treasure in his cellar, and he was extremely happy to see how well this initially "ugly duckling" white Burgundy vintage had blossomed. The nose on the '88 Goutte d'Or is outstanding, as it jumps from the glass in a complex and mature blend of pear, apple, lovely minerality, buttered almonds, dried flowers and a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and poised, with a lovely kernel of fruit at the core, impeccable focus and balance and lovely length and grip on the *à point* finish. A lovely wine at its apogee and with years of life still ahead of it. 2007-2015+? **92.**

Meursault "Charmes"

The Meursault "Charmes" holdings of Domaines des Comtes Lafon are the largest of the white premier crus that the family estate owns, with the Lafon parcel in Charmes Dessus totaling 1.71 hectares of vines. This is also probably the very finest parcel of vines in the entire vineyard of Charmes, as they lie upslope on the extreme southern end of the vineyard, contiguous to Puligny-Montrachet "les Combettes". The resulting wine is always one of the most minerally-infused examples of Meursault "Charmes", with a beautiful synthesis of the gloriously pure fruit tones of this vineyard, lovely nutty tones redolent of almonds or hazelnuts, and a wonderfully complex base of chalky minerality. The vines have been replanted in stages, with the vigneron responsible for the vines during the era of metayage agreements- the Morey family- having replanted one third in 1946 (Auguste Morey), another third in 1963 (Pierre Morey), with the final third of the parcel replanted by Dominique Lafon in 1996. Currently, in most vintages, the production from the young vines planted in 1996 goes into the Meursault AC bottling. This is my absolute favorite bottling of Meursault "Charmes".

2010 Meursault "Charmes"- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Dominique Lafon's Charmes is also excellent in 2010, offering up a complex bouquet of apple, pear, tangerine, almonds, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a good core, lovely complexity and very fine length and grip on the snappy and laser-like finish. This reminds me very strongly of the 1985 Lafon Charmes out of the blocks. 2017-2040. **94.**

2009 Meursault "Charmes"- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2009 Charmes is stunning, as it offers up a stunning synthesis of pure and charming fruit tones and kaleidoscopic minerality. The superb bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of apple, passion fruit, iodine, hazelnuts, beautifully complex soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely complete, with a suave attack, beautiful mid-palate depth, bright acids, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip. This will be difficult to keep one's hands off of in the cellar, but five years of bottle age will produce an even more magical bottle! 2015-2040+. **94+.**

2008 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

No one has a better plot of vines in Charmes than Dominique Lafon, and this was readily evident despite the 2008 being one of the last to finish its malo in the cellars (in fact, a few older barrels were still not quite finished in November). The bouquet is deep and excellent, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of apples, oranges, almonds, spring flowers, great minerality (particularly for Charmes) and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and displays great nascent complexity, with fine mid-palate depth, striking transparency and great length and grip on the impeccably balanced finish. Great wine. 2015-2035+. **94.**

2007 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Charmes was still in barrel and showing beautifully in February. The bouquet is deep, very minerally and transparent and wonderfully complex, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of apple, pear, tangerine, iodine, great minerality, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and elegant, with great intensity of flavor, bright acids, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, very elegant and transparent finish. This is not a blockbuster by any means, but is a deeply pure, complex and racy wine of great intensity and complexity. Ultimately it is probably a hair better than the Genevrières, but it is hard not to be seduced by the beauty of that wine right out of the blocks. A lovely Charmes. 2014-2035. **93+.**

2006 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I had really liked the '06 Lafons out of the blocks, and the 2006 Charmes is really evolving very well indeed. The nose is quite lovely at this point in its evolution, as it offers up scents of apple, pears, hazelnut, a touch of the skins, laid back soil tones and very gentle notes of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a sound chassis of acidity, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the perfectly poised and *à point* finish. There are none of the overripe tones that plague so many other 2006 white Burgundies in evidence here, and while the wine is only a few years away from full maturity, there is little reason to assume that it will not drink very well for at least a dozen years at its peak. 2012-2025. **91.**

2005 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Like the 2005 Goutte d'Or, the 2005 Charmes sticks out for its rather deep-pitched profile in comparison to these other wines (in a small vertical of Charmes at the domaine). The nose offers up a mélange of buttered apples and pears, acacia blossoms, hazelnuts, a very discreet touch of minerality and a fine framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and easy-going, with good depth and a long, chewy finish that reminds me quite a bit of the style of the 1999 vintage in Meursault. This is certainly a tasty wine, but again one I would expect to enjoy more in the bloom of youth than down the road. 2007-2017? **90.**

2004 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

2004 is an absolutely classic white Burgundy vintage *chez* Lafon, and the '04 Charmes is evolving beautifully. The bouquet is just beginning to blossom into secondary layers of complexity, as it delivers scents of apple, pear, passion fruit, almonds, great, chalky minerality, iodine and a very faint whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and zesty, with great transparency, fine mid-palate depth, brisk acids and excellent length and grip on the snappy and minerally finish. This remains just a touch reductive in personality, which can only augur even better things for down the road. At

age six there are not even the faintest glimmers of premoxy characteristics on either the nose and the palate and this beautiful young vintage of Charmes is aging just like white Burgundies did twenty years ago. A dynamite bottle that is blossoming now, but promises plenty more to come. 2010-2030+. **93.**

2001 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

This particular bottle of the 2001 Meursault “Charmes” from Comtes Lafon is beginning to show the first signs of premature oxidation, as it is beginning to lose both length and grip on the backend, despite the wine’s lovely aromatic and flavor profile. The bouquet is a fine blend of apples, honey, almonds, a touch of tangerine, lovely minerality and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and shows lovely transparency down to its minerality, with sound acids, but a finish that is beginning to shrink as premoxy takes hold. I would drink this puppy up in the next few years and not take a chance, though of course, there are probably plenty of fresh and youthful bottles out there somewhere. 2009-2012+? **88.**

1997 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

This particular bottle of the 1997 Charmes from Dominique Lafon was lovely-fully mature, but by no means suffering from premoxy. The complex and classy nose offers up scents of hazelnuts, oranges, pears, iodine, lovely minerality (particularly for Charmes, but then again, the Lafon parcel of Charmes is probably the very best in this large vineyard) and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plush and very generous on the attack, with respectable depth, but nothing left in reserve in the mid-palate at this point in its evolution. The finish is long, displays nice framing acidity and is quite complex, with fine elegance and succulence. It is time to start thinking about drinking up the ’97 Charmes, but it is a lovely example of the vintage. 2009-2015. **91.**

1996 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

In contrast to our very classically evolved bottles of both ’97 Charmes and ’96 Genevrières, the 1996 Charmes was beginning to show the first signs of premoxy when I tasted this at the end of February of 2009. But this is the random nature of premature oxidation- one bottle dead before its time, another still fresh and as youthful as it should be, and several somewhere in between. In any case, this bottle of ’96 Charmes needed to be drunk up over the near-term, as it was beginning to lose grip and length on the finish, but was still reasonably complex on the nose, as it offered up scents of apple, passion fruit, pretty minerality, buttered almonds and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, with a juicy attack, but a briskly softening and shortening finish as premoxy begins to take hold of the wine’s soul. 2009-2011? **87.**

1988 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

This was the first vintage that Dominique Lafon had sole responsibility for the wines at the family domaine, and after what he reported to be a “lean, green and snappy youthful period” the wines from this vintage are blossoming beautifully and are probably one of the best recent vintages for current consumption. The 1988 Charmes is a great wine by any measure, as it offers up a complex and beautifully-etched nose of apple, oranges, butter, salty soil tones, iodine and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and wonderfully complex, with fine mid-palate depth, perfect balance and great cut and grip on the very long and stunning finish. A great bottle of Charmes with years and years of life still in it. 2010-2030+. **93.**

1986 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

I am sure that the 1986 vintage was hardly a memorable vintage for Dominique Lafon, as his late harvesting practices resulted in many of his vineyard holdings being hit heavily by botrytis (the '86 Perrières is very heavily botrytized). However, the Charmes seems to have been spared by the noble rot, and has turned out wonderfully. The bouquet is deep and fresh, offering up scents of apple, hazelnuts, passion fruit, leesy tones, fine minerality and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and shows admirable depth, with fine focus and balance, and quite impressive freshness on the long and complex finish. This looks to be one of the longest-lived vintages for the Charmes in Dominique's career, as its youthful acids would prefer another year or two before opening. This is a lovely, snappy wine. 2003-2016+? **93+**.



1979 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

(This note dates back all the way to 2001, but the wine was so good then and seemed likely to cruise along for a long time, that I have included the note here. I would love to cross paths with another bottle and see if it is still drinking as brilliantly as it was a decade ago!) I had a rather tired bottle of this from the same batch a few months previous, but this bottle was fresh, *à point* and totally captivating. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a joyous bound of apple, tangerines, coconut, wheat toast, a touch of honey, strong minerality, and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very, very elegant, with excellent complexity and grip, and a superb synthesis of soil, fruit and spice tones on the finish. This is a very bright and fresh 1979 white

Burgundy- it will clearly keep cruising along nicely for at least another five to seven years. A wonderful bottle that may someday be equaled by the fine 1986 Lafon Charmes. 2001-20015? **94.**

Meursault “Genevrières”

The domaine has just over a half hectare of vines in Genevrières Dessus (the upper, superior section of this vineyard), with the family’s parcel lying very close to the border with Perrières. Two thirds of the Lafon parcel is planted in old vines, which date back to 1946, and one-third were replanted in 1993. The old vines in Genevrières were really struggling at the time of the replanting of one-third of the plot, and Dominique initially thought that it would be necessary to replant their entire parcel eventually. However, the transition over to biodynamique viticulture in the latter half of the decade of the 1990s has really reinvigorated these old vines and they are far more productive than was the case twenty years ago, and it now looks like there will be no need to replant them any time soon. The Domaine des Comtes Lafon, along with Domaine François Jobard, makes the most brilliant rendition of this great premier cru that I am aware of, with the Lafon version always a glorious example of the inherent elegance and refinement of Genevrières. Many example of Genevrières that I taste in other cellars are very pretty and well-meaning wines, but they lack the soil-driven personality to augment the hauntingly beautiful fruit and spice tones of this terroir, and while tasty, they do not possess the backbone of greatness. This is never a problem with the Comtes Lafon version of Genevrières, which seamlessly combines refined purity of fruit, an almost silky palate impression and a beautiful base of white soil minerality that seems to get almost “salty” with long-term cellaring. This is a supremely suave and elegant example of Meursault “Genevrières”.

2010 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Given the inherent elegance of the 2010 vintage, it is not surprising that Meursault’s most refined *terroir* would excel in this vintage, and this is exactly what has happened with the Lafon Genevrières. The simply gorgeous and perfumed nose offers up a beautiful blend of apple, pear, fresh coconut, chalky minerality, almonds, apple blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure on the attack, with great complexity, fine mid-palate depth and great cut and backend energy on the focused and dancing finish. A beautiful, beautiful bottle of young Genevrières. 2017-2040. **94.**

2009 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The very 2009 Genevrières was also showing beautifully out of bottle back this past November when I visited the estate to taste primarily the 2010s out of barrel. The nose is deep, pure and nicely reserved in its mélange of apple, tangerine, salty, chalky soil tones, hazelnuts, spring flowers and a nice dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and refined on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine balance, crisp acids and a very long, nascently complex and classy finish. At this early stage, the 2009 Genevrières does not seem to have quite the same precision as the lovely 2010- but we are splitting hairs here! 2017-2035. **93.**

2008 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

Dominique Lafon’s vines in Genevrières older vines seem to have really contributed to the fine quality of this vintage, and the wine really has turned out beautifully in 2008. The wine is more reserved on the nose than the younger vine Goutte d’Or, but there is great complexity and class to come with this wine, as it offers up a superb mélange of tangerine, apple, hazelnuts, a touch of coconut, great minerality, a gentle touch of vanillin oak and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very racy, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and great length and grip on the very soil-driven and classy finish. What a lovely bottle of Genevrières. 2014-2035. **93+**.

2007 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Genevrières was also already in tank at the time of my visit, but was also showing quite well. The nose is deep, very pure and very complex already, as it offers up a vibrant mélange of passion, fruit, pears, apples, hazelnuts, butter, complex, chalky minerality, apple blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, very elegant and refined, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids and a very long, complex finish that closes with great minerality (which almost comes as a surprise, given how seductive the fruit is on the attack). A very refined and simply irresistible bottle of Meursault. 2013-2030+. **93+**.

2006 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

I know this is getting redundant, but this is as fine a young vintage of Lafon Genevrières as I have ever tasted. The bouquet is deep, complex and flat out beautiful, as it offers up notes of pear, tangerine, iodine, buttered almonds, vanillin oak and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and very racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, great intensity of flavor, brisk acids, laser-like focus and flat out great cut and grip on the very long, palate-staining finish. To my palate this is a step ahead of the Perrières in 2006! 2012-2035. **94+**.

1997 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

This particular bottle of ’97 Genevrières was starting to show some signs of premature oxidation on both the nose and palate, and while it was still quite drinkable, this bottle at least did not have a long life ahead of it. The advanced nose offers up scents of apples, butter, oranges, chalk, vanillin oak and nutty tones of oxidation, rather than Meursault. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and a tad soft, with some overt signs of oxidation perking up on the short and gentle finish.

1996 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

In contrast to the bottle of ’97 Genevrières that I tasted at the same time, this particular bottle of the 1996 Genevrières was utterly pristine and simply smoking. The gorgeous nose soars from the glass in a breathtaking mélange of apples, tangerine, butter, a glorious base of soil, pastry cream, iodine, vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very, very racy still, with superb mid-palate depth, glorious complexity and great cut and grip on the laser-like and dancing finish. Just another beautiful bottle of 1996 white Burgundy that fully underscores what has been lost when this vintage succumbed to the plague of premo! 2009-2030. **94**.

1989 Meursault “Genevrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

A recent bottle of Dominique Lafon’s Meursault “Genevrières” showed absolutely beautifully, with a degree of elegance and lacy raciness that I have seldom found in white Burgundies from this vintage. The nose is deep, complex and very refined, as it offers up a complex blend of apples, pears, hazelnuts, lovely, salty soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off a lovely signature of soil, with very good acids and just a touch of tropical ripeness poking out on the very long and complex finish. Just a lovely bottle at its absolute apogee. 2011-2025+. **92.**

Meursault “Perrières”

The Lafon family owns .77 hectares of vines in Perrières, now situated in two small plots and one much larger parcel. The vast majority here are located in two plots in the section of Perrières Dessous, with nearly ninety percent of the vines dating back to their plantation in 1955. These parcels lie right on the border with Genevrières. A small plot here was replanted in these two sections in 1983, but this is just a bit over ten percent of the vines in these two parcels. There is also a tiny new slice of .14 hectares that has been added in 2004 and replanted- its first harvest will be in 2010, but it will not be part of the Perrières cuvée chez Lafon for many years to come, but will rather add complexity to the Meursault villages bottling. The Comtes Lafon Perrières has long been considered one of the greatest white Burgundies produced in the Côte de Beaune, with its consistent excellence rivaled by very few white Burgundy bottlings and surpassed by none.

2010 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2010 Comtes Lafon Perrières is absolutely stunning and is clearly one of the vineyards that was collected before the rains came on the 24th. The brilliant and soaring nose delivers a magical mélange of apple, a touch of pink grapefruit, tangerine, almonds, spring flower, vanillin oak, a touch of iodine and a kaleidoscopic base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shut down tight, with a rock solid core of fruit, brilliant focus and balance, snappy acids and brilliant length and grip on the perfectly balanced and electric finish. A brilliant young bottle of Perrières. 2020-2060. **96+.**

2009 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2009 Meursault “Perrières” from Comtes Lafon is a spectacular young wine. The brilliant and quite reserved nose offers up a classic mélange of apple, grapefruit, tangerine, stony minerality, almonds, iodine and a hint of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with great purity on the attack, a rock solid core, brisk acids and laser-like focus and stunning grip on the racy and transparent finish. An absolute classic Perrières. 2018-2050. **96+.**

2008 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2008 Lafon Perrières will be a stellar example of the vintage. The nose is very deep and very reticent (as a young Perrières should be in a top vintage), but with a bit of coaxing offers up a complex blend of grapefruit, orange, apple, spring flowers, citrus zest and kaleidoscopic minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-wound, with a rock solid core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and stunning

length and grip on the youthful and racy finish. A great wine in the making. 2018-2040. **95+.**

2007 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

Dominique Lafon’s 2007 Meursault “Perrières” is really starting to blossom at age five and shows absolutely superb potential for a long life in bottle. The beautiful nose offers up a complex mélange of apple, orange zest, iodine, kaleidoscopic minerality, almonds, spring flowers and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and suave, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe acids, exquisite focus and absolutely superb length and grip on the racy and laser-like finish. At age five, it is far from a crime to open a bottle of the 2007 Perrières, as the wine is really starting to blossom, but if the angry premo gods are willing, this wine will last an extremely long time in bottle. A great wine. 2012-2045. **96.**

2006 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The last time I crossed paths with the ’06 Perrières from Comtes Lafon was in the cellars in November of 2008, and the wine was showing excellent potential. This past March (2012), the wine was still in fine form, but as context is so important in wine, perhaps its following hard on the heels of the racy and laser-like 2007 was not particularly fair to the 2006, as the wine came off with just a bit of adolescent “gangliness” in comparison to the svelte and snappy ’07. In any event, the 2006 Meursault “Perrières” offers up a really lovely bouquet of passion fruit, pears, almonds, great minerality, a touch of pastry cream and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with the same brightness and purity that was evident a few years ago, but with the delineation not quite as precise today. The acids are bright and zesty, the balance is good and this wine is probably simply going through a shut-down phase at the present time. Good juice, but I would not opt to serve it for a few years now, so that its previous focus can snap back and the wine can again start to dazzle completely. And by the way, I do not think I would serve it sandwiched between the 2007 and the 2004 Perrières again! 2016-2035. **93.**

2005 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 2005 Lafon Perrières is about as imploded a young wine as I have tasted in quite some time and simply demands several years of cellaring before it should be broached. The potential quality here is outstanding, but this wine is shut down pretty seriously at this time, as it reluctantly offers up a bouquet of stony minerality, pears, passion fruit and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and rock solid at the core, with its structural elements currently masking all the future generosity. The finish is long, the acids are bright and snappy and the underlying soil tones are very promising, and in the fullness of time this will be an excellent wine. But give it at least another five years to open up again, as drinking bottles now is simply a waste. 2014-2035+. **93+.**

2004 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 2004 Lafon Perrières is another outstanding example of the vintage and at age eight it is now really entering into its plateau of peak drinkability. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a complex and vibrant mélange of apple, passion fruit, iodine, salty minerality, orange zest, almonds, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a wide open and succulent personality, outstanding mid-palate depth, exceptional focus and cut and a very, very long, soil-driven

and supremely classy finish. Just a classic vintage of Perrières from Dominique Lafon, the 2004 has blossomed beautifully with bottle age, coming out from behind its youthful girdle of acidity to reveal classic mid-palate concentration and great style and breed. 2012-2030+. **95.**

2001 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

As is typical of Dominique’s wines these days, the 2001 Perrières is a bit more forward stylistically than one might expect from this vineyard, but the wine’s complexity is quite impressive. The nose offers up fairly ripe fruit tones of passion fruit and buttered pears, sulfidey leesy tones, hazelnuts, vanilla and really lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is full, focused and displays bright acids that give the wine a crystalline brilliance. It is only on the finish that the new oak detracts from the wine, as it impinges a bit on the fruit and soil tones that knocks the score down a few points. But this is one of the freshest vintages of this wine that I have tasted in a number of years, as Dominique has clearly backed off the *battonage* a bit from what he was practicing in the mid-1990s. A lovely wine that needs a year or two to better integrate its wood, and then should drink very well for at least five or six years out. 2005-2010+. **90.**

2000 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

It had been quite a few years since I last saw the 2000 Perrières from Dominique Lafon, and the early and very clear promise the wine offered back then is very much delivered upon today. The deep and utterly beautiful nose offers up a complex mélange of apple, pear, passion fruit, iodine, magically complex, chalky minerality, orange zest, almond paste and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and *à point*, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the seamless and electric finish. A great wine in its prime. 2012-2025. **95.**

1999 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1999 Lafon Perrières is a beautiful bottle of wine that is now at its apogee, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The deep, tertiary and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apple, hazelnuts, *crème patissière*, iodine, superb minerality and a nice dollop of butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure, with a fine core, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the focused, complex and utterly suave finish. Just a beautiful bottle of 1999 white Burgundy. 2012-2025+. **93+.**

1997 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

This particular bottle of the ’97 Lafon Perrières was showing beautifully, but as if to underscore just how hard it is to find sound bottles from the toughest premox vintages, two bottles of the ’96 Perrières opened up beside this ’97 had fallen prey to premox and were oxidized. In any case, this bottle of the ’97 was approaching its peak and drinking splendidly at age ten, as it offered up a very minerally expression of passion fruit, delicious apples, hazelnuts, coconut, complex stoniness and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with excellent focus, lovely mid-palate depth and great length and grip on the transparent and racy backend. Classy juice- I hope there are still some pristine bottles out there! 2007-2025+? **93+.**

1996 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

I have tasted the 1996 Perrières from Domaine des Comtes Lafon on four occasions in the last several years, with three of the bottles in varying degrees of

premature oxidation, and the fourth fresh as a daisy and aging exactly as one would expect from this wine in its youth. Here is the note on the last pristine bottle tasted and would be indicative of how a perfect bottle should show today. Of course, with premo, one never knows if they are going to get a good bottle or a prematurely oxidized example. The Lafon '96 Perrières performed much more like my expectations for the Coche-Dury example, as it was initially quite tight and closed, and took some time in the glass to fully blossom. Eventually, this wine showed extremely well, soaring from the glass in a youthful blend of green apple, grapefruit, passion fruit, iodine, strong stoniness, and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, racy and soil-driven, with fine depth at the core, and outstanding length and grip on the backend. 2010-2025. 94+.

1988 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

I had not seen a bottle of the 1988 Lafon Perrières since 2007, but Dominique generously offered to open a bottle to finish up our mini-vertical of this cru in the cellars in March. The wine was even more spectacular than it was four years ago and it is quite clear that I did not show it enough respect at that time. The utterly brilliant nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tangerine, pears, buttered almonds, salty, chalky minerality, iodine, citrus peel and a lovely touch of *crème patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely *à point*, with a beautiful core of fruit, flawless focus and balance, magical complexity and a perfectly poised, elegant and endless finish. The 1988s from Dominique Lafon have aged brilliantly and, despite being the first vintage on his own, they remain one of the greatest accomplishments of his very fine career. Stunning juice. 2012-2035+. 97.

Comtes Lafon Meursault “Perrières” bottlings sampled at New York Tasting in 2004:

1995 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The Lafon '95 Perrières is a step up from the Domaine Guy Roulot Perrières in terms of freshness and focus, but it too is essentially a wine that borders on being a bit too heavy. The nose offers up notes of apples, passion fruit, almonds, damp stones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and complex, with plenty of depth at the core, still reasonable acids to give it some lift, and solid length on the finish. This is a clean and complex 1995 that should really be drunk up in the next couple of years, as the structural foundation seems rather shaky. 2004-2006+? 89.

1993 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The high acids of the '93 vintage have done a fine job of keeping Dominique Lafon's more heavily-battonaged style of this era light and relatively fresh at age eleven. The nose is deep, delicately honeyed and quite secondary in nature, offering up notes of buttered pears, passion fruit, hazelnuts, lovely minerality, honey and new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with fine length and complexity, zesty acids and just a touch of new wood poking through to shadow the finish. This is a very strong Perrières from Dominique in this era of experimentation, but I have little doubt that if he was given the same raw materials to work with today, he would produce a significantly finer example of the vintage. 2004-2010+? 92.

1992 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

1992 was at the height of Dominique Lafon's infatuation with heavy stirring of the lees and late harvesting, and this methodology coupled with the softer nature of the

vintage has produced a Perrières that has aged briskly and is now well into decline. The nose offers up tiring notes of fallen apples, pears, almond paste and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full, dull and flaccid, with a short finish of little distinction. While I did not taste the '92 Lafon Perrières with any regularity back in the mid-to-late 1990s, I did cross paths with the 1992 Charmes and Clos de la Barre with frequency, and both of those wines aged very, very fast as well. Drink up. **80.**

1989 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1989 Lafon Perrières is a lovely wine in the context of the vintage, and to my palate a step above both the 1990 and 1992 in quality. The nose offers up a mature and stylish mélange of buttered pears, nutmeg, moderate minerality (particularly for Perrières), floral tones, nutskins and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and displays fine vinosity, with a solid core of fruit, sound acids, and an impressive complexity on the long, elegant and zesty finish. This is really a very stylish 1989 and one of my favorite vintages from the domaine from this epoch. 2004-2010+. **91.**

1986 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

In the past I had tasted bottles of the '86 Lafon Perrières that were borderline undrinkable from the heavy glaze of botrytis, but either the *terroir* is beginning to fight its way up to the surface through the noble rot, or there are bottles out there where the botrytis is not as pronounced as in the examples I had tasted previously. This wine surprised me a bit, as I expected it to be much more subsumed by botrytis, but the nose here is reasonably clean, offering up notes of passion fruit, mango, some minerality, hazelnuts and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and gentle, but still fresh and shapely, with fine soil tones, sound acids, and good length on the complex, mature finish. A very pleasant surprise. 2004-2008. **90.**

1985 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1985 Lafon Perrières is not quite as ethereal as Jean-François Coche's version from this vintage, but it too is a ringing success that will continue to drink very well indeed through the at least the end of the decade and perhaps quite a bit further. The nose is a bit deeper-pitched than the '85 Coche Perrières, but also more than excellent, as it offers up notes of ripe apples, oranges, passion fruit, iodine, vanilla cream, minerals and buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and balanced, with plenty of finesse and a long, palate-staining finish. To my palate this is infinitely more interesting than the very leesy wines that Dominique made in the middle years of his career, and one has to be totally content today that the changes that were afoot at the domaine starting back in 2004 have led to such fine wines in the last several vintages. 2004-2010+. **93.**

1982 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1982 vintage was one of the last for Dominique's father, René Lafon, on his own, and his 1982s have been marvelous drinks for decades. Starting with the 1984 vintage, Dominique joined his father at the domaine, after completing his *stage* with Becky Wasserman's firm. The '82 Perrières is spot on, offering up a mature and refined nose of apples, pears, almond paste, lovely minerality, a touch of coconut and a deft framing of vanillin oak. Much like Dominique's superb 1985 Perrières, the 1982 is a wine with much less lees influence to the overall aromas and flavors than more recent Lafon wines, and to my palate displays much more purity for that reason. On the palate the wine is fullish, refined and brilliantly focused, with fully mature flavors, but still solid

acids to keep the wine fresh and light on its feet throughout the long finish. A lovely wine with still a few years ahead of it. 2004-2009. **92.**

1979 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1979 Lafon Perrières has been gently sliding down the far side of its plateau for a few years now, and at this point in its evolutionary cycle, it is bottle by bottle as far as catching a wine that is still drinking with some vigor. That said, I am sure this was glorious at its apogee, because even in gentle decline it is a very tasty bottle of wine, offering up a delicate and stylish nose of pears, apples, buttered almonds, a touch of mineral and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and elegant, with fine focus, and good length on the mature, but fresh finish. There are sufficient acids here to keep the wine light on its feet, but not enough to really lend the wine grip and intensity on the backend. I would drink it up over the next handful of years, but there may well still be bottles out there that are more vibrant than this refined old gentleman. 2004-2007+? **90.**

1978 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1978 Lafon Perrières is a bit more advanced than the 1979, and though it too retains plenty of flavor interest, this wine is fraying a bit on the palate. The bouquet is a complex and mature blend of poached pears, honey, apples, minerals and a touch of new leather. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and beginning to dry out a bit, with good focus, but without the fruit now being able to fully carry to the back of the finish. Again, I am sure this was quite tasty in its day, but I would have loved to have seen it back in the late 1980s, as it has clearly been in decline since at least the mid-‘90s. Still, not a wine without interest, even at this late stage. Drink up. **87.**

1971 Meursault “Perrières”- Domaines des Comtes Lafon

The 1971 Lafon Perrières is another old white Burgundy that is vigorous, complex and impressively compelling at age thirty-three. Structurally it is not quite as sound as the 1978 Roulot (with the back end drying just a tad), but this is really a very tasty and complex bottle even at this advanced stage. The refined old nose initially offers up notes of caramel, leather, toasted almonds, chalky soil tones and vanilla custard. With further air the fruit tones begin to come up nicely, with notes of coconut and pear filling out the register nicely. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and still reasonably fresh, with fine depth at the core, a lovely expression of chalky *terroir*, and fine length on the slightly decrepit finish. I can only imagine how fine this wine was fifteen or twenty years ago, and even as it fades slowly, it is still a very, very enjoyable drink. 2004-2006+? **89.**

Montrachet

The Domaines des Comtes Lafon’s parcel of Montrachet lies on the most southerly boundary of the vineyard, right alongside Bâtard-Montrachet, with the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti’s parcel lying just above it on the slope. The vines are in two ages, as part of the parcel was replanted, with one section now forty-five years of age and the other fully sixty-five years old. In a year with normal crop loads, there will be five barrels of Lafon Montrachet. The domaine only took back control of the parcel in 1991, so for vintages prior to this, half the crop went to the sharecropper who looked after the vines. Needless to say, this is sadly a wine that I do not taste with any great frequency, other than during my annual visits to barrel taste the new vintage at the

domaine. The wine is so good and so rare, that it probably took me close to fifteen years of visiting at the domaine before I felt comfortable spitting the Montrachet during the tasting, as wasting even that tiny sip seemed borderline sacrilegious. Unlike many other examples of Montrachet, the Comtes Lafon version is one of the most elegant and refined grand cru bottlings to be found anywhere in the Côte d'Or, as the domaine has never been interested in producing as big and powerful of a wine from its plot as possible- a trait that is often found in several other examples from this great vineyard. As Dominique Lafon has adopted his vineyard management to harvest earlier in the last decade, the domaine's example of Montrachet seems to have gotten better and better. It could not be further removed stylistically from the rendition of its closest neighbor in the vineyard, DRC, who continues to try and make a very old-fashioned and heavy style of Montrachet that is harvested very, very late and very often beset with botrytis.

2010 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2010 Lafon Montrachet is also absolutely stunning in this great vintage. The deep, full and very pure nose wafts from the glass in an aristocratic blend of apple, pear, tangerine, a touch of fresh coconut, magically complex, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and silky on the attack, with a great core of fruit, a crystalline expression of its underlying *terroir*, snappy acids and laser-like focus on the brilliantly long, seamless and very racy finish. A great, great wine. 2022-2075+. **98+**.

2009 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2009 Montrachet is simply magical *chez* Lafon. The bouquet is a celestial blend of apple, tangerine, passion fruit, a touch of almond paste, very complex, chalky minerality, *fleurs des vignes* and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with bottomless depth at the core, bright acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long, utterly refined finish. Lafon Montrachet is never one of the larger-scaled examples of the vineyard, but in terms of kaleidoscopic complexity and supreme elegance, this is a joy ride of near perfection. 2020-2060+. **98+**.

2008 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2008 Montrachet from Domaine Lafon is also magical. The brilliant bouquet offers up scents of apple, grapefruit, a nice touch of bacon fat, stunning minerality, floral tones and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extremely minerally this year, with a beautiful core of fruit, flawless balance and stunning length and grip on the racy and multi-faceted finish. This is like drinking diamonds. 2018-2050. **97+**.

2007 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2007 Lafon Montrachet is everything one would expect in this superb vintage, as the wine offers up a gloriously complex and ethereal nose of apple, pear, passion fruit, tangerine, buttered almonds, pastry cream, white flowers, great minerality and vanillin oak. Did I mention that the wine was complex? On the palate the wine was deep, full-bodied and very pure, with supreme elegance, great focus and breed and a hauntingly long, snappy and utterly seamless finish. Glorious wine. 2016-2060. **98**.

2006 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2006 Lafon Montrachet weighs in at a rather remarkable 14.2% alcohol (most of the Meursaults are in the 13.2 to the 13.5 range in 2006), and yet shows no signs of

heat, overripeness or any other potential malady associated with high alcohol. As Dominique noted, for whatever reason, the Montrachet vineyard can often produce these higher alcohol levels, and yet carry them with no difficulty. The 2006 Montrachet is, not surprisingly a great wine in the making, as it offers up a brilliant aromatic mélange of pear, apple, orange, almond paste, fresh coconut, floral tones, vanilla and a great base of minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, refined and very elegant, with stunning nascent complexity, beautiful focus and grip, impeccable acidity and a very long, very complex and classy finish. As is always the case *chez* Lafon, the Montrachet is not a blockbuster, Barry Bonds sort of a wine, but rather a precise and very complex bottle of finesse and superb complexity. 2016-2040. **96+**.

2005 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2005 Montrachet is another magnificent bottle, as it offers up a stunningly complex and compelling bouquet of apple, pear, coconut, passion fruit, almond paste, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly powerful for this normally rather understated and refined Monty, with a fine core of fruit, perfect balance, and a very long, aristocratic finish. This is a superb wine by any measure, but the more buxom side of the 2005 vintage here seems at the present to be obscuring just a touch of the haunting elegance for which the Lafon Montrachet is so well known. If the customary polish of this wine emerges with further bottle age, then this score will seem conservative. 2015-2035. **94-96+?**

2004 Montrachet- Domaine des Comtes Lafon

The 2004 Montrachet from Dominique Lafon has evolved brilliantly since I last saw the wine out of barrel in the fall of 2005, and it has to be one of the greatest white wines of the vintage. The deep, gem-like and youthful nose soars from the glass in a magical mélange of apple, pear, orange zest, iodine, stunningly complex minerality, spring flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very racy, with a marvelous core of fruit, laser-like focus, zesty, youthful acids and simply profound length and grip on the nascently complex and oh, so refined finish. A great, great bottle of Montrachet in the making, in a perfect world I would not touch this for another half dozen years at least. But, as we all know, we no longer live in a perfect world for white Burgundy, as the scourge of premoxy might rear its ugly head with any bottle we put in the cellar, and given just how beautifully this wine is drinking in its youth, it would be far from criminal to start serving this wine now. Just call me if you do! 2012-2050. **98**.

CHÂTEAU DUCRU-BEAUCAILLOU ONE OF BORDEAUX'S GREATEST ESTATES



The imposing and mammoth façade of Château Ducru-Beaucaillou in the heart of St. Julien.

Château Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the crown jewels of the star-studded Left Bank of Bordeaux. Nestled in the center of the St. Julien appellation, which happens to be the smallest of the communes on this bank of the Gironde, it sits on a beautiful plateau overlooking the river on one of the finest parcels of *terroir* to be found in the Haut-Médoc. With eight hundred hectares under vine, St. Julien may be the smallest of the Left Bank communes, but it is home to eleven of the sixty-one estates that were first classified in 1855. There are five Second Growths in St. Julien, but most commentators would rank Ducru-Beaucaillou and Leoville Las Cases as the very finest of this handful of top estates, as they possess the greatest *terroirs* to be found in the commune, and in contemporary claret circles, both estates are considered the quality equivalents of First Growths. As Philippe Blanc of nearby Château Beychevelle (certainly no stranger to claret excellence) once commented of Ducru, “perhaps I could make a wine to rival Ducru-Beaucaillou if I only made a selection of the very best four or five percent of my *terroir* to make the *grand vin*, but I could never compete with their great *terroir* if I were to use the majority of my vineyards.” In fact, the name of the château, Ducru-Beaucaillou actually can be translated quite simply into “*the cru of the beautiful pebbles*”, reflecting on how this stunning gravel mound on the banks of the Gironde has always been viewed

as one of the great vineyards of the Médoc. However, the Ducru of the name actually hails from one of the estate's owners in the late eighteenth century, Bertrand Ducru, who appended his name to the estate.

Ducru-Beaucaillou had originally been a part of a much larger Château Beychevelle in the seventeenth century, but when Beychevelle's proprietor of the time, Bernard de la Valette passed away in 1642, in the midst of constructing the main section of the château that now graces Beychevelle (completed in 1644), he left behind considerable debts that his survivors needed to address. The vineyard lands that now constitute both Ducru-Beaucaillou and Branaire-Ducru were sold off from Beychevelle at this time to help settle the estate of the deceased Monsieur de la Valette. However, in these days, the very stony personality of the soil at Ducru was not necessarily considered a positive, as the stony vineyard land was extremely hard to work and it had not yet been widely recognized as a positive aspect of the *terroir*, so that the initial name of the estate once it was to stand on its own after its separation from Beychevelle was "Maucaillou" (or "bad pebbles")- though the wine for much of that time was sold under the name of the estate's owner, a Monsieur Bergeron. However, towards the end of Monsieur Bergeron's tenure as proprietor (he passed away in 1795), the name of the estate was officially changed to Beaucaillou- as both the wine and the underlying *terroir* were beginning to build a considerable reputation for themselves. No doubt, it was also considerably far easier to market a wine from "Beaucaillou" than "Maucaillou".

After Monsieur Bergeron's passing in 1795, the estate of Beaucaillou was sold to Bertrand Ducru, who quickly added his name to the domaine and today's Ducru-Beaucaillou was born. Bertrand Ducru and his wife Marie had two children, a son Gustave Ducru and a daughter, Marie-Louise Ravez, and when they inherited the estate upon the passing of their father in 1829, they decided to jointly continue to run Ducru-Beaucaillou together. Gustave Ducru had married very well and had more than sufficient resources to devote to Ducru-Beaucaillou, and it was during the tenure of the Ducru children that the estate really began to make its mark in the firmament of Bordeaux. The imposing château (one of the largest and most beautiful in the entire Médoc) that graces the property today was constructed primarily during this time, and the Ducru children did not hesitate to also pour resources into fine-tuning the vineyards as well. The reputation and price for Ducru-Beaucaillou rose slowly, but steadily, during their tenure at the head of the estate, and it is certainly true that Ducru-Beaucaillou's ranking as a Second Growth in the classification of 1855 is to be credited to the energetic rein of the Ducru brother and sister team in the years between 1829 and 1855. The rather unique brother-sister management of Ducru did not last much beyond the 1855 classification however, as Gustave Ducru purchased neighboring Branaire-Ducru in 1857 and handed over sole control of Ducru-Beaucaillou to his sister in 1860. Six years later, Marie-Louise Ravez sold Ducru to Madame Lucie-Caroline Dassier, the wife of the well-known Bordeaux merchant Nathaniel Johnston.

While Madame Dassier and Monsieur Johnston were well-placed in Bordeaux commercial circles to continue to build upon the estate's success of the Ducru children, their timing was not ideal, as Bordeaux was about to be hit by the twin killer tides of the

phylloxera and powdery mildew epidemics, which swept through the vineyards of France over the last decades of the nineteenth century. They were able to weather the depredations that struck the region- in part because Nathaniel Johnston's vineyard manager at another property came up with the famous "Bordeaux Mixture" (a copper-based spray) to at least alleviate the threat of powdery mildew, and the Dassier-Johnston era at Ducru-Beaucaillou was as successful as one could hope for during that difficult time in the world of French wine. Nathaniel Johnston's firm was one of the most prestigious merchants in Bordeaux (having been founded several generations previously by Scottish immigrant, William Johnston), and in addition to Ducru, the firm owned several other properties in the Médoc at this time. But, the crown jewel of the Johnston commercial empire was certainly Ducru-Beaucaillou. Madame Dassier passed away before her husband, and Monsieur Johnston remarried, celebrating his new bride from the Turkish royal family by adding the two distinctive towers at each end of the château (one of which features prominently on the Ducru label) and adding beautiful gardens on the property with the help of one of the most famous Parisian architects of the time. Ducru's luxuriant grounds and grandiose château that now dazzle visitors were completed at this time.

The Johnston era at Ducru was not destined last successfully far into the twentieth century, as it could not withstand the draconian economic policies of the English banking classes in the wake of the First World War, coupled with the madness of unethical securities speculation in the United States that eventually teamed up to plunge the entire world into economic crisis and the great depression. France remained insulated from much of the economic upheavals of this period far longer than either England or the US, but eventually it too was dragged down into the economic morass and the Johnston firm's business needed to unload some of its assets to survive, including Ducru-Beaucaillou. The Johnston era at Ducru came to an end in 1929, when the property was sold to another prominent Bordeaux merchant, Monsieur Desbarats, but his tenure was relatively brief, and he in turn sold Ducru in 1941 to another merchant, Francis Borie, and Ducru's contemporary history commenced. The Borie family did not acquire the same glittering jewel of a property that had earned its Second Growth status in 1855 or wowed visitors at the turn of the century, as the periods of war, economic and political malaise and yet another war had certainly taken their toll on a rather rundown and shabby Ducru-Beaucaillou by 1941. Following the end of the Second World War, Monsieur Borie began the task of restoring Ducru to its former glory, and the projects were continued by his son, Jean-Eugène Borie, upon his passing in 1953.

Jean-Eugène Borie became much more interested in running Ducru-Beaucaillou (rather than the family merchant wine business) and eventually, in 1965, he left the family firm so that he could focus all of his energies on running the estate. He quickly followed the lead set by Baron Philippe Rothschild at Mouton and began to estate-bottle all of Ducru in the 1960s, ending the practice of selling a percentage of Ducru off in barrel to merchants who would bottle the wine themselves. He also had hired back in 1953 the young, but soon to be very well-known, Bordeaux University professor, Emile Peynaud as a consultant for Ducru. Jean-Eugène Borie became synonymous with Ducru-Beaucaillou and was very active as an ambassador for both his estate and the region in

general throughout the world, as the Bordelais reached out in the 1960s and 1970s to further Bordeaux's presence in the world wine markets. As his career evolved, he added other properties to Ducru, including Châteaux Grand-Puy-Lacoste and Haut Batailly in Pauillac. Monsieur Borie and his wife, Monique, lived at Ducru and raised their three children here, instilling in them a love for Ducru and the land. When Jean-Eugène Borie became ill in 1997, he arranged for the children to split the family businesses evenly, as each child received one-third of all of the Borie family properties and other business interests, in the hopes that they would be able to amicably come to a decision on how to split the responsibilities for each property. Jean-Eugène Borie passed away the following year, and from 1998 until 2003, his oldest son, François-Xavier Borie directed the family businesses. Eventually the final split of the family properties was affected in 2003, which led to François-Xavier Borie taking over ownership of Grand-Puy-Lacoste and direction of the Haut-Batailly (still owned by his aunt), while sister Sabine and brother Bruno-Eugène Borie jointly owning Ducru-Beaucaillou (along with their mother). With this organization finalized, Bruno Borie assumed the role of director of the famed Second Growth estate in 2003. He continues to live with his family at Ducru, following in the family tradition that is increasingly rare at other top estates in the Médoc.

Ducru-Beaucaillou's *terroir* is a classic gravel mound that is typical of the very best properties in the Médoc. According to James Wilson's invaluable tome, Terroir, Ducru's vineyards sit up high on its gravel mound, overlooking the Gironde, with the highest elevation in St. Julien at 45 feet above sea level. One might think that this implies that the gravel mound at Ducru is particularly deep, but this turns out not to be the case, as the underlying substrata of calcareous bedrock is also elevated here, so that the depth of the gravel at Ducru is estimated to be about fifteen feet. Mr. Wilson opines that the thickness of the gravel mound at Ducru "suggests the internal geology must be unusually favorable." Ducru's fifteen feet of gravel is decidedly deeper than most of the vineyards at nearby Beychevelle for instance- a reality alluded to above by Monsieur Blanc in his discussion of the relative merits of the entirety of the two *terroirs* at these St. Julien superstar domaines. Perhaps it might have been better back in 1642, when Bernard de la Valette passed away and his children needed to sell off some of the parcels at Beychevelle to pay down his debts, if they had sold some of the plots on the southern end of the estate, rather than the more northerly, stonier sections that would eventually become Ducru-Beaucaillou and Branaire-Ducru. In any case, it is quite clear that Ducru-Beaucaillou sits on some of the very finest *terroir* to be found anywhere in the Médoc.

Today, Ducru-Beaucaillou is comprised of seventy-five hectares under vine, with an average age of the vines a very healthy thirty-five years of age. The estate's grounds are much larger, encompassing fully 215 hectares, but only seventy-five are planted to vineyards. Of these seventy-five hectares of vines, roughly half lie immediately around the château, overlooking the Gironde, with the vineyards of Château Beychevelle bordering them to the south and those of Château Latour to the north. The vineyards are planted densely at a rate of 10,000 vines per hectare. The other half of Ducru's vineyards lie a bit further inland from the Gironde, to the west of the château and closer to those of Châteaux Gruaud-Larose and Talbot. From these vineyards the estate produces two wines, the second wine, La Croix de Beaucaillou, from the section of vineyards over by

Talbot and Gruaud, and the *grand vin*, Château Ducru-Beaucaillou. Both wines are the products of strict selection of both parcels in the vineyards and cuvées in the cellar, and the domaine continues to sell of a substantial percentage of their production each year (often from younger vine parcels) in bulk, if the wine is deemed not up to the high standards set for each bottling. La Croix de Beaucaillou was first established in the 1995 vintage. Like a few of the other very top “second wines” in the Médoc, it has evolved over time from a bottling of declassified barrels of Ducru (as it was for the first decade of its existence), into a wine that comes each year from the specific section of the estate’s vineyards located further away from the river, which the winemaking team at Ducru has identified as having a unique *terroir*. Since the 2005 vintage, La Croix de Beaucaillou has been sourced from the estate’s vines up on the plateau away from the château itself, with the vineyards that surround the château and overlook the Gironde now reserved exclusively for the *grand vin*. The decision to make each wine from a different section of the vineyard has benefited both wines in my opinion, adding a distinctiveness to the expression of *terroir* of La Croix de Beaucaillou in the last several vintages that was perhaps not as precise when it was made as a barrel selection in the cellars of the entire production of the property. La Croix de Beaucaillou is also noteworthy in the 2010 vintage for having a new, chic, black and gold label designed for it by the artist Jade Jagger (though a few larger format bottles of the 2009 also bear the newly designed label).

The Borie family also has another significant section under vine in the commune of St. Julien, which Jean-Eugène Borie purchased from Château Lagrange in 1970. This is a thirty hectare parcel- twenty-five of which are planted to vineyards, that could quite easily have been included in Ducru-Beaucaillou (for those new to Bordeaux, it can sometimes come as quite a surprise how vineyards can be purchased quite a distance from an estate’s existing vineyards and still be included the next vintage in the *grand vin*- for example, a percentage of Pauillac First Growth, Lafite-Rothschild’s vineyards actually lie over the communal border in Ste. Estèphe), but which was also deemed to have significantly different *terroir* from the existing seventy-five hectares of vineyards already in the Ducru stable, so the Borie family decided to create another estate, which has been bottled ever since as Château Lalande-Borie. It is consistently a lovely wine and offers up very good value in contemporary St. Julien pricing. It is noteworthy these days in its inclusion of cabernet franc in the blend, which has fallen out of favor for both La Croix de Beaucaillou and Ducru-Beaucaillou over the last decade or so.

While each vintage’s *cépage* differs at Ducru-Beaucaillou, depending on how each grape variety excels during the growing season, Ducru is of course a classic, cabernet sauvignon-based bottle of St. Julien. The blends at Ducru tend to range from roughly seventy-five percent cabernet sauvignon in most classic vintages to a high of ninety percent in cabernet-dominant vintages such as 2010. The vineyards themselves are planted to seventy percent cabernet sauvignon and thirty percent merlot these days, with the former plantations of both cabernet franc and petit verdot that were part of the *vignobles* back in the seventies and eighties now gone or decreased dramatically. Formerly, Ducru’s vineyards included five percent each of these two varieties. Like many of the very top estates in Bordeaux these days, the viticultural team at Ducru practices a

green harvest in July and is very careful about sorting and selection in the vineyards at harvest time, with portable sorting tables brought into the vineyards to separate the perfect fruit from any less than ideal as soon as possible.

Happily, vinification techniques at Ducru-Beaucaillou under long-time *Chef de Cave*, René Lusseau, remain quite classical in style, with the wines fermented in small batches that allow for variations in their underlying *terroirs* to be guarded through fermentation and initial *elevage*, so that there are more options available when considerations are taken for the final blend of the *grand vin* and the La Croix de Beaucaillou bottlings. Extraction tends to be quite gentle at Ducru-Beaucaillou. Most importantly, malolactic fermentation at Ducru continues to take place in stainless steel tanks (of varying sizes, to accommodate the different sized cuvées from different parcels of vines), as the estate has withstood the temptation to do some of its malolactic fermentation in new wood- thus safeguarding a most complete expression of this compelling *terroir* in the finished wines. One of the changes that took place when Bruno-Eugène Borie assumed primary responsibility for the direction at Ducru-Beaucaillou in 2003 was to increase rather dramatically the percentage of new oak that the *grand vin* was raised in at the estate. Previously, about forty percent new oak had been used for Ducru, but Monsieur Borie raised this to one hundred percent new wood for the vintages between 2003 and 2008, and then dialed this back to approximately eighty percent for subsequent vintages. Today, according to the estate, the *grand vin* will be raised in anywhere from fifty to eighty percent new wood, depending on the style of the vintage, but I am yet to see a vintage that has seen only fifty percent new oak. While current vintages of Ducru are certainly not over-oaked wines by any stretch of the imagination, the significantly higher percentage of new wood used these days has slightly changed the underlying expression of *terroir* in the young wines- though all of these vintages are still much too youthful to see just how significant this change will prove to be over the course of the long life in bottle of a vintage of Ducru-Beaucaillou. Certainly, the higher percentage of new wood in use at the estate has allowed Ducru to show significantly better right out of the blocks at early tastings of a young vintage, so that early scores from most critics for Ducru-Beaucaillou have increased since the change to a higher percentage of new wood. One of course might ask what was wrong with their palates in the first place, to miss the inherent quality of this great wine before it was gussied up with more new wood. The second wine of the estate, La Croix de Beaucaillou, tends to be raised these days in anywhere from twenty to forty percent new wood, again, depending on the style of the vintage, which makes it a bit more reminiscent out of the blocks of the vintages of Ducru from the past.

Today, Château Ducru-Beaucaillou is at the top of its game, producing wines that brilliantly deliver the superb, underlying *terroir* that has made this estate famous since the original classification of the top estates in the Médoc in 1855. While the prices here are far from cheap, at least one is guaranteed a classic example of old school claret for the tariff and a wine that is built to age long and gracefully in the cellar in exchange for ponying up for a bottle or a case. Under the leadership of Bruno-Eugène Borie, no expense has been spared to make both Ducru-Beaucaillou and La Croix de Beaucaillou even better than they have been in the past, and this impressive commitment to

excellence was certainly in evidence with the extremely successful wines turned out here in the difficult 2011 vintage. But, Ducru's historical excellence has deep roots, with only a brief hiccup in the mid-1980s the sole blemish on what has been a long and very fine run of great wines. In the vintages of the mid-1980s, the estate had issues with a slightly musty character in their wines, which I assume was the result of a TCA or bacterial contamination in the old cellars (which have now been replaced by beautiful new cellars). I dropped a note to the château's management team prior to this article to see if they wished to discuss in detail the problems with the wines from the mid-1980s, but, understandably in our blindly commercial age, I did not receive any answer. In my experience, the vintages from 1985 to 1990 were affected to varying degrees by this issue, which acted on the wines as if they were very slightly "corked", with the structural elements a bit pinched on the backend and the wines' finishes slightly clipped and not at all typical of Ducru-Beaucaillou either before or after this period. This slight taint in the wines is not overt by any means- witness the fact that the 1986 was one of the most popular wines at a recent vertical Ducru tasting that I attended- but, for those who know of the issues in the cellars at this time, it is quite easy to spot in the wines from at least the 1986 through 1990 vintages.

In any case, those days are long behind Ducru-Beaucaillou today and the estate is making brilliant wines that fully justify Ducru's ranking as one of the very finest "Super Seconds" in Bordeaux. In my experience, any vintage of Ducru from 1982 backwards or from 1995 forwards can be purchased and cellared with complete confidence. I had not tasted the 1983 vintage of Ducru since its release, prior to our vertical tasting in Saarbrücken in March of this year, so I am not certain whether or not the problems in the cellar affected this wine or not- a question I had hoped might be cleared up with my query to the estate's team. (The '83 showed well enough at the vertical, but a bit bell peppery for a wine of its age, which makes me wonder a bit if the cellar problems here were starting manifest themselves in the wines from this vintage, or if this is just a less ripe year for Ducru.) But, despite this few years of less successful vintages, the historical record of Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of stunning wine after stunning wine and I would have no issues if the officials in Bordeaux one day bestowed a First Growth promotion on Ducru. The style of the wines at Ducru are classic Médoc, with black fruity notes of cassis and black cherries, plenty of cigar smoke and tobacco leaf, fresh herb tones in their youth from unmanipulated cabernet sauvignon and that signature of glorious gravel mound *terroir*. With sufficient bottle age, notes of violets, coffee and black truffles often appear in Ducru. As noted above, the wines prior to 2003 were raised in a more conservative percentage of new oak, which was, of course, more to my personal tastes, and which made those earlier vintages of Ducru more tightly-knit and dominated by their youthful structures early on and requiring long-term cellaring. The higher percentage of new wood used here today makes the wines just a bit more accessible early on- hopefully without affecting their long-term potential- but, even this change has done little to change the fact that a top vintage of Ducru-Beaucaillou demands a minimum of a good twenty years of cellaring to really begin to reach its period of peak drinkability.

Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the longest-lived wines in St. Julien, and given how handsomely it rewards long-term cellaring, it makes little sense to open a top vintage

before it has seen fully two decades of cellaring. To give some idea of how beautifully Ducru ages, the fleshy and quite velvety 1970 Ducru has been drinking well now for more than two decades, and yet, each time I revisit the wine (which happens with as much frequency as I can engineer!), it seems to have gotten deeper and more profound than the last time I tasted it and it now seems clear to me that even though top vintages of Ducru really start to blossom around age twenty, their true apogees are more likely to occur as they celebrate their fortieth birthdays.

The following wines have generally all been tasted in the last couple of years, with the younger vintages primarily tasted at the estate during my annual pilgrimages to the region for the *En Primeur* tastings. As Monsieur Borie is a great admirer of modern art, a visit to the estate to taste is always one of the most aesthetically enjoyable stops in the Médoc. I am once again deeply indebted to the Saarbrücken Wine Club for inviting me to take part in a vertical Ducru-Beaucaillou tasting in March of this year, which filled in several gaps in my recent tasting notes of many Ducru vintages. I have had the pleasure to be a guest speaker for this fine group of tasters so often in the last few years that it is really high time I mastered a bit of German, so that we do not have to keep conducting these tastings in English! A couple of very good friends here in New York have also been very generous in opening up old vintages of Ducru with some regularity in recent years, which has allowed me to drink wines from this estate with some frequency and well beyond the reach of my own personal cellar. But, this article has been in the works since the early days of View From the Cellar, as I had the pleasure to chat at length with Bruno-Eugène Borie during one of his extended visits to New York to promote the wines of Ducru, where he served a lovely selection of vintages of both Ducru-Beaucaillou and La Croix de Beaucaillou. I had put off writing this piece for a few years in the hopes of crossing paths with a handful of important vintages of Ducru that I had not tasted in several years, including the 2001, 1989, 1982 and 1975, but eventually decided that many of my other recent tasting notes might become out of date while I waited for the opportunity to taste those vintages- as I had not been savvy enough at the time to cellar them myself. So I have contented myself with a piece on Ducru that is not quite as in-depth as I would like it to be, but which is still pretty well-stocked with notes on many of the vintages of Ducru-Beaucaillou from 1945 forwards.

La Croix de Beaucaillou

2010 La Croix de Beaucaillou

The team at Ducru-Beaucaillou has fashioned a pair of outstanding 2010s. The La Croix de Beaucaillou is a stellar example of the vintage- poised, concentrated and impressively light on its feet for this powerhouse vintage. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, a touch of graphite and a topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with beautiful balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the ripe and pure finish. An impressive effort. 2020-2050+. **92.**

2009 La Croix de Beaucaillou

Since 2005 the Croix de Beaucaillou has been made each year from a specific section of the estate's vineyards up on the plateau, and is truly a second wine at the

estate, rather than a second label for the younger vines from Ducru-Beaucaillou. The nose on the 2009 is excellent, as it delivers a fine mélange of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and delivers a fine core of ripe fruit, with firm, beautifully integrated tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. A fine, fine wine. 2020-2045+. **89-91.**

2008 La Croix de Beaucaillou

The 2008 La Croix de Beaucaillou is an excellent example of the vintage, as it delivers the seamless harmony, great depth and superb signature of soil that makes this vintage so exciting. The first rate bouquet offers up a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, gravel, espresso and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and destined to blossom into a very complex wine, with a fine core of fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins, good acids and excellent length and grip on the bouncy finish. A fine, fine result. 2018-2045. **91.**

2005 La Croix du Beaucaillou

The 2005 La Croix du Beaucaillou is a lovely example of the vintage that will drink well from a fairly early age and offer up a nice option for fans of the estate that may not necessarily want to wait twenty-five years for the *grand vin* to reach its apogee. The nose is beautiful and quite plush in style at this early age, as it delivers scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, tobacco, French roast, herb tones and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows fine mid-palate depth, with lovely focus, ripe, measured tannins and very good length and grip on the poised finish. There is not the same degree of complexity here as will eventually emerge in the 2005 Ducru-Beaucaillou, but it will be the better drink of the two for the next fifteen to twenty years. 2014-2030+. **89.**

Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

2010 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 2010 Ducru-Beaucaillou is a riveting success for the vintage and one of the best three or four wines to be found on the Left Bank this year. The bouquet is deep, pure and stunning, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of sweet cassis, dark berries, tobacco, a superb, gravelly soil signature, coffee and a fair dollop of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fabulously structured, with great intensity at the core, impeccable focus and balance, plenty of ripe, beautifully integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the palate-staining and dancing finish. Here is one of the extremely rare 2010s that actually is worthy of all the hyperbole bantered around about this vintage! 2022-2100. **95+.**

2009 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The good news is that the 2009 Ducru-Beaucaillou was raised in ninety percent new wood this year and shows no signs whatsoever of over-oaking. I would still love to see this very special *terroir* featured a bit more in the finished wine by returning to the old days, when a third new oak was deemed plenty sufficient for the *grand vin*, but the new wood is seamlessly woven into the tapestry of the wine this year. The bouquet is deep, pure and ripe, as it offers up an outstanding blend of dark berries, black currants, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, tobacco leaf and a discreet base of nutty oak. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully reserved, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the chewy and beautifully focused finish. This is a very traditionally made bottle of Ducru, with the vintage's power beautifully harnessed. Superb wine. 2030-2075. **92-94+**.



2008 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 2008 Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the top wines of the vintage and a stellar bottle in the making. The wine delivers a truly stunning bouquet, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of cassis, dark berries, French roast, tobacco leaf, a complex base of gravelly soil tones and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full and wonderfully suave on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe, perfectly-integrated tannins and great length and grip on the nascently complex finish. While Ducru has produced exemplary efforts in both 2009 and 2010, make no mistake, the 2008 is the finest of the troika. A great 2008! 2022-2075. **95**.

2006 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

In the very underrated 2006 vintage, Ducru-Beaucaillou is very good, but not one of the very top wines of the vintage. The culprit here, at least at this very early stage, seems to be the high percentage of new wood, which the wine is struggling under just a bit at this point in its evolution. The nose is deep, complex and youthfully primary still, as it offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, a touch of Ducru's youthful fresh herb component, tobacco leaf and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite closed, with a very good core of fruit, fine focus and length, but with a

finish that is currently a bit marked by uncovered oak tannins. I am sure that there is plenty of stuffing to eventually carry its wood with much more aplomb, but I wonder if this vintage will always be a bit at a handicap *vis à vis* previous vintages of this fine château. 2020-2050+. **90+**.

2005 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 2005 Ducru-Beaucaillou, which was also raised in one hundred percent new wood, will have no difficulty carrying its new oak to the finish line and is a superb young vintage of this fabled estate. The nose is deep, pure and shows off a lovely tang to its aromatic mélange of black cherries, cassis, a touch of blood orange, tobacco leaf, soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and rock solid at the core, with a nice girdle of tangy acidity, excellent focus and grip and a very long, ripely tannic finish. Today there is just a touch of oak spice that sticks out on the backend, but this should be absorbed with no difficulty over the next couple of years and the 2005 Ducru-Beaucaillou should prove to be one of the reference point vintages for this property. 2020-2070+. **93+**.

2004 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 2004 Ducru is in a rather awkward stage at age five, as it has begun to shut down for a bit of hibernation and is currently a rather tough customer on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a very black fruity mix of cassis, tobacco leaf, soil tones, a bit of espresso, herbs and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite tight, with a firm structure, good, but not great depth at the core and a bit of a green edge currently to the tannins on the long finish. There is a certain tariness to the backend of this wine that most likely hails from the one hundred percent new wood, and I worry that the slightly more *tendre* style of the '04 vintage will have a bit more of a challenge carrying this much new lumber to the finish line. 2020-2045+? **88+**.

2003 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

For the life of me I cannot understand other commentators who rate the 2003 vintage as a great vintage for Bordeaux, as I have never found a single wine from this year that I would term “great”. The 2003 Ducru is one of the more successful examples of '03 I have tasted, as it steers clear of overt overripeness, but it is certainly more developed than other vintages from this decade. The nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, tobacco, herb tones and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with good freshness on the attack, a good core of fruit, a decidedly low acid personality and just a touch of heat on the finish that belies its origins in this heady vintage. The tannins on the finish are not entirely ripe, and hence there is a certain “greenness” to their texture that does not really augur well for the long-term health of this wine, so I would be inclined to drink it up over the relative near-term. It still needs at least a few years to fully blossom, but I would not be making plans for drinking the 2003 Ducru-Beaucaillou at age forty! Still, it is not a bad effort for this challenging year. 2013-2030+? **89**.

2000 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 2000 vintage in Bordeaux is generally in a pretty sullen point of its evolution at the moment, but the 2000 Ducru-Beaucaillou was actually still showing a lot of charm and polish to its powerful veneer at our vertical tasting in Saarbrücken in late March. The bouquet is deep, ripe and classically pure in the Ducru style, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, gravelly soil tones, tobacco leaf, a touch of dried herbs and still plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core,

with modest acids, firm, ripe tannins, fine focus and nascent complexity and a very long, youthful and tannic finish that still needs a few more years to fully integrate its new wood component. This is still at least a decade away from blossoming and the real fireworks with this excellent vintage of Ducru will not start for another twenty years! A fine example. 2022-2075+. **94.**

1998 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

Despite the fact that the 1998 vintage is much more heralded in the Right Bank than on the Left, the 1998 Ducru has turned out quite well indeed. The very stylish nose offers up a fine mélange of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a complex base of gravel, fresh herb tones, still a bit of youthful tobacco leaf and smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is surprisingly deep and full-bodied, with fine purity on the attack, blossoming complexity, a quite solid core and a long, focused and still fairly tannic finish. This still needs several more years of bottle age to come into its own, but it is a very well-made wine and a sleeper at Ducru in the last decade or so of vintages. 2018-2040+. **89+.**

1996 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1996 Ducru-Beaucaillou is just beginning to stir from its closed adolescence and is showing very good promise for its eventual period of peak drinkability, but that is still more than a decade away. The nose is starting to develop some secondary layers of complexity in its mélange of cassis, dark berries, currant leaf, cigar smoke, a touch of Ducru's nutskin, complex soil tones, herbs and a nice framing of cedary, spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite black-fruity in personality, with an excellent signature of soil, a very tobaccoey personality, fine-grained, but quite substantial tannins, lovely acidity and a very long, soil-driven and classic finish. This is a superb vintage of Ducru that should really get interesting to drink around its thirtieth birthday and prove to be very, very long-lived. Impressive juice. 2025-2100. **93+.**

1995 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

I love the style and shape of the very classic 1995 Ducru, which is the most promising vintages here in the decade of the 1990s. The utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a refined and timeless mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, fresh herbs, tons of gravelly soil tones, a discreet base of cedary new wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the attack, with a rock-solid core of sweet black fruit, blossoming layers of complexity, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, primary and still fairly tannic finish. It remains young days for the 1995 Ducru-Beaucaillou, but this will be a brilliant wine in the fullness of time. 2020-2075. **94+.**

1990 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1990 Ducru was one of the last vintages here to be affected by the TCA contamination in the cellars, and it shows as bit of shortness and a pinched aspect on the backend from this affliction. That said, the wine is still not a bad drink by any stretch of the imagination, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of gravel and perhaps, just a whisper of mustiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely complex, with a fine sense of transparency on the attack, modest tannins and good focus and balance. The finish just tails off, which is more of a sign of the TCA issues here than the very, very faint touch of mustiness on the nose. I would still be happy to drink this bottle (it was in fact one of the favorites amongst the

non-professionals at our vertical- do not doubt to the lovely resolution of the 1990), but it is clearly not all that it might have been. 2015-2045. **87.**

1988 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1988 Ducru is also from the years when the cellar was contaminated with TCA, and like the 1990 and the 1986 on display at our tasting in Saarbrücken, this very slight touch of taint was most evident by a slightly clipped aspect to the fruit on the finish of the wine. The nose on the 1988 is even more pure than on the 1990, offering up a very classic aromatic mélange of sweet cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, still a touch of youthful bell pepper, gravel and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with lovely complexity, fine mid-palate depth and lovely focus. The finish is just cut short a bit by the slight taint here, which pinches the backend fruit and leaves the moderate tannins on the finish slightly uncovered. I would assume that the wine will keep this type of balance for its entire life, but like the 1990, the 1988 Ducru is really not a bad drink. 2016-2040? **87+.**

1986 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1986 Ducru is also slightly affected on the backend from the cellar problems at the time at the estate, which is a shame, as this would have been one of the legendary vintages of Ducru-Beaucaillou of the second half of the twentieth century if this were not the case. The bouquet is completely untouched by the TCA issue, offering up a deep and vibrant blend of cassis and sweet, dark berry fruit, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of gravel, tobacco leaf and a gentle base of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with stunning focus and nascent complexity. This wine is a very powerful and very precise vintage of Ducru, but the cellar issue again pinched the fruit component on the backend a bit, leaving the wine a bit short and fairly chewy. Given the firm and tangy nature of the 1986s, one might think that this fruit compression would leave the wine a bit brutally tannic on the finish, but this is in fact not the case, as this is an impeccably balanced and refined wine that is just a bit short from the cellars issues of this short epoch at Ducru. 2018-2050. **87.**

1985 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

This is one of the vintages that hails from the era at the estate where there was purportedly a TCA or bacterial problem in the cellars, and this particular bottle was not showing particularly well when I tasted it in February of 2010. The nose is oddly earthy and mushroomy, offering up notes of dark berry fruit, herbal tones, road tar and a distinct overtone of mustiness. The wine is deep, full and modestly youthful on the palate, but with the *herbacité* and mustiness having the upper hand and making the wine undrinkable. ???

1983 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

1983 is certainly not the ripest vintage of the decade of the 1980s at Ducru, and some tasters may find the tobacco leaf, slight touch of bell pepper that this wine is likely to always possess to be less to their liking than the more black cherry-like fruit tones found in the riper vintages at the estate. But, I was very struck by the beautiful complexity and breed of this wine and have no issues with its aromatic and flavor profile, which strikes me as likely to evolve very much along the lines of the lovely 1978 at this property. The beautifully complex nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of sweet cassis, Cuban cigars, incipient notes of chipotle peppers, a nice dollop of red cherries, orange peel, cumin, gravel and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely

flavored, with moderate ripeness, but lovely complexity. The finish is very long and focused, with modest tannins and a long, pure and classy finish. If even the very slightest touch of cabernet sauvignon's natural inclination towards gentle herbaceousness is off-putting to you, then the 1983 Ducru-Beaucaillou is likely to not be as enjoyable to your palate as I found the wine to be, but if your tolerance is not hyper-sensitive to this very classic side of the cabernet grape, then this wine will prove to be delightful. I happen to like it very, very much. It is still a few years away from reaching its absolute apogee and should keep very nicely for many decades. 2016-2050. **90+.**

1981 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1981 Ducru-Beaucaillou is an absolutely stunning bottle of wine and has to be one of the candidates for wine of the vintage. I am deeply indebted to a good friend for recently re-introducing me to the '81 Ducru, which I have had the good fortune to find languishing in the market and to add into my cellar. The superb bouquet is deep, complex and still quite youthful, as it offers up a refined mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs, a gentle framing of cedar and a blossoming topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and rock solid at the core, with superb complexity, modest tannins and absolutely great length and grip on the deep and intensely flavored finish. This is an old school vintage of Ducru-Beaucaillou of outstanding breed and nascent complexity. A true sleeper from the decade of the 1980s, the '81 Ducru is still climbing in quality! 2015-2040+. **93.**

1978 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1978 Ducru is one of the unequivocal successes from this vintage. The wine shows just a bit of the overt bell pepper tones of this year, which was "saved" by a brilliant Indian Summer that brought late-arriving ripeness to the grapes in what had looked for a long time like a vintage that was not going to be successful. I have drunk more than a case of the '78 Ducru over the years and have enjoyed each and every bottle, but have noticed that the slightly "weedy" nature of the vintage has increased a bit in the last few years. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a tertiary blend of cassis, bell pepper, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a touch of coffee, fresh herb tones, cigar smoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, lovely complexity, melting tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully focused finish. The wine these days has a "cooler vintage" profile that I very much enjoy, as the slight weediness from the not quite ideal physiological ripeness of the '78 vintage provides a character that is very much in keeping with claret from this and earlier epochs. Today, some palates may find this lovely wine just a touch "green", but I find it absolutely enjoyable and it is a great success in the context of the vintage. 2009-2030+. **90.**

1977 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

I could not believe how good the 1977 Ducru-Beaucaillou was drinking at our vertical in Saarbrücken. The beautifully evolved and *à point* nose offers up scents of cherries, chipotle peppers, cigar wrapper, a touch of nutskin, gravel and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very complex and impressively focused, with moderate depth, lovely balance and excellent length and grip on the pure and very classy finish. The wine has been fully mature for decades, but still seems to have easily another ten to twelve years of fine drinking in it. I cannot believe that this is a 1977 claret! 2012-2022+. **88.**

1971 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1971 Ducru, which was one of the very first “mature” vintages of this fine property that I ever had the pleasure to taste (going way back to my early days in the wine trade back in the mid-1980s) has aged just brilliantly, and like so many of its top counterparts from this wildly underrated vintage, seems to have put on mid-palate weight in the last decade and is absolutely stunning to drink today. The bouquet is deep, complex and absolutely beautiful as it closes in on its fortieth birthday, offering up a superb mélange of cherries, cassis, a touch of nutskin, tobacco smoke, gravelly soil tones and a classic Ducru topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely at its apogee, with stunning complexity, perfect focus and balance, an impressive core, melting tannins and exceptional length and grip on the focused and classy finish. For drinking today, the 1971 Ducru is an absolute beauty! 2010-20235. **94.**

1970 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

I have been a big fan of the 1970 Ducru-Beaucaillou, but in the past I have always found it just a half step behind the superb 1966. However, the most recent tasting seemed to indicate that the wine is showing more structural integrity and greater depth than it did for the last decade and a half, and it may well be that the wine has simply remained a bit young and I have been underestimating it in the past. This most recent bottle offers up a stunning and still youthful nose of cassis, black cherries, a touch of red currant, cigar smoke, nutskins, hints of blood orange, gravel, fresh herbs and a touch of tobacco ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the attack, with excellent mid-palate depth, moderate tannins, very good acidity and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and complex finish. Just a beautiful vintage for Ducru. 2012-2040+. **94+.**

1967 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1967 Ducru-Beaucaillou is still a very pretty and complete middleweight, without a great deal of depth, but with impressive complexity and still a completely intact structure. The complex and mature nose offers up scents of red cherries, nutskins, cigar smoke, lovely soil tones, summer truffles, herb tones, a bit of heather and a whisper of remaining cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and still very well-balanced, with modest depth offset by a nice intensity of flavor. The finish is long, soft and bright, with no remaining tannins, but fine focus and still quite impressive complexity and grip. This was never a blockbuster vintage of Ducru, but it has held admirably and is a tasty glass of wine at age forty-five- not too bad for a lightweight vintage that was thought to be drinking right from release! 2012-2020+? **87.**

1966 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

While the 1961 Ducru-Beaucaillou is rightfully famous for its profound quality, the 1966 is not very far off the pace of the stunning 1961 and is not very well-known at all. This most recent bottle of the '66 Ducru was absolutely monumental, soaring from the glass in a deep and vigorous blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar box, complex, gravelly soil tones, a touch of eucalyptus, espresso and a classy topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, a “cool fruit” profile, melting tannins and stunning length and grip on the very, very complex and nicely tangy finish. Just a profound bottle of claret, the 1966 Ducru vies with Latour and Palmer as the Médoc of the vintage in this woefully underrated year. 2008-2040+. **96.**

1962 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The '62 Ducru is a classic example of a top Médoc in this vintage, as it offers up a complex and classy perfume, coupled to lovely intensity of flavor in its medium-bodied format. The bouquet is deep and very complex, as it jumps from the glass in a mélange of cherries, red berries, a touch of melted paraffin, woodsmoke, some nutty tones, cigar box, lovely soil tones and a spicy topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and tangy, with a juicy kernel of fruit at the core, melting tannins, and lovely length and complexity on the soil-driven finish. High class wine. 2007-2020. **91.**



1961 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

It has now been more than a decade since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 1961 vintage at Ducru, which remains the greatest vintage from this estate that I have ever tasted. The low yields of the 1961 vintage seemed to create a wine that is both more elegant than most vintages of this era at Ducru-Beaucaillou, and more intensely flavored as well. It is a very, very special wine and one of the greatest wines produced in the Médoc in this legendary vintage. The bouquet the last time I tasted this wine was absolutely pure and classic Ducru, soaring from the glass in a beautifully refined and complex blend of sweet cassis and black cherry fruit, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of nuttiness, black truffles, herb tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and utterly seamless, with a great core, impeccable focus and balance, melting tannins and stunning length and grip on the very, very long and dancing finish. It is probably the supremely elegant 1961 Ducru that first earned comparisons of this estate to Lafite-Rothschild at its best. My thanks go out to an old tasting chum, Doctor Herb Werner, who was first generous enough to pull this wine from his cellar and share it with

me back when I was only starting out in the wine trade in the late 1980s. I have been fortunate enough to taste the wine several times in the ensuing years, but no bottle has been more memorable than that first taste of '61 Ducru. This is a legendary claret from the post-war years, and though it has now been more than a decade since I last tasted the wine, I have little doubt that it continues to cruise along magically and that time remains incapable of touching this wine. 1997-2040. **98.**

1959 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

While it has been many years since I last tasted the brilliant 1961 Ducru-Beaucaillou, I have been fortunate to taste the equally magical 1959 on a few occasions in the last several years. This is a stunning vintage for this great estate and the wine remains at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, singed tobacco, a touch of truffle, coffee, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure on the attack, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, lovely focus and balance, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the quintessentially elegant finish that is the essence of Ducru-Beaucaillou. This is a brilliant wine that is very close in quality to the legendary 1961. 2010-2040+. **96.**

1959 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (served from magnum)

The 1959 Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the great, post-war vintages of this great St. Julien estate, and out of magnum the wine is drinking magically. The bouquet is deep, pure and celestial, as it offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, just a hint of blood orange, walnuts, tobacco, fresh herbs and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid, with great vibrancy, simply stunning complexity, melting tannins and stunning length and grip on the superb finish. The freshness and of this wine is fairly rare in 1959 Left Bank wines these days, and it is this quality that will keep this wine drinking at its zenith for another fifty years. A great, great vintage for Ducru. 2009-2060. **96.**

1955 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

The 1955 Ducru has been fully mature for several decades, but continues to drink beautifully and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The deep, refined and beautifully complex nose offers up scents of cherries, orange zest, tobacco, a touch of nuttiness, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and just a whisper of lead pencil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and intensely flavored, with good mid-palate depth, just a whisper of remaining tannin, bright acids and very good length and grip on the fully mature finish. There is no rush to drink up the '55 Ducru, but it is at its absolute apogee right now. 2006-2025+. **91.**

1945 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

This particular bottle of '45 Ducru is quite elegant and tertiary in style, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The very complex bouquet is a smoky and utterly classic mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, a touch of nutskin, fresh herbs and a bit of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and still quite intensely flavored, with superb focus and balance, little remaining tannin, a fairly gentle structural profile, but outstanding complexity and grip on the very long, nuanced and gentlemanly finish. I suspect there are even more vigorous bottles of the '45 Ducru out there, but this was an utterly satisfying and complete glass of wine. 2011-2030+. **93.**

ANOTHER VISITATION FROM THE PURE MAGIC OF MATURE GERMAN WINES



One of Marc Chagall's stained glass masterpieces in the Cathedral in Metz- close to German wine country.

I am fortunate to have the opportunity over the course of my several visits each year to Germany to taste some truly outstanding older vintages of German wines while visiting with friends and at some of the domaines I regularly write about. I do not find space on a regular basis to include these notes in the newsletter, so once every couple of years I like to compile the notes into a feature such as this one, so as the notes can find their way into the database and so that readers will keep in mind that as good as German wine is in its youth, so many of the best bottlings really are at their best twenty or thirty or even forty years after the vintage. In my own cellar, there are no German vintages that I am drinking regularly from this millennium, as most of the wines still strike me as decidedly too young to have really reached their prime. Perhaps some of the 2002ers are starting to reach a very good stage for drinking today, but every other vintage from this last, superb decade in Germany are still decidedly too young to have reached their apogees. As the notes below will attest, there is an awful lot of inner magic in the finest German Rieslings (not to mention many of the other top grape varietals produced here) that does not come to the fore until a couple of decades of time has passed from the vintage date. Most of the notes that appear below are of course, from Rieslings drunk in the last couple of years, as I drink more Riesling than any other white wine in the world.

That said, most of the notes that appear below are due to the generosity of others, as several of my good friends in Germany have great cellars of older Rieslings.

On top of this, a few of the family estates that I visit on a regular basis are very, very generous with their older wines as well- most notably the Zilliken family in Saarburburg, the Schaefer family in Graach and Egon Müller and his gracious wife Valeska, all of whom very often dip into their cellars to open a few older bottles of interest when I make my spring visits to their estates to taste the new vintage. It is also quite rare to make a visit to Frau Thanisch at Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch in Bernkastel and not find at least several older wines prepared to finish off the tasting. Hanno Zilliken in particular is one of the most generous and gracious people I have ever met in the world of wine, with an infectious love of old wine, and my spring visit every year to the family domaine always includes a dinner afterwards with a beautiful collection of older Rieslings (both from the Zilliken estate and from other old Saar producers), as Hanno truly loves old Riesling. Without the extraordinary generosity of all these special people in Germany, this report would of course be far less interesting in its breadth of vintages and wines. Of the notes that follow, I do not always have AP numbers for wines that I ought to, as sometimes the bottles come up out of the cellars without any labels, and the AP number files are not always handy to the dinner table. I apologize for this, as it can sometimes cause a bit of confusion, but, I have little inclination to ask Egon Müller or another generous winemaker to get up from the table to go in the office and check to see what AP number a particular bottle might have carried when it had a label- besides, I am often too busy trying to guess what the blind wine is in the first place at this moment in time!

As I hope the notes below will attest, as good as German wines are a few years out from their release, the real magic in these great wines is not completely revealed until many years have passed. German Rieslings in particular are amongst the longest-lived white wines in the world, and as many other once long-lived white wines struggle with issues of premature oxidation, it is nice to know that (at least heretofore) German white wines continue to age long and gracefully. I have arranged the notes that follow by Prädikat, with the wines within each category listed chronologically. With one or two exceptions, I have tried to limit these notes to wines from the last century, but the occasional stunning bottle of 2001 has been included (even though this is a vintage that I am studiously trying to avoid opening at the present time, as it strikes me as one of the greatest vintages in recent memory and I have a very strong desire to drink most of my 2001ers in the full bloom of ripe old age, which is still decades in the future), even though it does not really belong in an article on “old” German Rieslings.

Kabinetten

2001 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Egon Müller

Egon Müller’s 2001 Scharzhofberger Kabinett AP #3 is still a very young wine by the standards of this great estate, but its excellent potential is self-evident. The deep and nascently complex nose offers up a superb blend of apple, lemon zest, sea salts, petrol, complex slate tones and a touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe, quite substantial acidity, fine grip and impressive filigree on the very, very long and

youthful finish. I would not touch a bottle of this for at least another three or four years, and I would not be surprised in the least to see my score seem unduly conservative ten or twelve years down the line. A beautiful wine in the making. 2015-2050. **94.**

1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1998 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #4 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but it is beginning to stir and show outstanding potential. The very pure and lovely nose offers up scents of delicious apples, pears, petrol, complex slate tones, wild yeasts and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, delicately styled and gentle at the core, with lovely filigree, fine focus and really impressive backend persistence on the snappy finish. I might have expected just a bit more mid-plate intensity, but this is a very pretty wine that should age well and may yet improve with further bottle age. 2015-2040+. **90+.**

1997 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett AP #14- Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken

There is a decidedly exotic component on the nose of this beautiful bottle of Rausch Kabinett, as the bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of vanilla bean, smoke, lime zest, a superb base of slate, a touch of sea salt, pineapple, orange zest and a bit of wild yeastiness still remaining in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, crisp and complex, with beautiful filigree, fine mid-palate intensity, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised and classically ethereal finish. As good as this wine is to drink today, I would still give it another five or six years and let its fully blossom from behind its superb girdle of acidity before really drinking it in earnest. Classic Kabinett! 2018-2040+. **95.**

1994 Erbach Marcobrunnen Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Schoenbrunn

The 1994 Erbach Marcobrunnen Kabinett from Schloss Schoenbrunn is quite nice and almost exotic in its fruit tones on the nose, with scents of papaya, honeysuckle, new leather, a touch of petrol and a fine base of stony soil. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied and quite complex, but also very soft, with a good core of fruit and fine length, but a slightly chunky backend. This is not bad, but I would have loved to have seen the exotic flavors and good base of soil harnessed by a serious spine of acidity. It is probably well-balanced enough to last another decade, but shouldn't a '94 Kabinett have a bit more cut and grip? 2010-2020. **86.**

1991 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett AP #12- Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

The 1991 Berncasteler Doctor Kabinett is a stunning example of this largely forgotten vintage. The superb, mature and beautifully complex nose offers up scents of yellow plum, salty soil tones, lime peel, laurel, beeswax, petrol and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, glorious complexity and a wide open, crisp and beautifully balanced finish. This is another facet of the brilliant *terroir* of the Doctor vineyard, and I would be thrilled to drink this superb Kabinett anytime in the next couple of decades. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2030+. **93.**

1991 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Kabinett AP #8

1991 is never a vintage that I think about when trying to come up with the top vintages of this fine decade in Germany, but I have had some truly outstanding surprises from this vintage in the last couple of years. The 1991 Abtsberg Kabinett AP #8 is a brilliant and absolutely classic example of Kabinett from this great *terroir*, soaring from

the glass in a blaze of white cherries, citrus zest, apple blossoms, glorious slate, fresh mint and a touch of mossiness so typical of this vineyard as it starts to mature. The wine is medium-full, deep and very intensely flavored on the palate, with beautiful complexity, great focus, ripe acids and a rapier-like finish of great filigree and mineral drive. This is a great Kabinett by any stretch of the imagination. 2012-2030. **95.**

1986 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken

The 1986 Saarburger Rausch Kabinett is a very pretty and quintessential example of Saar Kabinett, offering up a lovely mélange of lemon, tangerine, sea salts, white flowers, a lovely base of slate, beeswax and candied iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and tangy, with beautifully filigreed complexity, seamless balance and absolutely great length and grip on the dancing finish. This lovely and very classic, ethereal Kabinett is at its apogee of maturity, but should easily drink well for the next couple of decades. 2012-2030. **92.**

1981 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken

The 1981 Kabinett Trocken from the Rausch is surprisingly good- I cannot recall ever even tasting another example from the 1981 vintage in the Saar! The very pretty and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of lemon peel, smoke, sea salts, plenty of slate, petrol and beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and still very racy, with a lovely kernel of fruit at the core, fine focus and very good length and grip on the complex finish. There is just a touch of austerity here that belies its vintage, but this is an eminently satisfying drink with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2012-2030. **88.**

1976 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

I love the more powerful style of Kabinett fashioned by Weingut Egon Müller, whose low yields invariably produce a quite rock solid style of Kabinett. The 1976 version from the Scharzhofberg is a stunning wine, jumping from the glass in a complex blaze of apple, yellow plum, laurel, salty soil tones, just a whisper of new leather and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied, round on the attack and beautifully balanced, with relatively moderate framing acidity (particularly for a Saar wine, but in the context of the buxom 1976 vintage, this is quite racy), lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the classy finish. This will be a relatively short-lived vintage by the high standards of this great estate, but it will prove to be one of the long-distance runners of the 1976 vintage. 2011-2035. **94.**

Spätlesen

1999 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller

I have had very few 1999ers in the last several years and was way off base when guessing this wine blind when served at the domaine. The wine is drinking very well-though clearly still on its way up and with many decades of fine drinking still ahead of it- as it offers up a complex nose of pear, white cherries, bee pollen, blossoming notes of salty soil, mint, cress, slate and still just a touch of its youthful petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very suave on the attack, with a relatively laid back personality (particularly for Saar Spätlese!), ripe acids and lovely filigree on the long, dancing and complex finish. Just a lovely wine. 2011-2040+. **92.**

1991 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese AP #1- Weingut Zilliken (Auction)

The AP #1 Spätlese from the Rausch was the Auction bottling in this vintage and the wine is absolutely stellar. The deep, complex and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of complex herbal tones redolent of laurel and lavender, lime and other green fruit beyond my experience to describe, sea salts, bee pollen, citrus zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very intensely flavored, with lovely mid-palate depth, a cool fruit profile, zesty acids and simply outstanding length and grip on the complex and superb finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Spätlese! 2012-2035. **94.**

1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #1- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #1 from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a beautiful wine that is now fully into its plateau of maturity and drinking beautifully. The deep and absolutely lovely nose offers up scents of apple, dried peach, sea salts, a touch of moss, bee pollen and a beautiful base of slate soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and beautifully filigreed, with a round attack, lovely freshness and bounce and a very long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. This wine is not the snappiest bottle of mature Spätlese one is likely to come across, but the balance is so fine that I cannot believe that this wine will not last for many decades to come. Lovely juice and then some. 2011-2030+. **94.**

1983 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese AP #11- Weingut Egon Müller

The 1983 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese AP #11 is an utterly brilliant wine that is just now reaching its zenith of peak drinkability. The vibrant and magically complex nose offers up a stunning mélange of lime, fresh fig, bee pollen, freshly-culled mint, salty, slate soil tones, a touch of sweet corn and a topnote of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure and complex, with a great core of fruit, beautiful, bright and zesty acids, laser-like focus and superb grip on the very, very long and electric finish. Just a bottle of Scharzhofberger Spätlese approaching perfection. In my experience, 1983 is one of the finest vintages in the Saar for current drinking. 2012-2035. **95.**

1975 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken

I simply adore the style and shape of the 1975ers, so I was delighted to have a chance to taste the Ockfener Bockstein Spätlese which was the last vintage of the domaine's wines made solely by Hanno Zilliken's father. The nose is deep, complex and absolutely lovely, offering up a mature mélange of apple, lemon, plenty of the Bockstein's signature smokiness, sea salts, honeycomb and orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and still freshly youthful in profile, with lovely focus, quite good depth and a long, bouncy and complex finish. This does not quite hit the heights of the best Saarburger Rausch bottlings from this era at the estate, but it is a lovely bottle of mature Spätlese that is still at its zenith of peak drinkability. 2011-2030. **90.**

1959 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1959 Zeltinger Schlossberg Spätlese from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is getting to the end of its long ride, but is still a very interesting glass of Riesling. The gently mahogany colored wine offers up a mature and very complex blend of star anise, pickled pear, leather, a delicate touch of tea leaves, orange peel and a lovely touch of salty soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and gossamer-strung, with fine balance still hanging by a thread. The finish is long, quite dry at this point in its evolution

and still beautifully focused. There is little doubt that this was a stunning bottle of Spätlese thirty years ago, but even at age fifty it remains a very tasty glass of wine. I would drink it up in the next few years, as there is just the first touch of fraying starting to threaten the backend. A lovely, old, fragile bottle. 2009-2015+? **88.**



*The Mosel gently rolling by in Bernkastel, as seen from the grounds of Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben
Thanisch.*

Auslesen

1999 Serriger Herrenberg Riesling Auslese* AP# 5- Weingut Bert Simon

The 1999 One Star Auslese from Weingut Bert Simon is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, offering up a lovely and complex bouquet of pineapple, a touch of petrol, slate, a bit of wild yeast, apple skin and a gentle topnote of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is medium-full, soft and inviting, with nice length and focus, but a very soft acid base. This is a pretty wine that is quite well-balanced, but given its gentle acidity, I would drink it over the next ten years. 2010-2020. **88.**

1994 Braune Kupp Riesling Auslese- le Gallais

I have had some very lovely 1994 German wines in the last few years and this is a vintage that has reached a beautiful plateau of drinkability. The '94 Braune Kupp Auslese crafted by Egon Müller is really lovely, offering up a classy bouquet of apple, pear, cress, honeycomb, beeswax, a lovely underpinning of slate, a dollop of sweet corn and a very pretty, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and light on its feet, with lovely focus and purity, fine mid-palate depth and beautiful balance on the long, complex and nuanced finish. This wine is at a lovely point of its evolution, with plenty of the fresh

fruit of youth still front and center, but a blossoming base of more mature nuances that really add to the complexity and refinement of the wine in the glass. Lovely juice that is perhaps still climbing in quality. 2012-2060. **94.**

1993 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese AP #33

I am not sure how many different “regular” Abtsberg Auslesen were produced at the estate in 1993, but the AP #33 version is superb. The lovely still fairly youthful nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of white cherries, lime zest, moss, bee pollen, a beautiful base of slate and blossoming notes of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and still a touch tight, with youthful acidity, outstanding focus and balance, burgeoning complexity and a beautifully filigreed finish of impressive length and grip. This is an example of the magical *terroir* of the Abtsberg at its finest, with the best yet to come with just a bit more bottle age. 2015-2040+. **93+.**

1993 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese AP #5- Weingut Zilliken (375 ml.)

I love the 1993ers and this superb Auslese from Hanno Zilliken perfectly captures all the purity and breed inherent in the best wines of this vintage. This was the regular Auslese this year, rather than an auction bottling, which must have made it an absolutely stunning value back in the day. The utterly superb bouquet offers up a complex mix of pear, lime, lavender, honeycomb, sea salts, lilacs and a beautiful mineral bath of slate. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with a lovely, refined glaze of botrytis, tangy, ripe acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long, very complex and filigreed finish. Man, I hope my bottles of the 2001 Rausch Auslese turn out this elegant at their respective apogees. 2012-2040+. **93.**

1991 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese- Weingut Egon Müller

Herr Müller could not recall what AP number this wine earned in 1991, but it is most likely that this was the only Auslese produced in this vintage. I had not tasted any 1991ers in a long, long time, prior to this trip in March, but I was served one on back to back to back days this time around (which made guessing this wine blind a bit easier). The nose on the 1991 Scharzhofberg Auslese is really quite fine, offering up a fresh and very clean blend of lime, fresh pear, petrol, beautiful slate tones, honeycomb and a nice dollop of lilacs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows lovely mid-palate intensity, with very good balance and fine length and grip on the ever so slightly four-square finish. Good juice and a very impressive 1991er. 2012-2030+. **90.**

1990 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #21- Weingut J. J. Prüm (Auction)

The 1990 auction bottling of Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from Dr. Manfred Prüm is a beautiful wine that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity. The deep, complex and really lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, honeycomb, gentle notes of laurel, a nascent touch of sea salts, a dollop of petrol and a woody touch of heather. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, complex and perfectly balanced, with excellent focus and grip. The structure here is a tad on the gentle side, which probably indicates that this wine will be best over the next decade or so, but with a wine this cunningly balanced, it may cruise along far past that point, despite its relatively gentle girdle of acidity. A beautifully filigreed Auslese. 2009-2030+? **93.**

1990 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #5- Weingut Willi Schaefer

I had not tasted this wine since I sold it in the 1992, when, like a fool, I did not buy any for my own cellar. Happily, a good friend had better sense than I did back in

those days and generously pulled this from her cellar while I was visiting down in Washington, DC. This is a beautiful wine that has just starting to arrive at its apogee, as it offers up a still almost youthful blend of fresh apricot, orange peel, petrol, honeycomb, clover and a touch of peach pit. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe, but not particularly botrytized, with ripe, but fairly gentle acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, impeccably balanced and complex finish. This is a lovely moment for drinking this wine, but it may get even more interesting with a bit more bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2011-2030+. **93.**

1990 Josephshöfer Riesling Auslese- von Kesselstaat (650th Anniversary Bottling)

The 1990 Josephshöfer Auslese from Weingut von Kesselstaat is a very lovely wine that is long on filigree and elegant styling on both the nose and palate. The complex and mature bouquet offers up a fine mélange of apple, peach, still a nice touch of wild yeasts, complex slate tones, petrol and a dollop of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and suave on the attack, with lovely purity and complexity, good mid-palate intensity and lovely length and grip on the bright and classy finish. Weingut von Kesselstaat never makes powerful wines, but in their understated and refined style, they are really quite impressive. 2011-2030+. **92.**

1989 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Fuder #93

When the wines were young, I had a strong preference for the 1989ers over the 1988 vintage that had preceded it in Germany, but a couple of decades on, I am not really sure of which of these two fine years I prefer. The 1989ers are certainly more of what we think of as a classic top vintage in Germany, with plenty of upper Prädikat wines produced and no shortage of botrytis. The '89 Abtsberg Fuder #93 Auslese is a glorious bottle that is just reaching its true apogee of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a deep and hauntingly complex mélange of lemon, salty soil tones, lilacs, white cherries, a beautiful base of grey slate, citrus peel and a nice topnote of sweet corn. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and beautifully delineated, with a great core, bright, zesty acids, the moderating sweetness of age and stunning length and grip on the dancing and superbly complex finish. A great wine by any measure. 2011-2040+. **95.**

1988 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Fuder #153

I still have a few of these left in the cellar, but not enough that I feel it appropriate to open a bottle more than once every couple of years. This most recent bottle was singing on both the nose and palate, soaring from the glass in a beautifully complex and *à point* blend of yellow plums, mossy tones, sea salts, a touch of fresh mint, a beautiful base of slate, just a whisper of remaining petrol, lime zest and laurel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very complex, with lovely acids, great purity and focus, moderate remaining sweetness and great length and grip on the filigreed finish. This was from very young, three year-old vines at the time, which produced a legendary wine from their "third leaf" and first vintage. 2012-2030+. **95.**

1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Halbtrocken- Weingut Zilliken

1983 is a brilliant year for Hanno Zilliken, which he ranks as his finest vintage up until 2005. I have enjoyed immensely several of the noble sweet wines from this vintage, but I had no idea he had made a Halbtrocken example of Auslese in 1983, from what Hanno describes as "a very light Auslese." The wine is truly beautiful, delivering a superb bouquet of green apple, lime, fresh mint, sea salts, Herrenberg-like botanicals, plenty of slate and a topnote of smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied,

complex and absolutely *à point*, with crisp acids, fine focus and outstanding length and grip. This is one of the best dry Rieslings I have tasted from Hanno Zilliken from back in the day. 2012-2035+. **92.**

1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #19- Weingut Zilliken

Until the monumental vintages of 2005 and forwards came along, Hanno Zilliken was often heard to state that 1983 was the finest overall vintage of his career. It is easy to appreciate his fondness for this vintage, as every '83 was extremely strong in the Saar and every Zilliken wine from this year I have tasted has been a thing of transcendental beauty. The '83 Gold Kap AP #19 is stunning, offering up a bottomless and magically pure bouquet of lavender, pineapple, apple, gorgeous slate-based minerality, sweet corn, sea salts, iris blossoms and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with laser-like focus, stunning complexity, ripe, seamless and still plenty tangy acidity and stunning length and grip on the dancing finish. Just a brilliant wine at its peak. 2011-2060. **97.**

1976 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Trocken- Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken

Until recent times, I had never thought of Weingut Geltz-Zilliken as a great source for Trocken wines, as intuitively, I have always assumed that the climactic conditions from this era in the Saar vastly favored sweet wine production. However, this '76 Trocken Auslese is really a beautiful wine, offering up a deep and mature nose of lemon, beeswax, loads of salty soil nuances and a very smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a very refined palate presence, excellent mid-palate depth, bright, zesty acids and outstanding focus on the very long and effortless finish that closes with a distinct note of lime zest. A very impressive bottle of dry Riesling from Hanno Zilliken's first vintage- just imagine how well his dry wines are going to age from more recent vintages, when climate change is now favoring this style of wine quite a bit more in the Saar and Hanno has, shall we say, a wee bit more experience upon which to draw! The '76 Rausch Auslese Trocken will continue to drink well for decades to come! 2011-2040. **93.**

1975 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1975 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from J. J. Prüm is one of the most brilliant wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from this great estate. The deep and utterly ethereal nose soars from the glass in a blaze of peach, orange, a touch of custard, beautiful, salty soil tones, a gentle dollop of honey, orange zest and an exotic, mossy topnote that reminds me a bit of the Herrenberg vineyard from Maximin Grünhäuser. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very, very complex, with the lightness of step of a ballerina, beautiful focus and grip, bright acids and stunning length and grip on the absolutely *à point* finish. This is the epitome of elegance and transparent purity. 2011-2040. **98.**

1966 Scharzhofberger Riesling Feine Auslese- Weingut Egon Müller

The 1966 Scharzhofberger Riesling Feine Auslese from Weingut Egon Müller is a beautiful bottle of mature Auslese now at its drinking peak. The deep, pure and refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of yellow plum, orange peel, new leather, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a gentle touch of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and flawlessly balanced, with a lovely touch of framing acidity keeping everything bright and bouncy. The finish is very long, beautifully fresh and oh, so complex, with all of its elements still beautifully knit together into a seamless and

ethereal wine of remarkable breed. This is why many of us do not touch our bottles of Auslese in the cellar until they have seen several decades of bottle age, as there is so much more to be found in a great old bottle of properly-aged Auslese than there is in the admittedly, luxuriant pleasures to be had drinking a younger one. Though, of course, Egon Müller would say, with a twinkle in his eye, that the 1966 Scharzhofberger Riesling Feine Auslese is not an old wine! Pure beauty. 2012-2030+. **93.**

1959 Saar Riesling “Naturwein”- Unknown Producer

This beautiful old gem was shared by Hanno Zilliken, who had purchased a collection of older Riesling bottles several years back, where a few of the bottles no longer had much of their labels legible- as was the case with this bottle. I have listed this wine in the Auslesen section, but this too, is simply speculation on my part, as there was virtually no label left on the bottle and nothing branded on the cork. In any event, this true mystery wine was lovely, offering up a deep, old and beautiful nose of dried apricots, oranges, sherry-like nutty tones, a whisper of vanilla custard, soil and an overtly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is very deep, medium-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with good acids, very good focus and a very long, complex and still quite extant finish. Lovely old Riesling with plenty of life still ahead of it- wish I had some clue what the wine actually was! 2011-2035. **92.**

1959 Trittenheimer Apotheke Feinste Auslese- Freidrich Wilhelm Gymnasium

This lovely old Feinste Auslese from Freidrich Wilhelm Gymnasium was shared by Hanno Zilliken from his lovely collection of old Rieslings. The wine is a beautiful, bright amber color and offers up a vibrant and beautifully complex nose of apricot, honeyed oranges, white cherries, barely sugar, beautiful soil tones, sweet almond notes, orange rind and a nice touch of old, soft leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite broad-shouldered in style, with excellent acidity for the vintage, lovely mid-palate depth and truly lovely length and grip on the very complex finish. This is just a beautiful bottle of old Auslese that shows absolutely no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2011-2035. **93.**

Goldkapsel and Lange Goldkapsel Auslesen

1994 Wiltinger Braune Kupp Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Le Gallais

The 1994 Braune Kupp Gold Kap is a beautifully fresh and refined wine that is drinking splendidly well at age eighteen. The deep and refined bouquet offers up scents of lime, fresh mint, honeycomb, slate, petrol, orange zest and a floral topnote redolent of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully light on its feet, with a great core of fruit, very crisp acidity and superb balance on the long, complex and superbly focused finish. This is still a baby by the long-distance running standards of Egon Müller’s wines, but it is drinking very well indeed and it is no crime to be pulling corks on this lovely wine today. 2012-2040. **93.**

1983 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Zilliken

The 1983 Saarburger Rausch Gold Kap is a beautiful wine at its apogee. The deep and very complex nose delivers a superb blend of apple, pineapple, salty soil tones, a touch of fresh mint and a bit of mature, herbal complexity. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and dancing, with a lovely core, very refined, expansive flavors, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. Just a lovely wine. 2011-2035+. **94+.**



The old cellars at Weingut Forstmeister Geltz-Zilliken- lots of great old Rieslings here!

1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #23- Weingut J. J. Prüm

I do not drink as many J. J. Prüm wines as I would like and I have yet to have the pleasure to visit and taste at the estate. However, this should not be misconstrued as a lack of respect for the work of Docteur Manfred Prüm or the beautiful wines that the family estate has turned out for as long as I have known of them. The 1971 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Gold Kap Auslese AP #23 is an absolutely profound bottle of Riesling at its pinnacle of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a glorious mélange of peach, apple, salty soil tones, orange zest, gentle notes of petrol, custard and a floral topnote redolent of almond blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and dancing, with great focus and filigree, bright, zesty acids, impeccable balance and stunning length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. The sweetness level here after forty years or bottle age has dropped down to an Auslese level. This is a brilliant, brilliant wine. 2011-2040. **96.**

Dessert Wines

1999 Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Egon Müller (375 ml.)

The 1999 Scharzhofberger TBA is a lovely example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of ripe pears, delicious apples, tangerine, a beautiful base of slate, citrus blossoms, new leather and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and very pure on the attack, with lovely depth, a most impressive “dancing”

personality, crisp acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long finish. By the very heady standards of Egon Müller, this wine falls into the “very good, but not great” category of his TBAs, but it is still a very lovely glass of wine. 2011-2050. **94.**

1995 Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Egon Müller

The 1995 TBA from Egon Müller is a much more obviously botrytized wine than the more idiosyncratic 1999 version, with a lovely glaze of noble rot and superb depth on both the nose and palate. The excellent nose delivers a complex mélange of orange, apricot, honey, new leather, a lovely, exotic touch of laurel and caramelized orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully framed by racy acidity, with laser-like focus, outstanding complexity and superb length and grip on the electric and magical finish. Just a glorious and utterly classic TBA from Egon Müller. 2011-2035+. **96.**

1991 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Eiswein-Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (375 ml.)

The 1991 Doctor Eiswein from Dr. Thanisch is a really lovely wine that has just reached its apogee of peak drinkability, but should cruise along beautifully for many decades to come. The deep, complex and very refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of yellow plum, orange, lavender, fresh apricot, salty soil tones, laurel and honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with lovely focus and balance, “green apple” acidity and outstanding length and grip on the sizzling finish. I love the combination here of the broad shoulders of the Doctor’s *terroir* and the zesty bounce of Eiswein. 2011-2040+. **93.**

1986 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Eiswein Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken (375 ml.)

According to Hanno Zilliken, this was a fairly light Eiswein that was harvested on Christmas morning of 1986- a pretty nice present for all of us! The color here is still fairly light gold, flecked with green tints. The bouquet is bright and electric, offering up a magical mélange of apple, mandarin orange, honey, salty slate soil tones and that classic smoky topnote of mature Rausch. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and hauntingly elegant, with a fine core of fruit, racy acids, laser-like focus and brilliant length and grip on the very, very complex and flawlessly balanced finish. Hanno Zilliken is a Zen Eiswein Master and this 1986 example is pure magic. This is a pretty strong example of why one buys wines, rather than vintage charts! 2012-2040. **96.**

1985 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Eiswein Weingut Forstmeister Zilliken (375 ml.)

In contrast to the more youthful appearing 1986 Eiswein from Hanno Zilliken, the 1985 is decidedly more amber in its light golden orientation, but is still a young and very pure wine on both the nose and palate. The brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a riper blend of clementines, apricot, *crème caramel*, beautiful minerality, tea leaves, honey and orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with great mid-palate depth and complexity, a dancer’s balance, brilliant inner tension and stunning length on the laser-like and still quite snappy finish. This is a brilliant bottle of Eiswein. 2012-2050. **97.**

1976 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Zilliken

Hanno Zilliken describes this brilliant wine, with characteristic understatement, as “a light TBA from a very good vintage.” I might be a bit more florid with my praise! The utterly stunning nose soars from the glass in a refined and vibrant mélange of apricot, cherries, laurel, honeyed oranges, stunning minerality, barley sugar, orange peel and a touch of new leather. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless, with a great core, ripe and zesty acidity, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip on the magically complex and utterly electric finish. Not too bad for a “light TBA”! Pure magic. 2011-2050. **98.**

1959 Steinberger Cabinnett Beerenauslese “Naturwein”- Staatesdomaine

The 1959 Steinberger Beerenauslese from the Staatesdomaine in Kloster Eberbach is a beautiful bottle of wine, offering up a deep and mature bouquet white cherries, fresh apricot, tea leaves, orange rind, beautiful spice tones, a touch of leather, lilacs, lavender, a lovely base of soil and an exotic topnote of saffron. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and magically complex, with lovely brightness for the vintage, outstanding focus and balance and a very, very long, pure and dancing finish of great poise and purity. Just a legendary wine from this heyday for the Staatesdomaine, the 1959 Steinberger Beerenauslese will continue to cruise along at this celestial altitude for decades to come. I cannot believe I have been fortunate enough to cross paths with this great old bottle twice in the last couple of years! 2011-2040+. **96.**

REVISITING THE 1978 PIEMONTE VINTAGE A GREAT SET OF WINES REALLY STARTS TO STIR



I first wrote about the 1978 Piemonte vintage all the way back in the first issue of View From the Cellar. Normally, I would steer clear of another report on the vintage so soon after the last installment, but when a chance came to attend a superb tasting of the vintage hosted by The Rare Wine Company which featured a great many wines that had not been covered in the first installment on the vintage, I jumped at the opportunity to run through so many 1978s that I had not had the pleasure to taste. I should apologize to Mannie Berk, owner of The Rare Wine Company, as I was supposed to co-host the event with him, but was side-swiped by so many outstanding 1978s that I had never crossed paths with previously, so that by the second flight of wines, I was busy taking my notes and was not much use making comments for the remainder of the evening! But, as I had observed back in Issue One, the 1978 vintage here in Piemonte is of great historical significance, as this was probably the last vintage before the scourge of “modernism” swept through so many cellars here and changed the styles of so many wines that had previously been quite fine and traditional in style. As Mannie observed during our tasting here in New York, it was initially not a vintage that was overly praised in the wine trade, as it was thought to be decidedly inferior to the great 1971s from earlier in the decade, and perhaps not qualitatively superior to the fine 1982s that soon followed on its heels. However, time has added proper perspective to this vintage and today, there are few commentators on the beautiful wines of Barolo and Barbaresco that would not rank 1978 in the same rarefied air as 1964 and 1989.

One of the keys to the stunning quality of the 1978s here was the low yields experienced across the board in the region, which produced deep, tannic wines of great depth of color, superb concentration in the mid-palate and formidable structures that demanded long-term cellaring. In fact, most of the very best 1978s are still a tad on the young side today, despite their now being more than thirty years of age. The 1978 vintage in Piemonte was a very short crop, with yields averaging only 28.5 hectoliters per hectare, which was decidedly smaller than the fine years of the 1980s that followed, as 1982 averaged 47.4 hectoliters per hectare, 1985 was 43.3 hectoliters per hectare and even the great 1989 vintage was larger, with its average yields coming in at 32.5 hectoliters per hectare. Looking back to top vintages prior to 1978, the superb 1971s were also the product of a much larger crop as well (48.3 hectoliters per hectare), so 1978 is rather unique (along with 1989) in the last generation in being such a dramatically low yield vintage. These low yields have provided a depth, intensity and structural integrity to the top wines of the vintage that has demanded a long time in the cellar before the *crème de la crème* of the year have begun to stir, but which promises that a generation down the road, the 1978s will continue to dazzle lovers of Piemontese wines. It is a great vintage and one of historical importance, as it represented one of the high water marks for the generation of great winegrowers in the region who had really brought the wines of Barolo and Barbaresco to worldwide prominence.

At the time of the 1978 vintage, such legendary producers as Bruno Giacosa, Giovanni Conterno, Bartolo Mascarello, the Rinaldis and Mauro Mascarello were in their primes and making wines at the very peak of their powers. In addition, producers such as Angelo Gaja and Aldo Conterno were still completely wed to traditional styles of wines and were making wines of great classic beauty, and a myriad of other producers who would soon take the darker side of the road towards more spit-polished and manipulated, modern styled wines had not yet wandered away from traditionalism, so there was really an embarrassment of riches to choose from in 1978. By this point in history, single cru bottlings in both Barbaresco and Barolo were well-established in the region, as the trend started by Renato Ratti and Bruno Giacosa in the mid-1960s was now widely (though not universally, as Bartolo Mascarello still had little interest in not producing a blended wine!) embraced by estates in the region and there was a great flowering of different cuvées to sample from the producers in Piemonte. In addition, bigger firms such as Ceretto, Fontanafredda and Pio Cesare were still making very, very good wines at the end of the 1970s, so this really was a glory time for the wines of Piemonte. The Rare Wine Company tasting really highlighted the rich cornucopia of options available in terms of producers and different cru bottlings available from this great vintage, as Mannie Berk selected several wines for this tasting that I was completely unfamiliar with prior to the event, and all of them showed extremely well.

I have broken up the tasting notes section here into two parts- with the first part being wines featured at The Rare Wine Company tasting of the vintage in May. The wines in this first section have been primarily sampled at this tasting here in New York. I have augmented the notes in the first section with other 1978s that I have tasted in the last year or two, and which have not been reported on previously. This section is grouped regionally, and then each wine is listed alphabetically by producer, rather than in the

order that we tasted the wines at The Rare Wine Company event. Following this first section (or two sections, as the wines are broken out into Barbaresco and Barolo sub-sections), I have included notes on other 1978 Piemonte wines tasted and reported on in various other articles in the newsletter, following my customary practice of trying to create a reference piece that will allow readers down the road to pull up this article and find all my notes on the vintage in one location.

1978s Tasted at Del Posto or Recently Elsewhere and Not Reported On Previously:

Barbaresco:

1978 Barbaresco “Bricco Asili”- Ceretto

Ceretto was still making classically-inspired wines back in 1978, and their Bricco Asili bottling was a significant step up from the more modern fare which is currently being produced here. The wine had clearly been mature for many, many years, but was cruising along nicely on both the nose and palate. The complex and tertiary bouquet is a very pretty blend of cherries, orange peel, *sous bois*, a touch of road tar, gamebirds, sweet onion and nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with fine focus, melting tannins and very nice balance and grip on the moderately long finish. This wine does not have quite the mid-palate stuffing or length on the top wines of the vintage, but it is a delightful bottle of Barbaresco that shows off more than a little of the magical *terroir* of Asili, and I would be happy to drink it anytime over the next couple of decades. 2012-20235. **88.**

1978 Barbaresco “Riserva Speciale”- Franco-Fiorina

According to Sheldon Wasserman, Franco-Fiorina was established in 1925 and began bottling on their own with the 1947 vintage. The winery was founded by Andrea Franco, and Signore Franco’s daughter Elsa and her husband, Giuseppe Fontana took over the direction of the firm in 1952. They did not own any vineyards of their own, but purchased grapes on long-term contracts from good growers in the region and believed in blending different crus to produce a wine of superior complexity- the customary Piemonte style of their era. For their Barbaresco bottlings, they purchased fruit from the commune of Barbaresco and from the village of Treiso. The 1978 Barbaresco Riserva Speciale is a very pretty and quite classic wine, offering up a complex nose of dried cherries, woodsmoke, fresh oregano, a touch of road tar and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with lovely focus and balance, gently fading fruit tones on the backend and a long, softly tannic and tangy finish. This is a lovely wine that probably will need drinking up by the end of the decade in normal-sized formats. Good juice. 2012-2020. **89.**

1978 Barbaresco- Gaja

What I wouldn’t give to see the Gaja firm go back to making traditionally-inspired wines! The 1978 Gaja Barbaresco is a really beautiful wine that is still in its peak of maturity, offering up a deep and beautiful nose of cherries, blood orange, *sous bois*, gamebirds, fresh herbs and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with the vigor of a Barbaresco that has just reached its peak of maturity. The wine shows off fine mid-palate depth, lovely focus and balance, still a bit of old school tannin perking up the backend and outstanding length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. This is nowhere near as slick as the

modern concoctions championed by the firm today, but to my palate, it is a wine of far more beauty and integrity. 2015-2035. **91.**

1978 Barbaresco “Santa Stefano” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa

I have had the good fortune to taste the 1978 Santa Stefano Riserva from Bruno Giacosa on many occasions- despite no longer owning any bottles in my personal cellar- but, I have never had one as flawlessly mature as this most recent bottle at The Rare Wine Company tasting. To my mind, this is absolutely perfect Barbaresco and I could not imagine a finer bottle, as the wine soars from the glass in a celestial aromatic blend of cherries, orange zest, fresh herb tones, gloriously complex soil nuances, gamebirds, coffee, lavender, woodsmoke and a lovely, autumnal topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully vibrant and bouncy, with bottomless depth, laser-like focus and magical complexity and grip. The finish is stunning, with still a fair bit of ripe tannin to resolve, tangy acids and profound length and complexity. This is just perfect Barbaresco that is only now entering its plateau of peak drinkability, and this great wine will continue to dazzle for decades to come. Of the Giacosa Santa Stefanos that I have tasted, only the surreal 1964 Riserva and the young 1989 Riserva are in this same league. A humbling wine of breathtaking and magical beauty. 2012-2050. **100.**

1978 Barbaresco “Bernadotti”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

I had never previously tasted this wine, from a cru in the village of Treiso, and was very impressed with how well Mauro Mascarello had done with this purchased fruit. The nose is deep, complex and very stylish in its blend of cherries, fresh sage, woodsmoke, summer truffles, balsam boughs, a touch of tariness, new leather and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tangy, with excellent mid-palate concentration, superb soil inflection and a very long, chewy, old school finish that closes with a nice touch of resinous tones and overt flavors of summer truffles. This is another fine example of the school of “noble rusticity” and a lovely, lovely bottle of Barbaresco with years of life still ahead of it. 2010-2040. **92+.**

1978 Barbaresco- Francesco Rinaldi e Figli

I had only tasted a couple of Barbaresco bottlings from Francesco Rinaldi e Figli in the past, and never had the pleasure of crossing paths with the 1978. The wine showed very well, with a nice touch of “noble rusticity” that I have found typical in the few Barbarescos I have tasted from this fine Barolo producer. The nose on the 1978 offers up scents of dried cherries, game, fresh herb tones, charred wood, a touch of leather and a fine base of forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely autumnal, with a good core of dried fruit, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. This is a touch on the raisiny side, but otherwise, it is a lovely, complex and broad-shouldered example of mature Barbaresco. 2012-2030. **88.**

1978 Barbaresco “Crichët Pajé”- Roagna Azienda Agricola I Palieri

Crichët Pajé is the crown of the hill of the vineyard of Pajé, which lies in the center of the DO of Barbaresco, one ridge to the north of the hillside that houses Asili, Rabajà and Martinenga. Roagna is the most important vineyard owner in this small cru, which saw a section replanted in the early to mid-1960s. This bottling would have been made primarily from these younger vines, as the oldest parcels here are reserved by the Roagna family for their Riserva bottling from this cru. The nose is deep, tertiary and sweetly complex, offering up a fully mature blend of cherries, nutskins, autumnal tones, road tar, fresh herb tones and a gentle touch of mushroom. On the palate the wine is

fullish, long and classy, with good mid-palate depth, fine complexity, melting tannins and a long, tangy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Barbaresco that has been at its apogee for many years and will probably be best drunk up over the coming decade or so. Good juice. 2010-2025? **89.**

Barolo:

1978 Barolo “Rocche”- Brovia

The Brovia 1978 Rocche *normale* was tasted as part of a small Brovia vertical tasting out in Napa back in the summer of 2009 (again, another fine tasting organized by Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company). This is a really lovely wine that is almost ready for current drinking, as it is far more resolved than its Riserva counterpart, offering up a deep and classic nose of black cherries, dried spice tones, woodsmoke, licorice, a touch of dried fruit, summer truffles, tariness and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite vigorous, with a lovely core of fruit, fine complexity, ripe tannins and a very long, youthful and complete finish. This is a fine example of the vintage that is still blossoming and another few years (or a decade) in the cellar will do it no harm whatsoever. Fine juice. 2015-2050. **92+.**

1978 Barolo “Rocche” Riserva- Brovia

The 1978 Rocche Riserva from Brovia at our tasting at Del Posto in May showed very well, but not quite as pristine as a bottle served at another Rare Wine Company event a couple years previously out in Napa Valley (from the same batch of bottles), so I assume that the wine had not taken to its cross-continental travel with any great relish. I have reprinted the note here from our tasting a couple of years ago, which I had been keeping in the vaults for an upcoming feature on the wines of Brovia. The '78 Rocche Riserva is still a young and classic example of the vintage, offering up a deep and powerful nose of black cherries, road tar, spit-roasted game, fennel, *tartufi*, a superbly complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and classically broad-shouldered in the Brovia style, with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and purity and a very long, chewy and well-balanced finish. A fine, fine bottle that still could use with a few more years of cellaring to more fully blossom. 2015-2050+. **94.** 2012-2030+? **94.**

1978 Barolo- Pio Cesare

All the way back in Issue One, I had reported on the '78 Barolo Riserva from Pio Cesare, which had not acquitted itself with aplomb at our tasting at that time. Given how well the *Normale* showed at The Rare Wine Company tasting here in New York, I now wonder if our bottle of Riserva back in the day was tainted by poor storage. In any event, the straight '78 Barolo from Pio Cesare is an exceptional wine that has reached its apogee and offers up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, orange peel, dried roses, road tar, forest floor, oregano, woodsmoke and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with a great core of pure fruit, lovely transparency, excellent focus and a very long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This is a superb wine that has decades of fine drinking still ahead of it and is one of the great sleepers of the 1978 vintage! 2012-2040. **93.**



1978 Barolo “Vigna Gallaretto” Riserva Speciale- Fontanafredda

At this point in history, Fontanafredda produced eight different crus of Barolo, with their Vigna Gallaretto having first been produced in the 1974 vintage. At the time, this was still planted to young vines, as the vineyards had been replanted in 1971 (again, thanks to the superb research of Sheldon Wasserman). The vineyard lies on the communal border of Serralunga and Diano d’Alba, with a part in each village. The 1978 Vigna Gallaretto showed beautifully at our tasting, with the low yields of the vintage seemingly helping keep the vigor of the young vines in check. The nose is deep and superb, offering up a youthful mélange of red and black cherries, licorice, a gentle touch of tar, red curry and a fine base of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, still a touch of tannin to resolve, lovely focus and balance and outstanding length and grip on the classic finish. A very, very impressive bottle and another great sleeper from the vintage. 2012-2035. **92+**.

1978 Barolo “Marcenasco Conca”- Renato Ratti

I have had some absolutely glorious bottles of this wine hailing from the decade of the 1960s and early 1970s, and though this fine 1978 is a lovely wine, it is not quite in the same league with what the estate was producing a bit earlier in the career of Signore Ratti. The beautiful nose is the finest part of this very, very good wine, offering up a sappy mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of licorice, chestnuts, gamebirds, gentle tariness, oregano and charred earth. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classically tarry in personality, with a superb core of fruit, lovely focus and pretty good length on the still moderately tannic finish. There is just not quite the same

precision, length and grip on the palate here as is found in the 1978 Pio Cesare Barolo, but this is still a fine wine in its own right. 2012-20235+. **90+**.

1978 Barolo “Cannubio Brunata”- Francesco Rinaldi

This was the first vintage from Francesco Rinaldi e Figli to ever proclaim the names of the crus on the label, and it is a very fine inaugural vintage to begin the era of Cru-designated bottlings at this superb estate. I had previously reported on this wine released under the Cavalieri del Tartufo label, and I would suspect that those bottles and the wines released under the estate label are identical except for the label. This particular bottle showed beautifully, with a bit more freshness than the last example, soaring from the glass in a brilliant mélange of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, coffee grounds, hung game, charred soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, excellent focus and a very, very long, chewy, old school finish. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2045+. **94**.

1978 Barolo “le Coste di Monforte”- Antiche Casa Vinicola Scarpa

I had never previously crossed paths with any wines from Scarpa, and I was quite impressed with the quality of their '78 le Coste di Monforte. According to Sheldon Wasserman (where would any of us lovers of Piemonte wines be without his great book, Italy's Noble Red Wines?), the firm did not own any vineyards in either Barbaresco or Barolo proper (though plenty in the surrounding region) and relied on long-term contracts for purchased fruit with which to make their wines. The 1978 le Coste offers up a deep, complex and quite classic nose of cherries, pomegranate, dried roses, lovely, chalky soil tones, fresh herbs and a touch of nuttiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This is not quite as complex as the two Baroli that preceded it on our tasting, but it is a lovely wine with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2012-2030+. **89+**.

1978 Barolo- Bartolo Mascarello (served in magnum)

While I have had the '78 Barolo from Bartolo Mascarello on several occasions in the past, this was the first time I had the pleasure to try the wine from magnum. The wine out of mag remains quite youthful and still almost fruit-driven in personality, as it offers up a deep and beautiful nose of raspberries, red and black cherries, roses, licorice, orange peel, lovely soil tones, a touch of tar and a topnote of red curry. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with plenty of ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, youthful and oh, so promising finish. Out of magnum, I would not even consider opening this wine for at least another eight to ten years, as this is not yet showing any of its secondary layers of complexity. A great, great vintage for the Barolo master. 2020-2070. **95+**.

1978 Barolo “Villero”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

While I have had the '78 Monprivato from Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio on a handful of occasions, this was the first time I had tried the Mascarello Villero from this same vintage. The wine is beautiful, with a red fruity and spicy bouquet soaring from the glass in a mélange of cherries, orange peel, coffee, dried spices, a touch of road tar, fresh oregano and forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a fine core of fruit, still a fair bit of old school tannins to resolve, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and still fairly youthful finish. I

would give this still a couple more years to fully blossom, for like the '78 Monprivato, this is still a pretty young wine. 2015-2050. **92+**.

1978 Barolo Riserva “Rocche dei Manzoni”- Podere Manzoni (Valentino Migliorini)

I once thought that the '78 Barolo Riserva from Valentino Migliorini (based in Monforte d'Alba) must be one of the best-kept secrets from Piemonte in this seminal vintage. Signore Migliorini is actually best known these days for his *vina di tavola* blend of nebbiolo and barbera call Bricco Manzoni. I reported on a great bottle of this wine all the way back in Issue number One, but, I have now had the wine on six or seven subsequent occasions and been consistently disappointed with the wine. Perhaps I have just been unlucky with the recent bottles, but it seems more likely that I was simply extraordinarily lucky with the first one and most folks are going to experience the more disappointing wines I have had in subsequent tastings of the '78. This most recent bottle was consistent in its tired personality, offering up a slightly oxidative nose of cherries, gamebirds, fennel seed, *sous bois*, onion skin and smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and tired, with moderate length and grip and a bit of backend oxidation poking through. As I have only had one great bottle of this wine in the last six years, and several like this, I have to assume that this is a more accurate note on the current state of the wine. 2012-2015. **84**.

1978s Tasted Over the Last Few Years and Reported Upon in Previous Issues:

Barbaresco:

1978 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 1978 Produttori Asili is a great bottle of Barbaresco that is blossoming beautifully, but will undoubtedly continue to improve with further bottle age. The simply great nose is a superb mélange of black cherries, intense notes of porcini, road tar, a touch of onion skin, kaleidoscopic soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of nutskins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with beautiful focus and balance, superb mid-palate concentration and great elegance and transparency on the meltingly tannic, tangy and laser-like finish. A beautiful bottle of Barbaresco, the 1978 Asili has reached its apogee, but will continue to add more autumnal spice tones on both the nose and palate as it moves further along its evolutionary arc. A great bottle of Barbaresco. 2008-2030+. **95**.

1978 Barbaresco- Guasti, Clemente & Figli

This is a producer that I have never encountered previously, and the wine really showed quite well. There is less polish to the winemaking style here than found in the Produttori Montestefano paired with it, and though the Guasti showed more roundness and sweetness of fruit, it was a much less structured and complex wine. The nose delivers a lovely blend of jammy raspberry fruit, tar, damp earth and grilled game notes. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, round and generous, with a sweet core of fruit, pretty low acids for nebbiolo, and just a hint of oxidation beginning to creep in on the finish. This wine faded a bit with air, indicating that it should be drunk up over the near-term. Not a great bottle, but a very good, old-fashioned Barbaresco that still is delivering pleasure. 2005-2008. **87**.

1978 Barbaresco “Santa Stefano”- Bruno Giacosa (white label)

Bruno Giacosa’s Santa Stefano is perhaps the most famous and highly sought after bottling of Barbaresco. Only the cru bottlings of Angelo Gaja have shared the same renown, and as the Gaja style has become more and more modern, his crus are no longer spoken of in the same reverential tone as Bruno Giacosa’s. Giacosa, whose cellars are in the northern Barbaresco town of Nieve, and whose name is intimately associated with that of Barbaresco, actually owns no vines in the commune. He has bought grapes from the Santa Stefano vineyard, which is wholly owned by the Castello di Nieve, for decades, from which he makes both a regular (or white label) bottling and a Riserva (or red label) bottling depending on the quality of the respective vintage. This was the first opportunity I have had to taste the ’78 “White Label” Santa Stefano from Giacosa, and not surprisingly, the wine is magical. It is much more ready to drink than the still brooding “Red Label” Riserva (which I have not had the pleasure to taste in a few years now), offering up a classic nose of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, gamebirds, tarry tones, a bit of toasted nut, *sous bois*, and Clos Vougeot-like herb tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and multi-layered, with wave upon wave of fruit wrapped brilliantly in soil tones, with sound acids, ripe tannins that are beginning to fade away, and great length and grip on the long, magnificent finish. This is a brilliant wine that may travel a bit under the radar at auction, as most Giacosa collectors focus on the Riserva bottlings. Glorious wine. 2005-2020+. **94.**

1978 Barbaresco- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 1978 “straight” Barbaresco from the Produttori is a lovely bottle that has clearly been fully mature for many years, but continues to drink very nicely indeed. I am sure at this point in its evolution it has begun to very gently ease down the far side of its plateau of maturity and was probably better a decade ago, but it continues to drink beautifully and is in no danger of fading any time soon. The nose is now quite sweet and perfumed, as it offers up scents of candied black cherries, blackberries, chocolate, tar, dried violets and a topnote of delicate smoky tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and sweet at the core, with lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. What is missed here is the unique signature of *terroir* found in the various cru bottlings, but otherwise this is a lovely bottle with plenty of life in it still. 2008-2020. **88.**

1978 Barbaresco “Moccagatta” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 1978 Moccagatta from the Produttori is probably the most fruit-driven of all of the cru bottlings in this vintage, but it shares the lovely complexity and beautiful structural integrity of the more soil-specific crus from this great cooperative in this superb vintage. The nose is a fine blend of dark berries, black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of fennel seed, *sous bois*, tar and a topnote of bonfires (does not sound particularly fruit-driven, does it!). On the palate the wine is fullish, plush, complex and completely mature, with good mid-palate depth, no rough edges, sound acids and lovely length and focus on the velvety and poised finish. A very classy bottle that should continue to drink beautifully for decades to come. 2008-2030. **91+.**



Barolo aging gracefully in the large botti in the cellars of Francesco Rinaldi e Figli.

1978 Barbaresco “Montefico” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The Montefico is very often one of my favorite crus from the Produttori (after the obvious choices of the Asili and the Rabajà), and the 1978 is quite simply a beautiful wine at its apogee. The deep and gorgeous nose offers up a wonderful mélange of blackberries, black cherries, road tar, leather, forest floor, gentle notes of cigar smoke, and a lovely topnote of truffles. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and utterly suave, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful complexity, bright zesty acids and superb transparency on the long, pure and focused finish. The elegance of this cru is beautifully synthesized with the depth and intensity of flavor of the 1978 vintage, making this by a small margin the most stunning vintage of the Produttori’s Montefico that I have had the pleasure to taste. Like all of the ‘78s here, this wine is fully mature, but with the potential to age gracefully for many, many more years to come. 2009-2035+. **93.**

1978 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 1978 Montestefano from the Produttori is also still a tad on the young side, but it is inherently a bit more powerfully built than the Montefico, and I am not sure it will ever be quite able to match that wine for breed and refinement- even when it finally reaches its apogee. The bouquet on the Montestefano ’78 is deep and still a bit closed, as it offers up scents of dark berries, road tar, fennel, some game tones, a great base of soil and a bit of shoe polish in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still fairly young, with a fair bit of ripe tannin still to resolve, a firm core of fruit, and fine length and grip on the tarry finish. This has fine potential, but it needs to be given a few more years of cellaring to fully uncoil. 2012-2040. **92+.**

1978 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

Ovello is always one of the more forward and seductive crus from the Produttori, and the 1978 is now at a very plush and enjoyable stage of its evolution. In contrast to the more backward 1982, the 1978 Ovello is now fully mature and wide open and drinking beautifully. The first class bouquet is a fine mélange of black cherries, road tar, dark berries, herb tones, soil, espresso, smoke and autumnal notes of damp leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite silky, with a fine core of sweet, resolved fruit, fine focus and complexity and impressive length and grip on the *à point* finish. This is a delicious bottle of wine at its apogee, but which will continue to drink well for at least another fifteen to twenty years. 2008-2025+. **91+**.

1978 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

1978 was a typically late harvest by traditional Piemonte standards of the time, with the grapes brought in at the end of October. While many of the Baroli from '78 that I have tasted recently still would do well with a few more years cellaring, the '78 Produttori wines are fully mature and just lovely. The nose on the Pora is beautiful and at its peak, as it offers up a complex blend of red and black cherries, anise, underbrush, a touch of espresso, herb tones and gentle notes of game. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still shows a wisp of tannin, with fine mid-palate depth, great acidity, fine focus and great grip on the long, pure and classy finish. A lovely bottle of Pora with decades of life still in it. 2009-2035+. **91**.

1978 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva - Produttori di Barbaresco

The 1978 Rabajà from the Produttori is still a tad on the young side and if one wishes to drink this great vintage at the same peak of maturity that the 1979 has currently reached, then a few more years of patience will be required. This is not to say that this stunning wine is not already superb on both the nose and palate, but it has not quite resolved all of its elements into the same seamless whole of the 1979. The nose is deep, pure and utterly classic, soaring from the glass in a superb mélange of red and black cherries, a bit of beef stock, gamebirds, autumnal soil tones, curry and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely rock solid at the core, with bright acids, impeccable focus and balance, superb complexity and great grip on the very long and still modestly tannic finish. A great wine and one of the legendary vintages of Rabajà from the Produttori. 2014-2050. **96**.

1978 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 1978 Rio Sordo is a lovely example of the vintage, but the wine does not possess quite the same level of elegance and refinement as several of the other '78 Produttori wines. The nose is deep, complex and quite ripe, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, camphor, a touch of petroleum jelly (quite reminiscent of old school California cabernet), tar, summer truffle, herb tones and anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerful and just a touch fiery, with a bit of old-fashioned tannin still remaining, but good length and grip on complex finish. There is just a hint of rusticity here in a nice way that would dovetail well with roasted meats. 2009-2025. **90**.

Barolo:

1978 Barolo “Bricco Boschis” Riserva- Cavallotto

I am not sure if I prefer the 1979 Bricco Boschis Riserva to the 1978 from Cavallotto, but it may well simply mean that the 1979 is closer to its apogee of maturity. There is a slightly dense aspect today to the 1978 Cavallotto Riserva that may simply indicate that the wine needs more bottle age. In any event, the bouquet on the '78 Bricco Boschis Riserva offers up a deep and still quite youthful mélange of red and black cherries, road tar, herb tones, spit-roasted game and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and rock solid at the core, with the slightly dense character blurring the palate impression slightly. But the finish is certainly quite long, still quite tannic and shows good framing acidity and soil detail on the close. I like this wine quite well, and given the fact that it is still quite a young example of the '78 vintage and that it had to close a rather remarkable dinner of much older Baroli, my score may be a tad on the conservative side. 2008-2030+. **90+?**

1978 Barolo “Vigna Cicala”- Aldo Conterno

The Cicala is a subplot of Bussia Soprana, and it is all owned by Aldo Conterno (as is the case with one of his other crus, Romarisco; according to Sheldon Wasserman he shares his third cru, Colonello with two other growers). Aldo Conterno only bottles it in top vintages, and he only takes fruit from vines in the vineyard that are at least fifteen years of age for this bottling. The domaine did produce its top of the line Riserva in 1978 as well, the Gran Bussia, which is a selection rather than hailing from a specific cru in Bussia Soprana. The 1978 Cicala is outstanding and in full bloom at age twenty-seven, soaring from the glass in a mélange of red and black cherries, roasted gamebirds, forest floor, dried roses, and tarry tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and exquisitely balanced, with a beautiful core of fruit, melting tannins, well-integrated acidity, and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is just a beautiful bottle of Barolo for drinking over the next ten to fifteen years. 2005-2015+. **93.**

1978 Barolo “Monfortino” Riserva Speciale - Giacomo Conterno

The 1978 Monfortino is the first vintage produced entirely by the Conternos from the Cascina Francia vineyard in Serralunga. I have had the pleasure to taste this wine a handful of times previously, but this was the first time where we gave the wine a solid four hours decanting time prior to pouring. The result was the finest expression of the '78 Monfortino that I have had the pleasure to taste, as the wine simply opened up completely, while never losing any of its depth, power or purity. Not surprisingly, the 1978 Monfortino is a monumental bottle of Barolo, and a very strong candidate for wine of the vintage. The magical bouquet is deep, profound and wide open with four hour's air, offering up a beautiful blend of cassis, black cherries, black licorice, roses, tobacco, herbs, smoke and earth. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and absolutely stunning, with perfect balance, First Growth focus and breed, an impenetrable core of candied fruit, well-integrated tannins and acids, and a monumentally long and complex finish. This is as good as Barolo gets, and the scary thing is that it may even get better with further bottle age. 2005-2040+. **98+.**

1978 Barolo “Collina Rionda” Riserva - Bruno Giacosa

The 1978 Collina Rionda Riserva is a monumental bottle of wine. The previous bottle of this wine I had tasted a few years back was still fairly tight, as it was only decanted for about thirty minutes before we drank it. With this particular bottle we gave it

four hours in decanter prior to serving, which in retrospect might have been just a tad longer than necessary. The '78 Collina Rionda Riserva is a work of art in the bottle, as the wine soars from the glass in a glorious mélange of red cherries, orange zest, roasted nuts, herb tones, forest floor, fennel, woodsmoke and a whirl of minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and kaleidoscopically complex, with perfect balance, a rock solid core of fruit, laser-like focus, and a very, very long and elegant finish. The tannins here are falling away, but there remains plenty of acidity to carry this wine for decades to come. Simply a profound wine. 2005-2035. **98.**

1978 Barolo “Brunate”- Marcarini

I am not sure what I have been doing right in the last few years, but I have now crossed paths with the stunning 1978 Marcarini Brunate on more than half a dozen occasions. This is a great Barolo that is just now reaching its apogee of maturity and offering up absolutely scintillating drinking. The deep, complex and classic nose offers up a beautiful blend of cherries, orange peel, *sous bois*, a touch of road tar, fresh hazelnuts, licorice, a gloriously complex base of soil, a bit of chocolate and an exotic gentle topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, flawless balance, still a bit of tannin and simply outstanding length and grip on the tangy, complex and wonderfully focused finish. Just a classic in the making, the 1978 Brunate is a joy to drink now- but give it a few hours in decanter, as it is still a fairly young wine! 2012-2040+. **95.**

1978 Barolo “Monprivato”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio

The 1978 Monprivato is still a fairly young wine, and it certainly has not reached the same point in its evolution as the 1985 and 1982. The nose is deep, youthfully tarry and still somewhat reticent, as it offers up notes of vibrant black cherries, a bit of charred wood, herb tones, game, smoke, tarry tones and a complex base of damp soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite tarry today, with a rock solid core of fruit, still a fair bit of tannin to resolve, sound acids, fine focus and a long, soil-driven and still fairly closed finish. Perhaps if the '78 Monprivato was decanted for several hours it would show more detail than it did at our tasting, but we had to have given this wine at least an hour in decanter, and it still showed little signs of blossoming. It will be an excellent wine in the fullness of time, and I am probably underrating it a bit. This bottle of the 1978 was decidedly deeper, more powerful and more backward than the bottle I reported on back in the first issue of the newsletter, and with sufficient bottle age, will be better superb. It can certainly be drunk now with decanting, but I have to believe that even more generosity and profundity will emerge with further bottle age. 2012-2040+ **92-94.**

1978 Barolo Riserva- E. Pira & Figli

According to Sheldon Wasserman, Luigi Pira, who died in 1980, was one of the very finest Barolo producers during his career (and the Wassermans' absolute favorite). Everything was done traditionally under Luigi Pira, with even the grapes still trod on by barefoot men for the pressing. The Pira holdings are in three crus in the village of Barolo: a bit more than half a hectare in Cannubi, and a bit less in each of the neighboring vineyards of San Lorenzo and Via Nuova. The 1978 was still in cask when Luigi passed away, and it is not reputed to be in the same league as the wines that he finished and bottled himself. This particular bottle faded fairly briskly in the glass (it was only decanted about twenty minutes before serving), and after an additional twenty minutes it was showing distinct notes of maderization. During its peak in the glass, the wine offered

up a lovely bouquet of cherries, rose petals, road tar, smoke and sweet prunes. On the palate the wine was full-bodied, robust and balanced, with a juicy core of almost candied red fruit, good depth, and a solid, slightly old-fashioned finish. This particular bottle was hanging onto life precariously and was finished at the forty-five minute mark, with oxidative notes taking center stage and the acid going volatile. But if I were to serve it again I would decant and serve it immediately, so as to prolong its peak of enjoyment. The '78 Pira Riserva is certainly not dead yet, but it now requires a bit of special handling to get maximum enjoyment out of it. 2005-2010? **88.** (before it faded).

1978 Barolo- Giuseppe Rinaldi

Giuseppe Rinaldi is another of the very fine traditionalists in the village of Barolo. Rinaldi's eight hectares of holdings are all in Barolo proper, with three-quarters of a hectare in Le Coste, one and a half in Revera, four-tenths of a hectare in San Lorenzo and one and a half hectares in Brunate. According to Sheldon Wasserman, Rinaldi bottles his Brunate separately in top vintages, or at least this was the practice up until the 1980s (perhaps now the Brunate is bottled separately in each vintage). Wasserman also notes in his feature on the producer that he has found little qualitative difference between the Brunate and the straight Barolo, as both are outstanding. I assume that there was a Brunate bottling done in the '78 vintage, but this bottle was simply labeled Barolo, and it was a classic. Rinaldi's vineyards produce a more black fruity interpretation of Barolo than those of someone like Bartolo Mascarello, who relies significantly on fruit from the Cannubi vineyard. The complex nose on the '78 is lovely, soaring from the glass in a blaze of cassis, black plums, pungent notes of curry, allspice, forest floor, road tar, and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and resolved, with great depth in the mid-palate, melting tannins, firm acids, and great length and grip on the complex and palate-staining finish. This is a superb bottle of old-fashioned Barolo in the very best sense. It will cruise along for years to come. 2005-2020+. **94.**

1978 Barolo "Rocche"- Vietti

Alfredo Currado is the proprietor at Vietti, having married Luciana Vietti in 1957. Based in Castiglione Falletto, Currado has a bit more than seven hectares of vines spread across a wide variety of fine vineyards in the Barolo region, with his primary holdings being found in Brunate (one hectare), Bussia (three hectares- presumably in the lower section of the vineyard, called "Bussia Sottana"), Lazzarito (2.29 hectares purchased in 1990), and a bit more than half a hectare each in Parussi (again purchased in 1990), Rocche (di Castiglione Falletto) and Villero. Currado's own vineyards are sufficient for about forty percent of his needs, with the rest purchased from local growers with whom he has long-term contracts. Amongst these he buys grapes from one of the two other growers that share the Bussia Soprana subplot of Colonello with Aldo Conterno; Currado has routinely blended these grapes into his Barolo "Bussia" bottling. The Vietti Rocche bottling is Currado's favorite of all his crus, as it is the longest-lived and most complete in his estimate. The 1978 is superb, offering up a complex nose of cassis, bonfires (*à la* Echézeaux), venison, forest floor, licorice, fresh oregano and lovely earth tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and refined, with excellent depth, fine structure, and a very long, complex and palate-staining finish. Interestingly, one of the tasters at the table with plenty of Vietti in the cellar thought that this bottle was atypically forward and that there are even more powerful and younger examples out there. 2005-2020. **92+.**

ANOTHER HANDFUL OF 1996 RED BURGUNDIES



The church of Chambolle-Musigny- walking distance to de Vogüé, Roumier, Mugnier and Barthod.

While I was in Burgundy for the majority of the month of November of 2011- primarily handicapping the magical 2010 vintage, I took the opportunity to taste a few more 1996 red Burgundies from some of the growers I was visiting, just to try and augment the notes I had written up in the feature on the vintage in Issue 35. One of the happy things I found with the wines that I tasted out of the cellars during my visit was that there were absolutely no signs of premo in any of the 1996 reds that I tasted on this trip. Of course, this did not surprise me, as the onset of premature oxidation seems to be intrinsically tied to the temperature that bottles are stored throughout the course of their lives, and I did not anticipate that any bottles being pulled directly from a domaine's bottle cellar would have seen any warmer temperatures during the course of their lives. Premature oxidation seems to have a trigger mechanism tied to temperature, and once a bottle sees a particular temperature, the reaction gets going, sulfur gets consumed and the wine eventually starts to pick up oxidative tones. I had noticed this first with white Burgundies from the 1996 vintage, as my bottles here in the states showed signs of premo several years ahead of European friends' bottles of the same wines that we had all sourced together. With time, their bottles also showed signs of premo, but it clearly took longer to get started in their cellars. As our storage conditions are quite similar, I assume that this difference had to do with the transit temperatures of my bottles

somewhere along the line from Europe to New York having been higher than what would be considered ideal, and while the wines were not “heat damaged” in any other way, the temps were probably high enough to get premox rolling earlier in my examples.

Côte de Nuits Villages

1996 Côte de Nuits Villages- Maison Louis Jadot

The parcel of vines that Maison Jadot produces their bottling of Côte de Nuits Villages from lies right alongside of the Nuits St. Georges premier cru of Clos de la Maréchale owned by Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier. The 1996 Côte de Nuits Villages is really a pretty good wine, with a touch of rusticity on both the nose and palate giving the wine a certain sturdiness. The complex and tertiary nose offers up a blend of cherries, woodsmoke, hung game, coffee and soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and still a bit on the young side, with a good core of fruit, a bit of lurking tannin perking up the backend and well-integrated and ripe acids adding bounce and bit on the long finish. There is just a whiff of barnyard here as well that may simply be a function of its relatively adolescent stage right now. Not bad and perhaps decidedly more elegant with a couple more years of bottle age. 2013-2030+. **87+**.

Gevrey-Chambertin

1996 Gevrey-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Denis Bachelet

The 1996 Gevrey old vines from Denis Bachelet is a tangy example of the vintage, but with the acids here still very nicely integrated into the body of the wine. The nose is deep, tertiary and really quite stunning, offering up scents of black cherries, grilled meat, a touch of fresh mint, woodsmoke, espresso, an exotic touch of *pain epice* and a lovely base of dark Gevrey soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with secondary layers of complexity beginning to blossom. The core is solid, the tannins ripe, but still quite present and the acids quite tangy, though still well-integrated on the very long and soil-driven finish. I like this very much today, but it is on the snappy side and probably always will be over the course of its life. I might give it another year or two just to allow a bit more of the tannin to fade away, but I suspect that this will have to be drunk through its tangy acids its entire life. 2013-2035+. **91**.

Morey St. Denis

1996 Clos des Lambrays- Domaine des Lambrays

The 1996 Clos des Lambrays is a very fine example of the vintage that is really blossoming beautifully at age fifteen. The deep, pure and tertiary nose offers up a complex mélange of candied cherries, a touch of small, dark berry, fresh herb tones, gamebirds, incipient notes of candle wax, summer truffles and a beautifully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with a good core of fruit, beautifully integrated acids, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is tangy, without being shrill and is just entering its plateau of peak drinkability. One of the best 1996s I tasted in Burgundy in November. 2011-2040+. **93**.

Chambolle-Musigny

1996 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

Domaine Mugnier’s 1996 Amoureuses is a beautiful middleweight that offers up stunning complexity and intensity of flavor, while remaining very light on its feet. The stunningly pure and sappy nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, red plums, summer truffles, mustard seed, complex soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and rock solid at the core, with suave acids, a touch of remaining tannin and outstanding focus on the complex, long and perfectly balanced finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Amoureuses- not powerful by any stretch of the imagination, but deep, long and wonderfully complex. The acids here are just buried in the body of the wine and this looks likely to age long and very gracefully. 2013-2045+. **94.**

Nuits St. Georges

1996 Nuits St. Georges- Domaine Henri Gouges

The 1996 Nuits AC from Domaine Gouges is aging very gracefully and is blossoming beautifully at age fifteen. There is just a touch of brett on the nose here that may deter those more sensitive, but to my palate this was hardly a distraction. The deep, complex and maturing nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, new leather, spit-roasted game, a beautifully complex base of soil, woodsmoke and coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite precise on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable balance, well-integrated acids and a very long, complex and still fairly tannic finish. This is an excellent example of the vintage and a wine that still needs several more years in the cellar to fully blossom. It should prove to be a very long-lived village wine. 2015-2050+. **91+.**

Aloxe-Corton

1996 Corton “Clos du Roy”- Domaine Antonin Guyon

The Domaine Guyon ’96 Clos du Roy is one of those 1996s that seems to have its acidity moving off in a direction of its own, rather than remaining integrated into the body of the wine. The acids are not particularly strident in this wine, but they already seem a touch disassociated from the other elements on the palate. The bouquet is still quite youthful in profile, but offers up a complex mélange of black cherries, red plums, iron-like soil tones, venison, coffee and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely focused, with a good core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly volatile finish. As I noted above, the acids here are not particularly aggressive, but they now have an agenda of their own and I would suspect that this wine is going to become more volatile as time goes by. 2011-2025+? **89+?**

Pernand-Vergelesses

1996 Pernand-Vergelesses “Ile de Vergelesses”- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The 1996 Ile de Vergelesses from Domaine Chandon de Briailles is an absolutely superb example of the vintage that offers up admirable complexity and beautiful integration of its structural elements. The very deep and classy nose offers up a complex mélange of red and black cherries, grilled venison, coffee, great minerality, orange peel, forest floor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very

transparent, with a fine core of pure fruit, moderate tannins, beautifully buried acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and very long finish. Just a beautiful 1996 red Burgundy. 2011-2025+. **92.**



Savigny-lès-Beaune

1996 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Fourneaux”- Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The 1996 Fourneaux from Chandon de Briailles is a very pretty and well-balanced middleweight that is drinking very well at the present time. The bouquet is a fine mélange of dark berries, roasted game, coffee, *sous bois*, dried red berries, a beautiful touch of soil and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very nicely balanced, with still a bit of firm tannin perking up the backend and very good length and grip on the tangy finish. At the present time the acids here are perfectly integrated into the body of the wine. Good juice, but perhaps without quite the flair of the wines made by the domaine in the last decade. 2011-2025. **88.**

1996 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Fourneaux”- Domaine Simon Bize et Fils (375 ml.)

Patrick Bize’s 1996 Fourneaux is one of the most beautiful wines for current consumption from this vintage that I tasted in preparation for this series of articles. Out of half bottle the wine is at a beautiful apogee of maturity, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, sweet red currants, gamebirds, coffee, bonfires, summer truffles, a touch of orange peel and a brilliantly complex base of soil that is just starting to show signs of its eventual autumnal shadings. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure, with

gorgeous balance, a lovely core of fruit, lovely transparency, fading tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and perfectly refined finish. Lovely juice. 2011-2040+. **93.**

1996 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Narbantons”- Domaine Camus-Bruchon

The 1996 Camus-Bruchon Narbantons is still a very young wine, with very good balance and no signs of any shrillness from acidity, but also with a fair dollop of firm tannins still to resolve before it begins to drink with any generosity. The bouquet is blossoming quite nicely, offering up a complex mélange of dark berries, woodsmoke, incipient notes of *sous bois*, venison, stony soil tones, orange peel and a topnote of Savigny spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good focus and a fair bit of tannin still to be worked though on the long and tangy finish. The acids here are very nicely integrated and I see no reason that this will not be excellent with a half dozen more years of bottle age. 2017-2040. **91+.**

1996 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Vergelesses”- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1996 les Vergelesses from Maison Jadot is an excellent example of the vintage and a wine that is still a few years away from fully reaching its apogee. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up scents of red and black currants, iron-like soil tones, gamebirds, bonfires and incipient notes of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with still a bit of youthful tannin to fully resolve, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the blossoming and classy finish. I would still give this three or four more years to let the tannins more completely fall away, and then drink it over the ensuing twenty-five years or so. It is a beautifully balanced and very classic example of this great Savigny premier cru. 2015-2040+. **90+.**

1996 Savigny-lès-Beaune “les Guettes”- Maison Louis Jadot

I very much like the complexity and balance of the les Guettes 1996 from Louis Jadot, but the wine does not quite show the same freshness and precision of the superb '96 Vergelesses that preceded it in this lineup. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, venison, forest floor, a touch of coffee grounds, herb tones, woodsmoke and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly closed, with a long and chewy finish, bright, well-integrated acids and very good length and grip on the gamy and autumnal finish. I would be tempted to keep this in the cellar a few years longer than the '96 Vergelesses, as I suspect that there is more polish to come here if one exercises a little patience. 2018-2040. **88+.**

Beaune

1996 Beaune “Clos des Couchereaux”- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1996 Clos des Couchereaux is a very classy example of the vintage on both the nose and palate, but my score is kept down a bit from just a whiff of volatile acidity. The deep and very vibrant nose offers up an impressively complex blend of cassis, dark berries, a bit of new leather, gamebirds, complex soil tones, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with fine focus and mid-palate depth, a bit of tangy acid that is starting to go volatile (at least in this particular bottle), but excellent length and grip on the very complex and soil-driven finish. If the acids can remain integrated into the body of the wine here over the course of its life, then my score will seem ridiculously conservative. I would love to re-taste another bottle to see if the slight bit of VA is endemic in this wine or was just a function of a particular bottle. 2018-2040+? **89+.**